

Return to Dinosaur Planet

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Chapter 1

Lil-rel climbed slowly, carefully along the edge of a sheer, stone cliff. He paused briefly, to take a quick look at the jungle floor hundreds of meters below him, and he knew if he fell he would be dead in an instant. He was not concerned, however, for he had climbed this cliff hundreds of times in the past, and even though it was quite a workout, it was nothing he couldn't handle. Lil-rel was an Onduran, a primitive, feline race from Antos, the fourth planet in the Morna system, and, like most Ondurans, he was a skilled climber. His hands and feet ended in claws that dug into the cliff's crevices and cracks with ease.

The only difficult part of the climb, as far as Lil-rel was concerned, was not being seen until he made it to his destination, which was a large pterodactyl nest about twenty meters above him. Like most pterodactyl nests, this one was huge, at least five meters in diameter, roughly circular in shape, made of straw, leaves, tree limbs, and mud, and it was built on the top of a large tree that grew from the side of the cliff. The nest's inhabitants, a pair of pterodactyls Lil-rel affectionately referred to as 'Grumpy' and 'Mrs. Grumpy,' rarely left the nest unattended for extended periods of time, especially during the past few months, ever since Lil-rel had discovered it and started raiding it regularly.

Lil-rel was an egg thief, and he was proud of it. Despite only being seven years old, he was one of the best egg hunters in his village, and that was a big deal since dinosaur eggs (especially pterodactyl eggs) were considered an Onduran delicacy. Over the past couple of years, Lil-rel had explored the jungle all around his village, and he had located most of the prime nests in the area, and he raided them as often as he could. He couldn't wait to see the look on his parents' faces when he returned later that evening with another bunch. His mother would waste no time preparing them for the evening feast, and his father would pat him on the back and praise him like always.

He hesitated for a second as he neared the nest, right at the spot on the cliff the tree grew from. From here, things got a little tricky, since he had to actually leave the cliff and climb out onto the tree to get to the nest itself. He had to be extremely careful once he was on the tree, because once he headed out onto it, he was completely exposed, and if Grumpy and Mrs. Grumpy returned while he was out there, it would be bad news for him. It had happened once before, and he had barely escaped with his life, avoiding Grumpy's massive, razor-sharp claws by mere centimeters.

He took a quick peek across the tree, into the nest, and his heart raced. Much to his delight, Grumpy and Mrs. Grumpy were nowhere to be seen, and the nest was filled with eggs. Each was oblong in shape, a mottled, brown color, and about twelve centimeters from top to bottom. There were at least eight, maybe nine, but it was hard to tell for sure since some of them were partially covered in the mud and straw at the bottom of the nest. Ever so carefully, but not wanting to waste any time, for fear Grumpy and Mrs. Grumpy would return, Lil-rel inched himself out onto the tree, feeling it bend slightly under his weight. The sensation was a little disturbing, since he was so high in the air, but it was nothing he hadn't felt before on earlier trips, and he wasn't daunted even for a second. Before he knew it, he had reached the edge of the nest, and he climbed inside and started to collect his prize, placing the eggs, ever so carefully, in the

leather pouch he wore at his side. He stopped momentarily, however, when he heard a loud squish, and he looked down to see his left foot right in the middle of a large pile of thick, white pterodactyl dung.

Gross, he thought. Pterodactyls are so disgusting.

He wiped his foot off, the best he could, then went back to work. His heart raced when he discovered there were even more eggs than he had first realized. Several were completely buried in the straw, and he hadn't been able to see them until he dug into the bottom of the nest and uncovered them. There was no doubt about it. This was going to be one of his biggest hauls ever — at least twelve eggs total, maybe more. He rounded up the last of them, climbed back out of the nest, and started to make his way across the tree toward the cliff when he froze in his tracks.

In the distance, he heard a shrill squawk.

He knew the sound instantly. It was Grumpy, and he was returning. He was about a hundred meters away, maybe more, but with his keen vision, he had already spotted Lil-rel and was heading right for the Onduran boy. Lil-rel scrambled toward the cliff, as fast as he could, but he was only about three quarters of the way to it when Grumpy reached him. The pterodactyl was a frightening sight, to say the least. It was dark gray, with a matching pair of bat-like wings that were approximately ten meters from tip to tip. A long, slender crest grew from the back of the creature's skull. But the things on the pterodactyl that worried Lil-rel the most weren't its wings or its crest. His biggest concern was the beast's razor-sharp claws and its long, pointed beak. It soared by him and tried to knock him from the branch with its claws. He ducked at the last second and dodged the beast's blow by less than a centimeter. It turned and raced back at him, attacking once again, this time just as he made his way off of the tree and back onto the stone cliff. The pterodactyl lunged at him with its massive beak. Lil-rel dodged to the left, then to the right, each time managing to narrowly avoid the blow. He saved himself, at least momentarily, by reaching into his pouch and pulling out his pa-va, a crude, stone knife used by Ondurans for a multitude of tasks, and sliced Grumpy across the beak. The pterodactyl reared back momentarily, clearly in shock and pain, giving Lil-rel just enough time to slip free and scurry down the cliff's face. He was descending at a much quicker rate than he preferred, and it was extremely dangerous (to say the least), but he had no choice. Approximately twenty meters below him was a narrow ridge, with a small cave opening next to it, and he knew he could use it for shelter if he could get to it in time.

Somehow, miraculously, he actually did. Grumpy's massive claws reached out to grab him, but he darted along the ridge and into the cave just in the nick of time. Unfortunately, during the melee, Grumpy had sliced a hole in the side of his pouch, and several of his eggs fell free and started to roll back toward the cave's entrance. Lil-rel was too slow to catch the first one, and he watched as it fell helplessly toward the jungle floor far below.

What a terrible waste, he thought.

Luckily, however, he was able to dive onto the ground and save the other eggs before they met a similar, unfortunate fate.

When he looked back up, and gazed out of the cave's entrance across the valley below him, his jaw fell open. He had expected to see Grumpy out there, flying away, his head down in defeat at having lost his precious eggs, but he didn't expect to see the other thing that was out there. Far in the distance, he saw the ancient ruins his people referred to as the Manani. In the middle of the Manani was the largest of several structures, a massive, stone pyramid covered with moss and vines. Surrounding the pyramid was a group of ships and other machinery,

massive bulldozers and other earth-moving and excavation equipment. Operating the equipment were large numbers of alien creatures, and they were unlike any creatures Lil-rel had ever seen. Like him, they were humanoid in size and shape, with two arms and two legs, but these creatures were much stockier, and they had many porcine features, including blunt, pig-like snouts and long tusks that protruded from the sides of their mouths. They were using their ships and machinery to clear the area around the central pyramid, and others stood near its main entrance, clearly searching for a way inside. One of them wore an overcoat, and he appeared to be a scientist or an archaeologist of some type. The others seemed to be looking at him for advice and guidance.

Lil-red didn't know what they were doing, but he knew one thing for certain. He needed to get back to his village as soon as possible, and he needed to tell his people about this discovery. His grandfather, the leader of the tribe, would surely want to know what was happening.