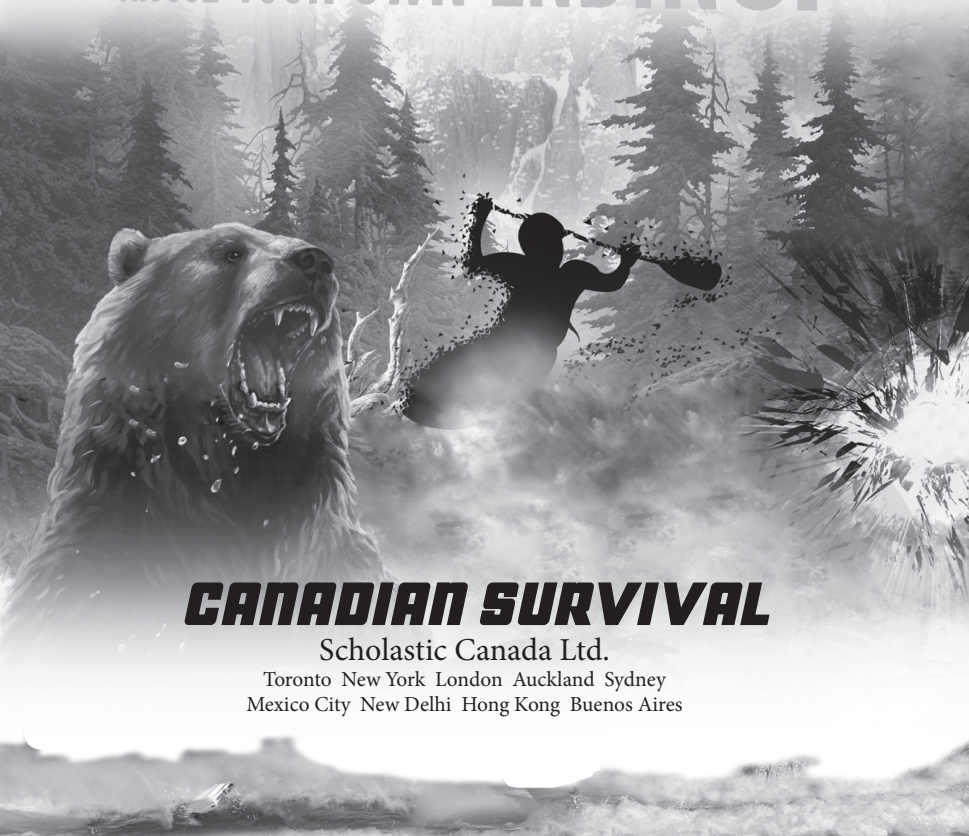


**JEFF SZPIRGLAS**

**COUNTDOWN TO  
DANGER**  
CHOOSE YOUR OWN ENDING!



**CANADIAN SURVIVAL**

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# *For Danielle, Léo, Ruby, Penelope and Spooky!*

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**Y**our canoe scrapes to a halt against the rocky shore of a small lake. You wobble unsteadily out of the boat and wipe a smear of sweat from your brow. You're just steps away from a thick forest. Beyond that, a towering ring of jagged mountains surrounds you. It's like an advertisement for the Rockies.

But then reality sinks in.

You let out a shaky breath and turn around. Doubled over in the back of the canoe is Prisha Singh. She's looking pale, and a thick stream of blood oozes from a wound on her head.

She was your guide on Camp Aquila's annual canoe trip, but it's all gone wrong.

Now you're lost *and* separated from the rest of your cabin. You hadn't counted on those rapids. Why hadn't Prisha warned you?

"Prisha," you say, but she doesn't respond. You reach forward and gently pull her back. She lets out a whimper, and that's when you realize how badly hurt she is.

"Prisha," you say again, and she opens her eyes. "Why did we take those rapids? You never prepped us for them. We didn't even have the proper gear."

"We *had* to take the fork in the river," she mumbles.



“We were in danger. We were being . . . followed.”

You narrow your eyes. “Followed? What are you talking about?”

“By . . .” she starts, but she’s already shaking her head in disbelief. “By some kind of animal,” she says.

You’re about to laugh like this is some kind of weird joke, but that’s when you hear something in the woods. Is it a grunting sound? It’s coming from someone. Or something. It can’t be very far away, either. And whatever it is, it sounds BIG. You’re going to need help, and fast. When the rest of your group notices you’re missing, they’ll be looking for you, but who knows how long it will take them to find you out here. Prisha doesn’t look like she’s going to hold out too much longer without medical assistance.

You’re on your own now.

Instinctively you reach into your pocket for your phone. But of course you don’t get a cell signal here.

So you pull the dry bag with your emergency supplies from the canoe. Spilling the contents out, you spot a few things you’ll need for sure—that map, for example. But there’s also a compass, a pocket knife . . . and a flare gun!

You consider taking everything with you, but then think twice. Maybe you should leave something for Prisha. More importantly, which way should you go?

There’s no time to debate this. You’ve got to act now.

***If you grab the knife and head into the forest, turn to page 3.***

***If you take the flare gun and head out on the river, turn to page 4.***

27:42

**Y**ou grab the knife, compass and map, leaving Prisha with the flare gun, and walk towards the woods.

As soon as you step off the beach, you're swallowed in a thick coniferous forest. You're already getting scratched and covered in a film of sticky pine sap.

Plus there are the bugs.

Blackflies, mosquitoes—you name it! It's like you've walked into a cloud of insects that exist solely to drain your blood. Between dodging oncoming branches and slapping at stinging, biting insects, you're already feeling defeated.

But you're *alive*.

How long will Prisha stay that way? Or yourself, if you don't find help?

You have the feeling that there's definitely someone in these woods. But you're not going to help Prisha or yourself by waiting for them to find you. If you track them down, maybe they can help you both.

But maybe if you can get to a high vantage point, you'll have a better sense of where help might be.

***If you press deeper into the woods, turn to page 5.***

***If you search out higher ground, turn to page 7.***



27:42

“I’m going to take the canoe to get some help,” you tell Prisha.

She nods weakly. You can tell there’s no time to waste. You grab the flare gun, leaving Prisha with the knife.

Back into the canoe! You jam the paddle against the rocky shore and push off until you’re floating.

You look over your shoulder and see Prisha lying on the beach. You’re not sure how long she’s got before something really bad happens.

Come to think of it, you’re not sure how long *you’ve* got.

Soon you’re moving downstream, and the current does most of the pushing. You just use the blade of the paddle to keep from bumping into the riverbank.

The rest of your camp group has got to be farther this way. Maybe you can catch up to them and let them know what happened.

But the river keeps flowing faster and faster. You notice that it’s branching off in two directions up ahead. One way seems to be moving quickly; the other seems calmer.

The fork in the river is coming up soon. You’ll need to choose which way to go—now.

***If you brave the faster-moving water, turn to page 14.***

***If you stick to the calmer path, turn to page 15.***

26:33

**Y**ou head deeper into the forest and quickly realize this was a bad idea. All of your hiking experience has been on well-marked trails. There's no discernable way through this thick tangle of trees. Sharp branches jut out, poking and tearing at your skin. You try crouching down low and shimmying around the thick tree trunks, but that just makes your journey all the more confusing.

A slight crackle breaks the eerie silence. You whip your head around, looking for the source. Is it just a falling branch? Or is there someone else nearby?

You hold steady for a moment. You can feel your pulsing heartbeat in your throat and ears.

*It's nothing*, you try to convince yourself. You get up and move on.

And that's when you catch sight of a dark blur in the woods. It's a person, only it isn't.

It's bigger.

Darker.

And hunched over.

You blink, and then it's gone, swallowed back into the forest.

Now your heart is pounding a mile a minute. You reach into your pack for something to defend yourself

with, but what? The knife? Your hand-to-hand combat skills are limited to video games, and some good that'll do you *here*.

How did a useless city slicker like you wind up here? You're about to start feeling sorry for yourself when your ears perk up at more sounds.

Something is crunching through the underbrush.

You duck behind an oversized tree trunk.

The sounds get clearer, closer.

You ignore the ticklish beads of sweat running down your brow into your eyes, and strain to get a look at whoever's coming.

Your jaw drops open.

It's Prisha!

She's looking a lot better. There's even a bandage over her head wound.

You're about to run out to her, but then you stop yourself.

How did she manage to bandage herself? She was looking close to death only a few minutes ago.

Something isn't right here. Should you stay hidden until you figure out what's going on?

***If you follow Prisha from a safe distance, turn to page 9.***

***If you confront her right now, turn to page 12.***





26:33

**Y**ou turn towards the mountains and push onward and upward. Soon your muscles are working against a steep incline. Jagged rocks and boulders tear gaping holes in the mountainside. You find a few hand- and footholds and use exposed tree roots to pull yourself up, but when you look over your shoulder, you gasp. Already you're so high up that you wonder how you'll manage to get back down without falling.

Looking up again, you see that the forest soon thins out to reveal slabs of exposed rock. How are you possibly going to finish this climb?

You *must*, you tell yourself. It's do or die.

You reach forward to grab the closest root—

*SNAP!*

Your weight tears the root into pieces. Your footing slips. You grab on to the rock face with one hand, but you can feel your fingers slipping.

You open your mouth to scream and something **GRABS YOUR WRIST.**

You look up.

You're staring into the face of a man with chiselled features and a stern look on his face.



This guy is strong. With one hand, he pulls you up and sets you down beside him on the rock ledge.

He doesn't take his eyes off you for one second. He's clearly sizing you up.

*Who is this guy?* He's wearing camouflage clothing and has several items clipped to his vest, including some kind of futuristic-looking device that vaguely resembles a gun.

Finally, he speaks. "That was a close call," he says. "I'm John." He extends a large, weathered hand for you to shake. You tentatively reach out, and the next thing you know, he's practically crushing your hand in a vice-like grip.

***If you are "Matthias," turn to page 48.***

***If you are "Zara," turn to page 50.***