

EIGHT

The hovercraft settled in its “usual” spot in the snow.

“Come, we here,” Aldin said as he scampered over to the door. He looked back at the other two, who still kept a bit of distance from him. He turned to the door. “Open,” he commanded in Common and it slid open. He looked about, sniffing the air. Feeling it was safe, he leapt out and down into the snow. He took a couple of leaps and then looked back at the two wild squirrels who stayed inside.

“You no come?”

The elder female pointed to pawprints in the snow with her tail. “Biggens here.”

Aldin slipped into a combination of their simple chitterspeak and his expanded Terran chitterspeak hoping they’d understand enough of what he said. “Biggens here yesterday. No here today. Biggens my friends. We come yesterday. That’s when I met female. We no expect female here. We thought no one claim this territory.”

“Why you come?”

“Biggens know many things. Biggens forget many other things. I teach biggens how squirrels gather food and store food for winter. We come here fall harvest. I bury food. We come back yesterday so I can find food. But food all gone. Female moved it.”

The male leapt down and over to the prints and sniffed. “Small biggen speak true. Prints old.”

“I call female. I think she watch.” Aldin scampered over to the nearest tree and called out, “I, small biggen, return.” He paused, listened, and called again. Then he heard scrabbling from above.

The female paused on a branch about 5 mits up. “Why? You no chase. You no make pups. Leave!” She chattered a warning. “Or I bite!”

Aldin drooped his tale. “Yes, I no make pups. Biggen elders no allow. I leave soon. But...” he pointed towards the other male with his tale. “Maybe you and him...” he trailed off.

The two wild squirrels stared at each other. The female crept partway down the trunk to get a better look. “He no small biggen?”

“No small biggen. Squirrel like you. I trap him. Bring to you.”

“And other?” She pointed to the elder squirrel in the hovercraft.

“His granddame.” She looked at him funny. “Sire dame. Elder,” he added.

“I no choose?”

“I take back to their territory. Trap other male. Try again.”

“Why?”

“You want pups. I no make pups.”

“No. Why bring elder?”

“I trap male. She try to save her grandpup,” he paused, “pup of pup. So I trap her. I fear she hurt self if I no trap. I tell what I do. I let go. They choose come meet you.”

“Small biggen strange.”

“Yes,” the elder replied. “He strange. I no invade territory. I sit here, watch small biggen. No trust small biggen.” She twitched her tail.

“Elder wise,” the female replied.

Meanwhile, the male had crept over to the tree and had made part of the way up to her. He chittered quietly. She chittered back in invitation and they climbed back up to the same branch she had been on before. They began to sniff each other.

Aldin quietly scampered back towards the hovercraft and pulled the flatpanel off his back and tapped a few icons.

“What small biggen do? I no trust.”

“Elder, as I explained before, while biggens know many things, they forget others. They know little how squirrels live.” As he spoke a box in the hovercraft opened and a small spherical hoverdrone rose out of it. The elder squirrel skittered back and quietly chattered wigwagging her tail in warning.

“No fear. Look.” He jumped up into the hovercraft and held his flatpanel around so she could see the image. She stared at herself staring at the flatpanel. He pointed to the drone behind him with his tail. “Biggen thing like eye. Let biggens far away see. Biggens learn. Biggens no disturb.”

“Predator night bird quiet,” she said.

“Yes, but no hunt. Just watch.”

The hoverdrone floated out of the hovercraft and rose up to the same level as the other two squirrels who were grooming each other.

“I think you may soon be a great granddame...” Aldin trailed off a moment. “Soon your grandpup sire pups.” As he finished the sentence, the female started to climb further up the tree, wigwagged her tail at the male and he followed. The chase sped up quickly. The drone followed. The elder watched the flatpanel totally mesmerized as Aldin held it out for her to watch.

After about 15 ceklicks, she finally looked away from the panel. “Grandson sire pups.” She chattered quietly and smiled at Aldin.