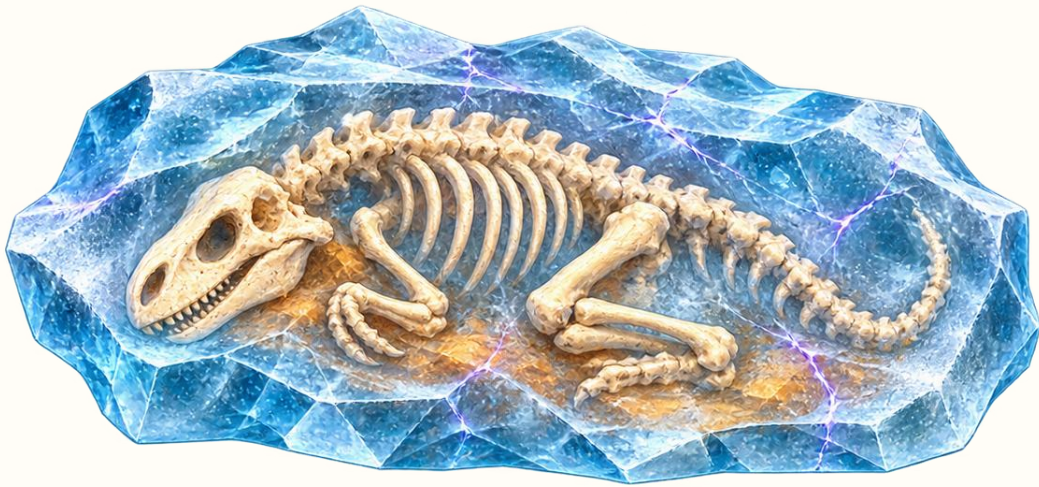


STEAL A DINO

The Last Great Fossil Heist

An illustrated adventure in six chapters



Maya · Rook · Kai · Ace

Steal a Dino: The Last Great Fossil Heist

Chapter One: A Very Angry Chicken

Maya had come to the valley to finish a school assignment.

The assignment was called *What Fossils Can Teach Us About the Past*.

So far, the past had taught her that chickens could run much faster than expected.

“OPEN THE GATE!”

She sprinted out of Cluckpatch Farm with a frozen fossil clutched against her school uniform. Behind her, an angry chicken tore through the grass, making a noise that seemed much too large for its body.

A broad-shouldered man in an expedition shirt looked up from the corral fence.

“Keep your elbows in!” he called. “Helps with speed!”

“HELP WITH THE CHICKEN!”

He swung the gate open.

Maya stumbled through. The chicken stopped at the boundary, scratched the dirt, and fixed the man with an accusing stare.

“Yes, Captain Peck,” he told it. “I know. Another criminal.”

The chicken marched back toward its coop.

The man offered Maya a hand.

“Rook. Explorer, treasure hunter, occasional rescuer.”

“Very occasional.”

Someone laughed above them.

A boy dressed in black sat on the fence with his legs crossed. His hood concealed most of his face, but his eyes were smiling.

“You made enough noise to wake every guard in the valley.”

“And you are?”

“The Midnight Ninja.”

From a nearby workbench, a man wearing a battered flight jacket called, “His name’s Kai.”

Kai sighed.

“You’re supposed to let me introduce myself.”

The man at the workbench pushed his aviator sunglasses into his hair.

“Ace,” he said. “Pilot.”

Maya looked at the bent propeller beside him.

“Of what?”

“Currently? That workbench.”

Maya almost smiled.

Then the fossil moved.

All four became quiet.

She carried it into her corral and placed it on the warming bed. Here, inside the ring of amber boundary stones, frozen fossils could thaw. Bring a fossil home, wait, and something that had slept for ages might open its eyes.

But this fossil looked wrong.

Most were covered in clear blue ice.

A thin violet vein ran through this one.

As the warming bed began to glow, the violet vein snapped like a thread pulled too tight.



Far beyond the farm, a low roar rolled through the valley.

Ace stood up.

“That’s new.”

The ice softened. A tiny dinosaur unfolded itself, blinked at Maya, and sneezed into her sleeve.

Rook laughed with relief.

“There. Perfectly healthy.”

Maya wasn’t looking at the dinosaur.

She was watching the amber boundary stones.

Each had flashed when the violet thread broke.

She took out her notebook.

“You came here to dig,” Rook said.

“I came here to learn.”

He leaned against the fence.

“Same thing, if you’re lucky.”

That evening, Maya returned to Cluckpatch Farm.

Captain Peck met her at the fence with an immediate threat of violence.

“I’m not taking anything.”

Maya held up her empty hands.

Near the coop, frost had spread across the grass. The evening was warm enough that she had rolled up her sleeves.

Captain Peck stood over her nest, feathers puffed around her shivering chicks.

Maya knelt.

The frost contained a faint violet glow.

She laid her spare scarf over the nest.

For once, the chicken let her.



Chapter Two: The Wrong Kind of Clever

By morning, Maya had a page of observations and three people telling her not to worry.

“Cold ground,” Rook suggested.

“Strange weather,” said Ace.

“Ghost chicken,” Kai offered.

Maya closed her notebook.

“There’s an archaeologist at Bonewash Dig Site. He might know.”

Rook’s expression changed.

“Professor Quill.”

“You know him?”

“He knows me.”

“That sounded different.”

“It is.”

They followed the main road out of the farm.

At Grumpy Grove, an old man watched from the porch of a crooked farmhouse. A cane rested across his knees. A sign beside his vegetable garden read KEEP OUT.

When Rook waved, the old man turned the sign around.

The other side read ESPECIALLY YOU.

“Friend?” Maya asked.

“Silas has a complicated way of showing affection.”

“You took my wheelbarrow!” Silas shouted.

“I returned it!”

“Without the wheel!”

Maya stopped at the fence.

“Have you seen frost?”

Silas’s irritation faded.

“On my porch this morning.”

“Purple inside?”

He nodded.

Then he looked at the shovels on their backs.

“If you’re going farther, keep your eyes open. And your hands off things that aren’t yours.”

At Blackfang Junkyard, a huge black dog emerged from between two abandoned trucks.

Kai stepped behind Rook.

“Studying its movements,” he explained.

The dog sniffed Ace’s jacket.

“Hello, Fang.”

Ace scratched behind one black ear.

“You know him?” Maya asked.

“Been buying aircraft parts here for weeks. He supervises.”

Fang allowed Ace past. He watched everyone else with considerably less enthusiasm.

They reached Bonewash Dig Site as Professor Quill was brushing dust from a rib larger than Maya.

“No visitors,” he said without looking up.

“We have a question.”

“Questions are visitors with extra steps.”

Maya described the violet frost.



Quill's brush stopped.

Then he noticed Rook.

"No."

"I haven't said anything."

"You're standing near my discoveries. That is usually the beginning."

Quill gathered his notes and disappeared into his research tent.

Maya stared after him.

"He knew something."

Rook was already studying the tent.

"So we find out what."

"We ask again."

"He's said no."

"That doesn't mean—"

But Rook had turned to Kai.

"Can you get through that gap?"

Kai followed his gaze to the loose canvas at the back.

For a boy who called himself the Midnight Ninja, it was a difficult challenge to refuse.

Five minutes later, they were running toward Sunscar Outpost with a stolen notebook.

Ten minutes later, Sheriff Flint had locked them in a cell.

The Outlaw Sheriff placed their shovels against his office wall.

"Fossil theft. Trespassing. Disturbing an archaeologist."

"He's always disturbed," Rook said.

Flint added another mark to his pad.

"Being tiresome."

Kai sat on the bunk, staring at his hands.

"I didn't know Quill had an alarm."

"A string with bells," Ace said. "Ancient and highly advanced technology."

Nobody laughed.

Maya faced Rook.

"We needed him to listen to us. Now he has a reason not to."

"We would've brought the book back."

"You decided for all of us."

"I was trying to help."

"You were trying to be the person who could get anything."

Rook opened his mouth.

Then he closed it and sat down.

For a while, the only sound was Flint sharpening a pencil.

Then the sheriff's water glass cracked.

Ice spread across its surface.

Violet ice.

Maya pointed.

"That."

Flint put down the pencil.

When Professor Quill arrived, he found Maya sketching the frozen glass through the bars.

He approached slowly.

"You saw this at the farm?"

"And inside a fossil. It disappeared when the fossil crossed into the safe zone."

"Disappeared how?"



“Like something snapped.”

Quill lowered himself into a chair.

“Tell me everything.”

This time, everyone listened.

His notebook contained years of observations about the meteor at Extinction Crater. Its strange energy had preserved creatures beneath the valley in enchanted ice. The amber stones interrupted that enchantment, allowing recovered fossils to thaw.

But the violet frost was new.

“The meteor is failing,” Quill explained. “Its own energy is running out. Now it is drawing warmth from the valley.”

He opened a drawing of the crater.

At its center lay a dinosaur fossil sealed in a jagged block of ice. A small skull, ribs, and a curled tail were visible inside.

“The Heart Fossil. Buried beneath the meteor’s edge. Every line of energy I’ve measured passes through it.”

Maya traced the lines.

“Like a knot.”

“Exactly.”

“Then if we take the fossil into the safe zone...”

“The connection breaks.”

Ace leaned forward.

“How long do we have?”

Quill showed them a chart. The violet frost had spread farther each night.

“Two days, perhaps. After that, I cannot promise the amber stones will withstand it.”

Flint unlocked the cell.

Rook stood.

“Then we go.”

“No,” Maya said.

He turned toward her.

“We make a plan first.”

For a moment, she expected an argument.

Instead, Rook picked up Quill’s notebook and handed it back.

“I owe you an apology.”

“Yes,” said Quill.

“And probably a new alarm.”

“Definitely a new alarm.”



Chapter Three: The Road They Would Have to Take

Ace spread a map across the corral fence.

One road passed through all ten biomes.

There was no hidden passage home. No tunnel beneath the mountains. No convenient route around the guards.

“However far we go,” Ace said, “we have to come all the way back.”

He marked the steep slopes and damaged crossings.

Maya studied the distances.

“We can’t carry something heavy that far without stopping.”

“We take turns,” Rook said.

“And we practice taking turns,” Ace added.

They spent the morning training.

Maya ran with a sandbag held against her chest. Kai learned to receive it without stopping. Rook practiced handing it over instead of insisting he could carry it farther.

The first time Ace called for a change, Rook ignored him.

The second time, he stumbled.

The third time, he handed over the bag.

By noon, their exchanges were smooth.

That afternoon, they explored the rest of the route with empty hands.

The guards watched them, but most cared more about their fossils than passing travelers.

In Prismatic Hollow, the Crystal Golem appeared to be part of an enormous crystal formation until Maya stepped close.

An eye opened inside the stone.

Violet light flickered through a crack in its chest.

“You feel it too,” she said.

The Golem placed one heavy hand on the ground.

Through her shoes, Maya felt the same pulse she had felt through the fossil.

Quill showed it his drawing of the Heart Fossil, then pointed toward the safe zone.

For a long time, the creature did nothing.

Finally, it turned toward the damaged crossing above a deep fissure. It pressed both hands against a leaning pillar and pushed it upright.

Dust poured into the darkness.

Ace looked at the narrow bridge.

“We can work with that.”

They secured the crossing with timber. Along each side, Ace stretched a length of salvaged aircraft cable between anchors in the rock.

“Handrails?” Kai asked.

“Among other things.”

Ace tested each fastening twice.

At Frostfang Reach, the Frost Yeti watched them from its snow cave.

Kai whispered, “We could go around.”

A growl followed them.

“We should definitely go around.”

Near the cave lay an old expedition sled. Ace pointed at it, then mimed pulling something heavy.

The Yeti drew it closer.



No.

As they left, Maya glanced into the cave.

Several small frozen creatures lay sheltered beneath a mound of white fur.

The Yeti shifted to hide them.

Maya looked away.

Emberfall Rift was harder.

Heat shimmered above black rock. The Armored Carnotaurus patrolled a mound of icebound fossils beside the road, ember-colored scales glowing between plates of armor.

"Cinder," Quill said. "Do not approach her fossils."

The shortest route ran beside it.

Rook measured the gap.

"We could get through if we were quick."

Maya waited.

He looked at Cinder. At the fossils. At the drop on the other side.

Then he pointed farther around the mound.

"We use the longer route."

Ace marked it.

In the Obsidian Expanse, a massive Rex watched from a raised basalt shelf.

He did not move when they passed.

Only his eyes followed them.

Beyond him lay Extinction Crater.

The Meteor Titan rested around the glowing meteor, his body curved into a protective circle.

The Heart Fossil was barely visible beneath his foreleg.

Maya raised Quill's field glasses.

There were scratches in the stone around the fossil. Deep ones. The Titan had hollowed out a place for it.

Smaller stones formed a sheltered rim around the ice.

"He's caring for it," she whispered.

The Titan lowered his head and gently touched the ice above the small skull.

Nobody spoke.

"And we have to steal it," Maya said.

Rook crouched beside her.

"If we leave it, does it survive?"

She watched violet light pulse through the ice.

"No."

"Then we bring it somewhere it can."

She nodded, but it did not make the task feel easier.

They returned home to find Silas beside the gate with a box of tools.

"The western hinge sticks," he said. "Been saying so for years."

Flint arrived with rope and supplies. Quill began organizing the work along the road.

Ace went to his airplane.

By midnight, its landing wheels had become a small carrying cart.

Kai sat beside him, passing tools.

"I thought you needed those to fly out."

"I need them for this."

Ace tightened a bolt.

Then tightened it again.

"You already checked that one," Kai said.



"I know."

For a while, Kai watched the wrench move.

"What was the crash like?"

Ace stopped.

"The windscreen went white. Snow everywhere. I couldn't see the ground."

"What did you do?"

"Everything I knew."

He turned the wrench over in his hands.

"The ground found me anyway."

Kai looked at the airplane.

"You always make it sound funny."

"People stop asking if they're laughing."

Ace set the wrench down.

"I've spent a week fixing engine parts that don't need fixing. Easier than finding out whether I can still get back in."

Kai pulled at a loose thread on his sleeve.

"I saw Quill's alarm."

Ace looked over.

"The bells. I saw them before I went in."

"Why didn't you say?"

"Rook was watching. Everybody was watching."

Kai stared at the floor.

"I wanted to be as good as I said I was."

Ace leaned back against the cart.

"Next time, tell us there's a bell."

Kai nodded.

"Next time, tell us when you can't see."

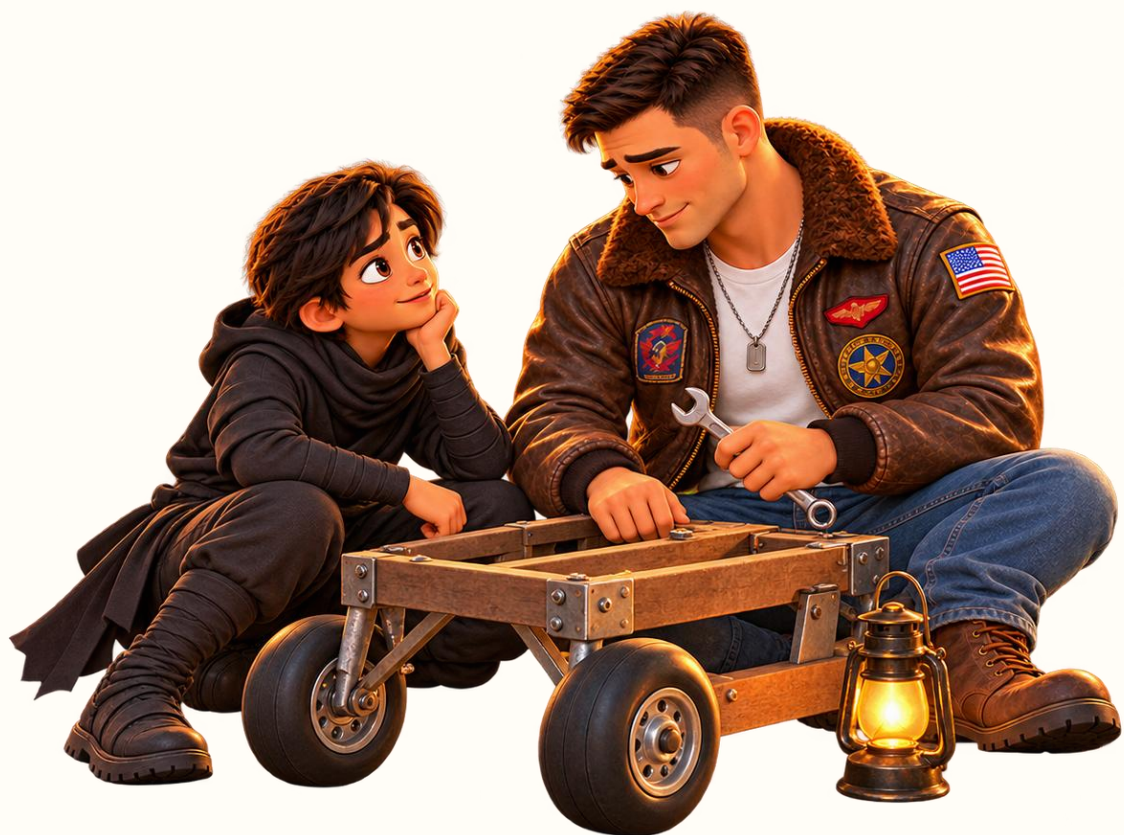
They sat together a little longer.

Then Ace handed him the wrench.

"Check that bolt."

Kai raised an eyebrow.

"Yes," Ace said. "Again."



Chapter Four: Beneath the Titan's Hand

They left before dawn.

At Cluckpatch Farm, violet frost had reached the legs of the coop.

Silas stood outside his farmhouse with his cane and tools.

Fang paced the junkyard fence.

At Sunscar Outpost, Flint raised a hand.

"I'll keep the road clear."

They passed Quill in Prismatic Hollow, inspecting the repaired crossing beside the Crystal Golem.

He handed Maya a strip of thick cloth.

"Wrap it around the ice before you lift. The violet ice burns."

Then he hesitated.

"I should come."

"You understand this crossing," Maya said. "If something goes wrong here, we need you here."

Quill disliked that answer.

He also knew it was correct.

By the time they reached the crater, the sun was high.

The meteor's glow had dimmed.

The Titan's had grown stronger.

Purple light moved beneath his skin with every pulse. Each time it did, his claws scraped the ground.

"He's hurting," Maya said.

Ace settled the cart behind a rock.

"Then we do this carefully."

They had watched the Titan long enough to learn his movements. At intervals, he rose and circled the meteor, nudging loose stones back into place around the hollow.

That was their chance.

They waited.

Kai remained still so long that an insect landed on his mask.

Rook crouched beside Maya.

For once, he did not hurry.

At last, the Titan stood.

One immense foot lifted.

Then another.

Kai moved first.

He slipped between the stones and began clearing the earth around the fossil.

Maya joined him with the cloth.

Rook and Ace waited beyond the hollow.

The fossil was larger than they had expected.

Of course it was.

Maya wrapped the exposed ice. Kai dug beneath it, carefully working around the bottom.

A shadow crossed them.

The Titan had stopped walking.

Maya looked up.

One enormous eye looked back.



Nobody moved.
Then the Titan lowered his head.
She could hear his breathing. Slow. Uneven.
Maya placed a hand against the ice.
“We’re taking it somewhere warm.”
The Titan made a low sound.
His foreleg shifted.
He was going to cover the fossil again.
“Now,” Maya said.
Rook and Ace lunged forward.
Together, the four lifted.
For a heartbeat, the fossil resisted.
Then it came free.
A violet thread stretched between the ice and the meteor.
It did not break.
The crater shook.
“Cart!” Ace shouted.
They lowered the fossil into its padded cradle.
Behind them, the Titan roared.
Maya glanced back only once.
He was staring at the empty place beneath his hand.
Then he came after them.



Chapter Five: Voices in the Snow

The cart rattled over black stone.

Ace pulled. Rook pushed. Maya ran beside the fossil, holding it steady, while Kai watched the road ahead.

They had prepared for a chase.

They had not prepared for the sound.

Every footstep of the Meteor Titan struck through the ground and into their bones.

At the basalt shelf, the Obsidian Rex stepped into the road.

Ace almost stopped.

Then he saw where the Rex was looking.

Violet frost spread beneath the Titan's feet, crawling across the black rock. The Rex lowered his head and roared.

"Keep going," Ace said.

They took the outer edge of the shelf.

Behind them came a crash that shook dust from the cliffs.

Nobody looked back.

They reached Emberfall Rift and followed the longer route they had marked. Through the steaming vents, Maya glimpsed Cinder standing beside her mound of frozen fossils.

The Carnotaurus turned toward the approaching noise.

Her answering call rose over the rumble of the crater.

The sound followed the explorers into the snow.

Then the wind swallowed it.

They ran until running became a matter of lifting one foot and trusting the next patch of ground.

Kai's breath rasped beneath his mask. He pulled it down.

Ahead, the cart lurched.

A wheel struck something buried beneath the snow.

There was a sharp metallic crack.

Ace stopped so suddenly that Rook almost ran into him.

One axle had bent beneath the cart. The fossil leaned against its padded side.

Rook caught the cradle.

"Hold it!"

Maya got her shoulder underneath.

Kai dropped beside the wheel.

"I can fix—"

He tugged at the twisted metal.

It did not move.

He tried again, harder.

The cold bit through his gloves.

Behind them, something enormous roared.

Kai's hands stopped.

He could keep trying. He could spend the little time they had pretending he knew what to do.

"Ace," he said. "I need help."

Ace knelt beside him.

For a moment, the pilot stared at the broken wheel.



Then he reached past it and released the cradle straps.

"We can't repair it here. We carry."

They had barely lifted the fossil when a dark shape appeared through the snowfall.

The Frost Yeti.

Maya tightened her grip.

The creature looked at the fossil. Then beyond them, where violet light was spreading through the snow.

It dragged something forward.

The old expedition sled.

Ace lowered his end first.

No one stopped to thank the Yeti. There would be time for words if they reached somewhere warm.

The creature took the rope and pulled.

They followed at a stumbling run.

The snowfield narrowed toward Prismatic Hollow. Wind drove loose ice between the rocks until the whole world seemed to be moving sideways.

Quill's lantern appeared across the fissure.

A small, blurred light.

They had reached the crossing.

Kai went first.

He kept one hand on Ace's cable and tested each board before shifting his weight. Halfway across, he heard a splintering sound below him.

He stopped.

The next board tilted.

Through the gap, he saw the timber support beginning to turn.

His first thought was that he could jump.

His second was that the others could not.

"STOP!"

His voice cracked.

He shouted again.

"STAY OFF THE BRIDGE!"

Behind him, the sled halted.

Kai dropped against the right-hand beam as several planks tore loose and vanished into the fissure.

For a moment, he could hear them falling.

Then the Crystal Golem moved beneath the crossing.

Its shoulders struck the remaining support.

The bridge lurched upward and held.

Kai crawled the last few feet to Quill.

On the far side, Maya, Rook, and Ace stood beside the fossil.

Between them lay a broken deck and one narrow beam.

The wind thickened.

Ace vanished behind a sheet of blowing snow.

"Ace!" Kai called.

No answer.

On the other side, Ace gripped the sled rope.

White air.

The sound of tearing metal still in his ears.



For an instant, he was back inside the airplane, waiting for the ground to appear.

“Ace!”

He heard Kai this time.

“I can’t see the crossing,” he called back.

“The right beam is there!”

“How much?”

“All the way. The boards are gone in the middle. Your cables are still attached.”

Ace looked at the cable beside his hand.

He had checked those anchors.

Kai had checked them, too.

He forced himself to look at what was in front of him.

The sled.

The straps.

The two cables running across the fissure.

“Maya. Rook. Cross one at a time. Use the beam. Hold the cable.”

“What about the fossil?” Maya asked.

“I’m going to hang the sled beneath the cables. You pull it from that side.”

Rook looked into the gap.

Then he looked at Ace.

“All right.”

He crossed first, turning sideways along the beam.

Maya followed.

Below them, the Golem’s shoulders ground against the support. A thin shard broke away and fell into the darkness.

Ace worked.

He doubled the straps into sliding loops around the cables and fastened them to the sled. The Yeti held it level while he tightened each connection.

Across the gap, Quill secured the hauling rope.

Kai watched the knots through breaks in the snow.

“One at the back is twisted!” he called.

Ace checked.

It was.

He straightened it.

“Good catch.”

The violet thread above the fossil brightened.

Far behind them, the Titan roared again.

“Ready?” Ace shouted.

Kai looked at the others.

Rook had the hauling rope wrapped around his forearms. Maya stood behind him. Quill braced against the rock.

“Ready!”

The Yeti lowered the sled until the cables took its weight.

They sagged.

The anchors held.

“Pull!”

The sled moved out above the fissure.

For a few feet, it slid smoothly.

Then one loop caught against a rough fastening.



The fossil swung.
Maya gasped.
“Stop!” Kai shouted.
Everyone stopped.
Ace reached out with a hooked length of broken sled rail. His first attempt missed.
Kai’s throat hurt.
He kept speaking.
“A little left. Lower. There.”
Ace lifted the snagged strap.
It slipped free.
The sled moved again.
Nobody cheered when it reached solid ground.
Rook and Maya pulled it clear. Quill secured the fossil.
Kai went back to the edge.
“Ace. Your turn.”
The pilot stood on the remaining beam.
Wind pulled at his jacket.
Kai could see his hand trembling against the cable.
“Keep coming,” he called.
Ace took a step.
Then another.
Kai stayed where Ace could hear him.
When the pilot finally reached the rock, Kai caught his sleeve and held on.
For several breaths, neither spoke.
Then Ace looked down at the boy’s hand.
“You can let go.”
Kai did not.
“Give me a second.”
Ace nodded.
“All right.”

* * *

By the time they reached Sunscar Outpost, the sky was darkening.
Flint waited with a freight wagon.
They transferred the fossil and kept moving.
The sheriff asked no questions about the missing cart or the shaking in their hands. He took one shaft of the wagon. Rook took the other.
Ace walked beside a wheel.
Kai stayed near him.
For a while, there were no jokes.
They passed Bonewash Dig Site. Quill’s tent stood open, its lantern hanging outside to mark the road.
Farther on, strips of cloth tied to the fences showed the clearest way through the junkyard.
Someone had filled the deep ruts.
Someone had moved the scrap metal.
The journey still hurt.
But the road was ready for them.



At the junkyard entrance, Fang emerged from between the trucks and pressed his head briefly against Ace's hand.

Ace rested his fingers in the dog's fur.

"Hello, supervisor."

Fang stayed beside him.

When Flint began to limp, Kai took his place at the shaft.

When Rook's grip failed, Maya stepped in without being asked.

They changed places as they had practiced.

The fossil remained steady.

At Grumpy Grove, the road widened where Silas had dismantled part of his fence. Beyond the broken boards, his vegetable garden lay flattened beneath a path of packed earth.

Silas stood at the turn with a lantern.

For once, he had nothing to say.

He walked beside them toward the farm.

The amber boundary stones appeared through the dusk.

Maya stared at them.

They looked so ordinary.

A fence. An open gate. The corrals beyond.

She had never wanted to reach anything so badly.

Captain Peck was ushering her chicks through the entrance, pecking at any that tried to stop. When the wagon approached, she hurried the last chick aside and stood beneath the gatepost, clucking furiously.

Behind them, Fang stopped.

His ears went flat.

Maya turned.

The Meteor Titan had emerged from the trees.

The violet light beneath his scales pulsed in time with the thread above the fossil.

He saw the wagon.

His head lowered.

"Keep moving," Ace said.

Maya tried to move faster.

She had nothing left.

Then Rook's hand appeared beside hers on the wagon.

Kai pushed from the back.

Flint and Silas leaned into the other side.

The wagon rolled.

The Titan's footsteps grew louder.

Maya watched the nearest amber stone.

She did not count the distance.

She watched it draw closer.

The front wheels crossed.

Then the fossil.

The violet thread snapped.

Gold light filled the gate.

Maya took another step before she realized the wagon had stopped.

Flint's hand rested on her shoulder.

"You're home."



Chapter Six: Something Worth Bringing Home

The Titan stopped beyond the gate.

The purple glow beneath his scales faded.

He looked smaller without it.

Still enormous.

But tired.

Maya and Rook lowered the fossil onto the warming bed.

Nothing happened.

No golden explosion.

No instant revival.

Only a faint crackle as the ice began to melt. Water trickled into the warming bed's shallow channels.

Maya knelt beside it.

"Come on."

The others gathered around her.

Ace had lost his sunglasses. Kai's mask hung loose around his neck. Rook's hands were scraped raw.

Beyond the fence, the Titan waited.

Maya looked at Quill.

"Is it alive?"

The professor leaned close to the clearing ice.

He listened for so long that Maya's throat tightened.

Then he raised one finger.

"Quiet."

Deep inside, the little skeleton glowed. Its outline filled out, and a tiny foot moved against the ice.

Tap.

Maya covered her mouth.

Another tap followed.

Quill sat back on his heels.

"Yes," he whispered. "It's alive."

They waited through the evening.

Silas brought chairs from his porch. Flint made a fire. Ace wrapped blankets around anyone who stayed still long enough.

Captain Peck claimed the warmest patch of ground.

No one challenged her.

Outside the gate, the Meteor Titan folded his legs beneath him.

He rested his head on the grass.

Maya stayed beside the fossil all night.

At dawn, the last of the ice softened into water.

A small snout lifted from the mist.

Then two oversized feet.

The little dinosaur stretched, shook cold water from its head, and stared at the circle of exhausted faces.

A gold stripe ran down its back.

It sneezed.



Ace laughed first.

Then Kai.

Then everyone.

The young dinosaur turned toward the gate.

Outside, the Titan lifted his head.

Maya opened the corral.

The little dinosaur waddled between her shoes, crossed the grass, and stopped beneath the enormous creature waiting beyond the fence.

The Titan lowered his nose.

The little one touched it.

His eyes closed.

Maya thought of the empty place beneath his hand in the crater.

Now it would never be empty again.

* * *

The valley took time to recover.

Sunlight melted the strange frost. The Crystal Golem's damaged shoulders slowly grew new points of shining quartz. Quill helped rebuild the crossing and complained about everyone's knot work.

The fossils under Cinder's watch were brought to the corrals and thawed. Soon, small dinosaurs were exploring the warm ground beside her.

The Yeti was seen carrying fresh bedding into its cave.

The Obsidian Rex returned to his basalt shelf, where he accepted no visitors and appeared entirely satisfied with his contribution.

Silas rebuilt his garden fence with a gate wide enough for company.

Flint issued Kai an official ninja license.

Under *Special Conditions*, he wrote:

Please look for alarm strings.

Kai laughed when he read it.

Then he showed everyone.

Ace rebuilt his airplane.

On the morning of his first flight, he sat in the cockpit for a long time before starting the engine.

Kai waited beside the runway.

Ace made one careful circuit of the valley and landed.

"How was it?" Kai asked.

Ace took off his goggles.

"My hands shook the whole time."

Kai considered that.

"Landing looked good."

"It was."

Rook returned Silas's wheelbarrow.

With a wheel.

And Maya finally finished her school report.

It was much longer than the teacher had requested.

On the last page, beneath a drawing of the Titan and his young one, she wrote:

Before this trip, I thought finding something meant it belonged to you.



She paused.

Then she added:

Now I think you should find out who is waiting for it first.

The teacher read the report twice.

The following morning, she called Maya to the front of the classroom.

“This is a remarkable account,” she said. “But several parts are difficult to believe.”

Maya glanced at her backpack.

It moved.

The little golden dinosaur poked its head through the opening.

The class went silent.

The dinosaur climbed onto the desk, sniffed the report, and took a large bite out of the corner.

Maya sighed.

“I brought evidence.”

Outside, a familiar shadow passed over the classroom windows.

“And,” she added, “his parent.”



The End

The Last Great Fossil Heist

Illustrations created for this edition using the game's character artwork and ten-biome design guide as visual references.