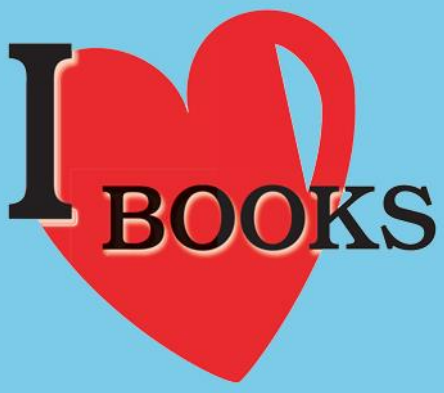


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Opening extract from

My Evil Twin is a Supervillain

Written by

David Solomons

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MULTIVERSE SCHMULTIVERSE



"Come on, Luke," I muttered to myself as I steered Zorbon's craft past another supernova. "How difficult can it be to pilot a stolen interdimensional spaceship to a parallel universe?"

I sat wedged in the command chair at the centre of a wraparound control panel laid out with a confusing array of touch-sensitive buttons and sliders. A Head-Up Display glowed at eye level showing a moving map of the immediate space around the vessel and a lot of probably very important numbers. Unlike the display, which moved slowly, through the clear bubble canopy stars flew past at an alarming rate. A read-out indicated I was travelling at

a speed of 3. Though 3 what, I had no idea.

Swiping Zorbon's keys and "borrowing" his ship had seemed like a good idea at the time. But now as I wrestled with the controls, the words of the universe's greatest smuggler and starship pilot rang in my head. "Travelling through hyperspace ain't like dustin' crops." Years ago, when I'd heard Han Solo speak those words in the first *Star Wars* film, I was puzzled. My confusion arose because I thought Han was referring to an actual person named Dustin Crops.

A light flashed green on the control panel. I was just thinking that at least it was green and not red when the bleat of an alarm reminded me that in Zorbon's topsy-turvy universe red and green were reversed. Uh-oh. I glanced at the floating display. The symbol depicting my tiny craft was heading rapidly towards a big dark circle in space. Now, wasn't there another name for an enormously dark space circle?

Black Hole!

I wrenched the control stick to one side in an effort to miss the giant cosmic dustbin. I felt the craft turn and figures on the display confirmed a change of direction. It looked like I would avoid catastrophe but it was going to be close. I held my breath as I skirted the edge of the gaping hole. Time seemed to slow as I looked up

through the canopy into a throat of endless darkness. It was blacker than the Chislehurst Caves I'd begged Dad to take me to when I was little. I was going through one of my periodic Batman phases and wanted to scout out a potential Batcave. Dad led me and Zack to a section he knew where the tour guides never went. Deep underground Dad turned off his lamp, *to give us a little fright*, he said afterwards. I freaked out, but I didn't want Dad to know how scared I was. Somehow Zack sensed my anxiety and found my hand in the dark. Though it was years later, there in the cockpit of the interdimensional craft, I could feel my brother's invisible fingers give mine a reassuring squeeze.

The hull groaned as immense forces clawed at the fragile ship. I could feel it come to a full stop and slowly begin to reverse direction. I was being pulled into the hungry Black Hole. If I couldn't break free of its gravity then my mission would be over before it had even begun. I needed more power. Scouring the baffling control panel my eye fell on a likely symbol. I mashed it with my thumb. There was a pause, then piano music tinkled from hidden speakers and a woman with a weird high-pitched voice began to sing. A message scrolled across the Head-Up Display. It read: Cosmic Classics (remastered). Instead of more engine power, I'd activated Zorbon's favourite

playlist. The voice fluttered and swooped like flappy sleeves and just as I was wondering, "What's a wuthering height?" the craft lurched sideways and began to spin. I'd lost control. Recovery systems triggered automatically. The cushioned pads of the command seat inflated, hugging me as tightly as Grandma Maureen when she hasn't seen me for ages, the autopilot assumed control of the flight systems and an oxygen mask fell from the ceiling.

The main drive strained like Dad's old Fiat on a cold winter morning. On the display 3 ticked up to 4 and with a grunt Zorbon's craft shot out of the mouth of the Black Hole. I was free! The command seat relaxed its grandmotherly grip and I sat back with a sigh of relief.

I suspected my destination might be on a list of Zorbon's previously visited stops, and I was right. I tapped the address and let the ship do the rest. As I whizzed across the universe I reflected on my epic journey. I was just like Superman, sent to safety from his doomed homeworld. Except that my homeworld wasn't exactly doomed, and in the comic it's Superman's dad who sends him. My dad didn't know I was gone, not yet. But he would. I wondered if he'd even care. Mum and Dad didn't care about much these days. I pushed the grim thought to the back of my mind, where it could make friends with all the others. There was no looking back – I had to put things right.

Now all that mattered was my mission.

On the control panel a new light flashed. The ship slowed and came out of hyperspace. Suspended before me in the darkness of regular space lay the third planet, Earth.

But not my Earth.

Adjusting its spin, Zorbon's craft entered the atmosphere and blew a futuristic space raspberry at mankind's finely tuned UFO detection systems. The Head-Up Display indicated that a cloaking device had been activated to deal with any nosy radar sweeps. The hull glowed hot and the whole craft shuddered as it skimmed the upper air. It continued its descent, knifing through low cloud to emerge over land. It was night, but a label on the display confirmed my position above the United Kingdom. A few minutes later I was circling over the south-east corner, but as I homed in on my ultimate destination there was a bang from somewhere deep inside the ship and it dropped so fast my stomach was left five hundred metres above.

"Auto-landing failure," cooed the ship's central computer. "Switching to manual control."

The virtual control-stick pressed itself into my hand. Land the ship?! At that point an ordinary person might have panicked. But not me. I wasn't merely Luke Parker, schoolboy and comic-book fan.



I was *Stellar*!

Granted superpowers by Zorbon the Decider to fight for truth, justice and … well, probably not to steal his spaceship. But anyway, I had powers. In fact, if I'd wanted to I could've pulled the eject lever and flown to earth under my own power. But I needed the ship – it was essential to my plan. Using a combination of regular flight controls, telekinesis and my natural brilliance I steadied the craft and prepared to set it down. I identified an out-of-the-way landing spot deep in the woods, far from prying eyes, the sort of place even a random dog walker would never stumble across. And by that I don't mean that the dog was random, like a collie crossed with an envelope, I mean— Actually, never mind.

As I prepared to touch down a gust of wind lifted one corner of the ship and before I could correct it the opposite corner had touched the treetops. Before I knew what was happening I was cartwheeling through the air towards a large structure illuminated by multiple spotlights. Through the spinning canopy I glimpsed some kind of warehouse. Just before we crashed against it, the ship did this weird dimensional sidestep and ghosted through the roof without smashing it – or me – to pieces. At the last possible second alien safety systems re-engaged, bringing us to a controlled stop.

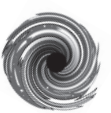
I popped the canopy and jumped out. The ship's emergency lighting flooded the immediate landing area. I seemed to have arrived in someone's bedroom. At least, it looked like a bedroom, but something felt off. For a start no one was here. Not that they hadn't yet come to bed, it looked as if no one had ever slept here. It was then that I noticed all the other bedrooms laid out around an open corridor and a bunch of labels with weird alien names. In a flash I knew where I was.

"IKEA," I mumbled.

From inside the ship I heard the onboard computer's voice once more. "Activating environmental stealth mode."

The ship began to change shape, transforming from its classic saucer-with-legs outline into a stylishly minimalist bedroom set. In seconds it had morphed into a bunk bed, a modular sofa and a storage unit in lime green.

"Flat pack achieved," declared the computer, which was now a bedside lamp. I knew it was the lamp because every time it spoke the light would flash. I could have sworn that the computer's voice sounded different too. Like a detective from one of those Scandinavian TV shows Mum and Dad were always watching. Which made sense since it was trying to fit in to its surroundings. I had to admit that it was a brilliant disguise. No one would ever



notice an extra bedroom in IKEA.

With the ship safely concealed I made my way out of the store to the nearest road. I shivered in the cold night air and took a moment to look up at the stars and reflect on my journey. I'd come a long way. The universe was a big place, but the multiverse was incomprehensibly bigger. Infinite, in fact. Universe upon universe, floating forever in the darkness. It was why I had risked all to travel here. That, and comics. They had taught me that in the multiverse everything is true. From planets made of cheese to civilisations where the dominant lifeforms are hyper-intelligent unicycles, worlds where dinosaurs still roamed, to worlds where everyone is a cowboy (and rides a dinosaur), anything that can be imagined existed out there, somewhere. I was counting on it.

For instance, at that very moment not far from where I stood, my family lay asleep in their beds. A parallel version of my family, leading different lives: Mum, Dad, Zack and me. I scanned the road ahead.

It was time to go and wake myself up.