

# ASTRONAUTS in TRAINING

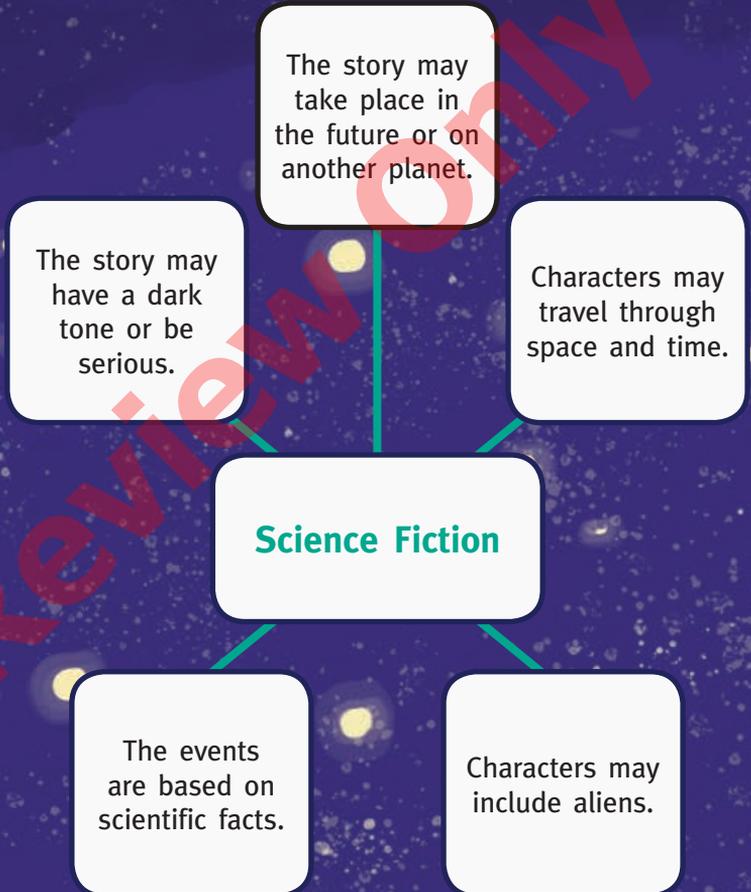
by Joanne Mattern • illustrated by Gabrielle Esposito



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## Science Fiction

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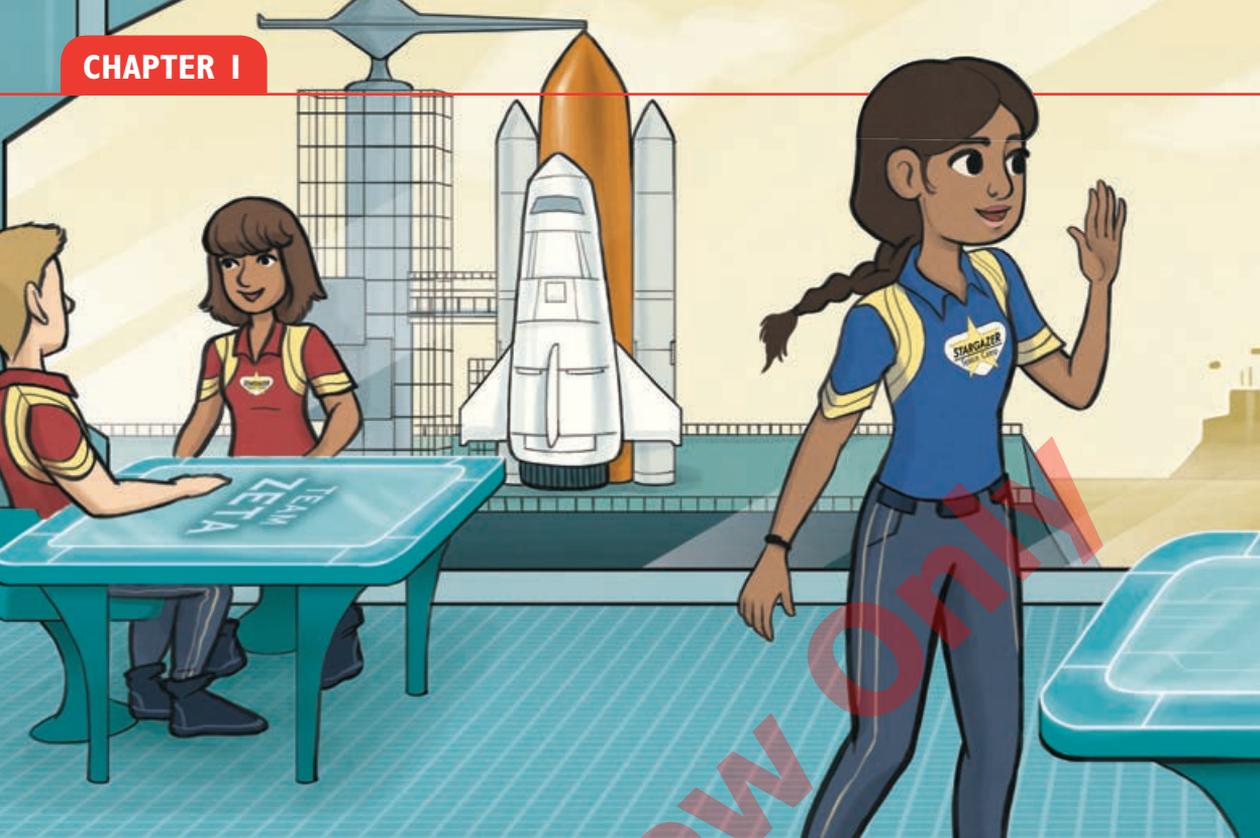
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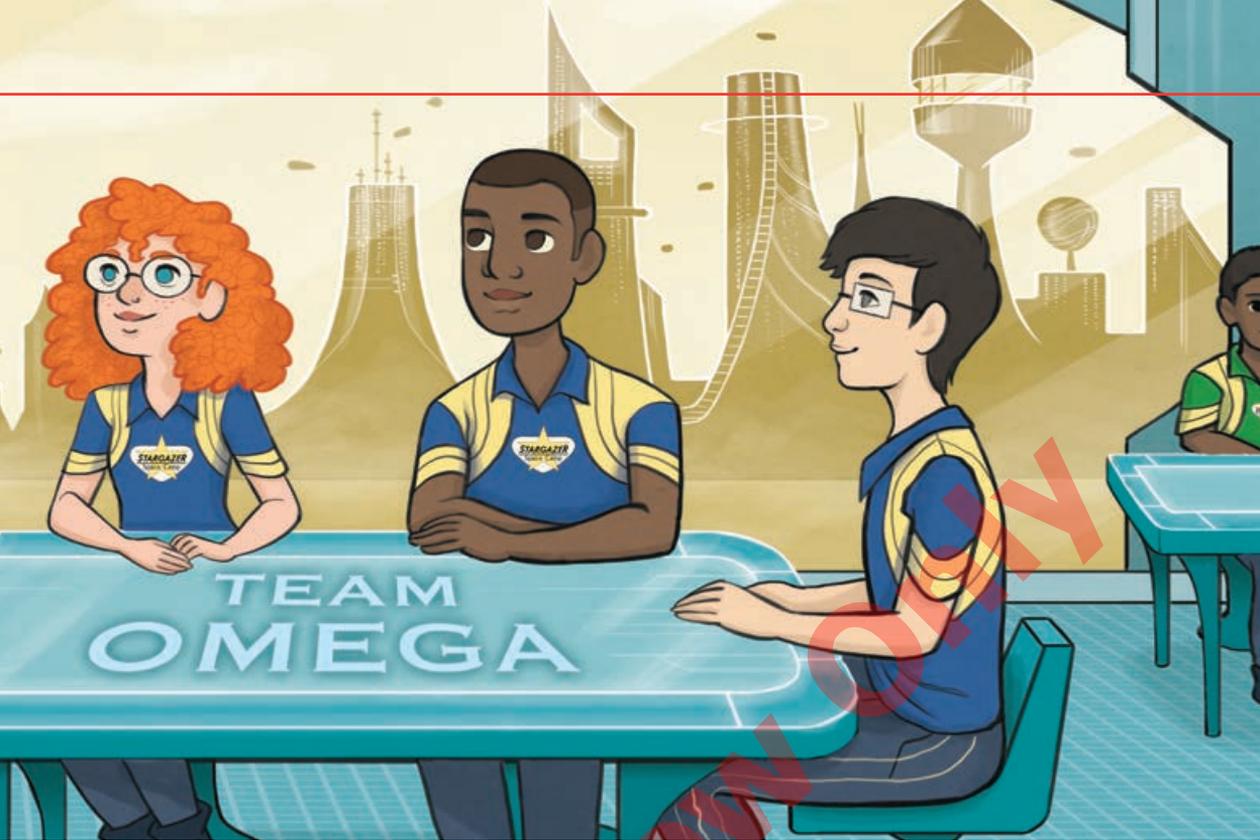
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## Space Camp 2125

As Saura Sharma approached the entrance to Stargazer Space Camp, the door slid open with a low *hissss*. Once inside, she stepped onto a small transport disk. Then she said, “Camp Cafeteria!” Within seconds, the disk had whisked her down a hallway and into a large room filled with other campers. A massive information wall on the far side of the room played all the campers’ application videos. The message “Welcome 2125 Space Campers!” scrolled across the bottom of the screen in several languages.

Saura stepped off the transport disk and began looking for the campers who were on her team. Soon she spotted a small group of other 16-year-olds dressed in blue shirts just like hers. Saura headed toward their table.



“Hey, I’m Saura,” she said as she neared them. They introduced themselves, and Saura made sure to look them in the eyes and repeat their names so she could remember them. “Meg, Nathan, Koji! So we’re a team.”

“Team Omega!” said Nathan. “I’ve been waiting for this day all my life—studying space science and math in school is one thing, but being an actual space camper is a dream come true for me!”

Meg nodded in agreement. “I’m super excited, too. My mom is an astronaut with the Stargazer program, so she’s very proud that I was accepted into space camp!”

Koji looked around the room. “What do you think we’ll get to do?”

“Maybe we’ll get to go on a real mission into space!” Saura said excitedly.

“Attention, campers!” announced a man in the cafeteria. Saura and her new friends watched the famous astronaut Dr. James Park step up to the podium. “Welcome!” he began. “I have some very exciting news. At the end of the month, we will choose one team to assist **ground control** with a real space mission. And one camper from the winning team will work with our astronauts on board our spacecraft, *Odyssey*, as it travels beyond the edge of our solar system.”

The room burst into a buzz of enthusiastic shouts and whistles. Finally, Dr. Park raised his hand to quiet the small crowd. “I’m sure you will remember the challenge of our rigorous application process,” he said. “Hundreds of students applied, and only you twelve were chosen. You were picked because of your physical fitness and your remarkable talents in math and science. All of you will be challenged even more now that you are here. Good luck!” Then Dr. Park sat down at his table, and dinner was served.

After dinner, the Team Omega table could not stop talking about the announcement. “We have to win! My mom is seriously going to want me to be the one to go on the *Odyssey*,” Meg said.

“Well, it’s only fair that I tell you. I’m the most astronaut-ready in my class at home,” Nathan said.

Koji chimed in, “I’m not bragging or anything, but I know I can make it into space! Just saying ...”

“Okay, okay,” said Saura. “Listen everybody, we’re a team first. And if we do win, those of us staying on Earth at the controls will have extremely important jobs to do. So everybody, get in a circle. Team Omega on the count of three. One, two, three ... “TEAM OMEGA!” the new team yelled.



# Astronaut Training

The astronaut hopefuls started training right after breakfast the next day. Dr. Park explained that they would rotate through four different training sessions.

Saura and Meg were pleased to start in the **zero gravity robotics** room. There they worked with two other campers to operate a machine that looked like a giant claw. It was used for moving objects.

“My great-grandfather told me about machines like these,” Meg said as she tried to lower the arm to grab onto a box as it glided past. “They used to have them at carnivals, but he said it was difficult to win the prize!”

“Yes, I played a virtual reality carnival game once—but at least those carnival machines had gravity!” Saura said. “It’s practically impossible to grab objects when they’re floating!”

Meanwhile, Koji was having his own zero gravity experience. He and some others boarded a special plane that flew into the lower part of the **atmosphere**. Koji was calm as the plane zoomed off the runway and into the blue sky.

Suddenly, the plane flew upward in a steep **vertical** climb. “Whoa!” Koji yelled.

An instructor gave a thumbs-up and unfastened Koji’s harness. “Here comes zero gravity. It’s time to float.”

Soon Koji and the other campers were hovering in midair. Koji clumsily floated around the cabin, trying not to bump into things.

“I’m super dizzy!” another camper yelled. Koji felt slightly nervous. His stomach lurched, and he swallowed hard—but there was no way he was going to get sick.

“Take a deep breath,” the instructor called out. “And don’t worry—we’ll be practicing this a lot, so you’ll all get used to it.” Koji wasn’t sure that was good news.

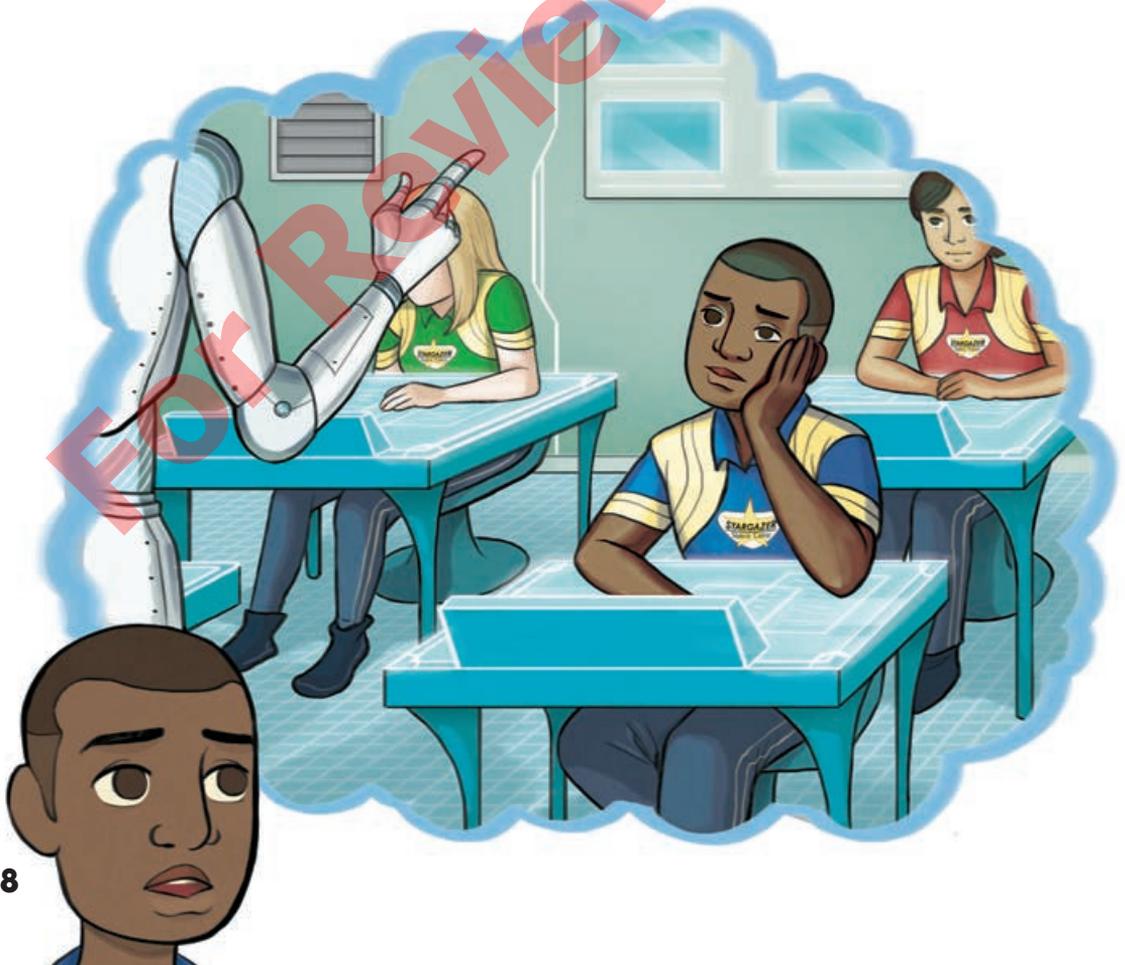


That night at dinner, Saura and Meg told their friends about working with robotics. “I used remote controls today to carefully manipulate the arm to stack tiny metal cylinders into a box,” Saura said. “The exercise was similar to the type of work astronauts do in space stations or on the moon.”

“Sounds fun. Was it hard?” Nathan asked.

“I don’t think I’ve ever concentrated so hard to make my fingers and my eyes work together,” Meg told them.

Nathan now looked glum. “I can’t wait to do that. All of you are having fun learning robotics and experiencing zero gravity—and what am I doing? I’m sitting in a classroom studying flight patterns and learning math equations! I might as well be at school back home.”





“Everyone is going to have a turn in the classroom,” said a new voice. Nathan looked up and blushed as he saw one of the astronauts behind him. It was Dr. Mason, Meg’s mom.

“Hands-on experience is important,” she continued, “but so is knowing the mathematical formulas and the scientific concepts that make space travel work. Every camper gets a turn learning every skill, and every skill is important to a successful mission.”

Nathan thought for a moment. “Thanks, Dr. Mason. You’re right, of course. And I know how lucky I am to be here.”

Dr. Mason smiled. “I know, and you’re all working really hard. Right, Meg?”

“Right, Mom!” said Meg.