

EIGHT

An otter stared into a camera drone. “This is Jerrico, WNN, reporting to you live from outside the Alisferil Region Court House in Forestdale, where the trial of former Alisferil Representative Enhray, accused of attempted murder of Al-den Bush-E-tail, Terran Embassahder of the Nah-mah-cant-ah Free Squirrels...” For those watching the otter on their flat panels, the scene switches from the otter to a replay of the fight on the Parliament floor and then back to the otter. “...will soon start. Here comes the Embassahder now.”

The otter and several other reporters rush towards Aldin. Several security guards block them. The reporters call out questions. Aldin motions them to quiet down.

“I am here for only one purpose, gentlefurs. That’s to see that justice is served, which has not been the case here.”

“Embassahder, you didn’t find five years was long enough?”

“Five years is too long. Parliament charged Mr. On-ray with fighting on the floor of Parliament, which is punishable by up to 2 months in prison. He’s served that. Any additional punishment is an injustice. It is my intention to see Mr. On-ray is set free as he’s already served 2 months. That is all I will say on this matter.”

Aldin proceeded into the court house ignoring follow-up questions shouted at him.

Later that day, Aldin stood in a circle in the center of the court chamber as the ferret serving as Enhray’s counsel paced in front of him.

“Embassahder, is it true that you told my client in his jail cell that it was your intention to pick a fight with whichever Representative charged to the floor in objection of you being there.”

“Yes.”

“So, you planned all along to instigate the fight.”

“Yes.”

“Why?”

“There was a faction of Representatives that believed I was nothing more than a trained wild cousin. At the time it was as much as a third of Parliament. I needed to set that straight immediately.”

The ferret nodded and looked to the jury. “By the Embassahder’s words, it seems the accused is really the victim here.”

“I object,” cried the lemur serving as government counsel.

Judge Perraul looked at the ferret. “Sustained. Counsel will not try to lead the jury in their decision through conjecture.”

The ferret bowed to the judge. “My error.” He turned back to Aldin. “Embassahder, you do realize that by planning to start a fight you could have spent time in prison.”

“Yes, I understood that at the time and still do.”

“Will you repeat to the jury what those rules are, please.”

“Per Parliamentary rules, punishment is up to two months prison time for fighting on the floor of Parliament. Appendix A, Section 2C.”

“And you chose to pick a fight knowing you would be punished?”

“Yes, I expected to be punished. If I had been punished, that prison time would have given me two more months to improve speaking your language, which is so different from my own.”

“So, you planned all along to pick a fight to not only prove you were more than a wild cousin, but because you wanted more time to learn our language?”

“That is correct, Counsel.”

“But they did not choose to charge you.”

“As the record shows, no, they did not.”

“Do you have any idea why you weren’t charged?”

“You would need to question members of that session of Parliament why they did not charge me for fighting. I can no more read minds than you can, Counsel.”

Some in the jury chuckled, but quickly quieted after Judge Perraul glared at them.

“Very well. Maybe we’ll do that before this is over. Why exactly did you fight with my client?”

“He was the first representative to charge down to the floor and object to my presence in the chamber.”

“How did the fight start?”

“He called me a ‘tree rodent,’ causing those squirrels present to bristle at the insult. I think his exact words were along the lines of ‘That’s On-ray to you, tree rodent.’ It was in response to me using just his title as I did not know his name yet. I was trying to remind him of the rules of Parliament and that I had the floor. At that point, I could have tried to diffuse the situation. But I chose not to. As I said before, I needed to prove to the ‘trained wild cousin’ faction that I was not just a wild cousin. So, I pretended to not quite understand what Mr. On-ray said and pretended to assume it was all part of his name, and said it back to him. ‘By all means, take all the time you need Representative On-ray-to-U-Tree-Rodent of Alisferil Region. That is quite the mouthful. I will shorten it or we may be here all day resolving this. Would Representative Tree Rodent be alright?’ At that point he leapt at me. I easily defended myself thanks to my combat training. I believe it got the point across to several in that faction that I am more than a trained wild cousin. Of course, this was all captured on video.”

The ferret nodded and tapped a couple icons on his flat panel. “Yes, that is true. The jury has access to the video footage, though most probably saw it as it happened.” He turned to the judge and jury. “Your honor, I submit to the jury both my client’s and the victim’s medical records. My client received a concussion in the fight. The victim was unharmed.” He turned back to Aldin.

“Embassahder, what was your legal status at the time of the fight?”

“I am sorry, I do not understand your question.”

“When you fought, were you an Earth citizen or visitor?”

“Ah. Thank you. Neither. My legal status was under debate by Parliament. The Chancellor did recognize me as a visitor.”

“But not all present viewed you as such.”

“No.

“Some didn’t believe your story that you’re from another world, correct?”

“Another world, another dimension, or possibly as one theorized, another time. Yes, that is correct.”

“Instead, they believed you were nothing more than a trained wild cousin squirrel.”

“Yes, that is the impression I had. In my head, I labeled them the ‘wild cousin faction.’”

“And I can see why,” the ferret responded, looking at the jury and pointing to Aldin. “Members of the jury, please take a good look at the Embassahder. I’ll leave it up to you to decide whether or not he looks just like a wild cousin squirrel.” He tapped an icon on his flat panel and photos of Earth wild cousin squirrels appeared on flat panels throughout the chamber with measurements next to them. Most looked a lot like Aldin, though many had different colored fur. Most were close to the same size as Aldin.

“Why were you visiting Parliament?”

“Members of Parliament wanted to question me to determine my legal status. It’s not every day that a talking ‘wild cousin’ falls out of the sky crashing at the feet of one of your citizens.” Aldin lazily flicked his tail back and forth in amusement.

Again, there were some chuckles from the jury, which quickly hushed at a glare from the bear judge.

“I remind the witness,” growled Judge Perraul, “to simply answer the questions and don’t add embellishments.”

“My apologies, your Honor,” Aldin responded drooping his tail.

“And my client was one of those who viewed you as a trained wild cousin.”

“You will have to ask your client that, Counsel. I cannot speak for your client. I can only speak for myself. I would assume so as he objected to my being on the floor of Parliament within the Visitor’s Circle,” Aldin looked down and gestured the circle he stood in with his tail. “In fact it’s about the same size as this witness circle.”

The ferret nodded. “Very well. So, he objected to your presence in the chamber, at which point, you fought with my client.”

“Yes.”

“And your legal status had not yet been determined at that point?”

“No it had not been determined yet. I had just arrived in the chamber and had started to address Parliament from within the Visitor’s Circle when Mr. On-ray interrupted.”

“So, technically, you could have been a wild cousin for all my client knew?”

“Yes, if your client believed so. Again, you need to ask him as I can only speak for myself.”

“We’ll ask him when it’s his turn to be questioned.” The ferret nodded and turned to the jury.

“As the victim’s legal status was not yet established, how is it that a charge of attempted murder can be brought against my client?” He tapped another icon bringing up the law in question. “For a charge of attempted murder there must be a victim with legal status. Mr. Bush-E-tail didn’t have legal status yet. At that time, if my client was actually trying to kill the victim as accused, and my client believed him to be just a wild cousin, my client would have had a legal right to hunt the victim.”

“Objection!”

The ferret clicked a couple icons on his flat panel and the local hunting laws for wild cousins appeared on flat panels throughout the chamber. Wild cousin squirrel was highlighted on the list of species that were legal to hunt.

“Objection overruled,” Judge Perraul responded.

“Thank you, your Honor,” the ferret replied. “Of course, that may soon change. Due to diminishing numbers, there is talk of removing wild cousin squirrel from the list. However, it is currently legal to hunt them.” He turned to Aldin again. “Embassahder, where were you one week ago?”

“I was in this chamber.”

“Why?”

“Mr. On-ray was requesting to change his verdict and request this trial. As the victim, I had a right to be present.”

“Did you object to his request?”

“No, I encouraged him to make the request.”

“Why?”

“Because Parliament charged him with fighting on the floor of Parliament, not attempted murder.”

“If it was up to you, would you charge him with attempted murder?”

“Objection!” the lemur yelled.

“Overruled. The victim may answer the question.”

“I temporarily withdraw the question, your Honor. I’m getting ahead of myself.”

“Very well, proceed.”

“Embassahder, our laws are different than those among your people, correct?”

“Yes.”

“One week ago, you explained that to the judge, government counsel and I. Would you please explain that again so the jury may hear it?” He gestured to the jury.

“Among my people, if the victim requests a charge be dropped against a perpetrator, it is dropped.”

“So, if allowed you would request the charge of attempted murder be dropped against my client?”

“That is correct.”

“Why?”

“As far as I am concerned, all we did was fight.”

The ferret nodded again as he turned towards the jury. “Unfortunately, as you know our laws do not allow a serious charge like this to be dropped. But as you’ve heard from the victim, even he does not believe my client is guilty of this charge.”

He turned back to Aldin. “You are the Embassahder of the Terran Nah-mah-can-tah Free Squirrels?”

“Yes.”

“So, by our laws, that makes you a Foreign Representative.”

“Per what Judge Perraul found in his research last week and granting On-Ray’s request for a retrial, yes. What you call a For-en Representative, we call an Ambassador.”

“And by the laws that govern Foreign Representatives as our Judge has found,” the ferret tapped an icon, “when a Foreign Representative is the victim of a crime he or she may request that the perpetrator be extradited to the Representative’s home country for trial. Why haven’t you done this?”

“I do not know where home is in relation to Earth, Counsel. Otherwise, I would do it. Judge Perraul was kind enough to allow this retrial because I cannot contact my home.”

The ferret nodded. “If there was some way to send my client to your people what would happen?”

“He would be brought before the Council of Elders. That is our version of your Parliament. The charges would be read. The per-pah-trait-or would be questioned and so would the victim and any witnesses. Judgement is made and punishment is handed out. That is, unless the victim requests one or more of the charges to be dropped for whatever reason the victim choses. At that request, said charge is dropped.”

“So, if you could bring him before your Council of Elders, you would request that the charge of attempted murder would be dropped?”

“Correct.”

“What of the fighting charge?”

“I would not ask for that to be dropped as we both fought. I would estimate we would each be assigned 100 hours, I mean clicks of community service on top of our normal duties. They would also probably remove me from the Ambassadorship and assign someone else.”

“Do any of your punishments involve imprisonment?”

“No. Our numbers are small, we are at war. We cannot spare anyone to watch someone in a prison cell.”

The ferret stared at Aldin. “What about more serious crimes? Like attempted murder?”

“Permanent banishment from the colony. For some that would be a death sentence. For others, they might still find some place among our human Fudd allies, but they would never be welcomed at Nahmakanta again.”

“Which wouldn’t really work in the case of my client.”

“No. As On-ray is not a Nahmakanta squirrel, that punishment would not work. I do not know what the Council of Elders would come up with in its place. It is of no matter in this case as I would request the charge to be dropped as I previously stated.

The ferret nodded. “No further questions, your Honor.”

“Government counsel may cross examine.”

The lemur now paced in front of Aldin. “At the time the accused leapt at you, he called you something other than ‘tree rodent’. What was it he called you, Embassahder?”

“He called me a ‘talking meal’.”

“At which point he leapt at you.”

“Yes.”

“And tried to kill you.”

“I do not know.”

“What do you mean by that answer?”

“Was he trying to kill me?” Aldin shrugged and flicked his tail. “Maybe or maybe not. You’ll have to ask the accused that. As I pointed out to his counsel, I can no more read minds than him or you. Whether or not he was trying to kill me, he failed, obviously. The records show I was unharmed in the fight.”

The lemur sighed at a loss on how to proceed with a victim that was cooperating with the accused. She sighed. “No further questions, your Honor.”