

# Time Meddlers on the Nile

## Chapter 1

*Cretaceous Park*



Silently Sarah parted the leaves of the gigantic feathery fern and peered out at the riverbank. Directly in front of her, a duckbill dinosaur dipped its spade-shaped muzzle into the water for a drink. Sarah glanced back at Matt, who was being far too noisy, rustling leaves and crackling dead branches beneath his feet.

“Matt,” Sarah squeaked. She pushed him down as the duckbill raised its head and examined them suspiciously.

“It’s okay, Sarah. It’s only a plant-eater.”

“A plant-eater that’s big enough to crush you with its feet, or one swipe of its tail. This is crazy. What are we doing?”

“My dad is here, just past that clump of trees. I’m sure of it.” Matt pointed to a spot in the forest congested with cypress and palm trees.

“Right,” said Sarah. “It looks like the Everglades, but it sure isn’t. Why couldn’t we rescue your father in a safer time period?”

She couldn’t believe he had roped her into another mad adventure, not in a war this time, but in the Alberta badlands sixty million years in the past. She remembered visiting Dinosaur National Park several years ago with her parents—the crumpled and scarred desert-like hills where one of the world’s most renowned collections of dinosaur fossils had been unearthed. At the time, her visit had been the greatest thrill of her life. Now, here she was, in a tropical jungle of vivid greens and yellows and reds, a landscape so far removed from the badlands that it seemed like she’d stepped from the moon into the Amazon rainforest. The thrill was lost to her. All she could feel was the clench of her teeth and the sickness in her belly.

The duckbill eyed them one more time, and then spun around. Sarah dove on Matt as its tail slashed the air where his head had just been. They crashed to the ground, nearly disappearing beneath the plush carpet of leaves.

Matt turned his head and spat out some rotting plant material, coughing and hacking loudly enough to wake a field full of dinosaurs. “Wha’you do that for?”

“What do you think I did that for? The dinosaur was about to take your head off with its tail.”

“Oh,” said Matt, in a softer voice. “Thanks.”

“You’re welcome. Now can we get out of here?”

Matt didn’t answer. He swivelled his head to the side as a crackling, zapping sound penetrated the undergrowth. “There he is,” he said, pointing towards a flattened clump of ferns where streaks of flesh and linen had suddenly appeared. Matt’s father emerged, wrapped in a Roman toga and looking every bit as imposing as Julius Caesar. Another figure, with mustard-blond hair and a jagged, pale face, similarly draped in linen, appeared at the same instant. “And there’s Nadine,” he snarled.

A shiver rippled through Sarah at the sight of the woman.

“And there’s an Albertosaurus,” Sarah hissed under her breath, pointing at the enormous lumbering dinosaur trampling the small trees and creating deep impressions in the mud farther along the riverbank.

“Hey, T-Rex’s cousin.”

“I hope your father doesn’t get eaten.”

“Wouldn’t mind if Nadine did, though,” said Matt. “Let’s grab Dad, and then wait for the computer to jack us out of here.”

Matt leaped to his feet, prepared to dash through the tangle of vegetation and grab hold of his father.

Suddenly Nadine screamed. “What is that?” Her eyes bugged out as the Albertosaurus let loose an earsplitting roar and stomped closer.

Nadine charged into the mesh of growth as Matt made an equally fervent attempt to race towards his father. They met in the middle, an explosion of creamy white and bleached blue where toga met jeans and T-shirt. Both of them fell backwards. Nadine landed in the large pile of dino excrement deposited by the duckbill before it had fled. A squelching sound filtered through the forest as Nadine shrieked and squirmed, now waist deep in the mound of dung.

“Wh-what happened?” Her eyes ballooned when she spied Matt. “You!”

Matt shook his head as the shock wore off and he eyed her sideways, his mouth twisting into a self-satisfied grin. “Exactly where I would expect to find you.”

Nadine scrambled to her feet, shaking the deposits from her hands with a grimace. Matt jumped up too, keeping a wary eye on her.

“Wish I still had my gun,” she muttered.

“Yeah, I suppose so,” said Matt. “‘Cause I’m bigger than you now.” Another roar made him start and spin back towards his father. “Dad, over here!” he yelled.

Nathan Barnes had his eyes fixed on the dinosaur, his body immobile. “If I don’t move . . .” he said.

“What if it’s not like *Jurassic Park*?” Matt cried. “What if he can see you just fine without having to track movement?”

“Right,” said his dad, obviously making a split-second decision and diving into the bushes just as the giant beast snapped its jaws. Matt reached out for him and pulled him deeper into the screen of ferns. The dinosaur nosed the tree above them, searching for his escaped prey.

Nadine scrambled away from a massive claw that smashed down right where she’d been standing, flattening a magnolia tree and splattering dino droppings in all directions, coating her even more emphatically.

“Matt, what are you doing here?” gasped his father. “Haven’t you learned anything? It’s the Cretaceous Period, for goodness’ sake.”

“What do you think I’m doing?” Matt answered. “I’m trying to save you before you get eaten, or killed, or something else nasty. I’m trying to save you from *her*, too.” He jerked his head at Nadine.

“She’s not the problem, Matt.”

“You can say that again,” Nadine snapped. “Did it ever occur to you what you might be doing? Interfering, making a mess of everything? Reckless, like your father.”

“You stole my father from me!” Matt yelled. “Trapped him. And I’m the bad guy here?”

“Be quiet,” said Sarah, eyeing the probing *Albertosaurus*. “Shouldn’t we talk about this somewhere else?”

“Nadine may be right,” said Matt’s dad.

Matt faced him, wide-eyed and gaping. *Are you serious?* his expression said.

“But Sarah’s also right,” his father continued. “This is neither the time nor the place. We have to elude this predator, and then perhaps we can finally go home and sort this out.”

“I’m all for that,” said Matt.

Suddenly the Albertosaurus swung back in their direction. His head dipped down and his jaws snapped centimetres from Sarah's torso.

"Matt," she screamed, and dove to the side, rolling into the dino droppings herself. At that moment, the familiar tug gripped her body—the initiation of the failsafe program, beginning to draw them home.

"Time to go," said Matt, echoing Sarah's thoughts. "Hang in there, Sarah. It's going to work this time." His fists tightened on Dr. Barnes's toga.

A gush of air surrounded them, pulling them away from the jungle floor. Sarah held her breath, hoping it would finally work. Their feet were dangling in midair when Nadine caterwauled like an injured cat and scooted between the dinosaur's feet. "Not without me," she shrieked, leaping at Matt and his father and landing on top of Dr. Barnes, wrenching him from Matt's grasp.

The air twirled around them. The wormhole compressed Sarah's body into what felt like atom size and ejected her on the floor of the lab, molecules rebounding. Matt plopped down beside her, *without* his father.

"No, no, no!" he cried, pounding his fists on the now-slimy floor. "I had him. I had him in my hands. We were nearly home. That miserable, soul-crushing demon!"

"Oh, Matt. I'm sorry. This is all so hopeless."

"No, it's not," he said, pushing himself off the ground. "I'll just set it up again and we'll go back."

"Not th-there?" she said, unable to disguise the tremor in her voice. "Not in Albertosaurus territory." She stood and the excrement oozed down her body, pooling on the floor around her. She must be a sight, but she hardly cared about that. It was the thought of those giant jaws nearly crunching down on her spine. She couldn't go back.

"Isabelle?" Matt asked the computer. "Is . . . is my father still alive?" His voice gave a similar shiver, so he was probably thinking about the dinosaur too.

"Your father still exists," the computer replied.

"Is he still in the Cretaceous Period?"

"Your father has moved on in time and universe. Son," she said. "He is in 701 BCE, in Nubia."

"Nubia?" said Matt. "Where's Nubia?"

"The Nile River," said Sarah. "Sudan today."

"Well then, we'll just have to go there."

“Matt, I’m not going.”

“Come on, Sarah. You can’t bail on me now. We were so close this time.”

“We’re always so close,” she said. Close enough to see Matt’s father, touch him. Close enough to speak to him, but also close enough to nearly get killed. “We have to come up with a plan that doesn’t involve rapids, arrows, guns, or dinosaurs. Understand?”

“But—”

“No skunks, bears, pigs, or chickens, *comprends?*”

“They weren’t *that* dangerous.”

“Look at me, Matt.”

He did finally look at her, up and down, from sopping head to slimy legs, leaking a syrupy brown substance on the tiles, and his expression changed. Instead of the tense, focused look he always wore when he embarked on his “missions,” his face slackened, his eyebrows rose, and his lips curved. He burst into a bellowing laugh.

Sarah narrowed her eyes and nearly kicked him. She held out at the last minute when he seized her hand and leaned his clean forehead against her dirty one. “I take too many risks with you,” he said. “But you always seem to come out like this—alive, healthy, but a little bit stinky.”

“Oh, you rat!” She wrenched her hand from his and turned away, hiding the grin she couldn’t suppress. At least on the “stinky” point, he was right. “But I’m still not going.”

“We’ll do some research first.”

“Lots of research.”

“And we’ll get cleaned up too.”

“Why, thank you.” She smirked. “And maybe we should stock up on food. We might have trouble finding any in the desert.”

“Desert? I thought you said Nubia was on the Nile River.”

“Yes, I did. Don’t you know anything? The desert’s all around it. You really need to do research. Imagine if we just jumped back in there and we wound up without any food or water in the middle of the Sahara.”

“Right,” said Matt. “So let’s go home and do the research, before your dad finds out we were here.”

He grabbed her hand again, and this time she didn’t pull away. She was having trouble getting used to the change in their relationship, but she kind of liked it. Her dad, however, didn’t, and he

was looking for an alternate place for Matt to live. He wasn't having much luck so far, though. Matt had no relatives to speak of.

They exited the lab and swept down the long corridor to the sliding doors at the back of the building. Just as they reached the doors a huge rumble sounded from deep within the structure's core. The floor trembled under their feet and seemed to bob up and down in alternate waves—the ripple-effect of a pebble cast into a pool. Sarah clutched Matt's arm to keep from falling. Gradually the ripples faded away, but now the air was clouded with dust, even though no plaster, paint, or drywall had detached from the walls. Sarah and Matt coughed and hacked for another minute before they could even talk.

“What was that?” Sarah asked, still wheezing.

“Heck if I know,” said Matt. “Minor earthquake, maybe.”

“Seemed like a major one.”

“Well, the building's still standing. Could have been a bomb, too.”

“Bite your tongue.”

“It's possible. We are near Parliament Hill.”

Sarah clenched Matt's hand as the door slid open in front of them. She reached out to keep her balance, but something extraordinary happened as her hand connected with open air. Flakes seemed to peel from her skin, molecules lifting away. Her hand was disintegrating before her eyes.

“What!” She shrieked and snatched back her hand. It reassembled within the security of the building.

Matt stared at her, stunned. Then he attempted to do the same thing, extending his hand into the alleyway behind the building.

“Matt, don't!” Sarah exclaimed, but he ignored her warning. As soon as his hand passed through the doorway, it seemed to come apart too.

“What? How?” He yanked back his hand.

“This is insane,” said Sarah, gazing at the invisible barrier between the lab and the outside world. How could they just . . . *disintegrate* beyond it? She'd always known that no good would come from their meddling with time, but never had she imagined something this bizarre, this horrific. They couldn't even step out of the lab.

“We're coming undone,” she whispered, suddenly feeling faint.