

JORDAN GOULD • RICHARD PRITCHARD

WYLAH

THE KOORIE WARRIOR



CUSTODIANS



When young people read the story of Wylah
they will all have a better understanding
of the language and history thanks to
Richard and Jordan.

Uncle Robbie Lowe Snr
Peek Whurrong Elder, Wungit • Chief



We would like to acknowledge and thank the
Gunditjmara/Maar Nation,
the Traditional Owners on whose land
this book was made.



**Ngatanwarr teen Marr mirring-u.
Ngeeye mayapa wangan wanyoo Marr
pernmeal, Alanmeen, korrokie, pongyapoon.
Munganoroo, wattanoo Marr koorooke,
ngapoon pa ngaraakeetong.**

**Ngatanwarr,
ngeeye teen mirring-ngan.
To ngootenwal.**

**Welcome to Marr Country.
We pay our respects to the Marr Great Spirit,
Ancestors, Grandmothers and Grandfathers.
From the Marr Grandmothers,
Grandfathers, and families.**

**Welcome,
this here is our Country.
Thank you.**

40,000 YEARS AGO





CHAPTER 2

I've never seen anything as beautiful as the Country from high up. The land is so vast and wondrous. Rivers, mountains, thick forests, lakes and endless wuurns* of tribes cover the open fields. I can see the huts, but I can't see any people.

I look down and see Bunyip, Kapa, Kinpa, Marntaro, Jayden and Woo following us at full speed on the ground. Jayden is clinging to Marntaro and I'm impressed he hasn't fallen off yet.

*Wuurn means home.

'Pippy, shouldn't we announce to the Custodians of these lands that we are here?' I ask.

'Yes, we should,' Pippy says. 'We just need to find a safe place to land – Wylah, look, fire.'

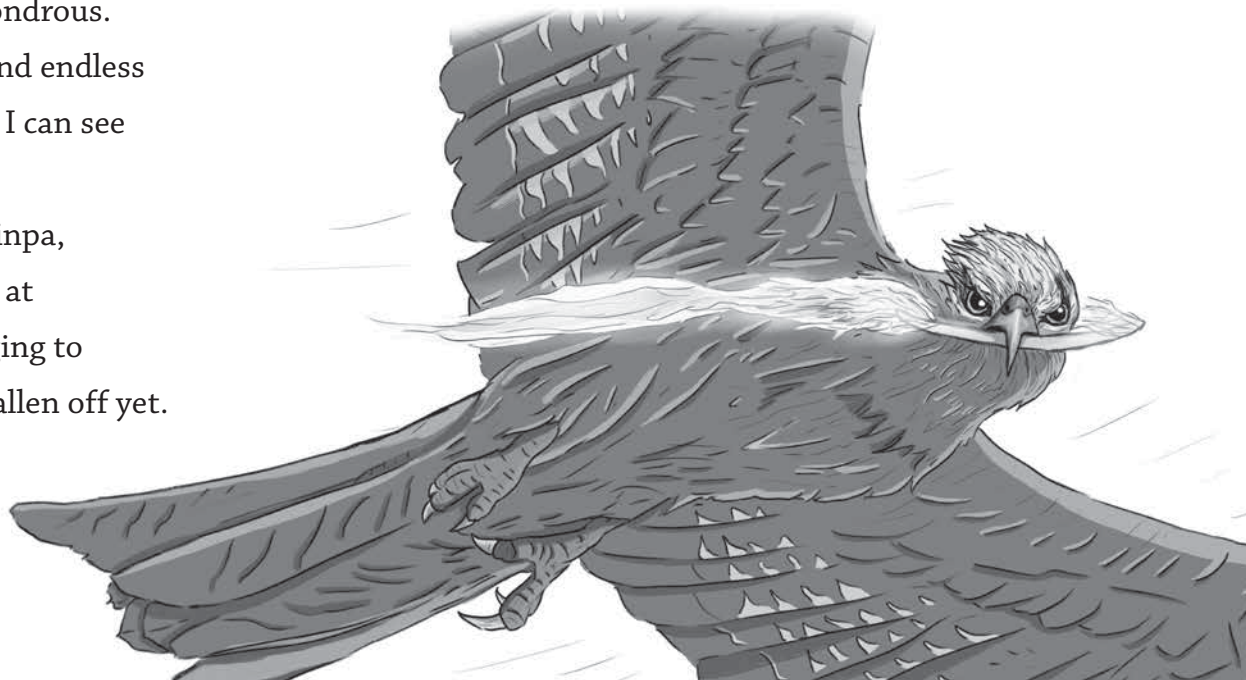
Up ahead, I see a trail of fire burning in the bushland. 'Dragons?' I shout.

'I'm not sure. I can't see any in the sky,' Pippy replies.

I glance back at Merri and Po, but they shrug.

'Wylah, look out!' Merri suddenly shouts.

A giant bird swoops down at us and knocks Pippy's wing with something fiery.



‘Hey, watch it!’ Pippy exclaims.

The bird circles around us at lightning speed. It’s flying so fast that it’s hard to see it properly at a distance.

‘It’s behind us,’ Po says.

Thara rolls out of its way as the bird tries to chase her tail. It’s holding a fire stick in its beak!

‘What are you doing?’ Thara calls out.

The bird flies towards us.

‘Hang on tight, Wylah!’ yells Pippy. He flips upside down and grabs the other bird’s claws with his own, and flings it across the sky.

The bird spins away, before righting itself with ease. It flies off at speed and disappears into the clouds.

‘What was that?’ I ask Pippy.

Before Pippy can say anything, we hear a loud swooshing sound.

Pippy rolls to the right as a boomerang whirls past, narrowly missing my head.

‘Hold on!’ Pippy cries, but I am already

gripping his feathers as tightly as I can. ‘Thara, take Po and Merri down to the others!’ I see the boomerang coming towards us again. ‘Roll left,’ I yell at Pippy.

I keep my eye on the boomerang as it swirls in an arc around us.

The bird swoops down from the cloud cover and catches the returning boomerang with its claw. It lifts the boomerang up to the fire stick it is holding in its beak until it catches fire.

The bird’s piercing eyes stare right at us as it throws the fiery boomerang.

Pippy somersaults in the air, weaving left and right to avoid being hit. The boomerang just grazes the tip of Pippy’s tail and I can smell singed feathers.

‘How can a bird do that?’ I shout at Pippy.

‘I don’t think it’s just a bird, Wylah,’ Pippy replies.

The bird has slowed now and is flying side by side with us. I get a good look at it for the first

time. To my amazement, I can now see a girl riding on top of the massive bird.

In her hand, she holds the fiery boomerang.

She looks at me eye-to-eye and points towards the ground.

‘Pippy, I think she wants us to land,’ I say.

‘Okay, but that bird just tried to burn us out of the sky!’ Pippy replies.

‘I think we’d better talk to her,’ I say with hesitation. ‘At least, we should find out why she attacked us.’



Pippy lands in a rocky field near where Thara, Po and Merri have touched down.

I can see the others standing in the cover of the nearby forest.

The mysterious girl and her bird perch on top of a wide rock looking down at us.

The girl blows out the burning boomerang and the bird throws the fire stick onto the grass, which sets it alight.

‘Hey! What did I say about leaving fire sticks on the ground!’ the girl says as she pokes the bird.

The bird flaps its wings to try to blow the fire out, but it only makes it worse.

The girl groans disapprovingly and leaps off the bird onto the ground to stomp out the flames. She then climbs back up the rock and onto the bird.

Pippy and I look at each other, confused.

‘No matter how many times I tell him, he still does it,’ the girl offers by way of explanation as she wipes her forehead.

Merri, Po and Thara come to stand behind us, and the others leave the protection of the forest to

join us. We stand together and stare at the girl and her bird.

She looks at all of us with an air of pride and says, ‘Welcome, trespassers. You are all now my prisoners.’

I move forward, thinking to introduce myself properly.

‘Don’t you take another step, *young* girl,’ she says to me commandingly, even though she looks about the same age as me.

‘Don’t you know who I am?’ the girl asks.

I look at Po; he has no idea. Merri shrugs.

‘I don’t think we do,’ I say, trying not to show my irritation. ‘Should we?’

‘Well of course you should!’ The girl straightens her shoulders and holds her head high. ‘I am Alinta,* Custodian of this land and this is Yapptarra,* my rescue friend.’

Yapptarra flaps his wings out wide, picks up a stick, lights it on fire, then throws it to the ground.

* Alinta means flame.

* Yapptarra means Torch Hawk.

He does a little dance stomping the fire out with his feet again.

‘Yes, yes. Thank you for that, Yapptarra. Please excuse him. He’s only meant to use it to make animals run from their hiding places when we go hunting for food. The problem is he just wants to burn everything. But we’ll get there,’ Alinta says as she strokes his feathers.

Then she jumps down from the rock and stands in front of us, snapping back into focus. ‘Enough distraction. You did not have permission to enter my sky. What are you doing here?!’

I take a step forward. ‘I am Wylah, daughter of the Maar Nation.’ I slowly pull out Kae Kae and show her.

Alinta looks me up and down then scoffs. ‘That’s not a boomerang, *this* is a boomerang,’ she says as she pulls out her own enormous weapon. It is easily twice the size of Kae Kae.

‘Hey, you can’t be so rude!’ Po marches forward furiously. ‘Do you know who Wylah is? She’s the

Koorie Warrior, the most powerful warrior in all the land!’ he announces proudly.

‘Po! Shush!’ I say, pulling him back. I hope she didn’t hear that.

‘Yeah, and our Guardian Pippy can beat your naughty fire hawk any day!’ Merri shouts.

I think I’m going to faint.

‘Oh, really? The most powerful warrior in all the land?’ Alinta says, squinting her eyes at me.



Yapptarra screeches at her, stomping his feet.

‘I know, Yapptarra, it *does* sound like a challenge,’ Alinta says, grinning and tapping her finger on her chin.

I feel my throat start to dry up.

Alinta points her boomerang at us and repeats her announcement. ‘I don’t care who you are, or what you are doing. You have all trespassed and are now my prisoners.’

‘Alinta, I’m sorry, but we need to pass through. My people have been captured by dragons and we are on a mission to save them. But we need to find the caves of gold to do that,’ I plead. ‘I noticed that the wuurns here are all empty. Was your family taken as well?’

Alinta looks away, and I almost don’t see her fierce expression becoming sad. She clears her throat and faces us, strong once again. ‘My tribe has left for the seasonal harvest, but I have my reasons for staying here and protecting our land.’ She points at me. ‘Now, surrender your weapons.’

‘Alinta, please, do you know where the caves of gold are?’

Alinta looks at us. ‘Maybe,’ she says.

Jayden peeks out from behind Marntaro. ‘Please, we would be greatly honoured if you could help us,’ he says.

Alinta looks closely at Jayden, then hops down from the rock and walks towards him.

‘Where do you come from?’ Alinta asks, surprised.

‘Well, I’m from a faraway land, stolen from my—’

But before Jayden can finish his story, Yapptarra starts to squawk angrily at Alinta.

‘Okay, okay. Calm down, beak brain!’ Alinta turns and climbs back onto the rock. ‘You know my deal. The law is the law, and you didn’t announce your visit,’ she says stubbornly.

I feel outraged. ‘How could we? You attacked us in the sky before we could land and make an announcement!’

Alinta shakes her head stubbornly. 'I'm sure you know the law. You do not enter another tribe's boundary without permission, or do you want to start a war between our tribes?'

Merri pushes past me towards Alinta. 'Sure, we can go to war,' she says defiantly. 'Wylah has five enormous Guardians and a Bunyip! We are a walking army.'

'Slow down, everyone. Just slow down.' I say, putting myself in between Merri and Alinta. 'Merri, that's enough.'

Jayden takes a step back, looking a bit frightened.

'Wylah is the Korrie Warrior. You can't talk to us like that,' Po says.

'Po, no more!' I shout at him.

'A warrior, hey?' Alinta starts to pace back and forth on her rock, thinking. 'Let's see about that. We shall have a race!' she shouts, smiling.

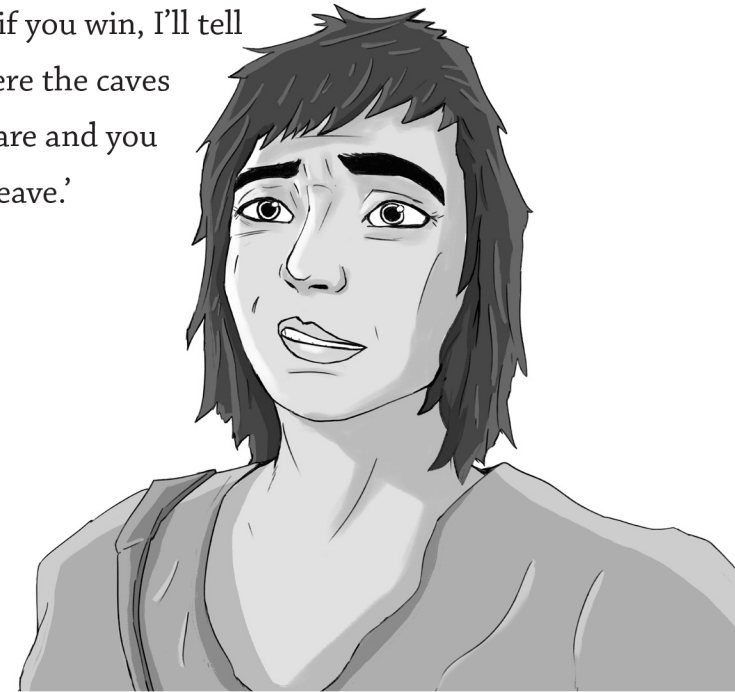
'Ah! Pippy is the fastest bird in the world. He will make your bird look like a snail,' Merri shouts.

My heart drops. These kids are getting me into so much trouble. It seems impossible to talk peace with Alinta, but at least we have avoided all-out war. For now.

'Here is my challenge: Wylah and I will race our birds through the forest to the top of that mountain and back.' She points to a mountain burning with smoke, far in the distance.

My eyes widen. 'That's not a mountain; that's a volcano,' I cry out.

Alinta nods confidently. 'If I win, he stays with me.' She points at Jayden. 'And the rest of you can go. But if you win, I'll tell you where the caves of gold are and you can all leave.'



‘Oh, that’s easy. You can just have him,’ I say with joy.

‘No!’ Jayden runs up to me. ‘I have to – I mean, I *want* to come with you to the caves. I promised Merri I would help.’

‘Yeah, you can’t leave him here just like that!’ Merri protests.

I sigh and turn to Alinta. ‘Unfortunately this boy is our only link to the dragons and our chance of freeing my people.’

Alinta scans the group and says, ‘Well then, I’ll take that little one.’ She points at Kapa. ‘I like his fluffy fur.’

I feel my nerves start to boil. ‘I would rather go to war than give up my fur child!’ I growl.

Bunyip swiftly crouches down, claws out and fearsome teeth bared. ‘You will have to go through me first!’

Woo, Marntaro and Kinpa quickly leap in front of Bunyip, forming a protective circle around Kapa.



Po and Merri run in front of them, fists ready to fight. ‘You’re not taking anyone!’ Merri shouts.

Alinta squints at them and grins. Yapptarra screeches, ready to fight.

‘Calm down, everyone,’ Pippy says as he flaps his wings between us. ‘I will trade myself. If I lose, I will stay to pay for our trespassing. I should have stopped before we entered your sky, Alinta. It is my responsibility. It is the law, and I broke it.’

Alinta tilts her head to the side. ‘Fine, agreed.’

I run up to Pippy. ‘No, I should be the one to pay.’

‘Wylah, a Guardian must protect his tribe. Trust me,’ Pippy says with a smile and a wink.

Pippy’s smile confuses me and I turn to Thara. ‘Is there another way out of this?’

‘I’m sorry, Wylah, but Alinta is right. The law is the law,’ Thara says. ‘I’d prefer your war suggestion though, as I am more than ready to fight.’

‘It might still come to that; Alinta is not taking my Guardian, no matter what happens.’ I take a deep breath. It feels like a little wallaby is doing back flips inside my stomach. ‘Pippy, are you sure about this?’

He nods back. ‘Trust me. We can do this.’

I face Alinta again, trying to look confident. ‘Alinta, let’s race!’

OUT 30 MAY



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