

Section 13 - Themoonyouidiot

Imagine you've scrunched up a piece of paper in one hand, then you open your hand and the paper opens up like a flower. That's what takeoff feels like.

But soon we began to level off. Florida said, "Are we there yet?"

Then Max said, "Are we there yet?"

And soon they were all saying, "Are we there yet? Are we there yet?"

I tried to shush them in case there was an important message from DraxControl. Then there was a *ding dong* sound in my headset and a nice reassuring voice in my ear said, "Hello, Mr. Digby. My name is Li. I'm your flight controller for today."

"Nice to meet you, Li."

"You too. Any questions, just ask me. Right now you can relax. If you like, you can deflate your takeoff outfits and enjoy the weightless environment."

I said, "Crew, you may now deflate your escape suits." They all yelled, "Yay!" and I felt not just dadly but actually captainish.

We started to float around the cabin, propelled by the air from the deflating suits. In zero gravity we really were like a family of novelty balloons.

Last time we were weightless it had only lasted a couple of minutes. So this time we bobbed about enjoying it, waiting for it to stop. But it didn't stop. Max did ask me if it was time to start our first task. I said, "Soon." I was too happy being a balloon to bother being the grown-up just then.

A few minutes later the reassuring voice spoke in my ear again. "Mr. Digby," it said, "we have a glitch. The release for the protective shield hasn't worked. There is an override button on the multifunctional display. It's a black button, in the top right-hand corner. Can you see it?"

I could.

"If you could press that when I tell you."

This was completely cosmic. Something had gone wrong and I was putting it right. I didn't mention it to the others. I didn't want to panic them. The voice said, "Now." I pressed the button.

There was a sound like a door shutting somewhere far away. The capsule

L) What was the view that Li told Liam to enjoy?

I) How did Liam feel when there was a "glitch" on take-off that he had to correct?

V) What does it mean if something is 'propelled'?

E) Would you have allowed the other children to complete the first task? Why/why not?

GD) How do you think the children were feeling when the rocket stopped spinning?

rocked a little bit. Then everything went bright.

Our protective outer panels had blown away. Now we had windows. We could see the rejected panels tumbling away from us into space.

"Great job, Mr. Digby," Li's voice crackled in my ear.

"Every mission has one glitch. You've just had yours. Now take it easy and enjoy the view."

The view by the way was Earth.

Not all of it, not to start with. Less than a quarter of it. We were still so close that that quarter filled the window. Because we were high up, I thought we'd be looking down. But really it felt more like looking up. And all we could see was blue. It was completely the bluest ever blue, except for bands of cloud and veins of green on the surface of the sea. We were looking at the southern Pacific.

Max was thrilled by the rejected safety panels. "Look at them go!" he yelled. "They're like torpedoes!"

I said, "I did that."

"What?"

"When DraxControl tried it, it didn't work. I had to press a special button."

"Did you really," said Florida, adding, "Dad?"

"Next time," growled Max, "it's my turn."

"No," said Hasan, "next time it's my turn."

In their heads we were an X-Wing Fighter and the Earth was the Death Star. In all our heads the whole thing was so cosmic it had to be a game.

I discovered that if I pushed my feet against the wall, I could flit clear across the cabin, spin round and kick off again from the opposite wall, like Spider-man flying around New York. Then Florida popped up in front of me, making a buzzing sound with her mouth, and miming a few passes with an imaginary lightsaber.

Looking back on it, I should have focused more on being dadly at this point. Because that's when DraxControl came on, asking for us to move on to our task. "You have a two-minute window to complete the task. Please commence now."

All we had to do was press the right buttons in the right order, then we'd be set for the trip home. Hasan and Max were still arguing about it. Samson Two put his hand up and said, "Please, sir, I'd also like to press the button," which was enough to get both Hasan and Max shouting at him. Maybe I should have just done it myself, but I was loving being a floaty Super Mario Matrix Jedi Power Ranger. Which is why I said, "Let's settle it with light-sabers!" and took a buzzing swipe at them. They ducked and then bobbed up again, looking a bit confused. I realize now that they'd probably never seen *Star Wars*. They'd definitely never seen a dad trying to make a crucial life-or-

death decision with an imaginary lightsaber.

I shouted, "LUKE, I AM YOUR FATHER."

Florida thought this was hilarious and shouted, "You are NOT my father."

"And you are not Luke."

We were buzzing and laughing and laughing and buzzing. Then Max noticed Hasan was closing in on the buttons. He yelled, "Hey! He's cheating!" and went after him. Samson Two dived in underneath them. Next thing, they were pulling and shoving each other in front of the multifunctional displays.

And the next thing after that: a long screeching noise. Then a jolt, as though we'd been caught on a bungee. Then we spun round. And round. And round. And over and round. Fast. And random. Like the cage of the Cosmic.

And a light strobed off and on and off like blue lightning.

And somewhere in the middle of it the voice of DraxControl was shouting in my ear.

Then it stopped.

Then it shouted.

Then it stopped again.

The Earth vanished.

And then came back.

Then vanished.

And then came back.

And then we stopped rolling.

And Earth was gone.

No one said a word.

We drifted over to the window and pressed our faces against the glass, looking for some sign of it.

It was very quiet. And very dark. And very, very scary.

ANSWERS:

- (L) The view Li told Liam to enjoy was the view of the earth.
- (I) Liam was excited to do something when there was a glitch, I know this because he described it as "Cosmic".
- (V) Pushed/ moved forward with force.