

WHAT I DID ON MY HYPERGALACTIC INTERSTELLAR SUMMER VACATION



**Sneak
Preview of
Chapter 1!**

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CHAPTER ONE



“**H**ave a nice summer, everyone,” Mrs. Clayborn said. She could barely be heard over the sound of seventh graders frantically stuffing their backpacks, slamming their desks closed, and talking excitedly about their plans for the coming three months. Words like “amusement park,” “camp,” and “family trip” floated through the classroom.

Only one student didn't move. Teddy Harper remained in his desk by the window, elbow propped on his desk, chin in his hand, eyes drifting past the

school fence to the highway and the distant buildings visible across a long, flat expanse of grass and swamp.

“Teddy?” he heard somebody say from far-away, as though they were talking to him across an underground parking garage.

“Teddy?” the voice said again.

Teddy jumped this time, worried that he had been called upon to answer some important question, and that the whole class might be staring at him. “Aw, jeez!” he exclaimed, seeing Mrs. Clayborn standing in front of his desk, smiling down at him. “Sorry, Mrs. Clayborn,” he mumbled.

“I don't mean to bother you,” his teacher said in a joking tone, “but school's over, and I thought you might want to start your summer

vacation.”

Teddy sighed in relief, then sighed again in resignation. He slid his textbook into his briefcase. Other kids had backpacks. He had a briefcase, the kind his father had. His dad owned one of the zillion souvenir shops on the town's main street. “For my little businessman,” his father had said, presenting it to Teddy last Christmas. Teddy often wondered if his father had ever been a kid, or ever had a kid's dreams.

Mrs. Clayborn tilted her head and looked at him strangely. “That's not the kind of enthusiasm I usually see from my students this time of year...”

Teddy shrugged. “It's just not going to be much of a summer vacation,” Teddy told her. “My parents signed me up for Summer Science, so I'll be

right back here most of the school break.”

“But Teddy, I thought you were *interested* in science! At least, that's what you always told me.”

“No, I told you I like *science fiction*,” Teddy reminded her. “Outer space, spaceships, aliens, laser beams, stuff like that. That's different.”

“Well, I think the Summer Science program is a great idea for you,” Mrs. Clayborn said with a confident smile. “It'll give you something constructive to do with your time, and it'll give you a leg up on your science classes for next year! And you know I'd like to see some improvement in your grades.”

“Aw, jeez,” Teddy muttered. “Yes, ma'am.”

Mrs. Clayborn shook her head, and leaned against the back of the chair behind her. “I don't get you, Teddy Harper,” she said. *Teachers always*

try to emphasize an important comment by using your last name, Teddy thought. “You’re brighter than anybody in your class-or in the class ahead of you, for that matter. You just don’t apply yourself. It’s like you’re somewhere else entirely!”

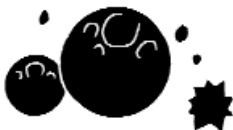
“No,” Teddy mumbled, “just *wanting* to be somewhere else.”

Mrs. Clayborn leaned forward and turned her head, so Teddy was looking directly into her ear. It wasn’t the best view of her he’d ever had. “I’m sorry, what did



you say?”

Teddy pulled his briefcase off his desk, smiled as cheerily as he could, and gave a gesture that was somewhere between a wave and a salute. “Nothing, Mrs. Clayborn,” he said. “Have a nice summer. See you in a few months.” And he slouched out the door, leaving Mrs. Clayborn to watch him go, puzzled.



Teddy came out of school into the early summer Florida heat and humidity, and immediately started sweating. He trudged down the steps to the bicycle rack. His was the only one left. All the other

students had gone, perhaps setting a new record for “fastest escape at the end of the school year.”

As he used a bungee cord to tie his briefcase down to the flat storage platform on the back of his bike, Teddy looked across the highway again, past the cars zooming by and out over the huge marsh. The ten or twelve buildings at the other end were miles away, but large enough to be seen. Most of them were flat and square, pretty boring, really, but one in particular held his eye. It looked like a crane, or scaffolding, or a construction structure of some kind. But every so often, it became a doorway to infinity. It was the launch platform for the Space Shuttle.

Since Teddy had been a little boy, his grandfather had driven him out to the shoulder of the



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highway near the school on launch days, and they'd parked the car, sat on the roof, eaten sandwiches and watched through binoculars with hundreds of others as the sleek white rocket screamed into the sky on a tail of fire. And always, Teddy wondered, *Where are they going?* And always, Teddy thought, *I wish I was going, too.*

Teddy turned to look down the highway, which became the main street of his town, a mile down the road. The buildings there were flat and square too, with nothing as interesting as a scaffolding to catch the attention. It was a boring, small town, filled with boring, small people who were born there, grew up there, and stayed there to sell cheap astronaut souvenirs in shops that all looked alike. Like his father. Teddy had a feeling the school

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would be as far as he would get down the highway.

“Aw, jeez,” he whispered to himself, “I’ll never get out of here.” Then he climbed on his bike and pedaled into town.