



Burra Nimu, the Easter Bilby



An Australian Children's Story

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Chapter One - The Great Council



"Survival, that's what it's all about," cried Burra Nimu. "The spirit of survival!"

He peered anxiously around the small group of birds and animals huddled together under the bright Australian stars.

"We need to stand together, to fight as one. If our land is to survive — if we are to survive — we must *do* something!"

There was silence amongst the strange gathering. Even the little desert mouse paused thoughtfully, as it scurried to and fro amongst the Spinifex.

Finally a voice spoke out of the dark. "Many of us gathered here tonight are natural enemies. But we have come together because we are all threatened.

"Invaders have come into our land who do not understand the way we all, friends and enemies alike, live in harmony with it, and with one another.

"Burra Nimu is right. We must stop them before we all perish!"

Gatar, the great Black cockatoo, had spoken. And those gathered in the cold desert night knew that he was right. Burra Nimu had called them together for good reason. Something had to be done!





Chapter Two - Burra's Plan



"Oh Burra, you are the cleverest bilby ever!" exclaimed Mrs Bilby. "What a wonderful plan! The eggs for the children will be such fun to make. And they will fit easily into our burrow, it is so full of cosy nooks and crannies."

Mrs Bilby looked at her husband sitting quietly in the corner. Like all bilbies, Burra was small and peaceful. He liked to spend his days curled up underground, safe from the desert sun. At night, he would venture out in search of delicious grubs and seeds, greeting the other creatures he met with a pleasant, sleepy smile.

Now all that had changed. The other creatures, like Burra Nimu and his family, were hungry and scared. The invaders were killing the land and the animals and birds who lived in it.

"I don't understand," said Bindee, Mrs Bilby's small niece. "How is Uncle Burra going to stop the rabbits?"

Mrs Bilby smiled proudly at her husband. His long, pink nose quivered quietly to itself as he sat lost in thought about the great journey to come.

"As you know, Bindee, you are the last of the Lesser Bilbies. Two summers ago, while you were visiting us, the rabbit army invaded the desert where your family lived. They ate everything in their path, destroying the land. No one could survive.

"That is the danger we are all facing now."

Mrs Bilby nuzzled her niece and wiped a tear away from her soft, furry cheek. "Don't cry, Bindee, your home is with us now."

"It will be all right, Bindee," promised Burra Nimu. "We bilbies may not be very big or strong, but we have courage.

"The newcomers do not understand the land the way the first people do. So we must reach the children.

"The children will understand that the eggs are a special gift — a message asking them to help us stop the invaders and give new life to the land."

"When are you going to see the children, Father?" cried Binni. "I want to go with you!"

Mrs Bilby gave her young son an affectionate pat. "You are too young, Binni. You and Bindee must stay here. It will be the first such journey a bilby has ever made, and it will be very dangerous.

"It is not just the rabbits who do not want your father to reach the children. It is also the foxes and feral cats. None of them want the children to know what is happening to the natural creatures of the land."

"But isn't Uncle Burra scared?" asked Bindee.

"There's nothing wrong with being scared," declared Burra, stoutly. "The important thing is to do what must be done.

"Now let's hurry to where Grandma BeeBee is making the eggs. She's saving the first one, in her pouch, especially for you!"





Chapter Three - Egg Time!



The burrow glittered with wonderful colours and shapes. Finally, Grandma BeeBee took off her glasses and put her recipe away: "It's time to decorate the eggs," she smiled.

Binni knew that eggs meant the start of new life and new hope, so he made his especially beautiful. He painted rich red eggs, the colour of the hot desert earth, and splashed them with bright sparkles, because the desert is full of life.

Next, he painted soft green eggs and sprinkled them with the colours of the wild flowers he had once seen, soon after the water fell from the sky.

Then Binni painted warm yellow eggs, the colour of the early morning sun before it fades in the heat of the day. These he gave to Bindee, who decorated them with animals and birds.

Finally, Binni painted deep blue eggs, the colour of the early evening sky when he and his family came out of their burrow to feed and play. Bindee decorated these with twinkling stars. Then she carefully painted each with the big, round moon that hangs on the horizon when the night is clear.

When all the eggs were finished the burrow was ablaze with the colours of the land.

"How proud I am of you all," said Burra Nimu. "Now we can start our journey to the children."

Everyone laughed and cheered: "Hooray! Hooray for the children!"

Burra Nimu nuzzled Binni and Bindee playfully: "Little Ones, you are the colours of the rainbow!"

It was true, they all were. Even Burra Nimu, himself, was covered in paint. How they had enjoyed making the eggs. And how the children would love them!





Chapter Four - Rabbit Invaders



A great cheer went up from the rabbit army as it thundered closer and closer to the bilbies' burrow. Rabbit soldiers loved to fight, even amongst themselves. The bucks were always arguing over who owned the most females. While the female rabbits, or does, often killed one another's young to win more space in the burrow.

Lepus, the rabbit general, wanted his army to grow bigger and stronger. So he kept his troops on the move, constantly invading new territory. When the rabbit army had ruined the land in one area, they simply moved on to the next. The native animals and birds whose homes they destroyed became easy prey for the foxes and feral cats that followed the rabbit army.

The rabbit soldiers stormed through the scrub, closer and closer to the bilbies' home. They were almost at Burra Nimu's burrow when they began to scream: "Kill the bilbies! Capture the eggs! Stop them from reaching the children...."





Chapter Five - Help us!



Burra Nimu and his family huddled together in a small hole, hiding from the rabbits who had captured their home.

"I don't understand," sobbed Bindee. "Why did the rabbits steal our eggs and try to kill us?"

"They are not like us," Mrs Bilby explained sadly. "We bilbies are creatures of the land. We love its plants, its soil, its water, and the animals and birds who belong to it. We are part of its great cycle. The invaders want the land for their own."

"We *must* find help!" said Burra Nimu.

"But who can help us now?" asked Binni, anxiously. "The rabbits tricked the children. They stole our eggs and pretended they were their own gifts to the children."

"Oh Father, why didn't the children understand the message of the eggs and come to help us?"

Burra Nimu sat back on his haunches and rubbed his tired eyes. He hated to see his loved ones so scared, hungry, and exhausted.

"You must be strong, Binni" he said gently. "And have courage."

"*Why* a gift is given is as important as the gift itself. The children did not understand the message of the eggs because the rabbits did not want them to."

"Do not despair, we will find a way of reaching the children."

"But how can we, Burra?" asked Mrs Bilby. "The rabbits stole the egg recipe and we cannot make more gifts without it."

Burra Nimu gave his tail a determined shake: "There must be a way, Beela Nimu, and we shall find it!"





Chapter Six - Little Escapades



"Oh Binni, we dare not!" cried Bindee. "How can we steal back the recipe from the rabbits without being caught?"

Binni sat quietly for a moment. His stomach growled as he sniffed the wind. He and his family had been so hungry since the rabbits invaded. Suddenly, Binni began to smile. "We shall ask Zeela for help."

Bindee was so astonished that she tumbled backwards down the hillock they were sitting on. "Binni Nimu" she exclaimed, picking herself up and dusting off the hot desert sand, "You are the silliest, most stupid creature I've ever met!"

Binni laughed. "Just think, Bindee, if we can persuade Zeela to give the rabbit soldiers a horrible fright, maybe we can dash inside our old burrow and grab the egg recipe while they are not looking!"

Bindee's eyes began to twinkle: "Oh Binni, perhaps you are right! Maybe Zeela will not eat us if we explain *why* we have come."

"Zeela will help," said Binni. "She hates the way the rabbits eat the land bare. Even snakes do not like to see their homes blown away and the trees die."

Bindee danced around, scared but excited at the thought of helping her family. "I shall come with you!" she said, dashing over to pull Binni's tail. "I shall be brave, just like Uncle Burra says."

"That's wonderful, Bindee," said her cousin. "I shall need your help if our plan is to succeed."

"But let's keep our adventure a secret for now. Somehow, I don't think it's what Father meant when he told us to have courage!"





Chapter Seven - Zeela



The sun beat down on their heads. Bindee could feel it burning the tips of her soft, pink ears. It had seemed like such an adventure: to creep away while the others slept and go in search of Zeela. But it was frightening. She wished that she and Binni were curled up safely with their family, far away from the rabbit army. During the day it was too hot, and dangerous, for bilbies to venture abroad.

"Quiet!" hissed Zeela as they crept closer and closer to their old burrow.

They reached the last clump of saltbush and Zeela turned to hiss at them again. "I shall frighten Lepus and his soldiers to help with your plan. But remember, Foolish Ones, if the rabbits do not kill you, next time we meet I shall not be so generous!"

And with a flick of her tongue, Zeela was gone.

"I'm so scared!" Bindee whispered.

"It's all right, Bindee. You stay here where you'll be safe. I shall go on alone", said Binni.

Bindee looked at her cousin. He was smiling bravely. But his nose had gone pale and his whiskers were giving little twitches all by themselves.

"No Binni," she gulped. "We shall stay together, no matter what happens. We faced Zeela together. Now we shall face the whole rabbit army!"





Chapter Eight - Back to the Burrow



Binni and Bindee raced down the hill after Zeela. There was no turning back. They must rescue the egg recipe and escape, or be killed by the rabbit army.

When the rabbit guards saw Zeela they began to pound their feet on a patch of hard earth. Soon more rabbits than anyone could ever imagine were pouring out of the burrow, spraying up clouds of dust as they rushed to escape.

Binni and Bindee stumbled through the earth-red air. They had never been so frightened, or so lucky. The rabbits were so surprised by Zeela's attack that no-one tried to stop the two little bilbies as they scrambled after her into the burrow.

Inside, there was noise and confusion everywhere as the rabbits pushed and shoved and bit and clawed and kicked one another, trying to be first to reach the safety of the ground above.

Zeela slithered happily ahead, hissing and snapping.

"It's all so different!" cried Binni. "I don't recognise it any more!"

And indeed it was. The rabbits had turned their old home into a maze of tunnels. Its once familiar, happy spaces were now unrecognisable.

"There's nothing for it!" Bindee shouted back. "We'll just have to follow Zeela and hope that we stumble across where the recipe is hidden."

But it was too late. Zeela was gone. And the little bilbies had no way of knowing down which tunnel she had vanished.

"Hold tightly to my tail, Bindee. We'll try to find a way out of here," said Binni.

They plunged into the darkness, stumbling down one tunnel after another. But always there were more strange pathways ahead, filled with fleeing rabbits.

Just as they began to despair, they rounded a corner and entered a large cavern. A thin stream of light was filtering in through an opening on the far side.

"We're saved!" Binni sobbed with relief.

But he had spoken too soon. Something was shifting across their path, blocking out the sunlight. Binni had never seen the head of the rabbit army. But he knew with instinctive horror that the huge, ugly creature standing before them was Lepus, the rabbit general.





Chapter Nine - Lepus



"Bilbies!" sneered Lepus. "Small ones! How *dare* you disturb my burrow?"

He drew himself up on his haunches, towering over the two young bilbies. His hot breath scorched their cheeks and his smell choked the air.

Bindee forced herself to stand as tall as she possibly could while the rabbit soldiers formed a circle around them.

"We have come for the egg recipe," declared Binni. "The one you stole from us. We need it to make more eggs for the children."

Lepus gave a roar that was so ferocious even his soldiers drew back in fright. He thrust his face close to Binni's. "It's *mine!*" he growled through barred, yellow teeth.

Lepus waved a paw and a rabbit soldier came forward and placed a small object on the ground before him.

Binni gave a squeal of excitement when he saw the little bundle of twigs, leaves, and seeds, so carefully blended together with dried earth. It was Grandma BeeBee's egg recipe!

"Beautiful, isn't it?" smirked Lepus. "Just think how I can use it to fool the children!"

"No!" cried Binni, "I won't let you!"

Lepus snarled fiercely and raised a massive paw. A terrible howl of fear echoed around the chamber. For a second, Binni thought it was coming from him. Then suddenly there was screaming everywhere and the rabbit soldiers began to run about madly.

"Snake! Snake! ..."

Out of my way! ..."

"Snake! Snake! ..."

And there she was, the most beautiful creature Binni had ever seen, slithering across the cavern towards them.

"Hello, Pretty Ones," hissed Zeela, snapping at the heels of a fleeing rabbit. "I think it is time to go now."

"Not so fast!" roared Lepus. And with a mighty swipe he knocked Binni to the ground and sent Bindee flying across the room.

"Run, Bindee, run!" shouted Binni, hopping painfully to his feet.

Lepus gave another swipe and Binni felt his stomach go squish as he landed on something round and lumpy.

"Get away, get away from it!" screamed Lepus.





Binni had landed on the egg recipe! Quickly, he tucked the precious bundle into his pouch and turned to face Lepus. If he was ever to escape it must be now.

So when the giant paw came flying towards him once more Binni gave a huge leap. He landed to one side of Lepus and scrambled to his feet. Ahead of him was daylight and a clear path!

With a cry of joy, Binni bounded to the burrow entrance. Bindee's head appeared at the opening, with Zeela peering down beside her.

"Quickly, Binni!" cried Bindee. Grabbing Zeela's tail, she reached down to haul him to safety.

Binni scrambled through the hole to freedom, just as Lepus's great jaws snapped behind him.





Chapter Ten - Rejoicing!



"You naughty, naughty, brave little bilbies!" cried Mrs Bilby, nuzzling them gently to show how glad she was that they were safe.

Burra Nimu whispered a few stern words that made Binni and Bindee blush from the tips of their pink noses to the tips of their pink ears. Then he nuzzled them lovingly and smiled to their gathered friends.

"Thanks to the brave efforts of Binni, Bindee, and Zeela we can make new eggs to take to the children.

"There is danger ahead, but we will face it together. And tonight we will celebrate!"

Everyone present began to cheer and dance, waving their tails in the air. Binni unfurled his tail shyly. Tied its end, right where the pink tip had once been, was a small bandage. Binni gave a shudder as he remembered how Lepus' big teeth had closed upon it.





Chapter Eleven - Making Plans



It was a worrying time. Each day as Gatar flew overhead he saw more and more rabbits scouting the land, searching for Burra Nimu and his family. Everyone was relieved when the new eggs were finally ready to take to the children.

Keela, the kangaroo, returned from a special visit to the forest. Binni had never seen this far-away place, but he knew that in it were many strange creatures.

Burra Nimu and Gatar peered inside Keela's pouch and talked with her for a long time. Finally, Burra Nimu smiled. "We are ready. Tonight we will start the journey to the children."

Binni was so excited. He and Bindee were going too!

"If Lepus was to find you alone, I dread to think what would happen," his father had said. "At least if we are all together I can fight to protect you."

"Besides, without you and Bindee there would be no eggs to deliver!"





Chapter Twelve - Escape!



They crept quietly along a small track hidden between two sand hills. Somewhere ahead lay the Great Saltpan. Binni knew they would have to skirt around the edge of this strange, dried sea. It was too dangerous to cross. Even a small animal might break through its thick, salt crust and be trapped in the sticky clay beneath.

Binni gave a shiver of fear as they left the safety of the path and set out across the mulga plain. He knew their friends were hiding nearby, hoping to help if the rabbits attacked. But the plain was scattered with trees and filled with secret dips and hollows. There were many places the rabbit army could ambush them.

They travelled on for what seemed like a very long time. Finally, Binni smelled the Saltpan in the distance. Soon they would be safely across the plain.

Suddenly, a great roar shattered the air. Binni's heart froze. It was the war cry of the rabbit army.

"Remember our plan!" cried Burra Nimu, as the rabbits streamed out of a hollow and surged around them.

Lepus sprang onto a nearby rock and raised a paw. His troops fell silent.

"I win, Burra Nimu!" he sneered. "Soon I shall be rid of you *and* have the eggs!" He stared down in triumph and Binni could see the gleam of hate in his eyes.

"You are wrong, Lepus" said Burra Nimu quietly. "You will never win. The creatures of the land will never give up. You cannot destroy their will to survive."

Lepus snarled. "But you have nothing left to fight with!"

And his troops began to drum their hind legs on the ground in victory.

Burra Nimu smiled mysteriously. "There is always the magic of the bush. Look, it is all around you!"

For a long moment nothing happened. Then swooping out of the sky, silent and black, came Gatar. He sped over the rabbit soldiers to where Lepus sat.

"Now, Gatar, now!" cried Burra Nimu.

The great bird ruffled his feathers and the night sky began to fill with hundreds of strange, shimmering lights. They swarmed around Lepus, buzzing before his eyes.

Lepus pawed the air angrily, screaming at his troops for assistance. But they did not move, they were too scared.

Binni watched in wonder. To him, the dancing lights were beautiful.

"What are they, Father?" he whispered.





"Fireflies," smiled Burra Nimu. "Keela collected them in the forest. They are harmless, but they will give us a chance to escape."

"Be ready, Binni. When Gatar returns, we must run."

As Binni nodded, hundreds more lights began to appear, filling the air around the rabbit soldiers.

"It's time!" cried Burra Nimu.

And they began to run: through the rabbits, through the dancing lights, towards the Great Saltpan.





Chapter Thirteen - Across the Saltpan



"There it is!" panted Binni. "We've made it!"

They scrambled onto the track that ran around the Saltpan. Binni's heart pounded against his ribs and his sides heaved. He gulped down the cooling night air. Poor Bindee. She was smaller than everyone else, but she had run just as fast. Now she was trembling with tiredness.

They rested for a moment, heads drooping. But as they did so, a dreadful smell began to mingle with the salty air and a long howl began to sound.

The ground began to tremble. Softly at first, then harder and harder, as if a great roll of thunder was shaking it.

The rabbit army was coming!

The rabbit soldiers burst out of the mulga scrub and surged around them, forcing the little group onto the edge of the Saltpan. Lepus watched in triumph.

"There is no hope *now*, Burra Nimu!" he snarled.

But Burra Nimu would not give up. "We shall cross the Saltpan," he replied.

Binni gave a gasp of fright. "Father, we can't! With our load of eggs we will break through the surface and be trapped in the mud below. Then we will drown or be killed by the rabbits!"

"That is a chance we must take," said Burra Nimu. "Come, we must go!"

And they turned and began to pick their way onto the saltpan.

"Stop! Stop! I order you to stop!" screamed Lepus. He raced back and forth along the edge of the saltpan, but he was not brave enough to venture onto it. Nor could he persuade his soldiers to do so, no matter how hard he bit and scratched.

"Hold tightly to one another's tail, in case we fall," said Burra Nimu. "I shall try to find a safe path across."

And as the moon shimmered on its surface, and the rabbit army watched in frustration, Burra Nimu and his little group set off together across the Great Saltpan on their journey to the children.





Chapter Fourteen - Towards the Future!



It was a long and dangerous journey across the Saltpan.

And even when they reached the other side they were not safe — the rabbit army was hurrying around its edge to catch them.

Binni would never forget the terrible journey that followed. He saw strange areas where trees had once grown, but which were now barren. "It is the rabbits" said Burra Nimu. "They eat the young shoots, so new trees cannot grow when the old ones die."

They passed through places where the soil blew on the wind and deep gullies scarred the land. "The rabbits eat the grass until nothing is left to hold the earth," Burra Nimu explained.

They saw silent, empty areas where no birds or animals lived. "The rabbits eat the food that the creatures of the land need to survive, and drive them from their homes. The foxes and feral cats do the rest," said Burra Nimu sadly.

Binni dreaded what would happen to his family if the invaders could not be stopped. But Burra Nimu did not let him despair. "Soon we will reach the children."

Finally, just as Binni was beginning to think they had lost their way, they came to a large hill. The sun was low in the sky as they climbed to the top and looked down into the valley below.

There, bathed in the soft rays of sunset, the children were playing.

"We've found them!" shouted Binni and Bindee, excitedly. "We've found the children!"

Everyone gave a huge cheer.

As they sat watching the children play, Burra Nimu and his brave companions were filled with great joy. After many adventures, they had reached the end of their journey. Tomorrow, they would give the eggs to the children and ask for their help.

There was hope now. The future lay ahead!





Chapter Fifteen - What else happened?



Besides the original adventure told here, Burra Nimu and his friends had a great many other adventures. They travelled a long way to reach the children, and both good and bad things happened on their journey, especially in the strange land on the other side of the saltpan.

If you would like to write about their other adventures, that would be wonderful!

Burra would love to see your drawings and read your stories....



Email Burra at burra@easterbilby.info



Visit Burra's website at www.easterbilby.info

