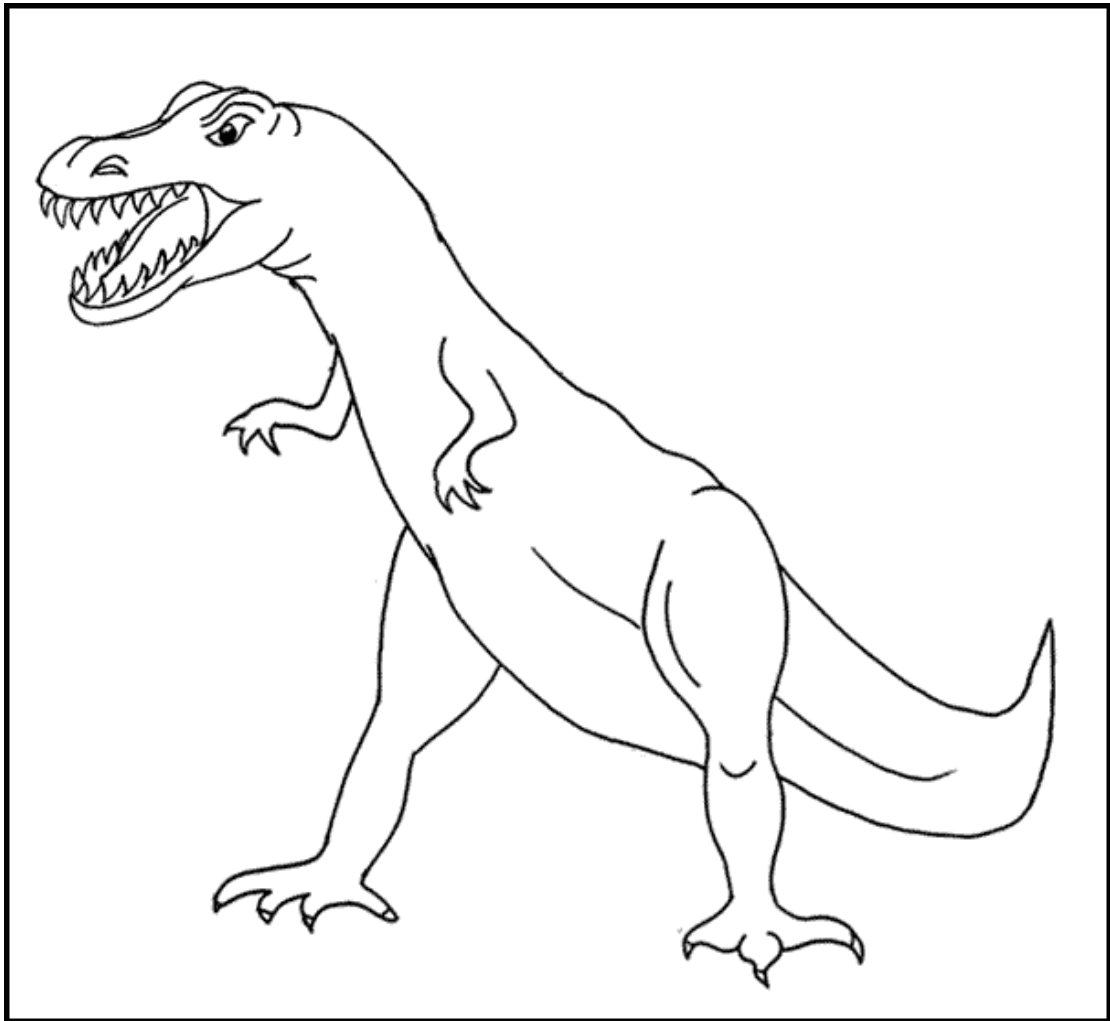


King of the Killers



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King of the Killers

Chapter One

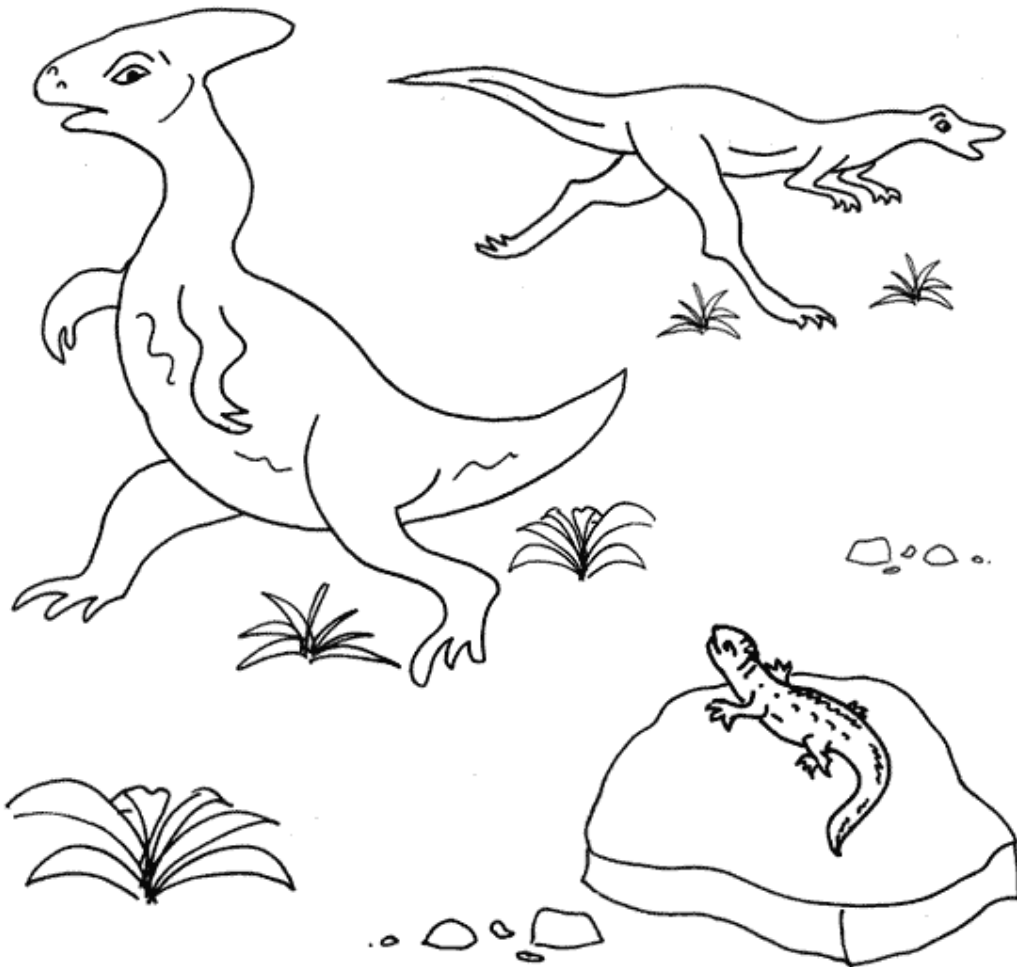
“He’s coming! *Run!*”

A stegosaurus lumbered through the trees, bellowing in terror.

“Flee for your lives!” squealed a compsognathus, before racing off as fast as it could.

“Get away! Get away!” trumpeted a herd of hadrosaurs as they stampeded in alarm.

The only creature not to move was a small, brown lizard called Lila. She was basking on a rock beside the lake. Opening one sleepy eye, she watched the dinosaurs rushing round in panic.



“Who’s coming?” she asked.

“The King of the Killers! Run while you can!” wailed a hadrosaur.

Lila did not run. She yawned, lay on her rock and waited.

A moment later she heard the thump of heavy feet. Trees crunched and crashed. Branches snapped like straw.

“RRRAARLL!!”



With a horrible howl, a Tyrannosaurus Rex charged through the trees and stamped over to the lake.

It stopped at the water’s edge. Then it glared around, looking for someone to eat.

The only animal it could see was Lila, the little brown lizard. Lowering its massive head, the T Rex bared its teeth at her.

“Why haven’t you run?” it snarled. “Haven’t you heard? The King of the Killers is here!”

“No, he isn’t,” said Lila calmly.

The T Rex shook its head and roared.

“You don’t understand. It’s **ME! I’m** the King of the Killers!”

Lila cast a lazy eye over the T Rex. It was a very big dinosaur, but it was also very young. “No, you’re not,” she said.

“Yes, I am too!” it bellowed. “I’m bigger than all my brothers and sisters! I’m the King of the T Rexes.”

“So?” said Lila.

“Rex means King! So I’m King twice over. King King, that’s me! Now prepare to be gobbled up, you measly mouthful!”

King King opened his great mouth wide, ready to snap Lila up. But Lila did not move.

“Don’t bother eating me,” she said. “Measly mouthful is right. I’m small and tough and stringy. What’s more, I’m not afraid. I’ve seen bigger killers than you.”

“*What? Who? Where?*” yelped King King in alarm. He whirled around.

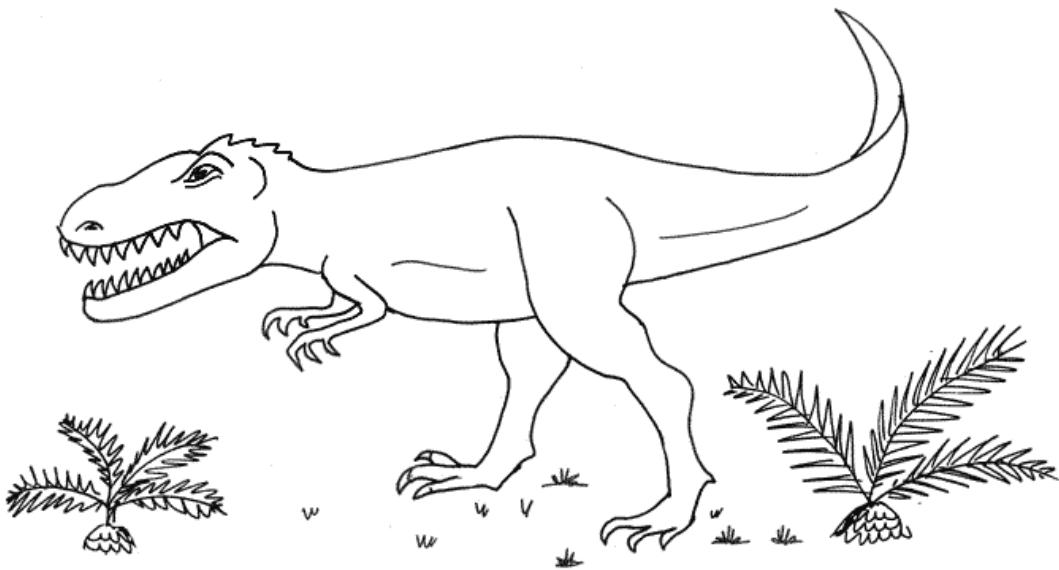
But he could not spot another dinosaur anywhere. Thumping his tail in anger, King King roared, “You’re lying! Stringy or not, I’m going to eat you up!”

Lila pointed at the lake.

“Before you do, just look over there,” she said.

King King gazed across the lake. His eyes widened.

On the opposite shore was a very fearsome dinosaur indeed. Its huge head was crammed with at least a hundred long, sharp teeth.



Its eyes were small and mean. Its tail thrashed from side to side as it strode around the lake. And it was coming towards them.

“Hey!” gasped King King. “Who’s that?”

“That’s Tyrannotitan,” Lila said. “He’s bigger than you.”

“Bigger than me? He can’t be! Are you sure?”

Lila shrugged. “We’ll soon know,” she said. “Titan will be here in a few minutes. He heard you bellowing, and he’s come to see who’s in his hunting ground.”

“I’m not scared!” said King King in a slightly wobbly voice. “I can beat that Titan in a battle any day!”

“Quite right,” yawned Lila. “I’m not scared of Titan either.”

“You’re not?”

“Oh no,” said Lila, “because I didn’t actually mean him. I was pointing at *that*.”

She pointed again at the lake, just beyond the reeds.

King King stared at its still surface. Suddenly the lake rippled. The reeds shuddered. The water heaved.

Then, with a mighty **WHOOSH** of waves, there emerged the biggest head that he had ever seen.

It held at least a thousand wicked teeth. And it was attached to a dripping body that was even bigger than Titan.



The new dinosaur glowered at King King. Then it began to wade out of the water. It was *enormous*. King King backed away.

“Wh– what is it?” he quavered.

“That’s a spinosaurus,” Lila said. “See the row of spines along its back? They make a sort of sail. Quite scary, isn’t it?”

King King gulped. “I’m not scared! Um – what does it eat?”

“Meat, fish, dinosaurs; anything that moves,” said Lila. “That isn’t the King of the Killers, though.”

“Oh, good!”

“No, she’s the Queen. That’s Queen Spinechilla: and this is her lake. She really doesn’t care for strange young dinosaurs thumping round it.”

“Oh,” said King King faintly. He stood and stared, not knowing what to do.

The two huge predators were heading straight towards him. They both looked bigger and faster than he was – and much, much meaner.

And now it was too late for him to run.



Chapter Two

The ground shook as Titan stamped around the shore.

The lake swirled as Spinechilla lurched out in a tidal wave.

“Help!” whimpered King King. “What do I do now?”

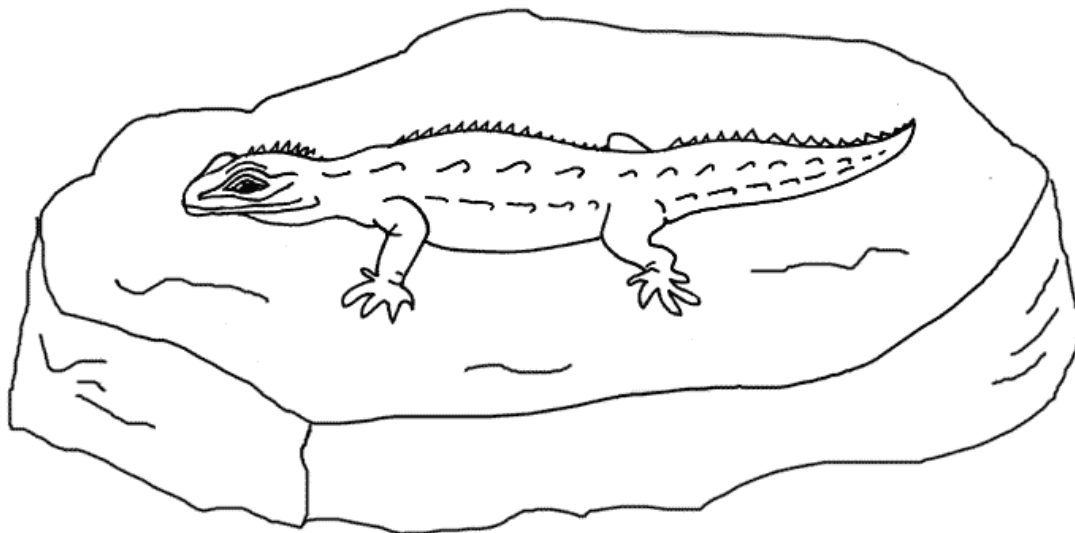
“If you want to be King of the Killers, you need to challenge them,” said Lila.

“But they’re bound to win!” he wailed, cowering behind Lila’s rock. It didn’t even hide one foot.

“No, they’re not,” said Lila.

“Yes, they are. They’re bigger than me!” cried King King. He dashed behind a tree-fern. It didn’t even hide one leg.

“Maybe they are bigger,” said Lila, “but how big are their brains? That’s what really counts.”



“What?” said King King, trying to bury his head in the sand.

She sighed. “Come out of there. I’ll help you win – if you’ll promise me one thing.”

“What’s that?”

“Never to eat me or my family.”

“I promise! I promise!” said King King, shaking sand out of his ears.

“All right. Now, listen carefully. You’re going to challenge those two to a race.”

“But they’ll beat me!” protested the T Rex.

“Trust me,” Lila said. “Go on! Show them you’re brave. Challenge them.”

King King cleared his throat. He drew himself up to his full height and yelled in a voice that made the trees tremble.

“I AM THE KING OF THE KILLERS, AND I CHALLENGE YOU TO A RACE!”



Spinechilla and Titan turned their fearsome heads towards him.

“CHALLENGE ACCEPTED!” they both roared.

“Now what?” King King asked Lila in a whisper.

Lila glanced at the approaching dinosaurs. She was so small and weak that they took no notice of her. They were only interested in King King.

“Tell them you want to race up to that line of trees,” she said. “You have to run in and out of them, and then back here again.”

“Why?” asked King King.

“Just do it.”

So King King roared out the challenge.

“A race through the trees? That’s easy!” sneered Titan.

“Far too easy!” hissed Spinechilla. “Start us off, and watch me win!”

All three dinosaurs lined up, ready to start the race. King King felt quite nervous.

“Right,” he announced. “Ready, steady – oy! Wait for me!”

The other two had already sped away. Spinechilla ran fast, and Titan ran even faster.

King King began to pound after them, but he was soon left behind.

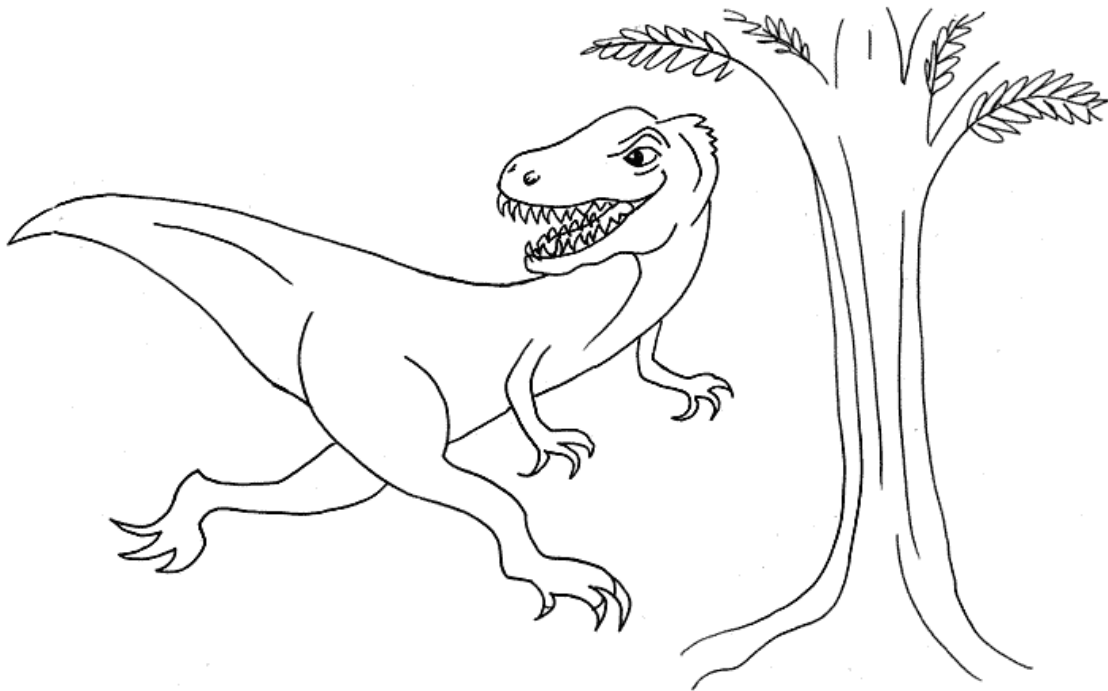
“This is a terrible idea!” he wailed.

“Keep running,” Lila called.

Titan got to the trees first.

“*Nyah nyah nyah!*” he jeered. He turned his head to stick his tongue out at the other two.

He wasn’t looking where he was going. Next minute, he ran smack into a tree.



“Owww!” howled Titan. While he was staggering round in a circle, Spinechilla raced past him. King King puffed along behind her. He had no chance of winning...

That was what he thought. But once they reached the trees, Spinechilla had to slow right down. She was too big to twist and turn between them.

King King could twist and turn between them easily. Soon he was in the lead.

He galloped to the finish line. “Yes!” he shouted. “I am the champion! I am the King of the Killers!”

“Oh no, you’re not,” snarled Spinechilla, thundering up after him. Titan came pounding along behind.

“I am!” cried King King. “I won the challenge!”

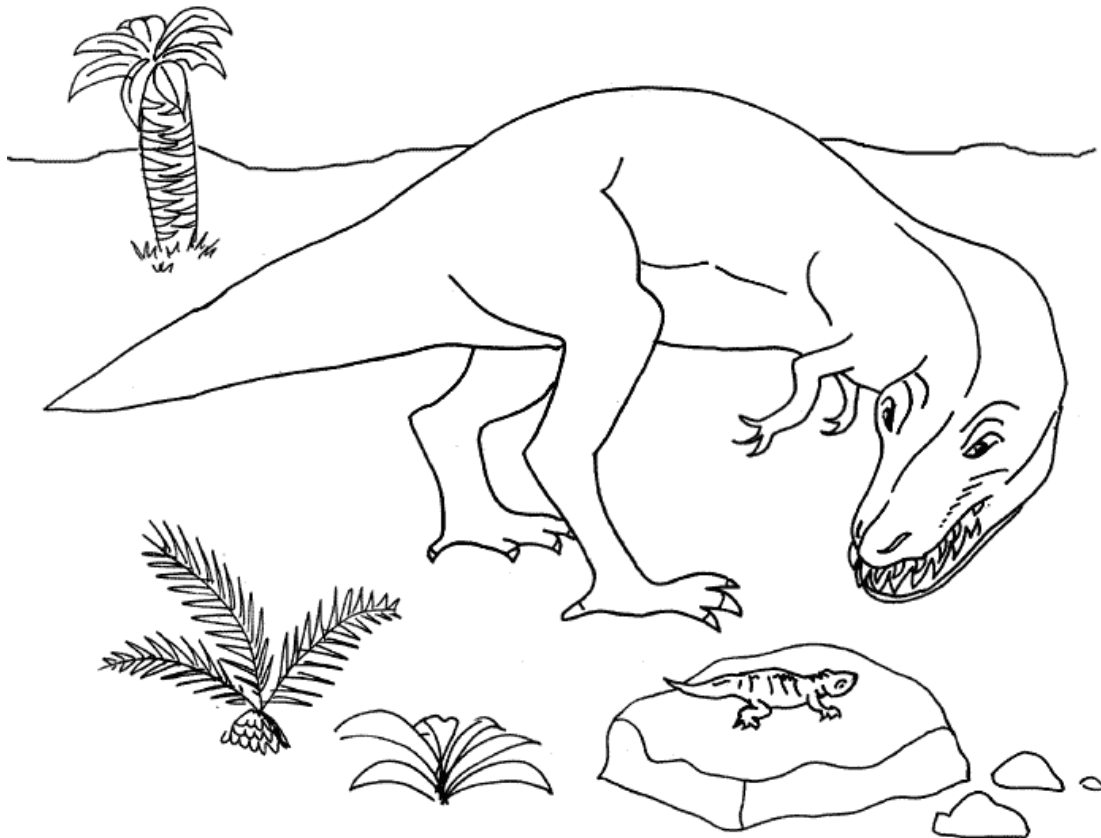
“It’s best of three,” Spinechilla said.

“Best of three?”

“That’s only fair. Whoever fails the next challenge is out! Then that will just leave two of us!” she hissed.

“What is the second challenge?” Titan asked.

“Um...” King King bent down and pretended to scratch his foot, so that Lila could whisper in his ear.



“Biting,” Lila told him. “The next challenge is to bite through one of those thick branches lying on the ground.”

King King looked at the huge logs in dismay. He wasn’t sure if he was *that* strong.

“You can do it,” Lila said encouragingly.

King King gulped. But he couldn’t think of a better challenge, so he told the others, “You have to bite right through one of those branches!”

“Easy!” snarled Spinechilla. She marched over to the branches, grabbed the biggest one and CRUNCHEd.

Splinters flew through the air. Spinechilla spat out the minced-up bits of wood and glared at King King. “Your turn.”

“Er – easy!” said King King. He seized a branch and munched with all his might. His jaws ached. His teeth hurt. But he just managed to bite his branch in two.



“Hmph,” snorted Spinechilla. “All right. Titan, you go next.”

“Easy!” Titan growled, as he took hold of a branch and shook it in his teeth.

Although his jaws were huge, they were not as strong as they looked. Lila knew this. So she was not surprised when Titan dropped the branch without biting through it.

“Hah! Loser!” sneered Spinechilla. “I won that challenge. Now run away, little Titan, before I crunch *you* up!”

She charged at Titan, who squealed in alarm. He turned and crashed off through the trees.



Spinechilla grinned at King King, showing all her cruel teeth.

“Just two of us left now,” she said. “Time for the last challenge.”

“All right,” said King King. “The challenge is—”

“Oh, no, you don’t! It’s *my* turn to choose! And I challenge you to swim across the lake!”

Chapter Three

“Well?” hissed Spinechilla. “Do you accept, or shall I just bite you in half like a dead twig?”



“I accept!” squawked King King, terrified. Then he slumped to the ground in despair.

“Oh, help! I’ve never swum before,” he groaned. “Do you think I *can* swim?”

“No, I don’t,” said Lila.

“Then I’m doomed!”

“You’re not doomed. Get Spinechilla to go first.”

“Good idea!” King King looked more hopeful. “While she’s in the water, I can run away.”

“Certainly not!” said Lila sternly. “I thought you wanted to be King of the Killers? You mustn’t run away. What you need to do is this.” Once again, she whispered in his ear.

“Really?” said King King, looking puzzled.

“Really,” Lila said.

Spinechilla plunged into the lake to start her swim.

As she set off, King King began to swing his head from side to side. He wailed and moaned, just as Lila had told him.

“Oh, I’m so hungry!” he whined. “Oh, I’m starving! It’s way past my dinnertime. I wish I had a nice plump plesiosaur to eat!”

“Quiet while I’m swimming!” snapped Spinechilla; but King King kept on wailing about his empty stomach.

“I could eat a hundred fine fat fish! I’m longing for a juicy ichthyosaur!” He kept it up until she was too far across the lake to hear him.

Then, at last, he stopped.

“This is useless,” he grumbled to Lila. “Why did you tell me to say all that about being hungry? It’s not doing any good. Look how fast she’s swimming!” For Spinechilla was already halfway to the other side.

“Watch,” said Lila.

King King stared. Spinechilla was slowing down. She began to swim round and round in circles, snapping at the water with her vicious teeth.



“What’s she doing?” he asked.

“She’s hunting,” Lila said.

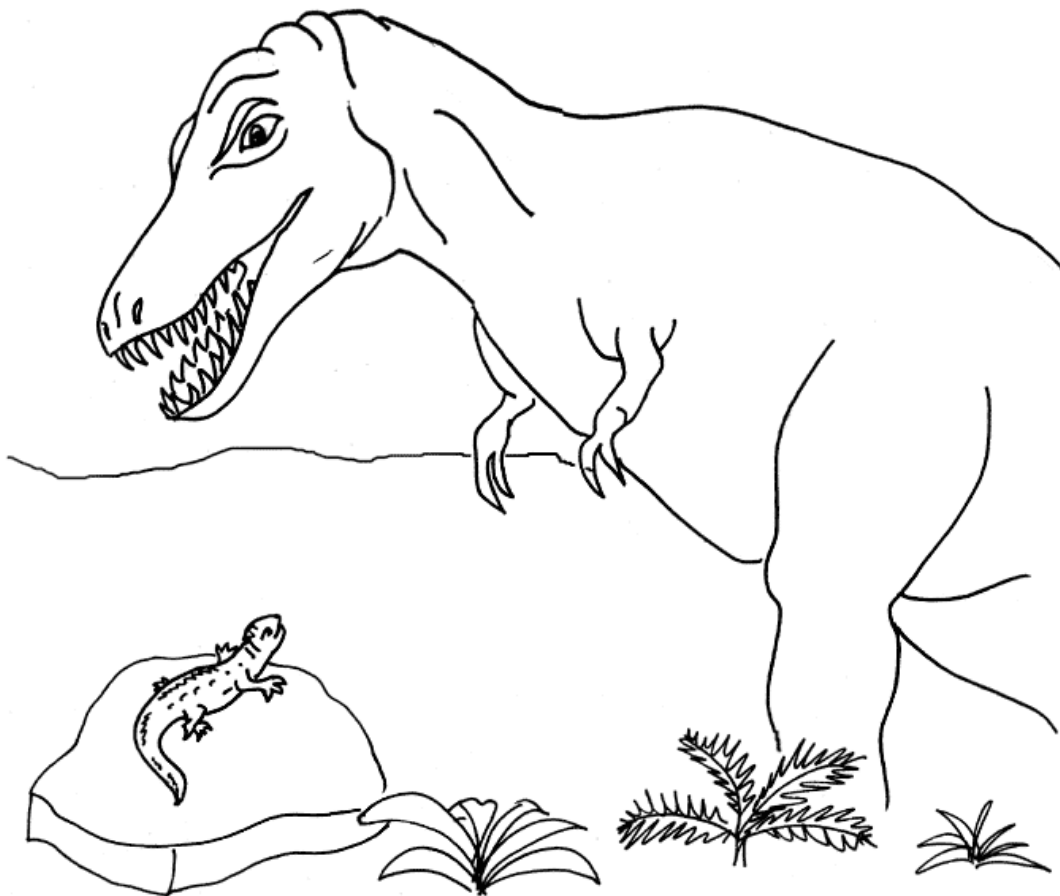
Fish were leaping out of the water all around Spinechilla, trying to escape. As the fish fled, she followed them, snapping at their tails and gulping them down whole.

Lila turned to King King. “You put the idea of food into her head – and there’s no room in there for more than one idea,” she said. “By the time she gets across the lake, she’ll be full of fish. She’ll have forgotten all about the challenge.”

Moments later they saw Spinechilla climb out of the far side of the lake. She waddled heavily to the bank and at once lay down to sleep. Her stomach was bulging.

“Well, I never!” said King King, amazed. “I was sure she’d win. She’s so big and strong!”

“Spinechilla’s very big indeed,” agreed Lila, “except for her brain – which is tiny. And so is her memory. I’m afraid all you big fierce dinosaurs have very tiny memories.”



“Not me!” said King King, lashing his tail indignantly.

“So do you remember what the challenge was all about?”

“Um...”

“You are now officially King of the Killers,” Lila said. “And because I helped you beat the other dinosaurs, my family are safe from you for ever. Can you remember that?”

“Of course I can!” huffed King King. “Though I wouldn’t bother eating a scrawny scrap like you in any case.”

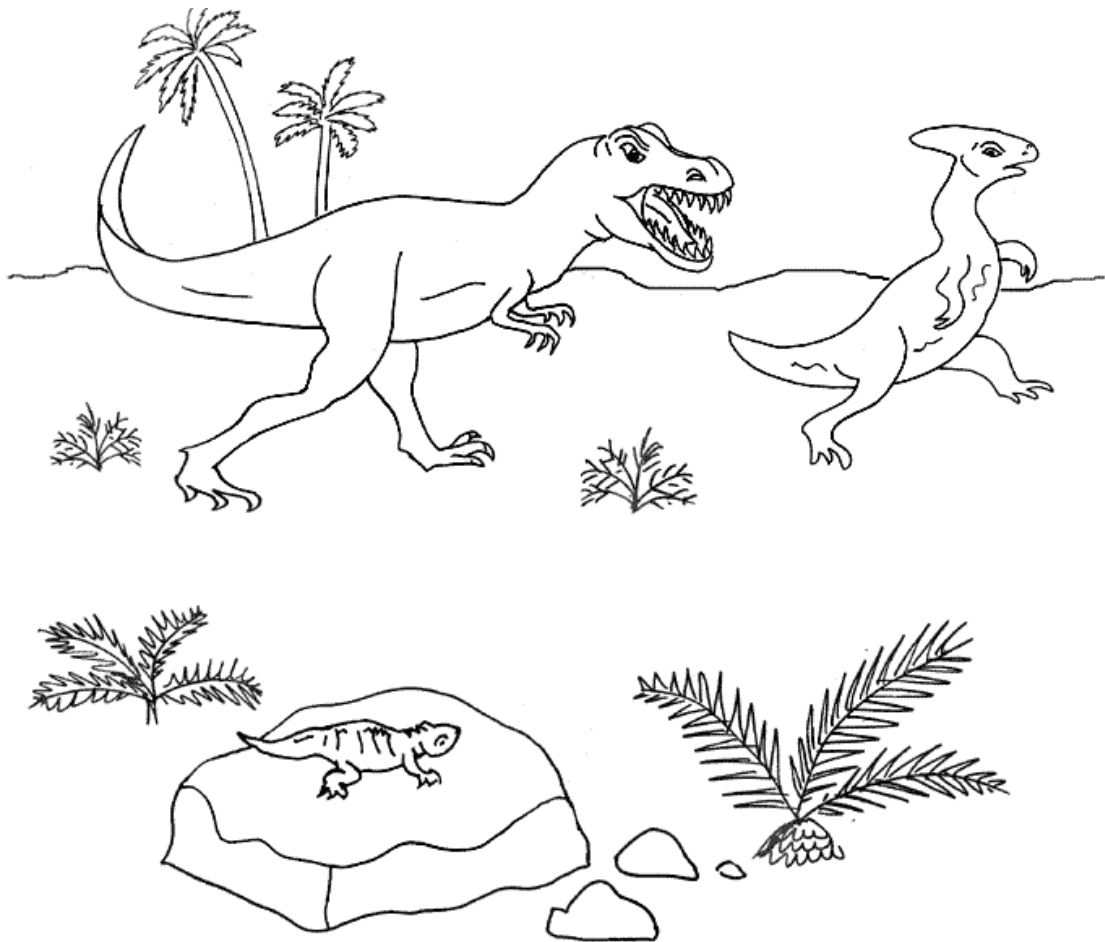
“Good.”

“Let’s face it,” he said loftily, “I’m the King of the Killers, and you’re just a tiny, helpless little – little – what exactly *are* you?”

“A tuatara,” Lila said.

“A funny little tuatara! Ha ha! Well, I won’t eat you. I don’t suppose you’ll last long anyway, with all these huge and hungry dinosaurs around! Goodbye, little measly mouthful!”

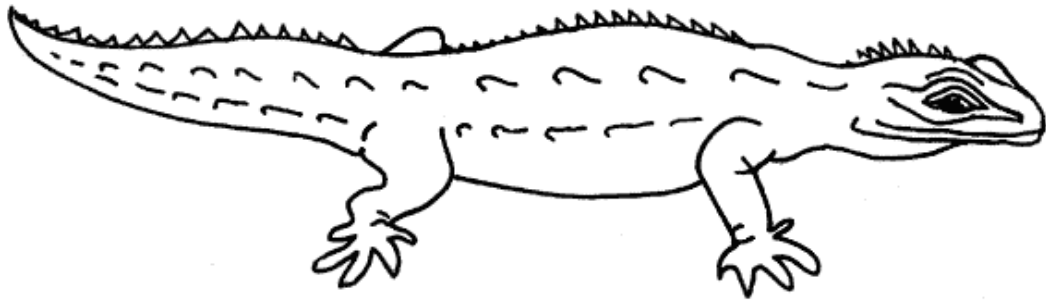
With a happy roar, King King ran off to chase a nice fat hadrosaur.



“Goodbye,” said Lila. She stretched out on her warm rock in the sun and watched him with a lazy smile, till he was out of sight.

The End

Tuataras are small lizards that lived many millions of years ago, at the same time as the dinosaurs. Unlike the dinosaurs, though, they did not become extinct. There are still a few around today, living in New Zealand.



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