

LEVELED Book • V

Razor and the Wolves



Written by John Perritano
Illustrated by Thomas Boatwright

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Razor was starting to wonder if he would make it home alive. Uncle Ted had taken a nasty spill down a **gully** as the pair hiked out of Anderson Pass. The fall smashed Uncle Ted's cell phone to bits, and the battery in Razor's phone was dead. Razor's **GPS**—he never left home without it—was still working, but a lot of good it did. Finding the way out wasn't the problem—moving Uncle Ted was.

The fall had knocked Razor's uncle unconscious. His head had a huge, bloody gash and a bump the size of an egg. His leg was probably broken. To make matters worse, Razor saw that the skies were darkening around the West Fork **Glacier**. It was going to be a long, cold night.

Yup, Razor thought, I'm in trouble.



Razor was supposed to have been back in town hours ago, fixing up the old motorcycle he and Jake had found a week earlier. It had been lying in the dirt forty paces off Valley Stream Road in a thicket full of mud, brush, and worms. The tires were both flat, the body rusted. A family of beetles had burrowed into the motor.

"Wow," Razor had said. "This thing is a hunk of junk."

"Yeah, but look," Jake said, pointing to the name on the gas tank. "It's an Indian motorbike, a classic. We can fix her up and get her runnin'."



Two hours later, the boys had lifted the old Indian into the back of Uncle Ted's pickup. Jake had wanted to start working on the bike right away, but Razor and his uncle were leaving to go backpacking near Denali that afternoon. Denali, also known as Mount McKinley, was the highest peak in North America. The motorcycle would have to wait until Razor got back in three days.

* * *

"Where is that slacker?" Jake asked, frustrated. His golden retriever, Molly, was the only one in the garage. "He's late. Razor's never late."

Molly yawned and rolled over. She covered her eyes with her big brown paws and drifted off to sleep. One hour late turned into two hours. Two turned into five. Jake knew something was wrong. He phoned Razor but just got his voice mail. He tried Uncle Ted's cell. That didn't work, either.

Jake tried to keep himself busy. He carefully cleaned the mud and dirt from inside the Indian's cylinders. He drained whatever oil there was from the crankcase. As he worked, Jake listened to his dad's old radio, which was tucked on a shelf near some rusty paint cans. When the news came on, Jake heard that a storm with high winds and snow was **barreling** in. The weather in this part of Alaska was unpredictable in April. Jake thought for a moment.

"C'mon Molly, let's call Callahan."

Jake and Molly raced into the house, where Jake dialed Vince Callahan at **Search and Rescue**. "Don't worry, Jake," Callahan said. "They're only five hours late. If they're not back by the time the storm blows through, we'll head up there."



As Callahan talked, Jake could hear the alarm go off in the Search and Rescue center. "I gotta go, Jake," Callahan said hurriedly. "A tour bus just overturned on the Park Road. Dozens of people are injured. We have to get up there fast."

"What about Razor?" Jake asked.

"Don't worry, son. We'll be up there soon enough. Right now I have to go."

Jake hung up. He looked out the window and saw the sky darken to a **menacing** gray. Jake couldn't wait for Callahan. He'd have to find Razor on his own.

But how?

* * *

Hank Brody, with his big mustache, stood two inches taller than six feet and looked down at Jake with a glare that the boy rightly took for **disdain**. Hank had rapped hard on the door of Hank's cabin moments before, startling Hank awake. The boy knew he was intruding but didn't care—Razor needed help.

"Who are you?"

"Jake Winslow, sir."

"I know you. You're the kid with that noisy ATV . . . Barry Winslow's kid. What do you want?"

Hank grimaced at the sight of Jake. Hank Brody didn't get many visitors, only an occasional tourist looking for a fishing guide.

"My dad says you're a pilot," Jake began.

"Might be," Hank fired back.

"He says you flew planes during the Gulf War."

"What if I did?"

"I need someone to help find my friend. Razor and his uncle went hiking up near Denali, but they haven't come back. I think something bad happened. That storm is about to blow in . . ."



Jake, standing in the doorway, glanced at the frightening sky.

"What business is it of mine?" Hank interrupted. "Call Search and Rescue if your friend is missing."

"I did. They're busy with a bus crash and can't spare the planes to fly up there. Mr. Brody, I need a pilot to help find my friend. I need your help!"

"Where's your father?" Hank asked.

"In Fairbanks. He'll be back day after tomorrow."

"And you want me to fly head-on into a storm to help this friend of yours . . . Beaver?"

"Razor. His name's Razor."

"How do you know he's lost?"

"He was supposed to be back early this morning. We were going to fix up an old Indian motorcycle we found. Razor's never late. Plus, I can't get him or his uncle on their cell phones. Something's wrong, I know it." Jake was nearly in tears, though he tried hard not to show it.

"Listen, kid, you're a good friend, but go find someone else. I don't do rescue missions anymore. I only fly paying customers."

"Oh, I can pay you!" blurted Jake. "That Indian motorcycle will be worth some money once we fix it up. I'll give it to you if you'll help me."

Hank chuckled to himself. "It'd take a lot more than an old motorcycle to convince me to fly into a storm like this one," he said, waving his arm at the ugly line of clouds rolling in. "Do you understand that I'd be risking my plane and my neck up there?"

"You gotta help me, Mr. Brody!" Jake screamed. "You're the only pilot around."

"I don't 'gotta' do anything," Hank fired back. "I get paid to fly the people to the fish, not to go looking for strays in storms."

"Look, my dad said you lost your best friend in the war," Jake said, his voice cracking. "Now my best friend is in trouble, and I have to find some help before it's too late. What would you do if you were in my shoes?"

Hank fell silent. He muttered some harsh words under his breath before spitting out, "This is blackmail." Jake gave him the saddest look he could muster.



"Hang it all! Alright, kid. I'll go up and take a look, but we better hurry. That storm's rolling in fast."

"We?" asked Jake.

"Yes, *we*," barked Hank. "I'm gonna need a **spotter**. You just volunteered for the job," he said as he jabbed a pair of binoculars in a leather case hard into Jake's chest.

* * *



The wind blew stronger. The temperatures dipped. The snow started falling. Razor didn't have time to think about the fix he was in. If he did, he might start to cry.

Instead, he busied himself tending to his injured uncle. Razor never paid much attention in class. Still, he knew how to make a fire using twigs, he knew which plants were okay to eat, and he knew how to ration water. He also knew how to bandage cuts. That skill proved very handy; he had stopped the bleeding from the gash on his uncle's head.

A fire was out of the question, though. There weren't any trees or logs to burn in Anderson Pass. Razor had a portable stove for heating food, but it wasn't powerful enough to heat a tent. He would gladly have traded it for an armful of seasoned pine and some kindling.

In an hour or two, Alaska's frozen wind would really start to howl. Razor was already beginning to feel the sting of the wind-driven snow pelting his face. Eventually, he'd have to drag his uncle inside the tent, but Uncle Ted's leg was bent in an unnatural position. The pain jolted his uncle awake occasionally, causing him to cry out. The only thing working in their favor was the daylight; it never got too dark at night in April. That meant rescue planes could fly longer.
"Except no one knows we're here," Razor whispered to himself.

Razor heard a piercing howl in the distance. Almost immediately, he heard an answering howl much closer.

Razor put his hands over his eyes to shield them from the flying snow. He looked around. He saw Muldrow Glacier. It was shrouded in a blanket of low, pale clouds. When he heard the howl again, Razor knew what it meant.

* * *



Hank knew his way around the controls of a plane, but it took all of his attention to steer the craft as the sharply gusting winds slapped it from side to side.

“Listen, kid,” Hank said to Jake. “We’re almost there. I’m going to bring her down as low as she can go. Your job is to keep a sharp lookout for your friend. I’m going to be busy trying to keep this crate of mine from hitting any cliffs.”

The plane descended. The driving snow and low clouds made it tough for Hank to see. The **crosswinds** shook the plane like a baby’s rattle.

* * *

The storm had grown worse. The sounds Razor had heard before were closer. They were the howls of wolves. The animals were hungry, and they smelled blood in the air.

Razor gripped Uncle Ted under the arms and dragged him into the tent. The boy tried to block out his uncle's screams but couldn't. Each tug brought more pain. When it became too much, Uncle Ted passed out.

Razor stood guard outside the tent, shivering, scared, and alone. He wished he had a weapon, any weapon. Razor looked around for something to defend himself with. All he could find was a graphite hiking pole. *Heck*, Razor thought, *I couldn't scare Molly with that.*

The wolves inched closer with their heads held low to the ground. Razor could hear their snarls. Wolves near the back of the pack paced back and forth, licking their steamy jowls in hungry anticipation. Razor stood guard with his back against a boulder. The icy wind bit through his layers of clothes. Razor buried his face in his gloved hands and shivered. He gripped the hiking pole in both hands like a spear.

* * *



"Listen, Brody, you need to turn back," Callahan's angry voice was coming in loud and clear on Hank's radio. "You're not a professional. We'll mount a search when the storm clears. I don't want my crew to scrape that plane and that boy's guts off the side of a cliff, over."

"I read you," Hank said, "but no can do. I'm in too deep to turn back now. By the time you guys get up here, Razor and his uncle might be dead. It's freezing, and this is grizzly territory, over."

Hank was now on the hunt. He was no longer just an occasional fishing guide. He had a mission to accomplish, just as he'd done countless times during the war.

"Brody," Callahan fired off, "I don't have time to argue. I'll get my planes and helicopters in the air as soon as I can. In the meantime, I hope you know what you're doing. We don't need another crash today."

"Roger that, Callahan," Hank said. "Over and out."

The storm was easing. Hank tipped the plane closer to the ground. Jake kept watch. He looked for a tent, a smoke signal—some sign that Razor was down there.

* * *

“Game over,” Razor mumbled to himself. He was starting to panic. The wolves were only about thirty yards away. There were four of them studying Razor and sneering. The snow and wind had nearly stopped, and Uncle Ted was waking up in the tent. Razor could hear his muffled moans.

One wolf howled, causing the hair on Razor’s neck to stand on end.

Think, Razor, think.

The boy looked around. He spotted the portable stove near the tent. For some reason, he thought of an old Frankenstein movie he had seen on TV with Jake.

Razor backed up slowly, moving carefully toward the stove. His eyes never left the wolves. When he reached the stove, he turned the knob on the propane canister to the open position. He hit the **igniter**.

Click!

“C’mon, catch!”

He hit the igniter again and the stove lit. A burst of blue-red flame danced around the burner.

The wolves hesitated a moment before edging toward him again.



Razor snatched a T-shirt out of his pack. He whipped the shirt tightly around the top of the hiking pole and stuck the tip of the pole into the hot flame.

Frankenstein's monster was afraid of fire—maybe these wolves will be, too, Razor thought.

The T-shirt began to smolder. A tiny flame slowly spread into a crackling blaze.

The wolves charged.

* * *

"It's not looking good, kid. We've been up here a long time, and our fuel is getting low. We're gonna have to turn back." Hank Brody didn't like to give up.

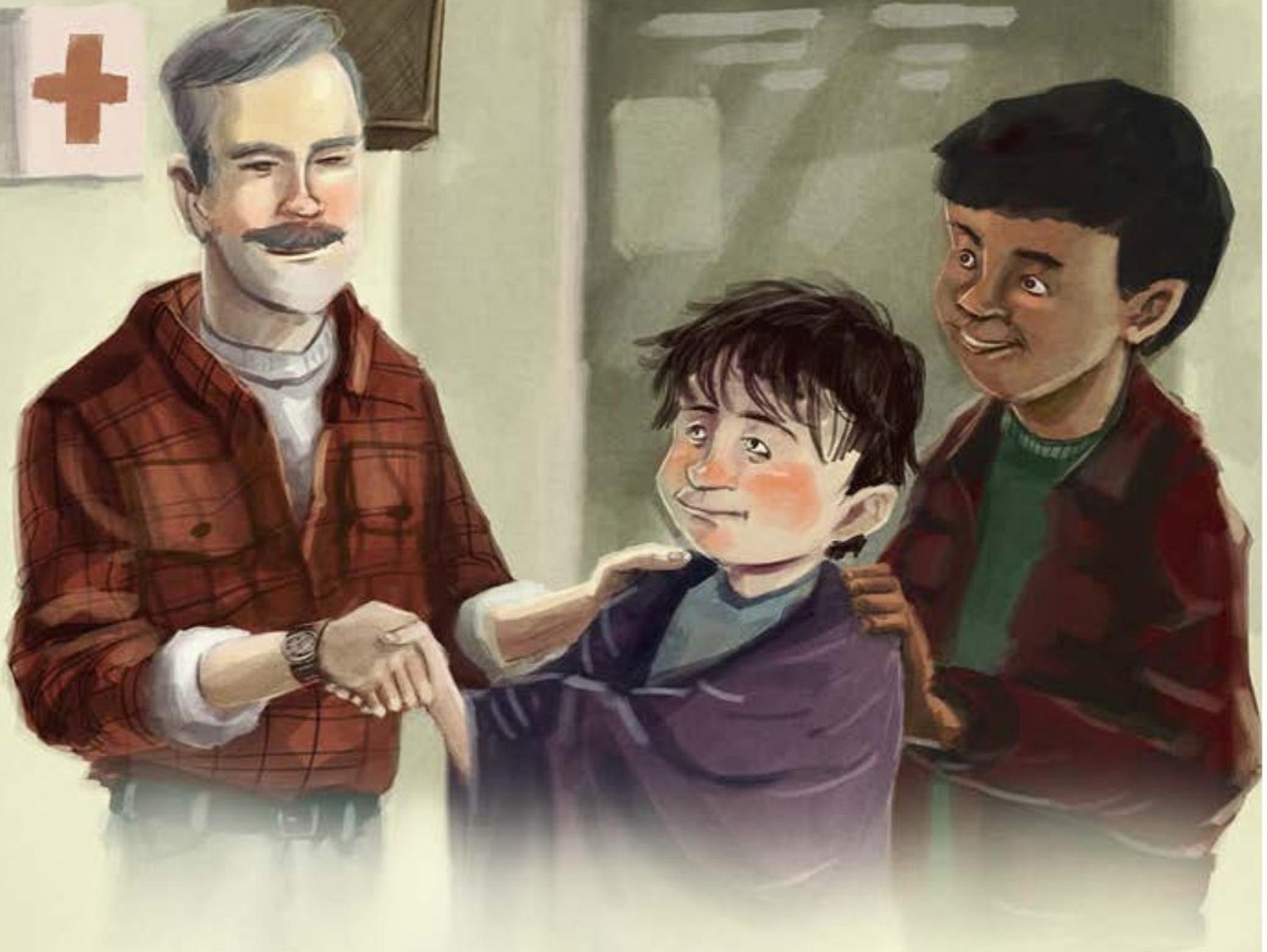
"Just a little longer," Jake implored.

A slender column of billowing smoke caught Jake's attention. Jake blinked and looked again. "Over there!" he shouted, pointing to his right.

Hank looked where Jake was pointing and edged the plane closer to the ground. Suddenly, Jake saw Razor standing in front of a pack of wolves, waving a flaming hiking pole in their snouts. The animals froze as Razor violently slashed the air with his **improvised** torch.

Hank gunned the throttle and swooped toward Razor's campsite. The plane flew so low that Razor had to dive for cover as its wheels roared past his head. Hank circled around and buzzed the wolves again, scattering the pack. Hank chased the animals until they were well out of sight. With the wolves no longer a threat, Hank radioed Callahan.

* * *



"How's your uncle doin'?" Jake asked Razor when the two finally found each other at the emergency clinic.

"The doc said he should be fine, although his leg is busted up pretty good."

"What were you doin' out there with that torch?" Jake asked, smiling. "Swattin' skeeters?"

"Those weren't skeeters, that's for sure. Those wolves thought I had a juicy chicken-fried steak tied around my neck."

Just then, Hank Brody walked in and shook Razor's hand. "You did good out there, kid. You saved your uncle's life."

"Thanks for finding us, Mr. Brody."

"Don't mention it. Your pal here, Jake, deserves the credit. It was his idea."

The room fell silent.

"So," Hank continued, "about my payment . . ."

"Don't you worry, Mr. Brody," said Jake. "A deal's a deal. We'll drop off that Indian motorcycle just as soon as we get it up and running."

"We will?" asked Razor, sounding surprised, until Jake shot an elbow into his ribs. "Oh, I mean . . . yes, that's right, sir."

"Actually, boys, I had something else in mind. I've got an old garage and a full set of tools up at my place. Why don't you bring that bike of yours over and work on it there? I've got some spare parts that might come in handy if you don't mind scrounging around a bit. I might even give you a hand if you get stuck on something. That way, I can keep an eye on the two of you so I won't have to fly rescue missions all the time."

"Deal!" said Jake.

"Yeah!" laughed Razor.

Glossary

barreling (<i>v.</i>)	quickly moving, often in a dangerous or reckless way (p. 6)
crosswinds (<i>n.</i>)	winds that blow across the direction of travel (p. 15)
disdain (<i>n.</i>)	dislike shown toward someone or something seen as inferior or not deserving of respect (p. 8)
glacier (<i>n.</i>)	a large body of accumulated ice and compacted snow that is found year round and that slowly moves downhill (p. 3)
GPS (<i>n.</i>)	Global Positioning System; a system or device that uses radio signals from satellites to pinpoint locations (p. 3)
gully (<i>n.</i>)	a small valley or trench created by the action of water wearing away land (p. 3)
igniter (<i>n.</i>)	a device used to set something on fire (p. 19)
improvised (<i>adj.</i>)	made up or created in the moment (p. 21)
menacing (<i>adj.</i>)	threatening (p. 7)
Search and Rescue (<i>n.</i>)	teams who find and help people who are lost or trapped (p. 6)
spotter (<i>n.</i>)	a person who keeps a close watch or lookout for certain types of people or things (p. 12)

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Level V Leveled Book
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