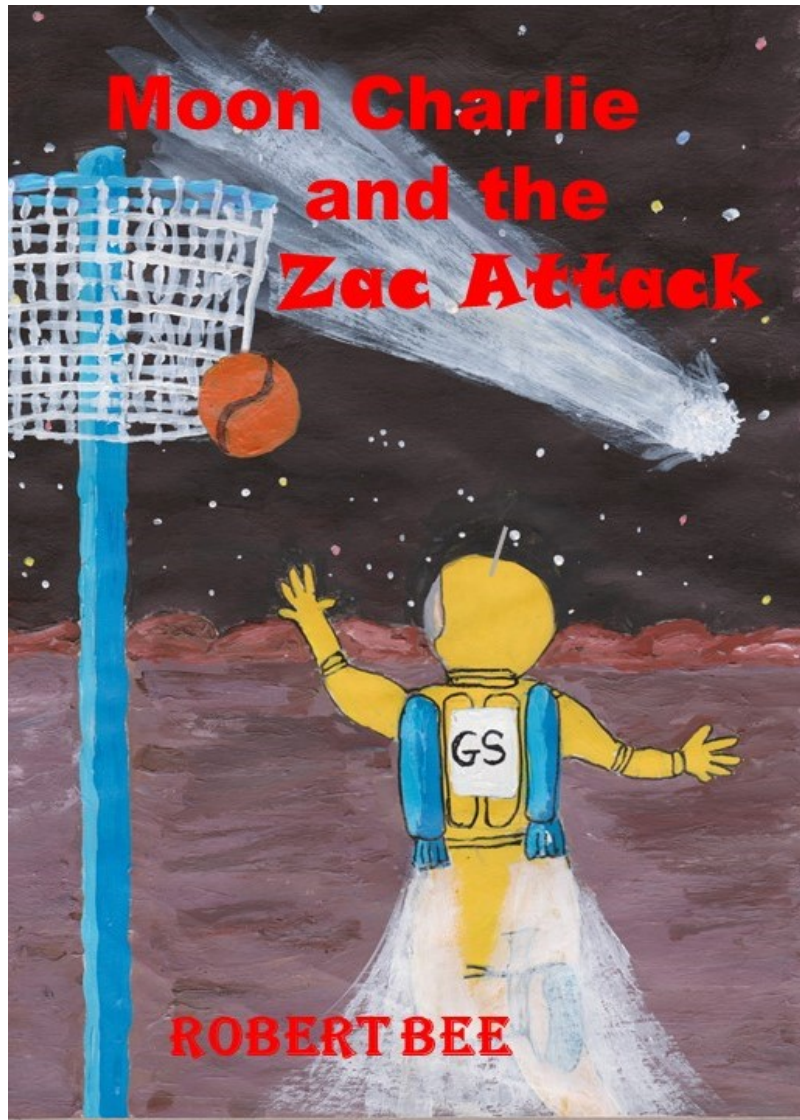


Moon Charlie and the Zac Attack - A Junior Novel
(Sampler)



This is a Junior novel for girls who enjoy sport but particularly netball, with some sci-fi adventure thrown in. It is also a book that their mothers and nans will enjoy.

“Moon Charlie and the Zac Attack” is a sequel to “Moon Charlie Shoots for Goal” and the action is set two years after that book.

With 320 A5 pages, in perfect bound paperback, it is for sale at meetings of the Macarthur Astronomical Society for only \$16.

It is also available for \$16 for mailing out but will incur a \$5 P&H cost. To order, contact the author at robertbee46@gmail.com.

Here is the synopsis of the story and a small sample of the book, where we meet our heroine, Charlie (Charlotte) Angler, or Moon Charlie, after her 12th birthday.

Charlie Angler still lives on the *Moon* in Dome Plato
with her parents and younger brother Jacob.

Charlie has just turned 12.

*Little does she know how much will change and
happen in her life in the next few months:*

- New and unlikely friends and rivals
- The thrill of the new Lunar netball gadgetry
- Surprise changes in her netball coaches
- Trying out for her dome's Under 13s *netball team*
- A hair raising and sky rising rescue

And all this happening on the **airless low-gravity Moon.**

**Will Charlie make it into the U13 netball team,
the *Garrett's Parrots*?**

**Can she get her Goal Shooter position back from
rival newcomer Zoe?**

Just what is the *Zac Attack*?

Can they win the Inter-Dome competition again?

Who are the Toby Four?

**Will Jacob's surprise telescope discovery threaten
everyone on Dome Plato?**

All this and more in

Moon Charlie and the *Zac Attack*

Best Friends Parted

“Wowsies. So cool,” Charlie squealed as she watched Gemma skimming over the rippling blue water behind the speeding boat. Gemma was hanging tightly onto the towing rope's handle as her two skis skipped over the waves caused by the boat's wake. Suddenly the boat made a tight left turn and Gemma shot out on a wide curve to the right, her arms straining to hold

on.

“Look out Gemma,” Charlie called, but too late. Her best friend lost her grip and let go the handle. Her speed carried her on a long straight line as the boat continued its turn until she finally came to a stop, sinking down into the water, her skis pointing skyward. Charlie watched as Gemma bobbed back up to the surface, her bright orange safety vest keeping her head above water.

Suddenly Gemma’s face was right in front of Charlie’s, her hair all dry and combed. She was no longer in her wet suit and vest but in a pink t-shirt in her bedroom. “That was exciting, wasn’t it? What do you think Charlie?”

“I think that water looks wet,” Charlie said laughing. “Isn’t it cold?”

“No, it’s lovely, almost warm. And it’s wet because it’s water, silly,” Gemma laughed. “It’s really different to skiing over that dry crater dust on the Moon. At least when I fall off and go under, I pop right back up again. I don’t have to wait under the dust to be rescued.” Then suddenly she was serious. “Gee, I wish you could be here with me.”

Charlie sighed. “Me too. I’m not sure I’d like to live with that full gravity all the time, though. But at least I can watch your water-skiing video and talk to you on Skype.” Charlie looked past Gemma at the room behind her. Lots of posters on the wall, a shelf full of books. It looked like she had really settled in. “It’s been three months since you shot off down to Earth. How much longer does your dad have to stay down there with his job? I’m really looking forward to you coming back. As they say, there’s no place like dome.” Charlie winced. “Yeah, I know, that was corny. But we have to catch up after you missed my 12th birthday party.”

“You missed mine too,” Gemma laughed, then grew serious. “Uh, Charlie, about Dad. I have some bad news.”

Charlie sat bolt upright on her bed. “Is he alright?”

“Yeah, yeah he’s fine. Same old dad. It’s just that...” Gemma took three deep breaths, then blurted it all out. “Dad’s move back to Earth was supposed to be tempor... tempor... temporary while he filled in for someone. Now he’s been given that person’s job.”

Charlie’s eyes opened as wide as saucers. “You mean... you can’t mean...”

“Yes... full time. He has to stay down here. Perman... perman... permanently.”

Charlie was too stunned to say anything. She watched her best friend’s face on the screen, over 300,000 kilometres away, slowly start to tear up. Finally, she squeaked out the words “Does that mean you won’t...”

Gemma nodded, blowing her nose with a pink tissue, looking down, avoiding Charlie’s eyes. “Yes,” she whispered, so softly that Charlie could barely hear her. “I won’t be coming back to the Moon. Dome Plato or any other dome.” Then she looked up and their eyes met. “Ever.”

Charlie stared at her best friend on the screen. She had really been looking forward to playing with Gemma again in the upcoming U13s netball inter-dome competition. They were a crack combination – Shooter and Goal Attack. Yes, Skyler and Mandy were pretty good too, but without Gemma, the Plato Parrots – or Platt’s Parrots as they like to call themselves behind Mrs Platt’s back – would never be the same. Dome Plato would never be the same.

“Never?” Charlie whispered.

Gemma just shook her head, then tried a smile. “Look on the bright side, as my dad’s always saying. You can come and visit sometime and get wet in a real lake. And you can try netball under full Earth gravity. The goals are lower and the court is a lot smaller, but you have to run all the time. You don’t get any rest while floating over the court. Wow, the first time I did it, I was exhausted at the end of the first quarter.”

Despite her sadness, Charlie smiled at the thought of Gemma being worn out after only one quarter. “Is Earth gravity really that bad?”

“Huh,” Gemma snorted. “You try running up a set of stairs at school with a full backpack of books. Give me Moon gravity anytime. Sandy and Trish thought it was hilarious that they had to hold me up at the top.”

“Sandy, Trish?”

“Oh, didn’t I mention them before? They’re friends from school. They’re really jealous about never having been to the Moon.” Gemma laughed her old laugh. “Isn’t it funny? We used to wish we could come down to Earth and they wish they could go up to the Moon.” She shrugged. “At least, I’ve done both now.”

“Do Sandy and Trish play netball too?” Charlie asked.

“You bet, they’re in my team... or is it I’m in their team? Whatever, we’re in the Lyrebirds Under 13s and Trish is a great Shooter and Sandy’s a mean Centre and ...”

“Is she as good as me?”

“Is who as good as you?” Gemma laughed.

“Trish, your wonderful shooter,” Charlie said. “Can she pop the ball in a ring eight metres high?”

Gemma laughed again. “I wouldn’t know, she doesn’t have to. The rings are only three metres high here on Earth.

“Huh,” Charlie snorted. “That’s nothing.”

“Yeah, but they’re a lot smaller. Hey, Charlie, what up?”

“Nothing,” Charlie said.

“Sure, nothing. I know you. I can see that bottom lip. Blip.”

“Don’t call me that.”

“I’ll stop calling you that... Blip... when you tell me what’s bugging you.”

Charlie said nothing for a moment, staring over Gemma’s shoulder. Then she looked her best friend in the eye. “You seem to have made a lot of friends down there,” she said softly.

“Yeah, I suppose I have. They’re nice. So?”

“So... so...” Suddenly Charlie just blurted it out. “Am I still your best friend?”

For a moment Gemma just stared at Charlie through the computer screen. Then she burst out laughing. “Great galloping grasshoppers. Look who’s jealous.”

“I’m not jealous,” Charlie snapped.

“Yes, you so are.”

“Not.”

“Are.”

“Not.”

“Are.”

“Not.”

“Are not,” Gemma said.

“Are... ooh, you tricked me,” Charlie fumed.

“Yep,” Gemma smiled across the miles. “because as your best friend, I knew how to do it.”

“You mean it?” Charlie said.

“Yep, I always know how to trick you.”

“No, I mean, the as your best friend bit.”

Gemma sighed. “Yes, the as your best friend bit. Golly, Charlie, do you think being three hundred and eighty thousand kilometres from you changes anything? Of course we’re still best friends. We always will be. But...”

“But what?” Charlie said.

“Well, you know, it looks like I’m going to become an Earth girl and you’re going to stay a Moon girl. We’ll both make new friends. Even new best friends. But Charlie, guess what?”

“What?”

“You and me, Goal Shooter extraordinaire Moon Charlie and amazing Goal Attack Gemma Stone, will always be best friends. You better believe it.”

Charlie smiled. “I believe it.”

“Great. Well, Mum just called me for dinner. It’s pizza tonight. Gotta go. Stay in touch Charlie.” Gemma held her hand to the screen for a high five.

Charlie did the same. “You too, Gemma,” she said, and just as she cut the Skype connection, her apartment doorbell rang.

Now I wonder who that might be, she thought as she strolled into the hallway. Probably Jacob forgot his key... again. He’d gone up to the astrodome with Toby to try out his new telescope. He shouldn’t be back already, she mused, as the impatient doorbell rang again. “I’m coming, hold your horses,” Charlie said as she went to open the door.

It wasn’t Jacob.

*

Attack of the Swarm

“Hey,” Charlie cried as she was bowled over by Skyler, Mandy and Vessa who had barged through the front door. “Hello to you too,” she said, picking herself up.

“Shut the door, quick,” Mandy said in a panicky voice, diving behind the nearest lounge chair. “They’re after us.”

“Who are after you?” Charlie asked as she watched Vessa dive behind the chair with Mandy.

“The moon bees,” Vessa whispered. “Quickly, shut the door. Shut it.”

“Moon bees?”

“Yes, moon bees, you dummy,” Skyler snapped. “Shut the door or we’ll all be turned into royal jelly. Please please please,” she said, then pulled open the broom cupboard door and dived inside, shutting the door behind her. There was a loud clatter and an ‘ouchy’ as brooms and dustpans fell on top of her.

Charlie hesitated for a second while staring at the strange behaviour of the others. What could possibly be after them to make them so scared? Then, against their squealed warnings of “don’t look, they’ll get you, just shut the door, shut it,” she took two steps and peeked out the door into the corridor.

She almost jumped out of her skin.

All three friends had screamed at the top of their voices and then burst out laughing. Charlie turned and saw Vessa and Mandy pointing at her, slapping their thighs with laughter while Skyler, who had disentangled herself from the brooms and vacuum hose, was laughing so much she could hardly breath.

“Fooled you, fooled you, made you look,” they all chorused. “Moon bees, moon bees,” they said together, waving their hands in the air as if to bat away a ferocious swarm of the things. Then they collapsed into the arm chairs laughing again.

“Gotcha,” Skyler said, after catching her breath. “You’re too easy, Charlie.”

Charlie just shook her head. “Moon bees? Really? Did you actually expect me to fall for that?”

“You looked, didn’t you? Yes, you did, you looked,” Mandy said.

“I was just playing along. I knew there couldn’t be any moon bees after you,” Charlie said, folding her arms.

“Oh yeah,” Vessa said. “How come, smarty?”

“Because all the moon bees are on the other side of the Moon in the full sun, pollinating the moon flowers.”

“Huh?” Mandy said.

“Oh,” Vessa frowned, thinking about it.

“Mmm,” Skyler stared at the floor, processing what Charlie had just said.

“Gotcha! There’s no such thing as moon bees. Too easy,” Charlie yelled, pointing at them. “It’s a draw.”

“Oh, alright,” Skyler said, flopping back down onto the lounge. “This time, but next time, we’ll fool you. Just you wait.”

“You’ll have to wait till the Moon turns into mozzarella cheese for that to happen,” Charlie laughed. “And I hope you do, ’cause you know I just love mozzarella cheese.”

After they had gotten up and raided the pantry for snacks – no mozzarella cheese unfortunately – Charlie, with a mouthful of potato chips, asked, “so what’s the real reason for your visit?”

“What else?” mumbled Vessa with a mouthful of Sao and vegemite. “Netball, of course.”

“Not just netball, but the inter-dome netball comp. And Pratt’s Plato Parrots,” Skyler said.

Mandy burst out laughing. “She means Platt’s Prato Prarrots... no, I mean...”

“No, it’s Platt’s Prato Parrots... oooh,” Vessa smacked her forehead.

Charlie just sighed, watching her friends struggle with the tongue twister. She cleared her throat dramatically. “Do you mean Platt’s Plato Parrots?”

“Yes, smarty, them,” Skyler said, shoving another potato chip in her mouth. “We came over to talk about the – what you said – team and our chances for the U13s this comp. Especially without... you know who... not being here for it.”

“You can say it Skyler. Gemma’s gone. It’s okay. I’m okay.” Charlie saw Skyler’s surprised look. “Really.”

“Oh, good,” Skyler said, relieved. “How is she, d’you know?”

“Yes, I just spoke to her. She’s been water skiing...”

“Water skiing? I’d love to try that...” Mandy said.

“Why?” Vessa piped in. “It’s just like dust skiing but you get wet.”

“...and you don’t have to wear a space suit,” Mandy continued, “and, yes, you get wet. That would be tops.”

“Well, go on, get on the next shuttle to Earth and try your precious water skiing,” Vessa said. “See if I care.”

“Alright, I will, so there.”

“I dare you,” Vessa huffed.

“I double dare you,” Mandy replied.

Charlie and Skyler sat chewing their snacks, watching Mandy and Vessa. They exchanged glances, then burst out laughing together.

“I think it’s official,” Charlie said when both Vessa and Mandy stopped to see what the laughing was about. “You two have become best friends.”

“No way,” Vessa said.

“Serious?” Mandy asked.

“Sorry, it’s true,” Skyler said. “Nobody fights like that over silly little things better than best friends.”

“But Skyler,” Mandy said, “where’s that leave you? We were best friends. Are you angry with me?”

“Angry as a swarm of moon bees,” Skyler said.

“But, there are no... oh, I get it. You aren’t angry. So what will..?”

“Oh, I’ll just have to get along with Angler here, won’t I, Angler?”

“If you have to, Snow,” Charlie said trying to keep a straight face.

There were three seconds of absolute silence, then everyone burst out laughing and placing hands together in a pile. “Best friends,” they all shouted, then went back to the serious business of devouring the chips and biscuits.

“Gemma also said she had joined a netball team down there,” Charlie said with a mouthful. “The Lyrebirds.”

“What’s a Lyrebird?” Vessa asked.

“Isn’t that some Australian bird that has a tail like a lyre and mimics everything it hears?” Mandy said.

“Ooo, Look at Google on legs here,” Vessa smirked. “So, what’s a lyre?”

“Yep, best friends,” Skyler smiled at Charlie.

“A lyre was an old string instrument used by the Greeks,” Mandy said. “It’s like a harp.”

“Well, good on Gemma,” Vessa said. “I mean it. I hope she enjoys the full gees. Now, where does that leave us this year for the Under 13s? We’re short a back-up goal attack. That’s what we came to talk about, remember?”

“Yeah, last year we were pipped by one measly goal by the Nightingales,” Mandy said. “I’ve been in touch with Brenda from Dome Newton and she’s not letting me forget it.”

“That would be our Brenda,” Charlie laughed. “As humble as ever.”

“And the Tycho talents last year were a different team,” Skyler reminded them. “Same players, but wow, had they improved. If they’ve improved again this year, we could be in trouble. Especially...”

They all looked around at each other, thinking the same thought.

Gemma was now playing for the Lyrebirds, not the Parrots.

Who was there to replace her?

*

Exciting News

“I’ll get it,” Mrs Angler called out when the front doorbell rang again.

“Watch out for the bees, Mrs A,” Mandy yelled, only to have her arm slapped by Charlie. The other two just shook their heads at Mandy.

“What?” she said, rubbing her arm.

“Don’t mess with Mrs A,” Skyler said. “Not cool.”

“What’s that about bees?” Mrs Angler called back. “They’re all over the other side of the Moon.”

“Okay, cool,” Skyler said.

“Oh, hi Zac,” they heard Mrs Angler say, “pop through to the lounge room. What have you got there? What, more chips? Better leave them here. I think they’ve had enough for today.”

“Oh, Mum,” Charlie protested.

“Thanks Mrs A,” Zac said as he came into the lounge room. He did a quick check over his shoulder, then pulled a large pack of crisp chips out from under his jacket. “I hid these ‘cos I know your mum, Charlie.”

“And I know you, Zac Watt,” Mrs Angler called out from the kitchen. “That’s why I let that one pack through customs. But don’t try it again.”

Zac winced. “Sprung,” he said, then tore the packet open and poured the chips into the empty bowl. “Make the most of them. Oh, hi, by the way.”

“Yeah, hi,” Skyler and Charlie said together.

“Zac,” Vessa said as she gobbled some chips.

Mandy took a chip, then offered the bowl to Zac. “Hi Zac,” she said with a big smile. “Thanks for the chips.”

Zac took a few chips and smiled back. “You’re welcome, I’m sure.”

Charlie winked at Skyler, who just rolled her eyes.

“So what brings you here, Einstein?” Skyler said. “Apart from the chips.”

Zac straightened his glasses. “Actually, the chips didn’t bring me. I brought them,” he said.

“Huh?” Vessa said while Mandy giggled. Skyler rolled her eyes again.

“Actually, I’m the bearer of news,” Zac said.

“Please, not another science project prize,” Skyler begged.

“Well, yes, I did get one of those…”

“You mean another one of those,” Charlie said.

“...okay, yes, another, but that’s not the news.”

He sat and watched the girls, a smug nerdy look on his face.

After five seconds of silence, Charlie threw the last chip at Zac and yelled, “Well, out with it or you’ll be wearing this bowl on your head.”

“It’s about the new netball rules for the under 13s and older,” he blurted, covering his head.

“You mean the ones Brenda was hinting about last year?” Mandy said.

“Oh,” Zac said, surprised. “Does she know what they are?”

Charlie shook her head. “If she does, she’s not saying.”

“Well, she shouldn’t know,” Zac said, “as they’ve been kept tightly under wraps for the official announcement next week.”

“So why are you here, mister bearer of news?” Skyler said. “If it’s such a secret, what news could you have to interest us?”

“I just said Brenda shouldn’t know about the new rules. I didn’t say…”

“Oh my gosh, you know!” Skyler said. “Oh… my… gosh.”

“What, you know?” Mandy jumped up off the lounge.

“He knows, he knows” Charlie and Vessa chanted together. “Tell us.”

Zac held up his hands to ward off the questions. “Well, it’s meant to be a secret and I don’t think I should…” That was as far as he got before the four girls all landed on him in a pile, tickling him in every ticklish place they could reach. “Tell us,” “give, give,” “what are they?” “give, Zac, give,” they pressed him.

After ten seconds of this mayhem and tickling torture, Zac pleaded for mercy. “I’ll tell, I’ll tell,” he said between gasps of laughter.

The girls piled off Zac and pulled him up onto a lounge chair.

“So, tell,” Charlie said, plopping onto the arm of his chair.

“Wait a minute,” Skyler said, suddenly suspicious. “Waaaaiiiit a minute.” She looked at Charlie and Zac, sitting close on the lounge, then turned to Mandy and Vessa. “Don’t you see what this is? It’s Charlie’s revenge for the moon bees trick. Zac doesn’t know anything, he’ll just make up something stupid and try to suck us in. They’re in this together.” She clapped her

hands slowly. "Nice try, Charlie but it won't work."

"You mean..." Vessa said, puzzled, "he doesn't know about the new rules?"

Mandy frowned, uncertain what to think.

Zac looked up at Charlie. "What moon bees?"

Charlie sighed loudly. "Forget the moon bees..."

"What moon bees?" Zac persisted.

"I said forget them," Charlie said. "Sky, when I get my payback, you'll know it. Trust me. This is not it." She turned back to Zac. "If it's such a tight secret, how come you know what the rules are? Hmmm?"

"So there aren't any moon bees?"

"Zac!"

"Sorry. Well, let's just say you don't call me Einstein for nothing, and I know people who know people, and I know a lot about computers and hacking and..."

"You found a scrap of paper with the rules on it, right?" Skyler was pointing a finger at him.

"Er, right," Zac blushed. "I was in the school admin office getting a print-out of my science project and I saw this sheet of ink-smudged paper on the top of the waste bin beside the printer. It said 'summary of new netball rules' at the top, so I rescued it."

"You stole it?" Vessa said, shocked.

"I like to think I 'recycled' it. Okay?"

"Nice work, Zac," Mandy said, grinning. "So, where is it?"

"Where?"

Mandy held out her hand, snapping her fingers. "Yes, where? Hand it over... please."

"Oh! Um, I lost it."

"You what?" all four girls shouted in unison.

"Girls, a little quieter in there please," Mrs Angler called from the kitchen.

"Sorry, Mum," Charlie called back. Then to Zac, thumping his shoulder. "You lost it?"

"But I remember what they were, really," Zac said, rubbing his shoulder.

"Well," Skyler leaned forward, "what are they?"

Zac smiled. "You know, a nice handful of chips would help my memory immensely."

*

...and so the story continues