

A SURVIVOR'S GUIDE TO  
THE DINOSAUR APOCA-  
LYPSE

—4—

“Burn”

by

Wayne Kyle Spitzer



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The Flashback/Dinosaur  
Apocalypse Cycle

*Flashback*

(re-printed in *Dinosaur Apocalypse*)

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## Flashback Dawn

(re-printed in *Dinosaur Apocalypse*)

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## Tales from the Flashback

(re-printed as *Dinosaur Rampage*)

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## Flashback Twilight

(serialized as *A Dinosaur is a Man's Best Friend*;

re-printed as *The Complete Ank & Williams*,  
*Dinosaur War, Paladins*)

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*A Reign of Thunder*

(serialized as *Heat Wave*)

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*A Survivor's Guide to the*  
*Dinosaur Apocalypse*

BECAUSE THE WINDOWS were bulletproof, it all had to come out through the main entrance, and that included the grand piano in the Entrance Hall—which we wheeled recklessly against the doorframe before upending it with a huff and shoving it down the stairs, where it sounded briefly, chaotically, as it impacted each step. By then I was leaning on one side of the door while Fiona leaned on the other, looking on: at our friends as they started busting up the instrument below with bats and feet and sledgehammers, but also at the overgrown North Lawn of the White House and its spitting, crackling bonfire; at the tricked out Hondas and Toyotas as they continued pouring onto the field and bringing more—more beer kegs and more gasoline, more children of the Flash-back, more us.

“Look at it, big sister,” I said, finding her already staring at me in the flickering semi-dark, “It’s like poetry, I swear.”

“Green Room,” she answered calmly, seeming almost to smolder. “And stop calling me that.”

My eyes flicked up and down her body—something they’d been doing a lot of lately—but I don’t think she noticed. Of course she was right; a lot had changed since our first burn—not the least of which was my voice—and calling her that no longer seemed appropriate. She, too, had changed—becoming less like a big sister (or even a mother) and more like an equal, even if, at 19, she still had a good 4 years on me.

“Okay, babe,” I said, winking at her. I kicked the pedestal and candelabra next to me over with a resounding crash. “So let’s do it.”

And we went to work, Fiona pulling down the pictures and the red and green curtains while I took my bat to the china cabinet—smashing the glass as though it were a thin layer of ice, sending shards of it flying, bludgeoning the green plates and gold leafed vases like piñatas, like the shattered skulls of imagined enemies, until 243 years of history lay a glistening wreck at my feet—just so much broken detritus to be burned with the rest; just so much dust and memory to be erased and finally forgotten. At which I looked at Fiona and she looked back, smiling, her

teeth large and slightly crooked, carnivorous—because it was a pleasure to burn, an ecstasy to burn.

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BY THE TIME WE REJOINED the party, the bonfire was licking at the boughs of the maple trees and the staging had been erected for Calvin's speech—staging he was already ascending, gripping the rungs with one hand while holding a rolled up document—or documents—in the other, the firelight reflecting off his glasses.

"So what's he going to talk about?" I asked Fiona, heaving one of the two chairs I'd brought onto the fire—its red upholstery going up like dry paper, creating plumes of black smoke.

"How should I know? He's barely said two words to me since North Carolina." She pitched the framed pictures she was carrying—one of a dude she'd called Jimmy Carter—onto the roaring heap. "Look, Leif. I know he's something of a hero to you ... but you don't know him like I do. And I'm telling you, his heart's no longer in this. The Burning. It hasn't been since Georgia. At least."

I threw the other chair onto the pyre. "But it was his idea in the first place—wasn't it? Isn't that what you said—"

"I've said a lot of things," she snapped, and used her whole body to throw the second picture. "People change, Leif. At least some do. Others just get old."

I paused, thinking about that. Had something happened between them, like a fight? What did that mean, 'Others just get old?'

"Okay, wild children, listen up!" cried Calvin from the top of the platform—and waved the rolled up documents to get everyone's attention. "Hear, hear! You're having *way* too much fun."

It took a minute but eventually the car stereos and loose chatter diminished and the silence reasserted itself—or nearly so, for the fire continued to crack and to pop and to roar like a veritable furnace.

“But then, why else would God have invented adolescence—if not to have fun?”

Hoots and cheers, whistles and applause.

“And that we have had. From Austin to Baton Rouge and Jackson to Montgomery, from Atlanta to Raleigh and Norfolk to Richmond ... to come at last to Washington, and the seat of Old Power itself. To come at last to the very pinnacle of what we set out to do—which was to loot and burn every vestige of what had come before; every deed and every ban-knote, every binding contract and article of law, and to cede them back to whatever chaos must ultimately rule our lives.”

He looked out over us, his friends, his people, and seemed to reflect. “And yet I wonder—what remains of the old world and the old laws to douse and burn? I mean, besides these ...” He lifted the rolled papers above his head, inciting raucous applause. “These relics of a bygone age—which Leif and Fiona have so brazenly liberated? Well, I tell you, there is one thing—but we’ll save that for later, when they return ...”

I looked at Fiona and she looked back. Were we going back to the Archives?

“For now, let us commend these, one U.S. Constitution and one Declaration of Independence, to the fires of a New World—a world as young and savage and beautiful as we are, for it has yet to see even its 30<sup>th</sup> month, just as we have yet to see our 30<sup>th</sup> year. And afterward, afterward, I’ll have a special announcement. Right now it’s time to party; and to dance on the grave of that which is old and dead—and which never served us anyway. *Salud!*”

“*Salud!*” echoed the crowd, raising their plastic cups.

And then he was unfurling the documents and dropping them into the fire, which hissed and popped and seemed almost alive, and Fiona and I were shoving our way through the crowd—both of us, I think, wondering where we were being sent, and more importantly, what this ‘special announcement’ might be.



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“BABE,” SAID CALVIN, descending the ladder, and I looked away as he and Fiona embraced (briefly), I’m not sure why.

“Got another job for you two—if you’re up to it.”

“If we’re up to it,” said Fiona, and laughed, at which there was an awkward silence I didn’t understand. “I know: You want us to take a group of bad apples and put down the Norsemen. Am I right?”

The Norsemen were the older group who’s territory we’d violated in order to access the White House and National Mall—and who were bound to cause us trouble if we didn’t leave soon.

“Wrong. I want you to go to the National Museum and liberate the Star-Spangled Banner—the flag, not the song—and bring it here to be burned.”

Fiona shot me a glance. “He’s a vandal, Leif, not a fighter.”

“I’m not a killer, if that’s what you mean,” he retorted, then turned away and watched the fire, hands on his hips. “Nor will I let any of us be. I mean, if I’ve said it once I’ll say it again: this isn’t about bloodshed. It’s not even about rebellion. It’s more about ...” He paused—as though saying anything else could only lead to regret.

“I thought it was about nothing,” said Fiona, softly. “That that was its beauty—it was wildness for the sake of wildness. Passion for the sake of passion. Isn’t that what you said?” She laughed with surprising bitterness. “Different context, I guess.”

“It was about filling the nothing,” he said, still facing away. “And letting go. Until ... But then—you haven’t had to think about any of that ... have you? No one’s made you king.”

“And cue the Messiah Complex,” fumed Fiona, which I took as my cue to leave; to give them space—to let them hash it out, whatever it was—after which I wandered over to one of the kegs and filled a cup, reckoning that next to a roaring fire wasn’t the best place to keep beer—because it tasted like piss, literally. Nor did I stop at one but downed three in rapid succession, wondering what Calvin had meant by

‘filling the nothing’ and ‘letting go,’ and about being king—not to mention starting a sentence with ‘until’ ... but never finishing it.

And I guess I must have stood there for a while, because I distinctly recall watching the same group of teens—their arms laden with destruction—moving back and forth between the fire and the White House—the fucking White House!—to the point that I began feeling shitty about what we’d done; and even a little sick to my stomach. But then Fiona returned jingling Calvin’s keys and we were firing up his Mustang convertible, and the next thing I remember she was piloting us down 14<sup>th</sup> Street NW past buildings with Doric columns (now choked in prehistoric ivy) and a pair of grazing stegosaurus and at least one giant millipede; all the way to Constitution Avenue and the National Museum; which I took special note of only because I was trying not to look at her body—something she noticed, I’m sure, but didn’t seem to mind—because she just glanced at me beneath the blood red sky and smiled—toothily. Carnivorously.

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IT WAS THE SORT OF thing you had to actually *see*; up close, personal—as up close and personal as the glass would allow, anyway—to fully appreciate; to fully understand that this was *it*, the flag that inspired the national anthem, the actual Fort McHenry garrison flag, a thing more than 40 feet high and maybe 30 feet long, laying at an angle in a climate-controlled black room, or a room that *had* been climate-controlled, until the Flashback, until the lights had gone out from Anchorage to Miami.

“Oh, say can you see,” I sang, moving my flashlight over the material, which was tattered and torn, “By the dawn’s early light ...”

I grinned and trailed off, letting the silence take control, letting the room buzz, and we just stood there.

“What so proudly we hailed,” sang Fiona at length, her voice cracking a little, “at the twilight’s last gleaming.” She took a breath in the dark.

“Whose broad stripes and bright stars ... through the perilous fight ... O’er the ramparts we watched—were so gallantly streaming...”

Then, together: “And the rocket’s red glare, the bombs bursting in air, gave proof through the night ... that our flag was still there.” We both took a breath. “Oh, say does that star-spangled *ba-anner* yet wave ... o’er the *land* of the free ... and the *home* ... of the ... brave.”

And again there was a silence, as perfect and deep as anything I’d ever experienced, either then or since.

“Fuck,” I said.

“Yeah,” said Fiona. “Fuck.”

I looked at the sparse starfield illuminated in her beam.

“They’re all gone,” I said, and lowered my flashlight. “Everyone who ever touched this. Those who first sowed it; those who stood in its shadow. Those who built this building to preserve it—all gone.”

“Yeah,” whispered Fiona. “It’s just us.”

“I don’t know, big sis—I mean ‘babe.’ But do you ever wonder if—like, we’re doing the right thing?”

“No.”

“Okay. Well. Why is that, exactly?”

“Because there is no right thing. I mean, maybe there was ... before the universe just—went bugfuck. Before everyone just vanished. But now? What’s right and what’s wrong, Leif? I mean, what could possibly make any difference—one way or the other?”

“I don’t know. It just seems that, like—”

“You’re sounding like Calvin; don’t go there. Because, I’m telling you, he’s not who you think he is. Not anymore. He’s—”

“Evolving?”

“Aging. Just aging. There’s a difference.”

“It’s going to happen,” I said. “We can’t stay teenagers for—”

“Can’t we?” She shook her head. “Maybe you don’t see yourself ... but I do. See you, that is. And let me tell you—*you’re a fire.*” She touched my hand where it gripped the sledgehammer. “And fires need to keep

moving, keep consuming,” She raised my arm gently, assuredly, until I dropped my flashlight completely and took the hammer in both hands. “... or they burn out.”

And then I swung, harder than I ever had before, harder even than when I’d destroyed the china hutch, punching a white crater into the glass as big my head, causing cracks to spread out in rings, like a contagion, I thought, or a cancer, until I swung again and the head of the hammer smashed clean through, enough so that I had to fight to pull it back out, after which Fiona joined in and we smashed through the glass together, not all at once but blow after blow, until the bitter shards lay all around us and we fell to the flag’s faded cloth, kissing and groping each other with abandon, unfastening and working off each other’s clothes, fucking like it was the end of the world, which of course it was—consuming each other like paper in fire.

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IT GOES WITHOUT SAYING that I was driving too fast; I was 15 and had just gotten laid. Add to that my inexperience—and a spike strip laid across the road—and, well, you probably have some idea how we ended up in the fountain of the Ronald Reagan Building with Old Glory folded up and sticking out of the trunk. All I know for certain is that we were both injured, Fiona seriously—to the extent that the blood from her head had fouled her left eye and she couldn’t stop shaking; which is how I noticed the figures approaching us from behind (I saw them in the rearview mirror when I removed Calvin’s doo-rag, to stop her bleeding).

“Fiona, listen—we—we gotta get out of here. Can you walk?”

“What is it?” she asked, weakly, deliriously, looking around like a blind person (which I suppose she was), bleeding profusely.

I squinted at the figures—there were more of them now—saw long beards and jackboots; rifles, riot gear, motorcycle helmets to which horns had been attached.

“Norsemen,” I said. “Lots of them. Hold on.”

I threw open my door and went around, noticing how exposed we were, how exposed the entrance to the building was.

"I'm going to put you across my back, okay? Just hang on."

"Okay."

"Here we go—"

And then I heaved her across my back and we went, hustling up 14<sup>th</sup> Street NW even as the Norsemen opened fire and the pavement sparked all around us—all the way to something called the M.I.M. Museum, the door of which I kicked in awkwardly before carrying Fiona up a flight of steps and laying her before a giant mural, after which I collapsed against the nearby wall—the window of which promptly exploded.

"Fuck!" I cursed, lying flat on my stomach, then crawled through the glass to Fiona where I shielded her lithe body with my own.

"It's okay, we're okay," I said quickly, even as she started to hyperventilate. "We're fine. They don't know we're not armed—they don't know we're not armed. They're not going to come in. Not yet."

I wrapped her in my arms and held her tight, even as the other windows were blown out and glass rained down. And then, just as suddenly as it had begun, it was over; at least for the moment—after which I lifted my head, slowly, cautiously, and listened.

Nothing. A squawk of a pterodactyl, maybe, way off in the distance.

"Leif?" managed Fiona, groggily. "Are you there?"

I squeezed her tightly, stunned that she couldn't feel it. "*Shh-shhh*," I said, stroking her hair, which was matted with blood, kissing her forehead.

At last a voice called, "We just want the girl. Give us the girl; vacate the House and the Mall, and we're done here. All right?"

I held Fiona close trying to still her trembling—realizing, in the process, that I was trembling myself. "*Shhh*—it's okay," I said, finding her hand, enveloping it in my own. "Everything is going to be okay."

"*Aww*, you're sweet," she said, her voice faint, papery. "But it's not. It never has been. You know that. Even before the Flashback."

“*Shhh*,” I repeated, and diverted my eyes to the mural, which depicted, in stark black and white, seemingly all the atrocities human beings had ever committed—most of which I was unfamiliar with, the Holocaust and Hiroshima being obvious exceptions.

“They’re right, you know,” she said, softly, having followed my gaze. “The lights in the clouds. The shapes ... in that beautiful borealis, that came with the Flashback. They’re right about us.”

But I only stared at the painting, at the depictions of medieval torture and Mayan beheadings, at the lifeless, flattened cities and mounds of emaciated corpses, like driftwood; at the piles of skulls and perfect, white tombstones extending forever.

“... Right to have—how would they say it? To have ‘cancelled’ us.” She laughed a little, which became a series of jagged coughs. “And Calvin ... Calvin is wrong. About you. About me. About everyone.”

She shifted her head slightly, looking at the whole mural. “We ... we were *meant* to burn.”

I angled my head to look at her; at the dark, smoldering eyes, the large, slightly mis-aligned teeth, even as she exhaled in a long, rattling breath, and just shrunk—like a bag with all the air sucked out; like a marionette lowered to the floor in an unrecognizable heap. After which I pressed my cheek to her own and just stayed that way, although for how long I couldn’t possibly say. All I know is that I was ‘awakened’ by gunshots, by the *crack-crack* of small arms, followed by screaming; screaming and the instantly recognizable growls of dinosaurs—big ones, by the sound of it—which itself gave way to silence ... at which I knew, with a mixture of relief and anger (because it was too late for Fiona anyway), that the Norsemen were no more.

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BY THE TIME I’D WALKED all the way back to the White House and the North Lawn—carrying Fiona’s body on my shoulders—Calvin’s announcement was well underway, although it came to an abrupt halt

when I appeared near the scaffold and laid her at its feet; after which there were gasps followed by a hushed silence—that is, save for the ubiquitous crackling of the fire.

When at last Calvin spoke, he did so as someone who had already resigned himself to the harsh reality of her death, asking only if she had suffered, to which I responded, “No,” and then inviting me to join him on the platform, which I did, climbing the rungs and taking his offered hand until we stood together over the crowd and the roaring pyre and he had turned to address his audience again.

“And so it goes,” he said, simply, giving the moment time to breathe, allowing everyone to catch their breath, until someone unexpectedly shouted, “How did she die?” —at which he turned to me, humbly, impotently, I thought, and indicated I should step forward; which I did, stepping to the very edge of the platform and looking down at the flames and the upturned faces, liking the way it felt, liking the way it made my blood race and seemed to snap everything into focus, liking the sense of power and purpose.

“Norsemen,” I said, bluntly, after which, having been a student of Calvin since before puberty, meaning I’d idolized him and observed him carefully in the hopes that I might one day be like him, I let the moment breathe—until, finally, I added, “They laid a trap ... and we blundered into it. And then they issued an ultimatum: Leave now. Leave, or die.”

“Fuck them!” barked someone almost immediately, and was quickly joined by others—all of whom felt that retaliation should be swift as it was lethal.

“We outnumber them five to one! I say we do it now, while it’s dark, and we have the element of surprise!”

At which Calvin quickly tugged me back and we changed places, so that I was standing behind him as he said, “Now wait just a minute, gang, just hold that line of thought. Because, see, the thing is, we *are* in their territory. All right? They warned us and we— well, we rightfully ignored them, because, as you say,” He pointed at one of the teenagers, “We

outnumbered them. By about five to one, as you say. But that's because we—we had a *job* to do. We had to come here and ... and burn what remained of the Old World, the old ways. But the Burning is done, don't you understand? We've done what we set out to do, we've burned it *fucking all!*"

He looked left and right quickly, as though to fan the flames—taking them all in, seeking to build momentum. When no one spoke up he said, "And that's why I think it's time to ... to consider a new way. A new paradigm, as they say. A new, well, a new purpose. A way—"

"Our purpose is to burn!" shouted someone near the front, an expression which was met with cheers and sustained applause, and at least one horse whistle.

"Yes! Yes, it is!" Calvin shouted back, and hastened to add, "And so you have! So you have. And so very, very brightly, I might add. But there comes a time when ... when Time itself—begins to *mutate*. When your mind and your body begin to change, to *evolve*."

"It's called getting old!" someone shouted, and was met by laughter.

"It's also called adapting; just bending ever so slightly so that instead of blowing you over the wind becomes an *ally*, a source of energy, and a renewable one at that. What I'm saying is ... the Burn is over. That the fields have been thoroughly cleansed and prepped. And that it's time to ... to build again. It's time to re-learn farming, irrigation, how to brew beer, for God's sake! Because the keg—the keg eventually runs out. And that's because what we're doing here isn't sustainable. It—it never was. *But*. But. You wanted a leader ... and somehow you found me. And so it was up to me in those first dark days to lift you up and to bolster your spirits, to channel your energy, to keep you busy and just get you through it." He sounded fatherly, patriarchal. "To help you let go of what was—and will never be again."

He turned toward me suddenly, I don't know why. "So ... no. There will be no retaliation. Not against the Norsemen, nor any other group. And there will be no more destruction." And then he held out his



hand—I'm still not sure why—and I just looked at it; wondering if he knew, somehow—if he had intuited it. That Fiona and I had lain together; that I was beginning to doubt his wisdom and his leadership, just as she had. That's when I noticed his hand was shaking slightly, as I had seen the hands of the very old and infirm do, and when I looked to his face I could see it—the age, the wear and tear, the lines just beginning to form around his eyes and his mouth, the hint of darkness just above his cheeks. But then he shook his hand as though urging me to take it and I did—grasping it firmly, assuredly—and we pulled each other into an embrace, a right bear hug, slapping each other on the back, seeming to acknowledge what we had in common, which, I was beginning to suspect, was a penchant for leadership. And Fiona.

But then I lifted my gaze over his shoulder—following the billowing embers, as I recall—and saw that great and terrible borealis in the sky and the dark shapes within it; saw the lights which shifted and bled in and out of each other and the alien colors which were not colors at all as we knew them but rather facets of some strange and inconceivable prism, and knew, even before I looked, that I would see those same colors in the eyes of the children below—the lost children, the children of the Flashback—just as I had seen them in the eyes of the dinosaurs which now ruled the earth. And more, that if I were to look, I'd see them in my own. And that's when I slid the shard of glass out of my back pocket (the one I'd kept as a keepsake after making love to Fiona) and, clasping it in both hands—so that it cut me deep before anyone else—drove it into Calvin's lower back.

At which Time stopped. It didn't mutate; it didn't evolve and transform—it just stopped; for I, and I alone, had stopped it. And then I was jerking Calvin against me, violently, brutally, again and again, sinking the shard deep into his flesh, using it to impale his spine, until he began coughing up blood—which gurgled darkly in the twilight and for the briefest of moments made one giant bubble—before releasing him completely and letting him fall backward into the fire, where he impact-

ed like a fresh log, causing embers to explode upward, and began screaming—hideously, obscenely. Briefly.

*“Salud!”* cried everyone below at once, raising their fists in solidarity, even as I looked at the sky yet again and considered what I saw there, and what I had seen of myself; as I considered what I had seen in the M.I.M. Museum and in Fiona’s dying eyes.

*You wanted a fresh start,* I said to them, the lights, the shapes *within* the lights. *You wanted to cleanse away the old. Let us help you.*

And then I looked at my friends, at my people, my *tribe*, seeing the Flashback in their eyes and knowing, at last, that this was its final expression; that we were meant to burn and to be burned, to end everything we’d ever touched; to end it all and to finally end ourselves. To just walk into the fire and close the book for good. To fertilize the fields for whatever was to come next.

To burn and to burn brightly.

To burn and to be burned, briefly.

end.

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The Flashback will continue in the next installment of *A Survivor's Guide to the Dinosaur Apocalypse ...*

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