

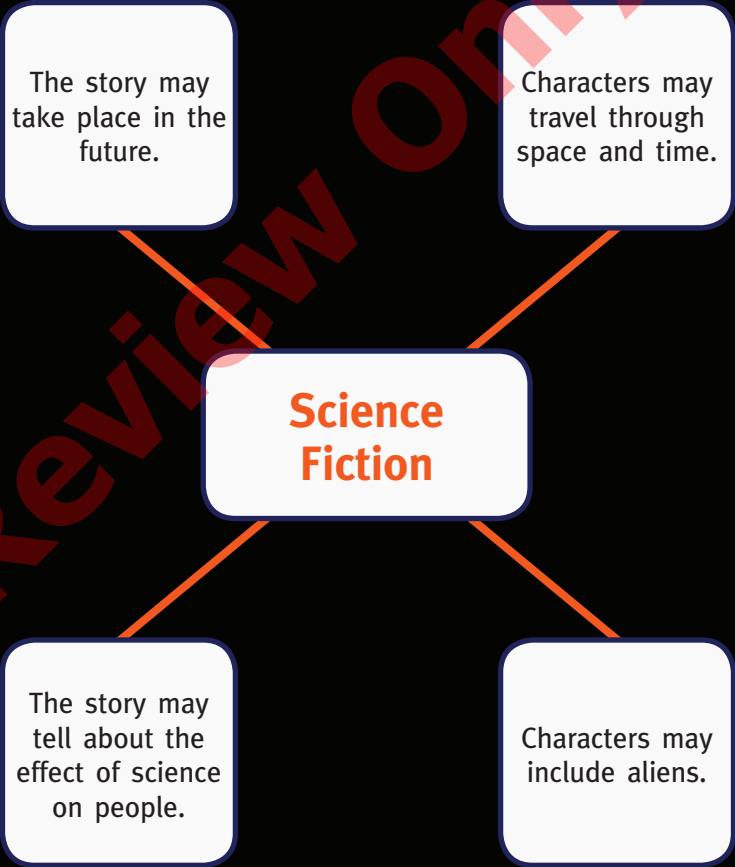
Three ... Two ... One ... **LIFTOFF!**

by Greg V. Wood • illustrated by Paul Fisher-Johnson



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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ISBN: 978-1-5322-8034-4

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Checking Systems

“Now what you’ve all been waiting for!” the tour guide said.

Shonda stood patiently as the Spaceport tour guide opened the door. Then the guide led the group into a room with a wall made of glass.

There it was—*The Ride*. Shonda caught her breath.



“*The Ride* is no ordinary spacecraft,” the guide explained. “It is unique. It is the first spacecraft in the world that uses magnets!”

“Will we get to ride in it?” asked one of the other students.

“No, sadly. But as part of the Future **Astronauts** Program, you will get to watch its very first test drive.”



“How could magnets move something that big?” Shonda wondered aloud.

“You probably have small magnets on your refrigerator,” the tour guide said. “Well, *The Ride* uses a different type of magnet. *The Ride* uses electromagnets.”

“These are very strong magnets powered by electricity,” the guide explained. “They can be turned on and off by our **engineers**. These magnets line the rail and the bottom of *The Ride* capsule. The magnets push away from each other. This causes *The Ride* capsule to float above the rail.”

“But how does *The Ride* move fast enough to break free from Earth’s **gravity**?” Shonda asked.

“That’s a great question,” replied the guide. “The magnets also move *The Ride* forward. They push and pull *The Ride* along the rail until it reaches a superhigh speed. Then it launches off the ramp, into the sky, and out of Earth’s gravity.”

“Then to Mars!” Shonda whispered to herself. Shonda hoped to be an astronaut someday and to travel to other planets.

A voice boomed from the loudspeaker. “Prepare for test. T-minus ten minutes.”



Members of the ground crew raced around making last-minute checks. In the far corner, Shonda could see a group of scientists behind computers.

Why would anyone choose to do that when you could be an astronaut and ride into outer space? Shonda wondered.



Just then, a team of astronauts came out. They walked up the steps and boarded *The Ride*. *That's where the real excitement is*, she thought.

Suddenly, it was T-minus one minute. The voice over the loudspeaker boomed: "Counting down. Three ... two ... one ... launch!"

The ring-shaped track was more than a mile long. At first, *The Ride* started slowly. But its speed quickly increased. Shonda couldn't wait for it to head up the ramp and launch into the sky. But then something went terribly wrong.

What Is the Problem?

Red lights flashed.

“Emergency launch shutdown,” the voice said over the loudspeaker.

“We need to leave right now,” the tour guide announced. “We want to avoid getting in the way of the engineers. We will use the back stairs to get to a safety zone.”

The back stairwell was nearly dark. Only small emergency lights lit the stairs below Shonda’s feet. Shonda was nervous. *What happened? Were the astronauts on board okay?*

At one point, a group of engineers hurried past, saying, “Excuse us! Coming through.” The tour group squeezed against the wall to make room for them to get by.

Shonda kept her eyes on the tiny lights. The group pressed together at the bottom of the stairs and then turned into a dark hallway. Shonda followed.

