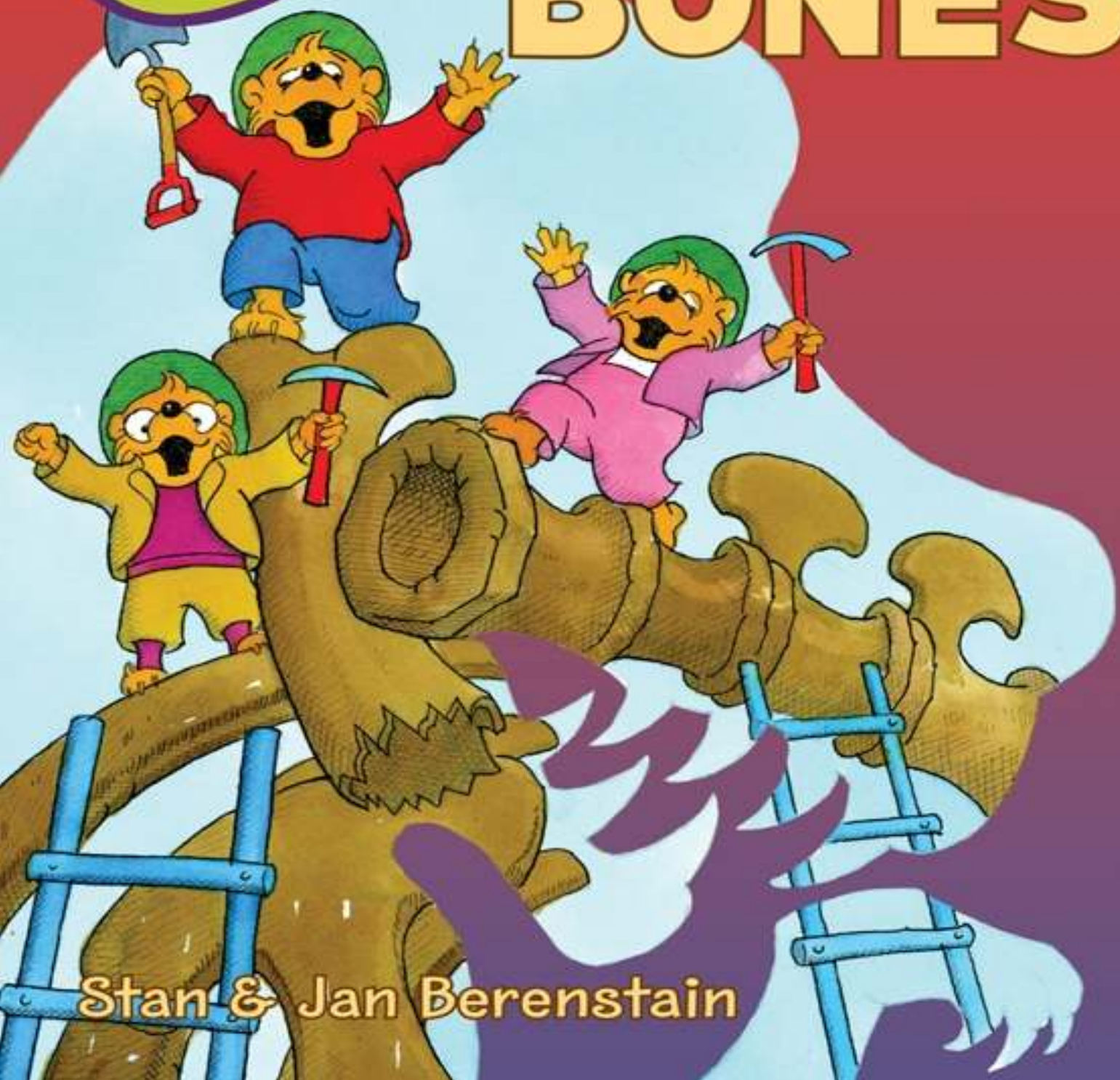


The Berenstain Bears®

AND THE

G-R-EX BONES



Stan & Jan Berenstain

The Berenstain Bears[®]
AND THE
**G-REX
BONES**



by Stan & Jan Berenstain

HARPER

An Imprint of HarperCollinsPublishers

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Chapter 1

An Unexpected Visitor

Ralph Ripoff, Beartown's small-time crook and swindler, had just settled down to an afternoon nap on his houseboat's living room sofa when there was a knock at the front door.

"Who could that be?" Ralph said to himself.

"Who could that be? Who could that be?" said his pet parrot, Squawk, ever alert on his perch by the window that looked out on the river.

Ralph ignored Squawk and padded to the door. He opened it. There stood a tall, thin bear who looked vaguely familiar.

"Zoltan Bearish," said the visitor in a deep voice. He had dark eyes and a piercing gaze. He wore a long black coat and a black wide-brimmed hat.

"No, sir," answered Ralph. "I'm Ralph Ripoff. I don't know any Zoltan Bearish."

"You do now," said the bear, with a little smile.

"I do?" said Ralph. "How's that?"

"Because *I* am Zoltan Bearish," said the bear. "*Doctor* Zoltan Bearish."

"Oh, I get it," said Ralph, chuckling at the misunderstanding. "But I didn't know doctors make house calls anymore. Especially when you don't even ask them to come."

"I am not a medical doctor, Mr. Ripoff," said Bearish patiently. "I am a doctor of chemistry."



"Oh, is that so?" said Ralph. "Well, what can I do for you, Doctor?"

"First, you can invite me in," said Bearish. His gaze became even more penetrating.

Ralph didn't usually invite callers in before they had stated their business. But Dr. Bearish's gaze had gained a strange hold on him. "Please come in," he heard himself say.



When they had seated themselves in the living room, Ralph said, "You look familiar, Doctor. Have you ever lived in Beartown?"

"Yes," said Bearish. He sat stiffly, his long, thin hands folded in his lap. "About five years ago I worked in the laboratory at the Bearsonian Institution. I was the head chemist. In fact, I was the *only* chemist."

"Sounds like a lonely job," said Ralph.

"Not at all," replied Bearish. "An assistant would only have gotten on my nerves. After all, I am the finest chemist in all Bear Country."

"If you don't say so yourself," chuckled Ralph. Boy, was this guy weird! "How come you left Beartown?"

Dr. Bearish's smile vanished. His gaze drifted to the window. "The Bearsonian director and I had ... a falling out, you might say." His use of the phrase "falling out" brought the smile back to his face for a moment, for it had caused him to imagine a certain bear falling out of an upper-story Bearsonian window.

"The director," said Ralph. "You mean Professor Actual Factual?"

Suddenly, Dr. Bearish sat bolt upright in his chair. "Don't *ever* say that name in my presence!" He snapped.

Ralph shrank back into the sofa. "Sorry, Doctor," he mumbled. This guy was an even bigger weirdo than he'd thought! "Guess that means he fired you?"

"That is correct," admitted Bearish. "It was over the most trivial of matters. I accidentally left the lid off a container of experimental fruit flies."

"It must have been a pretty important experiment for the professor to fire you for that," said Ralph.



“Hardly!” snapped Bearish again, making Ralph jump. “He was only angry because the flies ate the apple he’d brought for his lunch.”

Ralph nodded. But if he hadn’t been trying to be polite, he would have shaken his head instead. He knew Professor Actual Factual pretty well. And he knew that the professor was not only the greatest scientist in the history of Bear Country, but also one of its kindest, most generous citizens. Firing someone over a lost lunch just wasn’t his style.

“In any event,” continued Dr. Bearish, “I’ve come to you for assistance in seeking justice. I have devised a swindle to get back at the professor-who-shall-remain-nameless. Unfortunately, I have no practical experience in the swindling department.”

“Well, you’ve come to the right place,” said Ralph, holding his arms out wide. “The Department of Swindles—Ralph Ripoff, director, at your service. Let’s hear your plan.”

Dr. Bearish relaxed his gaze and leaned back in his chair. “You may know,” he began, “that the professor-who-shall-remain-nameless has long sought a particular fossil skeleton to complete his collection in the Bearsonian Hall of Dinosaurs.”

“You mean a *T-rex* skeleton?” said Ralph. “Sure, everyone in Beartown knows that. He even built that special room to put it in when he finds one.”

“The rotunda,” said Bearish.

Ralph had never heard the word before but thought it was a perfect one for the big circular room with the high domed ceiling that Actual Factual had built.



“After five long years of experiments in my private laboratory in Big Bear City,” continued Bearish, “I have at last produced a substance that can be shaped into perfect fake fossils. It can be made cheaply and in large amounts. And chemical analysis will reveal no difference between it and real fossil material, which I had a chance to study in detail in the Bearsonian lab.”

“Don’t tell me,” said Ralph. “You want to make a fake *T-rex* skeleton and sell it to the Bearsonian for a million dollars. See, I’m one step ahead of you, Doctor.”



“More like half a step,” said Bearish. “Because I’ve already had the fossil bones made—by a sculptor who is tired of being poor. And they aren’t *T-rex* bones. They are the bones of a similar but yet undiscovered species twice the size of *T-rex*. Imagine: *twice* the size! It will barely fit into the rotunda of the Hall of Dinosaurs. I figure this skeleton will bring at least five times as much money as a *T-rex* skeleton.”

“What do you call this new dinosaur species?” asked Ralph.

“I don’t,” said Bearish. “We’ll sweeten the deal by allowing the professor to name it himself.”

“He oughta love that,” said Ralph. “Get his name into the *National Bearographic* again. But there’s one thing I don’t understand, Doctor. How exactly would you get back at the professor with this swindle? You’ll make a lot of money, of course, but the professor will make an even bigger name for himself in the science world than he has already.”

Dr. Bearish smiled an evil little smile. “Very simple,” he said. “Exactly one year after the sale of

the fossil skeleton to the Bearsonian, I shall go to the media and reveal the hoax. The professor will be completely humiliated over having been tricked in a matter of science. His reputation will be stained forever.”



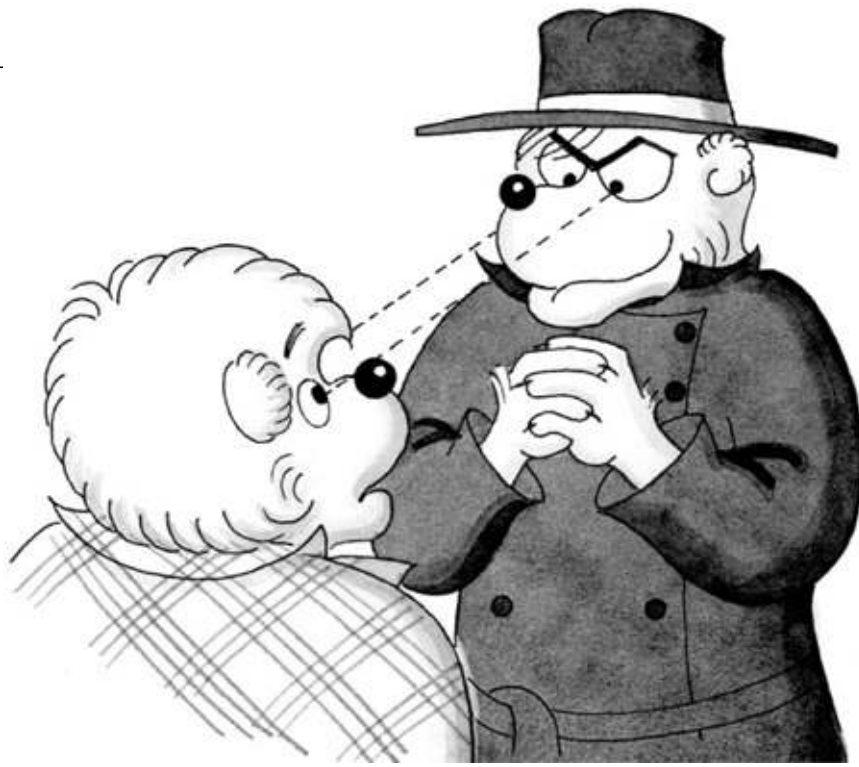
Now, most bears wouldn't have understood why Dr. Bearish could reveal the hoax after a year without fear of being arrested and thrown in jail. But no one was better versed in the ins and outs of hoaxes, swindles, and other kinds of fraud than Ralph Ripoff. He knew that a victim of fraud had to report the crime to the police within one year of the commission of the crime. If the victim failed to do so, the swindler could not be arrested and tried in a court of law for the crime—ever. It was called “statute of limitations”—a law limiting the amount of time for reporting a crime. And to Ralph Ripoff, statutes of limitations were the most beautiful laws in all the land.

“As far as it goes,” said Ralph, “it’s ingenious. But if your fake fossils are as good as you say they are, why would anyone believe you about the hoax?”

“Ah,” said Bearish. “I have marked one of the fossil leg bones with a chemical symbol known only to me. A kind of chemical signature. I will direct the media to examine and identify it with the help of chemists.”

Dr. Bearish’s penetrating gaze bore into Ralph’s eyes. *He’s trying to hypnotize me*, thought Ralph. *This mad scientist is trying to trick me into helping him with his evil plan!*

And evil it was. Cheating the Bearsonian out of millions of dollars wasn’t what was bothering Ralph, of course. After all, taking other bears’ hard-earned money was the lifeblood of swindlers. But usually there was nothing *personal* about it. Destroying the hard-earned reputation of a good and kind bear was different. A bear’s reputation was worth more than any amount of money.



Ralph knew from his days as a carnival hypnotist that a bear couldn't be hypnotized if he didn't want to be. *I won't let him do this to me*, he thought as he fought Dr. Bearish's gaze for control over his own mind. *Ralph Ripoff swindles only those bears he wants to swindle!*

That's when Zoltan Bearish lost the battle for Ralph's mind. But, oddly enough, that didn't make Ralph refuse to take part in the doctor's evil scheme. You see, most bears, like most humans, have a strong urge to do the selfish thing. And, as you can probably tell from his whole career, Ralph has never had much success resisting that urge. What's more, as you will see from his thoughts below, Ralph had a knack for turning what was good for Ralph into what was good for everyone.



Now wait a minute, thought Ralph. *There's a downside to Bearish's scheme, but it also has an upside.* He, Ralph, would be famous! In his mind's eye, he pictured his own smiling face on the cover of *Swindler's Digest*. Across it were the words: *The Greatest*. Why, Ralph's Place would become

swindlers' shrine! Crooks and conbears from all over Bear Country would flock to it to pay the respects. And he could receive them at his leisure, for the million dollars or so he would get from the swindle would mean he'd never have to swindle anyone again for the rest of his life. Indeed, Actual Factual's loss would be everyone else's gain. By helping Zoltan Bearish, he would be doing good for all bearkind!

Besides, thought Ralph, *Actual Factual* is supposed to be the greatest scientist in Bear Country history. If he hurts his reputation by allowing himself to be the victim of a scientific hoax, he'll have only himself to blame, won't he?

Blaming the victim: that was another thing Ralph did even more often than most bears. It was natural in his line of work.

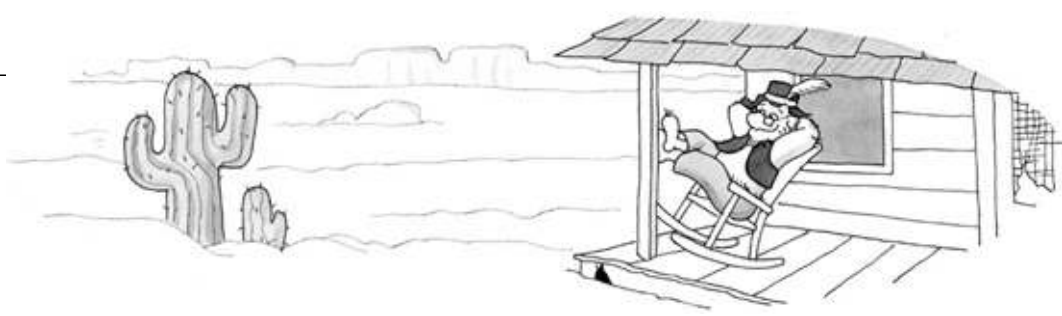
"Dr. Bearish," said Ralph, "I have considered your plan and found it good. For twenty percent of the take, I'll help you get your revenge."

"Agreed," said Bearish. "But I prefer to call it justice."

"Sounds more like revenge to me," muttered Ralph.

"Revenge, justice," said Bearish with a shrug. "Is there a difference?"





Chapter 2

Swindle Within a Swindle

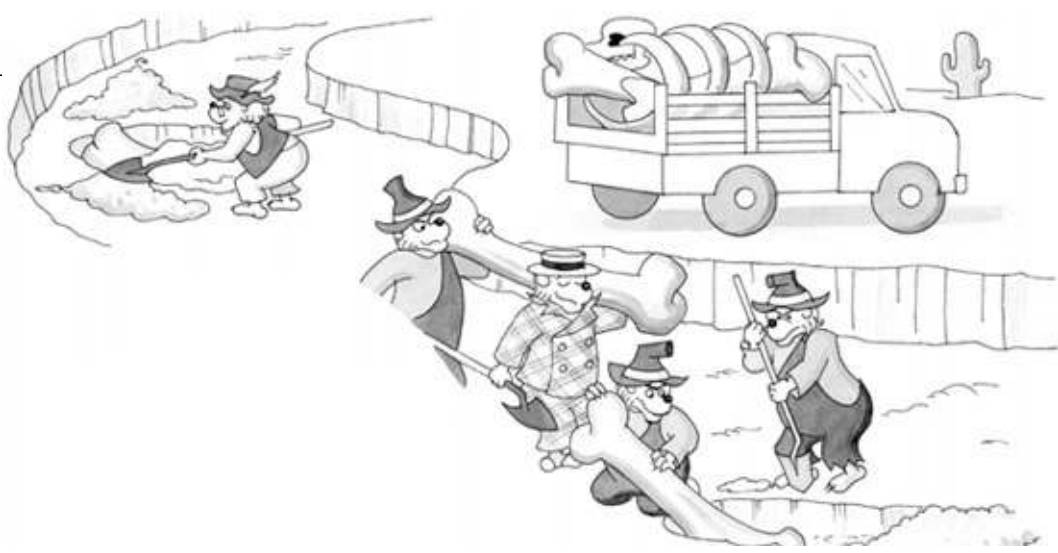
Even a crook like Ralph Ripoff thought that Zoltan Bearish's idea of justice was a little spooky. But not spooky enough to make him change his mind about collecting a million dollars.

What Bearish needed was someone to organize the whole plan. And Ralph certainly filled the bill. Even before they shook hands on the deal, Ralph's mind was hard at work. First he had to hire someone to "discover" the phony fossils in a likely place. And Ralph knew just the bear for the job. His name was Sandcrab Jones, and he lived all alone in a little shack out in Great Grizzly Desert, about good fifty miles west of Beartown. Sandcrab would strike fossil gold while pretending to dig a deep well in the dry streambed near his shack. Then Ralph would contact the media, who would broadcast the live the rest of the skeleton being dug up. With good planning and execution, no one would suspect a hoax.

Now, Sandcrab Jones was an old hermit who had probably never had more than a few dollars in his pocket at any one time. Ralph knew that he could get him to do the job for as little as twenty or thirty dollars. Of course, he wouldn't tell Dr. Bearish that. He'd say that Sandcrab had demanded two hundred dollars, and when Bearish gave him the money to pay Sandcrab, he'd give Sandcrab the twenty or thirty they'd agreed on and keep the rest for himself. He'd do the same thing—pull the same swindle within a swindle—with the Bogg Brothers, whose labor and pickup truck he'd hire to transport the fake fossils to the desert. These career crooks lived in an old rundown house in the Forbidden Bog. They were a lot smarter than Sandcrab Jones, but Ralph suspected they didn't know the true value of dinosaur fossils. Ralph figured he could get their truck and labor for about two hundred dollars. But he'd tell Dr. Bearish that they had demanded *five* hundred, and he'd pocket the difference, just as he'd do with Sandcrab Jones.



Yes, the scheme was not only foolproof but highly profitable. In a year's time Ralph would be a millionaire, and in the meantime his little swindles on the side would buy him all the food, spatulas, straw hats, and canes he'd need until the big swindle finally paid off.



Chapter 3

Watched?

Ralph wasted no time putting his plan into action. And it worked like a charm—at least, up to the point of burying the dinosaur bones. There were so many of them and they were so big that the Bogg Brothers had to make three separate round trips to the desert in their pickup truck.

Finally, the third and final trip was almost done. The last shovels full of sandy streambed dirt had been tamped down over the buried dinosaur bones with the backs of five shovels. The five bear-hermits holding the shovels wiped their sweaty brows and looked at one another with satisfaction.

“That crazy doctor will be pleased as heck when I tell him these phony bones are safely in the ground,” said Ralph Ripoff.

“Not half as pleased as I am,” wheezed Sandcrab Jones, rubbing his aching old back.

The three Bogg Brothers, who were rubbing their backs too, nodded.

“You three have no right to complain,” grouched Ralph, “riding in that comfy cab while I bounced around with the bones in the back of the truck! Well, let’s hit the road. See you tomorrow, Sandcrab with an entire media crew.”

Ralph handed the hermit thirty dollars.

“Thanks, sonny,” said Sandcrab. “What did you say your name was again?”

“Ralph. Ralph Ripoff. You remember me, don’t you? I’m the guy you bought that termite insurance from. Well, happy fossil huntin’, old-timer.”



“No time like the present, I guess,” said Sandcrab, plunging the blade of his shovel into the newly tamped-down earth. But then he stopped and looked up. And looked all around.

“What’s wrong?” asked Ralph.

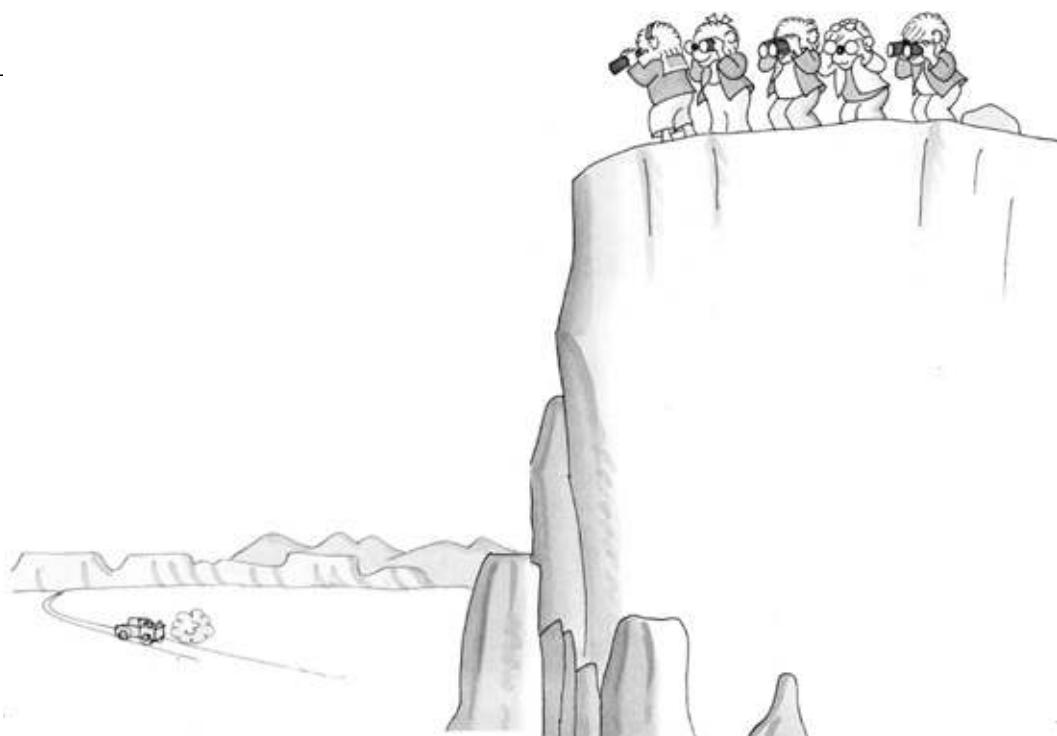
“Maybe nothin’,” said the old hermit. “But I just got a funny feelin’ we’re bein’ watched. Right this very moment.”

Ralph looked all around. Even though they were standing in a shallow gulch where the streambed was, he could see for miles in every direction. And all he saw was sand, rocks, cactuses, and, in the distance, a few of those flat-topped reddish hills called mesas. He looked back into Sandcrab’s blurry eyes. “Your eyesight is as bad as your memory, old-timer,” he said. “There’s no one out there.”

“I didn’t say I saw anyone out there,” protested Sandcrab. “I said I had a *feelin’*.”

“Well,” said Ralph, “if we can’t see them, they can’t see us. Okay, we’re outta here.”

Ralph looked back at Sandcrab Jones from the back of the pickup as it followed its own sandy tire tracks back to the highway. “Feeble old guy,” he said to himself. “All these years alone out here in the desert sun must have made him crazier than a bedbug.”



Chapter 4

Seen

But Ralph was wrong about Sandcrab Jones. Dead wrong. Sandcrab was no crazier than you or I. And though his memory and eyesight *had* grown a bit feeble with age, he was the exact opposite of feeble in some other important ways. He had a kind of sixth sense about certain things. For instance, he could predict right to the minute when the rare, sudden desert rains would come. And he could always tell you, right to the day, when the big cactus outside his shack would push out its tiny pink flowers. And like most bears who spend almost all their time alone, he always knew when he was being watched.

Just minutes before Sandcrab made his surprising statement, a small group of cubs was scanning the horizon with binoculars from the top of a mesa about a mile away. They were from Teacher Bob and Teacher Jane's classes at Bear Country School in Beartown, and they were out in the desert on a nature hike. Twenty minutes earlier they had chased a roadrunner down into a gorge while the rest of the group drifted off. And now they were lost.

"I say we go east," said Brother Bear, lowering his binoculars.

"Why east?" asked Sister.

"I just remembered," said Brother. "When we started out, Teacher Bob said we were headed west from the highway. Who's got a compass? I forgot mine."



"I forgot mine, too," said Sister.

"I left mine on the bus," said Lizzy Bruin. "It felt all lumpy in my pocket."

Brother looked hopefully at Cousin Fred. Surely a semi-nerd like Fred would bring a compass on a nature hike. But Fred felt in his pocket, only to pull it inside out with a sigh. There was a big hole in it.

"I've got mine!" said Barry Bruin. Proudly he held it up for all to see. It was tiny. Sort of a baby's compass. Barry looked at it and frowned. He shook it and looked again. "Darn!" he said. "It's busted."

"Where did you get that crummy little thing, anyway?" said Sister.

"From a box of Grizzly Jack," said Barry. "It was the prize. It must have broken when I bit it by accident."

"Great!" said Sister. "You're a prize, too, Barry."

"So how do we figure out which way east is?" asked Lizzy.



“I know!” said Fred. “The sun! It rises in the east and sets in the west!”

Shading their eyes, they all looked up. And groaned in unison. The sun was directly overhead.

“That means it’s noon!” cried Barry.

“So what?” said Sister.

Barry shrugged. “So, at least we know what time it is.”

More groans.

“We’re saved!” cried Fred all of a sudden. He pointed at the spot his binoculars were aimed at. “I see the bus! We’re only about a mile from the highway. Let’s get going.”

The cubs headed for the highway side of the mesa. But then they held back. “Come on, Liz!” called Barry.

Lizzy hadn’t budged. She was training her binoculars on something far off in the opposite direction. The others hurried to her side. “What is it, Liz?” asked Brother.



“I see some bears out there,” she said. “In a shallow gulch. Look.”

They scanned the area Lizzy was aiming at until they all found the bears.

“Five of ’em,” said Fred. “And there’s a pickup truck at the edge of the gulch.”

“They’re all holding something,” said Sister. “Shovels, I think. Hey, one of them just looked up. Now he’s looking all around. He’s looking in this direction.”

“Who are they?” Brother asked Lizzy, who had the sharpest eyesight of any of the cubs.

Lizzy peered extra hard through the rising heat waves that made everything wiggly and watery. “I can’t make out any faces,” she said. “But one of them is wearing a straw hat. Now he’s looking around too. He’s got a green suit on. And white things down around his ankles.”

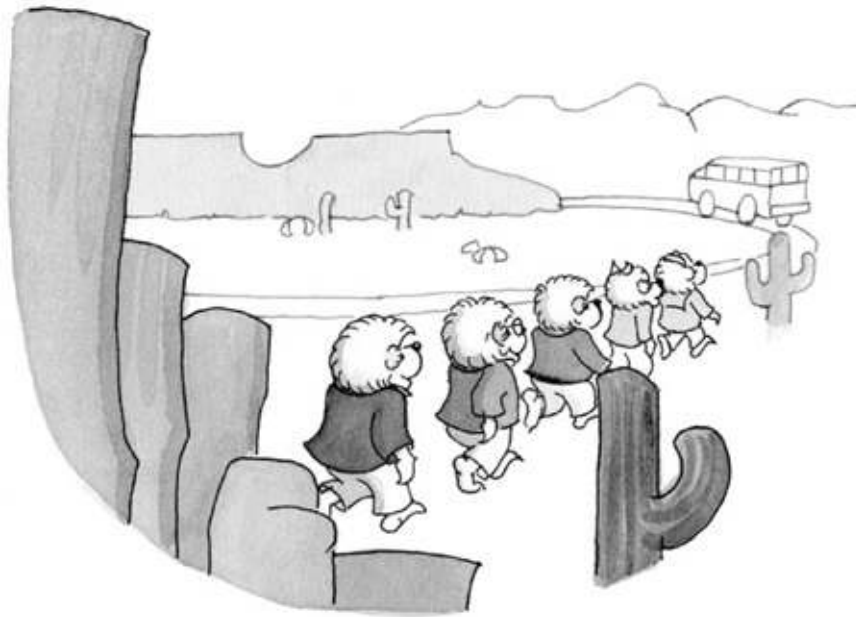
“Spats?” said Fred. “Green suit? Straw hat? You just described Ralph Ripoff.”

“What the heck is Ralph doing way out here in the desert?” said Sister.

“Hmm,” said Brother. “Something tells me that’s for Ralph to know and us to find out.”

“Does that mean you’re gonna call a meeting of the Bear Detectives?” asked Fred eagerly.

“Not yet,” said Brother. “We need more to go on. Maybe something will turn up in the next few days. Meanwhile, let’s get back to the bus. Sooner or later Teacher Bob and Teacher Jane will look for us there.”



Chapter 5

Fossil Furor

It turned out that Brother was right about both things. Teacher Bob and Teacher Jane did eventually check the bus for the lost cubs. And something did turn up about Ralph's desert trip in the next few days. The very *next* day, in fact.

The Bear family was gathered in front of the TV in the family room after dinner. Papa aimed the remote at the TV and pressed the on button. They were all very excited because they'd just gotten cable. Papa and Mama wanted to watch the Bear News Network (BNN), Brother wanted sports (BSPN), and Sister wanted Bear Music Television (BMTV). But Papa was the supreme lord and master of the remote (at least, whenever Mama let him be). So on came BNN.

A *BNN-Live* telecast was in progress. On camera was some sandy ground, on which rested some very large bones. The camera shifted to a group of bears digging with shovels in the sandy earth.

"Hey, that's Dan Digger and his team of workbears," said Papa. "I wonder what they found."

Then came the voice of Christiane Amanbear, the famous roving newscaster. "I'm out here in the Great Grizzly Desert, where an old hermit named Sandcrab Jones has discovered fossils of a dinosaur near his shack."

The camera shifted to another very recognizable bear, who was more infamous than famous. "Standing next to me," continued Amanbear, "is Ralph Ripoff, Beartown's well-known small-time crook and swindler. I understand, Mr. Ripoff, that Sandcrab Jones contacted you soon after he found the dinosaur bones. Is that correct?"

"That is correct, Christiane," said Ralph, grabbing the mike from her as he smiled broadly at the camera. "Sandcrab knew there was going to be a lot of publicity from this, not to mention a little money, and he was worried about handling such complicated matters all by himself. So I agreed to be his agent. He and I go way back, you know."



"So I hear, Mr. Ripoff," said Amanbear, snatching back the mike. "Our research staff has found out that some time ago you sold Sandcrab Jones a termite insurance policy for his shack. They also found

that the yearly price of the policy is more than it would cost Mr. Jones to rebuild his shack if it were completely destroyed by termites.”



“Termites?” said Ralph nervously. “I thought we were gonna talk about dinosaurs, not termites.”

“Maybe I should ask Mr. Jones himself about the termite insurance,” said Amanbear. “Where is he?”

“He’s holed up in his shack over yonder,” said Ralph quickly. “Kinda camera-shy, you know ...”

Papa hit the mute button and turned to Mama. “This is *really* big news,” he said. “Did you see the size of those bones? Wait’ll Professor Actual Factual hears about this!”

“I’m sure he already has, dear,” said Mama. “But it bothers me that Ralph is involved ...”

“Nonsense!” said Papa. “You heard Amanbear. Ralph sold Sandcrab some phony termite insurance. The old coot is probably feeble-minded. Natural for him to contact Ralph. Besides, there’s no chance in the whole wide world that Ralph would try to swindle Actual Factual. The professor knows fossils through and through. And that includes knowing what they’re worth.”

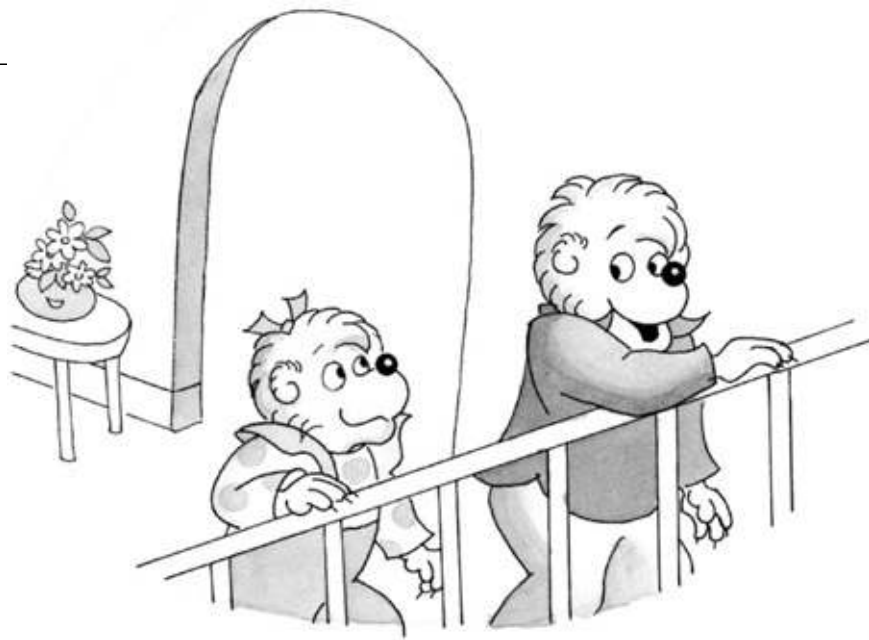
“I guess you’re right,” said Mama. “Still ...”

“What do you think, cubs?” said Papa. “Pretty exciting, eh?”

The cubs had been transfixed by the sight of Ralph Ripoff and bears with shovels in Great Grizz Desert for the second day in a row. They were still staring at the TV screen.

“Who, me?” said Brother. “Sure, Dad, it’s great. I think I’ll go upstairs and do my homework now.” He started up the stairs, then stopped and announced more loudly, “I said: I THINK I’LL GO UPSTAIRS AND DO MY HOMEWORK NOW ...”

Sister jumped up. “Oh, yeah, me too,” she said, and hurried after Brother to talk about what they had just seen on TV.





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