

= The Quest Begins =

The Quest Begins is the first novel in the Seekers series . It was written by Erin Hunter , which is a pseudonym used by authors Cherith Baldry , Kate Cary , Tui Sutherland and editor Victoria Holmes . The novel follows the adventures of four bears , Toklo , Kallik , Lusa and Ujurak . Each bear is stranded by themselves in the wild and must learn to survive . The declining environment of the bears is the main theme conveyed throughout the novel . Like the Warriors series also written by Erin Hunter , Seekers began as a request from HarperCollins who requested another animal story . The company and Victoria Holmes agreed to write about bears after discarding dogs , horses and dolphins . The novel was released in the US on 27 May 2008 and has also been released in the UK , Canada and translated into Russian . Critical reception was positive with reviewers praising the realistic behaviour of the bears .

= Development and publication =

= = Conception = =

The Quest Begins began as a request from HarperCollins who wanted Victoria Holmes , editor and creator of the Warriors series which followed the adventures of feral cats , to write another series about animals . The company suggested dogs to Holmes , but the idea was rejected since dogs behave very similarly to the cats in the Warriors series . Both horses and dolphins were suggested , but rejected due to their tendency to run away rather than fight and the slowness of battles underwater . Out of ideas , HarperCollins consulted with Holmes on what she wanted to write about . After a bit of thinking Holmes replied , " BEARS ! They live much more solitary lifestyles than cats , they are wild through and through with no history of domestication whatsoever (performing bears don ? t count) , and they are much bigger animals , with a whole lot more potential for fighting " .

= = Publication history = =

The Quest Begins was first featured on the HarperCollin 's FirstLook Program in November 2007 . Readers who signed up for the program had a chance to read an early edition of this book , an Advanced Reader 's Copy , before it was published in stores . The Quest Begins was released in the US on 27 May 2008 . The book was also released as a paperback on 10 February 2009 and an e @-@ book on 6 October 2009 .

The books have also been released in the UK and Canada . Canada received the first book on 25 May 2008 . The first three books have also been translated into Russian .

= Plot summary =

The novel follows the adventure of four bears , Kallik (a polar bear) , Lusa (a black bear) , Toklo (a brown bear) and Ujurak (a brown bear) .

The novel first follows Kallik who lives with her mother and brother . However , they are separated on ice when a group of killer whales attacks them and Kallik must survive by herself . On her own , Kallik decides to go to a gathering place for polar bears that her mom told her about . At the gathering , Kallik asks other polar bears if they have seen her brother , but no one has . Alone , Kallik meets a female bear Nanuk who helps Kallik around the area . However , Nanuk is killed by a helicopter crash shipping her and Kallik back to the wild . Before she dies , Nanuk tells Kallik about a place where the ice never melts . Hearing this , Kallik sets off to this place .

Somewhere is the Rocky Mountains in southern Canada , Toklo 's mom is bringing Toklo and his sickly brother to a river to teach them how to catch salmon . However , in insanity , Toklo 's mom abandons Toklo after a mental break because his brother died . Now Toklo must survive on his own , just like Kallik . Wandering randomly , Toklo gets chased by human hunters and then meets a bear

who is also getting chased by hunters . The bear gets injured , but they make it to safety and requests that Toklo to retrieve certain herbs , which he does . The bear turns into a human and later introduces himself as Ujurak . It is revealed that Ujurak is a Shapeshifter , to Toklo 's disbelief , before turning back into a bear . The two end up traveling together .

Lusa is a pampered black bear living in the Bear Bowl , a zoo in Canada . Despite knowing that the wilderness is harsh , Lusa has dreams about one day escaping and living outside . Her father , King , once lived in the wild and is strongly against Lusa 's idea . One day , Toklo 's mom is brought into the Bear Bowl . She talks with Lusa about how much she regretted abandoning her cubs , but that it was too late and that she couldn 't find them . Hearing this , Lusa decides to bring a message to Toklo about how sorry his mother is . Although Lusa succeeds in escaping , she realizes the dangers of the wild . At the end of the story , Ujurak and Toklo meet up with Lusa .

= = Style and themes = =

The novel is written in a similar style to the Warriors series . Holly Koelling from Booklist notes that " Despite the change in species , much will be familiar to readers . Alternating narratives tell the tales of three young bear cubs , who will be brought together in future installments " . Nancy Gilson from the Columbus Dispatch praised how easily the separate stories are handled and noticed how many chapters end on a cliffhanger .

The main theme addressed throughout the novel is decline of the environment and habitats of the bears . In the novel , Kallik watches her mother die by a pod of killer whales while Toklo is abandoned by his mother . Koelling realised how " Each tale touches on environmental issues " . Publishers Weekly noted how the " bears ' struggle to survive , along with Hunter 's environmental theme " . At the same time , older bears are " comforted by their belief in mythical bear spirits as they navigate the harsh realities of life in the wild " . Jennifer @-@ Lynn Draper from School Library Journal recognised that " The bears ' declining habitat is evident , and often throughout their journey the animals have to dodge cars and humans with guns " . Gilson noticed that every adventure " involves hunger , hardship and the loss of family that turns the young bears into solitary travelers " . Gilson also noted the environmental theme writing " This one offers prominent themes about the dangers of global warming and diminished wild places " .

= = Critical reception = =

The Quest Begins reached number 6 on Publishers Weekly 's Children 's Fiction Bestsellers during the week of 9 June 2008 . The novel was also chosen as number 9 on Al Roker 's Al 's Book Club on The Today Show .

Reception to the novel was positive and many reviewers praised the realistic setting and behaviours of the main characters . Koelling noted how the novel has a balance of cute anthropomorphic characterisation and also gives a realistic view of how hard it is for the bears to survive on their own . Koelling also recommended the novel to Warriors fans . Kirkus Reviews praised how " Hunter creates a richly sensuous world filled with cruelty , beauty , tenderness , savagery and just enough underlying legendary background to add mystery " , but felt that there is little advancement of the plot due to the time introducing and developing the characters . Still , the reviewer felt that the novel would appeal the animal fantasy lovers for the its extreme detail . Publishers Weekly found the novel written more loosely than the Warriors series , but still appealing to readers as they follow the bears survival . Draper praised the fast pace and how Erin Hunter " is apt at creating and sustaining the adrenaline @-@ charged mood of these youngsters on their own " . Matt Berman , writing for Half Moon Bay Review , praised the cliffhanger ending which would invite in more readers for the second novel , but felt that Warriors fans would be disappointed while " animal lovers will find this story ? s mix of anthropomorphism and realism appealing , and Hunter may find an entirely new audience " .