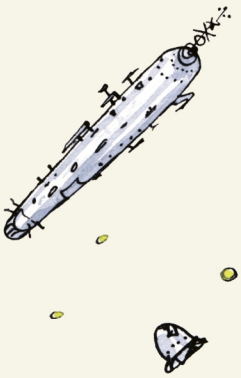
THE ROALD DAHL CLASSIC COLLECTION



ROALD DAHL

Charlie and the Great Glass Elevator

Illustrated by Quentin Blake



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I

Mr Wonka Goes Too Far

The last time we saw Charlie, he was riding high above his home town in the Great Glass Lift. Only a short while before, Mr Wonka had told him that the whole gigantic fabulous Chocolate Factory was his, and now our small friend was returning in triumph with his entire family to take over. The passengers in the Lift (just to remind you) were:

Charlie Bucket, our hero.

Mr Willy Wonka, chocolate-maker extraordinary.

Mr and Mrs Bucket, Charlie's father and mother.

Grandpa Joe and Grandma Josephine, Mr Bucket's father and mother.

Grandpa George and Grandma Georgina, Mrs Bucket's father and mother.

Grandma Josephine, Grandma Georgina and Grandpa George were still in bed, the bed having been pushed on board just before take-off. Grandpa Joe, as you remember, had got out of bed to go around the Chocolate Factory with Charlie.

The Great Glass Lift was a thousand feet up and

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cruising nicely. The sky was brilliant blue. Everybody on board was wildly excited at the thought of going to live in the famous Chocolate Factory.



Grandpa Joe was singing.

Charlie was jumping up and down.





Mr and
Mrs Bucket
were smiling for the
first time in years,

and the three old ones in the bed were grinning at one another with pink toothless gums.



'What in the world keeps this crazy thing up in the air?' croaked Grandma Josephine.

'Madam,' said Mr Wonka, 'it is not a lift any longer. Lifts only go up and down *inside* buildings.

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But now that it has taken us up into the sky, it has become an ELEVATOR. It is THE GREAT GLASS ELEVATOR.'



'And what keeps it up?' said Grandma Josephine.

'Skyhooks,' said Mr Wonka.

'You amaze me,' said Grandma Josephine.

'Dear lady,' said Mr Wonka, 'you are new to the scene. When you have been with us a little longer, nothing will amaze you.'

'These skyhooks,' said Grandma Josephine. 'I assume one end is hooked on to this contraption we're riding in. Right?'

'Right,' said Mr Wonka.

'What's the other end hooked on to?' said Grandma Josephine.

'Every day,' said Mr Wonka, 'I get deafer and deafer. Remind me, please, to call up my ear doctor the moment we get back.'

'Charlie,' said Grandma Josephine. 'I don't think I trust this gentleman very much.'

'Nor do I,' said Grandma Georgina. 'He footles around.'

Charlie leaned over the bed and whispered to the two old women. 'Please,' he said, 'don't spoil everything. Mr Wonka is a fantastic man. He's my friend. I love him.'

'Charlie's right,' whispered Grandpa Joe, joining

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the group. 'Now you be quiet, Josie, and don't make trouble.'

'We must hurry!' said Mr Wonka. 'We have so much time and so little to do! No! Wait! Cross that out! Reverse it! Thank you! Now back to the factory!' he cried, clapping his hands once and springing two feet in the air with two feet. 'Back we fly to the factory! But we must go *up* before we can come down. We must go *higher and higher*!'

'What did I tell you,' said Grandma Josephine. 'The man's cracked!'

'Be quiet, Josie,' said Grandpa Joe. 'Mr Wonka knows exactly what he's doing.'

'He's cracked as a crab!' said Grandma Georgina.

'We must go higher!' said Mr Wonka. 'We must go tremendously high! Hold on to your stomach!' He pressed a brown button. The Elevator shuddered, and then with a fearful whooshing noise it shot vertically upward like a rocket. Everybody clutched hold of everybody else and as the great machine gathered speed, the rushing whooshing sound of the wind outside grew louder and louder and shriller and shriller until it became a piercing shriek and you had to yell to make yourself heard.

'Stop!' yelled Grandma Josephine. 'Joe, you make him stop! I want to get off!'

'Save us!' yelled Grandma Georgina.

'Go down!' yelled Grandpa George.

'No, no!' Mr Wonka yelled back. 'We've got to go up!'

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'But why?' they all shouted at once. 'Why up and not down?'

'Because the higher we are when we start coming down, the faster we'll all be going when we hit,' said Mr Wonka. 'We've got to be going at an absolutely sizzling speed when we hit.'

'When we hit *what*?' they cried.

'The factory, of course,' answered Mr Wonka.

'You must be whackers,' said Grandma Josephine. 'We'll all be pulpified!'

'We'll be scrambled like eggs!' said Grandma Georgina.

'That,' said Mr Wonka, 'is a chance we shall have to take.'

'You're joking,' said Grandma Josephine. 'Tell us you're joking.'

'Madam,' said Mr Wonka, 'I never joke.'

'Oh, my dears!' cried Grandma Georgina. 'We'll be *lixivated*, every one of us!'

'More than likely,' said Mr Wonka.

Grandma Josephine screamed and disappeared under the bedclothes, Grandma Georgina clutched Grandpa George so tight he changed shape. Mr and Mrs Bucket stood hugging each other, speechless with fright. Only Charlie and Grandpa Joe kept moderately cool. They had travelled a long way with Mr Wonka and had grown accustomed to surprises. But as the Great Elevator continued to streak upward further and further away from the Earth, even Charlie began to feel a trifle nervous. 'Mr Wonka!' he yelled above the noise, 'what I don't understand is *why* we've got to come down at such a terrific speed.'

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'My dear boy,' Mr Wonka answered, 'if we don't come down at a terrific speed, we'll never burst our way back in through the roof of the factory. It's not easy to punch a hole in a roof as strong as that.'

'But there's a hole in it already,' said Charlie. 'We made it when we came out.'

'Then we shall make another,' said Mr Wonka. 'Two holes are better than one. Any mouse will tell you that.'

Higher and higher rushed the Great Glass Elevator until soon they could see the countries and oceans of the Earth spread out below them like a map. It was all very beautiful, but when you are standing on a glass floor looking down, it gives you a nasty feeling. Even Charlie was beginning to feel frightened now. He hung on tightly to Grandpa Joe's hand and looked up anxiously into the old man's face. 'I'm scared, Grandpa,' he said.

Grandpa Joe put an arm around Charlie's shoulders and held him close. 'So am I, Charlie,' he said.

'Mr Wonka!' Charlie shouted. 'Don't you think this is about high enough?'

'Very nearly,' Mr Wonka answered. 'But not quite. Don't talk to me now, please. Don't disturb me. I must watch things very carefully at this stage. Split-second timing, my boy, that's what it's got to be. You see this green button. I must press it at exactly the right instant. If I'm just half a second late, then we'll go *too high*!'

'What happens if we go too high?' asked Grandpa Joe.

'Do please stop talking and let me concentrate!' Mr Wonka said.

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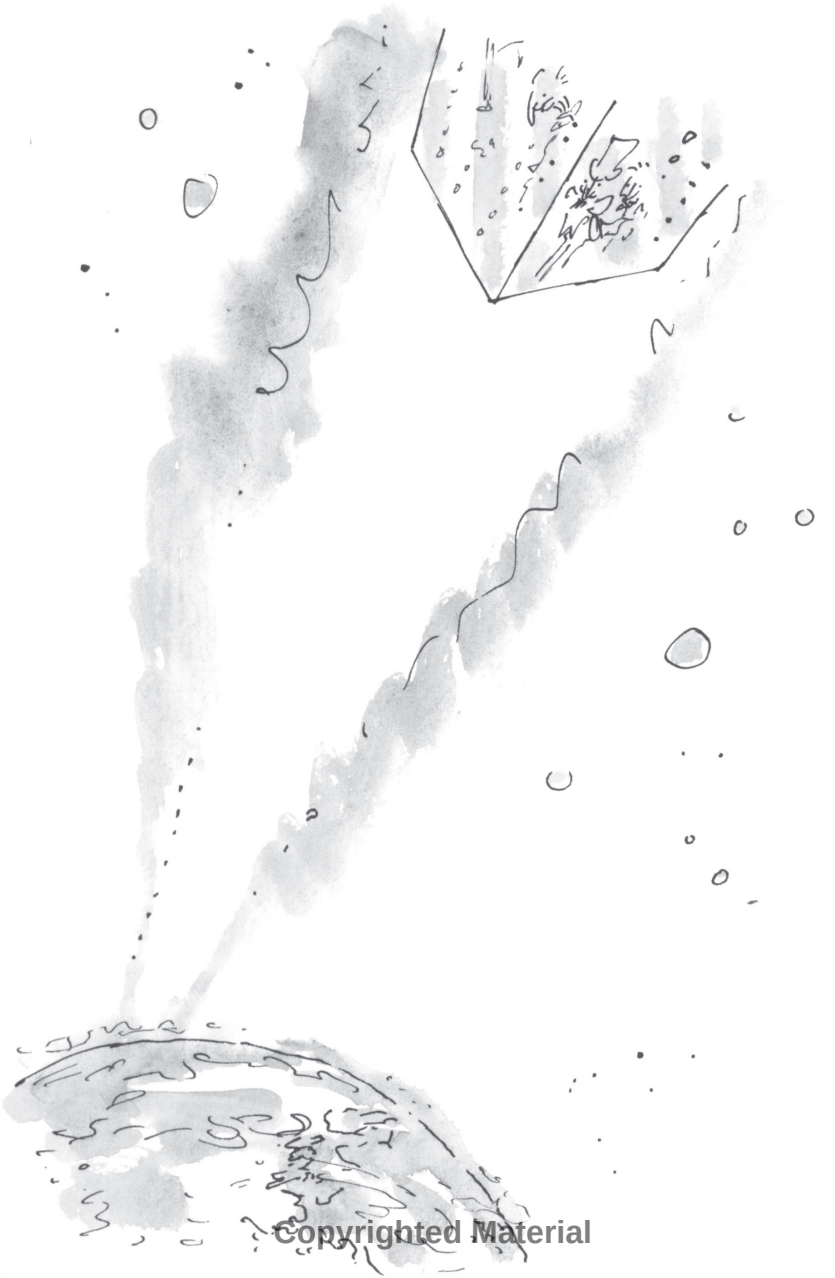
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At that precise moment, Grandma Josephine poked her head out from under the sheets and peered over the edge of the bed. Through the glass floor she saw the entire continent of North America nearly two hundred miles below and looking no bigger than a bar of chocolate. '*Someone's* got to stop this maniac!' she screeched and she shot out a wrinkled old hand and grabbed Mr Wonka by the coat-tails and yanked him backwards on to the bed.

'No, no!' cried Mr Wonka, struggling to free himself. 'Let me go! I have things to see to! Don't disturb the pilot!'

'You madman!' shrieked Grandma Josephine, shaking Mr Wonka so fast his head became a blur. 'You get us back home this instant!'

'Let me go!' cried Mr Wonka. 'I've got to press that button or we'll go too high! Let me go! Let me go!' But Grandma Josephine hung on. 'Charlie!' shouted Mr Wonka. 'Press the button! The green one! Quick, quick, quick!'

Charlie leaped across the Elevator and banged his thumb down on the green button. But as he did so, the Elevator gave a mighty groan and rolled over on to its side and the rushing whooshing noise stopped altogether. There was an eerie silence.

'Too late!' cried Mr Wonka. 'Oh, my goodness me, we're cooked!' As he spoke, the bed with the three old ones in it and Mr Wonka on top lifted gently off the floor and hung suspended in mid-air. Charlie and Grandpa Joe and Mr and Mrs Bucket also floated upwards so that in a twink the entire company, as well

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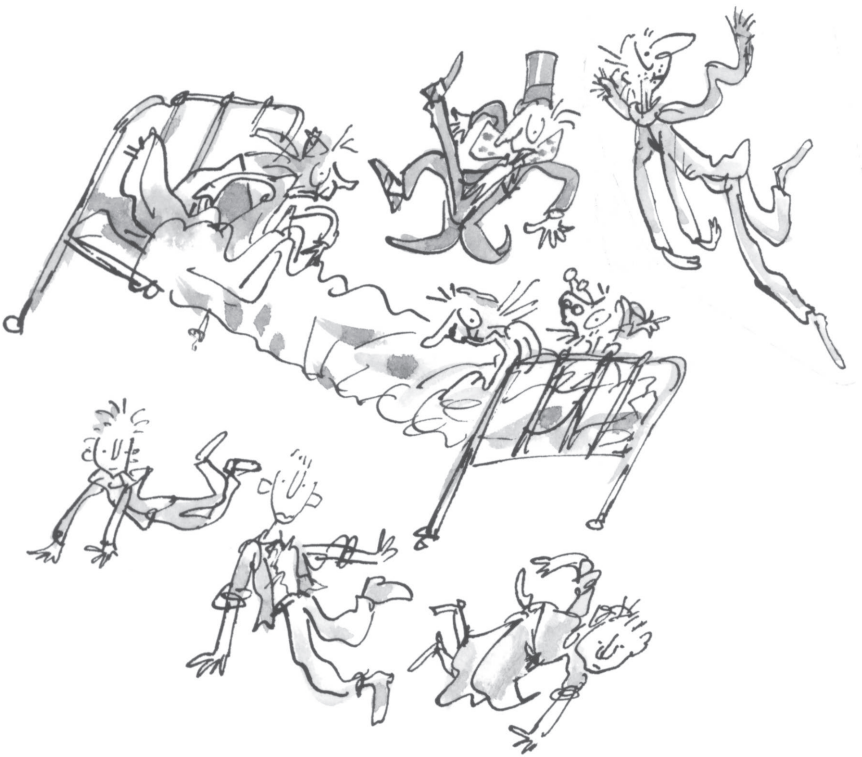

as the bed, were floating around like balloons inside the Great Glass Elevator.

'*Now* look what you've done!' said Mr Wonka, floating about.

'What happened?' Grandma Josephine called out. She had floated clear of the bed and was hovering near the ceiling in her nightshirt.

'Did we go too far?' Charlie asked.

'Too *far*?' cried Mr Wonka. 'Of course we went too far! You know where we've gone, my friends? We've gone into orbit!'

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They gaped, they gasped, they stared. They were too flabbergasted to speak.

'We are now rushing around the Earth at seventeen thousand miles an hour,' Mr Wonka said. 'How does that grab you?'

'I'm choking!' gasped Grandma Georgina. 'I can't breathe!'

'Of course you can't,' said Mr Wonka. 'There's no air up here.' He sort of swam across under the ceiling to a button marked OXYGEN. He pressed it. 'You'll be all right now,' he said. 'Breathe away.'

'This is the queerest feeling,' Charlie said, swimming about. 'I feel like a bubble.'

'It's great,' said Grandpa Joe. 'It feels as though I don't weigh anything at all.'

'You don't,' said Mr Wonka. 'None of us weighs anything – not even one ounce.'

'What piffle!' said Grandma Georgina. 'I weigh one hundred and thirty-seven pounds exactly.'

'Not now you don't,' said Mr Wonka. 'You are completely weightless.'

The three old ones, Grandpa George, Grandma Georgina and Grandma Josephine, were trying frantically to get back into bed, but without success. The bed was floating about in mid-air. They, of course, were also floating, and every time they got above the bed and tried to lie down, they simply floated up out of it. Charlie and Grandpa Joe were hooting with laughter. 'What's so funny?' said Grandma Josephine.

'We've got you out of bed at last,' said Grandpa Joe.

'Shut up and help us back!' snapped Grandma Josephine.

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'Forget it,' said Mr Wonka. 'You'll never stay down. Just keep floating around and be happy.'

'The man's a madman!' cried Grandma Georgina. 'Watch out, I say, or he'll lixivate the lot of us!'

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Space Hotel 'U.S.A.'

Mr Wonka's Great Glass Elevator was not the only thing orbiting the Earth at that particular time. Two days before, the United States of America had successfully launched its first Space Hotel, a gigantic sausage-shaped capsule no less than one thousand feet long. It was called Space Hotel 'U.S.A.' and it was the marvel of the space age. It had inside it a tennis-court, a swimming pool, a gymnasium, a children's playroom and five hundred luxury bedrooms, each with a private bath. It was fully air-conditioned. It was also equipped with a gravity-making machine so that you didn't float about inside it. You walked normally.

This extraordinary object was now speeding round and round the Earth at a height of 240 miles. Guests were to be taken up and down by a taxi service of small capsules blasting off from Cape Kennedy every hour on the hour, Mondays to Fridays. But as yet there was nobody on board at all, not even an astronaut. The reason for this was that no one had really believed such an enormous thing would ever get off the ground without blowing up.

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But the launching had been a great success and now that the Space Hotel was safely in orbit, there was a tremendous hustle and bustle to send up the first guests. It was rumoured that the President of the United States himself was going to be among the first to stay in the hotel, and of course there was a mad rush by all sorts of other people across the world to book rooms. Several kings and queens had cabled the White House in Washington for reservations, and a Texas millionaire called Orson Cart, who was about to marry a Hollywood star called Helen Highwater, was offering one hundred thousand dollars a day for the honeymoon suite.

But you cannot send guests to an hotel unless there are lots of people there to look after them, and that explains why there was yet another interesting object orbiting the Earth at that moment. This was the large Transport Capsule containing the entire staff for Space Hotel 'U.S.A.' There were managers, assistant managers, desk-clerks, waitresses, bellboys, chambermaids, pastry chefs and hall porters. The capsule they were travelling in was manned by the three famous astronauts, Shuckworth, Shanks and Showler, all of them handsome, clever and brave.

'In exactly one hour,' said Shuckworth, speaking to the passengers over the loudspeaker, 'we shall link up with Space Hotel "U.S.A.", your happy home for the next ten years. And any moment now, if you look straight ahead, you should catch your first glimpse of this magnificent spaceship. Ah-ha! I see something there! That must be it,

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folks! There's definitely something up there ahead of us!'

Shuckworth, Shanks and Showler, as well as the managers, assistant managers, desk-clerks, waitresses, bellboys, chambermaids, pastry chefs and hall porters, all stared excitedly through the windows. Shuckworth fired a couple of small rockets to make the capsule go faster, and they began to catch up very quickly.

'Hey!' yelled Showler. 'That isn't our space hotel!'

'Holy rats!' cried Shanks. 'What in high heavens is it!'

'Quick! Give me the telescope!' yelled Shuckworth. With one hand he focused the telescope and with the other he flipped the switch connecting him to Ground Control.

'Hello, Houston!' he cried into the mike. 'There's something crazy going on up here! There's a thing orbiting ahead of us and it's not like any spaceship I've ever seen, that's for sure!'

'Describe it at once,' ordered Ground Control in Houston.

'It's . . . it's all made of glass and it's kind of square and it's got lots of people inside it! They're all floating about like fish in a tank!'

'How many astronauts on board?'

'None,' said Shuckworth. 'They can't possibly be astronauts.'

'What makes you say that?'

'Because at least three of them are in nightshirts!'

'Don't be a fool, Shuckworth!' snapped Ground Control. 'Pull yourself together, man! This is serious!'

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'I swear it!' cried poor Shuckworth. 'There's three of them in nightshirts! Two old women and one old man! I can see them clearly! I can even see their faces! Jeepers, they're older than Moses! They're about ninety years old!'

'You've gone mad, Shuckworth!' shouted Ground Control. 'You're fired! Give me Shanks!'

'Shanks speaking,' said Shanks. 'Now listen here, Houston. There's these three old birds in nightshirts floating around in this crazy glass box and there's a funny little guy with a pointed beard wearing a black top hat and a plum-coloured velvet tail coat and bottle-green trousers . . .'

'Stop!' screamed Ground Control.

'That's not all,' said Shanks. 'There's also a little boy about ten years old . . .'

'That's no boy, you idiot!' shouted Ground Control. 'That's an astronaut in disguise! It's a tiny astronaut dressed up as a little boy! Those old people are astronauts too! They're all in disguise!'

'But who *are* they?' cried Shanks.

'How the heck would I know?' said Ground Control. 'Are they heading for our Space Hotel?'

'That's exactly where they are heading!' cried Shanks. 'I can see the Space Hotel now about a mile ahead.'

'They're going to blow it up!' yelled Ground Control. 'This is desperate! This is . . .' Suddenly his voice was cut off and Shanks heard another quite different voice in his earphones. It was deep and rasping.

'I'll take charge of this,' said the deep rasping voice. 'Are you there, Shanks?'

'Of course I'm here,' said Shanks. 'But how dare

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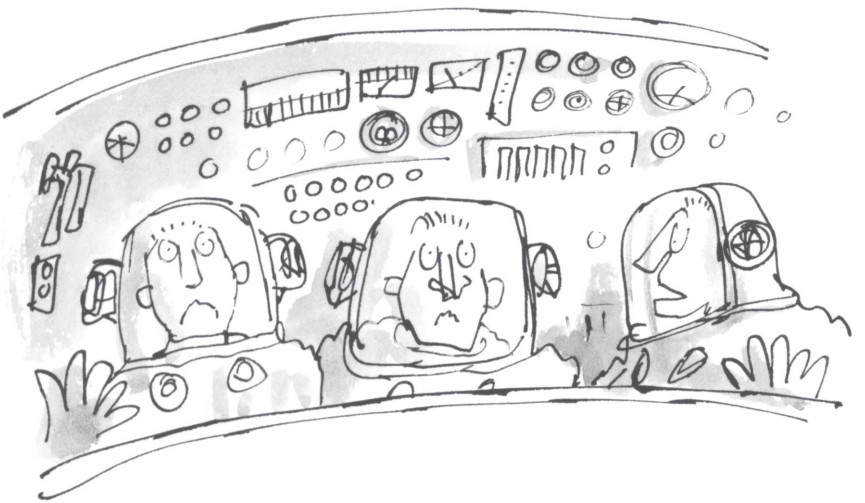
you butt in. Keep your big nose out of this. Who are you anyway?'

'This is the President of the United States,' said the voice.

'And this is the Wizard of Oz,' said Shanks. 'Who are you kidding?'

'Cut the piffle, Shanks,' snapped the President. 'This is a national emergency!'



'Good grief!' said Shanks, turning to Shuckworth and Showler. 'It really *is* the President. It's President Gilligrass himself . . . Well, *hello there*, Mr President, sir. How are *you* today?'

'How many people are there in that glass capsule?' rasped the President.

'Eight,' said Shanks. 'All floating.'

'Floating?'

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'We're outside the pull of gravity up here, Mr President. Everything floats. We'd be floating ourselves if we weren't strapped down. Didn't you know that?'

'Of course I knew it,' said the President. 'What else can you tell me about that glass capsule?'

'There's a bed in it,' said Shanks. 'A big double bed and that's floating too.'

'A bed!' barked the President. 'Whoever heard of a bed in a spacecraft!'

'I swear it's a bed,' said Shanks.

'You must be loopy, Shanks,' declared the President. 'You're dotty as a doughnut! Let me talk to Showler!'

'Showler here, Mr President,' said Showler, taking the mike from Shanks. 'It is a great honour to talk to you, Mr President, sir.'

'Oh, shut up!' said the President. 'Just tell me what you see.'

'It's a bed all right, Mr President. I can see it through my telescope. It's got sheets and blankets and a mattress . . .'

'That's not a bed, you drivelling thickwit!' yelled the President. 'Can't you understand it's a trick! It's a bomb. It's a bomb disguised as a bed! They're going to blow up our magnificent Space Hotel!'

'Who's *they*, Mr President, sir?' said Showler.

'Don't talk so much and let me think,' said the President.

There were a few moments of silence. Showler waited tensely. So did Shanks and Shuckworth. So did the managers and assistant managers and desk-clerks and waitresses and bellboys and chambermaids and pastry

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