

# Flurry the Bear

The Book of Snow



J.S. Skye

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2<sup>nd</sup> Edition – January 2015

First Published – February 2014

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The Book of Snow  
(Flurry the Bear – Book 4)  
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Cover art by Luís Figueiredo, J.S. Skye, & Tony  
Washington

ISBN: 0692373088  
ISBN-13: 978-0692373088



## CHAPTER 2

### NERO

The chirps of crickets were the loudest sound to be heard in the quiet, peaceful village located in a very distant land known as Kunteris. This region was far beyond the reaches of Christopher Kringle's domain or any land that had even heard of him.

It was a fine summer evening. Only the occasional hoot of an owl broke the continuous drone of nocturnal insects. The wind was soft and refreshing against the tapestry of green foliage. The trees swayed

with each subtle wisp of the breeze. Their twin images reflected in the moonlit surface of a still, gentle pond.

Aside from the full moon, nothing but the dwindling embers of a central campfire lit the encampment of bamboo huts with grass roofs. The windows were almost completely dark except for one; a slight glow came from a larger hut on the outskirts of the village.

Inside stood a gray, furry animal with black stripes on her tail. Her snout was long and slender, and she had black fur that encircled each eye. She wore a pair of goggles while she chipped away at a gemstone on the table. The hut had been converted into a humble little workshop. There were metal gears which lay all over the place. A stone grinder, a box full of various gems, and a variety of tools littered

the tables and shelves. There were a number of contraptions that looked like steam-powered mechanical inventions of some kind. By all appearances, this little worker was quite savvy with mechanical things.

The night grew late for her. She was deeply fatigued. It might have been more evident if she did not already have dark circles around her eyes naturally. Her work was very dear to her heart, and it always came before sleep or anything else. This project was of the utmost importance, and she was so close to being done with it. All she had to do was finish the gemstone and place it in the book, which she had yet to give a title.

She chipped away at the crystal. Her mind focused on how difficult it had been to get her paws on such a rare item. The stone was

said to have special properties over space and time, and it cost her a pretty penny to acquire.

The chipping, grinding, and polishing finally came to a halt. She held up the stone against the moonlight that shone down through a skylight in the hut's roof.

“Perfect!” the female coon said to herself. “Now, let's see if you'll fit.” She carefully laid the gemstone into an indentation on the book's cover. It dropped into place smoothly. She was well pleased with her finished product. The raccoon realized the job would have been much more difficult if not for having found a way of depleting the crystal of its power temporarily. The precious stone was an unlimited, self-sustaining energy source, and it would have been problematic to work with it in that

state. She had used her vast knowledge and devised a way to short out the gemstone long enough for her to mold it to her desired configuration. If she had not done this, the crystal would not have been able to be shaped. It would have adapted and changed to any form it so desired. It was like it had a mind of its own.

The indentation in the book's cover worked to confine the gemstone to one size, as long as it remained in the book. "Now all I need to do is activate this little fella, and it'll be done," the raccoon told herself. A pleased smile came to her adorable, furry face.

She pulled out a smaller gemstone. It radiated blue light, shining brighter than the stars in the sky. She touched the smaller gemstone to the larger stone inlaid in the

book's cover. The light transferred from the small stone to the larger one that was now part of the book.

The book was complete. Its centerpiece gleamed brightly. She smiled at her masterful craftsmanship. Before she had a chance to take it all in, the locked clasp came free. The book sprang open, and two furry objects flew out from the book's pages and across the room.

\*“Ahhh!” Flurry bellowed through the air before he landed in a pile of hay. He sat up and rubbed his head. “Wow! What a trip! I wonder where I am,” Flurry asked himself out loud. He looked himself over and brushed hay off of his fur.

Suddenly, Flurry sensed something move beneath him. He jumped up and spun around. In the hay below was Honja, and the

little rabbit did not look pleased with Flurry for having landed on him.

“Oh! Hi, Honja! You’re here, too! Yay!” Flurry reached out to pat Honja on the head, but Honja quickly shot back into the pile of hay to avoid Flurry’s touch. The rabbit hated being petted on the head. No matter how many times Flurry had been reminded, it never stuck in his memory.

“Honja? Honja, you can come out now. I won’t pet you, I promise.”

Flurry and Honja had not realized they were not the only ones in the room. The raccoon cleared her throat, which startled Flurry. With a gasp, he whirled around to face the source of the sound. Flurry was relieved that it was a cute raccoon and not something more sinister.

The raccoon cautiously waved to him, as

if she had no idea what else to do. She had not expected the book to fly open, let alone bring visitors.

“Oh! Hello, I’m Flurry!” said the little cub.

Honja peeked out from the hay and then went back into hiding. “Hi, there. I’m Lotor. Who’s your little friend?” the raccoon responded.

“Oh, him? That’s Honja.”

\*“He’s a cute little mouse!”

“Oh no! He hates that!”

Honja was infuriated. He ran out from under the pile of hay and head-butted the raccoon in the foot. He then did likewise to Flurry before he leapt back into his hiding spot.

“Oh, my! I’m so sorry! Please don’t be mad at him. He has a bit of a temper. That

was very rude of him.”

“It’s fine,” Lotor reassured him.

“You see, he’s a bunny rabbit. He doesn’t like to be touched, petted on the head, or mistaken for a mouse. He probably has an entire list of things he hates, but those are the ones I remember at the moment.” Flurry put his paw to his mouth and pondered if he had left any out or not.

Lotor knelt down and leaned toward the haystack. She spoke softly, saying, “I’m sorry, little one. Please come out. I didn’t mean to upset you.” She tried to coerce the little brown bunny out of his seclusion. “I have a carrot for you, if you’ll come out. I’m not planning on eating it.” She stood up and reached for a plate of food that sat on the table next to her book. Some of the food had only been half eaten. It looked like she had

barely nibbled any of it.

Litora dangled the carrot down low where Honja could reach it. He peeked out from the hay. Slowly, he inched his way out with his ears swooped back. He sniffed at the carrot, grabbed it, and darted back inside the hay.

“Honja! You didn’t even say thank you! Mommy would be so disappointed!”

“*Kamsahamnida,*” came a faint voice from within the hay.

“*Nae,*” the raccoon replied.

“Wait a minute! You can understand him?” Flurry was surprised.

“Of course, I can.”

“Wow!”

“So, where are you two from?” Litora was fascinated by her new guests.

“Well, I’m from a village called Ursus.

Maybe you've heard of it?"

"No, I can't say that I have."

"How could you not know about Ursus? That's where Santa's lives!"

"Who's Santa?"

"You don't know who Santa is? Oh my goodness!" Flurry was shocked beyond belief.

"I'm sorry, but no," Lotor replied. "What about him?" she asked while she pointed to where Honja still hid. "Is he from Ursus, too?" \* \* \* \* \*

"No. I think Daddy bought him in some distant country, on his way back to Middleasia," Flurry replied.

"Where's Middleasia?"

"You don't know where Middleasia is either?"

"No," Lotor replied. "Can you point to it

on a map?”

“I suppose,” Flurry replied. He climbed up onto a chair to get a view of the table top.

Litora pulled out a map from her shelf, blew off the dust, and unrolled it across the table. She lifted Flurry up from the chair and set him on the table next to the map.

On all fours, Flurry crawled over to one corner of the map and examined it. “Hmmm. It should be right around ... hey! I don’t recognize anything on this map. This doesn’t look anything like the maps at Mommy and Daddy’s house. It doesn’t look like my Uncle Vinegar’s maps either. Where am I?”

“You’re in the land of Kunteris. This village is named Coonlei.”

“Kunteris? Kunteris? Where in the world is Kunteris? I’ve never even heard of

Kunteris before!” Flurry looked worried and flustered. He started to breathe heavily.

“Calm down! Relax! Everything is fine. Just breathe. I have a theory why you don’t recognize anything.”

Flurry calmed down a bit. He nervously stuffed Lotorá’s leftovers in his mouth to cope. A smile came upon Lotorá’s face. Her entire demeanor changed. She acted excited about her internal thoughts. “Aha! This is amazing! If my theory is true, this is the greatest news ever! What were you doing the moment before you arrived here?”

With food stuffed in his mouth, he replied, “I was looking at a book that Santa gave me. It’s called *The Book of Snow*. I put a crystal in it, and it opened up. I turned some pages, and the next thing I know, I’m here.”

“*The Book of Snow*, huh?” Lotor turned and paced back and forth. She chanted the phrase “*The Book of Snow*” repeatedly under her breath. To Flurry, it looked like she was having a discreet conversation with herself.

Her muttering reminded the bear cub of his uncle. Uncle Vinegar often did likewise, when Flurry observed him deep in his studies. “What? What is it?” Flurry inquired.

“Well, my theory is that you’ve traveled in time through my book. I deduce you’re from the future, because I haven’t named the book yet. I was thinking of calling it *The Book of Frost*. I made this book to be a recounting of the horrors and tyranny brought upon our many lands and nations by Jack Frost. This book is to be a record of all that was, is, and will be.

“With each day, his strength grows. He’s

been killing off all of the red pandas so he can be the one and only in all of existence. He doesn't want to have any rival to his beauty or power. The number of red pandas that still live are few, and those that remain have been in hiding for many years.”

“Wait a minute! Jack's alive? But I saw him die!”

Lotor's tone instantly became grave. “Hush! Do you want to be heard by one of his spies? Don't say things like that! You can be put to death if the wrong soul heard you say that.”

“Say what?” Flurry was confused.

“To say that Jack's dead. He's very much alive and ruling from his palace at Ursidea.”

“Finally! A name I know! That place is very close to Ursus, where I'm from.”

“Wait a minute! Now I know where

you're from. The land of Mezarim, right?"

"That's what I said earlier!" Flurry was suddenly frustrated that he had to repeat himself.

"No, you said Ursus," Latora corrected the little cub.

"Well, same difference," Flurry returned.

"Can I assume there's another name for the one you call Santa?"

"Yeah, I suppose," Flurry replied with an embarrassed look on his face. "The other bears call him Mr. Kringle."

"Kringle!" Latora gasped. She was shocked beyond words. "I had no idea you were speaking of Nikolas Kringle!"

"His name is Santa," answered the cub.

"Whether you call him Santa or not, Nikolas is renowned in this part of the world, though he isn't a very well-liked

man. It's because of him that Jack exists. Many have sought his death. In fact, he'd probably be dead if he could be found. He's quite an elusive man. Most knowledge of him has become akin to legend or fairy tale. Good luck trying to find him!"

Flurry was not sure what she meant by the name Nikolas. He always heard his papa call him Chris. Flurry cried and buried his face in his paws. "What's going on? This isn't how it's supposed to be! This is wrong. It's all wrong! Where I'm from, everyone loves Santa, and Jack is dead. This is a nightmare!" Flurry smacked himself in the face and said, "Wake up, Flurry! Wake up! Wake up, Flurry! Wake up! This is just a dream! It's just a bad dream! Wake up!" It was no use; he was still there. Tears streamed down the cub's face.

Latora's demeanor softened, and a tear came to her eye. She felt bad for making the poor cub cry. "There, there, little one. I'm sorry for being so stern. If what you say is true, then there is hope yet. I feared that Jack would rule forever and destroy everything that I hold dear. If you're from the future, as I suspect, then you're a herald of good news. You may become a beacon of hope to us all. Your presence means that the suffering of all of the lands will come to an end someday. Thank you!" She gave Flurry a warm hug.

The hug did not last long before screams were heard from beyond the walls of the hut. Latora quickly let go of Flurry and rushed to the window.

"What is it?" Flurry asked.

"Oh no! Not them! They know! Quick!"

We have to get out of here!” Lotor hurriedly grabbed Flurry from the table and set him back on his feet before she turned back to grab the book. Honja frightfully peeked out from the hay. He came out and trailed closely behind Flurry and Lotor. “Let’s go! We must not be captured.”

“Why? What is it?”

“Jack’s henchmen are here. They’re burning the huts. Somehow they must’ve found out that we’ve been hiding red pandas here. Quickly! Let’s move!”

Lotor rushed out of the hut and darted toward the tree line as fast as she possibly could. Flurry and Honja followed. They made it into the brush just as something approached the hut. Right before Flurry’s eyes stood a creature he had never seen before. He thought it was a fox at first, due

to its orange fur and canine features, but it was far worse. Its paws looked like burning embers, and it had three tails. The tip of each tail and the creature's back were aflame. For some reason, the fire did not seem to hurt the beast. As the creature looked around with its searing orange eyes, Flurry shivered. It scoured the area for anyone or anything to be its next victim. With a sweep of its tail, the hut was set ablaze.

"No!" Lotorā shouted. Flurry quickly put his paw over her mouth and muffled her objection.

"Shhhhh! You don't want it to hear us," Flurry whispered.

Flurry was too late. At the sound of Lotorā's voice, the flaming, foxlike creature looked in their direction.

“Maybe it didn’t notice us,” Flurry tried to reassure Honja and himself. Honja shook with fear. He backed up slowly and pulled leaves down around himself.

The flaming beast came near to their location in the brush and sniffed around. It appeared to be aware of their presence. A growl came from the horrific creature. It took a step closer. Its snout was right next to Flurry’s head, where he remained hidden on the far side of a tree.

It looked as if they would be eaten alive, until a loud and commanding voice called out from the midst of the flaming huts. “You there! Quit fooling around! We have more huts to burn!” The flaming fox immediately withdrew and ran back toward the voice.

“Phew!” Flurry let out a sigh of relief. As he wiped the sweat from his brow, he

exclaimed, “That was close!”

Flurry turned to find Lotor curled up in a ball, sobbing.

“What’s wrong?”

“It’s over. It’s all over. If Jack finds Tomodachi, our hope is lost. He’s the only one who has been bold enough to speak out against Jack.”

“Hey! I know that name! Doggy told me all about him. He beat Jack.”

\*Lotor instantly looked up with a startled expression. “What? Are you sure?”

“Uh, huh,” answered Flurry. He nodded his head vigorously.

“Then we have to try to save him! It’s risky, but everything depends on his survival. Come quickly! I know where the other villagers were hiding him.”

Lotor jumped to her feet, grabbed Flurry

by the paw, and ran toward the huts. “Come on, Honja!” Flurry shouted back to the bunny.

Honja shook his head in fear. He trembled so much that you would have thought he was freezing to death. Honja simply did not have the desire for adventure that Flurry did. He preferred the safety of his home and the quiet of his own little corner of the house. After all, he was just a little rabbit. He did not have the means to defend himself from something like that creature he saw.

Just then a growl was heard, and the bushes shifted. In fear, Honja ran and called out to Flurry, “*Gah-chi gah!*”

The three of them made their way across the village of huts, ducking down and hiding behind anything they could find. So far, so good; they had not been spotted yet. Flurry

saw three of the flaming monsters led by another kind of fox, who appeared to be the leader. The one in command was an arctic fox with pearly-white fur. He stood upright on two legs like a man. Over his white fur he wore black pants, boots, a vest, and two swords, one at each side.

“Hurry up already! They have to be here somewhere!” shouted their commander. The arsonist walked over, grabbed the village leader from among the prisoners, and slammed him against the door of the nearest hut. “Tell me where he is, or I’ll burn down your entire village!” The raccoon would not speak. The fox tossed the raccoon back to the ground. The arctic fox shouted, “Very well! Have it your way!” He whistled at the flaming beasts and commanded them, saying, “Finish the job! Burn down the

entire village!” Screams resounded through the chaos that ensued.

“We have to do something, quickly! Tomodachi’s hut is already on fire,” Lotor insisted.

Flurry and Honja raced after Lotor. She came up to a hut almost completely engulfed in flames. She looked concerned when she peered in through a gap in the wall. “I don’t see them. Tomodachi and Yujin should be in there,” said the raccoon. She gave Flurry a troubled glance.

“Let me see.” Flurry peeked in. “Where would they hide? The hut is so small.”

“They would be underneath the floor. We dug out a hole to hide them in if trouble came.”

“Maybe they’re still inside and can’t get out,” Flurry proposed.

“Oh no! That’s terrible! We can’t even get in to check!” Lotor was frantic.

“No, but Honja can,” Flurry replied. The bear shifted his gaze to his rabbit friend. The little bunny was taken off guard. His mouth dropped open, and he pointed at himself in disbelief. “*Nah?*” he asked.

“Yes, you! You can fit through the hole and make sure they aren’t trapped.”

Honja shook his head vigorously in rejection of the idea. There was no way Honja wanted to have any part in going into a burning hut.

“Come on! You’ll be a hero!” Flurry attempted to appeal to his friend.

“Something needs to be done quickly, before the roof collapses!” shouted Lotor.

Honja relented. He rushed in through the hole and looked around. The smoke was so

thick that nobody else could have been in there without being smothered to death from the lack of air. Luckily for Honja, he was so small and low to the ground that it allowed space for him to breathe. He looked all around. It seemed hopeless until he noticed the hidden door. The door was lashed shut. He chewed away at the leather rope the held it secure. Fire continued to rain down around him as he gnawed at the binding.

\*Outside, Flurry and Lotor were deeply troubled.\* They had neither seen nor heard anything from Honja. Flurry was uncertain if his friend was even alive.

“Honja!” Flurry and Lotor shouted together, but there was no answer.

“I hope he’s okay,” Lotor told her new friend.

“Me, too,” said Flurry with a very worried

tone to his voice. Sweat rolled down his face. The situation was dire, and there was still no sign of the rabbit. Snapping, crackling, and tearing could be heard as the hut was about to come crashing down.

When things could not possibly get any worse, Flurry heard a voice from behind them. “You two! Get to your feet! What are you doing here?” Flurry turned and saw the arctic fox that had been commanding the fire beasts. “I’m General Nero of the Majesty’s royal army! You shall answer when I speak to you!”

Flurry was frightened and slowly inched his way behind Litora’s legs. He even used her tail to hide beneath.

Nero looked right at Flurry. “You there! Little one! I haven’t seen you before. Who are you, and what are you doing here?”

Flurry did not answer. His chin quivered as he tried to fight back tears. The white fox frightened him, and Flurry badly wanted to go back home, where it was safe.

“I’ll give you to the count of three. One, two, ...”

Before the fox reached the number three, a loud voice from within the burning hut shouted, “Run!”

Suddenly, swords cut through the wall, and two red pandas burst out from the walls of the burning hut. The villagers scattered. Flurry and Lotoran ran for their lives.

The male red panda was arrayed in red samurai armor, and the female wore silky robes singed by the flames. Both of them were armed with bladed weapons. Flurry glanced back and observed Tomodachi let out a war cry. He and the female red panda

attacked Nero and fought in a two-on-one swordfight. Nero appeared to be holding his own against his two smaller opponents.

The raccoon villagers continued to run for their lives; the sound of metal on metal rang through the village. Flurry kept looking back to find Honja, but the hut collapsed, and not a single sign of the rabbit could be seen. Flurry cried and fell to the ground in tears. Latora ran back and picked him up. “We can’t fall behind. We need to keep going. We’ll meet up with Tomodachi and ask him about Honja at the rendezvous point.”

Flurry did not care about her attempt to comfort him. Now being carried away, he cried and shouted over Latora’s shoulder, “Honja! Honja!”