

The Fate of One Planet

by Ian Dow

Chapter 8

Games

The White Ship was ordered to go to the Planet of the Games. Before it got there, the Balls wanted to control their copy of Jay, so they asked the Ship to make another duplicate of naked Jay.

He came out of the Parallelogram with the words, "Wasn't I here earlier?"

They told the Ship to show Jay a hologram of his home planet. Pointing at himself and the hologram of the planet Earth, he said, "Yes please, take me home. Take me there."

The White Ship was uncomfortable but carried out the next part of the order. The image of the hologram Earth changed to that of a broken-up dead planet. "What?" said Jay. "The Earth is going to be destroyed?" The shock of this news hit Jay hard, and he collapsed to his knees and shook.

"I have seen what is heading toward the sample's planet, and it is doomed," The Right Ball said to the Ship.

The shock went instantly across the universe to the other Jays; they all saw the image of a destroyed Earth. The Jay on Earth also saw the image in his sleep and with great shock, sat up quickly in bed.

The Planet of The Games was purple and green with pink-white clouds. The White Ship did not head there but went to a large metal sphere at a la-grange point between the Planet of the Games and its tiny moon. The sphere spun around on its axis, so at the poles, the ports of access had zero-G, and at its equator, the docks had the equivalent of four times the gravitation force of Earth. The ports that climbed or fell in latitude from the equator had G-forces with intermediate values.

Beings joined the metal sphere at a port with a G-force that suited them. The Balls entered the metal sphere at a 2-G port. The Left Ball had an object on the end of one of its arms and when it rolled, the stick-like object stayed at the same attitude, pointing at Jay.

Jay was struggling with a gravitational force twice that on earth; for a tall slim man, he was panting hard whilst being very aware of the stick-like object constantly pointing at him. Weapon or cattle prod? He wasn't sure, but he knew he didn't want to find out the 'hard way'. So, he kept one eye on the stick, and if it moved one way, he followed.

Inside the metal sphere, were large corridors that ran along the lines of latitude, so the G-rating remained the same. There were also side corridors that sloped and stepped up to the lower spin gravity areas, or ones that stepped and sloped down to the higher G corridors.

Jay was very aware of different aliens but still focused on the stick. This is why, when a larger Ball with thicker arms came along, he did not see the sucker punch coming. He went down hard and bashed his face on the floor. The Large Ball also had a stick. There was a rapid exchange of words from all parties, and then the Left Ball aimed at the larger Ball and discharged its weapon. The Large Ball had the same idea and also opened fire. The two violet arcs of plasma met and locked together over Jay on the deck. They crackled and popped with the immense power of the snaking beams. Jay could feel the intense heat against his skin, and the hairs on his body stood up. The Left Ball started to push the Large Ball back. The Large Ball laughed, and they both stopped firing. The Left and Large Balls dropped their sticks and started bouncing into each other. This was apparently a friendly greeting.

Jay was not feeling too good. The higher gravity, the sucker punch, hitting the floor hard with his head, and the air was a different mix of gasses than on the White Ship. Laying on his side, he realised that even puking in 2-G, was challenging.

The Large and Left Balls picked up their weapons and rolled off together. The Right Ball grabbed Jay's leg and pulled him along the ground. Jay faced backwards and saw a creature scuttle across to Jay's vomited breakfast, after a quick examination, it ate the vomit. The creature was pleasantly surprised by the complexity of the food and turned to watch Jay being dragged away.

Jay was taken to a holding room off the corridor. The floor, walls and ceiling were smooth and grey, with a very slight curve to match that part of the sphere. Jay lay on the floor and panted. When the door closed, thousands of tiny pinpricks of light gave the cell an even glow. After a long wait, the door opened just enough to let the creature in from the corridor. It left two small containers in front of Jay, did a quick circuit of the floor and left. One of the containers had water, which he greedily guzzled down. The other had a grey paste. Jay sniffed it, licked a little from his index finger, and then puked. Whatever it was, it was not for humans. Luckily there was plenty of water to clean his burning throat.

Over the next few days, Jay deteriorated fast. After all, he was without food and in a strange atmosphere with a different mixture of gases. The bruise on his face had now grown and was swollen and purple, shutting one of his eyes. He had worked out that there was a slight low spot to one side of the door where he did his business, and Creature came in and once again, ate it.

Creature, who brought Jay different types of food and cleaned up, always gave Jay a wide birth. He was wary of Jay and behaved as if he might attack at any moment. Creature produced a new container, which smelt so awful that Jay didn't even attempt to pick it up. It looked at the container and then at Jay.

Jay said, "you can have it," and pushed it towards Creature. It edged forward, slurped out the contents, and then shot out the door. Time passed, and Creature brought water and different food types, none of which Jay could eat.

Later, Creature arrived again, and a weakened Jay pushed himself up from the floor to a sitting position. This made him dizzy, but he braced himself with locked-out arms.

"Hello," said Jay to Creature. "What inedible shit have you brought me today?"

"Shit, have you brought me today," mimicked Creature in an almost exact copy of Jay's voice.

"Very good," said Jay, "I would like an energy bar, the green smoothie and the tin of baked beans from my rucksack, please." Creature mimicked his voice perfectly, sliding today's food choice toward him. Jay sniffed it and pushed it back towards Creature, who scoffed it down once more.

After waking from another fitful sleep, the panting, sweating and aching had worsened, along with a seven on the Richter scale from his long-empty stomach.

Creature appeared and mimicked Jay's previous words, saying, "Energy bar, green smoothie and a tin of baked beans."

From the folds of its skin, a tentacle pulled out an energy bar, the green smoothie bottle and a tin of baked beans. Jay snatched up the bar, ripped off the wrapper and noshed it so fast he nearly choked. He sat up, broke the seal on the smoothie bottle and sipped to avoid losing this much-missed, Earth-based food.

Over and over, Jay just kept saying, "Thank you, thank you," to Creature. Creature watched Jay eat, which, despite his immense hunger, made Jay feel somewhat self-conscious, so he offered Creature the last part of the bar and the dregs of the smoothie. A hungry Creature scuttled forward and consumed them.

Creature analysed the food and realised it had never experienced them before, except for the hints of exotic alien food, when it had cleaned up the vomit from when it had first seen Jay. It realised that Jay was not from the known group of races. He was, in fact, something far more interesting. So, Creature decided to study Jay and learn as much about this unknown race as possible.

Jay sat with his back to the wall, opened and ate the cold baked beans with his fingers. It was the best meal he had ever had. He enjoyed the food but still decided to offer Creature some of the beans that he thought he'd never have the opportunity to eat ever again.

"I know when this tin has gone, and even if I get the other items in my rucksack, I will probably still starve to death in this room. Despite this, I want you to have part of my last tin."

He put the tin down and gently slid it to Creature. It understood the gesture and the whole meaning of the offering. It was overcome with a massive rush of emotion, and as a result, turned from grey to orange and bolted out the door.

Jay bent the lid back to cover the opening of the tin and revelled in the energy the food gave him and a stomach that had other problems than being empty. A short while later, Creature returned, wearing its regular grey colour scheme.

It said, "rucksack," and pulled Jay's rucksack behind him.

Jay profusely thanked Creature, reopened the tin of beans, and looked in his rucksack. Creature slurped down the beans and pushed the empty container towards Jay, as he also found the packet of wet wipes. It was not what they were designed for, but they were sterile, so he started to clean his face and hands with one. He enjoyed this refreshing action so much that he used another six cleaning his entire body, popping the soiled wet wipes in the empty tin, which Jay moved to the waste area of the room. T-shirt, shorts, socks and deck shoes later, Jay decided to stand up for the first time since he was knocked down. He was wobbly and leaned against the wall, but he was up. He looked down and saw something in the rucksack that did not look right. Bending down, he put his arm in and pulled out a full unopened tin of beans. "How is this possible?" Jay said at the tin. "I only packed one tin!"

Further rummaging revealed a second smoothie bottle and energy bar. Jay felt a glimmer of hope and realised that perhaps he would not starve to death in this strange, alien place after all. Suddenly, his emotions flooded out uncontrollably...but only for a few seconds until he slapped himself around the face and told himself to 'man up' as he remembered that he was still very much in trouble.

Creature was sure now that this pink and gangly alien had shared what it thought was the last of its food. It opened the door and went out to the corridor. The door remained open, and Jay did not move. Creature came back into the room, tugged at the rucksack and went out again, leaving the door open. Jay picked up the pack and walked into the door opening. Creature turned away and scuttled down the corridor. Jay followed, and the door to his room shut behind him.

As he walked along the corridor, aliens of different races stared at him but did nothing, so Jay kept walking the best he could in the 2-G corridor behind Creature.

Creature turned into a side corridor and went up the slope. Jay took the large steps behind it. After a few minutes of puffing and wheezing up the very long stairway, Jay noticed the going had become more manageable. The longer this

went on, the lighter he felt. When they got to a corridor running the other way, they turned left again. Jay estimated that the spin gravity was a little heavier than Earth's. He stood taller and had time now to observe his surroundings.

A large white Parallelogram stood out against the grey of the corridors. An alien by it made a strange noise, and there was a flash of light, before the alien moved off with a new object in its claw. Creature showed Jay a new room on the one-point two-G corridor. This had a raised platform with a soft, yielding surface, a cleaning alcove that sprayed icy water from many side jets, and a large central drain.

"Upgrade," said Jay. Then he stripped, grabbed his microfibre towel and shampoo and had a very much-needed, cold shower.

Finally, he fell exhausted onto the sleeping platform, and slept well, with very vivid dreams.