

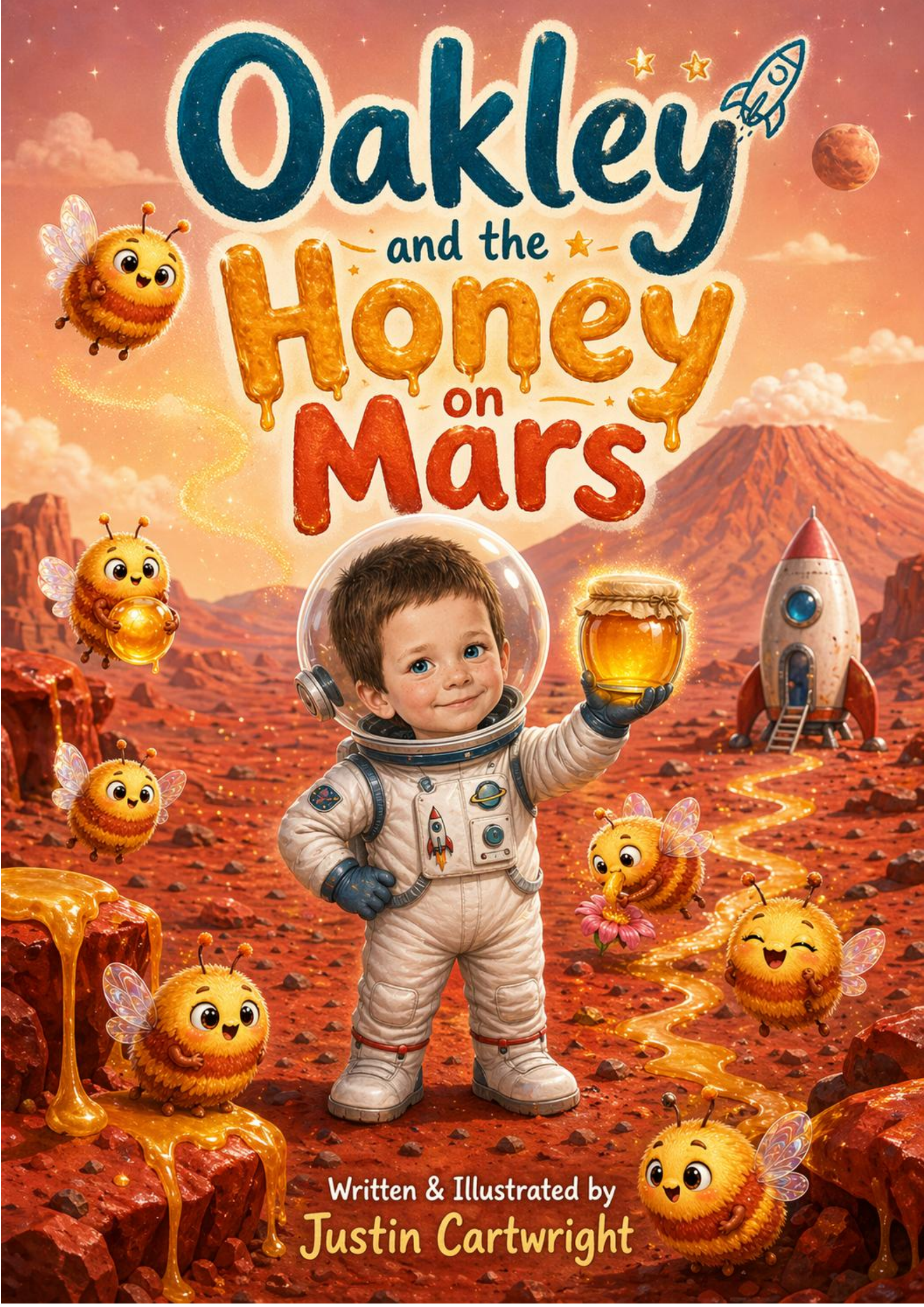
Oakley

and the

Honey

on

Mars



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Oakley was four years old and absolutely certain of
three things.

He loved rockets.

He loved adventures.

And he loved honey on toast.

So when a shiny silver letter whooshed down from
the sky and landed in his paddling pool, Oakley
clapped so hard he nearly fell into the daisies.

It said:

OAKLEY, WOULD YOU LIKE TO VISIT MARS?

"Oh, yes," said Oakley. "Very, very, VERY yes."





Soon Oakley was zipped into a puffy space suit with round boots and a helmet like a fishbowl.

His little rocket rumbled.

It roared.

It zoomed past clouds, past the Moon, and out into the deep, dark sparkle of space.

Oakley pressed his nose to the window.

Mars glowed ahead, red and dusty, like a giant rusty marble.

When Oakley landed, he took the tiniest step...
and boinged!

Mars has less gravity than Earth, so Oakley felt lighter there. His boots made soft, springy hops across the ground.

"Bouncy boots, curious eyes," Oakley giggled,
"what a rusty, sticky, sweet surprise!"

He did not know about the sticky part yet.

But Mars did.





Mars was quiet.

Very quiet.

No trees swishing. No bees buzzing. No dogs barking.
Just dusty wind whispering over red rocks.

Oakley remembered what he had been told:

"Mars is called the Red Planet because its dust is full
of rusty iron."

Oakley looked around.

Red hills. Red pebbles. Red cliffs.

"Rusty planet," he whispered.

Then his boot stuck to the ground.

"Squish," said Oakley.

He looked down.

Under his boot was a golden, gooey blob.

Oakley poked it with one gloved finger.

It stretched.

It shimmered.

It smelled...

sweet.

Oakley blinked. "That," he said slowly, "is definitely not ordinary Mars mud."

He looked up.

All across the red ground were globs and glimmers and dribbles of golden honey.

Heaps of it!





Oakley followed the honey trail over little rocks and through a shallow crater.

Ahead, he saw a giant mountain rising in the distance.

"That must be Olympus Mons," said his chirpy backpack computer. "The biggest volcano in the solar system."

Oakley stared. "The biggest?"

"The biggest," said the computer.

Oakley nodded seriously. "Mars does not do things halfway."

Then he slipped bottom-first into a honey puddle.

He slid past red stones.

He slid past sparkly pebbles.

He slid right into a hidden cave beneath the dusty
hill.

Inside, everything glowed warm and gold.

There were amber honeycombs stuck to the cave
walls. There were bright yellow flowers growing from
cracks in the rock. There were tiny floating
creatures with fluffy stripes and shimmering wings.

They were not bees.

They were space buzzblers.

And they were making honey.





The space buzzblers zipped in cheerful loops.

Bzzip! Bozzle! Bzzip!

They bounced from flower to flower, gathering sweet golden nectar and tucking it into wobbling honeycombs.

Oakley laughed. "You're honey makers!"

The buzzblers wiggled proudly.

Above the cave roof, evening came, and through a crack Oakley could see Mars's two little moons—Phobos and Deimos—peeking down like curious pebbles in the sky.

Mars, Oakley decided, was showing off now.

But then Oakley noticed something else.

Honey was spilling everywhere.

It dripped down rocks.

It plopped into puddles.

It oozed right across the cave floor.

The buzblers were trying very hard, but their combs
were too full and too wibbly.

"Ohhh," said Oakley. "You don't need a taster."

The buzblers paused.

"You need a helper."





Oakley got to work.

He stacked flat red stones into little shelves.

He used his lunchbox lids as honey trays.

He rolled round pebbles to guide the drips into neat
golden pools.

The buzblers buzzed excitedly and followed his lead.

Soon the cave was less splatty and more splendid.

Honey gleamed in tidy rows.

Flowers stood tall.

Nobody got stuck upside down.

"Well," said Oakley, "only a little stuck."

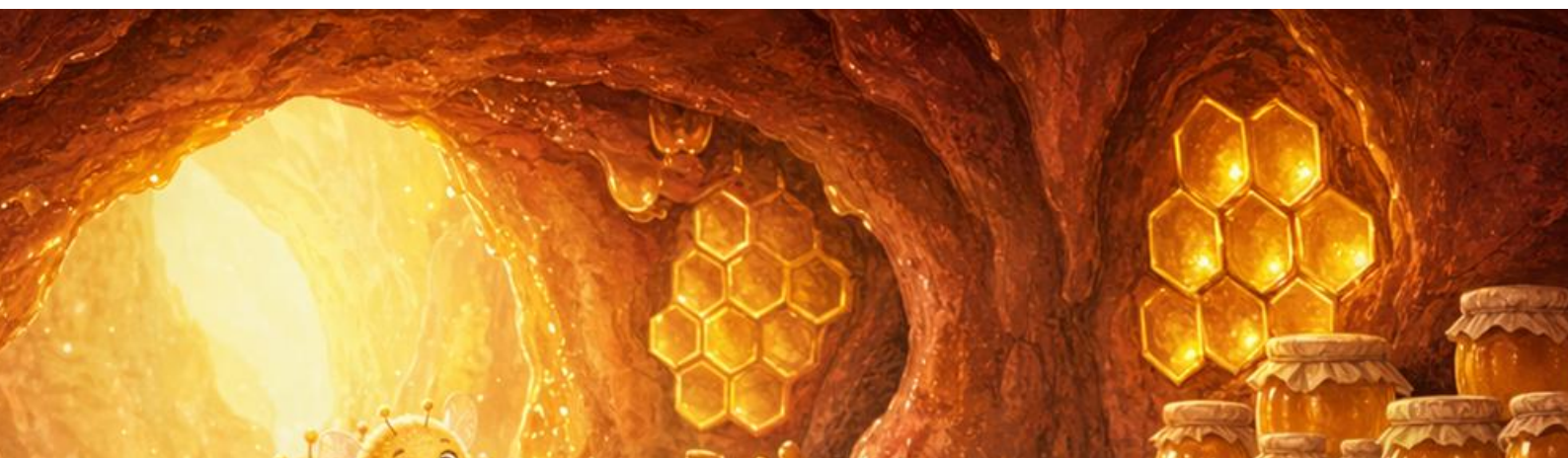
The buzblers thanked him in a grand buzzy parade.

Then their queen floated forward wearing a tiny
crown of petals.

She gave Oakley the smallest jar in the world, filled
with glowing Mars honey.

Just one spoonful, the backpack computer explained,
because Mars is cold and dry and delicate—and good
explorers take only a little and leave the wonder
behind.

Oakley nodded.





Back home on Earth, Oakley sat at breakfast with a
smile as wide as a rocket trail.

He drizzled one shining drop of Mars honey onto his
toast.

It tasted sunny and warm and just a tiny bit sparkly.

Oakley looked up at the sky and whispered,
"Bouncy boots, curious eyes—what a rusty, sticky,
sweet surprise."

And far, far away on the Red Planet, the space
buzzblers buzzed back,

"Bzzip!"

Because sometimes the biggest adventures begin
with one small step...
and one very sticky boot.



