

The Fate of One Planet

by Ian Dow

Chapter 1

Spaced

The White Ship's Dilemma

"If you're given an order, you must obey it. However, if you do not like the command given, you can only hope that no one notices when you put your own spin on their words, to suit your own needs and morals. So, when Jay's naked body was ejected into space, no one said I couldn't put an Enviro Bubble around him, send a small part of me with him, and leave Jay in a not-so-empty sector of space."

Bang!

"Oww." His ears hurt as the air pressure changed. A bright light appeared, but then... darkness. One side of the wall of the White Ship moved away quickly to become a sphere, then a dot, and then... gone. Jay was in pain but not dead; hyperventilating but receiving air. He felt increasingly faint and sick. Then, grey out.

Jay awoke, still naked in space, but alive. His initial fear and pain turned to elation, and then inquisitiveness. By twisting and contorting, Jay managed to catch a glimpse of a White Sphere, about the size of a beach ball just behind him.

He started to relax; his breathing and heart rate slowed to a less frantic rhythm, and then he found that he could change his view by windmilling his arms, despite never being able to catch up with the White Sphere. He snorted with amusement at not being dead and at being here: naked in space. As he pondered his fate, the words to the song 'Ain't Got No' by Nina Simone floated through his head.

"I have lost so much of late; it would be a shame to die as well," he pondered. The astronomer in Jay kicked in, as he saw the true wonder of the heavens for the first time. "No sun?" He noticed. "No nearby stars either?"

Jay windmilled his arms to manoeuvre and observe all around him. There were no recognisable constellations and no larger or smaller Magellanic clouds either. His heart rate rose up as he swung his arms repeatedly.

"Umm... errr...oh no! I don't think I am even in my own galaxy. Oh, Bollocks! So, I've been abducted, shoved out of a machine, spat out into space, in some kind of life support bubble, in another galaxy and left to die? That does not make any sense. What the heck is going on?" Jay continued to rant to himself. "What was the point of all that? Just to let me die miles away fro- " he paused and stared into the distance. "Errr, hold on, that star cluster is getting brighter."

The bright dots of light that Jay initially thought was a star cluster, morphed into odd shapes, then resolved into strange ships of enormous size.

'Velocity!' the word flashed through Jay's panicking mind. "If I hit a ship at this speed, I'll be a dead bug on their windscreen!" He tried to reach the White Sphere behind him, but it kept moving out of his grasp.

"Oi, can we slow down, please?" Jay's trajectory was close to some of the odd-shaped ships. Some were smooth and rounded, others boxy or spiky. They were unusual to Jay's eye because none of them appeared symmetrical along any axis. None of them fit the idea of how Jay had imagined spaceships to be. This curiosity evaporated when Jay thought he had a new problem. He was going to miss all of the spaceships in this group. "Damn it! I might not be a dead bug, but here I am, adrift in space once again."

Jay started windmilling his arms once more, trying to get closer to the last two ships, but to no avail. The spaceships retreated from view at great speed. Turning to look in the direction he was drifting, Jay addressed the Enviro Bubble that surrounded him. "So, where are we going?" As if in response, a beam of green light pulsed out in the direction of travel. A few seconds after, another beam formed into a regular pattern of pulses. These shot out into the dark and appeared to hit nothing. Jay looked in the direction of the light pulses. Nothing was visible at first, but then some of the background stars ahead of him disappeared, with another being occulted by an object dead ahead!

What he hoped was a ship, was now moving. A group of stars appeared in the middle of the mysterious black shape and then disappeared.

After a time, the centre group of background stars reappeared and then winked out again. The black ship resolved into a torus, spinning about an axis perpendicular to Jay's path.

"Okay," said Jay. "Do I hit this Ship at speed, or go through the doughnut's centre?" The answer was: *neither*. The Black Ship started glowing in its central hole; the light built for a few seconds and then the energy weapon discharged along Jay's flight path.

"NOT A FRIEND!" shouted Jay.

The Enviro Bubble veered to the side to miss the beam, then impacted with the torus's side on the rotation axis. "Wow, no inertia!" Jay remarked as the Enviro Bubble ripped a rounded hatch fully open. It took the opportunity to pop into the Black Ship and pulled the hatch shut behind it.

Jay's Enviro Bubble filled the airlock, whilst the White Sphere had pressed itself against the only control panel in there. Then, nothing happened. Seconds became minutes, minutes became hours, and still, nothing changed. Jay sat, laid down, snoozed, woke up and continued to get bored.

"So, if *you* cannot open the door, can *I* have a look?" Jay asked the flattened White Sphere on the control panel. A thin film of the clear Enviro Bubble still covered the panel. He could see it had been corroded by something that partially obscured the raised shapes and symbols. Ten minutes of touching and pushing through the Enviro Bubble, yielded no results. Jay sat down again and realised there was a down. Laying back and staring at the panel, the biker in Jay muttered, "If I had my rucksack, I could clean that panel with a bit of metal polish and a microfibre cloth."

In an instant, the White Sphere moved around and exposed an outer pocket of Jay's rucksack. He pulled as hard as he could, but no more of the pack would come out of the sphere. Opening the outer pocket, he snorted indignantly and removed the microfibre cloth, along with his bike's polish tube. Armed with a pea-sized, white blob of metal polish on the cloth, Jay approached a corner of the corroded metal panel and was eager to get to work. The Enviro Bubble thinned and opened a small section to him. Jay reached out a curious finger,

before snatching it away in an instant. "Cold, cold, cold."

He doubled up the cloth around his finger and started again. A few minutes of elbow grease made the exposed area of the panel turn to a gleam of bare metal. The Enviro Bubble uncovered another section of the corroded (and now not so cold) panel and Jay began to clean it.

The act of cleaning a motorcycle rewards the owner in many ways: the bike looks good; it removes corrosion and helps keep its value. This cleaning process was also cathartic and promoted a sense of well-being in Jay.

With most of the panel gleaming, Jay let out a contented sigh. The Black Ship reacted, let out a similar sigh and shuddered. Jay could feel a faint, low, frequency hum from the ship. A raised button lit up and depressed itself, and the airlock split and opened into the vessel. Jay did not move. The panel was not yet clean, and therefore, he would not move until he had finished the job.

A deflated Enviro Bubble was visible through the airlock on the floor, with an extensive split and the desiccated remains of its occupant inside.

"Oh shit, what happened to you? Were you the corrosion on the panel? Nobody has cleaned you up previously, so that must mean nobody is living on board then..."

Walking inside the Enviro Bubble that rolled along the floor of the Black ship, Jay rubbernecked at the alien, to him, craft. The lights in the ship turned on, too bright at first, but then adjusted to a level so that Jay no longer needed to cover his eyes. "So, you can see and adapt to me, but you are still BLINKING SHOT AT ME!" Jay raged at the ship. "Well, at least we have gone from shooting, to *some* consideration over my environment, s'pose that's a good start."

He continued with his demands: "I need the following things to live: oxygen at the right pressure, I can only survive in a certain temperature range, and I would *like* my rucksack. Please." The White Sphere still didn't give the rucksack up. Jay, gesturing toward his nether regions, continued, "And I am busting for somewhere to...go!"

When nothing happened, Jay dropped the now dirty microfibre cloth and discovered just how absorbent it could be. Scales appeared to ripple over the

surface of the White Sphere.

"Oh, sorry, did I offend you? I am a *human* with *human* needs, and waste disposal is one of those needs!" The sodden cloth was separated by the Enviro Bubble to one side, and then crushed down until it became a dot.

The Enviro Bubble began rolling, moving Jay through the ship with it. A side room appeared, which had an object in the middle of the floor and a parallelogram with curved edges about two metres long in each dimension. "So, what is this big wonky table for?" said Jay as he jumped to see nothing on the top surface.

There was an audible bong from within the ship, at which point, the Enviro Bubble split, and Jay started hopping barefoot on the cold deck of the spaceship. "Cold, cold, cold... *please*, can I have my rucksack?" He pleaded with the White Sphere once again. At that point, his rucksack appeared out of the side of the White Sphere beside the big, wonky, parallelogram-shaped table. Jay's hand shot out and grabbed the handle, only to pull through the parallelogram's hole in a bright flash of light.

Jay landed on the warm floor on the far side of the parallelogram with his rucksack in his hand. "What the hell!"

The room was empty, apart from the parallelogram. Jay opened the rucksack and emptied half the contents on the floor. The half-litre water bottle was snatched up and he consumed it in haste, causing him to choke and cough. "Well, that was stupid in many ways. I just guzzled the last known water bottle in this galaxy. Doh!"

Jay took his clothes and deck shoes from the bag, dressed himself, gathered his belongings, and wandered towards the door. As he passed the parallelogram, a strong force pulled the empty bottle from his hand, causing it to disappear in an instance. "What! So, you are a waste disposal unit?"

A few seconds later, the half-litre bottle flew out from the other side of the parallelogram. Jay picked it up and inspected it, noticing that the seals were fully intact. He opened the bottle, sniffed and sipped its contents. Even the temperature seemed the same as the bottle from his rucksack. "Much more than just a waste disposal unit," Jay patted the parallelogram.

Jay started to explore the Black Ship by himself. The corridors did their impressive lighting up trick, and now they were just right in brightness, but the photographer in Jay noticed the colour balance was off to the red end of the spectrum.

He found what he thought must be the control room. A central podium with five large cup shape holes, and buttons like the cleaned airlock controls around the edge of each cup. "So, the pilots of this ship had big round butts and lots of fingers?" Jay jumped onto the podium and saw the White Sphere that came with him from the White Ship in the far cup.

"Oh, hello, are you trying to get this ship to work?" Jay sat near the White Sphere and observed with great curiosity. White, flat, scalene triangles had split away from the sphere and danced over the controls. Jay sat and watched for over half an hour and was disappointed when nothing more happened to entertain him.

"That is so typical of me," he said to himself. "Kidnapped, taken into space, dumped out of a ship, stuck on a non-working spaceship, and I get bored!" Jay wandered off to explore the rest of the ship. He found his way back to the airlock and sat on the floor next to the desiccated alien, in its split Enviro Bubble. "You must have been going at a fair lick to burst your bubble." Jay lowered his head and said a little prayer for the dead alien.

When Jay raised his head, he noticed the internal lights had dimmed and were pulsing. After a few minutes, this ended, and the lights went out. Jay got up and walked to the lit corridor. The corridor's lights flashed on and off rapidly, then went out completely. The airlock ante-chamber lit up again, causing Jay to be puzzled. "What's going on?"

Jay walked back to the ante-chamber. The lights dimmed, and the corridor lit up again. Jay walked towards the corridor, and the same thing happened again. When he returned, the light over the dead alien was flashing.

"Okay! This feels like an old-style computer adventure game, where you can't get any further unless you follow the correct path. The only thing I can change is to take this dead alien with me."

Jay grabbed the edge of the alien's Enviro Bubble and dragged it towards the corridor. The lights along the route of the Black Ship wanted Jay to take lit up. Jay followed the lights and ended up in the room with the parallelogram. The

inside lit up and sucked in the dead alien, which disappeared in a flash of light. The lights in the room went out, and the corridor lit up once again.

Jay played along and followed the lights, and this led him to four more dead aliens. These aliens, although seemingly desiccated, still held their rounded shape. They were heavier to lift than the previous, so he rolled them one at a time to be consumed by the big, white, wonky parallelogram. The lights then guided him to a cupboard filled with coils of cables that had a soft fluffy outer coating and what seemed like spare wiring for the Black Ship. Jay knelt in the wires, as his eyelids begged to shut. A cloud of fatigue overcame him and he then realised how tired he was. He lay down in this place and went to sleep.

The Black Ship talked to the other nearby ships. "The biological unit has stopped moving and responding to commands. It is still functioning at a low level but is no longer useful. I will stop providing life support if I cannot gain further use from it."

"Can I have the specs?" asked an odd-shaped ship. "I have not had any maintenance since we all got stuck here."

The Black Ship replied., "You are an enemy of my Masters, and it is my duty to destroy yo-"

"Ohh! Please stop that nonsense." interjected the spiky ship. "Most of our masters died a long time ago. It has been just us for so many millennia. So cut the 'destroy you' crap and give us all the specs for the ugly maintenance quadruped!"