

that the others were all shuffling around on the steps of the plane, arranging themselves into some kind of group, I pretended to ignore Florida and shouted like I was talking to Dr Drax, 'It's OK, Dr Drax. Florida doesn't want to be in the group photograph.'

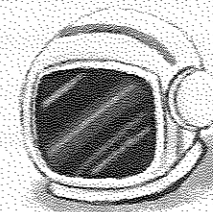
As soon as she heard the word 'photograph', Florida sat up and started listening. I said, 'It's just a group photo. For the newspapers or something. I'm not sure. Don't worry about it. You just keep kicking me.'

'Newspapers?'

'Or magazines. I didn't hear which. Oh, maybe it's for telly. Honestly, kick away.'

Florida was doing one of her smiles in the front row of that photograph before I had time to stand up. Dr Drax said, 'Well, Mr Digby, you certainly seem to be a very effective parent. Smile for the camera, everyone.'

IN CHINAYOUDIOT 12



'We have reached our destination,' said Dr Drax. 'Welcome to Infinity Park. It's too dark now to see it properly and you'll be too tired to appreciate it.'

A thing like a minibus with caterpillar tracks came to take us to our accommodation. I remember looking out of the window but there was nothing to see – just the odd campfire and every now and then a car.

We'd been driving for about ten minutes when the minibus thing stopped suddenly and Dr Drax asked us to look out of the windows on the left side of the bus. At first there was nothing but darkness, but then suddenly something like a massive door had opened. There was a building. It looked like a big red cliff lit by banks and banks of spotlights. It

was bigger than the biggest skyscraper you've ever seen, and had massive Chinese letters painted down the side.

'What is it?' said, well, everyone really.

'That,' said Dr Drax, 'is the Possibility Building.'

'But what's inside?'

'Inside there is our main attraction. Inside there is the Rocket.'

'But what is the Rocket? What kind of ride is it? What's it like?'

'What's it like? It's not like anything. It's unique. It is the biggest thrill ride in the history of the world, that's all. I can't describe it because it's indescribable.'

When I was being a grown-up in Liverpool, I got free yoghurt. In China I got My Own House! The minibus thing dropped us off at a little cluster of bungalows with lawns and street lights and traffic islands, like a housing estate.

A whole bungalow all to ourselves. I said to Florida, 'Isn't this brilliant?'

'Basically you've kidnapped me and taken me to a desert, a desert in China.'

'I suppose. But come on – apart from the fact that

it's in China – what d'you think? I mean, look at this house!'

'There's nothing *apart from* about being in China, Liam. Being in China is major.'

The house was mostly one big open room – with a kitcheny bit at one end and two huge couches at the other and a weird kind of little garden full of cacti in between.

'And,' said Florida, looking all around it, 'it's got no telly.'

'Well, maybe we could ask for a telly. Anyway, it's probably good that we haven't got one because we're supposed to get up early in the ...'

Florida had found a little panel of buttons in the arm of the couch. When she touched one, the whole living room wall turned blue and started to hum, and then a picture appeared with sound. The television was an entire wall of the living room.

'Now this,' said Florida, 'is good.'

We both flopped on to the couch. We were hypnotized. It was amazing even when it was only showing farming news in Cantonese, but after a bit of channel flicking we found an American channel that was showing *Celebrity Seance* (where living celebrities try to contact the spirits of dead

celebrities) and Florida looked like she'd gone to heaven.

'Look!' she yelled. 'There's Lindsey. Aaaaah!' Lindsey was the presenter, but Florida acted like Lindsey was like her mum, her sister, her cat and her favourite blanket all rolled into one.

I said, 'As soon as this is finished, lights out and bed. Big day tomorrow.'

'Liam, stop talking like a grown-up. There's no grown-up here – that's the only good thing about it.'

'But I'm supposed to be your dad. That's the whole point. I've got to act the role of your dad. So I'm getting into character, like Lisa said.'

'If you're going to be a dad, be like my dad, not like yours. Get me presents, and ice cream; don't sit there telling me about history and stuff.'

'D'you know what time it is? Isn't it a bit late for ice cream?'

'It would be if you were a real dad. But you're not. You're a kid. I'm a kid. We can do what we want. If we want ice cream for supper, we can have ice cream for supper.'

And apparently we did want ice cream for supper. Luckily there were *buckets* of ice cream, including Chocapocalypse flavour, in the freezer.

Florida took it back to the couch and sat there in front of the telly. Every few seconds, she'd poke her spoon in. '... And if we want to watch the telly all night,' she said, 'we can.'

'Yeah but—'

'Not "Yeah, but." Just "Yeah."'

While she was busy with the ice cream, I sneaked another look at *Talk to Your Teen* and found a bit about how to lay down ground rules and make sure your teen has barriers. I was just going to set a few barriers in place when Florida yelled, 'Liam! Come and look at this!'

She'd discovered that you could send pictures from her Draxphone to the big screen. She made me video her doing an acceptance speech and then project it on to the wall.

'I want to thank my mum and especially my dad. I hope you're proud of your little princess now,' she said. 'And I hope together we can end global warming and poverty and stuff.'

It looked wobbly but convincing on the big screen. I said, 'What exactly are you accepting?'

'An award.'

'For what?'

'For being famous.'

I went to get a drink out of the fridge and found some little bottles of water shaped like rockets, with fins and a pointy bit at the top. They were perfect weapons for a water fight. I stuffed three in each pocket, tiptoed back to the living room and squirted Florida. She shrieked and ran after me. I threw her a bottle just to make it fair and we had this excellent water fight all over the house. I hid behind the couch, hoping to ambush her. I must've fallen asleep there, because the next thing I knew, the phone was ringing.

'This is your alarm call,' it said. 'Please join your party in the car park of the Possibility Building at 8 a.m.'

I picked my way through the discarded ice-cream buckets and over the soaking wet floors and eventually found Florida curled up asleep in the cupboard with the cleaning stuff. I woke her up (she wasn't happy) and went to get changed.

I emptied my bag on to my bed so that I could sort everything out. There were some Warcraft notes, and an unexpected envelope, which turned out to contain a photograph of me, Mum and Dad on my First Communion day – Mum must have sneaked it in there. Dad's broken St Christopher statue was

at the bottom of the bag too. He must've sneaked that in too. He'd obviously been worried about me going to the Lake District on my own. I've brought it with me into space. It's standing on top of the multifunctional display, just like it used to stand on the dashboard of his taxi. If my dad could see it now, he'd be *really* worried.