



SPACE ODDITY

CHRISTOPHER EDGE



A MESSAGE FROM CHICKEN HOUSE

I've really enjoyed Chris Edge's other brilliant books – in fact, I've often thought his jokes were *out of this world*. So when Dr Sarah Ryan won our Big Idea competition with an idea about alien parents (aren't all parents aliens?), Chris seemed a natural fit. And if you ask me, he knows an awful lot about outer space . . . I wonder if he's ever visited? Anyway, this story is closer to home than all that. At heart it's about how, wherever we come from, family is oddly and tremendously important.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Barry Cunningham', with a stylized, sweeping flourish at the end.

BARRY CUNNINGHAM

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*For Josie, who's always
the first to spot the stars.*

*And in memory of
David Bowie,
whose songs told us that
we're not alone.*

*“I’m sure the universe is full of
intelligent life. It’s just been too
intelligent to come here.”*

ARTHUR C. CLARKE

A black and white illustration of a village at night. The scene is viewed from an elevated position, looking down at a cluster of houses with steep, gabled roofs. Many windows are lit from within, casting a warm glow. In the foreground, there is a patch of tall grass. The background features rolling hills or mountains under a dark sky filled with numerous stars and constellations. The overall mood is peaceful and nostalgic.

TWELVE YEARS AGO ...



A SHOOTING STAR

It looked like a shooting star at first – a silver streak of light, glowing bright against the darkness of the night. And trailing in its wake soared three more glowing spheres, their lights flashing blue and white as they fell towards Middlewich Forest.

But if anyone could have heard the noise coming from inside the silver streak of light they would have realized that this wasn't a shooting star – it was a *screaming* star.

'AAAAAAAARRRRGGGHHHHHH!!!'

The alien's scream faded into a gibber of fear as he spun around the observation dome. Branches and leaves bounced off the flying saucer's failing force field as the spacecraft crashed through the trees. On the rear-view screen he could see the glowing spheres growing even brighter, their blue-white beams of light almost blinding him as they closed in for the kill.

'WARNING! YOU ARE TRESPASSING IN A COSMIC ZONE OF EXCLUSION. ALL TRAVEL IS STRICTLY RESTRICTED. WARNING! YOU HAVE ENTERED THE ATMOSPHERE OF A P-CLASS PLANET. ALL CONTACT IS STRICTLY FORBIDDEN. WARNING! YOUR VESSEL WILL BE VAPORIZED IN THREE ZEPTONS. PREPARE FOR DISINTEGRATION, ION OF MMBOG-'

With a despairing flick of his wrist, Ion tried to cut the communication channel into silence. For an alien, Ion looked remarkably human. One head, two arms, two legs. No tentacles. The only thing that would make him stand out from the crowd, apart from his shiny silver

jumpsuit, was the colour of his skin – which was a bright shade of green.

Ion grabbed hold of the starry egg that hung suspended in the air in front of him. This was the Quintessence – the beating heart of his spaceship. With this he could control everything: the interstellar drive, the quantum gravity boosters and the Zeno cloaking shield. But all of these were useless now . . .

Wrenching the egg-shaped device free from the energy matrix, Ion's emerald fingers scabbled to activate the emergency settings. If he couldn't save his spaceship, he could still save himself. Through the observation dome, Ion could see the ground of this strange planet racing up to meet him. The only chance he had left was an emergency teleport to the surface of this world. And there wasn't far to go.

Twisting the device, Ion heard the lifeboat mode load with a click. The stars that shimmered across the Quintessence's surface now shone with a pale green glow. As this eerie

light surrounded him, Ion felt the atoms in his body start to unravel.

The last thing he heard was the sound of the robotic voice ringing in his ear: **'YOUR VESSEL WILL BE VAPORIZED IN ONE ZEPTON—'**

And then he was gone.

NOW



JAKE, I AM YOUR FATHER

‘EXTERMINATE! EXTERMINATE!’

E I flatten myself against the intergalactic scenery as the Year Five Daleks sweep past me in the wings. The cheers and applause that greeted their synchronized dance routine to the *Doctor Who* theme tune is still ringing across the school hall.

The last of the Daleks pokes his sink plunger into my chest as he passes me by. ‘Primitive life form detected! Exterminate!’

‘Get lost, tinhead.’ The Wookiee standing

next to me swats the Dalek away with a swipe of her paw.

‘Ow, Amba,’ the Dalek protests, tinfoil and egg boxes flapping as he beats a hasty retreat. ‘That really hurt!’

‘Put a sock in it, Lucas,’ Amba says, flicking the woolly fringe of her Chewbacca costume out of her eyes. ‘Are you OK, Jake?’

‘I’m fine,’ I reply, wishing that I’d been the one to tell Lucas to get lost.

‘You should’ve told him to put a sock on it,’ Damon chips in, his voice muffled behind his Darth Vader helmet. ‘That’s the best way to defeat a Dalek. Stick a sock on their eyestalk and they can’t see a thing. For a master race of alien monsters, they’re pretty rubbish really.’

Amba laughs and even I can’t stop myself from smiling at the thought of Darth Vader using his smelly socks to beat the Daleks.

Everyone in school is dressed up like this because of the theme of this year’s concert.



So far this evening we've had the Wind Band's medley of songs about the Moon, a Search for a Star talent show, the Guitar Orchestra performing 'Across the Universe' and the Year Five Dance Group's celebration of all things Doctor Who. Now the school choir

are back on the stage singing ‘Space Oddity’.

This is my dad’s favourite song. It’s by this singer called David Bowie who used to pretend to be an alien. Dad’s always playing me his old videos on YouTube as he tries to get me to sing along. David Bowie did look kind of strange sometimes, but he wasn’t really an alien. Dad says he was a star.

That’s what Dad wants to be – a rock star. He spends most of his time at home playing air guitar and pulling rock star shapes as he blasts his music loud. Dad’s real name is Ion Jones, but he says his stage name is going to be Ion Cosmos. He’s got this crazy idea that he’s going to be the biggest star in the universe.

There’s only one problem.

He can’t sing.

Mum doesn’t seem to mind that Dad’s singing voice sounds like a cat being strangled to death. She just makes gooey eyes at him when he serenades her with ‘*Space Oddity*’ for the zillionth time. Dad says it’s their song as it

reminds him of the time when he first met my mum, staring up at the stars while she stole his heart. That's when I tell them to pass me the sick bag.

Standing at the side of the stage, I peer through a gap in the scenery to see if I can spot Mum and Dad in the audience. The school hall is packed, but I spot Mum straightaway. She's sitting in the very front row, dressed in her paramedic uniform. She must have come to the concert as soon as her shift on the ambulance finished.

Mum has a proper job helping people – unlike Dad. Whatever job he tries, he never gets it right. Like that time he worked at the supermarket and got into a fight with one of the self-service checkouts. Dad said it was trying to vaporize him and zapped it with his pricing gun, but it was only telling him that there was an unauthorized item in its bagging area. This got Dad his final warning, so when he accidentally crashed the line of shopping

trolleys he was collecting into a special offer display of baked beans and pasta shapes, the manager sacked him on the spot. Most people would be sad about losing their job, but not my dad. He just came home with a big smile on his face and seventy-six badly-dented tins of Alphabetti spaghetti.

Giving Mum a wave, I spot that the seat next to her is empty. I look around, but there's no sign of Dad. He must've popped to the toilet or something.

As the choir sings out the final word of the song, the audience breaks into applause.

'Get ready, Gym Stars,' Mrs Mays says as she appears at the side of the stage. 'You're on next.'

Mrs Mays takes us for gym club after school. That's where Amba, Damon and me became friends – at Gym Stars. At first, I wasn't even thinking of doing gymnastics, but when it came to picking an after-school club, there wasn't really much choice. Chess Club, Drama

Club and Forest Skills were all full, Cooking Club was cancelled because Mrs Fitz had food poisoning, and Times Tables Fun Club was just Extra Maths in disguise. So when Damon and Amba asked, ‘Are you coming to Gym Stars?’ I just said ‘yes’ straightaway.

I didn’t even know I could do gymnastics. I’ve always had a bit of a spring in my step and sometimes other kids make fun of my bouncy walk, but it turns out that when it comes to gymnastics, a spring in your step is just what you need. From that very first practice, I found I could jump higher, flip further and tumble faster than anyone else in the club – even Amba, and she’s been doing gymnastics since she was six. Mrs Mays says it’s like I forget that gravity exists when I get on the gymnastics mat.

That’s why I’m dressed as Luke Skywalker now, ready to take the starring role in this *Star Wars* gymnastics routine that Mrs Mays has worked out for us. We’ve been practising for weeks, but I still feel a nervous fizz in the pit of

my stomach as the lights go down and the choir shuffle their way off the stage.

‘Good luck,’ Amba whispers as Mrs Mays shepherds us into our positions.

Then the stage lights go up and the *Star Wars* music starts and I’ve not got time to be worried any more.

**ВАААААА-ВААААА! ВА-ВА-ВА-ВААААААА-
ВАА! ВА-ВА-ВА-ВААААААА-ВАА! ВА-ВА-ВА-
ВААААААААААААААА!**

Ewoks start their tumbling passes from opposite sides of the stage, their furry flips and twists followed by forward rolls. Amba was meant to dress up as an Ewok too, but seeing as she’s so much taller than everyone else in the class, Mrs Mays decided to turn her woolly costume into Chewbacca instead.

Now it’s her turn to strike a pose in the centre of the stage. Leaning forward on her paws, Amba swings her long legs round in a circle, the toes of her furry boots pointing upwards as she ends the flair with a flourish. Pushing herself up

on to her feet, Amba stretches her arms out and then kicks into a run, letting out a Wookiee roar as she cartwheels off the other side of the stage.

As the audience applaud and the music swirls, I take a deep breath.

It's time for me to make my grand entrance.

Taking a few quick steps, I bound forward on to the stage as I launch myself into my first tumbling run. As I push myself off the ground, it almost feels like the Force is pulsing through me, my body twisting acrobatically as I soar through the air.

OOOOHHHHH!

As I land, I leap forward again, somersaulting head over heels. I flip back and bounce in an aerial twist, then land with an acrobatic roll.

AAAAHHHHH!

Bounding to my feet, I start my last tumbling run with a backward take-off. I flip, twist and roll, every backwards bounce sending me higher still, arms and legs stretching out as I hang in the air for a second or two. It almost feels like

I'm flying.

Then I pull off the perfect landing, a beam on my face as I peer out into the audience.

Through the bright lights shining down from the rafters, I see my mum clapping wildly, the smile on her face as big as my own. But the seat next to her is still empty, with no sign of Dad.

I feel my smile fade a little.

Typical. He's missed my big moment again.

Then with a trumpet blare, the music suddenly changes into something more sinister.

**DAH-DAH-DAH DUM-DA DAH-DUM-DAH-DA -
DAAAAAHHHH!**

Glancing to the wings, I hold out my hand as Mrs Mays tosses me my lightsaber.

It's time for the grand finale.

Pressing the button on its side, I flick my wrist to extend the lightsaber and watch it light up with a metallic swoosh. As the blue blade glows, I turn to face the spot where Damon should be standing, dressed as Darth Vader.

**DAH-DAH-DAH DUM-DA DAH-DUM-DAH-DA -
DAAAAAHHHH!**

There's no sign of him there.

Puzzled, I glance around to where my teacher is still standing in the wings. Mrs Mays looks just as confused as me. Then her eyes open wide in surprise as the music suddenly stops to be replaced by the mechanical rasp of Darth's Vader's breath.

KKKKHHHHH! HHHHSSSSS!

Feeling relieved, I spin round with a grin, ready to face Damon at last. We've spent ages choreographing this fight scene, but I almost drop my lightsaber in shock as Darth Vader somersaults on to the stage.

I say Darth Vader, but it actually looks more like Darth *Lamer*.

He's wearing a black plastic bin on his head, a badly-drawn Darth Vader mask scrawled on the front of this in silver pen. And as his black cape billows, the strange figure swings his red lightsaber in a swooping arc.

SCHURMMMMMM!

I scramble backwards, unable to believe what I'm seeing as Darth Lamer's lightsaber swings towards me again. Throwing my arm up, my own lightsaber just blocks the blow, the blue and red blades clashing with a fizzing hiss.

VRRUMMMUMMM! FVISH!



This isn't part of the routine we practised, but then this can't be Damon beneath the bin helmet. He's only in Year Six like me and this idiot's as tall as a grown-up.

KKKKHHHHH! HHHHSSSSS!

'Jake,' the voice rasps with a metallic hiss. 'I am your father.'

Oh no. This can't be happening.

Still backing away, I catch my foot on the edge of the mat. My arms windmill wildly as I feel myself falling backwards, but it's too late to save myself as I land on my bottom.

Everyone laughs and my face flushes red.

It's all gone wrong and I know the reason why.

Standing over me, the dark figure reaches up to lift the bin off his head and I see the face behind the mask.

It's not Darth Vader – it's my dad!

The dyed-green tuft in his blond spiky hair that he reckons makes him look cool is now flattened to his forehead with sweat, but Dad's

blue-green eyes shine bright with excitement as a girl's voice calls out from the choir, 'It's Jake's dad!'

There's a cheer from the audience and then every kid in the hall joins in the chant.

'Jake's dad! Jake's dad! Jake's dad!'

With a windmilling wave of his lightsaber, Dad reaches out a hand to help me up, but I roughly push this away.

'Jake,' he asks with a puzzled look on his face. 'Are you OK?'

I shake my head as I climb to my feet.

'No,' I say, feeling just like Luke Skywalker at the end of *The Empire Strikes Back*. 'And I wish you weren't my dad.'