



The Little Universe
A novel by Jason Matthews

Sample - Theta 7

2008 Jason Matthews. All rights reserved.
Library of Congress Control Number: 2005905821 1/7/2008

Theta 7

Whitney began driving her own car, so she could work different hours and have time alone with Jim. She probably also needed some space from Adams and me. We hadn't spoken about the kiss we shared, but I could tell Whitney was reluctant to date someone she worked with, or maybe just me. I understood, and although I would have happily dated her, I accepted the role of a good friend without pushing for more.

She would arrive at lunchtime and work with all of us for half of the day and then with Jim on her own projects afterwards. Having Jim to herself was something we all understood. One thing she was able to do was help us catch up on our logs. Ever since we found Alpha 17, we had done nothing to check up on the other known planets, nor had we looked for any new ones. Adams thought the split crew was a brilliant idea, and he encouraged me to stay late with her when I felt up to it.

Half of the nights, I had the strength to stay late with her, and on other evenings I simply went home and fell asleep. Either way, I was always catching a ride with somebody. I had saved money by then, enough to make car payments, but I hadn't any time to do the shopping.

I was with Whitney the night she scanned the Theta galaxy, a small, elliptical galaxy in a far section of the universe where we hadn't done much research. Whitney was passing through a cross section of the galaxy, having Jim take notes of the star types and their positions. It was a routine that had been neglected for weeks. She cruised through the galaxy, inspecting dozens of Thetan stars, when a specific red sun caught her eye. She veered slightly from her course to inspect it. She asked Jim to study the red star and look for any planets in its vicinity.

After some searching, Jim concluded that the red giant sun had at least ten planets in its orbit. With that many planets, we decided to take an inventory and give them all a quick look. There was nothing remarkable about the first six. They were primarily gaseous and barren worlds.

But even from space, we could see that the seventh planet was different. We could see its purplish-blue oceans and land masses of striking yellows, oranges and greens. From space, it looked beautiful, and it seemed to be warm. The technical name was Theta 7 of star gd556. It orbited a red giant sun, a large orb that lit up the planet in a thick, orange-colored atmosphere.

“This looks like the prettiest one yet,” Whitney said. “Let’s go in closer.”

As the shot went in, we realized Theta 7 had a great variety of life. We scanned large sections of continents and saw many ecosystems - savannah, grasslands, deserts and deep jungles. The air was clear, the forests thick with plants and trees, and the water in the lakes and oceans looked clean and inviting. We scanned over a white sandy beach and then the shallows of an ocean, where we saw a multitude of marine life in the clear water.

Jim reported, “The planet has a good blend of nitrogen, oxygen, silicon and carbon.”

We scanned back over to the landmass and found wildlife in abundance. Jim took the shot deep into a savannah area, and we zoomed in on a thundering herd of hooved mammals. The exotic beasts ran in a pack of thousands, galloping over hard ground and kicking up a whirlpool of dust in their wake. We followed them as they trampled across an established migration route, a path carved from pounding hooves and many years.

Other creatures watched the herd as well, mostly the smaller ones that dove underground as the masses thundered over them. There were also the predators that hid on the sidelines. Occasional streaking attacks encountered the herd. A group of canines made a successful lunge, singling out one of the younger beasts. Whitney rooted for the little animal to escape, but as the dogs closed in, she asked Jim to change the scene.

“Pan back toward the coastline,” she said. “Take it up higher too. I want to see more from above.”

The shot lifted, and the thundering herd became smaller until it was a blip that could barely be distinguished from the land. The monitor moved over a large section of coastline and the surrounding area. As the shot moved laterally over the countryside, we noticed a pattern of straight lines, rectangles and circles embedded in the landscape. There were several areas of them on the monitor, indicating something we had become familiar with from Alpha 17. Large well-defined rectangles and circles meant organization and farming.

“More intelligent life?” Whitney remarked.

“Doesn’t surprise me a bit,” I said. I picked up the phone and made the call to Adams at home.

Jim zoomed in on the area above the rectangular patterns. As the shot went toward the ground, we saw groomed rows of planted crops. They looked like they were doing well, with strong stalks and large ripe fruit hanging from them. There were no signs of farming machinery.

As Jim readjusted the camera to follow a pathway from the rows, we were blessed with the presence of animals and farmers walking through the crops. The animals led the way. Large beasts without harnesses, they walked carefully past the rows of waist-high plants. The farmers followed them, and we cheered as we saw them.

The farmers walked slowly with long strides. They carried bags around their shoulders and placed ripened fruit in them. Their walk seemed to have a rhythm to it, done patiently. We sensed the warmth of their atmosphere and the slowing effect of a humid afternoon. The farmers had smooth, brown skin and wore simple clothing around their midsection, like cloth hanging from a waistband. They were hairless on

their bodies and heads. The ones we found worked casually, looking after the animals and picking choice fruit. A close-up on their faces showed them talking and laughing. Their eyes were spread wide around elongated heads, and their ears and noses were bigger than ours proportionally. They had no apparent teeth, just gummy nubs that barely showed when they opened their mouths. Their faces were very expressive. I saw them singing as they walked behind their beasts, and I sensed the enjoyment they were having.

Adams joined us within a few minutes, probably setting new speeding records along the way. Whitney gave him the data she had of the planet and the star, with Jim and me adding tidbits. Adams stared in shock as a thought came to him.

“This planet orbits a red giant?” he asked in surprise. Whitney and I should have thought of that as well, but we had been too absorbed in the new life to have recognized the oversight.

Like any burning object, a sun gradually lost its fuel. As that happened to red giants like the Thetan star, an interesting thing occurred. As its own gravitational pressures relaxed, the red stars actually expanded to many times their size. Red giants were in a state of massive growth, and they often engulfed their nearest orbiting planets and caused instability for those further out in orbit. After exhausting their resources over millions of years, the red giants would wear out and collapse back into themselves, often dragging a majority of their old solar system with them and making orphans of the planets that remained in space.

Red giants were not wonderful stars to be living under. They were in a state of change that was happening much faster than at previous eras.

Seeing algae and primitive life growing on Theta 7 would not have been a surprise, but seeing mammals and people, and knowing how many millions of years it took for them to evolve is what made it surprising.

“I guess we don’t know everything about evolution yet,” I offered.

Adams sat down and asked Jim a number of questions about the star. Jim confirmed that the red star was indeed expanding. The rate was likely to be nearly 1 percent each hundred years. At that rate, the sun was doubling its size about every 7,000 years, not nearly the kind of stability we associated with advanced life forms.

“I don’t think those numbers can be right,” Adams reasoned.

“That’s the best I can figure without doing a time leap,” Jim replied.

We spent the evening scanning around Theta 7. All night, we continued to find villages and farms spread across the globe. Some villages were small, but we also found others containing thousands of visible huts and people walking about. Theta 7 was surprisingly populated, more so than it appeared from above. The construction went beyond simple architecture. Some of the cities had large structures in beautiful design, built of stone, clay and metal. Again we saw the conical shape in some dwellings, similar to ones from Alpha 17, just built with basic materials.

The villages were very well kept. Even the largest cities appeared to be manicured. We also found artwork, statues, symbols of nature and what appeared to be temples with dramatic designs. People sat outside them in prayer or meditation. Other people walked about dancing.

They danced in groups, and they danced alone, making mystical body movements and allowing themselves to be taken over with the moment. I found it fairly bizarre, but Whitney couldn’t have been happier with her discovery.

“I love everything about this planet,” Whitney said, watching a group of elders dancing, moving her arms as they did.

The people and lifestyle were simple, yet something about them was appealing. Many of the people wore elegant robes, some of basic colors and others in dazzling displays. Other people, like the farmers, wore very little clothing, made of the simplest cloth. Most of the children were naked.

There was nothing of technology to be found. Carts were pulled by beasts and not machines. There were no wires, no power plants, no electric lights.

Many of the villages had elaborate layouts with a central design. Near the middle of the villages were beautiful structures that we presumed to be temples. Outside and nearby the temples, Thetans sat as if in meditation.

“With such long limbs,” Whitney noted, “they seem very flexible to be sitting cross-legged.”

Despite living under a red giant, Theta 7 appeared to be a comfortable planet to live on. It was primarily tropical with no polar caps, yet it maintained a series of continents with pleasant temperatures and a huge variety of nature.

Whitney had Jim take a collection of faces from the Thetan people and come up with a general look based on patterns. She then had Jim match results to a generic Alphan face. As we looked at the two composite faces side by side on the screen, the Alphans had lighter, off-white complexions, with a thin coat of hair over their entire bodies. The Thetan skin was darker, and their bodies were hairless, even on their heads. The Alphans had smaller, more compact heads, while the Thetan head was elongated. The Alphans were shorter and stockier. They had ears and noses that looked like indentations. The Thetans were taller and thinner, and their movements were far more graceful. The Thetans also had more pronounced ears and noses, and they had eyes similar to ours in size and angle, yet spread a bit wider around the head. The Alphans had larger, more circular eye openings.

“The differences are due to the physical traits of their planets,” Adams said.

He had Jim calculate the time in years that it would take for a message to be sent from one planet to the other, if they knew of each other’s existence and attempted communication through radio signals.

Jim figured that one planet would have to wait about twenty thousand years for the message to be received. The idea made no sense anyway, since the Thetans had no means of sending or receiving such a signal.

Even though they occupied worlds simultaneously in the same universe, there was basically no chance that they would ever know about each other, nor would they know about any of those other worlds because they were so far away from them. It made me think our situation was probably the same. Our universe was probably teeming with life, even intelligent life, but the chances of us ever connecting with it were very slim.

“Got a call tonight. We found Theta 7, our second planet with society! Strangest thing, orbits a red giant. Must have recently changed from a yellow star. Doubt they have much time left. Polar caps are gone already. Shame they’re so primitive, probably a thousand years from technology. Whitney fond of them. Hope she doesn’t get too attached.”

- From p. 97 of Webster’s journal.

(End of current sample)

Find more from Jason Matthews at his websites

www.cosmicforceproductions.com - www.thebigbangauthor.com
<http://www.thelittleuniverse.com>- www.thelittleuniverse.webs.com