

COsmic

WEEK 1 DAY 3

it's one giant

leap for all

boy-kind

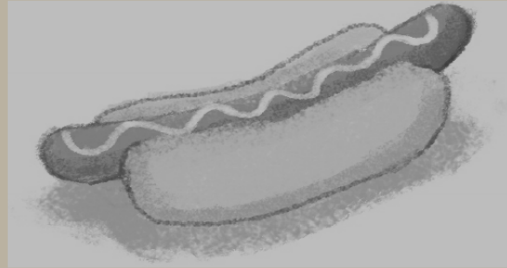
# READ CHAPTER 4 ' *NEARLY SHAVED MYSELF TO DEATH*'

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As you read, jot down interesting information  
about Liam in your books.



## I NEARLY SHAVED MYSELF TO DEATH



Even though I could barely see the Premature Facial Hair, once I knew it was there, I couldn't stop thinking about it. It was ticklish and it was tempting to stroke it. Stroking it made other people notice it and when other people noticed it they tended to shout, 'Wolverine!' and worse. Which is why I decided to get rid of it.

I slashed at the brown candyfloss with Dad's razor, which did get rid of it. Sadly it also got rid of a lot of blood.

Sheets of blood just sort of fell out of my face. I wasn't quite sure what the procedure was so I squashed a towel into my chin, prayed that I wouldn't die and carried on squashing and praying for about an hour. I was starting to think that maybe I was already dead when Mum called me for supper. When I went down she said, 'What happened to you? You look like you've boiled your face.'

Dad said, 'He's been shaving.'

'What?' said Mum. 'He can't shave! He's too young to shave! He's *much* too young to shave.'

'Well, he's definitely too young to have a beard,' said Dad. And he showed me how to shave in a less life-threatening manner.

'The only thing is,' he said, 'now you've started, you'll have to carry on. The hairs will get harder and harder the more you shave them.'

Mum said, 'Liam, you've got to stop growing so fast. I'm not ready to lose my little boy yet.'

Mum got so worked up about all this that she took me to see the doctor. The doctor said there was nothing to worry about. That made Mum really worried. She asked to see the specialist.

'Specialist in what?'

'Well, you read about these people, don't you, who grow up too fast? Their hair starts falling out when they're teenagers, then they get wrinkles and they look like old men but they're only twenty.'

She'd never mentioned these people to me before. She must have noticed my look of absolute terror because she said, 'They're very rare. But they do exist. You read about them on the Internet, don't you?'

I was relieved when the doctor said, 'No, I don't think I have read about them, to be honest. I could send you to see a bone specialist at the children's hospital.'

At the hospital they gave me scans, blood tests and an 'I've been brave' sticker. They took me to see a specialist, then a special specialist. They both said that I was normal. Completely normal. Extra normal. Abnormally normal.

But tall.

'He's just a little boy,' said Mum. 'He's growing up too quickly.'

'We all feel like that about our children, Mrs Digby. The important thing is to remember that he is still a child. Even though he looks like a grown-up. Just because he can't shop in the children's clothes section any more, that doesn't mean his childhood is over. Boys grow at different speeds. Particularly at this point in their lives. You might go back after the summer, Liam, and find that everyone's had a bit of a spurt and you're not even the tallest in the class.'

'D'you know, that makes sense,' said Mum. 'His dad was tall at primary, and now look at him. He's well below average height.'

'In fact,' said Dad, 'I'm slightly above average.'

**'In fact you are not.'**

**'Only very slightly – but very very definitely – I am above average.'**

**'We'll talk about this another day,'** said Mum, which is what she always says when she wants you to shut up.

**The special specialist was partly right about the growing spurts. Nearly everyone had one over the summer.**

**Including me.**

**When Mum wanted to mark my height on the See How I Grow chart in the kitchen, she had to get a chair to reach the top of my head. 'Oh,' she said, 'you've had a spurt!'**

**And Dad said, 'Seven inches is not a spurt. Seven inches is a mutation.'**

**On my very first day at Waterloo High, I was the tallest person on the lower-school site.**

**The new uniform Mum had bought at the beginning of the summer didn't fit any more and they had to send off for an extra-large lower-school blazer. I got a special dispensation to wear my own clothes for the first half-term.**

**When we went to get my travel pass for the bus to school, the woman in the office wouldn't believe I was school age so we had to go home and get my birth certificate. And then the next morning, when I showed it to the bus driver, she wouldn't believe it was mine, and I had to get off the bus and text Mum, and she came down and explained to the driver of the next bus that I was unusually tall for my age.**

**'It's not the height, love,'** said the driver. **'It's the stubble.'**

**Mum said, 'Am I going to have to do this every morning?'**

**'Only till we all get used to him.'**

**In the end, Mum sent off for a passport for me. I kept it in my pocket in case I got questioned again. Dad said, 'That'll keep you out of trouble.'**

**How wrong can a person be, by the way?**

**Dad also gave me his old mobile phone, so that if he ever lost me again – like in Enchantment Land – he would be able to find me. His phone's got Drax-**

**World on it. In case you don't know, that's this cosmic application that shows you your present location, directions to anywhere from anywhere, and also live satellite photographs of anything in the world. You can use it to look at volcanoes erupting. Tidal waves. Forest fires. Anything. Dad uses it to make sure the traffic is flowing smoothly on the bypass.**

**That first day at Waterloo High, I was on DraxWorld all the way to school on the 61. I used it to look at theme parks and thrill rides. I found Oblivion in Alton Towers, Space Mountain in Eurodisney, the Terror in Camelot, Thunder Dolphin, Air . . . all of them. As the bus was crawling along Waterloo Road I typed in Waterloo, wondering if I'd be able to get a satellite view of me on the bus. Instead the screen filled up with ten thousand options. There were Waterloos everywhere. Waterloo Station in London. Waterloo the port in Sierra Leone. Waterloo in Belgium. You could go round the whole planet, just jumping from Waterloo to Waterloo.**

**I found Waterloos with waterfalls, Waterloos in the jungle, Waterloos in snowy mountains and Waterloos with sandy white beaches. I couldn't figure out why anyone who wanted to live in a Waterloo would think – yes, Waterloo, but not the one with the big beach, or the one in the limitless white wastes of Siberia; no, the one with the flyover, handy for the New Strand Shopping Centre.**

**DraxWorld gives you directions to anywhere, so it's not like it would be hard. If you were a proper grown-up and not just a stubbly boy – if you were my dad, for instance – all you'd have to do is fill your car with petrol, turn left, turn right, go straight on and next thing you know: white beaches, snowy mountains, coral reefs. Truly, grown-upness is wasted on grown-ups.**

**When I got to school, Mrs Sass (the head) saw me in reception and said, 'Ah . . . Tom?'**

**'Liam.'**

**'Yes, of course. I'm Lorraine – come this way.'**

**I remember thinking, Fancy her telling me her first name. Isn't that friendly? Mrs Kendall never told us her first name when we were in Joan of Arc.**

So 'Lorraine' took me off to the staffroom and started telling me the names of all the teachers. They all shook hands with me and said they were pleased to meet me. I was thinking, What a polite school! I wonder if they do this to every new kid. It must take ages. Then Lorraine said, 'Everybody, this is Tom – sorry, Liam – Middleton, our new head of media studies.' And she was pointing at me.

I know I should've put her right there and then, but someone gave me a mug of coffee and a custard cream and sat me down in a nice big easy chair. So I thought, I'll tell her later when I've eaten the biscuit.

Then Lorraine said, 'We've got assembly this morning. I'll bring you up on to the stage and introduce you to the whole school. Do you have anything you'd like me to say about you – like what football team you support, or any special interests?'

I suppose that would have been a good time to say, 'Very interestingly I'm not a teacher. I'm a Year Seven.' But she just seemed so happy, so I said, 'I like massively multiplayer online computer games.'

She looked a bit blank.

'Like World of Warcraft. You know, where you have an avatar, and your avatar has skills and goes on quests?'

'Ah,' said Lorraine, 'skills. We are great believers in promoting skills here at Waterloo High.'

'I've got a lot of skills,' I said. 'Of course, some of them aren't that useful in real life – like dragon taming. Some of them are illegal – like knife-throwing. I think that's illegal.'

'I think it probably is.'

'I did try to persuade the head in my last school to start a World of Warcraft club, but she just looked at me like I was an idiot.'

Lorraine looked at me like I was an idiot.

Then the bell went. 'We'd better go through to assembly. Maybe you should just introduce yourself. Don't worry about being interesting.'

So that's how I ended up on the stage, standing just behind Lorraine while she talked to the whole school. There were about eight people in the front

row who knew me because they'd been at Joan of Arc Primary too, including Florida Kirby who kept waving and making faces. Lorraine said everyone was welcome and she hoped everyone had had a good summer and then something about a new registration procedure and then she said, 'And now I'd like to introduce you to a new member of staff. He's going to be teaching media studies and he'll be form tutor for Class Nine Mandela. This is Mr Middleton . . .'

And she pointed at me.

I stepped up to the microphone and said, 'Thanks, Lorraine – sorry, Mrs Sass.' But everyone in the hall was already muttering, 'Lorraine . . . her name's Lorraine . . .'

and Lorraine was looking cross.

All these faces were looking up at me. Part of me was thinking, I really should think more about the consequences of my actions. Then this wouldn't happen to me. But another part of me was thinking, This is good.

I said, 'Morning, everybody.'

And everybody said, 'Morning, sir.'

Sir!

I said, 'Has anyone here been to Waterloo near Liverpool?'

Twelve hundred hands shot up and waggled in the air like a salute. Looking out at them, I felt like the bad emperor in *Star Wars*. I took a breath and said, 'Has anyone been to Waterloo in Belgium, scene of the original Battle of Waterloo in 1815?' No one. I said, 'Siberia. Siberia is as big as Europe. It's got the largest freshwater lake in the world. A lake so big it has its own species of dolphin. The ice is so thick that the railway runs over it. It's also got a town called Waterloo. Has anyone here been to Waterloo, Siberia?'

No one put their hand up.

'Why not?'

No one answered, but they all squirmed in their seats, as though going to Siberia was homework and they hadn't done it.

'Waterloo in Sierra Leone?'

No one had.

'Sierra Leone has lush rainforests and amazing history. Anyone?'

No one.

'Why!?'

They all squirmed again. 'Why have we all been to the Waterloo with the bypass and the shopping precinct when none of us has ever been to the Waterloo with the waterfall, the Waterloo in the jungle, the Waterloo by the frozen lake? Why? These places – they're not in Narnia. You don't have to find a magic wardrobe to get to them. They're not in Azeroth. You don't have to create an avatar and climb inside a computer. They're real places. You can go there by bus. Sometimes it'll take a lot of buses. But they're just there. They're part of your world.'

Someone shouted, 'Yes!'

I was amazed to see it wasn't one of the children; it was Lorraine. I realize now that she thought I was being a bit metaphorical. She thought I was going to say something about how education opens up new worlds for you or something. But I didn't. I said, 'Let's go!' No one moved. They all thought I was being metaphorical too. I said, 'Come on. What are we doing here? Let's go. Come on. Follow me.'

I don't know where that last bit came from. It just came out. It was part of the flow of the thing. I walked out down the middle of the hall towards the doors at the back. It took a minute, but somebody followed me. Then someone else. Then someone else and someone else and everyone followed me out of the hall, through the lower-school exit and into the playground.

The sun was shining. The birds were singing. I walked up to the gates and pushed. Nothing happened. Waterloo High is a high-security school. The gates are locked at 9 a.m. and no one can get in or out without a swipe card. That's why there was a man in a leather jacket standing on the other side of the gates, talking into the intercom.

'I'm the new head of media studies,' he was saying.

And over the intercom the secretary was saying, 'I don't understand. You're already here. You're taking assembly.'

By then Lorraine was at the gate. She looked at the actual new head of media studies. Then she looked at me and she hissed, 'Who are you?'

I did try to explain it all to her. I said, 'I'm really sorry, Lorraine.'

'Don't call me Lorraine any more. It's Mrs Sass.'

'Yes, Mrs Sass.'

'Why didn't you tell me your real name?'

**'I did.'**

**'But . . . well, you should have more sense, a big lad like you.'**

**When I got home Mum said, 'So how did it go? First day at big school?'**

**I said, 'All right.'**

**'Is that all you've got to say? All right?'**

**'No.'**

**'What else?'**

**'I'm starving.' Sometimes it's better not to go into too much detail.**

What made chapter 4 so funny?

Can you think of any other stories where there has been a case of mistaken identity?

If you were in Liam's position, at which point would you have explained ?

GENERATE A LIST OF ALL THE THINGS THAT HAVE HAPPENED TO LIAM SO FAR AS A RESULT OF HIM LOOKING OLDER.

Example:

1. He was able to ride 'The Cosmic' several times.
2. He has cut himself shaving

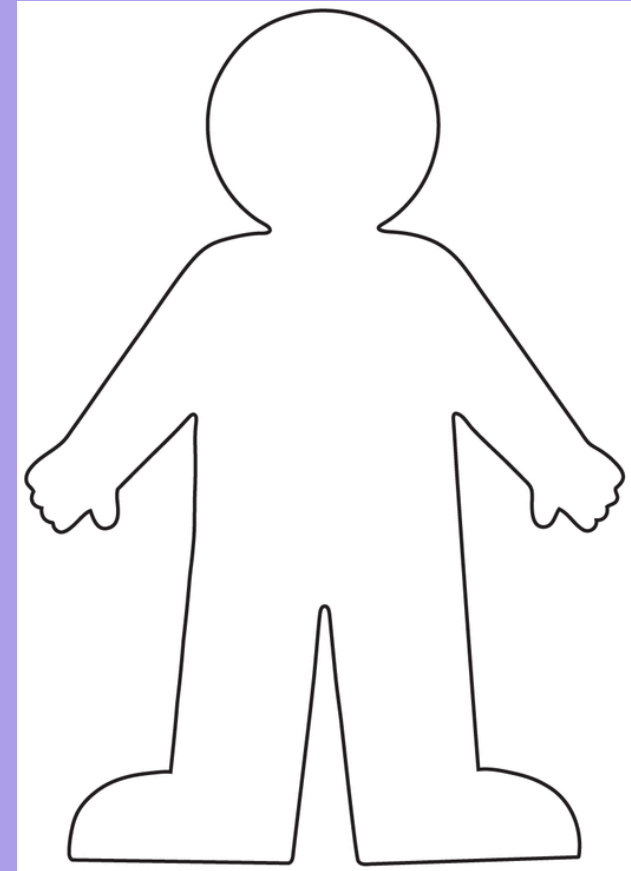
You may want to read the first part of chapter 4 again. Refer to the notes you made as you read the chapter.

# TASK:

On the outside of the shape, write all of the positives about looking older.

On the inside of the shape write the negatives about looking older.

Your work should be full of ideas, clear and neatly presented.





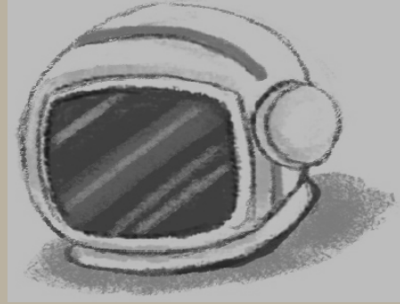
This is Bootle, Liverpool where Liam lives. What can you infer about this area?

Liverpool is a city in the north of England. People from Liverpool speak with a strong Liverpudlian accent, often called a 'scouse' accent.



STARTER: READ THE FIRST PAGE OF CHAPTER 5 '*MY  
VISIBLE FRIEND.*'

## MY VISIBLE FRIEND



There were about ten million meetings and letters home about my ‘peculiar and disruptive’ behaviour at school assembly. Mrs Sass decided that the problem was I had ‘poor social skills’ because I was an only child. ‘He doesn’t mix with the other children. He’s an isolated figure on the playground.’

Wouldn’t you be an isolated figure if people followed you round shouting, ‘Sir, sir!’ or, ‘Wolverine!’ or yelling, ‘Hello up there!’ a million times a day? I mean, what did they want me to do? Shrink?

Dad said, ‘You need to try and make some friends.’

‘I’ve got loads of friends. I’ve got twenty guild members just waiting to do my bidding.’

‘I’m talking about real life, not computers.’

‘I don’t accept that distinction.’

‘That’s exactly my point, said Dad. ‘You need a friend who is visible to the naked eye.’

The point about World of Warcraft is that the other players don’t know how tall or short or fat or thin you are, they just accept you for what you are – namely, in my case, a highly skilled Night Elf with healing powers.

This wasn’t enough for Mum and Dad. So they sent me to the Little Stars drama group. Every Saturday morning. Lisa – the girl who ran it – didn’t

# WHY DO OTHER CHILDREN SHOUT THESE THINGS TO LIAM?

Wolverine!!

Sir! Sir!

Hello up there!

Who does Liam say his friends are when asked by his Dad?

CONTINUE READING CHAPTER 5 UP TO *'AND SHE GAVE THEM A CHOMP BAR EACH'*

**'He's twelve,' said Dad.**

**'What? Mental age?'**

**'No. Physical age. And mental, I suppose. He's twelve – mentally, physically, emotionally, the lot. He's just a bit tall. And stubbly.'**

**'Oh!' She looked like she didn't believe him. I showed her my passport.**

**'He's a clever lad,' said Dad. 'He's in Gifted and Talented.'**

**'He's not exactly a *little* star though, is he?' said Lisa. 'I suppose if we did *The Big Friendly Giant*, he'd be perfect. So –' she smiled – 'why don't we do that then?'**

**So we did. Florida Kirby was already a fully paid-up Little Star. Lisa gave her the part of the giant's little friend, Sophie.**

**'The Sophie in the play,' Florida said, 'was named after Sophie Dahl, the supermodel. So when I play Sophie, I'm playing a young supermodel.' Florida always has to be a celebrity. When Lisa made us do a role play in which we had to act like we'd seen a ghost, Florida saw the ghost of Britney Spears. When we had to pretend to be a dog, she was Madonna's dog.**

**As we walked home through the Strand the first day Florida kept practising her lines on me. The lines were mostly things like, 'You're huge!' 'Goodness, you're tall!' or 'You're proper gigantic!' and she said them all in her best Little Stars loud-and-clear voice. I sat down on one of the benches by the water feature, just to be a bit less tall for a while.**

**'If we sit here,' said Florida, 'Security will come and chase us. They hate kids hanging round this bench. They hate kids really.'**

**But Security didn't come and chase us. In fact, one of them walked past us and nodded at me.**

**'What's going on?' said Florida.**

**'They think,' I explained, 'that you are with me. And that I am your dad.'**

**'No. You're kidding! Do they? Do they, honest?'**

**'Yes.'**

**'But this is brilliant.'**

**And she was right. We could do anything, so we did. That Saturday and every Saturday from then on we played on the lifts, messed about in the**

photo booth, went into Total Games and tried out all the new releases. We even went into Newz and Booze, which is 'Strickly no unaccompanid children under eny sercumstance's.' Florida loved it in there because she could browse through all the celebrity magazines while I bought a newspaper to make myself look more dadly. Sometimes she used to give me a pound before we went inside so I could buy her chocolate.

I said, 'Buy your own chocolate.'

'Girls do not buy their own chocolate when they're out with their dads. Dads buy it for them.'

She even tried to get me to buy her cigarettes.

'Dads don't buy their children cigarettes.'

'My actual dad would. He'd do anything for me. He's going to buy me a pony.'

'Ask your actual dad then.'

Once I went in there without her and the woman behind the counter said, 'Where's your little princess today then?'

How much did Florida love *that* when I told her. 'Princess is brilliant. You have to call me Princess.'

'I don't think so.'

'Why not? My dad calls me Princess all the time.'

'We'll talk about this another time,' I said.

'Whoa, you really sounded like a dad when you said that.'

'Thanks.'

Another time she brought her little sister Ibiza with her. 'Oh, another one,' said the woman in Newz and Booze. 'I didn't know you had two. I hope you don't mind me saying this, but it's lovely to see a young dad spending time with his girls the way you do. And they're both a credit to you. Aren't you lucky girls to have such a good dad?'

And she gave them a Chomp bar each.

It was a golden time and maybe we should have stopped there. But if you play a lot of games, then the moment you get good at something, that feels like Level One. You start itching to level up.

What are your impressions of Florida? Why?

How have Florida and Liam been spending their time?



The shop assistant says *'Strickly no unaccompanid children under eny sercumstance's'*  
Why did the author write it this way?

Why might he author have chosen the names Florida and Ibiza to be sisters?

CONTINUE READING UP TO *FLORIDA SAID, "THAT WOULD BE GOING TO FAR WOULDN'T IT?"*



Liverpool Waterfront



Liverpool Porsche Centre

Read to the end of the chapter

What might Florida and Liam do next?  
What has made you think that?

One day Lisa had to finish early because her dad was ill. We could have spent the time in the Strand doing all the usual things. Or we could have used the extra time to look for Level Two.

The 61 stops right outside the parish hall and goes all the way to Liverpool's celebrated city centre. So there it was. The way to Level Two.

Being a grown-up in the Strand was fun. Being a grown-up in Liverpool's celebrated city centre was totally cosmic. The moment we got off the bus a woman in a white miniskirt and a red sash came up, said hello, and gave me a free sample of a new yoghurt drink. 'Here,' she said, 'have a couple more for your little girl.' We hadn't even finished drinking them when another woman gave me a free newspaper and another one – in a trouser suit – asked me if I had five minutes to answer some questions.

The questions were mostly about how we had got to town and what our favourite shops were. Then there were a few about what year I was born and what I did for a living. I gave her my dad's birthday and told her I was a taxi driver. She said, 'Would you like to come in here with me and taste a new sandwich spread we're developing and on which we'd value your opinion?'

She took us to a really nice room and gave us free sandwiches and fizzy water. Afterwards we had to fill in questionnaires and we were allowed to keep the pens. Florida asked for more sandwiches. The woman in the trouser suit laughed and said, 'I guess that's all the feedback we need.'

'So can we have some more then?'

'No.'

Which is how we ended up near the world-famous waterfront, looking in the window of the Porsche showroom. Florida said, 'That would be going too far, wouldn't it?'

'Let's find out.' I was getting that Crispy New World feeling again.

It was my first time in a car showroom. I'd never seen a car on a carpet before. It was like being in the living room of the Posh Car Family. The cars looked smaller and glossier than they usually do. A man in a suit saw us come in and said, 'Be with you in a minute, sir. Help yourself to coffee.'

There was a coffee machine and a plate of biscuits – disappointingly mostly plain digestives. Florida nabbed the only Bourbon. Then she walked around dropping crumbs on their carpet. There was one really nice, sleek-looking car. Florida said, ‘Take a picture of me with your mobile.’

‘Why?’

‘That’s what dads do.’

So she leaned on the bonnet and smiled while I took her picture. Straight-away the man in the suit was standing next to us. ‘I admire your taste,’ he said.

Florida said, ‘This is the Boxter. Wayne Rooney’s got two like this, in red.’

‘He has indeed,’ said the man in the suit, ‘and he bought them both here. You’re a very well-informed little girl.’ Then he asked me how old she was.

I said, ‘She’s eleven.’ Then I thought I should say something grown-up so I said, ‘I’m not sure about this colour.’

‘There’s a red one like Wayne’s over here. Come and have a look.’

So I did.

‘I’ve got to agree with you. A car like this was born to be red.’ It was nice of him to agree with me even though I didn’t remember saying that. ‘She costs a bit . . .’

‘I know.’ The price was written on the windscreen. It took up most of the windscreen.

‘. . . but she’s worth it.’

‘Yeah. Oh. Yeah.’

‘Are you looking to buy or just looking?’

Yes, I know what I should’ve said. But ‘to buy’ sounded older.

‘Would you be bringing your old car in, in part exchange?’

‘No. No, I like my old car. I’ll probably keep my old car. It’s a good car.’

‘I know the score. The other one’s a family car. That’s for when you’re being a proper grown-up dad. This is for when you’re playing racing cars. Isn’t that right?’ He winked at Florida. ‘Men, eh? We never grow up, do we?’

‘He definitely hasn’t,’ said Florida.

‘Well,’ said the man in the suit, ‘let’s pretend we have grown up. Just for a minute. What’s your income?’

‘I’m not sure. Varies really.’

**'You're right. You are so right. I'm too nosy. I mean you haven't even said you want her yet, have you?'**

**'No. No, I haven't.'**

**'I'm always giving it the hard sell. A car like this, you should let it sell itself.'**

**That's when Florida said, 'Can we sit in it then?'**

**He looked at her for a second and she said, 'Please?'**

**'Go on then.'**

**We both got in. She whispered, 'You should've told me to say please.'**

**'You did say please.'**

**'Yeah, but you should've told me before I got the chance. That's more dad-like.'**

**'OK.'**

**The man in the suit looked in, winked at Florida and said, 'Comfy?'**

**'Yeah,' said Florida.**

**I said, 'Yeah, what?'**

**'Yeah, thanks.'**

**And then the man handed me the keys. 'Go on,' he said. 'You know you're dying to. Just nudge her out on to the forecourt. See how she handles.' Before I could say anything he was asking the other salesmen to move the other cars out of the way and open the big doors so I could take the car outside.**

**'I'll need to push the seat back a bit for you. You're a big lad, aren't you?'**

**I could've said, Yes, I am a big lad but that doesn't mean I'm old. I didn't say that. I said, 'Thanks,' and added, 'mate.'**

**'Have you got your licence on you, Mr . . .?'**

**'Er . . . Digby. No. No, I haven't.' I tried not to sound too happy about this.**

**'That's all right, Mr Digby. I trust you. Thousands wouldn't.'**

**He crouched down next to me and gave me a guided tour of the dashboard – 'There's your MP3 player, your ergonomic seat thing, your satnav, in case you actually want to go somewhere.'**

**I had a thought. 'I've got DraxWorld on my phone. Can I hook that up to the satnav?'**

**He was impressed. He said, 'Not sure. Give it a go.'**

I got DraxWorld up on my phone and chose a Waterloo.

'Waterloo,' said the man. 'No, this doesn't work. Waterloo's about fifteen minutes from here. This is showing a journey time of three days.'

'Actually,' I said, 'that's Waterloo in Sierra Leone, Africa.'

He looked at me like I was talking pure poetry. 'Wow,' he said, 'Africa. And it's in your favourites? What would you do? Shoot down through France? Over the Pyrenees . . .' He was gone, imagining the whole journey in his head – the rivers, the mountains, the ferries, the desert. 'Mr Digby,' he said, 'you DESERVE this car. If I could, I'd give it you.'

So I turned the key in the ignition. The car made a sound like a cat purring. The man stepped aside and pointed to the bonnet. 'Engineering perfection.' He smiled.

It is at the moment, I thought. But in five minutes' time it might well be a load of scrap metal. The thing about Level Two of course is that it has new and unexpected dangers. So you stand a much better chance of being killed.

I looked down at the pedals. I knew one of them was the accelerator. I just wasn't quite sure which one. One lesson that World of Warcraft teaches you is that if you want to succeed on the next level, you need to acquire new skills. Don't level up until you've skilled up. Sadly this was a lesson I had forgotten. I was pretty sure though that the accelerator was the one in the middle. I had my foot on it when the door on the passenger side opened and a very familiar voice said, 'You. Out. Now. Come on.'

I probably didn't mention this at the time, Dad, but, on balance, I was pleased to see you.

When I climbed out, you were shouting at the man in the suit, telling him that I could have been killed and asking him why they don't check ages.

'How was I supposed to know?' wailed the man.

'By checking his licence.' Good point, Dad.

'He didn't have one.'

'Of course he hasn't got one. He's twelve years old.'

'Look, mate,' said the man in the suit, 'don't go blaming me because your son's a freak.'

**I thought Dad was going to hit him then. He growled, 'He is not a freak. He is normal. But tall.'**

**'It wasn't just his height. It was the fact that he seemed to have a daughter.'**

**Dad's got this little statue of St Christopher stuck to his dashboard. When he was shoving me into the taxi on the way back from the town centre I bumped against it and it rolled on to the floor.**

**'Pick that up,' snapped Dad.**

**'OK, OK. You've knocked the baby Jesus off his back.'**

**'Just don't talk to me, Liam.'**

**I said OK, but there was something I wanted to ask him. I waited till we were on the Dock Road, then I said, 'How did you know where we were?'**

**'I'm your dad,' he said. 'If you act funny, I notice. If you get on an unexpected bus instead of going home, I follow you, even if that means turning down fares and having the boss bawling at me on the radio. I'm your dad. It's what dads do.'**

**Thinking about that now makes me wonder if you're out there, somewhere behind us, charging after us through the wastes of space in your taxi. But no. No taxi would be able to generate the necessary escape velocity.**

**In case you are interested, by the way, this is how Dad located us that day. When he gave me his old phone, he bought himself a new one but he kept his old number. So there were two phones – phone one (Dad's) and phone two (mine) – with the same identity. So, if he was ever worried about me, he could fire up DraxWorld and request 'present position of phone two', and that would tell him where I was.**

**So my phone looked like a phone but it was really an electronic tag.**

**Because we shared a phone number, I used to get all Dad's messages from Pine Planet, telling me that my new kitchen units were ready for collection, and Dad used to get messages from members of my World of Warcraft guild saying stuff like, 'Been attacked by dragons – need yr healing powers now!'**

and 'Captured fifty goblins. Kill? or hold for ransom?' A nervous person might've thought, Blimey, we're being invaded by mythical creatures, and maybe gone and hidden away in the woods behind the golf course. Dad just thought, This phone's gone funny. I'll turn it off and turn it on again.

That's Dad's solution to any technological problem. Microwave, satnav, computer, dishwasher – turn it off and back on again and it'll be OK. To be fair, it usually works. I'd try it now, but I'm not sure this rocket has an Off switch.