

The Fate of One Planet

by Ian Dow

Chapter 14

Explaining

"Good morning, planet Earth!" said Jay.

"Well, it's morning here in England. So sorry, I should have said 'hello Planet Earth, whatever time zone you are in'. Umm. OK, I suppose you want to know what happened to me? And how this affects the whole planet? I wanted everyone to know at the same time. I have relayed what happened to me several times to smaller groups. So, they can check that all I tell you is the same, or they can call me out if there is some inconsistency. Does anyone object to me starting? No? OK. On the morning in question, I was riding my motorcycle to go sailing with my friends on their catamaran. My motorcycle was loaded with a soft bag strapped to the rear seat and I had a rucksack on my back. I was driving along the M25, London ring motorway, when...."

One of the images began flashing red, which meant they wanted to talk.

"Umm, Yes?" said Jay, "I was hoping to tell at least part of the account before being interrupted."

The red-light link said, "This was not at the time of the first atmospheric incursion?"

"Pardon?" replied Jay, "I can only relate to you my own personal experience. When was the first atmos..."

The screens all went blank.

"What!?" Jay examined the set-up, checking that the computer was on, and the monitors were working. He heard a noise from the street, and looking out the window, he noticed a black van and the new cable from the street pole hanging down.

Jay bolted. Out the back door, up the trellis, over his and his neighbour's garage roofs, swung down using a tree branch, over three fences into a garden of a neighbour he knew, grabbed their kid's bike, gate, street, gone.

Sweaty and out-of-breath, he arrived at an acquaintance's house and asked to use the phone. He still had the Tech Ladies card in his back pocket, so he rang that number. A lady answered, and Jay told her the cable to the pole had been cut, that he was in trouble and asked if she could help him.

An automatic voice said, "Transferring."

A man answered. "Who is this?" asked Jay.

"I work for the Civil Service. What is the problem? We saw you, and only you go off the air."

"A black van full of men in combat gear with guns, cut the cable. I did not hang about to find out if they were friendly or a kidnap squad."

"They would be the latter, Sir. We have your location; we will send a car."

"To take me home?"

"Yes, to take you home, Sir. Give me a password, so you know it is the right car."

A nondescript car pulled up. The passenger got out, walked up the door and said, "Boss flusher," through the letterbox.

Jay thanked the acquaintance and went home after returning the kid's bike. The cable was already back up, and the car remained outside. The front door was lying broken in the drive, and the cleaning ladies were fitting a new door and straightening the house after it had been turned over in the search for Jay. "Sir," they nodded at Jay, before returning to work.

Jay had a shower, got some toast and a weapons-grade and went back on the air.

"Hello everyone, I'm so sorry, but someone just tried to kidnap me. Anyway, where was I? Oh yeah, so I was driving down the M25..."

Jay told the story in its entirety and then answered questions for several hours. It was hard work being scrutinised by so many people over so such a long period of time. When they finally ran out of questions relating to the abduction, they turned to personal questions to ascertain Jay's character. When the Japanese representative asked for the weapons grade hot chocolate recipe, many representatives leaned into the screen. Jay just laughed, then stretched and yawned.

A few seconds later, most of the screens flashed red. The chairman said, "What did you just say?"

"Pardon?" said Jay.

"What did you just say?" the chairman asked again.

"What? When? Play it back to me." Jay listened in to understand what was going on. "I just said, 'the main engine is about to self-destruct'."

"No," said the chairman, "you made an unintelligible noise."

"I think I was talking a load of balls," said Jay, shocked at what had happened.

"I am tired, and I think I am signing off for today," said a perplexed Jay. With that, he turned off the screens.

Jay reflected on the strangeness of the situation, and how weird the comment that came out of his mouth was. With his palm on his face, he wondered too about what engines could be about to self-destruct.

The cleaning ladies had gone. A new front door hung in place, with the new keys on his key ring and the old keys and locks in a bag.

"Those guys are good," he said to the empty room. His tummy distracted him as it asked for food. He prepared and consumed a large meal just before the phone rang.

"Hello?"

"Beer, eight."

"Yes!"

Clunk.

Jay walked out to the car that had replaced the one that had brought him home. As he walked towards the black car, the window rolled down, and the woman inside said very quietly, "Boss flusher."

Jay nodded and said, "I'm off to my pub. Just a heads up."

It was then the woman's turn to nod.

Jay arrived before Gea this time. So, he got in three pints. Gea arrived a little later with arms open for a hug.

"Still nope," said Jay, "I'm still having nightmares about the last time."

The Landlord added, "The horror!" with raised eyebrows. Then laughed.

"What delights befell you now?" Gea asked.

"Well, in short, Bea pissed me off by trying to manipulate me with her environmental cause. A bunch of bodybuilders cleaned my carpets, some nice ladies filled my house with video conference tech, an armed kidnap squad kicked my front door in, and the bodybuilders, who I secretly call 'The Cleaning Ladies', fixed the house. I had a very long conference call with representatives from all over the world and ended by me speaking a load of balls."

"Nothing new with the last bit then," added Gea.

"Cheers, mate, with a friend like you who needs an armed kidnap squad?"

"Are you going to tell Gea about after the ball?" Asked the Landlord, "he is dying to find out."

"I am worn out from talking all day," said Jay, "If you are so keen, you tell the story."

The Landlord took a sip of his pint and said to Gea, "It was a dark and stormy night."

"No... it was warm and starry actually," interrupted Jay.

"Who exactly is mis-telling this story!" said the Landlord with his hands on his hips in mock indignation.

Jay waved him on.

"It was a warm and starry night, with a full blood moon that is always a harbinger of bad omens."

Then he scowled at Jay, daring him to challenge him again. "Our man here, after making such a monumental fuckup at the ball, comes home without his date, having abandoned her to the attention of the bosses' idiot nephew. Who has evil designs towards Bea and offers her a lift home in his vintage Aston Martin. Our man, who is still rattled by what had happened, decides he cannot sleep and will go out for a ride on his motorbike to calm down, resulting in him managing to piss off his neighbour by starting his Ducati at that ungodly hour of the night."

"Oh, so that's why your neighbour thinks you are a dick," added Gea.

Jay continued to shake his head in disbelief.

"Well, Jay here drives back to the event hall, but finds it closed, so he heads for home. Unbeknownst to him, Bea is in the Aston Martin a few miles up the road. Her bosses' nephew is a big fan of a particular film franchise. And when you have too much money that you have not earned yourself, people can indulge their fantasies.

Both Gea and Jay nodded along in agreement.

"So, this Aston has had some modifications. Jay on the Duke eventually catches up with the Aston and the nephew informs Bea that he thinks they're being followed. To which Bea tells him, 'So what!' The Nephew decided to cut through High Beech wood and put his foot down. This is Jay's way home, and he coincidentally follows. Bea has never seen any of the films in this franchise and wants to know why the nephew is suddenly talking with a slight lisp. In the

woods, on very familiar roads, Jay opens up the Duke and starts to catch the Aston. The Nephew, semi-heroically, tells Bea that he's got it under control, before flipping a switch in the central console. 'This car has sprayed oil all over the road to take out the motorcycle following us,' he proudly announced. Bea, unimpressed, raged at the nephew and begun hitting him with her clutch bag. She realised how fatal this could be, on a sharp bend too, and told him as such!"

Jay swirled the beer round in his glass as he recalled the event.

"Meanwhile, our man here sees the road ahead go black and very shiny in the brake lights. Thinking that the old car has lunched its motor and dropped its sump contents on the road just in front of a bend. With no time to stop, or any road to use, his familiarity with this road is his only saving grace, and he rides the High Beech Berm."

The Landlord stood tall, folded his arms and nodded.

Gea pointed at Jay in disbelief and said, "He rode the High Beech Berm, at night, on a road bike. When most of the off-road lads struggle with that one?"

"Yep," said the Landlord.

"Fuck me!" said Gea.

"No thanks," said the Landlord and Jay together.

"Meanwhile, Bea thinks the nephew has just tried to murder some poor motorcyclist. So, she beats the living crap out of him with her clutch bag until he stops the car. The big V twin arrives with a thunderous roar. The idiot Nephew is still in the role, says he will protect her and tries to leap out of the Aston. Our man here stops close to the driver's door, it hits the rubber foot peg and bounces back. The Nephew hits his head, and the lights go out. Bea and Jay are surprised to see each other. She walks around to the Darmah, hoicks up her micro dress and climbs on the back. Then tells our man here to drive her home."

"When nephew wakes up and winds down the window. Bea gets right in his face and tells him not to leave the scene until he has called the police to get the oil and its environmental disaster cleaned up before someone gets hurt

when they skid on it. Then our man Jay drives her home on the Duke. He thinks Bea will be pissed with him because of the embarrassment at the ball, being abandoned, and the incident with the Aston, which he still believes was engine failure. Bea, still in her hoicked up micro dress, windblown hair due to no crash helmet, is super mellow, with a silly grin on her face. This was because numbnuts here did not realise what the big V twin had done for her. She just pats him on the arm, says goodnight with a silly grin on her face and goes into her house."

Gea's eyes narrowed. "How do you know all this?" he asks.

"I have multiple sources," said the Landlord tapping the side of his nose.

"You rode the High Beech berm?" Gea asked Jay directly.

"I got punched in the nuts by the tank, and it was a really rough ride. The alternative was to brake; the bike would go down on the oil, then you slide at speed until you get launched by the far end of the berm into the, oh so forgiving, mature oak tree trunks."

"I had a dream about that area near High Beech the other night," said the Landlord.

"Well, tell-all," said Gea.

"Well, I had a dream the other night about riding my pushbike down the old A11, towards the Robin Hood Pub, through Epping Forest. In my dream, there were no curbs, road signs or pub. Just road and forest. I made a left turn on the roundabout, and as I did so, I noticed an old man sitting on the ground. I thought something was wrong as he didn't look dressed for sitting on the ground in a forest in winter. So, I turned around the triangle on the roundabout exit, to pull alongside the man. I got off the bike, took off my cycle helmet to speak with him, and checked he was OK. The man looked up at me and told me the police had just left him there to die."

"I then noticed that the man was Spike Milligan, the Comedian who had passed away several years before. So, I put my jacket around him to keep him warm and started a conversation with him. Apart from being cold, he seemed ok, so after five minutes of talking, I said I knew a joke about him that was not disrespectful and asked if I could tell it? He said yes, but got in first and asked

had I heard the one about the window frame and the air freshener? Then my bloody alarm clock went off, and I didn't even get the bloody punch line! I know thousands of jokes but have not heard this one and will never get the bloody punch line!"

"It must be a fart joke," said Gea.

"...and on that cultural high note, I'm off home," said Jay.