

Curtis was sitting down on the porch of Maple Leaf cabin, watching the sun set over the lake, sipping a Red Hook IPA, which he had brought with him. It was his final evening. Two loons called out across the lake as dusk settled in. Maybe he'd come back here on his own someday and try to enjoy a week as a 'normal' guest. The Fourniers treated their guests well and the rates were reasonable.

"Chit, chit."

Curtis glanced up and recognized the tawny brown squirrel. "Hello, Mentat," he said in a low voice.

"May I join, you Doctor?"

"Sure, if you don't think the others will see you."

Mustard dropped down on the railing and then jumped to the small side table next to Curtis. He pointed westward with his tail to a large campfire in front of the main lodge.

"If we keep our voices low, they won't hear us over the crackle of that fire. It's also making them night blind, Dr. Devon."

"Curtis, please."

"Only if you call me Mustard. If you search in the kitchen cabinet over the dry sink, you'll find a small ceramic coffee cup about the size of a shot glass. I was serious about sharing that beer," he paused seeing the label on the bottle, "er, even better, ale, if you want to hear my story."

Curtis found the cup, which could hold about an ounce and filled it from his bottle. Mustard updated him on what had transpired after he left with the 2 liter of Moxie.

"The Cuton™ reactor is gone."

"Gone?"

"Yup. It looks like a sphere opened around it as what happened to Aldin. I just hope it didn't go to wherever Aldin wound-up. I found some bunny tech cobbled together beyond where the reactor had been. It might have been responsible for generating the doorways or whatever they were. There was a bunny computer hooked to it. Said computer was fried, but I may be able to salvage the data on the hard drive.

"There have been rumors over the years that devilbunnies didn't originate from here on Earth. Maybe those rumors are true and the buns who were in charge of this lab were trying to build a doorway to their home world to bring over more of their kind. Who knows? Maybe that thing

sent that failing reactor through to their home world.” Mustard smiled a moment at the thought. “It would serve ’em right.

“I’ve ordered the contraption carefully disassembled over Mentat Cloud(chitter)’s protests. Rank has its privileges and I am the senior mentat. It’ll be locked away in a storage room. Maybe someday, we’ll figure it out and if it is safe to do so, maybe we can contact Aldin. Everything else is being disconnected and once complete, the old labs will be sealed off. If it weren’t for our neighbors, I’d order the whole place to be collapsed with explosives just to be sure.”

Curtis nodded but also frowned at the idea of that machine being turned on again if it really did allow one to jump into an alternate universe.

“I can tell you’re not happy with that, Curtis. There is another reason I want to examine it. I’ll admit I don’t have a lot of faith in your species. No offense against you in particular. If things go south with your kind and your species decides try to take the whole planet with them, I’d like an escape hatch available for my people. However, we also take good care of our friends as you’ve learned. If things get that bad get yourself and your family up here and if there something we can do to help, we will. In the worst case scenario, you can’t pick a better place to spend your last day on Earth.”

Curtis didn’t feel too reassured by that, but nodded.

Mustard sipped at the IPA and smiled. “Wow, that’s good ale. Thanks. I haven’t had a good drink in ages. The others frown on ‘poison’ as they refer to drinking alcohol. Now, as I promised you.

“I started life as a devilbunny and was born in the spring of ’97. I was a smart beta and studied to be a techbun and easily aced the classes. Military service is compulsory. Soon after I completed basic training, our commander ordered us to try and disable the Maine Fudds’ Cuton™ detection network. That was in mid-January ’98. The day after we headed out on our mission, the Ice Storm hit. We got nowhere near any of the sensors in that storm. My regiment was wiped-out, mostly from falling ice-covered tree branches. All but me,” he sipped from his cup. “I was half-frozen to death and delusional. I was arguing with the Black Rabbit to take me like he had the rest. It shook its head in the negative and left me. That’s when the Fudds found me...”