

Johnny Jetpack  
By  
Ethan Crownberry

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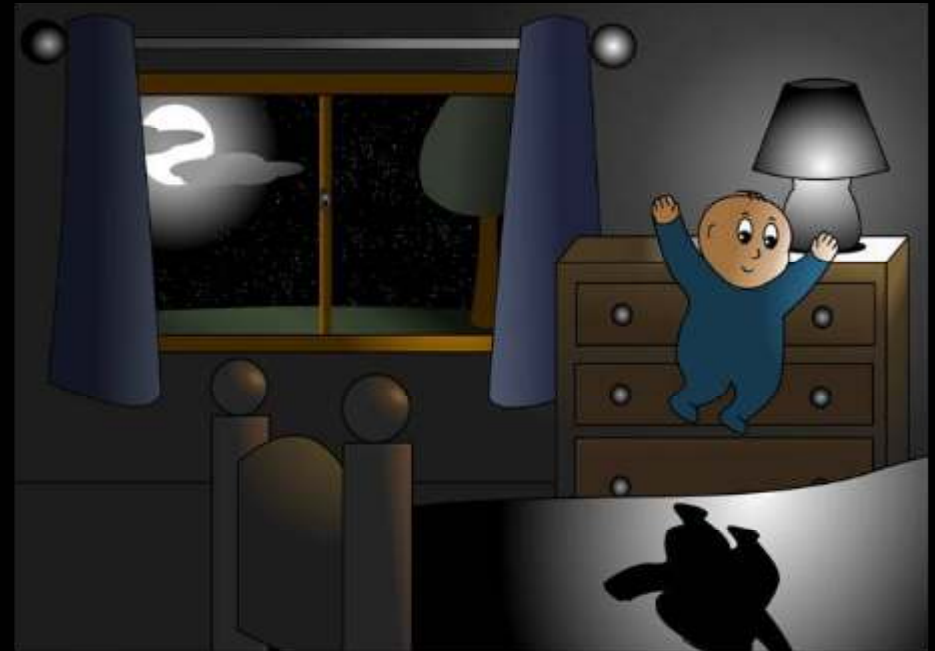
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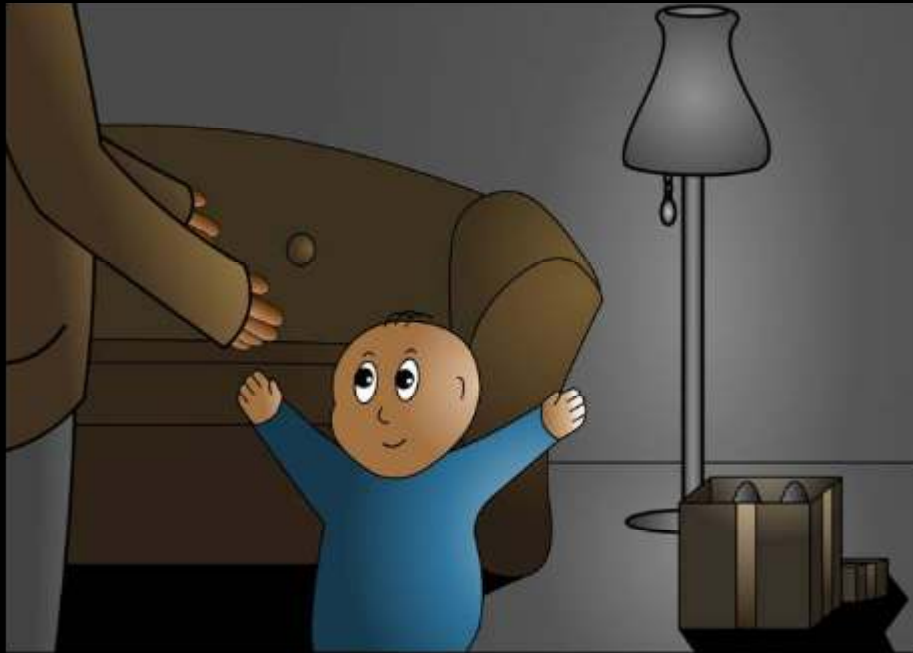
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To my mother,  
a real American hero.

Johnny Johnson knew that one day he would fly among the stars—  
he dreamed of someday flying out past Jupiter and Mars.  
“But how am I to do this?” Johnny said, then scratched his head,  
then he leapt down from his dresser and bounced high up off his bed.  
And for nearly two whole seconds, Johnny felt like he could fly,  
‘til he flopped down on his backside without really knowing why.  
“I will fly someday—I swear it! I’ll be up there someday soon,”  
Johnny muttered as he stared out through his window at the moon.





Then soon came Johnny's birthday; it was finally here at last.  
He was older now, and wiser. He was growing up quite fast.  
And later on that night, his grandpa came by for a spell,  
and he brought with him a present he had wrapped up very well.  
And as Johnny opened up the box, he found a great surprise;  
it was something so fantastic, he could not believe his eyes.  
"OH, THANK YOU!" shouted Johnny, then he hugged his grandpa tight,  
then he grabbed the box, ran up the stairs, and disappeared from sight.

Then down the hall he ran, into his room, and closed the door,  
then quite quickly dumped the contents of the box out on the floor.

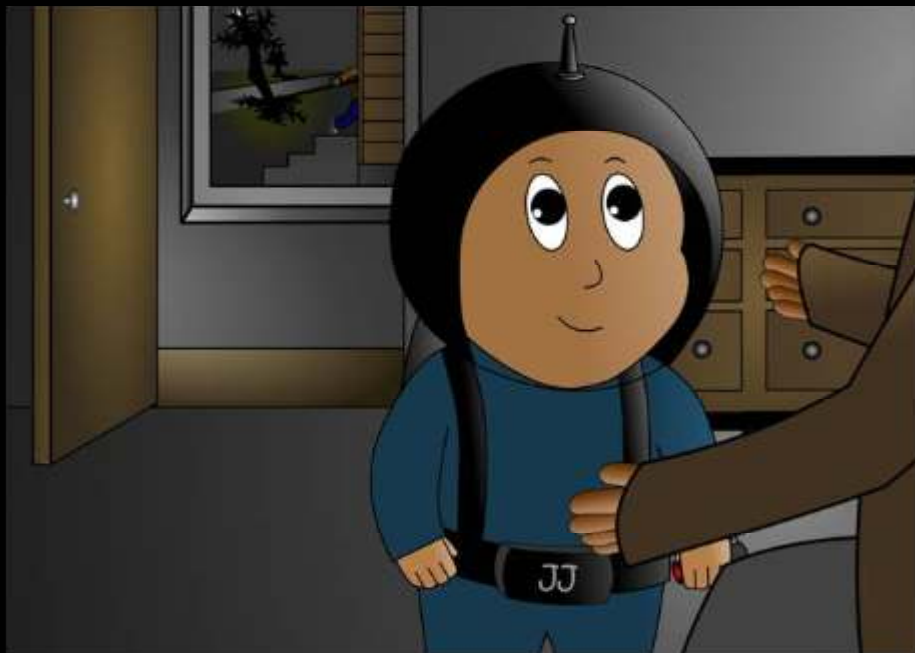
And there it was—the thing he needed most to help him fly;  
it was a jetpack with two jets to help him soar up through the sky.

And with it came a helmet, and a black utility belt,  
which he quickly wrapped around his waist to see how snug it felt.  
Then he put the helmet on his head, and next, picked up the pack,  
and with a shoulder through each harness, strapped it tightly to his back.

Then behind him, rather suddenly, his door swung open wide,  
and his grandpa, who had come to talk, took three short steps inside.

Then ol' Grandpa slowly knelt, and asked for Johnny's full attention;  
for it seemed he had some things he thought were quite well worth a mention.





"I am sorry I can't stay," he said. "I have to catch a flight.  
I am flying home to Portland on the last plane out tonight.

But before I left, I wanted you to know a thing or two  
about the jetpack that I built, and all the great things it can do.  
It can take you all the places that you've pictured in your mind.  
It can even save your life if you should find you're in a bind.

This jet pack is unique—there is no other of its kind.  
But be warned, the fuel it runs on is quite scarce and hard to find.  
So fly it anywhere you'd like—see all that you can see.  
Do the things you've dreamed of doing, and be all that you can be.

Just remember that this jetpack comes without a warranty,  
and will certainly stop running when the gas gauge points to 'E'."



So Johnny nodded twice as if to say he understood.  
Then he hugged his grandpa one more time as tightly as he could.  
Then ol' Grandpa took his leave, and Johnny quickly turned about;  
he just could not wait a second more to try his jetpack out.  
So then, up onto his dresser Johnny climbed with little fear,  
then he took one final check of all his newfound flying gear.  
Then he took one giant leap out toward his bed and hit the switch,  
and the jetpack, as expected, fired up without a glitch.  
And instead of falling downward, Johnny hovered in midair.  
It was working! He was flying! And he seemed no worse for wear.  
So back and forth he went across his room a time or two,  
'til he finally got the gist, then out the window Johnny flew.





Then he climbed and climbed and climbed, 'til all the rooftops disappeared,  
'til the height had made him dizzy, and his stomach felt quite weird.

Then Johnny leveled off, and with his jetpack burning bright,  
swung a left, hit the gas, and shot out straight into the night.  
He flew up over buildings, down through alleys, and over trees.  
He flew up over mountains, down through valleys, and over seas.  
He flew completely 'round the world, then Johnny finally stopped.  
Then he quickly checked his gauge to see how far his fuel had dropped.  
But the needle hardly moved. Yes, he had fuel to spare it seemed.

It was time to fly up into space, just like he'd always dreamed.  
But he barely moved an inch before a sound had caught his ear;  
it was someone crying out for help, their voice quite full of fear.

It was coming from inside his helmet, odd as that may sound;  
it was picking up a signal somewhere down along the ground.  
“I can hear you,” shouted Johnny. “You are coming in quite clear.  
I can help you, but I’m not sure which direction I should steer.”  
Then he looked into the distance and the sky was filled with smoke.  
Then the voice inside his helmet started coughing as it spoke.  
Putting two and two together, Johnny took off like a shot,  
then he soared across the landscape with his jetpack burning hot.





And in less than fifteen seconds, he had come across a town, with a building plainly filled with smoke and quickly burning down.

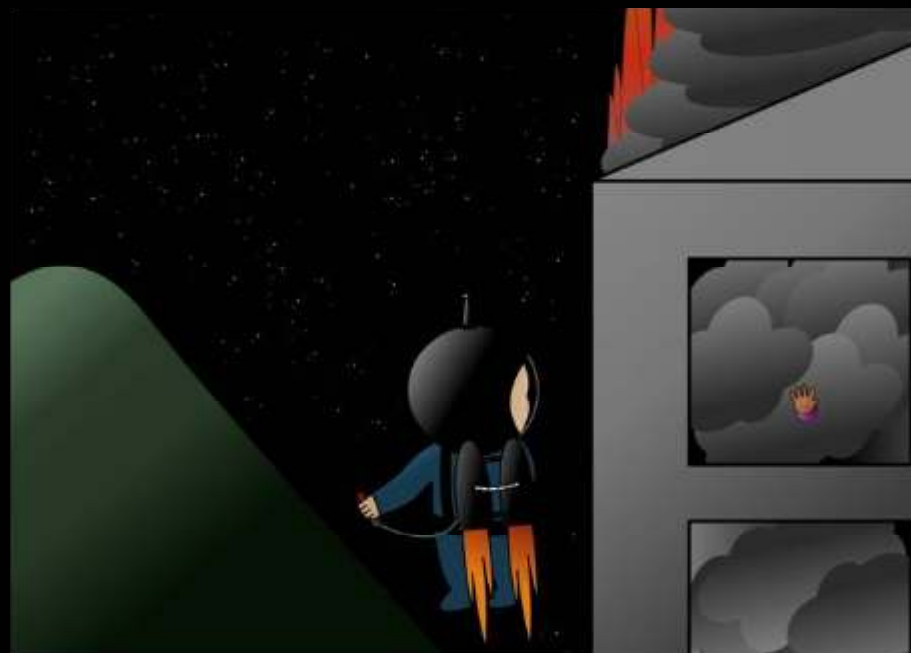
And inside the burning building was a girl about his size.

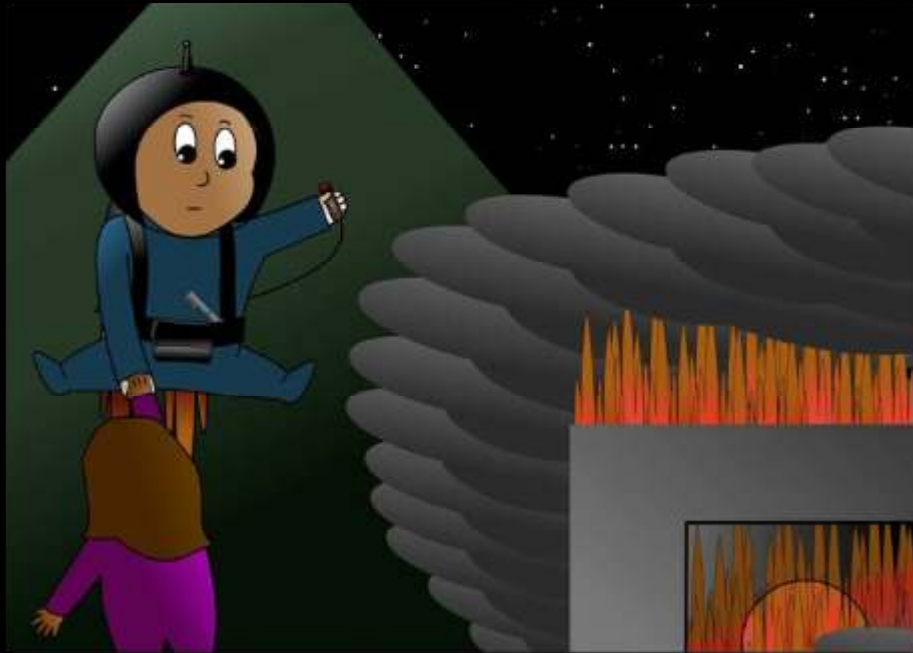
She was standing in a smoke-filled room and rubbing both her eyes.

She was somewhere on the fourteenth floor—the highest floor of all, and the firemen could not reach her, for their ladders weren't that tall.

She was trapped behind a window painted shut and locked up tight; it just simply would not open, though she'd tried with all her might.

It was time to take some action. It was time now to make haste.  
There was no time left to dawdle. There was no time left to waste.  
So without a hesitation, to the window Johnny flew,  
then he looked around a moment, quite unsure of what to do.  
Then he looked to find the girl, but there was too much smoke inside;  
there was just her hand against the glass, her fingers spread out wide.  
Then quite suddenly, it hit him—he had thought up something quick:  
his belt could have a gadget that perhaps might do the trick.





So inside his buckle, Johnny reached, and quickly searched around. Then, “Ah-ha!” he said quite proudly, pulling out what he had found. It was something that could cut through glass he now held in his hand, with directions on the handle not too hard to understand.

So then, with his newfound gizmo, Johnny traced along the glass, cutting out a circle large enough through which the girl could pass. Then the glass piece fell away, and Johnny reached in with his arm, and without a moment left to spare, he pulled the girl from harm. For the moment she had cleared the glass, the room went quite ablaze, and everything inside had vanished in a red-hot fiery haze.

It was over. They had made it. Johnny sighed with great relief. And the girl, now hanging from his hand, looked up in disbelief. She was dangling fourteen stories up—no net to break her fall, hoping Johnny doesn't drop her, and his jetpack doesn't stall. Then quite quickly, they descended, with a crowd beneath them cheering, and the girl felt slightly calmer with the ground now slowly nearing. Then he opened up his hand, and down the last few feet she dropped; into the waiting arms of both her mom and dad she gently plopped. Then Johnny gave a friendly wave, and shot up straight into the sky, as the girl, whose name he did not know, looked up and waved goodbye. She was thankful for his efforts, and was now quite in his debt. Johnny Johnson was a hero that she would not soon forget.





And now that things had settled, it was time to fly through space;  
Johnny Johnson was determined; you could see it on his face.  
So, again, he quickly checked his gauge to see what fuel he had.  
And, again, the needle hadn't moved a bit more than a tad.  
He was ready. He was anxious. He was raring for a ride.  
But which direction was the best to take, he could not quite decide.  
And, again, he hardly moved before he heard some body speak;  
it was someone crying out for help, their signal rather weak.



It's as if his helmet knew just when somebody needed help;  
it could hear the faintest whisper; it could hear the faintest yelp.  
"I can hear you," shouted Johnny, "though your signal is quite low.  
I can help you, but I'm not sure which direction I should go."  
Then he looked out in the distance, and he saw a red light blinking,  
so he took off rather quickly without any further thinking.  
And he soared across the landscape with his jetpack set on high.  
Rushing headlong into danger, Johnny raced across the sky.





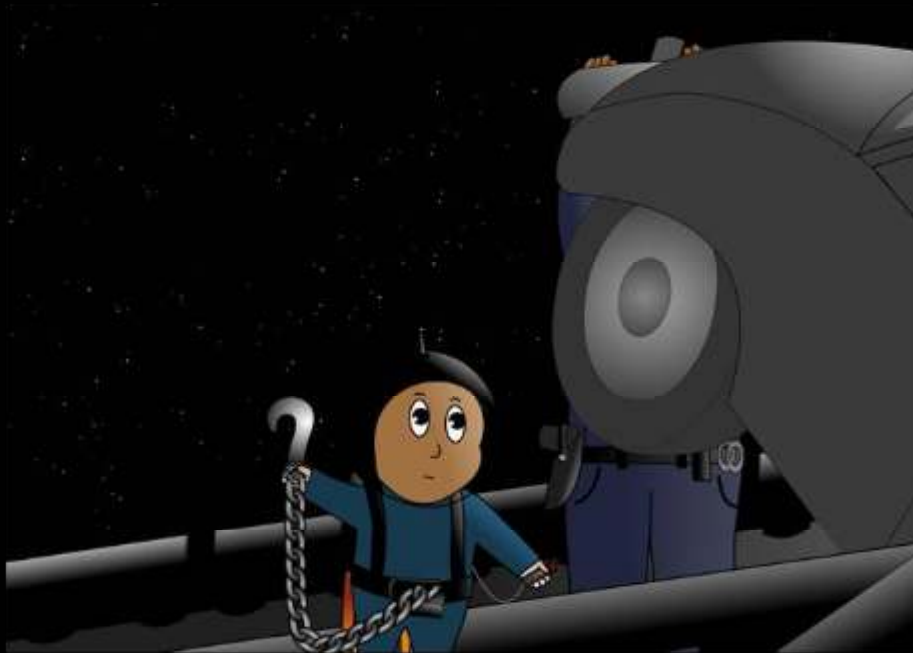
And in less than fifteen seconds, he had come across a river, and along the bridge across it, was a sight that made him shiver. There were two cars on the roadway, one with red lights flashing brightly, while the other, halfway off the bridge, was teetering quite slightly.

There had been some type of accident—a driver lost control, and as luck would have it, after, came a cop car on patrol. But there wasn't much the cop could do but keep the car from tipping; he had grabbed the bumper at the rear to keep the front from dipping.

But the car was growing heavier, and now, quite slowly slipping, and the muscles in his arms and legs felt much like they were ripping.

Then suddenly came Johnny, swooping down to save the day.  
The clock was ticking quickly; there was no time for delay.  
So he looked around a moment just to see what could be done,  
but he wasn't sure just how to lift a car that weighed a ton.  
Then he looked inside the cab and saw a woman sort-a sleeping,  
while behind her, in a safety seat, her son was loudly weeping.  
He was just a frightened baby, maybe nine or ten months old.  
There was no one to unbuckle him—his mom was knocked-out cold.  
And the car was titling further. And the cop was growing weary.  
Whether mom and son would make, Johnny felt a little leery.

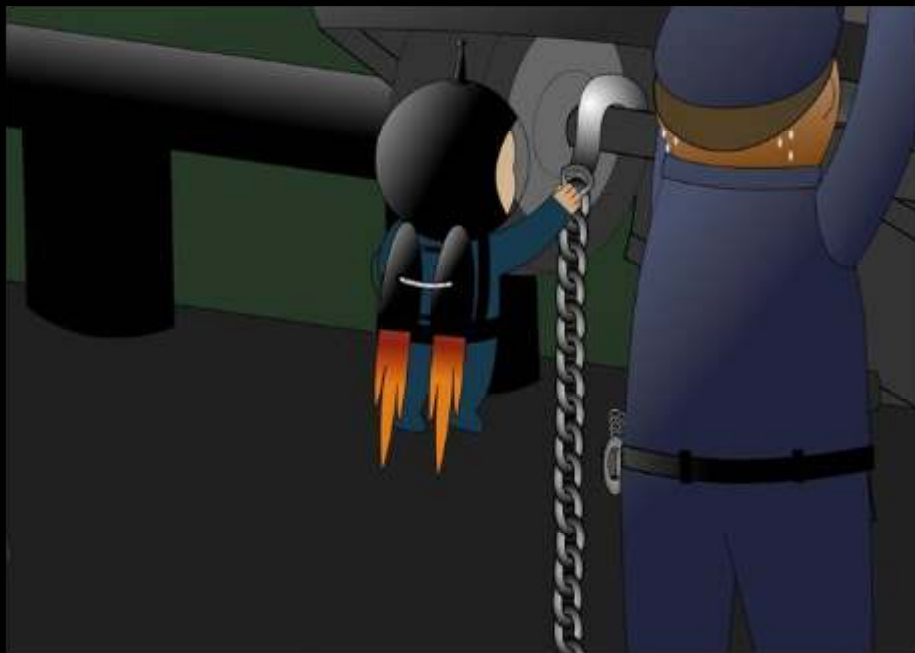




Then quickly he remembered, he had tools that he could use;  
there were gadgets in his buckle—quite a lot from which to choose.  
So inside he reached, and searched around, and moved some things about.  
Then, “Ah-ha!” he stated proudly at the gizmo he pulled out.  
But the gizmo was no gizmo; it was just a hook and chain;  
he had something rather clever going on inside his brain.  
He could use the chain to brace the car, then that would free the cop,  
then the cop could grab the mother and her son before they drop.

Then suddenly he heard a noise, like metal slowly bending—  
a sound now loudly pointing out a fait now quickly pending.  
The car was tilting more and more and soon would fully tip.  
There were only seconds left before the cop would loose his grip.  
Then, inside the car, against the glass, the boy held up his hand;  
there were goings-on around him he did not quite understand.  
He was nervous. He was frightened. He was not sure what to do.  
Then Johnny smiled to let him know he'd somehow make it through.





Then time ran out completely—not a moment left to spare.

Like a bullet from a rifle, Johnny shot right through the air. Then he headed for the rear-end of the car with chain and hook, where the cop was sweating madly and had quite a worried look. For the car was slipping more and more—it simply would not stop. “Whatever you’re going to do, please do it quickly,” said the cop.

So as fast as Johnny could, he hooked the chain onto the car. Then he grabbed the end without a hook and ran it out quite far.

Then he tied it to the railing at the far end of the road. Then he crossed his fingers, hoping that the chain would hold the load.

Then suddenly the chain was pulled as taut as taut can be. Johnny turned to face the cop, whose hands were now completely free. They had done it! It was working! They had stopped the car from falling. They had saved the mother and her son from something quite appalling.

Then the cop gave him a nod as if to say, "A job well done!" then he hustled to the door to grab the mother and her son. And in seconds he had pulled them out—the crisis was averted. Thanks to Johnny, once again, another danger had been skirted.





And now that Johnny's work was done, he smiled and waved goodbye.

Then he jetted upward toward the sky as fast as he could fly.

And around five-thousand feet or so—just less than one full mile,  
Johnny stopped to get his bearings, and collect his thoughts a while.

He hovered, staring into space, a billion stars alight.

Like a kid inside a candy store, his eyes filled with delight.



There was nothing now to stop him. He was going, come what may.  
Just a quick check of his fuel gauge and he'd soon be on his way.

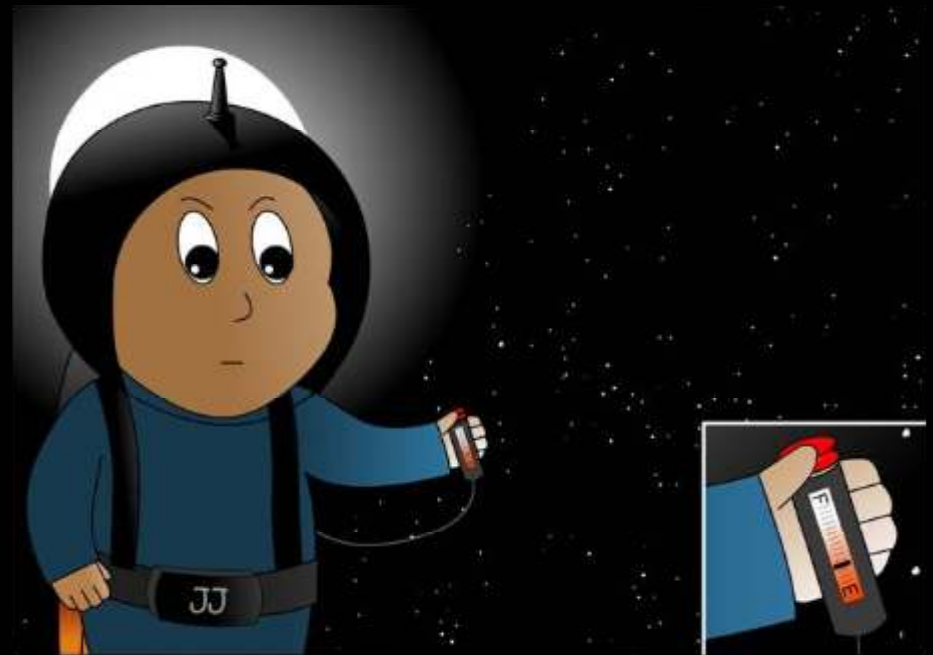
But the reading on the gauge was not at all what he expected;  
it would seem his fuel consumption was much more than last reflected.

"That's impossible," said Johnny. "I can not believe my luck."

Then he tapped his finger on the gauge to see if it was stuck.

But the needle did not move—he had a quarter-tank at best.

Could this lack of fuel now mean the end of Johnny's space-ly quest?

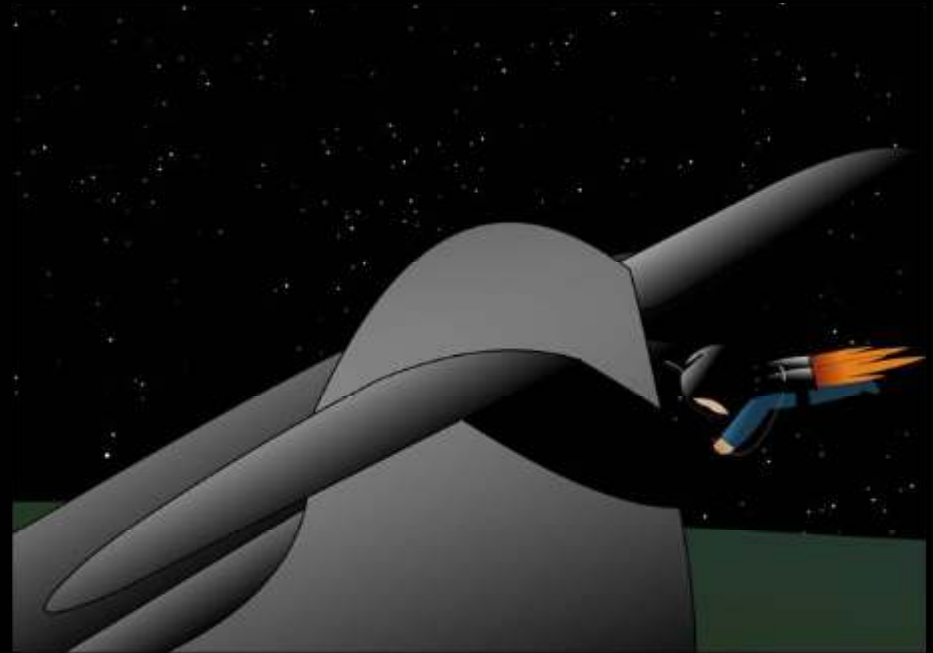


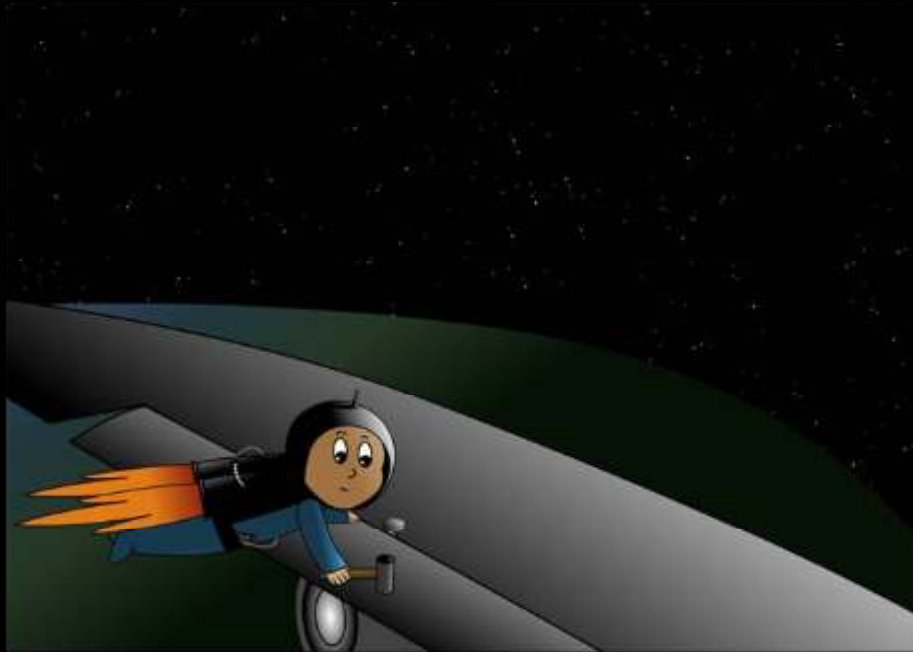


Perhaps around the moon, he thought; a quick trip to and fro. He could think of nowhere else to go since now his fuel was low. So he braced himself for blast-off, with his finger on the switch.

And he eyed the moon a time or two to estimate his pitch. Then he started slowly counting back from five on down to one, hoping no one else would cry for help before his count was done. Then quite suddenly from nowhere, something rather large flew past; it was made of shiny metal, and was traveling quite fast. It appeared to be a plane, out of control and going down, which now possibly could crash into some unsuspecting town. Johnny looked up at the moon; he knew his trip would have to wait. He just could not leave the people on the plane to such a fate.

So he took off rather quickly, leaving smoke-rings in his wake;  
he could not afford to take his time with so much now at stake.  
And as fast he could go, he headed downward toward the plane,  
and in seconds, he was on them, with just inches left to gain.  
He could see the problem right away—the left wing flap was jammed;  
in the space between the wing and flap, a bolt was tightly crammed.  
It had broken loose from somewhere and had wedged itself in good,  
and now the flap was really stuck and not quite working like it should.



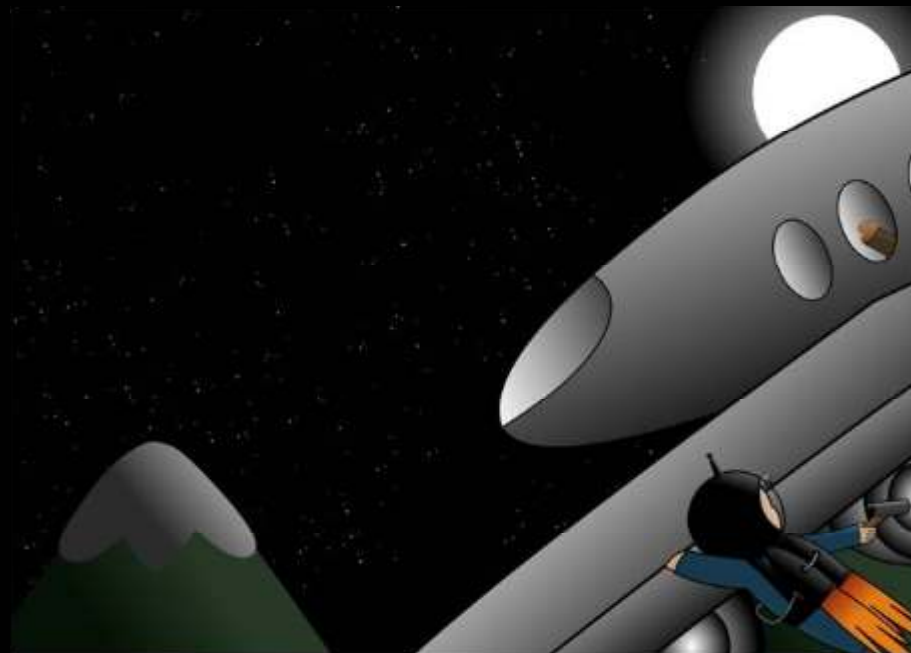


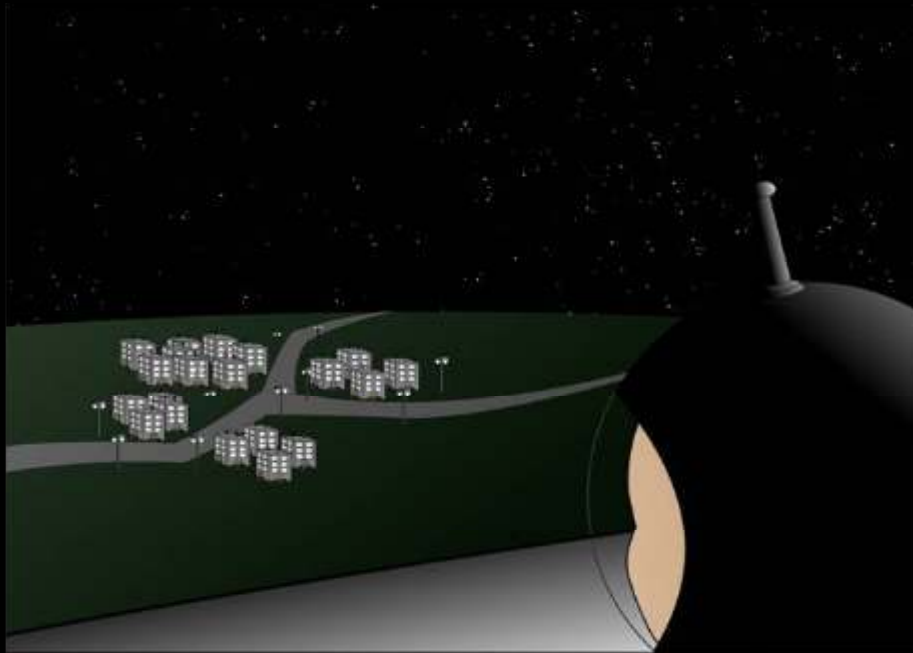
So without a hesitation, Johnny reached into his buckle,  
and he clutched the biggest hammer with the strength of every knuckle.

Then he pulled it out, hit the gas, and sped out toward the wing.  
Then he looked around for something on which one could tightly cling.  
But the wing, quite by design, was smooth, and slippery to the touch.  
There was nothing to hold onto—there was nothing there to clutch.

So instead, he hooked his hand around the thick part of the flap,  
with his fingers in between the wing and flap where there's a gap.  
Then he grasped the hammer firmly, and he swung it out quite wide,  
then he swung it back and struck the bolt quite nicely on its side.

But the bolt did not break free; in fact, it wedged itself in deeper,  
with the plane still heading down, now at an angle slightly steeper.  
So he hit the bolt again, but this time harder than before.  
Then he hit it once again, then again, and then once more.  
But the bolt stayed where it was, though it had taken quite a nudge;  
it just simply would not move at all—it simply would not budge.  
And his time was growing shorter. And the ground was quickly nearing.  
And quite soon the plane would crash if he did not restore its steering.  
And then suddenly the corner of his eye beheld a sight;  
there was someone in the window of the plane off to his right.  
Then he turned and saw a sight that really broke his heart in two;  
there was someone in the window of the plane that Johnny knew.





“GRANDPA!” shouted Johnny. What a horrible surprise.

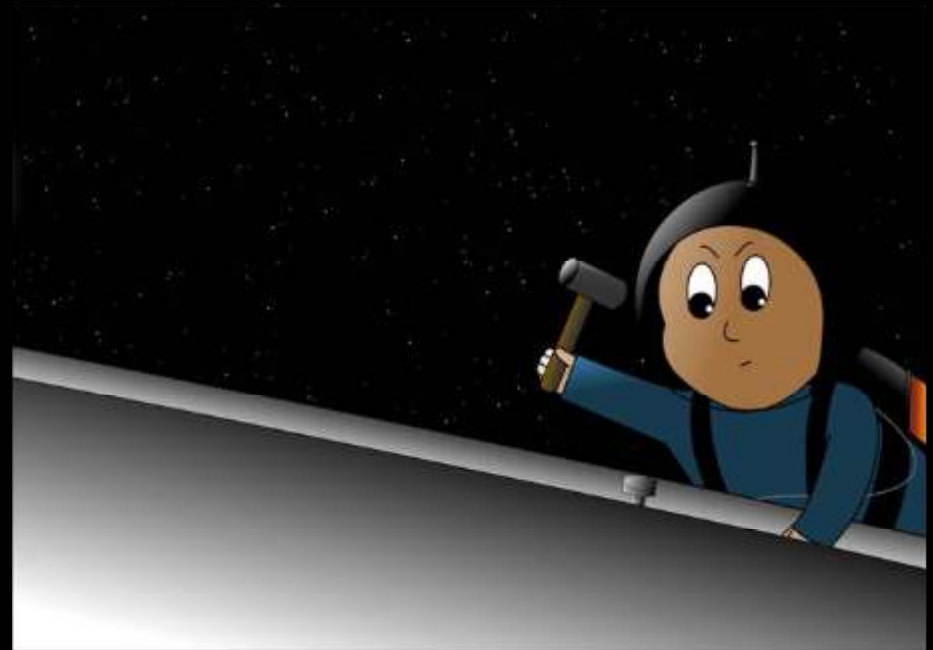
“No,” he whispered sadly; he could not believe his eyes.

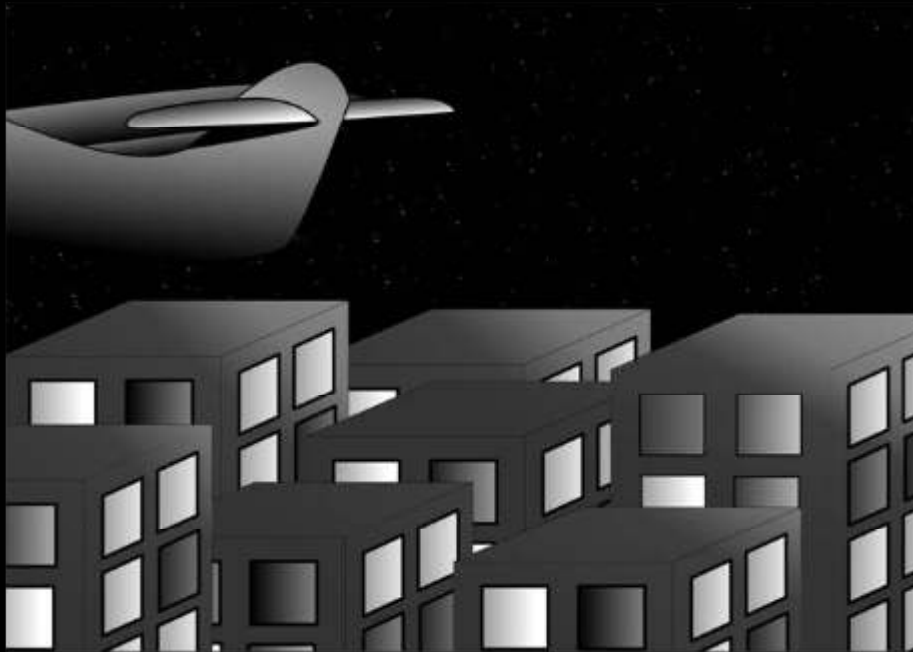
Then he looked down toward the ground and saw a wealth of lights approaching;  
on the center of a quiet town, the plane was now encroaching.

Then he looked back at his grandpa. Then he looked down at the bolt.

And he knew to break the bolt loose would require quite a jolt.

So he swung his hammer back again as far as it would go.  
Then he hit the bolt along its side again with quite a blow.  
And he hit it, and he hit it, 'til his hand felt rather sore.  
Then he hit it once again, then again, and then once more.  
Then suddenly it happened. Johnny gathered all his strength.  
He swung the hammer back again, his arm stretched at full length.  
Then he hit the bolt so hard, he never saw which way it flew—  
so hard, he split the handle of his hammer right in two.

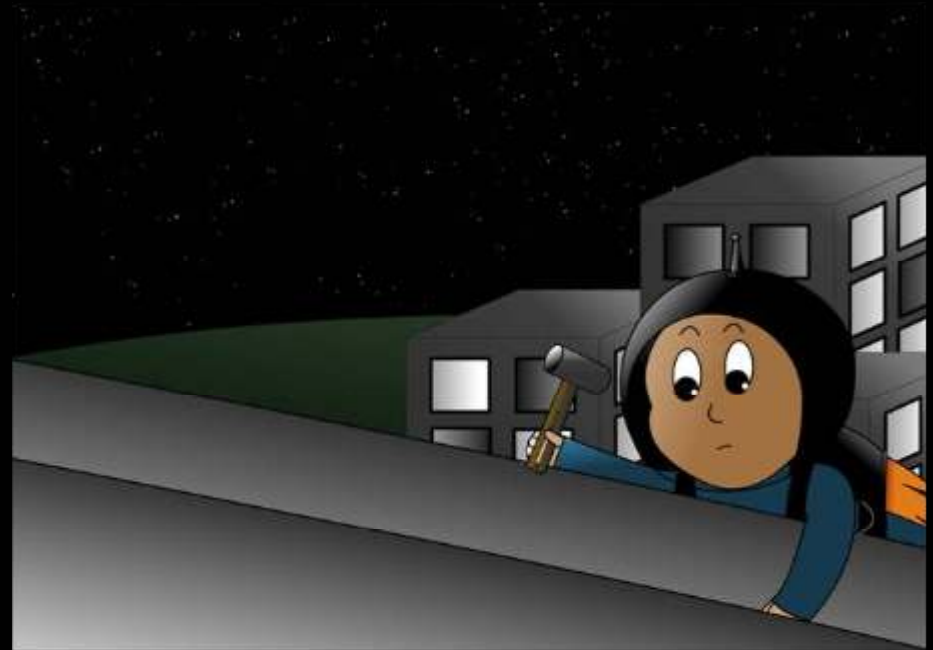




Then suddenly the flap could move, and all was right as rain.  
The pilot quickly gained control and leveled off the plane.  
Then past the town they flew with maybe fifty feet of clearance,  
with the flap now working freely without any interference.  
Then suddenly the flap flipped up as far as it could go  
as the roar of all the engines rattled every house below.  
Then up they quickly climbed into the darkness of the night.  
Johnny Johnson, with his jetpack, once again, had set things right.



And now that everyone on board the plane was safe and sound,  
it was time that Johnny left; there was no need to stick around.  
But as he tried to pull his hand out from between the wing and flap,  
he discovered he was stuck, much like a bear caught in a trap.  
It would seem that when the flap came up, the gap closed up a bit,  
and now his hand was stuck inside a space in which it did not fit.  
So he jerked his hand a bit to try and yank it from the slot,  
but every time he yanked his hand, it seemed to hurt his wrist a lot.  
Still, he yanked and yanked and yanked until it almost made him cry,  
while the plane that he just saved kept climbing higher through the sky.





Then suddenly the flaps came down, and everything was grand;  
the slot had opened up a bit, and out came Johnny's hand.

The pilot leveled off the plane, then straight away he sped,  
while our hero lagged behind and let the plane fly off ahead.

Then he slowed down to a hover as the plane flew out of sight;  
he was certain that his grandpa would now make it home all right.  
Then he looked up at the moon, and could not help but crack a smile,  
for he knew he'd soon be up there in not much more than a while.

Then “hiccup”, “cough”, and “sputter”; Johnny’s jetpack suddenly quit.  
He turned to check his gear and found his rockets weren’t lit.  
He was now completely out of fuel—his gas tank had run dry  
(which was not a great predicament for someone up so high).  
Then he looked up toward the moon and reached his hand out rather sadly.  
He knew his dream was gone—a dream he longed for very badly.





Then down went Johnny Johnson just as fast as he could fall,  
his body tumbling wildly like a rolling, wayward ball.  
His heart was beating quickly. He was feeling rather frightened.  
He braced for what was coming—every muscle of his tightened.  
He suddenly felt nauseous; in his stomach, things were stirring.  
He was starting to get dizzy, and his vision started blurring.  
And he tumbled, and he twisted, and he rolled and rolled and rolled,  
'til he could not take it any more, and finally passed out cold.

Johnny woke up to the sound of someone calling out his name;  
he was still a little groggy and not sure from where it came.  
He was back inside his room, where his adventures had all started;  
in his bed, close to the window, where he originally departed.  
Then he heard the voice again and knew right then it was his mother,  
for her voice was quite distinctive, with a tone quite like no other.  
She was calling from the kitchen, "EGGS ARE READY! COME AND EAT!"  
Johnny stretched a bit, then slid down from his bed onto his feet.





Johnny couldn't help but think about the dream that he just dreamt;  
and how flying was a dream of his he'd someday soon attempt.  
But for now, his feet were grounded, and for breakfast, there were eggs;  
and the only way to get there was by walking with his legs.  
So he stretched a little more, and then he headed for his door,  
but abruptly he was halted by a box along the floor.  
Then suddenly it struck him; things were not all what they seem;  
everything that happened, happened, and his dream was not a dream.  
Then he looked into the box and saw his jetpack wasn't there;  
there was just a piece of paper folded nicely in a square.  
So he took it out, unfolded it, and there in black and white  
was a simple illustration that quite nicely shed some light.

Johnny knew then what had happened, where his jetpack could be found,  
how he managed to survive the fall and never hit the ground.

Then he darted to his window, and he stood up on his toes,  
then he looked into the yard out past the ledge beneath his nose.

And he saw his belt and helmet on the ground next to a tree;  
and above them hanging nicely was an awesome sight to see.





For his jetpack had a parachute he did not know about;  
and this parachute was smart; it knew the right time to pop out.  
And it must have gotten tangled on a branch as he descended,  
but it saved him, nonetheless, just like his grandpa had intended.  
He had programmed it to open if the jetpack ever stopped  
while it's altitude was higher than the ground but quickly dropped.  
And that's what the illustration on the paper was displaying,  
and the paragraph beneath it in so many words was saying.  
And he must have somehow freed himself, then crawled inside the house,  
then climbed up to his bedroom just as quiet as a mouse.  
For his parents never heard him, they assumed he was in bed;  
they had no idea their son was outside saving lives instead.



Then he heard his mother's voice again, but this time slightly clearer.

She was on the upstairs level, down the hall, and growing nearer.

Then she opened up his door and stuck her head in for a peek.

"Your grandpa called," she said. "He's coming back again next week.

And he wanted me to thank you, and to give you some good news:

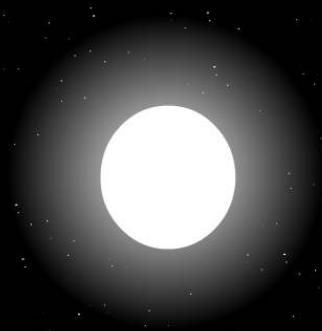
he has come across another type of fuel that you can use.

He said you'd understand, and by that grin, I think you do."

For Johnny knew now that his dream could somehow

someday still come true...





Look! Up in the sky!  
It's a Bird! It's a Plane!  
It's a toddler with a high-velocity  
rocket strapped to his back.



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