

The Fate of One Planet

by Ian Dow

Chapter 10

Ambassadors

Jay woke up and began his everyday morning *things*. At five minutes past nine in the morning, exactly, the doorbell rang.

"Here we go. What silliness is going to happen to me today?" He answered the door, and a very smartly dressed Asian man and woman stood there and gave a tiny bow.

"Hello," said Jay, "How may I help you?"

The man explained, in perfect English – with a private school accent- that he was the Ambassador for the People's Republic of China, and continued to politely introduce his wife.

"We would be grateful if we could come in and talk with you, please?"

His pretty wife had a lovely smile, and so Jay said yes. He always had been a sucker for a nice smile.

Jay was glad he had spent so long cleaning the house yesterday as he sat them down in the lounge and offered them a choice of hot and cold drinks. He had the tea, and she had the hot chocolate.

Jay went into the kitchen to make the drinks, and he reflected on last night's conversation in the pub, remembering that he could ask for anything, anything at all, and could be the most important person in the world at that moment.

He returned to the lounge and gave the Ambassador's Wife a weapons-grade hot chocolate in his grandmother's best China cup and saucer. The Ambassador got a cracked mug with the teabag still floating in it.

"Oh, sorry about the mug," said Jay, "but people from your country broke into my house yesterday and threw everything on the floor." Jay didn't know this

for sure, but he stared hard and bluffed it out.

"If we could talk about what happened to you," the Ambassador started.

"No, no, no, no, no," said Jay, "We are not talking about anything until all the snooping devices are out of my house and possessions. I don't want to be tailed by goons, and you had better not disturb my friends and neighbours either."

The Ambassador's Wife put the hot chocolate down and, getting a device out of her handbag, started walking around Jay's house. After ten minutes, she dropped seven small devices in the cracked mug of tea and then carried on sipping the hot chocolate.

In the meantime, the Ambassador had been on the phone talking heatedly in Mandarin.

"We have complied with your wishes," he said at the end of the phone call.

"Ok," said Jay, "I had packed my motorcycle to go to Southampton for a weeks sailing with friends because I had been laid off on gardening leave from work and..."

Jay was interrupted as the doorbell rang. He excused himself and answered the door to the Russian Ambassador, and his slightly flustered 'because she was rushed there' wife.

"Hello, may we also come in?" the Ambassador requested after they had introduced themselves.

"Yes," said Jay, "But there are conditions."

Upon entering, the wives sat next to each other because they quite evidently knew each other. The Chinese wife leaned in and whispered, "Have the hot chocolate; it is actually very good."

The Russian Ambassador asked if his technician could come in to sweep the house. Jay nodded. The Russian technician found twelve devices.

Another knock on the door welcomed the Israeli Ambassador and her husband also arriving with a scanning device in hand.

"So, I still have a bug problem," said Jay.

One hour later, Jay had a full house. The spouses had taken over the kitchen, the smokers were banished to the garden, and the lounge was full of slightly strained smiles. It all felt very surreal.

The Japanese Ambassador's wife was trying to explain to the American Ambassador's wife that, "You get ordinary uranium for power stations and weapons-grade uranium for making bombs. Well, there is ordinary hot chocolate, but this," she said, taking another sip, "Is Weapons-Grade Hot Chocolate."

The American Ambassador's wife did not get it, which gave the German Ambassador's wife the giggles. "Since when has this situation gone nuclear?" The American Ambassador's wife asked. That statement set off the South African, Saudi and Argentinian wives laughing.

It was also equally rowdy in the lounge so Jay knew it was time to intervene. "Ok, everybody, your cars and security are blocking the street and bugging my neighbours, therefore bugging me. Please move them; then I can concentrate on the business at hand. If you don't feel secure here without armed goons outside, the door is right there,"

The room was still noisy, so Jay took a dining chair, put it in the middle of the room, sat on it, Christine Keeler style, and started to talk very quietly. Within seconds you could hear a pin drop. He explained the events of early yesterday to a large group of the world's Ambassadors. They managed not to ask questions until the end. These eventual questions, Jay answered the best he could.

Then, the Italian Ambassador asked with much raising of shoulders and upturned hands, in an apologetic manner. "What about you, waking up in bed and saying aloud, 'what? the Earth is going to be destroyed'?"

"Well," said Jay sarcastically, "thank you for bugging my bedroom and spying on me in my home." He was about to say it was just a dream but changed that to, "It is an image I have seen."

Four of the Ambassador's phones measured Jay's heart rate, pupil dilation, breathing, perspiration, voice modulation, body language and other markers. It

was a true statement that came out on the phones as accurate.

"The aliens told you the world is going to end?" The French Ambassador asked.
"I did not say the aliens told me anything directly; I never met them," replied Jay.

"What do they look like?" asked another Ambassador.

"A four-foot diameter ball with short arms- WHAT!" Jay interrupted his own sentenced with great surprise at his own response to the question.

The data sent from the phones and answers returned to earpieces, and again, all said every statement was true. This contradiction sent the meeting into uproar. Jay quickly left the room and went to the loo. He leant heavily on the basin, breathing hard. "Where the fuck did that come from? How do I know that? I did not see anybody or anything. I never got off the bike, and what is that awful smell?" The loo, which was clean this morning, was now a mess. Jay walked back into the lounge, pulled himself up to his full six-foot-five height and quietly said, "I would like you all to leave. Now."

They all filed out.

"What the fuck?!"

His house looked worse than when the spies had tossed it.

Cleaning the house again, Jay had to put tape on the hole in his vacuum cleaner to stop it whistling, where the spy camera had been removed. The dishwasher took two loads, with the rest done by hand. After several hours the house was cleanish, and the carpets and furniture would still need shampooing. He went to the fridge to get something to eat. Empty. Freezer stripped bare. Online shopping again, and thinking about a takeaway.

The phone rang.

"Hello?"

"Beer, eight."

"Yes."

Clunk.

As Jay walked out to the garage, he was harangued by his neighbour. "I could not get out of my own drive earlier!"

"I'm very sorry about that; I did get them all to move as soon as I became aware of the problem," replied Jay.

"There were men with guns! It upset the wife. This is England, not the wild west," the neighbour added.

"Yes, I told them not to do that around here," said Jay as he walked to the garage.

"Well, it's not good enough," said the neighbour to Jay's back.

"Always got to have the last word," Jay said under his breath, as he rolled his eyes.

He drove out the drive, past the neighbour. He saw Bea across the road with her hands on her hips. She made eye contact with Jay in his car, held her palms up, and mouthed the words, "What the fuck?"

"Sorry," Jay mouthed back and drove off to the pub.

The surveyor in Jay noted that the cannon bollard by the side door was at a very slight angle, from the vertical, compared with yesterday. Gea was at the bar with the Landlord. He got up to greet Jay with arms wide for a hug.

"Nope, not happening after your behaviour yesterday, mate!" said Jay as he dodged Gea and sat down on a barstool.

"A pint of your very best, please, my good Bar Steward," said Jay smiling and drumming his hands on the bar.

"Was that Bar Steward or Bastard?" enquired the Landlord, still polishing a glass.

"There's a difference?" enquired Gea with an innocent voice.

The Landlord pretended to spit in a glass. He pulled a pint and put it in front of Jay with a plonk. This spilt some beer onto the bar towel. Gea examined the

spillage and said to Jay, "You work for, or should I say used to work for the council. Do you know anyone in the Weights and Measures department?"

"They are called Trading Standards these days, and I do."

The Landlord did a long hawk in the back of his throat and offered to top up the pint. Jay covered the top of the glass quickly with his hand and said, "That would be fine, good sir." Jay quickly downed his pint.

"I needed that after today, I have been host to many of the world's Ambassadors and their wives, and they trashed my house and consumed everything in it.

"They didn't drink all of your vintage ale collection?" asked the Landlord. "No, that is safely stored in my garage pit," Jay said. He asked for, "Another pint with slightly less head on this time, please."

The Landlord leaned into Jay and told him he was telling Gea about Jay's disastrous date with Bea at her works ball just before Jay arrived.

"Oh crap, that was bad," said Jay with his head in his hands. Gea took the reins. "So, is it true?"

"No," interrupted Jay, "It is all lies or an urban myth or something."

An undaunted Gea carried on. "That you were dancing with Bea at her very posh works ball. You in a rented penguin suit and she in a gown-less evening strap."

Gea sounded like a barrister in a courtroom.

"That you managed to sneeze into her cleavage."

"I was getting over a cold," interjected Jay.

"And when you pulled out a hanky to help clean up, a packet of condoms fell out on the floor."

"I was in the Boy Scouts, and you should always be prepared," added Jay.

"And when you bent down to pick up said condoms, you farted!"

"Well, it was more of a gastric type of flu I was getting over," Jay lamely embellished.

"That sounds like our boy at his best," added the Landlord.

"That is one hell of a story," said Gea.

"That is not the end of that story," said Jay, "I will save that for another night." Jay asked for another pint.

The Landlord held out his hand and said, "keys."

Jay handed over the Corrado's keys, which were hung up behind the bar and said, "Yes, Mother," as he received his third pint for compliance. Gea raised his eyebrows at the Landlord, who defended his decision.

"Three pints at 4.7% alcohol? He said those bloody Ambassadors ate him out of house and home, which obviously means an empty stomach and Jay being such a lightweight!"

"When you do the maths, he is such a cheap date," agreed Gea.

They told each other their stories of last night and this morning. "They pulled the diplomatic immunity crap on the police. But I would not release the Range Rover till they paid a small amount of compensation to clean up the car's fluids from the pavement," said the Landlord.

Jay, not driving for once, had a fourth pint.

"Man, you should not use alcohol to try and relieve stress. You had better be on your best because they will want more information from you," said Gea. "And now you added the balls up with the Balls."

"What, are you trying to put me out of business?" countered the Landlord. It was late, so Gea drove him home in the Corrado and got a cab back to his car.

Jay went to bed and started having more vivid dreams.