

# Diamond Jim and the Dinosaurs

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Rosemary Claire Smith

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“What should you do if a mosasaur comes up out of the sewer and into your bathroom?” The little blond girl blinked rapidly as she stammered through her question for Dr. Marty Zuber. A hush fell over the third graders contemplating the forty-foot-long mosasaur skeleton hanging over their heads. Even the hyperactive kids grew still and stared at the twin rows of razor-sharp teeth in the fossil’s gaping jaw.

After having fielded hundreds of questions from reporters and the public over a good ten years, not just the too-often-asked ones, but also the ridiculously misinformed and downright hostile questions, and even the all-too-rare insightful ones, Marty would have thought that handling an eight-year-old’s question during a museum field trip would be as easy as discerning which logs floating in the river shallows were really crocodiles. The wildlife biologist paused, aware that kids all over the country were watching live.

“It can’t happen,” he ventured, gesturing at the bones of the once-deadly Cretaceous reptile. “There are no mosasaurs in our sewers.”

Undeterred, the girl laid out her evidence before her whole class and the cameraman. “There *a re*. I know ’cause my brother’s friend Barry told me, and he knows ’cause his uncle works for the city.”

“They told the same story when I was a kid, only we didn’t have any dinosaurs back then, so they scared us into believing there were alligators in the sewers.”

“Wow, Dr. Zuber, are you so old that you were born before the dinosaurs?”

Marty sighed, not daring to look at his fiancée, Julianna Carson, who was standing in the back of the group with the teacher, both of them trying their best to repress laughter. He plunged onward. “The last mosasaur died more than sixty-five million years ago, at the end of the Mesozoic Era.”

“But didn’t they come back? Just like special pigeons and woolly elephants?”

“The passenger pigeon and the woolly mammoth are alive today because bioengineers re-generated them after they went extinct.” These days, it seemed like no twenty-first-century family was complete without a diminutive mammoth, bred by Nerd-iverse, trampling the moss in a

repurposed gerbil cage and trumpeting at the latest Amazeballs Media action figures of *T. rexes*, brachiosauruses, and ceratopsians. “It was hugely difficult for scientists to recreate them. But they couldn’t make living mosasaurs even if they wanted to.”

“Not *people* making mosasaurs. The sewer alligators had baby mosasaurs. Barry said so! And the babies grew up to be ginormous.” By now, other kids were nodding.

“No living creature can give birth to a baby of a different species without major help from biologists and lab technicians.”

The little girl chewed her bottom lip, obviously not entirely persuaded.

Marty forged ahead. “To recreate the extinct passenger pigeon, the scientists had to cobble together all its strands of DNA and produce living embryos. Then, they got the embryos to grow inside other pigeon eggs, and to hatch. Bioengineers also regenerated woolly mammoths using DNA they took from frozen mammoths. But nobody can do that with mosasaurs because we don’t have their DNA.”

“Why not?”

“They’ve been dead way too long.” Marty gestured overhead. “All the DNA in this fossil was destroyed millions of years ago. Same goes for DNA from other mosasaurs.” He paused, thinking of the DNA in the teeth, feathers, and eggshells of various extinct dinosaurs and reptiles that he had collected on his prior trips to the Mesozoic—every scrap of it locked in a biohazard containment facility by court order. The same fate would greet any more materials he might bring forward to the present. Would developmental biologists or any other scientists ever have the opportunity to study the samples?

“The next time that you go back a bazillion years, can you bring us some real live dinosaurs—only not big scary ones?” A ripple of interest swept the room at that notion.

“That’s not a good idea,” Marty replied. “You know why?”

The little girl considered then said, “I bet that mosasaur could run a lot faster than me.”

Tempting though it was, Marty refrained from saying she’d only need to move faster than her brother or his friend Barry. Instead, he said, “Mosasaurs only ever lived in the water.” He pointed to the specimen. “See those short limb bones? They had flippers; no legs or feet. And they weren’t like seals and walruses; they couldn’t wriggle onto solid ground—or come into your bathroom.”

She smiled with relief.

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As Marty and Julianna drove away from the museum, her Nerdspex pinged.

“Open,” she commanded. Like other science reporters he knew, Julianna was constitutionally incapable of ignoring a news flash. She bobbed her head slightly as she scrolled through the text on her Nerd-iverse device. “I wish I’d broken this story.”

“Why?”

She read out loud. “Knowledgeable sources confirmed today that Triassic Treks, the brash start-up tour company for the uber-rich, launched Dr. Derek Dill on a time jump, one hundred million years into the Mesozoic past.”

“Dill! What’s he up to now?” Marty’s grip on the steering wheel tightened. Dill, that self-aggrandizing paleontologist, had spent the better part of the past year pursuing Julianna.

“He’s in Cretaceous Antarctica.” She gave her head a little shake. “I thought he swore off ever going back to the Cretaceous when he found out he was allergic to it.”

“Not a problem if his allergy is to angiosperms—flowering plants. Some paleoclimatologists have proposed that Antarctica may have lagged behind other continents. It may not have had nearly the variety or predominance of pollen-producing species until later.”

“Marty, ‘Triassic Treks refused all comment on the speculation that Antarctica could become the destination for their safaris to the land of the dinosaurs.’ Hmmm . . . so that might explain something.”

“Tell me.”

“I contacted Derek a week ago for a comment on the Denver Dinoseum’s grand opening of its new hadrosaur exhibit.”

“You’ve been talking to him?”

“Oh, don’t be upset. He is the foremost authority on duck-billed dinosaurs and I needed a quote from an expert.”

Marty told himself to relax; Julianna had gotten engaged to him, not Dill.

“You do know that he’s seeing someone else.”

“I wouldn’t bet against Dill trying to put the moves on you, again.”

“Anyway, we didn’t talk. Derek refused to take my call and ignored my messages. And you know how he dearly loves to see himself in the news.”

“He might have had instructions not to speak to the news media before the time jump.”

“Marty, this article says that Derek didn’t go alone. He was accompanied by Dr. Sid James, ‘the unorthodox geologist whose nickname is Diamond Jim because of his highly successful secret methodology for locating diamond-bearing kimberlite formations in volcanic rocks’.”

“Unorthodox—that’s putting it kindly.”

“You know him?”

“I only saw him once, presenting a paper.” Marty recalled the short, pot-bellied, balding man at the annual meeting of the American Association for the Advancement of Science.

“Yes . . . and?”

“He deserves his reputation for being a maverick and an iconoclast. He’s so energetic, so in-your-face. He talks a mile a minute and it all leads to how smart he is.”

“But apart from that, he’s a great guy?”

“Well, they say he did great things for the mining companies, to the tune of hundreds of millions of dollars. Maybe more.”

“See what else you can find out about him while I call my source at Triassic Treks.”

Marty switched the car to auto-drive and ran a search on his own Nerdsplex. Meanwhile, Julianna began a conversation with a woman on-screen, sitting in front of the green and orange Triassic Treks logo. The spokeswoman sounded like she was reading from a carefully prepared script as she said, “Triassic Treks is aware of certain news reports regarding a time jump to Cretaceous Antarctica. We are unable at this time, or at any point in the future, to confirm or deny these stories.”

“Off the record. Look, we all know it happened.”

“Julianna, there is no ‘off the record’ as to this.” The spokeswoman tapped her metallic nails to emphasize each word.

“Can’t you just—”

“No. Not today. I’m very sorry.” She cut the connection.

“That was odd.”

“Here’s something else that’s odd.” Marty scrolled through a story he’d pulled up. “Diamond Jim disappeared from public view. Also, he sold his villa in Tuscany and his Florida ocean-front compound. Not ‘houses’ or ‘homes,’ but ‘villa’ and ‘compound.’ He hasn’t published a paper or given a scientific talk, or even an interview, in three years.”

“What’s he up to?”

“Hard to say.”

“I’m going to find out, Marty.”

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When Marty answered his Nerdsplex, Julianna said, “Go to All Science News, right now.” She’d been working longer hours than usual and had been uncommonly close-mouthed about her latest project, which he figured meant that she was onto something big.

He blinked on the channel. There she was, as beautiful as always, all that long hair and the sparkle in her green eyes. “This is Julianna Carson reporting live from Manaus, Brazil, on the banks of the Amazon River. I’m standing outside the corporate headquarters of Rainbow Mining and Minerals, one of the world’s largest mining companies. I’ve just learned that Rainbow has bought Triassic Treks. That’s the controversial and secretive adventure/travel outfit known for its plans to send wealthy tourists to the era of the dinosaurs. Unfortunately, both companies are being less than forthcoming. The two privately owned companies did issue a terse joint

statement saying, ‘We are excited by the productive synergies that can grow out of our merger.’ But what makes this so intriguing is the reason behind the deal. Why is one of the world’s biggest mining companies interested in Antarctica of a hundred million years ago? Is it planning to drill or strip mine the pristine Cretaceous? What exactly does Rainbow Mining and Minerals hope to find?”

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Within twenty-four hours, environmental groups of all sorts had whipped up public outrage at the prospect of a rapacious corporation setting up posh resorts, or worse yet, strip mining pristine Antarctic landscapes of the Cretaceous. “Boycott Rainbow” hashtags sprouted up everywhere. Ace Anders, the CEO of Amazeballs Media jumped on the bandwagon by announcing that as soon as the next temporal window opened his holo-cartoon/action-figure/toy company would send Marty in the company’s just-built time jumper, the *Charles Darwin*, to observe dinosaurs in a nearby location where he could also keep an eye on Rainbow’s Cretaceous operations. It was an easy decision for All Science News to send Julianna along to report first hand. All of which meant that Marty spent fourteen hours a day learning his way around the *Darwin*’s controls, as well as its six-legged land-strider, christened the *Beagle*.

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Marty settled the *Charles Darwin* at the forest’s edge, admiring the massive Cretaceous redwoods, the profusion of ferns of every imaginable shape and size, and the stunning cobalt-blue lake stretching to the horizon, all of it bathed in sunlight streaming through storm clouds, sunlight that would linger until midnight. The cool air pouring in through the air intake smelled clean and fresh, with the temperature hovering at a balmy fifty degrees Fahrenheit. His heart sank; wealthy tourists were more likely to prefer Cretaceous Antarctica to the Cretaceous steam-bath jungle they’d find elsewhere.

“Time to take the land-strider out for a walk?” Already, Julianna was pulling on her ultra-camo body armor and helmet, though she refrained from switching them to the concealment setting.

Marty nodded, opening the weapons locker and selecting a high-powered rifle and several grenade-like canisters of Improved Saur-Away. He’d been assured that the new formula had been thoroughly tested and, unlike the original Saur-Away, had proved to be effective against alligators and sharks. They climbed into the *Beagle*, and Marty began maneuvering it between the giant trees of the forest primeval, following the rocky shoreline toward the *Triassic Trekker*’s landing site.

Ace Anders called. His boyish grin and unruly shock of red hair flashed onto the screen, contrasting with the shredded green sleeves of his jersey emblazoned with Amazeballs Media’s corporate logo. “Whew!” Anders launched into a typical monologue. “This environmentally conscious corporate-good-citizen gig chews up every spare nano-sec. I never realized. Marty, be thankful that I gave you the fun part—plunging into your epic paleo-eco-Antarctic adventure.”

Marty shot back with a slight variation on his favorite Mark Twain quote. “It’s good of you to do the right thing. It will gratify some people and astonish the rest.”

Anders missed the reference. “I see that you’re not using your Nerdspex to steer the *Beagle*.” He frowned.

“Nope. Much easier to grab the joystick—”

“But that’s the point—I need you to show how using your Nerdspex to take the land-strider out for a spin is just as easy, or even easier, than using its joystick. Don’t forget we’re partnering with Nerd-iverse.”

That’s what he got for signing on with a company like Amazeballs Media: continuous monitoring of his work. Marty had enjoyed more freedom to do his job in a modern-day sub-Saharan jungle than he did a hundred million years away. With a repressed sigh, he switched to the optical controls on his Nerdspex, which was attached to his visor.

Anders barely nodded before switching topics. “I have a surprise for you. In the console you’ll find a DNA scanner. It’s an up-to-the-nanosec prototype for recording DNA sequences.”

Marty halted the *Beagle* and dug out a device that looked like an out-sized black plastic electric toothbrush with a few buttons and a Nerd-iverse logo. He switched it on. The miniature screen flashed READY. "It's not subject to the court injunction?"

"Nope. It doesn't retain any samples, just data."

Julianna raised her eyebrows. With Anders, there was always a catch.

The CEO continued, "Just point it, press and hold the silver button, and the scanner does the rest. You want to seize your opportunities to scan for dinosaur DNA. I'm talking dynamic footage of you scanning feathers, scales, eggs. It'll only work if it's six inches or less from—"

"Six inches!"

"It'll be dramatic. Epic. But remember—we need to show that no prehistoric creatures large or small were harmed by our intrepid adventurer in the course of his amazing journey."

Naturally, Anders and the PR folks at Amazeballs Media were all about touting his qualifications for ecological sainthood. But they wouldn't be the ones taking the risks and making split-second decisions. "I can't promise I'll never use the elephant gun," said Marty. "If I have to—"

"I'll support you 110 percent. Only, I need you to call it a 'dangerous beast' gun."

Before Marty could point out that elephants *were* dangerous, Julianna touched his arm and pointed to some gray rock slabs. It took sharp eyes to discern a pair of dappled-gray bipedal dinosaurs, no bigger than chickens, scuttling across the boulders.

"We've got some small ornithopods," Marty told Anders. Several more hopped across the outcropping. Since they were going in that general direction, anyway, he directed the *Beagle* to follow at a distance not likely to spook them, but didn't bother activating the land-strider's camo mode.

"Ornithopods . . . not predators? Are they colorful, at least?" Anders sounded hopeful.

"They come in stunning shades of gray."

"We need eyeball kicks. Reds and oranges are always amazing sellers."

"See for yourself." Marty patched Anders into the feed from the *Beagle*'s dino-cam, which showed their big yellow eyes and a hint of greenish-yellow in their crowns. Several of the dinosaurs had paused to sip some water collected in the hollow of a rock before moving on paralleling the shoreline.

Anders made an impatient gesture. "Those scruffy things? You know what you want to concentrate on? I'll tell you. Ankylosaurs."

"Why ankylosaurs?" Julianna asked.

"They do amazingly well when we focus-group them. The more spikes the better. With a serious club at the tip of the tail. Oh sure, any big, honking, top-of-the-food-chain predator is the best. But ankylosaurs are almost as good. Just find us colorful critters."

Colorful! What damned difference did a dinosaur's real color make? Marty refrained from pointing out that Amazeballs Media had changed the colors of the *Microvenators*' feathers he had observed on the last trip; they'd even unveiled a red-and-green model timed for Christmas.

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The gray chickens of the Mesozoic had scampered off into the thick fern undergrowth by the time Marty and Julianna reached the *Triassic Trekker*, perched on a rock outcropping sloping down a couple of hundred feet to the shoreline. Its day-glow orange hull gleamed in the slanting sunlight. Nearby, a core sampler rose to twice Marty's height. He chuckled. "That time jumper's got all the color Anders could want, plus the lettering of a mutant race car wannabe."

"Yeah, Rainbow isn't big on blending in with the temperate rainforest."

Their boots squelched as they stepped from the *Beagle* onto lichen-covered rocks. They'd scarcely taken a dozen steps toward the *Triassic Trekker* when its hatch swung open. Dr. Sid James barreled out, having considerably less hair than Marty remembered, not to mention more belly straining against his Max-Kevlar vest, and a high-caliber rifle slung over one shoulder. Derek Dill followed, his helmet tucked under one arm where it wouldn't disarrange his photo-perfect hair or mar the dashing pose he struck for Julianna's camera.

Marty began to introduce himself and Julianna to Diamond Jim.

## ANALOG

The geologist cut him off. "I don't care who you are or what you think you're doing here, but guess what. Whatever it is, you don't come onto our territory without my permission. You got that?"

"Your territory?" Marty held up a hand in protest. "This part of Antarctica isn't owned by anyone."

"Rainbow laid claim to everything on this side of the lake clear up to the foothills of that mountain range."

"We don't mean to intrude," Julianna said softly. "We couldn't help but spot your time jumper while we were tracking some ornithopods. I thought perhaps Derek might be interested in them."

Dill's head jerked up. "Where? How many? What size?"

"Half a dozen hopping along the rocks above the shoreline, to the east. They had peculiar beaks. The way they whistled and chirped to each other reminded me a bit of the duckbills that you and Marty observed on your first trip."

"Were they as big as those hadro—"

"Good golly, we've got more company coming." Sid James had extended the telescoping lens of his Nerdspex.

Everyone turned toward the sound of branches cracking and breaking as something made its way steadily toward them. Marty, Julianna, and Dill began to scan with their own Nerdspex while Diamond Jim readied his rifle.

"Here it comes," Marty said.

"What is it?" Julianna asked.

"The love-child of an armadillo and a tank," Marty replied.

An ankylosaur parted the emerald green sword-like leaves of two towering cycads, swinging its head from side to side. No more than chest height, it scarcely gave the *Triassic Trekker* or the human gawkers a second glance as it ambled across the rocks. What first looked like dirty white stripes running the length of the charcoal gray quadruped resolved into rows of knobs, plates, and sturdy spikes protruding from its scaly skin. It snuffled and snorted its way toward a boggy part of the lake.

Diamond Jim lowered his rifle. "Good golly. That critter reminds me of my ex-wife."

"Your ex-wife? But it's built like a low-slung, scale-covered tank," Julianna protested.

"Uh huh. Squat; with knobs and horns ready to poke at you. Like I said, my ex-wife."

Julianna looked away, disgust shaping her lips.

Marty whispered to her, "Twenty bucks says this dinosaur will be some 'amazing' shade of orange, like the *Triassic Trekker*, when Anders gets done 'focus-grouping' it."

"Hey you guys," Dill shouted. He'd circled around the ankylosaur so that he stood at water's edge. "There's something enormous down there. I just saw a bit of scaly skin. It's as big around as a dolphin."

"Back off." Marty strode forward, envisioning having to save Dill from the Mesozoic menace.

Dill froze in place, staring. The water churned.

With one hand, Marty reached to yank Dill back. With the other, he drew forth a small canister of Improved Saur-Away.

A yard-long mouth filled with yellow teeth surged up. Just as Marty popped the top of the canister, Dill leaped away. Marty hurled the canister, which gushed pink mist, straight into the monster's jaws. The mouth snapped shut, then opened again.

There came the distinctive crack of a rifle shot, which echoed back from the rocks.

The beast spun to one side, and submerged beneath the muddy water. Blood welled up. Sid James dropped to one knee, rifle at his shoulder, ready to take another shot.

"What was that thing?" Julianna had gone pale.

"Mosasaur," Dill gasped and then began to wheeze. "I need . . . to go . . . back inside," he managed to get out in three shallow breaths.

Diamond Jim kept his gaze fixed on the water. So did Marty, keenly aware that wild creatures were more unpredictable and dangerous when wounded.

“Let me help you.” Julianna hurried to Dill’s side and held out her arm rather more solicitously than Marty thought necessary.

Leaning on her, Dill trudged back to the time jumper while Marty and Sid James covered their retreat. They saw and heard nothing except the ankylosaur crashing through the undergrowth in retreat. Dill reached the hatch, punched in the combination, and unlatched the door.

“Hey wait,” Diamond Jim jogged after them, his belly bouncing. Marty followed. “No reporters allowed inside.”

“I wouldn’t dream of it.” Julianna gave James a look that Marty could well imagine her giving to a little boy who’d just told her no girls were allowed in the boys’ club house. She turned and strode off toward the *Beagle*.

That left Marty alone with Sid James. He gave the geologist his best crooked grin. “With all the years of experience that you and I both have in the back country, I think we can agree on how quickly amateurs can get themselves into serious trouble. Not to mention endangering those around them.”

“What’s your point, Zuber?”

“Look, I’m not here to get into your business. But seeing as we’re the nearest neighbors in a hundred million years, we oughta look in on each other now and then, just to make sure everything’s copasetic.”

“Well, you might have a point. Not that I can take time for social calls.”

“You don’t have to. We’ll come by every few days. Not any trouble. It’ll give us a chance to observe some dinosaurs here that we haven’t seen where we’re set up. It never hurts to have a couple more sets of eyes in case something truly dangerous tromps into your clearing.”

Sid James grunted. “Just as long as you be sure you keep your eyes on the dinosaurs. And that goes double for your nosy reporter.”

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After a bad night’s sleep in the never ending summer twilight, Marty sat at the *Charles Darwin*’s control screens, coffee in hand, when the time jumper began to spit forth readouts indicating that the *Triassic Trekker* had taken off, heading up into the mountains.

“Damn,” said Marty as he stared at Diamond Jim’s flight path. The *Darwin* could chase after them, but not surreptitiously. On the other hand, the *Beagle* had great concealment capabilities, even masking their heat signatures from infrared sensors, but it couldn’t fly or scale cliffs.

“This is our chance to make a thorough search of their lakeside operation,” Julianna said.

“Now there’s an idea. I’ll turn on the *Beagle*’s full camo mode. Set your body armor to full concealment, in case they come back unexpectedly.”

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Hours later, the camouflaged land-strider still hadn’t reached its destination. Steep scree slopes rose to their right, and the lake lapped the shore to their left. On the narrow passageway between the two stood a fifty-foot-long titanosaur placidly munching the endless supply of needles and pine cones from the limbs of lodgepole pines. While they waited, Marty contacted Ace Anders, but the CEO wasn’t particular interested in “a humdrum brontosaurus retreat.” That was just as well, seeing as Marty wasn’t about to try scanning its DNA.

The titanosaur continued with its seven course lunch. Marty tried lobbing a canister of Improved Saur-Away between the behemoth’s feet. That accomplished nothing except to coat the underbrush with pink foam and mist.

“I guess we’ll have to wait for it to move along,” he said.

“How about honking the horn or flashing the lights? Let’s get it moving.”

“Not a good idea, Juli. You never know what a large beast—”

Julianna reached over and depressed the horn, giving it a long blast. The titanosaur reared up, shrieking and waving its mighty forelimbs. It shook the rocks when it came down. With a flick of its tail whistling inches from the *Beagle*, it retreated toward the hills, the ground reverberating with each footfall.

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By the time they reached the *Triassic Trekker's* former landing site, a gaggle of Mohawk-crested ornithopods had taken over the area where the core sampling equipment had stood, their plump, dingy white bodies perched on improbably long chicken legs, their bird-like feet scattering shards as they hopped from rock to rock. The dinosaurs failed to see the *Beagle*, even with their oversized eyes. But once they heard it coming, they gobbled their way up the slope and over the hill, with their rainbow-hued crests bobbing in disarray.

The herbivorous dinosaurs left behind a few feathers and less savory droppings, which Marty scanned. Though Anders didn't care about them, the developmental biologists and paleontologists would. Julianna raised her visor, wrinkled her nose, and immediately lowered it again. She helped Marty pick through tailings and other debris from the geological sampling until their backs ached from bending over. All to no avail. He had brought a portable geological field kit, and tested numerous samples. Only a couple of them had a combination of minerals indicative of kimberlite, but not the diamondiferous variety.

Marty straightened up. "Diamonds. All this fuss over some lumps of coal that kept at their jobs." Switching topics, he continued, "At least we know why the little gray ornithopods don't go down to the lake to drink."

"That's right," she said. "They drank water pooled in the rocks. They have more sense than Derek."

"More sense than the rest of us, too."

"Well, we won't make that mistake again."

Marty's Nerdspex showed Anders calling. "I've got an epic idea," the Amazeballs executive began. "I want you to think seriously about naming your fancy new ankylosaur after me."

"It may well already have a name—*Antarctopelta*."

"What kind of a name is that?"

"It's what was selected when twenty-first-century paleontologists unearthed ankylosaur fossils not far from here."

"Don't they ever focus-group these names before they give them out willy nilly? Oh, never mind. All you need to do is make a determination that the ankylosaur you discovered is different—a new species. You with me?"

"And therefore deserving of a new name," Marty answered. "I have another idea." He streamed Anders some footage of the crested ornithopods. "What would you say to having this genuinely new species we just observed named after you, instead?"

"Why would I ever lend my name to a bunch of obese bug-eyed turkeys having an exceedingly bad hair day?" Anders looked at Marty as though he'd lost his mind, then launched into a new subject. "How's the kimberlite hunt?"

Marty made a face. "We're not getting anywhere."

"No worries," Anders replied. "There's always Plan B. You see, I happen to know that there is an amazing little spy cam emplaced in the *Triassic Trekker*."

"You did what?" Julianna quivered with outrage.

Anders held up a hand. "Now, now, you don't want to know how this might have happened. Thing is, its feed is set to be activated the next time the two time jumpers are geographically close enough."

Julianna broke in. "If you think I'll be a party to something so—"

"Of course you will." Anders' voice was as smooth as ever. "You wouldn't want word to get around that you've been spying. That's a bit hard on the good old-fashioned journalistic integrity."

\* \* \*

Marty set down his coffee mug next to the screen and rubbed his eyes. "Bad news."

Julianna leaned over his shoulder. "What?"

"The *Triassic Trekker* just came back to its original landing site. I'm looking at the feed from its interior right now."

A fish-eye lens took in everything from the hatch to the far wall. The control room was empty, though a computer screen had been left on. Where most people would have an enticing



background scene, or a sequence of family photos, there was a quotation from evolutionary biologist J.B.S. Haldane:

\* \* \*

THE FOUR STAGES OF ACCEPTANCE:

1. THIS IS WORTHLESS NONSENSE.
2. THIS IS AN INTERESTING, BUT PERVERSE, POINT OF VIEW.
3. THIS IS TRUE, BUT QUITE UNIMPORTANT.
4. I ALWAYS SAID SO.

\* \* \*

Julianna looked away. "Don't even show me."

"You may as well see what Anders will be looking at soon enough. And I have more bad news. Both of our ships have just a few days left in the Mesozoic before the window closes on the return time jumps."

She wrinkled her nose. "Not a lot of time, but I have an idea."

He knew that tone of voice. "Tell me."

She did.

Marty wasn't sure if he should be relieved or alarmed. Judging from the look on her face, probably a little of both.

\* \* \*

Marty directed the *Beagle* to splash through the afternoon drizzle and mist along the lake-shore trail toward the *Triassic Trekker*. He didn't have much faith that James or Dill would fall for Julianna's plan, though lacking a better one, he'd agreed to it. On their way, they overtook and passed the flock of Mohawk-crested ornithopods headed in the same direction, jabbering as they went. So far so good.

Yesterday and the day before, Marty had maneuvered the camouflaged *Beagle* into a position safely out of ear-shot of the orange time jumper, where they'd maintained hours-long stakeouts. Both afternoons, Diamond Jim had gone off for hours in his own land-strider, crammed with core-sampling equipment. Frustratingly, Dill remained behind, venturing outside only a few yards from the *Triassic Trekker* for the brief passage of the Mohawk-crested ornithopods, before disappearing inside. The spy cam had picked up no conversations about kimberlites. In short, Marty had gotten nowhere with documenting that Rainbow was after diamonds. Nor did he have any idea what Diamond Jim's core samples from the other locales might contain.

Making no attempt at concealment this time, Marty brought the *Beagle* splashing into the rocky clearing and halted it between Triassic Treks' land-strider and the shore line. After they'd greeted James and Dill, Marty did his "just coming to check that everything's A-Okay" routine, hoping he'd timed it right.

Sid James crossed his arms in irritation. "Now you've checked up on us, guess what? We've got things to do. So you can take yourselves back to your base camp."

Julianna held up a hand. "First, I wanted to talk to Derek about the crested ornithopods we've located."

"Of course." With a smug smile, Dill moved closer to her.

As if on cue, out of the fog shrouding the lake-shore trail came that distinctive, deep-voiced chattering, growing louder. Not two minutes later, they spotted the flashy feathered headdresses of a dozen or more dinosaurs.

"Just listen to the way they communicate!" Dill sounded entranced.

"Those bills look nasty, like geese," she said.

"Oh don't worry." James had to raise his voice to be heard. "Good golly, they make a lot of noise. Shoo!" He flapped his arms and stomped his boots on soggy moss-covered rock. "Go on! Git!"

As one, the flock turned tail and fled back into the mist.

"Wish you hadn't done that," muttered Dill. "I've been studying their sagittal crests."

Diamond Jim scoffed, “Reminds me of the hair on the head of my daughter’s last boyfriend.” He shuddered. “He was a sight I never want to see again.”

“Those crests might serve as a mechanism to distinguish individual members of the flock.” Dill said.

“Sure,” said Marty. “That would work exceedingly well in a habitat with months of winter darkness, not to mention fog thicker than pea soup.” Julianna gave him a look, and he resolved to go back to the script.

“I didn’t say it was the exclusive means of identification.” Dill shot back. “Didn’t you hear their call-and-response mode of communicating? Species ancestral to the lambeosaurines might have begun like this, before they evolved the hollow crests they used to make sounds.”

Marty bent to pick up a stringy, red-and-yellow feather, though he couldn’t scan it without revealing the prototype device. “Well, we’d better be going if we want to catch the crested ornithopods at their afternoon feeding grounds.”

Julianna added, “I could use more video of them chewing. So bizarrely comical. My viewers will love it.” At Dill’s look of interest, she went on. “They remind me of the hadrosaurs’ jaw motions—the ones you two watched at the Montana sea shore. Derek, you’re welcome to come with us.”

It was easy for Marty to remember to scowl.

“Sure.” Dill looked excited. “Sid, we’ve never observed any other species, ancient or modern, that can chew by moving both its upper and lower teeth in that distinctive way. They’re incredibly efficient.”

“Suit yourself,” James grumbled. “I’ve got work to do.”

\* \* \*

Once Marty had led Dill to the Mohawk-crested ornithopods’ feeding grounds, the paleontologist was in his element, preening through Julianna’s interview for All Science News, while the dinosaurs consumed bark, branches, needles, and pinecones. He practically beamed when she described him as the world’s foremost authority on duckbills and the youngest-ever director of the Denver Dinosaur. In the middle of the interview, they heard the distinctive sound of Diamond Jim’s land-strider heading off.

That was Julianna’s cue to halt the interview with the excuse that she needed to go back to the *Beagle* and get a piece of camera equipment. “I’ve got my Saur-Away just in case.” She fingered the canister clipped to her waist.

Marty tried to record field notes as he pictured Julianna tapping in the code for the *Triassic Trekker’s* hatch, which her NerdspeX had recorded as Dill punched it in when she’d escorted him back to his ship. What was taking her so long? Why hadn’t he insisted that he be the one to take the risk? Yes, it made sense to do it this way, but—His NerdspeX flashed an incoming call. He almost jumped out of his skin. Julianna. Thank goodness!

“I’m just going to see what’s over there.” Marty pointed to a thick clump of undergrowth.

Dill barely grunted, not looking up, having become absorbed in recording observations on an adult dinosaur using its forelimbs to strip needles from a conifer and feed them to a juvenile, who seemed to think it a great game to spit them out. Marty ducked under the cover of umbrella-sized leaves and switched his NerdspeX to Julianna’s channel.

“Can you see me?” she whispered from inside the *Triassic Trekker*. With her ultra-camo body armor set on full concealment, and her helmet resting on the workstation beside her, only her head was visible. Her green eyes alternated between excitement and apprehension.

Marty guided her as she turned toward the area concealing the spy cam. It was miniscule, but she finally located it and tore it from its hiding place, stuffing it in a zippered pocket.

“Damn,” he said.

“What?”

“I’m still getting feed from inside the *Triassic Trekker*, only from a different angle. There must be another spy cam.”

“Where?”

“Over to your left . . . Farther . . . Higher.”

"I see it but I can't reach it."

"Hurry up, Juli. I don't know how much longer you've got."

She picked up her helmet and swung it at the spy cam, knocking it to the floor where it lodged beneath the console. She went after it.

Marty peeked out from behind the umbrella leaf. Dill was no longer focused on dinosaurs. In fact, he was nowhere in sight. "Juli, get out of there. Now!"

Her face filled with panic. Scrambling to her feet, she jammed the second spy cam into the same pocket. Footsteps rang on the metal stairs of the *Triassic Trekker*. Julianna made a grab for her helmet, but she'd set it down out of arm's reach. The hatch swung open and Dill strode in. Marty watched helplessly on his Nerdsplex.

"Julianna," Dill exclaimed. "How did you get in here? What are you doing?"

"I . . . I . . ." she stammered.

Marty grabbed his rifle and started to sprint back to the *Triassic Trekker*.

"Trying to steal my discoveries to give them to Zuber—that two-bit nobody!"

"Marty hardly needs your discoveries," she said sharply.

"No? Then what are you doing here?"

"This isn't what it looks like."

"Don't play dumb. You and Zuber are really something."

"You're a fine one to talk, Derek. You come here to open the unspoiled past to jaded, rich tourists, while Sid James looks for diamonds." Her eyes blazed. "Is it really worth strip mining the Cretaceous to sell diamonds to overly entitled millionaires?"

Dill's face paled, but he recovered quickly. "After the passage of a hundred million years, every conceivable trace of a mining operation will be gone. That is if Sid finds enough diamonds. Would you rather have Rainbow set up operations in the pristine Antarctic environment of the twenty-first century?"

"We'll just see how well your rationalization goes over after my next report on All Science News."

Dill laughed in her face. "Not after your credibility goes down the drain, once the word gets around that you're working for Amazeballs and Nerd-iverse."

"What are you taking about?"

"I happen to know that Nerd-iverse bought a controlling stake in Amazeballs Media. It's pretty obvious what creatures they intend to regenerate next."

"Don't be ridiculous. They would never . . . Well, it wouldn't be feasible . . . not without viable embryos or genetic material or . . ." she trailed off.

Marty took the steps three at a time and burst through the hatchway. "Leave her alone, Dill!"

"Time to play hero, Zuber? Now that you've used her to get good press for Amazeballs and Nerd-iverse?"

"Oh Marty!" The accusation in her voice felt like a stab wound.

"I would never do that, Juli, no. Maybe I'm an idiot, but I swear I had no notion what Anders was up to."

She stood equidistant between the two men. Her eyes darted from one to the other, uncertain.

"I love you Juli. And I thought Anders wanted the genetic sequences for authenticity." Marty fought the lump in his throat. Anders had never cared about authenticity before; he'd never cared for much of anything except what sold. "The bastard manipulated me!" Marty felt his face turning red with anger and embarrassment.

Which was the confirmation Julianna must have been looking for. Giving Dill a venomous look, she whirled around, stalked out of the hatch, and made for the *Beagle*. Marty followed, with Dill trailing behind, yelling.

Before they got there, Diamond Jim's land-strider marched into the clearing.

"Sid's not going to be pleased to hear about this," Dill said.

Sid James parked his land-strider in the *Triassic Trekker's* cargo bay. With his rifle slung over his shoulder, he trotted down to where the *Beagle* stood close to the lake. "Glad you're still here, Zuber." He tried for a smile and almost succeeded. "Guess what? I've got an idea for you."

Dill reached to take the geologist's elbow. "Sid, wait, before you—"

"Later," James waved the paleontologist away and gave him an annoyed look. "I've been thinking about the best name for the ankylosaurus I discovered. I'll want you to back my choice, Zuber." He raised his chin, a self-satisfied smile on his face. "I suspect you may have a pretty good idea what name I've picked out."

"*Antarctopelta*."

"Nonsense. Derek, here, assured me that's a completely different genus and species. So what's your guess?"

"Sid, if I could just—"

"Not now, Derek," James said.

"Rainbowsaurus?" Marty ventured, recalling the creature's splashy gray stripes. And why not, seeing as the Atlascopcosaurus, a small ornithopod, had been named for the Atlas Copco company, manufacturer of mining equipment, not to mention that the Qantassaurus, a big-eyed plant-munching dinosaur, had been named for the Australian airline.

"Good golly, no. How about you, Julianna? Care to guess?"

"You're just bursting to tell us, Sid."

"Diamond-J-Saurus." He lifted his chin.

"Diamond-J-Saurus?" she repeated.

"I was the first man to set eyes on this ankylosaur, so I deserve to have it bear my name."

Despite everything, Marty repressed a snort of laughter. How fitting that the dinosaur—a prickly, pudgy loner—might bear this little man's name.

"Congratulations." Julianna smiled faintly.

Already, Sid James was on to his next topic. "Something has gone amiss with the automated data transfer from my Nerdsplex to the *Triassic Trekker*. I can't upload remotely." He unclipped the device from his visor and scowled at it. "There's a week's worth of data in here that I haven't been able to analyze, yet."

Dill tried again. "Sid, listen to me—"

Suddenly, the lake water geysered up. With no warning, a mosasaur rushed straight for Dill. He froze.

Julianna triggered her Saur-Away canister and threw it at the beast. Pink gas gushed forth. The mosasaur snapped it up in two crunchy bites, leaving nothing but a trail of pink foam. In those precious seconds, Sid James flipped the safety off his rifle as he brought it up to his shoulder.

"Derek—out of the way," James yelled.

The antediluvian monster uttered a ghastly sound between a bellow and a honk. Marty raised his own rifle, but he didn't have a clear shot either. Dill came to life. Wild-eyed and shrieking, he fled—barreling into James and knocking them both down onto the moss-slicked rocks. Diamond Jim's arm took the brunt of the impact. Dill's helmet tumbled down the slope. The mosasaur bit the Max-Kevlar helmet in half. James curled onto his side with a groan. Marty sighted on the roof of the creature's mouth and took his shot. And another.

Spraying blood, the mosasaur kept coming. It lunged. Marty squeezed off a third round. The beast collapsed onto a rocky slab, blood streaming into the lichen. He placed another round into its head. It lay still.

"My arm!" moaned Diamond Jim.

The geologist's lower arm was bent at a gruesome angle. "Don't move," Marty said, "we'll get you patched up, enough to get home at any rate." Hastily, he deployed an inflatable splint while Julianna dug a roll of cloth bandages out of their first-aid kit. Sid James had turned quite pale as Marty immobilized the arm. Julianna persuaded him to sip some water and take a pain pill. With Dill's help, Marty got James to his feet and then back inside the *Triassic Trekker*. Diamond Jim insisted he could handle the flight home. Dill began racing through the pre-flight check list.

When Marty came out, Julianna was crouched down where Diamond Jim had been knocked onto the rocks, searching for something. As he approached her, the sound of the time jumper unfolding its wings came from behind him, followed by the humming whine of its engines fully engaging. Then silence. He turned anyway, knowing it had vanished.

He scrutinized the lake, though it lay placid beneath wisps of rising mist, as though there were no dead beast lying on the shore, mouth agape and legs splayed. “Son of a bitch!”

“What?” Julianna asked, plucking something from a hollow in the rock.

“I was a fool to believe Dill when he said the beast was a mosasaur.”

“It’s not?”

“Take a look at those legs and feet. Mosasaurs have paddle-like flippers.” This creature must have close connections to contemporary crocodilians. Marty reached into his pack and took out the DNA scanner.

Julianna grabbed his arm and shook her head.

“Think what this can tell us about the development and differentiation—”

“Think of the risk, Marty.”

“Anders would never be so stupid as to recreate—”

“Maybe not Anders, but someone, some day, some where,” she said.

“You assume it’s inevitable.”

“Not inevitable, but highly likely if there’s enough money in it. Can’t you picture Nerd-iverse proclaiming how they owe it to their shareholders?”

“They could get the development work done overseas by an outfit not subject to the court injunction.” Marty put away the DNA scanner.

\* \* \*

On the trip back to the *Charles Darwin*, Julianna asked, “Do you think Diamond Jim is right about Cretaceous diamond mines leaving no surviving traces? I mean, who knows what’s under all that modern-day Antarctic ice.”

Marty shook his head. “First of all, why would Rainbow limit operations to a single mine? And have you seen how huge some diamond mines are?”

Before she could respond, Ace Anders called. “Marty, I just watched the latest from your dinocam. I don’t need a single focus group to know how much I love your epic footage.”

Marty let out a breath. “I need you to be straight with me about those DNA sequences I scanned for you. Can you swear that Amazeballs and Nerd-iverse have no plans whatsoever to use my data to reproduce dinosaurs?”

“Let’s get back to the immediate issue,” Anders replied. “My people will have to carefully select and edit those clips so that our customers won’t think your warning shots actually harmed the mosasaur.”

“I put those ‘warning shots’ right between its eyes. Precisely where I aimed. And it wasn’t a mosasaur. So about the DNA—”

“You do realize that all data in the scanner is the exclusive property of Nerd-iverse to use as it sees fit? Even so, I can’t fathom that they have any ongoing plans to recreate, say, a *T. rex*, as lucrative as that would be.”

Well no, naturally not, seeing as the *T. rex* tooth that Marty had retrieved on an earlier time jump currently sat under lock and key and court order in the biohazard contamination facility.

“Any plans to regenerate the small dappled ornithopods with the big yellow eyes?”

“That chattering gaggle of absurd, prehistoric nobodies?” Anders dismissed the idea with a wave of his hand. “They focus-grouped so poorly that we’re not even going to include them in our variety pack for collectors of our complete dinosaur line.”

“Or the ankylosaur?” On their first day, Marty had tried out the DNA scanner on some of its droppings, which the *Beagle* had stepped on.

“How could anyone object to an agreeable plant eater like that?”

“For openers, it’s a twelve-foot-long creature with spikes, claws, and a weaponized tail.”

“Amazing features, all of them. But when it’s miniaturized, what’s the issue?”

“If it becomes an invasive species, you could trigger an ecological catastrophe. You have no idea how fast they might breed, what they might do to modern-day ecosystems. They could eat up the food supply for other species, which in turn, would endanger whatever eats those species. Before you know it, you’ve got a cascading effect.”

“Marty, relax. We’re bringing in the top people in the field. We’ll build in triple redundancies, take no unnecessary risks—”

“The whole thing is an unnecessary risk.”

“When you get back, you sit down with the amazing team I’m assembling. You’ll be pleasantly surprised.”

“Just because it can be done doesn’t mean it should be done. Can you guarantee that you’ll be prepared to deal effectively with absolutely every danger?”

Anders’ frown deepened. “Could Viking chiefs make that promise to their crews before they set out? How about NASA when they sent Neil Armstrong and Buzz Aldrin to the Moon? There are no ironclad certainties in our world or the Mesozoic. But what I can assure all our customers is that the knowledge we will gain has the potential to benefit every living person. As much or more than exploring a new continent or landing on the Moon benefited us. We owe our loyal customers no less.”

Anders kept on talking, but Marty couldn’t hear him. The blond girl’s voice rang in his head. *What should you do if a mosasaur comes up out of the sewer and into your bathroom?* Was something just as bad a single focus group away?

\* \* \*

In the eerie 3:00 A.M. twilight, the DNA data in the scanner weighed on Marty’s mind. He could see his developmental-biologist colleagues salivating over the wealth of information as to how species evolve. Their faces were driven away by the specter of beasts like the one he’d dispatched, and all the children in the museum. He tossed and turned for hours while coming to grips with what he had to do, with the lack of other options, with the absence of a lasting solution, at least for now. At 6:30 A.M., he got up, made some coffee, and started to prepare, before he lost his nerve. Time to tell Julianna.

“What?” she asked, looking so attractive in the early morning light, in a disheveled way.

“There will be no dinosaur regeneration. Not on my watch.”

“Huh?” Her eye brows rose with curiosity.

“Get your body armor on. We’re taking the *Beagle* for a stroll.”

While she dressed and grabbed coffee, he stowed the spare fuel cans in the back of the land-strider. They climbed inside, and Marty took the lakeside trail to the sloping rocks where the *Triassic Trekker* had recently stood. For once, no creatures emerged from the fog. Along the way, he couldn’t keep from sneaking glances at the DNA scanner sitting in the front console like a malevolent dental device. Marty climbed out into the misty morning. Julianna’s eyes grew big as she watched him gather up reasonably dry branches and heap them onto the rock slab.

Then came the expected call from Ace Anders. “Marty, I know you’ve been under a lot of stress, what with that attack. You’ve done an amazing job so far. Now, I just need you to stop and think for a minute.”

Marty shook his head. “Dinosaur regeneration can’t be done now, and maybe it won’t be feasible next year. But when I think of the resources that Nerd-iverse can throw at it—”

“Marty, are you listening to me? You need to stop what you’re doing.”

“We both know it’s only a matter of time.” He nestled the DNA scanner in the center of the heap. Julianna helped him get the fuel containers from the *Beagle*.

“Marty, you know you’ve always had my complete confidence. I’ve supported you 110 percent. It sure would be a shame if we had to part ways. I know how much you’d like to continue your trips to the past. I must say, I can’t see anyone else funding you if word gets around that you can be difficult to work with.”

He doused everything with fuel.

“Marty, stop. Julianna, you don’t have to be a part of this.”

He took out a lighter. She looked at him and gave a small nod. He held it to a reasonably dry branch. With a whoosh, it ignited.

“Marty—”

He switched off the channel, replacing Anders’ words with the crackle of fire. The smell of burning fuel and wood smoke filled his nose and throat as the smoke billowed into the Cretaceous skies.

Julianna came close and slipped her hand into his. Presently, she said, “What ever happened to that old company motto, ‘Don’t do evil?’”

Marty gave her a wry grin. “Nerd-iverse must be trying to revive an even older corporate slogan . . . ‘We bring good things to life.’”

Eventually, the midday rain swept in and doused the fire. Marty fished the melted, twisted mess that had been the DNA scanner from the ashes and strode toward to the lake, being careful not to get too close. He hurled it as far out as he could. Before it could hit the water, a pair of jaws snapped it up.

“Time to go home,” he said.

\* \* \*

A hush fell over the hotel meeting room when a spokesman for Rainbow Mining and Minerals stepped up onto the dais, accompanied by Sid James with his arm still in a cast. Marty shivered as the sweat from the tropical heat met the over-chilled air blasting at the crowd of reporters. He turned to Julianna, pleased that she had wrangled him a seat by her side in the packed press section, but she was busy with her NerdspeX. Her All Science News report showing the attack by the crocodilian in the lake had amassed more views than any other wildlife video ever.

The spokesman greeted everyone, called for the lights to be dimmed, and played a video of the company’s CEO, an impeccably dressed show horse with the open demeanor of someone you instinctively wanted to trust. Marty wasn’t about to let that fool him. The CEO cleared his throat, and after starting off with a self-deprecating joke, launched into platitudes about Rainbow striving “to be transparent about our recent exploration of Antarctica of the distant past. Despite the potential business risks, we intend to be completely forthcoming. We take our global responsibilities very seriously. We’ve all heard the rumors that we’re about to establish diamond mines in prehistoric Antarctica, or open it for tourism. Ladies and gentlemen, I want to personally assure you that nothing . . . nothing . . . could be further from the truth. Our excursion to that distant time and place was undertaken in an effort to gain a better understanding of the geology of this vitally important continent that still contains the world’s largest ice sheet. To do that, we sent the best geologist in the business, Dr. Sid James.”

Marty caught a glimpse of Diamond Jim, illuminated by the red light from the EXIT sign. The balding, little man had puffed out his chest and looked extraordinarily pleased with himself. Yanking himself back to the video, Marty watched the CEO wrap up with the assurance that “Rainbow Mining and Minerals is made up of people—hardworking men and women dedicated to seeing that the world’s needs for the company’s products are met while also assuring the preservation of the world’s biggest pristine environment.”

The lights came up, and the spokesman turned it over to Sid James, who talked opaquely about his many contributions to understanding the geological forces that had shaped the continent. The reporters stirred restlessly. The PR man threw the floor open to questions.

Julianna got hers in first. “Dr. James, we’ve known for years that Antarctica has kimberlite pipes, and that’s where diamonds can be found. Now that you have access to ancient pipes that aren’t buried under ice, why exactly is Rainbow giving up on mining Antarctic diamonds?”

“Because it isn’t worth it. Not just any kimberlite pipe will do. Guess what? Worldwide, 98 percent of all kimberlite-bearing rock doesn’t have commercially viable quantities of diamonds. I did examine a few Cretaceous pipes, and they’re even worse. That’s why.”

Julianna pounced. “In that case, why doesn’t Rainbow promise not to ever mine them even if advances in technology make it feasible some day?”

Diamond Jim jerked back as though he’d been slapped. “Good golly, I’m not going to stand here and make promises as to what the company might do in a hypothetical and unlikely situation years from now.”

Now the pack of reporters, like jackals, scented blood and were on him.

“So Rainbow *will* mine Antarctica if it becomes financially worthwhile to do so?”

“Didn’t all your rich tourists bail out after watching the film of the mosasaur attack?”

“Dr. James, can you assure us that Rainbow’s decision has nothing to do with the boycott against it?”

“How much has the boycott hurt Rainbow’s bottom line?”

“One at a time.” The spokesman glared at the unruly mob.

“Boycott,” Diamond Jim scoffed. “I’ve been in this business long enough to know that—guess what—those boycotts never amount to a hill of beans.”

“Americans are very—”

“Americans are a shrinking percentage of the world diamond market. It won’t be long before it’s dominated by Chinese and South Asian consumers.”

Julianna squeezed Marty’s hand. Rainbow had lost this round.

\* \* \*

As soon as they’d climbed into his rental car, Marty turned to Julianna. “How did you get Diamond Jim to give up?”

“Me?”

“Yes, you.”

“Derek gave it away in the *Triassic Trekker*. He said, ‘if Sid finds enough diamonds.’ That meant Sid hadn’t yet found a suitable kimberlite formation. And then Sid complained of having a week’s worth of data he couldn’t download or analyze. I simply returned his Nerdsplex after we got home.” She winked. “He dropped it when the beast attacked.”

Somebody had fiddled with the kimberlite data in Diamond Jim’s Nerdsplex to show insufficient quantities of diamonds. Not Julianna. She didn’t possess the geological or computer expertise. But she’d had ample time to feed the data into the *Darwin*’s computer, where it had been available to Ander’s wide array of engineers and technicians. All she’d had to do was to use the *Darwin*’s comm system to tell Diamond Jim that she’d found his Nerdsplex.

“Sure hope there’s no hint of tampering,” Marty said.

“No idea what you mean.”

Just then, a call came from Ace Anders. Marty glanced at Julianna. “I may as well get this over with.”

“Marty, Julianna, amazing news. Glad I got hold of you.” Anders’ easy grin belied the past history between them. “Let me be honest. I’m willing to overlook the stresses and strains of your incredible journey that resulted in the unfortunate accidental loss of the scanner and its data.”

Marty glanced at Julianna, who looked as suspicious as he was. “What do you want?”

“I know you’ll meet me half way by naming that new ankylosaur . . . *Nerdisaurus andersi*.”

“I don’t suppose I could interest you in an agitated titanosaur, instead?”

Anders laughed and waved the suggestion away. “That’s a good one. Now on another note, the results of your focus group are in.”

“Focus group?”

“Don’t play coy. You know we’ve been testing you as our latest holo-cartoon/action figure.”

“You were?”

“Well, I’m happy to break the news—your potential is amazing, through-the-roof amazing. Here’s what you’ll need to do. Marty—time for a few hair plugs to take care of that incipient receding hairline. And Julianna, you can get in on the deal, too. We’d love to hire you. Naturally, we’ll need you to drop a few pounds. You know what they say, less is more.”

Through clenched teeth, Julianna said, “We’ve got a bad connection, we’re about to lose—” She stabbed the off icon.

Marty chuckled. “You didn’t give him a chance to say he supports me 110 percent.” He threw the car into auto-drive while Julianna flipped her Nerdsplex to an incoming message from the little blond girl they’d met at the museum.

The child’s smiling face filled the screen. “My Dad said I don’t need to worry about old monsters coming into the bathroom because you saved us. Thank you, Doctor Zuber. Oh, and you know what else?” She looked to the side and then back to the camera and whispered, “I’m going to be a biologist when I get bigger.”

Her words warmed his heart, as did Julianna’s fingers squeezing his hand, and that was enough for now.