

Armando and the Amazing Animal Race

Diana Schaffter

Sea Otter Press

(312pp)

978-1-06-907951-0

Armando and the Amazing Animal Race is an intricate, thoughtful coming-of-age novel about endangered species and life after loss.

In Diana Schaffter's adventure novel *Armando and the Amazing Animal Race*, an animal-loving conservationist and his quirky grandmother go on an exciting, educational trip around the world.

When twelve-year-old Armando visits Granny D in London, he uncovers a secret about his missing mother: She participated in an annual wildlife expedition, the Amazing Animal Race, in which photographers snap pictures of seven endangered animals in seventy days. Eight years after she went missing, Armando jumps at the opportunity to join the race with Granny D, wanting to feel close to his mother and to see endangered species up close. With the help of his mother's old journal and texts from his friend Jinny, Armando and Granny D travel across the globe, their expedition tracked on a detailed map in the book's front matter.

The novel moves at a leisurely pace, introducing numerous animal facts and beautiful, intricate black-and-white line drawings throughout. Indeed, it takes a while for Armando and Granny D to begin the race. Further, each chapter is saturated with details about the settings, animals, and Armando's internal experiences. While some of these details enhance the story, others—such as the specific model of helicopter that Armando flies in—bog down its momentum.

The prose is whimsical, and its descriptions of each new setting, person, and creature are evocative—Granny D's eyes are said to sparkle "like a snow leopard looking for an adventure," for example. As a hero, Armando is involving, and his passion for animals is infectious. He starts off shy and reserved (Jinny compares him to an armadillo), but by the end of the race, he's become more confident and strong. And while he holds back because of his fears at first, he grows into himself as he explores his interests, spars with anticonservationists, learns about his mother, and discovers new countries and cultures.

Armando's path is complicated by McCoy, an adult who wants to win the race, and whose introduction is cartoonish and amusing. McCoy's intense drive to complete the race before anyone else, and his insistence that the race should be for adults and not children, make him a formidable opponent. His taunts only bolster Armando's determination, though, heightening the stakes of the race and the story overall.

In the adventure story *Armando and the Amazing Animal Race*, a shy twelve-year-old goes on a perilous international expedition with his grandmother.

LEAH BLOCK (January 31, 2025)

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