## THE DAD WHO FELL TO EARTH

MANAGE



eading home with his friends after the school disco, Thomas glanced up to see strange lights in the sky, moving like no plane he'd ever seen. For a second, he couldn't speak – his mouth opening wide in disbelief as he watched this silver streak grow brighter still, the faint metallic shape of a flying saucer now visible through the glare. It looked like it was falling towards Middlewich Forest, three glowing spheres trailing in its wake as they chased the craft down.

'Hey!' Tom called out as thoughts of alien invaders filled his head. 'Check out the UFO!'

His friends looked up from their phones, just too late to see the unearthly lights disappearing behind the trees.

'Don't be stupid, Tom. You probably just saw a shooting star.'

But as Tom pushed his way through the trees,



sticks and twigs crunching underfoot as he left his friends behind on the road, he knew that what he'd seen was real. A flying saucer had fallen into the heart of Middlewich Forest. And he was going to find it.

A sudden flash lit up the forest – an explosion of light that didn't make a sound. Tom froze in his tracks, his lips pressed tightly together to stop himself from crying out in fear. He watched as an eerie green glow shone through the trees. Then the strange light flickered into darkness again and Tom remembered how to breathe.

This must be it.

With his heart thudding in his chest, Tom crept forward again, the trees slowly thinning to reveal a small clearing. And that's when he saw the little green man dancing in the middle of the woods.

Well, not exactly *little*, Tom realized as he peered around the tree trunk open-mouthed. The dancing figure in the silver spacesuit looked more the size of a grown-up really, but the bright green sheen of its skin proved it was an *alien*.

Ion hopped from foot to foot, the searing pain of teleportation slowly fading to a dull ache. This was why it was only used in emergencies – the sensation of every atom in your body being reassembled in a new location was too painful for everyday use. He glanced down to see the Quintessence still clutched tightly in his hand. As its lights flickered dully, he read all it knew about this strange new world.

LOCATION: PLANET EARTH
ATMOSPHERE: BREATHABLE
GRAVITY: LOW
INHABITANTS: PRIMITIVE
CHANCES OF SURVIVAL: NIL

Ion jumped as a sudden brightness lit up the clearing, this bounce sending him soaring in the air. Glancing up he saw three glowing spheres hovering above the trees. He might have escaped from his spaceship just before it was vaporized, but he wasn't safe yet. These remotely controlled probes would be scanning for any life forms that didn't belong on this primitive world. And that meant Ion had to make a quick change . . .

As he landed back on his feet, Ion set off at a run into the trees, hoping their darkness would buy him enough time. He twisted the Quintessence between his fingers, its starry lights flickering faintly as he tried to find the right setting. Ion just hoped it had enough power left to pull off this final trick.

With its emergency settings activated, the Quintessence could help you survive in a hostile alien world. There was a universal translator to aid communication, a cloaking shield to disguise its advanced technology, and even a quantum flare to let the universe know you were here. Not that Ion wanted to activate that now. Not with the Cosmic Authority hunting him down.

No, what he was looking for was the harmonic modulating circuit. This could scan the DNA of any native life found on an alien planet and then reprogram your biology to match. The perfect disguise to fool the Cosmic Authority's probes.

Breathing deeply, Ion paused in the shadow of the trees, his fingers finally finding the right mode with a click. And peering round the other side of the tree, Tom watched in disbelief as the alien started to change.

The colour of its skin began to flicker, cycling through a brilliant rainbow of shades until it matched the same pale pinkness as his own.

Tom gasped. The alien looked human now.

Hearing this sound, Ion turned around, a strange tingle still running through his brand-new skin. But as he peered into the darkness, all he saw was the shape of a shadowy figure, disappearing through the trees. Tom had watched too many science fiction films to risk hanging around to find out what happened next.

'Wait!' Ion called out.

The alien knew that first contact was strictly forbidden, especially with the inhabitants of primitive P-class planets. But Ion was stranded here now and, if he was going to survive, he needed a friend. Shouting out again, Ion started to run towards the place where he'd seen the shadowy figure disappear.

Every step he took turned into a stumbling jump, the low gravity on this strange planet making Ion's head spin. Twirls of mist rose from the forest floor making the world blur before his eyes. From space this looked like a blue planet – just like the distress call that brought him here had told him it was – but down here on the ground everything looked brown. Leaves and branches

snapped back, hitting him full in the face as Ion stumbled out of the trees and felt the ground become smooth and hard beneath his feet.

And that's when he heard a strange wailing sound.

Ion turned around to see flashing blue-white lights zooming towards him out of the dark. He spread his arms wide, hoping that his disguise would fool the glowing sphere's scanners. But as the wailing sound was joined by a jagged screech of brakes, Ion realized too late that these lights didn't belong to one of the Cosmic Authority's probes.

The ambulance sent him flying through the air, pain suddenly blooming in places that Ion didn't even know he had. As he landed with a crunch on the cold, hard tarmac, Ion looked up to see a sky full of stars. Through flickering eyelids, he tried to find the one he called home.

He was still holding the Quintessence tightly in his hand, faint lights flickering across its surface as the device tried to fix the broken bits inside Ion's new human form.

Jumping down from the ambulance, a paramedic rushed to his side.

'Are you OK?' she asked, her hands gently

pressing against Ion's chest as she checked his vital signs. 'What were you doing stepping out on the road like that?' Then her hands stopped moving and Ion saw her eyes open wide in surprise. 'You've got two hearts.'

'That's good,' Ion replied, feeling the double thump inside his chest start to stutter, 'because I think one's about to stop.'

He looked up into the face of this strange and beautiful alien, the Quintessence's translator helping him to find the right words before everything went black.

'I'm lost and alone and so, so far from home. Can you help me please?'

And then his two hearts stopped beating.

