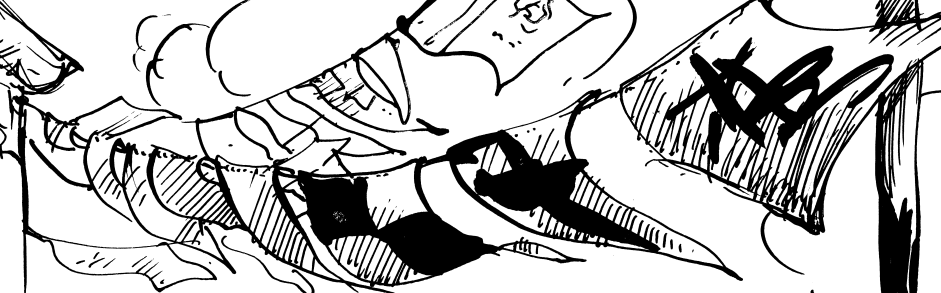


‘Check this out. It looks like a giant stone woodlouse!’ Jamie Morgan told his best friend Tom Clay, pointing to a hand-sized fossil on the display table. The weird fossil creature had a rounded head with big bug eyes and a body divided lengthwise into three ridges.

‘That’d give your grandad a scare if he found it in the woodpile.’ Tom laughed.

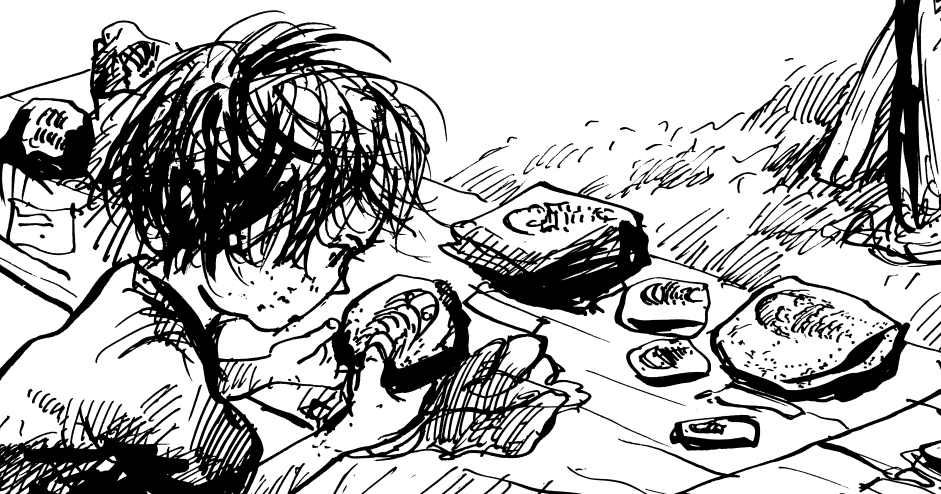
‘It didn’t live on land, you wombat,’ Jamie said with a grin. ‘It’s a trilobite. They were sea creatures, like ammonites.’





It was Fossil Finders' Day at Jamie's dad's dinosaur museum in Dinosaur Cove. Jamie and Tom had spent all morning putting out the trestle tables and hanging up the strings of brightly coloured flags that were now fluttering in the sunshine. Fossil hunters from all over had come to show their finds and take part in the Best Fossil competition.

'This one's curled up into a ball.' Tom was looking at a deck-of-cards-sized fossil





trilobite. 'Cool! I reckon it's better than the woodlouse one.'

Jamie picked up a tiny trilobite the size of his finger nail with eyes that looked like miniature honeycombs. 'Naw, this one should win the blue rosette!' he exclaimed.

'Even though it's tiny, I can make out all the ridges along its back.'



A woman with a ponytail walked over to them. 'That's my trilobite,' she said proudly. She raised her voice. 'It's a much finer, more detailed, specimen than the other two, isn't it?' she said, glancing mischievously at two men standing beside the table.

'That's what *you* think,' the first man spluttered, peering over the top of his glasses and picking up his woodlouse-like fossil. 'I think *my* fossil is the best.'

'No, no, no, mine is vastly superior,' the second man chuckled into his beard. 'But it's for the judge to decide.'

'The judge is my dad,' Jamie told them. 'Here he comes now. Hey, Dad,' he called, 'why don't we have any of these cool trilobites in our museum?'

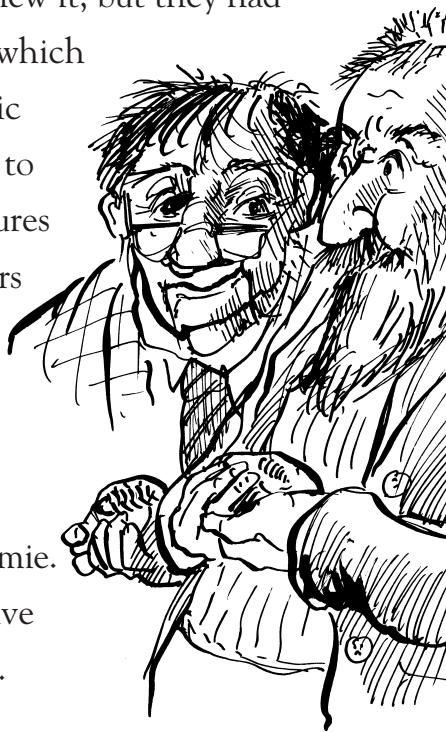
'Because our museum's a dinosaur museum,' Mr Morgan



explained, ‘and there weren’t any trilobites around by the time of the dinos. They’d all died out in a mass extinction at the end of the Permian Era.’ Mr Morgan paused, with a dreamy look on his face. ‘Now, that was a fascinating time period . . .’

Jamie glanced at Tom and raised his eyebrows. No one else knew it, but they had discovered a secret cave which led back to the prehistoric world. They’d come face to face with awesome creatures in the age of the dinosaurs and the Ice Age. But they’d never gone back to a time before dinos!

‘Cool!’ Tom said. He looked meaningfully at Jamie. ‘So did any *big* creatures live in the Permian?’ he asked.



‘Loads!’ Jamie’s dad said. ‘They were the ancestors of mammals and dinosaurs. Dimetrodon, for example . . .’

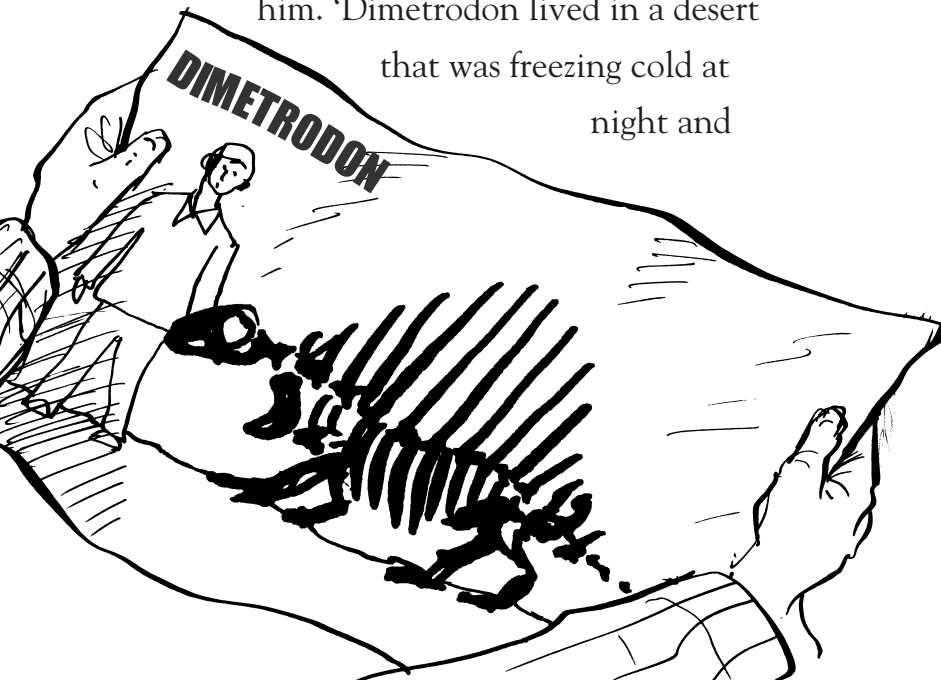
‘I have a poster of dimetrodon.’ The woman with the ponytail reached beneath the table and unrolled a picture of the fossil skeleton of a humongous clawed lizard with sharp teeth and a tall fan of spines along its back.

‘Awesome!’ Tom exclaimed.

‘What were the spines for?’ asked Jamie.

‘They supported a sail,’ the woman told him. ‘Dimetrodon lived in a desert

that was freezing cold at night and



burning hot in the day, so the sail helped it heat up and cool down . . . ’

‘No, no, no,’ the man with the beard interrupted her. ‘The sail was like a peacock’s tail. The creature used it to impress a mate.’

‘You’re both wrong,’ said the man in the glasses. ‘The sail made it look bigger. Dimetrodon used it to scare off predators.’

The woman laughed. ‘Experts hardly ever agree,’ she said. ‘Who do you think is right?’ she asked the boys.

‘Hard to say,’ Tom said slowly, fingering the binoculars around his neck. ‘We’ll have to look into it, won’t we, Jamie?’



'Right!' Jamie nodded. He knew what Tom was thinking. To find a real live dimetrodon, they'd need to take a Permian fossil with them to bring them out in the right time period.

'Please may we borrow a trilobite fossil?' he asked politely.

'To help us with our research,' Tom chipped in.



'Will this do?' The woman rummaged under the table and gave Jamie a tissue-wrapped stone that fitted into the palm of his hand.

Jamie unwrapped the trilobite. Two goggle stone eyes looked up at him.

'Perfect!' he said, putting it carefully into his pocket. 'Thanks. We'll bring it back soon.'

‘Time I got on with the judging.’ Jamie’s dad picked up his clipboard. ‘Have fun researching the Permian!’ he told the boys.

Jamie and Tom dashed into the lighthouse, grabbed Jamie’s backpack and rushed to the smugglers’ cave on the headland above Dinosaur Cove. Jamie’s heart beat faster





as they squeezed through
the gap into the secret cave
and fitted their feet into the line of fossil
dinosaur footprints that led across the stone
floor of the cave. They counted the steps,

‘One,

two,

three,

four... five!



There was a blinding flash of light.
Then everything went dark.

‘Are we still in the cave?’ Jamie
wondered aloud. He couldn’t see a
thing. He felt the trilobite in
his pocket.

‘Why didn’t it
work?’ Tom
whispered.



