

Excerpt from

SURVIVE

Book one | Dinosaur

The Sarge saw them coming from his vantage point near the top of the ship and activated his analogue radio, shouting into the receiver, “Digger crew: Get back to the Pod now! Move it!” He stole a quick look through his electro-binoculars. “You are about to be overrun! Repeat: You are about to be overrun – Get out of there!”

He watched the diggers become even more jerky and awkward in their movements, which probably meant they were flat-out. Unfortunately, this only equated to the speed of a fairly slow jog; not nearly enough.

The clearing where the *New World* slept erupted as a terrifying menagerie boiled out of the forest. From The Sarge’s bird’s-eye view, it bore all the chaos and madness of an early mosh pit, but there were no friendly faces or helping hands to pick up the fallen from this dance. The downed stayed down, the crushed remained crushed, as creatures of all sizes and shapes honked and bellowed; every one making their best speed, frantically barging, clawing and fighting to reach the other side, putting as much distance as possible between themselves and the oldest of all enemies: fire.

The enormous edifice of the ship forced them to pour around its sides, like an island in a stream. Angry roars and agonised screams rolled across the landscape as the stampede diverted; the unlucky falling into the new ditch, trampled against the rampart. From the humans’ perspective, it was fortunate that the construction crews had done just about enough. Had the massive earthwork not been there, the ship may have been irrevocably damaged by the push and smash of thousands of tons of terror on the run.

Despite taking their ease for the last day or so, the Mapusaurus pack had become increasingly agitated by the approaching smoke. For this reason, The Sarge had recruited Dr Pearson to keep vigil on *their* side of the ship, keeping tabs on their movements, and their moods, whilst the digger crews worked *his* side. The veteran soldier wanted to be ready, just in case the crews needed to display the better part of valour, and in a hurry.

His radio crackled. “*Sarge, this is Natalie,*” said a tinny voice. “*They’re moving; all of them!*”

“Oh great,” said Jackson, toggling the talk-back switch. “Understood, Sarge out.”

The Mapusaurus were a pack of killers, no doubt, but they could also be artful scavengers and the indiscriminate, mostly accidental killing taking place all around, made it *Mappy* hour.

They belonged to the family of carnivorous dinosaurs known as Carcharodontosaurs. The Latin name Carcharodontosaurus literally meaning, ‘shark toothed lizard’, and almost too good for metaphor, the sharks were circling today. However, as these terrible animals fought their way around the obstacle represented by the *New World*, they encountered threats, even to *their* majesty. The first was the deadly crush which took the lives of three of their number; the second was a rival pack of Giganotosaurus, flushed out of their own territory by the fire and on a collision course. They converged exactly where the hapless digger drivers attempted their escape.

Giganotosaurus was a larger cousin of the deadly Mapusaurus. Ideally, they would have avoided one another where at all possible, hunting separate territories to circumvent the sort of injuries which could result from a direct confrontation. However, as the drivers caught up in the *mêlée* were all too aware, this day was not shaping up ideally for anybody.

The men were terrified almost out of their wits; the wall of flesh, teeth and claws chasing them, fuelled by their *own* terror, seemed almost demonic to these interloping apes, lost in a past they did not understand. Putting everything into a final, valiant effort, whilst praying not to be overturned, the drivers eventually pierced the incomplete gateway. Spinning their cabs around to face back the way they had come, they continued to grind their way forwards, tractors reaching for the safety of the cargo bay at their best possible speeds. From the drivers' perspectives, travelling backwards made sense, enabling them to face the onslaught and raise their huge buckets as deadly, defensive weapons.

Like making harbour in a storm, the smaller ten-ton excavator was now inside the ramparts which continued to deflect creatures around the *New World* in waves.

The earthen bridge, across the ditch to the gateway was well over-sized, almost fifteen metres across as it currently stood, and the reason was simple; a narrow causeway would collapse under the traffic of such heavy vehicles. Eventually the entrance would be narrowed and the sides battered to prevent slippage, but there just simply had not been enough time to undertake this stage of construction yet. Unfortunately, this land-bridge over the ditch provided an ideal platform for an assault on the gateway.

Giganotosaurus and Mapusaurus, masters of their domains, faced off like warring clans at the gates to the *New World*, filling the land-bridge and all around it.

The last man in the middle faced a score of lethal killers, some of the most dangerous the world has ever known; he faced his death. The way he saw it, he had but one chance, his only hope of surviving the serrated savagery of those jaws; he had no weapons as such, but his thirty-tonner might, just possibly, be the last word in blunt instruments.

Both packs needed to defend the area from their competition. Even in the throes of terror, the stampede attempted to avoid the impending bloodbath, escalating the general chaos still further. The ensuing violence shocked the driver to his core, his predicament made all the worse by the realisation that if he moved his machine from the gateway, the battle would spill into their enclosure. Stopping his tracks in their tracks, he could only watch Death at work – praying this metaphor would not subtitle his obituary; his only upside the fact that his colleague would reach the safety of the ship, thanks to the blocked entrance.

This slaughter distracted the majority of the predators away from the petrified driver, but still left enough animals at the sides of the engagement to press the attack on the monstrous, bright yellow invader, with a view to cracking open the tempting snack inside. Swinging the bucket threateningly, the man could not help noticing that the edges of the gateway aperture, although twenty metres deep, were beginning to crumble in some areas, as massive bodies flung one another at the walls. Sandwiched in a pit of its own making, the excavator went from quarry to quarry as a few of the giant killers managed to slip past the engagement. The last man began to shake uncontrollably, his nerves fraying as they came on.

The Sarge reached for his comm, opening a channel to the captain again.

"Douglas here." The captain was back on his bridge, in his command chair.

"Sir, that guy's in serious trouble out there. There's one excavator which didn't make it. He's trying to hold the gateway, fighting them off with the digger's bucket; it's bizarre! Those creatures are fighting a war and that poor sod's right in the middle of it."

"But the commander ordered them in several minutes ago!" The astonishment in Douglas' voice rang clear even through the comm.

"And most of them did as they were told, Captain, but for a couple of stragglers; clever Herberts who thought they knew better. The lucky one of whom, is just entering the airlock now. Sir, can you send Lieutenant Singh out in the shuttle? Maybe he can *buzz* the animals, using the noise of the jets to back them off? Like you suggested earlier?"

A short moment passed as The Sarge waited for a response.

"He's on his way, Sarge. Good thinking; hope he's in time to help. Can you order a team to watch the skies when the shuttle bay doors open, please? We've got enough trouble by all accounts, without having the ship invaded."

"They're already en route, sir. I took the initiative."

"Glad you did, Sarge."

Captain Gleeson stood at the threshold of the cargo bay's main vehicular hatch watching the horror show. He and Major White were each armed with a Heath-Rifleson and a bandolier of Dingo Wingers.

White was barking orders at the driver of the smaller digger, who had just achieved the relative safety of the cargo bay. The man looked like he might be going into shock, clearly terrified, but the Major showed no mercy.

"Crank this goddamn thing back around and guard the door!" he bellowed at the shell-shocked driver, grabbing the man's shirt and shaking him. "DO IT!"

White jumped down from the machine as the traumatised driver began manoeuvring into a defensive position, at least partially blocking the bay doors. He positioned the ten-ton excavator facing forwards, with the two metre wide spreading bucket raised in challenge. Unlike a digging bucket, the spreader had no teeth, but the awesome hydraulic strength of the machine still made the leading edge a lethal cutter.

White grinned at Gleeson. "Ready to play hero again, Elvis?" he shouted above the din.

Gleeson wore his most sarcastic expression, simply saying, "Uh huh."

The two soldiers steeled themselves, shook hands, and ran like hell towards the massive digger still under attack outside. The giant, toothed bucket swung around the mouth of the ramparts in graceful arcs as the arm hinged and straightened, pushed and twisted, craning in a fashion almost more birdlike than the dinosaurs themselves. It put Gleeson in mind of an avenging swan from hell.

The animals attacked completely without fear, but quickly learned respect after a few side swipes sent them tumbling. A full grown Giganotosaurus slipped under the arm of the machine making a beeline for the driver, but one devastating drop of the massive bucket, made deadlier still by gravity, almost cut the creature in half.

By this time, much of the fire had gone out of the bloody skirmish between the opposing packs. Both sides stepped back, instinctively sensing the edge of a metaphorical precipice threatening to claim them. Apart from a few opportunistic snaps at anything coming too close, the creatures retreated into a shouting contest; battle lines redrawn. The Mapusaurs outnumbered the Giganotosaurs but the latter's greater size and strength levelled the playing field and so the fighting degenerated into a contest of wills and nerve for the spoils.

However, despite their standoff, the giants still had a greedy eye for the man, just out of reach in his hastily reinforced cab and each time the digger came to rest they got bolder. The driver could only defend from one direction. If he moved his machine back out of the bottleneck created by the earthworks, they would be all around him. Worse, they would have a clear run at the open cargo bay behind his position. There was also another pressing concern; after the big push on the ramparts, not to mention all of his 'self-defence-digging', the massive batteries which drove the machine were running low on power.

The man was contemplating his next move when an explosion nearly gave him a heart attack. His hands, holding the control joysticks in a death grip, jumped, sending the bucket up and to the side. The cab spun quickly in a completely unpredictable movement, catching one animal by surprise and launching him into one of his pack-mates. The pack-mate was so unhappy about it that he attacked the victim back in his face.

The whole chaos seemed primed to erupt again when two men came out of nowhere, running either side of the heavy machine, shouting insults at the top of their lungs. The men were soldiers, but looked impossibly small and fragile when scaled against the earth mover and the huge killers who threatened it. Gleeson and White threw small stick-grenades at the giants, sending deafening bangs echoing around the enclosed gateway ramparts.

The beasts were certainly spooked by this turn of events. White and Gleeson hoped the bangs would scatter them, or at least cause a stampede in the opposite direction, like a herd of cattle. It was 50/50 but luck was not on their side. The result of their shooing tactics was more like wading into a pack of wild dogs, kicking out and shouting; one hopes to cow them but sometimes they get angrier still. However, what made the situation even worse, was these were not dogs.

The ROAR was ear-splitting. They charged¹.

“Whoaoaoaaaa!” screamed Elvis – and he was not singing.

“RUUUNN!” White bellowed.

The huge animals slammed into the excavator. Despite the driver’s heroic attempt to stabilise the machine by turning and dropping his bucket, it was too late and the digger went over with a terrible *groan* and *clang*.

Still strapped into his harness, he decided his only choice was to stay put, play dead and hope Tom Wood’s protective cage would save him.

As the combined forces of this new *super-pack* scrambled over the stricken earthmover, the two soldiers began the longest run in history; or prehistory.

Gleeson looked over his shoulder to a vision from darkest Revelation, terrible gnashing of teeth and all. With more than sixty metres still to run, the monsters bore down on them.

The sonic blast was so loud it knocked White and Gleeson to the ground.

They turned onto their backs, expecting the end, only to find themselves looking up at the belly of the shuttle, jet thrusters throttled wide open.

All was noise and dust. Something smacked White in the face and he knocked it aside reflexively before realising that it was a rope. Communication was not possible so he slapped a piece of it into Gleeson’s hand and wrapped the piece he had around his wrist. The rope began to rise and rise faster as the ship gained altitude rapidly. The two men zipped out of the top of the dust cloud, an action somewhere between a rope trick and a yoyo.

“Bladdy lucky that wasn’t a diesel,” shouted Gleeson, looking down at the toppled digger, trying to distract himself out of his panic.

“Why,” White shouted back, “would it have exploded?”

“Naow,” drawled the Australian. “He’s turned it over, mate. He’d have never got it going again!”

White’s response to this invaluable titbit was lost, however, because at that moment they were both hauled up into the belly hatch of the craft. Two of White’s men grabbed them by whatever they could reach, launching the pair quite unceremoniously into the hold

¹ *The concept of fair dealing and sharing never really got going on this Earth; whichever time you happened to live through. During the long and majestic story-arc of life, several things have ended up on the Creator’s snagging list, fair-play being just one of them. Another was a tendency for all of His creatures to squabble, the only thing which ever threw common ground into sharp relief, was having someone else to fight.*

Giganotosaurus and Mapusaurus were in a sense cousins; both Carcharodontosaurs. Maybe it’s just anthropomorphism, but that afternoon, perhaps for a moment only, man’s clumsy, half-baked intervention seemed to remind them of this, making them charge as one against the greater perceived threat.

behind them. Considering their alternative fate, avoided by a hair's breadth, the officers were not overly put out by this rough treatment.

One of the men shouted above the engine noise, "Just the two of you, sir?"

White and Gleeson looked at one another before looking down from the hatch. "The driver's still in the middle of all that," shouted Gleeson.

All four men now looked down, dismayed by the dust and turmoil below.

"There's nothing we can do," acknowledged White, sadly. "We'll lose the whole ship if we go down there."

Gleeson's colour drained. "The ship!" he shouted.

White caught on immediately, turning to his men, "Call the pilot and get him to order the Pod cargo hatch closed!"

The driver of the smaller digger guarding the Pod's main doors saw his workmate's machine go over and the two soldiers fall. Then there had been all the noise and the dust – and out of that dust, the attack came.

A young adult Mapusaurus burst past the digger before the driver could react. A soldier standing in the path of the creature suddenly screamed; a scream cut off almost immediately.

The driver felt like he was in a dream state, his movements slowed. He turned his machine, trying to bat the animal away. Unfortunately, this only propelled the creature at even greater speed in the direction it had already decided to take.

News of the emergency had spread quickly, with temporary security personnel recalled and pressed back into service. These men and women came from all sides in an attempt to prop up the established team. Carrying stun rifles or anything they could lay their hands on, they plunged into the fray hoping to bring the dinosaur down. Unfortunately, the sudden influx of people meant their weapons could only be used on low power and achieved no more than glancing blows. The chaos only fed the fear and therefore the aggression of the beast.

Corporal Thomas watched the carnivores skirmish near the edges of the compound outside; they were getting accustomed to the shuttle's engines. Praying the distraction would hold a little longer, Thomas shouted for the digger driver to creep his machine back over the threshold. Two young Giganotosaurs skirted the fracas, heading his way. Only half-grown but already the weight of bull elephants, they made eye contact with the soldier and charged. Thomas bellowed for Jones to close the outer bay doors immediately. The deafening clang as the hatch sealed was like music to the corporal. Motioning for the driver to retreat, he ushered the machine through the air lock back into the cargo bay.

Inside the bay, the Mapusaurus was spinning around in fury, taunted by little creatures it did not recognise. No one dared risk hitting one of their fellows with 500,000 volts, but even so, they were dealing out shocks which would have landed even Pte Jones in a hospital bed for a week. The dinosaur became more and more angry.

When the digger hove into view, the beast recognised a worthy quarry, lowered its head and charged. The resulting clash was almost fantastic, a million to one chance impossible to repeat. As the creature leapt, the driver was just able to rotate the house of the machine, bringing the boom and dipper around in a graceful arc that, with sublime timing and almost surreal gentleness, deposited the enraged animal back into the voluminous air lock from which it had sprinted just moments before.

Akin to kicking-out-time on a crisp November evening, it skated across the metal deck like a drunk on ice, swaying and flailing but somehow keeping its feet, all the while roaring in fury. Under the force of its own momentum, the dinosaur slammed into the closed outer hatch.

“SHUT THE INNER HATCH!” someone screamed.

“I’m doing it, I am!” Jones shouted in reply.

The Mapusaurus rallied, turning to run anew at these vexatious little creatures it could not quite bring to bay. The digger drove right up to the hatch, the driver swinging the bucket wildly. The threat kept the animal back, its head bobbing and tail swishing angrily, looking for an opening – but the doors were closing. Its roar of frustration was deafening in the enclosed space, when, with a massive *clang*, the hatch sealed and everything went still.

Jones activated the airlock camera, watching the feed on a small screen set into the door controls. The animal paced around its impromptu cell, banging the walls with its tail, livid.

“Tidy,” the Welshman commented, satisfied.

Captain Douglas arrived in the aftermath, jogging over to view Jones’ catch. The men watched the caged animal, mesmerised. “Is there any movement from the man still outside in the other machine?” he asked eventually.

Jones summoned a feed from the external camera above the main hatch. The digger was on its side with no movement around it. “Not that I can see, sir.”

Douglas shook his head sadly. “OK, let it go,” he said quietly.

Jones opened the outer hatch and the dinosaur ran, still roaring defiance.

