

Section 16 – An Unscheduled Diversion

The real problem was Max. It wasn't the moon that bothered him; it was the *Dandelion*. "Our mission was to decouple this module, to put it in orbit. We must do it now."

I explained that we couldn't do it right this minute because we had a problem.

"Not to release it means we've failed. Failure is not an option."

"We haven't failed. We just haven't succeeded—yet. We'll press the green button when we can."

"But Dr. Drax said—"

"Dr. Drax didn't know."

"She knows more than you do. I am now going to press the green button," he said.

I ran after him. Weightless running isn't exactly speedy. It felt like one of those dreams where you're trying to get away from mad dogs but your feet are sort of stuck to the floor. In the end I sort of toppled forward into an involuntary somersault, just caught him with my foot and sent him spinning back toward the seats.

I grabbed the hatch myself and said, "Listen, we've got a plan and it's a plan about..." What was it about? "Florida is going to tell you what it's about."

Delegation, see. Very important with teenagers.

"I haven't got any plan," said Florida.

Delegation and affirmation.

"You've got a brilliant plan, Florida. About trajectories, remember?"

"Oh. The free-return trajectory," said Florida. "Like on *Apollo 13*. You must remember *Apollo 13*?"

"The brilliant failure," said Samson Two. "The lunar mission that was supposedly abandoned because of a faulty oxygen tank." I didn't notice him saying "supposedly" at the time, but I certainly noticed it ten minutes later.

She explained the whole thing to them about going round the back of the moon until we were facing the right way, and she pointed out that it was going to be easy for us. It was going to be a ride, in fact. "On *Apollo 13*, all they had was this tiny module and it was really cramped and there wasn't enough oxygen or power. We've got this whole solar-powered *Dandelion* and it's got plenty of room and loads of food. So...it's a picnic really. By comparison. The *Dandelion* is meant for space travel but not reentry. The command module is meant for reentry but not really for space travel. So we use the *Dandelion* to get us back to Earth orbit. Then we all go back into the command module and use that to get back to Earth. Understand?"

Everyone said yes. What was there not to understand? But Max said, "Yes, I understand. And now I am going to press the green button."

"What?! Have you been listening to anything we've been saying?"

"Yes, but I listened to Dr. Drax more."

"Anyway, you can't press the button," said Hasan, "because it's my turn."

And the two of them hurled themselves toward the hatch.

I shouted, "No one is pressing the green button! We'll all be killed."

Samson Two said, "Of course we won't be killed. You don't believe we're really in space, surely?"

Everyone stopped and stared at him.

"Of course we are not really in space. This is a trick Dr. Drax has played on us. If we open the door, we will find that we are in the middle of Infinity Park, same as always. In fact, I am going to open it now."

He kicked his feet on the back of the seat and floated off toward the airlock.

I was going to go after him when I realized I had to go after Max too. My brain tried to choose between being shot out of a spaceship and accelerating to death, or being set adrift for ever and ever in a space ice-cream van.

L) What does Max want to do to prevent the mission being a failure?

I) What do you think is going to happen next? Why?

V) What does 'delegation' mean?

E) How would you distract the children?

GD) If you were Liam, how would you have tried to stop the children from taking action which could be dangerous?

In that horrible moment I realized that the real danger wasn't the infinite vacuum of space, or the six million possible flaws in the rocket. The real danger was the children.

Remember, a teenager is barely in control of anything—not even his or her own body. You are in control of everything. If your teens are reacting irrationally or disproportionately to some little thing, it's up to you to try to work out what's really upsetting them.
from Talk to Your Teen

Max was upset because he's very fixated on success. To him, being halfway to the moon in an ice-cream van meant we were failures. He thought that if we jettisoned the *Dandelion* we'd be winners again.

As for Samson Two, he was upset because he'd totally flipped out.

Which is understandable. If I didn't have to look after the others, I'd flip out too.

All I had to do to sort Max out was show him that getting ourselves home in one piece after all the problems we'd had would be an even greater achievement than just doing what Dr. Drax had told us to. So I said to him, "You know, Max, after all our problems, getting home in one piece will be an even greater achievement than just doing everything that Dr. Drax said."

He said, "All our problems are Hasan's fault."

"No," said Hasan, "they're all your fault."

"You pressed the wrong button. Now I'm going to press the right one."

"I didn't press any button: you did."

"No, I didn't press any button. You did."

I said, "I'm the DADDY and I DECIDE who presses the buttons. And I have decided that whoever WINS my game presses it. WHEN I SAY SO."

"Wins?" said Max, suddenly interested. Like I said, every monster has its soft zone. Winning is Max's. "What game?"

Hmmm. Yes. What game?

It turns out that Hasan had a board game in his PiP. "This game," he said, "taught me to love money. And that's why I love it." The game was Monopoly. There really is no getting away from it. I suppose that's why it's called Monopoly.

Low-gravity Monopoly is better than the Monopoly you play round the kitchen table, in that it lasts only a few minutes. If you've got a magnetic travel set—like Hasan's—the pieces will stay on the board. And if you carefully keep hold of the money, that's okay too. The problem is the dice. You can throw the dice, but they won't actually land. They just drift off in random directions, dipping and swooping like genetically modified sugar cubes. And they never stop spinning.

The endless spinning really interested Samson Two. "Fascinating," he said. "There must be some way to harness the energy these dice create by spinning like this." Then, just in case I was starting to feel a bit relaxed, he added, "I wonder how Dr. Drax has achieved this effect. It really does feel as though we are weightless. You could almost believe you were really in space."

We did try throwing the dice on to a loop of Scotch tape that we stuck to one of the seats, but it didn't really work, and during the arguments about whether it was a six or not I spotted Max heading back to the command module.

I shouted, "What about rock, paper, scissors?"

None of them—except Florida—had ever played that. They were completely interested in it for about twenty minutes. The first ten minutes were taken up discussing *why* paper beats rock and whether anyone would ever really try to use scissors to cut a rock. I had a round with Max in which he played dynamite and I played scissors. Then in the next round, he played paper and I played scissors again. Scissors wins.

He said, "You played scissors last time and I destroyed them with my dynamite. How can you still have scissors when I destroyed your scissors?"

"Well, they're not destroyed forever. Just until the next round."

This game was obviously too abstract for Max. He went very red and started yelling, "This is madness. One of them must be destroyed or how can there be a winner? You can only have a winner if something is DESTROYED!"

When he shouted "destroyed" like that I nearly panicked. But I didn't. I just said, "Hide-and-seek, anyone?"

ANSWERS:

1) Max wants to push the green button so that they have

completed their mission.

2) Giving jobs or tasks to other people when you are in charge/telling others to do something.