



DEATH BY DINOSAUR

A SAM STELLAR MYSTERY

JACQUELINE GUEST

COTEAU
BOOKS



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*For Mary – forever friends
from alpha to omega*

Chapter 1

NEW CASE

GUARD MURDERED IN DINOSAUR BONE THEFT! Police Baffled

Samantha Stellar couldn't tear her eyes away from the newspaper article. The headline screamed for attention, especially the 'police baffled' part. It was all there in black and white – an unexplained, unsolved theft with a deadly twist. She pushed her glasses back up onto the bridge of her nose and smiled. It was exactly what an aspiring spy such as herself dreamed of – a mystery suitable for James Bond, code name 007.

Sam nudged her cousin, Paige Carlson, who was sleeping in the seat beside her. "Wake up."

"What? Are we finally there?" Paige mumbled groggily.

"Nope, still rollin' across the Alberta prairie in our trusty Greyhound. But, on a cooler subject, did you know that a couple of months ago there was a South American dinosaur fossil stolen from a museum in Ontario? During the theft a guard was killed with the fossilized horn from a *Triceratops*. Can you believe it? It's the mysterious case of...da-da-da-dum: *Death by Dinosaur*." She used her best theatrical voice for drama on the last part.

Sam could imagine the gruesome scene the police had found. The dead body, its sightless eyes staring into infinity, the massive horn protruding from the hapless victim's back. Or front, the article hadn't said. And blood! She was sure there'd been enough to keep any Count from Transylvania positively gorged.

"That's messed up!" Paige said sympathetically. "Truly a brutal way to go. What I don't get is why you woke me up to give me this really, *really* old news flash."

Sam heard the irritation in her cousin's voice but went on anyway. "It wasn't the only theft. The string of targets stretches right across Canada into every museum with so much as a chunk of coprolite. That's fossilized dino dung in case you aren't up on all things Jurassic. Of course, I've been tracking these dinosaur bone heists from the beginning and have information from every web page, blog, twitter and tweet."

"Yeah, so, what does any of this have to do with us?"

Paige had gone from irritated to confused, and Sam knew she had only seconds before she lost her cousin completely. "Connect the dots, Paige. Dinosaur bones are being stolen. Every dino museum in Canada *except one* has been hit. And where are we going to work this summer?"

Her cousin blinked, not connecting a single dot. "Um, don't tell me...the Tyrrell Museum of Thingamabob."

"It's the Royal Tyrrell Museum of Palaeontology and it's filled with dinosaur bits and bones. It's also the only one *not* on the hit list. You know what this means?" Sam tried to keep the excitement out of her voice.

"Uh...our museum isn't as popular with murdering thieves as the others?"

Sam ignored her cousin's comment. "It means the Tyrrell will probably be next. This museum is a huge deal in the Dino Verse, and it doesn't make sense to skip it."

"So why have they?" Paige pushed herself semi-upright in the sagging seat.

Sam thought about this. "That, cousin, is a very good question. Maybe the crooks are working their way down some kind of heist list and the Tyrrell is last. You know, kind of like keeping dessert as a reward for eating your Brussels sprouts. It's a good thing we're going to be there."

This got Paige's attention. "What aren't you telling me and what are you plotting? Samantha Stellar, have you conned me into being on this bus to Drumheller with you?"

Sam ignored her cousin's rather accurate accusation. "It all started when my *weirdometer* went off. Remember I told you about the odd feeling I get when I'm onto something important? Well, when I saw the first article on the museum thefts I got a particularly high reading."

Paige scowled. "Don't start with the hocus-pocus stuff, Sam. And you still haven't told me what any of this has to do with us."

"You are *so-o-o-o* suspicious. All I meant was, you know, *if* the Tyrrell were to acquire, say, an exotic South American dinosaur fossil, things could get exciting."

"*Fine*," Paige said, managing to work a big helping of suspicion into this word too. "As long as you're not conjuring up some government conspiracy fantasy." She pulled a small hot-pink mirror out of her purse and scrutinized her face. "*Crap on a cracker!* I drooled in my sleep and washed away my perfect pout." She hastily repaired her smudged makeup then shook her bright-red hair back into perfect curls that framed her heart-shaped face.

Sam's cousin was the "early bloomer" in the family. She was all glam – tall, slim and with killer cheekbones.

Sam, on the other hand, was what you called "healthy." She was on the short side and her body type screamed "athlete" with muscles that went way past toned and no hint of curves. Add to this pencil-straight auburn hair and campfire-smoke grey eyes behind black-framed glasses and you clearly had a girl who'd never willingly be on a fashion shoot. She was happy with the way she looked and didn't bother with makeup, even when there was a new hot "student body" at school.

As Sam watched her cousin's *toilette*, she decided not to add how she'd kept up with all things Tyrrell, and if what she'd

read was correct, she was sure this museum would be targeted next. A perfect case for *Sam Stellar, Super Sleuth!* (She'd decided this was the title she'd have on her business cards when she actually had...well...a business.)

This carefully collected intel meant she needed to be behind the scenes at the famous palaeontology centre in order to foil the upcoming crime.

Actually, being on-site when the thieves struck had presented a real challenge. Then – a miraculous sign from the heavens! Sam's school counsellor told her about the Summer Studies and Work Experience program.

The program was available to students who wanted to learn about a profession they were interested in. As an added bonus, the lucky ones chosen earned extra school credits while doing it. Sam had needed to bring her marks up to get in, which meant studying harder than she ever had in all of her fourteen years on this particular planet, and it had paid off big time.

Convincing her family she was thinking of being a palaeontologist had been the tricky part. Her unexpected career choice was news to them, but when she persuaded Paige (a girl with a rep for being down-to-earth) to sign on, the deal was clinched.

Sam thoughtfully tapped the article she was holding, then decided to tell her cousin everything she had deduced. "Paige, I've got a hunch we won't have to wait long for the next theft." She pulled another clipping out of her backpack and held it up with a flourish. "Read this."

Finally happy with her appearance, Paige dropped the mirror back into her bag and then read out loud. "*Royal Tyrrell To Receive Unique Colombian Dinosaur Find*. Yeah, so what?"

"Last time I played Where's Waldo, Colombia was in South America. Refer back to previous article." She waved the other piece of newspaper, Chinese fan style. "It's as though the Tyrrell is supplying the perps with mighty tasty bait."

"Perps?" Paige cocked one perfect brow at Sam.

“You know – the dirty rats, the low life, the *perpetrators*...” Sam enthusiastically wiggled both her eyebrows at her cousin.

Their discussion was interrupted by a raised voice from the row behind theirs.

“Mom, I had to slug him,” a young boy whined. “He hit me first!”

“I don’t care who started it. You and your brother are both in trouble, so knock it off.” The harried mother was obviously in no mood for scrappy kids. “Excuse me sir,” she said in a calm controlled voice adults reserved for other adults, “could you tell me the time?”

“*Si, señora*, it is nearly six o’clock,” a man with a strong Spanish accent answered.

Sam froze. Had she heard right?

A Spanish-speaking man on the bus to Drumheller where the Tyrrell Museum with its soon-to-arrive, South-American dinosaur was located! What were the odds?

Sam tingled with an electric buzz and knew her weirdometer had jumped off the scale. Was it only some cosmic coincidence, or had her first case just begun?

“Paige, give me your mirror,” she whispered urgently.

“You really should get your own beauty gear.” Her exasperated tone said this was covering old ground. “Oh wait, you don’t do the fashionista thing, do you? Instead, you borrow mine...” Grumbling, Paige rummaged in her over-over-sized bag, then handed Samantha the small compact.

As casually as possible, Sam held the mirror up as she scoped out the mysterious passenger. She spotted him immediately. The dark suit he wore made him very conspicuous. Everyone else sported denim jeans and ball caps. She committed his details to memory: thin black moustache, dark wavy hair, swarthy complexion. Check, check and *check!* Very Latin, very suspicious!

In case anyone was watching, Sam smudged her mouth

with her finger as though applying lip gloss. She angled the small mirror a little higher and was able to sneak another furtive peek at the man.

That was when Sam saw the conspicuous bulge in his jacket. She gasped, and her heart sped up a beat, or maybe two.

Unless she missed her guess, this dark stranger had a gun hidden under his coat. And in an instant, he became more than mysterious; he became menacing.

Chapter 2

CLUE NÚMERO UNO

As the kilometres rolled by, Sam decided surveillance on a bus was pretty easy (where could the guy hide anyway?), which made it simple for her to keep a covert eye on the dark stranger. She continued periodical observations of her suspect; unfortunately, he did nothing to warrant her super-spy attention.

Finally, as twilight faded into dusk, the bus started a steep descent into a lush, green river valley, and the town of Drumheller came into view. It was in this valley that a wonderful treasure trove of dinosaur bones had been found, and because of these finds, the Royal Tyrrell Museum had been built. Along with being an amazing museum, it was an important research facility with top scientists from all over the globe working on fossils.

Even if it hadn't been the next logical target for the thieves, Sam couldn't help being excited about working at the museum. One-hundred-million-year-old bones of the biggest creatures that ever roamed the earth! Truly mind boggling. Maybe she *would* take up dinosaur hunting, between cases.

Turning to take a last peek at her suspect, Sam's attention was unexpectedly grabbed by a young man watching her. The cute blond winked. She spun around feeling her face burn.

He obviously thought she'd been looking at him. Groaning, Sam shrank down into her seat. As soon as she got home, she'd log on to her favourite online academy, The Superior School for Spies, and repeat the class on Undercover Observation Techniques.



After a rather bumpy stop, the passengers gathered their belongings and shuffled down the aisle. Sam waited for her suspect, and then, as he moved past, she stood and accidentally brushed against him.

She was right! There was no mistaking the feel of a semi-automatic in a shoulder holster. "Scuse me," she mumbled, ducking her head as she reached down for her backpack. She watched him out of the corner of her eye as he continued moving with the other passengers.

Sam followed at a discreet distance, which on a crowded rural bus meant two farmers and a cowboy behind her target. Her cunning master plan: trail her suspect and see what he was up to.

Emerging from the bus, Sam winced as her cousin abruptly changed the master plan.

"Yo! Sam, over here!" Paige yelled in her best hockey-rink voice. "I'm almost positive I put tags on all four of my suitcases but one bag seems to be missing. Can you help find it?"

Samantha inspected the tidy row of suitcases on the sidewalk and had to admit, they were all very similar. Finding Paige's was like picking one suspect out of a lineup of clones. Her own battered neon-green bag was easy to find and she pulled it out of the row then added it to Paige's pile. "Doesn't the driver deliver these to the *inside* of the building?"

"Apparently not in the *très chic* town of Drumheller," Paige said, trying not to bend over too far in her tiny red-and-black plaid skirt as she continued reading the name tags. "This is stupid dumb! Does everyone in the world have exactly the same black suitcase as me? For crying out loud, Sam, help me before I'm arrested for indecent exposure!" She tugged at her skirt.

Sam was about to mention she had her own stuff to worry about when she glimpsed her suspicious suspect disappearing

into the terminal. As any covert agent knows, when tailing someone, timing was crucial. She grabbed the two random bags nearest her. "I'll take these inside for you, Paige." And before her cousin could yell at her, Sam hurried toward the doors.

Once inside, Sam quickly scanned the room. No sign of him. "*Rotten rodents!*" she cursed. This was not an auspicious start to her spying career.

Abandoning the suitcases, Sam searched for a pay phone to call her mother's long-time friend, Mrs. O'Reilly, who ran the boarding house where they'd be staying. Inconveniently, Sam didn't have a cellphone, and that was a constant source of argument at home. Her parents thought the ability to Snapchat, text or #*anything* to her friends 24/7 was unnecessary. They simply didn't understand modern social networking!

The fact she'd lost her new cell two days after she'd received it as a Christmas present might have had something to do with her parents' negative take on the situation. It had fallen out of her pocket while she'd been skiing in the back country and was probably frozen in a glacier by now.

Paige was no help. Her supersize cell with its sparkling pink rhinestone case was fabulous, but as she continually forgot to charge the battery, it was more of a pretty paperweight than a functioning phone.

Finding a public pay phone was a bit of a treasure hunt. There weren't many around and the ones that still existed were always tucked into some hidden alcove, invisible to mortals.

Fortunately, in a bus terminal the size of a broom closet, there weren't many places to stash the booth. Across the room, Sam saw the only communications kiosk in the depot – and it was being used.

She caught her breath. The tall guy in the red phone booth, which could have been straight off the streets of old London, was her mystery man!

Her cousin, now dragging her complete set of all four

over-packed suitcases, came to a halt behind Sam.

"Paige, do you see the guy using the phone?" Sam asked urgently.

Sam's cousin scrutinized the man in the booth. "Yeah, why? He's not only too old for you," she wrinkled her small nose, "he's not yummy at all."

"He's the suspicious man from the bus! The one I've been watching. Check him out – he's writing something down."

"What suspicious man? Why were you watching him?" Paige's mouth drew into a hard line. "Oh, no you don't. No way, Sam! You're not going to start with that secret agent stuff, are you? Every time we go anywhere, you turn it into a James Bond movie. It's just some old geezer, for crying out loud! He probably runs the local hardware store and was in Calgary ordering new toilet seats for outhouses."

She pulled hard on one of her wheeled suitcases, sending it smack into Sam's heel. "You promised me on this gig there would be all kinds of cute, scientific-type guys back from months of working on lonely digs, or hanging out in boring labs and in need of stimulating conversation from a stunning young woman...such as myself. That homey is none of the above."

Wincing, Sam bent to rub her bruised foot. "Do you have a driver's license for your wheeled weapon?" As she watched, the dark-haired man stepped out of the phone booth and started across the terminal. "Duck!" She reached up and pulled Paige's arm down. The rest of her cousin's body obediently followed.

"*Sa-man-tha...*" Paige warned, carefully pronouncing each syllable. "I mean it. No nutty cloak-and-dagger stuff. We're almost fifteen now, you know – *practising adults*. We don't have time for your superspy scenarios."

"*Pa-i-ge*," Sam reciprocated with the three-syllable pronunciation, which was hard to do with a one-syllable name. "He's dangerous." She knew this was going to be a tough sell. "When

he was leaving the bus, I bumped into him and felt a concealed weapon.”

“You actually *saw* this alleged concealed weapon?” Paige’s tone had *doubtful* written large.

“No, Sherlock,” Sam said impatiently. “It was *concealed*. But it felt exactly like a gun.”

“Or a hairbrush, or a lumpy wallet, or keys, or who knows what! Your *imagination* says it was a gun.” Paige dismissed the idea with a flick of her hand.

Sam shook her head. “Sceptic! I know that guy couldn’t tell a Robertson screw driver from a Stillson wrench.”

She sprinted for the pay phone and had nearly made it when she intercepted an elderly woman heading for the same unoccupied booth. “Excuse me.” Sam pushed in front of the flustered senior. “Telephone sanitation officer!” Flashing her library card, she slammed the door shut.

The irate woman beat on the booth with her cane. Paige glared in Sam’s direction, then stalked off, suitcases trailing behind.

“Great!” Sam grumbled. “So much for backup.”

Ignoring the loud banging, Sam inspected the booth. Everything was normal. No secret messages taped to the bottom of the phone or code words etched into the glass. She noticed the ancient directory had been left lying open. Tipping the page slightly, she could make out a faint impression. With her trusty yellow Ticonderoga pencil from her backpack, she carefully shaded over the ghost message. *Museo 403-555-4157* appeared.

Tearing off a small corner of the page, Sam quickly jotted the name and number down, then held up one finger to let the woman know she was nearly through. Fishing in her blue jeans for change, Sam thumbed the coins into the phone and dialed Mrs. O’Reilly to arrange transportation.

The thumping became a lot more energetic. For an old girl, this lady had quite a swing. Smiling sweetly, Sam surrendered

the pay phone before any security personnel showed up.

Excitement built as she hurried after her cousin and held up the paper. "Well...?"

Paige frowned at the crumpled scrap. "So...it's obviously Mr. Museo's phone number. There's nothing clandestine about writing down a phone number – besides, you don't know Mr. X wrote it."

Sam scoffed, "Mr. X? You're not serious? That's way too cliché for our mystery man." She thought about the perfect tag for her prime suspect; then the corners of her mouth crooked up. "Me, I think it should be Agent D, for Double-O-Dino. Plus, it's a darn good thing our country's security isn't in your hands, Ms Carlson. This is practically oozing with intrigue. I saw him write something and I'm sure this *Museo* guy's phone number is it."

The woman in the booth was still shaking her fist in their direction and giving her opinion in a way that made Sam wish she couldn't lip-read quite so well. A sailor could take lessons from her. Obviously, that particular phone was off limits and Sam made a mental note to call Mr. Museo on the first free land line she found outside the terminal. She simply had to get another cellphone. She felt like she was on her own lonely planet without one.

While they stood in front of the depot waiting for their ride, Sam saw another passenger from the bus, the blond dude. Cringing at the memory of being busted spying, she tried to make herself as inconspicuous as possible by crouching behind Paige's mountain of suitcases. Her own bag was too small and too 'look-at-me' green.

"What are you doing?" her cousin asked curiously.

Sam motioned Paige to be quiet – annoyingly her cousin didn't decode her frantic signals and continued loudly.

"Sam! Did you drop something? Get up. I'll help you look. Got a cramp in your leg? Those are killers. Rub your calf –"

“Paige – *be quiet!*” Sam hissed. “I haven’t dropped anything. I don’t want to be seen!”

“By whom?” Paige stood on tiptoe, rubbernecking left, then right. “Oh, my, Miss Scarlet! Is it your many fans hounding you for your autograph again? Perhaps the *paparazzi* found out you were coming and they’re trying to get a money shot.”

“Will you *puh-lease* keep your voice down!” Sam peered over the pile of suitcases. The hot guy was nowhere to be seen. “Okay, it’s safe.”

Her cousin’s lips formed a perfect *O*. “*O-o-o-o!* That’s really comforting to know. I thought we were both done for!”

Sam stood and dusted off her jeans. “Civilians. *Humph!*”