

NINETEEN

“After the presentation, Parliament took-up the unfinished business around cousin squirrels...”

“The Representative of the High Dessert District is recognized.”

The strange hodgepodge of fox, raccoon, and lemur bounded down to the Parliament floor.

“Fellow representatives. I think it’s time we take-up the ‘loose ends’ as the Ambassador has called it in regard to cousin squirrels. That way, he may return to his mate and pups. Anything after that we have questions on for him, can be conducted by video as past Parliaments have done. Technically, he should be on family leave right now.”

There was general agreement. She turned to Aldin. “Ambassador, what is the ‘loose ends’ in regard to cousin squirrels you referred to in your opening remarks several days ago? What did our predecessors in the previous Parliament miss?”

“Thank you, Representative Josine,” Aldin replied. He tapped an icon on his flatpanel and the laws and rules the previous Parliament created in regard to cousin squirrels appeared on flatpanels across the chamber. “Members of Parliament, please take a moment to scroll through these laws and rules put forth by the previous Parliament.” He watched as Josine and the others did so and patiently waited. When she stopped scrolling and then looked at him again, he asked, “Do you see anything amiss?”

Most in the chamber remained silent and scrolled some more. Josine scrolled through again quickly and her eyes widened. “Cousin squirrels grow quicker than citizens as you reminded us at the beginning of this session. Yet, there is no mention of an age of majority in these laws and rules.”

“Exactly. As is, cousin squirrels would be treated exactly like citizens. They wouldn’t be viewed as having reached the age of majority until they are sixteen. Which would mean I’ve coupled with a child of five years of age. Of course, it would also make me a child as I’m nine, along with the eldest of the cousin squirrels among us, Teacher, who is eleven. As Representative Josine has pointed out, we mature and age faster than citizens. If left as is, it also means that no cousin squirrel would ever be able to petition for citizenship. Technically, I shouldn’t have been able to take the oath of citizenship if these rules had been in place at that time.”

“So, what age do you propose we recognize for cousin squirrel age of majority?” Josine asked.

Aldin shrugged. “I won’t simply propose that for your cousin squirrels. I’ll leave that up for you to debate once I present a few things. My and Pinecone’s current litter of pups will be mostly on their own by fall. They will be able to choose mates and reproduce by mid-winter. At what age does a citizen youth’s reproduction systems reach maturity?”

“Between eleven and twelve years.”

Aldin nodded. “Much like cousin squirrels reach the same maturity at eleven...sorry, I’m thinking Terran calendar again. You’d think after being here for two years, I’d finally get the difference. Cousin squirrels reach reproductive maturity between nine-and-half months and ten months/one year. So, a citizen reaches reproduction maturity at age eleven to twelve. Yet, the age of majority for citizens is sixteen and not twelve. Why?”

“It takes longer for the mind to mature.”

Aldin nodded. “That hasn’t been such an issue in the past for cousin squirrels as it has been more important to create the next generation so to speak. I’ve tried my best to have a paws-off approach with how ‘The Refuge’ has evolved. I’m trying to do the same here. Assuming cousin squirrels mature at the same pace, then age of majority would be just under one-and-a half years of age. I would recommend you reach out to some cousin squirrel experts including Dr. Raoul Kaynobble and others to confirm.”

Josine nodded. “So, what is the age of majority among your people on Terra?”

“On Terra, our age of majority is two years. While we can reproduce at one, we’re encouraged to wait a year. We have a lot of education to cover in such a short period, including fighting skills as we have been at war with devilbunnies since before I was born...”

“They did contact Dr. Kaynobble and a few others to confirm what I said about cousin squirrels. After much discussion, Parliament has decided that cousin squirrels will be viewed as adults at two years of age for purposes such as conducting business with citizen creatures, should one seek to become a citizen, marriage if they choose to join with a citizen, and the age at which a citizen cousin would be eligible for the Lottery.” Aldin finished. “They don’t need me to be present for the rest of their session. I have a few things to wrap-up, but I should be able to head home tomorrow or the day after. If the Council decides I should stay longer, please get back to me as soon as you can. I’ll call again just prior to leaving the Capital District.”

Jessophat nodded. “Thank you. I will pass it onto the others.”