Avery was born red. Like really red. While his thick fur protected him from harsh mountain weather, his underbelly was not black like the other red pandas. He was terrible at hide and seek, but more importantly, he lacked the protection needed to conceal him from predators. So, he mastered the art of escape. Soon, all the young cubs would come to watch the great escape artist, Avery, the Firefox. They followed every competition, waiting for him to make it to the big game – Bamboo Breakout.

Bamboo Breakout was a combination of running, climbing, hanging and tag. Players had to race while dodging shadowy, snow leopards. If the pretend "leopards" caught you, you were out. So, Avery practiced every day while the others were sleeping. He knew that one day he would need to save his family from a real shadowy threat.

GAME DAY. All the red pandas arrived at Weeping Bamboo Stadium in the center of the Himalayan forest. Avery's entire family came to watch, including his younger sister, Zara. She had always looked up to her big brother and celebrated his unique look.

On your mark, get set. Go! Avery shot up the bamboo lightning fast and hopped across the bending tops. He danced along the stalks like a ninja. Zara cheered as he reached the bamboo bars. Using his extra thumbs, he swung across the long stretch of bars. He was winning!

Avery looked back toward his sister when something caught his eye. Humans with nets walked through the trees below. Was this the real shadowy threat? Avery had to let everyone know they were in danger but he was so high up in the trees. "Red alert!" Avery yelled. "Poachers!"

The red pandas scattered but one poacher's large net was within reach of Zara. From high above, Avery leapt as far as he could toward the forest floor below. He grabbed the net as he slammed his head on the forest floor. Avery smiled as he watched Zara escape. Big brown boots were the last he saw as he closed his eyes.

What happens next? Find out by reading Java Lava!

Check for Understanding:
1. How was Avery different from the other red pandas?
2. What special skills did Avery develop? Why were these skills important?
3. How are you similar to Avery? How are you different from Avery?
4. Make a prediction about what happens to Avery.