

The Fate of One Planet

by Ian Dow

Chapter 4

Lumpy

"What the hell?"

Jay found himself floating in darkness, naked, with the handle of his rucksack in his right hand. He pulled on the bag and felt in one of the outer pockets until he found a small LED torch and switched it on. Jay looked around to see a larger white parallelogram machine in a great empty room with grey walls. Floating weightless, he carefully removed clothes from the rucksack and got dressed. Swimming actions got him nowhere fast, so he swung the bag around as hard as possible, and then let it go. This moved him to the cold grey walls that were ribbed with holes, making convenient hand and footholds. Jay then pulled himself around the room and launched himself to collect the rucksack.

Deck gloves on against the cold, Jay tried to take a drink of water for the first time in zero-G. The water stuck to his face and was accidentally inhaled up his nose. Coughing and spluttering produced ex nose water droplets floating in the room. "Bugger, that is too precious to waste."

He put the rucksack on and launched himself towards the droplets, sucking them in as he passed, just like he had seen on the videos of the International Space Station. When he had collected the water droplets, he stopped and smiled. It had been a fun game and experience.

"This is not the Black Torus Ship!" he said to the darkened grey room. Jay located the door and launched himself towards it. It opened as he flew through and the door rumbled shut behind him.

In the large corridor, Jay shone the torch in both directions. It was the same ribbed grey as the last room: no signs, no markings, just grey.

Before exploring, Jay decided to mark this door with an X, made by sticking plasters from his rucksack's small first aid kit. He then used the smaller plasters to mark his route at junctions. Some doors would not open, and others had

large dead alien bodies that were desiccated as they lay in, what was probably, their personal spaces. They seemed to be held in webbing hammocks. It was hard to make out the shape of the long-dead creature, which was grey and large, lumpen in shape, with short arms that ended in two fat digits poking out in a dozen places.

Jay's exploring brought him to what he thought must be the control deck. A large round room with a large ball suspended in the middle, occupied most of that space. Fluted tubes supported this structure also covered in the ribs. The central ball had a dozen holes, each big enough to take one alien. The holes themselves had recesses that would take the dozen two-fingered arms this species had.

No screens. No lights. No windows. The room was probably in the middle of the ship. "Not big on visuals this race." He said.

Jay noticed the torch had started to dim, so he followed the sticking plasters back the way he came, hand over hand, along the ribs in the weightless corridors. When he got to the parallelogram room, he decided to try something...

He held up the torch and shouted, "Torch," and then threw it through the parallelogram. The torch disappeared in a flash of light, and then he was surrounded in darkness. Jay bounced off two walls to reach the far side and shouted the word torch again.

In the bright flash of light, Jay caught a glimpse of a torch made by the White Parallelogram, before everything went dark again. Finally, he heard the metal torch bump into the wall behind him, and, after a quick fumble, he had grasp of it. This new torch's batteries were full and it illuminated the grey room.

He produced two more fully charged torches by shouting "torch" twice more. New game: naming and doubling up all his possessions. With his duplicated possessions packed into his rucksack, he went to one of the empty personal spaces and carefully consumed food and drink in zero-G. He then tangled himself into the webbing hammock and went to sleep.

"Um, my bio unit has also stopped moving."

The Lumpy Ship said to the other vessels.