

## THE BEAST

Cascading waterfalls send pure snow-melted water tumbling off the pebble-lined cliff.

Magnificent trees tower above the damp humid environment beneath. I gaze around the forest and I see a twisted vine-maze climbing up a tree like lattice. I hitch my foot up into one of the roots and haul my pack onto two shoulders; it'll slow me down but if I survive it will be vital.

I start climbing the wet, mossy, bendy, unstable vines. My foot slips leaving me dangling in mid-air by my arms, a caterpillar walking across the vines towards my fingers, like in the cartoons. I manage to haul myself up as an ear-piercing scream/roar echoes around the forest.

A tree comes tumbling down and leaves brush past me as I speed up the tree like a chipmunk that just drank coffee.

A beast emerges from the undergrowth close to the tree that I'm on, not thirty metres from the trunk.

It has a bear's body, only twice the size, with shaved patches of fur dotted on its body. It has an eagle's head at least triple in size, straggled feathers matted in with its fur.

It looks up at me, roars again then smashes itself against my tree. The creature may have pushed over other trees by this tactic, but I have a nice, strong beech tree so it'll need a better tactic to get me.

It screeches again and I hear a not so loud echoed reply over the other side of the forest, so I start hauling myself up further. The roar is coming louder now and two more beasts emerge from the trees, exactly like the others.

I climb around the tree as the vines have run out; I climb onto a maze of strong branches, meeting the main inhabitants of the trees: monkeys. "Hey ancestors," I call to the monkeys as they watch me strangely, eating figs.

I look down the trunk of the tree and I see the beasts climbing up with their horrendous claws, their weight starting to tip the tree as they rip wood out of it with their talons.

I jump to the next tree of knotted branches as the one I was previously on tumbles down to floor of leaves.

I'm hanging now. I slipped; I'm hanging thirty metres in the air. If I **drop** and I don't die from the fall the beasts will thrash my flesh apart, without even leaving the bones.

The only thing that stops that from happening is the pack. I'm holding onto it and one of the straps is hooked around a bended branch. If I pull myself up, the branch will snap but it is also currently bending over. I have a sense of impending doom.

The monkeys are screeching at me now, maybe thinking that I'm a threat. They are crawling along the branch towards me, looking at me curiously.

They come closer, as if wanting to join me on my branch. Flash! They jump to my branch, weighing it down to a vertical slope, my bag slipping ever so slowly.

A leopard jumps out after the monkeys, then retreats as thunder rolls around the forest, clouds darkening up the sky as flashes of lightning strike in the air, the first droplets of rain coming down.

The water gets heavier and soon it's well on its way to being a downpour.

I hear the monsters roar-like screech while looking up at me. I'm not sure if they're angry, calling for more backup or are distressed by the rain. The beasts start to back off slowly, a hateful look in their eyes.

They scowl at me, a disgusted look on their face. They back off into the denser undergrowth. They then turn and run, leaving an obnoxious trail of damage behind them.

I see a vine, my only chance, I swing on the bendy branch I am hanging off and jump... I grip the vine as it slips through my hand. I manage to hold onto the end of it.

I swing on the vine; I've still got my pack somehow. I jump to the closest tree and climb down the trunk. I lay against the tree and pull out of my pack a large blue speckled egg.