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Opening extract from

Dilly's Bumper Book of Stories

Written by

Tony Bradman

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DILLY AND THE VAMPIRE

'It's time to make your mind up, Dilly, once and for all,' said Mother the other week. 'Just who *is* coming with us on your birthday outing? I want four names and I want them . . . *now*.'

Mother and Father had told Dilly months ago they would take him somewhere special for a birthday treat, and that he could bring some friends along. Dilly simply had to decide who to invite.

Seems easy-peasy, doesn't it? Well, it wasn't. He'd changed his mind so much he'd nearly driven Mother and Father mad.

'But . . .' Dilly started to say. Mother

narrowed her eyes a fraction and Dilly got the message. 'OK,' he said quickly. 'Darryl, and Dudley and . . . no, not Dudley, I'll have Daniel and Dicky – but he doesn't like Darryl, so *he* can't come, and then there's . . .'

'STOP!' shouted Mother. She held a paw to her forehead. 'That's it, I've had enough. We'll take Darryl, Dudley and Daniel,' she declared. 'And we mustn't forget . . . Denzil.'



'*Denzil*?' said Dilly. 'But why does it have to be him?'

'Because he invited you on *his* birthday outing, dozy,' I said from behind Mother. 'So you have to invite him back.'

'Who asked you to butt in, smelly boots?' hissed Dilly.

'Actually, Dilly,' said Mother firmly, 'Dorla took the words out of my mouth. Besides, Denzil is a nice little dinosaur and he likes you a lot.'

'But I don't like *him*,' said Dilly. 'Everybody at school says he's a wimp.'

'Oh, do they?' said Mother. 'I suppose that's because he wears glasses and he's small for his age. You ought to be ashamed of yourself, Dilly. How often have I told you it's wrong to judge others by the way they look? I'll bet Denzil's got hidden depths.'

'Hidden *what*, Mother?' asked Dilly, sounding puzzled.

'Depths,' replied Mother. 'It means there might be more to Denzil than meets the eye.' Now Dilly was utterly baffled. 'Never mind,' sighed Mother. 'You mark my

words, though. Denzil will surprise you and your friends one day . . . And he's coming on your outing. That's *final*.'

'But . . . but . . . it's not fair!' said Dilly scowling.

'Well, I'm afraid *I* think it is,' said Mother. 'So that's something we'll just have to disagree on, won't we?'

'Yes, Mother,' snapped Dilly. 'Can I go now?'

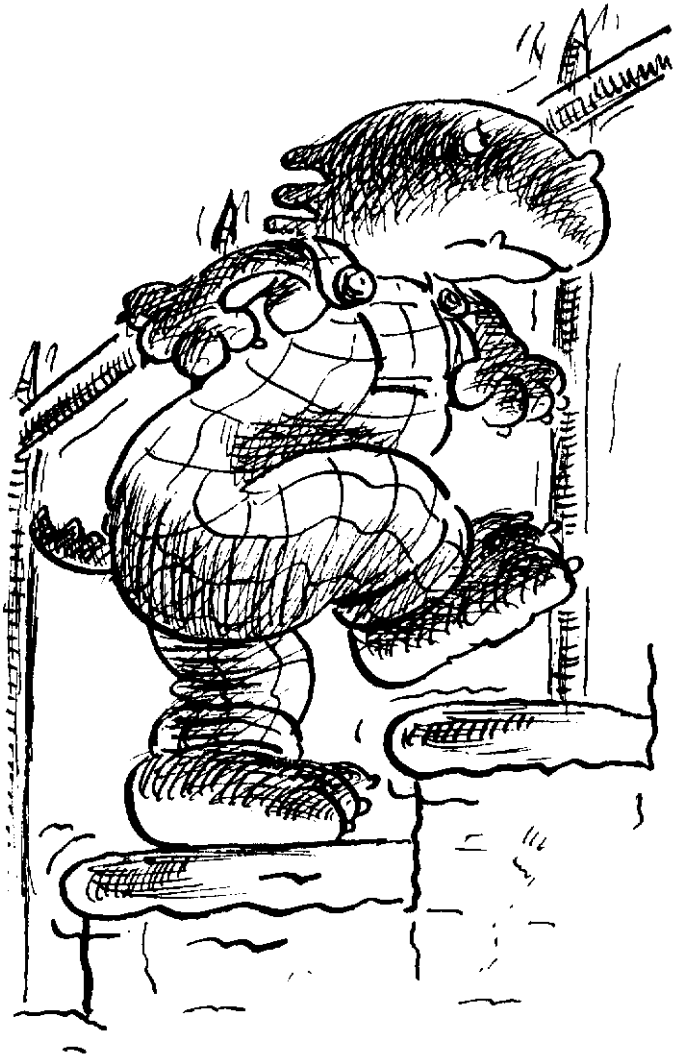
'You *may*,' said Mother.

Dilly stamped upstairs, STAMP, STAMP, STAMP. He went into his bedroom, paused, then slammed the door shut with a . . . BANG!

'I think that went quite well,' said Mother brightly, smiling through gritted teeth. 'Don't you agree, Dorla?'

I didn't, mostly because I thought it meant we were in for a Mammoth Dilly Sulking Session. But luckily, he soon cheered up.

At least he hadn't Dilly-dallied over where his outing should be. He had asked Mother and Father to take him to *The Count Dinula*



Experience. It's a special place for young dinosaurs based on the vampire film that was so popular last year, *Count Dinula, Prince of Bloodsuckers*.

I was looking forward to visiting it myself. Mother and Father had asked if I'd go along to help them and I'd said I would.

The big day came at last and we set off in the dino-car. Half an hour later, we parked near a spooky-looking black building. A huge neon sign on the front said: *The Experience*. Dilly couldn't wait and ran on ahead.

'Hi, guys!' we heard him yell.

Mother had arranged for Dilly's friends to meet us at the entrance, and they had already arrived. The parents asked what time they should collect their little dinosaurs and left.

I noticed that Darryl, Dudley and Daniel were almost as excited as Dilly. The four of them made an amazing amount of noise together.

Then I saw Denzil.

He didn't join in when the others gave Dilly the presents and cards they'd brought.

He stood slightly apart, trying to attract Dilly's attention. Father had to tap Dilly quite hard on the shoulder to make him turn round.

'Happy birthday, Dilly!' said Denzil, smiling nervously. He gave Dilly a neatly wrapped present and a large envelope. 'I hope you like the card. I spent the whole of yesterday making it.'

'Oh, thanks,' said Dilly, without much enthusiasm.

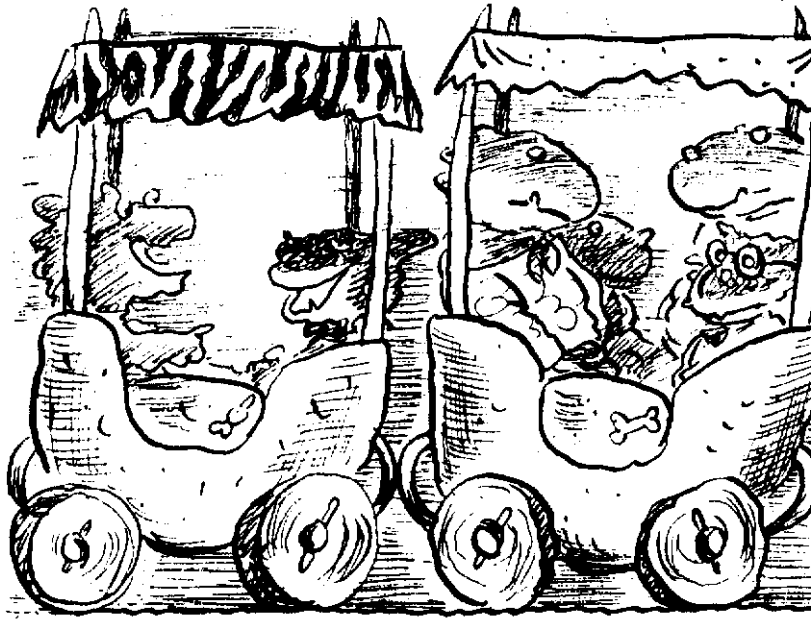
'It's probably a load of rubbish,' Darryl said. Dudley, Daniel and Dilly giggled. Denzil blushed bright green.



'I don't think we want any more comments like *that* this afternoon, Darryl,' said Mother. 'It's a *lovely* card, Denzil.'

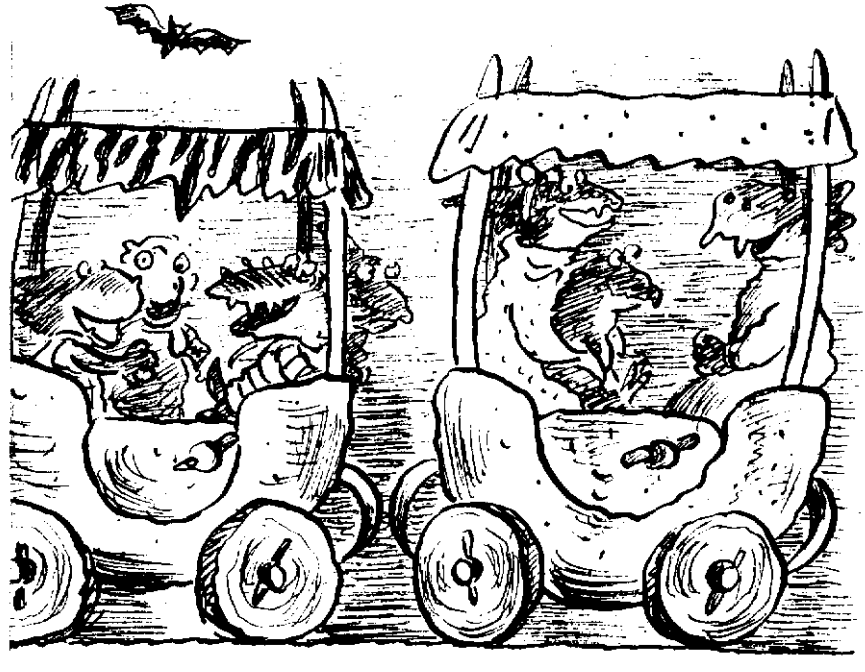
Father put Dilly's presents and cards in the dino-car while Mother bought the tickets. Then we followed a crowd of chattering dinosaurs through the entrance and into a dark, dark chamber . . .

'Welcome to *The Count Dinula Experience*,' rumbled a deep voice. 'Step this way and prepare to be . . . TERRIFIED!'



A line of four-seater carriages came rattling in. Dilly leapt into the leading one with Darryl, Dudley and Daniel, leaving Denzil standing alone and uncertain. Mother took him by the paw.

'You can sit with us, Denzil,' she said, shooting Dilly a Wait-Till-I-Get-You-Home look. She climbed into the carriage behind with Denzil, and so did Father and I. The other carriages filled up . . . and off we went.



I've been on plenty of rides, but none as good as *The Count Dinula Experience*. The carriages slid slowly past scenes re-created from the film. I knew the whole thing was only dummies and sets and models and tape recordings and lights. Just the same, it was still pretty scary.

Thunder crashed and lightning flashed, doors creaked and bats squeaked, candles sputtered and voices muttered. There were ghastly goings-on in graveyards, and Count Dinula did lots of biting and sucking.

But of course, the biggest pain in the neck was . . . Dilly.

'I'm not frightened of you, stupid old Count Dinula!' he kept shouting. Darryl, Dudley and Daniel copied him, and soon all four were boasting loudly about how brave they were. Every so often they turned to snigger at Denzil. They were obviously convinced he was scared silly.

He wasn't though. And if you ask me, Dilly, Darryl, Dudley and Daniel *were* frightened. They were covering it up by showing off.

At the end of the ride, we found ourselves back in the dark, dark, chamber. Everybody headed for the exit, then stood outside in the street talking about how great it had been . . . and feeling relieved it was over.

Or was it? Suddenly, a shadow fell across the pavement. We looked round . . . and there was Count Dinula himself – *in the flesh*!' He had his cape raised like a pair of wings and his sharp fangs shone in the neon light.

'As you can see, there is no escape,' he said in his silky, evil, vampire voice. 'I will suck the blood of everybody here. And I shall begin with the littlest, juiciest ones first . . .'

I think most of us realised pretty quickly this wasn't a *real* vampire, only somebody made up to look like Count Dinula. The idea was to give everyone a last fright, just when we thought it was safe to relax.

I said *most* of us. Perhaps you can guess which small dinosaur and his chums stood rooted to the spot with horrified expressions on their faces.

Several things happened next, in quick succession.

Count Dinula advanced, and Darryl, Dudley and Daniel fled howling for their lives. Dilly opened his mouth instead and let rip with an ultra-special, 150-mile-per-hour super-scream, the kind that deafens a crowd of dinosaurs and stops pretend vampires dead in their tracks.

And Denzil surprised everybody.

'Don't worry, Dilly,' he yelled. 'I'll save you!'

Denzil dashed at the pretend Count Dinula, dived . . . and bit *him* on the ankle! The pretend Count Dinula yelped with pain and started hopping around. But whatever he did, he couldn't shake Denzil off . . .

It took ages for Father to prise open Denzil's jaws. Mother explained that Dilly wasn't in danger, and Denzil calmed down. He apologised and the pretend Count Dinula was nice enough to say he saw the funny side of it. I noticed he was limping quite badly as he walked away, though.

I also noticed Dilly was behaving rather



oddly. He was staring at Denzil as if he'd never really looked at him before, and he barely said goodbye to Darryl, Dudley and Daniel when their parents came to collect them.

And when it was Denzil's turn to leave, Dilly sidled up to him.

'Er . . . would you like to come round to my house some time, Denzil?' he said rather shyly, his tail tucked up under his bottom. 'I

could show you my collection of squashed swamp slugs.'

Denzil seemed too happy to speak. He just grinned and nodded.

As we drove home afterwards, Mother, Father, Dilly and I kept going over what Denzil had done, and bursting into fits of laughter.

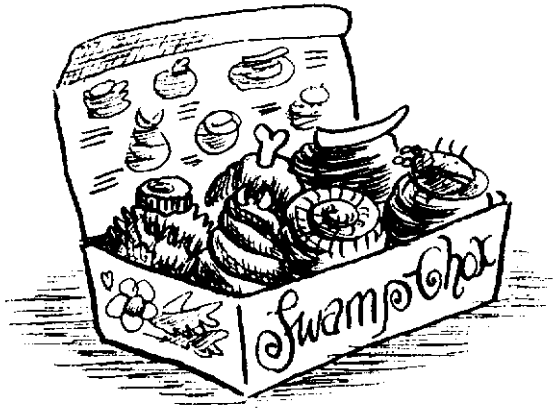
'I told you Denzil had hidden depths, Dilly,' said Mother, trying to be serious. 'Do you understand now what I meant?'

'Oh yes, Mother,' said Dilly eagerly. 'Do you think *I've* got any?'

'I sincerely hope not,' said Mother, a look of panic crossing her face.

And then we all burst into laughter again!





DILLY AND THE MISSING SWAMP-CHOCS

'How strange,' said Father. 'I can't seem to find the swamp-chocs we bought. Are they in any of those bags, dear?'

It was Saturday and we had just returned from the Dino-Market. I was helping Mother and Father unpack the shopping. Dilly wasn't. When we'd got home, he had trailed in last and gone straight up to his room.

'No, they're not,' said Mother. 'But I'm certain I put them in the top of a bag at the check-out. I hope we haven't dropped them somewhere . . .'

I felt the same. The swamp-chocs were

meant to be a treat for later. On Saturdays, Mother and Father usually buy something sweet for us all to share while we watch TV in the evening. And I adore swamp-chocs.

In fact, there's only one young dinosaur in the world who likes them more than me, and that's Dilly. Which is why I began to feel rather suspicious as Mother and Father searched and searched . . .

'Well, they're definitely not here,' said Father finally.

'I'll bet Dilly took them,' I said, unable to hold it in any longer.



Just at that moment, Dilly himself appeared in the kitchen doorway. I don't know whether he'd heard what I'd said. But suddenly he seemed to think of somewhere else he would rather be.

'That's not very fair, Dorla,' said Mother. 'I don't see how he could have. Dilly, you haven't been near the shopping, have you?'

Dilly froze. 'Who, me?' he replied. 'Er . . . no, Mother.'

I noticed he had blushed ever so slightly green. He had the oddest expression on his face, too . . . but then it vanished.

'You're lying,' I said. 'I can tell.'

'You shut up, stinky fat Dorla,' said Dilly crossly. 'You're only trying to get me into trouble with Mother and Father, just like you always do.'

'I do *not*,' I said. What a cheek!

'You do, you do!' yelled Dilly and began hopping up and down.

I yelled at him and we started a loud argument. Mother and Father told us to stop it, but we ignored them. Then the dinophone rang.

'Right, that's enough!' bellowed Father, 'I'll count to five, and whoever's still shouting when I've finished won't get any pocket money. One . . .

Dilly and I instantly went quiet. '*Thank* you,' said Father.

The call was from Donald, an old friend of Father's. It seemed Donald had moved back to Dino-Town, and would be visiting us later. Mother and Father were pleased . . . but Dilly and I weren't off the hook.

'You'd better both go to your rooms to cool off,' said Father. 'We don't want you behaving like a pair of hooligans when Donald's here.'

'But what about the swamp-chocs, Father?' I said.

'You'll just have to forget them, Dorla,' said Father.

'But . . .' I started to say.

'The subject is closed, Dorla,' said Mother firmly. 'Now up to your room and make sure you leave your little brother *alone*, OK?'

I pushed past Dilly who was giving me one of his Beat-You-This-Time smirks, stuck my

snout in the air and went to my room.

I sat on my bed, brooding. I was absolutely convinced Dilly had taken the swamp-chocs, but I knew Mother and Father wouldn't believe me unless I could prove it. The question was . . . how?

I'd heard Dilly follow me upstairs and go into his room. But he didn't stay in it long. After ten minutes, I heard him heading downstairs again, probably to say he was sorry and generally be a creep.

'Now's my chance,' I thought. I could sneak into his room while he wasn't there and have a look in the usual hiding places. I eased my door open, checked no one was on the landing . . . and tippy-toed across.

'What *are* you doing, Dorla?' said a voice behind me.

I took a deep breath and turned round. Mother was coming out of the bathroom. She was holding some towels and giving me one of those stern parental stares, the kind that soon has you feeling incredibly guilty, even if you haven't done anything.

'Oh, I er . . . just wanted to make it up



with Dilly,' I said, flashing my biggest I-Really-Am-*Such*-A-Sweet Dinosaur smile at her. 'And after that I was, er . . . going to come and say sorry to you and Father, of course.'

'That's OK, then,' said Mother. 'But I don't think you'll find Dilly in his room.

He's gone downstairs. I'm surprised you didn't hear him . . .'

'Drat,' I thought. It didn't look like I'd be able to slip into Dilly's room easily, so I would have to devise another plan. And I'd have to apologise to him, too, worse luck. There was no getting out of it now.

Dilly was in the sitting room with Father.

'Sorry, Dilly,' I said. 'Can we be friends?'

'Sure,' said Dilly. 'No problem. I'm sorry as well.'

'There, that wasn't so hard, was it?' said Father, beaming at us.

'No, Father,' Dilly and I said together, beaming at him.

We stopped smiling the second Father went through the door.

We watched TV for a while. Dilly sat in one corner of the sofa. I sat in the other, leaving as much distance between us as possible. I racked my brains for a way of proving the little horror had taken the family treat.

And then it came to me.

I remembered that odd expression on his

face, and realised I'd probably looked much the same when Mother had caught me on the landing. Dilly had felt *guilty* when Mother asked him if he'd been near the shopping!

I thought that if I made him feel even more guilty, he might own up and tell us what he'd done with our swamp-chocs. After all, I'd almost been ready to confess to Mother myself, and I hadn't done anything.

So that afternoon, whenever Mother and Father weren't around, I kept on at Dilly.

'Taking stuff which doesn't belong to you is called *stealing*, I said. 'And it's really bad. You never get away with it, either,' I added.

At first, Dilly pretended he wasn't bothered. But he didn't tell Mother and Father what I was saying, so I knew I was wearing him down.

'I'm not listening,' he said in the end, sticking his head under a cushion.

'It doesn't matter,' I said to his rear. 'I've decided to call the Dino-Police. They're good at catching dinosaurs . . . *who steal*.'

'You wouldn't do that . . . would you?' said Dilly's muffled voice.