

No officials came the following day. Orlan let Aouphril know he had called and left a message with the local representative's secretary requesting to talk to the representative directly. So, they went about their normal business. Before she headed off to class, Aouphril helped Aldin access some child learning programs to keep him busy while she was away. He was fine with that arrangement. He wanted to learn their language and not having much context, child programming was probably a good starting point. The programs were a lot like what the humans had on public television back home. It made it easy to grasp the words. The repetition was almost annoying, but it was helpful. He learned this world, like his, was called Earth by the locals, almost pronounced exactly the same, which seemed odd.

Orlan dropped by mid-day to check on him, but didn't stay long. He returned in the evening and had dinner with him and Aouphril. Their food was similar to some of the food back home when he served as a scout with the Fudds, though it smelled a little different. It was close enough as it didn't make him sick. A salad of green leaves, colorful sliced roots, and some seed kernels similar to sunflower seeds. Aldin had his plain while his host and her friend poured a dressing on theirs that smelled something like vinegar and oil, but it was a very pungent vinegar that made Aldin wrinkle his nose.

This was followed by pasta similar to what the Fudds ate back home, except it was a darker brown color and the vegetable sauce was more of a violet color. There were crumbled things in the sauce that Aldin guessed was similar to tofu as it didn't smell or taste like cooked meat. The crumbles didn't seem to have any flavor at all to him. Over dinner he learned the names of the foods and simply assigned those names in his head to what they looked similar to back home on his Earth.

After dinner, Aldin demonstrated his slightly expanded vocabulary, including basic colors and being able to count to ten. Orlan and Aouphril were impressed with what he had picked-up in a single day.

"Long way go," Aldin replied after their praise. "Iz start tho."

"Aldin, how old are you?" Orlan asked. He started to translate in (chitter)speak, but Aldin stopped him.

"I unnerstand. Need think," he swished his tail about. "Not my world, so must count in my head, but will also talk through. Good prac-tis. My world day two-four klicks long. We call klicks, hours," he added the word in English. "Your world two-five klicks long. Year my world three-six-five days. Your world three-five-zee-ro days. Year 'bout same at eight-seven-six-zee-ro klicks long. So, if I say I seven years old my home," he paused a moment, "iz 'bout same here. If go by days then little more here."

They looked at one another in surprise. "You're just a child."

“My world Aldin adult since 1,” he paused trying to think, sighed and chattered something.

“One-and-a-half,” Orlan translated.

“Wow.”

“Body like wild cousin,” Aldin reminded them. “How old Orlan an’ Owfril,” he paused and tried again. “No, Owfril not right. Aw-fril,” he paused again, “that not right, but close-er.”

They looked at each other. It was a fair question and they had asked him first. “I’m twenty, er, that’s what two-zero is called.” Aldin nodded back.

“Same here,” Aouphril added. “Here child until nine or ten. Adolescent through one-six, sixteen. Age of majority, adult, after that.

“How old can you be?”

“Six-eight, sixty-eight to seven-five, seventy-five. Some live longer, others not so long.”

Aldin nodded. “Feral,” he paused as he realized he used the English word. “Sorry, that one name for ‘wild cousins.’ They live ten or one-two,” he paused while Orlan filled in that was twelve. “That is if predator not eat dem. My kind, not sure. We fight dee-mund rah-bits. If not die in fight some live to three-zee-ro or more. Fath-er-fath-er iz,” he paused a moment, “three-eight if still live. No one see him two years.”

“Father-father? You mean father of your father?” Aouphril asked. Aldin nodded. “Word is grandfather.” Aldin repeated it.

“Would mahth-er of father iz grand-mahth-er?” Aouphril nodded. “Grand-mahth-er iz ‘bout twenty-five or eight. Not sure. Never ask. Not,” he paused again, “nice. Not word want. Close I think. She not seen in two years like grand-father. She was our leader for over ten years.”

“Did your grandfather fight the demon rabbits?”

“Not at first. He born wild cousin.” Aouphril and Orlan exchanged glances. “Dee-mund rah-bits change grand-father to smart squirrel like you, me. Dee-mund rah-bits force grand-father dig in ground. Then grand-father fight dee-mund rah-bits. Win,” he paused, “don’t have word. No word in (chitter).”

He looked around and saw a loose piece of ribbon sitting in a basket of crafts. He wrapped it around himself, semi-tangling it. He then worked himself loose as they watched. “What call what I do?”

“You got tangled in the ribbon and then worked yourself free.”

“Free. Not sure right word. Iz close. Grand-father win free from dee-mund rah-bits. He then,” he drooped his tail again and sighed. “Learn lots. No not right words. Too soon. No words yet.” He scuffed a foot in frustration as he looked down at the floor.

Aouphril picked up his small right forepaw in her hands and patted it like he had the day before. “Iz oh-kah,” she tried in his English. It was hard to pronounce. Aldin’s eyes lit up. She turned to Orlan. “Now, I think I know what that means. A reassurance that things will be fine. Is alright.” She turned back to Aldin. “Do you understand?”

“Some. You know what ‘Is Okay’ means.”

“And we were able to learn so much from each other after just one day of child tutorials.”

“Aldin learn fast. Must learn fast.”

It was growing dark outside and Aldin began to yawn and excused himself as he headed for the cushion. He explained that like wild cousins his kind awoke and slept with the rising and setting of the sun. He was soon asleep.

Orlan and Aouphril conversed quietly so as to not disturb their little guest.

chirpchirp

Aouphril glanced at her entertainment flat panel on the wall. She had an incoming call. It was unusual for someone to call through that one and not her portable. She answered the call. On the screen was the rabbit, Dr. Hanter, from the clinic.

“Good, you’re both together. I first tried Orlan’s residence. Is,” he paused looking at something off screen, “All-dun with you?”

“He’s asleep.”

Dr. Hanter’s ears shot straight up as he tensed up on screen. “But he **IS** with you there at Aouphril’s residence, right?”

“Yes.”

The rabbit relaxed a little. “Good. I’m sorry to say you both and All-dun are now under quarantine.”

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