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Opening extract from
The Phoenix's Flame

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The title 'Hanging Out' is written in a black, cursive script. It is surrounded by several black stars of varying sizes, some of which are arranged in a curved path above and below the text, resembling a constellation or a decorative flourish.

Hanging Out *

It was a sunny Friday afternoon, and Hattie Bright and her best friend, Chloe, were sprawled on Hattie's bed, surrounded by a pile of magazines.

'Another week of school over,' sighed Hattie happily. 'I can't wait for two whole days of chilling out!'

‘Me neither,’ agreed Chloe. ‘It was really nice of your mum to invite me for tea today too.’

‘Perfect end to the week!’ said Hattie.

She slotted her MP3 player into her stereo and chose her favourite song. A happy beat filled the room. The two girls jumped off the bed and began dancing around, as if they were shaking off a week’s worth of schoolwork.

As the song finished, Chloe did a crazy spin, and the two friends ended up in a giggly heap on the floor.

‘Oh!’ said Hattie. ‘You’re on my wrist!’ She laughed as she tried to pull her right arm free from beneath her friend’s leg.



‘Is that what it is? Sorry!’ said Chloe, giggling and rolling to one side.

‘Too much dancing,’ replied Hattie. As she said that, she could feel a funny warm tingling feeling creeping along her other arm.

Chloe got up and went over to the stereo, choosing another song from Hattie's playlist.

Hattie glanced at her left wrist, where she always wore her favourite charm bracelet. The six charms were swinging gently. And, just as Hattie suspected, they had started to glow a warm yellowy-orange.

Her stomach did a flip. She wasn't sure if it was nerves or excitement, but she was certain of one thing: the evil Imp King Ivar had stolen another power from one of the creatures in the magical Kingdom of Bellua. That meant they needed her there . . . now!

As Guardian of Bellua's magical creatures, only Hattie could cure Ivar's latest victim.

Not only that, but when she was last in Bellua the Imp King had threatened the next power he would steal would be the 'ultimate' one – stronger than any of the five he'd taken already!

Hattie shivered. Had Ivar succeeded in his quest? Would it finally be impossible to defeat him? There was only one way to find out. She had to go to Bellua right away! But how could she grab the old vet's bag hidden under her bed and let it secretly transport her to Bellua when Chloe was *right there* in the room?

Hattie knew she couldn't wait until Chloe went home after tea – that would be leaving it dangerously late.



Think, think! she said to herself, squeezing her eyes tightly shut.

There had to be a way to get to Bellua and still keep the secret oath. Hattie only needed Chloe to leave the room for a few minutes – long enough for her to go to Bellua and return as if nothing had happened.

‘I love this one, don’t you?’ said Chloe, as a new song burst from the stereo. She began dancing around the bedroom again. ‘Come on, Hattie. On your feet, lazybones!’

But Hattie stayed right where she was on the bedroom floor, looking at her bracelet.

‘Er, actually I don’t know if I do like this one that much – and anyway it’s probably

nearly time for tea. Can you go down and ask my mum when it'll be ready while I choose another song?'

'OK then,' agreed Chloe, smiling at Hattie. 'But I'm trusting you to make a good choice!'

Hattie jumped up and busied herself with the stereo, while Chloe slipped out of the room and headed downstairs.

With her heart pounding, Hattie hurried to her bed and reached under it. From downstairs she could hear the muffled voices of Chloe and her mum. She pulled the bag out from its hiding place and dropped it on to the bed.

Quickly, she pressed the glowing star charm on her bracelet against the bag's star-shaped

lock. It clicked open immediately and, as the bag began to sparkle and shimmer, Hattie strained her ears for any sound of Chloe making her way back up the stairs. Was that a creak?

Hattie didn't have time to check. She grasped the bag firmly and pulled it wide open. Then she peered inside and found herself tumbling down, down and down . . .



'Your mum says tea's in ten minutes, Hattie!' called Chloe as she pushed the bedroom door open. 'Hattie? Hattie, where are you?'

Chloe glanced towards the silent stereo, then at Hattie's empty bed.

What's that sparkly silver bag doing there? she wondered. She couldn't remember seeing it in the room before. Chloe moved closer to the bag and looked inside, then gasped as she took in the



strangest sight she'd ever seen – Hattie's blue trainers disappearing into the bottom!

'H-Hattie?' she whispered, her voice trembling. 'A-are you i-in there?'

Chloe knew the question was ridiculous so wasn't surprised when there was no answer. With shaking hands, she picked up the bag and gazed at the spot where Hattie's shoes had been. Suddenly she had the strangest sensation. Her whole body tingled and she felt as though something invisible was pulling her into the bag.

Then she felt herself tumbling down, down and down . . .

