

The door to the quarantine suite opened. All looked up in surprise as Representative Mara entered.

“It’s only been two weeks. Why are you here?”

“All of you,” she sighed, “except Aldin are free to go. The medical quarantine has been lifted, but we don’t know what to do yet about Aldin.”

She handed a flat panel to Dr. Hanter. He scrolled through it as an ear twitched. “After further testing at Hofstrah Medical University, they’ve determined Aldin isn’t carrying any viruses. What set off the computers in the initial testing were some antibodies for a previously unknown disease, but he’s not carrying that disease.”

“Rabies,” Aldin piped in. “Deadly virus among my people. Hit our main,” he paused a moment thinking, “colony twenty years ago. Half my people die. Can only be infected by exposure to saliva of someone with it. Not sure word,” he paused, “time it sits in your body before you show signs of disease.”

“Incubation period,” Dr. Hanter suggested.

“Thank you. In-ke-u-ba-shun per-e-od for Rabies iz 30 days. Once you show signs, antibodies shot,” he made like a needle into his arm, “not work. You die. If lucky die quick. Not lucky, you lose mind, attack, infect others, then die. Must get shot before show signs. Antibodies last one year. So, my people get shot every year to avoid what happen 20 years ago from happen again. I got my yearly shot a couple days before I come here.”

“Well, that explains that,” Dr. Hanter grumbled.

“Representative,” Aouphril started.

“Chancellor,” Mara sighed again. “Thanks to my declaring the quarantine, the fact it occurred in my district, and the nature of the emergency, my colleagues ‘rewarded’ me with chancellorship of the parliament until we resolve what we’re going to do about Aldin. And in here, please just call me Mara.”

“Mara, what is to become of Aldin?” Aouphril finished.

“I don’t know yet. I need to question him, and who knows from there.”

“I have more words than when I arrive, but not e-nuf.”

“Chancellor,” Orlan raised his paw to stop her protest. “No, I have to ask this under your official title. You said we’re free to go. Does that mean, we’d also be free to stay if we choose?”

Mara looked to both Orlan and Aouphril. “Why would you choose to stay?”

“We’re the only friends he knows here. We’ve been with him since he arrived. We’d like to see this through.” Orlan’s tail flicked a couple times. “And as Aldin said, he is still learning our language. It is very different from his Ing-lish. I know (chitter)speak. While limited, it has helped to bridge some of the gaps so far while helping him to understand and speak ours. As such, I’m offering my assistance. Otherwise, you’ll need to find someone else to help and that will take time. Not just in finding someone, but also for that individual to learn and understand Aldin’s accent.”

“Yes, even in (chitter), slow go at first. I still have to repeat sum time for Orlan to unnerstand.”

Mara thought about it for a moment. “It’s your choice. If you stay, I will appreciate the assistance.”

“Thank you.”

Dr. Hanter thumped a foot a couple times in debate. “He’s my patient and he’s grown on me the past couple weeks. And I suspect you’ll need someone to testify to how he is and is not like a wild cousin. I haven’t seen one since I was a kit, but I’ll use what we have on file to make the comparison if need be.” He looked towards the two orderlies. “The choice is yours. I won’t be upset if you choose to go. I know you’ve got families who miss you. I don’t.”

Both thanked him, wished Aldin best of luck, and left.

Mara sat on a cushion. “I need to know **everything** you can tell me, Aldin. I’ve already read the daily reports from Dr. Hanter on what you talk about with him and the others in here. So, let’s start with your world. Tell me about your world.”

Aldin pulled up a cushion to sit on, leaving light paw prints on the floor. “I unnerstand, Chan-sil-or.”

Mara started to protest and then stopped herself. This was a formal discussion. As much as the title made her bristle. She clicked an icon on her tablet to set the room’s cameras on record mode.

“My world, like yours, called Earth. ‘nother name for it is Terra. I’ll use Terra to not confuse with this Earth. Terra similar in size and land-mass to water.” He picked-up a small flat panel got it to connect to the large one on the wall and verbally asked it to bring up a map of this Earth. He slid his finger across the small pad being careful of his claw not scratching the surface, and it would as he had discovered soon after the quarantine started. On the larger screen a mouse pointer moved about. “Some of your land masses even look somewhat similar.” He pointed to

the eastern set on the map. They were separated by a water passage way. “On my world these two would be connected by narrow piece of land.” He pointed to the southeastern section of the upper large island of the set. “Here there would be a point of land jutting south for,” he paused.

Mara watched as he thought things through, his tail twitching a little.

“Sorry, needed to do math in head. Our length units and yours not same. Your basic length unit is a mit?”

“Yes.”

“And you are about a mit tall?”

“Three-quarters.”

Aldin nodded. “And you have name for thou-zand mit length?”

“Kamit.”

“Okay, Not as hard as I feared. One of our units of measure similar in length. Let me think it through.” Again that concentrated look as his tail twitched a little. “That point of land would come down this far, about five-hun-red-fifty kamits and two-hun-red wide. Similar, but not same. I say this as ex-sample of how not same.” He clicked his thumb and a finger claw together, lightly touched the pad and spread them apart. He repeated the process a few times. On screen the map zoomed in on the northern continent. “If this were my Terra, I come from about here.” He pointed to a place near the eastern coast, and north a bit, about half-way between the equator and northern pole a little inland from the coast.

The others stared.

“Aldin, that’s where Dr. Hanter, Orlan, and I live,” Aouphril said.

Mara nodded, “that is the district I represent in parliament.”

“Which backs-up what I tried to explain to you about how I got here but didn’t have the words yet. It is a,” again he paused, “guess. I not sure right word, but maybe you unnerstand. It is a guess back home. This guess says that there could be many, many worlds that occupy same space. All different. Could be different in big ways or little ways. I was doing fiz-ics re-search. There was high pitch whine fall-owed by an ex-plo-shun and a bright light. I fall and land here. As I explain to Orlan and Aouphril,” he paused and turned to Aouphril. “Two weeks and I think I finally get you name right. Am I?”

“Yes, you pronounced my name correctly this time,” Aouphril smiled.

“Good. Sorry for my distraction, Chan-sil-or. Work hard to get that right ‘cause Aouphril friend. Some sounds in your lang-you-ug not in mine. Hard to learn new as adult. As I explained to them. I think ex-plo-shun created a brief doorway between my world and here. Door must have closed on my tail.” He raised it to emphasize the missing tip. But what I don’t unnerstand is what caused ex-plo-shun. What I re-search was safe.”

“And what was that?”

“Don’t have words yet. Try es-plain. Material that power pass through easily when real cold. Does that make sense?”

Mara nodded. “Okay, so there was an accident in your world and somehow, you got thrust here. Would it be possible to open that doorway again?”

“I don’t know what made doorway open. I could maybe open doorway if repeat ack-see-dent. Don’t know what caused ack-see-dent . And if I cood repeat ack-see-dent , no guarantee open right door. Cood open door to ‘nother world. Could be worse world than mine. Could put your world in danger for me try.”

“Worse? Your world has problems?”

“Many. From what I learn you not have war for many hun-red years. Not case my world. My people number a few thou-zand. We at war with dee-mund rah-bits.” He paused again. “No, I won’t call them by words your lang-you-ug. Don’t want to scare people into thinking Dr. Hanter could be dee-mund rah-bit.”

“He pulled away in terror the first time we met,” Dr. Hanter added.

“In English, they are devilbunnies. I’ll just use that. If people ask, then I describe, but be careful how I do so. Devilbunnies number about hun-red thou-zand, if that correct word, add two more zeros on end of thou-zand. Not sure exact number of devilbunnies on Terra. They made my people from wild cousins. Make slave force to dig tunnels. Some fight back and win free. We build colony where I pointed on map. As others escape, we welcome them.”

He drooped his tail. “Devilbunnies not biggest danger. Humans biggest danger. Dom-in-ate top predator. Large, average 2 mits tall and hun-red-fif-TE times Aldin weight. Near furless. Can adapt to most en-vire-o-mints. Good tool maker,” he paused, “**very good** tool maker. Can eat neer-lee anything. Selfish. Greedy. Many don’t care for what they do to planet. They make war on one another. Some fear those who are different. If Orlan and Aouphril were humans, they might fight each other just ‘cause different fur color. There are about seven followed by nine zeros of them on Terra.” He paused as all of the others stared at him.

“How do your people survive?”

“We keep secret from most humans, just like the devilbunnies do, except, they kill and eat humans when they can, though much bigger than them. Devilbunnies a little larger than me. But if they were to win, would be worse top predator than humans as they have sim-u-ler traits and reproduce like wild cousin rabbits. So, we befriend some humans who know of devilbunnies and they fight them with us.”

“If humans are as dangerous as you say, why work with them?”

“Not all humans like other humans. Some unnerstand they need to change ways to save Terra. Those are ones we work with. Old human saying, ‘Enemy of your enemy become your ally’. ‘nother saying that fits why we work with them, ‘we chose less of two ee-vils.’ If ever full defeat devilbunnies, then worry about what to do ‘bout humans. They are the real reason I don’t want to risk opening a doorway again if it were possible. We don’t know what wait on other side. Your technology ahead of humans, but so is devilbunnies’. Even so, war between humans and devilbunnies stuck. Humans win battle. Devilbunnies win battle. Back and forth. Nee-ther side gain edge. It secret from most humans ‘cause if the more dangerous humans were to learn about devilbunnies, bunnies would quickly be wiped-out.”

“That sounds like a good thing.

“No, many others die too. Maybe no one survive.”

“How?”

“Not sure of word in Common, what I call your lang-you-ug versus mine, English, which is borrowed from humans. Humans know how to split atom. Have dropped atom-split bombs on other humans twice about seven-tee years ago. Tens of thou-zands die. Some as soon as bomb explode. Others more slowly. Humans build more split-atom bombs, much bigger bombs. So, many could destroy Terra many times over. Fif-tee-five years ago, two human groups fighting each other nearly press button and end Terra.”

Mara’s eyes widened in fear. “It is said that a long time ago, in the lost history of our world, we did likewise and nearly destroyed the planet.” The others shuddered.

Aldin nodded. “The more dangerous humans not afraid to use these bombs even if they destroy the planet. So selfish. So scared of others not like them. So stupid that they rather destroy the world then lose a fight, even if they die in process. And if they learn of you, they’ll fight you to try and steal your technology.”