

WHERE IS THE SECRET POWER Z?

# The Space Ship Under The Apple Tree



Louis Slobodkin

THE SPACE SHIP  
UNDER THE APPLE TREE

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# THE SPACE SHIP UNDER THE APPLE TREE

by

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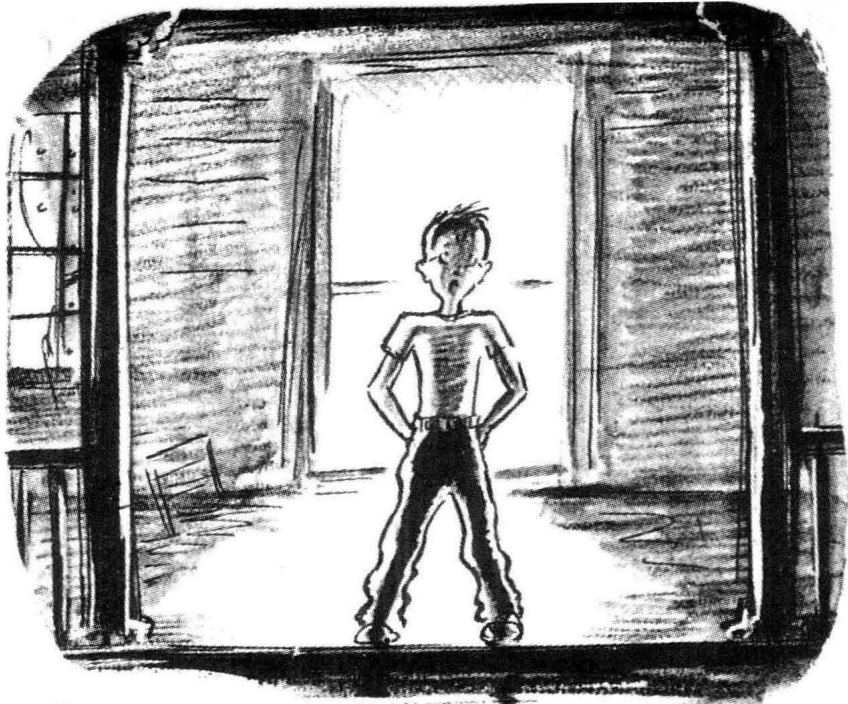
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## 1 Falling Stars

ONE night in mid-August just before he went to bed, Eddie Blow stood on his grandmother's porch looking up at the star-filled sky.

"There's a lot of shooting stars out tonight, Grandma," he said. "Come on out and look . . . There's lots of them."

"Make a wish, Eddie," called his grandmother from the kitchen.

"What's that, Grandma?"

"Make a wish, Eddie," she repeated. "That's what you should do when you see a falling star."

"Aw, Grandma," said Eddie. "That's superstit . . . superstition. I mean . . . wishing on falling stars. Falling stars are meteors. Chunks of matter that are flung off—off into space and things . . ."

"Wait a minute, Eddie. I can't hear a thing," called his grandmother. She had turned on a water tap in the kitchen, "Wait just a minute, son, I'll be with you in a minute and then you can tell me."

In a little while she came out the door, wiping her hands on her apron. "Now what were you saying, Eddie?"

"I was just saying, Grandma. Wishing on falling stars is—Well, falling stars are great meteors or something. They shoot off like that burning all the time. Sometimes they don't burn out altogether and they fall to earth . . . and make big holes . . . Look, there's one! There's a beauty! . . . It just went over the ridge back of the apple orchard!"

"My! My!" said his grandmother. "That was a beauty. But I surely wish that it did go over the ridge and did not come down to earth. It would have come down just about on top of Grandfather's apple tree. If I were to make a wish on *that* star, I'd just wish it didn't come down on Grandfather's apple tree and break it up."

Grandfather's apple tree was the oldest tree in the orchard. It was called Grandfather's apple tree because it was said to be the first tree planted by Eddie's grand-

mother's grandfather. And all the trees in the orchard were said to be the children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren of Grandfather's apple tree.

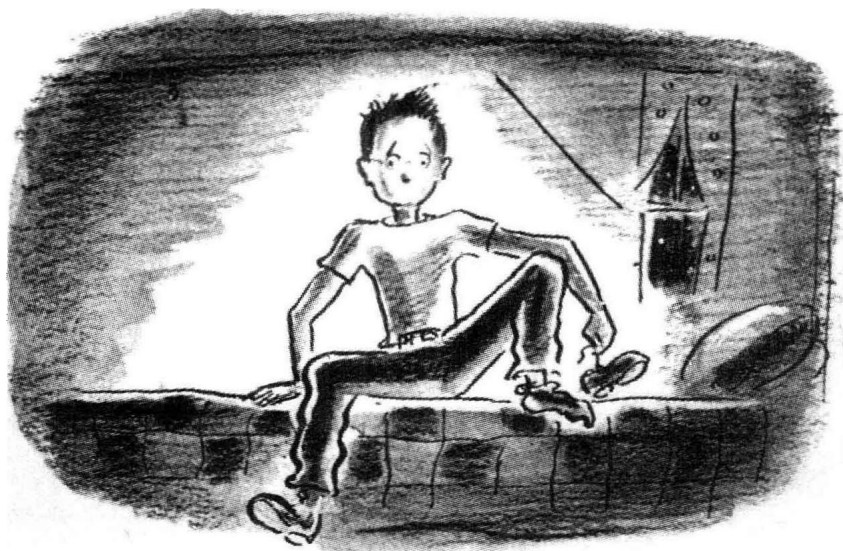
"I guess it didn't. But I wish one of them would come down around here somewhere," said Eddie, and he hastily added, "Just a little one, Grandma, one that wouldn't hurt anything. It wouldn't hurt anything if it came down, maybe, in the road."

"Well, none of them will be coming down just by wishing them down," said his Grandmother. "And it's getting late anyway, Eddie boy. You'd better get off to bed. I just wish if that big star or meteor or whatever it was did come down, it hasn't come down on Grandfather's tree and broken it all up. Eddie, you'd better get off to bed. I'd like to have you go up to the orchard the first thing tomorrow morning. I'm just a little bit worried about Grandfather's apple tree."

"O.K., Grandma. 'Course I'll go up to the orchard," said Eddie. "Don't worry about that old meteor. Bet it's just whirling off into space right this minute. G'night, Grandma."

Eddie went up the stairs two at a time, swung the door of his room as if he'd tear the door off its hinges, took a running jump and plunked on to his bed. Then he ripped off one of his shoes without undoing the laces and





stopped . . . and thought . . .

*What if the meteor really did come down in the apple orchard?*

*What if it did come down on Grandfather's apple tree?*

*What if it were up there right now burning and burning?*

*What did it look like burning away like that?*

Eddie Blow was an eleven-and-a-half-year-old boy, who wore glasses and was interested in science and nature. He often stopped and asked himself questions about things and then tried to find out. In New York, where he lived all fall, winter and spring, Eddie read a lot of books in the library about science and nature. And his Boy Scout troop often went to the Natural History Museum. There Eddie found out about lots of things.

The small apartment, where he lived with his mother in New York, was rather crowded with his own collection of animals. He had a rabbit, a turtle, two white mice, a horned toad, a salamander, a family of guppies, a few goldfish and an assortment of spiders, moths and some other insects in a cardboard box. He also owned a ninth part of an absent-minded carrier pigeon named Bixxy.

The other eight parts of Bixxy were owned by eight other boys, who with Eddie had found and taken care of Bixxy sometime ago when all nine boys were members of a Cub Scout den. Bixxy had been an Army pigeon and was somewhat of a hero.

Besides his collection of living animals, Eddie had a collection of arrowheads, coins, pieces of stones, shells, cocoons, bird's eggs, pressed flowers, leaves and ferns and a lot of other things. Every summer, when his mother sent him up the Hudson River to visit his grandmother at her farm, a few miles above Albany, she warned him.

"Eddie," she'd say, "I'll try to take care of your collection while you're gone, but if I can't, I can't . . . So don't be surprised . . ."

But Eddie was never surprised. He always came home to find the animals in his collection as healthy as ever and often a lot cleaner, because of his mother's care, than they usually were.

At his grandmother's farm Eddie had no collection of animals. He did not need any for he was able to see the birds, animals and insects living in their natural habitat. The farm sprawled up over the side of a steep hill. It was a big farm, but the soil was too stony to raise any crops of corn or wheat or things like that, though it did have a large apple orchard. And in the early spring Eddie's grandmother hired men to spray the apple trees. In the fall she again hired the men to pick, pack and cart away the big red apples. But during the long summer months Eddie was the only man who worked on her farm (so she said).

Eddie helped around the farm as much as possible, went to the village on errands and almost always did anything he was asked to do. His first job tomorrow morning was to go up to the apple orchard for Grandma, he told himself, as he slowly took off his other shoe.

"... But why wait till morning?" he asked himself suddenly. "If that old meteor landed, it's burning right now, I bet ... Maybe I ought to go up tonight ..."

He heard his grandmother's bedroom door close.

Eddie thought another moment or two. Then he quietly got his flashlight and slipped out of his bedroom window. As lithe as a cat, he slid down the water drain pipe and landed on the ground below with a gentle thud.

The moon had risen and the road up the hill to the or-

chard was well lit. Little animals scurried across Eddie's path as he walked quickly along the road. He scrambled over the stone wall that separated the orchard from the road and then went on up through the orchard. The moon threw shadows of the leaves and branches on the orchard floor. The whole ground looked as if it were covered with a beautiful patterned rug.

When Eddie rounded the fat trunk of one of the sturdy children of Grandfather's apple tree he got his first clear view of the old tree. At first glance there seemed nothing unusual. Grandfather's apple tree stood out clearly against the rising moon. There was no sign of any fallen meteors or anything else strange about the old apple tree.

Then Eddie saw something that made the hairs on the back of his neck stand up straight!

On a stout branch of the old tree, about ten feet up from the ground, something moved! It had looked like part of the tree, a leafless, strangely shaped, small branch attached to the stout branch . . . Then it moved! It was the figure of a little man!

The little man was standing on the branch . . . But he was not standing on the top side of it. He stood on the bottom side of it! Head down! And he stood there as naturally as if his feet were firmly planted on the broad flat ground!

The little man was about three feet tall. He seemed to

be looking out over the moonlit countryside with a tiny spyglass. Suddenly the little man fell like a shot, head first from the branch! He landed with a bang on his head. But his fall had no effect on him at all, for he was up on his feet in an instant. As he stood up he saw Eddie for the first time.

"Speak . . . English?" he asked in a high-pitched voice.

"Y-e-s . . . sir," stammered Eddie.

"Good," said the little man. "One moment . . . Must adjust non-gravity shoes."

The little man crouched on the ground, twirled some knobs on the heavy soles of the shoes he wore. Then he stood up and walked over to the trunk of Grandfather's apple tree—and he kept right on walking, straight up the side of the tree and back along the big branch he had been clinging to (head down) when Eddie first saw him!

"One minute," said the little man again. "Must record observations."

After a minute or two of peeking through his little spyglass, he took what seemed to be a tiny typewriter out of one of his pockets. He quickly tapped its keys a number of times. Then he slipped it back into his pocket and marched back along the tree branch. He walked down the tree trunk to the ground and right up to the astounded Eddie!



"You . . . are native," he said.

"What?" exclaimed Eddie.

"One minute," said the little man. He pulled a little box out of another of the many pockets in his short jacket. He snapped it open. The box seemed filled with luminous little cards. He squinted at one of the cards and then he spoke again.

"You . . . are . . . born in United States . . . of America?"

"Yes, sir," said Eddie.

"Good," said the little man. "One minute."

The little man consulted his little luminous box again. As he squinted through some of the little cards Eddie began to get over the first shock of seeing the little man. "What's going on here?" he said to himself. "Who is he to ask me a lot of questions in my grandmother's apple orchard?"

"Look here!" said Eddie in a loud, angry voice. "What's going on here? . . . Who are you? . . . Who do you think you are, asking me a lot of questions in my own grandmother's apple orchard. You'd better . . ."

As Eddie talked the little man stopped looking through his luminous box. He adjusted a small knob on a bracelet he wore on his wrist. And as Eddie's voice rose angrily the little man suddenly touched Eddie's chest lightly with one of his fingers.

Eddie sat down hard on the ground!

"Speak slow . . . No anger," said the little man.

Eddie scrambled to his feet, his fists clenched.



The little man held out his finger menacingly.

Eddie stood breathing hard.

"I answer question," said the little man. "I Scientist Explorer from Planet Martinea."

Eddie gasped . . . Then as he remembered his reading in astronomy books, he said doubtfully, "Martinea? The planet Martinea? G'wan, there's no such planet!"

The little man hastily consulted his little box again and ruffled through its luminous pages.

"What means g'wan?" he asked.

"G'wan means . . . What difference does it make?" asked Eddie. "What's that box?"

"This box explains language. English language, Martinean language," said the man. "Dictionary Box. Our Language Scientists study American English through high-powered telescopes from Martinea."

"How could they?" asked Eddie suspiciously.

"Your language on highways— 'Go slow! Speed limit 40 miles! Turn left! Hot Dogs! Welcome to Hoosic Falls! Our Language Scientists construct language from these examples."

Eddie just blinked.

"Where's this Martinea?" he asked.

The little man pointed in the general direction beyond the moon.



"Martinea outside your sun's orbit," said the little man.

"Yeah? . . . Well, I never heard of it," said Eddie.

"What is yeah?" asked the little man, quickly consulting his dictionary box again.

"Never mind that," said Eddie. "If you did come from this Martinea, how'd you get here?"

The little man looked at Eddie as if he were making up his mind, then he spoke again.

"Come, I show you."

And he turned and walked over the ridge in back of Grandfather's apple tree. Eddie followed. About ten feet from the tree trunk, the little man stopped, then quickly and with surprising strength he began to pull away a lot of old branches that filled a rather large gully. Eddie didn't remember ever seeing that gully before.

In a few minutes the gully was cleared. The moonlight revealed a metal something which looked very much like an immense overturned metal dish. It was about fifteen feet in diameter. There were strange gadgets on its metal surface and along the outer rim, regularly placed, were a number of small metal tubes.

"A Flying Saucer!" exclaimed Eddie. "Say, that looks like . . . No, it can't be, it's impossible! There are no such things as Flying Saucers!"

The little man turned to Eddie, then he quickly snapped