

Nowhereverse Tales



#23

AGES **16+**

We exist in our space and time... and we are not alone. Beyond our world lies numerous others with their own histories and biologies. And between them all, where the walls grow thin and possibility seems endless, there is a lighthouse, sitting in the space between spaces.

Welcome, travelers and castaways alike, to **Nowhere**.

In this Issue



Sometimes life surprises us in strange ways. Sometimes things evolve in a way we weren't expecting. Sometimes we learn that what we thought was ordinary isn't ordinary at all.

And sometimes our dreams about furies in space continue unabated. Wait... no, that's just Jasper. Let's see how he's doing...

—Ronyo

Jasper's Day Off

As Terra demonstrates the extent of her skills, Jasper finds his situation evolving
Rated Mature : coarse language, sensuality

An Expected Interrogation

Sometimes it's hard to be understood, but you try anyway.
Rated General : foreign thoughts, religion

Last we left off...

Jasper is an artist who frequently dreams about his character, **Terra Astra**, an anthropomorphic mouse living in a futuristic spacefaring world. He recently—and suddenly—moved out of his parents' house and onto his friends **Carl** and **Lisa's** couch. And the dreams have kept coming...

Jasper's Day Off

The anthropomorphic mouse flattened herself against the wall as she waited for the patrol to pass, her glowing orange eyes sweeping the empty hall. Her enhanced hearing finally told her the patrol was far enough away that she could move, and she did, bare foot-paws nearly silent on the smooth metal ground.

She darted to the doorway to the secure vault and pulled up the access panel. "Alright, Terra," she said to herself, "time to work your magic."

She brought her tail around and stuck its glowing orange tip into a data port. Immediately the screen flickered to life and flipped through several screens, access protocols bypassed and disabled one by one—

Until the screen froze with an alert saying "Biometric Scan Required."

Terra bit her lip. "That wasn't in the spec," she muttered. "Maybe I can bypass the whole thing?" She cocked her head and cracked her knuckles.

More screens flickered past until everything cleared away except a green checkmark. Terra grinned and watched the doors to the vault open. With a grin, Terra disconnected from the terminal and walked into the vault—

And was immediately met with red lights and sirens everywhere.

She stared towards the wall. "Yup, that's me," she groaned. "You're probably wondering how I ended up in this situation."

Carl looked at Jasper on the couch and sighed. "Gotta admit, homie," he said, "I'm a little jealous you get today off."

Jasper looked up from his sketchbook. "Yeah," he said, "but you get a weekend. I don't."

Carl dipped his head. "Too true." He hefted his computer bag and walked towards the door, taking a moment to look over Jasper's shoulder.

Even in black-and-white, Jasper had put enough icons and flourishes to note the alarms going off in the scene. Terra was frozen mid-stride, facing the side but looking straight towards the camera.

“Hey,” Carl said, playfully tapping Jasper on the shoulder, “does she say the line?”

Jasper made eye contact with Carl and grinned.

“Ha!” Carl barked. “Tell me the rest when I get home.”

He’d barely shut the door behind him when Lisa scampered out of the bedroom still pulling a blazer on. “Corporate bullshit strikes again,” she muttered as she ducked into the kitchen just long enough to grab a granola bar.

“What this time?” Jasper said.

“Oh, they sent out another email defending RTO.”

Jasper groaned. “Synergy and collaboration?”

“Yup,” Lisa said. “Everything except ‘every middle manager needs to justify their existence’ and ‘our shareholders own the building and want us to keep paying rent.’ It’s a call center, for fuck’s sake! Fuckers didn’t learn a damn thing from COVID.”

She stopped at the door and made eye contact with Jasper. “You good for today? There’s microwave pizza in the freezer if...”

Jasper waved her off. “I’m good, thanks,” he said. “You guys are doing more than enough just letting me crash here.”

“Yeah,” Lisa said, her voice slightly strained. “I just feel bad leaving you here without a car.”

Jasper shrugged. “I’ve got legs. And the bus exists.”

Lisa looked like she wanted to protest, but she took a deep breath and let it go. “Okay,” she said. “I’ll see you later.”

Jasper waved at her as she left, then focused back on his sketchbook. The drawing was mostly done save for a few details, and he filled them in as he heard the two cars leave. Another minute, and the drawing was done. One shot from his camera—a moment to mourn the much better camera on his former phone and another to cut that train of thought off entirely—and it was ready to post.

He turned and peeked out of the window to confirm that Carl and Lisa were both gone before reaching into his duffel bag and pulling out a separate sketchbook, this one with the paper edges colored red: his more explicitly adult drawings.

His friends wouldn’t have a problem with most of the things in here; hell, he’d *shown* them most of the things in here. The secrecy this time was less about the content of the drawings as it was the subjects. His ability to contribute to his hosts’ finances was limited, but he could draw them something as a gift.

He finally got to the page he was looking for, an anthropomorphic buck with well-trimmed antlers and tied-back dreadlocks in a short-sleeved coat. The sketch stopped at the waist, the rest of his body nothing more than rough shapes.

“Alright, Captain Buck,” Jasper said to himself, “let’s get you some legs.”

Terra passed into the daylight side of the planet. Through the window, she saw entire mountain ranges, mighty rivers start and end, cities and countries with no imaginary lines to denote them.

“In the immortal words of Edgar Mitchell,” she said with a smile, “Look at that, you son of a bitch.”

Captain Buck walked up and leaned forward to look out, one hand on the console and the other on Terra’s shoulder. “Oh, I’m looking, homie,” he said in awe.

Terra looked up at the deer. “Love what you did with the antlers,” she said.

Buck smiled down at her. “I did good, didn’t I?” he said, running a hand along one of his freshly-trimmed antlers. “Majesty’s no good if you can’t walk through the door.”

“Aye, Captain,” Terra said with a smirk.

Buck rolled his eyes. “Why am I the captain, again? You’ve got the ship.”

“I am the ship,” Terra corrected, getting up from her pilot’s seat and turning to face Buck, their muzzles nearly touching. “But as good as I am at getting us there, you’re better at deciding where ‘there’ is.”

Buck brought his arm around Terra and pressed on the small of her back. She let herself be pulled in and pressed her hands against his chest.

“Right now,” he said, his voice low, “the only place I want to be is right here.”

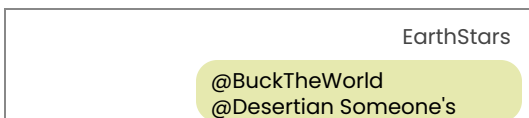
“Sap,” Terra griped before leaning in and—

Jasper woke from his nap with a start. He blinked and looked blearily around the living room before he heard a heavy knocking at the front door.

He froze, not wanting to make any kind of sound.

Another knock. “I know you’re in there,” a gruff male voice said. “If I have to get the master key I will.”

Jasper’s blood ran cold. Quickly he fished out his phone.



knocking at the door, think it's your landlord?

He's threatening to get the master key.

Another knock. Jasper fought with himself, the fear of getting Carl and Lisa in trouble warring with the fear of falling into a trap. Thankfully, he got a response.

BuckTheWorld

Answer, but don't tell him anything other than you're a guest.

I'll be home at 5:30 if he's stubborn.

With a shake of his head Jasper got to his feet and answered the door. A middle-aged man in a blue polo and khaki pants was glaring at him. "Right," he said. "And you are?"

"I'm a guest," Jasper said, trying to sound confident.

"You've been here over two weeks," the man said. "How much longer are you going to be a 'guest'?"

Jasper swallowed. "Carl'll be here at 5:30," he said. "You can talk to him then."

The landlord seemed to debate whether to press the issue before shrugging. "He better be," he said before turning and walking away.

Jasper quickly shut the door, locked it, and stumbled back to the couch, the adrenaline draining out of his body and talking all his energy with it. He fumbled with his phone and sent the update.

He's gone. Think he wants to talk to you, Buck.

I'm sorry if I'm causing trouble for you.

Desertian

Nope, don't go there. You KNOW Buck knows the lease inside and out.

Jasper did his best to take Lisa's words to heart, but the knot of worry stayed in the pit of his stomach. He turned back to his private sketchbook, still open to the drawing of Captain Buck. That dream

wasn't the first one he'd had with him—or any of the other fursonas in the group chat—but that was definitely the first one where he and Terra were *involved*—or at least it certainly seemed that way.

He shook his head. His brain worked in strange ways, and it wasn't worth looking into the metafictional implications of his character and Carl's character sleeping with each other. Terra fucked; he knew that, he'd seen it.

Quickly he shut the sketchbook, putting Captain Buck and his supremely well-defined muscles out of mind for the moment. He switched back to his normal sketchbook and flipped to a page with Terra seated at a high top table across from a raccoon-*taur* in a chef's apron. That dream had been informative, to say the least...

"So youse got two types of FTL," the raccoon-*taur*, Roscoe, said. "For interstellar travel, you got the punch drive. Basically point yourself in a straight line and punch a hole through space."

"And hope you don't punch through something else?"

The raccoon narrowed his eyes. "That a real question, or are you scrapping me?"

Terra glared back. "I'm new here. Enlighten me."

He held her gaze for a moment. "If you got the wrong vectors?" He mimed an explosion with his hands.

Terra nodded. "Holdo Maneuver."

Roscoe cocked his head and glared again. "Ain't heard of that, but if it means 'starship go boom' in whatever language that was, then yeah."

"Right. What's the other one?"

"Tesseract gates. Space compression between points A and B. You still have to move through it, but we're talking about five seconds at sub-light speed to go four light-hours."

Terra nodded. "Sounds great; what's the catch?"

"You only get points A and B. And there's all sort of number crunching just to find out if you even can before you actually do the math,—probably need to hire out some high-end AIs for that—and even then, sometimes it don't work. You get there, you set it up, you turn it on, and nothing doing." He shrugged. "Maybe some quark got in the way."

"Maybe Schrödinger's cat was actually a dog."

Roscoe waved his hand. "Again with the foreign language stuff. But you get it. And those odds get tougher the farther out you go. Exponentially tougher."

"So you can't use it for interstellar travel."

"There's one. Between Corvus and Taurus. Takes a full minute to go through, but it works." He scoffed. "Took them thirty years to do the math and get it running. Pretty much scared everyone off of it."

Terra nodded. "But it's precise, like you can go planet-to-planet?"

"Eh," the raccoon-taur groaned, "more like orbit-to-orbit, 'cause planets rotate. There's ways around it, but again with the high-level AIs, probably one at each end. Don't know how MRCL affords it, but that's their secret sauce."

"Who's Merckel?"

"You don't—" He narrowed his eyes. "You're scrapping me for sure. Em-ar-cee-ell?"

Terra sighed and nodded. "MRC Logistics, got it. Never heard it pronounced that way. They do planet-side gates?"

"Theirs are stable enough to run an antique rail track through. And even that ain't the holy grail of FTL."

Terra's eyes glowed a bit brighter as she took a sip of her drink. "Let me guess," she said with a smirk, "ad-hoc point-to-point tesseract travel?"

The raccoon leaned in conspiratorially. "Bingo," he whispered.

Jasper heard the key in the lock and quickly closed his sketchbook. Carl flung himself inside and nearly slammed the door. "Landlord saw me pull up," he said. He looked around and sighed before making eye contact with Jasper. "Just play along, homie. Okay?"

Jasper nodded, the knot in his stomach becoming a rock.

Carl shed his briefcase but kept his jacket on and straightened his tie. He took a breath and straightened his posture.

The landlord knocked, and Carl quickly spun on his heel and opened the door. "Orin," he said with a winning smile. "I heard you met Jasper." He motioned, and Jasper stepped into view.

"I did," the landlord said. "He won't be here much longer, right?"

"Nothing in the lease says we can't have guests," Carl said calmly.

"Guests don't stay longer than a month," his landlord shot back.

Carl sighed dramatically. "I was hoping to avoid this," he muttered. Louder, he said, "He's my domestic partner."

Jasper did his best not to freeze, to keep acting natural. He had no idea if it was working.

Orin raised an eyebrow. "I thought Lisa was your 'domestic partner.'"

"She is," Carl said with a nod, "and so is Jasper."

"Partnerships are two people."

"Really? Because the law firm I work at definitely has four partners."

The landlord narrowed his eyes. "Okay, sure. If he's your domestic partner, he can stay. But I'm not convinced you're just saying something to get me to go away." He turned to Jasper. "You're his partner?"

Jasper blinked. "Uh, yes; yes, sir," he stammered. He managed a weak smile. "Sometimes you just know, you know?"

“Oh, don’t I just,” Carl said with an easy smile. He turned to Jasper with an unreadable expression and leaned in and—

Their lips meeting sent a shock through Jasper. He froze, unsure whether to pull away or push forward. All he could think about was the feeling of Carl’s lips on his; the soft, tender contact. Another part of him reminded him that he was supposed to be selling this, and that managed to unfreeze him enough to lean into the kiss.

Carl pulled back after what was probably only a second but felt like an eternity. “Never gets old,” he said, mostly for his landlord’s benefit. “Convinced?”

Orin just stared at them, lips pressed tightly together, before pulling out his phone. “You got a drivers’ license, Jasper?”

Jasper forced himself to answer. “Yes, sir.”

“Get me the number before the 22nd, and I’ll have a lease for all *three* of you to sign.” He narrowed his eyes. “If you’re still here, of course.”

“I mean, I hope he will be,” Carl said, reasserting control over the conversation. “I’ll get that for you. Anything else?”

The landlord just turned and left without a word.

Carl shut the door and stared at it for a moment. “That’s either going to be perfect, or it’ll backfire spectacularly.”

Jasper felt his legs start to give out and he stumbled over to the couch. He sat down hard and stared into space.

Carl walked in front of him and scratched the back of his head. “Homie, I...” he stammered, but didn’t say more.

Jasper swallowed, his mouth inexplicably dry. “How real was that?” he said, his voice small.

Carl sighed and clenched and unclenched his fists. “Look, homie, I...”

“Just be straight with me, man,” Jasper said. He blinked. “Honest. Be honest with me.”

Carl cracked a smile. “I mean, you know I’m bi.” He slowly walked forward and sat next to Jasper, leaving enough space to be comfortable. “How real do you want it to be?” he said.

Jasper unconsciously licked his lips. “I don’t...” He fidgeted. “I don’t know.”

Carl slowly put his hand over Jasper’s. Jasper didn’t move.

“Do you want me to kiss you again?” Carl said.

Jasper fidgeted again, but he couldn’t help a little smile. Whether it was fear or elation, he couldn’t tell.

Carl moved closer. “Jasper,” he said, his voice low and warm, “may I kiss you?”

Jasper kept facing forward but didn’t move away. “If you want to,” he said.

“I wouldn’t ask if I didn’t,” Carl said.

Jasper couldn’t hear anything but his heart pounding in his ears. He turned towards Carl to find him much closer than he expected—what was he expecting? “Yeah,” he whispered.

They leaned in, and their lips met again. This time there was no surprise, no pressure. Just the two of them. Jasper felt the contact, felt some emotion rise in him...

He wanted more.

He pressed in, deepened the kiss, and inhaled sharply through his nose. Carl reacted by gently bringing his arm across and holding Jasper by the shoulder to turn them to face each other. Another gentle suck on Jasper’s lip brought another inhale.

The door opened. Jasper’s eyes shot open and he went to pull away in shock, but Carl held him in place and pulled him closer. “Shhh, shhh,” he whispered, bringing his other hand to the back of Jasper’s head. “It’s okay, don’t worry.”

Lisa shut the door and hung her keys on the rack. “About time,” she said.

Jasper blinked. “W—what?”

“So you two are poly.”

“Yeah.”

“But it’s just the two of you.”

“Yeah. Well, Dave’s involved too, but he’s not in town anymore.”

“Okay.” Jasper swallowed. “And you like me?”

Carl smiled. “Sure do, homie.”

Jasper couldn’t help the slight smile. “So, is it like, you-and-Lisa and then you-and-me?”

Carl grinned. “It can be.”

Jasper blinked slowly. And blinked again. “What does that even mean?”

“It means we both like you,” Lisa said, leaning against the doorframe to the living room. “And you can do whatever you want with that information. Including absolutely nothing.”

“You’re still welcome here as long as you want,” Carl added. “No matter what your answer is here.”

“Yeah,” Jasper said with a slight nod. “You didn’t... I’m not just here because...”

“Absolutely not,” Lisa said. “You’re here because you’re our friend. We have room, you needed a place.” She tilted her head slightly. “And you’re a good person that won’t trash the place. And we know you would do the same thing if the situations were reversed.”

“We didn’t do this so we could sleep with you,” Carl continued. “But, well...” He smiled. “We’d be lying if we said we didn’t want to.”

Jasper nodded along and stared into space, trying to process the new information. “I mean,” he said, still in a bit of a daze, “I’m not even sure what I am. I know Terra’s pan but I never...”

Carl winced. “I’m sorry again, homie,” he said. “This... was not how I wanted to broach the subject.”

Jasper blushed. “I’m not complaining,” he muttered. He took a deep breath and let it out with a sigh. “But I think I need some time to process.”

“Cool,” Lisa said, punctuating the end of the conversation. “Dinner in fifteen?”

Terra ignored the alarms as she pushed the pallet of ration packs across the space dock towards the ship, a small cargo hauler that couldn’t hold much more than what she was pushing.

Captain Jack in his well-worn longcoat was standing at the top of the cargo ramp. “Where have you been?” He yelled. “The alarms went off five minutes ago!”

Terra rolled her eyes and pushed the pallet up the ramp. “So you dropped your haul? We’ve only got half of what we came for.”

“We’re gonna have nothing at this rate!”

She shoved the pallet off the cart and let the cart slide back down the ramp. “We’ve been making trouble for a month now and you still don’t trust me?”

“The whole navy’s going to be here any second. If they see us leave—“

“They won’t.” Terra slid into her seat in the cockpit and flicked a switch. Instantly opaque shields slid into place over all the windows. She turned back to Jack who was frantically strapping himself into the other seat. “Hang on tight, spider monkey.”

The ship lurched in place, there was a sensation of movement for a moment, and then everything went still. Terra flicked the same switch, and the shields opened, showing them in orbit around a completely different planet.

Jack’s jaw dropped. “Wh—how?” he sputtered.

Terra smirked at him. “How’d we get to the other side of the system so quickly?” She got up and waved her hands. “Magic.”

Jack got very still. “Do you have any idea what you just did?”

“Yep,” Terra said, over to Jack’s seat and straddled his lap. “Do you have any idea how you’re going to make up for the haul you left behind?”

Jack rolled his eyes. “You’re going to hold that over my head for a while, aren’t you.”

“Eh, you’ve got a thick head.” She squeezed her thighs tighter and leaned in to whisper in his ear, “Now use it.”

Jack smirked and gripped her waist, his fingers digging into her fur. “Blackmailing me for sex?” he said. “What happened to that innocent girl at the spaceport?”

Terra didn’t budge, though she did loosen her grip slightly. “You know the safe word.” She licked the edge of his ear. “But I don’t hear you complaining.”

Jack slipped a hand up her skirt. “I’m not.” He turned his head and met her lips with his, his other hand rising to the middle of her back.

Jasper blinked himself awake. “What even is my life?” he muttered.

Terra Astra will return



Last we left off...

About eight years ago, you found two other people in your head: **Eutychia** and **Alec**; to the three of you, you are **Red**, **Green**, and **Blue**. While you may never be together physically, you're determined to bring light to your respective worlds. And this past Sunday, you blurted out to your pastor that you're in a hive mind...

An Expected Interrogation

You hadn't told many people about Red and Green, and to be honest you weren't sure why you had told Pastor Todd. You didn't have long to get into it at the time, but he wanted to hear more.

Your schedules align to get lunch later in the week. You make small talk for a bit before Todd gets to the point. He pulls out a Moleskine notebook and opens to a partially-filled page. "So, a faun and a dragon?"

"Wyvern," you correct with a smile. "Two legs and two wings." You make sure he's got the correct spelling of their names before adding, "We call each other Red, Green, and Blue."

"Nice," he says. "So, they see everything you do?"

"And vice versa," you say.

"Were they always there?"

You shake your head. "No, it only started about eight years ago."

Todd hums. "Was anything particularly stressful happening then?"

You shrug. "Finishing college? Starting my first real job?"

The questions continue for a bit. What are their personalities like? Are you always seeing what they are? Do they have families? Do you influence each others' actions? What are their hobbies? Do you know which thoughts are yours and which are theirs?

You pause on that last question. Green's been feeling increasingly uneasy about the conversation, and they're now sure it's an interrogation.

Should I bail? you think.

Absolutely not, Green thinks back. He's coming in with an open mind, so let's show him who we actually are.

“I do,” you say. “It’s kind of how we came up with the names. There’s a certain... aura to their thoughts. That’s how we knew it was happening in the first place.”

Todd senses your change in demeanor. He sets his pen down and closes his notebook. “You know I have to ask this,” he says, his face apologetic but firm.

You nod. “You’ve been curious; I want to honor that.”

“I genuinely am,” he says. “But I’d be neglecting my duty if I didn’t ask if they told you to do things.”

You can’t help but smirk. “The answer to the question you’re really asking is ‘no.’ No, they don’t tell me to hurt myself or other people. They don’t take over or control me; I don’t have gaps in my memory.” You give a performative sigh. “But they do tell me to do things. Often. It’s usually some variation on ‘do your dishes,’ ‘don’t shut yourself in your house all week,’ and ‘no, seriously, go to bed.’”

Todd laughs at that last one. He opens his notebook and jots down a quick note. “God knows I could use that sometimes,” he says.

You can’t help but smile fondly. “I love them,” you say.

He smiles back. “Then my last question is: how can I help?”

You take a breath. The three of you had anticipated this question too. “Pray for us,” you say. “For guidance and wisdom and—” You take a shaky breath. “And if we’re feeling bold, that we’ll find a way to each other.”

He nods and jots down your answer.

“Oh,” you blurt before he finishes (at Red’s insistent prodding), “and if you can tell interested parties about Thursday nights that’d be great.”

He raises an eyebrow. “What’s Thursday night?”

You smile. “I cook pasta.”

The Lightbringers will return



Ask the Lighthouse

Blue—

*How actively religious are you? You seem to be Christian -
what kind?*

—Bullseye

The kind that hates that “what kind” is a question you have to ask.

In all seriousness... I'm not sure. The church I'm going to now is Episcopalean, but that's what I would call an “implementation detail.” They're focused on serving the neighborhood they're in, and that's what I'm interested in.

That and the pastor respects my pronouns which, for The South, is no small feat.

Ask your question at wndfx.link/ask

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