

Small World

Chapter 2: First Contact Day

The next day...

With a somewhat nervous demeanor, Doctor David Gray, who was now wearing his granduncle's glasses, stepped out into a large room filled with rows upon rows of display monitors and high tech control consoles, with a wide variety of other Ferrens of all sizes, fur colours and both genders manning each one. However, upon seeing all the workers in the room suddenly turn their attention from their tasks to look towards him, and give him a warm, welcoming round of applause, a small, confident smile managed to creep onto the timid scientist's furry grey face.

A dark brown furred Ferren, towering at four feet tall and wearing a red and black striped tie and white dress shirt then walked up to David. Offering him a bright smile, the taller Ferren greeted the scientist. "Welcome to the Triple-P Research Center, Doctor Gray. I must say, it's truly an honour to have you join us as our new Chief Administrator on this momentous occasion."

"Thank you, Director Thomason. I'll do the best I can," David responded courteously.

"My condolences about your granduncle, Doctor Gray. He was a truly brilliant man," the brown furred Ferren, Director Thomason, added sympathetically. "Let's hope that here today you can surpass the legend he helped to forge."

"I can never hope to surpass Uncle Anthony, Mr. Thomason," David reminded firmly, "All I intend to do here is succeed him."

"Of course," the tie wearing facility director concurred with an almost used car salesman-like smile, before gesturing further inside the room, "Why don't I show you to your new work station, Doctor Gray?"

Without hesitation, David promptly followed Director Thomason's lead towards the back of the room, up onto a split level floor to steps above the rest of the facility, where rested an unoccupied small, grey, plastic looking work desk with a flat screen display monitor and control pad mounted on top. After taking a seat in the provided swivel chair at the desk, the newly dubbed Chief Administrator flexed his paws together in front of the console, and declared enthusiastically to the other researchers, "As the old human adage goes, 'Let's get this show on the road!'"

Another small round of applause echoed throughout the room.

After a couple hours had passed, one of the researchers, a male with a red and cream coloured, fox-like fur pattern, suddenly turned around in his chair to face Director Thomason, and informed, "I think I might have something, sir."

"What do you make of it, Mr. Evans?" Thomason inquired in a professional tone. "Could it be a response from Earth?"

"I'm checking now, Director..." the researcher, Mr. Evans, responded, as donned an audio headset that was resting on his work station, and began quickly adjusting the instruments on his control board for a moment. "Sir, this can't be right... According to these readings, the signal is coming from less than thirty solar hours away. It's coming from Ushawuan..."

"Ushawuan?!" Thomason repeated in disbelief. "Ushawuan is a gas giant! There's nothing but hydrogen and helium down there! Evans, are you sure it's not just some sort of glitch in the systems?"

"No, he's right. I'm getting it here, too," David quickly interjected at that moment. "And whatever it is, it's getting closer..."

"Put the signal up on the audio coms," Thomason then instructed seriously.

The researcher named Evans immediately began adjusting a few more of the controls on his console. After a moment, upon suddenly hearing a methodical sounding voice in a language that was foreign to him booming throughout the room, Thomason quickly turned around to look towards David, and asked, "Doctor Gray, can you identify this language?"

"It's definitely a human language, Director. English, to be precise," David replied, "I'm putting it through the translation buffer now."

A few seconds later, the unfamiliar human language quickly changed to that of an almost monotone sounding voice in the native tongue of everyone in the room, saying, *"Target in T-Minus six hours and counting. Six hours and counting to target."*

After a brief moment of tense silence, Director Thomason commanded soberly, "Get the Prime Minister on the line."