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ALSO BY CHRIS COLFER

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LITTLE, BROWN BOOKS FOR YOUNG READERS

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To my dad,
for helping me pave a path
to the stars.
And for an endless galaxy
of dad jokes.



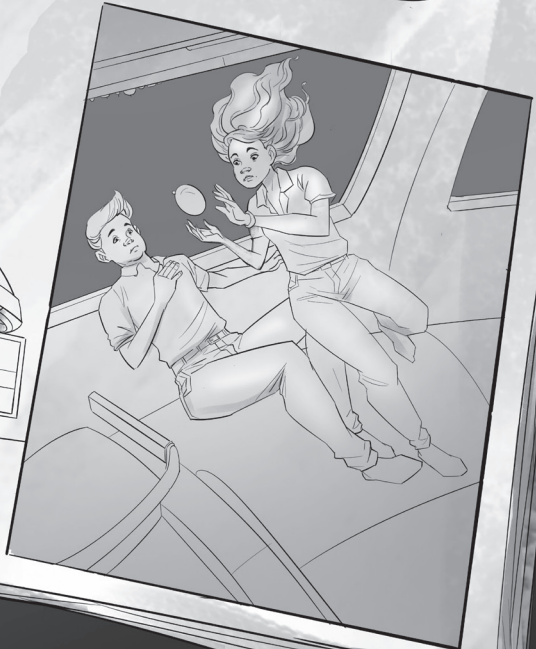
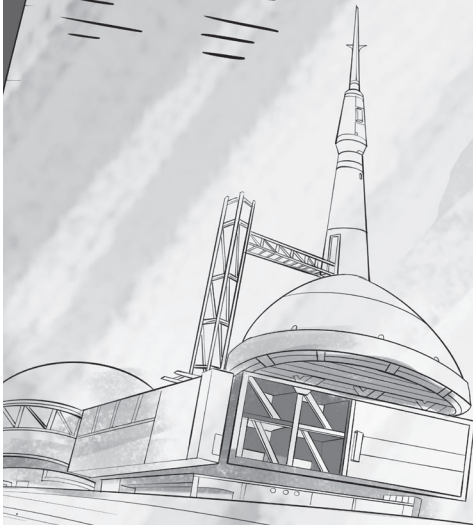
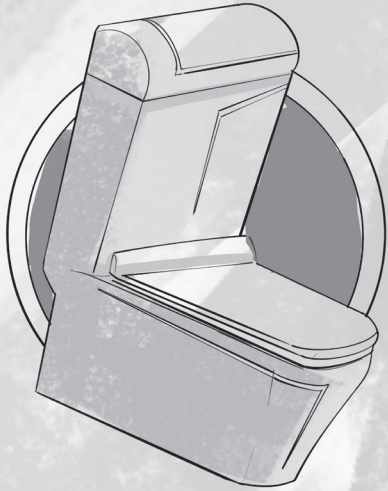
AUTHOR'S NOTE

While some elements in this book are exaggerated for dramatic effect, all the science described in the story is based on actual astronomy, astrophysics, biology, botany, chemistry, ecology, genealogy, geology, microbiology, physics, psychology, technology, and zoology.

Also, the headlines mentioned in chapter 1 are from real publications, and the experiences described in chapter 2 are from real eyewitnesses. I strongly encourage every reader to research them further.

After all, the truth is out there....

THE OSTENTATIOUS OBSERVER



THE OSTENTATIOUS OBSERVER MARCH 16

Toilet Billionaire to Weaponize Space! (No, Seriously!)

By Shelly Simcox

RUMP ISLAND, SOUTHEAST FLORIDA—When the *Ostentatious Observer* broke the news last week, most of our readers thought the story was a practical joke. And how could we blame them? After all, the idea would be laughable if it were the plot of a science fiction novel or Hollywood blockbuster. So, consequently, the *Observer's* mail room clerks worked overtime as they sorted through a tsunami of complaints about our publication's "terrible sense of humor" and "blatant unprofessionalism."

However, the *Observer* can now confirm the report is true—and the truth is so outrageous it could only exist in the clown show we call *reality*.

Last week I had the rare opportunity to interview billionaire Eli Rump on the top deck of his 652-foot superyacht, the *Hades*. The tycoon was in a trance as he gazed across the ocean and admired the launchpad towering over his private island.

"Beautiful, isn't it? It took me three decades and seven billion dollars to get here, but it's been worth every second and every penny."

As we spoke, Mr. Rump relaxed on a tufted lounge chair. Despite the sweltering Florida heat, he was dressed in a thick designer suit. Two members of the *Hades*' ninety-person crew continually refilled his glass of champagne and a dish of caviar. A third crew member fanned the billionaire with a giant palm leaf, while a fourth gave him a manicure. Meanwhile, I sat on the floor and asked for a glass of water that never came.

“What I’m doing may seem excessive, but it’s all for the greater good. People only criticize me because I’m rich. But when was the last time *the poor* did something to help the planet?”

For those of you living under a rock, Mr. Rump is currently ranked as the richest man in the world. His estimated net worth is north of \$300 billion, and (as the billionaire reminded me multiple times) his wealth grows significantly each day.

Mr. Rump credits his success to his “humble beginnings”—although I have no idea what he’s talking about. After all, Mr. Rump is the twelfth son of an oil industry juggernaut. He was raised in an eighty-thousand-square-foot home in Upstate New York, he attended the finest private schools in Manhattan, and he never lived a day of his life without servants or chauffeurs.

“Sure, it was a nice house, *but* it was a very competitive household. My brothers and I were constantly pitted against one another. Father made us show our

report cards at the dinner table. Whoever had the lowest GPA was banished to the guesthouse for a whole week. That sort of destitution builds character. It creates drive. And money can't buy *drive*."

After his father's passing in 1985, Mr. Rump used his inheritance to start Rump Dump Inc. and began manufacturing his infamous line of luxury toilets.

"I strongly believe everything in life should be enjoyed—and I mean *everything*."

The product and its memorable slogan—"You haven't taken a dump until you've taken a Rump Dump!"—were a hit with the American public. His late-night infomercials turned him into an instant celebrity among insomniacs. The extravagant toilets earned Mr. Rump an impressive fortune virtually overnight.

"Part of being a good businessman is recognizing a void and having the guts to fill it. No one had the courage to make *defecation* a lavish experience before me. But no risk, no reward. Gandhi said that. I think."

After his rampant toilet success, Mr. Rump wasted no time expanding his empire. In 1990 the billionaire opened Rump World, a theme park where families ride questionably shaped log flumes across swirling porcelain pools. In 1995 Mr. Rump created the film studio Rump Pictures and produced such hits as *The Godflusher*, *Interstinker*, and *Larry Plunger and the Septic Tank of Secrets*. In 2001 he bought a California football team

and renamed them the San Diego Cloggers. Understandably, Mr. Rump's companies have received harsh criticism over the years from the squeamish.

"I have a brand. So what?"

His lucrative endeavors would surely quench any normal corporate thirst, but Mr. Rump wasn't finished yet. In 2009 the billionaire founded his most ambitious (and surprising) enterprise yet, Rump Rockets, a private space tourism company. For a small six-figure fee, Rump Rockets launches multimillionaire customers beyond Earth's atmosphere for the extraordinary experience of vomiting and losing consciousness in zero gravity.

"It wasn't until Rump Rockets' maiden voyage that I realized, *Wow. I'm a lucky man.* How many people own twelve homes, three superyachts, a theme park, a film studio, a football team, a fleet of rocket ships, and more wealth than ninety-nine percent of the global economy? Three? Four? Maybe *five* people at the most? Hashtag blessed."

Besides being the owner and CEO of Rump Rockets, Mr. Rump was also the first civilian his company hurled into space at twenty thousand miles an hour.

"Once I regained consciousness and cleaned the inside of my helmet, I gazed down at the breathtaking view of Earth and had the greatest epiphany of my life: *I wanted more.*"

The comment made me drop my pen.

“I mean, I wanted to *do* more—to protect Earth, that is. I love this planet so much. I want to do everything in my power to save it. So I decided to turn my affection into action.”

Mr. Rump lovingly stroked the SAVE THE EARTH T-shirt he wore beneath his blazer. Meanwhile, his superyacht’s CO² emissions turned the sky a dark shade of gray.

“Now, there are plenty of groups protecting the seas, the rainforests, endangered species, blah, blah, blah. We’ve got those covered. I’m concerned about the threats we *don’t* see coming. It’s a big universe out there—who knows what’s lurking in the shadows of space? We need to be prepared for *anything!* So I called a meeting with my Rump Rockets board of directors and tossed around a few ideas. Eventually we came up with the revolutionary ERASE program.”

The Eli Rump Apparatus for Space Emergencies is a system of twelve satellites that Mr. Rump plans to position around the globe. Each satellite will be equipped with a laser powerful enough to destroy any asteroid, comet, or debris that gets too close for comfort. Although Mr. Rump was extremely eager to start ERASE and prepared to fund the project himself, the program needed permission from the US government to proceed. But that was merely a speed bump for the impatient businessman.

“I just called my good friends in Congress and scheduled a meeting on Capitol Hill.”

By “good friends” the billionaire is referring to the 252 congresspeople and 57 senators, both Democrat and Republican, whose campaigns received very generous donations from Mr. Rump’s controversial super PAC: Rump, White, and Blue.

“We had a wonderful chat, and I pitched them my vision for the program. Congress couldn’t have been more supportive. They said the Eli Rump Apparatus for Space Emergencies was the best proposal they had ever heard and a wonderful way to protect the planet. Then we all hopped on my private plane and went out for oysters in Monte Carlo.”

Those must have been exceptional oysters. Just last week a vote to approve the program was presented before Congress. It passed the House and the Senate with flying colors and was sent to the White House the very same day. Many people—at least the *rational-minded* ones—hoped the president would stop Mr. Rump’s project. But our commander in chief signed the bill without hesitation.

“The president’s a good friend too. Horrible golfer, but a good friend.”

Unfortunately, that’s only where the controversy begins. Mr. Rump was not only given permission by the US government to *start* ERASE, but also given *full*

operational control of the program. (Yes, you read that correctly—*full operational control*.) The greatest defense system ever assembled will *not* be controlled by military or government officials. Instead, the safety of our planet will be placed in the manicured hands of a glorified toilet salesman. God bless America.

“It’s my technology. I should be the one running it. Plain and simple.”

However, reaction to the news has been anything but plain and simple. When word spread about the agreement (and it was finally taken seriously), the United States was condemned by allies and adversaries alike. The British prime minister called the decision “dangerous and idiotic.” The Chinese president referred to ERASE as “a reckless act of capitalism.” The German chancellor warned it would lead to “devastating, worldwide consequences.” The Supreme Leader of North Korea deemed it “proof the Western world has lost its stinkin’ mind.”

Concerns at home only echoed those abroad. The directors of the FBI, the CIA, and Homeland Security signed a joint statement urging the president and Congress to repeal the decision. The head of NASA released her own statement too, assuring the worried public that they have “never discovered anything to warrant an absurd project like the Eli Rump Apparatus for Space Emergencies.”

Mr. Rump is not fazed by the world's concern.

“I understand the alarm. What’s stopping me from turning the satellites around and pointing them at Earth? What’s stopping me from using the lasers against my enemies and critics? What’s stopping me from holding the whole world hostage?”

I held my breath as I waited for Mr. Rump to answer his own question.

“Come on, I’m rich! Why would I want to destroy the planet? Why would I want to start a war? No, no, no. Destruction takes too much *planning*. Wars take too many *meetings*. I just want to protect the planet so I can enjoy my wealth for as long as possible.”

Following the government’s green light, Mr. Rump immediately put ERASE into production. The first of twelve satellites is scheduled to launch on April 1 (yes, *this* April 1). Although Mr. Rump swears the program is not a colossal April Fools’ prank. Rump Rocket’s team of engineers are working around the clock to meet their boss’s demands.

Across the ocean on Rump Island, I could see the team constructing the rocket that will carry the first of twelve armed satellites into space. I couldn’t help but notice the vessel looks remarkably like the Rump Dump Sucker 400, the electric plunger Mr. Rump sells with his luxury toilets. I asked him if the resemblance is intentional.

“There’s no sin in synergy.”

The billionaire snapped his fingers, and a fifth crew member jumped forward—seemingly out of thin air—to slather his bald head with sunscreen.

“I know what people whisper about me behind my back. Everyone thinks I’m a *joke*. But I’m no stranger to mockery. My father and brothers laughed at me when I was a child. People laughed at me when I started Rump Dump Inc. And now they’re laughing at the Eli Rump Apparatus for Space Emergencies. But we’ll see who’s laughing when *the world needs me*.”

At this remark Mr. Rump’s confident smirk sank into a rather vengeful scowl. It was out of character for the cocky billionaire, like an entirely different man was sitting before me. I asked the tycoon if he could describe a scenario when the world would need him. After all, why was Mr. Rump spending billions of dollars on a space project that NASA said was useless?

“Just because NASA hasn’t seen them doesn’t mean they aren’t coming.”

The loaded comment gave me pause. I asked Mr. Rump if he believed there were asteroids or comets headed for Earth that hadn’t been discovered yet.

“Or something else.”

The billionaire refused to elaborate. However, there was an unmistakable twinkle in his eye as he left me hanging. His coyness gave me chills, and it was

abundantly clear our interview was over. I departed the *Hades* with more questions than answers, but one question in particular has haunted me since our discussion:

Is Mr. Rump just a privileged man who's excited about a new toy? Or does the billionaire know something about the universe that he isn't telling us?

Time will tell.