

## EPILOGUE

Giguere powered down the hovercraft. It settled in the snow. He stepped out into the forest. "I seek Elder!" he called out in chitterspeak. He paused and waited a moment and then heard the distant reply, "I know Biggen squirrel voice. Biggen come." He gauged where the reply came from and walked through the snow towards the direction of the voice and then climbed the tree carefully. He arrived at the same nesting hollow he had pulled the old Elder out of the previous summer. He sat on a nearby branch large enough to hold his weight. The present Elder poked her head out of the opening and looked at him.

"Is you, Biggen squirrel who take Great Grandsire to Biggen healer. Speak. Why you come?"

"Elder, I bring word from your Great Grandsire."

She came out and up onto the branch near the Biggen squirrel. "Speak."

Giguere slowly pulled a small flatpanel off his side where it had stuck to his fur and showed it to the cousin squirrel. "This Biggen tool. Name viewer. Biggens use tool speak over far distance. With this, Great Grandsire speak to you."

He gently tapped it with a clawed fingertip and it lit-up. The cousin squirrel jumped back a bit and wigwagged her tail nervously. An image of her great grandsire appeared on the viewer. It smiled at her while wigwagging his tail in greeting.

"Great Grandpup! This special Biggen tool let us speak far, far away." His tail drooped. "I very far, far away. Biggen help me with this part." His image shrank down and moved to the upper right corner. A rotating image of Earth filled most of the screen. "This show whole world." A purple dot appeared. "This where you are." The world continued to rotate. About a quarter rotation later, a blue dot appeared. "This forest I in now. Sunrise here, sun six paws up sky where you are."

His great grandpup chittered nervously, wigwagging her tail. "Is very far, far away. You teach me in Elder ways, Great Grandsire how world round like butternut. I no know how big world is."

The image disappeared and the old Elder's image took-up the whole viewer again. He flicked his tail up and down once in the affirmative. "I no know how big world is when I teach you Elder ways. World very, very big. Is why I ask Biggen squirrel for help speak to you. I visit all forests of world with small Biggen Elder, Friend, and Pinecone who Biggen Elders make Elder Voice. I wish speak story one time all Elders. As Biggens say, I sign off now. Come back after you call other Elders." The flatpanel went dark.

The cousin squirrel stared up Giguere. "How this viewer tool work, Biggen?"

Giguere drooped his tail. "I can no explain in chitterspeak, Elder. Biggens know many things. Have many tools. This one tool."

She accepted the answer and called the other Elders together. As they arrived, they kept a bit of distance upon seeing the Biggen squirrel. She went to them and explained about the Biggen. They hesitantly approached. He held still as they sniffed him.

“Are backpacks useful?”

They hesitantly agreed raising their tails and flicking them down once.

“Good. Old Elder send me. Asked this Elder,” he pointed to the squirrel in question with his tail, “his great grandpup, to call you here.”

“Why, Biggen? Why you here?”

“To allow old Elder speak to you.”

They looked about and sniffed the air. “We no see, hear, smell old Elder. Where old Elder?” “He far, far away,” Giguere replied patiently. “This Biggen tool we use speak to each other when far, far away.” He let them sniff it.

“Wait, you see old Elder soon,” his great grandpup said.

This time, Giguere hung the small flat panel onto the trunk of the tree. He then placed the call again and the old Elder answered much to the others’ amazement.

“Elders, I have much to speak. I far, far away,” again he showed the image of Earth to show where he was compared to them and the time difference.

The others chattered nervously as they glanced at each other.

“Is special Biggen tool let me speak to you with no travel. One danger of trust Biggens. Some their tools very useful. Tempt you use other tools. Soon, you Biggen too. I become like small Biggen.” He drooped his tail. “I travel all over world with small Biggen Elder Friend, and Pinecone, squirrel made Biggen Elder Voice. Speak new Biggen Elder rules to squirrels in all forests. Take from time I see you at begin harvest time through,” he held up seven claws, “days ago. We come to this forest, Pinecone home territory, last. I chose claim territory in this forest. I no return to your forest. Friend and Pinecone now mates. Pinecone growing pups. Pinecone dame this forest Elder.”

He explained all that had happened since he left on his journey at the beginning of autumn. Giguere retrieved food from the hovercraft to share with the Elders as they listened to the old elder speak for over two clicks on all that had occurred.

“...Big predator bird hunt/kill most squirrels here. Small Biggen Friend, trap/kill bird, save squirrels. Squirrels here no have food enough for winter as bird hunt/kill them as try gather food all harvest time into winter. Biggen squirrel with territory in forest share food and nest with us. No squirrel starve. No squirrel freeze die.”

“Must no trust Biggens!” one of the Elders exclaimed.

The old Elder nodded. “Choose like when I break tooth. Trust Biggens, live. No trust Biggens, starve/freeze die. Trust Biggens no become pup forever. Trust Biggens we become like small Biggens. Better live than die. This Biggen squirrel more like big squirrel. Pinecone call him, Kind. Name fits. Count Friend, Pinecone, and me, two tens and seven,” he held up all ten claws twice and then seven more, “squirrels are all there is here and Kind, mate and pup. Most squirrels pups, mate of pups, grandpups, mate of grandpups of Elder and Pinecone.” He paused a moment. “This forest needs more squirrels,” he continued in a pleading voice, wigwagging his tail. “Is why I choose take territory here. You know squirrels who need mates and can no find mates, send them to Biggens. Biggens bring them here. They get mates. Biggen Elders send other Biggen squirrels to other forests ask same. Must warn them. They become small Biggens. If one or two squirrels come from each forest will save this forest. Good trade. Become small Biggen, but we save this forest.”

“Great Grandsire, I will ask.”

The former Elder bowed his head in thanks. “Our Elder rule we wait make pups late winter. She no want pups come to dames while we live with Biggen squirrel, Kind.”

“You say Pinecone growing pups?” One of the Elders ask. “She disobey Dame Elder?”

“Pinecone and Friend make pups before Elder make rule. Pinecone surprised pups grow in her. She said she and Friend no chase before try make pups. She no know how pups grow in her if they no chase first.” He gigglechattered. “I guess and her Dame agree, she and Friend be close for tens and tens of days before they choose be mates. Friend follow her to her nest from Biggen squirrel nest. Was far enough to be like chase. When they try make pups, she ready grow pups like after long chase.”

The others nodded. “You still wise Elder. Your new forest’s Elder wise, order no pups while live with Biggens.”

“She no learn Elder things from old Elder. Predator bird hunt/kill old Elder. She see six,” he held up six claws, “winters. She oldest those left, makes her Elder. Young, still wise Elder. I no take her place. She still Elder. I teach her, Friend, and Pinecone Elder things. Biggens have names for all things. I take Biggen name, Teacher. Pinecone Dame Elder take name Tassel.”

He paused for a moment. “Is Biggen squirrel with you?”

“No, Elder named Teacher. Biggen squirrel go back to Biggen flyer, get more food. Is good food.”

“Good, Need speak things no for Biggen hear. In all forests we go to speak new Biggen Elder rules, no Elder see more than,” he held-up nine claws, “winters.”

The others looked at each other and chattered quietly at what the old Elder said sank in.

“Pinecone and Friend see this too.” The old Elder caused the image to turn and show both Friend and Pinecone darting over to be on image.

Both wigwagged their tails in greetings. “Elders of other forest, where this Elder, now called Teacher as he teaches Elder things to others, once claimed territory. We speak what Teacher speak is true. No other Elders in other forests see ten and one,” they held up all ten claws and one more, “winters.” Elder bowed to both of them in thanks as they scampered away out of view of the camera.

The others looked at each other again and chattered in a concerning tone. One of them spoke, “According to Elder rules...”

Teacher stopped him. “I know Elder rules.” He drooped his tail. “I teach all of you Elder things. Makes me Elder of Elders if I choose.”

“You no choose lead all squirrels?”

“I squirrel no more.” Teacher drooped his tail. As I speak before, we all this forest become like small Biggens. I now hear Biggenspeak. If choose, I learn use tool to speak Biggenspeak to Biggens, like Pinecone. I no decide yet. Others start hear Biggenspeak. Is no right I claim Elder of Elders.”

“Great Grandsire, you become small Biggen no matter. You visit, I still welcome. I no chase off as I no chase off Biggen squirrel who bring this tool so you speak to us. You can no choose. You are Elder of Elders.”

The former Elder bowed his head again in thanks before continuing. “Is no time for Elder of Elders to lead all squirrels. I claim place if need. No need right now.”

“Elder of Elders Teacher wise Elder. Biggen squirrel approaches.”

“We speak more on this different time,” Teacher stated.

Giguere returned with a backpack full of seed, which he shared.

Teacher continued. “I near done speak. I know sunset soon your forest. I make big ask. I ask as former Elder your forest. I no ask as Elder.” He left ‘of Elders’ unspoken. “Let Biggen squirrel leave Biggen viewer in nest hollow. Let Biggen squirrel place flat tools on top tree. Flat tools change sunlight to energy run viewer. Can no explain better. Is big ask. You can then use viewer tool speak to me. I to you. You can speak to Biggens with tool. Remember, Biggens promise help squirrels. If Biggens come try hunt squirrels, can speak Biggen Elders speak of Biggens who disobey Biggen Elder rules. Biggens come catch those disobey Biggen Elders. If squirrel break tooth like me, can call Biggen healer come help. Is useful tool.” He suddenly warning

chattered briefly. “Is dangerous tool if use wrong. You learn many Biggen things if use wrong.” His tail drooped. “Then you become small Biggen like me.”

The Elders discussed this quietly while his great grandpup chose to stay out of the discussion. The four raised their tails in unison. One spoke for the others. “Old Elder who take name Teacher, if great grandpup agree take risk, we allow.”

“I will take risk,” she responded.

The Elder bowed his head again in thanks. “As Biggens say, I sign off now. Take care.”

Giguere turned to the others. “I return tomorrow place flat tools in tree. No time, sun set soon.” He climbed down, got in the Biggen flyer and left.

The others turned to Teacher’s Great Grandpup. “Head Elder of Elders’ warning of Biggen viewer tool.”

She bowed her head in thanks and understanding. They then departed back to their own territories.