

# FIRST PRIZE

## Life Searcher

“Lifeseacher to Houston. You there?”

“Copy that, Lifeseacher.”

“Life-sustaining planet found. Movement recorded on planet’s west face. Permission to land?”

“Copy that, Lifeseacher.”

That was the last I heard from Earth. Now I live on that planet surviving on crew provisions. I live under a particularly dense patch of star trees (local fauna), avoiding contact with the natives and dusk riders. Dusk riders are rogue bandits who hunt people for fun. They ride on birds called dusks, swift and slender like a shadow. The planet’s natives are ugly quadrupeds. They live in ant-like colonies of soldier, worker, and hunter. The queen rules over all. They are intelligent enough to build clothes and homes. NASA would be proud.

*Log29*

Colonies operate like a living creature. In the middle, there is a beating heart where inhabitants recharge each week. I’m gonna have to exploit that.

*Log59*

A plan: I will use the remains of the spaceship to make a transmitter and sneak into the colony to plug my transmitter into the core. That will hopefully send a signal loud enough for Earth to hear.

Then I’ll wait and wait.

*Log109*

Almost a year. Time to work. First, I scour the spaceship for supplies.

*Clunk.* Satellite, check.

*Clang.* Battery, check.

*Crash.* Transmitter, check.

*Log122*

Next, attack supplies: my knife, my dusk pelt (dusk feathers are razor sharp), the battery obviously.

*Log134*

Today I’m going in.

I’m on my belly in the forest. Ferns and thorns scrape me. Sharp rock cuts into me, but my dusk pelt protects me. I can see the hive. It glows soothingly. Too bad after I drain the energy, there will be no more light. I’m silent like the hunting dusks. Swiftly, I take out the guards. Razor-sharp feathers fly straight to their brains. I enter. Three more guards come at me bringing goliaths, mutated battle versions. This is going to be harder.

I run at them. Three quick shots to the brain and they are dead. It takes me five minutes to get to the centre chamber. When I get there, I am surprised to find the core on the ceiling.

The floor of the hive is gooey like a living animal. The natives inside are mostly workers and not threatening, so I go unnoticed. I must use the inner pathways to get to the core. Along the way, I take out a few soldiers and one goliath.

I’m at the top of the pathways. In front of me there is a series of catwalks laid out like a living spiderweb. I make a break for it, and I’m there. Tears well up against my eyelids, threatening to burst.

I’m finally going home.

**by Ronan Tang** (Grade Five)  
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# FIRST PRIZE

## Torn Apart

The sunset was beautiful, a streak of pink in the faint orange sky. Julia would have enjoyed this, but she was in a terrible state. Trudging in freezing December snow made her feel bitter, frozen, and numb. All she had was a tattered shawl, dusty apron, and torn frock.

She opened the door, which groaned, then slammed it. Her back aching, Julia set down the soup she was holding, made of only water and onions. It was the only food the Nazis gave to the pitiful prisoners. She shook her boots off. Approaching the sink, she washed her soot-covered face and dried it with an itchy cloth. Julia looked into the broken mirror and was disgusted when she saw a filthy and pale girl staring back. Glancing at the soup, she felt anger boil inside of her. *Why? Why am I separated from my family? Why am I doing nothing except following orders from Nazis and labouring for enemies? Why is the world cruel?* Those were the questions racing through her mind, wanting answers. Julia was about to cry. She sat down on her “bed,” pulling the thin, straw blanket over her. She looked around. *How have I come to this most uncomfortable and cramped room? How could this be home?*

*Home.* Julia wanted to be back in her cozy cottage, snuggling in bed with her sister. She wanted her mother’s carrot cake, to discuss politics with her dad. But it was gone.

She stared at her boots, her only memory of happiness. They were the only things the Nazis let her keep. Tears streamed down her cheeks, remembering when she was taken from her family.

Julia’s sadness once again became rage as she remembered how she was now working in a “factory.” It was prison, with metal doors and supervisors. You were watched everywhere. Every time you did something wrong or slow, you would feel the heat of a supervisor’s breath, a gun pointed near your head, whispering threats. Julia could still see that malicious face smirking every time she got in trouble.

Julia stood up, trying to erase the horrid image in her mind. She walked to the tiny window and gazed at the stars. Julia closed her tired eyes and imagined her mother standing beside her, hugging her close and whispering to her in that sweet, motherly voice: *“I’ll always be there for you, no matter what. Just take a deep breath and pray,”* her mother had often said.

Julia did so; taking a deep breath, she prayed, “God, make the world a better place. Help me through hard times. Tell Mother, wherever she may be, I love her, I always will. Tell her I’m safe. Please.”

**by Poorvi Jain** (Grade Six)  
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# SECOND PRIZE

## The Fluffy Mess

One sunny day in September, Rick O'Connor, the senior scientist with Boreal Climate Research, returned to his camp on the shore of Hudson Bay. Rick had studied sea ice in northern Canada for nine years and had many adventures along the way. As he unpacked his gear at camp, he remembered the things he liked about his job. One of his favourite things was when he rescued a seal five years ago and called him Hartich after a sound the pup had made.

On the second day in camp, Rick decided to explore the rocky beach and see if he could find his friend the seal. After a short wait, Rick was happy his friend appeared! It seemed to Rick that the seal was so friendly, it almost seemed tame. After an hour, Rick decided to head back to camp. He called goodbye to Hartich and started to walk the long way back. He was just about at his camp when he saw tracks in the mud.

Rick took a look at the tracks, trying to decide if they were new, when he heard a helicopter. Running to the top of the hill, he caught a peek of a large helicopter flying very low to the ground. Rick decided he better look for the animal that had made the tracks in the mud. The tracks were bigger than his boot, and they belonged to the white bear.

Looking around the camp, Rick noticed the bear had looked at his gear. He also found boot prints and knew they were Russian boots, which must have come from the helicopter. *Spying on my research!* thought Rick. He had heard rumours from Canadian Rangers that Russia had a research team in the area, and they had an interest in animals.

Rick was thinking about the bear the next morning, when he spotted Hartich. He was sitting quietly watching the seal, when he heard a voice behind him. The voice was coming from a bear! Rick was so surprised, he fell over. The bear explained that he was Russian and worked in a team of scientists. His job was to talk to other animals about climate change and report back. And he was waiting to talk to Hartich. Rick asked the bear how he learned to talk, and the bear explained that all animals could talk, but people had forgotten how to listen.

Just then, Hartich joined the conversation. The seal and the bear explained to Rick that all animals in the North must work together to save the planet, and it was now up to him to make a difference.

*by* **Conor Wilkins** (Grade Five)  
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# SECOND PRIZE

## Mama

It was a Sunday morning when Mama had gone to the town market to fetch us some bread to go with the stew she had been making earlier. She had been gone a couple of hours before we started to worry. Her usual visits to the market only took thirty minutes on average.

Papa went to look for her. He came back a while later with her in his arms. He ran to the couch and laid her down. Her breath was heavy, and I could see she was struggling. She was coughing roughly. She opened her mouth and tried to speak, but her voice was croaky. I could barely understand her. “Smoke . . . flames. . . .” She gasped after speaking.

Papa told her to save her energy.

I could see she was in pain. I ran to her, trying desperately to comfort her.

Papa was whispering something in a kind of modified English. I held Mama’s hand. I watched her chest rise and fall, rise and fall, rise and fall. . . . I waited for it to rise again. Nothing happened. A sudden consternation filled me. My mouth opened to scream, but Papa put a hand over my mouth. His deep-blue eyes filled with worry and sorrow. I stared into them. The stillness and serenity made me realize I mustn’t worry. He took his hand off my mouth. I took deep breaths and released my hand from Mama’s. He led me out the open door of our house and took me to the water to watch the schooner in the sunset.

We came back to our house at dark. He scooped Mama’s lifeless, but still beautiful, body into his arms and headed slowly to the door, humming a sad tune. I followed him out with my head down.

I didn’t look up until we reached the edge of the dock. Papa stepped up the shallow stairs into our schooner. He walked to the middle of the wooden boat and laid her on the ground. He turned around and walked out solemnly. He reached for the rope that held our schooner to the dock. He untied it slowly. Papa raised his lantern high, letting the soft yellow glow seep through the glass and mingle with the shadows. I looked up at him. His brow was furrowed, and I saw the tears welling in his eyes. Looking at him like this made me cry too. I felt my lip starting to quiver involuntarily, and a lump formed in my throat. I let a tear escape my eye. I couldn’t hold it in. I looked out into the bay where our lonely schooner sat—elegant and beautiful in the foggy bay.

*by Mollie Martin-Nilson* (Grade Six)  
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# THIRD PRIZE

## Escaping China

“Last night, the Japanese dropped ten nuke bombs and killed 300 people.” I ran to the table and turned off the radio. I couldn’t bear to listen to the radio anymore; everyone was dying.

“Jasmine! Can you come pick what flavour you want for your birthday cake?” my mom shouted. I was born on July 7, 1938, a year after the Second Sino-Japanese War started.

“Coming!” I yelled.

I ran down the hall and banged into my mom. “There you are!” she exclaimed.

We went into the kitchen and sat down. “The real reason I called you here is because . . . we’re running away tonight,” she whispered.

“What?” I shouted.

“I’m sorry. You should start packing.” I just nodded and ran to my room.

I opened my drawer and packed a big bag. Then, I climbed in bed and fell asleep.

“Jasmine, wake up!” my mom urged.

I opened my eyes and glanced at the clock. It was 11:00 p.m. I climbed out of bed and my mom handed me the darkest clothes I had. I quickly changed, grabbed my bag, and ran down the hall, where I met my mom waiting at the door.

“Okay, let’s go,” she whispered.

We crept into the crisp night air and set off, darting behind houses, afraid the Japanese might get us.

“This way,” my mom called.

Suddenly, we heard a twig crack behind us. We ran to hide behind the nearest tree, holding our breath.

Minutes later, a shadow passed over us. I squeezed my eyes shut, and after what seemed like an hour, we heard them moving on.

Then we found a clearing and sat down to eat breakfast. I waited for my mom to get food, and she waited for me. “Didn’t you bring the dumplings?” she said.

“No, I thought you brought them.”

My mom sighed and told me to go look for food.

A while later, I came across some berries. I got as many as I could and ran towards the clearing.

After an hour, I still hadn’t found the clearing. “Mom!” I shouted. Finally, I sat down on a rock and started to cry.

*Tweet!* I opened my eyes. I must have fallen asleep. I got up and saw a shadow staggering towards me. I thought the Japanese heard me, then I recognized the scarf I gave my mom. “Mom!” I shouted and ran towards her.

We clutched each other, while my mom murmured, “I met a man who’s willing to take us to a country called Canada. He’s waiting for us now.”

We walked over to a truck, climbed in, and zoomed off towards the setting sun.

*by Mona Zhao* (Grade Five)  
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# THIRD PRIZE

## New Wings

Joseph Gardner's plane soared over the destroyed city below. His plane was the only one in the sky for miles, and the villagers below, who had survived, were scavenging for food and other useful things.

Joseph despised this. What was once a mighty city was now in ruins. Joseph remembered his one order: *Kill Lucas Beder and end World War II.*

"Why?" Joseph had argued. "You think killing one man will stop the war that has devastated so many?" But now, here he was, searching for that one man. This mission was impossible.

As he guided his plane lower to search for Lucas on the ground, he noticed something. All of the people were staring up at him as he flew by. Even though this was an enemy city, Joseph had not expected this. By the looks on their faces, they were not mad or even scared. They were disappointed. As Joseph was contemplating this, another plane came into view.

Startled out of his trance, Joseph pulled up his goggles and stared out the windshield. *Could this be? Definitely.* Joseph recognized the huge wings and the massive main body with the word ACE painted across the side. The plane was enormous, with slots that opened and closed across the bottom to let out bombs. Joseph shuddered. He knew most people would not dare to come as close as he was now. Lucas Beder was a feared and dangerous man. Back in the trenches, there were outlandish stories about him—that he was a spy from another world or something.

Then Joseph noticed clouds of smoke were rising from the engines of Lucas's plane. In the cockpit, Lucas, desperately trying to keep the plane airborne, had a look of panic on his face. Instantly, Joseph grabbed the "fire" button mounted on the dashboard of his plane, but something stopped him. *I could just let him crash. . . .* Joseph thought. *No, it's my duty to kill him.* But just before he could, a third option popped into his head: *Save him.*

"What?" Joseph thought aloud, angry such a thought could occur, even though he knew it was the right thing to do. Looking at the size of Lucas's plane, Joseph realized the stress on his own engines would probably make him crash. And before he could think, Joseph found himself diving towards Lucas's plane.

The nose of Joseph's plane rested under his enemy's plane as he started to lift it up. His engines groaned and creaked as if they would give out at any time. And then they did. Joseph looked up at the sky and saw Lucas flying away. He turned and saluted him, as Joseph's plane exploded into a million pieces.

**by Adam Blanchard** (Grade Six)  
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