

World Chase:
The Race around the World

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It's the race around the world! Kevin Williams' dad, Darren Williams, has brought together a group of Kevin's friends to compete in the race around the world. But when Darren is injured and unable to compete how will they win the World Chase?

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Introduction

Kevin Williams was your average 12-year-old boy. He lived with his mom and dad in Shady Oaks, Indiana. Shady Oaks was a large town. The population was only about 30,000, but it was home to the Shamrock MegaCenter. The MegaCenter was basically a huge hotel/resort/shopping mall/country club/theme park and waterpark. It was the home to SpongeWorld, the world's largest Sponge Bob-themed theme park.

The MegaCenter was huge, and it attracted millions of tourists each year. That also meant that about two-thirds of the people in Shady Oaks worked for the MegaCenter, and the other third worked for McDonalds. McDonalds had a store called the McDonalds MegaPalace near the MegaCenter.

The McDonalds MegaPalace was five stories tall with two massive underground kitchens in the basement. This also meant that Shady Oaks got a lot of traffic, specifically semis with loads of Chicken McNuggets and Big Macs. One time, a truck carrying a load of McNuggets crashed and all the McNuggets spilled over the Colton Bridge, blocking traffic for days.

The Colton Bridge connected Shady Oaks to the neighboring city of Colton. It was taken care of by the Colton County board of transportation, a little tiny shop that was under the MegaCenter.

The board of transportation was a tiny shop under the MegaCenter. That was where Kevin Williams (the character from up above)'s dad worked. In the back of the shop was a pile of scraps from the shops. His dad, Darren Williams had always thought that that pile of junk would come in handy someday. He just didn't know that today would be that day.

Darren Williams was on his way to work at the train control center. Darren controlled the trains on the lines that led to places near Lake Diaman, a city near Shady Oaks and Colton. These lines were old and in bad shape, and trains were stopping all the time. Darren Williams had a hard and boring job, but it beat working at the MegaPalace.

Darren was sitting at his desk, watching TV. Nothing bad was going on today with the trains, so he decided to take a break from watching a screen with moving dots on it. Suddenly, an ad popped on to the TV.

“Hello, people everywhere! Can you guess what’s going on in two weeks and is all over the world?” said a TV announcer enthusiastically, “Well if you guessed the World Chase 2000, you’d be correct!

“Thirty racers will be chosen to race around the whole entire world in ten different segments! Each segment will be a separate race. The racers will get a certain amount of time to complete each segment. However, the World Chase isn’t that easy. Each segment will have its own challenge!

“Here’s the challenge for segment one: No motorized vehicles! After that, each segment will have a different challenge. Are you up to the challenge, or should I say, challenges? If you are, hurry! There are only five more spots available! Call 1-800-ITSRACETIMESISTER or visit www.racetimenotfacetime.webs.com to sign up!”

All of a sudden, an idea popped into Darren’s head.

“I QUIT THIS DUMP!” he said as he ran outside to the junk pile, and began to build something that was not a motorized vehicle.

Beep!

Two trains on line 123d crashed the moment Darren left his spot.

After many long hard hours of work, when everyone from the train control center and the bicycle shop were done working, Darren Williams had finished the B.I.K.E.

What is B.I.K.E., you ask? Well, B.I.K.E. is the Bionic Incomprehensible Killer mEgamachine. It was non-motorized, but it had special wheels made so one pedal on the B.I.K.E. would be equal to ten pedals on a normal bike.

Darren called 1-800-ITSRACETIMESISTER. A grumpy man answered:

“Hello. Thanks for calling,” he said in a tired, grouchy voice, “We’ll reserve you a spot on www.racetimenotfacetime.webs.com. Visit there soon.”

He obviously didn't want to talk to anyone. Darren decided to go to the website. He didn't want to talk to the grumpy old man either.

That night, he went home and went to the website. He logged in with his phone number and chose a password. He pressed the big button in the corner that said 'SIGN UP' and it took him to a page where he could sign up for the race.

He chose a team name, *Team Williams*, and chose his city as 'Shady Oaks'. After a few more questions, it read 'Team Members:' and then showed three spaces to write names.

"KEVIN!" shouted Darren.

Part One:

In which Kevin, Kelly and Keith must find a replacement member for their team.

Chapter One: Trouble in NYC

Darren, Kevin, and two of Kevin's classmates were all on a flight to New York City to start the race. Kevin was happy about one of his classmates being there, Kelly, but mad about the other. Kelly was a smart and sort of nerdy girl. She was pretty smart in math and science, but on a computer she could do anything. She made money from developing widely popular games such as *Mutant Monkeys vs The Terrible Toucans*. The other was the school bully, Keith.

Keith was twice the size of Kevin and thrice the size of Kelly. He was already five foot five, and he was only in the sixth grade. His favorite activities were picking fights and robbing other kids of their money. He bullied them to get money. However, Keith had to come along, as they would need his strength to power the B.I.K.E. Even though it had special qualities that would make it go much faster, they would still need some muscle.

Then the first major problem occurred. It was when they were getting off of the plane from the Colton County Airport. Darren accidentally slipped on an ice cream cone some clumsy kid had dropped. He broke both of his legs and got a concussion. Darren would not be able to compete in the race. But the World Chase was starting in two days, so they would have to compete.

"What are we supposed to do?" asked Kevin.

"I don't know. He's your dad!" said Keith.

“We need someone else to help us. Otherwise, it will be impossible for us to win!” Kevin responded.

“Maybe we could do the first segment without your dad. Then, he could come back for the rest,” Kelly suggested.

“No, that won’t work, concussions take weeks to heal. We need someone else,” responded Kevin.

“Wait! I know!” said Kelly “When I was in the third grade, we had pen pals. Mine lived in New York. I remember her name, and her address! She lived on 2363 Overwood Street, room 63. C’mon! Let’s go!”

Kevin, Kelly, and Keith arrived at the apartment building. It was run down and old. Kelly led the way through the doors and into the building. Inside was a nice room that was nothing like the outside. It had luxurious furnishings and potted plants all over the place, making it look like an indoor jungle.

A friendly voice with a thick British accent said, “Welcome to the Bartholomew Ivonov Apartment Complex. How may I help you?”

Kevin turned around. Standing behind him was the tallest man he had ever seen. He was wearing a Nike jacket and a set of headphones so huge, they looked as if they were miniature speakers.

“Lemme guess: You’re looking for Kirsten,” he said as if he knew what they were doing.

“Um, actually, yes. How’d you know?” asked Kelly.

“Kirsten’s probably the most popular girl on the continent. She’s always getting visitors like you. Room 63. Floor six,” the man said.

“Um, thanks?” said Kelly, a little creeped out by the man.

“Don’t mention it!” said the man, excitedly.

Our three musketeers took the elevator all the way up to floor six. There was room 63, right there. Odd. You’d think there’d be a 60, a 61, and a 62 before 63. Kelly knocked on the door three times.

“If it’s Marianne, Annabeth, Flora, Katherine, Roberta West, Roberta East, Roberta North, Roberta South, Roberta Southwest, Hope, Kaitlyn, Brianna, Zoe, Jade, Girl Sam, Boy Sam, Rodriguez or Billy, GET OUT!” screamed an unfriendly voice from inside.

“I’m not any of them, I’m Kelly...you know, from third grade?” said Kelly.

“Wait – which Kelly? Kelly N., Kelly D., Kelly Ja., Kelly Je., Kelly Jr., or any of the 26 Kellys I’ve friended on Facebook?” said the voice.

“It’s me, Kelly Okello! Your third-grade pen pal, remember?” Kelly said in disgust.

“Oh yeah...that Kelly. What are you doing in New York City? Anyway, I don’t hang out with nerds anymore. Goodbye,” the voice said.

“Well, I guess you don’t want to be a millionaire on any of the most popular TV channels then. Bye!” said Keith.

“Wait – I could be famous? Rich? And on TV? And not just some local channel nobody watches?” said the voice.

“Pretty much, yep,” said Keith.

“HOLY FACEBOOK! I’M IN!” said the now-friendly voice as a girl burst through the door knocking over Kelly and Kevin. “Oops, looks like I just got a little overexcited. So what’ll get me all this stuff?” the girl asked.

“The World Chase,” said Kelly, “It’s starting here in two days. One of our team members got injured and can’t compete with us. We need a fourth team member, so we thought you could help us, Kirsten.”

“OMG! How’d you nerds get into that? Isn’t that only for celebs?” asked Kirsten.

“Well, this year, they’re using real people,” Kevin said, “and my dad got us in! I don’t really know how. But he quit his job for this, and that was the highest paying job in Shady Oaks besides Mayor. So we’ve got to win this! For Darren!”

“For Darren!” said the other three.

Kevin hoped he could win the race for his dad. Kelly hoped she could win it for her family. Working at the MegaPalace didn’t earn them that much money. Kirsten

wanted to be famous. And for the first time in seven years, Keith finally felt moderately happy. Even if it was only moderately.

Part Two:

**In which Keith decides to help out
another team who is losing**

Chapter Two: The Great Race Begins!

Kevin, Kelly, Keith and now Kirsten were all gathered inside a McDonalds drinking hot chocolate. It had gotten quite cold outside, and the weatherman said that a bad storm was coming. Kevin now knew that his dad had made the right choice by inviting Keith. Keith had brought most of the money he had stolen from kids. He was the one who had bought them the hot chocolate, and he did it without complaining or demanding change from the others. It was now Friday, and the great race was starting a 6:30 the next day, possibly in the middle of a storm.

“You know, if it really does storm, which all the weathermen say it will, we’ll need heavy coats. I’d be willing to buy some for all of us,” said Keith.

“Sure, that would be nice, but wouldn’t you have to save your money for something else later?” said Kelly.

“Well, I’ve got lots of money. In fact, I brought all my money with me. Money’s gotta be spent, or else it’s just green strips of paper,” responded Keith.

“OMG! That is like, so true! I never even thought about it that way before! When I get back from winning this race, I’ll buy myself another iPhone 5 and a new laptop!” shouted Kirsten with excitement.

“Yeah, I never thought about it that way. Maybe Keith’s right,” said Kevin. “C’mon! Let’s go buy some coats for tomorrow.”

“I’m not so sure about this, guys. We might need to save our money for somewhere else,” said Kelly.

“Oh, don’t be such a worrywart, Kelly. C’mon!” said Keith

“No. I’m not coming. We must save our money,” said Kelly.

“You know guys, Kelly might be right. Saving our money might just be the best idea instead of just spending it all at once,” said Kevin.

“OMG. I want iPhone!!!!!!!!!!!!” said Kirsten, “And Keith’s right. I do think adults are overemphasizing the money thing. Money’s for spending, you should spend it!”

“Well, then we’ll buy them for everyone except Kelly,” said Keith, “OK? C’mon, we’re going shopping.”

The next day, at the start of the race, Keith, Kevin and Kirsten were all warm in their new coats. Kelly was not. She didn’t have a coat. And it was snowing. Hard. Already, there were almost six inches on the ground, and more was still coming down. The storm wasn’t supposed to go away for another two weeks, the length of the first segment.

Kelly wished she had taken Keith up on his offer and taken a coat. But until the second segment, it was the shivers for her.

People began to gather around for the start of the race. Little kids were picking out some of their favorite teams. Some of the teams looked challenging to beat. Most of them were biking, some of them had brought hang gliders, and some were even planning on running all the way to Vancouver, Canada.

Team Williams’s B.I.K.E. seemed to be pretty even with what the other competitors had come up with.

That was when the first real challenge came.

A huge, four-wheeled bike pulled up. It was six feet tall, lightweight, and fast. Its wheels were designed for superior traction and speed, just what they'd need to get all the way across the continent, on a bike, in the middle of one of the largest storms the world had ever seen. If this wasn't real competition, Kevin didn't know what was.

Or maybe he was wrong. Parked next to the giant bike was an even more impressive bike. This one had not two, not four, but eighteen massive wheels that would somehow be pedaled by just four people. How was this possible? A special chain, similar to the one Darren had built for the B.I.K.E. connected the pedals to the eighteen wheels. Three of the members each pedaled six wheels, and the fourth member steered the monstrous beast.

Beside this mega machine was a giant pedal-powered hang glider with a giant propeller on the front of it. Again, three people pedaled and one drove.

"OK, guys. We're in for some serious competition here, particularly those three. We need to prepare and strategize," said Keith, "First, let's pick a leader. Anyone like to volunteer?"

"Well, my dad built this thing, I think I should be the leader," said Kevin.

"No, I'll be the leader! And as first act of leader, I GET ALL THE PRIZE MONEY!!!!" exclaimed Kirsten.

"Guys, I hate to break it to you, but I don't think any of you should be leader," Kelly said. "Keith has brought us all down to business here. He has money. He bought you guys coats. I think Keith should be our leader. He's the only one of us mature enough for the responsibility, including me."

"I think Kelly's right!" exclaimed Kevin.

"OMG. She does have a point. But I still want my iPhone. Keith, if I don't get my iPhone... none of you nerds will like it," said Kirsten in disgust.

"OK then, it's settled. Keith's the leader. Keith, what should we do now?" asked Kevin.

"Now?" asked Keith, "Well, the race starts in thirty minutes. Kelly, you steer the B.I.K.E. The rest of us will pedal. Oh, and Kirsten? You're gonna have to give up your phone. If I know this race – and I think I do, there's no specific route to get from one place to another. The only rules for segment one are start when they say so, don't use a motorized vehicle, and get to Vancouver, Canada in two weeks. We'll need a GPS."

Twenty-nine minutes later, an announcement came over the loudspeaker:

“Welcome race fans, to the one and only race around the world. Our competitors will be visiting ten of the world’s largest and most popular cities: New York City, Vancouver, Sydney, Hong Kong, New Delhi, Paris, Cairo, Cape Town, Rio and Mexico City. They’ll be visiting every continent with civilization. This is the World Chase 2000! Now let me introduce you to the thirty teams.”

After that, the announcer spent another twenty minutes telling the audience the names of all the teams and the racers. After they were done singing the national anthem, the announcer said:

“Now, let the race begin! 3... 2... 1... GO!!!”

Chapter Three: Racing

To Vancouver

The racers all started pedaling their machines; running; even riding horses, as the *Southeastern U.S. Horse Riding Club* did. However, one team, the *Antarctic Explorers Fund*, appeared stuck at the starting line. Keith saw them from behind.

“Guys, we need to help them!” he said.

“Aren’t they our opponents? That we want to beat? So I can get a new phone?” asked Kirsten.

“Yes, but without them in the race, what will we say to people? That we only beat a team that didn’t even start the race? We’re already stopped here arguing. It’d probably be quicker to go back and help them, than to spend all day arguing like this. C’mon. Let’s go!” said Keith.

“Whatever,” said Kirsten, disgustedly.

Kelly steered the B.I.K.E. back to where the other team was.

“We’re here to help,” said Keith.

“What?” said the old man who was standing in front of the car, “Oh, you came to help us. Listen, what you can do to help us is win, and give us all of your prize money. We’re the last four members of the *Antarctic Explorers Fund*. Turns out there aren’t that many Antarctic Explorers that need funding. I put all of my money into this business. I thought it’d work. But did it? NO! It didn’t!

“Anymore, no one’s into exploring Antarctica. It’s not even in this race. Every continent with civilization. Why there are tons of Antarctic civilizations! Turns out, nobody’s interested in exploring the frozen continent. Google Earth has done that for them. To them, looking at a place is just as good as actually going there. And the explorers? Exploring

other planets. Oceans. Spending billions of dollars on places just to find out that there's no life on Mars. Like they didn't actually know that. Of course there's no life on Mars!

"Anymore, people just want to explore places and not actually spend any time there. Just to say 'OMG! I went to Mars. Seriously. it would cost them billions to go to Mars, but only maybe a hundred thousand to go to Antarctica. Why not start a civilization there? It's too cold! Well, you can't even breathe on Mars, or in the ocean, for that matter.'"

The man kept on blabbing about how no one wanted to go to Antarctica. If he was so mad at nobody going there, then why didn't he just go himself, thought Keith.

"Here," said Keith, handing the man a twenty, "have some money for your fund. Maybe you could even go to Antarctica yourself someday."

"Come on, now! Let's go win this race!" said Kevin.

Team Williams got on the B.I.K.E. and started pedaling like mad.

"Hey thanks! Maybe I will go to Antarctica," shouted the man as the B.I.K.E. sped away, "By the way, the name's Herbert Colton!"

The B.I.K.E. really did work. It was going much faster than a normal bicycle, and in no time at all, it caught up with one of the teams that chose to run. For the next few hours, they kept passing by teams who were running, biking on normal bikes, or occasionally, horseback riding. Kelly even thought she saw a hang glider up in the sky.

Soon, the B.I.K.E. approached its first real trouble. It was a long car that used pedals to move. On the side in big blue letters were the words *Elderly Hills Retirement Home Chain*. Driving the car was an old, beefy man and three elderly ladies who were constantly giggling. Kevin didn't see how that one old man could pedal the huge car all by himself.

The only problem was, the car was big. So big, it was taking up the whole road. The old beefy man spotted *Team Williams* in the mirror.

"Hey!" he shouted.

Suddenly, the trunk of the car lifted up. Tacks began to shoot out of it. It was like some chase scene from a cheesy movie. Luckily, the tires of the B.I.K.E. were made of a special sort of rubber used in car tires, and wouldn't pop.

"Hmmm," said the man.

The trunk opened again and marbles poured out. The ladies in the car giggled.

“Hmm hmm!” he said.

The ladies giggled some more.

Fortunately for the *Team Williams*, Darren built the B.I.K.E. with amazing traction to conquer the toughest terrain. Kelly nimbly steered the B.I.K.E. around the old man’s car.

“Mm mm mm!” he said.

One of the ladies jumped out of the car and onto the B.I.K.E. She snarled, as if she were some sort of wild animal. Keith pushed her off. The other ladies giggled like little girls.

“HMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMM!!!!!!!!!!!!” shouted the man.

The B.I.K.E. sped ahead of the old man’s car, but it wasn’t long before the kids met their next challenge. The storm was closing in on them. First, it started to rain, and not just a little bit. Before long, the whole road was flooded. And *Team Williams* and the B.I.K.E. were stuck in the middle of it.

“I guess we’ll just have to go through it,” said Keith.

For a few hours, the B.I.K.E. was able to handle the water okay. But then, day turned into night and it started to get colder. Much colder. The river of water began to freeze. Soon, the whole road was nothing but a huge sheet of ice.

“It’s getting late,” said Keith, “I guess we’ll just have to set up camp for the night.”

“OMG! That’s like, such a good idea!” said Kirsten.

“Sounds good to me,” said Kevin.

Team Williams set up camp for the night. It was cold and hard to go to sleep, but eventually exhaustion won out. The next morning when Kevin, Kirsten and Kelly woke up, Keith was already awake.

Wow! I never thought Keith would be so, well, helpful! I just thought he was a bully. Maybe Keith just didn’t fit in. He’s turning out to be a nice guy, thought Kevin.

The others were all thinking similar thoughts.

“Guys, over here. Look what I made!” said Keith.

The others walked over to Keith.

“Ice skates,” he said, “Now, we can just skate over this. It’ll be much too slippery for the B.I.K.E. I even made a pack, so I can carry the B.I.K.E. on my back!”

Keith had made the ice skates from tree sticks. He had used his pocketknife to whittle some of them into blades. He even managed to craft a backpack to carry the B.I.K.E. Keith was probably the only reason *Team Williams* was still alive.

“Wow! Thanks Keith!” said Kelly.

“OMG! These are like, so awesome!” said Kirsten.

“Thanks!” said Kevin.

Keith was glad he could be of use to *Team Williams*. Kevin, Kelly, and Kirsten just wanted to be of use to Keith.

Part Three:

**In which Keith changes his ways from bully
to friend**

Chapter four: Keith Saves Kevin

Team Williams had put on the ice skates and were now skating as fast as they could down the sheet of ice. Keith didn't seem to mind carrying the B.I.K.E. on his back, and Kirsten was happy that she got her phone back. She was pretending that this was a really boring version of Temple Run.

A while later, it began to snow. Snow covered the ice and they couldn't skate anymore.

"I have an idea," said Keith.

"Don't you always have an idea?" asked Kirsten. They all laughed.

It was true; Keith did always seem to have some sort of an idea.

"I put a little switch on the ice skates. If you pull it, they'll turn into snowshoes," explained Keith.

Kevin, Kelly and Kirsten all flipped their switches. The blade flipped up and the bottom of the shoe went out to make snowshoes. After marveling at Keith's clever design, they all ran through the snow as fast as they could.

“What’s that up ahead?” asked Kelly.

“Probably another team,” said Kevin.

Sure enough, *Team Williams* was approaching another team. This team was running on expensive snowshoes designed to go much faster than the ones Keith had built. Still, *Team Williams* was gaining on them. Kevin approached the team first.

“Oh, hi there!” said Kevin.

One of the team members grabbed Kevin and threw him down into the snow. Kevin got back up and tried to keep running, only to have another member of this rival team kick him ten feet into the air.

Well, if these jerks want a fight, I’ll give them a fight! Kevin thought.

He pushed down on the lever on his right snowshoe, and kicked one of them in the foot with his blade. This made the other team very mad. They stopped running, and all attacked him with punches and kicks. Kevin tried to fight back, but he was outnumbered.

Fortunately, Keith, Kelly, and Kirsten came to the rescue. They pushed the other team out of the way. Kevin turned his ice skate back into a snowshoe and resumed running.

For Team Williams, the next few days passed uneventfully. The snow turned back into ice, then the ice turned into road, and the team brought back out the B.I.K.E.

Despite sore muscles and tired bodies, the kids steadily pedaled across the Canadian/U.S. border. It wasn’t until the last day of the trip when they met their next challenge. It was the extremely long, eighteen-wheeled bike they had seen at the starting line.

“Kelly, you go scout out how much of a threat these guys might be,” said Keith.

Kelly jumped off the B.I.K.E. and ran ahead. Just when she was getting close to the bike/truck, the whole back of it caught on fire. Kelly jumped back in the nick of time, and ran back to rejoin the rest of her team on the B.I.K.E. As they neared the firey eighteen-wheeled contraption, a door opened and spit out fire, too.

“This time, I have a plan!” shouted Kevin. Kevin jumped off the B.I.K.E. and onto the roof of the car. Again, more flames shot out, but luckily for Kevin, he had landed in a spot where no fire could reach him.

“HELP!!!” shouted Kevin.

“I’m coming!” shouted Keith. Keith jumped into the circle of fire Kevin was standing in. Keith grabbed Kevin and threw him out into the snow. Then, Keith jumped out into the snow as well. The eighteen-wheeled bike had beat them. Keith decided it would be easier to get fifth place and not challenge them, then to try and pass them and get toasted.

Later that day, *Team Williams* and their B.I.K.E. reached Vancouver, crossing the finish line in fifth place, right behind *Team Flamewheeler*. Maybe in the next race, they could win.

“And now for the results!” said the announcer, “Our top five race teams have reached Vancouver, Canada. In fifth place, we have... *Team Williams*! In fourth place, we have... *Team Flamewheeler*! In third place, we have... *Team Featherwing*! In second place, we have... *Team Demon*! And in first place, the winner of the race from New York City to Vancouver, Canada, we have the one, and the only, *Team Pacific*! That’s all the teams for today, but we’ll have more reach the finish line tomorrow, for sure!”

Team Williams was pleased with their fifth place finish, but they knew they were only a tenth of the way done. The race had already proved to be much harder than any of the kids expected. Kelly and Kevin decided to go get something to drink at a local coffee shop.

“Kevin, you know how many times Keith has saved you, right?” said Kelly, “But what’ve you done for him? He bought you guys coats. He made us ice skates that turn into snowshoes – out of sticks, no less! And who carried the B.I.K.E. on his back when we were trudging through all that snow? Keith did. He even saved your life – twice! But what have you done for him? I’m not mad, I just want you to be thinking about that. Okay?”

“Um, alright,” said Kevin.

In the next segment of the race, Kevin promised himself, he’d do something nice for Keith.

Funny how things quickly things change, thought Kevin. Up until two weeks ago, Keith was my arch-enemy. But now, he has saved me so many times, I couldn’t even count them. Keith was no school bully. He was the best friend a guy could ever have.

Part four:

**In which Kirsten finds out there's more to life
than herself.**

Chapter five: The Boat Race!

“Welcome, racers!” said the announcer, “Today we are meeting right on the edge of the Pacific Ocean. Why? For the next segment of the race, of course!

‘In this segment, we’ll be boating across the world’s largest ocean, from Vancouver, Canada, to Sydney, Australia! This time, you will have three weeks to complete the challenge. But you will all be given top-of-the-line speedboats designed for long-distance speed racing.

“In addition, we have built five boathouses along the way that you can use to refuel your boats. The race will begin today at noon. If you’re not there, you’re disqualified. Now, I hope you all have a heated, exciting second segment of the race across the Pacific Ocean!”

Team Williams gathered at a nearby coffee shop.

“I’m not feeling so good about this,” said Keith.

“Why not?” asked Kelly, “We did just fine in the other race,”

“Well, let me just confess that I get a little queasy just thinking about water,” said Keith, “And I get a kinda seasick just looking out at the ocean. Water’s just not my thing. I’m not so sure I should be the team leader for this segment.”

“Well, then I can,” said Kirsten.

“Kirsten?” said the other three in unison.

“Yep,” said Kirsten, “My dad? His job is boating. He’s raced – and won – in the Great Lakes Chase. Twice. I’ve gone boating with him a hundreds of times, and I’m pretty good with boats. I think I can do this.”

“Well, if you’re sure,” said Keith.

“I’m sure I’m sure,” said Kirsten.

“Well, if you’re sure you’re sure, than I think we have our new leader!” said Keith.

“Okay then, Kirsten it is. So, Kirsten? What’s the plan?” asked Kevin.

“Well, my GPS has the locations of all the boathouses on it. All we have to do is get to each one as fast as we can, and not just so we can win. Remember that storm?”

“Of course,” said Kelly.

“Yeah. It’s still out there, and even stronger than before. Scientists say that when it meets up with the Pacific Ocean, it may cause a hurricane. We’ve got to beat that storm, no matter what.”

That afternoon, the team met up at the ocean for the start of the race. The race would visit five boathouses, where the contestants could fuel up, as they raced their way to Sydney, Australia. This time, each team would be given the same boat, all fueled up and ready to go, so no team had a design advantage. This would be a fair, equal race.

The only rules were: Get to Sydney, Australia, in three weeks; use only the provided boats; and start when they say ‘Go’. Unlike the last race, where design played a major role in the outcome, this race segment was was all about skill.

“On your mark, get set, GO!” shouted the announcer.

Twenty-nine teams pulled out of the harbor and into the Pacific Ocean, *Team Williams* among them.

Kirsten was right. She really could steer a boat.

Kelly was watching the GPS, and again, Kirsten was right: the storm was coming. Worse, it was changing into something more.

The first boathouse was still a few days off; however, the first challenge was not. The two boats directly in front of *Team Willaims* were pushed by a wave into each other. The two boats went under. Kirsten jumped over the wave with her boat, but more waves kept coming. Kirsten just kept jumping over them, as if they were tiny little hills. She was the boating master!

Another boat pulled up next to Kirsten's. They recognized who was in it all too well: *Team Flamewheeler*!

For the next few days, all was quiet on the ocean. Kelly kept a close eye on the GPS, watching as the storm grew larger and larger, and came closer and closer. As predicted, it morphed into a hurricane, and it wasn't long before the powerful storm caught up with the kids.

When the hurricane reached *Team Williams*' boat, it was already a level-two hurricane and gaining strength faster than most. At first, Kirsten was steering through the waves just fine. But then, a massive wave came that even she couldn't get around. It flooded the boat and soaked the GPS, leaving the kids with no way to navigate.

Kevin, Kelly and even seasick Keith were forced to bail water out of the boat. Waves kept flooding it, and Kirsten was worried that it would sink. (Or course, the team was already wearing life jackets, and all of them could swim, but they knew the odds of survival without the speed boat were slim to none.)

The waves began to get stronger. They had to face the ugly truth. These weren't just normal waves, they were from the hurricane, and they were getting bigger. That could only mean that the hurricane was getting stronger. That night, Kirsten stayed awake driving, and the rest of the team took shifts bailing out the water. As the crew began its second day fighting the hurricane, the ocean continued to roil with waves. Kirsten was getting tired.

"I have a plan," said Kirsten, "First of all, do any of you know how to drive a boat?"

"I could probably figure it out," said Kelly.

“Okay then,” said Kirsten, “You and I will take shifts as driver. My shift will be longer. Kevin and Keith, you’ll take shifts as bailer. Kevin, why don’t you go now? I need to rest, and so does Keith.”

“Sounds good to me,” said Kelly.

“Thanks for letting me rest first,” said Keith, who was having trouble with his seasickness.

Throughout the long day and night, Kirsten’s plan worked well. The next day, too, they kept their shifts.

But the storm showed no signs of letting up. The skies began to get darker as their boat veered deeper into the level three-and-still-getting-stronger hurricane. The waves became more intense, the air got colder, and the rain started falling even harder.

Somehow, despite the desperate conditions, Kelly managed to fix the GPS, but only the GPS. Kirsten’s phone couldn’t do anything else. Miraculously, Team Williams had managed to stay on course. The next day, they pulled up to the first boathouse. Or, at least what was left of the first boathouse.

Part five:

**In which *Team Williams* meets another team
of children, and they become friends**

Chapter Six:

Team Jensen

The storm had completely destroyed the first boathouse. All that was left of it was a floating platform and half of the house. A boat had crashed into the side of it. The gas tanks on the platform were riddled with holes, and a few had blown right off during the storm.

Kirsten parked the boat next to the platform to see if they could salvage any fuel. They tied their boat to the platform and climbed out onto it. Kirsten led the way into the house.

Man, Kirsten's really changed since the first segment, thought Kelly, Now, she hardly spends any time on her phone at all, she's less obsessed with winning, and she's a much better leader. When she's excited, she doesn't even start every sentence with 'OMG' anymore!

"O... M... G...", said Kirsten as she opened the door into what was left of the boathouse.

Okay, maybe that last part's not quite true, thought Kelly.

Inside the boathouse was another team. Before, Kirsten thought they were the only team of children in the race. Now, she knew that wasn't true. Huddled inside what was left of the

boathouse, was another team. There was a normal-looking girl; a small, nerdy boy; a big, muscly girl and a boy, who was playing on his phone.

“Let me guess. You’re just gonna abandon us like the other teams all did. *Team Pacific*, *Team Demon*, *Team Featherwing*, *Team Jumbo*, *Team Flamewheeler*. All of them just left us here to die. There’s no gas left, so there’s no point in trying that,” said one of the boys.

“Did you say *Team Flamewheeler*?” asked Kevin.

“I sure did,” said the boy. “They were the worst of them all. When they came through, we were still trying to fix the boat. *Team Flamewheeler*, they took that motor right off the boat. Then, they set half of the shelter on fire. It sure did take us a lot of water to put that out.

“By the way, we’re *Team Jenson*,” he continued. “Miranda, her dad was gonna make us a team. He was gonna help us. But then, he got hit by a car in New York City. We then had to find my old neighbor, Mo, when we got there. He moved away when I was in third grade, but now we’re back together.”

“For some reason, I think you guys are our duplicates from another dimension,” said Kelly, “You see, we’re *Team Williams*, and Kevin’s dad was going to help us, too. But then, he broke his legs and got a concussion. Then, we had to find Kirsten, my third-grade pen pal.”

“Sounds about like what we did, too,” said the boy, “By the way, my name’s Mike. Miranda, Molly and Mo are on my team as well.”

“Well, why don’t you come with us?” asked Keith, who was now always trying to be cooperative, “You can come in our boat. You’ll have to help us drive and bail out water, but it’ll probably work. Your boat still has some gas, right?”

“It sure does. We’ll just dump ours right into yours, and boom, we should have enough gas to get us to the next boathouse,” said Molly.

So, *Team Williams/Jenson* took off for boathouse number two.

The next day they arrived at the boathouse. The kids refueled quickly and got out of there.

By this time, they were far ahead of the storm, and were in fourth place. Pass three more teams, and they would be in first. The ride from here on out would be fairly easy, so long as they didn’t meet up with anymore unfriendly teams.

Kevin checked the weather on Mo's phone. They were far ahead of the hurricane. Alongside that, he saw that the World Chase had made an app called RaceRTrackR. It showed *Team Williams's* position. They were in fourth place, and they were nearing the next boathouse! Unfortunately, the teams ahead of them were way ahead, and the teams behind them were way behind. Kevin was pretty sure they were going to get fourth place. The team in third was right now at the third boathouse. But still, fourth was pretty good.

Part Six:

In which although they are in last and without a boat, Kirsten gives them hope.

Chapter Seven: Ambush!

The next day, *Team Williams/Jenson* arrived at the third boathouse. Inside, a man in a suit and tie was sitting at the desk, just like at the other boathouse that wasn't destroyed.

"Let's see... You must be *Team Williams* and *Team Jenson*. I see you decided to partner up. Good thinking. It'll help both of you get a good place, even if you do have to share it. It'll certainly be better than getting last by yourself, no matter what. Anyway, I'll go fuel up your boat!" said the man.

That was odd, thought Kirsten, He didn't even have to look at his sheet to know what team we were, and he went out to fuel the boat for us. He didn't even check to see if we were in the race!

Suddenly, the doors to the boathouse shut. A panel opened on the roof and four men – including the man who was behind the counter – jumped right on in.

"Well, well, well," said one of the men, "If it isn't both of the kiddy teams! Imagine that! I get the two easiest teams to beat, right where I want them! That'll be two teams we won't have to compete with in the next race! Right, Buckeye?"

"That's right!" said the man who was originally behind the counter.

Mo took out his phone and checked the World Chase app. Sure enough, *Team Featherwing* was still at the boathouse.

Mo looked around. Miranda, Mike, Molly, Kevin, Kelly, and Kirsten were all trapped in the boathouse with him. But wait! Keith was missing!

At that very moment, Keith jumped in through the rooftop opening. He landed on the man named Buckeye and pushed him right through the boathouse wall.

The other members of *Team Featherwing* were so shocked at what had happened that they just stood there with their mouths hanging open. Keith and Molly seized the opportunity and threw two more *Team Featherwing* members into the ocean.

Kelly realized something – only three *Featherwings* had been pushed off. There must have been a fourth hiding somewhere!

From out of nowhere, the missing team member crashed through the boathouse in a boat. Except it wasn't his boat, it was *Team Williams* '!

Kirsten sprang into action. Literally, she jumped off of what was left of the platform and onto the boat, pushing the man overboard.

Kirsten thought she was safe, but then, Buckeye came up from the lower deck. Apparently, he had managed to climb aboard the ship, while he was stuck in the ocean. Buckeye pushed Kirsten right out of the way and took control of the wheel. He headed straight for the rest of *Team Williams*, who were balanced precariously on the remnants of the boathouse platform. Kirsten grabbed the wheel and yanked it hard right. She pulled so hard, the steering wheel came straight off the boat. She threw the wheel into the ocean as she leaped from the boat back to the boathouse platform.

"That... was... AWESOME!" shouted Mo.

They may have gotten rid of *Team Featherwing*, but now they didn't have a boat. The kids watched as one by one, the other competitors sped by the boathouse. They didn't bother stopping to refuel; they knew it would be useless. And they didn't offer to help the stranded children.

After the last boat was gone, Kevin asked, "Well, what do we do now? We have no boat, and we're stuck out on this floating platform. We're stuck! We've lost!"

"Kevin! You're a genius! That's it!" said Kirsten.

"What's it?" asked Kevin.

“The platform, it floats!”

Chapter Eight: A *floating* Platform!

“So wait – your proposal is that we float back to Australia?” replied Kevin, “We’re only slightly more than halfway there! We’d die of starvation before we hit land, except for the fact that the hurricane is still coming our way, and we’re going to be shark food.

“Didn’t you hear what happened to the hurricane? It’s lost most of its power, now it’s just regular storm, and it’ll blow us towards Australia. All we need is a sail!” said Kirsten.

“But where are we going to find a sail out here?” asked Molly.

“In there,” Kirsten said, pointing to the remains of the boathouse. “There’s a tablecloth on the table; it’ll work perfectly.”

“Not really, we’re already in last place! It’d be quicker just to wait for some kind of airplane to come and rescue us!” said Mo.

“Exactly!” said Kirsten, “We’re already in last place! We can’t do any worse than we’re already doing! C’mon! Let’s go!”

Somehow, that one little speech set off a spark in the other team members, and they all started preparing the sail. Soon, the storm would be coming, and they’d have to be ready!

A few hours later, they were done. Their new ship was beautiful. The two teams had a sail made from every kind of cloth they could find, including the boys’ shirts. Mo checked

the weather on his phone. The storm was coming in with winds strong enough to blow them all the way to Sydney.

Kelly and Keith were working on building a rudder for the ship. Keith was furiously gathering scraps of wood, while Kelly was assembling them into a makeshift rudder.

While Kelly and Keith created the rudder, Mo was busy acting as lookout. He stood on top of a platform he and Molly built. Mo had his phone with him, and was constantly checking the weather. As Mo looked off into the distance, he could see the storm, a dark cloud looming above the vast ocean.

“Keith! You better hurry up! The storm’s coming!” shouted Mo.

“Alright, Mo, you said it!” said Keith from below. He started working double-time on the rudder project.

Before long, the sail and rudder were ready and the storm was almost there. When the first winds reached the sail... nothing happened.

“What’s going on?” asked Molly.

“I... I don’t know,” said Kelly, “the sail should work.”

“I know!” said Kirsten.

“What?” asked the rest of the kids.

“How do you think the boathouse stayed in place? It must have some kind of an anchor!”

“Good thinking, Kirsten,” said Kelly, “But where would an anchor be?”

“Right under the platform, of course! Look over there. There’s a little trapdoor on the floor. It’s probably directly under there!”

Kelly ran over to the trapdoor and lifted it up. However, it was no use. It wouldn’t budge.

“A key!” said Kelly, as she pointed to a keyhole on the side of the trapdoor. “We need a key!”

“It’s probably in the desk,” said Molly, as she pointed to Mo’s lookout platform, “That’s mostly made of the desk. Open it up!”

“Okay,” said Mo.

He reached down and opened up the desk. Sure enough, there was a key.

“Alright!” exclaimed Kirsten, excitedly. She rushed over to the keyhole and inserted the key.

Sure enough, it clicked open. She pressed a button and rolled in the anchor.

Once the anchor was all rolled up, the boat began to move.

“Alright, guys! We did it! No, you did it! All I did was give you an idea! Now let’s go!” shouted Kirsten excitedly.

Wow, thought Kelly, Kirsten’s really changed. She’s not nearly as self-absorbed as she was when she started the race. Now, she gives the credit for everything to us, not just to herself!

The storm’s winds blew the makeshift ship towards Australia. And as the kids crossed the ocean, their spirits soared. They began to realize that together, they could do anything. Consider what they’d already done. Keith had helped them through the icy storm on the road to Vancouver – with only the B.I.K.E. and some handcrafted ice skate-snowshoes. Then, even though all the other racers abandoned them, Kirsten inspired them to build a ship from the remains of a badly damaged boathouse. Even though they were in last place, they certainly couldn’t do any worse.

Ten days later, Kirsten’s ship pulled into a harbor just north of Sydney, Australia. The moment they landed on the beach, reporters started swarming around them, wanting to know how eight kids had built their own ship and gotten from the middle of the Pacific Ocean to Sydney, Australia in just ten days.

“It was all Kirsten,” said Kelly, “If it wasn’t for her leadership and selflessness, we would still be stuck out there on the boathouse in the middle of a storm.”

“No, it was all them,” said Kirsten, “If Mo hadn’t used his phone to guide us, and Kelly hadn’t steered the ship, we never would have gotten here. And if I was the only one stuck on the platform, I could never have built the boat!”

“Let’s face it,” said Kevin, “It took all of us!”

Later that day, Keith bought them a room in a nearby hotel and asked the hotel clerk not to give away their room number to anyone else.

“That was great, guys!” said Kelly.

“You’re right, Kelly. That was great,” said Kirsten, “We built our own boat out of half of a boathouse. But what isn’t great is this next challenge. We have to fly a helicopter all the way to Hong Kong. This is going to be the hardest segment yet. I can drive a boat, but I can’t even fly a remote-controlled helicopter.”

“Well, maybe Keith can be the leader for the next segment,” said Kevin.

“No, I don’t really think so, Kevin,” said Kirsten, “I think Kelly should do this. She’s the smartest one of all of us. If anyone can learn how to fly a helicopter in a day, it’s Kelly.”

“You’re right, that does sounds like our best plan,” said Keith.

“Uh-uh. Not to me,” said Kelly, “Kirsten, I’m afraid of heights like really bad. I get scared looking out the window of tall buildings. There’s no way I can do this.”

“Yes, there is,” said Keith, “You’ll just have to overcome your fear. It may be hard, but I’ve done it, and so can you.”

“Yeah, well, what did you do?” asked Kelly.

“I’ll tell you later. Don’t worry, Kelly, you can do this,” he said.

“Well, if you say so,” said Kelly.

That afternoon, the team reported to a town square in Sydney.

“Welcome, racers!” said the announcer, “As you know, in the last race, some teams worked together to complete the challenge. So, we’ve made a new rule for this segment. No teams may join together. At all. If you do, you’ll be disqualified. Now, in this segment, you’ll be flying by helicopter to Hong Kong. We’ll be taking off tomorrow at noon, so report back here then. Good luck teams!”

Part Seven:

In which Kelly overcomes her fears

Chapter Nine:

The Helicopter Race

“Welcome, racers and race fans to the third segment of this amazing race,” said the announcer. “Today, we are here in Sydney, Australia. In just one week, we’ll be in Hong Kong, China. How will we do this? Top-of-the-line racing helicopters. In thirty minutes, our twenty-five remaining teams will take off. Until then, enjoy this slideshow of the first two race segments. Best of luck racers, with segment three!”

By this time, Kelly had figured out the basics of flying a helicopter. She spent her last thirty minutes preparing for the flight.

Meanwhile, Kirsten pulled out the new phone that Keith had purchased for her, and checked the forecast. The storm that had caused so much trouble in the first two segments was still out there, and a morph into another hurricane was entirely possible when it collided with the Indian Ocean. The storm had taken a sudden move to the northwest, and was now headed right for Indonesia and right in the middle of their helicopter’s flight path. Worse, given the rate the storm was expanding, Kirsten realized they’d need to fly right through it, if they had any hope of winning the race.

That afternoon, twenty-five helicopters stood ready to take off into what were soon to be turbulent skies.

“3... 2... 1... GO!!!” shouted the announcer.

Twenty- five helicopters, some more shaky than others, headed up into the sky. Kelly flew *Team Williams* over Australia, and everything seemed to be going just fine. When they reached the end of the continent, Kelly began giving Kevin helicopter flying lessons, as just like Kirsten, she was going to need to sleep sometime.

By the time they reached the first island of Indonesia, Kevin was almost as good as Kelly. (However, that wasn’t completely reassuring, as Kelly had only spent two short days reading the manual.) Once they flew over the island, Kelly decided she would go to sleep for the night, and Kevin took over. Kevin carefully piloted the helicopter over more islands. This race was going much faster than the other two segments, since they had helicopters instead of bikes and boats.

By the next day, it was Kelly’s turn again, just as they reached the edge of the storm that had plagued them throughout the race. Kelly realized that she hadn’t seen another team since takeoff. That would mean that they were in first place! Then she realized the ugly truth. It could also mean that they had veered completely off course. Kirsten checked her phone to see what had happened. Sure enough, they were in first place by a landslide.

Throughout the afternoon, the storm continued to worsen. It met up with the warmer waters from the Indian Ocean, and was starting to move northeast, towards China. That night, while Kevin was piloting, he ran into a particularly strong column of swirling air, near the center of the hurricane.

He swiftly maneuvered the chopper out of the way – and straight into yet another hurricane. This was not good. Two hurricanes, one from the Indian and one from the Pacific were fighting in a test of strength – and Kevin was right in the middle of it!

“KELLY! WAKE UP!” shouted Keith.

“What?” asked Kelly, “Why’s it still nighttime? My shift doesn’t start till morning.”

“Well, we’re gonna need your piloting skills now,” said Kevin, “or else it won’t be pretty. You see, we’re right in the middle of two warring hurricanes. And if you don’t get us out of here now –”

“I’m on it!” said Kelly.

She took the pilot’s seat away from Kevin and immediately shot down toward the ocean, where the funnels were smaller. Then, she flew around the Pacific hurricane towards China.

But as if that wasn't bad enough, Kelly turned around to see another helicopter stuck inside of the hurricane –*Team Jenson's*!

"We have to help them!" said Keith.

"No, we don't," said Kelly, "All we *need* to do is save ourselves."

"Yeah, but they saved us," said Keith, "Could we have built the boat without their help? And what about Mo's phone? Without that, we never could have floated our boat to Sydney! We've got to save them!"

"You know, he does have a point, Kelly," said Kevin.

"Alright, then, it's settled. We save them. But how?"

"Well, how did we save ourselves?" asked Kirsten, "Couldn't they just do the same thing?"

"What if they can't figure it out?" asked Kevin.

"That's my point," beamed Kirsten, "I'll call Mo and tell him what to do! He gave me his phone number when we finished the last race!"

"You know, that just might work!" said Kelly.

Kirsten called Mo's phone.

"Hello, Mo? This is Kirsten. I'm going to tell you how to get out of there," said Kirsten.

"Oh, what? Thanks. But how? And I'm not piloting. Mike is," said Mo.

"Well then, tell Mike," said Kirsten.

"Okay, thanks, Kirsten. So then, how do we get out of here?" he asked.

"Simple. Just fly down to the bottom of it, and then fly out," explained Kirsten.

"Well that seems simple enough," he said.

Kelly then demonstrated how to do it.

The team watched out the window as Mike lowered the helicopter, and then flew out from between the two hurricanes, where the columns were skinnier.

“Thanks!” said Mo from his phone, “Now, I’ll race you to Hong Kong!”

From there on out, *Team Williams* and *Team Jenson* knew that they were good friends, not just kids with a common enemy.

Part Eight:

**In which *Team Williams* and *Team Jenson*
complete their friendship**

Chapter Ten: first Place!

Just one day after *Team Williams* saved *Team Jenson* from the dueling hurricanes, they ran into their old rivals, *Team Flamewheeler*. *Team Flamewheeler*, and another team with ‘Jumbo’ painted on their chopper (in bright, red paint) were taking turns trying to crash another race competitor’s helicopter.

“I really do hate those people,” said Kevin.

“So do I,” said Mo, who was chatting with Kirsten on his phone.

“Let’s stop those jerks, and save that team!” said Keith.

“Awesome,” said Mo.

“Here’s our plan,” said Keith. “We’ll push the helicopter they’re targeting away from the other two, just as *Team Flamewheeler*’s about to ram into it. Then, *Team Flamewheeler*’s chopper will go flying into ‘Jumbo’ and they’ll both end up with a little surprise!”

“Sounds like a plan,” said Mo. “I’ll tell the rest of our team.”

Kelly maneuvered their helicopter behind the chopper that was slowly being destroyed. She waited until *Team Flamewheeler* was about to knock the helpless team into the other chopper, then gently nudged the damaged helicopter up into the sky. *Team Flamewheeler's* helicopter knocked right into 'Jumbo', in a collision similar to the one involving the two hurricanes.

Before *Team Flamewheeler* and 'Jumbo' realized what had happened, *Team Williams* and *Team Jenson* were already flying away.

Kirsten looked behind them.

"Um, guys?" she said to her team and Mo, "I think we're in for a nasty surprise."

Both of the helicopters pushed it up to full speed. The two crazy teams behind them were mad. Fortunately, their collision had done some damage to their helicopters. But even so, *Team Jumbo* had an experienced helicopter pilot on their team, and Kelly and Mike were most certainly *not* experienced helicopter pilots. Just as *Team Jumbo's* helicopter was about to crash right into Kelly, one of the hurricanes came from out of nowhere, and swallowed it whole as if it were a bite-sized Oreo.

Inside of the giant pillar of wind, *Team Jumbo's* helicopter crashed right into *Team Flamewheeler's*.

Now, it was only *Team Williams* and *Team Jenson* in the race for first place. They flew right over the coast of Asia until they were within miles of the city. This was where the real race began! Both helicopters pushed the throttle up to full speed for the final stretch of the race.

In the end, it was extremely close, with more than a few bumps before the two teams finally landed. Kelly managed to get the *Team Williams* copter on the ground first, but not without plenty of excitement first. A few hours later in a Hong Kong restaurant, Kelly retold the story just as it had happened.

All of *Team Williams* and *Team Jenson* gathered at the restaurant to celebrate.

"Geez! Those final seconds in the race to Hong Kong were the most exciting so far!" said Mike.

"You bet so!" said Kelly.

"I really am not quite sure what happened," said Keith.

“Yeah,” said Mo, “from the back of the helicopter, it was pretty hard see what was going on.”

“Well, if you want, I can tell you the play-by-play,” said Kelly.

“Oh, we want!” said Molly.

“Okay then,” said Kelly, “Here it goes. So Kevin turned around and saw you guys behind us, along with two other helicopters coming in fast. Suddenly, the one behind us ran into us, and we were all flying through the helicopter.

“Lucky for us, you guys flew your helicopter over and knocked the offending helicopter over. From there, we could see ‘Jumbo’ painted on its side, and we knew who it was.

“That was when things got intense: *Team Flamewheeler* flew straight into your chopper. Then, it turned around and used its tail propeller to cut the tail off of yours. Your helicopter began to plummet out of the sky, but amazingly, *Team Jumbo*’s helicopter was right below you.

“You landed right on top of Jumbo, stopping their top blade from spinning. Now here’s the truly crazy part—somehow, your top and their bottom worked together, kinda like a normal chopper. Of course, all that extra weight wrecked the aerodynamics of the thing, and your helicopters were fused together, slowly falling. *Team Flamewheeler* tried to knock you apart. Fortunately, you were losing altitude more slowly than *Team Flamewheeler* estimated. They missed, and for some reason, lost control of their helicopter and went spinning through the air.

“You guys weren’t out of the woods yet, so we helped you out by pushing you towards the finish line. At the last second, we pushed you off of *Jumbo*, then raced down to the helicopter pad. We made a safe landing, and even though you were missing your tail section, you managed to get on the ground more or less intact.

“*Jumbo* came crashing down, right behind you. I don’t know how, but all the *Jumbo* team members survived the crash and jumped out of what was left of their chopper. The empty helicopter slid off the pad and onto the road below, causing a massive roadblock. And that’s pretty much what happened.”

“Wow,” said Kevin.

“That was pretty flipping awesome!” said Mo.

“OMG!” said Kirsten.

Soon after that, the teams gathered at the helipad for the announcer to give his speech.

“Now, if that wasn’t an exciting race, I don’t know what is!” said the announcer, “Lots of teams in this race have lots of points. So let’s take a moment to recognize the top five teams! In fifth place, we have... *Team Featherwing!* In fourth place, we have... *Team Jenson!* In third place, we have... *Team Williams!* In second place, we have... *Team Flamewheeler!* And in first place, we have, the one, and the only... *Team Jumbo!*

“Let’s hear a round of applause for *Team Jumbo*. Now, as you know, this last race was by far our most intense. So, we’ll give you all a day to rest before we head out on our next adventure. Here’s a tip, for our fourth segment, you’ll need to pair up with another team.

“That’s right, you’ll all be pairing up. With just twenty-four teams left in the race, we’ll have twelve teams of eight. And here’s the challenge: you’ll be flown to the edge of the Himalayas, where you’ll race the entire length of this massive mountain chain. On foot. After that, we’ll drive the teams who survive this challenge to Delhi, India, the starting point for segment five.

“But for now, rest up and find your partners. We’ll see you at the start of the Himalaya Mountains in two days!”

Part Nine:

In which Mike betrays his team

Chapter Eleven: The Mountainous Trek

“Welcome, teams, to the start of segment four, the Mountainous Trek! In this race, you’ll be pairing up with another team,” said the announcer.

Obviously, *Team Williams* and *Team Jenson* chose to work together. The only problem was that *Team Flamewheeler* and *Team Jumbo* had too. The two teams glared at each other as they waited for the race to begin.

During their day off, Kelly and Mike had planned the quickest route through the mountains. Kevin decided it was time he took a turn as team leader, though he shared the position with Miranda.

We’ve done pretty well in all the other races, thought Kevin, but this time, I’m worried. I just don’t know how I can help my team win the race!

“As this race will be the hardest yet,” explained the announcer, “we’re giving race contestants four whole weeks to make it through the Himalayan mountain chain. No pressure, but if anyone from your team fails to finish the race in the given amount of time; you will be disqualified. I hope that this warning gives you extra motivation to get through these mountains as fast as you can! Now, on your mark, get set, GO!”

All the teams took off, running as fast as they could through the mountains. This time, the entire *Williams/Jenson* team (including Kelly) was outfitted from head-to-toe in state-of-the-art winter clothing.

Running alongside them was no other than *Team Flamewheeler/Jumbo*. (It seemed neither hurricanes, nor fiery crashes could slow them down.)

“Hey, jerks!” said the man who seemed to be the leader of *Team Flamewheeler*, “I’d like to introduce myself to you. I’m Cal Rutledge, the leader of *Team Flamewheeler*. This guy next to me is my brother Dan Rutledge, the leader of *Team Jumbo*. And that guy over there, well he’s our third brother.

“Even as we speak, he’s planning to betray *Team Demon* and join us. His name’s Dom Ruttedge, and he’s with *Team Featherwing*. You see, we’ll all step over the finish line at the same time, making a tie for first place. Then, it’ll go *Jumbo*, *Flamewheeler*, *Featherwing*. Yep. It’s us, the World’s Greatest Chasers and future millionaires. We’ll rule the whole wide world! GO TEAM RUTTEDGE!”

“You seem pretty confident, huh?” remarked Keith.

“Yes,” said Dan, “We are.”

“C’mon, team,” said Cal, “Let’s go. We don’t have time for kids.”

The two horrid teams ran off into the mountains, followed by *Team Featherwing* and their partner team.

“Well, at least we know a little bit more about their teams now,” said Molly.

“Mike? Mike! Why are you just staring back at them?”

“Oh, it’s nothing,” said Mike.

Our eight heroes took off into the mountains. They planned to get around the first mountain in twenty-four hours, and for a time, everything went according to plan. They weren’t in first place, but they weren’t in last either, and neither was *Team Flamewheeler/Jumbo/Featherwing*. In fact, on many occasions, they could see one of the competing teams on a nearby mountain. Ten days into the competition; however, things began to get worse.

First, it was the food. Their supply of food was dwindling much faster than they had expected. Kelly checked her calculations, and sure enough, she hadn’t packed nearly enough food for the eight travelers – she’d only planned for four. As if that wasn’t bad enough, they were eating what food they had twice as fast as she expected. A few days later, the situation became even more tenuous.

Mike saw *Team Flamewheeler, Jumbo and Featherwing*, go into a mountain tunnel, and he decided to go with them. He tagged along behind them, and his team didn’t know he was missing. They just got more food.

Soon, Mike saw that the group he was following had stopped to set-up camp. They began to eat food and talk. After watching the group for nearly an hour, Mike walked into the middle of their camp.

“Hello, uncles,” he said.

Meanwhile, down at the base of the mountain, *Team Williams/Jenson* was also setting up camp for the night. Using the extra warm tent and blankets Keith purchased for the trip, they huddled together in an effort to get warm, and not think about how little food remained.

“Man, is it cold out here!” exclaimed Molly.

“Like we didn’t already know that,” said Mo, “It’s like, negative a thousand degrees out here! If Keith hadn’t bought us all these mountain explorer equipment, we’d be freezing to death!”

“Speaking of Keith buying us this tent,” said Kelly, “When our teams win the prize money after the race is over, I say we pay Keith for all the things he’s bought—it would only be fair.”

“You know, you’re right,” said Molly, “Even if Keith isn’t on our team, if we win, I’ll still pay him back.”

“Well, thank you guys,” said Keith, “It really would be nice. Truth is, I don’t really have all that much money left. Probably enough to finish this race, but after that, I don’t know. We’ve really got to get serious about winning this.”

Back at the cave, Mike and his uncles made a plan. An evil plan designed to make *Team Williams* lose.

You see, part of the inspiration for this plan came from *Team Featherwing*. They betrayed *Team Demon* to collaborate with *Team Flamewheeler/Jumbo*. The plan was for Mike to return to *Team Jenson* and convince them to betray *Team Williams*. Then, *Team Jenson* would betray *Team Williams*, and lead them straight into a trap.

Team Flamewheeler/Jumbo/Featherwing would take *Team Williams* with them to the finish line. One member from *Team Featherwing* would keep *Team Williams* from crossing the finish line.

And so was their plan.

Chapter Twelve:

Betrayal

The next day, Mike returned to his team. Luckily for him, they hadn't even noticed he was gone! Mike just started walking with them through the mountains, as if he had never been gone.

A few days later, while the kids were preparing camp for the night, Mike took his other *Team Jenson* members aside.

"You know what let's do?" asked Mike.

"What?" asked Molly, "And why isn't *Team Williams* here?"

"Because, I have a plan that'll give our team the victory it deserves!"

"And what plan is that?" asked Mo.

"Let's double cross those nerds! We'll walk all over them, and beat them to a pulp!"

"Actually, Mike, you're the nerdy one here," said Molly.

"Never mind that, I'm just saying that I think it would be for the best if we tricked *Team Williams* and claimed victory all to ourselves. In fact, I have a plan all figured out!"

"And what plan is that?" asked Miranda.

"Miranda," said Mike, "I'm just doing this for your dad. You know how *Team Williams* beat us in the helicopter race, and what I'm saying is that they'll just keep doing that. We'll never get bring home the first place prize, as long as their still in the race. We need to ditch them, and now would be the time, when they least suspect it."

"I get your point, Mike," said Mo, "but that wouldn't be very nice. Let's face it. No matter who else sides with you, I won't. I'm going to stick with *Team Williams*. They saved us, and I will not leave them hanging out to dry. Besides, Kirsten and I are getting to be good friends."

“Well, I, for one, agree with Mike,” said Molly.

“I see his point, too. I’m sorry Mo,” replied Miranda.

“Well, then, it’s settled,” said Mike. “We betray them.”

“No, it’s definitely not settled,” said Mo.

“Yes, Mo. It is,” said a voice from behind them.

Team Jensen turned around. Standing behind them was Cal Rutledge.

“Dom, you take the girls. I’ll get the feisty one,” said Cal.

A big, muscly man stepped out from behind Cal Rutledge’s immense shadow. He grabbed the girls, Miranda and Molly, slapped a strip of duct tape across their mouths, and started dragging them back up the mountain.

“Now, I’ll take you!” said Cal. He reached down and grabbed Mo, and he too started trekking up the mountain.

Soon, Mike arrived back at the *Team Williams* camp.

“The other three went to scout ahead; we thought we saw some other teams up ahead,” said Mike.

“Sounds good,” responded Kirsten.

Back at the mountain cave, Cal Rutledge threw Mo into a pit and had tied up the girls in a corner. Inside of the pit, Mo knew what he had to do. He took out his phone and called Kirsten.

“Yes? Who is this?” asked Kirsten.

“It’s me, Mo,” said Mo.

“Oh, Mo. I thought you were scouting up ahead,” said Kirsten.

“No, I’m not,” he said.

“Then where are you?”

“I’ve been thrown in a pit. I’m actually in a mountain cave, hidden on the trail up above you.”

“Wait – how did you end up in a pit? Are you okay? Did you fall in?” asked Kirsten.

“Listen up. Mike is a traitor. He’s teamed up with Cal Rutledge and *Team Flamewheeler*. They’re trying to get us to get you out of the way – just so they can win.”

“That’s horrible, Mo. What can we do?”

“Here’s what. Mike’s going to lead you up the mountain to this cave, where *Team Flamewheeler* and *Jumbo* and *Featherwing* are planning to attack you. They’ll take you prisoner, and just to taunt you, they plan to take you with them all the way to the finish line.

“But here’s where their plan is screwed up. See, they’re going to have some of their teammates keep you from crossing the finish line. What they don’t know is that all the players on both partner teams have to cross the finish line in order for a team to win.

“Well, imagine what’s going to happen when they find out. They’ll probably say: ‘let’s have all the people on that team hold back *Team Williams*’. But whatever team they choose to sacrifice certainly won’t like it. You know they’ll end up fighting like cats and dogs. That’s when we make our move. While they’re fighting, they’ll forget all about us, and we’ll be free to sneak across the finish line, winning the segment...or at least beating those losers.”

“Sounds like a plan,” said Kirsten, “I’ll tell the others.”

Part Ten:

**In which *Team Williams/Jenson* overcome
Mike's betrayal**

Chapter Thirteen: The Plan Works!

Sure enough, the next morning, Mike began leading them up the mountain. He said he'd 'found a little shortcut'. *Team Williams* knew he was leading them into a trap, but they went along anyway. Once they reached the mountain cave, Cal, Dan and Dom Rutledge jumped out and took them hostage, just as Mo had predicted. The men gathered all the kids together, and began leading them through the mountains, all the way to the finish line. The kids went meekly along with their captors, not putting up much of a fight.

In truth, the kids were much better off. On their own, they'd been nearly out of food, but the Rutledge brothers had plenty for everyone. They kept the kids well fed, and in general, took good care of them. Travelling with the adults was much easier. However, as they neared the finish line, all havoc broke loose.

"Okay, let's put this plan into action." said Cal, "Brenna, you hold Miranda and Molly. Chad, you take care of Mo. Dave, you stop Keith and Kevin. And Carly, you take Kirsten and Kelly. Okay?"

"Okay!" they all said.

Brenna, Chad, Dave and Carly held onto the kids. At first it worked pretty well, until the three brothers and Mike crossed the finish line. They waited for the announcer to say that they had won, but nothing happened.

“Hey, Mr. Announcer man! Wake up! We won!” shouted Dom.

“No, you didn’t,” said the announcer, “In order to win, all members of both partner teams must cross the finish line.”

“What?” said Dom, “That wasn’t in the rules!”

“Yes, Dom, it was. You just didn’t take the time to read them,” replied the announcer.

“Well, okay then,” said Cal, “*Team Featherwing*, you hold the kids back. Me and Dan’s teams will cross the finish line together.”

“No,” said Dom Rutledge, “I’m not going to do that. I have my own team. You don’t get to tell me what to do.”

“Oh,” said Cal, “are you so sure about that? ‘Cause there’s two teams on my side, and only one on yours.”

All the while this was happening, the kids quietly slipped past the feuding teams and crossed the finish line together.

Mike saw what had happened. He looked back at his fighting uncles, then he shrugged and crossed the finish line.

“And the winners are... *Team Williams* and *Team Jenson!*” said the announcer.

The two teams all cheered. Cal, Dan and Dom Rutledge hurried back across the line, but again, they had to wait for the rest of their teammates, who apparently thought they were still fighting. The three of them were all yelling for the members of their teams to get across the line. But eventually, the brothers ended up fighting over who would finish third.

It took them a couple of hours to get things straightened out, but in the end, Dom Rutledge and *Team Featherwing* got third, Cal Rutledge and *Team Flamewheeler* got fourth, and Dan Rutledge and *Team Jumbo* settled for fifth.

With four race segments complete, the overall standings were: *Team Jenson* fifth, *Team Williams* fourth, *Team Featherwing* third, *Team Jumbo* second, and *Team Flamewheeler* first. In other words, the race was still on. *Team Jenson* and *Team Williams* had to make up

for their last place in Australia fast, and in the process, give the Rutledge brothers' teams a few more losses, if the kids had any hope of winning the race.

Later that day, the kids met up in a nearby restaurant.

"Well, that ended up a little on the awkward side, but at least we finally won a segment," said Kirsten.

"And it was a good thing too, otherwise, we wouldn't be in fourth and fifth place," said Molly.

"I vote that we all promise never to lie to each other again. No more lies, no matter what it's about. Even if it's just something stupid," said Kevin.

"That's actually a pretty good idea," said Keith.

"Yeah," said Mike, "I made a dumb move over there. Sorry, I just thought that when I saw my three uncles in the race, I should follow them. Turns out, uncles aren't everything. From now on, I've learned my lesson. Stay true to your friends and never trust *Team Flamewheeler*."

"Okay. Now repeat after me," said Kevin, "I, Kevin, am a member of *Williams Team*. I will never trust *Team Flamewheeler*, *Team Jumbo*, or *Team Featherwing*. I will always tell the truth when I am communicating with a member of *Team Jenson* or *Team Williams*."

The other members all repeated what Kevin had said.

"Well, for the next segment I guess we'll be split up again, so I guess this is goodbye," said Miranda.

"We'll see about that," said Kevin, "If *Team Flamewheeler* keeps up their tricks, then I'm sure we'll meet up again."

"Well if they do, we've already proved that together, we can handle whatever they try to throw at us," said Miranda, "Let's stay friends."

"Yes, friends. Always saving ourselves and saving each other from whatever happens," said Kevin.

"Well then, see you after the next segment, or whenever *Team Flamewheeler* strikes again," said Miranda.

“Okay then, bye!” said Kevin, as they left the restaurant.

“Bye!” shouted Miranda.

Part Eleven:

In which *Team Williams* refuses to cheat

Chapter fourteen: The Offer

“Welcome racers and race fans, to the start of the fifth segment!” boomed the announcer, “Yes, that’s right. We’re halfway through the World Chase! But still, we’ve got a lot of racing left to do.

“In this race, our contestants will be competing on state-of-the-art racing bikes, and we’ll be racing across half of Asia and almost all of Europe, all the way to Paris, France.

“This will be a hard challenge, but I know you can do this! As this is the longest segment yet, you will each be given five weeks to reach the finish line. It will be hard, but I know each and every one of you can make it to the end. The only question is: how long will it take? Because the fastest team gets first place! And the team that gets the most first place wins will be crowned our World Chase champ. So, can you do it? Yes you can! But how fast can you do it? That’s the only thing left to be decided. Now, on your mark, get set, GO!”

The teams strapped on their racing helmets and sped off, headed towards Europe. But while the other teams were thinking of Europe, Keith was thinking of something different.

“Alright guys,” said Keith, who had again been chosen leader of *Team Williams*, “Let’s take this one step at a time. Asia first, then Europe.”

“Good advice,” said Kirsten.

One night, after a particularly long day on the road, Keith splurged and paid for hotel room. The four weary kids were sleeping soundly, when suddenly, they awoke to a knocking on the door. Keith was the first to get up. He walked over to the door and opened it up. Outside, a man was standing in the hallway.

“You know what I think,” said the man.

“What?” asked Keith.

“I think that your team deserves to win, but how are you going to do that? You’re just a bunch of kids. However, I’ve designed a bike that is guaranteed to give you an advantage, and it’s disguised to look exactly like the model you’re riding right now. I have four of them. Whattya say?”

“I say no,” said Keith, “because that would be cheating. And I don’t cheat. Thank you very much!”

Keith shut the door on the man.

But the man opened it right back up, before Keith could lock the door.

“Listen here, bucky. I don’t take no as an answer. I want you to win so badly, I would do anything for you. And this is my anything. Understand?”

“I do understand, and I still say NO!” shouted Keith.

“Fine,” said the man, “I can always give these to *Team Flamewheeler*. I’m sure they’d accept it. After all, I’m a big fan of them, too!”

“Well, then give them to *Team Flamewheeler*! They’ll get caught and be disqualified!”

“I’m pretty sure they wo-on’t!” he said.

“No matter what you say, I will not take your bikes,” said Keith, firmly.

“Or will you?” said the man.

“No.”

“Are you sure about that?”

“I’m sure.”

“Are you sure you’re sure?”

“I’m sure, I’m sure.”

“You know you waaaaaaaant it!”

“NEVER!”

“Well what does the rest of your team have to say about it?”

Keith slammed the door on the man, this time, managed to lock it.

“You may have won this round, but this is just one battle. The war is the race. The race is the war. Either way, I will win. If you do not accept my offer by midnight, *Team Flamewheeler* just might be getting a surprise present from yours truly.”

Keith walked over to the others, who were sitting up in their beds.

“I’m not so sure you made the right choice there, Keith,” said Kelly.

“Why not?” asked Keith, “taking those bikes would be cheating!”

“Well, we could just accept the offer and then throw out the bikes.”

“I heard that,” said the man, who was apparently still standing outside the door.

“Well, we could accept the offer and risk getting caught,” said Kirsten.

“But what if we did get caught?” asked Kelly. “Then we’d have come all this way for nothing!”

“She has a point,” said Kirsten.

“Well, then we should decline,” said Kelly.

“But then *Team Flamewheeler* would beat us,” said Kevin.

“I think that’s a risk worth taking. Maybe those *Flamewheeler* jerks will get caught. If not, it’ll just give us a reason to pedal harder and faster,” said Keith.

“Well then, it’s settled. We decline.”

“Did ya hear that, creepy old man?” shouted Kirsten, “We decline. Give the bikes to *Team Flamewheeler*. We don’t care. We’ll just work harder and win anyway!”

“Okay then,” said the man in his gruff, creepy voice, “these bikes are going to *Team Flamewheeler*!”

Chapter fifteen:

Stalked!

The next day, the team woke up bright and early and continued on the trail that would lead them across Asia and into Europe. As they passed through a small town in west India, Keith swore he saw the man who had visited them the previous night.

Later that same afternoon, Kirsten reported she, too, spotted a suspicious man, hiding along the path. Throughout the day, the team kept reporting strange sightings of the man. Eventually, Keith decided something needed to be done.

“This can’t go on. We’re being stalked, and I cannot stand the feeling of being constantly watched,” said Keith, “The next time one of us sees this man, we’ll pull over and do something about it.”

Eventually in a large town, Keith saw the man and they pulled over. He made sure many people were watching him as he did this.

“What do you want?” asked Keith, as he approached the unknown man.

“I want you to win,” said the man.

“Listen,” said Keith, “Sure, we’d like to win, but we absolutely refuse to cheat, so why don’t you just leave us alone.”

The man walked around Keith’s bike, then Kevin’s, then Kirsten’s and Kelly’s.

“Listen, kids. This is about more than you. This is about adult stuff you wouldn’t understand. But it’s also adult stuff that can change the world – for *better*, or for worse. And I want the world to change for the *better*, don’t you? So just let me make a quick little exchange of bikes here, and everything will be just fine. Okay?”

“No,” said Keith.

“You’re going to regret this, and when you finally come to your sense, just call this number, anytime. But don’t wait too long. Remember, the world can be – *better* – and you kids are the key. Okay?” said the man, as he handed Keith a card with a phone number on it.

“Whatever,” said Keith. He threw the card on the ground in disgust, and *Team Williams* resumed their race to Paris.

The kids kept watch for the strange man throughout the day, but never spotted him again. Keith assumed that the man had gotten what he’d wanted, and hoped he’d leave them along now.

For the next few days, the kids made substantial progress towards Europe. In fact, it wasn’t until the last day of their Asia trip that the man approached the kids again. It was nighttime, and the kids were once again sleeping in a hotel room. Suddenly, they heard a pounding on their door. Keith opened it, assuming it would be the strange man, but he was wrong. Instead, it was a group of men wearing dark coats and badges that said ‘World Chase 2000: Official Race Enforcer’ in bright orange letters.

“Hello there, *Team Williams*, you’ve been accused of cheating. Rule number twenty-three, segment five of the race,” said one of the men.

That was when Keith noticed the crazy man they’d encountered earlier was standing behind the race officials, smiling.

“In other words,” the race official continued, “you’ve been modifying your bikes.”

With that said, the race official pushed his way into the kids’ room and proceeded to check their bikes. He spun the back wheel on one of the bikes, and pulled a small device off of the spokes.

“This,” he said, “is a sprayer. It sprays out a liquid that makes the wheel spin easier and faster. Sprayers are illegal. You are disqualified.”

Suddenly, Keith remembered when the suspicious man had leaned on their bikes during their last encounter with him.

“Hey!” shouted Keith, “we didn’t put on the sprayers, but I think I know who did.”

“Then who?” asked the head race official.

“That man over there. Fingerprint him, and I’m sure you’ll see it’s true.”

“Well, if you’re sure. Okay, men. Fingerprint him!”

One of the other race officials pulled out a pad of ink and some other tools. Soon, he had come to a conclusion.

“Good news!” he said, “The fingerprints match. The kids were right and you sir, are under arrest for meddling with the race. *Team Williams*, please accept our apologies. You are free to continue the race.”

“YES!” shouted Keith.

“NO!” wailed the man.

“This is good for a night’s work. Move out!” said the head race official.

Part Twelve:

**In which *Team Williams* is saved by one of
their enemies.**

Chapter Sixteen: The New *Team Flamewheeler*

Just two mornings later, (the team's first day in Europe) as *Team Williams* was having breakfast at a coffee shop, a headline on a local paper caught their eye: *Frenchman arrested for meddling with World Chase*. The kids skimmed the newspaper article; apparently the Frenchman been trying to win a bet.

"Geez, what a guy!" said Keith.

"Well, it wasn't so long ago that you bullied kids for money."

"Yeah, but that was before I changed. Truth is, I think this race has changed all of us," said Keith.

"He has a point," said Kirsten, "Before this race, I spent all my time on my phone. Now, the last time I used it is when we were stuck in the Himalayas and needed to communicate with Mo!"

"Right!" said Kelly, "Before this race, I was afraid of heights. Now, I can fly a helicopter."

“What about me?” said Kevin. “Before this race, I never thought I could do anything. Now, I know I can! I even led us through the Himalayas.”

“Yeah, we’ve all grown up a lot in the race, but now, we’d better get going,” Keith said. “Kirsten, would you check your phone to see what place we’re in.”

Kirsten checked her phone.

“GUYS!” she exclaimed, “LOOK HERE! WE’RE IN FIRST PLACE!”

“That’s great, but look who’s in second place -- *Team Flamewheeler* -- and their dot is moving fast. We’ve better get going,” Keith pointed out.

The team ran to their bikes, anxious to get started on another long day of racing. They had already passed through Germany and were now in Italy.

Unfortunately, while they were travelling through Italy, Kevin accidentally veered off course and crashed on a rock. He went flying through the air, and when he hit the ground, he was sure he had broken all the bones in his body. He hadn’t, of course, but his arm was dangling at unnatural angle.

Keith picked him up and hauled him over to the main path. They were miles from the nearest town, so they couldn’t get immediate help. Kirsten called 911, but the operator said it might be hours before help arrived. The kids parked their bikes and tried their best to comfort Kevin, who was clearly in a lot of pain.

They hadn’t been waiting long when another World Chase team came rolling around the corner.

“HELP!” cried Kevin, but the other team didn’t hear, or they just ignored him. They didn’t even break stride as they pedaled past.

Soon, a different team came around the corner, but rather than stop to help, they just looked at Kevin’s team and laughed.

More than an hour had passed, and the ambulance still hadn’t arrived yet, when none other than *Team Flamewheeler* came rolling around the corner.

“What happened?” asked Cal, as he abruptly stopped his bike.

“I went flying over a rock and broke my arm,” replied Kevin.

“Have you called 911 yet?” asked Cal, who was beginning to seem rather helpful.

“Yes, I have,” said Kirsten.

“Look, I may have done some bad things in the past, but they were all under the influence of my siblings, particularly Dan. He can get crazy sometimes. Anyway, I decided it would be better if I split up from them, and I did. I’m really sorry for what I’ve done. Will you forgive me?” he asked.

“Well, I guess,” said Keith, “but how can you help us?”

“Well, when I was your age, I was in the Boy Scouts.”

“Hey, so am I,” said Kevin, “but how’s that going to help me?”

“I learned some stuff about first aid along the way,” he replied, “and so will you, if you stick with it. Anyway, I’ve got some gauze in my pack. Will you trust me to help you out?”

“I guess...” said Kevin, tentatively.

“Well then, I think this’ll do the trick until the professionals get here. And in effort to make amends, I’d like to pay the medical bill.”

“Sure, I guess,” said Keith. “We are running low on money. Anything would help.”

“Well then consider it done. So does this mean you’ve forgiven me?” asked Cal.

“It sure does,” said Kevin, and all the other team members agreed. *Team Flamewheeler* turned out to be quite nice, once they had been forgiven.

Maybe that was all Cal needed, thought Kevin, just the sense of being known and liked by someone other than himself.

After a while, the ambulance got there. Cal paid the bill as he promised, and even rode with Kevin to the hospital. He sent Kevin’s dad a note reporting that his son was in an Italian hospital, but that everything was fine.

“You should go to sleep, Kevin,” said Cal, sounding a lot like a comforting father. “It’d do you some good. You’ve had a long day.”

The next day, Kevin woke up to find his arm in a cast; his dad, Darren Williams, standing over him; and Cal Rutledge, his enemy turned hero, asleep on the couch.

“Hey there, Kevin!” Darren said, “It looks like you and I are in the same position, with our broken limbs in plaster casts. Are you feeling okay?”

“I’ve been better....but dad, I’ve got to help out the team. They need me to win. You’ve got to get me out of this hospital,” Kevin said.

“Not to worry. The doctors say you’ll be able to complete the next segment. Lucky for you, it’s through the Mediterranean Sea by submarine, and as long as you’re not driving, it shouldn’t require any arms.”

Kevin and his dad chuckled.

Kevin spent the rest of the day telling his dad all about the team’s amazing adventures, from finding Kirsten and helping the man who wanted to explore Antarctica, to Keith changing from bully to friend. They laughed at how Kirsten had learned there was more to life than a phone (and herself), and how cool it was that there was another team of kids, *Team Jenson*, in the race. He shared how resourceful they’d had to be, just to make it to Australia and how smart Kelly was to learn to fly a helicopter in just a day.

Kevin didn’t leave out the tough stuff, like when Mike betrayed them in the Himalayas, or the surprising things, like being rescued by their worst enemy, *Team Flamewheeler*.

Kevin didn’t stop talking all afternoon, and his father just listened and was amazed at all his son had accomplished. (Cal just kept snoring on the couch.)

Part Thirteen:

In which *Team Williams* returns a favor.

Chapter Sixteen:

A Rutledge family

Reunion

Back on the trail, the two three-person teams, *Team Williams* and *Team Flamewheeler*, were making great strides towards Paris. The teams were encouraging each other to try and do their best.

After all they'd been through, there was a lingering distrust between the two teams, but also, a recognition that they were better working together than acting as adversaries.

Just like their friendship with *Team Jenson* was solidified when *Team Jumbo* and the old, win-at-all-costs version of *Team Flamewheeler* attacked *Team Jenson's* helicopter, this relationship was complete when *Team Williams* stuck up for *Team Flamewheeler*.

It happened like this: one of the members on Cal's team, Vincent Vladimir looked behind him to find Dan Rutledge and his team approaching.

"Hey, brother!" shouted Dan, "Why are there six of you?"

“Cal’s not here right now,” said Vincent, “He’s with Kevin Williams, at the hospital. Unlike you, this race has changed him for the better, and we’re now helping these children win the race. They’re just kids after all. You should be helping them, too, not trying to kill them.”

Keith felt slightly embarrassed at what Vincent had said, but ignored it, as it was meant in a nice way. He was beginning to get a feel of how truly awful *Team Jumbo* was, especially compared to the new and improved *Team Flamewheeler*.

“Ha!” said Dan, “What a little baby! Siding with the kids! Don’t think we haven’t heard you, you depend on these kids! Without them, you’d be sitting on the ground, crying your little heads off! These kids – these *kids* – are more mature than you are, Vincent Vladimir!”

“That is not true!” stammered Vincent, who was holding back tears.

“Admit it!” said Dan. “It is!”

“It’s not!” said Vincent.

“Oh, does the wittle baby need his tissue?” said Dan, as the rest of his team laughed.

“That – That is not true!” stammered Vincent.

“I’m sowwy, wittle baby. I couldn’t hear you over your teaws.”

“NO!” shouted Vincent, who was now crying.

“Shut up, you bub!” said Keith, “Cal was right. You really are a baby. A bully. Well, let me tell you what. I was once a bully too. But then, I met Kevin, Kelly and Kirsten. They changed me. They made me who I am now. Cal was once a bully too. But just like me, he changed. Vincent’s not the baby, you are. A baby bully, who hasn’t changed. No...you are just a big, old jerk.”

“But – but I – but – but!” said Dan.

All of the people there, including those on his own team started laughing. Dan started crying.

“I’m sorry!” he said, “I now know what I need to do. I’m not a little kid anymore, and I am most certainly not a jerk. I am Dan Rutledge! Come on, guys, you finish this race, and I’ll stay back here and wait for Dom. I’ve got some words for him. We are the Rutledge Brothers, not the Rutledge Babies! And as Daniel Thomas Alexander Rutledge, Junior, I

will not let anything stand in my way! Thank you! Thank you all! Now, I know what I must do!”

After his sudden outburst, Dan parked his bike at the side of the road. And as he had requested, his team continued on, now traveling along *Team Flamewheeler* and *Team Williams*.

Part fourteen:

In which *former enemies arrive in Paris...together.*

Chapter Seventeen: Halfway There!

The next day, *Team Williams*, *Team Flamewheeler*, and *Team Jumbo* arrived in Paris, France.

“And the winners of segment five are, *Team Williams*, *Team Flamewheeler* and *Team Jumbo!*” said the announcer, “Let’s hear a round of applause for them! They are now halfway through their journeys, and you are halfway through yours, World Chase fans.

“As so many teams had difficulties with this segment, we installed a new rule: only three of the four members on each team must cross the finish line in order for a team to win. However, I think that some of our missing team members are with us right now! Let me hear a round of applause for Kevin Williams, Darren Williams and Cal Rutledge.

“Look here, two more teams are rolling in, *Team Featherwing* and *Team Jenson*. Well folks, now that our top five teams are here, it looks to me like I should announce their places. In fifth place, we have the one and only *Team Featherwing*, and in fourth place, we have *Team Jumbo!* Good job, Jumbo!

“In third place, currently with the bronze World Chase 2000 cup, is *Team Flamewheeler!* In second place, currently with the silver World Chase 2000 cup, is the one, and the only, *Team Jenson!* Let’s hear it for them!

“Now, last but not least, the team with the most total points and wins since the *Team Antarctic Explorers Fund* in the 1991 World Chase Race, is the one, the only, *Team Williams!* I present you with... Kelly Okello! Keith McIntyre! Kirsten O’ Connor! And Kevin Williams. Oh, and let’s hear it for Kevin’s dad, the one and only Darren Williams! Ladies and gentlemen, please give us a nice round of applause for our current leaders.”

Later that day, after being interviewed by what seemed like hundreds of reporters from all of the world’s largest newspapers, *Team Williams*, *Team Jenson*, Darren Williams, and Cal Rutledge gathered in a hotel room. Cal, still trying to make up for his previous transgressions, gave the team a one-thousand-dollar check, a big boost to the team’s dwindling finances.

Since the race was now halfway complete, all the teams were enjoying a one-week break. While they could rest their weary feet, their brains were in overdrive. Cal and the kids were making the most of their days off, planning and studying for the challenges ahead.

“So, how exactly did you find Kirsten?” asked Darren, taking a break from the book he was reading.

“I already told you, dad,” reminded Kevin.

“Yes, I know,” said Darren, “but it’s such an amazing story, I really can’t believe any of it happened!”

“Well this race is all about amazing things, and you know there will be many more before we get back to New York,” said Kelly.

“I just can’t wait until the second half starts. I hear that it’s even more exciting than the first!” said Kirsten.

“Our next segment, we submarine through the Mediterranean Sea. Then, we cross Africa by truck. After that, there’s balloons, dirt bikes, and the one I dread the most, the secret segment. Considering how crazy these others have been, I can’t image what awaits at the end” said Keith.

“Hey, how’d you learn what all the remaining segments are? I didn’t think the race officials released that information yet,” asked Kirsten.

“Your phone, remember? You showed me the new World Chase app?” said Keith, with a touch of humor in his voice. “They updated it with more information.”

“Oh yeah, right!” said Kirsten.

They spent the next week relaxing in Paris, and learning the ins and outs of submarine travel. But seven days later, it was time for them to get back to the race.

Part fifteen:

In which Kirsten is faced with the challenge of loss, but finds just what she needs in the strangest of places...

Chapter Eighteen:

Muffintins

“Welcome, racers and race fans, to the start of segment six, where we will be taking submarines through the Mediterranean Sea. I hope you’ve all recovered from your break, because it’s time to get back to racing! *Team Williams* may be in first place, but we’re only halfway through the Chase! Contestants, start your submarines in 3... 2... 1... GO!”

Kirsten was off. She had spent her whole break reading up on the intricacies of submarine driving. Everything was going fine; they had no enemies to watch out for, no one gamblers stalking them, and no problems to overcome. That is, until Kirsten got a phone call.

“Kelly, can you steer for a while, while I get this?” asked Kirsten.

“Sure thing!” said Kelly, as she took the wheel.

“Hello! Who is this?” asked Kirsten.

“Hi, honey. It’s me, your mom. I have some bad news, and I’m sorry I have to deliver it to you during the middle of your race, but Muffintins?”

“My cat?”

“Yes, honey. Muffintins. You know how old she was.”

“Was? Don’t you mean is?” asked Kirsten.

“No, honey. Was. Yesterday, around noon, she died. I’m sorry.”

“NOOOOOO!” shouted Kirsten.

“Sorry, pudgy princess tickle fingers,” said her mom.

Beep!

The connection was lost and Kirsten began to cry.

“Pudgy Princess Tickle Fingers?” asked Keith, “what the heck?”

“Okay guys,” said Kelly, “this isn’t good at all. I can sort of drive this submarine for a while, but we’re going to have surface for air, and I don’t have any idea how to safely bring this boat I just don’t think I can do that. We need Kirsten back, and fast, or we’re going to run out of air.”

“I’ll go try to make her feel better,” said Keith, as he walked over to Kirsten.

“Hey Kirsten,” said Keith, “what happened?”

“Muff – tins – mom – phone – cat – die – omg – tins,” said Kirsten.

“Whoa, whoa, whoa. Hold your horses, Kirsten,” he said, “Take a deep breath, then tell me what happened.”

“Okay,” said Kirsten, as she blew her nose.

Keith smiled gently.

“So, my cat, muffintins,” she started, before collapsing in tears.

“Why, oh why. Muffintins...Muffly...Tin-tin...Kitty...NOOOOO,” she cried, as she ran around the room.

“What happened?” asked Kevin.

“I’m not sure, but as near as I can make out, I think that was her mom on the phone. I think Kirsten had a cat named Muffintins, and her mom call to tell her that the she died,” Keith explained.

“Kirsten didn’t die,” said Kevin, “she’s right here!”

“Kirsten, did you hear that?” asked Keith. “Kevin just told a joke. Hey Kevin, why don’t you try some more?”

“Okay,” said Kevin.

For the next twenty-two minutes, Kevin told Kirsten jokes, and she little-by-little, she began to get over her sadness. Everything was fine until he got to ‘What’s a cat’s favorite color?’

“Um, well, Muffintins just loves our blue-green couch but – Muffintins! Aaaaaah!” Then she rolled on the floor, sobbing uncontrollably.

“Well, that was useless. If anything, it just made the situation worse,” said Kevin.

“Guys, I’m afraid we’re back to square one,” said Kelly. “And pretty soon, we’re going to be out of air. We’ve got to do something fast. Wait – I’ve got an idea! Kirsten still loves her phone. Maybe we could try letting her play an app on there.”

“Sounds like a plan!” said Keith.

Keith walked over to Kirsten.

“How would you like to try playing an app on your phone?” he asked Kirsten.

“Okay,” said Kirsten, still sniffing.

For an instant, she seemed to recover from her sadness over Muffintins. However, when she logged onto her phone, things just got worse. As it turned out, the background image on her iPhone was a picture of Muffintins on her favorite blue-green couch.

“Oh, look,” said Kirsten, “That’s a picture my mom took of Muffintins when she was a – MUFFINTINS...OH MUFFINTINS!”

By this point, Kirsten was back to running around the submarine like a wild dog, tearing up everything she could find.

“MUFFINTINS!” she shouted, “I WANT MY MUFFINTINS!”

Kevin grabbed Kirsten by the shoulders.

“Kirsten,” he said, “Calm down. I went through this once, too.”

“You did?” she asked, choking back her sobs.

“Yes, Kirsten,” said Kevin, “I did. Just two weeks before I left to go on this trip, my gerbil, Freddy died.”

“Your cat died, too?” asked Kirsten, “So, you like cats, too?”

“No, Kirsten,” said Kevin, “Freddy was a gerbil. I actually hate cats. Their annoying, they scratch you, they – oops.”

“Gerbil,” murmured Kirsten, “Freddy. Don’t like cats. Annoying, scratch you. Annoying, scratch you. ANNOYING, SCRATCH YOU. WHAT KIND OF A SORRY EXCUSE FOR A PERSON ARE YOU, KEVIN JEREMY WILLIAMS? GET OUT OF MY WAY, YOU DIRTY LITTLE @\$!@!?!?”

Kirsten jumped onto Kevin, and started clawing him.

“Annoying, scratch you,” she said, “How’s this for annoying, scratch you? Huh! HOW DO YOU LIKE IT NOW!?!?! YOU KNOW, if I ever visited *your* house, and met *your* gerbil, you know what I’d do?! I’d RIP YOUR GERBIL’S HEAD OFF HIS TEENSY LITTLE GERBIL BODY! THAT’S WHAT I’D DO! WHAT DO YOU THINK ABOUT THAT?!”

Kirsten kept trying to scratch Kevin’s head and shoulders. The scratches didn’t actually hurt, but Kevin didn’t know what to do. They were stuck underwater, in a submarine, without their driver, and just fifteen minutes left of air.

“Guys, I think I might have found something,” said Kelly.

Chapter Nineteen: Kelly

Saves the Day?

“Guys, I think I might have found something,” said Kelly repeated, as she pulled a book out from a compartment in the sub.

On the front cover, the title said *Submarine Instruction & Safety Manual: An Owner's Guide to the PowerSub MecaEX Legacy 51 5100xcd 2.5*

“Let’s see,” said Kelly, “It sounds pretty straightforward. ‘Maneuvering submarine to surface. Step one: Maneuver submarine to calm waters. Step two: Press button id43 remove air from tanks. Note: Do not attempt to steer submarine while surfacing’.”

“Kelly,” sniffed Kirsten, “that’s such great advice. That was just what I needed to hear, and to think it came from a submarine instruction manual. I’m gonna be okay now, thanks so much!”

Just like that, Kirsten ran up and re-took the wheel of the submarine. From there, she piloted safely piloted the submarine through the mighty Mediterranean Sea. As day approached night, Kirsten received another a call from her mom.

“Kirsten, good news!” said her mom.

“What?” asked Kirsten.

“Muffintins didn’t actually die! She was just taking a nap. Silly me, I should have known. All the while, I was just checking for her pulse in the wrong place.”

“That’s great news!” said Kirsten, “I’m sure glad Muffintins is still with us, I don’t know what we’d do without her!”

“I agree one-hundred percent. And just so you know, it turns out that cats don’t have pulses on their claws. Good-bye, honey!” said her mom, as she hung up the phone.

“OMG!” said Kirsten, “Muffintins never died, she was just napping! All of that drama for nothing!”

“Great,” muttered Keith.

“What was that?” asked Kirsten.”

“Oh, nothing,” replied Keith.

Kirsten continued to pilot the kids’ submarine through the Mediterranean without further incident. She seemed to have a way with the submarine, a way that none of the other race competitors had -- just as she’d had a knack for driving the boat, earlier in the race.

On water, so long as she wasn’t overcome by sorrow, Kirsten was champion. None of the others could even come close. After just a few days of submarining, *Team Williams* arrived off the coast of Egypt. The following day, they would be driven to Cairo, where the next section of the race would begin. This time, they would be crossing the continent by car. As the kids exited the submarine, a familiar voice filled the air:

“Welcome, racers and race fans, to the end of the sixth segment! In this segment, our teams raced across the Mediterranean by submarine. As you can see, our races are becoming more high tech. Instead of rewarding pure strength, our race winners need strategy, smarts and skill. And to win the next segment, our racers will need a healthy dose of all three of those qualities as they race across Africa by car. Your cars will be fast on road and on any terrain. I’m sure they’ll get you across the continent of Africa in two weeks. Report here tomorrow at 6:30 a.m. for the start of the next race segment. Until then, have a happy break.”

Part Sixteen:

In which Keith is almost removed from the team, and the kids learn to never, ever leave anyone out.

Chapter Twenty: Darren or Keith?

That night, Darren Williams joined the kids at their hotel.

“So,” asked Keith, while they were eating at a local restaurant, “what’ll we do tomorrow?”

“We’ll drive across Africa,” said Kevin. “Duh.”

“No,” said Keith, “I mean about winning. At this point, if we seriously want to win the race, we’d better get whole lot better at driving. In the other races with helicopters and submarines, we’ve been up against fair competition. Not many of the adult teams had members who had driven those vehicles before, but they’ve all driven cars for their whole life. We haven’t. We need to find a better driver.”

“My dad could help us,” suggested Kevin.

“Yeah, but then somebody would have be replaced from the team,” said Kirsten. “That wouldn’t be fair.”

“But it would only be for one segment,” said Kevin, who was serious about winning.

“Well, in that case, since Darren is heavy, we’d should take the heaviest person off the team, to save weight,” said Keith.

“Are you volunteering? You’re the heaviest one of all of us,” said Kelly.

“True, but you guys *need* me. What about Kirsten? All she ever does is play around on her phone,” responded Keith, with anger in his tone.

“That’s not fair. Kirsten doesn’t just play around on her phone anymore, she’s our GPS. None of us can run that better than she can,” said Kelly.

“Well, what about Kevin?”

“Kevin? Darren’s his dad, for goodness sakes! If Darren’s going to be on the team, Kevin will have to stay,” Kelly said firmly.

“What about you?” asked Keith.

“Nope,” said Kelly, “I’m our brains. I help us get out of sticky situations. That’s what you and I do, Keith -- except you’re the muscle, too.”

“Exactly!” said Keith, “I’m the brains and the muscle!”

“Yes, you are,” said Kelly, “but are we going to need muscle for this race?”

“Probably,” said Keith. “What if the car gets stuck in some mud?”

“That’s not likely to happen, and besides, now that he’s got his casts off, I’m pretty sure Darren’s plenty strong, too. He can also help me solve problems, and he can keep us under control. He’s an adult, for goodness sakes. I think we all know what we need to do here.”

“You guys would never do that to me!” shouted Keith.

“Yes, but it was your idea in the first place,” said Kelly, “And I’m sure we’ll have you back in for segment eight. For this segment, we need Darren’s driving skill. Sorry, Keith.”

The next day, Kevin, Kelly, Kirsten and Darren all arrived at the start of the race.

“Welcome, racers and race fans, to the start of segment seven, the race across Africa!”

Keith, who was sitting in the audience, watched *Team Williams* from above. Darren Williams was driving the vehicle, while Kirsten was sitting in the back, checking her phone. Kelly was sitting next to Kirsten, and Kevin was sitting in the front, next to his dad.

Why did I say those things back at the restaurant? Keith wondered. Why? I better go apologize to them for being so bossy. I guess I just got so excited. I mean, our team's in first place, and I've helped lead it – twice! Okay, if I'm honest with myself, I guess I just thought that I was better than them. I'm not. I guess I haven't changed quite as much as I thought. I better call them and apologize, before they start thinking that I've become a jerk again. There's no way I'm giving up the new, improved Keith and going back to the way I used to live.

Keith stood up and carefully made his way through the rows of people.

“Excuse me,” he said, “Excuse me.”

Soon, he reached the bottom of the stands. He looked around for a payphone, and sure enough, he found one. He called Kirsten's number and waited for her to answer.

“Oh look, I have a call!” said Kirsten, “I wonder who it's from?”

“Hello, Kirsten?” asked Keith.

“Yeah,” said Kirsten, “Who's this?”

“It's me Keith,” said Keith, “And I just wanted to say that I'm sorry.”

“For what?” asked Kirsten.

“For last night, at the restaurant. Me being bossy? And telling you guys that I should kick you out? It was only natural for you guys to decide to leave me behind. Nobody likes you if you're bossy.”

“Oh, that's all right. Apology accepted. Here, I'll see if I can get you back on the team.”

She paused, and Keith waited for about a minute or so.

“Okay,” said Kirsten, “I worked out a deal with Darren. Once the race starts, we'll wait for you to jump in the car, but you'll have to hurry.”

“No, that’s all right, you don’t have to do that,” replied Keith.

“No, Keith,” said Kirsten, “We all agree: there’s just no way we can win without you!”

“Alright!” said Keith. “Let’s do this thing!”

“And in 3... 2... 1... GO!” yelled the announcer.

All the cars left. All except one.

Keith ran to the car and jumped in. He was surprised to see Kelly behind the wheel. Before he could even form a question, Kelly slammed on the gas and sped ahead.

Part Seventeen:

In which the members of *Team Jenson* have to put their trust in an unlikely source.

Chapter Twenty-One: A friendly Reunion?

Kelly drove the car at top speeds, trying desperately to catch up with the rest of the teams. After hours of driving (and no other teams in sight), she and Kevin decided to switch positions.

And so, Kelly was taking a quick lunch break, and Kevin was at the wheel when they pulled up to two familiar teams, *Team Jenson* and *Team Flamewheeler*.

“Ooh, if you’re trying to mess with *Team Williams*, you’re gonna PAY!” shouted Miranda, who was driving for *Team Jenson*.

“No, Miranda, they’re not our enemies anymore. They’ve changed. They won’t hurt you, I promise,” yelled Kevin, as he pulled his car alongside the *Team Jenson* vehicle.

“I wouldn’t do that, if I were you,” said Miranda.

“They saved us more than once on the bike trip,” Kevin replied.

“Yeah, right,” said Mike, “They probably just did that to gain your trust. Now, when you least expect it, they’ll probably push you into some deep, dark, abyss.”

“Actually, Mike,” said Kelly, “There are no deep, dark abysses along any of the planned routes we’ll be taking. And even if they did try to lead us off course – which I’m telling you they won’t -- Kirsten has her phone. We’ll know.”

“Gotcha Kelly,” said Mike. “I’m just kidding. Still, no matter what you say, I’m not gonna trust them, especially after all the terrible things they’ve done to us.”

“Look,” said Cal. “We’re sorry. I know it’s just a word, but I mean it. I’ve changed. So let me introduce you to the new and improved Cal Ruttedge. My brothers, Dan Ruttedge and Dom Ruttedge, they’ve changed, too. All thanks to you, Keith. If you hadn’t talked some sense into Dan, he’d have never talked any sense into the rest of us.

“Now Mike, there’s been one thing I’ve been trying to figure out. I know now that I’m your uncle, and we’re family. But before this race started back in New York City, we’d never met. Heck, I didn’t even know you existed. So I’m guessing that your mom must have told you about me.

“We did some awful things to her growing up, so the next time you talk to her, please tell her that her brothers -- Cal, Dan, and Dom -- we’re sorry.”

“You’re right about mom telling me stories,” replied Mike. “She even kept pictures of you guys – that’s how I recognized you. Truth is, I think she still loves you, no matter what you did when you were young.... You know what, if *Team Williams*, believes you’ve changed, then so do I.”

“Well then, nephew, it’s nice to meet you -- and all your friends,” said Cal.

While Cal seemed nice enough, secretly, Mike wasn’t convinced. He remembered what his mom had told him about growing up with her three older brothers. They had indeed been jerks. Could people really change? Mike decided he wasn’t ready to trust *Team Flamewheeler*, not after what they had done to him in the Himalayan Cave.

The next day, the three teams were still racing along together. *Team Flamewheeler* hadn’t pulled any vicious stunts, and they weren’t planning to. However, Mike didn’t know that. It was going to take more than words for Mike to forgive his uncles. He needed something extra special. Little did he know how soon that ‘extra special’ was going to happen.

Later that same day, the road began to narrow. Before, the three cars could race along, side-by-side, but soon there wasn’t going to be enough room. Mike, who was driving *Team Jenson’s* car, decided to venture off-road, using the car’s all-wheel drive. Mike enabled the

feature and drove off the road, straight into a mud pit. He tried to power up the engine, but they were stuck.

“HELP!” he cried.

Team Williams and *Team Flamewheeler* slammed on the brakes and backed down the road. They slowly drove over to Mike and *Team Jenson*, careful to avoid the muck.

“Whoa, Mike!” said Cal, “What happened?”

“Well, I was trying to get off the road, ‘cause it was getting too narrow for three cars. I threw it into four-wheel drive and attempted to veer off the road, but I guess I accidentally drove into this pit of muck,” said Mike.

“Well then, we might as well get you unstuck,” said Cal, “Mike, you stay put and slam on the gas when I say ‘Go’. The rest of us will try to push you out of the muck. Sound like a plan?”

“Got it!” said Mike.

Wow! thought Mike, *These Team Flamewheeler guys aren’t half bad. Maybe they really have changed!*

Unfortunately though, they weren’t able to get *Team Jenson’s* car unstuck. Soon, a car driven by Dan Rutledge, with ‘Jumbo 2’ painted on the side of it pulled up.

So it really is true, thought Mike, *they really have changed!*

“Hey, brother!” shouted Dan, “Need some help?”

They were even asking to help! Wow!

“Sure we do!” said Cal. “By the way, this is our nephew, Mike Jacobson!”

“Hello there, Mike!” said Dan, “I’m your uncle Dan! Nice to meet you!”

Dan stepped out of the car and shook Mike’s hand.

“Hello, Mike,” he said, as he shook Mike’s hand, “I’m Dan Rutledge!”

“And I’m Mike Jacobson,” said Mike.

“Nice to meet you, Mike. Anyway, I heard you needed help.”

“We sure do,” said Cal, “Mike here’s drove his car into a mud pit, and we can’t get him out. We need all the help we can get!”

“Well, I’d be glad to help,” said Dan, “What can I do?”

“Just push!” said Cal, “3... 2... 1... Push!”

With the four teams all pushing on the car, plus Mike driving, they managed to free the car from the muck and get *Team Jenson* back onto the road. All of the teams then got back into their cars.

“Okay, people!” said Cal, “When I say go, we go! This’ll be a fair race from here to Cape Town, South Africa...and... GO!”

After that, all four teams took off. They were all pretty even, and it was a fair race. Since the road was narrow, Cal and Dan even volunteered to drive on the sides of the road, leaving the main highway for the kids.

That was how it went for days. Every night, the teams took shelter in Dan’s large tarp, and every morning, they piled in their cars and raced across Africa. Soon, they arrived in Cape Town. Ultimately, the only reason *Team Williams* won the race was because Cal and Dan had the disadvantage of going over the rough terrain.

As Mike reflected on the race, he considered the African race a big success. They’d all gotten to know the new and improved Rutledge brothers better, and the four teams were learning to trust each other.

It was a good thing to, because if *Team Williams* and *Team Jenson* were to survive the next race segment, they were going to need all the friends they could get.

Part Eighteen:

**In which Kirsten nearly costs them
everything.**

Chapter Twenty-Two: The Tablet!

That night, Kevin's dad sprang for a huge suite in fancy, five-star hotel. It was big enough that all the kids, along with Darren and Cal, could each have a bed to themselves. When they were eating in the hotel's elegant restaurant, someone came in. It was Kirsten's mom.

"Kirsten!" she screamed.

"Mom!" screamed Kirsten. They ran over and hugged one another.

"Kirsten," said her mom, "I'm so proud of what you've been doing. And guess what, I've been earning money by giving interviews. You're famous, and I'm rich! I even bought us a new house -- it's much better than our old apartment. And look what else I have -- this!"

She held up a case.

"Kirsten," she said, "This is the 3D Graphitab^{le} 71 Powerstroke. It has twice the memory of a supercomputer, it's waterproof, and it can be tracked, even when it's turned off. It can't ever be damaged because it's has enough casing to survive a hundred pounds of dynamite.

“Kirsten, this tablet is a prototype, one of only ten in the world. The Phondesign Company gave one to me, just for you to test. And you get to keep it. And we get paid to test it. All we have to do is give them feedback once every day. This may very well be the best thing that’s ever happened to us.”

“Thank you SO, SO, MUCH!” said Kirsten, jumping up and down. “Let me see it!”

“Remember, all you’ve got to do is write them feedback.”

“Okay, bye Mom,” said Kirsten. “We’ve got to get back to our hotel room. Thank you!”

“Oh, Kirsten, thank you for chasing the world!”

“Bye, Mom!” said Kirsten.

They then went up to their hotel room. Kirsten began testing the Graphitabket, while the rest of the teams watched some TV. The 3D Graphitabket was amazing; its 3D pictures were literally popping out of the screen! Even better, it had access to way more apps than any other tablet or phone on the planet, and it could store all of them in its supercomputer memory. It even had a pull-out keyboard! The Graphitabket could do anything!

The next day, *Team Williams* gathered around to hear the announcer give his speech.

“Welcome, racers and race fans, to the start of segment eight!” said the announcer. “First, let’s remind everyone of our top five teams. In fifth place, we have... *Team Jumbo*! In fourth place, we have *Team Jenson*! They’re on a roll!

“In third place, we have a new team to our leader board: it’s *Team PXL31*, sponsored by Phondesign, makers of the brand new 3D Graphitabket, with a record breaking 71 Powerstroke Processor! Will they win? Not if they don’t beat *Team Flamewheeler*, our second place team! And last, but not least, in first place, we have those amazing kids *Team Williams*!

“Now, who will win this race? Well, *Team PXL31* seems pretty confident. I’m told that they’ve boasted to all the major newspapers that this is the race they star in. They certainly have the credentials to do it, considering they’ve won the World Wide Balloon Cup for five years in a row!

“Alright competitors, 3... 2... 1... GO!”

All of the teams floated up into the sky. They were using huge balloons, with a special design so that the racers could control the balloon's flight path. Right now, Kevin was in control of the balloon. The balloons were big, with the team's name painted on the side of it. Team Jumbo had somehow taken to painting a '2' at the end of their name. A lime green balloon with black writing on it appeared next to *Team Williams's*. It said 'PXL31'.

"Driving this balloon is really quite hard," said Kevin, "Do any of you think you could do better than I am?"

"Oh, I could, but I'm too busy on my brand new Graphitablet," replied Kirsten.

"Sorry, Kevin, but I can't," said Kelly.

"Why not?" asked Kevin.

"Because, while Kirsten's busy on her Graphitablet, someone's got to run the GPS," replied Kelly.

"Keith? What about you?"

"Sorry, Kevin," said Keith, "I'm no good with balloons ... or helicopters ... or boats. It's all down to you or Kirsten."

"Kirsten," said Kevin, "I'm really not that good at flying this thing. Come on, I need your help so we can win."

"Sorry, Kevin," said Kirsten, "I'd really like to, but this is the event of my life. I've never gotten anything like this, and I probably never will again. This is the best thing that's ever happened to me. Sorry."

"But, Kirsten! That thing has a 3D GPS! It can tell you exactly what's going on anywhere at any time on earth!" said Kevin. "You could at least be using that!"

"I tried it out, Kevin," replied Kirsten, "But it doesn't work. I guess they haven't configured the satellite yet. You've got to remember that there are only ten of these things in the whole wide world."

"Okay, Kirsten," said Kevin, "I can see we're not going to change your mind, but we only have four weeks to finish the race. Maybe in a few days you could help us?"

"Well, I don't know," said Kirsten, "this tablet is soooo amazing..."

Chapter Twenty-Three:

Understanding Kirsten

For the first few days of the balloon race, Kirsten was completely enthralled by her new tablet. She fell asleep with it tightly clasped in her hands, and hardly bothered to eat. Once, she woke up to find Kelly flying the balloon. For a moment, Kirsten contemplated to take over. She knew she could out-fly Kelly, but the tablet's attraction was too strong. After all, she was getting paid to provide feedback on the best, and most exclusive, tablet in the world.

Throughout the next day, Kevin, Kelly and Keith all tried to get Kirsten to take a break from her tablet, but every time they tried, they failed. Kirsten just wouldn't budge.

"I have an idea," said Kevin. "What if we took Kirsten's tablet from her, and hid it in the balloon's storage chest? Then, she'd have to help us!"

"Probably not, Kevin," said Kelly. "She'd just get super angry at us, and anyway, the chest would be the first place she'd look."

"That might happen," agreed Kevin. "But if things keep going like this, that may be what we'll have to do."

"He has a point," acknowledged Keith, "but let's not do that right away. First, let's try to understand her....Hey Kirsten!"

"What?" she asked.

"You know, it's been a couple of days now, and maybe it's time to come help us? We're not in first place anymore, but maybe if you take the wheel, you could get us back in the lead?"

"What about my Graphitab? I have to give them feedback EVERY day."

“How about we take shifts? Kevin flies the balloon in the afternoon, but you do it in the morning. Deal?”

“Well, I guess. That’ll give me half of a day to work on my Graphitablet project. Deal.”

“Kevin? Deal?” asked Keith.

“Deal!” Kevin eagerly agreed.

Soon, *Team Williams* was back in the race. Kirsten caught up with *Team Flamewheeler* and *Team Jumbo 2*, leaving just three teams -- *Team Jenson*, *Team Featherwing*, and *Team PXL31* -- ahead of them. Kirsten flew them fast in the morning, but in the afternoon, Kevin just couldn’t keep up. They needed a full-time Kirsten in order to win.

“Hey, Kirsten,” said Keith, “did you know that every time you drive the balloon, we gain places?”

“Yeah,” said Kirsten, “that’s because I’m a pro at balloons. So is Kevin!”

“Look around Kirsten,” said Keith, “Kevin’s not a pro at balloons, but you are. The team needs you at the helm, not him.”

“What do you mean, pro at balloons? Kevin’s good. He can get us to the finish line just fine.”

“No, he can’t, Kirsten. He’s not nearly as good as you are. Even he admits it. We need you.”

“Sorry, no can-do. I promised to give Phondesign feedback, and I keep my promises.”

“What about your promises to *Team Williams*?” Keith asked.

But Kirsten had no response. She was too engrossed in the Graphitablet to even hear his plea.

A few days later, the race was still on. They weren’t in first, but with Kirsten driving half the time, *Team Williams* was still in fourth. Only *Team Featherwing*, *Team Jenson* and *Team PXL31* were ahead of them.

“Guys, I’ve called a meeting here because something must be done about Kirsten,” said Kevin one night.

“Why?” asked Keith, “we’re in fourth place. We’re doing good, and Kirsten *is* helping out.”

“Yes, but how long can we stay in fourth?” Kevin demanded. “*Team PXL21* is catching up, and so are some of the other balloons.”

“He has a point, Keith,” said Kelly, “I think it’s time to put this plan into action. Kirsten’s sleeping right now, so now would be the perfect time to strike. We’ll hide the tablet for now, and when the race is all done, we’ll just say we found it. She sure won’t be using it on the next race, because it’s dirt bikes through the Andes. You know, I think this might just work.”

“But what if she gets all raged?” asked Keith. “Remember how she was on the submarine?”

“If that happens, we give her back the tablet, simple as that,” said Kevin.

“Well, you guys make it sound pretty convincing,” said Keith, “But that still wouldn’t be very nice.”

“Two outvotes one, Keith. Besides, you can just say you had no part in this,” countered Kelly.

“No,” responded Keith, “That would be lying. We promised each other not to lie, and that wasn’t a lie, was it?”

“Well, no,” said Kevin, “If she asks, I’ll just say that Kelly and I stole so she’d fly the balloon full-time. That won’t be a lie.”

“Well, if you guys say so,” said Keith, who was still unsure about the decision, “But be careful, we don’t want her to jump off the balloon or anything.”

“Don’t worry, Keith. This will be a sneak operation.”

“Right,” he said, although he still didn’t believe it was the right choice. But as for now, it was out of his control.

Later that night, Kevin snuck out of bed. Kelly was watching him, and so was Keith, although he didn’t know it. Keith just couldn’t go to sleep, knowing that a robbery was about to take place.

Kevin tiptoed over to Kirsten, who was sleeping on the other side of the balloon's enormous basket. He slowly, but carefully, snatched the 3D Graphitablet out of Kirsten's arms. He opened the storage chest, without making a noise, and put the 3D Graphitablet inside.

The next morning, when Kirsten woke up, she instantly started reaching for her Graphitablet.

"Hey!" she shouted, "where's my tablet?"

"I don't know," said Kevin, who just realized he was lying, "I mean, I think it's in the –"

"Balloon somewhere!" interrupted Kelly.

"NO KIRSTEN! IT'S IN THE –"

"Oh yes, of course!" said Kelly, "It must be on your bedside table!"

"I don't have a bedside table," said Kirsten, "But anyway, this is good! Now I get to test out the Graphinder app on my old iPhone. It should find it instantly!"

Kelly and Kevin looked at each other as to say, 'WHAT THE!?'.

Kirsten took her iPhone out of her pocket and went to the Graphinder app. Sure enough, it found the Graphitablet right where Kevin had put it, in the storage chest.

"Oh, silly me!" said Kirsten, "I must have left it here last night. Anyway, I've been thinking about your offer. I'll fly the balloon full time, but Kevin, you'll have to play on my Graphitablet, and give Phondesign feedback. Sound like a plan?"

"Sure does!" said Kevin, who was about to spend the rest of his day playing on the unbelievable 3D Graphitablet.

Part Nineteen:

**In which the team must do the impossible,
and put *Team Featherwing's* trust to the
ultimate test.**

Chapter Twenty-four:

Team PXL31

The next day, Kevin was playing hard on the 3D Graphitabket, and Kirsten was working hard flying the balloon. Kirsten knew she would get unlimited Graphtablet time, after the World Chase was over, so she could finally concentrate on flying fast. In just one day, the *Team Williams'* balloon caught up with both *PXL31* and *Team Featherwing*.

PXL31 was a bit above the kids, and *Team Featherwing* was right below them. Just as they were flying under *Team PXL31's* balloon, a sharp object landed on top of the kids' balloon.

POP!

"What was that?" asked Keith as a metal plate fell to the floor of their balloon. Keith looked up. The balloon had popped! There was a giant hole in it.

"HELP!!!" yelled Kirsten, "MAYDAY!"

Kirsten logged onto her Graphitablet, but when she went to the phone app, a screen appeared, saying that a virus had been downloaded onto her tablet! She put the Graphitablet in her jacket pocket and pulled out her iPhone. She quickly dialed Dom Rutledge's number.

"HELP!" shouted Kirsten into the phone, "Our balloon is falling and we're right above you – you've got to help us!"

Dom Rutledge looked up at them.

"Get me a rope and a hook!" he shouted.

Dom Rutledge took the rope and tied a large fishing hook to it. He then threw the rope up to *Team Williams's* balloon. It caught onto the basket. Suddenly, another metal plate fell into the balloon, nearly hitting Kirsten's face. Team *PXL31* was trying to kill them!

"Okay kids, just put your hands around the rope and slide!" cried Dom.

First Keith, then Kirsten and Kevin, slid down the rope to the safety of Dom Rutledge's balloon. Only Kelly was left in the balloon. "HELP!" she cried.

"Slide down the rope!" said Dom.

"The rope?" asked Kelly, "It's only held up by a fishing hook! There's no way it could hold my weight! It's against the laws of physics!"

"Well, somehow it held up Keith, and he's twice the size of you! Now, hurry up, before the balloon falls!"

Suddenly, a huge barrage of sharp metal objects rained down inside the balloon. It was sinking, and fast. Kelly jumped onto the rope and slid down. Unfortunately, the hook snapped. The rope went flying towards Dom's balloon. Fortunately, Dom had a strong grip, and he managed to hold the rope. Kelly threw her legs out at the very last minute, and stopped them against the balloon's basket. The balloon tipped, and Dom was almost thrown off the side. He threw some of the rope back to the back of the basket.

"Grab onto these, but stay back there! You too, *Team Williams!*"

The four members of *Team Featherwing* pulled Kelly up the side of the basket, and Kelly marched up it like she was climbing a wall. Eventually, Dom pulled her up into the basket of the balloon.

“Phew!” said Dom, after Kelly had finally climbed up into the basket. Kelly looked down.

“So, I climbed all the way up from there?” asked Kelly.

“You sure did,” replied Dom, “And I don’t know how you did it. You sure are some talented, quick-thinking kids. Maybe you’ll even win the chase. But right now, there are still two more segments to go, and a big balloon up there to beat.”

“There sure is,” said Kelly, “Let’s beat it!”

“If you say so, boss!” said Dom, as he turned the balloon around and raced to the finish.

But they couldn’t catch up to them; they couldn’t even get close! Soon, Dom realized that they were losing altitude.

“Okay,” said Dom, “We’re falling, we must have too much weight. We need to let something go.”

“How about our coats?” suggested Keith.

“That’s actually a pretty good idea, Keith. Everybody throw your coats overboard!”

They all threw their coats over the edge, and the balloon began to rise.

“YES!” said Keith, “we did it!”

“Not yet you didn’t,” said a voice from above.

Chapter Twenty-five:

The Attack of PXL3 I

“Not yet you didn’t,” said a voice from above.

Everybody looked over the edge of the balloon, to see a man leaning over the edge of *PXL3I*’s balloon with a sharp, metal boomerang in his hands. The man threw the boomerang, but he wasn’t quite quick enough. Kirsten grabbed one of the metal plates that had taken down the Team William’s balloon.

She threw it up towards the *PXL3I* balloon. It cut off one of the ropes and knocked down the man who tried to attack them. His metal boomerang went flying right down into the ocean. *PXL3I*’s balloon drifted away, but not before their leader could strike.

Their leader, a huge, muscular man, jumped right out of their balloon and onto *Team Featherwing*’s. The rope Kelly had climbed was still there, and he grabbed onto it.

“Everybody! To the side of the balloon he’s climbing up!” yelled Dom.

They all ran to that side of the basket, so he couldn’t climb up. The *Featherwing* balloon started drifting south, towards the *PXL3I* balloon. They soon caught up with the balloon, as there was nearly double the weight.

“Attack!” yelled Dom. His plan was to force the man to fall down into the ocean by smashing him in between the two baskets.

The plan failed.

Just as they were about to crash, the man, grabbing the rope, pushed off of *Team Featherwing*’s basket and onto his own. He climbed up and into the basket, and tied the rope to it. The rest of his team began pulling in the rope. The leader took out a sharp metal plate, and flashed an evil smile at *Team Featherwing/Williams*.

Just as he was about to throw it...

Another balloon came crashing down on top of them. It was *Team Jenson's*, and *Team Flamewheeler's* was right above it.

"Hop in!" yelled Mo, as he threw the *Featherwing* balloon a rope.

First, Kirsten walked onto the rope and hopped into the basket. Soon after, Kelly and Keith did the same thing. That left Kevin still trapped in *Team Featherwing's* balloon. Kevin jumped onto the rope, and tried not to look down. Unfortunately he did. As if that wasn't bad enough, the members of *Team PXL31* let go of the rope. Luckily, Kevin grabbed it at the last second.

Unfortunately, the fishing hook attached to it snapped off, sending Kevin falling down towards the ocean. Soon, Kevin found a second rope flying next to him. He grabbed onto it, and was pulled right into *Team Flamewheeler's* balloon. Kevin got up just in time to see the leader of *PXL31* hurl metal shards at *Team Jenson/Williams*.

Cal Rutledge, who was in the balloon with Kevin, threw another rope with a hook on it down to *Team Jenson's* balloon. It grabbed onto the basket, but it was no use. There were more of them than there were of *Team Flamewheeler*.

At that very moment, Dom Rutledge, who had flown his balloon up higher, threw another hooked rope down to the basket. Together, the two teams had enough power to lift up *Team Jenson/Williams*. But *PXL31* wasn't about to give up. They jumped onto the balloon, making it impossible to pull up. Now, it was up to the kids to fight them off.

Keith and Molly were able to hold them off for a little bit, but they knew that in the end, it would be useless.

"Go! Climb up the ropes!" yelled Keith.

Team Williams climbed onto *Team Flamewheeler's*, and *Team Jenson* climbed up the rope to *Team Featherwing's*. Still, that left Keith and Molly down on the balloon to fight off four adults. Suddenly, Molly got an idea.

"Keith," she whispered, "get them all around to the back. Then, we'll jump over to their balloon, and go up!"

"Good idea, Molly," responded Keith.

Together, they fought them back to the back of the balloon. Then, Molly grabbed a rope and threw it across to what was originally *Team PXL31's* balloon. Molly first, then Keith,

climbed over to the balloon. Molly took the wheel, Keith cranked up the hot air, and they lifted way up above the balloon that was originally *Team Jenson's*. Once in the sky, they balanced out the weight by having Cal Rutledge, Vincent Vladimir and Mike all join Keith and Molly's balloon. From there on out, it was a fair race to the finish.

Part Twenty:

In which *Team Williams* gets lost, and must work together to get found.

Chapter Twenty-Six: The Ultimate Rivalry

Later that day, after *Team Williams/Jenson/Featherwing/Flamewheeler* won the race, (they all tied for first), they were sitting down in a hotel room.

“So, wait. How did you get together with *Team Flamewheeler*?” asked Kevin.

“Well, this story may sound pretty crazy,” said Mo, “But we had a little run in with PXL31 team ourselves. They threw a bunch of metal plates at us like they did to you, when *Team Flamewheeler* came rushing in with a full-fledged flamethrower. We thought that taught those jerks a lesson, but obviously not.”

“Oh yeah,” said Mo, “I forgot. I tried to call you, but for some reason your phone had a virus on it, and it got into mine as well.”

“Oh yeah,” said Kirsten, “That was my new 3D Graphitablet prototype. It was pretty cool, until it got the virus. But how in the world would a virus get on there? All I’d ever done social on there was use the phone app, and the Graphitablet line of products are supposed to have better antivirus protection than a supercomputer!”

They all laughed at that. Fortunately, Kirsten was a computer genius. She got the virus off of the Graphitablet in no time. But since when did tablets get viruses? That was what Kirsten wanted to know. But somehow...

Chapter Twenty-Seven:

lost

“On your marks... get set... GO!” yelled the announcer, the very next day.

The racers took off on their bikes. This time, they would be following a straight, well-marked path through the Andes mountains. They could go off course a little tiny bit, but overall, they would have to follow a straight path through the Andes. It would be hard, yes, but *Team Williams* knew they could do it.

Right next to *Team Williams* was *PXL31* and *Team Flamewheeler*.

“Oh, how I hate them!” said Cal.

“Hello, kids,” said the leader of *PXL31*, “How are you today? I, myself, am very good. And very ready to knock you right out of my path!”

“Over my dead body,” declared Cal, who was becoming a father-figure to the kids.

“Well, well, well. If it isn’t their precious protector, protecting them from who, little old me?” he asked, sarcastically, “Well, I don’t need to be protected from. If anything, I need you to protect me from them. Did you see what they did to my balloon in the last race. Why they ought to be disqualified. I’m just a little old man.”

He then pushed Kelly into Keith, who bumped right into Vincent Vladimir.

“Help!” cried Vincent.

Vincent didn’t actually need help, he just got scared easily.

“Vincent, don’t be such a baby,” said Cal.

“Ca-al,” cried Vincent.

“Oh, man up!” replied Cal as they all chuckeld.

From there on out, *Team Williams/Flamewheeler* left *PXL31* in the dust. Despite being competitors, they worked together and moved steadily along through the mountains. The path laid out by the race committee was a pretty direct route, so Kelly didn't use the GPS much. (Once Kirsten had removed the virus removed from her Graphitablet, she left it with her mom, to avoid any temptations. She even gave Kelly her phone, so she'd be one-hundred percent focused on the race.)

The next day, things began to get more rugged. The *Williams and the Flamewheelers* hadn't seen many other teams, and the path was turning into more of a trail. Eventually, the trail began to turn into a less-overgrown area, but then the less-overgrown area became completely overgrown. They had to face it – they were lost.

"Kelly, can you use your phone to get us back on track?" asked Keith.

"Sure thing," said Kelly, "Anything for my team."

She reached into her pocket to grab her phone, and pulled out... a sheet of cardboard.

"What?" she exclaimed, "Wait – someone took our phone!"

"WHAT?!" shouted everyone else.

"Well, if you don't have a phone," said a member of Cal's team, "don't worry, I do. Here you go."

He pulled a phone out of his pocket and turned it on – but nothing happened.

"What? Of all the times for my battery to run out! Now?"

The teams had to face it – they were lost.

"Well, what are going to do now?" asked Keith.

"There's a mountain right up there," said Kevin. "That's probably where the trail is. What do you think, Cal?" he paused, "Cal?"

"Down here!" cried a quiet voice that sounded like Cal's.

Everybody looked down. Except for Cal, that is. He looked up, to find them staring down at him. Cal was stuck in a giant ditch, and his bike was broken beyond repair.

"A little help here?" he asked.

“Well, how are we supposed to get you up? The sides of that ravine are so steep...there’s no way down to reach you!” exclaimed Keith.

“Well, I don’t know. Maybe you could throw me down a rope?” said Cal.

“We don’t have any rope! We put that all away after the balloon race!” Keith replied.

“Well then,” he said, “I guess you’ll just have to find a way to come down here yourself.”

“So, who’ll go down?” asked Vincent Vladimir, who liked getting down to business.

“I could,” said Keith.

“Not me,” said Vincent, who was definitely not the heroic type.

“Well, then, Keith?” suggested Kelly.

“If nobody else wants to try,” said Keith, “I guess it’ll have to be me.”

Keith slowly descended down into the ravine, trying not to lose his tenuous grip. The closer he got to Cal, the more he realized he was going to need help. Cal had fallen on a rock, and his leg was bleeding badly.

“I need help here!” shouted Keith, “Cal hit a large rock, and he’s bleeding. There’s no way I can get him back up by myself.”

“Don’t worry, I’m coming!” said a member of Cal’s team. He was a tall, muscular man, and he slid down the ditch with ease.

“Ooh, Cal. Nasty bruise you got there,” said the man.

“It’s no bruise,” said Cal. “It’s bleeding, and it hurts horribly. Don’t suppose you brought a first aid kit with you?”

“Sure, we’ve got one, up at the bikes. Come on, now. We’d better get you up there, fast. Now this might hurt a little, but it can’t get much worse than it already is.”

Together, the man and Keith slowly dragged Cal up the side of the ditch. By the time they’d neared the top, Cal was even able to limp a little bit.

“Let’s give you some first aid, there,” said the man.

Cal's teammate took a whole lot of bandages and tape out of the bike's storage compartment. Cal had done more than scraped his knee. A deep cut ran the length of his leg, and he had pulled some muscles and sprained his ankle. Miraculously, he hadn't broken any bones. Still, it took nearly all of their first aid materials to fix him up properly.

"Now that that's over, let's get back on the road!" exclaimed Cal. "We've got a lot of time to make up, but I'm pretty sure I can pedal now. I think the trail's probably back up the mountain, so let's go!"

The two teams walked their bikes up the hill to the base of the mountain. Sure enough, they saw the trail, halfway up the steepest, most rugged mountain the kids had ever seen.

Part Twenty-One:

In which conditions get much, much, worse.

Chapter Twenty-Eight:

The Road up the Mountain

“So, how are we going to get halfway up that mountain?” asked Keith.

“Simple,” said Cal, “We aren’t. We’re just going to go around the mountain, until the trail gets back to ground level.”

“Won’t that just take longer?” asked Kelly.

“If the mountain was flat, yes it would. But alas, mountains are not flat, so we will have to go around it,” replied Cal.

“Well, if you’re sure,” Kelly said reluctantly.

The next day, they made steady progress along the side of the mountain. There was a little trail at the bottom, but it seemed clear it hadn’t seen much use in long, long time. As they made their way along the path, all the kids and Cal could do was hope that the trail would somehow lead back to the main path.

Later that day, they finally made it to the main path. Or at least, what they thought was the main path. After following the trail for hours, the path dwindled until it was just another little tiny trail. On the bright side, at least it did lead right up the mountain, much like the main path would have done.

“Well, it’s not the main path, but it’ll do. Come on,” said Cal, trying his best to stay positive.

At first, the team did all right as they climbed up the mountain. But after a while, Kevin began to get tired. Really, really tired.

“Can’t... go... any... higher...” he panted.

“Oh, come on, Kevin! It can’t be that hard!” said Keith. “Think about all the climbing we did in the Himalayas. This is no worse than that.”

“Easy...for...you...to...say,” said Kevin, as he gasped for breath.

“Oh, come on! You can do it! I know you can!” Keith replied.

“No... I can’t, Keith,” said Kevin. “I’ve got to rest. Can’t we stop for just a moment?”

“Oh, Kevin. I used to not be able to bike up big hills either,” said Kelly, “but then, I started practicing every day, and eventually, I was able to do it. See, this mountain is just like practice. Soon, you’ll be a pro at it. Remember, practice makes perfect!”

“Right,” said Kevin. “Right.”

For the rest of the day, they continued the steady climb up the mountain, mostly in silence. However, the higher they climbed, the lower the temperature dropped. By this time, Kevin was cold.

“Brrr,” he said. “It sure is getting cold out.”

“Well, I went through a storm in Vancouver without a coat, so I’m sure you’ll be fine,” said Kelly, not feeling very sympathetic.

Kevin was too tired to reply.

A few hours later, Kevin was really falling behind the rest of the group.

Come on, Kevin, he told himself, you can do this! Just get to that log up there! Then you can rest!

However, he couldn't actually rest up at that log, he was just telling that to himself, so he could get some motivation going. But if motivation was going, it was sure some slow motivation.

Finally, they did get to rest. By that time, Kevin was more tired than he ever had been before. He began to realize how much of the work Keith must have done on the road to Vancouver, as Kelly wasn't really in the race at all.

Boy, thought Kevin, the road to Vancouver sure did seem like a long time ago. We're already on segment nine, and soon, the World Chase will be over. What will we do then? Well, who knows. But there's definitely more of the race to go through before then, this is only our third mountain. Still.

After that, Kevin went to sleep under a heavy blanket. As he drifted off to sleep, his last thought was of Keith. *How could Keith carry the blankets, along with two first aid kits, the food and the water. Kevin could hardly carry himself up the mountain.*

As tired as Kevin was, the two teams weren't even all the way up the mountain. *Tomorrow would be another rough day, thought Kevin, especially without a full night of sleep. At least after that they'd be able to go down the mountain, and then up another. Boy, segment nine sure sounded as if it would go on forever. But soon, it would be over, and they would be in the nice, flat, hot, dry desert of Mexico on the way to Mexico City.*

The next morning, Kevin woke up, prepared for another hard day of biking up the mountain. Sure enough, it was hard work, but not quite as hard as it had been the day before, Kevin noticed. Soon, they'd be done, and they'd be going down the mountain. But then they'd be going up, and down, and up, and down, and it hurt Kevin's mind to think about it. But then... Mexico!

That day they finished biking up the mountain, and set up camp at the summit. From the top of the mountain, they could see the main path below them. In fact, it was right at the bottom of the mountain they were on! And as if that weren't enough, *Team Jenson* was sleeping near the base of the mountain. That meant they would meet up with *Team Jenson* again! They were all super excited for morning, but first they had to get through a very difficult night.

The wind at the summit of the mountain cut through their tents, chilling the riders to the bone. The temperature dropped fifteen degrees lower than it had the previous night. It was pure cold! None of the team could stand it, so halfway through the night, since none of them were asleep, Cal suggested they bike down the mountain and sleep at the bottom.

“Now, that’s a good idea!” said Kirsten.

“I agree!” said Vincent.

“And remember, after these cold mountains, we get to ride through nice, dry, populated Mexico!” said Kevin.

“Right!” said Cal, “I’ve always wanted to go to Mexico, and now more than ever.”

“Well then, let’s get a move on!” said the man, who had helped Keith pull Cal up the ditch a few days earlier.

They all hopped back on their bikes and sped down the mountain. The closer they got to the bottom, the warmer it got. Once they were at the base of the mountain, they set up camp in a dugout that was just big enough for the eight of them. In the morning, they would go meet up with members of *Team Jensen*, who were sleeping nearby.

“Good night!” said Keith.

Chapter Twenty Nine: A

Snow Day

The next day, *Team Williams/Flamewheeler* awoke to the sound of bikes. *Team Jenson* saw them coming down the mountain and woke up early to greet them.

“Good morning,” said Mike.

“Wha?” said Keith, “is it morning already?”

“Sure seems to be,” said Cal. “I guess we slept in a little bit, eh?”

“A little bit?” said Mo. “Last time I checked, it was nine thirty!”

“A little bit?” said Mo, “Last time I checked, it was nine-thirty!”

“Well then, we’d better get a move on. Let’s go!” said Cal, ever the team cheerleader/slave driver.

They quickly packed up and headed out on their bikes. At first, the ride was easy, as it was a few miles to the next mountain. However, once they reached the mountain, it would be up and up and up.

Within an hour, they arrived at the base of their next big climb. This one wouldn’t be as hard as the first, as it was less steep and not as high, but it would still be a challenge – after all, it was a mountain.

“Let’s get a move on!” said Cal.

The three teams set off to conquer the mountain. They hoped to get up and down it in just one day, as it was quite a bit shorter. But that plan was quickly thrown into doubt. They were only a quarter of the way up the mountain, when they ran into a problem. Snow. Not light, fluffy snow, like they’d encountered the previous night. This was heavy, wet, concrete-like snow.

About a half-hour later, conditions began to get worse. There was already about an inch of snow on the ground, and they could hardly see. It was as if they were stuck in a fog machine.

Okay, guys,” said Cal, “it’s snowing hard, and we can’t go up any further. I’m afraid we’ll just have to go around the summit.”

“Sounds like a plan!” said Vincent.

The three teams slogged their way halfway around the mountain, until the snow got so deep they could no longer bike through it. The snow was falling so hard, they could only see the back tire of the teammate in front of them, if they were lucky.

“It sure is getting hard to see out here,” said Cal. “I’m going to attach this bright, red light to the back of my bike. Nobody go in front of me, and we’ll all be able to stick together.”

By this point, they were walking with their bikes through the snow. It was hard work, until Keith came up with the best idea ever:

“What if we slid down the mountain on our butts?” he asked.

“Keith!” said Cal, “You’re a genius! That is a fabulous idea! C’mon everybody, get ready to slide!”

Sliding down the mountain proved to be much more fun than biking through the heavy snow. They all slid down speedily fast, and when they reached the end of the snow, Kevin said:

“Let’s do that again!”

After pelting Kevin with snowballs, the teams surveyed their surroundings. They weren’t far from the bottom of the mountain, and at the lower elevation, it wasn’t snow at all. They could finally ride their bikes again!

Kevin reached over to grab his bike, only to find that it wasn’t there.

Part Twenty-Two:

In which our heroes challenge the forces of nature, and win. (By a *landslide*.)

Chapter Thirty: Uh Oh...

“Where’d my bike go?” asked Kevin.

“I don’t know,” said Keith, “Didn’t you bring it down?”

“Uh, no,” said Kevin.

“Wait – so you left your bike all the way up there?” asked Keith.

“It sure does look that way,” said Kevin.

“Well, then let’s go get it. C’mon!” said Cal, whose perpetual cheerfulness was starting to grate on everyone. “You guys can go on ahead. Kevin and I’ll go get that bike.”

“Ugh,” said Kevin.

“Well, it’s not my fault you left your bike. Let’s get a move on,” replied Cal.

That day, Cal and Kevin made their way back up the mountain. As they neared the spot where Kevin had left his bike, they heard a deep rumbling sound. Suddenly, snow began to roll down the mountain.

“Wha – what’s happening?” asked Kevin.

“No...” said Cal. “No, no, no... Kevin, this is an avalanche! RUN!”

Kevin and Cal ran down the side of the mountain as fast as they possibly could, but the snow was gaining on them. Luckily, they found a huge rock they could hide behind. It wasn't perfect, but it would do. Our two brave mountain climbers hid behind the rock as the snow jumped over them. This went on for a while, when suddenly...

CRACK!

The rock split right down the middle. Snow began to pour through the crack. At first, it was just a few, small flakes, but the flakes kept getting bigger, and bigger, until the rock split in half.

"KEVIN! RUN!" shouted Cal.

Kevin ran around the rock, but slowly, more rocks began to break under the pressure. Kevin saw Cal was safely out of the way of the rock slide, and he'd somehow managed to hang onto his bike. All Kevin had to do was make his way over to Cal -- through an avalanche.

Kevin jumped over a small boulder, and then a few hunks of snow, but he looked up only to see more rocks coming. At this point, there was only one thing left to do, jump. Kevin gathered together all of his strength and pushed himself right off the mountain, and landed on the path below. For another hour, Kevin and Cal waited there while the avalanche kept coming. Then it stopped, and the mountain was still.

Kevin looked around. The whole mountain had been destroyed. The side of it that had once stood majestic and tall, was now nothing but a pile of rubble filled with brown snow, ugly rocks and dirt. Lots and lots of dirt.

Kevin jumped onto the back of Cal's bike, and they rode on, hoping to catch up with the rest of their teams. By this point, Kevin's bike was lost forever.

"Hey, look!" shouted Kevin, excitedly.

"What?" asked Cal.

"My bike! The avalanche never actually hit it!"

Kevin pointed a little way up the hill, and sure enough, his bike was right there.

"Great eyes, Kevin!" exclaimed Cal. "It looks like the avalanche even pushed it down the mountain! Great job!"

“Well, you’re welcome,” said Kevin.

“So are you, Kevin,” said Cal, gently, “Now, let’s go get that bike!”

Chapter Thirty-One:

When Cavies Attack

Meanwhile, the rest of the teams were also running into their own problems. They were climbing a mountain that was known to be slightly warmer than the others in the Andes chain. Unlike the previous mountain, this one had extremely steep parts, but occasionally flat grassy meadows. It was covered with huge cliffs, grassy fields and all kinds of interesting stone structures. It was as if two giant hands had made some sort of abstract art.

Right now, the path was leading them through a grassy field, punctuated with lots of tiny holes in the ground and small mounds of dirt. As darkness approached, the teams decided that this field would be a perfect place to spend the night.

Kirsten settled down for the night near one of the larger holes. She rested her head on a mound of nearby dirt, and was surprisingly comfortable. Just as she was drifting off to sleep, she felt a bite on the back of her neck.

“Ow,” she said, as she rubbed her neck.

Too tired to investigate, she rolled over and resumed sleeping. Everything was fine, until halfway through the night, she woke up to find that her blanket had gotten quite a bit... fuzzier? She felt around inside her now fuzzy blanket and realized that it was also a little bit more crowded than usual. Was Keith in there? He had a fuzzy jacket.

She felt around some more. No, Keith wasn't in there. Suddenly, she heard a squeal, like that of a pig. She looked inside, only to find about fifteen pairs of eyes looking right at her.

“AAAAAAH!!!” she screamed.

“SQUEAL!” squeaked the wild rodents who had made their home in her sleeping bag.

Kirsten jumped out of the bag. So did the rodents. The rodents chased Kirsten around the field, waking up their furry friends who were still sleeping in their rodent holes.

“The rodents are coming! The rodents are coming!” shouted Kirsten, as she was chased around the field by a swarm of raving wild guinea pigs.

Between Kirsten’s screaming and the guinea pig’s squealing, everyone else woke up.

“What’s going on?” shouted Mo.

“GUINEA PIGS!” said Kirsten.

“Whaa?” asked Vincent, as a swarm of wild covies jumped over him.

Now, it just so happened that at that time, Cal and Kevin were arriving. They were riding their bikes on a trail just below the field where their teammates had set up camp, a swarm of giant rodents jumped over their heads.

“Something tells me they’ve set up camp in that field up there,” said Kevin.

And sure enough, they had. Kirsten was still being chased by a few covies, and Vincent was trying to get them out of his sleeping bags.

“I say we move to a different field,” said Vincent.

“Now, that’s a good idea, if I’ve ever heard one.” replied Cal.

The team moved to the field below them, where they set up their cavy-free campsite.

Part Twenty-

Three:

In which Kelly teaches Mike a valuable lesson.

Chapter Thirty-Two: The Road up the Mountain

Despite the excitement of the previous night, the teams were up early the next day, ready to get over the mountain. They slowly biked up the mountain, until it began to get quite steep.

“This sure is one weird mountain,” said Kevin.

Again, Kevin was falling behind the group, but this time wasn’t nearly as bad as the last.

After a few hours of hard biking, they finally reached the summit. It wasn’t very cold, as it was the lowest one they had climbed yet. It was basically a long, flat rock. It wasn’t until the teams began to plan their descent that they realized just how hard the journey would be.

There was no straight path down. Instead, it was a mass of gradual descents and steep, rocky cliffs. One of the largest cliffs was from the summit, down to a flat meadow.

“We’ll just have to jump,” said Cal.

So they did. They all jumped. All except Mike, that was.

“Mike, jump down!” said Cal.

“What?” said Mike. “That’s almost fifteen feet down. I’m not jumping from here!”

“Oh, come on! The rest of us have all done it, why can’t you?” asked Cal.

“Actually, I haven’t either,” said a voice from above. Vincent was still up there as well.

“Well, if you say so,” said Mike.

He looked down. There was no way he could jump. The more he looked down, the more he realized how scary -- and potentially painful -- it would be.

“No,” said Mike, “I’m not jumping.”

“Then how are you going to get down? I’m not going to just wait for you. Did you forget we’re in the middle of a race? We’ve got to win this!” said Kevin.

“Mike, I was once afraid of heights,” said Kelly, with understanding in her voice. “And then I had to fly in the helicopter race. It wasn’t that bad, actually. I mean, I still wouldn’t choose to ride a super tall roller coaster or anything, but it’s all right once you try it. I promise!”

Mike looked down at Kelly. He felt that Kelly had really meant those words, unlike some of the things Cal had said. Cal may have been friendly, but he still seemed to have trouble empathizing with other people. He seemed to only understand his own feelings. Cal was nice, and he tried, but he wasn’t perfect.

“Well, okay,” said Mike. He closed his eyes and jumped down into the meadow below.

He opened his eyes, to find out that he was still alive. It hadn’t hurt at all, and it wasn’t that scary!

“Thanks, Kelly!” he said.

“Anytime,” she responded.

“Wait – what about Vincent?” asked Keith.

“I think he’s still up there,” said Cal.

“Vincent! Come down!” he shouted.

“Well, okay,” shouted Vincent.

Vincent walked over to the edge of the ledge and jumped.

“CANNONBALL!” he said as he jumped off.

“Well, what now?” asked Vincent.

“We jump again,” said Cal.

They all walked over to the ledge of the next cliff and jumped. And so they continued, until they reached a long hill that led to the bottom of the mountain.

“No time to rest, let’s keep on biking,” said Cal.

Part Twenty-four:

**In which they are faced with the toughest
mountain yet.**

Chapter Thirty-Three: Mount Meysan

It was fifty miles before the teams reached the next mountain. It was massive. In fact, it made the top ten list for steepest, and tallest, mountains on the planet. It was steep, and it was tall, and it was always, always, cold. It was named after a man named R. G. Meysan, who had been the first person to ever climb the brutal mountain. In the Himalayas, they had avoided most of the tall mountains, climbing only the short ones, so the mountain ahead of them would be the tallest mountain any of them had ever climbed – by far.

“Let’s spend the night here,” suggested Cal, “Then in the morning, we’ll tackle Mount Meysan. It’ll be hard, yes. Probably harder than anything you’ve ever done. Shoot, it’s harder than almost anything I’ve done in my entire life, and I’m a full grown man. We’ll sleep for a few extra hours tonight, but after that, it’ll be Mount Meysan. Hard, cold and just plain horrible. But it’ll only take about three days to finish, and then, it’ll be over.”

“Okay then,” said Keith, “whatever you say.”

“I’m not so sure about this,” said Kevin. “Is there any way around this mountain?”

“Well yes,” admitted Cal, “but it would take weeks, and those are weeks we don’t have. I saw on the iphone app that *PXL31* is already a day into this mountain. We’ve got to catch up with them.”

“If you’re sure,” Kevin said, unsurely.

“I’m sure,” said Cal.

They set off for the summit of Mount Meysan (also known as Spyke) the next morning.

Kelly looked up ‘Mount Meysan’ on Google Maps (even though the *Antarctic Explorer’s Fund* said otherwise) and found that there was only one trail that went straight up and straight down the mountain. Then, she went to her World Chase 2000 app to look at their place.

They were in third: *PXL31* and *Team Flamewheeler* were both ahead of them. Things were looking good for the kids. All they needed to do was get first or second in each of the last two segments and Team Williams would win the whole race. That was assuming *PXL31* didn’t get first in both of the last segments – but first, the kids had to beat Mount Meysan.

Once again, Kevin was having a hard time keeping up. Mount Meysan really was Spyke: a big, giant, unforgiving spike sticking up out of the ground.

Keith, Cal and the member of *Team Flamewheeler* who had saved Cal from the ravine (his name turned out to be Derek) were leading the way, as they were the most physically fit in the group. Vincent and Kevin brought up the rear.

Suddenly, Derek heard a deep rumbling noise.

“What’s that?” he asked.

“What?” asked Cal.

“That noise!”

“What noise?”

“That low rumbling noise!”

“Oh, that?” said Cal, sarcastically, “it’s probably another avalanche.”

“An avalanche? We’ve got to get out of here fast!” cried Derek.

“Geez, Derek!” said Cal, “can’t you take a joke.”

“Well,” he said, but was interrupted by a small rock rolling down the side of the mountain.

“What was that?” asked Keith.

“Oh, it’s not an avalanche,” said Derek. “Things like that happen all the time on mountains.”

“Yes,” said Kelly, “but not things like that!” She pointed at something big, coming straight at them.

It was a huge boulder, and it was rolling right toward them.

“JUMP!” shouted Cal, as they jumped out of the way.

The boulder narrowly missed the teams.

“That was one wicked avalanche!” said Kirsten.

“No, it wasn’t,” said Derek.

“What?!?” asked Kirsten, “How was that not an avalanche?”

“How many stones were there?”

“Two, counting the small one,” she said.

“Exactly,” said Derek, “There were only two stones. An avalanche has way more than two stones, and did you notice how the big one rolled right down the path. Do you see any reason a big rock would come straight towards us?”

“Well, no...” said Kirsten.

“Exactly,” said Derek. “In my opinion, that was no avalanche. That was set up by people. Specifically, *PXL31* kind of people.”

“So, you mean that *PXL31* set that up?” asked Kirsten.

“Yes,” said Derek, “And I bet they’re setting up more. We’d better watch out.”

“I sure don’t want to become a pancake,” said Mike, as everyone else laughed nervously. Despite the mysterious rolling rocks, the teams headed higher up the mountain.

It soon began to get colder. It was snowing, but just a few flakes every now and then. The snow wasn’t the problem, it was the cold. Everybody put on their heaviest coats and continued the mountainous trek.

No thirty minutes later, the teams ran into more trouble. Hundreds of thousands of covies started running down the path from behind two boulders.

“I will get you, *PXL31!*” shouted Keith, as he jumped out of the rodents’ way.

“Oh, be a man!” said one of the covies humorously.

Chapter Thirty-four: The Trek Gets Harder

The rest of the day was hard for Kevin.

Don't worry, Kevin! he told himself. Soon, you'll be over this nasty mountain! This mountain cannot last forever!

Kevin was having trouble, but he just kept telling himself “*Soon, Kevin, soon*”. In fact, they were already more than halfway up the mountain. Soon, they'd be in Mexico City, where they would be given a whole entire week to prepare for the final segment across the good old U.S. of A.

Soon, Kevin. This mountain will be over. This mountain will not last forever!

Soon, they ran into more trouble. *PXL31* trouble.

Another boulder began rolling at them from the top of the mountain. However, this time, the teams were caught between two other rocks.

“What do we do?” shouted Keith.

“Just roll back,” said Cal.

“What? We'll get run over!”

“No, that boulder'll get stuck between the rocks.”

“Then how will we get over the rocks?” Keith said, but it was too late.

As Cal predicted, the boulder hit the rock, and it got stuck.

“HOHOHOHO!” laughed *Team PXL31*. The sound of their laughter filtered down from high above.

“What do we do now?” asked Mo.

“Well, we’ve got to get over this boulder, but how?” said Cal.

“What if we crawled under it?” suggested Keith.

“Yes, but what about our bikes?” Vincent added.

“We could throw them over,” said Miranda.

“I don’t know,” said Cal, “They might break, and then how would we get up the mountain?”

“What if we went around it?” suggested Mo.

“We really don’t want to veer off the trail, there could be more cavies,” said Cal. “What I’m thinking is that we’ll have to push the boulder over the two that are holding it up. Then, it’ll roll right through, and we can ride through. Okay?”

“Okay,” said the others, in unison.

“Derek, Vincent, you help me push.”

Derek, Vincent and Cal all started pushing on the boulder. But it was no use, as nothing happened. The boulder was just too big.

“Let me help,” said Keith. “I just might be able to move it.”

“It couldn’t hurt,” agreed Cal. “3... 2... 1... Push!”

The boulder began to move from between the rocks where it was stuck. Derek, Vincent, Cal and Keith all jumped out of the way as it rolled past them and rolled down the path. After that, they got back on their bikes and continued their ascent up the mountain.

It began to get cold, and Kevin began to shiver. He just thought about the ride down the mountain and kept going.

One day later, they reached the summit of the mountain.

“We’re almost there!” shouted Derek, from his position at the front of the group.

Once they reached the summit, four guys from *Team PXL31* jumped out from behind a rock and pushed all their bikes down the mountain. They just stood there, grinning, as if they were better than everyone else.

“Okay,” said Derek. “You kids stay back here. Cal, Vincent and I will go up and take care of *Team PXL31*.”

The three adults walked up the hill to the summit, but *Team PXL31* was waiting for them. *PXL31* just stood there like some sort of invincible line. They tried to push them out of their places, but no. They had four, and *Team Flamewheeler* only had three.

“Hey Jon,” shouted Cal, “come help us!”

Once the other member of Cal’s team reached the top, they pinned *PXL31* in their place.

“NOW!” shouted Derek.

The kids all got on their bikes and rode up the summit of Mount Meysan, and down the other side. *Team Flamewheeler* quickly turned and did the same thing. They had done it! They had beaten the horrible *Team PXL31*!

“YES!” Kevin shouted.

Part Twenty-five:

**In which *Team Williams* heads off on their
final segment.**

Chapter Thirty-five: Mexico City!

After crossing the border between Guatemala and Mexico, it was a pretty easy ride. There was no *Team PXL31* constantly trying to kill them, and no more mountains.

Finally! thought Kevin. *We're finally over that brutal mountain and into nice, warm Mexico.*

The teams made good time, and in just a few days, they crossed into Mexico City (in first place, of course). *Team PXL31* wound up in fourth place, but Kevin didn't really care. He just wanted *Team Williams* to get in the top three, and for *Team Jensen* and *Team Flamewheeler* to be up there with them, too.

With just one segment left to complete, it seemed like his dream could become reality. Unless *Team PXL31* interfered with their progress again. And so, Kevin was deep in thought when his dad and Kirsten's mom greeted them outside their hotel.

Kirsten ran to give her mom a quick hug, and get her Graphitablet back. She now knew that when she was given a task, such as a segment in a race, she could give up her tablet

until the task was done. The thought of getting her precious tablet back when the task was complete was all the inspiration she needed to give one-hundred and ten percent.

The kids spent all their free time catching their parents up on all their Andes adventures. Too soon, it was time to head to the starting line for the final leg of the race.

“Welcome, racers, to the start of the final segment!” boomed the announcer the next day. “As you know, every year, we let our fans choose how they’d like to have the racers get to the finish. This year, our fans overwhelmingly demanded another non-motorized vehicle race.

“I hope you all still have your vehicles from segment one, because you’ll be needing them! In fact, we’re giving you an extra day to find your vehicles. We’ll see you all back here tomorrow at noon. That’s when the final segment of our World Chase will begin. Good luck finding your vehicles!”

Part Twenty-Six:

In which *Team Williams* gives help to an enemy, following in the footsteps of *Team Flamewheeler*.

Chapter Thirty-Six: final Segment...

The race organizers had flown all the competitors' vehicles from Vancouver down to Mexico City. The kids used their free day to make sure the B.I.K.E. was in perfect working order. Meanwhile, *Team Flamewheeler* was back in their flaming pedal car and *Team Jenson* was on their bikes.

"3... 2... 1... GO!" called the announcer, as the racers took off for the final finish line.

Team Williams quickly took the lead on their B.I.K.E., closely followed by *Team Jenson* on their bikes. In no time at all, they crossed the Mexico border and entered the U.S. *Team Flamewheeler*, in their flaming pedal car, served as a flashlight in the night, but soon, *Team Williams* and *Team Jenson* left the adults behind.

They didn't mind. They were in third place, and that was good enough for Cal Rutledge.

A day after leaving Cal's protective reach, the kids ran into a familiar enemy, *Team PXL31*. But *PXL31* wasn't up to any of their usual tricks. Instead, they were lying on the ground.

"Help!" cried their leader.

Team Williams stopped.

"Help?" asked Keith, perplexed. "You need help from us?"

"Yes," the *PXL31* member replied. "We weren't looking where we were going and we crashed. Now, we need your help. We'll stop being your enemies! We'll let you win! Anything! Just call 911 and get us out of here!"

"What should we do?" asked Kelly.

"Well," said Keith, slowly. "When we needed help, the only team that stopped was *Team Flamewheeler*, and we thought they were our enemies... They helped us when we needed it, I vote we return the favor."

"I don't know," said Kelly. "They are in fact our *enemies*! Remember the balloon race?"

"What about *Team Flamewheeler*?" asked Keith.

"Well, they were the ones being mean to us," said Kelly.

"But after we help this team, they'll probably be nice to us again, too."

"Fine, but what can we do?" asked Kelly.

"Well," pleaded the *PXL31* leader, "just call 911. An ambulance should be here fast. We can pay for it, don't worry. You can just go on ahead. That's all we need."

"Okay then," said Kelly, as she took out her phone and dialed the number.

"911, how may I help you?" asked the operator.

"We're racing in the World Chase, and another team, *Team PXL31*, had crashed their bikes and need an ambulance, badly. We're at the corner of Third Street and Seventeenth Avenue."

"We'll be there shortly," said the operator.

Team Williams waited for the ambulance to come. When it arrived, the paramedics picked up the four injured members of *Team PXL31* and drove them away.

“Thank you so much! Please don’t think of us as your enemies anymore,” shouted their leader, as they drove away.

“Well, that was nice,” said Keith.

“Yeah,” said Kevin, “It was easy, too.”

“That may have been easy, but I’m not so sure this will be,” said Kelly.

“What is it?” asked Kirsten.

“It’s *another* storm. And it’s a really bad one, too!” added Kelly.

“Well, it can’t be as bad as the storm that we faced on the way to Vancouver,” said Keith.

“Oh, it can,” said Kelly, “and it is. The Vancouver storm had thirty-mile-per-hour winds. This storm is expected to have seventy-five-mile-per-hour winds. Worse, it’s supposed to last for two weeks. At least it’s not a winter storm.”

“Well, that’s good,” said Kevin.

“And that’s not!” said Kirsten, as she pointed to the sky.

A few miles away, the kids saw the most massive mass of storms any of them had ever seen. (And remember, these kids had survived not one, but two hurricanes.) It was huge, it was thundering, and it was mad. It was a bull, and they were the red cape. The storm was around Charlotte, North Carolina, when it first hit, and so was *Team Williams*. The giant mass of clouds was getting closer to them every second.

“We’d better move,” said Keith. “We need to get as far as we can, before this megastorm hits.”

“Now that’s a good idea, if I’ve ever heard one!” agreed Kevin.

The kids pedaled as hard as they could, away from the city and the storm. Kelly checked her phone.

“Guys,” she said, “I don’t think we’re moving away from the storm.”

“Why not?” they asked.

“The storm has settled just north of us. That’s exactly where we’re heading.”

“Well, then let’s get through it as fast as we can,” replied Kevin.

“It’s no use,” wailed Kelly. “This storm goes all the way to Canada!”

“Well, then pedal hard, team!” shouted Keith.

Part Twenty-Seven:

**In which the forces of Mother Nature herself
present *Team Williams* with their toughest
challenge so far...**

Chapter Thirty-Seven:

The Attack of Kevin

“Hey Kevin,” said Kelly, as they headed into the heart of the storm, “Did you know that this storm is named after you?”

“So its name is Kevin?” said Kevin.

“Yep. And Kevin’s mad. I think this is the attack of Kevin.”

“The attack of Kevin,” said Kirsten, “That’s a pretty good name. Sounds kind of catchy.”

“It sort of does,” said Kevin, “It sort of sounds like the name of the chapter in a book when the heroes are faced with their toughest challenge.”

“Yeah,” said Keith, “that would make a pretty cool book. If I became an author, I might write a book like that. The attack of Kevin!”

After that last moment of laughter, *Team Williams* rode into Kevin. The only question remaining was: would they ever come out?

Kevin (the storm) was worse than anyone expected. Instead of seventy-mile-per-hour winds, the winds got up to ninety-miles-per-hour. And if that wasn't bad enough, the temperatures inside the storm soared to one-hundred-fifteen degrees Fahrenheit. The riders were bitten by wind and overheated at the same time. Pure horrible.

However, if you thought that was Kevin's final attack, you'd be wrong. It was not only raining, but hailing giant balls of ice, that seriously hurt when they fell on your head. Among the storm records that were broken that day: largest ball of hail, strongest continuous winds, and longest-lasting storm. Then adding insult to injury, despite the intense heat, it began to heavily sleet, so whenever the kids pedaled, their bikes went sliding all over the place.

Although the conditions seemed hopeless, *Team Williams* would make it through Kevin alive, and well... Well, not entirely well. But that will be explained later...

Kevin's storms raged throughout the day and night. Over one-hundred tornadoes (some of the F5 and stronger) were spotted all along the Atlantic coast.

When the sleet doubled in intensity, *Team Williams* finally had to stop. There was so much sleet, it looked as if the ground was covered in ice. There was no way they could bike.

"What do we do now?" asked Kirsten.

"Snowshoes?" asked Keith, "those worked before."

"Yeah, but that was on snow. They're called *snowshoes* for a reason," said Kelly, who had proven herself to be the brains behind the team.

"Then I have an idea," said Kevin. "What if we slide down the sleet on a sled. This entire town is on a giant hill, and we're going down it."

"That's actually pretty good, Kevin," acknowledged Keith, "Looks like I'm not the only one who can come up with genius ideas!"

Keith carried the B.I.K.E. on his back, and they all slid down the hill.

Once they reached the bottom of the hill, the temperature rose enough to melt the sleet of ice back into water. They sped as fast as they could along the water-logged road, as they knew that it would probably turn back into a sheet of ice at any moment. But instead of the sleet, *Team Williams* ran into a much different problem.

Kevin (the storm) started raining again, ten times as hard as it had done earlier. The new and improved Storm Kevin was a giant thundercloud looming over their heads. First, the water-logged road looked like a lake. Then it began to resemble an ocean.

“Now, we have another problem,” said Kevin, stating the obvious. “It’s exactly the opposite of our previous dilemma.”

“Let’s swim across it,” suggested Kirsten.

“I can carry the B.I.K.E.,” volunteered Keith.

“No, I’ll get it this time,” said Kelly, who considered herself the second-strongest on the team. “You need a break.”

“Thanks, Kelly,” said Keith, “I’m sort of tired after carrying the B.I.K.E.”

“Anytime,” replied Kelly.

The team swam over the newborn ocean.

“Since you get a storm,” said Keith, “I get my own ocean! I call it the Keith Sea!”

“Nah,” said Kirsten, “I think that Kirsten’s BIG puddle sounds better!”

“Or maybe,” said Kelly, “it should be Lake Williams. That sounds pretty cool!”

“Yeah,” said Kevin, “I like that!”

The team swam across Lake Williams, and soon, they arrived on dry land.

“Let’s keep going!” said Keith, a little too excitedly.

“Keith, it’s not that amazing,” said Kevin, panting heavily.

“Oh, shut up,” said Keith.

“I’m just glad to get this B.I.K.E. off my back. It’s heavier than I thought,” said Kelly.

The kids, excited to be near the race’s end, biked on.

“Here’s a little incentive,” said Kelly, as she checked her phone. “It’s only two hours until we arrive in New York! And guess what?”

“What?” asked Kevin.

“All of our parents are going to be there, plus those of *Team Jenson*, and they’re planning a party at Kirsten’s mom’s new mansion!”

“I have a mansion?” asked Kirsten.

“Yes,” said Kelly, “Apparently, it was given to you by the Graphitable people, after you gave them all of the feedback they needed.

“Once the World Chase is over, Phondesign is releasing the Graphitable to the public. And guess what else? You know how Phondesign was originally supporting *Team PXL31*? Well, they figured out they’d sell a lot more Graphitablets if they backed us. To announce our new partnership, Phondesign is giving away one hundred Graphitablets to poor people in remote countries all over the world. All we have to is win!”

“Now, let’s win this thing! For the poor people in remote countries!” shouted Keith.

“Go Team Williams!” exclaimed Kevin, excitedly.

“Kevin, there’s really no need for that,” said Kelly.

“Oh, whatever,” replied Kevin.

Part Twenty-Eight:

In which *Team Williams* finally quits racing.

Chapter Thirty Eight:

Arrival, At last!

One day later, *Team Williams* crossed their final finish line.

“And the winner of segment ten in the World Chase is... *Team Williams!*” said the announcer when they arrived. All of their parents were there cheering for them, in addition to what looked like the entire population of New York City.

Somehow, Kirsten’s mom attracted all of the public’s attention, a fact she had used to make herself a pretty rich lady. But none of the team members cared about Kirsten’s mom’s new fortune. After all, they would soon be the recipients of their own monstrous cash prize.

After all the teams rode (or ran or flew) past the final finish line, the announcer made one last announcement:

“Hello, people of planet earth!” he said, “We’ve just finished the biggest race in the history of the world, the race around the world, the World Chase 2000! Thank you all for watching, but now, I must tell you the winners.

“As you know, the top five teams will all receive cash prizes, with the first-place team earning one million dollars! Now it’s time for me to announce these five very special teams, but first, let’s remember all their adventures.

“We started this journey ‘round the world right here, in New York City. Our races had to make their way to Vancouver, with any help from a motorized vehicle. Then, they sailed by boat to Sydney and flew by helicopter Hong Kong. Next up, our racers endured that inspiring hike through the Himalayas to Delhi, followed by a mad-capped bike race which ended in Paris.

“We’ve watched as our teams submarined to Cairo and drove across Africa to Cape Town. And who could forget the thrilling (and dangerous) balloon ride to Rio, or the mountainous bike ride that ended in Mexico City.

“For our final race segment, we reprised those non-motorized vehicles, and our racers made their way all the way from Mexico City to New York City.

“So without further adieu, let me just start by announcing our fifth place team: *Team Featherwing!* Congratulations, *Team Featherwing!* You’ve just won ten thousand dollars!

“Now in fourth place, earning a fifty-thousand-dollar prize, we have the one, and the only, *Team PXL31!* They started catching on fire towards the end of the chase, and if they’d started winning earlier, they might just be millionaires! But alas, they’ll have to settle for fourth.

“However, let’s hear a big round of applause for *Team Flamewheeler*; they’ve just won one-hundred-thousand dollars! Congratulations to them!

“Now, ladies and gentlemen, may I give you a team, who passed all other teams... except one. Let me present you with... *Team Jenson!* I wonder what they’ll do with their five-hundred-thousand dollars? I don’t know, but they aren’t perfect.

“In fact, nobody’s perfect, except for maybe Kevin, Kelly, Keith, and Kirsten, from *Team Williams*, our first place team! If they aren’t perfect, they’re the closest thing you can get, and they’re millionaires! Congratulations to *Team Williams*, the winner of the one-million-dollar grand prize!”

After that, the announcer just kept on yapping. Kevin wasn’t paying any attention. He now had two-hundred-fifty-thousand dollars, one-fourth of a million. What would he do with it? It seemed like the others all knew. Keith was going to give back the money to all the kids he’d ever bullied. Kirsten was going to support the Phondesign company in their quest to provide remote countries with high-tech phones.

Kelly planned to use her share to fund a program she was developing called StickR. (StickR was an educational video game that would help children learn math and science.) But what would Kevin do? It seemed like the others were all supporting a good cause. Kevin decided that first, he would repay Keith for all the money he had spent during the chase. That would be good.

That night, Kirsten’s mom threw them a huge party, (paid for, of course, by the Phondesign company). As he looked at his friends, Kevin finally realized what he wanted to do with the rest of his money. He would support Keith, Kelly and Kirsten and their philanthropic plans. They were his friends, and since his friends were important to him, then that was what he would do.

Throughout the race, a World Chase 2000 employee had followed along in a helicopter, filming the action as it unfolded. Of course *Team Williams* was one of the teams he'd filmed extensively. As the resulting movie was about to be shown on T.V., the four members of *Team Williams* gathered together. They didn't watch all of it, just some of the parts that blew everyone away. It was really fun.

Phondesign decided to give the rest of the team 3D Graphitables. And no doubt because of their partnership with *Team Williams*, the Graphitable sold extremely well, making the company millions of dollars from its first day of sales, alone.

Kirsten even sold her Graphitable to support her give-phones-to-poor-people program (which was renamed PhoneShare). On the World Chase website (racetimenotfacetime.webs.com), there was even a link to their plans. These plans eventually turned into things much, much, bigger than any of them had expected. How did they turn out? Here's how...

Epilogue:

Many years later, Kirsten went on to start her own company, WilliamsPhone. WilliamsPhone was obviously named after their World Chase team, and most of the money the company made went to PhoneShare, which had become a worldwide movement. Almost every country in the world was supported by PhoneShare. Likewise, children around the world learned math, science, reading and history from Kelly's program, StickR. (In fact, critics worldwide celebrated the program, calling it: 'The most helpful learning tool ever made'.

Kelly, of course, was still in charge of StickR. It had surpassed all other tools used for learning around the world. StickR became so forceful, that illiteracy was nearly wiped off the face of the earth. Together, PhoneShare and StickR were making the world a better place by informing the next generation. It was so impactful, that Kelly was just waiting for the day when one of the children, influenced by StickR, would have an even better idea.

After the celebration died down, Keith returned to school a completely new person. As promised, he returned all the money he'd ever stolen. Then for good measure, he doubled it. Everyone liked the new Keith, and he went on to become an architect. He designed many structures that revolutionized the world, including the Williams Tower in Chameleon City, Kenya.

(Side note: Keith's parents were originally from Kenya, and not coincidentally, Kenya was among the first countries to receive free phones from PhoneShare. Chameleon City was its new capitol, and was included in the World Chase New Generation, the World Chase race staged thirty years after Kevin, Kelly, Keith and Kirsten won it.

But what about Kevin? Kevin was honored to become chairman of the World Chase Foundation. Now, instead of giving away prize money, the World Chase makes a donation to StickR. And StickR grew so much, that all over the world, kids were using it. Together, *Team Williams* had not just won a race, they changed a world.

I'm afraid this is the end of the story. Visit racetimenotfacetime.webs.com for more World Chase! Until then, I guess this is...

THE END