

Tales from the Flashback:

“Raptors on a Plane”

by

Wayne Kyle Spitzer

Copyright © 2018 Wayne Kyle Spitzer. All Rights Reserved. Published by Hobb's End Books, a division of ACME Sprockets & Visions. Cover design Copyright © 2018 Wayne Kyle Spitzer. Please direct all inquiries to: HobbsEndBooks@yahoo.com

Based upon "Flashback," first published by Books in Motion/Classic Ventures, 1993. Reprinted by Hobb's End Books, 2017.

All characters appearing in this work are fictitious. Any resemblance to real persons, living or dead, is purely coincidental. This book contains material protected under International and Federal Copyright Laws and Treaties. Any unauthorized reprint or use of this book is prohibited. No part of this book may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying, recording, or by any information storage and retrieval system without express written permission from the author. This ebook is licensed for your personal enjoyment only. This ebook may not be re-sold or given away to other people. If you would like to share this book with another person, please purchase an additional copy for each recipient. If you are reading this book and did not purchase it, or it was not purchased for your use only, then please purchase your own copy. Thank you for respecting the hard work of this author.

• • • •

IF SAMANTHA HADN'T known better, she would have sworn she'd seen a bat—a *big* one, a very, *very* big one—by the 777's flashing wing lights. Of course, when she blinked it was gone, and not into the inky dark outside the window, she was sure, but back into her own mind, which was still half-asleep and probably hung over with Ambien. What she did see, and *knew* she saw, were a series of strange lights, like lightning amongst the clouds—except there *was* lightning amongst the clouds, they were passing through a storm, and these lights weren't that. No, these were something otherworldly, which shown with colors she could not quite define, and she would have studied them further, even snapped a pic with her cellphone, had she not suddenly realized that the elderly couple next to her were no longer in their seats, nor, for that matter, were the people in the middle row, or the row beyond that.

Her pulse quickened, and she sat up with start.

No one was in their seats, not in the entire rear cabin—at least no one tall enough, or fat enough, to be visible beyond the head and armrests. Wait, no, she could see that wasn't true, there *was* someone, she could just make out their arm on the rest in the front-most seats before the next economy class section. She noticed the "fasten seat belts" pictograph was illuminated and thought, *To hell with that*, then got up and began walking down the darkened aisle, finding it odd that all the TVs were stuck on static. Nor was that all that was odd, for a good portion

of the seats contained items that normally wouldn't be left unattended, purses and cellphones, laptops, iPads. Lightning flashed outside the windows as she approached the man in the seat and thunder boomed over the drone of the engines.

"Excuse me, sir, but—"

And then the airliner rocked suddenly and so did the arm on the chair rest, rolling back and forth once before it fell off completely and landed on the floor, dotting the blue carpet with blood.

• • • •

TWELVE MINUTES. IT had been twelve minutes, according to her watch, since the arm had fallen on the floor, after which she'd collapsed into the nearest chair and just sat—her head spinning, her heart pounding. *Okay*, she thought at last, *here's your options: One. You are still sleeping and are experiencing a nightmare. Two. You've gone completely insane. Or, three ...*

It was really happening.

And if that were the case, there weren't many scenarios that could explain it, other than that terrorists had slaughtered everyone on board and piled their bodies in first class—a possibility she found dubious at best.

The only thing to do was to accept the facts so far and make her way toward the cockpit—where she had at least some chance at finding answers. And so she moved forward slowly, not wanting to look at the seat where the arm had been resting but knowing she must, and when she did she saw that it was empty but splattered with blood, and that entrails had been strewn across the next two seats like unseparated sausage links. And she saw something else too, which was that a hatch had been opened in the floor of the aircraft—a hatch from which jungle vines spread like the branched arms of a basket star, and which steamed as though there were an entirely different climate down there in what she assumed was the cargo hold.

Somehow, she stayed calm, and continued moving forward, remembering something she had learned in zoology class before she'd quit college and decided to fly south to winter with her father, and that was that certain predators—hawks, for example—spurned the stomach and intestinal track.

And that's when she stepped into the premium economy section and realized that it was empty too. No. No, it wasn't. Something was moving. Several some-

things, actually—dark, scaly, feathery, almost, swaying and curling above the seats, like huge cat tails.

She froze, looking at them, unable to process just what it was she was seeing, or hearing, for that matter, for it sounded as though something were being eaten. That's when the TVS, including the projection screen at the front of the cabin, snapped to life, and she saw the CNN logo below images of New York City (Times Square, to be exact), where people were running for cover as police lights flashed and colored smoke billowed—*Jesus, oh Jesus, it is terrorists ... they're striking again just like 911 and they're on this plane right*—before what appeared for all the world to be a Tyrannosaurus rex entered the frame and the cameraman began running. And then something lifted its head amidst the swaying tails and she focused on it—even as it focused on the projection TV—and she realized she was looking at a living, breathing velociraptor, right there on Flight 33 bound for Houston.

• • • •

JUST ... DON'T MOVE, she told herself, understanding that if she moved even a little the thing would apprehend her at once, then virtually held her breath as the velociraptor—yes, velociraptor, just like in *Jurassic Park*, only this one was blue-black and had a mohawk of oil slick-colored feathers—cocked its head at the screen. At last it lowered its head and she dropped to the carpeted floor, but waited before drawing so much as a breath.

The cabin was quiet except for the drone of the engines and the wet, gristly eating sound—even the TVs had fallen back into static—and she inhaled slowly. Then, just as slowly, she began crawling forward, toward the closed curtain of business class ... and the cockpit.

Scarcely a moment had passed before she heard labored breathing and saw another raptor lying on its side between the seats, foaming at the mouth, dying. Something went *drip ... drip ... drip* nearby.

It was headless man, his body draped over a seat like so much dirty laundry, his blood falling in droplets to the floor. And there, in the middle of the stained carpet, lay a gun. A revolver. A *big* one.

An air marshal, she thought, and reached for the weapon. *Yes, there. And there.* Gold rings and bullet noses, just visible inside the chamber. But how many?

She found the latch and popped open the gun—she was fortunate to know something about revolvers, having spent much of her youth target shooting with her father—and was disappointed to find only two bullets left. It would have to do. Then she crept forward along the carpet ... until creeping forward more would expose her to the raptors, and peeked around the edge of a seat slowly.

There were three of them, their clawed hands and snouts covered in blood, only one of which had the strange comb of feathers that resembled a mohawk, and it was at precisely that instant that this one raised its head and apprehended her, its oil slick-colored crest rising and falling, its white eyes blinking—before it barked at the others as though issuing orders and rushed toward her, at which instant she climbed to her feet and swatted open the curtain to business class, and was about to sprint forward into first class when she realized there was a door directly next to her—a *restroom!*—and grabbed hold of its latch, which was locked. She pounded upon the door with her left fist even as she brought the revolver up with her right, and was about to squeeze off a shot at Mohawk's snout, which had just appeared around the edge of the curtain, when the door suddenly opened and someone pulled her in—someone who quickly shut the hatch and locked it.

And then she was breathing heavily, trying to slow her heartrate which had raced out of control, as the raptors clawed at the door and gnashed their teeth, and a man in a pilot's uniform placed his palm over her trembling gun hand and lowered the pistol slowly. Then everything just broke inside her and the tears started flowing, as she threw her arms around him and sobbed almost violently, all the while thinking how good it was, how very, very good, to no longer be alone.

• • • •

“WHAT,” SHE MANAGED, after she'd finally settled down, “what's going on? Do you know?”

He only shook his head, listening at the door, trying to determine if the raptors had lost interest. From the sound of it, or rather the lack of sound, they had. At least for the moment.

“It all happened so fast,” he said, leaning against the wall. “It's possible the pilots don't even know. If there *are* any.”

“But you're a pilot ...”

He shook his head again. "Not on this flight." He rubbed the bridge of his nose. "I was deadheading from San Francisco to Houston—repositioning for another assignment—when everything went crazy. Most the passengers and crew vanished just before we lifted off. I don't know where the, the velociraptors, came from, only that they arrived shortly after everyone disappeared." He looked up slowly, as though he were processing several things at once. "We've got to get to the cockpit—I'm sorry, what is your name?"

"Samantha," she said, offering her hand.

"Peter," he said, and shook it. "Peter Romero." He looked at the gun. "The air marshal's, I presume."

She nodded. "Such as it is; there's only two rounds left in the chamber."

"Two rounds ... and three raptors," he said.

"Right."

"Can you handle it? I've—never fired one."

"I can," she said, simply. "How will we get into the cockpit? I can't imagine anyone just saunters in post-911."

"No, but there's a camera in the forward galley, just above the cockpit door. Plus there's an intercom. Regardless, if anyone's there, they'll see us. If not, I guess you'll have to prove how well you can handle that thing by blowing the lock."

"And the raptors?"

"There's another restroom right next to the cockpit—two of them, actually. The doors open out ... while the cockpit door opens in. If we can get to the restroom, we should be able to open a passageway with cover between it and the cockpit—that's how close they are. It'll all have to happen very fast, of course."

Samantha sighed. "Hopefully they're still there. Can you fly this thing alone if you have to?"

"As for the pilots, I wouldn't hold your breath. Because I saw—I saw others disappear after we levelled off, meaning the fact we completed takeoff doesn't mean a thing. They could have vanished after engaging the autopilot. And yes, I can, with your help." He looked at her and smiled, warmly, engagingly. "So don't get yourself eaten along the way, yeah?"

She smiled in spite of herself and they stared at each other for what seemed a long time.

"You sure you're up to this?" he asked her at last.

"No. Are you?"

“No.”

“Okay, then,” she said, and tensed for what was to come. “Let’s do it.”

• • • •

THEY EASED THE DOOR open and there was nothing, not a raptor in sight. Purple light had begun creeping in the windows, meaning dawn was breaking. They crept out—still nothing—and crawled rapidly toward first class, pausing to peek beneath the curtain before entering the cabin—saw the tail of a raptor swaying and curling above the seats, heard the distinct sound of flesh being gnawed upon. They lowered the curtain and looked at each other.

At length Samantha indicated a magazine rack, which was low to the floor on the cross-wall between classes, and Peter nodded, understanding. Then she removed a sheath of periodicals and threw them back toward the opposite side of the plane, hoping to draw the animal out. It worked, and as the beast barked and burst through the far curtain they shuffled forward into first class—then scrambled to their feet and ran for the forward restroom.

An instant later they were in, having rapped on the cockpit door before closing and locking the hatch, and such was their post-stress euphoria that they began laughing and tittering at the absurdity of it—until a voice could be heard coming from the cockpit ... and they stopped, abruptly, and listened.

The voice came again, scarcely audible over the drone of the engines: “Hello? Hello, can you hear me?”

“Yes, yes, we can hear you,” said Peter immediately, and shuffled closer to the door. “Who are you?”

“Karen,” she said. “Stewardess Karen Agutter. I—I’m having trouble hearing *you*. The pilots. They’re ...”

At last the engine noise and muffling effect of the doors proved too much.

“Karen, can you crack the door? Just a crack, I’ll explain later.”

There was a long pause. At last they heard a latch turn. It was funny how that particular sound carried.

Peter popped their own hatch—about an inch, no more. “Hello,” he said, nonchalantly.

“Hi,” she said.

“The pilots. Are they ...”

She shook her head. "All gone. I—I was deadheading in the jumpseat—Captain Rhodes ... he liked me, I think—when ..." She burst into tears suddenly.

Samantha peeked between the door and the jamb, back at the cabin.

The raptors were there, spearheaded by Mohawk. They had all gathered in first class—four of them, she realized, not three—and were waiting, patiently.

"We've got company," she said.

"What about the passengers?" asked Karen suddenly. "The other flight attendants? My brother, he was serving in first class—"

Peter and Samantha stared at each other: The empty seats. The wet, gristly eating sounds.

"Darling, listen," said Peter, modulating his voice carefully. "I can explain everything. But we've got to get into the cockpit, do you understand?"

There was the briefest of pauses. "Well, come on in, what are you waiting for ..."

And she began opening the door, completely oblivious to the threat, at which instant Peter shoved their hatch open even as Samantha brandished the revolver and the raptors rushed forward.



SOMEHOW, THEY MADE it—mostly because the restroom door opened out and thus created a barrier in the narrow passageway. And then they were all together in the cockpit and the door had been safely secured, although the raptors continued to assault it for several moments, denting it inward and filling the flight deck with their muffled snarls and barks, until that, too, subsided, and they could see on the monitors next to the steering yokes that the animals had retreated.

Peter wasted no time in seating himself in the pilot's chair and buckling in, while Samantha took the jumpseat next to the window (there were two of them) and did the same. The cab turned white as a meteor passed them not 200 feet away—and everyone gasped. Dawn, meanwhile, continuing to break.

"We're just in time," said Peter, scanning the instruments. "The next airport is coming up. Go ahead and catch your breath, Sam. But remember—I'm going to need your help when we land." He looked at her over his shoulder and winked. "And that means taking the co-pilot's seat."

Sam, she thought, and smiled inwardly. *So he feels it too*. “Is landing a good idea, considering what’s going on?”

“There’s no other choice, we’ve only got so much fuel. We passed Houston while it was on autopilot.”

“Okay, what *is* going on?” asked Karen abruptly. “And how are the passengers and the other flight attendants? You said you’d explain. Jesus, are they even there?”

The cockpit fell silent save for the rumble of the engines, the soft beeping of instruments. “No,” said Peter at last. “I’m sorry.”

Samantha jumped in, reading the look of stark terror on her face. “We don’t know that. There may be people in the aft galley. It’s possible they ...” she trailed off, looking from Karen’s trembling expression to Peter’s disappointed one. She’d just made a terrible mistake, and she knew it.

“I’m going back there,” said Karen immediately, and got up from her seat.

“You can’t do that,” said Samantha. She tightened her grip on the revolver at her side. “There’s ... something back there. Four somethings, to be exact. You see, there’s been some kind of storm ... like, a time-quake or something, and ...”

The stewardess paused with her hand on the latch. “Some kind of storm,” she repeated, scornfully, it seemed. “A time-quake.” She glanced at Peter. “Well that explains everything, doesn’t it?” She faced Samantha again. “Look, I don’t know who you are, or what your *main* problem is, or why you’re carrying a gun ... but my brother is back there, and I’m going to—”

Samantha drew the pistol on her suddenly. “No, actually ... you’re not. You’re going to sit right down and fasten your safety belt, and let Peter—let the pilot—do his thing. Because there’s a whole lot of hell waiting just beyond that door that you know nothing about.”

The engines droned; a meteor flashed past somewhere in the distance. Karen looked at one of the monitors. “No, there’s no one. So shoot me if you have to.”

And she opened the door.

• • • •

EVERYTHING HAPPENED at once as Samantha saw a blur on the monitor and Mohawk exploded into the cockpit, clamping his jaws about the stewardess’ head and forcing her against the instrument panel—his tail whipping about

the compartment viciously, his mohawk of oil slick-colored feathers rising and falling.

He jerked his head once and half her face came away, the muscles stretching and snapping, her right eye being drug out by its stalk, her skull winking whitely, as Samantha pointed the gun and it was knocked from her hands. Then all was blood and chaos as Peter attempted to help Karen—who was likely dead already—and Samantha groped for the pistol, gripping it again even as the animal turned on her friend—but was held back, somehow, by his suddenly mighty hands.

And yet such was the violence of their struggle that she couldn't get a clean shot—and so decided, as Karen's hemorrhaging blood splattered the instruments and sprinkled her face and painted the windows with blotches of maroon, to do the only thing left, which was to point the pistol at the side window near Peter and fire.

The result was as instantaneous as it was cataclysmic, as both the raptor and Karen's body were sucked out the shattered window and the oxygen masks dropped, even as Peter began his descent and Samantha took her position in the co-pilot's seat.

But Mohawk wasn't gone. Indeed, he had clung to the window frame and was attempting to work his way back in, attempting to bite at Peter—when Samantha placed the revolver into his fetid mouth and squeezed the trigger, blowing his brains out the back of his head even as they touched down briefly and were pursued by a T. rex, before Peter lifted off amidst a hail of meteorites and they were on their way once more ... to where or when neither he nor Samantha could imagine.

• • • •

THEY FLEW LOW FOR SOME time, taking in the landscape, marveling at the changes.

"Jesus, Peter ... look at it. It's everywhere."

He nodded, saying nothing, and Samantha couldn't help but to notice that his hands were trembling. So, too, had his eyes glazed over ... and she realized that he wasn't merely in a kind of shock, but was tired, too. Simply exhausted.

"How far did you say the next major airport was?" she asked, placing a hand over his on the steering yoke.

"About 45 minutes," he said, then looked at her squarely, his face full of consternation. "But I can't promise you that it's going to be any different."

"It's okay," she said. "Why don't you ... take it up to an appropriate level, and engage the autopilot. You can get a little sleep while I man the fort. What do you say?"

He stared at her a little longer before facing forward at last. At length he said, "I didn't have anyone. I was alone before this ... this flashback. How about you?"

"A father," she said. "In Houston."

"Maybe we can get back there, somehow. After we land."

"Yeah," she said, and laid her head on his shoulder. "Maybe."

Several moments passed before he said, "It's funny, isn't it?"

But she was already fast asleep.

The End
