

## Homecoming

Lance blinked, the planet below slowly becoming visible onscreen; the two foxes standing beside him looking on in amazement. Neither of the canines had been able to view their home planet from this distance before, nor could they have imagined just how small their world was. A knock at the cabin door brought the three to their senses, the foxes taking a second to return to a more acceptable, human appearance as Lance moved to answer.

"Admiral, sir?" Lance asked, looking rather confused. "I...sorry. What can I do for you sir?"

The older man simply chuckled, offering Lance his hand. "Lance, Roth...Duan...I wanted to come by to personally thank you all for your help. Without you three; I don't know how we would've survived."

Lance gave the admiral a smile, taking his hand. "Thank you sir. I do have to ask though. That planet doesn't look the same as I would expect it to. Are we certain it's inhabitable?"

"I can't say for certain yet, Lance." The admiral replied. "But look at it. While yes, it looks very different from earth, you can see the clouds, what looks like water below, and what appears to be some small level of plant-life. It looks very promising."

"It's perfectly safe," Roth said, glancing back at the screens. "If these visions have been accurate at all...we'll be able to settle in over the next few months."

"I would like to suggest we land the fleet on one of the smaller continents. One of them had a large clearing we should be able to set down in if I remember correctly," Duan said. "The area is near the water and the forest surrounds it. It's also nice and flat."

The admiral thought for a few moments before looking at the younger males. "Are you certain these visions are correct?"

"They've gotten us this far, Admiral." Lance said. "They haven't been wrong about the location of this place, and they weren't wrong about the invasion either. I say we trust them."

The Admiral gave a small nod. "We'll map the planet from a distance first and we'll send a scouting party down to provide coordinates. We should be able to touch down in the next few days."

Lance nodded. "Thank you for guiding us through all of this, Admiral. It's much appreciated."

"Just doing my job, son. You three have been a great help to us, and you two...thank you for all the help in finding us a new place to settle."

"Our pleasure." Roth said, bowing his head as the Admiral turned to leave.

Lance shut the door to the cabin and looked over at the two young men standing before him. "So...those visions..."

"Memories," Roth said, sitting down and returning to his original canine form.

"This is where you're from...?" Lance asked.

"Yes," Duan said. "We've been away for some time...but we were born and raised on this planet."

Roth looked over to Lance. "There are several more like us...but they cannot blend in with your kind as we do, I wouldn't think. Are you certain we won't have anything to worry about from the others?"

Lance offered a reassuring smile. "It's nothing to worry about. You and your friend will be reunited with your families soon, I'm sure."

The two foxes exchanged a glance but nodded. "Thanks."

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"Sir, we're cleared to land. Data has been uploaded to the ships computer. Touchdown location requested is at 21 degrees 42 minutes 10 seconds north, 175 degrees 25 minutes 32 seconds west."

"Excellent. Thank you Lieutenant."

"Additional information Sir, other than the landing coordinates."

"Go ahead."

"There appeared to be a city on one of the larger continents, though we were unable to identify any life forms from our initial pass. There are also five moons which orbit this planet."

"We can check on those when we're settled in," the Admiral said. "Let's inform the others."

"Looks like we're going home," Roth said, glancing over at Duan. "Excited?"

"Anxious," He replied. "You know how long it's been? Surely they've forgotten us by now..."

"Family and friends don't forget, pup." Lance said, scratching the foxes between the ears lightly. "You two will be welcomed back with open arms, I'm sure."

Roth smiled slightly. "I sure hope so."

As the fleet touched down, Lance felt himself feeling considerably heavier than he had before. The two foxes beside him couldn't keep from laughing as the young male made his first attempts to stand, promptly falling back to the seat.

"Oh shut it you two. It's no wonder you guys were in such great shape," Lance grumbled. "I feel like I'm twice as heavy."

Roth snickered, quietly. "It's only about a third larger than earth."

The two couldn't help but smile as they watched the young man struggle along, far from used to his new weight. "Right...Let's go pay the Admiral a visit and see where we are exactly," Lance said, making his way down the hall.

The Admiral looked over at the group as they entered and smiled, clearly excited to set foot on this new land. "Time to start over boys," he said. "Over two years since we had fled earth...you guys certainly pulled though. Thank you."

"Couldn't you have warned us about the gravity difference, Admiral?" Lance asked.

The older man laughed. "I could have, but I didn't think it relevant. I apologize."

Lance smiled and shook his head. "It's fine. Will you be joining us outside at all?"

"Shortly, yes. Believe me, I want to see this place just as much as you, but we have a few things to clear up here before we join the others. You three should go on."

Lance nodded, leading the Roth and Duan out from the bridge to the ships exits. As they stepped down from the hatch and into the sunlight, the two canines couldn't help but smile as Lance stopped dead, staring at the silver field before him.

"Come on," Roth said, pulling the man aside to let the others out.

"What...is this place?" Lance asked, inhaling deeply. "It's so...different."

"This is home." Duan said. "The only difference from earth is the times really. Days are longer and the years last forever. A single turn can take almost thirty-six hours and a set several years."

"Time is matched with the phases of the moon. Each season or pass has a different primary moon. Anyway, you might want to get an idea of what you've got to work with," Roth said, leading Lance towards the forest.

Lance looked down at the stone they were walking upon, the gray slate beneath his feet marbled with what looked like red veins. The grass was brilliant silver though the dirt it grew upon remained a deep brown. The trees appeared to twist as they grew, the bark of the trunks spiraling upwards with the plant, the leaves varying color from a soft pink to a deep green.

"It's...so strange," Lance muttered, taking in the plants around him. "Is there anything we should worry about?"

"There are a few creatures of the forest you might mistake for plants. Most are harmless and will run, others...they'll kill you," Duan said.

"What should we look for?"

"Watch for moving plants, basically," Roth said. "They're very...I think the term was gamey?"

"It'd make sense," Lance said, looking around.

"Not to break this short, but we really should get back to our own," Duan said.

"We really could use your help, you know," Lance said. "We have nothing out here."

"You'll manage," Roth said, giving the man a smile. "Besides," he said, taking a moment to return to his canine form. "I'm not sure they understand what we are and are most definitely not used to us. I've never had to maintain this kind of control for so long either. I can't hide amongst you all easily."

"Besides, it's all similar to Earth," Duan said.

"You mean besides how everything is heavier and how everything grows? Not to mention; the animals we know are our size and speak?"

Roth glanced over at Duan and shrugged. "We've been here forever...if you asked me, I'd say you guys were the strange ones." He said, smiling slightly.

Lance laughed. "Alright, fair. You two will have to come by and visit when you can, alright?"

Duan gave the man a small smile. "We'll be around...hopefully we won't have to hide next time."

The man nodded, raising a hand as the two foxes turned, making their way off into the forest. They'd meet again; there was no doubt about that.