

WEEK 3 DAY 2



READ CHAPTER 16 – I CAN'T WORK MY TROUSERS

In your opinion, what the funniest part of the chapter and why?

Which part did you enjoy the most and why?

Who do you think voted for Liam and why?

I CAN'T WORK MY TROUSERS



On my fake programme for the South Lakeland Outdoor Activity Centre, it says, Day Three – Nature Walk and Tree Recognition.

On our actual third day in Infinity Park what we really did was: Spacesuits, an Introduction.

I remember walking into the Possibility Building, just popping with excitement. I was talking to Florida about my favourite game-and-movie spacesuits. 'Have you ever played Orbiter IV? The spacesuits in that are just cosmic . . .'

'Liam,' said Florida, 'you are very undadly.'

'What?'

'Dads do not play Orbiter IV. Dads do not say things are "cosmic". And most of all, dads do not get excited about clothes. When you go clothes shopping, dads don't say, "Great." They say, "Do we have to?" Then, when you get to the shop, the dads all sit together outside the changing rooms, looking bored.'

I said, 'Florida, a spacesuit is not clothes. A spacesuit is EQUIPMENT. It'll probably come with an instruction manual and everything. It's a gadget. All dads love gadgets. This is a dadly occasion, not a girly shopping date.'

The moment she saw us, Dr Drax said, 'Oh, Florida, thank goodness you're here. Let's you and I make this session into our own little girly shopping date.'

Then they talked for about ten years about Extraterrestrial Colour Coordination. Vehicle Escape Suits are always bright orange, because orange is the most visible colour at sea. But Florida was worried that orange would clash with her unfeasibly red hair and Dr Drax could see her point.

'I totally understand. You'd look like a massive satsuma. On the other hand, a massive satsuma would be very, very visible.'

While this was going on, all the dads were sitting together feeling bored. Florida was right.

Eddie Xanadu smiled at me. He said, 'I was thinking – in a way you saved our lives yesterday. You found the flag. You made us listen to Samson Two. You are a good guy, I think. It's a shame I got all the votes. I hope you have no hard feelings?'

I said, 'No, of course there's no hard feelings,' but I think he could tell that I meant, Next time, we'll stake you out, cover you with your own ice cream and leave you to the man-eating ants.

'Good man. Maybe you'll join me in a little drink.' He pulled out another flask – this one was silver and had his initials written on it in diamonds. 'This makes the time go faster,' he said. 'Don't let anyone else see.' He passed it to me behind his newspaper.

I wasn't sure why no one was supposed to see. Maybe it was because everyone would want some and he only had a little bit. He said, 'It's made from plums. In my own village. Where I grew up. In the autumn time, we have a great fiesta.'

'Thanks. I don't think I've ever had plum juice. What's it like? Ribena or something?'

I took a swig. It didn't taste like Ribena. It tasted more sort of like being shot through the throat with a laser. All the muscles in my body con-
tinued up and then tromboned out. Then my eyes opened so wide that I thought they were going to fall out.

'Good stuff, eh?' smiled Mr Xanadu. 'More?'

I tried to say, 'No, thanks. Not now. Not ever,' but all that came out was a wheezy little croak, which together with the huge-eyes thing made me feel

that I had very possibly been turned into a frog. He put the flask back in my hand, and for some reason, I drank some more. It wasn't as bad the second time. I managed to gasp the words 'Thank you'.

Then Dr Drax gave us our escape suits and said it was time to try them on. I tried to say OK, ready when you are. Unfortunately my jaw wouldn't open and close properly. Well, it opened, but it wouldn't close up again.

Vehicle Escape Suits aren't really spacesuits. They're more sort of wearable lifeboats that you only wear during take-off and landing, just in case something goes wrong. Something seemed to be going wrong with mine because everyone else got into theirs quite easily but I wasn't able to work the trousers. I could see the hole where your leg went in, but every time I lifted my leg up, the hole disappeared. I put my hand up and said, 'Dear Dr Drax . . .' I don't know why I called her that. 'Dear Dr Drax, my suit doesn't work.'

'When you say it doesn't work . . .?'

'My trousers are malfunctioning.'

'In what way?'

'In a very, very bad way that makes my head have a funny hurt.'

'Mr Digby,' she said quite sternly, 'have you been drinking?'

'Yes! Yes, I have been drinking! You're right. Would that affect them, do you think? It doesn't affect my other trousers. If you can't put them on after drinking, then that is a design flaw. In my humble opinion.'

Eddie Xanadu said he would help me which he did by holding open the leg of the trousers so I could get my foot inside. I said, 'Mr Eddie Xanadu, you are my shining armour knight. My shining armour knight, that's what you are.'

'If we may continue . . .' snarled Dr Drax. 'The most innovative and useful feature of these suits is this . . .' She pressed a button on her suit and – slowly at first, but then faster – the suit started to swell up. 'The suit is inflatable, as you see . . .' hers was still growing, 'and if you pull your own cords, like so, yours will do the same . . .' Everyone pulled like so. Everyone started to swell up. 'They will be at full capacity during take-off and re-entry so that instead of being strapped in, you'll all be packed in snugly together, like huge peas in a flying pod.'

My suit was still growing. I suddenly noticed everyone else standing in a row, very still and serious but also unusually orange, like a police line-up of criminal tangerines. And suddenly I knew I had to bump Eddie Xanadu very hard with my massive orange belly. So I did. Dr Drax shouted at me. 'Mr Digby,' she shouted, 'grow up!' And for some reason this made me feel really really sad. My mum never told me to grow up. She actually told me to *stop* growing up.

Mr Xanadu had tried to stay standing up but I'd really bumped him quite hard. He fell into Monsieur Martinet. Monsieur Martinet fell into Samson One, Samson One crashed into all the children and the next thing I knew everyone – even Dr Drax – was rolling round the floor like huge orange marbles, all yelling and shouting for help. I did try and help Dr Drax back on to her feet, but she batted me away.

'Deflate your suits!' she yelled. 'Do not try to stand up until you have deflated your suits!'

I thought suit deflation was going to be hilarious. I thought we'd pull the plugs on our suits and then go jetting off around the room like balloons. Sadly it didn't work like this. We didn't jet anywhere; we just sort of wilted.

I can see now that I probably should not have tried to make up for the disappointment by running round and round with my arms out making raspberry noises. I can see now that this was hardly dadly behaviour, but at the time I sort of expected other people to join in.

Monsieur Martinet snarled, 'You're acting like a child again, Mr Digby.'

I snapped back at him, 'Well, someone has to. And it's not going to be these so-called children, is it? Look at them. They all look so CROSS. They're not like kids at all. They're like unusually small teachers.'

I knew I wasn't making much sense and for some reason that depressed me even more, so I curled up on the floor and went to sleep.

On reflection, that wasn't one of my better days. But I think I was right about the children. Hasan fretting all the time about money. Max always making sure he was first. Florida too, going on about colour coordination and stuff. They weren't proper kids. They were like trainee grown-ups.

They're like kids now though. Now that they're lost in space.

When I woke up I was in bed. This was so unexpected that at first I thought I'd been abducted by aliens. Especially as someone seemed to be trying to drill a hole in the top of my skull. Then I thought I was probably in Bootle and that the whole Infinity Park thing had been a dream. So I shouted, 'Dad!' – which really hurt my head – and then Florida came in and said, 'I have had the best afternoon!'

'What happened? Why is this bed so SMALL?'

Florida ignored me. 'Everyone was really lovely to me. They felt sorry for me because they thought I had a horrible, useless alcoholic dad. You do realize you got totally drunk, don't you?'

'Drunk? How?'

'Mr Xanadu's flask. You drank loads. He said he tried to stop you . . .'

'He didn't.'

'Everyone was so nice to me. It was like having three dads. And I've got the best spacesuit. It's blue. Like the Blue Power Ranger. I look great in it. It's definitely my colour.'

I groaned. 'Do we have to?'

'What?'

'Have a girly conversation about clothes and colours and stuff.'

'Spacesuits aren't clothes, idiot. Spacesuits are equipment.'

'Oh really?'

And Florida told me all this amazing stuff about the history of spacesuit design. I'll say that again. Florida Kirby told me about the history of spacesuit design. This was actually more unexpected than being abducted by aliens.

She explained that because space is such a hostile environment, the spacesuit has to be like a kind of mini-Earth, like a wearable planet, giving you oxygen and keeping you at a constant temperature when space is freezing or when it's boiling, shielding you from radiation and keeping you at the right pressure. On Earth the air is pressing down on you all the time, and that's sort of what keeps you in one piece. But there's no pressure in space so you have to make your own. Usually that means you have to wear a big suit, like a bag, full of gas, so you're walking round inside a big bubble of air pressure. It works but it's clumsy and people are always looking for something better

– like a really tight suit that puts pressure on you just by being too tight. Like a wetsuit but tighter even than that. The trouble is, anything that tight would be really painful and difficult to put on. But Dr Drax had come up with a solution – literally. Liquid spacesuits. Spacesuits that you spray on. Apparently they're like thick paint, quite sticky at first but then they cool into something hard but supple – like rubber. Florida showed me a photo on her Draxphone. She really did look like a Power Ranger. Apparently, before they spray the paint on, they put these wires all over, with tiny motors in them, which you activate by twitching. Stick-on muscles, in other words, so that you can jump like five feet on earth – and maybe twenty feet in space. There are also pipes and stuff so that you can wee and so on without taking the suit off – because to take the suit off you need a solvent spray and about an hour. Much too long if you're really desperate.

Like I said, all this stuff was amazing. But the really amazing thing was that it was Florida who was telling me. Florida Kirby was talking about air pressure and gravity and stuff. I said, 'Florida, how do you know all this?'

'That's what we've been talking about all day.'

'Yeah, but how did it go in?'

'I'm not thick, you know. The other dads were amazed that I didn't know about pressure and gravity already. And even more amazed when they found out I couldn't swim.'

'I didn't know you couldn't swim.'

'Exactly. That's what Monsieur Martinet said. He said you were a drunk who took no interest in me. We had to swim in this special pool to show that we could use the suits in weightless conditions. They were really shocked that I couldn't swim. They said that one of the main functions of being a dad was teaching your kid to swim. They taught me to swim – Samson One explained about buoyancy and stuff and Monsieur Martinet threw me in the deep end. Mr Xanadu said he'd buy me my own pool if I swam a length. They all said it was a tragedy that a unique child like me should have such a thoughtless father like you.'

'Can I just remind you that I'm not your real dad. I'm just someone who used to sit behind you in Year Six. The person who didn't bother to teach you to swim, that's your REAL DAD, not me.'

I knew right then that I'd said the wrong thing because she went quiet. Not quiet like Sunday morning. Quiet like Varimathras, Dreadlord of the Plaguelands, uploading a terrible new weapon.

I said, 'Florida . . .'

She said, 'Don't speak to me.'

'I just . . .'

'Don't SPEAK to me.'

'I didn't mean . . .'

'DON'T speak to me.'

'I've never even met . . .'

'Don't speak to ME!'

'But . . .'

'Don't you ever ever ever talk about my dad again. OK? Not now. Not ever. Never. My dad, let me tell you, is amazing. My dad travels all over the world. That's why he named us after faraway places. He buys me presents. He calls me Princess. He does NOT forget my birthday!'

She stormed out, slammed my door, then slammed her own door.

Talk to Your Teen has one thing to say about what to do when your teenage daughter slams a door – leave it slammed. Don't go near her. Let her calm down. The book made it sound like if you tried to open the door you'd dematerialize or something.

I just sat by myself and watched another repeat of *Celebrity Seance* – the one where Dracula comes on and complains about being misunderstood. 'All I ever did was impale people on wooden stakes, which wasn't that unusual at the time. My negative image was all media spin, et cetera.'

Suddenly Florida's door banged open again and she yelled at me, 'Excuse me. I'm upset. You're supposed to come and cheer me up.'

'Errrm, no. By slamming doors, you're marking off some personal space for yourself and the best thing is for me to respect that need.'

'What are you on about?'

'It's in this book.' I showed her the bit about banging doors in *Talk to Your Teen*.

She said, 'That'd work if you had a telly in your room. But I was getting bored in there.'

'You could always read a book.'

She stared at me. I said, 'Joking.'

Then she stared some more. 'You really think I'm thick, don't you?' Her bottom lip was starting to go. 'Maybe I am thick.'

I was really scared that she was going to cry. I said, 'Florida, don't cry. I've read the bits about when teens cry and it says you have to hug them. Please don't make me hug you.'

'Well, reassure me then.'

I said, 'You're not thick at all. Who said that? You know loads of stuff – just not the right stuff, that's all.'

'What d'you mean?'

'Well, you're really good at remembering things. You know all those celebrities' names, and who they're going out with and everything. You're very good at storing and retrieving information. It's just that it's not very useful information.'

Florida was starting to look a bit better. 'It was good today when they were all sitting round explaining to me about buoyancy and pressure and stuff. I was like – so *that's* why we don't just fall into millions of pieces. I never even thought about it before. Did you know all that already?'

'Some of it. I'm in Gifted and Talented, you know.'

'Maybe you could teach me stuff. You are supposedly my dad after all, and dads teach their kids stuff, don't they?'

'They're supposed to, yeah.'

'Only my dad's been too busy. Because he's so important. But you're not busy or important. You could help me get to know stuff. And I could show you how to be a better dad. Because this book is rubbish.'

'OK.'

Florida looked thoughtful for a bit and was surprisingly quiet. Then she said, 'You know when your inbox is full on your mobile and you delete old messages? Can you do that with your brain, do you think?'

'Mmmm . . . not sure. Why?'

'Cos my brain is full of un-useful information and I was thinking of deleting all of it and filling it up with useful information instead. What d'you think? Or maybe new good stuff could just force out the old stuff. Like if I learned about gravity, I'd forget about Jennifer Aniston's alleged struggle with depression.'

'You wouldn't need to delete anything. Your brain's got loads more storage capacity than a mobile phone. You can put new information in with no need to take old information out.'

Florida smiled. She looked different. Happier than I'd seen her look in ages. 'So I can be clever and stupid at the same time? Cool!'

Oh. Strangely, someone voted for me that day. Everyone got one vote. I assumed that mine was from Florida, but she said it wasn't. It must've been someone whose idea of a good dad was someone who couldn't work his own trousers.

SCORES	
EDDIE XANADU	5
M. MARTINET	1
SAMSON ONE	1
ME	1

WHAT PAMPHLET DOES LIAM KEEP READING TO HELP HIM MANAGE FLORIDA LIKE A FATHER WOULD?

Who would this pamphlet be aimed at?

What sort of articles might it contain?



MAIN TASK: WE ARE PRETENDING THAT 'TALK TO YOUR TEEN' ARE STARTING A CHAT SHOW, SIMILAR TO JEREMY KYLE, TO HELP PARENTS DEAL WITH THEIR DIFFICULT TEENAGE CHILDREN.

You will prepare advice on a given question. Think about the advice given in 'Talk to your Teen' and keep to the same style. You can choose one, several or all of them to answer.

My father acts like a child!

My teenage daughter is obsessed with celebrities!

My teenage daughter slams her door and won't come out!

My daughter won't speak to me!

How can I get my teenager to behave?