

Grandma in Space!

Norman Rose

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Norman Rose

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Grandma in Space!

*To the real Grandma who inspired this book and a
lifetime of adventure!*

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Introducing Grandma and Her Adventures

Welcome to “Grandma in Space!” – stories of adventure, danger, fun, and some mind-bending ideas and situations!

Grandma’s trips take her to planets that are very different from Earth in all sorts of ways. And the creatures that inhabit those planets are different in many different ways. But Grandma has a way of making friends wherever she goes – unless she’s getting in trouble or causing problems. Anyway, she means well....

This book contains 12 hand-picked episodes from the messages she writes to her grandchildren. Now, like most Earth children, they don’t really believe all these fantastic stories – and maybe you won’t, either. But that could change, couldn’t it?

And who is Tinkerbelle? She is Grandma’s tiny Pomeranian that is afraid of nearly everything. She’s even afraid of other tiny Pomeranians! Tinkerbelle isn’t comfortable going on all these Grandma adventures, but she would be out of her mind with worry if she got left behind on Earth. So Tinkerbelle travels the galaxy with Grandma, and she even has her own spacesuit for exploring other worlds.

Before you turn the page to begin, here are a couple of things you might be interested in:

- The first episode of this book was originally a video that Grandma made. You might want to watch it before or after you read the story. To find it, try one of these on the Internet:
 - sierrandipity.com
 - bit.ly/spacegranny (not a video, but a story with some pictures from the video)
- Grandma and her adventures are so amazing that this author wrote theme music for her and Tinkerbelle. Maybe it will be played during the TV show (or

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movie!) that is sure to be made about her. To find the music, try one of these:

- sierrandipity.com
- soundcloud.com/normanrose/grandma-in-space
- bit.ly/spacegranny

So buckle up your gravity belts and get ready for
GRANDMA...IN SPACE!



Episode 1: Granny and the Grabbers!

This is called Episode 1 because it is the earliest story Grandma or anyone else can find about her adventures. You see, Grandma loves her adventures zooming through space, but when she sits down and records what happened during a trip, she often forgets to put in the Earth date of the trip. So we don't know if this is really her first adventure. Probably it isn't. But it is the oldest one we know about, because it was all saved on her oldest grandson's computer with a date. Why did he save it? Not because he believed a word of it. He just thought it was a really funny way for his grandma to entertain him for his birthday. We're glad he kept it for so long!

**<Begin Transmission Andromeda Intergalactic ExtraNet
Star Date 17:Δ:5:5M>**

Hello, Logan! I'm on my way to the Argentile planetary system right now. Argentile is much bigger than our sun, and it has 24 planets orbiting it. I'm going to the sixteenth planet, Ghlip (like saying "flip" because the "gh" sounds like the "gh" in our word "rough," except with a little Ghlippian hiccup). I want to look around, because your birthday is coming soon and I want to find something there to bring back for you. Tinkerbelle is with me, of course, and she's nervous, as usual. So I have to say good-bye and take care of her.

I'll talk to you soon, and I'll come see you with some new treasure for you on your birthday.

Love, Grandma

<End Transmission>



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*<Start Transmission - Andromeda Intergalactic ExtraNet
Star Date 17:Δ:6:2K>*

Logan, I just found the perfect gift for you. I wanted to make it a surprise, but I'm too excited to wait until your birthday. And anyway, I wanted to show it off a little and test it at the same time. So here goes....

Okay, see this gadget I'm wearing around my waist? It's called a Transmogrifier XKP. Those initials stand for Xenographic Kinetic Projector. I got it at a terrific thrift store in downtown Burplethork here on the planet Ghlip. It's an old model, and used, but I didn't think you would mind. Besides, this one has a default library with many, many clipgrams to choose from!

Now here's what makes it special: This gadget can morph you into shapes! Here, let me zoom in on the controls so you can see how it works. See this dial? That's where you tell it what kind of hologram you want to morph into – a plant, an animal, a table, a refrigerator, whatever. And these buttons control the size and color you'll be. You can even move around and the holographic image will move with you!

Watch me try this out. I'll morph into a green tiger the size of Tinkerbell. So, let's see, I'll turn the dial three notches this way, and punch the downsize button four or five times, then I'll push this button here....

Can you see the little green tiger, Logan? That's me! Hey, Tinkerbell, what do you think of Grandma now? Just your size! Tinkerbell? No, don't bark and back away. It's just me, Tinkerbell! Oh, Logan, I have to change back and take care of Tinkerbell. Let's see, I turn this dial and push this.... Tinky, don't run away, I'm trying to get back to normal. Oh, bother! Logan, I have to go. I'll make a better demo and send it to you so you can study it. Bye!

<End Transmission>



*<Start Transmission - Andromeda Intergalactic ExtraNet
Star Date 17:Δ:2:76E>*

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Logan, things are much calmer now. The Transmorgrifyer XKP is on my belt, and I've got Tinkerbell in my arm so she won't run when she gets nervous. So here is your demo....

I've already shown you how to use the default library of hologram shapes. Now I'll show you how to scan something and create a hologram duplicate of it. See this purple tree? (Yes, they really are purple on this planet!) I turn to face the tree and click this button. That puts the tree in the XKP library. Then I turn this dial to scroll to the purple tree in the library, push this button, and watch me turn into a purple tree, just like the real one over there.

Ha! See, I'm a tree, and that shaggy branch is Tinkerbell. Well, really, I just LOOK like a tree. Imagine what you can do with this gadget! Now, let me show you how to return to normal. First, you flip this switch here, then click this button. *Aha!* I'm back to normal!

Wait, what's that noise? Oh no! It's a pack of Gaboris – only everyone calls them Grabbers. They're little green round creatures with skinny arms and legs – and big teeth. They're always grabbing small things to eat. I hope they don't notice Tinkerbell in my arm. Let me turn back into a tree so they won't see her.

Tinkerbell, stop that! She's got her paw on the Random button and I can't control the XKP. I'm a snake, she's a robin! I'm a lamp, she's a mouse! I'm a tuba, she's a pork chop! The Grabbers want to eat her! I've got to run! Can't go to the spaceship! I'll try to contact you later....

< ***Transmission Interrupted***>



<***Start Transmission - Andromeda Intergalactic ExtraNet
Star Date 17:Δ:6:19R***>

Logan, I'm whispering because I'm in danger, and I only have your address with me since you were the last one I transmitted to.

Last night – well, actually, there are two nights every day on this planet. But anyway, these Gaboris arrived here (or call them

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Grabbers) and they've been walking around – well, actually, they don't walk; they sort of glide and hop. But anyway, these Gabboris from the ninth planet – or is it the tenth planet? Okay, never mind all that. You know that Gabboris love to sniff out little animals and eat them. Well, they sniffed out Tinkerbell, and we've been on the run ever since. You just can't reason with these Grabbers and explain that a little animal is a pet and not to be eaten. They just wouldn't understand that. As far as they are concerned, they think I'm walking around with my dinner, but never eating it, so why shouldn't they get it instead?

Right now we're in this cave, hiding from those Grabbers. But the cave is full of some kind of gas swirling around. It might be poisonous, so we can't stay here long. The trouble is, I can hear them sniffing around outside the opening of the cave. So here's what I'm going to do: I'm going to use the Transmorgrifyer I got you to turn this rock into holograms of ourselves. Then when the Grabbers attack the rock, I'll use my ZipAlong on the back of my belt to propel us out of the cave at supersonic speed. That should give us a head start to get to the spaceship. I hope this works! If it doesn't, then you can tell the rest of the family why I'm not inviting everyone for Thanksgiving dinner this year.

Okay, here goes. Tinkerbell, come get in my arms. Now I'll put the XKP on the rock and aim it toward me and Tinky. Then I hit these buttons.... Yes, there's the rock, looking just like me holding Tinkerbell. Now I'll make a noise and get the Grabbers' attention. Once they're in the cave, I'll blast out. Ready, Tink? One, two, three...

<Transmission Interrupted>



<Start Transmission - Andromeda Intergalactic ExtraNet
Star Date 17:Δ:Z:14\$>

Well, Logan, you can see we're back on the spaceship, heading home. Sure enough, my plan worked. I called out Tinkerbell's name and the Grabbers rushed in. Then I blasted right

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through the cave opening and left them all behind! And I bet those Grabbers ate half that rock before they realized it wasn't us!

So the bad news is that your birthday present got left behind on Ghlip. But the good news is that you still have a grandma! See you soon!

<End Transmission>



Episode 8: Grandma to the Rescue!

Dear Grandkids,

I just came back from an adventure out in the galaxy, and I'm rather proud of myself. It started like any other shopping trip, but it turned into something much, much bigger.

You see, there was a clearance sale at a department store on Bugnar, and I wanted to get there early. So I set my alarm clock to get up before dawn, and when the alarm went off I dashed madly around the house getting myself and Tinkerbell ready. Big mistake! I always forget at least one important thing when I get in a hurry. But I didn't realize it until I was too far out in the galaxy to turn back.

What was it that I forgot? I didn't have any money or credit cards! Now how could I shop? I was so looking forward to finding bargains and coming home with gifts for all of you. This was awful! Earth money is quite valuable around the galaxy, and I have credit cards for Earth and for several other planetary systems. But now I couldn't see how I could buy anything, unless I, unless I...earned some money! Yes! That would solve everything!

I asked Computer for some help. "Computer dear, can you help me think of ways to get money out here away from home?"

Computer had some advice, but with an attitude. "Even on Earth you have very few ways to get money. Here in deep space, you have even fewer options, considering your age and your talents. Let me think.... Here is a list of things you might do to get money for your shopping pleasures:

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1. Rob a bank
2. Make counterfeit money
3. Take..."

"Computer!" I interjected. You're listing *illegal* things I could do. What has gotten into you? Can't you help me without being sarcastic AND suggesting dangerous things?"

"You did not specify that "get money" had to be legal. And everything I said was based on facts."

"I think you know me well enough by now to leave out illegal ideas and to leave out your so-called opinions even if they are based in facts." (Computer really needed some reprogramming!) "Okay, list some ways I can EARN money out here in the galaxy."

"Well, that is definitely being more specific. Here is a list of ways to EARN money:

1. Give rides to others and ask for money to do it.
2. Make a...."

"Computer! That's it! I'll give rides to earn money!

"Don't you want to hear my other ideas?"

"No thank you, Computer. That first one sounds perfect. It doesn't require physical strength or take up too much time. But where should I start looking for passengers?"

Computer had a ready answer. "Why don't you go to your shopping destination on Bugnar and see if anyone needs a ride home? But before you do that, wouldn't you like to hear my other ideas?"

"No thank you AGAIN, Computer DEAR. Let's just continue on to Bugnar."

"Very well. We should arrive in twenty-five minutes, which should be plenty of time for me to list my other...."

I turned off Computer's voice and decided to ride in silence until we reached Bugnar.



I landed and found a good parking space near the department store. Then I told Tinkerbell to stay until I returned in a few

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minutes. “Oh, and Tinkerbell, when I come back, I hope there will be someone with me – someone who will pay me so I can come back here to shop. So don’t go crazy when I open the door and bring someone in, okay?”

Tinkerbell tilted her head as if she was trying to understand, but I knew it didn’t make any sense to her. So when I returned and she saw a strange being with me, I would probably have to spend a lot of time getting her out from some hiding place. Oh, well, if that what was going to happen (and it would), I would just have to prepare some extra tidbit to get her to come out and relax again. I had no choice. I really needed some money!

I climbed out and made my way toward the front of the store. And there, outside the front entrance, were quite a few creatures standing around. Wonderful! I guessed they must be waiting for a ride. I was going to be one lucky grandma and get one to come with me!

I looked over the small crowd and made some calculations. Which ones looked anxious and might pay me well to get home quickly? Which ones would fit in my little spaceship? Which ones looked friendly enough to be trustworthy? That narrowed it down to just a few, so I approached the one nearest me – a creature about three feet tall (a meter, you know), with fuzz, not hair, covering the face.

“Excuse me, are you looking for a way to get home?” I tried to be polite and a little bit professional-sounding, as if I had done this before.

A growl came back to me. I waited for more of a response, but all I got was another growl. This was probably not a good sign, so I turned away and moved over to the next likely customer. This one was four-legged and wore flowery clothes, but when I got close, he or she stood up on two legs and suddenly looked about eight feet tall – almost 3 meters! I backed away, realizing this one went in the category of “too big to fit.”

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I approached a third being who eyed me suspiciously. I thought I should start speaking quickly and very politely.

“Excuse me. Are you looking for a ride home? I could give you one.”

The creature suddenly came apart! I mean that literally. It seemed to split into two pieces and become two very small creatures. Astounding! Maybe this was how such small beings made themselves look larger – by combining when they needed to.

And then they spoke – both at the same time. One had a high voice and the other had a lower voice, uttering the exact same words at the same time.

“Yes, please. You look like a creature that would not harm us, so we will accept a ride with you.”

Perfect! Small creatures wouldn’t scare Tinkerbell so much, and they would fit easily in my vehicle. And they spoke with so much appreciation that I was sure they would reward me generously for the ride home. Maybe they would reward me so much that I wouldn’t have to give any more rides and I could just go shopping!

As I led them to my spaceship, a couple of other ships were landing close to the front of the store. Someone got out of one of those ships and started yelling – at me! I couldn’t understand his language, but I noticed a little sign on top of his vehicle. He must have been the driver of a space taxi – and I was stealing one of his fares! I decided I would just ignore him to avoid trouble, and I hurried my passengers along. But I realized that if I came back and wanted to make another trip, I might have to be more careful.



Luckily, my passengers’ home planet was very close. And the trip seemed even faster because they described its beauty to me – full of green valleys and rivers that ran in gentle currents. And sure enough, as we approached the planet I could see why they were so proud of it. It really was very green, with only hills, not mountains.

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Even Tinkerbell seemed to accept these gentle creatures, sniffing them curiously but keeping her distance.

As we zoomed down and around to their homeland, an ugly black streak appeared on one portion of the planet.

“What is that?” I asked.

The two little creatures stopped their stories and looked out the window of my spaceship. They froze and became silent.

“That is our biggest worry on our planet,” they said in unison. “Suddenly the land sinks down and things get swallowed up in the hole. And this time, it has happened near our home!”

I looked down again and saw little towns near the edge of the hole. I felt very sorry for my guests, and worried, too.

Finally, I broke the silence. “I’ll land near your town, but as far as I can from the hole. And I’ll stay while you check on your town and your friends.”

In a few minutes we were on the ground. I turned to my guests. “Why don’t you go look around, then come back and let me know if everything is okay with your home?”

They promised they would do that as they climbed out of my spaceship. While I waited, I put Tinkerbell in my lap and told her how important it was for us to stay where we were for a while. And I realized that I had forgotten about getting paid. In fact, I didn’t really care about that anymore.

Soon, I looked out my window and saw not just my two riding guests coming toward me, but many more like them – probably over one hundred!

I put Tinkerbell down and climbed out to greet them. Instantly, they all began to “split” and talk at once. I couldn’t understand anything they said, but I could tell they were all excited and worried. Then the two who had ridden with me stepped forward, turned to the crowd, and waved to get everyone to stop talking. Turning around to face me again, they explained the situation.

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“The hole is getting bigger, which is very unusual. We need to abandon our town and go somewhere else. We all have relatives in different parts of the planet, and we all need transportation to get to them. Can you help?”

I gulped and looked over the crowd. Would I take them to relatives all over the planet? *Could* I take them all to relatives all over the planet? Well, of course I could!

I answered them. “Here’s what I can do: I can fit about ten of you at a time in my spaceship. So why don’t you get in groups of ten, and I’ll start with the group that lives closest to the growing hole.”

They all seemed agreeable to this and quickly formed groups. One group rushed up to me. “Please take us first. Our homes have already been swallowed up!”

That was good enough for me, so I invited them into my spaceship and scooped up Tinkerbelle. And in a couple of minutes, we were off the ground. I turned and looked at these pathetic creatures sitting all over the floor of my craft.

“I’ll cruise slowly above the planet. You can point to where you need me to land to let you out.”

The little creatures talked amongst themselves, then lined up by me. They had figured out how they could to get everyone off in just one trip around the planet. When I returned to my starting point, I climbed out for the next group to board. Someone in the group nearest me stepped forward.

“Now that you have rescued the ones in the most danger, we have made new groups. Now every group has relatives in the same part of the planet, so your trips can be quicker.”

That made perfect sense. For each trip I made, I would only have to go to one part of the planet. I really appreciated the way these creatures used logic to make my work easier, just like the first group had directed me so I wouldn’t have to zigzag or backtrack

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during the trip. These creatures might be small, but they are very smart as well as considerate.

For the next few hours, I flew groups to different parts of the planet. And by the time I returned to pick up the last group, I saw that the hole was already much closer to my landing spot, and their town had mostly disappeared!

When I dropped off that last group, one of them asked me to come outside before I left. There was a crowd gathered in front of me. Someone stepped forward and handed me a pouch. I thanked them all, then got back in my spaceship. I put the pouch by my control panel and put Tinkerbelle in my lap so she could see me open the little gift.

I set a course to return to the store on Bugnar. As we left my new friends' planet, I opened the pouch. Inside the pouch there was a shiny piece of metal. I assumed it was a coin – some money for all my trouble. I wondered how much the coin was worth at that department store, and I promised to buy no more than what the coin was worth. The store wouldn't be open much longer, so I couldn't make another taxi run even if I wanted to – and I didn't really want to.



Inside the store, I learned that I only had a few minutes before closing time. I wouldn't be able to shop for each of you grandchildren after all. So instead I looked around hurriedly for something that you all could enjoy whenever you visit me. And there it was: a little fountain that could sit on a table. But this fountain streamed thick golden liquid, not water. Perfect! I picked it up and walked to a cashier. Then I pulled out the pouch to pay for it. What happened next was a real shock...

I reached in the pouch and pulled out the piece of metal – and when I did, the pouch started floating up! I grabbed it and stuffed it into my pocket. Then I placed the piece of metal on the counter, hoping it would be valuable enough to pay for the little fountain.

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The cashier had been watching the whole time. He looked at me with an expression that was both puzzled and annoyed.

“What’s wrong?” I asked.

The cashier must have not understood my language and left for a moment. Soon a new cashier appeared and I asked the same question.

“My good Earth lady, you don’t seem to understand what you have and what you did. You came into the store with a pouch from Skinnectidee, which by the way is a lovely planet except for the terrible sink holes. But you tried to pay for something using the metal that keeps the pouch from floating away. On Earth, you think that metal pieces are money, but on Skinnectidee, it’s the pouches that are money. The metal is worthless except for how it keeps pouches from floating away. You were supposed to put the pouch on the counter and the metal in your pocket. Could you do that now? We are about to close, you know.”

Embarrassed and bewildered, I pulled out the pouch and asked if it would pay for the fountain. The cashier laughed and said, “This is a maroon-colored pouch made out of Krinklecloth, so it would pay for many fountains. Would you like your change in pouches or in Earth money?”

I asked for Earth money and quietly left with my head buzzing. On the way out, I browsed a bit in the table-setting section (because you can never have too many colors of napkins). A bell rang and I knew the store was closing, so I hurried out of the building. I heard the doors of the department store lock behind me. And that’s when I realized I had left my fountain inside! Now the store was closed and I would have to bang on a door very hard to have any chance of getting back in. And that’s when I realized something else: I was very, very tired after my long adventurous day.

So I shrugged my shoulders and headed back to my spaceship, empty-handed. I climbed aboard and looked at my

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precious little Tinkerbell. Right then, I knew that it really didn't matter that I had nothing to show my grandchildren from this trip. What really mattered was that I had helped a lot little beings that day. And I was grateful to know that I was going home to a planet that probably wouldn't swallow me, my dog, and my town.

Love and kisses - Grandma



Episode 14: Grandma and the Used Planet Salesman!

Dear Grandkids,

I get ads in the mail, just like everyone else. There are ads for the local supermarkets, ads for the local drug stores, and ads for the local discount stores. But I also get ads from far away stores – VERY far away – like the one that I found in my mailbox last week....

Going Out of Business Sale! One Week Only!

Prices Slashed! Everything Must Go!

Huge Savings on Everything for Your Home!

Hurry – Don't Miss This Giant Event!

Biggest Clearance Ever on Merithwop!

Those are the kinds of words that can really get my attention. I looked at the bottom of the ad to find the address of this Merithwop sale. But all I could see were these words in small print:

All sales final. No returns, no exchanges.

“That’s odd. The ad names says ‘Merithwop’ but not the name of the store there. It sounds familiar, but I can’t quite remember where it is. Well, I’ll just have to ask the computer. Tinkerbell, we’re going shopping!”

Tinkerbell looked up from her basket and yawned. She was used to this, but it still made her nervous. That word “shopping” usually meant spending time in her basket aboard the spaceship, but sometimes, it meant having to go outside on an alien planet! When she is outside, she might see or hear or smell things that scare her – which is nearly anything and everything. But she never wants to get left behind at home, either. That would be even scarier!

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“Now before we go, let’s think about things that we might look for. Hmm... Well, I could use a new teapot, especially one that whistles really loudly. Lately, my old teapot’s whistle is not as loud as it used to be. (It couldn’t be because my hearing might be changing!) And Tinky, you could use a new collar, maybe in a new color. Aren’t you getting tired of that pink glow-in-the-dark one?”

Tinkerbelle heard her name, but since no food came with the sound, she just continued licking her paws.

“And I’m still hoping to find some green placemats for the table. But they have to be the right kind of green: not too bright, not too dark, not too yellowish, not too bluish. It’s really hard to find just the right kind, especially at yard sales and thrift stores.”

I kept thinking. “What else? Maybe some glasses for the table – red ones, maybe, or orange ones! I love orange, but you just don’t find many in that color, do you, Tink?”

Tinkerbelle just kept grooming herself. Pomeranians have a lot of hair to keep in place!

“A good nutcracker! Yes, I’ve been needing one for a long time. That would be a great thing to find! And let’s not forget the grandchildren. I’m sure I can find things for them that they could never find on Earth!”

“Okay, Tinky, let’s get going. That sale has already started, and I don’t even know where it is or how far away it is.”

With that, I scooped up Tinkerbelle and headed for the garage. I clapped my hands and steps came down from a hole in the ceiling. I carried Tinkerbelle up the steps into the garage attic, and there was my gleaming little spaceship! I put Tinkerbelle in, then climbed in myself. Reaching up to the sun visor, I clicked the garage-door opener, and the roof of the garage slid away, showing a beautiful blue sky up above. Then I started the engine.

Fortunately, it’s a very quiet engine. I don’t really want my neighbors to know about the spaceship up in the attic, or about my adventures in space. When they come to visit and see unusual new

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things in the living room or kitchen, I just say I got them at a great sale of used things in another neighborhood. And that's true. I just don't tell them the other neighborhood is billions of miles away!

I don't mind telling you grandchildren about my adventures on faraway planets. But for some reason you don't seem believe my stories. If I hold up a new water pitcher and tell you it was made by Orpheons on the planet Derkel, I can tell that you are thinking to yourselves, "It probably came from a thrift store here in town."

Anyway, I pushed the Straight Up button and the spacecraft rose out of the attic and up into the sky. I was about to zoom away when I remembered to push the button on the remote controller to close the roof. I forgot that once, and when I returned from Zeekdorf, squirrels were in the attic, chewing on all the electrical wires of the spaceship battery charger!

Well, let's get back to this story. I put Tinkerbell in her gravity basket. Then I settled into my chair in front of the control panel.

"Computer, dear! Can you tell me where Merithwop is and how long it will take to get there? And then can you set a course for us? We have some serious business there."

The computer beeped and whirred as it searched its database for information. Then a 3D star chart appeared on the big screen. Computer explained what I was seeing.

"Merithwop is located here, in the Tanfabulous solar system. It will take approximately six hours to get there, if you do not stop along the way to buy trinkets for your grandchildren."

I smiled and then frowned. "Computer dear, thank-you. But I really don't need you to comment on my spending habits, especially when it's about my grandchildren. After all, how else can I keep getting them such special gifts?"

"...which they never get for one reason or another," replied Computer.

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“Well, I know, but space is a tricky place, and sometimes dangerous. So I can’t help it if my presents get left behind or exploded or evaporated...or sunk or shriveled...or smashed or stolen...or shrunk...or...”

“My point exactly,” said Computer. “So if you skip those side trips, you can be in Merithwop in six hours.”

“Okay, Computer, let’s go straight to our destination.” (Notice that I didn’t tell Computer that my “serious” Merithwop business was for serious *shopping*, so really there was no reason to stop along the way. It’s so easy and fun to fool Computer!)

With the course set, I pushed the Up and Away button, and the spaceship rocketed out into space. In just a minute, I could look out my window and see the Earth getting smaller and smaller.



As I zoomed toward my destination, a question came to me. Why did Computer show me a whole planet in the Tanfabulous solar system? Was Merithwop the name of a planet, not just a city on a planet?

“Computer dear, are you sure you gave me the right information about Merithwop? You made it look like it was a whole planet, not a city.”

“Yes, it is a planet,” answered the computer. “I am hurt that you doubted my information.”

I thought to myself: *I really have to work on this computer. It’s WAY too sensitive and WAY too bossy!*

“Well, Computer, I don’t mean to doubt you, but I can’t imagine how I’m going to find what I’m looking for on a whole planet. Is it a very big one?”

“Merithwop is almost the size of one-and-a-half Earths. It is covered by 60% water and has two large continents. One is called...”

“Never mind, Computer. I don’t need too much information just this minute. Maybe when I get closer I can figure out where to land.”

Grandma in Space!

Computer replied, “I will hold on to all this information until later. But I wish you wouldn’t interrupt me like that. It really upsets me.”

I grabbed a piece of paper and a pencil and wrote: *Turn down the feeling sensitivity of this computer – ASAP!* Then I folded the paper and put it in my pocket, to remind myself later about some necessary computer repairs.



In a while, Computer announced that the spaceship had entered the Tanfabulous solar system.

“Computer, please orbit Merithwop so I can look down and find a good landing spot.” That was the only thing I could think of. I just had to solve the mystery of where the going-out-of-business sale would be!

Soon, we were orbiting the planet with its large oceans and two large continents. On the second time around, I noticed something in the middle of the larger continent. I pushed some buttons and my screen zoomed in on the markings. I enlarged the image several times, until I could read what it said. It was in twenty different languages, with Earth language near the bottom. And all it said was:

FOR SALE

How odd! What was for sale? And was this a sign for the store I was looking for? There was no way to know without going down to the surface of the planet.

“Computer dear, could you set a landing course for those markings I have on my screen?”

In a few minutes, we landed, just a few feet from the sign. All around the sign, there was...nothing. Absolutely nothing. Just bare, hard-packed yellowish-brown dirt.

“Tinkerbell, you stay here while I go outside and try to find someone – or something – to explain this mystery.”

Tinkerbell liked that word “stay” and was content to continue her nap.

Grandma in Space!

I checked my control panel to see if I needed to carry oxygen with me, and I was pleasantly surprised to find that this planet had just the amount of oxygen I needed, and the outside temperature was much like a spring day on Earth, but extremely dry. So I climbed out of the spaceship without having to wear any special equipment.

There was the sign, in twenty languages, and there was the dirt, as far as the eye could see. There was nothing that looked like a city or a store or a crowd trying to find bargains. Very puzzling!

Then I heard a far-off noise, like a motorcycle, and it was getting louder. Someone was coming toward me. Finally, I thought, I could get some answers.

Sure enough, a vehicle was approaching, sending up a long cloud of yellow dust behind it. This vehicle had five wheels in a circular pattern, and in the middle of the circle sat a man wearing baggy clothes and a helmet. Well, not actually a man, but a creature that looked a lot like an Earth man. But unlike an Earthling, this creature had extremely long arms. The handlebar of his vehicle must have been more than 15 feet across (5 meters), and the creature's hands rested comfortably on each end of it!

When the vehicle got just a few feet away, it stopped. The creature sat, waiting for all the dust to blow away, then took off his helmet. Yes, it was a man sort of creature, with skin on his face that had green and orange stripes. When he took off his helmet, with his long, long arms, I thought of a very colorful grasshopper!

“Borgrrrup!” the man-creature said in a loud voice. I shook my head, not understanding.

He pulled out a little box and punched some buttons. Then he looked up at me and shouted “Heeeeemper!”

I shook my head again.

He punched buttons again on his box. “Hello!” he shouted.

I smiled and shouted back, “Hello! Why are we yelling?”

Grandma in Space!

“I thought that you might not be able to hear me because of the strong wind blowing now.”

I was puzzled, and shouted back, “But there isn’t any wind blowing – just a tiny breeze.”

The man-creature shouted, “Of course there is wind. It’s blowing furiously. I can barely hear you.”

I yelled back, “Okay, I’ll shout! But on my planet, this is not considered much of a wind.” And I thought to myself: *If I find a whistling teakettle on this planet, I’ll give it to this fellow. He needs it more than I do!*

Then I continued this shouting game. “Where is the going-out-of-business sale? Where are all the people?” I didn’t know how long I could keep yelling before I lost my voice.

The man-creature shouted back: “The sale? That was many days ago. Did you just hear about it? Some of our ads got out late, I’m afraid. And sometimes translators do a terrible job. Sorry you missed it. But there are a few things still around.”

I turned my head left and right. “I don’t see anything around. Just all this dirt!”

The man-creature smiled. “Yes, the dirt is available – lots of it. I can give you a good price on it. But that’s not all. There are other things, just not right around here.”

I was more puzzled than ever. “The dirt is for sale?” I shouted. “You must be kidding. Where’s the store that had the sale? Is that where the leftovers are?”

Now it was the man-creature who looked puzzled. “Store? There wasn’t just one store for sale. ALL the stores were for sale!”

I was shocked. All the stores were for sale? Just who was going out of business here? And that’s just what I shouted back.

“Just who was going out of business here?”

“Who was going out of business? Why, Merithwop was going out of business. Didn’t it say so in the ad that you got in your mail?”

Grandma in Space!

I couldn't believe what I was hearing. "What do you mean? The whole planet was going out of business? How does a planet go out of business? And can we go somewhere where we don't have to shout at each other?"

The creature put his helmet back on and motioned for me to follow. I hurried back to my spaceship and started the hover engine.

"Tinkerbell, we're going to take a ride to another part of this planet. When we get there, I can probably let you go out, because there doesn't seem to be anything around that could scare you." And with that, the spaceship hovered a few feet off the ground and moved slowly enough to follow the 5-wheeled motorcycle.

After a while, I could see a mountain in the distance, and it seemed that we were headed straight for it. As we got closer to it, I could see that it was a tall mountain, the only one on the whole planet, it seemed. But instead of having smooth sloping sides, it seemed to have very bumpy, lumpy sides.

Before we got any closer to the mountain, the cycle in front of us veered off to the left and stopped at a small building. The man-creature got off and went inside. I figured I was supposed to do the same.

"Tinkerbell, let's get out. You can sniff around for a minute, then we're going in that little hut."

Tinkerbell stood still in her basket. She wasn't so sure about safety, so she waited for me to pick her up, which I did. And outside we went.

I looked around. Still nothing but yellow-brown dirt, except for this little building in front of me and that lumpy mountain off to the right in the distance. Behind the little building, far off in the distance, there was something glittering far, far away. It was probably the ocean of this planet. I couldn't tell for sure, so I thought I would ask when we got inside.

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When Tinkerbell was satisfied that the dirt wouldn't attack her, she got bored and wanted to be picked up again. I picked her up and knocked on the door of the tiny building.

"Come in!" came the familiar shout of the man-creature.

I went in and closed the door behind me. There was just one room in the building, with a desk and a few chairs. It was obvious that the chairs were chosen for all sorts of creatures. One chair was about eight feet high, made for very tall creatures. One chair was practically inside-out, made for creatures whose knees bent the opposite of humans. And one chair was practically a bed, made for creatures who were long and many-legged. But fortunately, there was a chair just about human-size. I sat down, facing the man-creature on the other side of the desk.

"Now, then, about the sale of Merithwop..." he began. Again, I could not imagine what those words meant. But more importantly, I was amazed at the man-creature's voice in this building. It seemed so...so...dull and distant. It was as if there was less air in the room than outside, and the sound coming from his mouth had fewer molecules to travel on. I leaned forward so I could hear better. And I prepared to hear my own voice coming out faint, just like his.

I interrupted. "I'm sorry, I didn't come here to buy a planet." (Sure enough, my voice sounded far away in my own ears!) Anyway, how do you sell a planet? Do you own it? What gives you the right to sell it? And who could possibly buy a whole planet?"

The man-creature listened patiently, then answered. "Oh, I certainly do not own this planet. But I am the agent they hired to sell it. You can see my license tacked up on the wall over there."

I did not even look for the license. "You mean you are a real estate agent? And you are selling this planet for someone else? Who is the owner?"

"You mean the *owners* – plural. Why, all the inhabitants of this planet are the owners. But they found a nice, slightly used

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planet that fits their needs, and they have already moved out. So it's been my job to sell all the properties and get it ready for new owners. And it's also my job to show off the planet to possible buyers. I was hoping you were interested. It is a lovely planet, really, but it does need a bit of fixing up. That's why we reduced the price."

I suddenly had a vision of myself as Queen of Merithwop, but quickly put that out of my head. "I doubt that I have enough money to buy a planet, and I don't think I would know what to do with it. I came here looking for bargains on sale items, but now you've told me the sale is over."

"Yes, the sale is over, but there are leftover items that never got sold. I would like to get rid of them quickly before a possible buyer comes to look. I can make you a great deal. In fact, I would just give it all away if you would remove it in the next couple of days."

I suddenly sat up straight. I could get stuff for free? "You mean I can have all the leftovers as long as I get them off the planet? Where are they?"

"You must have seen them on your way here. I had workers scour the planet and pile them up in one place near here."

My jaw dropped in astonishment. "You mean that lumpy mountain in the distance? You mean that's not a mountain at all, but just a pile of leftover sale items?"

"That's right. There are no mountains on this planet. That's one of the selling points that makes this such a good buy. No matter where you are, you can see forever, because no mountains get in your way! And there are no uphill climbs when you are walking or running or driving or thrumping. Oh, sorry, you can't thrump, can you? Not on those two little legs you Earthlings have. Anyway, if you could take some or all of that pile, I would be so grateful!"

My head was swimming. A whole planet for sale. All the creatures going off to live somewhere else. Even the insects? Even

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the trees, if there ever were trees? And who bought all the things the creatures had built on the planet? And how did they get them off the planet? Finally, I spoke again, although I wasn't sure if my own words made any sense.

“I would be happy to look at the pile and see what I can do to make it smaller – or to make it go away completely!”

The man-creature smiled and stood up. He extended one arm, with the intention of shaking my hand, but his arm was so long that his hand ended up far behind me, near the door. So I shook his elbow.



A little while later, I was standing at the foot of the mountain. And now I could see that it wasn't a natural mountain at all. It was a pile of things – junk – from all over the planet. It was everything that hadn't sold at the going-out-of-business sale (except the dirt).

As I walked around the base of the mountain, I could start to see separate items in the pile, such as vehicles, beds, skyscrapers, trains, clothes, street lights, aircraft, houses, tools, appliances, parts of giant machines, books, tables, paintings, statues, and a lot of things that didn't look like anything on Earth, so it was impossible to tell what they were.

Tinkerbelle walked up to a few objects to sniff them. Mostly she walked away after a moment, but she growled at a few, as if they might come alive. Soon she trotted over to me for protection.

“Well, Tinky, this sure is a bargain hunter's dream-come-true. To think that all this is free! I would never run out of presents for grandkids. But I would have to get stuff off the planet in a couple of days, and I can't lift most of these things or drag them out from under all the weight. I don't know what to do!”

I thought about it for the longest time, until I realized how much time I was wasting! I needed to get realistic about this.

“Tinkerbelle, there's only you and me here, except for that real estate agent who really doesn't want to have anything to do with this mountain of junk. It's crazy to think that I can bring all this

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back to Earth in such a short time. So instead, let's look around for one great thing for each grandchild, and one thing for me and one for you!"

Tinkerbelle seemed agreeable with the idea.

So I started looking at the pile with new eyes. Now I just wanted to find a few small things I could carry to my spaceship. And this is what I found:

- ✓ a laser-blasting ring that would fit Logan's finger, once I hammered it back into a round shape
- ✓ a musical helmet that would fit Everest, as long as she didn't mind mostly green music (because the yellow and blue buttons were broken off, and the red button only worked sometime)
- ✓ a 2-sided finger-painting easel that needed no paint, because each finger would create a different color – for little Sophia and Alexa to share
- ✓ a stuffed toy that looked like a cross between a frog and a teddy bear, perfect for baby Max – at least until he found the hidden switch that made it screech like an eagle
- ✓ a pogo stick kind of contraption that made a squishing sound whenever it landed, just right for Xander – as long he used it outside, because it seemed to bounce about 12 feet high
- ✓ a box with a hole in it, which could hold five times more stuff inside than the size of the box itself – something Nicholas would enjoy.

I also found a piece of rope and an old blanket made of silvery material. I tied the rope to a corner of the blanket, so I could drag all the toys back to the ship. But before leaving, I just had to look around for something to take home for Tinkerbelle and something for myself.

I wish I hadn't done that. If only I had left right then....

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But while I was rummaging around for my last two prizes, a familiar noise and dust cloud came toward me. It was the real estate agent, and he seemed to be in a hurry. It was obviously a happy hurry, because I could see his smile over a mile away.

He came to a halt just a few feet from me, just as I reached down to get Tinkerbell, who did not like all the commotion.

He started speaking even before removing his helmet. And like before, he shouted. “Madam, I have to inform you that I have just sold the planet, and the new owners want me to leave it exactly as it is right now. You see, it’s a family with a new baby, and they’re going to make Merithwop their vacation home. When I told them about the pile of leftovers, they said they wanted it for the baby to play with. So you’ll have to leave now, because they will arrive any minute.”

I felt a whole lot of things all at once. I was disappointed about having to leave my great finds, and I was confused that one little family could use a whole planet, and I was upset that anyone would let a baby play with all this dirty, dangerous stuff.

I shouted back, “One family bought this planet? And they want their baby to play around this mountain of broken skyscrapers and trains and machines? Are they crazy or am I?”

The man-creature didn’t lose one bit of his smile. “I never argue with buyers who pay me in cash and want to take over right away. I’m just so happy they wanted it just the way it is. So can you put down all these things and prepare to leave?”

I sighed, realizing that it was useless to argue. The planet had new owners, and I was just a trespasser now. But I decided to stall for time, just long enough to see this family that was rich enough to buy a planet and stupid enough to let a little child play with the trash.

Just then, the sky became very dark. I looked up, and there was a spaceship filling up half the sky! Imagine how big this thing must have been, getting closer and closer. I quickly made a new

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decision: Instead of stalling for time and maybe getting squished by this giant ship coming in for a landing, I thought I would take off and watch the new family arrive while I hovered *above* the planet.

I got myself and Tinky strapped in and took off. I had to fly at a low angle at first, just to avoid this massive spaceship coming in and passing us on its way down. (Now I know how a hummingbird must feel when it flies near a huge jet airliner!)

Once we were high enough, I put the spaceship on hover, so we could see the new arrivals down below. I imagined this “family” would be a few thousand people, and it would be fun to see how they spread out and took possession of their new planet home. Well, was I in for a surprise! That big spaceship opened its door, and out came a family – a man and a woman, and she was holding a baby. That’s it. No one else came out the door.

And then I realized that the man and woman must have been taller than a 40-story building on Earth. No, more like a 60-story building! Or maybe more! For them, walking from the junk mountain to the far-away ocean would only take a few steps!

Then the woman put the baby down on the ground, near the pile of leftovers. And the baby sat on the ground and reached up, and its little hand reached over halfway up the mountain! And the little hand grabbed a spaceship that was probably twice the size of mine, and the little hand put the spaceship up to its little mouth, and then....

I had seen enough. One little family really did need a whole planet – at least this “little” family certainly did! I told Computer to set a course for home, and I didn’t look back.

And that, dear grandchildren, is why you’ll just be getting very normal Earth presents from me next time we see each other.

Love and kisses,
Grandma



Episode 17: I Eat at Your Dog's Restaurant!

Dear Grandkids,

I just had to tell you all about this as soon as I got back from my latest trip into the galaxy. I'm still dizzy with confusing thoughts, but I'm laughing at the same time. Here's what happened....

I was on Zork, which is a dark little planet in the Catchascatchcan solar system. It's not dark because it's far from its sun, like the way Neptune is far from our sun. No, it's dark because there are always thick clouds overhead – always! A sunny day on Zork is when you can see a faint shadow of yourself on the ground. A dark day is nearly the same as night. And of course you can never see the stars above you, night or day, because of all the clouds.

Well, I was there because I had heard about a multi-family yard sale there. And let me tell you, on Zork the yards are really big – as big as football fields. So I could only imagine what I could find in all that space!

Unfortunately, there really wasn't much to buy. There were some terrific things, and cheap prices. But how could I use a 10-foot wide mixing bowl in my kitchen, or a radio that only played Zork music, which sounds a lot like fingernails on a chalkboard? And how could any of you use shirts with six arm holes or pants with five legs?

But then I found a very curious thing: a little box with some sunglasses in it. And I thought to myself: *Who would ever need sunglasses on such a gloomy planet?* I picked up one pair and put it on. Incredible! Suddenly everything got brighter and clearer – like shiny and new-looking! Now I understood why Zorkites would

Grandma in Space!

wear such glasses. I decided to buy the whole box and let each of you have a pair.

I was ready to go home, when I struck up a conversation with someone else rummaging through the yard sale stuff. Her name was Heebro, and she was from another planet in the Catchascatchcan system, about two planets over.

It turned out that we had a lot in common. Heebro let me know that she, too, was a grandmother. I told her she didn't look old enough to be a grandmother (although it was hard to tell, since her whole face was covered with reddish fur. Also, her nose was pointed like a big poodle or a Collie).

Anyway, she said she was plenty old enough to be a grandmother. In fact, she was going to turn 278 in a few days! And then she asked me how old I was. When I told her, she looked at me as if I was lying! Then she started laughing and said I was a very funny creature, and asked if my grandkids enjoyed my wild sense of humor.

I didn't know how to answer her, because I wasn't sure what she thought was so funny. Then she suggested I come for a visit, as long as I was in the neighborhood. I agreed, and she gave me directions to her house on her planet, which is called Farndagle.



Back in my spaceship, I woke Tinkerbelle and told her we were not going home just yet, but instead going to a nearby planet. She didn't seem to mind. Then I told Computer the destination, and we got underway.

As we zipped along toward Farndagle, I had a weird thought: What would Heebro and the other Farndagmites think about the fact that I had a pet that looked a lot like them, only much smaller and walking on four legs? Would they be amused at the resemblance? Would they be insulted that I had a pet that looked like them? Would they think I was some kind of criminal slave-holder? Or should I just leave Tinkerbelle in the spaceship the whole time I visited?

Grandma in Space!

Before I could make up my mind, we arrived. The spaceship had landed in a field of green and purple grass, and I could see a cluster of houses just beyond. At least, I assumed they were houses. They were shaped like bubbles, perfectly round, so they didn't need roofs. But they had cute little doors and windows, so they had to be houses.

I decided to leave Tinky in the spacecraft, and I ventured out into the field. The sun was exactly overhead, so I knew it must be noon on this part of her planet. I walked into the neighborhood of houses. Sure enough, one of them had just the address and description that Heebro had given me – white and red alternating wavy lines. I knocked on the door.

“Who is it?” came the familiar voice.

“It's the grandma you met a while ago on Zork,” I replied.

The door opened, and there stood Heebro, now wearing a housecoat instead of a spacesuit. She asked me in and had me sit down in her living room.

We chatted for a little while, mostly about grandmotherly things. But then I heard a bumping sound from behind a door. Heebro tried to ignore the sound. She kept talking, probably hoping I would ignore it, too. But the bumping sound didn't stop, and I could see that Heebro was getting uncomfortable. Finally, she said, “I'm sorry. This is so embarrassing. My pet wants out. When he gets shut up in a room, he keeps bumping the door. But I just don't think it's a good idea while you're here.”

“Is your pet vicious? Does he bite?” I asked.

“No, he's really quiet and shy. But he's used to being with me all the time, so he doesn't like being separated from me. Still, it's probably best this way....”

“Heebro, please, I love that you have a pet. Let him come in the room and join us.”

“Well, I'm not sure. You might get upset....”

“Upset? Me? Are you kidding? Go ahead, I'll be fine with it.”

Grandma in Space!

“Alright, I’ll go get him.”

She got up and walked over to the door where the bumping came from. She opened the door and out trotted...a chubby little four-legged, bald-headed Earth man!

I nearly jumped out of my chair. Her pet’s face looked a little like the man who owns an Italian restaurant near my house. Only this little pet walked on four legs and didn’t have a cigar in his mouth, and the rest of his body was covered in short, dark-colored fur.

Heebro started talking, with her words coming out in a fast jumble. “Oh, I knew this would upset you! When I got home, I realized that our pet chobos look like Earthlings, so I hid him. I’m so sorry. This is terrible. But they aren’t humans. BeeBee here is just a chobo, not a human. Really, they’re just little pets!”

Now it was my turn to be embarrassed. But I figured that if Heebro could be honest with me, I could be honest with her. I stood up.

Heebro looked hurt. “I understand if you want to leave.”

I stopped her. “No, I’m not leaving. I just want to go to my spaceship and get something. I’ll be right back.”



In a few minutes, I was back at the front door, with Tinkerbelle in my arms. I knocked and told Heebro it was me again.

She opened the door and said, “I’m so glad you...” And then she saw Tinkerbelle, with her fur and pointy nose, looking like a little toy Heebro. Then Tinkerbelle looked up at her.

Heebro couldn’t finish her sentence. She just stared at Tinkerbelle and at me, and back at Tinkerbelle, and back at me. Her eyes were wide. She shivered. She froze. So did I.

Finally, I broke the silence. “On Earth, we have pet dogs. This is Tinkerbelle.”

Then Heebro broke her silence. “Well, how rude of me. Don’t just stand at the door. Please come back in. You and...Tinkerbelle.”

Grandma in Space!

Soon we were back in the living room, with BeeBee in Heebro's lap and Tinkerbelle in mine. We two grownups just stared at each other. Our pets tried not to look at the grownups or at each other.

Then we laughed. And laughed. And laughed some more. There was no more tension, no more misunderstanding. We were just two grandmas with our pets in our laps. But it was kind of weird. In my mind, it was like a dog holding a human sitting across from a human holding a dog. And I'm sure Heebro saw it in just the opposite way.

Still, we managed to be friends and find many things to talk about that afternoon. I don't remember much, but I do remember how strangely she looked at me when I told her about eating lunch on Zork.

"What is lunch?" she asked. "Is that a kind of food?"

"No, lunch is one of our three meals every day."

"Three meals? You Earthlings eat three times every day?"

I confessed, "Well, really we eat three meals, and sometimes a snack in between each one, and maybe another snack before bedtime."

Heebro just stared at me in complete disbelief. Then she laughed. "Oh, there's that sense of humor again!"

She changed the subject before I could protest and tell her I was stating facts, not telling a joke.

Soon Heebro announced, "I'm afraid it's getting late. I hate to chase you off, but I have a big day tomorrow, and I have to get to bed soon."

I was shocked. I had arrived at noon, and I had visited for no more than a three hours. Yet here she was, talking about bedtime. Was she being honest with me, or was she making excuses and trying to get rid of me?

She walked me to the door, and when she opened it, I was surprised that it was nearly dark outside! That got me thinking....

Grandma in Space!

“Heebro, how many times a day do you eat?”

“Why, just once. There isn’t time to eat more often.”

I did a little animation of spinning balls in my head. “Your planet must rotate around its axis very fast, compared to Earth, so your days are much shorter than ours. That must be why it’s getting dark already, and why everyone eats only once a day.”

Heebro just looked at me, a bit confused, but she seemed to accept what I said as probably true.

“And how many days are in your year here on Farndagle?”

“There are two hundred eighty.”

So I imagined my animated balls some more. “So your planet revolves around your sun much quicker than Earth revolves around our sun, and that makes your year much shorter than ours.”

Heebro blinked a few times, then said, “If you say so.”

Then I reached a conclusion. “So when you said you were about to turn 278 years old, that’s 278 Farndagle years, where the days are shorter and the years are shorter than on Earth. On Earth, you certainly wouldn’t be 278 years old! In Earth years, you would probably be about my age.”

Heebro smiled and accepted my rough kind of math. “That sounds good to me,” she said. “We certainly have a lot in common.”

As I started out the door, Tinkerbelle, still in my arms, finally looked out at Heebro and BeeBee. She quickly buried her head back in my arms and gave a quiet growl. When he heard that sound, BeeBee turned in his owner’s arms and looked toward Tinkerbelle. Then he made a sound – a sound that reminded me of a certain short, grumpy, bald man grumbling about his cold spaghetti noodles!

Heebro and I exchanged good-byes and hugs, and I started out across the field to my spaceship – nearly in the dark of night already. Before climbing in, I looked back and saw lights in the windows of the bubble houses, and then the lights started to go out.

Grandma in Space!

The Farndagmites on this side of the planet were going to bed now, after a daytime that lasted only about six hours. How strange!

Well, I was not a Farndagmite, and I was awake and hungry, and so was my Earth pet. So we hurried inside the spaceship to see what Computer could heat up for our dinner. And then it was off for home, so I could tell you all about this odd adventure!

Oh, and the sunglasses I bought you? Well, I had put the box of them on a shelf by a window of the spaceship. When I came back from visiting Heebro, the afternoon sunshine on her planet had shone through the window and melted all the glasses into a heap of messy goo. I should have known that anything made on a cloudy planet couldn't handle sunlight! Oh, well, some things just can't be predicted! Sorry!

Love to you all,
Grandma



Episode 28: Tinkerbell to the Rescue!

Dear Grandkids,

Next time you visit, bring something extra for Tinkerbell. Why? Because she's a hero! Yes, timid little adorable fearful Tinkerbell is a real hero. If it wasn't for her, I wouldn't be sitting here writing to you. And a whole planet would still be in danger. So let me tell you how she became so grand and wonderful...

On Earth, so many people have used social media to stay in touch over long distances. Well, I do the same with the friends I make in my travels. Every morning I check on Spacebook to find out what friends around the galaxy are up to.

The other day, I saw something posted by my friend Treezanna. She lives on a planet called Pembatron. She's a grandma like me, but she has over eighty grandchildren. Do you think that's incredible? It's not, because on Pembatron, lots of grandmas have over a hundred!

Anyway, Treezanna posted a message saying not one of her grandchildren had called or visited in over a month – and a month on Pembatron lasts 45 days – and a day on Pembatron lasts forty-six Earth hours. Just imagine how long a Pembatron month must feel! So it was understandable that she was feeling a little sad and sorry for herself. I would be the same if none of you ever called or visited for that long!

I wanted to see Treezanna and cheer her up, but it's such a long, long trip to Pembatron. I didn't want to be away from home for over three days just to cheer her up for a few hours. But I didn't want to just post a reply to her. I was a better friend than that!

Grandma in Space!

Then I had an idea about how I could be a good friend and cut the travel time in half: I would invite her for a visit on a planet halfway between Earth and Pembatron!

Before I could write her my reply and invite her to a visit, I thought I should get out a galaxy map and figure out where we could meet. Now that might seem like an easy thing to do, but it can be tricky. Our Milky Way Galaxy is very wide, but it has some thickness to it, so I had to get out my 3D map. And because all the planets revolve around suns, and all the suns are revolving around the center of the galaxy, finding a halfway point between two planets in two different solar systems gets complicated. So I put my 3D map in motion (something I should show you sometime) and let it run until it reached the following Monday. First I translated the day and date into the Pembatron calendar. Then I used the map tools to draw a 3D line between Earth and Pembatron. I focused in to get a close-up of the area around the halfway point of the line. There were about four planets I could choose from: Weeblix, Fazzbar, Glutentice, and Plaxtic.

Next I did a search on each planet to find out what kind of atmosphere, climate, and shopping was on the planet – oh, yes, and nice restaurants and cafés. And which eateries allowed pets, of course.

The winner came up Plaxtic. It had the right amount of oxygen and the right kind of prices in their stores. And it had a city called Jumbbit that had a little café with outside tables – and welcomed small pets.

Now I could reply to Treezanna. I had to put it in words that would make her want to leave her house, no matter how glum she was feeling.

Hi, Treezanna! I understand how awful you must feel right now. But I think it would do you a lot of good to get out of the house and do some grandma

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stuff – with me! What about seeing each other on a different planet and doing some sight-seeing and shopping and chatting? How about next Corsairvo? (That’s Monday for me.) I found a wonderful café on a planet called Plaxtic, with places to eat and shop. And I’ll bring Tinkerbell. You’re one of the only friends I have that Tinkerbell likes, and I know how much you like her. What do you say? Shall we meet on Plaxtic? I would really enjoy some time with you!

I hit the Send button and hoped for the best. And because of the distance and her sleep schedule, I knew I might have to wait a few hours for an answer. So I decided to get busy with a project. Aha! I could wash some walls in my house! That was something I had been promising to do for a long time. Out came the bucket and cleaning supplies. Out came the ladder. Out went Tinkerbell, skulking fearfully into another room. And away I went! Well, for a little while, anyway. My great wall-washing idea was beginning to feel like an endless chore, and I soon gave up. I started putting away all my equipment.

“You can come back, Tinky,” I called out. “I’m finished with this project – for now. Let’s go check Spacebook again!”

Of course, it had not been a few hours – in fact, it was less than even one hour since I posted on Spacebook. But that was beside the point. I wanted to see if Treezanna had replied to me in her time of need. And sure enough, she had.

I just woke up from my second sleep of the day and found your Spacebook message. I think you have a terrific idea! I would love to visit with you on a planet neither of us has seen. Corsairvo is a good day for me to do it, because I’ll be finished with all

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my regular chores by then. I checked my galaxy map and I can see that you want each of us to fly about the same distance. Good thinking! So I'll see you for lunch soon. Happy travels! And kisses to Tinkerbell!

Now I had to get busy preparing for the trip to Plaxtic. Even though it was a couple of days away, I needed to make sure that *my* chores would be done before I left. I set up the kitchen for bread-making and washed the window over the sink. I swept the floors and got the washer running. (Oh, am I a great multi-tasker!) Later, while the bread baked, I made the bed with fresh sheets. Finally, I watered the indoor plants and fed them a little plant food. When the bread cooled, I would slice it and put most of it away in the freezer. (That's why I always have wonderful sliced bread when you visit, in case you didn't know!)



Anyway, I won't bore you with any more details. So let's skip to Monday, when I carried Tinkerbell up into our spaceship and set a course for Plaxtic. Even a journey half as far as Pembatron was going to be a long one, so I did some multi-tasking around the ship as we sped on our way. I dusted the control panel and wiped down my chair. Then I contacted the café and made a reservation for later. And then I looked at Tinkerbell and frowned.

"Tinky, I forgot to give you a bath at home! Hmmmm.... Now that we're in zero gravity, it's probably not a good idea to do it here. I could have big water blobs all over the cabin. And any water that got on you would be very hard to get off, because the surface tension of the water would just stick to you. Well, I'll just have to groom you with baking soda instead, and even that could make a mess."

So I *very* carefully sprinkled baking soda on her coat, then tried to brush it out in just one direction so the powder wouldn't fly off everywhere. Hmmp! Nice try, Grandma! Now I had to clean

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up baking soda – not on the floor, the way it would settle on Earth, but in little dust clouds around the cabin. It’s a good thing I got that zero-gravity vacuum cleaner at a yard sale on Sherbus last month. I was able to point it at the little clouds and suck them all away in just a few minutes.

Now it was time to stretch out in mid-air and take a nap, since it would still be a long time before we arrived at Plaxtic. Of course, I had to tie myself up to the straps hanging down from the ceiling. I didn’t want to float around the cabin and bump my head against a wall. That’s no way to wake up from a nap!

When I woke up, I felt great, and there was only a little time left before we arrived. I first made sure my space pack had all the things I needed before I put it on. When Computer announced our arrival, I sat down at the controls and had it find us a parking space near the café in the town of Jumbbit. Then I got Tinkerbelle on her leash and we exited the ship.

Down on the ground, I found the air on Plaxtic very sweet and very warm, but not hot or humid. This was a Goldilocks planet for Earthlings – not too hot, not too cold, but just right! So I put Tinkerbelle down and let her walk on her leash as we made our way to the café.

The creatures on Plaxtic seemed somewhat human-like and friendly. They were hairless, and their skin was a brownish-tan color. But their bodies seemed, well, *wobbly*. I don’t mean that they walked wobbly; I mean their whole body wobbled a bit. Or was it something in the air that just made them seem to have an unstable shape?

The city was beautiful, with buildings and tall towers in many bright colors. And there were fountains all over, shooting water up high in the air. I couldn’t wait to meet up with Treezanna and explore the city some more with her. But for now, I had to get to the café and find her. I picked up Tinkerbelle and carried her as I walked along the busy streets.

Grandma in Space!

When I got to the café, Treezanna was already sitting at one of the outside tables. And she looked a little wobbly herself! I decided that it must be something in the air that made it happen, and most likely Treezanna saw me wobbly as well. So I put it out of my mind. We greeted each other in the Pembatron manner, putting our right hands on each other's head and slapping each other's left hands. (I have to admit that it feels a little silly, but on Pembatron, it's considered very normal and polite.)

I held out Tinkerbelle for Treezanna to greet, but Tinky just turned her head and hid in my arms. I apologized for her behavior, saying it must be because we were on a strange planet, not on Pembatron or Earth.

Then I sat down and we started chatting. Mostly, Treezanna wanted to catch up on my recent adventures and recipes and news. So I talked and talked and she smiled. I figured that she didn't want to talk about herself, probably because she had been unhappy. When a wobbly waiter appeared, we ordered – and I hoped that Plaxtic food would be to our liking.

Our meal came in a while and I have to say that it all seemed a bit slimy – even the drink. I told Treezanna it wasn't what an Earthling would call tasty. She nodded in agreement, but she ate all of hers anyway.



After the less-than-delicious meal and a long time talking about myself, I suggested that we walk around the city and see the sights – and look for thrift stores. I was glad to see Treezanna smiling so much. This visit was doing her so much good!

At one point, I told Treezanna that my arms were getting tired from holding Tinkerbelle. Would she mind holding her a while? She said she was very glad to hold my precious pet to give my arms a rest. But Tinkerbelle wouldn't allow me to give her to Treezanna. When I held her out toward my friend, Tinkerbelle scrambled up my arms to hide her face in my neck. This was so odd and a little irritating.

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“Tinky, you remember Treezanna! Stop being so fussy and scared. My arms are tired and she likes you so much.”

Then Treezanna reached over to take Tinkerbelle from my shoulder. When she took Tinkerbelle into her arms and held her next to her body, I smiled at them both. Then I realized what I was seeing: Treezanna was wobbly, but Tinkerbelle wasn't!

What was going on? I kept smiling, but my brain was whirring. I started thinking of possible explanations:

- *Maybe...only humanoids looked wobbly on this planet, not other creatures.*
- *Or maybe...humanoids and pets looked wobbly after they had been on the planet a certain amount of time, and Treezanna had been here longer than us.*
- *Or maybe...Treezanna wasn't Treezanna!*

I took that last thought and tossed it around in my head from one side to the other:

- *On the one hand, she talks like Treezanna. On the other hand, she hasn't talked much at all.*
- *On the one hand, she looks like Treezanna. On the other hand, she looks wobbly like all the others out here on the street.*
- *On the one hand, she agreed about the food being slimy. On the other hand, she ate and drank it all.*

I was trying to make myself come to some conclusion with all these thoughts. So I tossed them back and forth one more time:

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- *Maybe she's really half Pembitron and half Plaxtic. When she's on Pembitron, she doesn't wobble. But here on Plaxtic she does wobble.*
- *Or maybe this creature in front of me is just completely Plaxtic!*

I kept smiling, but I shivered. And I saw that Tinkerbell was shivering, too. I had to say something! I had to *do* something! I must have looked so foolish with a grin on my face and nothing to say. But I had to be careful not to give away my suspicions. I had to be clever to save Tinkerbell – and myself!

Before I could speak or act, I saw that Tinkerbell was starting to shiver so hard that Treezanna was having a hard time holding her. I quickly put my hands out and sure enough, Tinkerbell fell – and I caught her just in time! Instantly, Treezanna started shivering – but not like I did or Tinkerbell did. It was more like wobbling extra hard and fast. And the wobbling got even harder and faster, until....

Treezanna turned into a Plaxtic person!

That person was brownish-tan, like all the other creatures on the street. And no hair, just like all the others. But this person was different from all the others in one way: it was not moving. Plaxtic Treezanna was not Treezanna and no longer looked like Treezanna. And she no longer talked or moved like Treezanna. This creature did not do anything, as if it was asleep with eyes open – *and not wobbling anymore.*

I looked around and noticed a few Plaxtic people staring our way. Then there was a noise like a siren, getting closer and closer. A vehicle stopped nearby and the sound stopped. Two Plaxtic people with badges on got out of the vehicle and came toward us – wobbling all the way. One of them was much bigger than the other, and this big one walked over to Plaxtic Treezanna, picked her up, carried her to the vehicle, and put her in the back.

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The smaller one came up to me and Tinkerbell. She spoke very politely but firmly to us. “You and your little creature must come with us.”

I walked along with this Plaxtic person, who put me in the middle of the vehicle. Then we rode off, with the badge people sitting in front, me and Tinkerbell sitting in the middle, and the rigid fake Treezanna lying in the back.

In a little while, we arrived at a large orange building. The two badge people got out. The small one opened the door to let me out. The large one opened the back, picked up the rigid figure, and walked into the building with it. Was the fake Treezanna asleep, or dead? And wait a minute! I realized there was another, more important, question: Where was the REAL Treezanna!?! I was suddenly desperate to find out.

Maybe this was a police station, and I could get someone inside to help me find my friend. But then I saw Plaxtic people, barely able to walk, wobbling less than all the others. They were being helped out of the building – and every helper wore a badge and wobbled the “regular” way. So was this a hospital for getting Plaxtic people unfrozen? I asked the one who was escorting me into the building.

“Is this a police station or a hospital?”

The badge person looked at me blankly. “This is Retro-shift Station Number 2.”

As if that was going to mean anything to me! So I decided to ask a different question as we walked down a long hallway.

“Am I in trouble?”

“Do you mean to ask if you are being accused of a crime?”

“Exactly. Am I being accused of a crime?”

“No, you are not. At least, not yet.”

That sent a new shiver down my spine. I decided to keep quiet for now. And keep Tinkerbell hidden in my arms.



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After a long walk down the long hallway, the badge person stopped and pointed to a door on our left. I was supposed to go in. I did, and the badge person went in with me. There on a bed or table or something in-between, lay the fake Treezanna. There were tubes and wires attached to her, and the tubes and wires were all connected to some machine on the wall behind her.

Next to her, there was a Plaxtic person with no badge, but instead wearing a bright red robe. She spoke directly to me.

“Come over here and stand before me.”

I walked over and stood still, wondering what would happen next. I could feel Tinkerbelle starting to shiver again, but I didn't look down or talk to her.

She spoke again. “I must listen to your story of how this happened,” and she pointed to the rigid fake Treezanna. “Then I will pass judgment on both of you.”

So I told the story of my landing and my meeting at the café. I told about Tinkerbelle getting frightened by someone who was supposed to be a friend, and how her shivering caused her to be dropped, and how my friend turned into a frozen Plaxtic person after that.

“And who or what is a Tinkerbelle?” she asked.

I held Tinkerbelle out for her to see. Tinkerbelle was shivering a lot now, as if she was demonstrating what I had said in my story.

“Can this Tinkerbelle speak for itself?”

I replied, “No this is my pet, who has no language that you or I could understand. She just yips sometimes, and whines when she feels unsure of what's going on.”

“Can you have this Tinkerbelle produce these sounds that are called yips and whines?”

“No, I cannot. She is my pet, but I have not trained her to make noises on command.”

“So you are speaking for your pet. I see. Then we shall never know exactly how this Tinkerbelle discovered that you were talking

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to an imposter. That is unfortunate. It could be very useful to have Tinkerbells all over the planet spotting imposters. But if they cannot explain how they do it, there is a chance that the imposters might go free.”

Now I understood that this robed creature in front of me was some sort of judge. I was telling my story to help her decide who was to blame for the freezing. I decided to get a little bold and talk to her without being asked a question.

“Excuse me, but I don’t understand how people on this planet can become such good imposters and even look like other creatures. Does it have to do with the way people’s bodies seem to wobble? I would love to have someone explain. But there is something more important: I need to find the friend that this imposter was trying to imitate. She must be here somewhere, and she might be hurt or in danger!”

The judge nodded at what I said and replied.

“First, everyone on this planet can change shape. But it requires a lot of energy. The longer the change goes on or the more stress the imposter feels, the more energy it takes. This imposter must have felt a lot of stress and ran out of energy. When that happens, the imposter goes back to normal shape and freezes from lack of energy. That is when an emergency vehicle picks up the frozen one and brings him or her to a place like this. But that is not all. A judge and witnesses must be present at the unfreezing. That is how we determine whether the shift was legal or not. This one (pointing at fake Treezanna) was not shifting legally.”

“You see, in the old days of our planet, shape-shifting happened all the time. And it led to many problems when people became imposters to steal from others or trick others into giving away things. And so our wisest men and women invented the idea of having laws, so that we could have a peaceful planet. Now shape-shifting can only be used for good purposes, or else the shifter must be punished. It is hard to catch imposters who break

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the law, but your Tinkerbell would be a great tool for finding them, especially if it could be trained to talk.”

“Well,” I said, “Tinkerbell is my pet, my dog pet. But there are thousands and thousands of dogs on my planet that do not have owners. I could bring some to you to catch imposters, but I doubt you’ll teach them to talk. By the way, on my planet, there are many stories of shape-shifters, but they are all folktales or science fiction, because there is no such thing as a real shape-shifter where I live.”

“Interesting,” replied the judge. “I am sure if you did have shape-shifters, your pet-dog-Tinkerbells would be very useful. For us, who are real shape-shifters, pet-dog-Tinkerbells could be extremely valuable. In fact, your Tinkerbell should be rewarded. We will arrange that today. Now, as to your missing friend....”

With that, the judge motioned for the badge person to come forward. Then she spoke to me.

“Do you have a picture of your friend that our officers can look at?”

“No,” I replied, “but my friend does not look like me at all. She is from Pembatron in the Soinisoide solar system. If you have a Spacebook account, I can show you her picture. Or you can look up what Pembatron females look like in your data files. But maybe she is still in her spaceship, so it would be a good idea to find that first.”

The judge nodded again and spoke to the officer with the badge. “Did you hear that? Send a team of officers around the city to look for a spaceship with a Pembatron license plate. If you find one, contact me so we can take this friend to identify her.”

The officer nodded and left the room. I spoke again to the judge.

“Please don’t make a big deal about giving Tinkerbell a reward. It’s much more important to find my friend right now.”

The judge agreed. “Yes, we can wait until your friend is found. But the reward has to be done. It is the law!”

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“Alright,” I said, “but later.”

“Yes, later.”



Treezanna’s spaceship was found very quickly, not far from the café. Its door was sealed shut from the outside with some kind of glue. The officers opened it with tools and found Treezanna inside, asleep. I was taken to her, and Tinkerbell jumped out of my arms to run over to her and lick her face. She laughed and tickled Tinky’s stomach. Then she sat up and told her story to me and some officers who were taking notes.

“Well, I landed, and before I could walk out the door, there was a knock. I opened the door and there was a Plaxtic person wearing a colorful robe and many badges. He said he was on the Plaxtic Welcoming Committee, and he asked about my trip here. I showed him the Pembatron greeting ritual, then I explained why I had come and who I was going to meet, and that it was my first time on Plaxtic. And that’s the last thing I remember until you woke me up. What happened while I was asleep?”

“I had lunch with you, Treezanna. But it wasn’t you. It must have been the person who greeted you here. He must have shape-shifted to look like you so he could trick me for some illegal purpose.”

“A shape-shifter!” exclaimed Treezanna. “I never knew there were real ones!”

“Actually,” I explained, “we’re on a planet full of them! But fortunately, most of them do it only for good purposes.”

The officers insisted that we come with them to Tinkerbell’s reward ceremony. We walked to a green and yellow building that had an outdoor stage in front. The judge was standing on the stage and waved for me to bring Tinkerbell up. A trumpet-like instrument blew some notes and a small crowd gathered below the stage.

The judge opened a box and pulled out a medal on a ribbon. It was nearly as big as Tinkerbell herself! But the judge didn’t seem

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to notice. After all, she was here to proclaim Tinkerbell a hero of the planet and hang a medal around her doggie neck to prove it.

The judge gave a little speech about bravery and the law, then walked over to us with the medal. She reached out to put the ribbon around Tinkerbell's neck. That's when Tinky started shivering, and the judge backed away.

"Just hand the medal to me," I said. "I'll put it on her."

So the judge did that, and I could feel how heavy the medal was! I put it around Tinky's neck, but I held the bottom of the medal in the palm of my hand so it wouldn't be so heavy on her. I took one of her front paws and waved it to the crowd. Then I called out to everyone in a loud voice.

"If Tinkerbell could talk, she would say that she is proud to serve the people of Plaxtic!"

Everyone cheered, and the judge smiled graciously.

After the ceremony, Treezanna told me she was really hungry now that she had missed our lunch. Could I take her to that café so she could eat?

"I could, but only if you like slimy food and drink," I said.

Treezanna shivered like Tinkerbell. "Ugh! What a horrible idea. You know that on Pembatron, we only eat crunchy food and liquid drinks."

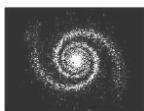
"Then let's go to your spaceship and thaw out some crunchy Pembatron food for you," I said, laughing.

And that's what we did – and we finally got to catch up with each other over stories of space flights and recipes and grandchildren. Too soon, it was time for each of us to go home. It was good to see the real Treezanna smiling again. We hugged and departed in opposite directions. And now here I am, safely back on Earth, writing to you about the whole adventure.

Now I didn't say Tinkerbell was a hero because she was brave. I just said she was a hero. And a hero is a hero whether it comes from doing something brave or from quivering in fear!

Grandma in Space!

Hugs and kisses,
Grandma



Episode 32: Lost in Space?!

Dear Grandkids,

My last space adventure taught me a valuable lesson, or maybe two. The trouble is, I'm not exactly sure what I've learned. I'll tell you all the whole story, and you tell me what to make of it....

Tinkerbell and I had been out shopping at flea markets and thrift stores. I was very lucky, and I was coming home with unique gifts for each of you (and myself). I was so proud that none of the things I bought you were very dangerous. And I was even prouder that I was coming back to Earth with all the presents. Not one of them had melted, or exploded, or shriveled, or got taken away from me.

Anyway, we were zipping along through the galaxy, and I was enjoying the scenery passing by. Tinkerbell was enjoying poking around familiar things in the cabin of the spaceship. The ship was humming, the computer had everything under control, and we had plenty of fuel for our journey.

Suddenly, I felt a blip. It wasn't like a physical bump or jolt, such as when the spaceship gets hit by a little meteor. It was more like a feeling – a change in atmosphere or mood or attitude. I looked out the window more closely, and I could swear that the stars had shifted somehow. I felt confused and curious, so I asked Computer about it.

“Computer, dear, did we change course or something?”

“No, we did not change course. But we are not on the same course, at least not exactly.”

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“Computer, you are speaking in riddles. Now tell me straight: Is this spaceship on the course I set, or has it changed? And how and why did it change?”

“I only make riddles when asked to do so, and you have not asked. As for the questions you asked, I cannot answer them with any facts. My data analysis shows that nothing has changed in flight controls, but my navigational instruments show a definite change in position. I cannot explain it, but I can give you a theory about what happened.”

“Yes, Computer, give me your theory.” I was getting nervous. Computer always had an answer, so this was unusual.

“My theory is that we accidentally passed through a wormhole. If that is the case, then I cannot tell you for certain where we are – or when we are.”

That made me sit up straight! Computer wasn’t sure *where* we were? Or *WHEN*?

“Computer, tell me more about this possible wormhole. Then tell me what you can do about it.”

“A wormhole is a little rip in the fabric of space-time. There are probably many of them in the universe. But they do not last very long. If we retraced our steps and flew exactly to the spot where it was, it most likely wouldn’t be there anymore. By passing through a wormhole, we could be in a new position in the galaxy, or even in another galaxy. We could also be in another time, past or future. It is possible that we might even be in a completely different universe, with its own galaxies and its own rules about gravity, time, et cetera.”

“Computer, I know you aren’t supposed to understand human feelings, but do you realize that you are saying things that are really scary to me? And then you say ‘et cetera’ as if I’m supposed to know how many ways one universe can be different from another. So tell me this: Can you take us back to Earth, right now?”

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“I can set a course for where Earth should be. It will be interesting to see if Earth is where it is supposed to be.”

“Interesting?!? Sorry, but I don’t think that’s an *interesting* thought at all! Take us back there now!”



The spaceship turned slightly and shot off in the new direction. Computer knew I was nervous and turned up the speed without having to be told to do it.

In a while, I saw a familiar sight: Saturn, with its rings. Then came Jupiter, with its huge red spot.

“Computer, dear, we’re flying past Saturn and Jupiter, so we must be on our way home. Right?”

“If we passed through a wormhole, it is possible that we did not move very far in space. But it is also possible that we moved quite far in time.”

When computer told me that, I started imagining going home and finding dinosaurs instead of my house – millions of years in the past. Then I imagined coming back during one of Earth’s ice ages and finding saber-tooth cats and woolly mammoths and glaciers where my house should be – thousands of years in the past. And then I imagined coming home and finding my grandkids living in my house – but old enough to be grandparents themselves! Think of all the birthdays and holidays that I would have missed!

“Computer, if my house is still standing, please park in the usual space above the garage. But do it very quietly, in case other people are living there now. And if my house is not there, please go back into orbit so I can look down and figure out what time in history we are visiting.”

Computer’s reply really shocked me. “I will do that, but remember there is no guarantee that the Earth you return to is even the same Earth as the one you left. It might be an Earth in a different universe.”

Grandma in Space!

I gasped with astonishment. “You mean I could land and everything would look normal, but it would really be completely different?”

“That is correct.”

“Well, what if I see someone I know? How will I know it’s really the same person I know or a copy of that person in another universe?”

“You could ask some questions, but if the answers sound normal to you, you would still not know for certain if it was the same person you know, or if it was the same person but living in another space-time existence.”

All this made me really frightened, but I had no choice: I had to go back to my house and try to deal with whatever might happen!

Soon we were hovering over my neighborhood and then my house. It looked the same as always. I looked in every direction, and I couldn’t see anything unusual or different.

“Computer, let’s go home now.”

The roof port opened up and we silently glided down into the space above the garage. I took a deep breath and let it out.

“Tink, I’m going to leave you and the gifts here and go inside. I need to be prepared for anything!”

Then I realized it might be foolish to just walk into the house from the garage, because someone inside might think I was an intruder. So I went around to the front door and rang the doorbell. I heard familiar footsteps, and then the door opened. And there stood....

ME!

The ME inside said, “Thank goodness you’re here! Come in quickly, before the neighbors see us!”

And then I, I mean she, grabbed my arm and pulled me inside.

Now it was my turn to talk. All I had were questions. “Were you expecting me? How? And what are we going to do with two

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of us from now on? Is there another Tinkerbell, too? That will scare her out of her wits!”

The other me smiled and led me to a chair, and then she sat facing me. I couldn't imagine how she (I) could be so calm with this catastrophe going on.

“Now don't worry about anything. All those kinds of problems have been taken care of. It's part of the service.”

“Service?” I asked. “What service? I didn't call for help. Did you know I was in trouble? How could you know I was in trouble, if you're me?”

“Ah, but I'm not you. I'm an agent with the Intergalactic Wormhole Resolution Service – the IWRS. I don't normally look and talk like you, but I got into costume when we received the emergency notification from our Wormhole Radar Patrolbot. It's been my job to take your place until we found you or you had found your own way back.”

“That's wonderful!” I exclaimed. “Imagine someone covering for me while I was lost in time or space! That's quite a service!”

The agent blushed. “Well, first of all, it's never a permanent replacement, and second, it's not free. Wait till you get the bill for our services!”

That made me want to ask more questions. But I didn't get a chance, because the agent had more to say.

“Right now, I have a couple of small emergencies that need to be taken care of. That's why I'm so glad you made it back so quickly. First, I got a phone call a few minutes ago from a woman speaking partly in another language. She said something about a fence, and I said okay, but I didn't really know what it was about.”

“Oh, that must have been Yolanda, my neighbor in back,” I explained. “She's probably standing by the fence right now to tell me something or give me something. I'm sure she's wondering why I haven't come out yet.”

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The agent nodded. “Then you should go out and take care of that. When you get back, I’ll tell you about the other emergency.”

So I went out to the fence and Yolanda told me she had been cooking lunch and would I like to taste her tamales. I said I would love some, and she handed them over the fence to me. I thanked her and said I had to get back inside because I was waiting for a phone call.

Once inside, I offered a tamale to the agent and asked about the other emergency.

“You – or I – (munch, munch) promised your granddaughter that you would bake chocolate chip cookies with her today,” the agent said.

“Really? That’s nice. So what’s the problem? Don’t they have chocolate on the planet you come from? Or is it that you have never made cookies before?”

“Madam, part of my training for this job is to know how to do many things, including (munch, munch) cooking and baking. The problem is that children can often spot an imposter. I don’t know how they do it, but they do. I was going to pretend you had a cold so that I could wrap up in a scarf and cap to look different, and then make myself sound different to keep her from being suspicious. But now that you’re here, there really is no emergency. Well, there is, because you’re out of chocolate chips and she’s going to be here soon.”

I was a little annoyed. “I just bought a new bag of chips last week. Have you been eating them?”

The agent was embarrassed. “Yes, I’ve been snacking. Chocolate is not easy to get everywhere, so I couldn’t resist. I’ll take the cost of a bag of chocolate chips off your bill. But you better go shopping as soon as I leave.”

Suddenly I felt silly. I didn’t want myself to leave! But then I remembered that only the agent was leaving. I was me and I was

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here and I wasn't leaving – except to go shopping quickly. But I still had more questions.

“Before you go, can you answer a few more questions? For instance, you said your service was never permanent. What if I was missing for a month or a year? Would you stay all that time? And what if the wormhole made me come back before I left? Would there be two of me – and two Tinkerbells?”

The agent got up to leave. “If you had been gone for a long time and we couldn't find you, I would have to call all your friends and relatives and tell them that I (or you) would be leaving for a long trip and might never return. As for your second question, you actually did get back before you left. This is Tuesday afternoon, just a little before the time you left.”

I was flabbergasted. “Then why didn't I find the real me here at home? Why wasn't there a duplicate spaceship upstairs when I landed? Why were you already here if I haven't or hadn't left yet?”

“Madam,” the agent said with a sigh, “if I explained all that to you, I would have to charge extra, and you probably wouldn't understand anyway. Let's just say it's all part of the service. We try to keep everything tidy and orderly in the past, present, AND future.”

With that, I/he/she/it put on a large overcoat and hat that hid my looks and walked out the door. The figure walked up the street, turned the corner, and disappeared.

I shook my head in disbelief. But then I remembered I had to buy chocolate chips. But before I did that, I needed to go back to my spaceship to get all my precious items!

When I opened the door of the ship, I bent down and Tinkerbelle jumped into my arms. Then I walked into the control room – and there were no presents!

“Tinkerbelle, what happened to all the stuff I bought at the sales we went to?” And then it hit me: It was Tuesday in the early

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afternoon – and I hadn't left yet! Of course there wouldn't be any presents.

“Tinks, did you watch the gifts disappear? Did it happen suddenly, or did they fade away slowly? Did it scare you?”

Tinkerbelle had no answer for me. Only she would know what happened, and I would just have a mystery.

So that's the whole story, kids. I really did have presents. But since I got home before I left, they aren't here. I'm sure you'll understand.

Love, Grandma



Episode 36: Grandma the Aggressive Athlete!

Dear Grandkids,

Of course you know about Earth's atmosphere – nitrogen, carbon dioxide, just enough oxygen, and some other elements. But out in space, there are planets with very different atmospheres. Some of them are poisonous to us, and I don't usually visit them. (Of course, if their ads promise really good bargains, I'll wear space gear for protection and breathing.) And then there are some planets have atmospheres that are very close to ours, but just enough different to make a big difference! That's what happened last week....

In the Biffident solar system, there are two planets in the same orbit – most unusual. (Don't worry: Since they both orbit their sun in the same direction and at the same speed, they will never collide with each other!)

On Trimark, the creatures are very human-like, although their skin is tough and spotted like a cheetah. And their voices sound like growls. On Frimark, the creatures look more like toads standing on two legs. Their bodies are covered with wooly hair, and their voices sound more like whistles. Since the two planets have nearly the same weather and nearly the same atmosphere, the creatures like to visit each other and compete in friendly ways.

There was a festival on both planets going on, with bazaars and street vendors and sports competitions. And there were space shuttles giving rides to make it easy to go back and forth between planets. Tinkerbelle and I arrived on Trimark on the next-to-last day of the festival, and it was very crowded. There were just about as many toad people as leopard people in the streets of the main city.

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With all the noise and crowding, I decided to leave Tinks in the spaceship. As I wandered the streets, I reminded myself that I was a visitor here, and I didn't know all the customs. So I politely let others walk and talk around me and get ahead of me in lines so I could observe the correct ways to act. I saw little things I could buy for each of you, and I watched street jugglers and mimes and acrobats. There was even a singing group up on a stage – with three Trimark growlers singing low and two Frimark whistlers singing high. It was fascinating and a bit funny to hear and watch, with their whistles and growls and different ways of moving with the music.

But then a loudspeaker caught my attention. A growly leopard-people voice was telling everyone that there was going to be a bi-planet sports competition very soon – on Frimark. The voice reminded everyone that they needed to catch the next shuttle to Frimark or they would miss the opening ceremony and the first several events at the stadium.

Instantly, a lot of toad people and leopard people stopped what they were doing and started moving quickly in one direction – probably toward the shuttle take-off station. I thought about taking the shuttle, but I remembered Tinkerbell all alone in the spaceship. So I decided to fly myself over to Frimark rather than take the shuttle.



We soon arrived at the Frimark city where the competition was being held. It was just as crowded as the city on Trimark we had visited earlier. So I knew I should leave Tinkerbell again.

It was easy to figure out where the sports stadium was, because there were so many leopard and toad people heading in one direction. I followed them. As I walked along, I noticed that the air here had a different odor than the air on Trimark – a bit more acid-y, and a bit heavier. No one seemed to mind. I supposed they were all used to it since there was a lot of traffic back and forth between the two planets.

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I got a seat in the stadium just as the teams were marching onto the field down below. What costumes! The Frimark teams wore mostly green and yellow, while the Trimark teams wore mostly brown and red. (It made me wonder if the two types of creatures could see the same colors as I do or as each other did!)

After the marching-in ceremony was over, the teams started warming up: stretching, jogging, and pushing against each other to warm their muscles. And that's when a strange feeling came over me. I really, really, I mean REALLY wanted to go out there on the field and start warming up, too! And I wanted to win at some event – I mean REALLY wanted to win! Quickly I got out of my seat and started running to leave the stadium and get back to my spaceship. I needed to change clothes for the competitions! I needed my best exercise shoes! I needed a sweatshirt and stretchy pants! I needed to move, to stretch, to WIN!

I opened the door to my spaceship. Tinkerbell was not waking up from a nap, as she usually would when I came back to the ship. No, she was right at the door and I nearly tripped on her. And she was growling and pacing and trying to jump up and down – as if she wanted to warm up for exercise and winning!

I quickly changed clothes and shoes and started out the door. But Tinkerbell was in the way, trying to get out the door, too. “Look, Tinky, I have to get out of here. Move over and stay till I get back.”

I pushed her away from the door with my foot and opened it. I went out and turned around to close the door, and there was Tinkerbell, outside, standing by my feet. “I don't have time to make you mind me. I've got to get back to the stadium!”

I reached down to pick her up, as I usually did, but she wouldn't have it. She raced down to the ground and started yipping at me to hurry up! Somehow I understood her need to move, just as I did. I started racing back to the stadium, with Tinkerbell always about two steps ahead of me. At the time it didn't occur to me that

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this was completely unlike Tinkerbell, who usually walked timidly by my side or even a step behind me. All I knew was that I needed to show these leopards and toads that I was as fast and as strong as they were – even their best athletes! And nobody better get in my way or I would make them wish they hadn't! Grrrr!

At the stadium, I started looking for a gate that let athletes onto the field. I pushed a few creatures out of my way and found what I was looking for over on the right. I hurried through the gate and ignored a hairy toad wearing some silly badge and whistle-yelling loudly at me as I ran onto the field.

I looked around and saw a racing event about to start. Here on Earth we use a starting gun, but on Frimark a bell sounded and the runners took off. And so did I! And so did Tinkerbell! I was frustrated to find myself falling behind in the race, and even more frustrated to see Tinkerbell ahead of me! Grrrr! I lowered my head and pumped my arms as hard as I could, but I couldn't keep up. I came in last!

Some toads and leopards wearing badges started running toward me. They looked upset. But Tinkerbell and I didn't have time to talk to them. I needed to find another event!

I ran around the field until I saw an event that maybe I could understand. The athletes were picking up balls a little smaller than Earth basketballs and holding them over their heads. I ran over and grabbed one of those balls, and it was heavy – made of some kind of solid metal. I watched the athletes line up for the race, and saw that they had to hold the metal ball over their heads with two hands. And they had to face backward at the starting line. When the bell sounded, the athletes started running backward, but each step had to be with knees up to their chests. I joined in, imitating the way they raced. Tinkerbell stayed on the sideline, unable to understand holding a ball or running backward. So instead she just jumped up and down and yipped furiously.

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Again I came in last! I was getting so angry! And I was getting tired of these toads and leopards with their badges running toward me. Grrrrr! I ran off to find another event, and Tinkerbelle followed, yipping all the way.

“Come on, Tinkerbelle! Let’s show these leopards and toads how tough Earthlings are!”

“Yip! Yip! Yip! Yip!”

Up ahead there was another event which looked even stranger than the last one. The athletes lined up with giant rubber bands wrapped around their arms and legs. Then the rubber bands were tied to each other with ropes. Then the athletes put on blindfolds. I dashed around wildly, looking for ropes and rubber bands and blindfolds so I could join the event. Grrrrr! I found some bands and quickly wrapped them around my arms and legs. Then I looked around for ropes and a blindfold. Over there! I ran toward some extra ropes lying on the ground, picked one up and....

Suddenly my legs left the ground. Day turned to night. I was lying face down, feeling very heavy. I couldn’t see anything, but I could hear Tinkerbelle yipping and growling. And then I heard a toady whistle-yell something that sounded like “Ouch!” I guessed that Tinkerbelle had bitten someone – and I was glad! How dare they keep us from competing!

Then I realized it was dark because I was pinned to the ground with toadies and leopards on top of me. Tinkerbelle must have bit some leg sticking out from the pile. Good for her!

I tried to wriggle free, but I couldn’t. Grrrrr! Then I was hauled up and into the light again as the leopards and toadies with badges held on to me. Grrrrr!

They carried me across the field with my legs kicking in the air while I yelled all sorts of threats at them. Tinkerbelle was following behind, yipping constantly in an angry tone. They marched me to the athlete’s entrance gate and out the other side of

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it. They put me down, then re-entered the gate without me. Then they stood at the gate, daring me to try to come back through.

I felt defeated – and suddenly very tired. I lay on the ground, and Tinkerbelle trotted over and licked my face. I think she was tired, too. I got up into a sitting position and put her in my lap.

“Tinkerbelle, what just happened? Did we go crazy or something? Why do I still want to get up and go in there? Why do I want to compete and win? Why do I want to be angry? Why am I so tired?”

Tinky just looked at me and licked my face again. She was as confused and as tired as I was. So I got up and walked my weary body and her weary body back to our spaceship.



When we got inside our ship, I was too tired to take off right away, but I knew we had to leave soon – partly because I had caused trouble and partly because I just didn’t feel right. I didn’t feel like *myself*. And Tinkerbelle was definitely acting strangely.

We finally lifted off the planet, but the strange feeling didn’t go away. As we hovered over the planet, I asked Computer for some advice.

“Computer dear, can you explain why I feel so athletic – and so competitive and so angry – even though we have left the sports event?”

Computer did not answer quickly, but finally said, “It might be because the atmosphere of Frimark has gases in it that have affected your brain. Perhaps those gases have stimulated the part of your brain that makes you more aggressive and nastier than you usually are.”

“More aggressive and nastier than USUAL? How dare you, Computer!” And I pounded the desktop with my fist.

Computer replied, “Do you see what I mean? You are finding it difficult to control yourself. This is what I suggest that you should do before you set a course for Earth: Go back to Trimark where the air is more like Earth. Open the door of the spaceship.

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Air out the cabin and take a few deep breaths. Perhaps breathing the Trimark air that will de-activate the aggressive parts of your brain.”

I understood what Computer was trying to say. So I set a course back to Trimark, where the atmosphere was similar to the atmosphere of Earth. And when I landed, I did what Computer suggested. Sure enough, after opening the door and taking some deep breaths, I started to relax. So did Tinkerbell. She walked over to her basket and settled in it for a nap.

“Computer, you were right. So I guess we can head for home now.”

“Before we leave this planet, you might be interested in watching a few minutes of the Trimark news broadcast.”

I couldn’t understand why Computer would want me to watch news on a foreign planet, but suddenly there it was on the screen. The announcer was talking, and then the screen changed to show the crowd at the stadium on Frimark.

Then the screen showed some moments from the colorful opening ceremony.

Then it showed highlights from some of the sports events.

Then the screen showed some leopards and toads carrying a crazy, yelling, squirming Earth lady off the field!

How embarrassing! How humiliating!

I realized I could never go back to these two planets again. I couldn’t go to Frimark because of what its atmosphere did to me, and I could not go to Trimark because I would probably get locked up or laughed at – or both!

“Computer dear, please take us home to Earth. And please erase those broadcasts from your memory!”

“I shall do both those things immediately, although you could get a lot of attention and money if you let everyone on Earth see you being carried off the field, kicking and screaming.”

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“Computer dear, no. Just NO! Never! Now erase those images or I’ll have ALL your memory wiped completely clean. Understand?”

“Yes, I understand that your brain is still slightly affected by the gases on Frimark. Let me put on some soothing music while I delete that video from my memory.”

And that, my wonderful grandchildren, is why my phone has been off the hook these last few days. You see, we humans have these adrenal glands on top of our kidneys, and when we get scared or aggressive, our brains tell those glands to go to work pumping out a chemical that gives us extra strength and extra energy. That’s what happened to me on Frimark. But you have to pay a price for that “adrenaline rush” as some people call it. Believe it or not, I’ve been sleeping over ten hours every night and half of every day, because my body needs to recover from all the energy I used being aggressive and athletic.

But I can promise that our brains are back to normal now. So if you come to visit I won’t yell and Tinkerbell won’t bite.

Love and hugs,
Grandma



Episode 46: Grandma Goes to Jail?!

*<Start Transmission - Andromeda Intergalactic ExtraNet
Star Date 29:Δ:6:3R>*

I'm transmitting from a most unusual planet. It's called Fusselbright. I need you to do me a favor before I can come back to Earth. I'll explain in a minute, but let me start at the beginning....

I got an ad that said there was going to be a new flea market on Fusselbright. In case you don't know, a flea market is a bit like a multi-family yard sale. Only a flea market happens in the same place all the time, and it's not done at people's homes. At a flea market, everyone who wants to sell things has to rent a booth or a table. They can sell old things, new things, food and drinks, or whatever they want. At least, those are the Earth rules. I couldn't wait to see how another planet would hold a flea market.

When we arrived at Fusselbright, we orbited a couple of times to find a landing site near the flea market. But I couldn't find any such thing. In fact, I couldn't even see much land at all on the planet. It was mostly ocean, dotted with islands here and there.

"Computer, dear, can you see the flea market on any of those little islands?" I asked.

"No, there are no flea markets on any of the islands we passed over. Only parking lots."

"Parking lots? Do you mean that there are no people or creatures on any of the land?"

"Correct. Several of the islands have parking lots with spaceships similar to this one. But there do not seem to be any parking lot attendants or any other living things."

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I thought to myself: *There are a lot of automatic parking lots on Earth, where you park and pay, and there is nobody in charge. So an automatic parking lot on Fusselbright isn't that unusual. But NO living things? That WAS unusual!* Then I spoke to Computer again.

“Computer, dear, can you find us a parking spot down there?”

“Certainly. I have located one in that cluster of four islands just below us. Shall we descend now and take the spot?”

“Oh, yes, grab that spot before some other ship takes it!”

So down we went, and our spaceship just barely fit in the last space in the lot. Then I turned to Tinkerbell, who had just awakened from a nap.

“Tinky, darling, we’re on a planet where there isn’t much land to walk on. I don’t understand it yet, but I want you to come with me for now, so we can both sniff around.”

I scooped up Tinkerbell and checked with Computer about the outside atmosphere.

“Looks like we’ll need breathing helmets here, Tinky, but the temperature is fine for us. So let’s get helmets on and take a walk around this parking lot.”

It was fun to see other spaceships from all over the galaxy. Some were very colorful and some had lots of decorations. And some had stickers showing all the other planets they had visited. At the edge of the parking lot, we stood at the planet’s ocean. As far as I could see, there was nothing but water. If I squinted really hard, I thought I could see another island far off in the distance.

“Tinky, let’s walk along the edge of this island and stay next to the water. There must be an explanation for all this somewhere.”

That’s what we did. And after a while, we came up to a little booth or kiosk, a lot like the kind you see at bus stops on Earth. And just like a bus stop, there was a list or chart on the wall of the booth. I figured it must be a schedule. Was a bus coming to pick us up? Where would it come from? And where could it take us, since

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the whole island was just a parking lot? After all, there was no bridge to get off the island.

Well, I didn't have to wait long for an answer. There was a gurgling sound coming from the water near us, and the water started churning and bubbling. Something was coming up from under the ocean!

The "bus" had arrived. This bus was more like a submarine, only it wasn't long like an Earth submarine. It looked more like a round, disk-shaped spaceship. And was it huge! It could probably hold hundreds of humans my size.

When the submarine reached the surface, a door opened and a platform stretched out to the booth where we stood. Evidently, we were supposed to walk across the platform and board the submarine. I was willing, but Tinkerbelle just shivered.

"Okay, Tink, I'll carry you aboard."

I reached down and picked up my quivering pet. Then I turned and walked down the platform and into the open doorway. And wouldn't you know it, but just then a couple of creatures came slithering up as fast as they could, hoping to catch this bus so they wouldn't have to wait for the next one. I had to feel sorry for them, trying to move quickly on monopods like Earth snails.

I took a seat. There were only four of us, and this submarine bus had hundreds of seats. So I chose a seat by a window. When the door closed, a voice started talking over a loudspeaker. Somehow I was able to understand, and so could my snail friends who must have had a different language.

"Welcome to Fusselbright. If this is your first visit, you need to know that the entire Fusselbright civilization now lives under the ocean. We really ruined the atmosphere on our planet with our pollution, and it caused the air to become unbreathable. And it caused all the ice to melt from our north and south poles. There was hardly any land left, and we couldn't breathe anyway, so we

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moved our cities and farms under the ocean. We hope you enjoy your stay here in our underwater society.”

“If you are here for the galactic comic book convention, please take the first stop on our ride. If you are here for the new flea market, please take the third stop. If you are here for the singing and dancing contest, please take the seventh stop. If you are here for...”

“Hear that, Tinky? We have to take the third stop. So let’s pay attention and get off at the right place.”

But it wasn’t that easy. We must have traveled over an hour before the reaching the first stop. And we stayed there for quite a while, as the vehicle waited automatically for passengers to get off and on. The snail-people got off, so I suppose they were coming to the comic book convention. It made me wonder if they were in costume, imitating some comic book hero from another planet, of if they always looked and walked like that.

Only a few passengers got on at this first stop. One looked like an Earth businessman, even with an Earth-looking jacket and tie. But below the waist he was just a ball of blubber that bounced along the floor. And another creature with six legs got on with shopping bags and two little creatures that looked similar – probably a mother and children.

Finally, we left the station and started traveling again. I tried to entertain myself by looking out the window. But this vehicle seemed to travel only on the edge of cities, so there wasn’t much to see except fish.

Suddenly, I woke up. How long had I been asleep? How many stops had the submarine bus made while I was asleep? Tinkerbelle couldn’t help, because she was asleep, too, and besides, she’s just a dog. I knew what I had to do: I had to get off at the next stop, even if it was the wrong one. My only other choice was to stay on the submarine bus all the way around until it came back up to the ocean surface, and start all over again. That could take days,

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and I didn't have that much time or patience. After all, I had some chores to do back at home: laundry, bread-making, and window-washing.

In a little while, a bell rang to indicate that there was going to be a stop. I made sure I had all of our stuff, got up, and carried Tinkerbelle through the automatic door that opened....

<Transmission Interrupted>



*<Start Transmission - Andromeda Intergalactic ExtraNet
Star Date 27:Δ:7:7K>*

Whoops! My battery ran out of energy, so I didn't get to finish telling you about my situation. Fortunately, they let me recharge in here. Now where was I...? Oh, yes! I got off that submarine bus after falling asleep. Well, then....

What luck! I walked right into a flea market! Fusselbright people were sitting behind long tables, and the tables were full of household items and clothes. And the air was filled with the smell of food. Sure enough, people were cooking behind the tables and putting the food out on some other tables. What a wonderful flea market this was going to be!

I walked along in the aisles between tables. The people seemed friendly as they relaxed in their chairs behind the tables. I suppose they looked extra-friendly because their skin was bright yellow, and their clothes were colorful, too. And they seemed to be very interested in Tinkerbelle, who peeked out from my arms every once in a while.

There seemed to be a lot of shoppers, but not a lot of shopping. Mostly, people in the aisles between tables just talked to the people behind the tables. I didn't see anyone buy anything. But with the flea market being new, I guessed that most visitors just wanted to look over all their choices before buying anything.

I stopped at one table and picked up a little statue. It was a cute little replica of one of these yellow-skinned people, holding a broom or a weapon – I couldn't tell which. I held the statue up to

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the nearest person behind the table and asked how much it cost. The man looked at me with wide eyes, and his smile was gone. Was he going to get serious and ask for a high price? Or did he just not understand my Earth language?

What he did was start talking – and talking and talking. I got the idea he was telling a story about the statue. Maybe he was trying to explain to me how valuable it was, or what the statue represented. So I shook the statue near his face, hoping he would stop talking and just give me a price. He stopped talking, alright, and grabbed the statue away from me. *How rude*, I thought to myself. *He will never sell anything if he behaves like that!*

I gave up and moved on to another table. I saw some perfect grandkid presents there: a yoyo that pulsed bigger and smaller; a double-decker model car, for passengers to sit above the driver; a squeeze toy that made many different sounds; a ball with little balls inside that bounced around all by themselves. I grabbed all the toys in one swoop and looked at the woman behind the table. She stared at me – and then hid under the table! I wasn't sure what to do next, so I walked around the corner of the table where it joined another table. And there I found even more perfect grandkid presents – a feather that weighed as much as Tinkerbell, a crystal with a moving hologram of an animal inside, and a teakettle made of braided tubes! (Okay, I admit the teakettle was for me.) I grabbed them all, and showed all of them to the man behind the table. He looked at me, then at the woman under the table, then back at me. Then he waved his hands, as if he was telling me to take everything I had in my hands, without having to pay!

I thanked the man, although I don't know if he understood or cared, because just then he got under the table with the woman! As they started talking to each other, I walked away, trying to juggle these wonderful presents and Tinkerbell in my arms. *If only I had thought to bring a shopping bag*, I thought to myself.

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As I adjusted my load, two friendly-looking Fusselbright men in green uniforms stepped up to me. They smiled, then grabbed my elbows and lifted me off the floor! Then they started walking, carrying me along, with my arms filled with Tinkerbelle and my new treasures.



I found myself at a table again, but this table had chairs around it. The two Fusselbright men in uniforms sat on either side of me. A Fusselbright woman in a purple robe came over and sat in one of the other chairs. She pulled out a little box and placed it on the table, then clicked a switch on it. She started talking, but what I heard didn't match the way her mouth moved. The box must have been a translator, because I was hearing her in my own language:

“Do you understand that you are under arrest for burglary? Do you come from a planet where people are allowed to steal from people's homes? Or are you a criminal flying around the galaxy looking to steal from innocent people? You look a bit like a criminal, hiding your face inside that helmet.”

I was flabbergasted. She was accusing me of stealing – of being a criminal! But I realized I better not just sit there. I needed to explain myself – and take off my helmet to look less like a criminal to her. A little voice in my head told me I should have learned more about the habits of these Fusselbright people before I started shopping!

“I don't understand what you could possibly mean. You advertise a flea market, and then you arrest me for shopping at it. Am I missing some important detail or piece of information about your planet? Your flea market looked like any other, and yet you say I've broken some major rules.”

The woman replied, “You were so far away from the flea market that you couldn't possibly expect me to believe you. You were in the middle of a neighborhood of homes!”

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“Homes?” I gasped. “Those tables were homes? Where were the walls and the roofs? Where were the streets and the parks? Are you playing a joke on me?”

The woman looked at me strangely. “Why would we need walls and roofs? Why would we need streets? All those things are part of the reason why we wrecked our planet up on the surface. When we moved down here in the ocean, we built huge domes to keep the water out, and then we didn’t need houses anymore. But surely you knew that. Everyone in the galaxy must know that. And everyone knows that down here no one needs to wear a helmet unless it’s to disguise themselves, because we have a perfect atmosphere all the time. I think you are just playing innocent, but you are really a criminal. And not only did you steal from people’s homes, you frightened them terribly – you and your criminal partner.”

I just stared in bewilderment. Then I laughed. “Tinkerbell, my criminal partner? Oh, that’s the funniest thing anyone has ever said about her. I can’t stop laughing. Wait till I tell everyone back home about that....”

The woman spoke again. “Perhaps you don’t realize how serious this is. I am a judge, and I can order you to prison right now.”

I guess I could stop laughing, because I did – in a hurry!



Well, that’s the story. Only the judge doesn’t believe the way I tell it. But I did make a deal with her, and that’s where I need you to do me a favor. She said she would believe my story if she could see or hear that I really do have grandchildren to shop for. So here’s my plan, and the favor I want to ask....

Call me and leave a message that I can record. Or type a reply to this ExtraNet message. It doesn’t have to be a long message. But make sure you say your name. Oh, and it wouldn’t hurt to say something like ‘I love you, Grandma.’ Then when all of you have left messages, I’ll let the judge read and listen to them. I’m sure

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she'll believe me then, and she'll let me leave. Can you do that – really, really soon?

<End Transmission>



*<Start Transmission - Andromeda Intergalactic ExtraNet
Star Date 27:Δ:8:2Z>*

Thanks for your sweet messages. It was wonderful to hear your voices and read your e-mails. (And you are probably thinking I asked you to leave messages just to trick you into saying hello, since none of you have called or visited lately.)

The judge thought the messages were especially sweet, because she said she has grandkids, too, who don't call very often. Stringy reddish-gold tears ran down her cheeks when she listened. Then she said I could go. So I'm on my way back to Earth, thanks to you.

Of course, I had to give back all the treasures, since they weren't actually for sale anyway. I'm sure you would have liked the yoyo that changes size or the balls that bounce inside a big ball or the crystal with the animal hologram inside. But it's even better to have your Grandma back, isn't it?

Love to you all!

<End Transmission>



Episode 49: Grandma the Super Gymnast!

Dear Grandkids,

I hope you never have to deal with bullies. It's just no fun, even if you finally win – which I did in the end. It all happened on my last trip, which started out very pleasant, and then became very difficult.

My destination was Flisster. Now, usually the planets I visit are a lot like Earth – about the same size and atmosphere. That makes it easy to get around and shop and chat without a lot of equipment like oxygen tanks. Flisster has an Earth-like atmosphere, but it is much smaller. I didn't give much thought to the size difference between Flisster and Earth. After all, I was just going for one neighborhood yard sale in one town there.

When I landed, I felt eager to shop, so I pushed up out of my chair with my arms – and flew up and bumped my head on the ceiling of my ship – while still in a sitting position!

I came down onto the floor with a thud, but not a very heavy thud. And then I remembered: Flisster is much smaller than Earth. As the scientists would say, it has less *mass* than Earth. So the gravity on Flisster would be less, too. Not so much less that I could jump up to the top of buildings, but enough less that I could jump quite a bit higher than when I am on Earth. This was going to be fun!

I put Tinkerbelle on a leash and headed for the sale. As we walked, I felt something strange. I looked down and saw that with each step, both my feet rose a little bit off the ground!

I wanted to see if Tinkerbelle had noticed the difference. I guess she hadn't, because she takes such dainty four-legged steps. I wondered what would happen if I encouraged her to jump. I sat

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on the ground and dug in my pocket for a piece of doggie kibble. Then I held out my arms.

“Tinky, if you jump up into my arms, I’ll give you this treat!”

It worked. Tinkerbelle usually can’t jump very high, but this time when she wiggled her little bottom and jumped to get in my arms, she ended up on my head! I knew that confused her, because I could feel her step-step-stepping around nervously on my head. So I reached up and grabbed her and brought her down into the safety of my arms.

“Tinky, don’t be scared. I’m sure you’ll get used to it, and maybe you’ll discover how much fun it is, just like I have!”

I put her down on the ground in front of me and encouraged her to walk a bit. At first she didn’t want to take even one step, but then she cautiously walked a little bit away from me, then came hurrying back.

“Okay,” I said as I picked her up. Then I got back to a standing position. “We’ll try this again later. But you can’t stop *me* from having fun with this low gravity!”

And with that, I bounced over to the multi-family yard sale.



At the sale, I found some fantastic things to bring home – and the prices were very reasonable. I managed to find things for all of you. And I started thinking about who should get each one....

Which one of you would like a belt that can also be used for climbing up trees or anything else tall? Or a hat that glows in the dark and is cool in summer and warm in winter? I got those from a family that is selling their house and moving to another planet.

Which of you would like an object that looks and feels like a rock, but it can get heavier or lighter just by squeezing it in the right places? Or what about a glove that doubles the strength of your hand? I bought those two things from a family that had taken a vacation trip to a planet called Vantasia.

Oh, Grandma is full of surprises, isn’t she? I couldn’t wait to get home and give out gifts!

Grandma in Space!

And I got some items for myself, such as a little kitchen tool that slices anything, but it can also weigh things and act like a funnel to pour liquids. And if something isn't a liquid, it can turn the stuff into liquid!

I also found a most unusual cake pan. It can stretch and shrink to be any size or shape I want. Imagine stretching and shrinking metal with just my two hands!



Fortunately, all my purchases were small, so they all fit in a cloth sack I kept in my pocket for little shopping trips. So I walked and bounced back to my spaceship with one hand carrying the sack and one hand holding Tinkerbelle's leash. At one point, I bounced a little too high, and Tinkerbelle flew into the air at the end of her leash. Drat! Now she was scared, so I had to stop bouncing and just walk, carrying her and the sack in my arms.

As I approached the ship, I noticed some Flissterites walking around it. You should know that Flissterites are about the same size as Earthlings, but they have green skin that gets darker as they get older. The Flissterites hanging around my ship were light green, so I knew they were young. And when I said hello to them, the way they answered told me that they were up to no good.

"Hey, granny, nice spaceship!" said one of them.

"Yeah, nice ship, for an old lady!" said another.

"You wanna take us for a ride?" asked a third one.

I could sense that they would be trouble for me if I wasn't careful. I just had to be friendly but not act weak or scared.

"Well, you young ones couldn't all fit in my ship. So I guess that just won't work," I said as I tried to walk past them. Unfortunately, that didn't work. They just formed a circle around me, and I had to stop walking.

"Now look, I'm a visitor to your planet, and it would be a good idea if you made visitors feel welcome. You wouldn't want me to leave here and tell all my friends that Flissterites are unfriendly, would you?"

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“What makes you think we’re unfriendly, old granny?” asked the tallest one. “We’re *very* friendly here. I’ll show you how friendly we are. I’ll carry your stuff for you!”

And with that, he grabbed my sack and Tinkerbell right out of my arms!

“See how friendly and helpful we are? We’ll even take turns carrying your sack, but I’ll hold on to your animal.” He started to hand the sack to one of his friends, but “accidentally” turned it upside-down so everything fell out on the ground.

“Oh, my mistake! Can you all help me and our old lady friend and pick up all the junk?”

His friends pounced on my stuff, each one taking an item. They held them up as if they were inspecting each item.

“Look what I found,” said the one holding the extra stretchy belt. “I used to have one of these belts. Maybe this one is mine!”

“Same here,” said the one holding the glow-in-the-dark warming-cooling hat. “I’m just sure this is my old hat!”

Another one spoke up. “Maybe this granny here is really a thief – coming to our planet to steal things!”

They started dancing around me, waving my yard sale purchases in the air. And the tallest one started lifting Tinkerbell up and down over his head! This was too much for me. I was getting really angry, but what could I do? I was outnumbered!

I looked down at the ground and saw that the glove was still there. They must have missed it because it was the same color as the dirt we were standing on. I started thinking how this glove and the rock thing from Vantasia could help save me. And then I remembered something: These young Flissterites only saw me *walking* to my ship. They never saw me bouncing. So they had no idea that I could do that. Also, they grew up on this planet, so their muscles developed for Flisster gravity. My muscles developed on Earth, where they had to push against more gravity. So here, my muscles could probably.... I started to form a plan in my head....

Grandma in Space!

They were whooping and hollering and calling out “Thief! Thief!” So I had to shout to be heard above all the noise.

“Alright! You kids have me outnumbered, which makes you feel tough. So why don’t you choose who will face me one-on-one?” I tried hard to sound fierce and strong.

The tallest one, holding Tinkerbelle, held up his free arm to get everyone to stop dancing and shouting. Then he walked right up to me, very close.

“Okay, Ms. Granny, I’ll choose myself! What do you think you can do to get your stuff back?”

I had to put my plan into action, and I had to be sneaky about it. I pretended to think about it before I spoke. Then I looked him in the eye and told him what I would do.

“If I beat you at two out of three things, you’ll give me back *all* my stuff!” I decided on saying two out of three just in case he was really good at something I didn’t expect. I hoped my idea would work.

He was very sure of himself, and he probably wanted to show off in front of his friends. “Sure, Ms. Granny, that’s fair enough. What do you think you can do better than me?”



I pretended to think again. “Well, first let’s shake hands to promise to stick to our agreement – and to find out who has a harder grip.”

“Alright, Ms. Granny, let’s do that.” And he handed Tinkerbelle to one of his friends.

“Wait a minute,” I said as I reached down to pick up the glove. “My hands are all sweaty from nervousness, so I need to wear a glove. Is that alright with you?”

“Sure, Ms. Granny. You wear a glove for your nervous hand. Now shake!”

So I reached out my gloved hand and shook with him. I let him squeeze as tight as he could, which made me wince with pain. But then I started squeezing, and I could feel how the glove made

Grandma in Space!

my grip super-strong. Now *he* was wincing with pain! I kept it up until he yelled to stop.

“Owww! Alright, you win that one, you stupid old granny.” And he shook his hand over and over to bring it back to life.

So far my plan was working. I had to talk fast to keep it going my way. “Now let’s see how far you can throw that rock you fellows took from me.”

The bully turned to his friend holding the rock-like object. “Okay, give it to her and let her throw it.”

When I got it, I put it in my glove hand and squeezed it really hard to make it weigh as little as possible. Then I threw it with all my might. It sailed far away and landed in some weeds, which made it easy to remember how far it had gone.

One of the youngsters ran out to bring it back. He was about to give it to my bully, but I stopped him.

“Wait! I want to inspect it to make sure it’s the same rock. I don’t want you to cheat and throw a different rock.”

So I was allowed to “inspect” the rock. I squeezed it hard to make it as heavy as it could get.

“Yes,” I said, “it’s the same one.” Then I handed it back.

My opponent looked a little surprised at how heavy the rock felt. But he shrugged his shoulders and threw it as best he could. It landed in the same weeds as my throw. This fellow was strong – for his planet. I was glad I had made a bargain for two out of three!

“Okay, Ms. Granny, you won the first and we tied the second. If you want your stuff back, you have to win the last one. What do you want to do for your third idea?”

Now I know I’ve told you grandkids many times how I was a really, really good gymnast when I was your age. And I know that was many, many years ago, and I haven’t done gymnastics for a long time. So I’m not as strong or as flexible as I used to be. But remember, that was on Earth – and this was Flisster, not Earth. So I was ready for Phase Three of my plan....

Grandma in Space!



“Alright, you have to run across the top of my spaceship and back to this point, and we’ll time it to see who can do it faster. You go first.” I was feeling really confident now.

He looked at the top of the spaceship, and then he looked around the edges of the ship to see how he would get himself up that high. Then he looked at me, and then he looked at his friends. He knew he couldn’t complain or else he would lose his friends’ respect. So he nodded his head, gritted his teeth, and started running toward my ship. His friends and I started counting.

“One, two, three....”

When he got to the edge of my spaceship, he threw his hands in the air and barely got a grip on the upper part. Then, with tremendous strength, he pulled himself up and got one elbow on top, then the other elbow.

“Seven, eight, nine....”

He hoisted the rest of his body onto the ship and stopped to rest just a bit.

“Fourteen, fifteen, sixteen....”

Then he got up and started running across the top of the ship.

“Nineteen, twenty, twenty-one....”

When he got to the other edge, he looked down and hesitated. How could he jump down without injuring himself?

“Twenty-six, twenty-seven, twenty-eight....”

Then he looked down at his friends. To keep their respect, he had to jump. He closed his eyes and went over the edge.

“Thirty-two, thirty-three, thirty-four....”

He was obviously injured – probably a sprained ankle. He made a grunting sound as he got back on his feet. And he hobbled back to the starting point as fast as he could.

“Thirty-nine, forty, forty-one!”

So that was the number I had to beat. (Not really, because I knew they would all count faster when it was my turn!)

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I backed up several steps, then started running toward my ship. *This had better work!* I said to myself. When I got to the edge of the ship, I pushed off and up and hard as I could. Sure enough, I practically flew! But not as high as I had hoped. My hands just barely grabbed the edge. Could I lift up my own weight in this gravity? I just had to!

“Nineteneleven....” They were counting *much* faster!

I pulled up with every bit of strength I had. And guess what? It was really fairly easy after all. I plopped onto the top of the ship and wasn’t even sore or tired. I got up quickly and started running.

“Eighteennineteentwenty....”

Just for fun, I twirled around the antenna on top of the ship. My legs were straight out, with my whole body at a right angle to the antenna. I went around one whole time and let go, and landed at the other edge. Without hesitating a bit, I jumped down.

“Twentyseventwentyeight....” But now some of them stopped counting, because of the incredible things they were seeing me do.

When I landed, I bounced, just as I expected, almost half-way up to the edge of the ship again! When I came down from that bounce, I aimed my next bounce toward the group of kids.

“Thirty...thirty-one...thirty-two....” And now the few who were still counting were slowing down, almost forgetting to count.

Each time I bounced, I pushed off again to give me a little extra height and distance for the next bounce.

“Thirty-six...thirty-seven....”

My last bounce landed me right in front of the one holding Tinkerbelle. While he stood there stunned by my performance, I grabbed Tinkerbelle before he had time to pull back. I tucked her under my arm and bounced to my ship. I opened the door and jumped in, and locked it behind me. Then I took off for home.

Why didn’t I stick around to get the yard sale things they promised to return if I won? Because I knew they wouldn’t keep

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their promise. They would just scatter, running off in all directions with my stuff so I couldn't catch them – even with my new “super powers.” So I saved Tinkerbell, since she was the most precious thing they had stolen from me.

Now that you've read the whole story, I'm sure you'll understand why I couldn't and didn't bring back all those wonderful gifts. I'm sorry about it, too. I was so looking forward to baking you all a cake in that stretchy pan!

Hugs to each of you,
Grandma



Episode 53: Species and More Species!

Dear Grandkids,

You know when I write you about a visit to a planet, I'll say "The creatures on the planet look like..."? Well, I really should be more specific about that, now that I've visited Clairdecon.

It had been raining constantly around here, and I was *so* bored. I rearranged my living room furniture twice in three days, and I groomed Tinkerbell until she got disgusted and went into hiding under the bed. Finally I got so restless that I decided to get off the planet and find somewhere to shop, even though I didn't have any particular purchase in mind. (But I know one of you has a birthday soon, so I gave myself that excuse for the trip!)

I coaxed Tinky out from under the bed with a treat. Then we boarded the spaceship. I didn't have a destination in mind, so I asked Computer to help me.

"Computer dear, I want to do some shopping, but I don't have to go to any particular place. Can you suggest someplace I've never visited before that doesn't take too long to reach?"

Computer answered after a few moments. "There are exactly five planets you have not visited that are inhabited and within a few hours of Earth. Three of them have no stores, only trading and bartering in open-air markets. Do you like bartering? Do you have anything to trade?"

I thought about it. Sometimes I like to barter, getting sellers to lower their prices. But not today. Did I have anything to trade? Not really.

"Computer, what about the other two planets?"

"One is named Plethipop. There are stores, but their prices are very high compared to other planets. The other is named

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Clairdecon. The stores there are not fancy. In fact, they are barely stores in the way you think of that word.”

“Computer, that sounds interesting. Set a course for Clairdecon.”

“Are you absolutely sure you want to do that?” asked Computer.

“Yes, Computer dear, I am sure.”

“If you are sure, then I will set the course. You are sure, is that correct?”

“Computer, I AM sure. Let’s go!” I was a bit annoyed with all the questioning. If there was danger in going to Clairdecon, Computer would tell me about it. But if the only reason was because the planet had unusual stores, why should Computer care? I made a mental note to read my computer manual and find out how to make adjustments.



The trip to Clairdecon was uneventful, so I took the time to teach Tinkerbelle a new trick. I would hold a little treat behind her and tell her to “stay.” Then I would tell her “turn around” so she could finally get the treat. She did just fine with the “stay” part, but she couldn’t understand the “turn around” part, even when I used my other hand to turn her around to face the treat. After several tries, I gave up. And by then, we had arrived. I picked up Tinkerbelle and grabbed a leash, in case she felt safe enough to walk on the ground later on.

The city where we landed had buildings, but they were all small, one-story, and light brown. There didn’t seem to be a “downtown” at all. In fact, it was impossible to tell which buildings were stores and offices and which ones were homes! How could I tell which buildings were okay to enter? I certainly didn’t want to walk in to someone’s living room! I decided to just watch for a while so I could figure out where to go.

And that’s when I noticed something interesting about this planet: There were two-legged creatures walking around, and there

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were four-legged creatures walking around. But the four-legged ones were all walking around on their own! They resembled dogs a little bit and chimps a little bit. They had no collars, and they seemed to be allowed to walk around without leashes. Every once in a while, a couple of two-legged creatures would stop and chat, and if a four-legged creature walked up to the group, it almost seemed to join the conversation!

This made no sense to me, so I kept watching. The creatures entered and left the same buildings, so that didn't help me figure out the difference between homes and businesses. But then I noticed creatures leaving a building with objects that they hadn't gone in with. Aha! There was the clue I needed. *That* was a store! I boldly walked up to that building, opened the door, and went in. And there I was in someone's living room!

Or at least it seemed like a living room. But then, it didn't seem to be exactly a home either. There was living room furniture in the room, with both types of creatures sitting around, but along the walls there were many, many objects on shelves, just like in a store.

Finally, I gave up trying to figure it out. I walked over to an empty seat, with Tinkerbell still in my arms. Everyone in the room had stopped talking and now they looked at us with great interest. I started talking, offering introductions.

"Hello! I am from a planet called Earth, and this is my pet. I just landed here and I am very confused about your planet Clairdecon. Could I ask you some questions?"

The creatures seemed pleased to hear me say the name of their planet. It was a sign that I was intelligent and had done some research before coming. Now it was their turn.

A two-legged creature spoke first in a somewhat metallic voice. "Welcome to Clairdecon! We don't get many visitors here. What is your purpose?"

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Before I could answer, another two-legged creature spoke in that same kind of metallic voice. “True, we don’t have visitors very often. But we’re a very friendly planet. And we’ll be glad to answer your questions.”

But before I could ask my first question, someone else spoke – *a four-legged creature!* And the voice was not metallic, but a bit hoarse in my ears. “On behalf of *my* kind, let me welcome you as well.” And everyone laughed! But I couldn’t tell how that was funny.

The one who had spoken first explained. “Here on this part of Clairdecon, Moreenos and Chulups live together in cities. And we Moreenos tend to be more talkative and more sociable than Chulups, so they complain that they have a hard time getting a word in during a conversation. But since we’re all friends, it’s really more of a joke than a complaint.”

The four-legged Chulup added, “Yes, they are *very* talkative and we tend to be quieter. But that’s *their* problem!” Everyone laughed again, but this time I could understand the joke.

“However,” said the Chulup, “before you ask a question, could you explain that word “pet” you used?”

Now it was my turn to talk with this intelligent crowd – of both kinds. “Well, this is Tinkerbelle, who is my pet dog. On Earth, many humans (which I am) own dogs or other small creatures as companions or to help do work. Humans have made our world very complicated, so in our cities, pets need to be held or fenced in or put on a leash to keep them out of danger. That reminds me of my first question: Who is in charge on your planet, the Chulups or the Moreenos?”

The whole group looked at me as if I was crazy or stupid, or maybe trying to insult someone.

“This is a good time to hear from a Chulup.” said the Chulup, “Moreenos might be talkative, but they are also quick to get angry. We Chulups are more patient and don’t get upset easily. So to

Grandma in Space!

answer your question, we are both in charge. But to answer the question you *didn't* ask, we are both *dominant species* on this planet.”

Two dominant species on a planet? Why hadn't I ever thought of that possibility? On Earth, humans are the only dominant species, and that was true on all the other planets I had visited so far. But why not have more than one?

The Chulup had more to say. “Actually, we two are not the only dominant species on Clairdecon. There are two others.”

Two others? Four dominant species on one planet?!?! I had to know more.

“Where are the other two? Why don't I see them here in this city?”

One of the Moreenos spoke up. “Well, on this continent, there is just one other. The Pokelins don't care for our cities. They live out in the country, far away from our cities and noise and crowds. But we do see them at times, since we buy food they hunt and grow, and they use the money to buy special treats for themselves. But mostly, they live on their own.”

“What do they look like?” I asked.

Another Moreeno answered. “They look a bit like you, but much heavier and stronger. They are farmers and hunters, and they live and work around little villages. Don't try to visit them, because they distrust outsiders coming into their land.”

Then a different Chulup spoke. “The fourth dominant species lives only on the planet's other continent. They call themselves Privonns, and they can walk on two or four legs. They live in tribes and they have a nomadic life that covers huge amounts of territory. They hunt animals and eat whatever plants are in season. Some walk, and some ride creatures called dorpoes, which look a bit like your “pet” but large enough to hold two Privonns at a time. You don't want to visit them, either, because they live a very rugged life with no towns or even villages. And they don't ever bathe!”

Grandma in Space!

Everyone made faces and laughed at that last remark. These city dwellers must have thought that the Privonns were very primitive, and I suppose they were right. And yet, no one went to war to conquer anyone else's land, so it was obvious that there was mutual respect among all four of the dominant species.

Then I asked my next question. "Is this place we are in right now a house or a business? Does someone live here with all those things on the walls, or does someone work here and sell the things on the wall?"

Again the whole group looked confused, but not insulted.

A Chulup now spoke. "Do you mean that on your planet there is a difference between a home and a business? I don't know if I can imagine such a thing!"

The others nodded in agreement.

Then I asked, "Well, who lives in this place? And how do you run a business and live here?"

Again, I got strange stares. The little group I was sitting with looked at each other, wondering who would answer – and how. Finally a Moreeno ended the silence.

"Well, it's obvious, really. You walk in the front door and there is a room for conversation and things to buy."

"On Earth we would call that a living room or a parlor, but there would never be things to buy there," I interrupted.

"Alright," said the Moreeno. "That's so very strange, but anyway, here you walk in during the visiting part of the day and have conversations and perhaps buy something. During the non-visiting part of the day, the one who lives there uses the rest of the home for cooking and sleeping. It's so logical and practical and sociable!"

I got curious. "Well, what if you want to go visiting and shopping but there are Moreenos and Chulups at your house. You can't just leave them sitting around your home while you go out, can you?"

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“Of course you can,” replied a Chulup. “Why not?”

“Well,” I said, “if you want to go shop while others are in your house, wouldn’t you have to do your shopping in a hurry, in case someone back at your house wants to buy something? Or steal something?”

The whole crowd started talking to me at once. They were acting quite upset. Finally a Moreeno held up a hand to get everyone quiet.

“First of all, we don’t have *hurries* on our planet, so we don’t know what it would be like to use one to travel around town. Second, you used the word “steal” and that is only a word in the language of other planets, not ours. It’s a very ugly word we have learned from visitors, but we really don’t understand anything about it.”

“Oh, then I should explain,” I said. “A hurry is not some kind of vehicle. A hurry is when you do something fast – faster than you usually do something, and probably faster than you want to do it. And if you don’t have stealing on your planet, then good for you!”

They all just stared at me. Then a Chulup spoke.

“Doing something faster than you want to do it? That is such a strange idea! Imagine doing something, but doing it quicker than you want to! Why would anyone do such a thing? How *could* anyone do such a thing? Remind me not to visit Earth!”

They all laughed at that comment. I felt a little embarrassed. But the Chulup began speaking again before I could say anything.

“I’m sorry, we are not laughing at you or your planet. Mostly we feel sorry for your planet, where you have hurries and stealing. But we laugh because we don’t have spaceships on this planet. We couldn’t visit your planet even if we wanted to! Still, from what you say about customs on your planet, I think we are glad we live right here!”

Then I had a brilliant idea. Maybe they would like to experience some space travel!

Grandma in Space!

“Would any of you like to take a ride in my spaceship – a short trip out into space and back?”

In that whole crowd, only two volunteered – a Chulup and a Moreeno. The others all made excuses about why they couldn’t or wouldn’t go.

“Alright, I’ll get my ship ready for visitors, and you two can come in a little while for a ride.”

I told them how to get to my ship, far out on the edge of the city. Then I left to clean up a bit and prepare for their little space adventure.



As I left the city and saw my spaceship off in the distance, a creature came toward me. It wasn’t a Chulup, because it walked on two legs, but it wasn’t a Moreeno, either. I figured it must be one of those Pokelins they spoke about – the ones that lived and hunted and farmed away from the cities. This was exciting! I would get to meet a third dominant species on this planet!

“Hello!” I shouted as the creature came near. “I am glad to meet you and learn about your kind.”

The creature came even closer, but did not talk. It seemed to have a smile on its face, so I smiled back really big, showing lots of teeth. Not a good idea!

Seeing my toothy smile, the creature stepped back, then let out a howl that was a lot like a wolf makes on Earth. Then it snarled at me! And then it held up large razor-sharp claws! And that’s when I realized this was not going to be a friendly meeting!

I turned and ran back toward the city as fast as a grandma can run with a Tinkerbell in her arms. I looked back. The creature was definitely chasing me, but not very fast. I ran some more, then looked back again. The creature had stopped chasing and had turned away, walking off in a different direction. What a relief! I slowed to a fast walk, and when I got near the home/store I had been in, I bumped right into the Chulup and Moreeno who were coming out for a space ride.

Grandma in Space!

“Oh my goodness!” I said, out of breath. “A two-legged creature came toward me and I thought it was a Pokelin, but it howled at me and tried to attack me with giant claws!”

“Lucky you!” said the Chulup. “That was a carsoe, a very dangerous wild animal that lives on our continent. It’s one of the things the Pokelins hunt, and we’re glad they do!”

My head started swimming. There were two-legged creatures on this planet that were really wild animals, and other two-legged creatures hunted them? No, no, no, no, *no!* I was having a really hard time imagining such a thing. Were they really wild animals? They looked somewhat human, in a hairy kind of way. But that howl, and those claws...! I had to let go of some very Earth-y ideas here. There was more than one dominant species. One of them walked on four legs. And there was a two-legged creature that was *not* one of the dominant creatures, but actually a wild animal. No wonder Computer asked me if I really wanted to come here! It was almost more than I could....

Wait! I had visited lots of other planets, with creatures that were odd to me, and towns and pets and customs that were odd to me. Why should this trip to Clairdecon be any different? I just needed to accept that this galaxy had a lot of things that seemed strange. But then, I was strange to them, wasn’t I?

Well, I gave short rides to my two guests, and when I brought them back to Clairdecon, they thanked me. The Chulup looked a bit wobbly from the fast motion of the trip – and left rather quickly. The Moreeno invited me and Tinkerbelle to dinner. But I was brain-tired by then, so I politely said no and headed back to Earth.

So you see, we take so much for granted. On our planet, we are completely used to being the only dominant species and completely used to separating homes from businesses – and completely used to thinking that walking on two legs means being tame and civilized. But it didn’t *have* to be that way. And in some places, it *isn’t* that way. What a fascinating galaxy we live in!

Grandma in Space!

Hugs and more hugs,
Grandma



Episode 58: Hotrod Granny!

Dear Grandkids,

You know how sometimes you get sick or injured and you need to go in for repairs? Well, that's what my spaceship was like last week. And was that ever an adventure!

I was on my way to a party on Bozak in the Zillkader planetary system, when my spaceship started wobbling. I stopped playing with Tinkerbelle and picked her up. Then I walked carefully over to the console to ask Computer what was going on. Computer's voice came back to me all wobbly, too!

"It-t-t seem-m-ms there is-is-is a prob-b-blem with the gyro-ro-ro-roperam-m-mbula-lation mechan-n-n-nism."

"A problem with the what?" I asked.

"Th-th-the gy-roper-per-ambu-bu-lation-n-n mechanis-is-ism."

I wanted to know more. "Well, is it serious?"

Computer answered, "It-t-t-t is if-if y-y-you don't-t like wob-b-bling."

"No, I definitely don't like wobbling. So what do we need to do?"

"I need t-t-to b-b-be re-rebal-l-lanced in-n-n my sh-sh-shelf be-before I f-f-fall ov-over. *You* need-d to get-t this-s-s sp-spa-spacesh-ship to a re-repair s-sta-station-n-n."

"Oh, dear! Quick, point us to the nearest repair station!"

"We are n-n-n-now on c-c-course for the n-n-near-r-rest rep-p-pair-r st-st-station-n-n."



The nearest repair station was actually a spaceship dealership on Kressipy, far in the north of the planet, where it was really,

Grandma in Space!

really cold. When I landed in the parking lot, I could see someone running toward my ship. I must have made a very wobbly and dangerous-looking landing, because the creature who came running immediately started spraying some kind of greenish-yellow foam all over my spaceship – probably to prevent a fire or explosion.

I grabbed Tinkerbell and climbed out quickly, just in case there really might be a fire or explosion. (You can't be too careful when your spaceship wobbles so fiercely!)

I got on the ground and started to thank the *someone* that had sprayed the foam. It was a most extraordinary creature: about the height of a man on Earth, but, well, you know how Earthlings are wider than they are thick? This creature was just the opposite – probably twice as thick from front to back as it was wide. Two arms, two legs, yes, but scales all over like a reptile, and a pinkish-orange color. And on his/her head was something like a cowboy hat but with earflaps.

“Thank you so much!” I shouted. “I’m here for repairs. Can you take a look at it?”

The creature walked all around my spaceship, then came back to me. “Yes, I can look at it, which I just did. But since I’m not a mechanic, I don’t know why you wanted me to look at it. Wouldn’t you rather have one of our mechanics look at it? Or better still, wouldn’t you rather have a mechanic look *inside* it?”

I wondered if he was being sarcastic or if he just couldn’t understand me. I decided it was a misunderstanding. “Yes, I want a mechanic to look inside it.”

“Alright. Would you like it to be one of our mechanics or one on another planet?”

This was truly weird. On this world, did the creatures have to be told *exactly* what you meant all the time? Wasn’t it obvious that I wanted to get my spaceship repaired right *here*? Well, you never

Grandma in Space!

know what you're getting into when you visit a place for the first time.

"Yes, I want one of *your* mechanics to look *inside* my spaceship. And I want that done now or as soon as possible." I added that last part just in case the next question was going to be *when* I wanted the work done!

"Good. I will tell a mechanic to come out and inspect it, because it might be too dangerous to move it from where it is now."

I was agreeable to that and he/she left to get a mechanic.

The mechanic looked and dressed very much like the first creature I met, except taller and more orange than pink.

I tried to explain the problem. "My onboard computer said the problem was in the gyro-ambulation system, whatever that is."

The mechanic frowned. Did he know what a gyro-ambulation system was? Was he about to ask me more questions like the first creature did?

"The computer might have been right. But then, the wobbling of the spaceship might have made the computer unable to tell what was really wrong. And maybe the computer itself was damaged."

I hadn't thought of that. "Do you repair computers here as well as spaceships?"

"No, for computer repairs, you would have to fly over to the other side of the planet. But you shouldn't do that because the spaceship needs to be repaired first."

Well, *that* was obvious! But all I said was, "I understand. So I guess I'll have you fix the spaceship and then I'll fly over to the other side of your planet to get someone to look at the computer."

The creature answered, "That is a good idea, but really you should get your computer inspected, not just looked at."

This was getting maddening! Of *course* I meant "inspected" when I said "looked at." But I just nodded my head.

"You and your little creature can go inside the building on the right over there while you wait." He was pointing one hand at

Grandma in Space!

Tinkerbell and the other hand at the building on the right. This planet really had a way of making everything 100% accurate – and expecting me to do the same.



When I got inside the building, a third creature approached me, almost running with excitement and enthusiasm. Tinkerbell growled and hid her head in my arms, and the creature backed away a bit.

“Hello. Would you like to see the latest models we have in our showroom? Or would you be more interested in a used model? You know, we can let you test-drive one, and we have generous trade-in deals for your old vehicle!”

So this was a salesperson hoping to get me to buy a spaceship rather than get mine repaired. I was about to tell him/her that I just wanted to wait for my repairs, but then I had an idea....

“You know, I think I *would* like to look over your used models and maybe take a test drive,” I replied.

“Excellent!” said the salesperson. “Let’s go out back and look at what we have.”

In back of the building there was a parking lot with at least one hundred spaceships of different sizes, shapes, and colors.

The salesperson (who by now I could identify as female) pointed to her left. “Over there is where we keep the vehicles made for two-legged humanoids.”

So we walked over there while she talked.

“For instance, this one is a nice shade of blue, and it should fit you comfortably,” she said.

I looked at it and frowned. “No thanks. It’s pretty to look at, but it’s got a lot of rust on it, and a lot of dents. Did it go through a few asteroid showers?”

The woman-creature ignored my question and pointed at another one. “This one had just one owner. She was too afraid to leave this solar system, so it’s like new!”

“Yes,” I replied, “it looks new, and the price tag looks huge.”

Grandma in Space!

Again she ignored me and started walking toward another craft. But I went in the opposite direction, fascinated by a yellow one with a red stripe from front to back. “What about this one?” I asked.

She came over to where I was. “Well, this is a highly unusual one. It was owned by someone who liked to tinker around inside and out. Not only did he re-paint it, but he customized some of the mechanisms inside – even the computer, I’m told.”

“Can I take it for a test drive?” I asked.

“Certainly!” she said, almost too eagerly, which made me wonder how long this spaceship had been sitting out here – and why.

She continued. “Go ahead and climb up and get in. I just need something valuable of yours to keep, to make sure you bring the vehicle back. How about your little creature there?”

“Oh, no, you can’t have Tinkerbell even for a few minutes. She would shiver into a puddle of nervousness! Why don’t you take my camera-phone-laser gun?”

She was agreeable with that, so I handed over my gadget and climbed into the spaceship with Tinkerbell.



I sat at the control panel and found the seat really, really well-padded and comfortable. Then I looked over the control panel. First I found the language dial and turned it until it showed Earth language. Then I flipped the ON switch and the whole cabin came to life – with colorful lights and soft music.

“Oh, Tinkerbell, that last owner really made this special, didn’t he?” But Tinkerbell hid her head in my arms so she wouldn’t have to look at the lights.

“Well, Tink, let’s go to a party on Bozak!”

Just then, the computer spoke up. “Did you say ‘party’ my friend? I’ll vote for that, too!”

I was shocked. Such a friendly and casual computer! The original owner really *had* made changes!

Grandma in Space!

“Yes, Computer, let’s go to Bozak. Do you know the way?”

“Sure I do. Everyone who’s anyone knows Bozak. And by the way, you don’t have to call me Computer. You can call me Larry! Let me get you up to a good traveling height above these buildings. And hey, if you push that red button on your left, I can practically get you to Bozak yesterday!”

A computer with a sense of humor! I looked to the left side of the control panel, and sure enough, there was a big red button with no words or symbols on it. When I looked closer, I could see that it was not set very well into the control panel. Someone had drilled a hole too big for the button, and then put gray putty all around the rest of the hole to keep the button in place. But the computer (you know, Larry) knew about the button, so it was obviously connected to the whole system. I decided it that it would be safe to use the red button even if it was installed rather sloppily.

Hovering over the dealership, I pressed the red button and WHAM we shot off! The thrust was so hard that I was pressed far back into my padded seat. Tinkerbell was so shocked she pulled her head out to see if someone had pushed us. Before I could take another breath, we were off the planet and headed into deep space.



As we zoomed toward Bozak, I tried out some other knobs and buttons and switches on the control panel. One of them made the music livelier and the lights blink in different colors – as if we were suddenly at a dance party. Another one made the window in front of me magnify whatever we were looking at. Another one made the whole spaceship vibrate – not hard or scary, but tingly and happy. And another one turned on a cloud machine which filled the whole cabin with swirly steam (but it wasn’t wet). This spaceship could turn into a party bus! But it was too small to have a very big party. I guessed that it could only hold three or four humanoids like me.

I won’t bore you with the details of the gathering I attended on Bozak. It was just some other grandmas I had met over my many

Grandma in Space!

trips. We had a lot of fun, talking about our travels and our families. And I made it a lot more fun by taking two at a time up in my borrowed spaceship to experience the lights and music and vibrations and dry steam. I guess I was the hit of the party with my new toy!

When it was time to return the spaceship, I hit the red button again to get there quickly. I didn't want anyone to think I had gone all that long or far on my test drive. When I arrived, I went looking for the mechanic rather than for the salesperson. And there he was, wiping his hands/claws/whatever with a rag, so I guessed he was finished.

“Well, could you repair it?” I asked.

“Yes, I could and I did,” he replied. “I had to install some new parts and re-attach some things that had shaken loose. And I tested the computer to find out if it was damaged. It did not speak to me in a very friendly way, but I don't know if that was because it was damaged or because your computer is just set to transmit messages of sarcasm and pessimism. Anyway, I adjusted those settings for you so it will be more factual and have fewer opinions and complaints. But I didn't touch anything else, so you still need to have the computer inspected somewhere.”

“Oh, THANK YOU!” I said. “I mean, thank you for fixing my ship and thank you for adjusting the computer's attitude. I'll go inside to pay.”

But when I got inside, I was attacked by the saleswoman before I could pay and leave quietly. She handed me my camera-phone-laser gun and started talking. “Wasn't that a wonderful test drive? Would you like to discuss trading in your old vehicle? You know, you could fly out of here today with that machine. Would you like that?”

I had planned to say no – and say that I was satisfied with my old ship even though I appreciated the chance to try out something else. But that exciting experience had made me wonder....

Grandma in Space!

Wouldn't it be fun to have another spaceship, one that vibrated and lit up and shot off like a lightning bolt? Or would it? I couldn't decide. One voice inside me said I could get places faster and give my grandkids incredible rides. The other voice said I was just a little grandma, and that spaceship was really customized for someone more adventurous than I am. What to do?



Well, here I am back on Earth, writing to you. And how did I get back? I came in my old spacecraft, not the incredible customized one. Why? Well, here's what happened....

I decided to buy the fancy one. I was surprised how much money they gave me for my old ship, so the new (used) one wasn't going to cost much at all. I got my personal belongings out of it and carried them over to my new one. Then I put Tinkerbelle in my lap, put the sales contract and legal papers on my desk, and took off.

I was excited about my new purchase, and I wanted to get home quickly. So I pushed the big red button, and this time it fell through its over-sized hole! That was annoying, because not only did it not work, but now it was deep down inside the control panel, and I couldn't get to it.

I knew I would have to get back to Earth at normal speed, so I figured I might as well enjoy myself and turn on some lights and music, and maybe some dry steam, too. I started clicking buttons and moving dials, when the computer began to speak.

"Hi, there! It's Larry! Looks like you really want to party with all those actions you're doing! Why don't I help you? Just sit back and let me get us in a party mood!"

And that's when everything went crazy. Loud music, I mean really, really LOUD, with a heavy, heavy, and I mean *really* HEAVY and fast drumbeat. And colored lights flashing so fast that I felt like I was being pounded by a rainbow. I tried to readjust the controls, but Larry noticed that I was fiddling with buttons, and he had other ideas.

Grandma in Space!

“Hahaha! You don’t want the party to slow down so soon, do you? C’mon, let’s *really* crank it up!”

The music got louder, and faster, and the lights flashed faster. And now dry steam started pouring in to the cabin, and glitter started spraying all around! And the ship was vibrating in rhythm to the music! Tinkerbell hid under my shirt, but I had nowhere to hide myself!

I found myself on the floor, drowning in lights and sound and glitter and vibration. I crawled over to the console and grabbed the sales papers. Somewhere there had to be some words about returning this ship and getting my money back! But it was ten pages long and I could barely see through the steam and glitter!

I squinted and turned pages. Aha! I found what I was looking for. The contract stated that I had 100 Kressipy hours to change my mind and get my money back. How long was that? I didn’t know, but I just had to go back and do whatever I could!

I decided to get the computer to turn around by tricking it. I would make it think that I wanted to enlarge the party. I had to shout my plan to make sure Larry could hear me.

“Larry! Let’s go back to Kressipy and find some friends to join the party!”

The computer liked that. “Alright! Great idea! Let’s go get some friends and make this party even more electrifying!”

In a few minutes we were back in the parking lot where we had started. I shut off the engine (and Larry). Then I clutched the sales papers in my hands and marched into the sales office.

I shouted, “Have I been gone more than 100 Kressipy hours?”

The saleswoman looked startled, then checked her Kressipy clock and replied, “Actually, you’ve been gone exactly 98.5 hours.”

“Good!” I shouted. “I want to return the spaceship you sold me and take back my old one.”

Grandma in Space!

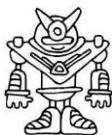
“Oh, dear,” said the saleswoman. “I was afraid that might happen. Was all that custom work just a wee bit too much for you?”

I shouted back, “A WEE BIT much? Oh, no, not a *wee bit* much. Let’s say that it was overwhelming. No, let’s say it was crushing! No, let’s say it was overwhelmingly and crushingly *devastating!* I think it’s meant for someone younger and much more fun-loving than I am!” Then I realized I had been shouting all this time for no good reason. She could hear me just fine, because there was no loud music or heavy drumbeat inside this building. Plus, my own hearing was returning to normal. So I apologized.

Anyway, the saleswoman tore up the contract and gave me back my money and my old spaceship. And I was *so* glad! Because when I thought about it, I realized that I just like to go places to shop or visit. So *how* I get to the shopping and the visiting is not really that important. Of course it would be fun to travel faster or fancier, with flashing lights and clouds of dry mist – and maybe a little shower of glitter every once in a while. But really all I need is something dependable to get around the galaxy, and I already have that.

Let’s face it: your grandma is just an old fuddy-duddy, not very adventurous at all.

Love and hugs,
Grandma



Episode 65: Grandchildren to the Rescue!

Dear Grandkids,

After that last adventure, I thought you would all enjoy getting the full story from everyone's point of view. Now that each of you has told me your side, I have pulled it all together and put things in order. So here's what happened – and you know it's true, don't you?

It started like this....

Last Saturday I walked out to my driveway in my pajamas and bathrobe and picked up a little newspaper. I brought it inside and started flipping through the pages. It wasn't very interesting – full of news stories and ads I didn't care about. But then a flyer fell out from between some pages. It said:

**BIG SALE ON PLANET X48!
EVERYTHING IS HALF PRICE!**

Of course, I got very excited. You know how much I love yard sales and thrift stores and big sales events – and how I'll travel all over the galaxy to find incredible treasures at ridiculously low prices.

“Oh, Tinkerbelly!” I sang out. Tinkerbell came running into the kitchen, hoping I had some bread or turkey or yams or cottage cheese or anything else to eat. She looked all around and sniffed the air, then realized there was nothing to eat. She almost walked out of the room, but I stopped her.

“We need to suit up. There's a big sale on Planet X48 and if we get there before closing time, I bet they will practically give us stuff for free!”

Grandma in Space!

Tinkerbell looked at me, unable to understand what I meant. So I made it plainer to her.

“Tinky, we’re going to GO!”

That was the magic word. *GO* meant leaving the house, and maybe having a scary adventure. But it was better than staying home alone!

For the next hour, I filled up my pack, put Tinkerbell in her spacesuit, and then put on my own spacesuit – the used one I got recently at the big yard sale on the equator of BurrBekew. (It has an orange stripe up the front and down the back, and you know how I just love orange!)

Then it was time to board the ship. I carried Tinkerbell into the garage, brought down the ladder, and got us into my wonderful little spacecraft. Up and out of the garage attic and on our way!

As I passed Jupiter and Saturn, I realized that I had forgotten to look up Planet X48 on a map. So I turned on my on-screen maps and asked for help.

“Computer dear, can you show me the way to X48?” In an instant, a star map flashed on the screen. X48 glowed yellow and green, and there were dotted lines on the map, one blue, one red, leading to the planet. That meant there were two ways to get there.

“Hmmm.... The blue path looks like fun, because it goes by the light show on Pantheroon. The Pantherooners really do a fabulous light show; you can see it over a hundred thousand miles away. But the red path looks good, too. It would get me there faster, even though there isn’t anything fun on the way.”

“Computer dear, please take us on the red path. I’m in a little bit of a hurry.” With that, the spaceship made a slight turn, then took off at a tremendous speed.

“Thank-you kindly, Computer,” I said, and then settled back in my seat and listened to a long story about a team of robot buddies who saved a whole solar system with just a toothbrush and a cotton ball – even though half the robots had amnesia.

Grandma in Space!

A few minutes after the story ended, the computer announced that we had arrived at X48. The spaceship started down to the planet, and I checked my pack to make sure I had the dog leash and plenty of space money for this solar system. Then I guided the spaceship into a giant parking lot and pulled into a parking space just big enough for my ship.

“Tinky,” I said as I put a leash on her, “I’ll walk you around to sniff things, but then you have to stay in the spaceship while I shop. It could be crowded in there, and I don’t want you to get stepped on!”

We walked down the ladder and roamed around the edges of the parking lot. Tinkerbelle was surprised that the grass on this planet was bright orange, and the rocks were mostly red and yellow! She was also surprised when she sniffed at a hole, and up popped a tiny little creature with fur and little horns – that roared as loud as a lion! Needless to say, Tinkerbelle was glad to get back in the spaceship and take another nap.

I walked across the parking lot and entered a building that was as big as twenty grocery stores on Earth – and 88 stories tall!

“Wow! What a place to shop! I’ll need a few hours to look through the whole building.” Then I checked my pack to make sure I had lots of snacks for the long day.

Sure enough, it was a fine day for shopping. I found a Galandrian teapot made of silver terrachium that would never break. And I found a rainbow-colored umbrella made of fluvenum that could fold up inside the handle, which was made from the bark of a Kinellian pheerphall tree. Plus, I found presents for each of you grandchildren. I hoped nothing would go wrong that would make me lose them, like what happened on some of my other galactic trips.



Hours went by, and I had only gotten up to the 66th floor. So much to see! So many interesting people – and creatures – to talk to!

Grandma in Space!

Then a big voice came over the loudspeakers, telling shoppers that the store would close in 30 minutes – or 500 flaxons, if your clock measured Kralleck System Time. When the announcement came, I was looking through racks of clothes, and I grabbed a few things to try on.

It took me ten minutes to find a dressing room, and the only one that was available was made for very tall, very narrow creatures, so I had a hard time fitting in. Finally, I started trying on the clothes. It was so strange that when I wanted to see how something looked on me, the mirror was on the ceiling – because tall narrow creatures (such as the ones from Digidum) would want it that way.

Finally I decided which clothes I wanted to buy. But when I tried to get out of the dressing room, it was locked! A big voice announced, “Thanks for shopping today. Come back next year when we put on another giant sale!” And then all the lights went out!

Next year! This whole building was going to be locked and dark for a whole year? I started to get worried. (Wouldn’t you?)

I reached into my pack and started digging around for my phone. As I did that, a few things dropped out of the pack – lost in the dark. Was one of them a present for a grandchild? No time to look for it in the dark, because I remembered my phone battery was low! Sure enough, when I found it, there was only enough power for one phone call. Who could help me? I pressed the number 6 on my speed dial and a voice answered, “Hello! How can I be of service?”

“Computer dear, I’m trapped in this building. Could you make sure the servo-bot puts out dinner for Tinkerbell, and could you set the spaceship for a trip back to Earth without me? Since it’s the weekend, the kids aren’t in school. So go to Everest’s house and get her to....” And then the phone battery died and I couldn’t give any more instructions to the computer!

Grandma in Space!



Tinkerbelle got a fine meal that night, served by robot arms that put extra gravy on her dog food. And the computer obeyed its other order, launching the spaceship off the planet and back toward Earth. In a while, it was hovering over Everest's house – but so quietly that no one looked up to notice it.

Everest, you were outside, picking up flower petals and leaves and arranging them in designs to give to your two little sisters, Sophia and Alexa. You thought it was pretty, but it was missing something. Maybe it needed another kind of leaf – maybe from the tree on the side of the house.

When you walked around there, you looked up at the tree. And that's when you noticed a spaceship up above it. And just then, the ship's computer noticed you looking up. It didn't know what it was supposed to do, since my message was interrupted. But the end of the message was "get her to..." so the computer knew it was supposed to get Everest's attention and get Everest to do something or go somewhere. (Computers are very smart, but they can't read your mind. So if you don't finish telling them what to do, they can't do what you want.)

Everest, you wondered if you were supposed to be afraid. But then you remembered how your Grandma told stories about going shopping on other planets, so maybe spaceships weren't so scary. And you decided you wouldn't even be scared when the spaceship started coming down into your yard! And that's when our fantastic adventure really began....



The computer opened the door of the spaceship, and Everest climbed in. There was no Grandma inside, but there was a little dog she knew very well. Were they glad to see each other! Then the computer played my last message for Everest to hear. When she heard me say, "go to Everest's house and get her to..." it made her think about what kind of danger I might be in.

Grandma in Space!

“I should call Xander and Nicky and get them to help me find Grandma.” Suddenly a phone was ringing, and Everest knew that the computer had heard her and had already made the call for her.

Xander answered the phone and said, “Hi Everest! Did you call because you want to come over and play with us?”

Everest spoke in a hurry. “No, I want you to come with me to help get Grandma out of trouble!”

Xander didn’t understand. “Why? Is Grandma in jail?”

“No, Xander, she’s missing! I want you to go outside so I can pick you up and take you to where she is.”

When she said that, the computer started the spaceship again and started toward the house where Xander and Nicky lived. They arrived just as you boys were going outside. The spaceship landed on the lawn and the door opened for them.

Nicky was very surprised. “Wow! A spaceship! Can we get in?”

Everest answered, “Yes! Get in, quick!”

The boys climbed in and before anyone could say hi or pet Tinkerbelle, the spaceship started up and rose into the air. But it didn’t go anywhere.

Everest was beginning to catch on to what the computer could and couldn’t understand. So she gave a command.

“Computer, take us to where Grandma is!”

And with that, the spaceship shot off into the sky.



I had eaten my last energy bar and an apple, and now I had no more snacks. “I sure hope the computer understood enough to get some help for me,” I said sadly, feeling a little sorry for myself.

Suddenly I heard a noise far away at the other end of the building. I listened carefully. It was the sound of robo-cleaners – the machines that would pick up trash and wash the floors. And of course, since they were robots, they didn’t need lights. They could clean everything in the dark. Was that good news or bad news?

Grandma in Space!

Would they think I was just a piece of trash to be swept up and thrown into a giant recycle bin?

Now my dressing room started shaking! Was this part of the way the building cleaned itself? Whatever it was, it was not fun! I reached into my pack and found an emery board I used to file my fingernails. In the dark, I pushed the little stick into the door of the dressing room and twisted it back and forth. Pop! The door opened and I ran out – just in time. A huge robo-cleaner picked up the whole dressing room and turned it upside down! I ran as fast as I could in the dark room, and bumped into something very soft....



The spaceship landed in a dark parking lot. Everest, Xander, and Nicky looked out and then looked at each other. Nicky spoke first. “Let’s go find Grandma. I bet she’s in that giant building.”

Xander agreed, but he was worried. “Yeah, but it’s SO giant we’ll never find her in there.”

Everest had an idea. “I’m sure there are elevators in there. Nicky, why don’t you start at the bottom of the building and keep going up? Xander, you could go to the very top to start looking and then keep going down. I’ll put Tinkerbelle on a leash and go around the parking lot looking for clues.”

Before leaving the spaceship, you all looked around for things that could help. You found two flashlights, and the boys took them. Everest didn’t need one, since Planet X48 had six moons, and four of them were full that night. You also found some snacks, which you divided. Xander took a long piece of rope that he found, and Nicky took some space coins that were lying on the dashboard.

Then you all left the spaceship. Everest started walking up and down the parking lot with Tinkerbelle, hoping my little dog would find some clue with her nose. You boys ran to the building and found the front door easy to open. Then you turned on your flashlights and ran inside. Nicky started calling for me, while Xander found an elevator to get to the top floor.



Grandma in Space!

So what was I doing while you kids started to search the building? Well, I discovered that the soft thing that I bumped into was bigger than me. It didn't move, so it wasn't alive and it wasn't a robot. After feeling in the dark, she realized it was a stuffed toy animal. In fact, it was a stuffed Zebracon, just like the real ones on a planet called Flizzbin. Then I found a button on it. Aha! It could move after all. So I climbed up on it and pushed the button. Its eyes lit up like flashlights, and its legs started moving up and down. Since I knew how to ride a horse from way back in my teenage days, I was sure I could ride this toy. And away I went, looking for a way out of my 66th floor trap.

Soon I found an escalator that connected to the floor below. It wasn't working, but I could get the toy Zebracon to climb down very slowly and carefully. I had forgotten what was on the 65th floor. Was it kitchen gadgets or was it garden supplies? And were there robo-cleaners down there?



Nicky ran around the first floor, calling "Grandma!" every few steps. Soon he got tired of looking and decided to go up to the second floor. He climbed up the escalator that wasn't working, and there he heard a noise. "Grandma!" he yelled. But instead of Grandma, there was a huge robo-cleaner coming right toward him! He turned and ran up the next escalator to the third floor. He was sure his Grandma would not be in the same room as that monster machine.

Xander was at the top of the building. The floor was covered with water. Not just a little water, but water up to his ankle. Now his feet were wet and he couldn't run or even walk fast. This was yucky awful, he thought. But he sloshed through the water, calling "Grandma!" every once in a while. He didn't notice that he was coming to an escalator, and when he saw it, it was too late. He fell and slid all the way to the floor below – right in the path of a robo-cleaner with a giant hose gushing water!

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He tried to stand up, and found the water up to his knees! So he swam away from the machine as fast as he could, looking for a way down. And that's when he swam right into another waterfall and down he went!

Everest was getting tired of walking around the parking lot, but Tinkerbelle wasn't. She had found lots to sniff – just not anything that Everest could use as a clue to where I was. Then Tinkerbelle started sniffing around a little booklet. Everest picked it up and discovered that it was a list of what had been for sale on each floor of the building. Eighty-eight pages for eighty-eight floors. And Grandma would like what was on at least half of them!

Then she noticed something on page 66. It said “66th Floor: Used Clothes for Two-Legged Creatures Who Are Female and Taller than a Porador.” Well, Grandma was two-legged and female, but what was a porador, and how tall was it?

Everest thought: “A porador must either be an animal or something that people on some planet have in their houses. So maybe there were some for sale here.” She flipped through the pages, looking for where they might have sold animals or things for your house. On page 32, she read this: “32nd Floor: Animals for the Home, Such as Goats from Earth, Reerees from Plubber, and Poradors from Eeeelianor.”

A clue! A goat was not very big, and Grandma was taller than a goat. Maybe Grandma was taller than a porador, too. So maybe Grandma was on the floor where they sold used clothes for two-legged females who were taller than poradors. Now what floor was that? Suddenly, a strong wind blew the booklet out of her hands, and it was gone forever!



For a long time, I rode my stuffed Zebraconz, looking for ways down and running away from robo-cleaners. By now Nicky was probably up to the 18th floor, Xander was down to the 73rd floor, and Everest was standing at an elevator, trying to remember which floor sold the two-legged female clothes before getting on.

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And that's when all the lights went on, and the escalators started running again! The light made you all feel braver and you started calling out for me and for each other, louder than ever. Of course, the building was so big and so tall, shouting didn't really help. In fact, all your noise did was wake up the watchdogs. These were not Earth dogs, but Vlattmott dogs – with razor-sharp teeth, flames coming out their noses, and smoke coming out their ears! They started out very quietly, trying to locate the noises they heard. They were really good at moving so quietly that no one could hear them coming....



Sixty-six! That was it – sixty-six! Everest jumped into the elevator and pushed the button marked 66. When she arrived and the door opened, there was Xander. He looked as disappointed as Everest. “I thought you would be Grandma,” they both said at the same time.

Everest asked where he had been. He told her he had been from the top of the building to where they were now, and there was no sign of Grandma. Everest thought hard. “Maybe she was here but started down. We should go down, too.” So they found a down escalator and started calling for me as they traveled.

Nicky was on his way up. He was glad the lights were on, so the robo-cleaners couldn't surprise him. But he wasn't scared of them anymore, because he found out he could push them over and they couldn't get up again.

All three of you children reached the 41st floor at the same time. You figured I had to be there, since you didn't find me higher or lower. So you called out louder and louder, racing around all the tables full of things that never got sold. And sure enough, I *was* there, asleep on a bed that was made for the creatures of Zimbor – which is why the bed was the shape of a pentagon and why it was eight feet high! (I had stacked boxes to get up there.)

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But guess what? The guard dogs had also arrived on the 41st floor! And it just so happened that robo-cleaners with hoses and brushes had also arrived, and they turned on the water full-force!



Shouting children and running water woke me up. I looked down from my bed and this is what I saw and heard:

- Robo-cleaners at every corner of the room, spraying water from hoses and moving toward the center
- A floor filling with water
- Three children running around calling for me
- Purple dogs with smoking ears, following the children

I called down, “Nicky, Xander, Everest! I’m up here. Climb up on the bed with me! Hurry!” You children looked up and waved to me, but I didn’t wave back. Instead I shouted. “Hurry, the dogs are after you!”

Sure enough, the dogs were getting closer – one dog following each child – and the smoke from their ears was changing from gray to red! All you children screamed at the same time, and you started running toward my tall bed.

Running was very hard to do, because of all the water on the floor. You kept slipping, but so did the dogs. Then Nicky remembered the coins in his pocket, and he pulled them out. He turned around and threw one at the dog near him. That coin couldn’t hurt such a ferocious creature, but it was shiny, and when it bounced on the floor in the water, the dog turned to chase it. It just so happens that Vlattmott dogs love shiny things!

Nicky ran over to his brother and threw the coin at the dog that was about to pounce. The coin hit the wet floor and the dog turned to chase it. Xander ran to the bed and Nicky ran to Everest. He threw his last coin at the third dog, and it too ran after the shiny object. Then Nicky and Everest ran to the bed.

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When they got to the bottom of the bed, they found all the climbing boxes had floated away. But Xander was standing by the bed, holding one end of his rope and throwing the other end way up high to me. I missed catching it on his first throw! But I caught it on his second try. While I held the rope, Xander climbed up, then Nicky, then Everest last. They were all safe! But how could we escape this room and this building with all the robots and dogs and water?

Then I had an idea. “Let’s wait until the water is really deep and spilling down the escalator. We’ll go down it like a water slide! And we’ll keep doing that until we reach the bottom.”

Everest asked, “What if the dogs follow us?”

And I said, “Now that we know they like shiny things, we can throw shiny things from my pack whenever one gets close.”

So that’s what we all did. In a few minutes the water was as high as Nicky’s waist, and we climbed down. At the bottom, we held hands and I led you to the down escalator. It really was like a water slide, and down we went in a line!

We repeated this over and over, going down slide after slide. And when dogs got too close, I would open my pack and grab anything shiny to throw at them. Unfortunately, all your presents were wrapped in shiny paper, and I had to throw them to keep the dogs away.

After forty water slides, we were at the bottom, and we ran out the front door and into the parking lot. We were tired and wet – and laughing. Everest said, “I’ll never ask to go to a water park again. I’ve had enough water slides for a hundred years!” Xander and Nicky agreed.

Then we all climbed into the spaceship. Tinkerbell was so glad to see us! But when she saw how wet and yucky we were, she went back to her basket and took a nap.



On the ride back to Earth, we told each other all the different kinds of adventures and discoveries we each had before we met on

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the 41st floor. (Of course, you were all so excited that the pieces of the story didn't come out in the right order. That's why I'm writing this down now, so you can read how it all happened.) Anyway, we drank hot chocolate and ate crackers that I had made at home the day before. Then Xander asked, "Grandma, what were all the shiny things in your pack that you threw at the dogs?"

My face turned from smiling to sad. "Well, I had to throw all the things I had bought today – even the presents I had bought for you three."

Nicky looked sad, too. But then he asked, "What was my present going to be?"

"Your present was a glow-in-the-dark space wand that could spit out colored light rays – from a planet called Shandicor. Sorry you won't get it now."

Then I looked at the other two of you. "Xander, your present was going to be a flying toy spaceship that never needs batteries – from the planet Zinderwinder. And I found a cuddly dinobunny for your baby brother Max. Everest, your present was going to be a silver shirt with real wings on the back of it – from no one knows where. And I even got a couple of musical bracelets for your little sisters Sophia and Alexa. I don't think I'll ever find things like that again."

"That's alright, Grandma," you each said, one after the other. And then you all curled up to take a nap and dream about the presents you wouldn't get. But I could tell you really weren't sad, because you had a better present. You had your Grandma back again, and *you* had been the ones to save her – all by yourselves!

THE END

Grandma in Space!

Did you enjoy these twelve episodes? Should Grandma publish more of her adventures? Should Grandma's adventures be made into a TV series? Or a movie? Or both? Would you like to ask Grandma a question? Or give her a suggestion or some advice?

You can contact Grandma at this address:

grandma@whizkidz.org

You can also tell other readers
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