

EIGHTEEN

“Hello Aldin,” Jessophat stated as he answered Aldin’s call.

Aldin wigwagged his tail in greeting. “Hello Jessophat. I’m calling to give a report on Parliament. They’ve tied-up a very important loose end in regard to cousin squirrels.” (drooptail) “That is, after yet another debate about me.”

“Good. I’ll set this to record so Teacher and Tassel may review it when they have time. Go ahead...”

The opossum serving as Chancellor hammered the group to order. He turned to Aldin. “We are aware you would like to get back to your mate and pups, Ambassador. We hope to wrap-up what you need to be present for in today’s session.”

Aldin nodded in thanks.

The Chancellor turned to the rest of the chamber. “When the Ambassador first arrived among us during the 805th Parliament, one of the things that Parliament established was a committee to look into the Ambassador’s claims of his origin. That committee has spent nearly two years in its investigation, which expanded after the two cousin squirrels who visited last session,” he glanced back briefly at Aldin, “and the resulting extra discussion about you.” The doors to the chamber opened. A beaver entered and began to make its way to the visitor’s circle. “The chair of that committee, Leona, is here to present their findings to date.”

Leona stepped into the visitors circle. “Thank you, Chancellor.” She turned to Aldin. “You, Ambassador, have been a puzzle for lack of a better way to put it, despite how much you have cooperated with us, that’s the general term of ‘us’ and not necessarily our committee. Whether or not you were aware of our work, as I said, you have been a puzzle for us.” She tapped her flatpanel. The room partially darkened as a large hologram appeared above her showing two DNA double-helices side by side with small differences highlighted. “You believe you are from another world. Yet, genetically, you are more than 99% Earth cousin squirrel. The only real difference is you have vocal cords like us, unlike other cousin squirrels. What are the chances that an alien from another world would have nearly the same exact genetic code as a species on our planet? And, be reproductively compatible with our cousin squirrels as you and your mate have recently proven. Congratulations, by the way, Ambassador.” She turned back towards Parliament walking in a slow circle so that she could face all of them over time. “And his ‘chitterspeak’ is the same or nearly the same as that of our cousin squirrels. How is that possible?”

She paused again before continuing. “Yet, he doesn’t have immunity to what we view as a common cold. One nearly killed him his first winter here. As he noted to the reporters outside this morning, he only survived thanks to a blood transfusion. How could that possibly be possible if he was an alien? Medically, only certain blood types are compatible with each other.

Due to these circumstances, the committee can't accept the alien from another world theory for the reasons I've just outlined. The idea he's an alien with a compatible genetic code is just too slim. The odds of everyone in this chamber being struck by lightning, each separately within the coming week while sheltering indoors are much better than the odds that an alien from some other random planet would show-up, look just like one of our cousin animals, and can reproduce with them."

"Which means he can't be from a different world. Instead, he must be from this world. However, we know he isn't one of our cousin squirrels. No others have vocal cords, except, former Representative Butternut Gowandle. So, a theory we investigated was that perhaps like former Representative Butternut Gowandle, the Ambassador was born a citizen squirrel, suffered a similar accident, and lived among cousin squirrels for several years and made-up the story he's from another world when he decided to return. He would have had plenty of time in the forest wilderness to make-up 'Inglish' as a different language to enhance the story and make it more believable." The beaver paused a moment. "A search of citizen records turned-up nothing. No other citizen who suffered an accident like former Representative Gowandle's. Nor did we find any who disappeared without being found, live or dead. And that theory doesn't explain his appearance here where the citizen squirrel Aouphril was nearly crushed by a large rock when Aldin landed on the ground before her."

Leona shook her head. "The committee can only conclude that maybe the Ambassador is from another time period, or perhaps a parallel universe as theorized by some in the 805th Parliament." She sighed. "I know many hoped we could determine something more precise, but that's where that stands."

"I need to discuss the committee's other research before delving further into those two theories. Last Parliament session, smart cousin squirrel Pinecone told her people's origin story, which was confirmed and expanded on by the Elder, who chose the name Teacher after he spoke to Parliament. We think we might have a time frame for the great fire described in their origin tale." There were hushed gasps in the chamber as Leona tapped a symbol on her flatpanel showing images of archeological excavations with the location listed at the bottom. Several of these were shown from different parts of the world. "Perhaps it's coincidence that a research paper was in the works of being published when our two special visitors came here last summer. It is the result of more than five years of field research by professors at nearly a dozen universities across the planet. Apparently, our planet suffered some sort of cataclysm a mere 100,000 years or so ago resulting in a fire that burned most of if not all the landmasses of that time. Excavations around the world point to a burnt layer carbon dated to that time period." The images on screen now show a very thin black layer in the various excavation zones.

Leona looked about the chamber. "Our history from prior to a few thousand years ago is lost. We've wondered where our missing link is and how we evolved to develop the society we have. The cousin squirrels' origin tale fits in well with this discovery. What if what they speak of is actually true? 100,000 years isn't a lot of time for a planet to recover from the sort of cataclysm that has been discovered to have occurred, at least not without help. Perhaps, they are our "missing link" and it's thanks to them replanting the forests after that cataclysm that our world exists as it does today."

Many of the representatives began to murmur among themselves. The opossum Chancellor only had to tap his gavel lightly once to get them to quiet down.

She glanced at the Chancellor and nodded in thanks. "I know, I'm just theorizing now on behalf of the committee. However, their tale explains so much. It also saddens me. They intentionally made themselves ignorant thinking it was the only way to protect our planet. I could see why they needed to do so at first. The resulting young forest would need a lot of attention and nurturing to thrive. But that task is over. I'm glad to see some are trying to leave ignorance behind." She turned to Aldin. "Embassador of 'The Refuge', please be sure those you represent understand our gratitude for what their ancestors did for all of us."

She turned back to Parliament again. "Back in the 805th Parliament the representative of Piccayune District, an astronomer, had theorized the Embassador was from our past based on the pattern of the stars in his world's sky compared to ours." She tapped an icon on her flatpanel and a hologram of the night sky appeared on the ceiling of the chamber, showing their night sky and a rendition of the same sky from 100,000 years ago. "That's not all that was different. Our scientists know there was more polar ice back then at both poles. Here is what they believe our land masses looked like back then." She called-up an image that looked similar to Terra, but with some differences such as a strait between North and South America. The Florida Peninsula was narrower. The Mediterranean Sea was landlocked.

She glanced at the Embassador as he stared at the image. "Does this look familiar to you, Embassador."

Aldin drooped his tail. "It looks very similar to Terra. There are still some differences, but it's close, much as I confirmed about the alignment of the stars when that was last shown in this chamber."

"Again, it's a best guess, it may not be perfect. I know you don't want to believe you're from our past as it means everyone you knew is dead. However, it's as good a theory as we have right now. You could be from before the cataclysm, which would also fit in with what Elder Teacher explained to the last Parliament on how cousin squirrels once could speak 'Biggen' but lost the ability through selective breeding." Leona paused. "Or perhaps you're from a parallel Earth."

"Ms. Leona, as I said in the 805th, I believe the time travel theory is false. I am willing to accept the parallel universe theory over it."

"Why? Both are valid theories."

"Humans, Terra's 'biggens' as smart cousin squirrels would call them, have split-atom bombs." He paused. "I don't know a better word in Common."

Leona stared at him. "Humans have nuclear bombs?!" She shuddered as did others in the chamber.

“If that is the word for splitting atoms, yes. They had many, many nuclear bombs. If this is 100,000 years later on the same world, there wouldn’t be anything alive here. This planet wouldn’t have just burned across the surface. It would be a radioactive waste land as a result of that cataclysm, which would have been brought about by them dropping nuclear bombs on each other. Humans first split atoms 75 years ago and drop two bombs on one human country to end a world-wide war.” There were gasps throughout the chamber. “Though they have not used it since, they have enough of that kind of weapon to destroy the planet many times over.” Many in the chamber shuddered at the implication of what Aldin was saying. “Why? I have no idea why they feel they need so many such terrible weapons. As I warned the 805th Parliament, they seem to live to make war on one another.” Aldin drooped his tail. “As such, I can’t accept the time travel theory as I can’t picture any other way the planet could burn like that other than through nuclear destruction.”

“I still needed to present both theories, Ambassador. Thank you for understanding.” Leona turned back to the Chancellor. “Based on this information on humans provided by the Ambassador,” Leona shuddered again, “then perhaps the parallel Earth theory has more merit. That’s all I have to report. Any questions?”

A wolf raised his paw and was recognized. “Madame chair, do the geologists who discovered the burn layer have a theory as to what caused it?”

“Not yet.” She looked about. “Any other questions?”

No more paws were raised. She thanked Parliament for their time and departed the chamber.