

Proving Himself

“I ought to prove myself, Michi,” a prince pondered to his personal guard. He sat at his desk, residing backwards in his chair. The brown-furred protogen was the heir to quite the impressive kingdom, spanning across his home planet. People had begun to wonder how their territory would grow further – there wasn’t a significant amount of land left to conquer on the planet, so to the stars did the common folk and nobles turn. There had already been quite a few explorations into nearby planets, but nothing further than a couple worlds over. Whilst there weren’t any other viable threats to the prince’s destined throne, doubt would inevitably linger in the hearts of those he ruled over if he couldn’t prove that he was worthy of inheriting the crown. Admittedly, the princeling hadn’t much experience in travelling through unrefined and unexplored places, but *surely* it wouldn’t be that difficult. “Perhaps I shall be taken more seriously, if I explore and record a planet successfully!”

Michi, the crown prince’s guard, sighed a little before he spoke, sitting casually upon the prince’s bed. Normally such would be enough to warrant the guard’s execution, but the two protogens were close friends – the guard was afforded this and more! “You’ve told me before, Aether. Though, I agree – a vacation to another planet would be great right about now!” Michi thought in silence for a few moments, flopping further down on the bed. Who could blame him – it was pristine and the incarnation of comfort! “...Aether, I think I’ve got an amazing idea!”

The prince perked up, his back straightening as his ears stood to attention. “Speak your mind, Michi! Everyone knows how brilliant all of your ideas are,” Aether’s bushy tail wagged behind him as he teased his dear friend. “Besides, I’ve no plans myself.” The royal plucked his wide-toothed comb from his desk, and attempted to soothe his unruly tail by running the comb through its fur. Aether needed to be at least a little presentable, of course. It wouldn’t do for a king-to-be to be messy and untidy!

“Well, then! Why don’t I take you to an unrecorded planet? You’ll be known far and wide for discovering a newly inhabitable place for us!” Michi could immediately tell that his plan was a hit from the way his liege turned to him with his eyes wide, mouth stretching into a great big grin! It was a brilliant plan, after all! Who would complain about Aether planting a flag on a whole new planet? Even if the planet was completely safe without a hint of danger, nobody would have any idea! Aether stood, having barely got his fur under control.

“Yes, yes! We can take my personal ship – if you leave a message on behalf, we won’t have any trouble leaving!” The prince hurried over to his sizable closet, digging around in it for a while until he found the perfect outfit. While within his forest of clothes he slipped into a simple white buttoned shirt with ash grey trousers. Aether decked his fingers out with rings, and he hung a golden necklace around his neck. Normally he wouldn’t dare be seen in such simple clothing, but very few people were going to see the prince before he left, anyway. *Besides!* If he really wanted to change, his personal ship had an even bigger closet than the one in this palace.

While he was changing, Michi had already left a message on the front of the crown prince’s room, for whoever needed him while they were out. The cobalt-blue-furred protogen himself was already fully dressed – he was wearing a thin black suit, armour beneath to protect his body. Of course. The protogen moved back to his spot on the bed, though he stood up as soon as Aether was out of his closet. Michi extended his hand, and the prince took it quickly. The guard led Aether out of his chambers, and through the many corridors of the palace. Each hallway was at least twice as tall as the crown prince and two times as wide as him, too. Paintings decorated the walls, evenly placed – not a single frame was tilted, damaged or otherwise out of place amongst its peers. It always felt as though the corridor was bigger than it truly was, as though just walking from one end to the other would cost you an hour of time.

Aether would’ve stopped to enjoy the paintings if he wasn’t busy walking to the castle’s dock. Innumerable ships were stored within, though a visitor wouldn’t be able to tell that much just from looking at the room. When the protogen pair reached the dock, they saw the ever-familiar sight of a large circular platform that was propped just above the floor. Michi led the prince close, and tapped the blue holographic screen that appeared upon his arrival. The platform whirred loud enough to startle Aether, as it descended down beyond the ground. Hundreds of sub-floors resided beneath the ground, each filled with evenly-spaced and well-maintained space-faring ships. Drones sped around the floor, occasionally circling a ship for a few minutes, leaving trails of sparkling ships in their wake!

“Gosh, I’ve not been on this ship for a little while. This is nice!”, Aether smiled, half to himself, at the mere prospect of being able to ride his ship again. He could always use a vacation, after all. The prince’s smile only grew as he watched the beaut’ rise from the many floors below, the massive beast of a vehicle barely fitting through the hole. Its door opened up automatically, air roaring as the metal descended onto the floor. It folded into a sort of staircase for the pair to walk upon, into the ship. They swiftly did so, wishing to leave as soon as possible – so, wasting no time, both protogens ascended the steps with a pep in their step. As soon as they were safely

inside, the door unfolded once more and rotated back into place with a steady pace. Michi continued to hold onto Aether's paw, leading him to the cockpit of the ship.

A small room, the cockpit was the only somewhat meager aspect of this luxury ship. There was a large panel near the front of the room, filled to the brim with buttons and levers – all already adjusted to their ideal settings from the last flight Aether went on. Two wide and comfortable chairs were positioned in front of the panel, red and velvet. They were perfectly cushioned and soft, yet their backs were just firm enough to provide strong back support. There were two cushions on each seat, each filled with pristine feathers. Their silken fabric matched the chairs' colour almost perfectly, only slightly lighter in hue.

He pressed a small circular button on the holographic dashboard, causing the enormous dock gate to rise up enough to allow the ship to pass. Their ship's engines grumbled to life, a fire igniting within each! It didn't take long for the vehicle to rise into the air, and it took an even shorter amount of time for the protogens to leave the palace entirely! The dock closed behind them, as they soared through the atmosphere. Aether himself had sat down in one of the pilot's seats long before they had accelerated much, though he still never could get used to this part of space-travel. Michi continued to pilot the ship, avoiding aircraft and debris as they sped through the sky! Clouds irreparably parted as they tore through them! It didn't take too long for the ship to touch space itself and as soon as it did, Michi joined Aether in idly sitting in the co-pilot's chair, comfortably placing his blue rump upon the cushions.

"I still can't believe that you've remembered what buttons you need to use to pilot the ship! It's been what, a month since we last flew? Is this where you've been spending all your free time?" Aether swiveled in his chair to turn to his blue friend, a smirk on his face. His princely tail swayed quickly behind him, as much as it could between the chair and his back. Michi rolled his eyes affectionately, crossing his arms in response – he always had the best reactions, Aether had concluded.

"Are you saying you forget everything after a month, then? I suppose that'd only be fitting for you, your Highness." The blue protogen had turned to face his king, not about to let himself get out-teased by his liege! From the way that Aether was pouting, he could only guess that his jab landed firmly. His dear friend span in his chair somewhat, before he suddenly planted both of his feet upon the ship's floor.

"Hmph. How are you getting us to this undiscovered planet, then...? Surely the ship's auto-pilot wouldn't be able to drive us!" At least that much was true, even as Aether spoke. The ship was merely orbiting around their homeplanet for now, building up

speed – they had to do at least that much to reach escape velocity, after all. Michi, however, looked as confident as ever! A smug smile had crept up onto his black visor, one of Michi's clawed fingers tapping the side of his head.

The blue protogen stood up and off his chair, spreading his arms with grandeur! “We’re going to an *undiscovered* planet, Aether! There’s no need to drive, we can just go deep into space and land on the first world we see!” As he spoke, the ship had finally reached the speed needed to break free from their planet’s tight embrace. Their engines continued to ignite, propelling the pair through the void surprisingly swiftly. Both protogens retreated from the cockpit, into the rest of the vehicle – looking out into space was largely unwise, even with the darkening filter that had been fitted upon the front window.

The rest of the ship was at least thrice as large as the cockpit, more resembling an apartment than an actually functional ship. The light metal that composed the ship allowed for at least this size of vehicle, though even more would theoretically be possible! The duo crossed through the entrance hall of the vessel, the door to their right. On the left was a bathroom, decked out with a shower and toilet – and only water that was at the perfect temperature for the user. It was admittedly rather plain for something a royal owned, but the truly stunning section was the bedroom-lounge combination that Aether’d thought up. Pictures of the prince were scattered upon the walls – both candid photos and proper portraits that he’d spent hours sat completely still for – though quite a few frames containing Michi’s visage were visible too! Lots were of the two’s travels, many hugs and close-up selfies. Even a couple images of the pair with food they’d bought while out! In the furthest corner of the room did a single king-sized bed reside, decorated with only the fluffiest of duvets and white pillows. A simple crown pattern repeated itself on the bed’s sheets – despite everything, the prince still liked the design. A nightstand was placed on either side of the bed, already full of the belongings that they’d left inside during their last trip. Not too far from the bed was the wardrobe, bolted into the ceiling and floor of the ship. It contained all sorts of clothes – easily a month’s worth of outfits, for both of them, resided within the wardrobe.

The rest of the area was dedicated solely to lounging! A large settee that was as long as four of those cockpit chairs, easily, with cushions as comfortable as them, too. An oaken coffee table was right in front of the seating, and Aether had made sure to stock up on all sorts of different snacks and sweets! The table was excellent at storing each and every one of them, the items all able to hide within its many drawers. A television that took up half of the wall opposite to the sofa turned itself on as the pair walked into the room, flicking to the same subpar and old comedy show that they still found

themselves enjoying. Aether was the first to recline into the couch, placing his soft rump onto the cushions – and he was the first to grin as he sank down somewhat, in the infinite fluff. Michi wasn't very far behind, himself, and he wrapped an arm around his liege's shoulder as he sat. The guard pulled his favourite royal close, pushing the smaller protogen into his fluff!

“You're right, it's been *way* too long since we've done anything like this! Are you excited to *actually* be outside for once, heheh...?” Michi used his free paw to rub the trapped prince's blonde hair, his victim play-resisting within his grip! Despite his more indoors-inclined nature, Aether couldn't help but admit that going outdoors sounded fun. He hadn't camped ever, actually – perhaps going out in the rough wilds would help him legitimise himself after all!

“Urgh...! I do go out! Sometimes!” The protogen whined, squirming and struggling to break free of his friend's arm! Aether wasn't lying...if one counted occasionally opening his chamber's windows or sitting on the balcony, as spending time outdoors. He had never been quite as prone to wanting to train his physique as Michi had been, nor was he the type to care or delve much into combat – whether melee or otherwise. The prince likened himself to much more of a strategist, and his somewhat doughy body was evidence of his favoured position. When he was finally released from his friend's ruthless petting, Aether reached down into one of the many drawers of the table. He plucked a bite-sized sweet out – a watermelon the size of one of his fingers, curled up – and popped it in his mouth. Much too hard to chew, Aether left it in his mouth and occasionally sucked at the sweet as it released its infinitely delicious flavour.

“You know, you've *always* been welcome to join me when I train, right? Maybe we could turn that tummy of yours into a six-pack, heheh!” Michi couldn't help but to chuckle at the mere thought of his friend without his iconically soft bod, the idea of Aether ever having the desire or dedication to train preposterous. Not that he, of course, minded the chubby protogen one bit – in fact, he even quite liked it! Made him that much more cuddly, after all. Difficult to argue with that benefit!

“I know, I know!” The prince playfully rolled his eyes, undoing the top buttons of his suit. He couldn't wait for tonight, when he'd get to change into actually comfortable clothes. “*But*, there are just so many more things I could do! Like, for instance, sleeping in my bed after a long and tough session of doing nothing at all...!” Aether shrugged, turning himself and resting his head on a pillow that he leant against the arm of the sofa. He placed both legs over Michi's own, using his guard as a sort of

improvised leg-rest. “Or, reclining on the settee with a certain someone in the way.” The shifting prompted the blue-furred protogen to groan out of faux-annoyance.

Michi slid Aether’s legs off of him as he stood up, waiting for the prince to move his feet back up onto the couch. As soon as he did, the guard sat atop his friend’s legs, a smug look on his face. “Now, then, how about we behave *civilly* for the next, like...hour before we find a plane—”

“DESTINATION FOUND: PLANET WITHOUT DATA. PROCEEDING TO PREPARE FOR ARRIVAL. ESTIMATED TIME UNTIL ARRIVAL: FIVE MINUTES.”

The pair’s little feud was rudely cut short by the ship’s interface, the vaguely feminine yet robotic voice sounding out across the entire vessel. In fact, Aether could hear the voice talking in the other room, whilst he was listening to it within the hybrid room. Michi stood up once more, reaching a hand out to his liege to help him up. The prince took it, and they approached the closet quickly. The guard hadn’t quite expected for the trip to be so short! He checked the time on the television – it’d only been around ten minutes of travel. The guard supposed that the ship *was* powered by many more thrusters than any other he’d rode. That’d explain it, wouldn’t it? Either way, Michi only realised something as he handed Aether a biohazard suit that they weren’t exactly rushed for time.

“Ah, well...” The guard slipped his legs into the neon yellow covering first, with the rest of his body soon following suit. He turned to Aether, and zipped up the back of his suit for him. The prince returned the favour – it was quite difficult to reach every spot on your back, you know. Just like that, the pair were ready to explore this new planet! If all was well and the place was inhabitable, they wouldn’t need the biosuits on future expeditions.

“ESTIMATED TIME UNTIL ARRIVAL: ZERO MINUTES. NOW LANDING. PLEASE KEEP AWAY FROM THE DOOR UNTIL THE SHIP IS STATIONARY.”

Luckily, neither of them was near the door to begin with, instead waiting around the lounge. The television had turned itself off to save power. The ship shook violently as it descended upon this foreign planet, and opening the door to allow its passengers off certainly didn’t help! The protogens were just about to fall to their knees and hope that that was more stable, when the rumbling stopped. They were hit by a warm breeze as soon as the door opened, as if they went on a holiday to a tropical beach!

Michi was, of course, the first to walk forwards. Aether was quick to follow him, and they soon were standing alone on a coast. Much like their homeplanet, grass seemed

to grow here – even in the presence of sand! It seemed to be a much deeper colour than back home, a luscious green that reminded the prince of the rainforests he'd seen. Looking around, that colour was almost a motif – the trees' leaves all seemed to be rather colourful, not to mention many in number! Even the sea looked to have a divine origin, sparkling with the light of the planet's star! It was so clear that Aether could see some sort of fish gliding through the water, and he would've seen the bottom if there was one.

“Let's go into that forest, there.” Michi pointed back towards where Aether had seen the beautiful trees, the prince now noticing just how many there were! They stretched on for as far as his eye could see. There was no way they were going to walk it. Not on...well, not in a million years. Aether took the lead, now, putting his hand in Michi's as he approached the woods! There was shade within, at least, so planning a course of action would be best done within! The suit was already beginning to make the prince sweat under the strong glare of the star. His guard nodded in agreement – even though the suits were made to be a little more breathable, they weren't yet perfect.

The grass hardly made a sound as their paws pressed down upon it, as if they were made of but candyfloss and dreams! Aether moved a vine away from his face as he entered into the forest, holding it in place as Michi slinked in behind him. It was darker within the domain of the trees, but not so much that they required their flashlights – it was closer to having everything blanketed in shade, protecting the inhabitants from the sheer power of the light.

There wasn't much movement nor noise as the pair made their way through the woodland, aside from themselves and whatever plants they were forced to move away. There was the occasional rustle, but it always stopped right before either of them could figure out the cause. Aether had begun to grow a little spooked – there wasn't even the chirp of crickets or the sing-song of birdtunes! It was just so...*different*, to anything the prince was used to. There seemed to be no end to the trees! No matter how far they walked, there were more that surrounded them!

Minutes passed with nothing but the other to guide them, hand-in-hand. Trees and vines continually blocked their path and their sight, as if personally sent to prevent the prince from achieving his goals. The silence continued on for this entire time, not a single squeak nor a creak – no insects nor any toppled trees. Eventually, though, something changed. They had found *something* other than more green trees and plants! A mountain, it seemed like. At the foot of it, where both of the protogens

resided, was a large hole. The inside of the cave was almost completely pitch black, away from the entrance.

Michi's voice was slightly muffled due to the suit, the built-in mask not helping to facilitate his speech. "You know," He used his left hand to tap the wrist on his right arm, a click echoing through the cave. Light. It came from beneath his right hand – wherever he moved his hand, did he move the light. "I am *very* glad I pushed so hard for the Tailors to add this." Aether copied his guard's motions, finding his own suit did the very same thing. The built-in flashlights seemed to properly pierce through the veil of darkness that protected the cave, allowing the protogens to see what lurked within. A reddish-brown stone tunnel was illuminated within, though it was angled steeply downwards. All that surrounded it were rocks and stones, cracked and threatening to break apart at any moment. . Aether turned back to Michi, who shrugged. "Why not? It's not like we can't defend ourselves."

"You're right. Plus, this is meant to be *fun*! Like a sort of haunted house, I think!" Aether swallowed down whatever hesitation he had, and began to walk. The tunnel, he realised, had stairs within. Not the kind he was used to seeing, of course. Rather than be refined and sleek metal, rather than have each step perfectly spaced for each of his footfalls, rather than have handrails...this set was *primitive*. Made of the same stone as the tunnel, if slightly greyer. It was clear that it had been chiselled haphazardly, as if someone was in a rush to finish constructing it. No steps were of the same width, and one had to occasionally turn themselves and their foot sideways to prevent falling in either direction. More of the steps had significant cracks in them than none, though they didn't seem to impact the stability of the stairs at all. Whether full-faced or weathered, the whole area was precarious at *best*.

Still, Aether made his way down there. Every few paces, he paused in case his step was more unstable than he thought. Every few paces, he found nothing of note. The tunnel was long, yes, but not quite as long as the forest. While it left the unfit crown prince as a panting mess at the bottom, his guard had yet to really make much of an exertion – he was full of energy, even! When the prince recovered, both protogens lifted their light at once, to examine this new chamber. There wasn't much, really. A wide open space, yes, but nothing actually within that space other than a wide hole in the ground. A few cracks within the stone walls, much bigger than on the stairs, but little else.

The one big thing, though, that they discovered was a sound. A sloshing noise. It continued and repeated constantly, without pause. Much like shaking a just-chilled jelly. The cacophony of sloshes and shudders and glorps filled the room entirely,

deafened the protogens to their own thoughts and to each other! They could merely shrug at each other again before Michi took Aether's hand, and brought the two closer to the source of the sounds – the strangely large pit. It was illuminated, somehow, without the light of their flashlights! The protogens got onto their hands and knees to prevent themselves from accidentally falling, and leant forwards to see what exactly could be doing all...*this*.

The hole was deeper than either of them could have ever imagined. Hundreds of translucent goo-like creatures squirmed and slithered beneath them, their forms so completely malleable that they could be something akin to a humanoid in one moment before devolving into an amorphous blob of see-through colour the next. The goo-things took up half the space of the pit! The protogens backed away from the pit, giving each other a look and a nod. They got up from the ground and brushed their legs and hands off, leaving clouds of rust-coloured dust to float in the air before dissipating rapidly. Aether interlocked his left hand with Michi's right, as his guard led him back towards the stairs.

Neither could hear the subtle squelching from within a crack in the stone walls, already making their way up the stairs.

On the way up did the protogens notice their footsteps – the cave and its tunnel had been neglected for so long that dust had built up on the floor. Where their feet had landed on their descent through the tunnel did the reddish stone reveal itself, leaving a trail of perfectly clear footprints behind. Going up the stairs was a much shorter process than going down – they didn't have to watch their step nearly as often – though that didn't stop the prince from being out of breath again by the time they reached the top. This whole trip was really making Aether wish he had actually chosen to join Michi in his exercise. He hadn't panted this much in his entire life! They didn't stop moving, though, until they had left the cave. Their flashlights turned off with another tap of their wrists, the forest well-lit enough for them to see without the artificial light.

Now that they were out, the protogens finally paused. They stood there in silence for a few moments, before turning to each other. "What the *heck* was that?" The pair said in unison, holding onto each other's hands. Michi was the first to speak up again, a pang of utter confusion dripping from every single one of his words. "You saw that, right? Right? Were those...*things* made of goo..." The blue protogen pointed over at the cave, to which his prince nodded wildly – there was no denying it, no trying to cover it up.

“I think so...? It was as if one of my *jellies* had come alive! Does this planet have monsters, then...? I thought this would’ve been, like, a safehaven of sorts...” Aether groaned as he leaned forwards, a slight feeling of sleepiness threatening to disrupt any and all plans they had for later on in the day. “Let’s go back to the ship...! I would kill for a nap...” His guard nodded, continuing to lead the crown prince. Back through the rather barren forest did they travel, tracing their steps and leaving their footprints in the light grass. It wasn’t difficult to get back to their ship – nothing was blocking their progress or threatening their lives, after all. The only annoyance was the star that the planet had yet to rotate away from, the sun-like object still glowering down at the protogens.

Aether didn’t think he could ever feel relief quite as intense as when he finally got back into the ship and took his suit off, leaving it in a pile on the floor of the lounge – god, he had sweat so much within it! The prince went back to the entrance of the ship and closed the ship door before he could forget. He immediately swayed into the bathroom for a *desperately* needed shower. Michi, on the other hand, opened the closet doors within the bedroom-lounge area. He moved both of the discarded suits into the basket that had, accordingly, come up through an opening in the wardrobe’s floor. The container sunk back down to prevent the clothes from affecting their peers’ smell! From there, the guard merely stood and watched the television – he didn’t want to sit down when he was so sweaty, of course. Luckily for him, both of the protogens were quick-washers. Oh, and had waterproofed visors.

When both spacefarers had finished cleaning themselves off, yet another seat upon the couch sounded brilliant. They’d already changed into their pajamas, silken clothes that were so breathable that Aether couldn’t remember the last time he overheated with them on. He picked the television remote up, pressing the button to pause the television they were watching. A home interface popped up as soon as the video was stopped, revealing everything they needed to know.

“*Nine o’clock* at home? Do you think this Sun’s ever going to go down? Maybe this planet’s tidally locked...” Aether grimaced at the sight – they’d barely been out, and it was already night-time! Jeez! He stood up off the settee quickly, and waltzed towards the open entrance of the lounge. “Anyway, I’ll...” Huh. Was that...green? As if honey was being slowly poured out of a jar, a leafy and translucent liquid seemed to creep through the tiny gap between the ship’s entrance and the hull. Panic made its way into the prince’s voice as he swivelled towards Michi. “I need your gun, Michi. *Now.*”

Of course, his friend listened without questioning the demand. The lounging guard stood up to attention immediately, and opened the wardrobe once more. He plucked a

simple handgun from the inside of the door, before handing it to his prince. Aether pointed the weapon at the encroaching syrupy-gooey liquid, noticing how it was already starting to pool up quite significantly. He charged the gun up, before pulling the trigger. A burst of bright white light exploded from the weapon – it would’ve blinded everyone who saw it, but neither protogen was affected and...this intruder had no eyes, as far as the prince could tell. The light pierced right through the creature, so Aether shot again. And again. And again. It looked as if he’d gotten four brilliant shots off, slaughtering the enemy in moments...!

But, of course, it wasn’t that simple. In every place that he’d shot, the trespasser simply came together again! By the time Aether’s gun had been loaded again, the beast had already fully slipped in, revealing its true form!

A goo-thing.

From the cave.

It was a housecat-sized amorphous blob of light green, and it was moving relatively fast towards the prince.

Michi could just about see it from the slits of visibility between his prince and the doorframe. He moved quickly, faster than the blob could ever hope to. The guard somewhat-gently shoved Aether out of the way, grabbing onto the goo with both hands. In this form, it almost resembled bread dough in how it sagged in Michi’s grasp. It wasn’t falling apart like the protogen thought it might. Seeing how guns didn’t work, Michi only had one option – they had no other weapons, and the door would take far too long to open. The guard opened his maw wide, and swallowed the slime whole. Only now did it revert to a more liquid state, sliding down into his gut smoothly. There wasn’t any resistance at all, in fact! All that remained was a small trail of green from the door of the ship to the lounge, but the ship would be able to clean that up as they—

“*Oourrp*. Sorry, sorry...! That...wasn’t actually that bad...” Michi rested his chin in one of his hands as he pretended to look philosophically up, indirectly teasing Aether for his completely indignant and uncomprehending look. “Tasted like apple!” The prince gagged and shut the door to the lounge, putting the gun back in the closet.

“I can’t believe you *ate* that thing, Michi! I just hope it’s not secretly poisonous, or something!” The prince looked upon his guard with a face of pure worry, until he looked down. Michi’s pajama t-shirt, normally displaying his impressively sculpted torso, instead had a notable roundness to it! As if the protogen had swallowed a basketball, it was taut and firm when Aether poked it with a delicate finger! Aether

lightly tugged the t-shirt up, and took note of a very faint green that dusted the skin and fur around Michi's belly button. "You know, I might not be the one with the big tummy anymore, heheh! Why don't *you* join *me* in training?" Aether teased his friend, a cheeky grin stretching onto his face.

The guard couldn't exactly debate his prince, letting Aether poke and rub his stomach. It certainly felt strange, having something like that in his gut. He felt awfully full, and yet a little hungry. Michi couldn't quite believe how delicious that slime actually tasted, nor could he believe how good a gentle massage upon a too-full tum felt! The protogen almost wanted to keep the gut purely to receive more of them. Michi moved and sat upon the edge of their shared bed, while Aether took but a moment to readjust and continue to massage his guard's stuffed stomach. The crown prince hadn't quite realised just how fluffy and well-groomed his friend's fur was, nor how good it felt to provide such relief to him! Aether couldn't help himself, only stopping his onslaught of affection when he was hit by a wave of fatigue.



The next morning, the two were woken by the ship. A robotic hand descended from the ceiling, removing their covers suddenly to shock them awake. *It worked*. Aether groaned and grumbled as he struggled to try and fall asleep again, whilst Michi sat up in silent contemplation. Only when the prince noticed his friend's quietness did he open his eyes, to look at what had happened.

Never in a million years would he have thought he'd see Michi *chubby*. Not just over-stuffed like he was last night. *Chubby*. While there was no sight of that too-full gut, instead there was a doughy tummy that softly jiggled with each movement. In place of his well-defined pecs were two perky moobs that pressed against his t-shirt's fabric. His limbs followed suit, all softened just a touch. His visor's cheeks weren't spared from the treatment! Truly, he mirrored Aether now – only taller and still far stronger. Aether immediately took it upon himself to place his hands on Michi's gut, gently shaking and soothing it. When the guard didn't push him away nor reject him, the prince moved onto nuzzling into his friend's stomach.

"I don't think I've been this chubby since...ever...!" The cobalt-furred protogen couldn't help the blush that dusted his soft cheeks, averting his gaze from Aether – Michi never could've imagined that he'd be receiving belly rubs from the *crown prince* himself...! It felt so good! Is this how Aether felt whenever he gave *him* tummy massages...? He felt a deep disappointment swell up within him when the

prince finally paused, though Michi shook his head a little to shake those thoughts away.

“Who would’ve thought that you of all people would enjoy that so much!” Aether teased his friend, gently hugging his sides as they moved towards the closet. “You can borrow my clothes...assuming you don’t get any bigger, heheheh...” To Michi’s dismay, his prince’s garments did fit him rather poorly! He had no choice but to wear his second pajama shirt, leaving his current one to be washed by the ship. The protogens left their biohazard suits in the vehicle – there didn’t seem to be many lifeforms that couldn’t be avoided, and it was *far* too hot out there for such bulky outfits. Still, though, they made sure to bring a light with them since the suits had been their only light source before. They were lucky the ship had intense cooling, or they might’ve had to take another shower before leaving!

The prince stepped out of the ship in more of his silken clothes, purely for their breathability. He took his friend’s hand, encouraging him out of the ship. “...let’s plan more in the forest, Michi...!” Gosh, the sun was *still* out? Maybe it was just a case of a slow rotation...either way, the forest was as shaded and cool as ever when they arrived. It was soothing, almost like the interior of the ship itself. There were trails in the grass, a consistent and smooth path of the flattened leaves. The slime must’ve travelled through the forest, too, then? Either way, neither of the protogens took much notice of it. Instead, they walked deeper into the forest and chose to start plotting out their journey from there.

“Don’t you think we should try and clear out the cave from the slimes? It didn’t look *that* difficult to deal with them – and besides, you seem like a pro, heheh!” Michi huffed and crossed his arms in response to his friend’s teasing, pretending to be oh-so-irritated. He almost wished he let the slime get to Aether, just to see how much bigger *he* would’ve gotten if he dealt with the goo himself. If Michi got this big after just one despite all his training and dieting, just imagine how soft Aether would have gotten! Who knows, perhaps he might not have been able to fit into any of his clothes!

“You’re speaking as if *you’re* not just as – if not *more* – big than me! You think I didn’t feel your gut pressing against my back during the night?” Michi teased in return, even going as far as to poke his friend’s slightly wobbly tum! Aether yelped as it shook, and thus in turn caused the rest of his body to jiggle briefly. Both protogens chuckled for a few moments after the prince’s body stopped, before turning to the cave. Michi pulled a small circular device out of his trousers’ pocket, and squeezed it within his paw. It whirred momentarily as if waking up from a lengthy hibernation! Michi held his hand out, pointing it forwards, and the little machine flew forwards. It

hovered at the entrance of the tunnel and began to produce a brilliant light. Stronger than the suits', the entire cave was brightened – where the suits' flashlights had only illuminated a small area, the machine's light wiped all darkness away. Thankfully, protogens didn't have eyes that'd be hurt by the brightness.

Michi took Aether's hand and led his liege back into the cave, and down the tunnel. The dust footsteps had been wiped away since yesterday, it seemed, and had been replaced by a straight, thick line. There were more large cracks within the walls of the cave and tunnel, and the pair could hear those signature glorps and schlorps much further away than before. Neither of the protogens thought much of it, and continued upon their journey. They didn't think much of it, no, even as the sounds grew closer. Grew behind them. The bottom of the tunnel looked about the same as it had before – a pit filled with various colours, reddish-brown walls, little else. Michi took Aether towards the hole in the floor, standing and looking down. The pit seemed more full this time. *Much* more. Not just half-way full, but three-quarters. The protogens shared a concerned glance at each other, and Aether turned backwards – he was *not* staying here, when these slime creatures could just escape from their containment!

Or, he would've chosen not to stay there. If one of those slimes hadn't snuck up behind him. It was pink, a neon pink – its translucence couldn't hide its bright hue. Nor could it hide its size, easily half as tall as Michi! Perhaps that was the source of the sloshing noises from within the tunnel! Aether panicked as it grew close enough to just almost touch him, instinctively jumping backwards! He bumped into his guard on the way, startling Michi into falling forwards! Due to their inter-linked hands, it didn't take long for both spacefarers to descend into the pit. Michi and Aether both cursed in the brief second they had before they hit the slimes atop the ever-shifting pile, though opening their mouths to speak was the biggest mistake they could've made!

They didn't have enough time to close their maws again, before the slimes had already started their invasive journey. Each protogen had a sizable slime assaulting them, forcing their way within their gullet! Michi was the first to give in, allowing his slime creature in – it, after all, tasted of peaches and he knew he had no way of resisting now that it'd gotten so close. The first slime slipped into his stomach easily. As did the second. The third. Fourth. Fifth. By the sixth slime, Michi was starting to struggle! His somewhat chubby gut had expanded to be easily as big as a yoga ball, and the new intruder threatened to make it yet *larger*! Specks of various different slimes coloured the protogen's cheeks and chin, stuffed with all sorts of flavours! Michi swallowed the sixth slime with slight difficulty! He only truly started to struggle when the seventh approached, clamping his mouth shut in protest. Only...being a semi-liquid, the creatures could still get inside the imperfect seal! Future meals spent their time

rubbing the guard's sizable stomach, soothing the glowing torso a little. Michi found himself getting...less full...?

Meanwhile, Aether was suffering much of a similar fate! Unlike Michi, though, he struggled and flailed within the grasp of tens of slimes, even as they forced their way into his maw! His belly grew ever-bigger, faintly glowing blue, as the prince tired himself out. It didn't take long for Aether to run out of energy, an even easier target for stuffing than the protogen actively helping the slimes. The prince panted for breath, another slime would force its way into his maw! Instead of being stuffed to the point of being unable to eat even one more bite, Aether found that the slimes constantly rubbed his gut – they never gave him a break, not even once. Instead, he found himself never full enough! He grew *hungry*, hungry enough to shatter the faint desire to resist his fate. The slimes began to push more into his maw, and yet the prince still didn't feel full!

Indeed, the slimes' rubbing was causing those ingested to immediately digest down into calories! They piled onto the protogens' bodies, causing their weight to soar! From slightly chubby men, to overtly obese. Their bellies were large enough that they'd have forced their legs far apart if they were to sit, and their moobs were each as huge as their bellies had been before the slime! Their limbs looked more like over-sized chicken wings, their fingers similar to sausages. Each of their cheeks had grown to start intruding on their sight, and a second chin had joined them both.

This was only the start.

Time seemed to stretch on for ages, as the slimes continued their spree of stuffing. They never ran out of more goo to shove into the protogens' more-than-willing mouths, causing their weight only to balloon further out of control. There was no hope for them to ever slim down to their normal size, as the amount of pounds weighing their frames down soon doubled! Their sight had become shrouded by the huge cheeks on either side of their visor, bellies so big they'd reached down to their calves! Three chins they both now had, joined by a neck so fat they could hardly turn their heads! Each moob was as large as a pillow, and their tails had started to be enveloped by the sheer size and roundness of their rears.

More and more slimes streamed into their maws, without so much as stopping to allow them a break! As the protogens grew, they started to take up more room in the pit! Their massively lardy bodies began to press against each other as they grew beyond what they thought even possible, the walls of the pit undergoing intense pressure! Even when the pair expanded enough to break the hole apart, the feeding

never paused. Their fluffy bodies began to take up the rest of the room as they fattened, their rolls growing so numerous that they couldn't even be counted on all their stiffened and thick fingers! Their visors were barely visible now, completely enveloped by massive cheeks and tens of chins! They could see nothing but their own fur, so completely immersed in gluttony that they couldn't move a *single* part of their form.

It didn't take long for their fat to break the cave open. Endless, boundless, they grew evermore. If there were any onlookers, they wouldn't be able to pick out what part of the blob was which – their rolls were simply too large and too many! The growth only began to slow when the protogens had grown large enough to bury the forest itself beneath their bellies, large enough that their bodies crushed every inch of land between the cave and their ship – and *far* beyond. Their furry guts pressed against each other at every opportunity, rolls of blue and brown mixing and mingling together.

Well, at least the slimes tasted nice. Maybe they'd burn enough calories to slim down, by trying – and failing – to move their body...?