

## The Lost Kingdom (by Ute Maria Sproulle)

There was a loud roar, a loud stomp-stomp-stomp and then out of the jungle came three mega huge dinosaurs. A Tyrannosaurus, an Iguanodon and a Stegosaurus looked round. A Pterodactyl swooped overhead.

"We're lost," said the Iguanodon, named Iggy.

"No, we're not. I know exactly where we are," growled the Tyrannosaurus, named T-Rex. He thought the name made him sound tough. He was the biggest dinosaur and their leader - or so he liked to think. The Stegosaurus - his name was Steg - said nothing. He knew when to keep quiet.

"I think it's this way," said the Pterodactyl, named Terry. "Let me show you." He had the best view and knew the way.

The three dinosaurs trudged on, clomp, clomp, stomp, stomp. Occasionally they stopped and looked round but it was difficult to see much in the jungle, with all those tall trees and clinging vines. Sometimes they would roar because, well, that's what dinosaurs did. But then there was this squooshy sound, which was coming out of Steg's backside.

"Phew!" sniffed Iggy. "Steg is really smelly today. He's always smelly when he eats those spiky plants. Everyone knows vegetation makes you ....."

"Stop right there!" said T-Rex. "I don't want any rude language on this trip."

Suddenly the ground opened up in front of them and they all dropped through a massive hole. Down, down, down went Iggy, Steg and T-Rex. They roared, they waved their necks and tails. They also screamed a bit because even dinosaurs get scared.

Then thump, bump, scrump, they landed - and this was the really freaky bit - on top of a mountain!

“What are we doing up a mountain?” asked Iggy, after he had unlooped his neck and long tail. “We should be down a hole. Down a deep hole.”

“Quiet! I’m thinking!” roared T-Rex. You could tell he was worried by the way he was gnashing his knife-like teeth. “I think,” he said after a few minutes, “that we’ve arrived in a Lost Kingdom.” Down below was even denser jungle, marshland, rivers and a very large lake.

“So, we are lost,” said Steg, shaking out the spines on his back.

“No!” roared T-Rex again. “I told you where we were. In a Lost Kingdom!”

“Uh-huh,” said Iggy. “That makes sense.” Although it didn’t.

The Pterodactyl was cruising around looking for them. Finally he spotted three very confused dinosaurs and landed. “What happened to you?” Terry asked. “How did you find your way up here?”

“It’s a long story,” said Iggy, “but T-Rex thinks we’ve arrived in a Lost Kingdom.” You could tell by the smirk on his long snout that he didn’t quite believe it.

“That’s right,” said Terry. “You’re in the Lost Kingdom of Lost Animals. There’s not many of us left and, let’s face it, dinosaurs are dying out.”

“What are you talking about?” growled T-Rex. “We’ll never die out! We’re too big!”

“No really. Birds will be alright, they can fly and search for food. But eventually, on the ground, rats will take over.”

This sounded too bizarre and awful to believe. But Terry continued, “You’ll be safe here for awhile. Lots of food, lots of plants.” He knew T-Rex liked meat, so he added, “Just don’t eat each other.”

Before he flew away, Terry the Pterodactyl gave them one last piece of advice. “Watch out for Brontosaurus. He’s really mean.”

“What, even meaner than a Tyrannosaurus?” smiled Iggy.

T-Rex didn't think that was very funny.

Terry nodded. "And he's got a crew. There's Predator X. He's a pliosaur with a bite four times as fierce as a tyrannosaurus." He tried not to look at T-Rex. "And be really careful around Titanoboa."

"Who?" asked Iggy, wondering if Terry was making this up.

"Oh, that's right, you wouldn't have heard of him. Well, he's a 45 foot long snake. Yes, that's right: 45 feet long," said Terry when he saw how surprised the other dinosaurs looked. "And he crushes his prey and then swallows it whole."

That got their attention and Steg was all for returning the way they had come.

"You can't," said Terry. "You've landed in the Kingdom of Lost Animals and if you all try to get on with each other, and don't pick any fights, things will be fine." He waved his wings as he flew off.

"Yeah, right," said Steg quietly. He didn't believe that two huge dinosaurs like a tyrannosaurus and a brontosaurus could ever get on peacefully.

Slowly it grew darker. The stars appeared and twinkled brightly. Meteors streaked across the sky.

Iggy, the Iguanodon, was fascinated. He tried counting the stars - impossible. He pointed to the meteors and their long vapour trail. "Isn't that amazing?" he asked.

Terry had just flown back and shook his head. "One of these days that thing will crash, right here where we live. And then - watch out."

"What do you mean: 'watch out'?" asked Iggy. How could anything that beautiful be something you had to watch out for?

Terry just shook his head. "Some day you'll discover why. When it's too late. There'll be a big explosion - then poof! No more dinosaurs."

“Stop trying to scare us,” said Steg, putting his forefeet around Iggy who really was quivering and shaking.

“It’s happened before,” said Terry. “A bright, shiny object flashed out of the sky - in my great-grandfather’s time - and wiped out a colony of Gigantosauri down in Triassic Tangle.” He paused. “It was terrible. There was no sun for decades, no plants to eat. Nothing could survive that.”

Suddenly there was a loud explosion and they all jumped in fright. But it was only T-Rex thundering through the undergrowth. He’d been on the hunt for food and he was looking worried.

“There are some strange creatures over on that hill,” he said. “They’re a lot smaller than we are and they fly. And they sting!” he added, rubbing his belly.

“Ah,” said the Terry, who seemed to know everything, “those are stinging insects. They’ll give you really nasty bites. So watch out for those, too.”

“Great,” grumbled Steg, “something else to watch out for.”

Once again the Pterodactyl swooped away to who-knew-where. The others tried to sleep crouching underneath trees, covering themselves with leaves. They kept one eye open for anything biting or stinging or bigger than they were.

Slowly the sky brightened, first pink, then golden, then a light, bright blue. It did look beautiful up here, Iggy thought. Like the beginning of a new world.

They started hunting for breakfast. There were enough plants for the moment but T-Rex could see that their food would soon run out if they couldn’t find another source.

“I’m still hungry,” said Steg, rubbing his spiny stomach.

“We all are,” said Iggy, craning his long neck to reach the last leaf.

A loud grumbling and rumbling interrupted their breakfast and it wasn't T-Rex's stomach!

Out through the jungle crashed a heavy, massive, mean-looking creature! The Brontosaurus! Beside him slithered a huge snake with enormous jaws. Fortunately, Predator X didn't seem to be with them.

"What are you doing here?" the Brontosaurus bellowed. "And why are you eating my plants?"

No one dared speak for a moment, then Steg piped up. "Because we're hungry?"

"Roar!" roared Bronti - for that was his name - "I want you out of my kingdom!"

"Why?" asked Iggy bravely. "We're all lost animals and this is the Kingdom of Lost Animals, isn't it."

Several more roars erupted from Bronti's gigantic belly. "Go and find another kingdom. There isn't enough food for all of us here. Besides, I don't like you."

"Now, you just hang on there," growled T-Rex. "You can't talk to my friends like that. There's plenty of food for all of us here. And if we work together, we can find more." He glared at Bronti. "We're all dinosaurs here. So, you'll have to fight me if you want to get rid of us."

That was fine by Iggy and Steg. They preferred to keep out of the way. And, luckily, the huge snake had curled up and gone to sleep.

The two mega-dinosaurs set to: roaring at each other, rearing up on their powerful hind legs and lashing out with their huge tails. Occasionally they would try to bite each other's long necks. It was a terrible fight and it seemed to go on forever.

Finally they both fell to the ground exhausted.

"I give up," gasped T-Rex.

“Me, too,” sighed Bronti. “You can stay.”

“Really?” T-Rex jumped up. “Then I - we win!”

“Well done,” shouted Iggy and Steg together.

“You’re right,” said Bronti, swinging his neck back and forth. “We’re all dinosaurs together. Besides, you’ll come in handy in a fight.” He glared down at the sleeping snake. “You can see how useless Titanoboa is.”

“Well,” said Iggy, “we’d better not fight each other if we want to survive.”

The Brontosaurus, the Tyrannosaurus, the Stegosaurus and the Iguanodon all went off together, looking for more food. Life in the Kingdom of Lost Animals was going to be good, thought Iggy.

But in the distance a bright, red light streaked across the sky.