

## “Perspectives”

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The lush woods comprised of odd-looking, twisted, leafy trees flashed by below in a yellowish-orange blur as Flight Officer Darin Stanic piloted the borrowed airspeeder above the canopy on the Rebel safe world. The forest seemed to swell and recede like stationary waves on the rolling hillsides. Above him, the cool overcast sky kept threatening to rain, though nothing more than occasional drizzles had fallen so far.

It was blissfully quiet up here all alone. Darin took a deep breath and exhaled slowly in the hopes of dislodging a bit more tension. Lately two of his squadmates, Chopper and Kalre, had been more antagonistic than normal to him, and Darin had jumped at the chance to take this flight just to get away from them. Yes, he knew he was the squadron’s rookie. Yes, he knew there was still a lot he had to learn about flying X-wings in combat. But he didn’t need those two to drill every single mistake and failure into his head over and over again. Darin could do that just fine on his own, thank you very much.

At least right now there was no combat, no life-or-death stakes. Corona Squadron had brought supplies to the safe world’s main settlement and was helping out there for a day, and this was just a little detour from the settlement to drop off some supplies with a group that lived a bit farther out. Then it would be back to the settlement, then back to his squadron, then back to the fleet, then back to the combat and the fighting and the too-steep learning curve.

At least this was something he knew how to do.

Darin kept an easy hold on the flight stick while following the navicom’s display toward his destination. It should be in sight any second...

There. In the muted daylight he could make out breaks in the leafy canopy where some of the trees had been cleared out. Darin eased back on the throttle and leaned forward, scanning the treetops more intently until he found the largest gap. Sure enough, that was the landing pad. He brought the airspeeder to a gentle landing.

Darin powered down the airspeeder and looked out the viewport. Large wooden buildings wove around the trees remaining in this area, making it look like the trees sprouted out of the buildings themselves. The massive structures seemed to occupy every available cubic centimeter of ground and airspace between the haphazard trees.

The scale of the simplistic-looking buildings was truly impressive, and the pilot felt dwarfed by them. Darin was used to humanoid-scale structures and vehicles, but of course the sizable group of Anx who lived here would need something much larger. He’d come across some Anx a few times before, and he particularly remembered the one who had come to the MC80 Mon Cal Cruiser where Corona Squadron was stationed to give a scouting report. That Anx scout hadn’t even tried to leave the hangar and enter the personnel corridors: his three-meter height would have made it extremely uncomfortable for him, and Darin’s wingman, Quiver, had even pointed out that the scout was a bit short for his species. Usually they were closer to four meters tall.

Darin grabbed the datapad with the information he needed and headed to the back of the airspeeder. He loaded the first stack of supply crates onto a repulsor cart, consulted the directions on the datapad, and then pushed the cart onto a particular pathway leading from the landing area.

He followed his map along a few turns until he came to the huge double doors of a building marked by a sign proclaiming it to be the Community Center. Darin stopped the cart and knocked.

About half a minute later, one of the doors swung open, and Darin craned his head back to see the stooped Anx towering above him. The Anx, for her part, seemed confused for a moment as she looked around at her own eye-level but didn't see anyone.

"Hello," Darin said with a smile.

The reptilian-featured Anx looked down and blinked in surprise when she spotted Darin. "Oh, I'm so sorry. Hello there." Her low, rumbling voice was thickly accented, and Darin could feel the slight vibration from it in his bones and stomach. A couple muted colors shifted on the fins below her large, sharply pointed head crest, but none of them were colors Darin had been told indicated negative emotions. Her narrow, blade-shaped head ended in a pointed chin, and she wore no clothing. Her skin was a dull yellow with a slightly greenish tone.

"I'm Flight Officer Darin Stanic. I'm helping with a supply run to the safe world here. One of the coordinators at the main settlement asked me to bring your group's share of the supplies to you." Darin patted the stack of crates on the cart. "I have the rest in the airspeeder at the landing pad. Is this where you want them?"

"Oh, wonderful, yes," the Anx boomed as her head crest turned a brighter yellow. "Gilen told us she'd be sending someone out this way. You've got the right building. Come in, please. Welcome."

"Thank you," Darin said.

"I'm Ryyok," she said as she stepped back to let Darin in. Her massive, muscular tail that counterbalanced her bipedal weight slid heavily along the smooth wooden floor when she did so.

"Nice to meet you," Darin replied. He pushed the cart in and followed Ryyok when she waved him with her to a particular corner in the cavernous open room. Though her gait was slow, Darin had to speed up somewhat to compensate for the amount of ground her longer legs covered, and he also paid attention to Ryyok's huge dragging tail so he wouldn't hit it with the cart. Several other Anx were inside the room doing various activities at tables as tall as the pilot, and they watched Darin curiously. One or two wore a utility belt, but that was the extent of their apparel.

When they reached the corner, Ryyok asked Darin to put the supplies there. The two of them had the cart unloaded in short order, and Darin turned to head back to the airspeeder for the second load.

He didn't expect to see an Anx about his own height standing a few meters away and gaping at Darin with wide eyes. Bright colors shifted chaotically on the Anx's head crest. The small Anx looked a little wobbly, and it leaned back heavily on its tail as it stood. Darin stopped, confused, but offered the small Anx a friendly smile. More colors swirled into being on its crest.

Ryyok gave what sounded like a soft chuckle that vibrated the floor under Darin's feet. She came next to Darin and crouched down, then spoke gently to the small Anx in a language Darin didn't understand. It still stood there transfixed. Ryyok turned to Darin and said in her accented Basic, "This is Fyxod. He's about one-and-a-half Standard years old. Just a— what's the Basic word for it— oh yes, toddler, I think. Please excuse his staring— he's used to other Anx being in here, not Humans. Actually, come to think of it..." Ryyok paused in thought, then she

looked over at one of the Anx sitting at a table and watching idly. “Thokyn, has Fyxod ever seen a Human before?”

The other Anx, presumably Thokyn, shook his head. “I don’t think so,” he rumbled back. Darin felt that one in his teeth. “He was born here, remember, and I don’t think we’ve ever had a reason to take him to the main settlement.”

Ryyok nodded, then she looked back at Darin. “Fyxod is a very curious child, as you can see. This may sound like an odd request, but would you mind spending a few minutes with him? The others can get the rest of the supplies from the speeder. Too many of us here have had horrendous dealings with the Imperials when they destroyed our planet’s ecosystem. I would like Fyxod’s first experience with a Human to be a positive one.”

“Um, sure,” Darin said, caught a bit off-guard. He was used to being the boring default in a galaxy run by humans, so the fact that he was a novelty to someone seemed unreal. Especially since he was probably the Corona who knew the least about other species, being from a predominately-human-populated planet way out in the Corporate Sector. His squadmates were always teasing him about how sheltered he was whenever he asked about a species he’d never seen before that the rest of them were well familiar with.

“Wonderful, thank you,” Ryyok said with what Darin guessed was an Anx smile. More bright yellow colored her crest. Ryyok stood and walked to Fyxod. She gave her hand to the child and again spoke to him in the other language, then she led Fyxod to Darin. Fyxod wobbled a bit as he walked and would have toppled over numerous times if not for his tail. He hadn’t torn his eyes from Darin for even one second.

Ryyok spoke again to Fyxod, and Darin thought he heard his first name amongst the incomprehensible words. Fyxod spoke a few halting words in that other language to Ryyok, and she answered. Then she stole a glance at Darin and grinned again. “Because of your similar sizes, he asked if you were a baby like him,” she told Darin.

Darin made a mental note to never, ever let Quiver get wind of that particular exchange or he would never hear the end of it. Unsure of what else to do with a toddler who was nearly eye-level with him, Darin smiled and said, “Hi, Fyxod. I’m Darin.”

Fyxod’s crest turned bright yellow, and he gave what sounded like a little hiccupping laugh. Fyxod turned to Ryyok and said something, then turned back to Darin and made his voice uncharacteristically high-pitched and squeaky-sounding. Fyxod laughed again with glee.

Darin chuckled. “Yeah, I guess I do sound kind of squeaky to you, huh?”

Fyxod giggled, and then tentatively reached for one of Darin’s hands with his own taloned, reptilian one. Darin spread his fingers and offered his hand, palm up, to Fyxod, who took it gently and started inspecting the thin, blunt, too-numerous digits.

“Unfortunately Fyxod does not understand much Basic yet,” Ryyok said. “We forget to speak Basic around him and teach it to him. We need to do that more often now so he’ll learn it easily.”

“I’m sure he’ll pick it up just fine,” Darin said. Fyxod was now staring back-and-forth between Darin’s five-fingered hand and his own three-fingered one.

Darin glanced down at Fyxod’s feet, which were stubby with three long talons for balance and grip. “If you like my hand that much, I bet my feet would really freak you out,” Darin told him. “But my wingman says my boots stink, so maybe I should spare you that particular experience.”

At hearing Darin’s voice, Fyxod lifted his gaze to look at the pilot’s face, and the weird Human hand was suddenly forgotten. Fyxod leaned closer and again hesitantly lifted a taloned

finger. Darin kept still and let Fyxod lightly trace his finger over Darin's small, rounded chin. Fyxod rumbled a question as his crest shifted to bright green, and Ryyok responded. Then Darin's ears got the most scrutiny they'd ever gotten in his life, and he noticed belatedly that the Anx did not have anything external that he could identify as an ear. Probably something to do with their physiological evolution and the frequencies they used to communicate. Fyxod was fascinated by the ear's convolutions and shape and probably would have kept poking at it for even longer if he hadn't gotten extremely distracted by Darin's short blond hair.

It startled Fyxod when he first poked at the hair and it moved. It took him a few seconds to gather the courage to touch Darin's bangs again, but once he did, he was fully intent on it. Ryyok stopped him after the first small exploratory tug on a lock, and then the flurry of halting, broken questions began. Darin didn't know what Ryyok was telling Fyxod in reply, or even what Fyxod was trying to ask. One time Fyxod touched Darin's hair and then immediately pointed to a small bulge of fabric on the shoulder of his beige general duty uniform while speaking to Ryyok, and Darin wondered if he thought the hair and the clothing were the same thing.

It sounded like Fyxod was in the middle of another question when something else seemed to occur to him, and he cut himself off as he stared at Darin again. He ran his hand over the rounded top of Darin's head, then with his other hand he felt his own elongated, pointed crest. A purple sheen started to spread on the crest, and the child looked extremely confused about life and existence in general.

"Yeah, my head's really small compared to yours. All humans' are. Well, unless you're a starfighter pilot called Chopper. My head and my hair can't change colors either," Darin told him. "It looks like this all the time. Pretty boring. You're lucky you don't have hair. I bet you save a lot of credits not needing to get haircuts constantly."

Fyxod laughed again and did his squeaking impersonation of Darin once more. He started to shakily walk around toward Darin's back when he suddenly stopped. Bright orange flared into existence on his crest, and he quickly turned to Ryyok. He sounded upset, almost stricken, when his jumbled words rushed out.

Ryyok hastily soothed him with some sort of explanation, and the bright orange on his crest faded, quickly replaced with purple.

A bit startled, Darin looked at Ryyok, concerned he'd done something wrong, but she smiled and shook her head. "It surprised him that you don't have a tail. He thought you'd gotten hurt and it had come off."

"Oh." Darin relaxed, then said to Fyxod, "Yeah, no tail for us. We live our lives constantly on the verge of falling over. Our chairs probably look different from yours, and I imagine your pilot seats are different too. But not having a tail lets us do things like this." Darin took a step back for some room and then quickly spun on his heel once all the way around. Then he immediately did it in the other direction. Fyxod laughed in delight, and his crest changed back to bright yellow. For a moment he looked like he was rebalancing himself to try the same feat, but Ryyok pre-empted the attempt.

Fyxod was busy examining the feel of Darin's clothing and apparently trying to figure out the purpose of a second skin when Thokyn walked up to them. "We brought all of the supplies in, and the cart's secured back in your airspeeder," he told Darin. "Thank you for bringing them to us."

"You're welcome," Darin said, willing his bones to stop vibrating inside his skin. "I'm glad I could help. Thanks for unloading the rest."

"Would you like to stay for a meal or any refreshments?" Ryyok asked.

“Thank you, but my squadron commander’s expecting me back at the main settlement,” Darin said. “I was just supposed to drop off the supplies here. Once we’re done at the settlement, we’re heading back to our fleet.”

“All right. Thank you for being so patient with Fyxod. I’m glad he was able to make a new friend today,” Ryyok said. She took Fyxod’s hand and began coaxing him away from Darin, though Fyxod resisted, still asking broken questions.

“I hope I didn’t scare him off humans forever,” Darin said with a grin.

“Oh, no. Actually I think he wants to keep you as a pet and name you Squeaky,” Ryyok said. She held on to Fyxod’s hand and prevented him from going back to Darin. “This is probably a good indication that he’s ready for more socialization with other species in the main settlement.” She looked back at Darin. “Please come by and visit any time. Thanks again for the supplies and your help.”

“No problem. Have a good day.” Darin turned to Fyxod and waved, deliberately opening his hand wide to show all five of his fingers as he wiggled them. “Bye, Fyxod.”

Fyxod watched Darin’s hand for a second, and then lifted his own hand and tried to vigorously wiggle his own three thick fingers in imitation.

Ryyok leaned down and said, “Fyxod, can you say bye?”

Fyxod gave one of his Darin-impression high-pitched squeaks while his crest stayed bright yellow. Darin chuckled, then turned and walked out.

Darin sighed happily as he headed back to the airspeeder. For just a few minutes, the sheltered rookie who wasn’t good at much, one of however-many-hundreds-of-billions of humans, had felt like the most unique, fascinating, amazing being in the entire galaxy.

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*The End*

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