

The Egg Trial – Lena, Year 3, NSW

Whoosh.

The leaves rustle briskly in the gentle breeze. The whole camp is asleep, tranquil under the blanket of scattered silver stars. The forest is just dark green, black and brown, the colour palette disturbed by the fiery red of Phoenix's hair.

The foursome hurriedly, but cautiously wrap dried beef jerky, salmon, sardines, roots and berries in smooth, shamrock banana leaves.

“What if we — what if we don't make it back?” asks Gertrude, her voice trembling. They take one last glance at their camp, their tribe, their home.

“We will,” Phoenix says confidently. “We'll get to the mountains and steal the Healing Egg from the other tribe, and then we'll be able to restore our war-torn land and live in peace!”

But she always sounded confident.

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“Ugh,” Charlie groans, lazily stomping with the other girls.

“We're all tired, Charlie, you obviously don't need to express that!” Rey sighs, trudging alongside her ten-year-old accomplice.

Gertrude stares up at the sky. Gradually, behind the thick mist, sprays of graffiti and watercolour splashes begin to appear. The sun and clouds are rising — and their guides, the moon and stars are fading away.

Charlie feels the sole of her bare foot stomp on someone's toes. “Ouch!”

But she is too hungry to apologise.

“BEEF JERKY!”

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“Shut it!” Rey snaps, “Gertrude! Stop quivering! Charlie! Stop stating that you're hungry! Phoenix! Stop going ahead!”

The redhead ignores her. The team keeps on going, stabbing their climbing hooks into the dirt cracks, heaving themselves up the rope, stepping on the slippery rocks, until, finally, they hear murmurs.

“Shh!” warns Gertrude. They peer over the cliff top, hearts pounding. But everything is still. Everyone is asleep. Charlie gazes up at the sky, a grey-blue splattered with pearl white clouds and cream-coloured fog. It is early dawn, the sun nowhere to be seen.

Slowly, carefully, the four girls haul themselves up, taking only tiptoes and tiny steps on the shards of rock, when they glimpse a shining, golden sparkle.

“There!” Charlie whispers excitedly, determinedly. The friend group slips past the sleeping troupe and slides the egg gently into a palm sack made of palm leaves.

“Hurry! They’re literally waking up!”

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Bitter cold avalanches blow onto their skin as the soil dirties their track pants. Rey jogs around them as Phoenix attempts to spark a flame, at least, and at the same time Gertrude and Charlie weave sacks and baskets out of bark.

“So, remind me, how did this all start again?” Charlie questions, tossing a bark basket into the pile of sacks.

“Well,” Gertrude starts, sorting out Charlie’s mistake, “the Jurassicans, or jurassic tribe, you know are—” she starts to whisper, “are mentally unstable and violent, so, for no reason, they exploded bombs in our peaceful territory and the mountain ranges. Our precious land — destroyed! But then, the magical bird laid an egg. *The egg*. And we need to get that, because the mountain tribe could be figuring out how to activate the magic any moment *right now!*”

“You sound like a storyteller, Gertrude,” Phoenix comments, “by the way, I got the fire started!”

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Crackle. Crackle.

The thick grey smoke billows away with the breeze. The flames blaze a fierce, striking red like Phoenix’s ginger hair. But they didn’t know who Phoenix was anyways.

“Major Arden! Major Arden! What are you doing there?” the deep voice of Soldier Leo calls.

“I see smoke,” she replies, “in the woods. I know what you’re going to say.”

“The egg is gone!” They cry, at the same time, “Follow them!”

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Snore. Snore. Snore. Burp!

Charlie disturbs the group's sleep, burping like a frog who had just eaten a whole log of flies.

"Huh, what's that noise?" Gertrude yawns, sleepily rubbing her eyes.

"Just Charlie's constant snore and irritating burp, that's all." Phoenix answers, sarcastically.

"No, something else!"

Trudge. Trudge. Trudge.

Even Charlie wakes up with a start. The stomping sound of heavy boots paralyses them. The Cliff People. They are coming, merciless, blood on their hands. But Phoenix and Rey's agility could, maybe save them for once, as they pull everyone up a tree, sprinting into the leaves and balancing. But only if everyone remains a statue. One wrong move and their corpses would lie here, in this remote place. One wrong move, even the twitch of a pinky finger, and they could track them down. One wrong move, and they would never return home.

Just as Gertrude mentioned.

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Wait, Charlie thinks to herself. She suddenly, speedily, quietly snaps a branch off the tree and tosses it away, to make a sound as it hit the cliffy mountain rocks.

"Huh? Let's go!" shouts the major. The army troupe rushes towards their home, still a long way away, across the vast forests.

"Yes! Good job, Charlie!" Rey slaps her on the cheek, a little too hard and cheers. But Gertrude is fiddling nervously with her hands.

"And what exactly are you doing, madam?" Her flaring red hair is in a frizzy, messy bun, the eleven-year-old speaking in a mock posh tone.

"Stop it Phoenix. *And*," she glares at Rey, who was about to interrupt, "how will we get back?"

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"Lion, Pegasus..." Gertrude mutters to herself. She gazes up at the night sky, hunting furiously through the stars, tracking down constellations.

“Would you *PLEASE* stop *worrying*?” Her best friend grumbles. Gertrude glares at her. Phoenix stares back. They keep narrowing their eyes at each other, never breaking off.

“Ooh, staring contest!” jokes Charlie.

“Let’s go now!” Rey snaps, “I found the way.”

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The foursome ride on wild horses they found in the wilderness. Rey keeps tracking down the stars and moon phases.

“Crescent moon and Sagittarius! We have to go east!”

They march ahead through the woods.

“Where are we going, exactly? I’m not so sure why we keep going off track?” Charlie asks impatiently.

“Hurry up! Get a move on,” Is all that Rey retorts, “unless you want the Cliff People to catch us!”

And Rey was quite right. Suddenly, a new, muffled voice comes out of the thorny shrubbery surrounding the friends.

“Who’s that?” The faint voice barks.

“See,” Gertrude whispers frantically, “I was right! This *is* dangerous! It’s what I predicted from the very moment Phoenix thought of this plan!”

While the girls were having a debate, a troupe burst out the bushes. Everyone froze.

“*Gertrude? Charlie?*”

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The foursome had had an everlasting argument with Esther, Chloe, Mandy, James and Louis, but Esther, Charlie and Gertrude’s sister, had immediately dragged them off once they revealed the egg. The adults decided that they would stop on their tracks and go home.

“We have to go east, I read the stars!” Rey states. So they took off, only stopping at the dead of night and waking up as the sun started to fade in, taking over the earl grey mist of the early morning. And they started to ride again.

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After riding a long way east, the group finally sees a glimpse of the sea, and they see a tent. Rocks, dead giant oaks, bizzare lanterns — their tent!

Days have passed, nights have broken. And finally they are back at camp. After riding horses and switching routes, they made it back home. The whirring sound of the egg working is overjoyous!

“One!” They chant, “Two! THREE!”

Everyone cheers. The egg has restored their land. The charred ashes are now gone. There are no more dry, crackly leaves. The giant oaks sway around them. The water is once more clear. It is peaceful, calm, and beautiful once again.

They *are* heroes after all.