

A SURVIVOR'S GUIDE TO
THE DINOSAUR APOCA-
LYPSE

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“Elegy”

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

OKAY, EASY DOES IT. Just nock your arrow—easy, easy, it's going to click—now put it in the rest ...

I looked at the allosaur as it fed, there in the slim shadow of the Mirage's entry arch, in the shimmering heat of Lost Vegas, and drew back the string—finding my anchor (which was just under my right ear), aligning the peephole with my sights.

Easy, easy ...

I stabilized the grip between my thumb and forefinger, sighting the area between the arms, the claws of which were covered in gore.

Great Spirit, thank you for sharing with me your glorious nature and abundant wildlife—

There was a *thwish* as I released the arrow.

Grant me always wisdom and respect in its pursuit—

Which struck the taupe-colored animal with a dull thump, causing it to rear up like a stallion, baying and squealing, barking at the sky.

And keep me ever humble in the harvest—

I nocked and released two more bolts, embedding them into its chest, into its great, beating heart.

So that I may be worthy of my place on this earth. Amen.

And it fell, the fast-acting microraptor venom locking its jaw, paralyzing its limbs, so that it squirmed briefly upon its belly before solidifying like stone (as though it had gazed upon Medusa herself) and lay still, at which Kesabe leapt from the palm bushes and bound toward it, barking and wagging his tail, and I followed, grateful for the meat yet distressed by the loss of the arrows—which I knew would never be recovered—and overall preoccupied enough that I didn't even notice the girl standing just beyond the kill—until she yelped once, taking me in, and bolted out of sight down S. Las Vegas Blvd; after which I heard a small engine sputter to life and begin to rev.

"Sic, Kesabe!" I barked, for she was the first person we'd seen since San Diego—but the Dutch Shepherd was already on it, leaping over the allosaur's tail and sprinting after her even as I shouldered the compound

bow and fetched Blucifer, whom I mounted quickly, gracelessly, before cracking the reins and giving chase.

And then there we were, she on her motor scooter (which sputtered and whined and left a trail of oily blue smoke) while we pursued, weaving between empty cars, maneuvering around stalled buses, racing down the Strip past Harrah's and Caesar's and the rows of transplanted palm trees—all the way to Planet Hollywood and a wide set of stairs (which she attempted to navigate but failed); all the way until Kesabe fell upon her like a threshing machine and I at last trotted to a halt, calling him off.

Fortunately, she hadn't been hurt, at least not seriously: she had a few nicks from Kesabe's teeth—a given—along with some minor cuts and bruises, but that was it. She was, however, pinned beneath her scooter; a circumstance she could do virtually nothing about—considering Kesabe's close proximity.

"Bastard!" she cursed—her voice full of venom—and spat at me. "What do you want?"

I recoiled as though slapped in the face, as though her small voice were instead the loudest thing in the world (which, at that time and place, now that I think about it, it *was*). And then the silence reasserted itself, as total and sublime as anything since Death Valley—only worse, for I now had something to compare it to—and because I was a man, and alone, with no rules to govern me, and because I'd heard nothing but death birds since the Cleveland National Forest, I decided I would not just slake my curiosity and let her go (who she was, where she was from, what did she know) but that in fact I would keep her, as a bound prisoner if necessary. In part this was to protect her, for she wouldn't last long with no weapons and no guile, but mainly it was for myself. Because, having heard her voice once, I intended to keep hearing it.

I *needed* to keep hearing it.

BY THE TIME I'D ESTABLISHED a camp in the covered breezeway of the Luxor obelisk—"Cleopatra's Needle" it was called, at least according to a bronze placard on its wall—and bound her hands and feet, the sun had set and a slight rain had started to fall; something I fully welcomed after so much time in the desert. As to whether the girl welcomed it also, who could say. For even though I set her near the opening (as well as the fire) and provided her my own bedroll to sit on, she only continued to glare—probably due to us eating in front of her; for I had decided, though you might think it cruel, that I would starve her into speaking, if necessary. Which, of course, she finally did—speak, that is—although only after a considerable time, saying, hoarsely, yet clearly, assertively, "Is this some kind of torture? I mean, don't you have to feed prisoners before killing them? Isn't that what the Geneva Convention says?"

I looked at her through the flames, saying nothing, even as Kesabe snarled.

At length I carved a piece of meat from the spit and dropped it on a paper plate, which I carried around to her—but didn't hand over. Instead, I knelt and sliced off a single bite-sized morsel—then held it close to her nose.

"Trade," I said, matter-of-factly. "One bite per something about you. It can be your name. Where you're from. How you've survived ... Just talk."

She started to protest but hesitated, searching my eyes, trying to judge intent. At last she said, "So what's with the war paint?"

I stood and began to walk away.

"Wait a minute—wait a minute—jeez, so we don't go there—fine. My name is ... it's Essie, all right? Essie McIntyre. I'm from Spokane."

I paused, looking over my shoulder. "Where?"

"Spokane. It—it's a city. In Washington."

"... D.C.?"

"State. Washington *State*."

I returned and crouched near her again. “Okay. So ... how’d you get to be here?”

She didn’t say anything—only opened her mouth wide.

“It—it’s got an aftertaste ... just so you know.” I fed her the piece of allosaur.

She chewed it up eagerly, voraciously—before pausing, making a face.

“It’s the game,” I said. “You have to get used to it.”

“It’s not that. It’s just ...” She swallowed slowly, tentatively. “I had alligator once, in New Orleans—this, this reminds me of that. Only heavier, oilier. With an acrid aftertaste.”

“That’s the predator in it ... at least that’s what they say.” I cut her off another piece. “Would—would you like some more?”

“Yes, I think so, please. It’s not terrible.”

I fed her the piece from the end of my knife.

“What, what was the question?” She finished chewing and swallowed. “Oh, yes. How did I come to be here. Well, that’s just it—” She paused suddenly and tilted her head. “Can I ask you something?”

I must have looked confused.

“Just one,” she said, and tried to smile. “What is your name?”

There was a pregnant pause as I thought about it. It seemed only fair. “Satanta,” I said, and cut her another piece. “Satanta—the Last.”

“Satanta, the Last,” she repeated, and shrugged. “Okay. Thanks. Guess I figured you weren’t a Brad.” She opened her mouth wide, waiting for the next morsel, but relented when I shook my head. “Right. So—how I came to be here. Well, see, that’s the conundrum, isn’t it? Because the fact is—I *don’t know*.”

I squinted, unsure how to take that. “What do you mean?”

“Again, I’m sure I don’t know. Only that ... I was at a stoplight—in Spokane—watching a stormfront roll in, when the news starting talking about, well, power outages, mostly, but also that people were going missing—I mean, not just one or two, say, over the course of weeks or even

days, but, *dozens* of people, maybe hundreds, all at once, as though they'd never even existed. And I was just sort of wrapping my head around that, or trying to, when I noticed there were ... lights in the clouds. Shapes. Things that were above me at that point and seeming almost to ... to be looking down at me. To be targeting me. Me—on my little motor scooter—somewhere in the Spokane Valley.” She laughed. “And the next thing I knew I was here,” She indicated the Strip. “Scooter and all—just sort of dumped over on my side at Circus, Circus, and feeling ... almost as though I'd been tasked with something. As though there was something I was supposed to do. Though what it was I couldn't remember—and still can't, no matter how hard I try.”

I'm afraid I just looked at her. What was there to say, exactly? That what she had described was impossible? That even though most the world's population had vanished and the dinosaurs had returned—an impossibility itself, but something we had accepted—her blacking out in one place and waking up in another was ridiculous?

“You should eat,” I said, offering her more meat. “No more questions.”

She pulled the flesh off the fork with her teeth and chewed, her eyes never leaving mine. “I have some,” she said, talking around her food, “Questions, that is. Like, what the hell brought *you* here? And where do you get off on kidnapping me?”

I paused, knife in hand, as the fire crackled and popped.

“I—I came to sift ashes,” I said—quietly, obliquely—but did not elaborate.

“You came ... to sift ashes,” she said, and nodded once, twice. “Okay. I'll play. Why not. And these ashes are here, in Las Vegas?”

“In the suburbs, yes. On Canosa Avenue. It—it's all so foggy. I haven't been back for a very long time. But I'll know the way once I find the gas station.”

“The gas station.”

I nodded. “The one on the corner. The RGB. If it's still there.”

“I see. And—and what do you plan to do with me?”

I looked at her in the firelight—at her auburn hair, which blazed in the fire’s glow, and her green eyes, which caught the light and glimmered. “It is my wish that I should continue hearing your voice,” I said.

She peered at me intensely, glimmeringly, as though she’d won some sort of victory. “Is that so?” Then she laughed, brusquely, boorishly, and held up her bound wrists. “Well, then. I guess you better start cutting, Chief. Wouldn’t you say?”

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“YOU’RE A REAL ASSHOLE, Satanta. Just so we’re clear.”

I turned around and looked up, shielding my eyes from the sun, and saw her glaring at me from Blucifer’s saddle (to which I’d bound her with zip ties), before jerking the rein, tugging them after me.

“And here I thought you were different—if only for a minute,” she continued. “*Boy*, was I wrong!”

“And I thought you were—how did you say it? On a speech strike,” I said.

“I am,” she snapped. “I just needed to say that one thing. Again.”

We *clip-clopped* up S. Las Vegas Blvd, past the fairgrounds and a gaudy strip mall called the Bonanza, saying nothing, during which I found myself gazing at the sky lights—our ubiquitous friends since the Flashback—and noting how angry they seemed today, how inflamed; and noting, too, that Kesabe had not circled back in some time (for it was his tradition to run far ahead), a fact which was beginning to trouble me.

That’s when I heard the strange sound: a kind of forlorn mewing, like the note of a horn being drug out too long, coming from just around the corner, just beyond the liquor store—and paused, holding up my hand.

“What? What’s going on?”

I waved her into silence, dropping the rein, then hustled to the edge of the building—where, after peeking around the corner, I saw a juvenile

sauropod of the Diplodocus family (meaning it was the size of a typical school bus) collapsed in the middle of the street—its right front leg stuck in a manhole.

“What is it? What do you see?”

I looked from the sauropod to the corner of a nearby building, where something had moved, then across the street to an overgrown alley. *Yes*, I thought. *There. And there. Between the tattoo parlor and the marijuana dispensary ...*

“Allosaurs,” I said, gravely. “An entire pack of them. In desert camouflage. They—they’ve got something trapped.”

“Omigod. It—it’s not your dog, is it?”

I returned and picked up the rein, began leading Blucifer forward, into the intersection. “No.”

“Wait ... what are you—”

“We’re going through,” I said.

“But what if those things—”

“They don’t care about us; they want the bigger game. *For now*. Just hold on.”

The horse’s hooves went *clip-clop, clip-clop* as we passed, the bluish-gray sauropod coming into full view ...

A moment later she said, “It—it’s stuck. In the manhole. Do you see that?”

I eyed the predators warily, continuing to lead. “There’s nothing we can do about it.”

“But she’ll be helpless against—”

“*That is the way of it*,” I insisted. “The way of the—”

“Look, would you stop with the Indian clap-trap? I’m not even sure—”

There was a *thwomp* as the allosaur by the building leapt into the road—not by us but about fifty feet away, near the sauropod.

“Jesus, can’t you do *anything*? What about your bow?”

“And risk bringing them down on us?” I intensified our pace, sprinting toward the Stratosphere. “No!”

And then they were coming—the allosaurs from across the street—passing so close we could smell the meat on their breath; closing in on the frightened herbivore ... until we passed the scene completely and sought refuge in a nearby gas station (its storefront had long since collapsed) and gathered there trembling as the sauropod cried out—for it wouldn’t be long now until they fell upon her.

“Jesus,” said Essie, listening. “What a world.”

“Yes,” I said, remembering. “My father used to say it had a demonic sublime; every tree and every rock, every animal, including man, down to the lowest insect.” I listened as the sauropod moaned, seeming already to give up, to resign its fate. “And yet.”

“What do you mean?”

“What?”

“You said, ‘and yet.’ What did you mean?”

I unshouldered the compound bow—rubbing my aching deltoid, stretching my arm. “Nothing. It’s just that ... maybe it doesn’t have to be this way.”

When she didn’t respond I looked at her—found her already looking at me: calmly, meditatively, her eyes seeming to glimmer. “I’m sure I don’t know what you mean.”

“I mean ... that I could end it. Her confusion and terror. That I—could prevent her from suffering.” I looked at the bow and the dark, poisoned bolts attached to it. “That it’s in my hands to do so.”

“A mercy killing, then. Is that what you mean?”

“Yes,” I said.

She seemed to think about it. “Well, you know, you’d have to expose yourself first—in order to take the shot. And there’s always the risk they might turn on you. Is that—is that a risk you’re willing to take? And if so ... why? How would it benefit you—or us?”

I stared at her, confused by the change. “Look, just a minute ago you were—”

“Just a minute ago I was participating,” she said, sounding cold, analytical. “Now I’m observing. And I’ll ask you again ... why? What could it possibly change?”

I gripped my bow and thought about that, wondering what had come over her, and why her eyes seemed to dance, to shine—as though they’d been illuminated from within.

At last I said, “Jesus. Maybe because we’re still human?”

And then I was moving: stepping over the overgrown rubble, hurrying around the nearby buildings; dropping to one knee near the allosaurs where I sighted the mewing diplodocus and released two arrows, one after the other, into the soft tissue of her eye orbit, killing her instantly—after which the predators fell upon her like wolves, snarling and clawing, opening her like a bag of sausage, tearing out her throat ... as I walked back to the station and was greeted by Kesabe, barking and licking my hand. As I looked at Essie and found her returned to normal, seeming almost not to know what had happened.

As she indicated the orange Union 76 sign and said, in her usual tone of voice, “So would this happen to be it? Your gas station?”

After which I looked around in a daze—recognizing the soda fountain (now an antique) with the American bald eagle on top; recognizing the wooden Indian which stood by the door—and knowing, at last, that I had found my way home.

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“IT—IT’S NOT WHAT I expected,” said Essie over my shoulder, as Blucifer whinnied and Kesabe pissed on the nearest tree; as the overgrown rancher sat—its nearly flat roof baking in the sun ... its slat fence partially collapsed.

“It’s not a teepee; if that’s what you mean,” I said, and dismounted.

"I didn't expect a *teepee*," said Essie, as I helped her down. "It's just that—it's so *white*. Like Wally and the Beav are gonna come running out any minute."

"My father didn't believe in reservations," I said, leading Blucifer to a bush, abandoning the reins. "He thought they were museums full of defeated people; just so many relics, withering in the sun. He wouldn't even take us there to visit our grandparents; they had to come to us."

"That must have sucked."

"No, actually—it really didn't," I gripped the doorknob and paused, wondering if I was really up to it; if I was fully prepared for what I might find. "It taught us—my brother and I—to see ourselves as individuals, not a collective—and a defeated one at that. Maybe that's why neither of us wound up pickled in Thunderbird."

I twisted the knob and eased the door open, watching sunlight spill across the floor, then stepped in slowly, cautiously. "He didn't buy the idea that land could be any sort of birthright, said living things had always competed for resources and always would, and that, change being the only constant, to deny that was to deny the fundamental nature of reality."

I paused in front of a framed picture of my mother, touching it gently, tracing a finger through the dust. "He always said, 'Should I apologize for winning your mother from a white man?'"

I laughed a little, and so did Essie.

"No, of course not," he'd say. "Because that's what nature does, it *competes*. It competes."

I stared at the picture, hoping it had been painless for them and that they had just vanished like so many others. Hoping they had gone together.

"Well, that explains that," said Essie. She had leaned in and was examining my face.

I must have looked confused.

"Your war paint," she said. "It's red and white."

And I had to laugh; because she was exactly right, even though I had never thought about it—had never even considered it, at least not consciously—after which, feeling cavalier, I said, “My real name is Steve, by the way. At least, that’s what my mother used to call me.”

She paused, looking at me with something like pity. “Steve.”

“Yeah. It—it means victor—”

“I’m gonna stick with Satanta. If you don’t mind.”

“Sure,” I said, and shrugged. “I prefer it. More apocalyptic.”

And then we moved on, picking our way through the overgrown house (liberating a stack of photo albums along the way as well as my mother’s Polaroid camera), after which we came to my old bedroom—the roof of which had collapsed so that the palm trees were visible outside—and sat on the bed.

“You had a beautiful life,” said Essie at length— perusing the photos, turning the pages. “You were very lucky.”

“I know,” I said.

“Not everyone is.”

“I know that, too.”

I peeled the plastic coating from one of the sheets and removed a picture, staring at it in the late afternoon sun, in the burnt ocher wash of what photographers called the Golden Hour. “That was us—my entire family—at Disneyland; in Anaheim—must have been about ’78 or ’79. I can tell by the hair.”

She leaned close to examine it, her own hair tickling my cheek. “Hard to believe that’s you. *Mercy*. You had prettier locks than I did. So did your brother.”

I rubbed the Polaroid between my thumb and forefinger, slowly, absently. “All dust,” I said quietly. “Everything in the picture, both the red and the white.” I laid back on the bed, feeling suddenly tired.

“Nonsense,” she said—and, to my astonishment, laid down next me. “You seem alive enough to me.”

And then she began to doze—or so it seemed to me—and it was just myself and the queer lights: which glowed all of a color and showed nothing of their usual chaotic rhythms, but only looked down on us softly, ambiently, like Christmas lights hung from the very firmaments; serene.

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IF NOT FOR HER HAVING taken off her over-shirt during the night, we would never have found her—for it was only after giving it to Kesabe and having him sniff it that the Dutch Shepherd was able to track her: a trail which had led straight to the gas station and the allosaurs from the day before—not to mention Essie herself; who stood trembling yet defiant amongst the ruins and seemed almost to be goading the animals on, daring them to attack.

“Essie! Good God, Essie!” I shouted, fighting the reins, as Blucifer—panicked by the predators—leapt and circled and whinnied, kicking up dust. “What have you done?”

“Oh, don’t you see? We had no right! No right at all!”

I dismounted quickly—having wrested Blucifer into submission only briefly, for he snorted and charged away even as I found my footing—unshouldering my bow as fast as I could, nocking a bolt. “Back up into the store, dammit; do it, now! *Why, for God’s sake?*”

But she only held her ground—even as the sky strobed and flashed and the clouds roiled with thunder—her feet planted firmly; her arms held wide. “But don’t you see it? *Oh, how can you not see it?* Look into my eyes, Satanta. Look into my eyes and tell me you don’t understand ...”

I sighted the animal nearest her and released an arrow, *Thwish!*—which struck the beast in its eye and dropped it, instantly, even as Kesabe barked and snarled and the others seemed to zero in on me.

“Look at me, Satanta. Slay ... *me*. Because *they* are in me, now, fully manifest. They—who have caused all the suffering. They, the very archi-

tects of the Flashback. And I want them to *feel* it. Oh, can't you understand? I want them feel what it is they have wrought!"

I caught a fleeting glimpse of her before the remaining allosaurs attacked: saw the eyes like a fire in the sky and the fallow skin shot through with green—until the animals charged and I loosed another bolt, dropping one as it ran, and yet leaving two, both of which would have fallen on me if Kesabe hadn't leapt into the fray like a pointy-eared threshing machine, barking and biting, scratching and snarling, peeling the predator away, as the other bit for my neck and I dodged, leaping onto its back; then stabbed it with an arrow again and again, hanging on as it leapt and bucked, groping for its eyes (which I would have gouged out had it not fallen), thanking the Great Spirit as it shuddered and died.

And yet I'd barely had time to climb off it when I heard Essie scream—not from the store's rubble but high above it, in the sky—where a pterodactyl wheeled like a kite in the sun even while gripping her like a ragdoll and beaking her as if with a sword—that is until it too was attacked by another, bigger bird—at which I snatched up my bow and nocked my last arrow, aiming into the flail of talons and wings, and shot the first bird clean through its skull.

And then it was over, or nearly so, as the thing fluttered down and dropped her; at which I ran to her and cradled her in my arms even as the bird next to us thrashed and died.

"They felt it," she gasped, "I know they did. They felt it through me."

"*Shhh*," I said, "Save your strength. We have to get you—"

"They thought they could just see through my eyes—that they could observe us that way, study us ..." She coughed violently—shudderingly—hacking up blood. "But what they didn't know was that they'd *feel* through me too. Feel it all, Satanta ..." She groped for my hand and found it, began to squeeze. "The pain ... the terror. But also the compassion. The mercy. Like the kind you showed the herbivore. The kind—" She seized up suddenly as though her insides were being torn apart. "The kind you showed me. That—that we showed each other. And for the briefest of

moments ... they understood. Go—go north, okay? You'll find people there, good people. I know—because *they* know. Our watchers. Our destroyers. I have been in their minds. Go north. But first ... first help your ...

And she died.

I closed her eyes. And that's when it hit me how quiet it was, and that I could no longer hear Kesabe barking—that indeed, I could no longer hear him at all.

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MY GRANDFATHER ONCE said, in response to my father, "We all live on reservations, some of us just don't know it yet." And though I didn't understand that then, I was pretty sure—as I stood over my friends' graves and watched the house go up in flames—that I did now; for he'd been talking about our limitations and the fact of our own mortality (trying to tell me, I think, as I got ready to leave for Los Angeles more than 30 years ago, that if I were going there to escape I was in for a disappointment). All I know for certain is that as I stood there over the crude markers—one for Essie and one for Kesabe—I felt smaller and less significant than ever before (and I'd felt pretty small and insignificant since the Flashback), to the point that I questioned going on at all, north or otherwise. But then Blucifer showed up with a familiar snort and whinny—where he'd gone I didn't know, nor did I ask—after which, feeding him what remained of the oats in my pocket, I decided we would head back to the coast and follow it north, for maybe there *were* people there, 'good people,' as Essie had said, and if that were true, then, truly, anything was possible.

Even so I hesitated—even after mounting and slinging the bow across my back (for I hoped to find arrows before leaving the city entirely), thinking on Essie, whom I had come to love even though I'd known her only for a short time, and on my friend, Kesabe (whom I'd named 'Kemosabe' but had shortened to 'Kesabe') ... a dog who had just been

a dog but thought he was a wolf; and who—as evidenced by his final act—sometimes was, sometimes was.

Like you, maybe? I wondered, and laughed. *Satanta the Last—come Steve?* And yet wasn't it at least partially true? For the Flashback made of you only what you already were—however veiled that may have been in the world before.

And then I snapped the reins and we went, Blucifer and I—back toward the coast and the passage north. Back to the winding trail, which, like all winding trails, went everywhere and nowhere at once.

end.

The Flashback will continue in the next installment of *A Survivor's
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