

## Years 7-8 Category Runner Up

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### The Pirate of Maria Island

Our family has a tradition. Every Easter we all go to an island. When I heard that this Easter, we were going to Maria Island, my expectations were not high. We had gone to tropical Heron Island previously, and that had been great! We swam with the turtles and waddled with the sea cucumbers, but Maria Island just didn't sound all too exciting.

On the first day we set off, walking all the way down to the South Island with our heaving packs on our backs. We set up camp at French's Farm in the afternoon and we were exhausted. Together, we put the two tents up quickly so we could get the food ready to eat before the sun set.

The sun vanished quickly. As the sky turned pink it suddenly became cold and windy, disturbing our peaceful evening. As if that was not enough, we had a visitor! With an ugly scar across his eye, like a mangy beat-up super villain, out of the darkness the thief entered our camp. We were the perfect, unsuspecting victims for his surprise attack.

I vividly remember him creeping past our tent in the protection of the darkness and lunging boldly face first into the metal Trangia bowl. Licking up the last remaining scraps of our fresh pasta meal, the confident trespasser continued to clean our bowls despite the commotion we had been made. Finally, Dad splashed water at him which made him disappear in a frightful hurry but only for a couple of minutes. This was long enough for us to gather up all our bowls and remove them from the scene.

As expected, he eventually came back. This time, as we weren't so frantic and concerned, and with our food secured tightly away in our tent, we could take a better look at him. His paws and the fur on his back were grungy. He also appeared blind in the badly scarred eye, leading us to call him 'Pirate Possum.' We had seen several possums before but none like Pirate. He was obviously not afraid of us, but some kind of battle with another creature had disfigured him.

Returning to Darlington the next day, I saw a handwritten sign promoting a 'Quiz Night at the Chapel' and, eager to go, I convinced my family. At the end we talked to the ranger about our experience with 'Pirate' and his scars. Hearing our story, she gave us a short explanation:

Once, the apex predators were possums; they were in control. They didn't need to worry about fights with other species, until the Tasmanian Devil program was initiated on Maria Island. The possums, the ranger explained, thought the devils were just some other lower animal species, but the devils themselves saw food. The devils tried to catch the unwary possums. The possums attacked back, but not many survived the uneven battles. 'Pirate' did, however.

As I watched Maria Island disappear as we ferried back to Triabunna, I reflected on Pirate, and how my feelings towards him had changed. At first, this bold possum annoyed and repulsed me. He was not the cute, timid furry animal I expected he should be. The ranger, however, changed my attitude, as I came to understand that Pirate deserved my sympathy. Humans introduced devils to Maria Island to save them, which is important, but it had caused pain and suffering for Pirate. I started to think that nature is not always attractive or perfect, but all species are just trying to do what they can to survive. It's important for us to remember that before we judge.