

JIM LONG

SPACE AGENT

Presenting

MENU

A NEW MINI-STORY



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YOU ARE NOW ENTERING THE WORLD OF JIM LONG SPACE AGENT MENU



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It came from nowhere. A brilliant green light exploded onto the flight deck. Intergalactic Craft 1b catapulted into the turbulence. It lasted but a moment, as the craft travelling at light speed came to an abrupt halt.

“What the hell was that?” blurted Gail Farmer as she stared at the deep green haze outside the craft on the forward holo-screen. “We don’t seem to be in space any more.”

“All the engines are functioning correctly,” replied a rather mundane Norman seemingly unaware of what had happened.

She looked down after feeling a tingling sensation on her left dimensional bracelet. It was intermittently glowing. A squelching sound followed as Jim Long emerged on the flight deck through the matter-receiver transmitter doorway. “I got a dimensional shift warning on the left bracelet. What’s happening?”

Gail nodded in agreement. “Don’t know as yet.”

He looked at the hologram screens over Gail’s shoulder. “We seem to have jumped dimensionally,” he said his face showing deep concentration. His left bracelet fully lit up as the dimensional numbers ran through his mind from nought. “We’re in dimension forty-four,” he concluded as it registered in his mind.

“Have we any information on this location?” said Gail noting Jim’s reaction knowing what was coming. Jim grinned this was his reaction to the unknown.

“I’m sure we’ll soon find out,” Frosty he said using her nickname because of her icy temperament.

Norman re-engaged the engines into reverse mode. “I’ll try a backward manoeuvre.” The ship shuddered to move as though a force-field was operating behind them.

“You should try going forward,” hinted Gail sarcastically.

Norman nodded as he moved the controller forward watching the speed indicator. A steady rhythmic hum followed heard throughout the superstructure. "We can go forward, boss," he said his mouth open in surprise.

"That's progress, Norman," said Jim with a hint of mischief in his voice. "Open up the front viewing portal."

A metal-coated blind moved slowly from left to right across the curvature of the elongated view port as their faces became flushed with the dark green tint.

"Our scanners are showing nothing," said Gail with a shake of her head.

"They're not working," replied Jim watching the speed indicator. "Even an atom can change shape in some of these environments."

"We will be all right as long as we don't hit anything," said Gail tongue in cheek.

"You know what they say, Frosty," quipped Jim. "It's green for go."

"Let's hope we run into some red to slow us down," said Gail with a laconic smile.

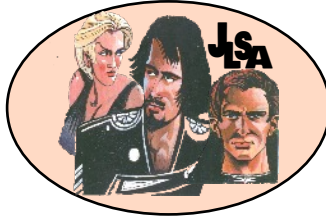
"Touché," said Jim in true cavalier style as the mist became thinner. The engines changed pitch, and in seconds, they were circling a planet. "How did we manage to get into orbit?"

"I put the AB computer on visual auto status," said Gail. "It spotted the planet before we did."

The surface below showed a criss-cross pattern of lines of land on what seemed like a pink ocean as Gail keyed in an automatic landing.

The IGC 1b descended onto its support legs and stopped as Norman's engineering assistant Zara Danton arrived on the flight deck. She stood behind him with a slight stoop whispering in his ear. "Why is the gravity engine still at 50%?" she asked.

Norman grunted. "You left it on automatic." He moved the sliding control back to nought causing the IGC to lean over sinking into the ground. He moved it back to 50, and the craft became level again. "Nobody goes outside yet we've not landed."



Jim stared out of the window. “What do mean not landed the ground looks solid outside?”

“I’ll check the atmosphere,” said Gail addressing the ship’s computer. “AB, check and assess the atmosphere.”

“Gaseous constituents unknown,” answered AB. “Atmosphere seems equal to IGC for sustaining human life although of a thinner substance.”

“What does that mean, boss?” said Norman, as he looked again at the gravity engine settings.

“It means we can breathe, but it will be like being at the top of a mountain,” Jim replied moving to the airlock.

He moved inside closing the inner door and keeping his hand on the control opened the outer door. For a moment, he gasped pulling air into his lungs and then regulated his breathing in short periodic gasps. He acclimatised within two minutes breathing as usual as he looked down to the ground below. Moving down the extended ladder, he gingerly tried to place his leg onto what he saw as solid. When his leg disappeared up to his knee, it became evident that the area although looking as real was not substantial.

Climbing inside Jim entered the airlock proceeding onto the flight deck and sat down panting. “We’re still floating in the air.”

Norman looked sheepish but shocked. “How do we land?”

“With great difficulty,” Gail retorted rechecking the scanners. “Scanners are partially working showing a surface down below.”

“Does it look like solid ground?” Jim inquired.

“That I can’t tell,” replied Gail. “I’ll continue to try recalibration.”

Norman turned down the gravity engine, and watched as the IGC moved downward through the green substance.

"It is a vapour substance that looks solid," said Gail watching the instruments. "It's a seemingly solid cloud and up to now five-thousand feet in depth."

The cloud thinned, and suddenly they were in clear air. Above was the green cloud with a pink tinge on the horizon. Below there were straight lines of a thousand white domes seen amongst scattered pink lakes of a liquid substance.

"AB?" asked Jim. "What is the pink substance?"

"Unknown," replied the computer. "It is more equal to the constituents of water."

Jim nodded. "Find us somewhere to land, Norman," Jim ordered as Norman keyed in the landing procedure.

The main engines fired for two seconds pushing them forward as the gravity engine at forty per cent made a steady descent. The IGC landed on a light green open patch of land facing the domes now within a close viewing distance.

"Zara, you are in control," said Jim beckoning to Gail and Norman as he opened the backpack locker. The small backpacks were part of the AB computer network and named Scrutinisers. Donning a pack each Jim opened the airlock, and they all stepped out onto the green surface as Zara closed the portal behind them.

"AB," said Jim, "Activate and link the Scrutinisers and the language synthesiser." A small green light protruded from each pack as Jim tested the small gravity belt that encased the structure. An operating joystick emerged from the pack and after pressing the top, he floated slowly upward to ten feet. Using the joystick, he pushed forward and then in a circle and back to the ground. "The gravity belt is functioning well."

Gail nudged him in the back, and he turned to see two people heading toward them. They were seven feet in height with a skinny humanoid body that tapered in the middle. The eyes oval in shape had a sunken nose underneath, and leaf-like ears. Their tight fitting garments were of a shiny metallic substance causing light to bounce off in prisms. Each had heads the top of which formed into a mushroom shape approximately eighteen-inch in diameter. Jim engaged with the two.

The first stopped in front of them, gestured at the other, and then pointed to a circular mode around the neck. Jim knew they were trying to find a way to communicate as he talked to his backpack. "AB, try to link with the alien technology."

The mode started to glow as the computer made contact. The first inclined the head slightly to the left as if receiving information.

The computer broke the silence. "I have imparted our basic language plus a full dictionary of words. In return, I have received several new frequencies that do not exist in my database."

The first suddenly spoke. "Greetings, what is your name?" The voice was melodic and exquisite almost as if delivering a song.

"I am Jim, and this is Gail and Norman," Jim replied as the first inclined the head to the right the left ear moving backwards and forward.

First, pointed to the three in turn with an elegant extended hand containing four pointed fingers. "You are male, female, and male."

Jim laughed. "You are correct."

"You are space travellers?" asked the first.

"To be precise, inter-dimensional travellers," corrected Jim pointing upward.

"Yes," first replied the oval eyes fluttering for a second. "You are very different my name is Yahoh, and this is my friend Johoh. We are the Vegah clan."

They seem very relaxed with us, thought Jim and not at all intimidated. "You've seen people like us before?"

"Yes, many seasons ago and they were able to vibrate through space and other realities."

"I know who they were," replied Jim remembering. "They were an advanced race of humans."

Yahoh nodded pointing to the IGC, "They were very polite and noble. That is your craft?" Jim nodded as Johoh beckoned them with an arm. "Come with us, and we will introduce you to our..." Johoh paused for a second the eyes closed with concentration. "What you would call, leader."

Following a trail through the green vegetation, they reached the first dome and entered through a circular door. Jim amazed to see that the whole inside was spherical with half its dimensions underground. They moved toward the centre on a small walkway reaching a circular platform stretched around a control console. Operating the controls, Yahoh caused a ten-foot wide aperture to open that circled the entire spheroid vertically. Norman stood intrigued gazing at the sky above down to the halfway ground position of the half-submerged craft.

For a second, the sphere shook and then rolled forward and up as they surfaced and sped moving along the ground. The two controllers, Jim, and crew remained stationary in the middle. The craft made more speed straight through a pink section throwing the liquid into the air and moved towards a town up ahead. Reaching the town Jim could see people walking through cultivated pathways of strange looking bright coloured flowers and the dwellings were all circular domes and spheroids. Many singles with some built on the top of others to five-hundred feet in height.

The sphere swung left and stopped sinking once more into the ground as Yahoh took them out into the town.

"Why is half the sphere underground?" asked Jim.

Johoh looked surprised. "It's what you call the brake otherwise we would roll away."

"Good answer," replied Jim showing a funny face to Gail.

It all looked exquisite and breathtakingly beautiful as they stepped out amongst other strolling aliens.

Much to Jim's amazement, the nearest five opened their eyes in horror and shrunk down with a loud plop to the ground in a flat mushroom shape of eighteen-inch diameter. Yahoh shouted at them. "Do not be afraid, they are friends." Slowly they all emerged up to their height of seven-feet tall. Jim did a short wave of the hand, and two popped down again.

"Some of our people are very timid," explained Yahoh. "Sudden movement frightens them. The air became turbulent as a large sphere rose in the air above the town igniting with the brightness of a miniature sun. Yahoh saw the look of surprise on their faces and explained.

"That is our nourisher," said Yahoh smiling. "Every town has one." The five of them arrived at a large building on the right and entered into a corridor inside. They then moved through a round door and into an office type area. Three seated aliens looked at a large spheroid-based at the centre of the room. The middle one stood up and approached.

"Arhoh, the leader of our clan," said Yahoh and then pointing to each, in turn, said, "Jim, Gail, and Norman."

"Greetings to you all," stated Arhoh raising the palms of his hands in the air. "It is good to have friendly visitors."

Jim smiled and nodded in agreement, thinking does that mean that there are visitors who are not. He was soon to find out as Zara reported from the IGC through the scrutiniser.

"Captain, you have visitors landing on the edge of the town."

"Thank you, Zara," replied Jim turning to Arhoh. "It seems some other visitors have arrived."

All the alien heads turned toward him their eyes almost expanding nearly double size.

"I'm afraid you've come at a bad time," said Yahoh with tears in the eyes. "The Feders have arrived."

"Who are the Feders?" asked Gail sensing that they were not benevolent.

A loud bang echoed around the town and into every dwelling followed by a sudden violent change in air pressure pushing them against the wall.

“They own all this land and the property,” answered Yahoh then all three deflated to the floor in a mushroom shape.

Jim and Gail looked at each other in surprise as Norman took a pistol from his backpack.

“Better arming ourselves and being ready,” he said nervously after seeing the pain in Yahoh’s eyes. Jim nodded as he and Gail placed their weapons in a tunic pocket.

“What do you think?” said Jim staring at the shapes on the floor.

“These beings have no internal organs because of their plasticity and are able to collapse,” replied Gail thoughtfully.

“Why do they go into this shape?” asked Norman pointing his finger to the floor.

“It’s because they become emotional and frightened,” concluded Gail. “And it makes me very nervous.”

Jim bent down and lifted Johoh up from the floor. “Amazingly light,” he said placing him vertically under his left arm. “Norman you take Arhoh, and Gail you have Yahoh.” Moving to the door, they made an exit down an alleyway.

Jim had mixed feelings. He felt they were in an absurd situation holding aliens and trying to find a way past other aliens of which they knew nothing. Using the scrutiniser, he contacted Zara.

“Zara, dispatch a hover dart to our position on auto setting.” He knew the dart approximately twenty by six-feet would be able, although cramped to carry them all back to the IGC.

“Dispatching now,” she replied.

Jim turned and spoke to Gail and Norman. “There’s a dome across the way with an upper and lower balcony running around the perimeter. Let’s try and reach an upper level to see what’s happening.”

Reaching the inside, they proceeded up an internal circular walkway that curved upward. It spanned around the perimeter to the upper floor and exited as it levelled out to the balcony outside. Jim gazed on the scene below with a puzzled look.

Two humanoids dressed in silver uniforms chatted to each other proceeding down the centre of the road heading for a domed glass building. One had a black box on his back with an Ariel protruding from the top. Jim could see they had no weapons and both seemed relaxed. The first man stopped and spoke the second nodded and operated a small console in his hand. The Ariel moved in a circle at high speed creating a loud bang. The following air pressure pushed Jim and crew once more against the building. Again, the bright sphere appeared above the town emanating a blinding golden light causing the two to place dark glasses over their eyes. They moved on and seemed oblivious to all around them.

“I would think that the sphere above is some kind of artificial Sun,” commented Gail thoughtfully. “A real Sun wouldn’t penetrate the green cloud level above.”

Norman nodded. “It’s a great piece of technology.”

Jim looked down at the back of his open hand that had started to itch. “The artificial sun may be too strong for our physical system.” He issued an instruction to the computer. “A.B, place a protective force field around each scrutiniser.”

Each backpack gave a loud hum, as a yellow hazy light mist emerged moving out and down covering their bodies. When completed a faint yellow pulsation around the torso was all that remained.

“Force fields completed,” said AB. “UV levels high from spheroid above.”

Jim inspected the mushroom shape of Yahoh and placed it down on the floor causing it to spring upward.

“What happened?” asked Yahoh.

“Don’t you know?” asked Jim puzzled with the answer.

Yahoh shook her head. “When we collapse into migration mode we have no thoughts and are unaware of life as you call it.”

“Uncontrolled hibernation,” said Gail in astonishment.

“It may be deeper than that,” said Jim his thoughts remaining on a more profound question. What is the purpose of beings who only semi-exist? He knew that Arhoh and their clan would not know the answer. The other aliens must have the knowledge.

Yahoh looked into Jim’s face with oval eyes filled with tears and a pleading look. “You will help us and see that we do not come to harm?”

Even Gail’s usual exterior melted for a moment as she grasped Yahoh’s tin spidery hand and turned to Jim. “We must try and do something.”

“We don’t know the complete story yet,” said Jim. “But, yes, we will help.”

The black box within the glass structure activated again with a tremendous bang followed by increased air pressure. Yahoh dived into collapse mode once more.

Norman gazed at the glass building down the road. “Some of the answers could be in there.”

“You may be correct.” Jim agreed as he formatted a plan of action. “You stay here, Frosty with Yahoh and the other two and wait for the dart. Norman and I will covertly investigate.”

Jim and Norman ran down the walkway to ground level and moved across the roadway as Gail watched them approach the building of glass. The big central doorway oval in design faced the road. Reaching the corner of the nearest building that blocked its full view, Jim now saw the actual size astonished by the depth. It stretched out back to at least three blocks. Down the side of the building were several small oval entrances. Jim gestured with his arm at the nearest door as Norman nodded and followed.

Slowly, they entered through the oval door and then climbed the staircase opposite. On the first floor, a balcony with a three-foot-high border stretched out in front that circled the entire inner structure. Bending down Jim and Norman moved to the left and took up a side position. Jim ran his hand over one of the side compartments of the Scrutiniser and took out a special binocular pack. He set the viewfinder to fifty times magnifications, and slowly extended the periscope section to look down above the border.

On the viewfinder, they could see the two men talking and then separating one to the left and one to the right. They were almost human in stature, but their skin was pale green in texture. Jim followed the one on the left as he approached a considerable bank of small mushroom shapes on a bed of soil. He took a small module from a rack on the wall and gently sprayed across the array of forms.

“It’s some kind of nursery,” whispered Jim as he watched the man gently check each module.

Pointing the binoculars to the second man, they watched as he shouted a warning to the first and then fired the module on his back. The loud bang was more intense in the confines of the building causing pain as both Jim and Norman covered their ears. Quickly recovering they heard the sound of machinery activating and looked once again on the screen. A conveyor belt filled with mature mushroom shapes passed under a large plunger that crashed down flattening them.

Jim and Norman looked at each other in horror as they watched them pile up into containers of ten stacked near the doorway.

“I think we’ve seen enough,” said Jim as they moved away. “I don’t want to meet people who kill sentient beings for food.”

Norman grimaced. “They’re cannibals.” They moved back to Gail and then in the Dart back to the IGC taking the three pods with them.

Gail carefully placed the three pods on the floor and waited. The next morning after they had taken a sleep break Yahoh sprang up. The ears were now of a brown colour, and parts of the face were showing decomposition as of the fingers and body reminding them all of a vision of a dying plant. The oval eyes blinked several times. “What has happened?” said Yahoh hardly able to speak.

“We brought you back to our ship to save you,” said Jim.

“Without our nourisher, we perish,” replied Yahoh.

Jim, Gail and Norman stood shocked as Yahoh disintegrated before them leaving a pile of ash on the floor.

Nobody said anything for five minutes as the other two mushrooms on the floor turned to dust.

Jim tried to evaluate the situation. “They were a menu of vegetables and would have been killed and eaten anyway,” he said knowing inside that what they had done was still a mistake. “They were on a vegetable production line, and we had no knowledge about the Nourisher.”

“These other dimensions that we visit,” said Gail with a hint of sadness. “They are complicated beyond our reason.”

“We are human, and we make mistakes,” said Norman with unusual sympathy. “I have difficulty living in our dimension let alone any others.”

“The banging machine must have been used to make them collapse,” said Gail. “That way they would not see others being prepared for food.”

“We all learn by our mistakes,” offered Jim still disturbed in his thoughts. “We should have confronted the other aliens before taking any action.”

“Are we ready for liftoff?” said Gail curtly. “I want to get away from this dimension. It is not how we live.”

Jim gave an order, “AB, take us back on the path we entered this dimension.”

As the IGC fired engines and lifted up to the green sky above Norman had the last word. “Boss, one day we can return and find out what it was all about.”

Jim Nodded. “I think we’re a bit shaken all is never what it seems. We should not have interfered. We will return in a year and try to find answers.”

Inside the massive glass construction, the two workers named Gratt and Porfa stopped and rested.

Gratt gave news of the nursery. "There were only two sentient beings in this nursery batch," he said pointing to the mushrooms on the table. "Has the elder, Baho been informed?"

"He has," replied Porfa. "That's the average two out of every hundred. All the rest are eatable."

"It is profound that a small per cent of these vegetables turns into living beings," said Gratt. "And I'm glad we can separate them from the ones on the menu."

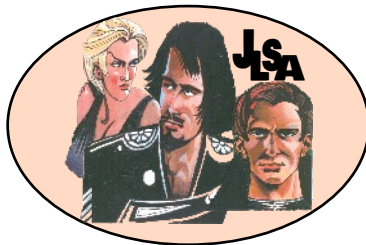
"You do a good job, my friend saving these creatures," said Porfa as he turned to greet Baho. "We have two more for you, Baho."

The vegetable being Baho wagged his leaf-like ears as he spoke. "There are three of us from the town missing."

"It happens," said Gratt with a hint of sadness in his voice. "If they've wandered too far from the nourisher they will have perished."

Baho gently picked up the two small mushrooms and moved to the door. "Please don't hit your banger to clear the air. I don't want to collapse before I reach central."

The End

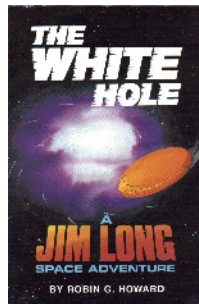
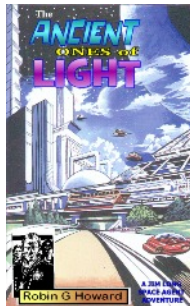
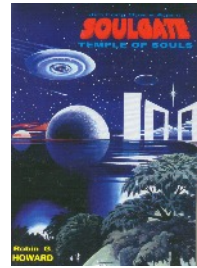
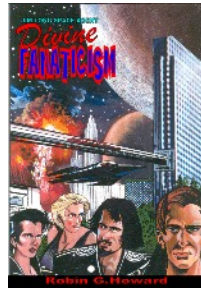


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