



RACE THE WILD

MOUNTAIN MISSION

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SCHOLASTIC INC.

**TO MS. DENISE AND MS. MELISSA'S
CLASS AT SEVEN ARROWS SCHOOL.
THANKS FOR A WILD AND
INSPIRING TIME! –KJE**

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ISBN 978-0-545-94065-8

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

16 17 18 19 20

Printed in the U.S.A.

40

First printing 2016

Book design by Yaffa Jaskoll



CHAPTER 1

THIN AIR, THINNER CHANCES

The tingling seemed to start in Russell’s nose, but it also stretched to his toes and fingers. He clenched his hands into fists and buried them in the pockets of his jacket.

“I’m not that cold,” Dev announced, looking at the rugged peaks above. Mountains rose in jagged steps, each taller than the next. The highest ones were crusted with layers of pure white ice and snow. “I shouldn’t be cold, right? It’s almost spring. So why are my hands numb?”

“The higher we go, the colder it gets,” Eliza reminded them. “The Himalayas are the highest mountains in the world, you know.”

“But that tingling probably isn’t from the cold,” Mari chimed in. “It could be from a lack of good air. As we go higher, there is less oxygen.”

“Well, yeah,” Eliza added between shallow puffs. “Obviously.”

Mari was talking about altitude sickness. Russell knew it was no joke. Not getting enough oxygen could make you very sick. Russell’s mom had told him about it after watching a movie. She had said that it started with a tingling, itchy feeling in the hands and feet, and it could cause dizziness and nausea. Russell knew that if he didn’t feel better soon, it could sideline him. It could knock any of them out of the race.

“We’ve been climbing for a while,” Sage said to the team. “Maybe we should take a break.” Sage was the group’s de facto leader. It was Russell, Mari, and Dev’s sixth race with Sage. They all had come to rely on her. She looked out for them, and not necessarily just for their chances to win. But they all knew the truth: Sage did not like to come in second.

This was one time Russell did not agree with their leader. He preferred to keep moving. As long as he was taking steps, searching for safe footing, his mind wouldn’t wander to other things. After all, there were a *lot* of other things to think about. It was the final leg of this round of *The Wild Life*. He and his four teammates were competing in a special all-star race against other winning teams from previous years. Some of the teams had

already been eliminated. No one knew which teams were still in it, but Russell was willing to bet that his old friend Dallas and the rest of Team Nine had made the cut. Russell just had a feeling, and not necessarily a good one.

“Can you check the ancam again, Dev?” Eliza asked. “It’s hard to believe we’ve hiked all this way and the race organizers haven’t given us a single clue. It seems like a waste of time and energy.”

Russell smiled to himself. Eliza was the newest member of their crew. She had once been their rival. Back when they were Team Red, Eliza had been on Team Purple. But now the five of them made up Team Ten, and they were working together in the All-Star Extravaganza.



“I just checked the ancam, like, two minutes ago,” Dev assured them, patting the trusty communication unit. Dev kept it strapped to his chest in a handcrafted harness so he could grab it in two seconds flat. (One point six-three seconds, to be precise.) Dev took his job of operating the gadget, which was their only connection to the race organizers, very seriously.

“Can you check again?” Eliza prompted.

Russell glanced over his shoulder and saw Eliza scanning the rugged trail and gritting her teeth. At the start of the All-Star Extravaganza, the race organizers had forced each team to take on another member. Sage had drawn Eliza’s name from a hat. Russell didn’t want to think what would have happened if Sage had picked the slip

with Dallas's name on it. He told himself not to think about it and focused on the rocky path.

After a moment, Dev answered Eliza. "The ancam still doesn't show anything except the X on the map. I think we should keep going. We aren't far." Dev glanced at the flame-colored sun as it dropped lower in the sky. "We might not be really cold now, but that'll change as soon as the sun goes behind one of the mountains."

"And spotting animals won't get any easier in the dark," Mari noted. After all, that was the whole point of *The Wild Life*. The race was an around-the-world competition—in some of the planet's most remote places—to seek out animals and animal facts. Russell knew Mari was right. She usually was when it came to the animals.

Nightfall would make tracking any wildlife more difficult . . . and more dangerous.

Russell took as deep a breath as his lungs would allow. “I agree. Let’s keep moving,” he panted. He was exhausted and needed to rest, but he wanted to get to their designated stopping point before he collapsed.

Over his heavy breathing, he heard a low howl echo through the canyon. Seconds later, another howl joined it. This one was long and high, like a siren.

“Is that what I think it was?” Russell wondered out loud.

“I believe so,” Eliza answered.

Another howl carried through the cool, crisp air.

“On second thought, we should keep going,” Sage said.

“Good thinking,” Dev answered, with a hint of sarcasm. He picked up the pace.

“It’s probably the wolves in a pack calling to one another, trying to meet back up,” Mari said, sounding unconcerned.

“Or maybe they are warning another pack to stay out of their way,” Eliza added in a matter-of-fact tone.

“Does it matter why they’re howling?” Russell asked. “There are wolves close by. Too close for comfort.”

“Don’t be so sure,” Mari replied. “Wolf howls can carry over six miles.”

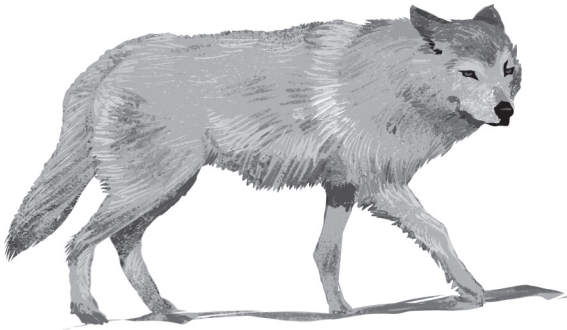
Six miles was far, but Russell was sure those calls were from much closer.

“I can see a light up ahead!” Dev called. “I’ll bet it’s our rest stop.”

Russell searched the path in front of them until he saw the glimmer of a lantern. Then he looked back, past Eliza and their chaperone, Jace. He thought he could see the silhouette of a wolf on a cliff in the distance. Moments later, a mournful howl sounded, and Russell knew the wolves weren't far behind.

CREATURE FEATURE

HIMALAYAN WOLF



SCIENTIFIC NAME: *Canis himalayensis*

TYPE: mammal

RANGE: regions of the Himalayan Mountains in Nepal, Tibet, India, and Bhutan

FOOD: mostly small or medium-sized mammals, such as rodents and rabbits

Himalayan wolves generally like to work together and hunt in packs, especially in the winter when food is scarce. They prefer to hunt in the open, where it is easier to wear down their prey. In the summer, some wolves might live and hunt on their own.

Himalayan wolves vary in color, with most being tan or light gray. They often have white or darker shading around the face.

Scientists believe the Himalayan wolf is an old species, maybe old enough to form the base of all wolf bloodlines. The *Canis* genus, which includes the gray wolf, coyote, jackal, and today's domesticated dogs, began over a million years ago.