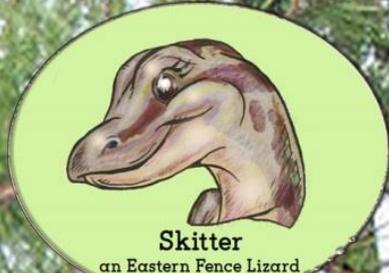


BOOK 2: THE STORY SHELL



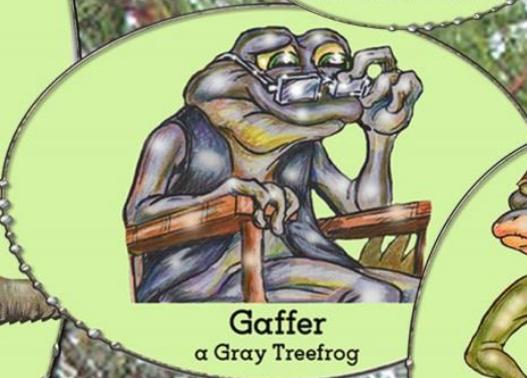
**Alix**  
α Red Squirrel



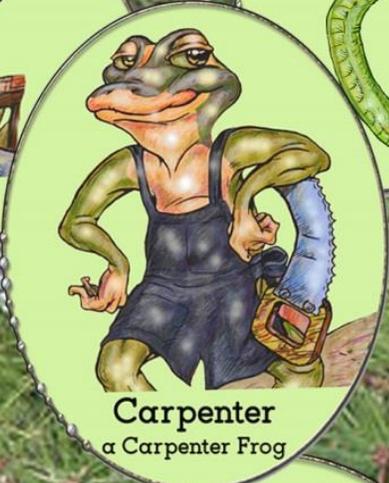
**Skitter**  
an Eastern Fence Lizard



**Miss Green**  
α Green Snake



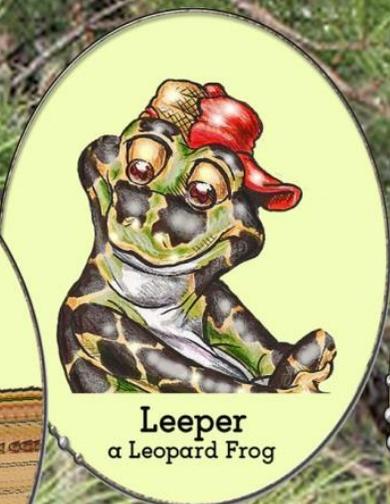
**Gaffer**  
α Gray Treefrog



**Carpenter**  
α Carpenter Frog



**Pibbin**  
α Pine Barrens  
Treefrog



**Leeper**  
α Leopard Frog



**BOSS**  
α Beaver





## Chapter 1

### Where's Leeper?

Pibbin hopped away from Friendship Bog and sat down to think.

Four days had passed, he told himself. Too many days! What could have happened to Leeper?

He shook his head. Maybe Gaffer, the old gray treefrog, would know. He'd ask him.

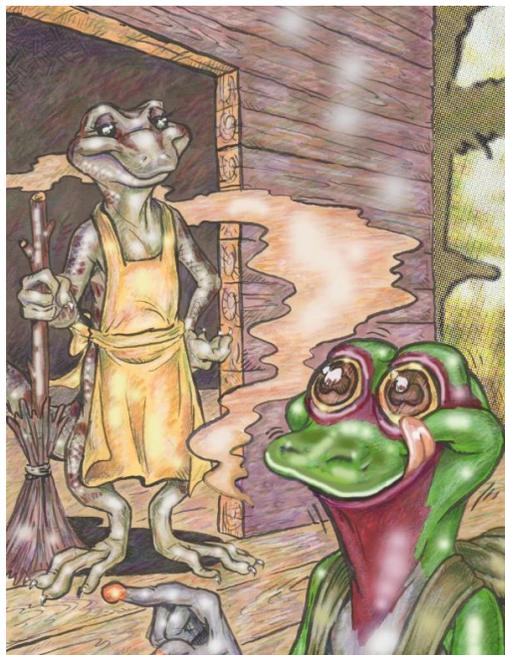
Pibbin climbed up the side of Gaffer's tree and knocked on the door.

Skitter the Lizard opened it, holding a broom in one paw.

Pibbin sniffed. Cookies!

The perky gray lizard often came by to help Gaffer, and sometimes she made good things to eat.

He sniffed again. Red bug cookies! Skitter made the best red bug cookies in all of Friendship Bog.



“Come in, come in,” she said. “I just spilled red bugs all over the kitchen floor, and the mess is driving me crazy.”

She hurried up a steep staircase, and Pibbin hopped after her.

“It would be so nice if you could sweep up those bugs for me,” she said. “I’ve got cookies to finish.”

“Sure,” Pibbin said.

The whole kitchen smelled good.

Trays of cookies stood on the table.

Bowls of spicy spider dip, and plates of mushroom chips, and three kinds of muffins waited on the counter.

Skitter handed the broom to Pibbin, and he began to sweep.

“I wonder where Leeper is,” he said. “Have you seen him?”

He had asked her the same question yesterday and the day before. She didn’t seem to mind.

“No, I haven’t.” Skitter gave him a kind glance. “If I had a big strong friend like that, I’d miss him too.”

She mixed chopped bugs into the cookies she was making. “Did he go down to Wild Bog to help one of his uncles?”

“Yes,” Pibbin said. “I just thought he’d be done by now.”

Pibbin swept the red bugs into a pile and picked them up. They looked good, but he’d wait for the cookies.

“It’s such a long trip to Wild Bog,” Skitter said. “I hope he gets back in time.”

“Me too,” Pibbin said. “This is the first time we’ve had a birthday party on Story Night. Is Gaffer excited about his party?”

“It’s hard to tell. He’s been quiet today. I think he’s working on the presents.”

In Friendship Bog, a birthday party was the time to give presents to all your friends.

Zip, the squirrel, had given jars of pine-seed butter. Uncle Hud, the jumping mouse, had given moss baskets. Ma Chipmunk had given boxes of acorn pancake mix.

“I hope I can get everything ready in time,” Skitter said. “I’m trying out an apple-and-cheese pie for the mice.”

Pibbin saw a plate of fried termites and smiled. “Looks like we’ll have plenty.”

People would come from everywhere to the party. Everyone wanted to gaze at the beautiful story shell and listen to Gaffer. “His stories warm the heart,” they said.

“Is Gaffer here?” Pibbin asked.

Skitter reached for a cookie sheet. “He’s up in the green room.”

Pibbin hopped up another set of stairs.

Gaffer’s rooms were stacked one above the other, all the way up the inside of the tree. Just right for a treefrog’s house!

Gaffer sat in the middle of the room. All around him were piles of sticks and pieces of bark. He must be making picture frames trimmed with bark.

Pibbin liked the cedar bark best. He picked up one of the reddish-brown strips and touched its pale green streaks.

He nodded at the stack of frames Gaffer had already made.

“These are going to be nice,” he said.

Gaffer looked up and smiled his gentle smile. “The other day, Uncle Hud showed me a picture that his oldest boy had drawn. I thought it would look good in a frame.”



He held out a frame that was almost ready for its bark covering.

“Great idea,” Pibbin said. It was just like Gaffer to think about what his friends could use.

He left the old treefrog to his work and went back to help Skitter.

Maybe, just maybe, Leeper would show up soon.

Skitter smiled at him. “Still waiting for your friend?”

She put a tray of cookies into the oven. “I polished the story shell this morning,” she said. “I’m going to run down and dry it off. Then the two of us can push it back inside.”

She paused beside a rack of crisp brown cookies. “Here, try these. You’ll like the pill-bugs. Take some for your backpack if you want.”

Pibbin smiled. “Thank you!”

He ate one right away. Nice and crunchy!

He put three cookies into his pack and started down the stairs.

A shriek came from outside.

“Oh, no! The story shell!”