

A TWINKL ORIGINAL



Phyllis and the Fossil Finders



Greetings

FROM THE



Jurassic Coast

A TWINKL ORIGINAL

Phyllis and the Fossil Finders



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Chapter One

“At least two good things about a storm: more game progress online for now, and a better chance of fossil-finding later,” Jacob said with a grin as he adjusted the headset on his ears.

“Yeah, I’m with you on the first one of those, Jay. You’re still on your own for the second, though!” Faizal chuckled.

“D’you think this rain is *ever* going to stop?” Nakeisha moaned as her avatar ransacked the corridors of a newly discovered stronghold and collected more glowing fire opal.

Outside Jacob’s window, water ran down the seaside village road in rapid streams. Below the steep cliffs, the sea pounded the bay with ferocious waves.

“Doesn’t seem like it! Feels like it’s been chucking it down for weeks,” said Faizal. He was following

Nakeisha's character on her path of destruction through the fortress in their online game, *Raider's Peril*. They'd been playing for hours that morning already.

"Actually," Jacob chipped in via his microphone, "the storm arrived on Wednesday night so it's only been two-and-a-bit days. The TV forecast said it should have passed by now. I'm pretty sure it will stop eventually." He glanced out through the window at the swirling black sky over the coast. He admired the view from his 'den', where his computer was set up.

Having no brothers or sisters meant that the spare room in Jacob's house was something that Jacob's friends all envied. Books lined the shelves along one entire side, and his dinosaur and fossil posters covered most of the opposite wall. Every available surface was crowded with dinosaur models, remains of science experiment kits or Jacob's rocks and shells. His hamsters, Steg and Rex, even had rocks and shells inside their cage. All three of his best friends liked playing *Raider's Peril*; only Jacob was such a big fan of science, though.

"OK, Mister Weatherman, we get it." Faizal's voice laughed through everyone's headphones. "Where's Gabi, anyway? Didn't she say that she'd be online again this morning?"

"Gone for another hospital check-up with her stepmum," said Nakeisha. "Said she's been feeling really tired and dizzy again this week. Reckoned she'd be done by lunch, though, so she'll probably be back any time now. I hope we can go outside again when she is."

"Feels like we're just not as effective without her on here. Hope she's OK," said Faizal as their characters raided treasure chests in an underground dungeon. "Anyone thought of a new guild name for us yet?"

Jacob had pitched his idea before but wasn't ready to



let it drop yet. “I still think ‘Fossil Finders Four’ is the coolest,” he said.

Faizal shot him down. “Not that again. Maybe if we were *all* fossil finders and not just you!”

Jacob’s thumb was poised over the joystick on his controller, ready to grab a topaz spear from the stronghold wall. Before he got the chance, however, his head spun sideways towards the den window again. A jagged fork of lightning zipped through the sky and flashed through the blur of midday rain. The lightning connected with the headland along the bay and vanished into the mist again as quickly as it had arrived.

“Woah! Anyone else see that?” shouted Faizal.

“Wicked lightning!” Nakeisha responded.

Jacob had dropped his controller into his lap and squeezed his hands under his headphones to avoid hearing the deep rumble of thunder that followed. His eyes were squeezed shut and he pulled his chin into his chest.

He counted to ten, to be sure that the sound had stopped. Tentatively, he peeled open one eye then the

other. He slid his hands out from under his earphones.

Before he had a chance to pick up his controller again, the screen in front of him crackled and then turned black.

He blinked.

He tapped the side of the screen. Nothing.

There was no red light showing on the console. No voices coming from his headphones. *The power must have gone off*, he thought. Just when they were making such great progress in *Raider’s Peril*.

Within moments, the doorbell rang. Jacob ran downstairs to answer it.

“Nakeisha! How d’you get here so quick?”

“What, from three doors away?” she quipped with a wide grin as she stepped inside. She gave her textured black hair a quick shake. As she was taller than Jacob, he got a brief shower from the drips that were flung from her tightly curled locks. “Power off here, too?” His friend closed the door behind herself as she breezed into Jacob’s kitchen and plonked herself on a stool at

the breakfast bar.

Jacob followed, taking off the headset that he was still wearing. “That game probably won’t have saved properly with the power going off so suddenly, you know. The autosave will have happened before we completed that last raid,” he said.

“Chill, Jacob. We’ll nail it again later,” Nakeisha smiled as she flicked through his *Young Palaeontologist* magazine on the countertop. Jacob watched her glance straight past an awesome article all about Ichthyosaurs, barely registering it.

It wasn’t long before the doorbell rang for a second time.

“That’ll be Faiz,” said Nakeisha.

Jacob opened the door. Faizal immediately dived inside out of the pelting downpour. He’d only come from a little further up the street but the rain must have lashed at him the whole way. He dripped all over the rug.

“Oh man, look at these new trainers! Flippin’ weather! Tried to jump that massive puddle by your front gate

but didn’t make it, did I?” Faizal stopped by the mirror in the hallway to smooth his jet-black hair back into place before wandering into the kitchen to join Nakeisha. Jacob followed again.

“That game won’t have saved properly,” Faizal said, shaking his head.

“Honestly, you two! You’re more alike than you think,” laughed Nakeisha.

“Did you see the lightning, though?” Faizal asked. “I think it hit the top of the headland, you know.”

“I once read that a lightning bolt can contain a billion volts of electricity,” Jacob offered.

“It might have taken out a tree!” Faizal continued.

“Nah, I think it hit the side of the cliff. Maybe we should check it out,” Nakeisha suggested.

Jacob thought of the coastline of their village, which curved around the edge of the bay. He wondered if the lightning could have caused any damage to the rocks by the sea. The area was known to visitors as the Jurassic Coast, but Jacob knew that the local geology

contained just as much history from the Triassic and Cretaceous eras, too. No one seemed to mention those as much.

“I ain’t going back out there in a hurry,” Faizal was saying.

“Oh, come on, you two. It’s only a bit of rain. You won’t dissolve,” Nakeisha pleaded.

Jacob pictured himself and his friends rushing around the beach like zombies as the falling rain started to dissolve them. *People don’t dissolve, he reassured himself. It’s rocks and soil that are eroded by the rain and wind, not us.*

“Actually, it might make for good fossil-hunting conditions after the storm passes,” he suggested. Neither of his friends seemed to hear him, though. Nakeisha was teasing Faizal about the amount of excess hair gel that might wash down his face if they were to go outside again.

The doorbell rang for the third time.

“What’s going on here today?” called Jacob’s mum from the lounge. “It’s like Piccadilly Circus.”

Jacob opened the door to let in Gabi, thinking that the famous Piccadilly Circus in London was not very busy if it only had three or four people passing through.

“I knew you would all be here,” Gabi announced as she plodded in to join the others. “How come you’re not in the den? Have you raided that new stronghold yet? Oh, and did you see the lightning?”

Nakeisha filled her in on how they’d carried out their raid and found new gems and weapons, then the power had gone off around the same time as the lightning and they’d probably need to do it all over again. “How are you, anyway, Gabs? Everything OK with the check-up?” she asked.

“Oh, you know. Still just feeling tired and worn out easily. Got another appointment in a couple of weeks. Hey, let’s go up to the den! I’ve got something cool to tell you – something really weird happened out there,” Gabi said.

Intrigued, they dashed upstairs after her, Jacob being the last into his own den. Nakeisha crashed onto the sofa bed and Faizal spun around in the swivel chair at the desk. Jacob sat on his beanbag as Gabi held court in the middle of the room. He worried about

her sometimes, always feeling easily exhausted, but he admired her positivity, too.

“I swear that this is true,” she began.

Faizal groaned and played with the spinning globe on the desk.

“Honestly, guys,” Gabi continued. “We were in the car just coming back down the main road into the village. We saw the lightning come down from the sky. You can ask my stepmum if you don’t believe me. It zapped somewhere into the side of the cliff in the bay.”

“Told you!” shouted Nakeisha.

“Yeah, but that’s not all,” said Gabi. “Afterwards, you could see this weird thing coming from near where it had struck. For a few seconds, it was like the cliffside was glowing or something. I’m telling you, it was really strange.”

The group looked at one another. Jacob eyed Gabi suspiciously, thinking that lightning couldn’t make rocks glow. *But then, he pondered, if it did contain a billion volts of electricity...*

“See? We should check it out!” Nakeisha repeated. She jumped up from the sofa bed and looked out through the window. “The rain is definitely stopping. I can see some blue sky through the clouds now.”



Faizal covered his face with his hands and groaned even louder. He swivelled round to turn his back on the others, giving the globe one more spin.

“Jacob, you up for it?” Gabi looked him in the eye.

Jacob considered whether he was being pushed for the casting vote. He couldn't quite tell what Gabi's stare was supposed to mean. He didn't want to upset anyone. He thought it highly unlikely that they would see any glowing rocks or frazzled trees. However, there might be some fresh ammonites washed up on the beach or unusual shells uncovered for his collection.

“Those clouds *are* clearing,” he said, motioning towards the window, “and if the power's off everywhere, we can't do much inside. We may as well go out for a bit.”

“Ugh. Fine!” said Faizal, as it became clear that he was out-voted.



Chapter Two

By the time they were heading out of the door, the rain had eased to a misty drizzle. Jacob had stuffed some useful supplies into his rucksack, as usual. He had his hand lens, his binoculars and a miniature hammer, among other tools. He never went to the beach – or anywhere, in fact – without his bag.

Faizal shook out the wet raincoat that he'd arrived in earlier. He had reluctantly borrowed wellies from Jacob, taking off his white trainers and placing them neatly next to each other in the hall. Pulling on the boots, he tucked in his expensive tracksuit bottoms, complaining that they had better not get dirty. “It's gonna be muddy, you know,” he had warned them several times.

With everyone decked out in coats and hats, they headed down the road to the main part of the village. From there, they could take the cliff steps down onto the beach. It was fairly quiet at this time of the year;