

Cosmic

it's one giant

leap for all

boy-kind

WEEK 3 DAY 5





READ CHAPTER 19 'GRAVITY IS NOT A TRIVIAL MONSTER' AND CHAPTER 20 'LAST CHANCE TO VOTE.'

You will need to go back to yesterday's PowerPoint for chapter 19 as you should have already read it. Chapter 20 starts on the next slide.

LAST CHANCE TO VOTE



The Penultima is called the Penultima because it's the next best thing to being in space. On the outside it looks like any other simulator but bigger. When you walk inside, though, you are standing in the biggest, best flight simulator ever built. It's a full-size replica of the Infinite Possibility command module – five seats, multifunctional displays, even a PlayStation 3 for the boring bits of the voyage. You can tell they think it's going to be a major attraction because it's right in the middle of the Infinity Dome and the queuing lane is about a mile long. How much did Florida love strolling past the 'Queue takes 45 minutes from here' sign! 'It's like this for a lot of celebrities,' she said. 'I read that they opened Chessington World of Adventures early once, especially for Brad Pitt and all his kids.'

We spent the morning on the Penultima, learning how to guide a rocket through re-entry. 'Of course,' said Dr Drax, 'on the big day, all that will be taken care of by those clever people over at DraxControl. But we want you to learn how to do it, just in case.'

There was a monitor shaped like a window. You could see the Earth, with clouds and seas rolling across its big curvy face. As the Earth got bigger you could just make out the glowing border of space and the atmosphere.

Mr Bean showed us what to do. 'Think of that glow,' he said, 'as the flap of an envelope. Just slip under the flap and you're on your way home. It's as simple as that. It's all about the angle. Max, you're first.'

Max stepped up to the control panel and tried to steer us in. There was a kind of arrow on the screen to show you the angle. What you had to do was keep the front of the module lined up with it. Max would probably have been all right if his dad hadn't been standing behind him saying, 'Steady, Max, steady,' over and over. The more he said it, the less steady Max got, until suddenly, just as the glow was getting clearer, everything changed. The Earth spun around – continents and oceans whirled into each other. Then the entire planet completely vanished and everything was black.

'Now, you see what's happened here,' said Dr Drax, 'is that Max didn't get the angle just right . . .'

'I told you to watch the angle,' snarled his dad. 'Why didn't you watch the angle?'

' . . . and as a result,' said Dr Drax, 'the rocket has bounced off Earth's atmosphere, a bit like when you skim a stone off the surface of the sea. My father, by the way, was rather wonderful at skimming stones. His record was twenty bounces.'

Through the 'window' there was nothing but blackness punctuated by stars as we rocketed further and further into space. Florida said, 'Can't we reverse?'

'Not now. We're drifting out of control.'

'But we'll stop in the end? Everything stops in the end.'

'Not in space. In space you just drift on forever.'

'Yes,' agreed Samson Two. 'It's Newton's First Law of Motion, I'm afraid. Unless an external force is applied, a body will remain at rest or will continue to move at a constant velocity. Forever.'

'So,' said Florida, 'if we bounce off the atmosphere on the day, what do we do?'

'Hold on tight and enjoy the ride.' Dr Drax smiled. 'But don't worry – it won't happen. Show them, Shenjian.'

Dr Drax reset the simulator and Shenjian took the controls. As we got nearer to the Earth, she read out all the changes in gravity from the monitors.

'She's doing that just so that we down on the ground can hear that she's awake,' said Mr Bean. 'A lot of people pass out during re-entry. Also, it's hard to move your hands. You've just got used to weighing nothing when – *ping* – you weigh a ton.'

The blue seas and the white clouds looked so friendly and familiar, and then they were gone. The screen was filled with a blazing golden fire.

'We're dead again!' yelled Samson Two. Shenjian didn't even blink. 'Or perhaps the machine is malfunctioning?'

Shenjian just kept saying the numbers.

Mr Bean said, 'We're not dead and it's not a malfunction. That glow is just us slamming into the atmosphere. We're moving so fast all the little atoms on the outside of the rocket are shedding their electrons. It's a pretty thing, isn't it? Of course, you'll have no time to appreciate it when it's actually happening.'

Shenjian shouted, 'Gravity five and rising.'

Samson Two said, 'That means she's back inside the atmosphere.'

'On your way home, Skylark,' smiled Mr Bean. 'Mother Earth is holding your hand. Just don't let her drop you.'

And the golden glow flew away like wrapping paper, leaving the blue Earth looking as new as a present.

All of the children had a go at the re-entry procedure. It made my fingers itch just watching them. Because the fact is, the Penultima – the world's most accurate rocket simulator – is just a big version of Orbiter IV – a game at which I am a consistent high scorer. Even the control-panel layout is the same. Re-entry is a task you have to master to get past Level Seven on Orbiter IV.

I was twitching to play, but the other dads didn't seem to be paying any attention at all. Monsieur Martinet said that watching the others reminded him of driving lessons, and the next thing they were all going on about cars. Monsieur Martinet said he drove a Mercedes and Mr Xanadu said he had

some Mercedes too 'for midweek, you know'. Samson One said he preferred Land Rovers because of living in the desert, and they all started on about four-wheel drive. They talked about cars as though they were playing Top Trumps. Sometimes they made me feel like I was the only grown-up there.

'What about you, Mr Digby? What do you drive?'

'A car.'

'But what kind?'

'A blue one . . .' I was trying to concentrate on the Penultima. 'I don't know much about cars.'

'But you drive for a living. Surely you have to know about cars?'

I'd forgotten about being a taxi driver. I said, 'It's more about knowing your way round town really. The car's just . . . tools of the trade really.' I remembered what Dad had said about taxi driving. 'Taxi driving is about people, not about cars. You have to be a bit of a psychologist, a bit of a tourist guide, a little bit of everything. I don't really have time to be interested in cars . . . I even delivered a baby once.'

I think probably the baby thing was going a bit far – though Dad did sort of deliver a baby once. Everyone stared at me, like they were going to ask me to prove it by delivering another baby right now. Luckily Mr Bean told Monsieur Martinet it was his turn at the controls.

Monsieur Martinet slipped inside the golden envelope just as neatly as Shenjian did. He crossed his arms and said, 'Child's play.' Then the screen went black and the simulator said, 'Permanent Fatal Errors. Uh-oh, you are dead.'

'I don't think so,' he snapped.

'Not quite yet,' said Dr Drax with a smile, 'but in a very few seconds. You forgot to open your parachutes.'

Next up was Samson One, who bounced off the atmosphere and into outer space. It didn't bother him. He seemed to quite like the idea of accelerating until you turned into a beam of light.

Mr Xanadu seemed more interested in trying to buy the Penultima than he was in steering it. 'Such a great machine. If you sell it to me, I will add

fighting monsters and lightly clad female aliens to the simulation. It would be popular and profitable.'

'The simulator is part of our training programme,' said Dr Drax. 'Fighting monsters is not one of our training objectives.'

'But with a little work,' said Eddie Xanadu, 'this could make your fortune.'

'I already have a fortune, but thank you for your suggestion.'

As she said this, he hit Earth's atmosphere hard in a kind of interplanetary bellyflop and burst into flames. 'Marvellous graphics!' he said. 'Please take a picture of me at the controls like a true taikonaut.' He gave me his phone and got the children to pose and smile with him.

Then it was my turn. I don't want to brag about this, but I have completed Orbiter IV Level Fifty, when you have to do re-entry while being chased by a giant squid. So it really wasn't hard. Even so, Dr Drax was impressed. 'Would you mind doing it again just to make sure that wasn't beginner's luck?'

This time they tried to trap me. An unexpected meteor shower went by during the final approach. Luckily this is a standard Orbiter IV trap. You just have to remember that meteors have a gravitational pull of their own and correct your coordinates accordingly. If you don't, you get pulled off course. I was into the golden envelope for a second time.

Afterwards, during the voting, Samson Two asked me why I was so good at the Penultima. I said, 'Don't tell anyone, but I've got a PlayStation game just like this.'

'You play PlayStation?' said Samson Two.

'A bit. I prefer massively multiplayer online games like World of Warcraft.'

'Those are unusual activities for a dad,' said Samson Two.

'But it turns out they're good activities for a taikonaut.'

Samson Two smiled, nodded his head and then went off and started whispering to the others. Then all the children went off to vote. I knew I was going to win. I was the only one who would be able to save them in an emergency. I did the maths in my head. Eddie and me were both on six. That meant if I got three, I'd definitely won. But I could still win even if I only got two, as long as the other two votes didn't both go to Eddie.

When Dr Drax came back in with the results, my heart was popping with excitement. 'The children have decided,' she said, 'who is the best daddy in the world. And who is going to be the best daddy in space. He got four votes today . . .'

Four votes. It had to be me. I was going to space!

'He is Mr Eddie Xanadu!'

Eddie got ten points altogether. I came second with six.

I did ask the children about it. 'I just like having my photo taken,' shrugged Florida.

'But I can work the machine.'

'Yes,' said Samson Two, 'you were the best at handling the rocket. But that means you are also the best at PlayStation. We don't want a grown-up who is good at PlayStation. When people are good at PlayStation, they don't get killed for hours and hours and you have to sit and watch them, waiting for your go. We don't want some console hog. We want someone with no PlayStation skills.'

That's the scary thing about children. They will vote to go into space with someone who is dangerously useless if it means they get a longer go on the PlayStation.

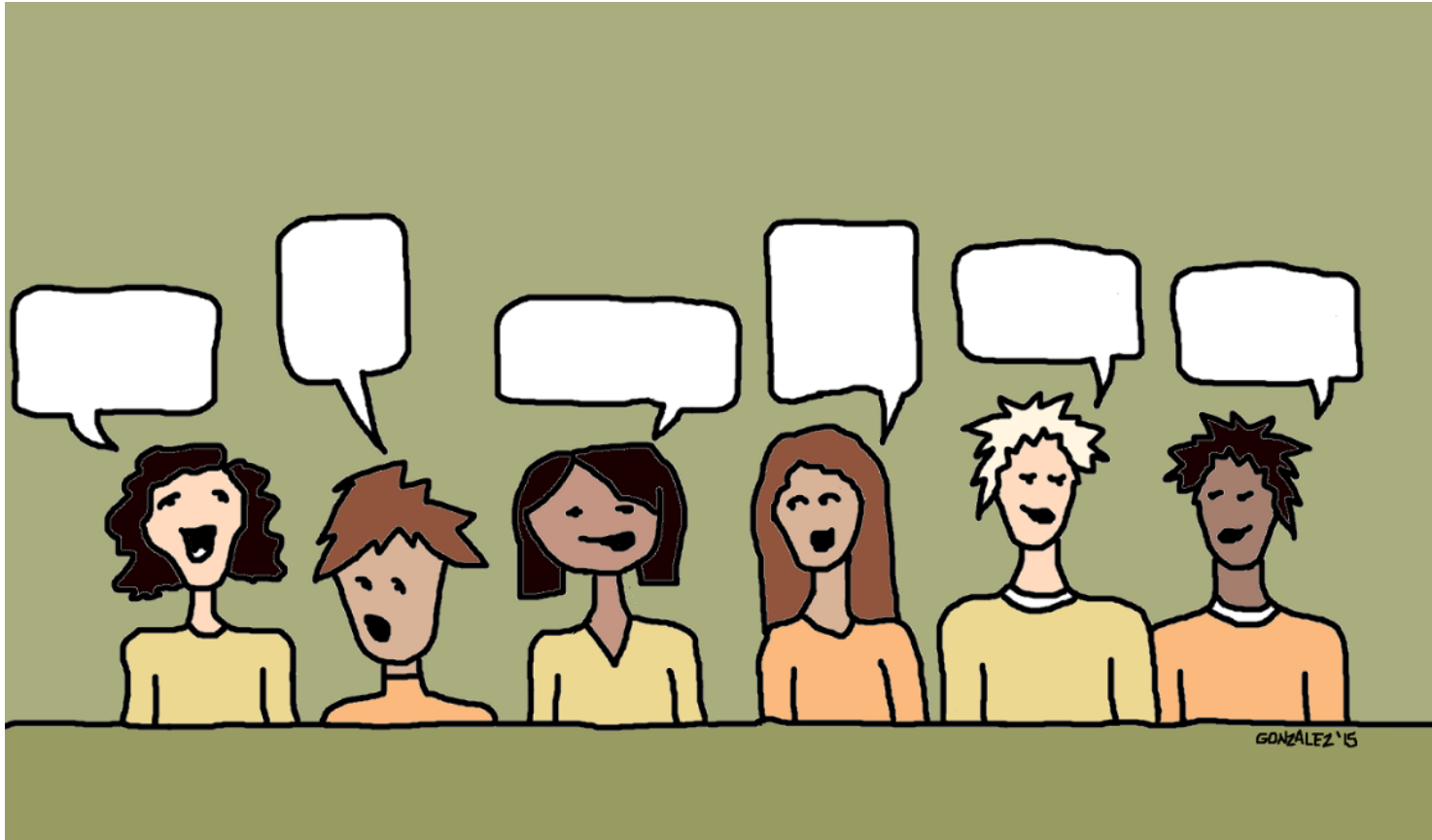
LOOK AT THE LAST PARAGRAPH OF CHAPTER 20

‘That’s the scary thing about children. They will go into space with someone who is dangerously useless if it means they get a longer go on the play station.’

Who did the children vote for? Why?

If you were there, who would you have voted for and why?

What do you notice about the author’s style of writing? Is it similar to any other author you know?



WE KNOW EDDIE XANADU WAS VOTED
FOR YET WE ALSO KNOW AT SOME POINT
LIAM ENDS UP IN SPACE.

Do you have any ideas of
how of how this might
happen?

If you were the author how
would you adapt the story
line so that Liam end up in
space ?


MAIN TASK – COMPLETE THE ‘IF I WERE THE AUTHOR, I WOULD TASK’

MINI MISSIONS **NAME:** _____ **CLASS:** _____ **Big Reading**

IF I WERE THE AUTHOR I WOULD...

Book title: Author:

Things about this book I would be proud of:	Things about this book I would change:
Things about the author's style I would steal to use in my own writing:	Things about this book I would point out to a friend:

 ▶ 100%