Phenomenal Beasts on the Lava

The moon is up. Jill meets the team outside town, and the cat sits by her boots.

'I must dig in the nether,' Jill says, tapping her axe on her boot. 'It is the one spot with the rock I need for my axe.'

The Mage lights up. He plants his staff and puffs out his chest. 'The nether! I go there lots. Lots and lots! Stick with me. I am no **phony!'**

'All we need is dark rock,' the Mage tells them. 'Then I will make us a gate.' And no one is as glad as Dr. Can Do.

'The nether!' he yells, gripping his hammer. 'That is where the fire beasts live! They step right on top of the lava! I must study them. **Phenomenal!'**

Jill blinks. 'Dr. Can Do, is that not a risk?' He grins. 'A risk? It is a thrill!'

'The fire beasts have big flat faces and thin legs,' says the Mage. 'They drift on the lava. And here is the best bit. We can ride them!'

Jill gazes at him. 'Ride them. On the lava.' 'Yes,' says the Mage. 'The lava is hot, but hop on and off we go. **Phew,** what fun!'

'Not fun,' says Jill. 'No lava rides for me.'

No one speaks. Then Jill has an **epiphany.** 'What if we do not ride at all? What if we make a safe path over the lava?' Dr. Can Do gasps. 'A path rig! I can craft one with cogs and a crank!' 'Yes!' says Jill, lifting her hand with a grin. 'A safe path! No lava, no beasts. That gets my vote.'

They plan to get the dark rock the next day and meet at sundown. The team sets off home, but the Mage stands by his tower, hugging his spell book to his chest. He has not had a team to trek with in so long. So, so long. A soft smile grows on his face. 'A new **phase,'** he says. Next, they will make a gate. And after that? Well. The nether is never dull.

By the next night, Jill has a big grin. She stands on a slab by Dr. Can Do, her bucket held up like a **trophy.** 'I tip it on the lava and it turns to dark rock,' she says. 'Block after block! **Phew,** hot work.' Dr. Can Do nods. 'And I set the gate frame far from town. Gates hum and boom, Jill.' 'Is that a fact?' asks Jill. 'Yes,' he says. 'Study.'

That night, the Mage can not sleep. Not one wink. He lies in bed with his arms out wide, grinning up like a kid with a grand prize. This will be his first trip into the nether with a team. And here is the thing. No one can tell what waits on the far side. A **phantom?** A fire beast? What a thrill!

The Mage is up first. He runs to the cave where the tall dark rock frame stands. His team is there. Jill grips her axe. Dr. Can Do clasps his hammer. The Mage lifts his staff and speaks a fire spell. He gives it some **oomph.** Boom! The gate blazes with a swirl and a glow. 'Here we go,' he says. Step by step they go in. The last yell is from Jill. 'If I end up on a fire beast, I will be so mad!'

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Jill and her friends plan a daring trip to the nether to find rare rock for her axe, but a swaggering Mage insists he knows the way. When talk turns to riding fire beasts across the lava, Jill has a better idea: what if they built a safe path instead? Will their plan hold once the gate roars to life and they step through to whatever waits on the other side? Written for Jolly Phonics classrooms (Step 3, Unit 1: ph as in phone), this book practises words like 'phew', 'phase', 'phony', 'trophy'.

Phonics Focus: <ph>

epiphany, oomph, phantom, phase, phenomenal, phew, phony, trophy

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