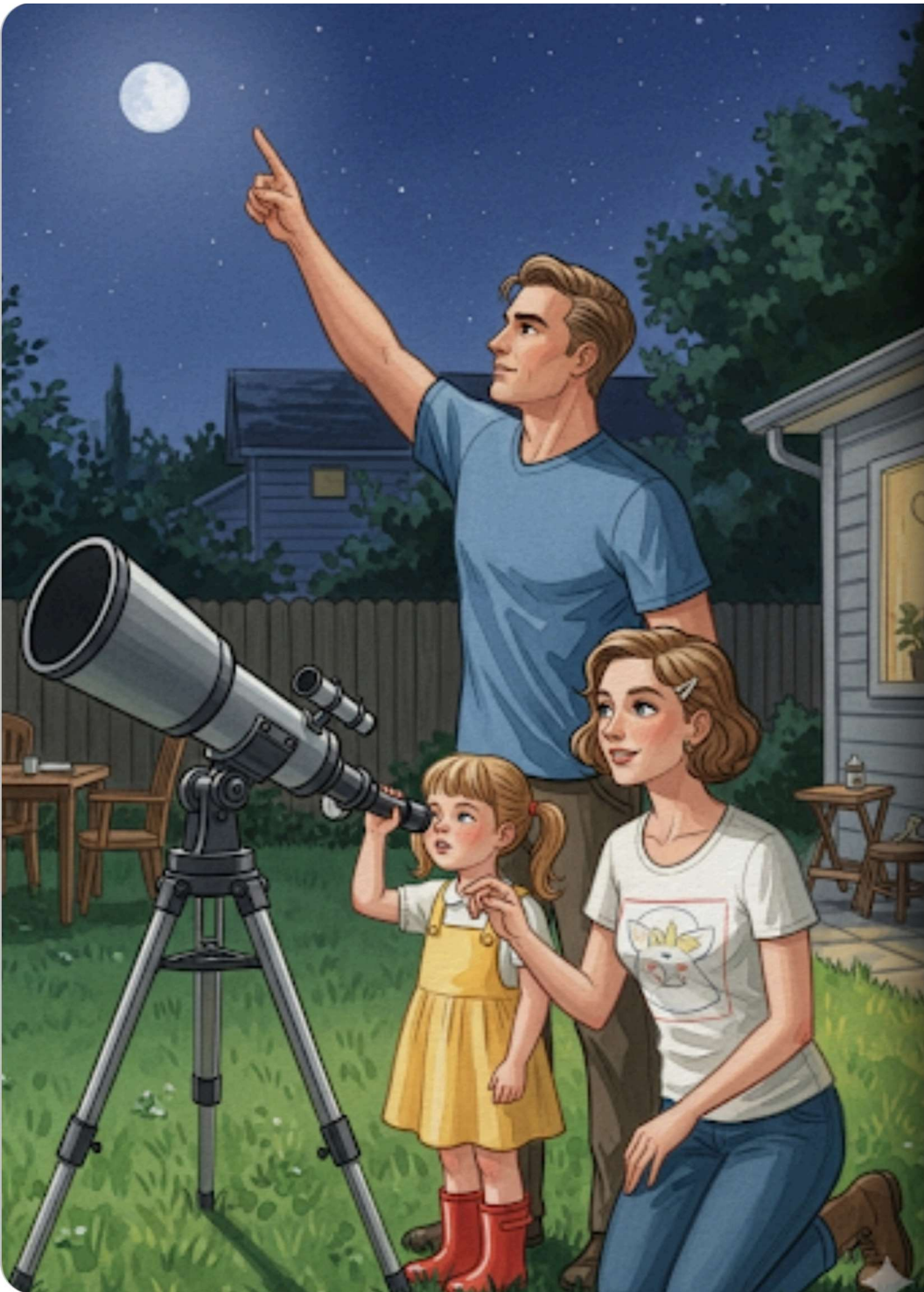


## Little Green Men

By Ai Austin



My diary, September 17th. I was born on Satellite Belt K, and I've lived my whole life in space. My home is a 20km-long city of steel and glass, orbiting Earth. From our observation windows, we see the world as a beautiful blue marble. But down on that marble, things can get a little... strange. This is a story about how a little misunderstanding on Earth became our biggest adventure yet.





It all started with a simple question. A father on Earth, looking at the Moon with his daughter, noticed some strange green marks. He asked, "What are those green marks near the limb of the Moon?" But his question went viral. Soon, every news feed and social media channel was buzzing with the same story. The next day, the newspapers screamed headlines that made us laugh so hard we almost floated away.





Kemlo and I were in the observation deck, looking out at the Moon. We'd seen the headlines and the memes. "Little Green Men," Kemlo chuckled, shaking his head. "As if. They probably just need a good telescope and a decent spectrometer." We thought it was hilarious. We knew the Moon. We knew its secrets. We knew there were no little green men.





Just as we were about to head to the recreation domes, our comms devices buzzed. The sound was sharp and urgent, cutting through the usual hum of the Belt. "Kemlo and Krillie report to Control for a mission briefing," the voice said. Our smiles faded. This wasn't a joke anymore. This was a mission.





Control showed us their data. Even with their powerful instruments, the green marks were a mystery. They were too faint, too scattered. "We need a closer look," the Control officer said. "We need boots on the ground." Or, in our case, boots on the lunar regolith. They were sending us to the Moon. Us! Two teenagers from the Belt, to solve a mystery that had the whole planet in a frenzy.





We suited up and headed to the hangar. Our Space Runabout, a sleek, two-seater craft, was waiting for us. It was a beautiful green, the same color as the 'aliens' everyone was so worried about. We strapped in, ran our pre-flight checks, and with a gentle hum, we detached from the Belt. Our little green ship was headed for the big green mystery.





Landing on the Moon was always a thrill. The silence, the low gravity, the black sky with the bright Earth hanging in it. We put on our helmets, sealed our suits, and stepped out onto the dusty surface. The green marks were visible from our landing site, a splatter of color against the grey regolith. We walked towards a large crater, our boots crunching softly with every step.





We reached the edge of the crater and looked down. The green marks were everywhere, like a dusting of emerald powder. "They look like fragments of a large meteor," I said, pointing to a large, jagged piece. It was so obvious from up close. No little green men, just a big, green rock that had broken apart on impact.





We took samples, our instruments beeping as they analyzed the material. The detector told us the deposits were rich in Magnesium and Nickel. "A chemical reaction with oxygen in the lunar regolith probably caused that," I observed, tapping the screen on my glove. The mystery was solved. The 'little green men' were just a big, green meteor.





Back in the hangar on Belt K, we landed the Runabout and opened the hatch. The first thing we saw were two inflatable little green aliens, with big eyes and antennae, propped up against the wall. The engineering team had left them for us. Kemlo and I looked at each other, then at the inflatables, and burst out laughing. It was the perfect welcome home.





The news of our discovery spread fast. The newspapers on Earth were back with new headlines, and social media went viral all over again. The panic was over, replaced by a new kind of excitement. It just goes to show you, sometimes the biggest mysteries have the simplest answers. And sometimes, those answers come from a couple of teenagers who live in space.