

DANIEL JÖSÉ OLDER



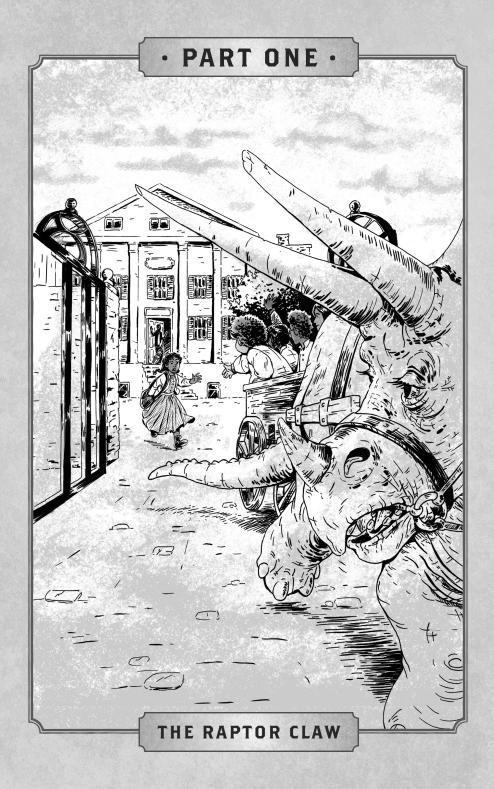
- BOOK ONE -





ARTHUR A. LEVINE BOOKS

AN IMPRINT OF SCHOLASTIC INC.





## "ARGARET!"

Magdalys Roca sat on her bed in the girls' bunk at the Colored Orphan Asylum and closed her eyes. Her day satchel was packed, her uniform was on, shoes buckled; she'd wrestled her hair into a tight bun the way the matrons insisted she do. The triceratops wagon was leaving any second for the theater, and the theater was just about the best place to be as far as Magdalys was concerned.

But . . .

"Margaret Rocheford, come here this instant!"

She had sworn, *sworn!* to herself that she wouldn't answer to that name anymore. She would answer to her *real* name, the way her brother Montez said it, the way her long-gone sisters

had: *Magdalys* with that *y* drawn out long and sharp *eeeees*, like a melody.

The matron's footsteps clack-clacked up the marble hall, paused, and then turned with a squeak and headed away again.

When Montez was there and he did say her name like the song she knew it to be, she didn't really care what Miss Henrietta Von Marsh called her. But now he was gone too, gone six weeks and two days to be exact, and sure the other kids called her Magdalys (and Maggie, Mags, or Mag-D, depending on the day), but it wasn't the same; it was a stumble not a song, and she certainly wouldn't be responding to Margaret. And Rocheford even less. So Magdalys sat there, and she tried not to think of the show she would miss at the Zanzibar Savannah Theater.

"The trike wagon will just leave without you, I suppose," Von Marsh called out as the hallway double doors squeaked open. "Shame, really. I heard the Crunks are performing *The Tempest* tonight." And then the doors slammed shut and the clack-clacking got quieter and quieter.

The Tempest! It wasn't Magdalys's favorite Shakespeare play, but she'd read it (she'd read most of them) and she was instantly filled with wonder: How would Halsey and Cymbeline Crunk, the two lead actors of the only all-black Shakespearean company in New York, bring that story of exiled wizards and lovers and monsters to life? Who would

play which role and how would they do the beast Caliban and what kinds of stage dinos would they use and how would the rowdy crowd react and . . .

Dang it! Magdalys thought, jumping to her feet and grabbing her satchel. She wasn't going to let Von Marsh's stubbornness make her miss out on some good theater. She shoved open the door and blitzed down the brightly lit corridor, her footfalls echoing all around her.

A bunch of kids were studying and playing board games in the first floor common area. "Whoa," Bernadette and Syl yelled as Magdalys blew past. "Slow down, Speeds McGee!" Sweety Mae called after her. But Magdalys didn't have time to stop and banter. She wasn't going to make it, and then she'd be mad at herself all night, and her already bad mood would sink beneath the floorboards as she imagined all the fun Two Step and Mapper and Little Sabeen were having without her.

"Careful now," old Mr. Calloway called when Magdalys slammed open the front doors and rocketed down the big, fancy staircase. "I just mopped!" Magdalys slowed a bit so she wouldn't slip and splatter herself all over the stone walking path ahead. Mr. Calloway had escaped a provisional farm in upstate New York long before Magdalys was born, and she tried to be as nice to him as she could.

"Sorry, Mr. Calloway!" she called over her shoulder. "See you tomorrow!"

"Alright!" Mr. Calloway called back.

Up ahead, Varney, the orphanage's huge old triceratops,

grunted and stomped his feet. Great big folds of flesh hung down from his massive belly and dangled in dollops over each other along his four thick legs. The two horns poking out from his forehead were dull and his sleepy eyes had bags under them, but Varney still managed to make the supply runs twice a week and take the kids on field trips to the theater now and then. In the orphanage library's tattered edition of *The Field Guide to North American Dinos, Pteros & Other Assorted -Sauria* (which everyone just called the Dinoguide), Dr. Barlow Sloan described triceratopses as *noble and docile beasts who wanted nothing more than to sit around chewing on grass and leaves all day, but were perfectly willing to ride into battle and march for weeks on end if called upon to do so by their masters.* 

Magdalys always wished she could spend more time with Varney. Dinos were much better than humans, mostly. They didn't make up names for you or judge you for how you wore your hair — they just lumbered around eating and pooping and carrying people places.

But it was only a few years ago that New York had passed a law granting black citizens the right to dinoride, and white people in Manhattan still bristled and stared when they saw someone with brown skin astride those massive scaly backs. Magdalys had no idea why anyone would want to keep her from dinoriding just because of the color of her skin, but she knew the orphanage certainly wouldn't let any of its wards near any dinos, except Varney, and him only every once in a while.

So Magdalys mostly had to be content with watching the great beasts cavort along outside her window: The lamplighter's iguanodons would pass first thing in the morning, extinguishing the lanterns as the day broke. Then the commuter brachys would stomp past, passengers cluttered on the saddles and hanging from straps along the side. By noon the streets would fill with stegosaurs lugging supplies and the duckbill riders in fancy dress clothes, heading off to important meetings, while microraptors scurried across the roads, carrying messages or making nuisances of themselves. Most of the trikes and raptors had been sent down south to fight the Confederates, but every once in a while she'd see one of those too. Magdalys could watch them out her window all day, but it wasn't the same as being out there with the dinos.

"Heeyah!" Marietta Gilbert Smack called out, and Varney heaved forward, pulling the wagon hitched to his back into motion.

*No!* Magdalys thought, sprinting through the big ornate gates enclosing the orphanage. A stitch opened up in her side. *Wait!* 

Varney stopped with a snort and sigh. He turned his big horned head and directed a single droopy eye at Magdalys. Magdalys skidded to a halt. Had Varney somehow...? It couldn't be. The old trike blinked once, then seemed to nod at her. Magdalys gasped.

"Mags!" Two Step yelled.

"Magdalys!" Little Sabeen squealed. "You made it!"

"So you decided to accept your name after all, *Margaret*," Henrietta Von Marsh said, a smug smile sliding across her face.

"No." Magdalys grabbed Two Step's outstretched hand and heaved herself onto the wagon. "I decided to go to the theater with my friends."

"Hold the wagon, Marietta," Von Marsh said with a withering scowl. She glared at Magdalys, who had made herself comfortable on the bench beside Two Step and Little Sabeen. "Young lady, when I call your name, I expect you to answer."

"I will answer," Magdalys said. "When you call my real name."

"Your *real* name is Margaret. Period. Your" — she curled up her lips in distaste — "other name no longer applies."

Magdalys took a deep breath, willing herself not to unleash the volcano fire of rage she had bubbling up inside her. *Can't* we just go, she thought, half hoping old Varney had somehow really heard her a few moments ago, half feeling like she was completely bonkers for even thinking that. *Go*...

"That is a remnant of the life you left behind," Von Marsh went on. "A life, I might add, that you don't even remember. You're in America now, not Cuba. And you will present yourself in American society as a proper little colored girl, as long as you are under my roof."

Varney grumbled like a tired old man and then heaved forward, pulling the wagon out of the driveway and onto Fifth

Avenue. "Hold the trike, I said, Marietta!" Von Marsh hollered, nearly toppling from the sudden lurch of movement.

"Good thing," Magdalys muttered as they rumbled out into the early evening streets of Manhattan, "we're not under your roof."



THE DINO LISTENED to me, Magdalys thought as Varney stomped along downtown toward the neighborhood everyone called the Raptor Claw, where the Zanzibar Savannah Theater was. He'd done just what she'd told him to. Twice! Magdalys had heard people talk about an ancient race of dinoriding warriors who could communicate with their steeds, but everyone knew that was all myth and rumor (Dr. Barlow Sloan, in particular, dedicated a whole side column of the Dinoguide to harrumphing the idea). And even if were true, it was ages ago, not today, in New York City. Certainly not some random orphan kid, right? It had to be coincidence.

Still, the nagging feeling that something extraordinary had just happened persisted . . .

"Watch this," Two Step said, standing in the middle of the wobbling cart and lifting both his wide arms to the sky. "I got a new move!"

"Oh, do sit down, young man," Old Mother Virginia Brimworth chided. "If you fall and hurt yourself we'll never hear the end of it from trustees."

Magdalys rolled her eyes. No one listened to Old Brimworth, and she usually got distracted so quickly after saying anything that it didn't matter anyway. "Do it!" Magdalys called. On the bench across from her, Amaya was staring out into the city around them, a sullen frown painted across her face, brow furrowed. Amaya always looked kind of sullen, and she didn't talk to too many people, but now there was something else: She looked alert.

Two Step spun once, then slid all the way to one side of the cart and made his whole body undulate like a wave. Then he jumped, clapped twice over his head, and did the whole thing again.

"Good heavens!" Old Brimworth grumbled.

"Brilliant!" Mapper yelled as Sabeen and Magdalys burst into applause.

"Again," Sabeen demanded. Amaya just stared at the old shacks and rowhouses of the darkening city around them. What was she watching for?

Magdalys closed her eyes, tuned into the wagon wheels rumbling through muddy cobblestone streets beneath her, the rocking cart, Varney's grunts and plodding footfalls, Sabeen and Mapper's laughter as Two Step fell into another round of dancing.

Something was different about the city on this warm July evening, and Magdalys couldn't put her finger on what it was.

"What's wrong?" Two Step asked, panting as he slid onto the bench beside her. A few lights flickered in the windows around them, but not many. Two Step was the one orphan Magdalys had come to think of as a friend. The others — she looked out for them when she could, especially Little Sabeen, and she had a good time with Bernadette and Syl, and Mapper sometimes. But the truth about orphan life was this: Nothing ever stayed the same. You made friends only to have them ripped away one bright morning with no reason given. They would just be gone. And if not all the sudden, they'd age out at seventeen and get shipped somewhere else anyway. And if they didn't, in five more years Magdalys herself would. So why bother?

Still, Two Step seemed to understand her without her ever having to speak, and that was the closest thing to friendship she could imagine. He had light brown skin and a big fro that he constantly argued with the matrons about, and a big belly that jiggled up and down when he laughed and big arms that felt safe when they wrapped around Magdalys for a hug. But he'd be gone one day too.

Just like Magdalys's sisters, Julissa and Celia.

Just like Montez.

"I don't know," Magdalys said, shivering against the

sudden night breeze. "It's . . ." She listened for a moment, tried to pick up something beyond the wagon wheels and clomping dino. Besides the far-off hoots of some sauropods, there was nothing. Nothing at all. "That's it," she whispered.

"What?" Two Step said, squinting out into the darkness. "I don't hear anything."

"Exactly!" Magdalys said. On a normal summer night, Manhattan sizzled with hollers, guffaws, and arguments, a million tidbits of gossip that warbled and bassooned down alleyways and over rooftops, across bustling avenues and through dingy saloons, back out into the streets where they were chewed on until all the juice was extracted, and then discarded to make room for the next morsel. Farmers and fishmongers would be packing up for the night, cursing and haranguing each other by way of saying see you tomorrow, and various merchants would be standing outside their stores, waiting for that one last customer to round out the day's sales. Dinos of all shapes and sizes should've been trundling down the throughway, skittering across intersections, hauling cargo along for a late delivery at some grocer or apothecary.

Instead, a single iguanodon limped along the cobblestones, its hunchbacked rider reaching a long pole up to light the street lanterns one by one. Magdalys watched him as they passed. His hands were shaking, and he kept looking around like at any moment something might jump out of the shadows and devour him. Amaya was staring at him too, and then she turned her wide eyes to Magdalys, as if to confirm they'd both noticed the same thing. Magdalys nodded ever so slightly.

"You think something's about to happen?" Two Step asked, not bothering to pretend he wasn't scared.

Magdalys nodded, then shrugged. "Sure seems like it." She liked that Two Step didn't feel like he had to keep up some pretense of bravery around her. It seemed like this strange, almost silent city kept whispering something under its breath, just a notch too quiet to make out, and Magdalys had no idea what secrets the night was hiding.

"A dactyl came with some grams today, children," Von Marsh announced. She pulled a stack of envelopes from her purse. "Kyle Tannery." Mapper hopped up, excited, and grabbed his letter, tearing it open before he'd even gotten back to the bench. "Sabeen Raymond." Von Marsh handed the letter to Two Step, who passed it to Sabeen. "Amaya Trent." Amaya didn't move, just stared at the passing city. "Amaya? You don't want your letter? It's from the General, I believe." Von Marsh adjusted her spectacles and tried to hold the envelope still amidst the bumping of the wagon. "Yes, the General." She looked up.

Amaya didn't answer, but her eyes looked wider than Magdalys had ever seen them.

Von Marsh sighed. "Very well then." She glanced at the last envelope, scowled. "Margaret Rocheford."

Now it was Magdalys's turn to sit perfectly still and gaze off into the distance. But still . . . a letter! Who could it be from?

"Margaret Rocheford," Von Marsh said again, this time with that shrill snarl she used to make a point.

Magdalys didn't remember much about her sisters. All four Roca kids been dropped off at the Colored Orphan Asylum when Magdalys was just a baby. Julissa and Celia spoke Spanish to her and combed her hair and said her name like a song, and Magdalys recognized her eyes in theirs. And then one day when Magdalys was four, a mustached man who reeked of tobacco appeared and took Julissa and Celia back to Cuba with no explanation, leaving just Magdalys and Montez. Magdalys had cried and cried and Montez, then only a kid himself, had tried to comfort her, but she could tell he was barely holding it together, so they ended up sobbing themselves to sleep on the common room sofa, where Mr. Calloway had put a blanket on them and convinced everyone to just leave them be instead of hustling them off to the bunks.

And six weeks ago, Montez had announced that he was leaving. "I have to do my part," he said, looking about as terrified and distraught as Magdalys felt inside. "Even though we weren't born here, this war will determine what happens to me, to you — to all of us. I have to do my part. I can't just sit here while it all happens hundreds of miles away."

So, not just leaving: Montez was joining the Union Army. Montez who was skinny and wore big glasses and hated fighting and loved reading, Montez who still cried sometimes when he talked about Julissa and Celia, and always helped out the younger kids, Montez was off to war, and Magdalys was alone.

Well, as alone as one could be in the midst of almost two hundred orphans and semiorphans between the ages of one and seventeen.

If the letter was from Montez, that changed everything, and Henrietta Von Marsh knew it. Magdalys finally exhaled in defeat and turned to face her. "Who . . . who's it from?"

"Oh," the matron declared, the slightest hint of a gloating smile curving her thin lips, "you're Margaret now?"

Magdalys narrowed her eyes. "What's the name on the envelope?"

Von Marsh looked perturbed for a moment, then simply shook her head. "I'm not going over this with you again, young lady."

Magdalys tried to contain the wrath burning through her. "Who . . . is . . . my gram . . . from?"

"If you had really wanted to know," Von Marsh chortled, "you would've answered when I called you the first time." She patted her purse once and then turned away. "Now you'll just have to wait till after the little play to find out, I suppose."

Magdalys launched across the cart. Her hands reached out toward Von Marsh; she would tackle her and she would get her stinking letter. The other orphans were standing, eyebrows raised, mouths opening, and then a strange grunting sound erupted in Magdalys's head: *Ree rooh arroooh* it went, and it sounded frantic, terrified. Magdalys froze. She looked around. Everyone was staring at her; no one seemed to notice the increasingly shrill squeals.

"Uh . . . Magdalys?" Two Step said.

"Didn't anyone else hear that?" Magdalys said.

Sabeen looked scared. "Hear wha —" she started to say, but then a sharp voice called out, "Stop there, you!" and the squeal in Magdalys's head became a shriek: *AREEEE-OOOHH!!* Magdalys ducked just as Varney reared up, jolting the cart to a sudden halt.



AD MAGDALYS SOMEHOW heard the dino get spooked? Inside her head? It certainly seemed like it . . . No one else had seemed to notice at all, and now, she realized, they were all staring at something just above her.

A knuckleskull loomed its ugly face over the wagon. Uneven bony growths made the dino's head look like a clenched fist with a snout poking out. It was reared all the way up on its huge hind legs, shorter forelimbs pawing idly against the wood planks.

Dr. Barlow Sloan spent a whole chapter of the Dinoguide trashing knuckleskulls. *Ugly, irrelevant, useless, lazy, good-for-nothing, abrupt, flatulent,* and *petulant* were some of the choice adjectives he'd selected for them. Magdalys had no idea how a

dino could be relevant, let alone irrelevant, or whether one species would really be more prone to dinofarts than another, but either way, it seemed like Dr. Sloan was having a bad day when he wrote that entry.

The dino blinked twice, then wheezed and snorted, eyeing the orphans. Its rider, a helmeted police officer with an unpleasant frown, growled at Marietta: "What business have you with these colored children in the city tonight?"

"Why, I don't see how our business is any business of yours," Marietta snapped. She was the youngest matron and the only one that seemed to actually talk to the orphans instead of at them.

"Ah, Officer," Von Marsh tittered, hurrying to the front of the cart. "Pay no mind to Marietta. She's quite fiery, you know. We're simply taking them to the theater, young sir . . ."

Magdalys saw Sabeen wrap her small hand around Amaya's and squeeze. Mapper and Two Step stood perfectly still, hands at their sides.

"Well, this isn't a good night to be out" — the officer shifted his mouth around like he was chewing on the words some before he spat them out — "with their likes." He nodded at Magdalys, Two Step, Mapper, Amaya, and Sabeen. Magdalys felt her stomach sink. Whatever the cop's talking about must be why the city's so creepy quiet, she thought. And then: No theater... It felt ridiculous to care about missing out on a play when the whole night seemed so full of danger, but the menacing city only made Magdalys even hungrier to disappear into some fantasy world.

"I'm afraid I don't understand what you're saying, young man," Von Marsh said. "I am Henrietta Von Marsh of the Ladies' Manumission Society, and these children are wards of the Colored Orphan Asylum. Now if you don't mind, we'll be on our way . . ."

Magdalys wasn't sure if that little speech was supposed to settle the matter somehow, but the officer was clearly unmoved. "Lady, haven't you been paying attention? This whole city's about to —"

"That's enough, Officer," a voice snapped. The knuckle-skull and the cop both startled and then hopped to attention. Varney let out a concerned wheeze and stomped his feet. All five orphans leaned up against the far rail of the wagon to see who had spoken.

A middle-aged white man with a clipped, sallow face stood looking up at them. Tufts of white hair sprouted from either side of his otherwise bald head like some distraught nebulous fungi. A shiny medallion punctuated his long black magistrate robes: a roaring tyrannosaurus inside a circle with some writing around it that Magdalys couldn't make out.

"Magistrate Riker, sir," the officer said. "I didn't know you were out and about tonight. I was just warning these matrons abou —"

"That's *enough*, I said." Riker's voice was quiet but razor-sharp. The officer shut up accordingly.

Magdalys took a step back as Riker walked a slow, deliberate strut toward the back of the wagon. "Now, Miss Henrietta Von Marsh — of the Ladies' Manumission Society, is it?"

Henrietta Von Marsh just stared at him for a few moments. Riker mounted the wagon in a single, smooth movement, almost like he was more liquid than man. Magdalys felt herself recoil inside but tried not to let it show on her face. "Is it?" he said again.

"Ah, quite," Von Marsh sputtered. "Indeed. Yes."

"And Miss Von Marsh of the Ladies' Manumission Society, I believe I overheard you say you're going to the *theater*." The magistrate drawled the word out with a soft lilt. "How charming. And I presume you have paperwork for all these" — he scrunched up his face like he'd just swallowed a slightly turned piece of fruit — "children."

Von Marsh cocked her head. "Paperwork?"

"To prove that they're not fugitive slaves, of course. You know we've had terrible trouble with that these days: contraband. It's illegal to harbor fugitives, particularly in a time of war."

"Why, Magistrate!" Von Marsh scoffed. "That's not true! But I assure you, these are free children and not fugitive slaves in the least! I give you my word as a member of one of the noblest families of New York City."

"Alas," Magistrate Riker sighed, "without proper papers, I'm afraid we'll have to take the children into the custody of the city."

"Custody of the city?" Marietta gasped. "You mean prison?"

Panic seized Magdalys. *Prison?* And then what? She'd heard stories of black New Yorkers vanishing off the streets, never to be seen again. Folks said they'd been snatched up and sent down south into slavery. Would she survive plantation life? Up front, Varney whinnied and snorted, sending tremors through the wagon. Magdalys didn't know if it was her terror seeping into the dino or his own, but either way she wanted out of there.

Riker smiled. "Prison is such an ugly word, don't you think?"

She had no idea if she could actually get the dino to do what she wanted, but even if she did, then what? A tired old trike couldn't outrun a knuckleskull. And cops had guns. Not to mention whatever untold horrors lay in wait deeper in the city tonight.

Still — if she couldn't get Varney to make a run for it, at least she could cause a distraction. *Up, Varney,* Magdalys thought. *Rear up!* 

Varney immediately squealed and raised his front legs into the air, lifting the cart and sending the knuckleskull stumbling backward. Everyone grabbed the rails to steady themselves.

"Oh dear!" Old Brimworth cried, just waking up from what must've been a very pleasant nap. "What in heavens is going on?"

"You, girl," the cop snapped at Marietta. "Control this trike."

"I'm trying," Marietta said.

So am I, Magdalys thought.

Riker's glare landed on Magdalys. His eyes narrowed, like he was shooting beams of light out of them directly into her soul. Could he tell what she was trying to do? Magdalys stared back at him. *Easy, Varney*, she thought. *Shhhhh*. And Varney settled with a snort and a grumble.

"I see," Riker said softly, a smile creasing his lips. "I see." "What's that?" Von Marsh asked.

Riker whirled around, suddenly magnanimous. "Nothing at all, dear lady. Which theater was it you said you were attending?"

Magdalys shuddered. Everything in her wanted to be away from this horrible man.

"Why, the Zanzibar Savannah, of course," Von Marsh said, blinking.

"Ah, of course, of course, excellent." Riker slid his icy gaze along each of their faces, stopping once again on Magdalys. "And what is this unfortunate creature's name?"

"That is Miss Margaret Rocheford, twelve years old, Magistrate, but I fail to see —"

"That'll be all," Riker snapped, still glaring at Magdalys. She stared right back at him, for once grateful that Von Marsh insisted on calling her the wrong name.

Riker finally turned away. "You may continue on your journey. Enjoy the theater." He slid off the wagon with that same fluid grace and signaled the still-spooked knuckleskull to fall back. And then Marietta gave the reins a tug and yelled "Heeyah!" and they were on their way. Magdalys glanced at the frightened faces of her friends, then looked up to the back of the wagon, where the magistrate stood staring at her with his searchlight eyes.

## Text copyright © 2018 by Daniel José Older Art copyright © 2018 by Nilah Magruder

All rights reserved. Published by Arthur A. Levine Books, an imprint of Scholastic Inc., *Publishers since* 1920. SCHOLASTIC and the LANTERN LOGO are trademarks and/or registered trademarks of Scholastic Inc.

The publisher does not have any control over and does not assume any responsibility for author or third-party websites or their content.

No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording, or otherwise, without written permission of the publisher. For information regarding permission, write to Scholastic Inc., Attention: Permissions Department, 557 Broadway, New York, NY 10012.

While inspired by real events and historical characters, this is a work of fiction and does not claim to be historically accurate or portray factual events or relationships. Please keep in mind that references to actual persons, living or dead, business establishments, events, or locales may not be factually accurate, but rather fictionalized by the author.

Library of Congress Control Number: 2018016850
ISBN 978-1-338-26881-2
10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1 18 19 20 21 22

Printed in the U.S.A. 23
First edition, September 2018

Book design by Christopher Stengel