

Section 12 - I Want my Daddy

When we left the crew quarters the next day, the dads were all waiting by the transporter, ready to say their last good-byes. Monsieur Martinet, Samson One and Eddie Xanadu with two security guards, one on each side of him. They chatted to their boys, rubbed their hair and punched them in the shoulder. Samson One shouted to me, "Look after my boy, now." I had one last crazy hopeful thought that my dad might show up with the others, but he didn't. At least I had Alan to talk to.

Dr. Drax gave us each a "lighter than air" ice lolly shaped like the *Dandelion*. "A last-minute treat." She smiled. "When Infinity Park opens we're going to sell these all over the world. Aren't they just delicious? Oh, by the way, I have to ask you all to hand in your new Draxphones. Just to protect the secrecy of the mission."

The first thing I did when I got onto the flight deck was shuffle Dad's St. Christopher out of my PiP and wedge it into the instrument panel. The whole rocket was throbbing, so St. Christopher looked as though he was doing some kind of mad dance. The other thing that I found in there was the little credit-card stress tester. As I picked it up it changed from blue to pink and a message appeared. Just one word: "Stressed."

The *Infinite Possibility* was two hundred feet high. At the top you could feel it swaying in the wind. And you could hear the wind rolling in and out of the pipes and engines, sobbing and sighing and generally sounding miserable.

As the Responsible Adult, I had to do all the last-minute checks. All the way through, Samson Two kept spouting space facts. I suppose it was his way of coping. "Do you know," he said, "that exposure to weightlessness makes you grow? Because there's less pressure on your spinal column, it relaxes and that makes you taller."

Just what I need, I thought. A few more inches. I said, "We could have a 'See How I Grow' chart, just to see if it's true. A kind of experiment." I made them all line up so I could mark their heights on the back of the safety door. Just to take their minds off things.

Max suddenly said, "I'm not frightened. When the going gets tough, the tough get going. Also, only the strong survive. And I am strong."

L) Why did Liam decide to have a "see-how-you-grow-chart" competition?

I) Dr Drax took away their Draxphones "Just to protect the secrecy of the mission." What do you think she was worried about?

V) What does the author mean when he described the wind in the pipes as 'sobbing and sighing'?

E) How would you feel in this situation?

GD) How do you think Liam felt when he was making the last minute safety checks as the "responsible adult?"

"Yes, but I'm not strong," said Hasan. "Does that mean I won't survive? Where's my daddy? I want my daddy."

Florida said, "Your dad's probably in jail by now," which didn't help.

The stress tester had changed from pink to scarlet. The message read, "See Doctor Immediately."

I said, "We're all worried about takeoff. Let's stop thinking about it. Let's think about inflating our escape suits. In fact, let's do it."

It hadn't just been the electric Ribena. I was right. It was distractingly funny. The kids all sat in their places. I made sure they were strapped in. Made sure the suits were on properly. Made sure they all remembered where the inflation buttons were. Then got into my own place and shouted, "Three, two, one..."

The suits began to hiss and grow, and we all swelled up like giggling tangerines again. The suits expanded into every corner of the module, with just our heads sticking out. Then the countdown started:

"Twenty...nineteen...eighteen..."

"I need a wee," said Hasan.

"Then do one. You've got your special suit on, don't forget."

"Pete Conrad wet himself just before *Gemini 5* took off," said Florida.

No one else heard her say this because there was a sound like mountains snoring. Everything shook like the worst earthquake film you've ever seen. Our stomachs dropped to the floor. The rest of ourselves dropped to the floor. And suddenly it felt like there really *was* a Giant Invisible Dad, but he was furious and he was crushing us between the palms of his hands. And we could do nothing because our arms wouldn't move. We couldn't shout. Because our faces wouldn't work.

And I remember thinking, If this is what it takes to get us up there, what is it going to take to get us down again?

ANSWERS:

- (L) Liam decided to have a "see-how-you-grow-chart" to distract the children from worrying about take-off.
- (I) I think Dr Drax was worried that one of them would send messages and videos about the mission which could end up being publicised.
- (V) The author was personifying the wind as the wind was making winning sounds that sounded miserable