

The following day, the questioning continued until near mid-day. Aldin looked about for more raised hands. Seeing none, he turned to Mara, "If there are no further questions for me, I surrender the floor." Aldin bowed to Mara. "Thank you, to all of you and to Madam Chancellor for giving me this opportunity. Now, as we would save on Terra, the ball is in your court." Aldin sat where he was indicated to do so.

There was quiet murmuring through the assembly, but no one raised a paw to request the floor. Mara looked about. "Do we need a break before continuing?" she asked. She looked about and saw several nod their heads slightly. "Very well, as it is also close to lunch time, I declare a two klick recess." She smacked her gavel.

Several of the Representatives departed the chamber, some by themselves looking at their flat panels, others in small groups. Aldin had tried to do likewise, but was soon surrounded by several Representatives and a few members of the chamber security force fearing the worse. Mara nervously watched wondering if she'd have to call more security forward. She got a glimpse through the crowd and relaxed as the conversation appeared to be cordial. They made their way to the door as a group and departed.

After the passing of two klicks the Representatives filed back in. Mara called them to order. She looked out on the assembly and pointed to the raccoon, Tamiyoki, with his paw raised. "The Chancellor again recognizes the honorable Tamiyoki, Representative of Low Island Forests District."

Tamiyoki made his way to the floor. "Thank you, Madam Chancellor." He looked about. "My fellow Representatives," and stared into one camera briefly, "and citizens watching from home. We have a unique opportunity here. I believe what our Terra squirrel visitor has stated is truth as he understands the notion. Which means, there is life out there, somewhere else other than here on Earth."

There was some grumblings in the chamber. Mara smacked her gavel once and they quieted down as Tamiyoki paused. He then nodded to the Chancellor in thanks. He briefly pointed to the opossum from Piccayune District.

"My colleague from Piccayune District has a good theory, but like our visitor, I can't agree with it and for the same reason. I've done some research since that theory was proposed and can't find any reference to these hue-mans or anything that might remotely resemble them in our past." He looked directly at the opossum, "my apologies, Madame Representative." He turned back to look out among the other Representatives.

"However, even if everything he has said were made-up, that would leave us with a different dilemma. I've looked at the medical data." He pointed at Aldin, "Visitor All-dun matches up to a wild cousin squirrel by about 90%. If he is not a visitor, but really just a wild cousin as some

of my colleagues believe, then they're smarter than we first believed. Which would mean we'd need to grant all of them the same citizen rights as everyone else."

Protests erupted across the assembly. Tamiyoki held up both hands to try and quell the complaints. Mara had to smack her gavel several times to bring things back to order. Again, Tamiyoki paused and nodded to the Chancellor.

"Yes, I understand the trouble that would create. Some of our societies still rely on hunting as a tradition or for survival in a natural disaster. If we declared citizenship for wild cousins, they couldn't be hunted anymore.

"Visitor All-dun is very much like a wild cousin. I watched his body language throughout the questioning. Whenever a predator came down to ask something he tensed up and if he was standing, he was leaving footprints. When the Representative of Klamath Valley came to the floor, I thought Visitor All-dun was going to bolt for sure he tensed-up so much." He looked to the wolf in the business suit. "No, offense Mr. Representative." He looked about again. "He is obviously more than a wild cousin. He thinks something like we do and he has worked hard to learn our language.

"As such, we could declare a new class of citizen, a 'smart cousin,' much like Visitor All-dun suggested in his opening speech. Any wild cousin, who can prove they are smart as us would then be granted citizenship." There was more grumblings but it quieted down before Mara needed to smack her gavel again.

"However, don't take anything I'm saying at the moment as a formal proposal. I'm just trying to lay out the possibilities as I see them. In the end, I don't think Visitor All-dun," again he pointed to the small squirrel, "is an Earth wild cousin squirrel. As I said, I believe his story. And he didn't contradict himself on answers to any questions we asked. I kept track. I'm sure others did too."

He lifted his flat panel and tapped a few icons. Some rules appeared on the large flat panels around the chamber. "Here's what I think we could do." He paused while the others read the passage. "Yes, this is old and predates the rules of our Parliament, dating back to the days prior to the last war, four hundred years ago back before we were a united people. It has never been repealed, and as such, it is still a valid set of rules that can be used. I suggest we consider this and if enough agree, I, or someone else can make it a formal proposal to be voted on." Tamiyoki returned to his seat.

Mara pointed to a beaver. "The Chancellor recognizes Betsy, the Honorable Representative of the Acadian Valley District."

The brown furred beaver made her way to the floor. She seemed a little unusual as her tail, nose and the inner portion of her ears were violet in coloration. She had a small green barrel ring in

her right ear lobe and was wearing square glasses. Despite her unusual coloration, she looked like she took her appointment seriously as she was in a business dress that fit perfectly. She glancing at her flat panel as she arrived on the floor. "This is an interesting suggestion from my colleague of the Low Island Forests District." She scooted down in order to slap her tail against the floor. "However, as our visitor has said, he didn't come here intentionally. He hasn't been appointed by his people. How could we do this?" She returned to her seat.

As she spoke, Aldin was using the blind-reader program through an earpiece to have the rule passage read to him. His tail twitched as he raised his paw.

"The Chancellor recognizes our Visitor from Terra."

"Thank you, Madam Chancellor. I need this rule explained in E-zee-r language. I don't unnerstand all the words. It doesn't sound quite the same as the Common you speak now. As it may determine what iz to become of me, I shood know what it means, right?"

Mara smiled. "Of course." She pointed to Tamiyoki. "Representative Tamiyoki, as it is your suggestion, I make it your responsibility to explain this to our Visitor, and I'm sure there are others watching who would like to understand this," she paused, "potential appointment."

The raccoon returned to the floor. "As you wish, Madam Chancellor." He looked at Aldin. "Four hundred years ago, before the last war, we were not a united people. What we now call Regions were separate governments, much like what your hue-mans seem to have on Terra. Even after that terrible war, it took close to a hundred years for all the Regions to unite. That is why there is that clause about 'Visitors' in there next to citizens being able to address Parliament. Those Region governments would send visiting Representatives to each other to negotiate trade and try to settle disputes and misunderstandings before they could escalate into war. In some ways, it became the basis for this Parliament. This set of rules I've called up explains the appointment of such, what they may and may not do, how they are to be treated by the government they are visiting and so on."

"Spirit," Aldin mumbled. "What you describe, we call such a visiting Representative, in English, an Ambassador." He looked about. "An official appointed by their government to represent that government to another government." He shook his head. "But how can I be one? I haven't been formerly appointed by my Council of Elders to serve that way, just as Representative Bet-zE just said."

Tamiyoki chuckled. "That is why we'd have to be," he paused briefly, "flexible in how we use this rule." He turned back and faced the others in the chamber. "That is, should we, as a group, choose to use this approach as a solution to this situation." He turned back to the Terran squirrel. "Of course, there is no point in discussing it if you were not interested in serving such a role." Tamiyoki again turned back to the assembly. "And based on the description in these rules, Visitor All-dun has already been serving in this role by answering our questions, telling us about

himself and his Terra. Doing his best to reassure us that his people are not a threat to us, but hue-mans and dev-ill-bun-Es could be. He is by default the,” he paused a moment and then tried his best at the English word, “Em-bass-ah-der for Terra.” He turned back to Aldin. “Would you accept such a role if we appoint you to it?”

Aldin looked about as he hesitated a moment, grasping his tail in his forepaws to keep it from whipping about wildly. “I would need time to consider it. It is a huge responsibility you are suggesting. But, no way could I or will I represent all of Terra. Terra is not united like Earth. It would be false for me to do so. If I were to accept, I would only represent my people, the Nahmakanta Free Squirrels. I would also expect this body to reconsider the appointment twice a year. Your appointment as a Representative is not for-evv-r. If you designate me as Ambassador of my people, my appointment shouldn’t be for-evv-r either.”

Tamiyoki nodded. “A wise suggestion. Very well. To discuss this properly we need to make this a formal proposal whether it passes or fails. And to not confuse it with ‘Representative’, I shall use your Terra Ing-lish word for it. Therefore, I, Tamiyoki Representative of the Low Island Forests District formerly propose that we appoint Visitor All-dun Bush-E-tail the younger of Terra as Em-bass-ah-der of the Nah-mah-can-tah Free Squirrels of Terra. Said appointment will be reviewed by Parliament every five months to determine whether he is still worthy to continue in this role or until such time as the Squirrels of Terra formerly contact us and appoint someone else as their Em-bass-ah-der.” The raccoon made his way back to his seat as the chamber erupted in shouts of outrage by some and cheers by others.

Mara slammed the gavel several times to no avail as the two sides tried to make more noise than the other. Aldin looked at her and with her nod, let out a high-pitched whistle that silenced the assembly. Mara slammed her gavel one more time and pointed to the otter from Alisferil Region. “The Chancellor recognizes Tobias, Representative of Alisferil Region.” He started making his way to the floor, paused as he looked at the calico cat, Representative Meoindy again, who was wearing a bright blue satin bow that day and complemented it. Then he noticed others were staring at him and he remembered he was supposed to be on his way to the floor. His harness today was red and black in a block pattern and he had traded out the gold earrings for silver.

“Thank you, Madam Chancellor. I second my colleague’s motion. It is a reasonable compromise to the alternatives.” He looked out to the rest of the chamber as grumblings started from some corners again, “that is, unless the rest of my colleagues would prefer to sit here and hammer out new citizenship rules for ‘smart cousins’ as that is what Visitor All-dun is whether he is from Earth, Terra, or somewhere else. Listening to and more importantly, watching Visitor All-dun’s body language, I know he is no threat to us. I suspect there is still much we can learn from him as he can from us.” The river otter returned to his seat.

“We have a proposal and a second. Discussion?”

Representative after Representative took the floor indicating how they felt on the issue. They broke for the evening and continued into the next day and the day after until all had their say, some speaking multiple times. Some were strongly opposed. Others who started in the opposition camp were swayed to those who agreed with the proposal.

“Barring any further debate,” Mara stated as she looked about and saw no further hands raised, “we shall now vote on Representative Tamiyoki’s proposal to formerly appoint visitor All-dun Bush-E-tail the younger of Terra as Em-bass-ah-der of the Nah-mah-can-tah Free Squirrels of Terra. Said appointment will be reviewed by Parliament every five months to determine he is still worthy to continue in this role or until such time as the Squirrels of Terra formerly contact us and appoint someone else as their Em-bass-ah-der.” She paused. “Due to the nature of this issue, this will be a secret ballot rather than verbal vote.” She tapped an icon on her flat panel. “Please make your selection in the next half ceklick.”

The voting was tallied live on the larger flat panels around the room. In the end, it was approved 83% to 17% with a few abstentions.

Mara turned to Aldin. “You’ve had the past few days to think about this, Visitor Aldin, while it was debated. Will you accept this appointment?”

“Seeing as most approve of it, yes, Madam Chancellor, I formerly accept the appointment of Ambassador for my people until such time that Parliament deems I am no longer worthy, or my people contact Earth and replace me.”

Most of the chamber erupted in cheering and congratulations. After a few ceklicks the cheering subsided.

“Is there any further business to discuss?” Mara looked around to a bunch of negative shaking heads. “Then I, Chancellor Mara, formerly declare this emergency has ended and along with it, so to shall this face-to-face session end. Remember, we still have two weeks left to our service, but hopefully, we will not need to meet again.” She smacked the gavel. This time, the chamber erupted in louder cheers.

Several Representatives came down to the floor to personally congratulate Aldin and wish him luck. A full klick passed before the chamber was mostly empty leaving behind Aldin, Orlan, Aouphril, Dr. Hanter, Representative Tamiyoki and Chancellor Mara as the only ones still in the chamber.

“Representative Tamiyoki, I don’t know if I should thank you or curse you,” Aldin stated. “Back home what you did translates roughly to what some would call, you having ‘voluntold’ me into this position. That is, when someone else volunteers you rather than you volunteer yourself. I just hope at some point I’ll be allowed to step down rather than having to displease Parliament into removing me.”

Tamiyoki chuckled at the term. “You can blame your friend, Aouphril for it. After your scuffle with former Representative Enhray, she spoke to us and reminded us how we’d now be at war with your people if you had come here as an official of theirs. That got me thinking and I did a little research.” He trailed off as he glanced over towards Aouphril and saw she was leaning close to Orlan whispering to him. Tamiyoki raised an eyebrow.

“Yes!” Orlan exclaimed as he slid a bracelet onto his left arm and hugged Aouphril tightly. She slid a similar bracelet onto her left arm. They then turned to the others. “Will you be our witnesses?”

“You need three,” Mara replied.

“There are three of you here.”

“Yes, you are correct,” Mara answered formally tapping an icon on her flat panel to record and document her next words. “I, Mara, Chancellor of Parliament and Representative of the Northeastern Hills Region do hereby recognize and bear witness that Citizens Aouphril and Orlan of the Northeastern Hills Region are now wife and husband.” When she finished, she passed the flat panel to Tamiyoki.

“I, Tamiyoki, Representative of the Low Island Forests District do hereby recognize and bear witness that Citizens Orlan and Aouphril of the Northeastern Hills Region are now husband and wife.” When finished, he offered the flat panel to Dr. Hanter. He waved it off and pointed to Aldin.

They all turned to Aldin. He looked to the others and they encouraged him on. He spoke in English. “I, Aldin Busheytail the younger, Nahmakanta Public Reserve, Maine, United States of America, Terra, Designated Ambassador of the Nahmakanta Free Squirrels of Terra, do hereby recognize and bear witness that Earth Citizens Aouphril and Orlan are now lawful wife and husband.

He switched to (chitter)speak, “Aldin chitchattercree Aouphril chit Orlan scree! (Aldin know mates for life Aouphril and Orlan be!)

And finally in Common, “I, Aldin Busheytail the younger, newly appointed Ambassador of the Nahmakanta Free Squirrels of Terra, do hereby recognize and bear witness that Earth Citizens Aouphril and Orlan of the Northeastern Hills Region are now wife and husband.”

The icon on Mara’s flat panel turned green confirming the documentation. The new couple hugged and kissed.

“Congratulations, Aouphril and Orlan, may you raise many healthy pups, as the expression from Terra sort of translates.”

“Thank you, Aldin! And now, what will you do next?” Aouphril replied while Orlan echoed the sentiment.

“I’ve got a whole world to explore and learn about. But I think I have a few more mundane things I need to do first, like find office space for an,” he switched to English for the next word only, “embassy, as such an office would be called back home, and hire some staff though I have no credits, else, I’d ask you two if you’d like a job, part-time for now until you graduate.”

Mara chuckled. “I took care of that in writing before the final vote. What you spend will be billed to your people, if and when they finally make formal contact. So be reasonable in what you spend if you don’t want to upset your, what did you call them? Council of Elders?”

“Yes, and thank you, Chancellor.”

“Mara.”

“No, that act was as Chancellor. I appreciate it. However, I do not believe in charity. I will find some way to fund the embassy and pay back what I spend up front as I doubt we’ll ever have contact from Terra. I promise.”

“How?”

Aldin scuffed a paw. “I’m sure I’ll come-up with something.”

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Tobias appears courtesy of Kylinn (<https://twitter.com/kylinn>) on twitter/deor on LJ

Betsy appears courtesy of herself (<https://twitter.com/betsythebeaver>)