

Excerpted from *See You in the Cosmos* (2017)

New Recording 1

Who are you?

What do you look like?

Do you have one head or two?

More?

Do you have light brown skin like I do or smooth gray skin like a dolphin or spiky green skin like a cactus?

Do you live in a house?

I live in a house. My name is Alex Petroski and my house is in Rockview, Colorado, United States of America, Planet Earth. I am eleven years and eight months old and the United States is two hundred forty-two years old and Earth is 4.5 billion years old. I'm not sure how old my house is.

Maybe you live on an ice planet, so instead of houses you have igloos and your hands are icepicks and your feet are snowshoes and you're covered in gold-brown fur like Carl Sagan. That's my dog. I named him after my hero, Dr. Carl Sagan, who was one of the greatest astronomers of our time. Dr. Sagan helped send Voyagers 1 and 2 into deep space and put a Golden Record on them with all kinds of sounds from our planet, like whales singing and people saying hello in fifty-five languages, and the laugh of a newborn baby and the brainwaves of a woman in love and mankind's greatest music like Bach and Beethoven and Chuck Berry. Maybe you've heard it?

I found my pup Carl Sagan in the parking lot at Safeway, and when I saw him he was dirty and hungry and hiding behind a dumpster. I said, Come here boy, don't be scared, but he was crying and curling his tail because we were still strangers at that point. I told him I'm not going to hurt him, I'm a pacifist, and I guess he believed me because when I picked him up he didn't even fight me or try to run. Then I took him back to my house and my mom was lying on the sofa watching her shows like she usually does, and I told her I got the groceries but I got a pup also and I'll take good care of him I promise, I'll play with him and feed him and give him a bath and all the stuff you're supposed to say.

And she said, You're in the way! So I got out of the way. My best friend Benji's mom would freak if he brought home a pup, but my mom, she doesn't care as long as I make us dinner and don't bother her when she's watching her shows. She's a pretty cool mom.

I don't know what kind of shows you guys have but the ones my mom likes are game shows and judge shows and shows with five ladies sitting in a fake living room. When I'm at Benji's house we watch Cartoon Network because his family has On Demand, and Benji loves *Battlemorph Academy* and so do a lot of the kids at school. I think that show's OK but I prefer the more classic cartoons like *Dexter's Laboratory* to be honest. That Dexter is one smart kid. I hate it when his sister Didi goes in and messes up everything. I'm glad I don't have a sister to mess up my stuff, especially when I'm working on my rocket.

I do have an older brother though. His name is Ronnie but everyone calls him RJ except my mom and me and some of his old high school friends because his middle name is James.

Ronnie's a lot older, he's more than twice how old I am. He's twenty-four. He lives in Los Angeles and his job is an agent, and I know what you're thinking but he's not that kind of agent.

He's not a spy or Bond, James Bond, kind of agent. He doesn't fight terrorists or bust drug dealers or play poker with super-villains. He helps basketball and football players get shoe commercials. But he does go to fancy parties and wear sunglasses, so I guess it's kind of the same.

Ronnie wouldn't let me keep Carl Sagan at first. He never likes it when my mom and me spend his money on stuff that isn't groceries or bills for our house. When I told him about Carl Sagan over the phone he said, Uh-uh, we can't afford a dog. I said I think we CAN afford a dog because I've been getting the on-sale food from Safeway and making my own sandwiches for school instead of buying hot lunch, and also I got a part-time job helping Mr. Bashir stack magazines at his gas station. I said, I've been saving the money for my rocket but I can use some of it to buy Carl Sagan's food because he's not that big of a dog, and besides, you should come back to Rockview sometime and meet him in person—I mean, in dog—before you make any brash decisions.

That was almost a year ago and Ronnie still hasn't met Carl Sagan in dog yet. But I'm sure when they finally do meet that Ronnie's going to love him because who can turn down that face?

Huh? Who can turn down that face?

That's right, I'm talking about you, Carl Sagan. Do you want to say hello?

Come on boy, say hello.

Carl Sagan doesn't want to say hello. He's just staring at me like, What are you doing? Who are you talking to? Is there a person in there? I don't see a person in there.

There's no person in here boy, it's just an iPod. You watched me spray-paint it gold, remember? I'm making recordings so when intelligent beings millions of light-years away find it one day they'll know what Earth was like, do you understand?