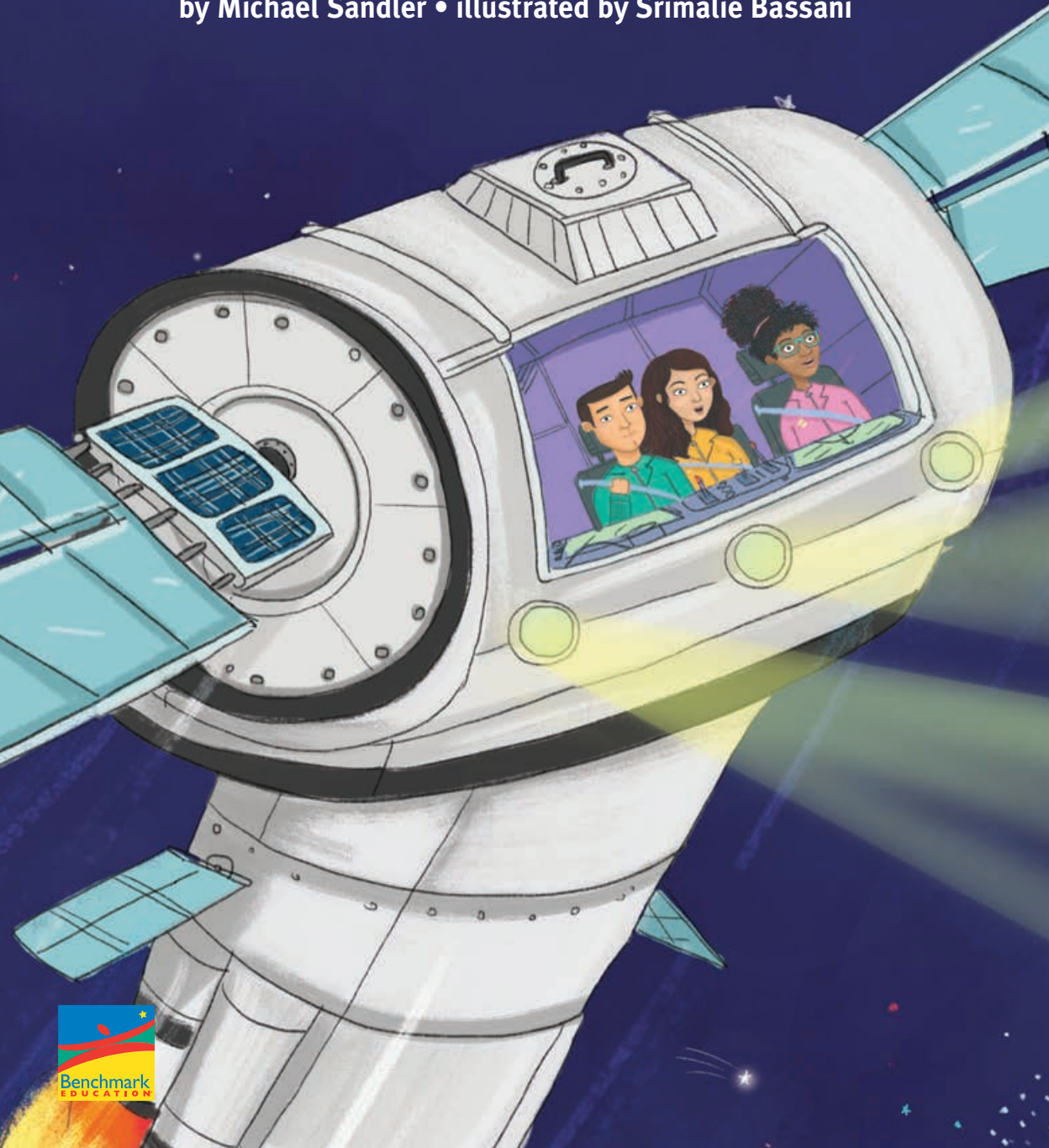


***RACE* TO THE NORTH STAR**

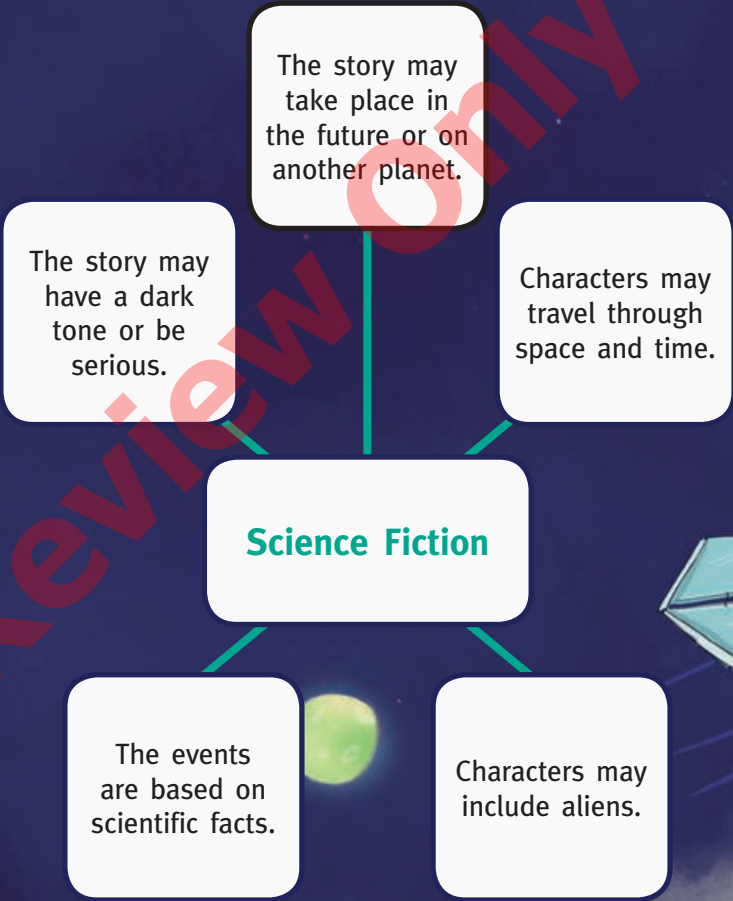
by Michael Sandler • illustrated by Srimalie Bassani



Level	S/40
Lexile®	800L

Science Fiction

Look for the genre features noted below as you read this book. Use the features to help you understand the text.



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Blast Off

Madri gripped her launch chair tightly, as the **Galaxy 11** Space Pod rocketed up into the sky. She looked out the pod window and watched as the space center at Cape Canaveral in Florida grew smaller and smaller.

“Woo-hoo,” shouted her shipmate Dawn.

“Yes!” yelled her other shipmate, Hugo.

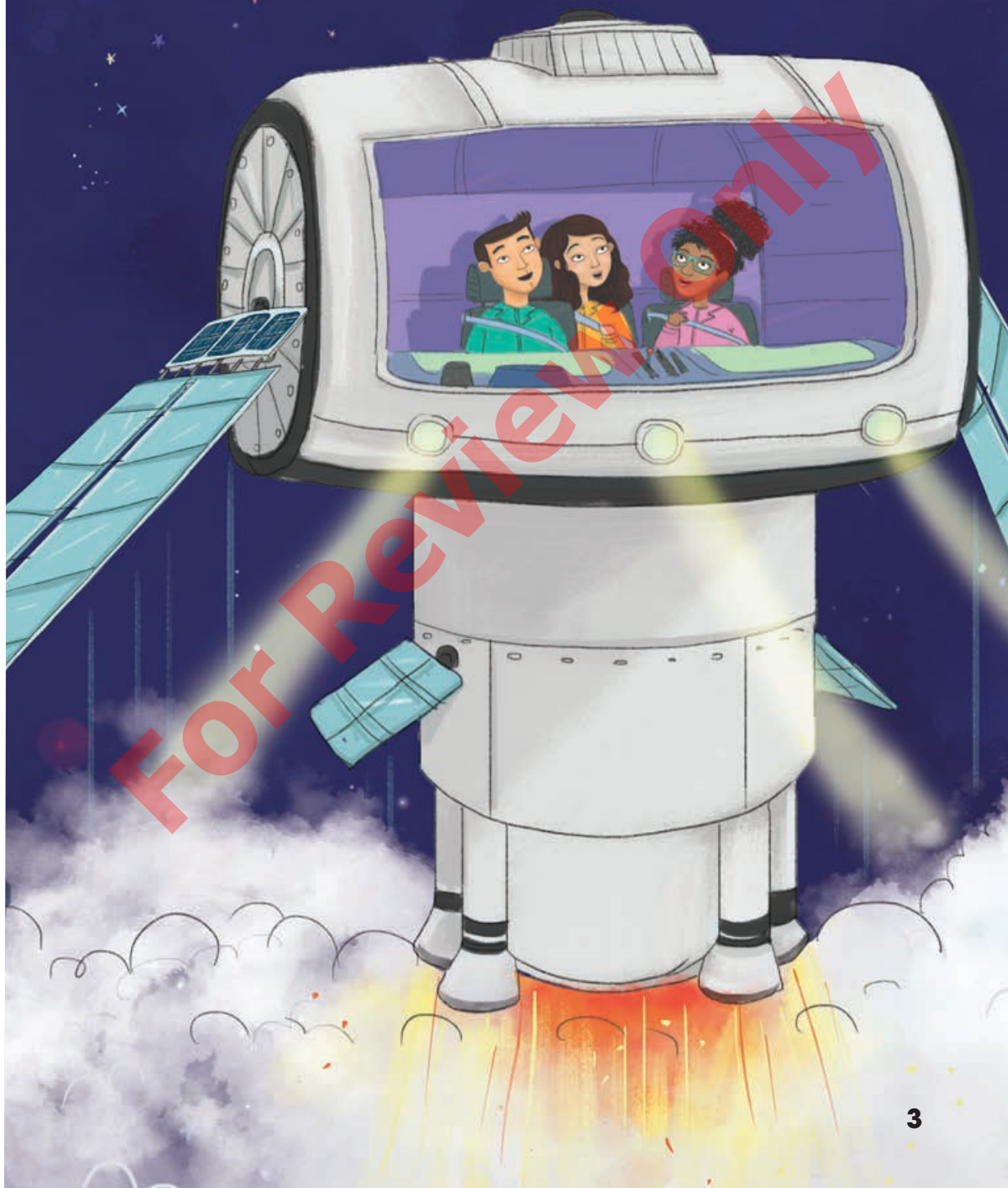
Madri, Dawn, and Hugo had all been waiting for this moment. Every kid in the Annual Earth **Interstellar** Race had been waiting for this moment. The Global Space Council offered this event every year. Each space pod contained a team of three young people who would be propelled into space. The first team to complete the assigned mission and return to Earth would win prizes and awards.

As they soared farther away, Madri wondered, *Do we have a chance?* All the teams seemed so talented, and everyone else seemed to know so much more about space than she did.

Madri and her team felt a thunk as their pod separated from the rocket that had propelled them into space. Madri could feel the pod **decelerate**. *We must finally be entering orbit around Earth*, she thought.



For Review Only



“We made it,” said Hugo, unstrapping himself from his launch chair and wobbling a little as he stood up.

“Phenomenal,” said Dawn, doing the same. “Just look at Earth from here!”

Madri stared and touched the pod’s window; Earth appeared to be a perfect sphere, like the most amazing marble, decorated with brown deserts, green continents, and deep blue oceans.

“Hey, we can see South America,” Hugo began. “And right there is my home, Tierra del Fuego, in Argentina.”





“Oh, wow,” said Madri, then she turned and peered out the window on the opposite side of the pod. “The moon is pretty cool, too.” They were rocketing so close that they could even see the moon’s craters.

“The side facing the sun is always lit up, and the other side is dark,” said Dawn, grinning. “Half and half. How much we see depends on the moon’s position in its orbit around Earth, and right now, we can see half of the ‘lit’ side. Two weeks from now it will be full. Hopefully we’ll be done with our mission before the moon is full, right?”

Madri let out a weak smile, but Hugo enthusiastically agreed, “Let’s win this thing!”

Madri looked over at her two teammates. *They know so much, she thought, about Earth, about space, about everything. Maybe we do have a chance.* Still, Madri felt uncomfortable and wished she knew more. She didn’t really feel as if she had anything to contribute.

Madri's thoughts were interrupted by a beeping sound as a huge computer screen inside the pod lit up. Hugo bounded toward the screen and announced, "Now we find out our mission."

The head of the Global Space Council appeared on screen, and her voice boomed from the speakers.

"Greetings, and welcome to Earth Interstellar Race 2125! As you know, every year we have a theme, and this year's theme is 'Take a Dip.' Each team must **navigate** a way to a star, either in the Big Dipper or in the Little Dipper, and bring back a souvenir to prove to the judges that the mission was accomplished.

"In case you think this space race to the stars sounds simple, it's not. We're turning off your auto-navigation systems, which means you'll have to navigate the old-fashioned way, using telescopes and star charts. You've all been selected to compete because of your special talents, and everything you need is in your space pods. I have confidence in you. The first team back wins the top prize; the best souvenir also wins a prize. Good luck and get going!"



The director waved, and the screen went black.

“Let’s get out the star charts,” said Hugo.

“Um, guys,” Madri stammered, simultaneously worried that she didn’t know what to do while also feeling worried about showing her teammates exactly how confused she was.

“Big Dipper, Little Dipper, are these planets? Stars?”



“**Constellations**,” said Dawn, but she could see the uncertainty in Madri’s face, so she explained further. “Constellations are specific groups of stars. Throughout history, humans named these groups based on their patterns or shapes.”

Hugo piped in, “The Big Dipper and Little Dipper look like soup ladles. Here, look at this star chart.” Madri peered over the chart, traced her finger around the stars until she saw a pattern labeled “Big Dipper,” and then moved her finger farther until she saw another smaller set labeled “Little Dipper.” Madri breathed a sigh of relief. Now she understood what the director was talking about.

“Sorry, it’s just that stars and constellations aren’t really my thing,” Madri apologized.

Hugo snorted, “How can they not be your thing if you volunteered for this race?”

“My mom is a mechanical engineer,” Madri explained, “and she works at the space center, building these things.” Madri tapped the wall of the pod. “Machines are more my style. Anything you need done with a wrench, thermal scanner, or hand drill—sure. But constellations ...?” her voice faded.



“That’s so cool,” Dawn said. “Not only are these Galaxy 11 Space Pods brand new, but they can also travel faster than anything ever invented—and your mom works on these!”

“So we have our very own Galaxy 11 mechanic on board,” interrupted Hugo, smiling. “Do you think we can take this pod to the Little Dipper? At one end of the Little Dipper is the North Star; I’ve never seen the North Star before.”

“It’s actually a system of three stars, really close together,” Dawn interrupted.

“I know,” chuckled Hugo.

“How come you’ve never seen the North Star?” asked Madri. “I thought stars were your thing.”

“Earth revolves around the sun,” explained Hugo, “and as it does, it rotates on its axis. But in the Southern Hemisphere, where I live, Earth is angled in such a way that we can never see the North Star in the night sky.”

“Well, you’ve seen stars we’ve never seen in the Northern Hemisphere, Hugo,” said Dawn, “and anyway, heading to the North Star sounds good, so let’s get to work!”

