

Unbeknownst to Cain or Paula, thousands and thousands of golf courses were whipping by them at dizzying speeds. There were old ones, there were new ones. There were simpler ones, there were challenging ones. There was the kind that you went to specifically when you need to hit things with a club, and there was the kind that you went to when you just want to go swimming. There was the kind you went to when looking for a date, the kind you frequented to find a worthy orphan to adopt, the kind you went to in an effort to give up golf altogether. Every imaginable type of golf courses sifted by them rapidly before they suddenly stopped.

For instance, they passed the famous Golf Course at Atlantis, most famous for the decisive match-up between Athens and Atlantis. Many historians believe that, thousands of years ago, there was a golf match between these two rivaling nations. The stakes for the match were high indeed: the loser of the match had to sink their nation into the unreachable depths of the ocean. Well, it all came down to a crucial chip shot of one of Atlantian golfers. If he had a nice chip shot from the rough and then proceeded to putt it in, Atlantis would come out ahead. Unfortunately, shortly after hitting the ball, it exploded mysteriously during its flight. Atlantians immediately blamed the Athenians of trickery, but since no evidence could be found, a two-stroke penalty was issued and the match was handed over to the Athenians. And the rest, they say, is sunk somewhere in the unreachable depths of the ocean.

Also, they breezed right by, not of their own accord, the Death Row golf course of the planet Pellatin. Devised as a recreational means of relaxation for the inmates residing there, the Death Row course boasted the world's first whirlpool water hazards, and the world's second Venus-Fly-Sand-Traps. At this course, if the players made a poor shot or were implicated in drug trafficking while playing, they were immediately targeted by the firing-squad caddies. It was a rather enjoyable and somewhat relaxing way to go, though.

Another of the courses Cain and Paula in no way stopped at had no significance as a course whatsoever. It was an ordinary golf course in a small town in Japan. What was significant about it, however, was one of its players. Huing Yoshida was on the third hole. He had never played golf before, but his psychiatrist had recommended it as a highly effective way of relieving stress. The day before, Huing Yoshida had gone to his psychiatrist claiming that, right in the middle of work, he was abducted by some mysterious force and thrown rather abruptly into a party. Needless to say, this didn't really enrage him, but it did bother him to some extent. This wasn't an ordinary incident. So, his psychiatrist, sensing the possibility of instability, sent him to a golf course to relax and possibly compose himself. Too much work, the shrink advised, was unhealthy and could lead to dangerous amounts of stress. As medicine, Huing was playing golf and, as Cain and Paula blitzed invisibly by him on another plane altogether, Huing experienced a sudden, disheartening feeling of *deja vu*.

Finally, the two travelers came to a sudden stop. More appropriately, since they didn't even feel like they were moving, they suddenly came to a distinct place, not a blur of greens and lakes. They were immensely surprised at what they saw, or rather, they were even more surprised at what they didn't see. There were no trees in sight. They saw no well-trimmed grass or any sand traps for that matter. The smell of paprika was faint at best.

What they did see, however, was an enormous landfill. Not only did they see it, but they smelled it thoroughly, they felt it reluctantly, and they even heard it ooze its dissonant rhapsodies. The only similarity between this landfill and even a poorly-kept golf course was a flag that came out of an old aluminum can a couple of feet to their left. It wasn't a golf flag, though, it was a weird flag with lots of stars and moons on it. There must have been some sort of mistake. The machine must have malfunctioned.

“Where do you suppose we are?” posed Paula.

“I don’t know, it’s *your* stupid machine!” Cain had grown tired of never knowing what was going on.

There was another pause. This one seemed a bit too lackadaisical, so Cain spoke to spur it away. “How about we just try to find—”

He was interrupted by Paula, who said, “I don’t know what happened. I have to report this one if I ever go back”.

“Let’s stop worrying about—” Cain once again began.

“I wonder where we are in respect to Albatross, even.”

The tendency of Paula’s to interrupt him very frequently was beginning to get on Cain’s nerves. It could be construed as impolite, of course, to point it out, but he was getting sick of it. It’s common courtesy to—

“Hey Baxter,” she cut in, “let’s try to find someone who knows where we are.”

“Good idea,” he said very, very quickly.

Paula gathered her belongings but before either could actually start to move forward, a golf ball came with a spitefully high velocity and flew by them, missing their faces by mere centimeters. Prompted by this, Paula fainted.

Cain was too amazed to move. Not expecting anything like this at all, since it wasn’t a golf course by any means, he was surprised that it had happened. He got down on one knee and tried to gently slap some feeling back into Paula’s body. It didn’t work. Guiltily, he took a sigh of relief. The *last* thing he wanted was to be hit in the head with sporting equipment. Just then, he heard a humorous voice call out from behind him, “Oh, hey, sorry about that. Didn’t see you there. In fact, I didn’t think anyone would be here. This isn’t really a hot spot for tourists. Do you know where my ball went?”

Cain pointed to the ball, resting about ten feet from Paula’s head. The strange man sported a shirt that looked as if it hadn’t been washed in several presidential terms and trousers that matched all too well. At least he wasn’t wearing knickers.

“Hey, thanks.” He walked over to it, took his club, and putted the ball into the aluminum can with the flag sticking out. He walked back to the Cain and Paula.

“Not bad. 8 strokes. With a little more practice, I think I can really get this one down”.

“What is this?” yelled Cain. He realized that he yelled, and asked again, the second time quieter. “What is this?”

“My front yard.” Cain should have almost guessed. The man looked very little cleaner than the garbage and debris that lay scattered across the landfill. If Cain weren’t completely immersed in garbage himself, he probably would have noticed how putridly the man smelled. Almost mechanically, he remembered that he had a friend that had come medically close to a heart attack. Instinctively, he devoted his attention back to Paula. She still wasn’t fully conscious, but at least her breathing patterns had returned to a more allegro tempo. Finally, after several minutes under the determined care of Cain, Paula came to and swore a lot.

Calming her down, Cain said, “Look, it wasn’t his fault. He didn’t expect anyone to be here. It was an accident.”

She calmed down a bit, but kicked the man in the shin anyway.

“Ow!” he promptly replied.

“Violence isn’t necessary, Paula. Just relax. Take a deep breath.”

He was right. Taking a deep breath relaxed her. She kicked Cain too.

“This isn’t right,” she finally vocalized.

“I could have told you that,” Cain rebutted, rubbing his shin. Actually, it was a statement adding to what she had said, but he said it as if he was rebutting the current number of former Soviet republics.

“Let’s find out how to get out of here,” she offered.

He concurred. “Hey, mister....” Cain’s voice faltered once he realized that the man he was addressing was no longer there. This was puzzling, but then again, most everything recently had been.

They began to wander aimlessly around the ceaseless mounds of waste. It made Cain feel nauseous and it eliminated Paula’s initial desire to go to bed immediately when they arrived at their new destination. Suddenly, Cain missed the birds that he had only recently discovered and with whom he twice tried to karaoke. He missed the trees swaying pleasantly to the songs of the wind. He missed the sky as it gradually swirled into a celestial kaleidoscope. Most of all, however, he missed his last opportunity to go to the bathroom. This didn’t really perturb him, though, for off in the distance he spotted, amongst the trash, a Port-A-John. He asked Paula, who at that moment was seriously reevaluating her recent life choices with an uncomfortable grimace, to wait a second.

Paula softly hummed a song to herself. She had thought anything would be a vast improvement over living with her father, the President of Albatross. She was sadly mistaken. This was a considerable deal worse than being the first daughter of a planet whose official bird was, of course, the eagle. A voice interrupted her thought. A voice that trembled rather unknowingly. A voice suggesting sheer amazement. A voice that came from inside the portable toilet room.

“Hey Paula! Come in here and check this out!”

Now, normally, Paula may have taken an immediate look at the object in question, but when words like these come from a Port-A-John sitting in a landfill, second thoughts come to mind, followed by third, fourth, fifth, sixth, seventh, eighth, and ninth thoughts. She was at a clear loss for a response.

Realizing what his words sounded like, Cain rephrased before Paula asked him to.

“Take a look at the bathroom itself. It’s really weird.” He opened the door so the two of them wouldn’t be crammed in a tiny room that reeked, as it were, of urine. It was certainly no ordinary Port-A-John. On all the walls were a number of tiny, unlabelled buttons. Of course, it still was a Port-A-John; it couldn’t be denied that there was a large hole in the middle of an uncomfortable bench, but it wasn’t this that bugged Cain. It was definitely the array of buttons on the walls. The only label found anywhere was one on the far side that simply said “Activate”. That’s not the kind of thing most people would want to push while standing in a public lavatory.

Paula, however, was not most people. If she had been, voting would have been a much simpler process, because being a majority in and of yourself would make any democratic process much simpler. It also would have provided better justification for her inability to find a man who wanted to be with her – if she were a majority of people, that would be enough to scare off even the most adventurous of men.

Without bogging herself down with the implications of being a large segment of the general population, Paula looked around briefly, shrugged her shoulders, and *Activated* something.