

A SURVIVOR'S GUIDE TO  
THE DINOSAUR APOCA-  
LYPSE

–2–

“Howl”

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*)

• • • •

*A Reign of Thunder*

(serialized as *Heat Wave*)

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

SOMEONE NEEDED TO SAY something, anything. The danger in silence was that, post-Flashback, one inevitably heard the emptiness, the melancholy: the sound of the world just breathing in and out, dreaming. So I said: “For her, the Flashback is over”—hoping it would break the spell of her liquefied eyes and deeply sunken sockets, the pale, wispy hair, the fuzzy white fungus in her nostrils and mouth. Hoping, I suppose, that it would drown out the Nothing—if only for a moment.

“No more power lunches for this babysan,” said Lazaro, and spat. He kicked the spilt attaché case at the base of the cycad, where her feet should have been, and paper and cash swirled. “Here one minute—melded with a tree the next. Shit sucks.”

Sam stepped closer, examining where the woman’s face merged with the tree. “Initial Flashback, you think? Or an aftershock?”

I watched the rain—which had lessened to a drizzle—dribble down the corpse’s face and neck. “I don’t know, she seems pretty well preserved. Could have been an aftershock.”

“Probably suffocated,” said Nigel. “Tree manifested and her lungs couldn’t expand. Jesus. What a horrible way to go.”

I looked at Joan who was white as a ghost. “You all right?”

“Yeah. It’s just that ...” She shook her head. “It’s nothing.”

She jumped as our walkie-talkies squawked; it sure looked like something to me. “Go ahead, Sea One,” I said. “What’s your twenty?”

I looked to see the Bell 206 arching over Elliott Bay.

“Just west of you—monitoring pack movements near the Colman ferry terminal. Carnotaurus, by the looks of it. I take it you’re at the Exchange?”

“Affirmative—and awaiting instructions.”

“Through the double doors, left at the first hall, all the way to the end. Austin Dynamics and Land Systems. They’ll be a secure door—you’ll have to blow it. And hurry, because there are predators of the human variety on the move in Pioneer Square.”

I peered at the sky, at what Roman called the Mesozoic Borealis, watching the colors bleed in and out of each other, watching them shift and change shape. “Yeah, ah, about that. Requesting alternative escape route—Over. We have had contact with Skidders. I repeat, we have had contact with them. We—they’re all dead. Over.”

But there was nothing, just the sound of the helicopter.

At last Roman said, “That’s unfortunate. But it doesn’t change a thing. Escape route is still 1<sup>st</sup> Avenue through Pioneer Square to Edgar Martinez Drive—then I-90 to Issaquah. Do you copy?”

That’s when I saw it: *him*, the kid, dirty-faced and wild-eyed, his hair like an unkempt mane, listening to us from the nearby stairwell—like the feral boy in *The Road Warrior*, I swear.

“Hey!” I shouted, drawing the attention of the others, “Hey, kid! Hold up!”

But he was already gone—climbing from the well at its opposite end, bolting up the shattered sidewalk like a gazelle. Weaving right at 2<sup>nd</sup> Avenue—where he vanished into the primordial mist.

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“JESUS,” SAID LAZARO, before the overheads had even finished flickering on. “I mean ... Who was this thing even built for, Godzilla?”

I stared at the vehicle, which was the length of a small yacht, say, 50 feet. “Well, not to put too fine a point on it, it was built for *us*. Or whoever survived whatever apocalypse Dannon had dreamed up.”

I approached the rover and slid my hand up one of the tires—which was taller than I was, by about a foot. “Welcome to the world of big tech billionaires and their passion projects.” The rubber felt stiff, unyielding, like polished wood. “His was to build a fully self-contained armored expedition vehicle—a kind of mini-Noah’s Ark—something that could not only sustain life but go about exploring what was left of the world—if and when the shit ever hit the fan.”

I circled the big rig while gazing up at its slanted cab and wide, black grill, its array of lights, its giant push and roll bars. The thing was like a van-version of the Cybertruck but on fucking steroids. “Reckon he was like Mr. Musk—in need of a challenge, but also a moral imperative to justify it. For him that was this apocalypse he saw coming.” I paused to examine the roof turret and what appeared to be a .50-caliber machine gun. “A virus, maybe. Or a war. Dinosaurs probably weren’t in his game plan.”

“Looks they were getting ready to test it,” said Sam. “Look.”

I looked to where a massive steel ramp (we’d descended stairs to get to the production floor) ended at an equally massive door. “Good. Looks like this might be easier than we—”

There was a rattle of weapons followed by Lazaro shouting, “Stop! Get on the ground!” —and I hurried to see what the commotion was; at which instant I saw a man in a blue shop-coat standing by a huge sphere and holding what looked like a small, olive-colored ball over his head—a ball with a ring attached, through which he’d looped a trembling finger.

“He’s got a bomb!” I shouted—but resisted raising my rifle. “Everyone just chill! Okay?”

No one did—chill, that is—but no one fired either, and a moment or two passed in silence.

At last the man said, “See this big tank here, this round monstrosity?” He indicated the white metal container next to him, which was taller even than he was. “That would be propylene gas—enough to level this entire floor, maybe the building itself. See this?” He nodded at the olive-colored ball. “That’s your standard military-issue hand grenade, courtesy of the kids who were stationed here before they *and* the city fell. See those?” He nodded at some handles and hoses near the floor. “Those are the valves I loosened as you were making your way here. If you don’t smell it yet, you will. It’s strong. Now. Any questions?”

“Only one,” I said, and pushed up my glasses. “What do you want?”

He shifted his footing as though preparing for a long standoff. “I want you to lower your weapons,” he said, and wiggled his fingers near the pin—keeping himself on his toes. “Lower them and kick them toward me, all of you. Then we’ll talk.”

Nobody said anything.

At last I set down my rifle and motioned for the others to do the same. “Do it,” I said, and slowly raised my arms. “You too, Lazaro. *Let’s go.*”

The weapons clattered as they were placed on the floor and punted toward him.

He lowered his arms cautiously. “There, see? We’re still capable of it—rational thought. It hasn’t gone the way of the dinosaur.” He laughed at that, but kept the grenade close to his chest. “Yet.”

He looked at our weapons as though running calculations through his head. “There’s Neanderthals roaming the streets, did you know that? Real ones—not supporters of President Tucker.” He paused, seeming to size us all up. “Remember them? With their little red hats and faces all puffed in rage?” He chuckled. “Fell off the flat earth, I guess. No, these are genuine *Homo sapiens neanderthalensis*—right beside modern man and triceratops; right beside honkers from the Jurassic and Cretaceous and Triassic. Just sort of one big medley—like Time itself was put in a blender, or a concrete mixer, or a cream separator, and churned.”

He seemed to relax a little and even lowered the grenade.

“I’m Ewan, by the way. Ewan Homes. I—I was *Gargantua’s* chief engineer. Before life put us all in the blender.”

“Jamie,” I said. “Jamie Klein. This is Sam.” I indicated the others. “That’s Lazaro, Nigel, and Joan. We—we’re from Issa—”

“Jamie, don’t,” interrupted Sam.

“It’s all right,” I said—and meant it. I trusted him; I don’t know why. “We’re from Issaquah. Got a camp there in what used to be a drive-in theater; it’s got walls, vegetable gardens, some chickens and goats—there’s even some generators, if you want to watch a movie. The thing

is—Ewan—it’s not overcrowded. And what I’m going to suggest just now is that—”

“Nothing leaves this facility,” he snapped—simply, with finality. “That includes me.” He raised the grenade tentatively and reached for the pin—then hesitated, his eyes searching mine, or seeming to. “No ... no, I don’t hear it. It’s not there.” He lowered the olive-colored explosive slowly, tentatively. “The guile of the predator, the cunning of the fox. It’s not there. You speak ... earnestly.”

I let down my arms carefully, incrementally, maintaining eye contact. “I speak as someone who has sought *Gargantua* while not knowing it had a guardian, a sentinel, which is yourself, or at least how you see yourself. I speak as someone who has faced the Big Empty alone just as you have—and knows it is not for lack of bread that a man dies, but lack of purpose, and that you have found yours in the guarding of this machine, this vehicle—a vehicle that, for whatever reason, you cannot even drive yourself, or you would have done so already. And I’ll offer you another way—Ewan, chief engineer at Austin Dynamics and Land Systems, whose budget was 8.5 million per fiscal year and who’s assistant was named Roman Daystrom, your best friend—if you’ll just turn off that fucking gas.”

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BY THE TIME I’D REINTRODUCED Roman and Ewan via radio, and the former had convinced the latter to not only come with us but to let someone other than himself drive *Gargantua* (Ewan, we were told, was blind as a bat), and Nigel had escorted the engineer to his quarters so he could retrieve some of his effects, the clock on the wall of the shop read half past one—more than enough time for the Skidders to have organized some type of counter-strike; a fact that weighed heavily on my mind as the women and I began gathering up specs and schematics and Lazaro paced the room impatiently.

“What the hell’s taking them so long? You heard Roman—carnotaurus, heading this way. Oh, I forgot. Nigel’s on Jamaican Time.”

“They have been gone awhile,” said Sam. “Maybe we should—”

“It’s no good splitting us up,” I said. “There’s no telling how quickly we might have to leave. Nigel’s got it—everyone just chill.” I looked at Lazaro. “Can you give us a hand with these? They’re going to be heavy.”

“Why the hell are we carting them along, then?” He snatched up one of the boxes with a huff and headed for *Gargantua*. “Or him, for that matter? Dude is definitely a few sandwiches short of a picnic.”

“You going to fix this thing when it—” began Joan, but Lazaro was already up the ramp.

We continued working in silence.

At length Sam said, “Who was he, you think? That kid?”

I shrugged my shoulders. “Just a kid. Probably been on his own since the Flashback, who knows?” I heaped some manuals into a box—which created a cloud of dust. “He gave me a start, that’s for sure. I didn’t really get a good look at him.”

“I did ...” She paused as though visualizing him. “He had bones around his neck, did you know that? Or teeth—like, really big ones. He’d strung them together as a sort of necklace. Isn’t that odd, you think?”

Our faces were close as I stopped to reflect. “I don’t know. Is it? Maybe he’s extracting them from dead Barney’s, like trophies. I confess, my first thought was that he’d gone feral. And yet ... He was wearing contemporary clothes, I remember that. Puffy coat, jeans, tennis shoes. I mean, he wasn’t like Mowgli or anything.”

She looked at me and started to grin. “I didn’t think he was like *Mowgli* ...”

“All right! Drop your cocks and grab your socks,” belted Lazaro—from the top of the ramp. “They’re back.”

I looked to see Nigel and Ewan entering the shop from the left, the latter seeming like an utterly new man—his hair no longer mussed; his clothes no longer a catastrophic mess.

“Apologies, apologies, a thousand apologies,” he said, before pausing to admire *Gargantua*. “But a maiden voyage such as this requires a fresh change of clothes.” He looked on a moment longer and then dropped to one knee—began ruffling through his overpacked bags. “Ah, yes, here it is. It’s—I opened it with Nigel.” He withdrew a corked bottle—which glinted darkly in the light from a high window. “*Voilà!* One of eight bottles of Dom Perignon Rose champagne, Vintage 1959, served in Persepolis in 1971 by the then-Shaw of Iran.”

He looked at us with a face flushed with excitement, and we looked back.

“To—to celebrate the 2500<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the founding of the Persian Empire ... by Cyrus the Great.” Disappointment stole over his face like a shadow. “It’s—it’s to break over the bow, as it were. To christen *Gargantua*.” Nobody said anything. “Yeah—well. Waste of liquor, anyway. Especially when I’ve got so much celebrating to do. I’ll, ah—I’ll just get the door. Over there.”

He moved up the ramp toward the garage door.

That’s when I thought of Lazaro’s admonition, I don’t know why: *You heard Roman—carnotauruses, heading this way.*

“Wait, Ewan,” I said.

But he was already there, triggering the great door with his fist, turning to look at us as it rattled upward, pulling the cork from the champagne. “Life is for the living,” he said, and toasted us with the bottle. “And this stuff ...” He poured champagne into his mouth and down the sides, soaking his clean, white shirt, splattering the floor with foam. “This is for howl—”

But then the door was open and they were there, the carnotauruses, and one closed its jaws about his scalp while another laid wide his abdomen (and another took up his legs) so that, howling, he was opened like a pizza being groped by eager hands. And then they themselves howled and piled over his body, and all we could do was to run—every-

one save Nigel, who had his trimmer, which he started with a sputter—because our weapons were already in the rover.

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WOULD WE HAVE MADE it to the truck if Nigel hadn't done what he did? I don't know—maybe. But I doubt it. The fact is these carnosaurs were *moving*—faster than I'd ever seen them move before—and had cut the distance between us in half before I heard the revving of Nigel's trimmer and saw him sweeping it across a dinosaur's belly, opening it like a can of spaghetti.

"Someone start the truck!" he shouted, his voice raw, animalistic, "I'll hold them off as long as I can!"

I scrambled up the stairs after Sam and Joan but before Lazaro. "Joan, this is your gig," I said, before essentially falling through a portal into the cockpit. "Get us out of here."

But she just stood there, looking around the deck and the crush of dials and switches; looking as if the vehicle itself might swallow her at any moment. "No ... No, I'm sorry. But I can't ... I just ..."

I indicated the co-pilot's seat. "Sam."

She buckled into her harness as I took the driver's seat and did the same, hoping that what Roman had told me was true—that *Gargantua* could pilot herself—and hoping, too, that I could remember the test protocol he'd so wisely insisted I study.

"Gargantua, this is Jamie—and I'm going to be your test driver today." I looked out the massive, slanted windshield to where Nigel had thrust his trimmer's saw-head into the mouth of a carnotaurus, only horizontally, after which he leveraged the shaft brutally—and popped off the top of the thing's head. "We are go for power on. I repeat: We are go for power on. Initiate protocol."

I watched as blood geysered from the beast's lower mandible—even as nothing seemed to happen with the vehicle.

"Gargantua. Initiate protocol."

"I got a bad feeling about this," said Sam, even as the creatures closed in around Nigel, and Lazaro opened fire from the ramp. "I mean, if you could just bounce in here and say 'go' then it obviously—"

"Clearance is Delta-Delta—*Dawn*," I said rapidly, recalling the code words Roman had insisted I memorize, recalling how well he'd prepared me should something happen to Joan, as the consoles lit up like Christmas trees and the screens flickered to blue life; as the rover's hybrid engines hummed and whirred and pulsed, powerfully. "Issaquah via I-90, *go!*"

And then we were moving, smoothly, robustly (after an initial lurch), as one of the screens showed the stairs beginning to retract and Nigel rushed onto them—where he was assisted by Lazaro—as we clanked onto the ramp and powered up its traction-metal and finally burst onto the street.

"Sea One, this is Away Team Alpha, we are on our way!"

I looked up through the cockpit's huge windshield in time to see the Bell 206 thundering overhead—zooming toward Pioneer Square and the headquarters of the Skidders; zooming toward Edgar Martinez Drive and I-90 and *home*. "Do you copy?"

"Copy you loud and clear, Away Team Alpha," said Roman at last, euphorically, and laughed. "Congratulations."

I looked over my shoulder as Nigel and Lazaro joined us on the bridge, then forward again through the tinted windshield—where the streetlights were passing dangerously close to the roof. "Everybody hang on, we could run out of clearance fast."

There was a *frap-frap-frap* as the twigs of trees started colliding with us. That's when I first noticed it: him, her—a lone figure—walking out into the middle of the road, stopping between us and Pioneer Square. Turning to face us as I instinctively hit the brakes.

"Auto-pilot disengaged," said a voice—Majel Barrett's from *Star Trek*, I swear; some geek's idea of a joke.

"Is that who I think—" Sam started to say but then trailed off.

I peered through the angled glass, which was bullet-proof, I presumed, I mean it was *thick*, as the truck ground to a stop and the figure came into focus—beard, flannel, and all.

It was Atticus.

“Well, well,” said Lazaro, sardonically. “Slippery motherfucker, isn’t he?” He added: “What’s that?”

I looked to where another figure had entered the street to join him, a smaller figure, wearing a puffy black coat and blue jeans, whose hair was wild and unkempt. A figure who wore a necklace of large teeth around his neck—T. rex teeth, by the looks of it—and smiled gap-toothed as Atticus ruffled his hair.

The kid. The feral boy. Mowgli, whatever.

But that wasn’t all, for there were others now too—not Skidders, there were no beards or flannel or Converse shoes—just people: men, women and children, most of them disheveled, who walked out single-file and formed a living fence across the road— even as another group (visible on one of the monitors) did the same behind us. And it was at precisely that instant that I glimpsed the first of the red dots—which were fleeting, erratic, sometimes holding on a person’s head, sometimes roaming—and realized just how much trouble we were in. How trapped we’d become.

To be continued ...

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