

Nowhereverse Tales



#27

AGES **13+**



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

It's good to get out of our comfort zones. New experiences can open our eyes to new sights, introduce us to new feelings and ideas. Literally carving new pathways through our brains! There's so much to see in the world.

And sometimes what we discover is something within us. New environments outside reveal something inside is not what we always assumed...

—Ronyo

A Desert Weekend

Adam doesn't know why he lets Connor drag him on these adventures, but at least it's fun.

Rated Teen: unexpected transformation, transgender transformation

A Milkshake Run

You explain how Thursday nights came to be what they are at your house.

Rated General: foreign thoughts

Ask the Lighthouse

Ocean—

Do you encompass the entirety of the oceans of your planet? Are there multiple Oceans, with separate wills? Ecosystems beyond any collective will?

—Coda

I am not the only ocean, no. A better translation of my name would be The Vast Ocean. My closest sibling is The Southern Ocean; we share a border, but our waters behave very differently. Just as our siblings of land, our wills stay within our borders, no matter what waters may pass for the sake of our collective whole.

There are smaller bodies of water as well: some are their own, while others are driven by the nearby land. My brother in the tropics has a bay he is particularly proud of, for example.

Ask your question at wndfx.link/ask

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You sigh dramatically. “The next day, Delores knocks on my door to give back my container and informs me, in no uncertain terms, that if I ever ‘accidentally’ make too much pasta again, at least let her know so she can season the sauce.”

Celeste snorts. “Saw right through you?”

You smile. “Saw it for what it was.” You motion to her milkshake. “So why strawberry?”

Celeste picked it up. “So the translation Nowhere does can be kind of weird. We don’t have ‘strawberries’ in Melodia, but whatever we do have is translating as that.” She takes a sip. “And it’s close enough that I don’t mind. How about you?”

You give yours a shake. “I’m a sucker for cookies-n-cream.”



The Lightbringers will return

A Desert Weekend

Adam fanned himself with his shirt as he got out of the car. “Connor,” he said, “I know I said I was up for anything.”

“But this is a lot?” Connor said with a grin as he popped the hatch and started opening a cardboard box labelled ‘Desert Adventure Kit.’

“This might be pushing it,” Adam agreed.

“Come on, man,” Connor said with a broad smile as he turned to Adam. “When have I ever steered you wrong?”

“Mountain weekend,” Adam listed, “Afternoon hike—”

“Hey, that one wasn’t my fault.”

“And the last-minute cruise.”

Connor grimaced. “Okay,” he admitted, “that one was my fault.”

“So you understand,” Adam said, “why you saying a weekend in the desert wilderness—where we legally can’t drink or eat anything except what we can carry in—seems a little sus, right?”

“That’s what this is for!” Connor said, finally opening the box.

The two men looked in to see four oversized water canteens, a dozen meal kits, and two folded bags that looked more suited to camels than campers.

“See?” Connor said, “Supplies!”

“Supplies,” Adam agreed, “and no way to carry them.”

Connor either didn’t hear him or chose not to. He reached in and pulled out a small box labelled “Drink these first.” The box had two small drink cans decorated in a fox motif, one blue and one pink.

“Here we go,” Connor said, grabbing the blue can and passing the pink one to Adam who took it without a word. “The website said this would make the desert easier for 48 hours.”

Adam nodded. “Today’s Friday; we come back on Sunday, make it in time for class on Monday. You sure you don’t want the pink one?”

Connor shrugged. “Either works. I’ll take it if you don’t want it...”

Adam shook his head. “No,” he said in a quiet voice, “I’m good.”

“Cheers, then,” Connor said. The two clinked the bottom of the cans and downed them quickly.

“Crap,” Connor said as they finished. “They also said to not wear pants.” He immediately started fumbling with his shoes.

Adam just narrowed his eyes. “Are you serious?”

“Yes!” Connor insisted. “The order confirmation email said it several times.”

Adam rolled his eyes and walked back to the side of the car.

“Where are you going?” Connor called.

“Out of view,” Adam said with a good-natured grunt.

Any retort Connor might have had was cut off when a strange cramp shot through his abdomen. “I think it’s working,” he groaned.

“I hope that’s what it is!” Adam called. “Otherwise we’re just Winnie-the-Pooh-ing it out here in the—oohhhhh” He trailed off with a groan.

“At least the parking lot’s empty,” Connor muttered as he pulled his shorts and underwear off in one single motion. A wave of nausea hit that turned into the worst leg cramps he’d ever experienced. He leaned against the car and gritted his teeth.

“At least the parking lot’s empty!” he heard Adam call. He could barely chuckle before the pain shifted.

The strange cramps moved up to his back as his legs started itching. He wanted to scratch, to rub them against anything, but he couldn’t seem to come off his tiptoes long enough to settle his weight. With a groan of frustration, he bent at the waist and poked his butt out. The instant, palpable relief that brought caused him to lean into the stretch. He kept his weight pressed against the car but found himself walking backwards—was he getting taller? Or maybe longer?

There were strange feelings coming from his abdomen, muscles and bones and parts that felt strange, unfamiliar. First the nerves lit up like the limbs had fallen asleep, then an ache like the muscles had been worked to the bone, and finally that infernal itch spread rapidly over the new growth and up his stomach.

He barely had time to register that before his hands started cramping. He forced his eyes open to see his fingernails thicken and turn black, looking more like claws. He felt the skin against the car grow more callused, and as the itch started he saw dusty yellow fur start to grow from his hands and arms.

“What the—” he started to mutter before an uncomfortable pressure attacked his face. He winced and closed his eyes, feeling his jaw shift, fur grow, his ears feeling both hot and cold. He inhaled sharply, which clued him into his new nose and the sheer kaleidoscope of smells around him.

“Woah,” he whispered to himself. He felt the itchiness subside, the cramps resolve, the aches fade. It was over.

He opened his eyes and looked at his arms. They were covered in that sand-yellow fur but still roughly the same size. He looked down between them and thought he saw two legs hanging in mid-air. His legs? He tried moving one—

You take another sip of milkshake to collect your thoughts. “Well, I wanted to meet my neighbors.” At her interested look, you elaborate. “So this is about seven years after we discovered we were in separate worlds. We had a bad night of it and basically all kind of came to grips with the fact that, if we ever did make it to each other, it was going to be a while. And we couldn’t ignore the world around us in the meantime.

“Now, I hadn’t really gotten to know my neighbors; we acknowledged each other, but I never actually went up to any of them and introduced myself because, well...” You shrug, figuring she would get it.

Celeste doesn’t get it. She stops herself from taking another bite and swallows what she has. “Why not?”

You stop. Red is already giving you grief for leaving the door open. So is Green, but they’re also preparing the info dump.

“Let me try to give you the quick version,” you say to Celeste with a poke at Red and Green. Red laughs; Green focuses on the takeaway, and you put it into words.

“When someone like me—someone with a decent amount of money—buys a house in a neighborhood like that, they’re usually either trying to do a quick renovation so they can sell it for a profit, or they’re hoping to rent it out. Either way, they want the value of the house to go up. And when the value of one house goes up, others start going with it.”

“Isn’t that a good thing?” Celeste starts unwrapping the tortilla.

“Not when you’re the one renting, no. It’s a known pattern, and it usually starts with someone like me buying a house in a neighborhood like that.” You shrug and take a sip of your milkshake. “So they didn’t exactly give me the cold shoulder, but they weren’t especially welcoming, either. And I was fine with that; I kept to myself. At least, I did until seven years had gone by and we realized we actually needed to be present in the worlds we were *actually* in.”

Celeste nodded and swallowed the last of her snack wrap. “So how’d you break the ice?”

“Well,” you say with a chuckle, “I made a couple pots of spaghetti, put them in containers, and took them to my neighbors asking if they want any.”

Celeste blinks. “You just knocked on their doors?”

“I had a rare moment of ‘fuck it, be cringe,’ and I used it. Put on my best ‘pathetic white kid’ face and everything. ‘Hey, I’m Jordan; I live over there. I accidentally made too much pasta, do you want some?’”

Last we left off...

Over a decade ago, you found two other people from other worlds in your head: **Eutychia** and **Alec**; to the three of you, you are **Red**, **Green**, and **Blue**. **Celeste**, an elf from Red's world, has made her way to you with the goal of bringing the three of you together for the first time...

A Milkshake Run

Celeste puts down the oversized styrofoam cup and shakes her head. "Are you sure I'm supposed to be able to drink that?" she says.

You can't help but chuckle. "They come with spoons for a reason," you say. "But there's no shame in letting it melt a little." You attempt a few sips of your own milkshake.

Celeste has already moved on to the styrofoam take-out box on her lap. There's a foil-wrapped double cheeseburger, a pile of well-seasoned fries, and a tortilla wrapped around a chicken tender. She nearly lunges for the burger and takes a colossal bite.

"Easy," you say. "We're not going anywhere." And you're not; you're in the parking lot of the fast food drive-thru. When Celeste intimated that the magic exhaustion had left her tired *and* hungry, you knew exactly where to take her.

She's devoured half the burger before you see her visibly relax. She slows down and swallows what she'd taken. "Sorry," she breathes. "Wasn't expecting to be that hungry."

"This hasn't happened before?" you say, still incredulous.

She shakes her head. "Never tried doing magic in a non-magic world before." She downs a couple of fries. "Thanks for helping back there, by the way."

"Of course," you say. And you mean it.

"So," she says, holding her burger at the ready, "that's a normal Thursday for you?"

"You mean having half the neighborhood and several families besides invading my house for a spaghetti dinner?" You can't help but chuckle. "It is now, yeah."

"How did that start, anyway?" She takes another bite of burger.

The signals mixed up, and his already precarious balance disappeared. He tumbled to the ground, barely managing to push his head away from the car before collapsing on his back.

"Are you okay?" Adam called. Or at least Connor thought it was him; the voice seemed a little higher pitch than normal.

"Yeah," Connor called back. "Just lost my balance. You?"

"I, uh... yeah," Adam said, "I'm okay."

He didn't sound particularly okay.

With a deep breath, Connor tried to sit up. He could curl forward, but he was having to strain his muscles to stay there. But that was enough to see why:

The dangling legs he had seen *were* his, as were the two legs he had been standing on. Four legs. Two pairs. A whole-ass body for the lower half of his body. The fur was lighter on his belly—his second belly?—and more yellow on the sides and legs. The paws at the end of his legs seemed enormous, but he quickly realized that *he* was enormous, at least compared to most animals. And where his beast shoulders would be, his human (or at least human-shaped) hips connected; his t-shirt covered up anything else.

He relaxed his abs and lay back against the ground. He felt his chest and stomach, mostly to make sure everything waist-up was still at least kind of normal. Satisfied, he rolled over so he was lying on his stomach and stood up from there.

The motion was surprisingly smooth, as if his body knew how to operate even if he didn't. He held his arms out for stability mostly out of instinct; he felt in-control, even though his few experiences with horseback riding would have implied otherwise.

He caught a glimpse of his reflection in the car window, and everything clicked. His head was fox-shaped, with slight whiskers poking out of his dusty yellow muzzle leading to his black nose. He inhaled and watched it twitch as he took in the smells once again. His ears, though? "Absolutely ridiculous."

"What, the ears?" he heard Adam say.

Connor frowned. "Did I say that out loud?"

"Yeah. They're like radiators, you know," Adam said with a laugh. It was higher, almost like he was having a nervous breakdown.

Connor shook his head and turned to walk around the car. He took a couple of tentative steps before the new muscle memory kicked in and he was back to full stride.

He trotted around to see Adam sitting with his lower body fully on the ground in a loaf. He was staring at his hands, running one thumb over the other. Adam had worn a baggy open button-up shirt over a t-

shirt which was looking less baggy at the moment.

Connor stared for a moment before he chuckled. “Nice pecs,” he said. “Did the drink give you those or have you been working out?”

Adam froze. Carefully, without moving his head, he looked up to make eye contact with Connor. “You...” His face turned incredulous. “Not cool, man.”

Connor cocked his head. “What are you talking about?”

Adam peered at him for a moment. “Oh, you’re serious,” he said. With a sigh, he pulled his arms back, making the shape of his chest more obvious.

Connor shook his head. “Still seeing a good gym bo—”

Adam twitched his shoulders, and his chest *bounced*.

Connor’s eyes went wide. “Oh—” He put a hand to his mouth and dropped his hind quarters into a sit. “Dude, I’m so sorry, I had no idea that’s what the pink can meant.”

Adam dropped his arms to his side. “Neither did I,” he said. His slightly higher pitched voice made more sense now. “And you offered to take it, so...” He shrugged. “That’s on me I guess.”

“Still, I...” He fumbled around. “There’s a support number on the box we can call, I’m sure there’s a way to reverse this.”

“It’s just forty-eight hours, right?” Adam said, a little more confident. “And now we know how we’ll carry all that.” He got to his feet and started walking toward the back of the car.

Connor got up and trailed after him. “We don’t have to if you don’t want to,” he said.

Adam shrugged and started unfolding the bags. “We’re here,” he said with a sigh, “we might as well.”

The provisions were well-planned, at least. They fit perfectly into what were quickly revealed to be saddlebags and were exactly enough for forty-eight hours in the desert. Combined with the trail mix Adam had insisted on bringing, they were set on food. The water would have to be budgeted, but that came more from wanting to actually retain the water, not pee it out within the hour.

They had gotten to the parking area at mid-morning and set off, wanting to get a little ways into the desert before breaking for lunch.

Connor checked his compass every so often and kept them on a straight west-northwest trajectory. “There’s supposed to be a gorge this way,” he explained. “I figure there should be an outcrop or cave or someplace shady we can wait out the afternoon.”

“Smart,” Adam said. And kept walking.

Connor felt his watch buzzing the next morning. Blearily he pulled his other hand up and rubbed his eyes. He tried to pull his other arm up, but it was blocked by Adie’s arm lying across his chest.

Carefully, he threaded his arm up and stopped his alarm. “Hey,” he said as he gently shook Adie. “Time to get up.”

“Sorry,” Adie slurred, “I can’t come to the awake right now.”

Connor sighed and shook her again. “I don’t want to either,” he said, propping his torso up, “but we’ve got three hours left before we change back, and I don’t want to be stuck in the desert with no pants.”

Adie got very still. Then, after a very long sigh, she opened her eyes got to her feet. “Yeah,” she said, subdued, “let’s get going.”

They made it back to the car with two minutes to spare. Adie was largely silent on the walk back, though she made more efforts at conversation than she did two days ago. One fewer pair of legs and one re-application of pants later and the two were on the road back to college.

“Hey,” Connor said a few miles in, “How are you?”

His friend shrugged. “I feel how I feel.”

“And... is that good?”

“It’s...” A sigh. “I don’t really know. Can’t exactly come back from an experience like that and just go back to normal life.”

Connor nodded. “Should I... uh...” He fumbled for a moment before he was rescued.

“Call me Adam,” Adam said.

“Sure thing,” Connor said, glancing over to see Adam with a slight smile.

“Yeah,” he said. “Call me Adam...” He looked down at the empty pink can and the website address on it.

“For now,” he said quietly.



The Windfox Emporium is open for business

Connor preened. “See?” he said. “I can pick some good ones.”

Adie just bumped her upper shoulder against his.

“Naw,” Connor said with a grin, “my stance is too wide.”

Adie giggled and looked back out at the view.

Connor felt a slight tug on his arm. He flexed his fingers and realized Adie had a slight grip on his hand.

He considered it a moment before gripping her hand back.

That afternoon when they settled down for their nap, Connor thought Adie had reclined a bit closer to him than before but decided not to mention it.

They didn’t have a particular destination that night, opting to wander around the sand dunes and take in the night sky in all its glory.

“I get it now,” Adie said. “How a hundred years ago people looked up at the sky and just... knew. Knew where they were, knew we were all part of something bigger.” She sighed. “That light’s been traveling for millions of years, and we get to be alive at just the right time to see it.”

“Space,” Connor said with a wry grin. “The one place that hasn’t been corrupted by capitalism.”

Adie laughed and leaned against him. “Thank you,” she said quietly.

Connor cocked his head. “You’re welcome?”

Adie shook her head. “Not every guy would have been as okay with...” She motioned to herself. “This.” She scoffed. “I’d wager most guys wouldn’t have.”

Connor shrugged. “Most guys aren’t *men*.”

“And you are?”

“Close enough.”

Adie smiled. “Race you back?”

“Works for me!”

Adie set herself. “On three?”

Connor nodded and set himself.

Adie looked forward. “One, tw—”

“Three!” Connor yelled as he took off.

Adie gaped for half a second before taking off after him.

Connor sprinted over a couple of dunes before looking over his shoulder to make sure Adie was following him—

Which distracted him just long enough for Adie to plow full-speed into his side, sending them both tumbling into the dunes. Connor grabbed her shoulders and tried to flip her over, but Adie dug her hind claws into his side and pulled him with her.

The attack very quickly turned into an impromptu roughhousing session that ended with them both on their backs in the sand laughing and catching their breath.

Connor made to start a conversation several times but chickened out at the last second. Adam seemed too lost in his own world anyway, which wasn’t helping Connor’s guilt about the cans.

They came to the crest of a hill and saw the cliffs in question. A little exploring found a small ledge underneath an outcropping. It wasn’t spacious, but it was big enough that the two foxtaurs could maneuver without getting close to the edge. More importantly, it was shaded from the afternoon sun.

Connor turned to face Adam and held his arms out. “How’s this?”

“It’s a good spot,” Adam said. Without another word he walked over to a corner and started unhooking his bags’ straps.

Connor just nodded to himself and did the same. He took a few swigs from his canteen and pulled out one of the “lunch” meal kits.

Adam just ate a few handfuls of trail mix. “We’re probably going to want to sleep off the afternoon,” he said quietly. “I’m pretty sure fennec foxes are nocturnal.”

“Makes sense,” Connor said as he polished off a granola bar from his meal. “Most stuff in the desert is.”

Adam nodded and leaned against one of the walls.

“Are you okay, man?” Connor said.

Adam thought for a moment. “I will be,” he said. He looked at Connor. “I’m not angry with you,” he said, projecting a little more confidence. “And I’m going to eat my lunch, I just want to wait until I’m actually hungry. I just...” He closed his eyes and sighed. “I’m just not sure how I feel... or how I’m *supposed* to feel.”

“Bro...” Connor clasped Adam’s shoulder. “You feel what you feel,” he said in a goofy voice, “and your feelings are real.”

Adam cracked a smile. “Thanks, Sven.”

Connor walked back to his corner and laid down in a loaf. He wasn’t quite sure where to put his torso, but eventually he settled on leaning it against the wall. It was cool, and maybe even a little damp. He barely had time to wonder if he even felt sleepy before he was out.

Connor slowly woke to the sound of a meal kit being torn open. He blinked the sleep out of his eyes and tried to will everything back into focus.

Adam was in his corner scarfing down his lunch. He made eye contact with Connor and grinned sheepishly.

Connor just shrugged and reached for his canteen. “Doing all right?” he asked.

Adam considered a bit and swallowed his mouthful of food. “Better,” he said. “Just gonna take it as it comes. Have anything planned for tonight?” He took another large bite.

Connor pulled out his map and walked over. “Wanted to try to get here,” he said and pointed to a point toward the center of the wilderness area. “The view there should be pretty good at sunset. And it’s close enough that we should be able to leave the gear here.”

Adam nodded. “Sounds like a plan.” He squeezed the last of his juice box into his mouth and gave a thumbs up.

The view was incredible. With the angle Connor and Adam came in at, the sunset was perfectly framed by the mesa in the distance. The yellow light and red rocks combined with the long shadows to paint a truly picturesque scene. The two watched the last moments of day as the sun dipped behind the mesa.

Connor shivered just a bit. “Didn’t realize the temperature would drop that quickly,” he muttered.

“Yeah,” Adam said, shifting closer and touching their flanks together. “You’d be surprised.” He smiled. “Good view, though.”

“Yeah,” Connor said with his own wistful smile. “Glad I got to see it with you, man.”

Adam shifted. He folded his hands in front of him and looked down.

“Adam?” Connor said gently, looking at his friend in concern.

“I wanna try something,” Adam said quietly, not looking up.

“Okay, what’s up?”

“Can...” Adam took a breath and let it out slowly. “Can you call me ‘Adie’?”

Connor couldn’t help but smile. “You got it, m—” He stopped himself. “Is ‘Adie’ a girl?”

Adam—now Adie—nodded very slightly, still not looking up.

Connor closed his eyes and repeated it in his head a few times. Adie, Adie, Adie. His friend was a girl named Adie.

He opened his eyes and took her in. She had the same build and hair (shorter than his, but that wasn’t saying much considering his luscious shoulder-length locks) on her torso that she had as a human, and a glance back at their lower bodies didn’t show much of a difference between them.

“You got it, girl,” he said. He reached an arm around and put it on her shoulder.

She leaned her torso against him. “Thanks, man,” she said.

“You know how bad I am at names, though.”

Adie chuckled. Which turned into a full-bellied laugh. Which ended up having a few tears by the end. She tapped Adam on the chest and wiped her eyes on her overshirt as she stood straight.

“You all right?” Connor said.

Adie nodded. “I feel what I feel,” she said. She looked him in the eye. “How about you, are you okay?”

Connor looked at his friend as the last glow of dusk was fading away. “I’m good,” he said.

They took several stops on the way back to camp to marvel at the night sky. Adie in particular had always wanted to be better about spotting constellations, and with the lower light pollution she finally was able to pick out several that had eluded her to this point.

Connor found himself bouncing around a bit more than normal. When the camp’s ridge was in sight, he stopped short and looked at Adie with a smirk.

“Wanna race?” he said.

Adie smirked back. “Long as you don’t mind losing,” she said as she started pulling her overshirt closed and buttoning it up, at least around her chest.

Connor cocked his head. “That looks uncomfortable.”

Adie pressed her breasts in and got the last button hooked. “Yeah,” she admitted, “but unless you know someplace in the *literal wilderness* I can get a sports bra, this is the best I got.”

Connor couldn’t help a chuckle. “Makes sense,” he said.

Adie just fixed him with a flat look. “Laugh it up, fuzzballs.”

Connor just chuckled again. “Okay, we go on three?”

“So ‘one, two, *three*’ and not ‘one, two, three, *go*’?”

“Right.” He took a breath and set himself; he saw Adie do the same out of the corner of his eye. “One, two, *three*!”

“I totally would have beat you.”

“If you hadn’t tripped over your own paws? Maybe.”

“That dune came out of nowhere. Besides, you fell down too.”

“Because I tripped over you!”

“And that’s *my* fault?”

“You sprawled out sideways. There’s *twice* as much of you that way now!”

“Fine. Draw?”

“Draw.”

The two tapped their canteens and took a long swig.

“So,” Adie said as she picked her dinner back up. “Anything planned for tomorrow?”

Connor and Adie stood on the vista and looked down into the canyon.

“Not bad for a morning hike, I’ll admit,” Adie said.