

Two hovercrafts quickly raced into the forest. Two others soon joined them coming from different directions. All four settled on the forest floor and the doors opened. Cousin squirrels bounded out of three of the craft. Behind them, a biggen squirrel stood in each doorway. A biggen female marten stepped out of the fourth. A metal badge on her chestfur twinkled in the sunlight. She turned to the cousin gray squirrel who followed her out. She then looked about at the other squirrels who kept their distance from her as they nervously wigwagged their tails briefly.

One of the cousin squirrels looked at the others. Those others each flicked their tails up and down once. The first squirrel nodded, took a deep breath and chattered out the Elder Council summons call. The others took it up. They then all fell silent. Soon, there were squirrels in the trees all around them.

Among them, one with a bitten ear glared down at the intruders. “Be gone!”

Aldin turned to the marten. “Do what you need to do, Constable Jeanna.” He paused. “Excuse me. That’s Ambassador Jeanna.”

The marten bowed to the squirrel. “I’ll do the best I can as he needs to stand trial, Ambassador Aldin.”

The marten quickly climbed the nearest tree and vanished from sight. The squirrels within the trees scattered as the marten climbed, including the one with the bit ear, all calling out about the predator. The cousin squirrels on the ground near the hovercrafts nervously flicked their tails but fought down the urge to flee/climb themselves. They gathered in a group and waited. Soon, they heard the cry of a panicked squirrel having been caught. It was scream-chattering in fear at the top of its lungs. The marten returned climbing back down a tree with the cousin squirrel with a bit ear firmly in its mouth. The marten pulled a cage out of the hovercraft she had ridden in. She opened the door, spat out her prey into the cage, and latched the door shut. The cousin squirrel within threw itself at the bars.

“Let me out, Biggen!” it chatterspat. It quickly fell silent as it saw all the other cousin squirrels gather around his cage as the biggen marten returned to Aldin’s side. Again, the gathered cousin squirrels called out the summons call. Slowly, the other cousin squirrels returned, many nervously wigwagging their tails.

One of those who arrived in the hovercrafts scampered forward and glared at the squirrel in the cage. “I, head Elder of forest to sunrise of Biggen colony call a Grand Council!” she shouted loud enough for those in the trees to hear.

Another cousin squirrel scampered forward. “I, head Elder of forest in direction of long shadows from Biggen Colony concur. A Grand Council must be called!”

A third cousin squirrel scampered forward. “I, head Elder of forest opposite long shadows from Biggen Colony concur. We must hold a Grand Council!”

Teacher scampered forward, whom the former Elder in the cage now recognized. “You!” he spat at Teacher.

Teacher ignored him. “As requested by the Elder Councils of three” he held up three claws, “forests, I, Eldest Elder, declare this Grand Council is in session!”

Through all of this, Aldin quietly translated the proceedings for Jeanna, the marten constable.

Teacher turned to the others and those in the trees. “You now know there are Elders here from three,” again he held up three claws, “forests. I am known as the Eldest Elder. Having travelled the whole world giving news of changes to rules Biggen Elders make about us, I had met no squirrel who see twelve” he held up all ten claws and two more “winters as I will this winter. These other Elders asked me to preside over this Grand Council. Due to the nature of the issue, I sent my Elder Voice to Biggen Elders,” he pointed to Aldin with his tail, “to ask for their help. They provide the Biggen flyers here with Biggen Squirrels to control them to enable these Elders to arrive here quickly for this Grand Council. The Biggens also appointed an Elder Voice to us, this marten, to assist us as needed. She serve as Biggen Elder Rules Enforcer to other Biggens.” Teacher turned to the three Elders. “What is the reason you have requested this Grand Council?”

“The Elder of this forest break many Elder rules,” the first Elder responded. “He must be punished.”

“Speak your accusations. Bring your witnesses,” Teacher responded.

Over the next two handspands of time, over a dozen female cousin squirrels among those who had ridden there in the hovercrafts stood forth and testified that the Elder had forced them to couple with him. They had then fled to the other forests to seek refuge. The biggen squirrel hovercraft pilots bristled their fur and lashed their tails about as they listened to the testimony. Jeanna barely kept in her rage as Aldin provided their rapes in detail to her word-for-word as the victims testified. He would pause from the translation at times to reassure her that he was as outraged as she was.

“I am glad I didn’t know the extent of his crimes or I would have only brought you his body,” she quietly confided to Aldin. “Even if it meant the end of my career as a constable.”

One squirrel tearfully spoke how her mate tried to protect her, but the Elder killed him and then threatened to kill her pups if she tried to resist him coupling with her. It was her mate who had bitten off the Elder’s ear tip.

Teacher’s eyes narrowed as he glared at the former Elder in the cage. “Do you deny what they speak?”

The former Elder chatterspat back at Teacher. “This my forest! My rules! All females are mine! I no recognize your Grand Council! Release me!” He thumped his tail against the wire wall of the cage.

Teacher glared at the former Elder. “We are squirrels! We are no deer! We no fight off all other males to claim all females as our own!” Teacher chatterspat at the caged squirrel. “Even dumb deer know to no couple with their own pup!” He pointed to the Elder’s daughter with his tail, one of those who had testified against him. He looked up in the trees. “If any of you wish to testify against your Elder, now is the time to speak. I promise you are safe to speak.”

Several stepped forward with similar tales of rape and murder. The former Elder railed in his cage until Jeanna threatened to injure him.

After the last victim testified, a male stepped forward from among those who arrived in the hovercraft.

“My territory is close to Biggen learn place. Territory of pup of Elder’s pup is between my territory and Biggen learn place.” He held-up four claws. “days ago, I see Elder attack pup of pup.” He drooped his tail. “I coward. I no go to help. I hide in my tree hollow in fear. When Elder leave, I see pup of pup’s bloody body on forest floor. I flee to forest to sunrise of Biggen colony and report what I see to Elders there.” He glared at the Elder in the cage.

The Elder of that forest stepped forward. “We have taken in many who flee this forest from this Elder and hear their tales. Until now we no know we could do anything to help. What this squirrel speak was last we could take. When an Elder kills his own pup of pup, we had to call Grand Council. We turned to Eldest Elder for help with call. Thanks to Biggen viewers we could ask for that help.”

Teacher stepped forward. “Except that pup of pup no die.” All stared at him. He continued, “Biggens and Elder Voice Friend’s pup found him barely alive and took him to Biggen healer.” He glared at the squirrel in the cage. “Your latest victim lives. He speak his story to me through Biggen viewer. That special Biggen tool remembers and will repeat his story now” Teacher turned towards Aldin. “Elder Voice show the others using your Biggen viewer what squirrel who takes name, Brave, speak.”

Aldin called up the recording of Brave’s testimony. He provided a running translation for Jeanna, who became more and more visibly agitated. All the cousin squirrels on the ground nervously watched the Biggen marten.

As Aldin tucked his flatpanel back on his back, Teacher turned to him again. “I see Biggen Elder Voice is mad as us at what this Elder do. Ask her how Biggens punish for this.” Aldin translated this for the constable.

“Our parliament appointed me ambassador for this Grand Council as cousin squirrel Elders asked for ‘Biggen’ assistance, which I have given,” Jeanna paused a moment before continuing. “Back when I was a young adult, my father taught me to hunt. Biggens do not need to hunt to live, but he insisted I learn in case a disaster strike so I could survive. We hunt small rodents. I felt remorse in killing and eating those we hunted.” She glared at the caged elder. “I feel no remorse in stating I would have killed that one earlier if I had known all he was accused of doing.” She paused again. “As for punishment, for rape, the rapist is castrated. For a single

murder, the killer would be locked in jail for no less than twenty years. There is no forgiving someone who tries to kill their own fur and blood. There is more I must speak if you find him guilty.”

Teacher and the others listened to the translation with Aldin explaining Biggens live long lives.

“Those who force coupling, punishment is same. Male member bit off,” spoke several among the other squirrels. One of them asked the marten, “Biggens no kill those who kill other Biggens?”

“Only if they resist punishment,” Jeanna answered, “try to kill while being punished, or have killed many other ‘Biggens’ before being caught and punished. If the accused cousin squirrel were a ‘Biggen’ and found guilty, he would probably be killed. To my knowledge, no ‘Biggen’ in living memory has committed this many rapes and murders other than those who burned the forest near Forestdale who we have not yet found.”

The one who asked bowed in thanks after Aldin finished the translation explaining that Forestdale was a distant, Biggen colony four times the size of the local one and that the destruction of that forest resulted in the current rule barring Biggens from entering smart squirrel territory without permission.

The various elders moved off to one side in a circle and quietly discussed the situation. Eventually, their tails raised. More discussion, and their tails all raised again. Even more discussion, and their tails all raised a third time. Throughout, Teacher didn’t move his tail one way or the other. He simply listened. They came back over and gathered around the cage. They turned to Teacher.

“The Grand Council has chosen me to speak for them,” Teacher spoke. “As you observed I no vote. Is no my place to vote as one who oversee. You are Elder no more. You have been found guilty of forced coupling many females, hunt kill several males, and attempt to hunt kill your pup of pup. You have gravely broken the rules of Elders. The punishment for forced coupling is your male member is to be bitten off. For hunt kill and attempted hunt kill you are banished from all forests with smart squirrels OR you die. We let you choose your punishment. Death or life in banishment. If choose death your male member will no be bitten off.”

The squirrel in the cage chatterspat at them. “I no choose! This my forest! I no recognize your Grand Council!”

Teacher shook his head in disgust as the former Elder refused to accept any responsibility for his actions even after all the testimony spoken in front of him.

“If I may, Eldest Elder?” Jeanna asked. Teacher flicked his tail up and down once and the marten continued. “As I was instructed by Parliament, should this squirrel be found guilty of rape or murder, we no longer recognize him as a squirrel. We now deem him a large rodent. As such, any ‘Biggen’ may hunt him if they see him.” She bared her teeth at the caged squirrel. “That includes me. I would gladly make him suffer as he made his grandson suffer, except, I promise you no healer would save his life.”

Aldin shuddered as he translated. As he finished, he raised his tail and was recognized. “Eldest Elder, as you know, but they,” he gestured around to all others present, “I speak a lot to Biggens. Biggens in big colony Forestdale, I speak of earlier have what they call a,” he switched to Biggenspeak for the next word before switching back, “park, a small forest in center of the colony. This one is just large enough that it could support one smart squirrel. It has no squirrels. It is two days travel from the edge of that small park through the colony to the nearest forest. They are willing to host this ‘large rodent’ in that park. Should he try to leave the park, he will be hunted and killed.”

Teacher bowed in thanks. “That is the Biggen colony near forest that burn that Foxy’s people came from?” He briefly held his tail up in a curl.

Aldin flicked his tail up and down once.

Teacher flicked his tail up and down once. “Good. Is so far away, this former Elder would never be able to return without Biggen help.” Teacher turned to the former Elder again. “Last chance to choose own fate or it go to vote.”

The squirrel in the cage chatterspat at him. “As I speak, I no choose! You have no right do this to me! This my forest! My rules!”

Teacher shook his head in disgust at the caged former Elder. He turned to the squirrels in the trees and the others who testified. “It is up to you. And your former Elder show no remorse for what he do. By show of tails: Hunt kill?” Some tails were raised. Aldin and Jeanna counted. When they finished, Teacher then asked, “Bite off male member and banishment.” All the other tails were raised, more than double the number that chose death. Some called out as they raised their tails, “Hunt kill too merciful for what he do even if Biggen marten hunt kill him slowly or eat him without kill first!”

Teacher turned one more time to the former Elder. “As chosen by those you abused, your male member will be bit off and you will be banished.” Teacher turned to Jeanna. “Biggen Elder Voice, we ask for your help on more time. Please hold down the former Elder so his male member may be bit off.”

Jeanna listened to the translation. “Tell them, I will bite it off for them.”

“No, you will hold him down for us,” Teacher replied without waiting for the translation. “I can hear Biggenspeak, Biggen Elder Voice. We will allow two of his victims to carryout the punishment.”

Jeanna nodded. She tilted the cage up on its end, standing behind it. Reaching around she yanked the former Elder’s rear legs through the bars, forcing his underside and belly against the edge of the cage. The Elder chattergrowled as he struggled in vain against the strength of the marten. Two of the females came forward. The former Elder cried out briefly before fainting after the deed was done. The females spat out his scrotum, testicles, and most of his penis they had bitten

off. Jeanna pulled a first aid kit out of the hovercraft and quickly treated the former Elder's wounds to prevent him from bleeding to death on the spot.

"Place him in our hovercraft, Ambassador Jeanna, please," Aldin requested.

"You take him to other Biggen Colony now?" Teacher asked.

Aldin flicked his tail up and down once. "After a trip to a healer so he no bleed to death. What Biggen Elder Voice do will no hold."

"Good. That leaves this Council one more task."

Aldin looked to Teacher to continue.

"We must appoint a new Elder here. Even if he really had one in training, that squirrel would no be fit to serve as Elder."

Aldin flicked his tail up and down once in agreement. He turned Jeanna the marten. "Constable, your service as Ambassador is finished and the Elders appreciate your assistance. After I go to the hospital, I can fly you back to your office before I transport the prisoner to the flutterport."

"Thank you, Ambassador, but I will summon a separate hovercraft. If I get in that craft again with that vile creature in that cage, I will be too tempted to finish him. I must respect your council's decision to let him live even if I do not agree with that decision."

Aldin bowed. "Very well."