

**Flip-flumpff to Planet Earth**

(Original title in the Italian: Capitombolo sulla Terra)

By Anna Sarfatti

Translated by Denise Muir ©

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SAMPLE TRANSLATION

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## THE FIRST FLIP-FLUMPPFF, BUT DON'T TELL

If you look at a map of the universe and, with your finger, follow a route that goes up from the Earth, beyond Mars, after Uranus, further than Pluto and further still, right there, that's where you'll see a place all coloured in an even deeper, darker blue. And if you stare really hard into that blue, try to defy its denseness, a cascade of tiny, scampish-shaped planets will come tumbling into view. One in particular will stand out because it looks so like a spinning top – a planet called BundleYore.

Not all maps take the time to indicate where it is, so you'll just have to imagine yourself ...

A sun quite unlike our own was setting and the children of BundleYore were making their way to school. They sat in a circle around their teacher, Cos the Elder, waiting in silence for the last ray to dip behind the mountains. When the light turned soft and biscuity, Cos started his story.

Cos was BundleYore's oldest cosmonaut. He had travelled far and wide across the universe. He had faced challenges which, until then, had been deemed impossible, he had met people in remote corners of the cosmos, collected rocks, liquid crystals, star dust, even captured photographs of craters and frozen lakes. He could drive (very skilfully!) every space vehicle on BundleYore.

Now that his time of adventuring was over and the time of remembering had begun, Cos would share space's many secrets with the children of BundleYore and answer all their questions. Above all, he awakened in them a curiosity for other places, preparing them for the voyages they, too, would go on in the future.

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Time passed and the young BundleYorians grew bigger, as did their yearning for adventure, but the day of their departure was still a long way away.

First, they had to study, learn to read maps, recognize the winds, and be well versed in planetary systems and flying objects; they had magic formulae to recite and mystical and transformational things to comprehend.

Forever at Cos' side was Ratapulta. Ratapulta who listened, repeated, learned, who pushed herself to do everything first, before everyone else.

Ratapulta couldn't wait to set off, alone, for the destination that intrigued her more than all others – planet Earth.

To grow up more quickly, she set herself impossible tasks, such as reading preposterously difficult books (which she understood very little of), dreaming in foreign languages and following all the recipes in the universal cookery book.

Observing Ratapulta's impatience, Cos the Elder urged her to think carefully – “It's too early,” he'd say. “You're not old enough yet. Try to be patient, your time will come quickly.”

“It's not coming quickly enough!” Ratapulta cried. “I'm ready to leave. No one sees, not even you Cos, that I'm big now, I can take care of myself!” she gulped forlornly, her protest dissolving in a flood of tears.

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## THE SECOND FLIP-FLUMPPFF, THE POT AND THE KETTLE

Crying can be a good for you sometimes, tears and sobs melt away anger and sadness. They make you feel stronger and ready to make important decisions.

This is what happened to Ratapulta – she dried her tears and felt more fearless and warrior-like than ever.

“If I want to go, they can’t stop me!” she reassured herself. “If they won’t give me their blessing, I’ll give it to myself. Go Ratapulta, go!”

“What could possibly happen to me?” she reasoned. “After all, even when Cos got into scrapes, he managed to get out of them! Am I, or am I not, big now?”

She decided to make ready to leave.

In the run-up to her departure, she wanted to deepen her knowledge, iron out any remaining doubts she had and, above all, listen to everything her teacher said, for fear of missing anything important.

Having taken her decision, she joined the rest of the BundleYorians gathered around Cos. She still hadn’t revealed her plans to anyone, yet Cos had already guessed.

He felt a little disoriented by Ratapulta’s impatience – in one respect, he feared she might land herself in trouble, on the other, he admired and shared her enthusiasm and curiosity. What could he do for her? Share his experiences through his stories, warn her, try to make her wait a little longer.

“Earth,” thought Ratapulta, “what will Earth be like? And earthlings?”

Her teacher had met them on one of his voyages and described them as joyous people, albeit a little chaotic, with hair that was all one colour and noses with only

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two holes. They travelled a lot around their planet but very few had ever ventured into space.

Young earthlings were not allowed to travel alone and could only move around on two-wheeled vehicles or on foot.

“I wonder what they’ll think of me, at least *they’ll* think I’m big!” Ratapulta imagined, smiling. “They’ll say, how did a girl like you travel through space all alone? And I’ll answer, it’s easy, just study a lot! And they’ll say, you must know lots of complicated things! And I’ll say, yes, I learned almost every complicated thing there is, I speak three languages and I know how to make the wind blow backwards! And they’ll ask, can you teach us these things? Can you stay with us for a while? And I’ll say, for a while, not for ever, because Cos is waiting for me!”

In the meantime, between imagining with her eyes shut and dreaming with her eyes open, her bag was nearly packed.

Where was she going to put all her stuff? In taking this and adding that, she’d accumulated an enormous pile. In the end, she had to choose. With great sadness, she took out several things to which she was more than quite attached.

Meanwhile, word had started to spread around BundleYore of Ratapulta’s departure, although Ratapulta couldn’t remember telling anyone, not even the teacher.

When they met her, most BundleYorians would shake their heads and express their absolute disapproval that she couldn’t wait, was breaking the rules, throwing everyone into turmoil, and setting a very bad example. Very few encouraged her with words such as, “if only I were as brave as you!”

Some even looked at her with compassion, thinking it might be the last time they saw her. But the thought of postponing didn’t even cross Ratapulta’s mind, and the day of her departure soon arrived.

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The colourful hot air balloon bounced gaily in Movement Square.

Around it, a small crowd of friends and curious onlookers had gathered to say farewell to Ratapulta, bringing her small gifts or messages for the inhabitants of the distant world she would soon discover.

Many BundleYorians, the ones who disapproved, did not attend.

Meanwhile, with a blah blah here and mwah! mwah! there, Ratapulta jumped, a little clumsily, in and out of the basket, lifting and laying, piling up and tidying away, all her bags, parcels and bundles.

She was almost ready when she saw the elderly teacher approach.

“You came?” Ratapulta gazed, dumbfounded. “I wasn’t expecting it!”

“The time of goodbyes has come,” Cos said, solemnly, holding out a small bag.

“For me?!” Ratapulta whooped, delving straight in.

The first thing to be extracted was a mirror with a note on it, which read:

*Trust the mirror more*

*Than an old man of yore*

Then a pair of shoes with another note:

*As to Earth you proceed*

*Many a shoe you’ll need*

There was one last envelope. Ratapulta opened it and read the third note:

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*She who seeks shall find, is my advice for you*

*To leave and return is what good voyagers do*

“Bon voyage!” their wished her in unison.

Propelled by the mass of waving hands and cheers, the balloon lurched off the ground.

Ratapulta’s heart lurched when she saw the inhabitants of BundleYore get smaller and smaller.

So small they disappeared....

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### THE THIRD FLIP-FLUMPPFF, BEST STICK TO TEA

Mrs Thistle let out a scream and her bottle of wine fell to the ground and smashed into a thousand pieces.

Undeterred by the stench of wine engulfing her, she screamed even louder, “Martians! Martians have landed!” But on smelling the fumes in which she sat, very few were inclined to believe her. “Mrs Thistle’s been wetting her whistle!”

But someone happened to look up and realized there was, in fact, something in the sky, and it was descending towards them. It wasn’t a spaceship, wasn’t a flying saucer, so, what, for goodness’ sake, could it be?

“It must be a cloud,” said Poggio, who lived with his head in the clouds and clouds were all he saw.

“What will be will be,” said Mrs Thistle’s cousin, Molly Mistle, who believed in fate.

“It’s a baby’s balloon,” Pling thought.

In the time it took Mrs Thistle to run home for a drink to calm her nerves, the news spread so quickly around the town that, in no time at all, the whole of Winehampton knew what was happening. Like an arrow from a bow, the entire population whizzed straight to the town square.

Right there, bang in the middle, stood the most wonderful statue of an immense white horse, the carving of which had been done to a T, and every other letter, too, and the following inscription has been written along the bottom:



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*Statue of the Horse that was High and Low*

*Dedicated to the children of Winehampton*

*To climb onto and play under.*

It had been carved by an elderly marble cutter who was tired of polishing grave stones and staircases and had decided to have some fun instead.

The children of Winehampton had looked on, excitedly, as the creation took shape before their eyes, and as soon as the back was cut, they rushed to jump on, fighting over whose turn it was.

“One at a time!” the marble cutter cried, a little uncomfortable at all the commotion yet happy his work had been such a success. “If you can’t climb up, you can play under!”

When the time came to choose an inscription for the statue, it seemed only natural to use the refrain so often intoned.

“Whoa,” said the horse, throwing its head as something entirely unexpected landed on its back.

“To what do I owe the pleasure?”

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**Denise Muir** is an Italian to English translator with a special interest in children's literature. In her 20-year career, she has translated the full gamut from board books to young adult fiction and everything in between. Her translations have been nominated for the Carnegie Prize three times and *The Distance Between Me and the Cherry Tree* was selected as the IBBY UK 2020 nominee in the translation category. She lives in Edinburgh, Scotland where she also teaches in a local secondary school. Learn more at [www.italianchildrensbooks.co.uk](http://www.italianchildrensbooks.co.uk)