

SPACE ODDITY

CHRISTOPHER EDGE

Chicken
House

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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.