

**Savage  
Dinosaurs  
of  
South  
Dakota**

# 1

*“Hey, Autumn!”*

I turned when I heard my name, already recognizing the voice and knowing who it was: Brady Vanguard, a friend I’d met only a few months before. He and his family moved into the house across the street from ours, and he’s in fifth grade, the same grade as me. Like me, he also has dark hair, and we are about the same height.

We like a lot of the same things, too, especially when it comes to food. My favorite food in the whole world is pizza, and so is his. He also

loves ice cream, and so do I. We both like school, but we don't like homework. And we both love the movies.

And something we're both fascinated with is dinosaurs. As a matter of fact, that's how we got to know each other. In class one day, he saw a dinosaur book on my desk.

"That looks like a cool book," he said.

"Do you want to take a look at it?" I asked.

His eyes lit up. "I'd love to," he said.

I handed the book to Brady, and he flipped through it.

"These drawings and paintings are really awesome," he said.

"There's a ton of information in there, too," I said. "You can borrow it, if you want. My parents got it for me as a birthday gift. I've already read it once, but I carry it around with me because I like looking at the pictures."

Brady looked at me. "Really? You'd let me borrow it?" he asked.

"Sure," I replied. "I mean, you just moved

into the house across the street from ours. If you don't give it back, I know where to find you." I smiled, and Brady smiled back.

"Thanks," he said. "I'll give it back, I promise."

Ever since, we've been good friends. We worked together on a school project where we had to make dioramas. Our diorama featured dinosaurs, specifically, dinosaurs from the Mesozoic era. We worked on that project a lot: before school, during school, and even after school. Sometimes, we worked together on the weekends.

But our efforts paid off, and we both received an 'A' for our diorama.

Now, he was running up the street, shouting my name. When I turned, I saw him stop at the curb, look both ways, and begin to sprint across. He was carrying a newspaper, waving it in front of him.

"You're not going to believe this!" he said excitedly. "I don't even believe it myself!"

“What?” I asked.

By the time he reached me, he was out of breath. He’d probably been running a couple of blocks.

“This!” he said. “Check this out!” He handed me the newspaper.

I glanced at the headlines and looked at the picture. Then, I read the caption next to it.

My mouth fell open, and I think my heart skipped a beat.

“No way!” I said. “Is this for real?”

Brady bobbed his head. “As far as I can tell,” he said. “It’s not April first, so it’s not an April Fool’s joke. I think it’s really going to happen.”

I studied the article intently, and I couldn’t believe what I was reading.

# 2

The newspaper article was about an eccentric inventor and entrepreneur who planned to build a dinosaur park in Rapid City, South Dakota, which is where we live. That's right: a dinosaur park. A couple of years ago, I saw a movie on television that was very similar. In the movie, the creatures were actual clones of dinosaurs, so they were alive and real.

But this inventor wasn't going to build a

park with *live* dinosaurs. All of the dinosaurs in his park were going to be mechanical, although he said they would look and move like real creatures. The difference being, of course, that the dinosaurs wouldn't need to eat food. They would all be powered by rechargeable batteries and programmed by computers.

"This sounds like something right out of a book," I said as I finished reading the article.

"Or a movie," Brady said. "Do you remember that movie about the live dinosaurs in the park?"

"I was just thinking of that while I read the article," I replied, and I pointed at the newspaper. "This park sounds a lot safer, being that the dinosaurs won't be alive."

"They sure look real," Brady said as he scanned the picture on the front page. It was a black-and-white photograph of two dinosaurs: a spinosaurus and a prosauropod. Although the pictures weren't in color, the dinosaurs appeared to be very real-looking.

My imagination went into overdrive. A

*dinosaur park! I thought. Right here, in Rapid City!  
How cool is that going to be?*

The inventor's name was Samuel Putnam, and he said he wanted to build the park for two reasons. First, to satisfy his love and fascination with dinosaurs. Second, he hoped to bring tourists to the area to enjoy the park and learn about the prehistoric lifestyles of the creatures. People could even get their pictures taken next to some of the most ferocious dinosaurs that ever walked the face of the Earth! He said that because the dinosaurs were controlled by computers and weren't alive, it would be a very safe family attraction.

And I believed him. Brady believed him. I think everyone who read the article probably believed him. Even Mr. Putnam himself believed that. I'm certain that, in his heart and in his mind, he really thought his dinosaur park would be safe for everyone.

He was dead wrong.



# 3

Construction on the dinosaur park began later that month. The location was an empty field not far from the city. The project wasn't expected to be complete for nearly a year, and that drove both Brady and me crazy. We were *so* anxious for the park to open. I even wrote a letter to Mr. Putnam himself, asking if Brady and I could buy the first tickets and be the first customers to visit the park. I went to the mailbox every day waiting for a

return letter, but I never got one.

No matter. I figured Mr. Putnam was a very busy man, and he had to spend all of his time working on his park and his mechanical, computerized dinosaurs.

One day, there was an article in the newspaper about the project, giving an update on how it was coming along. Surprisingly, they were ahead of schedule, and Mr. Putnam said the park might open two months early, on April 24th instead of June 24th. I marked it on my calendar, and every day that went by, I placed an X on that particular date.

Brady and I became even more fascinated with dinosaurs. I think the dinosaur park helped fuel our imaginations even more. We wondered what kinds of dinosaurs Mr. Putnam had created for his park and if they would really look and move like actual dinosaurs.

“I think they’ll look like the real thing,” Brady said one day. “My dad says that scientists and inventors and engineers can do amazing

things with robotics these days. That's pretty much what those dinosaurs are going to be: robots."

"I wonder if people will have to control them with a remote or if they'll be programmed by a computer?" I asked.

"They'll probably be programmed, each with its own individual computer," Brady speculated. "That way, he wouldn't have to hire very many workers. Just a couple of computer programmers would be all he would need."

"He might even do the computer programming himself," I said. "He sure sounds like a smart man."

"He's more than just smart," Brady said. "The guy's a genius. If he can figure out a way to make dinosaurs look and act like the real thing, like they really *are* alive, he's probably one of the smartest men on the planet."

The days passed slowly, and every day I put an X on my calendar. It drove me crazy. It was only March, and April 24th seemed a lifetime away.

But on the last day of March, something happened that was going to have a profound effect on my life.

It was Tuesday. I had walked to school, just like every other weekday. Brady and I walked home together, grumbling about the homework we'd been assigned. Not only homework, but math homework. The absolute worst kind of homework.

When we got to our houses, I said goodbye to Brady and walked to our mailbox. I flopped open the metal door and looked inside. There was only one letter there, which seemed a little odd. Usually, the mailbox is filled with letters. Sure, it's mostly junk mail, but it's a rare day when there's only one letter in the mailbox.

I reached in and pulled it out.

The envelope was addressed to me, which was strange. I hardly ever get any mail, except around my birthday.

And this was handwritten, too. Someone had sent me a handwritten letter.

*Strange.*

But even stranger—and much more exciting—was the name on the return address.

*Mr. Samuel Putnam.*

I tore open the envelope, and what I read made me more excited than anything else I'd ever experienced in my life.



# 4

Breathless, I read the letter.

*Dear Ms. McLachlan,*

*I apologize for taking so long to reply to your letter, but I have been very busy working on my dinosaur park project and have had no time to respond to anyone.*

*I am thrilled that you are just as excited as I am about my new endeavor. I'm not sure if you saw*

*the article in the newspaper or not, but construction of the park is ahead of schedule, and we will be opening in a few weeks, on April 24th. I will be hosting a grand opening with free food and beverages, tours, as well as souvenir prizes.*

*In your letter, you asked if you and your friend, Brady, could be the first to attend. It will be my pleasure to welcome both of you to my new park, and I will reserve the first two tickets in your names. When you get to the box office at the entrance of the park, simply tell them who you are, and they will take care of the rest.*

*I hope you enjoy my dinosaur park. I have been working toward this project since I was a little boy, and it is very rewarding and fulfilling to see my dream come true.*

*Very truly yours,  
Samuel Putnam*

I held the letter in my hands and realized that I was shaking. Then, I read it all over again.

I couldn't believe it! I had forgotten all about the letter I'd sent to Mr. Putnam, figuring he was too busy to get back to me. But he'd finally sent me a letter! Not only that, but he agreed to my request! Brady and I were going to be the first two kids to visit the dinosaur park!

Instead of going into my house, I ran to Brady's house. I pounded on the door so hard that they must've thought someone was trying to break in.

Mrs. Vanguard opened the door in surprise.

"Why, Autumn," she said. "What's the matter?"

"Mrs. Vanguard!" I blurted. "Is Brady home?" Which was a silly question. I'd watched him go into the house only moments before.

By then, Brady had reached the front door. His mother silently backed away, and Brady stepped forward, a puzzled expression on his face.

"What's up, Autumn?" he asked.

I waved the letter in front of his face. "This!" I said excitedly. "This is what's up!"

“What is it?” he asked as I handed him the letter.

“Read it!” I said.

Brady held the letter in front of his face, and I watched his lips move silently as he read. Slowly, his eyes widened. I could see the excitement growing on his face.

When he was finished, he lowered the letter.

“We’re going to be the first people to visit the dinosaur park!” he shouted.

We started jumping up and down. Mrs. Vanguard reappeared in the living room, a look of surprise and curiosity on her face.

“What’s all the ruckus about?” she asked.

“We’re going to the dinosaur park, Mrs. Vanguard!” I said.

“Yeah, Mom!” Brady chimed. “Not only are we going to the dinosaur park, but Mr. Putnam says we can be the first two kids to visit!”

“Who is Mr. Putnam?” Mrs. Vanguard asked.

“He’s the inventor who’s building the park,” I replied. “The dinosaur park has been a dream of

his since he was little. I wrote him a letter, asking if Brady and I could be the first two kids to visit the park when it opens. I didn't get anything back from him, so I thought he forgot about my letter. Well, he didn't. I got this letter in the mail today."

Brady was still holding the letter, and he handed it to his mother. Mrs. Vanguard took it from him, and she read it. When she finished, she smiled and handed it back to me.

"It sounds like you two are in for an exciting day," Mrs. Vanguard said.

And she was right. Our visit to the dinosaur park would be filled with excitement.

But sometimes, excitement doesn't mean having fun. Sometimes, excitement can mean the opposite.

And sometimes, excitement can be disastrous . . . as we were about to find out.