

Twelve thousand years ago, when a great worldwide flood threatened to make the Earth uninhabitable for humans, many attempts were made to preserve some small remnant of the species until the world was once more fit for habitation.

By and large, these efforts proved unsuccessful. One brilliant mind, however, came up with a radical plan to use an experimental size-changing technology to shrink a small population of humans, thus enabling them to survive on very limited resources. These people would then be placed inside an airtight chamber powered by geothermal energy, where a computer would maintain an environment suitable for the tiny human beings.

The conditions of the outside world would be monitored periodically until it was found to be capable of sustaining human life again, at which point the humans would be resized and sent out to repopulate.

Over ten thousand years passed before the oceans receded and the land was once more ready to host humanity. When the attempt was made to grow the humans to normal size, however, it was found that the growth device no longer worked—or maybe it never had. Unable to resize themselves, and unable to open the chamber at their tiny size, all they could do was send out a distress signal in hopes that some other remnant of humanity would receive it and come to their aid.

Many centuries later, the descendants of squids and octopi would come to populate the surface world, developing complex societies and advanced technologies, including the internet. Eventually, the humans made contact with the inkling internet, hoping to see if they could enlist the aid of this new species. Over time, closer communications developed between the leaders of both societies, until it was agreed that the cephalopods would send an ambassador—a famous octoling, Marina Ida.

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The ancient steel doors slowly ground open, their gears emitting metallic screeches as they strained to carry out their purpose, their mechanisms old and stiff with the rust of centuries. As a narrow opening formed between them, Marina felt the cool sea breeze rush past her and into the chamber within.

Though she had been given some information about the humans and their society, she had no clear idea what she would find inside the chamber until she stepped inside. The place was

surprisingly bright, as much as it was outside. The chamber, shaped like a dome, was illuminated by a vast screen that spanned the entirety of the walls and ceiling, presenting an image of the daytime sky. A “sun” shone far above, about the same place that the real one would be outside, but there were no clouds, though she had seen a few in the sky.

The room was bigger than she'd expected, at least 150 feet in diameter. All around its circumference there was a concrete walkway, about five feet wide, which encircled a shallow depression housing a vast expanse of dirt, dotted with puddles of water and patches of green.

Marina took off her shoes before continuing further into the chamber, feeling the cool earth beneath her feet. The lack of shoes was a precaution requested by the humans, as going barefoot would reduce the chances of her accidentally stepping on a human and improve the chances of their surviving if such an accident occurred.

On the ground near her feet she saw some tiny plants and even a few houses, but to her disappointment, no tiny humans. Were they all hiding from her? She couldn't blame them if they were, though she was really hoping she would get to say hi to some of them soon. From how tiny their houses were, she bet they'd be really cute.

Looking across the room, she saw that there were a lot of tiny villages and individual farms spread out over the habitat, but only one place that could be called a town, located right in the center. Supposedly that was the place where she'd find the human leaders. She started making her way there, being careful to watch her step.

As she walked, she spotted a few humans in a nearby village poking their heads out of their little houses to look at her. They stood about an inch tall and looked a lot like inklings and octolings, though their proportions were a bit different and they had hair instead of tentacles. She stopped and slowly crouched, not going any closer so she wouldn't risk scaring them back inside.

“Hey there!” she said, waving at them. “Don't worry, I'm not going to hurt you. My name is Marina and I'm here to help you. Could you tell me where I can find your leaders?” She waited a few seconds for a response before realizing they probably couldn't speak or understand her language. “No, I guess not. I'll be on my way then. See you around, little guys.” She stood and kept walking, waving goodbye at them.

The closer Marina got to the town, the more humans she spotted looking at her from the safety of their homes, a few even venturing out of their houses to look at her. She nodded to them as she

walked, and even saw a few of them return the gesture.

She was so caught up in greeting all the little humans that she didn't notice that one of them had wandered onto her path until she felt something under her foot. As soon as she did, she jerked her foot back with a gasp and knelt down to look at the tiny human who lay in her footprint. "Oh my gosh, are you okay?" She asked, scooping him up into her hands and bringing him up.

Concern gave way to relief as she saw him pick himself up, looking a bit dazed but otherwise healthy. "You had me worried there for a minute, little guy," she sighed. "Are you really alright? You're not hurt or anything?" She placed a finger on his back, helping him get back up. Standing, he staggered a bit, but soon regained his balance. He looked around, blinking his eyes as if still trying to get his eyesight back in order. All of a sudden he looked up at her face, startled by the realization of where he was. He looked so struck by disbelief that Marina couldn't help but giggle at him. She heard him say something, but it was pure gibberish to her. "Sorry, little dude; I have no idea what you're saying. I'm glad you're okay, though, and I'm really sorry for stepping on you. I hope you can forgive me for that," she said, touching her lips against his body in a small kiss before setting him down on the ground, his face expressing utter bewilderment. She stood and left him behind as she continued on her way to the human town, keeping her eyes glued to her path, determined not to step on a human ever again.

Stopping a couple strides away from the town's border, she looked through its streets and saw them filled with tiny humans. Most of them stood and stared openly at her while a few others looked like they were trying to run to safety and a smaller minority paid her no attention. "Uh, hi," she said. "I'm Marina. The ambassador? Is there anyone here I can talk to?" Her eyes scanned the entire town as she tried to make out who were the people she was supposed to meet with—an impossible task given how many of them there were.

A curious noise brought her attention to a big building, where she saw a couple of people blowing on trumpets. Then the doors opened up and some important-looking people marched out of the building, the small procession slowly making its way towards her. By the look of things, it would take them several minutes to reach her, so in the meantime she decided to sit down—after making sure there was nothing behind her, of course.

While she waited, a group of young humans ventured out from the town and went up to her. Standing next to her foot, they looked up at her like they were trying to judge how much of a threat she posed. One of them stepped forward and reached out toward her. He moved slowly, glancing up at her often, ready to turn and run at a moment's notice, before finally placing his hand on her toe. She gave him a friendly smile and saw him grow relaxed. Emboldened by his

example, the others joined him at her toes. As she reached out at them, they all shrank back, a few even retreating to a safer distance. She waited for them to grow comfortable again, then patted their heads one by one. Apparently satisfied, they all headed back to town together, waving her goodbye as they went.

By the time the procession made it to the town border, it had gathered a large crowd of followers, though these all stayed in town as the procession came to meet her. One of them, speaking the inkling language decently if a bit stilted, introduced himself as the translator and the other people as the governor, some members of his cabinet, and a few other important figures. Together they welcomed her into their habitat, honoring her as a guest and expressing their hopes that both their species could be friends.

Over the conversation that followed, the human leaders proceeded to explain their situation in detail, with Marina sometimes asking a question to clarify some point. The humans explained exactly what they were looking for: someone who could take a look at the ancient growth ray and hopefully get it working so they could all leave their little chamber to go out and populate the surface world.

"I could take a look at this device if you want," Marina said. "I'm an engineer, so maybe I could figure out how to fix it. I can't make any promises, though. I've never heard of anything like this. It might turn out that we won't be able to fix it with our current technology, or even that making growth rays isn't possible. Even if it can be fixed, it would probably take years to fully repair. If you don't mind my asking, what are your plans in case that the machine won't be fixed anytime soon?"

"We'll probably just stay here until it is," the governor said. "Maybe send some people out to look at the rest of the island now that the doors are open."

"If I may make a suggestion, you could come live with us in Inkopolis. I think there could be a place for humans in our society, even at your current sizes. Our society houses people from all sorts of different species, from inklings, to shrimps, to jellyfish and sea urchins. I'm sure your people would find a welcoming home there."

Her suggestion sparked what looked like a heated discussion among the humans. After a while, the governor responded, saying that they preferred to stay and colonize the island for now. However, they would spread word of her invitation so that anyone who wanted to could go join the inkling society.

With nothing else to discuss at the moment, Marina was invited to take a look at the size-changing device, which was housed in a small room near the entrance. The octoling would spend the next few hours looking it over. In the end, she had to admit she was stumped. It was completely unlike anything she'd seen before. Whoever invented it must have been a real prodigy.

Going back to the city, she reported her findings to the human leaders. They looked disappointed, but not surprised. Still, when she offered to come back next week with better tools to give it another go, they readily accepted, only warning her to watch her step on her return as they were planning to send some of their people exploring outside.

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Sure enough, Marina returned to the humans' island the following week, this time accompanied by her close friend and bandmate, Pearl Houzuki, a pink-and-white inkling. Pearl had insisted on coming along after hearing her talk so much about the humans, and after clearing the visit with the human leaders, who reluctantly gave their permission, Marina had let her tag along.

The two got off the ship together and went off towards the humans' cave. As they neared the entrance, Marina called for Pearl to stop, pointing out a small group of humans climbing up a rock. Marina gave them a boost, seeing them safe on top of the rock before continuing down the cave.

"Woah! This place is so cool!" Pearl exclaimed as she entered the underground habitat. "Nice acoustics, too. YO!!!" Her voice reverberated through the chamber, its volume making thousands of humans drop what they were doing to cover their ears.

"Whoops. Sorry," Pearl said after Marina motioned for her to be more quiet.

Meanwhile, Marina had crouched down over the edge of the human habitat, where a few of the human leaders had gathered to welcome them. She said she would be going directly into the machine room to take another look at the size-changing device while Pearl would be staying behind to familiarize herself with the humans and their culture while

The pink-and-white inkling introduced herself, saying, "Yo, humans! The name's Pearl Houzuki! Pleased to meet you." The humans looked like they couldn't say the same about her.

"I'll see you later. Please be careful with the humans, and remember to take off your shoes," Marina said before leaving.

Pearl did as she suggested, leaving her shoes near the entrance before wandering into the human habitat, oblivious to the human leaders' calls for her to wait for them. She walked until she found a small group of houses, then got down on all fours in front of them, almost crushing another tiny house that she had failed to see.

"Hey! Come on out, will you? I wanna meet some of you guys!" She said, tapping on the roofs of the little houses. "Come on, I know you're in there. I see you peeking through the windows."

After a while, one human did wander out of his house, walking halfway up to Pearl. "That's the spirit!" she said, roughly picking him up between two of her fingers before dropping him onto her open palm. He stood up shakily and stared up at her. "You know, Marina told me you guys were cute. I don't know about that; I think you guys look more puny than anything." she prodded him with a fingertip, causing him to stagger back a few steps. He didn't stop staring at her, though.

"What's the matter, little dude? Is there something you wanna say to me?" The human made some gestures which took her a while to understand. "This what you want?" she asked, opening her mouth wide and bringing her palm up to it. In the very edge of her field of view she could just barely make out the human stepping forward to peer inside her mouth, also feeling him reach inside and touch her lower beak.

"Hey, you want a closer look?" Pearl asked, pulling her head back a bit. The human looked confused. "Here, let me give you one." She picked him up by the shirt and opened her mouth wide, slowly bringing him inside, letting him dangle over her tongue. Then she went "Ahhhhh," letting him see the back of her throat as her breath washed over him.

After a bit, she pulled him back up, the tip of her tongue grazing his legs on the way out. "Hey, you didn't think I was going to eat you, right?" she asked after seeing how pale the human looked. "Here, you can go now, if you want." She set him back on the ground and noticed a few other humans had wandered out now.

"Oh, hi! I almost didn't see you there," Pearl said as she sat up. None of the humans responded, though. "Man, you guys sure are quiet. Don't you have any music here? You know, like..." She

mimicked strumming a guitar. None of the humans seemed to understand. "No? Nothing? Man, that sucks. Actually, now that I think about it, you guys have probably never even heard of the Squid Sisters, or any of me and Marina's music. Man, you've probably never heard Ebb and Flow and Calamari Inkantation! Well, maybe I can fix that for you. I don't have the instrumental on my phone, and I can't sing Marina's parts like she can, but maybe you'll like this." She got to her feet and started belting out Ebb and Flow, attracting the attention of every human in the chamber.

She sang song after song, putting on a quick-and-dirty concert for the humans, many of whom gathered around her in a little crowd as she performed for them, clapping or dancing along to the beat.

Pearl finished singing just as Marina came back out of the machine room. "Looks like someone's having fun," the octoling noted as she approached her bandmate.

"Marina, you gotta join me for this next song. It'll go so much better if the two of us sing it together."

"In a minute. I have to give the humans my report first. Have you seen them around somewhere?"

"Over here!" The human leaders yelled from nearby, their little group having followed after Pearl to make sure she didn't cause any trouble.

Marina sat down with them and explained her findings. Basically, she thought the device could be fixed, but she would have to consult with some other experts back in Inkopolis. The people seemed quite happy to hear that. They also had an announcement of their own to make.

"If you brought any food with you, we would be honored if you were to eat with us. We will be holding a feast in honor of the friendship between our species," their governor said.

Pearl and Marina were glad to accept. They went back to the ship to get their food, and when they returned they found thousands of tiny humans gathered just outside their town. The two sat an arm's length away from them, and after a few speeches from the human leaders, everyone started eating, enjoying the meal and the company.

After they had finished, Pearl and Marina lay back on the ground and kicked out their legs, their

feet now looming over the mass of tiny humans. Some people inched back from them, but most were used to their presence now, having seen that they meant no harm. A few adventurous souls chose to walk up to the two giantesses, and were soon joined by even more curious people. The tiny human beings kept a safe distance as they walked around their massive guests' bodies, in awe at their sheer size.

The humans had always known that they were much smaller than they were supposed to be, but because they lived in an environment built for their size, they had never actually felt themselves small. It wasn't until these outsiders came that they began to understand just how small they were. For most this realization only made it more urgent that they find some way to grow to normal size so they could approach these titans as equals. Others, however, thought it exciting to be living in a world filled with giants like these.

As they grew more comfortable around the giantesses, some humans went up to touch them, and eventually some of the braver among them began climbing them.

Pearl and Marina felt all this and let them do as they pleased. To be so huge compared to the little humans that their bodies were like hills to be scaled was an interesting experience, and they were both filled with wonder towards the tiny humans. The people crawled all over their bodies, from their arms and legs to their chests and bellies, only staying away from their heads and their more sensitive areas. Marina smiled at a few she saw lying down on her exposed midriff. She slowly moved her arm, giving the people on it enough time to get off, and reached up to stroke the resting humans. "How cute," she cooed, leaving her hand cupped over them.

Meanwhile, Pearl enjoyed the feeling of them crawling between her toes, wiggling them playfully around the little humans. She felt a few climbing onto her hand and brought it up to her face, moving her fingers around as the humans clung to her fingers to avoid falling off. Eventually they grew tired and one by one they let go and fell, bouncing off her chest and rolling down to her belly. The last one Pearl pinched between her fingers, dangling him by the shirt before lowering him onto her face, where he sat straddling her nose.

Pearl and Marina spent a long time playing with the humans. They would have liked to stay much longer, they had work tomorrow at Inkopolis News. Once they felt it was almost time to leave, they asked the humans to get off of them. The humans apparently understood what they wanted even without the need for a translator, and began making their way down, with Pearl and Marina helping a few of them get back on the ground. Only once they were sure that everyone had gotten off did they venture to stand, the pair of them stretching after their little break. They thanked the humans for having invited them to their celebration, and offered to perform a song to end their



visit, with the humans gladly accepting.

They went up on the outer walkway, using it as a sort of stage. Marina pulled out her phone and started playing the instrumental for their hit song, Ebb and Flow. They went all out, singing and performing just like they were at a real concert. Their music entranced had the humans hooked, as they had never heard anything like it before. Once the performance was over, the two went back to the town, where both groups said their goodbyes to each other.

“We thank you for your help and friendship, and wish you a safe journey to your home,” the governor said, “But before you leave, there's just one more thing to take care of. During your last visit we agreed to let the people know of your invitation to go live among your species. Well, since, many people have come to me expressing interest in taking up your offer.” He made a signal and a group of humans stepped forward.

“You all want to come with us?” Marina asked, stooping over them. Once her question was translated for them they all nodded. “Then we'd be happy to bring you along.” She and Pearl each scooped up a handful of humans, and with their passengers secure they left, all of them waving goodbye to the remaining humans.

It was dark out by the time Pearl and Marina got back to their ship. Feeling tired after such a long day, they went up to their room and got into bed. Rocked by the waves,

The pair went off to their room and bid each other good night and got into bed, falling asleep with the humans snuggled on top of them.

The humans, though, were restless. Tomorrow they would be arriving at a strange new world, one in which they would be almost as insects to everyone else. Had they made a mistake in coming along? Would they find a welcoming home? How would the others treat them? Such questions pressed at their minds. Despite their worries, the soft breathing of their new friends and the rise and fall of their chests comforted them and they gradually drifted off to sleep, feeling sure that, whatever happened, they could at least trust these two to keep them safe.