

Alvíss carefully picked his way through the rough ground of the Acrid Flats. The land was unstable -- and the reek of sulfur pierced through even the damp cloth he'd tied over his snout -- so each step had to be chosen with care. He *remembered* how to watch the ground and pick out the right trails. But those memories belonged to a different body, one larger than his own... It was a constant struggle not to give into the muscle memory, to pick his pawsteps carefully and deliberately. Lest he forget himself and end up facedown in a sulfur geyser. (His mate would certainly have opinions on such a predicament.) Then the reek would be the least of his worries.

It was a strange feeling. One he knew well, at this point, but always disconcerting. The ghosts of his ancestors (past lives? Other selves?) were always a constant companion to him. Some days he woke feeling like he *should* have-- longer legs, bigger paws, or shorter legs and an overbite-- too many lives, too many bodies. This one was simultaneously only a temporary vessel and everything he had. Lose it (say, to having his face blasted by a superheated sulfur geyser), and he would simply be another set of memories haunting the next in line.

Despite the danger, however, he had a reason for being here. Unfortunately, with the reek of sulfur hanging in the air it was impossible to scent his quarry. All he could do was keep his eyes on the horizon and watch for the gleam of light between the plumes of smoke--

--there.

He sprung, landing precisely on another safe footing. Another bound, and another-- awkwardly leapfrogging from footing to footing. Even as silly as it was, it was faster than what he was doing before. Getting himself there leap by leap.

Getting closer, it was soon clear that the light he was pursuing wasn't alone. There were two Ketucari shapes in the mist-- both squat and finned. Strange location for Danuocs. The dark-furred blue-and-yellow member of the duo was on the ground, protecting one of their front paws. The other, a bicolored pink-and-grey with rabbit-esque horns, was trying to keep a Lantern Betta away from their friend.

Alvíss leapt.

His jaws found the Betta's neck in the midst of his motion, and he rolled in midair to get it underneath him. He hit the ground in a somersault and when he came back to his feet, the floating fish was limp in his jaws. Its neck snapped from the force. Good, he needed the thing mostly intact. He set it down carefully on safer ground and turned to the pair of ketucari. "Are you both all right?"

They were both staring at him. After a few awkward moments, the grey-and-pink spoke. "Ah-- thank you? I'm quite all right, but Fionn burnt their paw--" A bit hurried, indicating their friend on the ground.

"I wasn't looking where I was going and stepped on a hot spot. It's not bad, just... hard to put my weight on because of where it is." Fionn explained further. "I should be fine in a bit..."

"Let me see it." Alviss moved closer, carefully lifting the paw in question in his own and examining it. "Hmm. It's blistering. You should avoid walking on it as much as you can, but I understand that may be difficult. Especially given where we are. But I do have something that can help with the pain." he sat down and dug in his bags. He had brought burn salve as a precaution, he just needed to locate it... There!

He unscrewed the jar and carefully smeared its contents across the blistered area. "Give it a moment to soak in before you put your paw back down. And..." He moved back to the betta, tearing a long strip of scales from its side with his kill-claw. "The waxes in a lantern betta's skin are heat-resistant. They'll protect your paw from further damage and speed the healing." he wrapped the strip around the burns, carefully tying it in place with the ends.

Fionn tentatively flexed their now-wrapped paw while their companion watched anxiously, then hesitantly placed it down on the ground. "...I can actually walk on this. Thank you."

"If I can ask-- who are you?" Fionn's companion asked. "Thank you very much for helping us, but I'm curious about what brought you out here in the first place."

"Ah, just a traveler." Alviss flicked his tail, then flipped the lantern betta onto its back. With one smooth motion, he'd sliced the belly open with his kill claw. "I was looking for these bettas." a twist of his talons and he flipped one of the phosphorescent sacs into a jar. "My home needs new fog lights, and if you treat their luminescent organs right, they'll stay glowing for *years*." the other sac followed it, then the fish's liver. "...Ah, if you like, you can eat the rest of this." he pushed the remains of the fish carcass towards the pair of very baffled Danuocs.