

Small World

Prologue: Part 2

About two Earth months later...

A reddish-orange furred male bipedal rodent-like creature stood on a podium before a roaring crowd of spectators with similar anatomy, yet of various fur colours and sizes. After raising a paw to silence the crowd, the authoritative looking mammal began to announce into an old fashioned looking microphone, "My fellow citizens! As I'm certain you all know, forty-eight days ago was one of the most momentous days in all Ferren history! The day when we finally discovered that we are not alone in the universe! Through countless hours of researching the radio transmissions we've received from these new aliens' home world, we have uncovered that they refer to themselves as humans, their home planet is called Earth, and we have successfully translated over fifty of their languages!" More cheers erupted from the spectators. "Now, without further ado, I hand the stage over to one of our best and brightest, the scientist who intercepted the very first Earth transmission, Professor Anthony Gray!"

As the reddish furred Ferren stepped down from the podium, a grey furred, glasses and white lab coat wearing male Ferren slowly walked up to the microphone in his place, eliciting even more cheering from the crowd. "Thank you, Mr. Prime Minister," the intellectually dressed Ferren, Anthony, greeted with a hint of shyness in his tone, adjusting his glasses. "In addition to the name of their species, their planet, and their languages, we've also determined that the medium the first transmission, and many others since we've received, was a form of media they referred to as television, similar in a way to our view boxes. Through these television broadcasts, we have learned that the humans have even developed their own space exploration program, which they intended to use to plan an expedition to their own moon. We can only assume they've reached that goal by now." Seeing a paw rise up from near the back of the crowd at that moment, which he instantly noticed belonged to a yellow furred, female Ferren holding a note pad and writing utensil, Anthony acknowledged politely, "Yes? The journalist lady in the back?"

"Pardon my asking, Professor Gray," the female Ferren spoke up, "but what exactly do you mean by *'we can only assume they've reached that goal by now?'*"

"Well, you see..." Anthony began to explain, "The system Earth is in is about twenty solar-years away from here, so the transmissions we're receiving were sent out twenty

years ago. Or, from what we've deduced, twenty-four Earth years ago. We've also determined that their days are shorter, as well. Twenty-four hours long, as opposed to our twenty eight. Which means they have approximately three hundred and sixty-five of their days in a year, rather than our three hundred and seventy-five. Or four hundred and thirty-eight, in Earth days."

"How many moons do they have? Are they going to explore all of them?" Anthony then heard another spectator, this one male, ask from elsewhere in the crowd.

"So far that we can tell, Earth only has one moon," Anthony responded. "We're not sure exactly what size it is yet, or how close it is to the planet, but what I'm pretty sure I can tell you is that one side of it always seems to face the planet. We've also determined that Earth is the third planet in that system, out of somewhere between eight to ten planets. We can't even say for sure if the humans themselves have figured out the total number of planets that are in their system at this point."

At that moment, on a prompting gesture from the Prime Minister, Anthony handed the microphone back over to him. "In any case," the red furred politician began, "In lieu of this monumental discovery, our nation and many others have come together to create our very own space program! And one of our first objectives will be to send a piloted expedition to our own two moons!" More cheers rippled throughout the crowd once again. "In addition to this, we will also be funding an operation, headed by our very own Professor Gray, which we like to call 'Project Pen Pal'. I'll let the Professor here explain it to you further."

Accepting the microphone from the Prime Minister once again, Anthony began, "The goal of Project Pen Pal, or Triple-P, for short, will be to send a radio wave transmission of our own back to Earth, containing a standard greeting and a brief description of our ways of life. The message will be translated into all fifty-two of the human languages we've deciphered so far, as well as the twelve most common of our own dialects. Then, about every twenty-five days or so, we will send another transmission, with updated information on both what we've learned from them, as well as our own scientific and political progress. Since Earth is so far away from here, however, it will take twenty of our years before the first transmission reaches them, and another twenty at least before we may receive any kind of response, assuming they pick up our transmission at all."

Gently taking the microphone from Anthony once again, the Ferren Prime Minister declared proudly, "From this day forth, we will no longer have to look to the stars and wonder if we are alone ever again! And on this day, forty years from now, our children and our grandchildren will open our ears as well as our eyes for the first ever interstellar communication our world has ever experienced! Let this day forever forth be celebrated

as International First Contact Day!” The Prime Minister then bowed proudly to the audience as they roared in applause one last time.