

Small World

Chapter 17: A Road Trip to Midnight

The next morning, somewhere between Nevada and Texas...

As her baseball cap-wearing assistant drove the white news van at high speeds down the barren desert highway towards Houston, the news reporter known as Veronica Wells sat grinning deviously in the passenger seat, eyes narrowed in obsessive determination. "Run and hide while you can now, my furry little extra-terrestrials... It's only a matter of time before the world knows that life from other worlds is among us..."

Meanwhile, back at the motel in Nevada...

David awoke to a furry paw shaking him.

"Hey, kid, time to get up! Come on, we got to get moving!"

Recognizing Jack's voice, David slowly opened his eyes, to see a slightly impatient look on the former human's furry brown face. "Ugh...what time is it...?" David groaned tiredly.

"Ten hundred hours pacific time," Jack answered bluntly.

After taking a moment to do the math in his head, David quickly sprung up out of bed, and exclaimed, "That means it's going to be after midnight by the time we reach Houston!"

"No kidding," Jack scoffed sarcastically. "Jade is already signing out our room, so she'll be back to pick us up any minute now."

"Great... time to play ragdoll again..." David muttered with an exasperated sigh.

At that moment, the door to the room opened, revealing behind it Jade, now clad in a pair of light-blue jeans and a pink T-shirt. "Okay, guys. Plushie time," the human girl whispered as she stepped inside.

Nodding in acknowledgement, the two Ferrens flopped limply onto the bed. Picking up the pair of furry creatures under her arms, Jade quickly carried them out to the car. As soon as David and Jack were safely buckled into their seats and she deemed they were

alone, Jade gave the all-clear signal, allowing her passengers to both breathe out a sigh of relief. Climbing into the driver's seat, Jade started the engine of the vehicle, and drove off out of the parking lot.

As the pink Volkswagen Beetle continued on its long journey down the highway towards the city of Houston, Jade said quietly to herself, "Next stop, Nasa headquarters..."

Meanwhile, somewhere in Houston...

Doctor Stein was sitting at a computer console in his laboratory wearing a small headset of some sort, bobbing his head up and down as he sang to himself quietly under his breath, "*We're all living in Amerika~! Amerika~! Ist wunderbar ~!*"

Just then, a small, black, rectangular device resting on the desk next to the computer started to emit a familiar cackling sound. Pausing a moment to remove his headset and glance at the rectangular device's screen, Doctor Stein lifted it to the side of his face, and spoke into it, "Ah, so vhat do you have to report zis time, Mishter Jeffershon? Good news, I hope."

"In a sense," Agent Jefferson's cold, calculating voice responded through the communication device's speaker. "I've just received a report from a couple of my subordinates that the fugitives have just left a small motel in Southern Nevada under an hour ago. This means they should reach Houston around twenty-four hundred hours central standard time. Make sure you're ready for their arrival before then."

"No problem, Mishter Jeffershon! I already have it all under control!" Doctor Stein assured confidently.

"Good," Jefferson replied coldly. "Oh, and by the way, keep a careful eye out for a couple of news reporters from Las Vegas. My sources tell me this one Veronica Wells is also in pursuit of our quarry, likely for the intent of exposing them to the media. If she becomes too much of a disruption to our plans, see to it that meets some *inconspicuous accident*."

"Vhy, of course, Mishter Jeffershon! I guarantee you, zere vill be no loosh ends on my vatch! Everything vill go according to plan!" Doctor Stein replied reassuringly, before deactivating and setting down the communication device. The scientist then turned his attention back to his computer screen, which displayed a diagram of what appeared to be a massive vessel comprised of a long shaft with a large pinwheel-shaped apparatus extending out from the center.

Later that night, in the outskirts of Houston...

After driving for more than half an Earth day, the trio of fugitives finally saw a bright-green sign on the side of the road illuminated by their vehicle's headlights that read, '*HOUSTON – POPULATION: 2,200,000*'.

"Well, here we are, guys," Jade remarked calmly as she reduced her car's speed slightly to match the new in-city limit. "Now all we need to do is find this '*top secret operation*' of yours..."

A few moments later, Jack heard what sounded like furious yelling from somewhere nearby. Peering out his rear passenger-side window, the former human noticed a slightly overweight, pale skinned, short haired man standing on the side of the road. The man was holding up a large cardboard sign on the end a wooden post that had written on it the word '*GOVERNMENT*' with a large red '*X*' painted over it.

As Jade's bright-pink car passed by the man, he turned to glare at her, and began shouting at the top of his lungs, "BEWARE THE MOUSTACHED MEN DRESSED IN BLACK! THEY WILL BEAT YOU, PERSECUTE YOU, AND TAKE AWAY YOUR FREEDOM! DO NOT BE A SLAVE TO THE SYSTEM!"

"Nice place," Jack quipped sarcastically with a lopsided smirk.

"You'll find a lot of that around here," Jade informed. "Cities in this part of the country are places where people tend to congregate who aren't exactly, shall we say, '*firing on all thrusters*'."

Entering the city limits, the three occupants of the small car failed to notice as they drove by a white, boxy van parked on the side of the road which had the words '*LV News*' painted on the side.