

“God help me!” Mike screamed.  
The water reached his neck.  
“God, help me!” he screamed again.  
The water reached his mouth.  
“God, please help me!” he screamed inside  
his head, because he was now completely  
under water.

**Comments from readers about the Mike Danford series:**



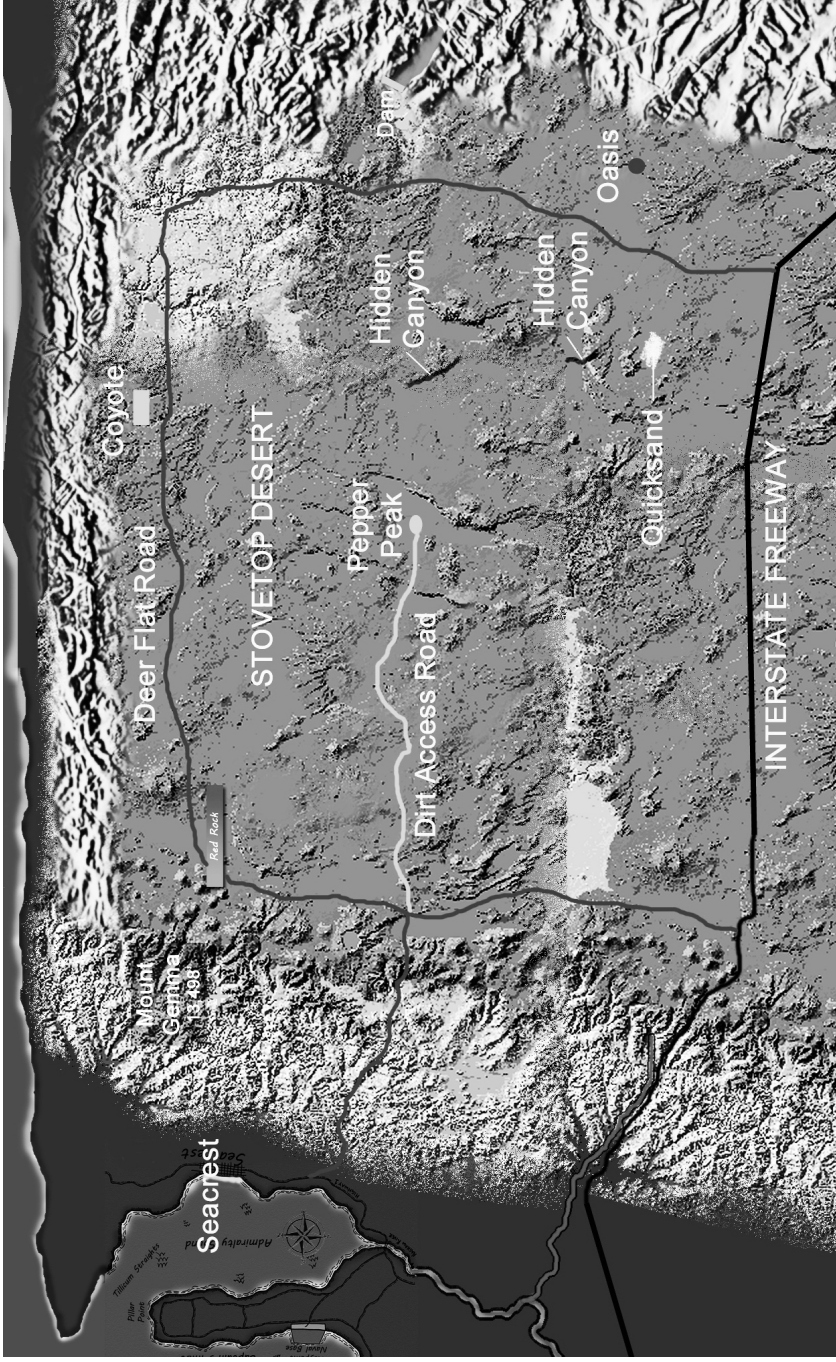
“My name is Andrew and I am in the middle of Dinosaur Dilemma, and I am loving all your books, especially the Mike Danford adventure series!” (Website review)



“My boy who does not enjoy reading for pleasure, devoured three of your Danford books in two days!! I then put them in my classroom for kids to read, but could hardly keep track of who had them because they were checked out all of the time.” (Website review)



“We have loved everything we have read by this author so far. At 16, my son may be technically older than the target age for this book but he read the entire thing in one day. His one regret is there is only one more book in this series he has not already read. We are hoping there will be more.” (Amazon review)



**Mike Danford Adventure Series #4**

**DINOSAUR  
DILEMMA**

**ARNOLD YTREEIDE**

**with**

**SHAYLA SANDROS**

**Jericho Quill Press**

**DINOSAUR DILEMMA**

by Arnold Ytreeide  
with  
Shayla Sandros

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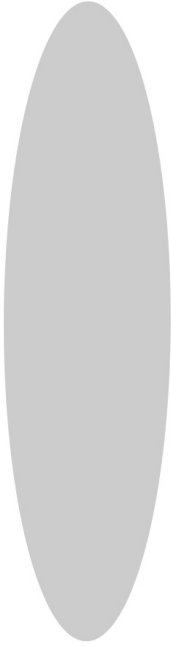
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For Thorin -  
Looking forward to  
all the adventures  
we'll have with you!  
You always make  
us smile.



Gabriel Parking



Trailers for

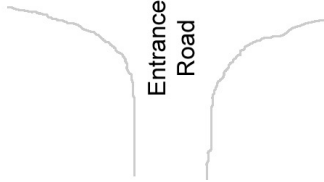
Professionals



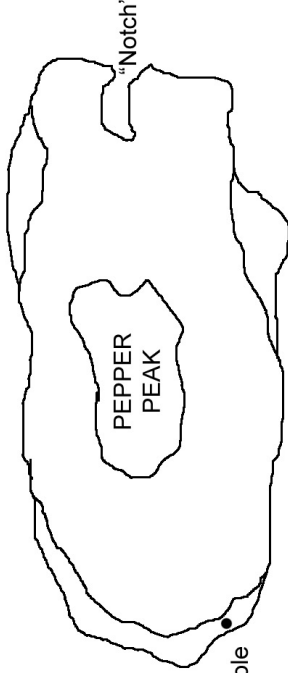
Lab Tents



Parking



Entrance Road



PEPPER PEAK

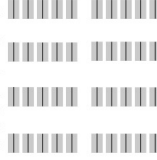
"Notch"

Hole

Supplies

Cook Tent

Student Tents



Girls

Boys



# PEPPER PEAK DIG SITE

## Chapter One

# Holes

“Can I borrow your toothbrush for a second?” seventeen-year-old Mike Danford asked his best friend Josh Roberts.

“Sure. Just clean the dirt off it before you give it back this time.”

Josh handed him the blue dental cleaner and Mike used it to brush away a few grains of sticky red clay.

“Now your paint brush,” Mike said, holding out his hand without looking.

“What’s wrong with *your* paint brush?”

“It’s buried down in my bucket and don’t want to take my eyes off this tooth.”

Josh sighed and handed his friend a two-inch wide camelhair paint brush. Mike brushed away a few more grains of dirt, then stood up straight and grinned. “Look at that!” he said proudly. “A perfect *Coelophysis* tooth.”

The two friends were in the middle of the Stovetop Desert digging for dinosaur fossils with about a hundred other high-schoolers at the Pepper Peak dig site. In reality, the “peak” was only about twenty feet high and a city block long. It was hot, dusty, and dry, and the sun beat down on them any time they left the shade of a canopy.

Altogether the camp was the size of a couple football fields. Rows of small, two and three person tents where the high-schoolers slept lined one side. Nearby was a large cook tent where everyone went to eat. On the opposite side of the hill were large tents for labs, research, and work, as well as trailers where the

professional crew lived. A few guards roamed the compound since a group of poachers had recently been stealing fossils all over the country. In camp, everyone got around either on foot or on four-wheelers.

Much of the hill, except for a steep “notch” indentation on one end, was covered with a grid of yellow string on wooden stakes creating “units” one-meter square. Each teen was responsible for carefully excavating one unit by brushing away layers of dirt a few grains at time, looking for fossils. College students supervised the high-schoolers. Mike and Josh worked under a friendly student named Connor Smith. They stood now on a ledge that had already been excavated on one side of the hill, working their units from the outside.

“Very pretty,” Josh said. “Now can I have my paint brush back?”

“Wow! I find what could be the most unique dinosaur fossil in history and all you can say is, ‘Can I have my paint brush back?’”

“Yeah, it’s really unique,” Josh joked. “We’ve only found about a thousand of them.”

“You never know,” Mike said, handing back the brush. “This could be the *one* tooth that reveals an entire new species of dinosaur. They’ll call it a ‘Mike-o-saurus.’”

“If you discover a new species of dinosaur I’ll eat my Junior Biologist license.” Josh went back to work.

The dig site was across the mountains from the boys’ hometown of Seacrest on the shores of Admiralty Sound. The expedition was led by the famous paleontologist and dinosaur hunter Dr. Philius P. Ruperrt, and was specifically for exceptional teens interested in paleontology – the study of ancient plant and animal life. Like all the teens, Josh had to agree to give up his spring break to work on the site, and Mike tagged along to keep him company. Many of the other teens had been excited to meet Mike and Josh, who were famous on social media because of their earlier adventures. Some even asked for their autographs.

“If you have a biology license,” Mike said, taking a step toward his bucket of tools, “it has to be a *senior* license. You know

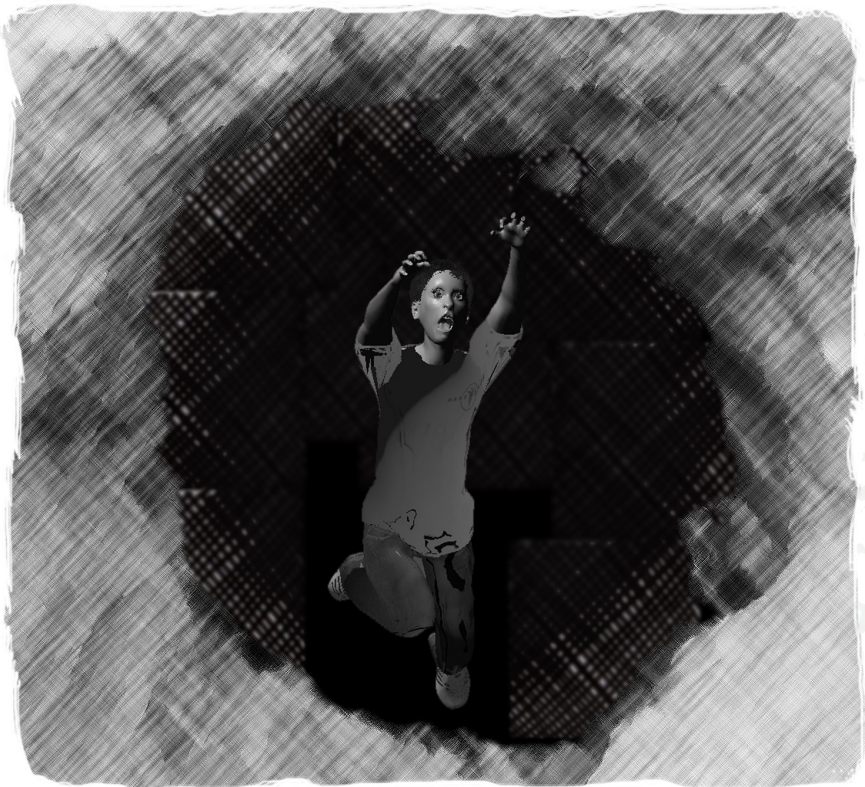


more than any of the biology teachers at school –”

Instead of stepping on solid ground, Mike’s foot sank into the dirt. Suddenly the ground collapsed and a hole the size of kids’ wading pool opened up. Mike screamed and grabbed for something to hold onto but there was nothing there. He dropped through, looking face up toward the hole.

As he fell, a shaft of sunlight hit the wall of the cavern and Mike saw something strange. He continued to fall into the darkness, screaming all the way.

Moments later he slammed into a solid mass and was instantly knocked unconscious.



Yelling.

A lot of yelling, but far away.

And black. Lots of black.

Except for one really bright spot.

Mike blinked several times, trying to get his eyes working, but still there was only blackness.

Except for the bright spot.

As he came more fully awake, pain exploded in every part of his body like a shark chewing him to pieces. He wanted to scream, but the shark had its mouth clamped on Mike's chest. Mike desperately tried to suck in some air, but his chest refused to expand.

Panicked, able only to force a tiny breath into his lungs, Mike looked up and saw a rope drop through the hole above. He watched a figure rappel down at lightning speed. It was Josh, looking back at Mike through his own terrified eyes.

"Mike! Mike!" he screamed. Josh hit the ground next to his friend, then dropped to all fours, trying to figure out what to do. "Are you bleeding?" Mike's only answer was a gurgling wheeze. "Oh God, help us!" Josh yelled.

Even though the shark's teeth were still ripping his flesh and cracking his bones, all Mike could think of was the red-hot flames in his lungs as he began to suffocate. The tiny bit of air he could suck in wasn't nearly enough to feed all the cells of his body, and in moments those cells would begin to die.

Josh was still frantic, still trying to decide what to do, still scrambling around his friend on all fours looking for some way to help. As Mike's mind began fading to black, his vision narrowed. Looking straight up, all he could see was the circle of light he'd fallen from, thirty feet above.

Moments later three more ropes dropped from the light, followed by three more rappelling bodies. The first one hit the ground, ripped off his yellow helmet, and was at Mike's side in a flash. He pulled out a light and looked in Mike's eyes while at the same time he used a stethoscope to listen to Mike's chest. He wore the white uniform shirt of a paramedic with a red cross and the

name “Ricky.”

In his delirium Mike thought the medic looked like a fifteen-year-old boy, and thought he looked Hispanic or Native American. *My brain’s dying*, Mike thought, knowing teenage boys cannot be paramedics.

“Lung sounds significantly diminished,” the boy called to the two men who had rappelled down with him. Both of them wore the thick, yellow outfits of firefighters and had Emergency Medical Technician patches on their sleeves. They seemed to be waiting for the boy-who-could-not-be-a-boy. “Poor tidal volume – almost zero. Probable double pneumothorax,” the boy said, tension in his voice. “Get me a ten-gauge needle and push sixty micrograms of Fentanyl, stat!”

Mike felt a stick in his arm, then moments later his mind, his soul, and everything he thought of as himself started floating away on a magic carpet. He didn’t care about the pain, he didn’t even care that he couldn’t breathe. It was as if he’d left his body and was floating overhead, watching it all from above.

The boy’s hands flew back and forth through the air as he ripped Mike’s shirt open, cut off Mike’s T-shirt, put rubber gloves on, and splashed red liquid on Mike’s chest. Mike felt himself drifting into the blackness, thinking the last thing that he was ever going to see was the boy jabbing a huge needle into his chest.

The sound of rushing air filled the cave as if a horse had suddenly exhaled all his breath. A moment later Mike’s right lung filled with air and he sucked it in greedily. The boy and men continued their tense talk all around him.

BOY: “Get a C-collar on him and get the backboard under him.”

EMT: “Copy that.”

BOY: “I’ve got possible neurogenic shock.” The boy paused and looked like he was making an enormous decision. “Prep for RSI!”

EMT: “Here?”

BOY: “It’s his best chance. Get that spider strap on him.”

One EMT began pulling vials of drugs and a syringe from a

bag while the other tied Mike to the board with nylon straps.

As oxygen filled his brain, Mike began to understand what was going on around him, but still through the haze of the pain killer. He saw a black cat walking around the men and equipment, and wondered what it was doing there. Then he saw the boy fill a syringe from a small medicine bottle. The boy looked toward Josh. “What’s his name?”

“Mike,” Josh answered. “Mike Danford.”

Looking at Mike again, the boy put his face right in front of him. “Mike, my name is Ricky. We’re gonna take good care of you, but right now I need to do a procedure you don’t wanna be awake for, so I’m giving you something to put you to sleep. Do you understand?”

Mike wanted to ask about the cat but couldn’t speak, so he nodded his head.

“Good. You’re going to be okay. I’ll see you at the hospital.” Mike felt another small pinch on his arm, heard the boy call out, “Sixty milligrams succinylcholine,” and a moment later finally faded into the darkness.

Even as he thought it, Mike thought it was strange that his first thought as he began to wake up was, *Oh no, not again*. He hadn’t even opened his eyes, but the familiar sounds of a hospital were all around and knew he was in an emergency room. To confirm this, he finally opened his eyes. A middle-aged man in a surgical mask seemed to smile at him.

“Welcome back, Mike.” Then the man turned his head and said to someone, “Get his friend.” He turned back to Mike. “I’m Doctor Two Arrows. For a while there, I thought we were going to lose you. Ricky here saved your life.”

His mind still foggy, Mike turned his head slightly and saw the face of a boy that looked about fourteen or fifteen, also in a surgical mask. *So I wasn’t imagining it*, Mike thought.

“Hi Mike,” Ricky said. “Welcome back to the land of the living.”

The man – a doctor Mike finally realized – took off his mask.

Like Ricky, he had the features of a Native American, and gave Mike a big smile. "You're going to be okay, Mike, but you have some very serious injuries. You'll need to stay with us for a while."

"Where . . . where am I?" Mike croaked. Only then did he realize there was an oxygen mask on his face, and that his throat was dry and his lips cracked.

"You're in the Coyote Hospital on the Coyote Indian Reservation," Ricky replied. "Your friends flew us all here in some kind of blimp once we got you out of the cave."

"Did the cat come with us?" Mike croaked.

Before anyone could answer, the door swung open with a soft *bang* and Josh hurried in. "Mike! Are you okay? Talk to me!"

Mike did his best to smile. "Of course I'm not okay. I haven't had a Jolly Rancher in hours."

Josh gave a huge sigh, relaxed, and smiled. "That's what you get for scaring me like that."

Mike looked around the room and saw it was a fully equipped, modern emergency room. Besides the doctor and Ricky, two nurses, one very old, scurried around, checking the tube into his arm, strapping electrodes on his limbs, and filling out forms. He was still very light-headed, but managed to ask, "What happened?"

Josh looked shocked. "You mean you don't remember?"

Mike thought for a moment, then shook his head.

"Oh man, you scared me to death," Josh repeated. "We were standing at the dig site talking about the tooth you just found when all of a sudden a hole opened in the ground beneath your feet and you dropped through. We couldn't see you, couldn't hear you, nothin'."

Mike did his best to pull up some memory of the event, but he had none.

"Someone called 9-1-1," Josh continued, "and I grabbed our rappelling gear." Mike and Josh had brought along some climbing gear to use when they weren't working. "Just as I dropped through, I saw these guys arrive in a paramedic unit."

"We just happened to be coming to the dig site anyhow," Ricky said, "to refill their medical supplies. Nice coincidence,

huh?”

Mike and Josh looked at each other and Josh said what they were both thinking. “Not a coincidence!”

“I thought there was no chance you could survive that fall,” Ricky continued. “Then I discovered you were alive, but had two collapsed lungs, and I knew for sure you were a gonner.”

“So why am I here?” Mike asked.

The doctor stepped in. “Because Ricky not only got one lung re-inflated, but put in a breathing tube to hold your throat open, something we wouldn’t normally do except here in the hospital.”

Mike turned to look at Ricky and decided his first impression had been right: the boy couldn’t be very old. “How old are you, fifteen?”

Ricky smiled. “Actually, seventeen. Everybody says I look young.”

“Okay, but, even so. How does a seventeen-year-old get to be a paramedic?”

An alarm sounded. “I’ll tell ya later!”

Ricky and the doctor checked the alarm, talked a lot of fast medical talk, and listened to Mike’s chest. The doctor ordered more drugs be put in the tube to Mike’s arm. Mike had felt a sharp pain run through his whole body at the moment of the alarm, but slowly it went away. He turned to Josh. “How’d I get here?”

Josh smiled. “Gabriel.”

Mike thought for a long moment, then remembered that their friend Sanjay and their girlfriends Jessica and Cindy were coming over for a weekend visit. Mike and his friends had built the dirigible earlier in the year, and Sanjay, Jessica, and Cindy had all learned to fly it. “I forgot they were coming,” he said finally.

“Yeah, they got here just as Ricky finished doing his thing on your throat. These guys,” Josh nodded toward the EMTs, “strapped you to a board, and a rope from Gabriel lifted you straight out of the hole. Then we all flew you here. You should have seen Jessica’s flying - it was perfect.”

Ricky grinned. “Riding in that blimp was like the coolest thing I’ve done all year.”

“Thank you to all of you,” Mike said. “You’ll have to introduce yourselves again later. I’m not really . . .” Mike faded off, then snapped awake again. “Where are Sanjay and Jessica?”

Josh started to answer, but the door burst open and a woman’s voice yelled, “Michael!”

“They flew back to Seacrest to get your parents,” Josh said, even though Mike had already figured that out.

Mike’s parents made sure he really was still alive, then the doctor told them he had two broken ribs, two collapsed lungs, a concussion, and possible spinal cord damage.

“We have the dirigible here,” Mr. Danford said, “if you think he needs to be transported to a hospital in the city.”

“I wouldn’t advise it,” Dr. Two Arrows answered, “but you certainly can if it would make you feel better. We have all the skills and equipment we need to care for Mike right here.”

Mike’s parents looked at the doctor, the two nurses – including the one that was at least seventy years old – and a young boy in a very dirty paramedic’s uniform.

“Uh, it’s not that we don’t trust you . . .” Mike’s dad started to say.

“So we *do*,” Mike’s mom interjected. “The best medical care I ever had was from a hundred-year-old village doctor in a rickety hut in Mongolia. I have no problem trusting your medical ability.”

The doctor smiled. “Thank you, Mrs. Danford. Too many people think we don’t know what we’re doing because we’re not in a billion-dollar hospital. But I can’t take credit for Mike’s survival. He should have been killed by that fall. I’m absolutely amazed that he’s alive. I can only say that it must have been a miracle.”

Mike’s mom smiled. “That’s easy for me to believe.”

Sanjay and the girls came in and were relieved to see Mike talking, though the many bandages, tubes and sensors covering his body looked scary. More tests were given and more x-rays taken, then Mike was moved to a regular hospital room. The same two nurses took care of him all night. He was the only patient in the small hospital, so he got a lot of attention. Even so, Josh and Mr. Danford watched carefully every move the nurses made,

remembering an earlier incident at a bigger hospital.

In the morning, Mike was still confused because of the pain killers. He was able to eat a little bit of breakfast – homemade food brought in by the doctor’s wife – but Josh ate most of it. As he slurped in some scrambled eggs, Josh said, “All right, so what did you see?”

Mike frowned. “Okay, I’m not kidding. There was a black cat walking around in the cave, and sitting on a cart in the emergency room last night.”

Josh looked amused. “What are you talking about?”

“The cat! You asked me what I saw, and that’s what I saw.”

“Mike, there was no cat. It was just the pain killer. You were seeing things.”

Mike frowned and looked away.

“Besides,” Josh continued, “I wasn’t talking about your hallucinations. I meant, what did you *see*?”

Mike was confused. “Whad’ya mean, what’d I see?”

Josh put the fork down and stared at his friend. “I mean that, when the boat almost hit you last summer you saw something strange on the bottom and we ended up chasing terrorists. Then you saw something strange just before you got smacked by an avalanche and we ended up chasing bigfoot into the mountains. Then you saw something strange on a boat after your parasail collapsed and we ended up stopping a gang of pirates. So what did you see that’s gonna send us on some strange adventure that’ll probably kill us?”

Mike sighed, then thought. “I dunno. I can’t remember a thing. If I saw something, we’ll probably never know.”

Just then, Ricky walked in wearing a fresh, clean paramedic uniform, complete with special pockets for various medical tools like long, thin clamps. He was followed by the older nurse. “Mornin’ Mike.” He picked up Mike’s medical chart. “Your chart says you’re doin’ better, how do *you* think you’re doing?”

Mike didn’t hesitate. “I hurt all over. It’s a dull pain, but it’s real pain.”

Ricky laughed and sat on the corner of the bed. “It’s only dull



because of the drugs you're on. If we took those away, you'd be screaming."

Through the open window, Mike heard several cars pull into the gravel parking lot outside and he realized he was on the ground floor of the hospital. Then he realized it was the *only* floor. Car doors slammed and he heard several people talking at once as they crunched across the gravel. A moment later the commotion was out in the hallway, then a short, plump man of about seventy entered the room, followed by several college-aged people, including Connor.

"Doctor Ruperrt!" Josh gasped. Though the boys had been working on Dr. Ruperrt's dinosaur dig for a week, they had never actually seen or met him. He was far too famous, busy, and important to work directly with the teens – his many college students took care of that.

The scientist smiled a warm smile and held out his hand to Mike. "Mr. Daniels, it is so very good to meet you."

"Uh, Danford," Mike corrected. He shook the doctor's hand, but winced at the sharp pain it caused in his side and shoulder.

"Oh! Forgive me," Dr. Ruperrt said, pulling his hand back. "How thoughtless of me. I come to comfort you and in five seconds I get your name wrong and cause you pain."

Mike laughed as best he could, holding his side where his ribs were broken. "No problem." He was actually glad that the scientist had no idea who he was. Sometimes fame got very annoying. "It's worth it just to meet you."

The paleontologist smiled and sat on a stool, leaning in closely to Mike. "Well now, that's exactly how I feel. I couldn't wait to meet the most famous dinosaur hunter in the world."

Mike's face crinkled up in confusion. "What do you mean? *You're* the only dino hunter around here."

Dr. Ruperrt shook his head slowly, and smiled like he was holding back some enormous secret. "Not anymore," he drawled. "Mike, when you fell through that hole and into that cave, you discovered the most amazing thing this world has ever seen."

Still confused, Mike looked from Ruperrt, to Josh, to his

parents, and back again. “What’s that?” he whispered.

The doctor leaned in even closer, still staring Mike right in the eyes. “You discovered,” he said, “a dinosaur no one has ever seen before. A dinosaur ten times bigger than any other. A dinosaur so big, Mike, that it could eat ten *T. rexes* for breakfast!”