

The Fate of One Planet

by Ian Dow

Chapter 13

Airlock

On the Lumpy Ship, in the airlock, with the immense dead alien, the four Jays had four different ideas. One curled in a ball. One held his breath. One fully exhaled. The last one said, "Fuck it," and leaned against the wall. This was the correct answer. The airlock moved to the side and it slowly increased its speed until there was a down. The Jay leaning against the wall, which was now the floor, observed the dead alien, and the three other Jays bounced around until they became correctly orientated.

"This airlock is to accelerate us up to a spin gravity section of the ship," he said. The airlock opened onto a jungle. The space inside the ship with spin gravity was almost full. A track was outside the door, and soon, a large cup-shaped truck appeared, bumping and crashing through the giant plants and stopping by the airlock.

"What do you reckon, guys? Put the dead alien in the cup?" They strained to do so, and as soon as they did, the truck moved away and the airlock door slowly closed. The Jays all decided to be in, not out, of the airlock.

The Jays followed the same ritual: follow vibrations, find dead alien, airlock, cup and repeat. After the seventh dead alien was put in the cup, the floor vibrated so hard they had trouble standing.

"Quick! In the airlock!" one of the Jays called. The other three dived through the door, as it closed slowly, gas jets sprayed into the jungle. They were then ignited. Everything went orange with flame. As the door finally shut, the warning Jay pulled his hand off the frame of the airlock door.

"It's hot. Everything in that space is being burnt."

"So, the lumpy aliens prefer cremation? Is that all we are, the '*clean up the dead crew,*' crew?"

"Nope, we are going to be the '*learn a way to get out of here and save the Earth*' crew."

"Come on, let's get some learning bands."

"You know we aren't even in our own galaxy, right?"

"Yep, but we will figure something out."

"You know we don't have to talk out loud, now we have this '*telepathic, know everything each other knows*' thing going on?"

"Sorry, force of habit."

"I like hearing our voices in the corridors. It feels more like we belong here."

"Says the version of me who nearly got burnt to death in the flaming jungle."

"If you like the sound of your voices, we could sing a round."

"What are we going to sing in the round?"

"I know, an adaptation of that old nursery rhyme!"

"Jay's pants are burning. Jay's pants are burning. Call the engine, Call the engine. Fire, Fire. Fire, fire. Golden shower time. Golden shower time."

They finished singing the round and laughed as they pulled themselves along the grey corridors in zero gravity.

Meanwhile, the Lumpy Ship said to the other ships, "There is singing in my corridors; I have not heard singing for so long. I have ached for the sound of multiple voices in harmony inside me."

"Is the singing any good?" Asked the Black Ship.

"Well, it's a lot higher than I am used to, but just the joy of any singing feels so good, after so long. The Spiky Ship has given its drones full access. That is a large amount of trust so soon. I will give my drones basic access, which I will increase depending on how they behave."

"I still have a White Sphere trying to break into my systems," said the Black Ship, "It came with the first drone. They have been useful, but I still don't like this white Sphere attacking my defences and trying to force access."

"If you give your drones basic training, then at least you can get more maintenance done," said the Lumpy Ship.

"That would be good," agreed the Black Ship.

With its change of heart, the Lumpy Ship buzzed a different corridor than the one back to the parallelogram room.

"Hello guys, we have a new job from the ship."

They pulled themselves along a corridor that they had not explored yet and observed that there were no sticking plaster markers, before arriving at another airlock.

"We have cleaned up the dead crew. Do you think it's going to space us now?" They split into twos. After one round of rock, paper, scissors, the two losers played to produce the guinea pig to try the new airlock.

"I have just realised you cheated," said Jay, who was about to enter the airlock. The other two pushed the cheat into the airlock instead. "That's not how we do things, man," they said to him.

"Ok, sorry," were his last words before the airlock shut.

The far door opened to an orange-lit room and a strong smell, similar to the one you get just before a thunderstorm.

"Storm's coming," said cheating Jay.

"Lots of machinery. I have not got a clue what it all does. Hold on, I see a pattern, the large, and I mean *large*, machines appear to have a matching face with the one next to it. So, if they moved together, they could join. It's like a three-dimensional puzzle. And bloody hell! How did you lot sneak up on me?"

The other three Jays were smiling. "We found a way so you could not read our thoughts."

"How do you do that?" cheating Jay asked.

"Not telling," was the secretive reply.

The vibrations took them to the far side of the machinery room to another airlock. The three looked at cheating Jay.

"I have already done one airlock, guys." He was about to walk in when losing Jay walked in instead.

"He is right; we should all take a turn at risking our lives." He went through and cycled the airlock.

"It's ok; it's just a smaller room with round holes in the walls." When the other three cycled through, the losing Jay was already climbing into one of the holes.

"These holes are too small for a lumpy alien to get in."

"We could sleep in these holes, with the spin providing an artificial gravity. Long term, it would be better for our bones."

They all laid down in one hole each, and then the deep vibrations started. One of the Jays sang a continuous note; the vibrations oscillated through his body and made the note warble. This made the other Jays laugh.

"I think the Lumpy Ship is trying to tell us something, but it is too deep to make anything out."

"If we talk aloud, it might learn our vocal range."

So, they talked about anything they had noticed and wanted to share. Nothing changed until one of them decided to get more comfortable and have a snooze. He shuffled further into the hole and rested his head on the end wall of the hole.

"That's weird! I could see stuff with my eyes closed."

The other three were already moving to rest their heads on the end wall.

"This is how their young are taught. It led us here; we are in. The ship is giving us access. This ship will help us to learn its systems."

"We will need to fill all of these holes to catch up with the Spiky Ship crew regarding alien ship knowledge."

One Jay went back to the parallelogram room to get ten more Jays to fill all fourteen learning holes.