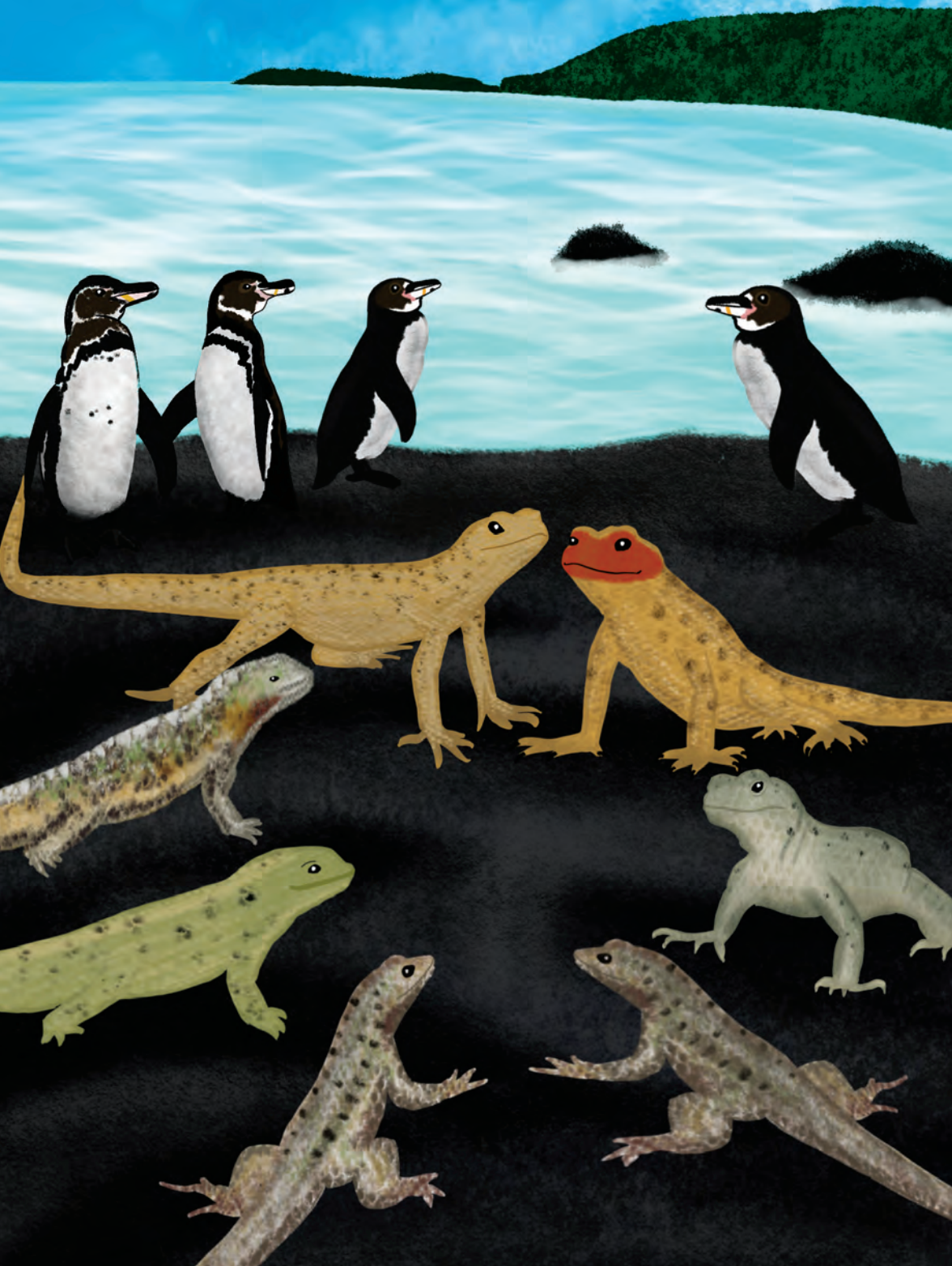


MARTINEZ KIDS ADVENTURES

THE ISLAND RESCUE



Written and Illustrated by
Minda Gomez



Chapter 6

Lava Lizards

The trio set off along the sandy shore, with Pepito and Diego rocking from side to side in a penguin waddle. Rico the lava lizard skittered in circles around them. The waves crashed on the shore beside them, rolling up to cover their feet with warm salt water, then receding back into the sea. They approached the group of penguins that stood nearby.

“Come meet my waddle,” Pepito said.

“Huh? Isn’t waddling how penguins walk?” Diego asked.

“A waddle is a group of penguins. These birds are my gang!” Pepito moved closer to his friends. “*Hola, panas!* This is Diego. He’s signed up for the deluxe tour of the island.”

“*Chévere!*” one of the bigger penguins said, slapping

Diego on the back so hard he almost fell over. The other penguins tittered with laughter and gave each other high fives with their flippers.

Diego regained his balance. "I thought I knew Spanish, but you guys talk weird. What do those words mean?"

"*Pana* means friend and *chévere* means cool in Ecuador," explained Pepito. "What island are you from that you don't know that?"

Diego didn't know how to respond. He looked down at Rico, realizing the other penguins hadn't even noticed the tiny lava lizard.

Rico spoke up. "We have a word like *chévere* that we use. We say *chido*."

"Did you hear something?" Pepito turned his head, looking everywhere but down. "I thought I heard a voice but there's nobody around. It must have been my imagination."

Rico's tiny lizard face crumpled in a frown. "I'm right here! I'm small, but that doesn't mean I'm not important. Right, Diego?"

Pepito muttered a comment about lava lizards under his breath and the other penguins snickered. Everybody ignored Rico.

Diego watched uncomfortably. He knew he should defend his brother, but this was his chance to hang out with PENGUINS! He laughed weakly, feeling guilty. "So, can Rico come with us? He's not that bad, for a lizard." Diego tried not to notice the hurt expression on his brother's scaly face.

"Well..." Pepito finally turned to Rico. "Usually we don't hang out with lava lizards, but we might be able to make an exception." He gestured with his flipper at a large volcanic rock down the beach. "There's a push-up contest taking place this afternoon. If you were to win, it would prove you were worth spending time with."

"We really have to get going—" Diego began, but his brother cut him off.

"I'll do it!" Rico scuttled across the sand and up the side of the rock, amazed at the way his claws gripped the rough black surface and allowed him to climb straight up. "*¡Chido!*" he said to himself. "I mean, *chévere.*"

As he arrived at the top of the rock, he saw a group of about twenty lava lizards, all resting lazily in the warm sun.

"I'm here to enter the contest!" he announced.

Every scaly head popped up, almond-shaped black eyes

opening to see who had spoken, but nobody replied.

Rico glanced around. "Can I compete?"

After staring at Rico for a second, the lizards put their heads back on the rock and closed their eyes again. He waited, hoping that one of the lazy reptiles would pay attention to him.

A small lava lizard with a distinctive red head scurried up, then stood completely motionless in front of Rico. Her mouth formed a friendly smile. "*¡Hola!* My name is Luna! *¡Mucho gusto!*"

"Hi, Luna! I'm Rico. Good to meet you too! Do you know when the push-up contest will start?"

"Why do you want to be in the push-up contest?" Luna asked. "It's just a bunch of *macho* lizards showing off for each other. Wouldn't it be more fun to go tease some sea lions? Come on, I'll take you!"

Rico glanced down at the beach, where Diego and the waddle of penguins were watching. "I just need to prove something to some new friends."

"Are you sure they're your friends if you need to prove yourself to them?" Luna eyed the black-and-white birds huddled together. "Why are you hanging out with penguins, anyway? They're not very nice to lava lizards."

Rico's response was interrupted as a lizard spoke loudly to the group. "It's time for today's push-up competition."

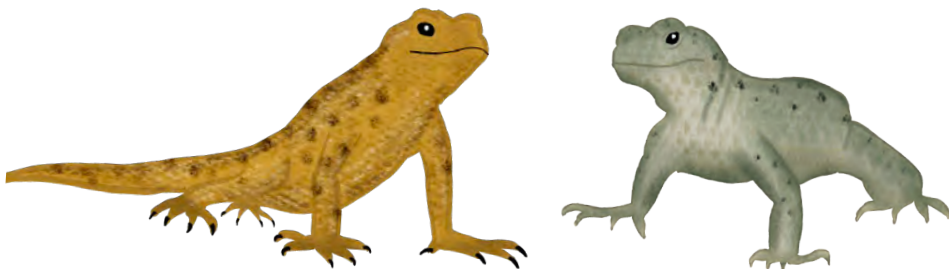
The lazy reptiles rose from their resting positions and moved to form a circle around the announcer.

"Here we go again," sighed Luna. "I don't understand boys' need to prove themselves. Let's go, Rico." She turned to leave, then noticed he had moved to the edge of the circle. She returned to his side.

Two larger lava lizards moved to the center of the circle, facing each other as the announcer spoke.

"We have here two of our strongest competitors, Lázaro and Lucio. On the count of *tres*, you may begin. The lizard who does the most push-ups without stopping wins. Are you ready, *panas*?"

"*¡De ley!*" the competitors confirmed. They braced themselves on their front legs, heads high, waiting for the announcer to signal.



“¡Uno, dos, TRES!”

The two lizards started to frantically push up and down on their front legs as quickly as they could. The crowd roared with excitement.

“This is SO ridiculous!” Luna rolled her eyes.

After a minute or two, Lucio collapsed on the rock in exhaustion. Lázaro did a couple more push-ups for effect, then stopped, turning to look at the crowd with a triumphant smile on his speckled face.

“Lázaro! Lázaro!” the crowd chanted.

The defeated Lucio slunk out of the circle and went to rest a distance away, looking dejected.

“With 153 push-ups, Lucio has been eliminated. We have our winner, Lázaro!” said the announcer. Everybody cheered loudly, and the winning lizard exited the ring with his head held high. “What an impressive show of strength and endurance. Is there anyone else who would like to compete today?”

Rico didn’t stop to think. He raced to the center of the circle. “I will!” he said loudly, trying to sound confident and intimidating. He looked around the crowd, waiting to see who would challenge him.

The announcer scuttled over to him. “We have a new

contender here. What is your name and what brought you here today?"

"Rico." The tiny lava lizard squared his shoulders. "This is my first push-up contest." He glanced at the penguins, who had climbed up the rocks and were watching from behind the circle of lizards.

"Go, Rico!" Diego clapped his flippers together, stopping as he noticed the other penguins were watching quietly.

"Who will challenge Rico to a push-up contest?" the announcer asked the crowd.

All of the older lava lizards looked bored, and a few even lay their heads back down on the rock.

"Anyone? Will anyone compete against Rico?"

The silence was deafening. Rico could feel his eyes filling with tears. Apparently, lizards could cry. How much more embarrassing could this get?