

The Fate of One Planet

by Ian Dow

Chapter 16

Business

The Jay on the Planet of Games Sphere woke up. He now knew of the other Jays' three partial alien languages, how to maintain small sections of three different alien ships and what the white parallelogram could do.

Creature came into Jay's new room, and Jay greeted it in the language of Ball. Creature was shocked and so flashed orange in skin colour, then quickly turned to its natural grey. Creature scuttled closer to Jay in a conspiratorial manner, put the tip of a tentacle in front of its mouth and made a shushing noise. Jay said in Ball, "You don't want me to speak that language?" Creature replied in Ball, "Not good for long life!"

Jay then tried Spiky and Lumpy languages instead. This resulted in even more shushing from a now bright orange Creature. "You do not speak," it commanded in English.

"Wow, you are a quick study", thought Jay, who blushed, and Creature gave a little laugh on seeing Jay blush.

Creature went to the wall opposite the bed and touched it, which caused it to light up as a screen. A main round view showed the inside of a giant spherical space, and the four remaining curved edged corners showed different pairs of beings talking to each other. Tapping one of the corners caused the conversation between the beings to be heard out loud. Creature did a quick demo, by waving a tentacle past the main view. It moved up or down and side to side, so you could see the complete inside of this area. By touching a zone, it zoomed in and, whilst flickering, it then zoomed out.

"One channel television," said Jay, "got it."

As it scuttled out of the room, Creature pointed at the screen and warned, "You do not speak, or you go here."

Jay put the rucksack behind his back and sat back to watch Alien TV. Nothing happened for quite a while, until the four pairs of aliens became more animated. The view then changed to a hole in the side of the wall, with a tube extending slowly, then pulling back rapidly. There was a puff of gas, and a flailing alien flew into the arena. It looked like the one he had seen by the White Parallelogram. The view followed its weightless tumbling and the picture then split to show where it was heading.

A Large Brown Lump opened multiple eyes and a huge mouth. On either side of the mouth, two bulges appeared. They swelled, then popped. Two smaller versions of the Brown Lump shot out towards the flailing alien, trailing umbilical cords back to the main, massive Brown Lump.

After a long flight, the Lumps intercepted the alien. It clawed at them with no effect as they bit off its limbs, then sank their teeth into the alien's body. The umbilical cords pulled tight, and the wriggling alien was drawn back to the largemouth. The smaller Brown Lumps kept the limbs as they were absorbed back into the main body and the still moving alien disappeared into the enormous mouth, which snapped shut.

"What the fuck? That was awful! Feeding that thing is entertainment! If you can hear me guys, I am in deep trouble!" Jay watched several different aliens all meet the same fate. He got the impression from the other Jays that more information was needed. So, Jay studied every inch of the spherical space and took in as much as he could learn about the alien-eating Large Brown Lump.

The Right Ball told the Larger Ball that they had some exciting merchandise from a far-off exotic world. "First, the pink quadruped, this alien may be as ugly as bad sex, but on the end of two of its limbs are many digits, ideal for holding cleaning tools, that its simple brain can cope with. It's skinny, so it would be good for cleaning atmosphere ducts and waste excretion pipes."

"What about the other two limbs? Why can't they hold cleaning tools? It could do twice as much work then?" asked the Larger Ball.

"That is a minor defect we had noticed," said the Left Ball, "But it should cover our debt even in this state."

The Larger Ball looked back and forth between the two other Balls waiting for the joke's punchline. But it never came.

The Larger Ball lost his temper and rolled around the room, knocking things over. It stormed into the Left and Right Balls and bellowed.

"You think one skinny ugly alien will settle your debts. Where is my stick? I will dismantle you both right now!"

The Left and Right Balls were not fazed by the threat of death. They stayed still and remained calm in the face of weapons and bellowing. The Larger Ball was expecting them to be rotating in fear, but it worked out there must be something that it did not understand, so it stopped.

"Well?" it asked.

The Left Ball said to the Right Ball, "Well, tell it the good part then."

"Okay, the ugly pink quadruped is the only known creature in the universe that can be reproduced alive by a, '*They Are Missing Machine*'." The Large Ball pointed at the White Parallelogram in the corridor outside. The enormity of the concept was slowly flooding its brain.

"With the correct verbal or light command to a '*They Are Missing Machine*', you could reproduce this ugly alien any number of times, anywhere in the universe?"

The pair of Balls give a slight roll forward and back, their equivalent of a nod.

"Good sex for me!" The Large Ball's expletive echoed down the corridor.

"And you, and only you, have the sole distribution rights to the ugly quadruped?" The pair of Balls did the little rock back and forth again.

"Wait, a short time measure. What's the catch? You two always have an angle. So, tell me right now, or I will get my stick out again," threatened the Large Ball.

The Right Ball went into its sales pitch. "First, you sell the ugly maintenance alien off cheap. Everyone wants a cheap maintenance drone to do their dirty work. Then they find it does not live on any other food in the universe, bar the products we found in the two soft containers that came with it. We have one

of these aliens, a couple of corridors lighter than this, and it nearly died on the multiple food types we tried until it was given its own food. Then it got stronger."

"This was the ugly pink thing that got in the way of our greeting?" the Larger Ball asked.

"And you want to sell it cheap with a small food stock, so lots of purchases are made, and then everyone will have to buy its expensive food from us, or it gets weak and dies." The pair of Balls bounced together with delight as the Large Ball got their plan.

The three Balls rolled up to the lighter gravity corridor where Jay was now kept. He was taken with the incentive of the Left Ball having a stick on its arm to a white parallelogram. First, a rucksack was produced, Jay's clothes were ripped from him, and they pointed at the rucksack until Jay pulled out and put on fresh clothes. Then a new rucksack and his holdall were produced. The other Jays could see the holdall, despite not having access. So, the Jays all thought about the holdall.

The Jay with the holdall said, "Jay's holdall", and threw it into the Parallelogram. It disappeared in a flash, and all the other Jays now had access to it.

The Left Ball fired and the Larger Ball bounced into the Left Ball, so the plasma weapon tore up the wall till it stopped firing. The plasma from the stick had melted his clothes to his skin.

"You have damaged the goods!" the Larger Ball berated the Left Ball.

"It's okay," said the Right Ball, "We can make another. We need to get this one out of sight, so the new one does not see it."

"Flight to ecstasy," they all said together.

They dragged the burnt Jay to a panel that, when touched, opened up to reveal a hole and a sucking noise. The Burnt Jay was thrown in, and the door was slammed behind him.

The Balls produced a naked Jay who said, "Wasn't I here earlier?"

With two rucksacks and one holdall, Jay was then dressed, fitted with the other full rucksack on his back and the holdall in hand. Then at stick point, forced to go into the Parallelogram while the Large Ball said, "Property of Large Ball Businesses."

The Left Ball went to the other side of the parallelogram and said, "Property of Large Ball Businesses."

"Okay!" Said an exact copy of the Jay, who had just gone in and came out again.

The Left Ball checked the side of its stick. It showed him that the agreed sum had been taken from its funds. They then emptied the holdall and rucksack and put all they recognised as food and drink in the rucksack and sent it through, calling it their 'properties' food'. When the Left Ball retrieved a food rucksack, it gasped and then laughed at the price. The Balls sent the new Jay back to the old Jay's room, believing that he did not know what had happened. The moment the door shut, he switched on the screen.

Burnt Jay slipped in and out of consciousness as he bumped into the walls of the vast pipe system that he was in. The moving air took his body to a funnel-shaped room that pushed him into a tube that shut at both ends. The air pressure built up until the pain in his head was more significant than the burns, then there was a sudden decompression, and he was left flailing around in the brightly lit metal sphere.

"Noo!" shouted the new Jay watching the screen. As he saw the burnt Jay tumble through the air in the sphere. Burnt Jay quickly took off the trousers he was wearing and flapped them in a vain attempt to change his course away from the large brown lump. The Jay watching the screen realised this caused great amusement to the commentators and the audience feedback.

"Fuck them!" cursed the new Jay, "Fuck them all!" he raged. The Burnt Jay was caught by the two smaller versions of the Brown Lump that took off an arm and a leg.

The new Jay felt the pain as well and screamed in agony. The smaller Lumps were pulled in on their umbilical cords and released Burnt Jay to fall into the Large Brown Lump's mouth. Burnt Jay wanted to fade out away from the pain

but flailed with his remaining arm and leg to get a better view as he went towards the giant mouth. He noticed before he went in that the Large Brown Lump shut its eyes and took a long breath just before the mouth snapped shut. Jay was consumed.

After a few minutes, the new Jay stopped shaking. The phantom burns and dismemberment pains he was feeling faded away. This was the first time Jay had experienced death, and he did not like it or its manner.

"Fuck them all!" he said one last time.