

ALL ALONE

Janos looked around him. In all directions smoke was filling the air as it escaped from cracks in the ground. The cracks were getting wider, and as they did so the planet made a frighteningly loud crunching noise and started to shake. He had no idea where the next crack might open up.

The ground beneath his feet kept getting hotter. He climbed to the top of the mountain where he found a cave. It was a little bit cooler in there.

It had been many weeks since he left his home and he had no food or water. He hadn't eaten for so long and he was weak. His bones were sticking out under his dry skin. If only he could drink something! His mouth was dry and his throat felt like it was on fire. Desperate, he licked the side of the cave wall where there was a little moisture, but it wasn't enough.

He had never felt so afraid his whole life. He looked at the small tree in a pot he had lovingly carried with him all the way from his home far away. He knew this tree was fragile and precious and he treasured it like no tree had ever been treasured in the history of his world. He held the tree in his hands and looked at it, feeling its life force, knowing that soon he and the tree would be dead. He had been hoping he could plant it, but where?

He looked over the valley but saw nowhere safe. His heart filled with grief and he put his face in his hands. He saw what his people had done and his heart was broken.

Everything he knew and loved was gone - his family, his friends, his old neighbours and his home. Gone was the song of the beautiful animals, the trees, fresh air.

All alone, he was the last living thing on Planet Tarjez. In between the rumbling of the ground and hissing of the hot steam there was an eerie silence.

How could this be happening? For years his people were told that when their world came to an end a magnificent Sky Being would come and take them to a special place where they would be happier than ever. But where was this Sky Being? He looked up at the sky but only saw smoke and black clouds. He coughed and choked for a few minutes.

Janos became very angry and yelled out at the top of his voice and with his last bit of strength:

"YOU LIED!!!!"

His voice echoed across the valley but nobody answered back. He started to sob out loud and he cried for all the beings who had died in pain because of the greed and stupidity of his people. Could it be that the reason why the Sky Being

didn't come was because the people didn't wait patiently for the world to end by itself, and destroyed it themselves?

And he started to pray very hard that if there was ever another planet like Tarjez that the people would never make the same mistake and destroy it.

At that exact moment in the sky behind him hovered a flying saucer. This saucer was from a faraway planet who had been visiting planet Tarjez for thousands of years. The pilot, whose name was Enjenikel, along with his two children Ellele and Rotarrh, saw Janos and were watching him closely. The sound monitors on the outside of their craft had picked up Janos' scream and they were wondering what was going on.

Ellele and Rotarrh said to their father "Dad, what if he's in trouble? We better go and help!"

"Not yet," replied their father, experienced in extraterrestrial journeys. "We have to observe a bit longer before we can determine if it's safe to land and whether indeed we can help him."

As they zoomed their radar towards him, suddenly Janos was overcome with weakness and fell to the ground unconscious.

Ellele was hysterical now "Dad, see! He needs help! We have to help him right away."

What was happening to Janos? His mind and body felt completely relaxed and strangely peaceful, as if he was floating in a warm pool of water. All the sounds around him stopped and he lost awareness of all sensations in his body, but his mind was aware.

All the memories of his life flashed before him in a split second as if he was back there all over again. As this was happening to Janos, Enjenikel had been using his thought measuring machine and reversing it backwards in time to record everything that had happened to Janos.

It turned out that Enjenikel was right to wait because, right after he had finished doing that, the mountain on which Janos was lying exploded and fireballs were hurled into the sky, forcing Enjenikel's craft to flee for its safety. Had they tried to land they would have been blown up too.

As soon as they were safely away from Tarjez, Enjenikel checked his thought-reversal machine and started unwinding the images from Janos' mind as he died. What followed next was the most amazing thing Enjenikel and his kids had ever seen.

HOW TARJEZ USED TO BE

All around Janos were unbelievable flowers with brilliant colors - purple, red, orange, pink, yellow, blue - that seemed to glow with an inner life force. He approached a purple one and put his nose close and inhaled deeply and slowly - the aroma filled him with incredible happiness and all his worries and troubles drifted away like clouds in the sky.

It was as if Janos was still alive reliving his memories of early childhood when everything was all right and things that happened at the cave were just a dream.

Each flower had a completely different aroma than the others, and each were beautiful in their own way. The variety of plants and flowers was amazing. Janos clearly remembered every single one.

There were also fruits, brightly coloured, each different from the other. Janos put one of the orange-yellow fruits in his mouth and was utterly thrilled as a sweet, creamy juice trickled out down his face and gave him so much pleasure! He kept eating till he couldn't eat another bite.

There were other plants that were not so sweet but still very tasty. These were the vegetables, beans, grains, nuts and seeds and they were growing wild everywhere. There was so much to eat!

There were thousands of types of interesting tastes. Some were sweet or salty, sour or spicy or bitter. The bitter plants were powerful medicines to keep people and animals healthy. Janos loved eating but he didn't like bitter-tasting food. His mother put all his foods in a bowl for dinner and made him eat them anyway.

Janos remembered the textures of every plant which were sometimes soft and juicy and sometimes hard and crunchy.

At school he learned that each plant contained thousands of seeds to create even more plants. All they had to do was to place the seeds into the ground, cover them up and give them nothing more than water every day, and they would grow into another tree or plant in a short time. It was truly amazing!

On other planets besides Tarjez, such fruits are rare and only contain one seed, which takes a long time to grow. The people there are very hungry and skinny.

Janos dug into the ground with his bare hands. The soil was warm and soft. He kept digging and found a hard object. He brushed off the dirt and held it up to the light. It was a shiny green rock, like a beautiful jewel.

Janos closed his eyes and held it in his hand. He felt very special and strong as if the rock was giving him secret powers. Janos kept that rock in his desk at home to hold every time he needed to feel strong.

Even though there were thousands of different types of jewels shining and glittering under his feet, Janos' green rock was the most special, and it was his secret.

Not far from him, Janos saw a lake that was perfectly still and mirroring the

bright blue sky and white puffy clouds overhead. A gentle wind whizzed in the trees over his head then moved over the surface of the water and made it shimmer like millions of sparkling diamonds. Truly Tarjez was an enchanting wonderland.

Now that he was dead, he appreciated the beauty of his world a thousand times more than he did when he was alive.

But to Janos the most amazing thing of all were the animals. He had a special place in his heart for them. He especially remembered the time he met a very dangerous animal in the forest, when he was all alone.

His mother warned him to be careful and always carry a stick for protection but he often did not do what his mother told him and ended up in trouble. Like this one day.

MAGICAL ANIMALS

Enjenikel continued to watch the flow of images on his thought reversal machine. Ellele and Rotarrh were very keen to know what Janos experienced in the forest alone. The three of them sat there, spellbound.

It was a sunny day and Janos had no school. He was only five years old. He was walking in the forest when suddenly a very big animal jumped onto the path in front of him, stopped and looked right at him.

Janos looked at him and had no idea it could have killed him. He saw a beautiful creature that he wished he could have been himself.

They both looked at each other and time stood still. The animal had black fur all over its body with five legs and a small head with three very large eyes.

Janos stood perfectly still, without fear and just watched the animal. He wondered if the animal was a boy or a girl, if it had little babies to feed somewhere and what it was doing.

What he didn't know was that the animal was doing the same thing. The animal was wondering what kind of creature is this boy? What is it like to be inside his body right now? What is he feeling and what is he doing? He didn't know that Janos had a name because he couldn't speak his language.

Janos then began to speak to the animal in a soft voice, almost like singing. "Oh, you are so beautiful! Your body is so strong! What nice fur you have - I really wish I could touch you, very, very gently. My mother showed me how to very gently touch animals so it doesn't hurt them and so they like it."

Janos waited quietly still looking at the animal, fascinated. The animal hadn't moved and continued to watch him intently.

Finally he said "Do you mind if I touch you?"

Of course the animal could not answer back, but he understood Janos' question.

Most importantly the animal understood that this was a being with a pure heart who didn't want to hurt him.

Slowly the animal sat down and then lay down on the ground, still looking at Janos. This was a good sign and meant that he was becoming less scared of Janos.

Very slowly, Janos went up to him talking softly the whole time and stopping from time to time and looking away.

Then gently he reached over and put his hand towards the animal's face.

"You can smell my hand if you like first," Janos offered.

The animal sniffed his hand and then lay down on his side and took a deep sigh. Janos was then able to touch him.

The two of them stayed together for a long time and eventually Janos fell asleep on the ground next to him. When he woke up, the animal was gone and it was almost dark. He better hurry home or his mother would get very upset with him!

Later when he got home, he told his friend about the animal who said it was the most dangerous animal in the forest! So he decided not to tell his mother about what happened.

From that time on Janos had no fear of animals and trusted his ability to talk to them from his heart.

He knew that each one of them made a different sound to call family members who had wandered off so they could be together again, or warn each other when there was danger nearby. Sometimes certain sounds would let them communicate when they found their favourite foods to eat and to hurry up and come get some too.

What was interesting to Janos was that some animal sounds were beautiful, like a melody, and some sounds were loud and screechy and made you want to cover your ears. When they talked like this, they also let each other know how they were feeling - either sad, happy, afraid, lonely - just like humans do when they talk to each other. And sometimes they sang just because they liked hearing their own voices and who could blame them?

Janos spent many hours alone in the forest watching and listening to all the animals. He understood them deeply and they made him feel very happy.

There were hundreds of thousands of amazing plants and animals on Tarjez. Some so incredibly tiny you couldn't even see them, others so huge they could crush you with their big toe. Some animals moved incredibly fast, others moved incredibly slow.

Since most of Tarjez was covered by water, many hundreds of thousands of types of animals lived together in the water. Strange and even miraculous-looking creatures lived here.

Janos would spend all day just sitting quietly and watching whatever animals

appeared. He would sit by the lake and watch as the sun shone down on the water, showing the outline of small winged insects fluttering down from the trees nearby to the surface of the water. Would they drown, he wondered?

On moving closer, he watched in amazement to see they were actually walking with their long legs on top of the water! How could they do that, he wondered. Whenever he tried it, he always fell into the water with a splash.

Soon other bigger animals flew down to the water, skidded on the surface with their feet then paddled around, every now and again poking their heads under the water to eat something there. Then when they were tired of that, they would flap their huge wings and fly off into the air again.

Some birds would dive really fast right into the water, swim under the water with their eyes and mouth open, catch something to eat, then fly right back out into the air again with the food in their mouth. Amazing!

Imagine being the creature, used to swimming only in the water, suddenly having the experience of being caught in a bird's mouth and flying high in the sky inside its beak?

Unfortunately, the next experience of being swallowed would not be so great, Janos was sure, and didn't even want to think about that!

Some sea creatures had wings and could fly in the air for a little while, then go back to swimming in the sea. These were Janos' favourite because the sun would catch their wing/fins and make them rainbow colours so they looked like magical creatures.

Most animals he could see lived or crawled on the land, but there were some who were very smart and hid in tunnels they dug in the ground. Others lived in the ground their whole life. Not very exciting, he thought.

Other types of animals swam in the sea then came out of the water and walked on the land, just like people did. Janos understood what that felt like. It was always an exciting experience to jump into the cold water, making sure to hold his breath, then come to the surface and gulp air again. He always felt so fresh and alive when he came out of the water, so maybe that was how the animals felt too?

To Janos, the most mystifying animals of all were those who could fly in the air, swim in the water and run on the land.

No matter what animal he was watching, Janos always tried to imagine how it would feel to be in their bodies looking through their eyes.

All the different animals helped the forest because they dug into the ground with their claws so seeds from trees could fall into the ground and grow more trees. Some of them ate the seeds then pooped them out somewhere else again spreading the trees across the land. Animals' poop on the ground made the trees grow strong and healthy, so the more of their poop, the better.

Trees were important for all the creatures because they created certain

elements in the air making it possible for all the living creatures to breathe. These trees also gave off a wonderful smell, different from the flowers but just as uplifting.

Janos found the best time to smell the trees was very early in the morning, when the sun was coming up, or in the evening of a hot day.

He knew most of what the animals ate. Many animals ate plants, some ate certain other animals, usually smaller. But they never ate too much - just enough so there would always be some left for later.

That was something Janos didn't do. He was always eating too much because he loved food!

Each of the animals on Tarjez were different colors, many brilliant like the flowers. Some of them were very soft to touch - like velvet. Others had sharp spikes all over them.

Most of them had ways to protect themselves when attacked by another animal. Some used sharp teeth to bite, some spat poison or clawed with strong nails. Some charged towards their attacker with a sharp pointed object in their head. Some made terrifying sounds that made your hair stand on end or they simply ran away to hide. Others changed the colour of their skin to match their background and become invisible.

Some flying insects caught the sun's light by day, which made their bodies like light bulbs at night to attract mates. What a magical sight!

Janos and his sister loved these special creatures and used to sneak out of the house at night, instead of doing their homework, to watch them.

All of the animals knew when danger was near and if you were their friend or going to hurt them. That's why Janos was able to make friends with that dangerous animal in the forest.

The animals also had many feelings like people do. They loved their children and families and would do everything they could to protect them, just like everyone does.

One day Janos saw some children in the forest try to kill a bird with a weapon. The bird was lying injured on the ground and trying to get back to its babies in the nest but was unable to fly. This made Janos very angry! He ran over to the children but it was too late ... they killed it with a rock. He started screaming at them about how cruel they were and what about the babies, but the children just laughed and ran off.

Janos cried for many days about this and would not talk to anyone.

It made him very determined to protect the beautiful animals from cruel people. So he studied as many books as he could and talked to many adults about the animal world and how they got to be this way, what their needs were and so on. He learned a lot.

Ellelle interrupted "Oh, how sad for the bird. I hate it when people are cruel to animals!"

Rotarrh asked "Dad, how did there get to be so many incredible life forms on Tarjez?"

"Well," her father, paused the machine, "on Tarjez all these fantastic creatures were possible because there were the right building blocks for life to flourish. Not all planets have enough water to help plants grow or air for animals to breathe. Many planets are too cold (too far from the sun) or too hot (too close to the sun). Some planets are too windy. But this planet was just right."

"The sun brought enough warmth to the surface so everything could grow and because it was only seen every twelve hours, the planet cooled down," he continued. "Otherwise it would be too hot or too cold all the time. So half the time it was bright and sunny and the other half of the time it was cold and dark, just so nobody got bored."

"There were also differences of temperature so it wasn't always the same. Water from the ocean could move up into the sky to become clouds that moved over the land to rain and make everything wet and green."

"How did that happen?" asked Rotarrh.

"Well, to explain how this happened is very complicated and depended on many things working together. This kind of thing doesn't happen on many planets where the only rain they have is from big chunks of ice, which are very dangerous. I've seen it and almost got caught in an ice storm once, it was very scary" said Enjenikel giving his body a little shake.

"How long did Tarjez have these creatures living on it dad?" asked Rotarrh.

"For several billions of years all the creatures evolved in harmony with each other and created a strong, beautiful natural kingdom. Everything was perfect," said Enjenikel.

"The more types of animals there were, the healthier the planet was because the animals made the soil rich. Because the soil was fertile, there were more plants. Because there were more plants there were more insects, more animals and more oxygen."

"Dad how did you learn all this stuff about Tarjez? We want to learn more, especially about the animals" said his children.

"If you go to the intergalactic records on the computer you can find everything you need to know," replied Enjenikel. So they did.

While the kids were checking out Tarjez' animals on another screen, Enjenikel went back to watching the mindstream of Janos.

He watched a beautiful, soft cloud full of white light surround Janos. He knew this meant that Janos was feeling love.

Janos did indeed love his planet and all the creatures on it. Except, it seemed, for one species - the most dangerous of them all.

RRP AUD\$30 - info@planetarktel.com