

Crichton Sings the Blues

John Crichton, astronaut, physicist, and veteran wormhole cowboy, had done it—he had finally mapped the quantum harmonics of wormhole navigation. A safe distance from Moya, as he watched the timer in his module wind down, Crichton heard D’Argo and Rygel arguing. “Twenty credits says he blows up,” Rygel offered.

D’Argo answered, “No, I have confidence in John. He’ll make it, then bring back some horrible problem we have to solve for him.”

He punched the coordinates for Earth, grinned at the familiar hum of Farscape One, and braced for the ride. Except, as usual, things did not go as planned. When the universe wasn’t inside-out anymore, Crichton realized Rygel hadn’t won his bet. It remained to be seen what would become of D’Argo’s wager.

Crichton’s eyes snapped open. He was lying on his back, staring up at a blue sky. So far, so good. He listened—children’s voices, speaking English with a distinctly Australian twang. Okay, still within parameters. He sat up, brushed grass from his fur (wait, what?), and stood to get his bearings.

That’s when he saw them: a trio of dogs, upright and laughing with glee as they played keepy-uppy in the yard. His tail curled in consternation.

A woman’s voice called from a nearby porch, warm and unmistakably maternal. Crichton blinked. She was a pink poodle. Oh, he was definitely not in Kansas, Toto.

He caught his reflection in a window. Floppy ears. Big nose. Tail. He was a dog. An anthropomorphic dog.

“Harvey?” he whispered.

Harvey materialized beside him, now a dapper, spectral dachshund in his coolant suit. “Bravo, John. From *Homo sapiens* to *Canis sapiens*. Well, I’d disagree with the *sapiens* part, but I always said you were barking mad.”

Crichton groaned. “I’m an astronaut, not a—what even am I? A beagle?”

Harvey sniffed. “You smell like an American foxhound. Appropriate, given your penchant for chasing things you can’t catch.”

Before Crichton could process his existential crisis, two Australian Heelers approached, one blue and one orange, trailed by two puppies, of similar colors. Their children?

The older blue dog squinted. “You look a bit lost, mate. I’m Bandit. New in the neighborhood?”

Crichton hesitated. “Uh, you could say that. I’m...not from around here. I’m John.” He held out a hand and hoped introductions didn’t involve intrusive sniffing.

The little blue dog’s eyes sparkled. “Are you an astronaut?” she asked with a little girl’s innocent wonder. “I’m Bluey. This is my sister, Bingo.”

Crichton grinned. “Astronaut, yeah, kid. Something like that.”

Chili offered her hand. “I’m Chili. You’re welcome to stay for tea. We love meeting new friends.”

Harvey, lounging on the porch, whispered, “Careful, John. Next thing you know, you’ll be playing ‘Shops’ or ‘Grannies.’”

Crichton found himself swept into a day of imaginative games—space explorers, time travelers, even a round of “Wormhole Chase.” Bandit, ever the good sport, donned a colander helmet and declared, “Let me get this right—you’re really a canopomorphic monkey in your universe? Sure you don’t want to stay, mate? We could use another player for ‘Keepy Uppy: Zero-G Edition.’”

Crichton laughed, the tension easing. The Heelers’ kindness, their unflappable acceptance of the bizarre, reminded him of what he had lost in the Uncharted Territories: a sense of home, of family.

Harvey, now wearing a child’s astronaut costume, smirked, “Admit it, John. You’re having fun. Maybe you should stay. Less Scarran, more scones. Maybe someone else will figure out wormholes and save the galaxy.” John winced, but put it aside.

After a raucous round of “Wormhole Chase,” Bluey and Bingo, curiosity dialed to eleven, cornered John Crichton on the back patio. Bandit and Chili, sensing a teachable moment (and perhaps a bit of mischief), watched from a safe distance.

Bluey, eyes wide, asked, “Mr. John, why do you talk to yourself sometimes? Are you a bit bonkers?”

Crichton, glancing sideways at the spot where only he could see Harvey lounging with a smug grin, sighed. “Yeah, kiddo, you could say I had a very chatty imagination. Sometimes, when you’d been to as many weird places as I have, your brain needed someone to talk to. Even if it is just... in your head.”

Harvey, unseen by all but Crichton, piped up in a mock whisper, “Careful, John. They’ll want to play ‘Doctors’ next.”

Crichton stifled a laugh, then continued, “But don’t worry. I knew he isn’t real. He just likes to give me advice—usually the kind I didn’t want.”

Bingo, tilting her head, asked, “Do you ever get really, really scared in space?”

Crichton's smile faded, but he answered honestly. "All the time. Space is big, and sometimes it feels like you are all alone out there. But being scared just means you care about getting home safe. And sometimes, you find friends in the strangest places."

Harvey, ever the commentator, chimed in, "Like a backyard full of talking dogs. Freud would have a field day."

Bluey, undeterred, asked, "Do you ever miss your mum and dad?"

Crichton's voice softened. "Every single day. But I learned that family wasn't just who you were born to. Sometimes it was who you find along the way."

Bingo, eyes shining, said, "Do you want to stay and play with us forever?"

Crichton knelt, looking both girls in the eyes. "I'd love to play as long as I could. But I have friends who needed me, too. And I think they were waiting for me to come home."

Harvey, rolling his eyes, said, "Sentimental as ever, John. You're going soft."

Crichton, out loud, grinned, "Yeah, Harv. Maybe I am."

Bandit nudged Chili and whispered, "Bloke's got a lot going on upstairs, eh?"

Chili smiled. "He's honest. The girls can always use that; they're strong."

Throughout the exchange, Harvey's sardonic commentary was audible only to Crichton, occasionally causing him to pause or smirk in ways that puzzled the Heelers. Crichton never ducked a question, recognizing the earnestness in Bluey and Bingo's eyes, and met each with the kind of candor that won over both children and parents alike.

But Crichton knew he couldn't stay; Harvey's dig had a core of truth. The Scarrans had to be stopped. Moya and Pilot needed him. So did Aeryn. So did the others. He explained his predicament to Bandit and Chili. Instead of disbelief, they nodded sagely.

"Sometimes," Chili said, "the best way home is to play pretend until you remember how to get there."

Bluey and Bingo built a cardboard wormhole generator. Bandit handed Crichton a toy wrench. "Give it a go, mate. You never know."

Crichton, with a lump in his throat, played along. The world shimmered—was it the magic of play, or the quantum weirdness of this universe? He closed his eyes. . . .

Crichton awoke on Moya, wrench in hand. Hand, not paw. Check. Harvey, now back to his usual self, grinned. "Feeling blue, John?"

Crichton smiled. “No, Harv. I think I needed that.” He turned to a nearby audio pickup. “Sparky, you lost! D’Argo, the jury’s still out on you.”

Somewhere, in a quiet Australian suburb, a family of dogs played “Space Explorer,” and a blue foxhound in their memories always won at keepy-uppy.