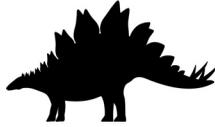


# Chapter 6



## Stegosaurus Snot

“It’s an earthquake!” Khan hollered. He grabbed my arm. “Get the HOMEWARD REMOTE. We gotta get out of here.”

“No,” Essie whispered. “It’s something else.”

“Something’s coming this way,” I said.

Something big. And more than one from the sound of it.

“Stay down.” We crouched on the side of the trail.

A bellow sounded. Another, lower-pitched bellow followed.

Then another and another, until the sounds came all at once.

It was a herd of *something*, that’s for sure. I wracked my brain trying to think of a predatory herd animal. No. Herd animals were generally herbivores.

Huffs, grunts, and *thump, thump, thump* sounds drew closer. *Crack!* Tree trunks snapped. Bushes rustled, like brush being cleared from their path. It sounded like a herd of elephants.

Another loud bellow split the air, followed by higher-pitched bellows.

Khan trembled next to me. "This is it. We're done for."

"Calm down. It's probably nothing dangerous."

Suddenly, creatures emerged farther down the trail ahead of us. Creatures that looked like—

I gasped. No, it couldn't be.

But it was.

Mammoth dinosaurs with ducklike bills crashed through the foliage. As they ambled across the path, I wondered if maybe we were still asleep. This had to be a dream.

I pinched my arm. *Ouch*. Not a dream.

More duckbilled dinosaurs of different sizes trailed behind the leader. Some looked thirty feet long and greenish-blue in color. The smallest ones, not much bigger than Rumble when he was a puppy, trotted across the path with careless excitement. They cried out in pitiful shrieks and off-key squeals.

We watched in stunned amazement.

The dinosaurs grunted and bellowed, downing the trees and plants in their path. Eventually—*thankfully*—the dinosaurs disappeared into the thicket on the other side of the trail.

When the last creature's long tail finally vanished, the trembling ground subsided. The noises grew distant, eventually fading into silence.



“That was—” whispered Khan.

“Maiasauras,” I said.

“Your *what*?” Essie asked.

“Not *my* a sauras. Maiasauras,” I corrected.

“That makes no sense,” she insisted. “Why do you think they belong to you? Did you invent dinosaurs? Are you God?”

“No *my a*...never mind. It’s a type of dinosaur—a duckbilled herbivore.” *Wait a minute*. That was impossible. “Didn’t we see *human* footprints? If there are dinosaurs, there can’t be people here. Right?”

“Actually,” said Khan in his professor voice, “there is a great deal of evidence that people and dinosaurs lived at the same time. Many ancient historians mention them.”

I squinted at him. “My history books don’t mention that.”

Esther laughed. “History books?” She stood and dusted off her tunic. “You don’t even *own* a history book.”

“I do so. I mean, I lost it. But I do own one.” I shrugged. “Somewhere.” My teacherBot constantly scolded me for only focusing on the subjects I liked.

Khan continued. “Plenty of people described dinosaurs before modern man even knew they existed. Herodotus, Josephus, Aristotle, a ton of people.”

“Never heard of ‘em,” I said.

Essie smiled mischievously. “And Marco Polo.”

Marco Polo? “Not a chance.”

“Yep,” Khan said. “Marco Polo described a creature with an enormous mouth that could swallow a man whole. It had tiny front legs near its head with three claws on each leg.”

“That sounds like a T-Rex type of theropod,” I said. “Are you sure. I don’t remember that.”

Essie’s chin tilted upward. “That’s because it would have required you to actually read a history book.”

I pointed at her dress. “Is that a cockroach on you?”

Her scream frightened a flock of birds into the air.

I laughed. Khan smiled.

Essie picked up a clump of dirt and threw it at me. “You are the worst brother!”

Khan laughed.

“Hey! You’re supposed to be on my side!”

Khan shrugged. “Anyway. Back to Marco Polo. I read about that dinosaur encounter in one of his travel journals.”

“But dinosaur fossils weren’t discovered until the 1800s. Marco Polo lived three hundred years before that.”

“That’s the point,” Professor Khan said. “How could he describe something that people didn’t know existed at that time in history? He couldn’t know what a T-Rex looked like unless he actually saw one.”

How did I not know about this? Hmm. I would have to

explore this idea further. I might have to crack open a history book when we got home.

“Dinosaurs are also mentioned in the Bible,” Esther said.

“And ancient art,” Professor Khan went on. “Ancient clay statues of dinosaurs were found in Mexico. The walls of Babylon show one. There are loads of dinosaurs in ancient artwork.”

Speaking of loads of dinosaurs, the assortment of animal prints on the path ahead of us told me we needed to keep a lookout. And we needed to focus on finding Dad and Rumble. “Let’s keep going.”

It was a little scary, but I scanned the jungle on both sides. I didn’t want to be surprised by another dinosaur.

After walking along the path for another hour, we broke out of the jungle into a savannah. Tall golden grass waved in the breeze as far as the eye could see. Beyond the grass rose a rock formation with openings that looked like caves. Above the caves stood a mountain. A very large mountain.

“Maybe Dad’s in one of those caves,” I said.

We crept into the savannah, crouching low to keep our heads below the tall grass.

*Snort!* I jumped at the loud noise. So did Khan and Essie.

“Wh-hat’s that?” Esther’s voice shook.

“Shh!” I wasn’t shaking, but my heart raced. All this talk of

T-Rexes had my imagination running wild. I didn't want to be dino dinner.

Slowly, Khan and I lifted our heads above the grass. Khan sucked in a loud breath.

My eyes nearly popped out of my head. *"Ohhh."*

"What is it?" Essie demanded. "I can't see anything."

I put down my backpack, grabbed Essie around her middle, and held her up so she could see above the grass. Her dark eyes turned round as an owl's. She didn't say a word. But she was still shaking.

"It's a Stegosaurus," Khan whispered in awe. "It's chewing its cud just like a cow."

A real, live Stegosaurus. A massive one. Bigger than I ever imagined.

Esther found her voice. "Let's get out of here before it sees us." She wriggled out of my arms and plopped to the ground.

"It's just a Stegosaurus." I parted the grass and made my way closer. Who would have imagined one would be so colorful? "Come on. It won't hurt us."

"You're sure?" Esther clasped my hand and squeezed it. Then she grabbed Khan's hand.

"It has a toothless beak," I explained in a tone that I hoped reassured my sister. "Plus, its back teeth are tiny and harmless. Inside that big head is a brain the size of a peanut." I tugged

on her hand. "Come on."

"There's a Stegosaurus carving on an ancient Cambodian temple," Khan said as we approached. "Maybe we're in Cambodia."

*Hmm.* I would have to investigate all of this when I got home. Maybe studying history could be kind of fun.

The Stegosaurus did not seem to care that we were creeping closer. It looked at us and kept on chewing.

When I was close enough to touch it, I reached out my hand. It kept right on chewing, so I stroked its scaly belly. "Wow. I'm petting a real live dinosaur."

"Look!" Essie clapped her hands. "He's wagging his tail." She didn't look worried anymore. The Stegosaurus's spiked tail swayed back and forth.

"That tail must weigh a ton," I said. It was time to display more of my dino-knowledge. "It's the Stego's primary means of protecting itself from predators." I smirked. "Although its size probably helps as well."

"The plates on its back are taller than me." Esther stood smack in front of the dinosaur. She craned her neck to see that far up.

Khan and I joined Esther. We had to back up to see those bony plates running down its back. Esther edged to its head, which was closer to her height.

“Essie . . .” I warned.

The Stegosaurus’s eyes followed a large fly that buzzed around its head. The fly landed on its snout. The insect crawled around for a bit and then walked right inside a large nostril.

Suddenly . . . *ah-choo!* The Stegosaurus sneezed, ejecting the fly. Along with the fly, a large quantity of green snot shot from its nostrils.

It sprayed into the air and right onto Esther, covering her from head to toe.

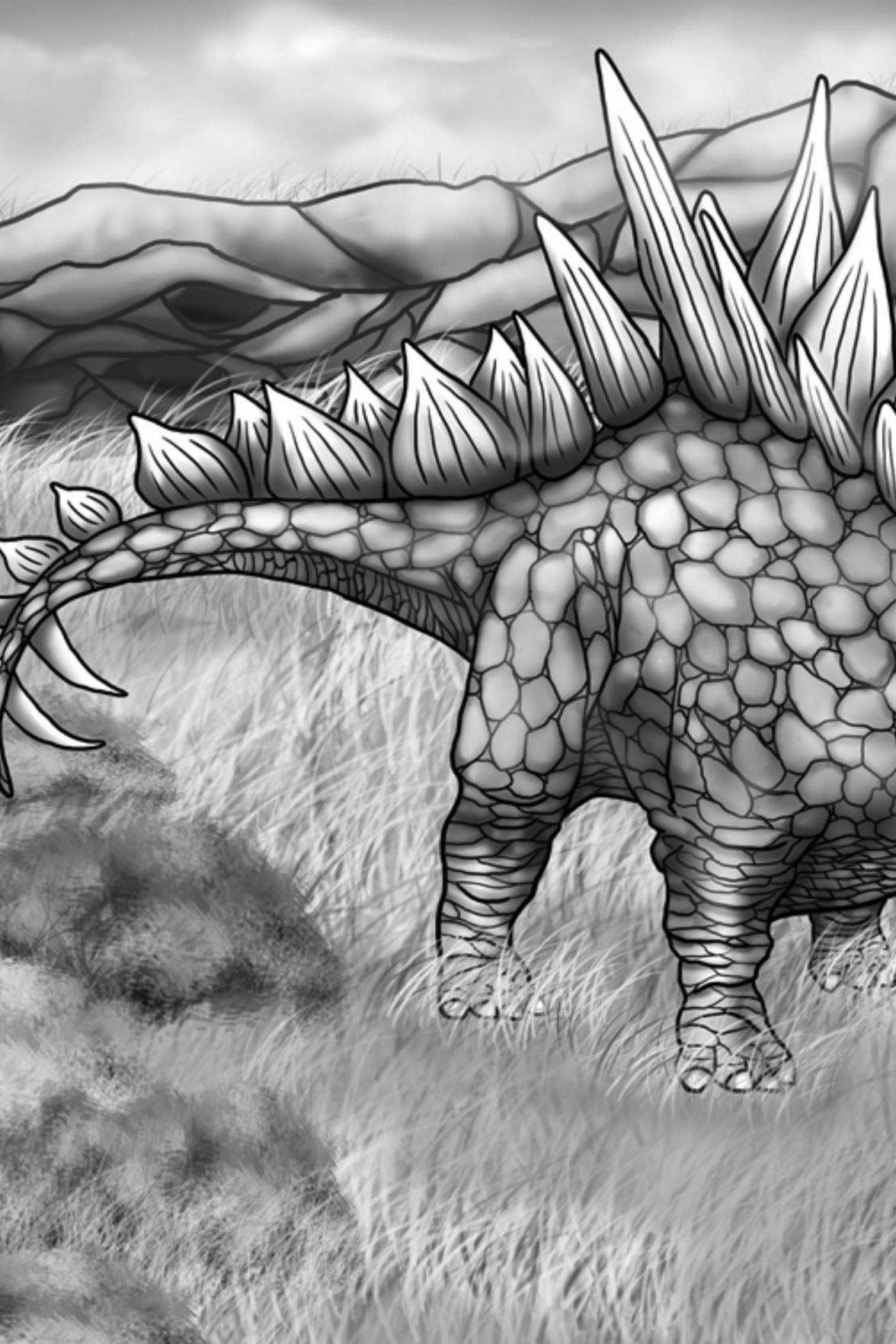
“Aaaaaaaah!” Essie screeched, trying to wipe the Stegosaurus sludge off her face. But it didn’t budge. “Get it off me!” she shrieked. “Get it off!”

Khan and I tried not to laugh. We really did. I held my hand over my mouth. Khan stood still. I tried not to look at my twin.

No use. We caught each other’s looks and burst out laughing. I doubled over, snorting and howling so much that I almost lost my breath. Khan fell onto his back and cackled.

“Just wait ‘til we get home,” Essie screamed. “You’ll both be grounded for life!” She shook with anger and disgust. Then she burst into tears.

Suddenly, Essie’s dilemma wasn’t very funny. I took a deep breath. “Sorry, Essie. Let me help you.” I grabbed a handful of dried grass and attempted to help Esther get clean. “*Eww*, this stinks.”





"Eww is right." Khan pitched in to help de-snot Esther. "Who knew Stegosaurus snot smelled so bad?"

After we cleaned as much snot off as we could, we set out again.

Esther followed Khan and me, mumbling under her breath. "This is the next-worst day of my entire life. Dinosaurs. Who needs 'em? They're nasty. They're disgusting. They're loud. They're gross. They destroy nature. They're useless creatures. Gross and useless. Why did God create such a vile animal?"

"Shh." I put a finger to my mouth. "We're getting near the caves. We need to be quiet in case there are people there."

Essie tilted her head and gave me a confused look. "Don't we *want* people to be there?"

"Yes, but we don't know if they're . . . nice."

"Why wouldn't they be nice?" Esther wanted to know.

"Good point," Khan said. "There were times in early history when humankind wasn't so friendly."

"That's very true. Very true," Essie agreed.

"Like when?" For the first time in my life I wished I knew as much history as my siblings.

Esther shrugged. "Before Noah's flood, all the people were wicked. They were violent and evil."

I paused. Noah? *Hmm*. "I'm not sure Noah was a real person.

That story seems kind of far-fetched, if you ask me.”

“You can’t pick and choose which stories in the Bible you believe. You either believe it’s God’s Word or you don’t.”

Khan put on his history-professor face. “Marco, are you aware that hundreds of cultures around the world have similar flood stories to the story of Noah in the Bible? And these cultures are separated by oceans and have completely different languages.”

“Yep.” Esther nodded importantly. “Remember the Epic of Gilgamesh? It’s almost exactly like the biblical flood story. And the Chinese character for the word ‘boat’ is a vessel with a person and the number eight. There were eight people in Noah’s ark. Coincidence? I think not.”

“What cultures have flood stories?” I asked.

“Too many to list. China,” Khan started counting off on his fingers. He could do that and walk at the same time. “Africa, Egypt, most all the North American Indians, Europe, and lots of small islands in Southeast Asia. There are more than 200 different people groups with a flood story.”

Khan has more history knowledge in his little finger than I have in my whole brain.

“Really? Wow.” I considered that for a moment. “That’s pretty solid proof. There’s also the scientific evidence of fossils of sea creatures on mountaintops all over the world.”

“There you have it,” Khan said. “We could be in a period before the flood when people were downright monstrous.”

My steps slowed. I wasn’t in any hurry to get to the caves. Maybe we were in the time of Adam and Eve before they ate the fruit. I really hoped so.

Esther glanced at the caves warily. “Oh, great.” She slumped. “First the monkeys. Then a snotty Stegosaurus. And now? Cannibals. That’ll really put a cherry on top of this wonderful trip.”

“I doubt they are cannibals.”

Essie shook her head. “Ancient writers say differently.”

“Maybe the people aren’t that wicked just quite yet,” I suggested.

This got me thinking about Dad and Rumble. What if they were captured by bad people?

I thought about my only weapon—my pocket knife. We would need a better way to protect ourselves. “I wish I brought my bow and arrows. Or my slingshot.”

My Swiss Army Knife didn’t stand a chance against truly evil men. “What do you think? Maybe we should go back to the jungle, find a few sticks, and carve them into spears.”

Khan and Essie didn’t get a chance to answer. A loud, terrifying noise echoed from inside the largest cave.

I froze. Khan froze. Esther froze. We stood stock still as a

series of shrieks pummeled us like violent, invisible energy waves. The noise sounded like a plane skidding across a runway, screeching and scraping in an ear-splitting shriek.

Without taking my eyes from the cave opening, I whispered, “Whatever that is, it doesn’t sound like it’s here to make friends.”