

CARNO CONUNDRUM

TERRA SAURIA EPISODE ONE



AUDIOVENTURES

AUDIOVENTURES PRESENTS

THE CARNO
CONUNDRUM

INTERACTIVE ADVENTURE EPISODE 1
OF THE TERRA SAURIA SERIES

A QUICK HEADS-UP

Dear adventurer/patron/fan,

we want to give you a heads up that we advise against turning the pages backwards when you are at the beginning of a choice. If you want to go back, use the links, because you may run into spoilers from other branches of the story by turning the page back. It's just one of the limitations of using links to specific chapters/choices/branches of the story.

We're extremely grateful that you are willing to support us and that you are invested this much in our creation(s). Keep an eye out for the next one and we hope you'll have a great time with the eBook version of our story!

Thanks!

Much love,

The Audioventures Team

START

Daniel rammed his foot down on the gas of the Range Rover, driving at full speed towards the abandoned and ruined town ahead in the distance, cageless and forgotten. Old, rusted road signs and broken down cars on the side of the overgrown road flicked by as he passed them, and a low, stone wall that led along the road separated him from the grazing herbivorous dinosaurs on the plains. The road was unstable and barely visible. There were holes and cracks everywhere, allowing the grass to come through the asphalt, and Daniel repeatedly had to swerve to avoid them. At such a speed, that put him at great risk of flying off the road into the seemingly endless fields of near-yellow grass on his left. A necessary risk, for the two carnotaurus behind chased him at an alarming speed.

With brownish red, leathery skin, two small horns on their heads, and two pathetic little chicken arms, the dinosaurs were basically just smaller, featherless T-Rexes.

But a smaller T-Rex was still a hell of a lot bigger than Daniel. In fact, at three metres tall and at least nine metres from head to tail, they towered over his Range Rover as they chased him over the nigh invisible road, bumps and cracks sounding below the car's tires.

"C'mon, c'mon," Daniel mumbled. His heart thumped rapidly in his chest. He rarely got scared these days, but that didn't mean he didn't get nervous. And now that Claire was sitting safely back in London, there was no one he could rely on to save him. Not this time.

To his left, one of the the carnotaurus' massive legs came into view, slamming its foot down right next to the car. The other followed. It was gaining on him. How could it be so fast?! The car shook with every step the dinosaur took, and Daniel had to swerve to avoid being squashed. The motion flung his car dangerously close to the low stone wall to the right, and it took all his effort to keep control over the vehicle.

As he focused on not crashing his car, however, the carnotaurus managed to catch Daniel off guard and cut him off by crossing in front of him. Daniel wasn't sure whether the beast was smart enough to do that on purpose or if it didn't understand how dangerous it was to step in front of a speeding vehicle, but he had a fraction of a second to react.

CHOICES:

SWERVE LEFT

HIT THE BRAKES

SWERVE RIGHT

CHOICE: SWERVE LEFT

[\(BACK TO PREVIOUS CHOICE\)](#)

Daniel pulled on the wheel and swerved left. A second later he found himself flying off the road. It all became a blur. The car rolled violently, and the windows around him exploded into chunks of glass. Fortunately the car's windows were made so they wouldn't shatter into sharp shards, but they still hurt like hell as they pelted his face. What hurt even more were the smashes he was receiving from being in a rolling car, which finally came to a stop after having been hurled a good twenty metres.

The car had ended up upside down, and as Daniel lay on the ceiling, he thanked himself for putting on his seatbelt. It hadn't kept him from lying in an awkward position, but at least it had mostly kept him in place. He groaned in pain; nothing seemed to be broken so far. Moving his limbs one by one, however, everything hurt. Things were definitely bruised.

Daniel quickly reached for his M4, which lay on the ceiling behind him. He had no time to check if it was damaged, though. The carnotaurus' footsteps approached, and through the broken windows he could see they weren't quite done with him yet.

He braced himself, holding on tightly to the driver's seat, and closed his eyes when one of the dinosaurs smashed its head into the side of the car. Daniel was slammed into the door from the impact, and the car slid over the grass for another two metres. More pain shot through his body. He had to get out. The dinosaurs weren't going to give up, and now would be his only window of escape while the beasts were distracted by the car itself.

The dinosaurs followed once more and, judging by the car's sudden tilt, one planted its foot down on the front. Daniel rolled forward and ended up painfully slamming the wheel with his shoulder. The carnotaurus released its foot when the car's horn went off loudly, and Daniel fell back down against the ceiling.

He clutched his assault rifle as he crawled through the broken window into the knee-high grass and stayed prone as he tried to get away. He desperately wanted to hide behind the car and prepare for a fight, but couldn't risk being squished in case the dinosaurs would smash the car again.

So he crawled. Hurried, nervous and in agony, he tried to get away from the car as quick as possible. He didn't look back. He just wanted to put distance between himself and the beast. Just enough so he could take aim and—

His suppressor was gone. He stared at the M4's barrel in horror. It had clearly been ripped off. The barrel was intact, but the quick attach mechanism, while still threaded onto the barrel, was broken. Without a suppressor he'd alert every other dinosaur nearby. It was the number one rule outside the cage: don't fire a gun without a suppressor unless you have a way to safety. Or well, one of the number one rules. They were all equally important.

He looked back. The carnotaurus were inspecting the car and nudged it with their horned heads. They made the car look like a mere toy.

Daniel hastily slung his rifle onto his back and lay completely still in the tall grass as he attempted to keep his panic under control. Perhaps they wouldn't see him, too distracted by the car. As he heard them circle the car, he carefully rolled to his back, pushing the M4 aside. Then, trying to keep the grass from moving as much as possible, he felt at his thigh. He mentally breathed a sigh of relief. His pistol was still there. With trembling hands he drew it, while taking out a spare, direct thread suppressor from his technical vest. He hastily twisted it onto the pistol's barrel, barely managing from the stress. Was he losing blood?

He'd have to check later.

Don't look this way, don't look this way, don't look this way.

When he finally did finish attaching the suppressor, he aimed at it the one of the dinosaurs with both hands, which was nudging the car with its head, almost causing it to roll back to its wheels. The other was sniffing at the exhaust. It was difficult to keep his weapon steady, but at least the dinosaur was big and close enough that it'd be difficult to miss.

Come on, you can look at me now.

Losing his patience, Daniel let out a short yet sharp whistle. Both carnotaurus looked up immediately and stood for a moment, beady eyes scanning their surroundings like a hawk. Finally, one spotted him. Daniel pulled the trigger twice in quick succession before it could make a sound. One hit it in the chest, the other in the head, causing it to crash into the ground on the spot. The beast lay motionlessly as the other finally found the source of the suppressed shots.

The ground trembled as it roared, threatening to pop his ear drums. Daniel scrambled to his knees and then his feet as the beast rounded the car. His right leg screamed at him in pain, but he decidedly ignored it, stumbling away around the car, trying to keep it between him and the dinosaur.

The dinosaur ignored the car entirely as it came for him, stepping directly onto it and flattening the vehicle somewhat. Daniel walked backwards. He only had one or two seconds before the beast would be upon him. And so he began to unload his pistol. Ten shots left, after having used two on the other. The recoil combined with his trembling hands made it difficult to remain accurate. Fortunately though, the beast was close enough to hit regardless. Unfortunately, however, the beast was also strong and difficult to take down with a few 9mm rounds. Sure enough, his shots to the beast's chest would kill it in the long run, but for now it held up and continued to approach. Six shots had hit their mark.

Daniel jumped to the side as the carnotaurus bent down in an attempt to take its first bite. It missed, and Daniel rolled over his shoulder, his M4 painfully pressing into his back. He ignored it, dropping the empty magazine out of his pistol and replacing it with another from his technical vest. He made a mental note of his ammo. Two mags left for his pistol. Twenty four shots. More than enough.

The carnotaurus, bulky and heavy, came to a slipping stop and turned. They may be fast, but they were clumsy. A pleasant change from the agile raptors that Daniel fought regularly. It allowed him to line up his weapon as the beast came closer once more. His initial shots were already taking its toll on the dinosaur, blood leaking from several holes in its leathery skin.

The recoil of the pistol met his hands as suppressed shots came out. This time, none of his shots missed. He only needed three well placed shots to finally hit it in the head. Somehow he had expected the thick skulls to be able to take it.

But the beast dropped, and Daniel sunk to his knees, keeping himself from throwing up from exhaustion, pain, and adrenaline.

I could really use you right now, he thought of Claire. Then again, in her current condition the dinosaurs would pick up her scent all around the area. Not that it mattered at this point. The carnotaurus had spotted him before he had even been able to reach the small town. On the plus side, however, he didn't have to worry about kids for a while longer.

"Should've waited a week before going on this job," he groaned to himself as he rose to his feet.

He stumbled over to the flattened car, barely able to keep his balance. The car lay upside down, the floor pressed almost completely into the roof, doors bent outward, and petrol was leaking from the side. There was no sight of the M4's suppressor. Not that he'd be able to reattach it anyway. Then, he realised in shock, his rifle's ammo had been on the back seat as well. He'd brought two extra magazines besides the one that was already loaded into the weapon. They were both gone. He frantically looked around, hoping they'd lie somewhere

close, but the grass was tall and reached to his knees, making it impossible to do a quick scan of the area.

No time to search for them now, he thought with a curse, and then looked over to the town in the distance. He had to find shelter, that was his first priority. His supplies, the job and getting back home were worries for later. Besides, he'd probably have to rely on Claire swooping down and saving his arse again.

With a sigh he began to make his way to the cluster of houses in the distance, though they weren't even really buildings anymore. None of them had roofs, and most of them had only three walls or less. The streets no longer existed and had been replaced by tall grass and weeds. Another decade and no trace would be left of the town.

As he walked he wasn't able to put his full weight on his right leg, and he still hadn't checked if he was bleeding.

No time.

Roars sounded in the distance ahead. Daniel looked up, his stomach twisting around. *Not again*, he thought. He quickened his pace. He saw nothing so far, but the crash and the fight *had* made a lot of noise.

Shelter, he thought. *Need to find shelter. And fast.*

The village turned out to be exactly as he expected it to be. None of the houses had floors, and the streets had completely disappeared under the grass. The buildings had decayed so much he could already see the other side of the village, where the fields of knee-high grass continued into the distance. In that field, he saw another pack of four carnotaurus approach, and it looked like they were going to cross directly through the town.

Shit, shit, shit, he thought, making for a building that had three walls and a tree covering the missing roof. *Claire is going to kill me for this.*

He pressed his back against a wall and sat down, holding his pistol ready. With some luck they'd pass him without noticing him and focus on the dead dinosaurs. Carnos weren't above cannibalism. Daniel waited with a racing heart. He felt himself grow dizzier and finally realised he felt warm liquid run down his face. He'd thought it to be the sun's heat before. So he *was* bleeding.

They're going to smell me, he realised. Genuine panic began to rise within him. *I'm not gonna be able to tend to my wounds like this.*

Twenty one shots for his pistol, and thirty in an unsuppressed assault rifle. Could he risk it? He still had to get home, regardless of these carnos. How much ammo could he spend?

CHOICES:

FIGHT

STAY HIDDEN

CHOICE: HIT THE BRAKES

[\(BACK TO PREVIOUS CHOICE\)](#)

Daniel slammed down on the brakes without hesitation. Swerving was simply too dangerous. The car's tires screeched loudly as the brakes tried and failed to bring the car to a stop in time. It was the carno's leg that ultimately halted the Range Rover. Daniel was caught in the seatbelt and airbag as the front of the car rammed into the dinosaur. He groaned, but before he could recover from the collision, the ceiling of the car came down towards him as the dinosaur fell down on top of it, all of the car's windows exploding outwards.

He tried to duck and cover his head with his arms, but he hadn't been prepared. A shard of metal slammed down from the ceiling and nearly impaled his skull. Fortunately it only grazed him, and Daniel immediately felt a sharp sting and warm liquid run down his temple.

He cursed loudly, pressing a hand against the wound, and looked up. The car's frame held for now, though it probably wasn't built to have a two thousand kilogram dinosaur on top of it. He needed to get out as quickly as possible. Was the beast on top still alive? And what about the other one that he hadn't hit?

He frantically reached for the pistol on his thigh as he looked around himself. He saw nothing on either side, but couldn't see ahead or behind him. Wincing, he reached into his technical vest and fished out a direct thread suppressor. He hastily twisted it onto the pistol, heart pounding wildly.

Then the footsteps came. They weren't running any longer. They sounded like heavy skin on asphalt, making the car vibrate slightly with every step. He heard deep breathing somewhere outside.

Daniel waited in silence, holding the pistol. The carnotaurus was sniffing, probably smelling the one on top of the car. Perhaps it *was* dead, then.

Unless it smelled *Daniel's* blood.

Shit, he thought, growing nervous. *I need to get out and find shelter before I attract even more of them.*

Finally, the carnotaurus's leg stepped into view, slamming down beside the car on the passenger's side as it walked toward the rear. It was circling him, investigating the thing that had invaded its territory and suddenly fallen still. Daniel held his breath. How was he going to kill this thing without allowing it to attack?

Daniel ground his teeth, waiting. He needed just one opportunity. One moment of the beast showing its face so he could bury a bullet into it. The suppressor was attached, he was free to shoot to his liking. He still had to preserve his ammo, but a well placed shot would probably kill the animal. He wasn't sure, though. He hadn't fought carnos before. Still, no skull could stop a bullet.

Could it?

He shook his head. *Stay focused*, he told himself. *Shoot it in the head and find shelter. Go from there.*

As the carnotaurus circled the car, Daniel waited in silence. He carefully undid his seatbelt, allowing him to look around more. The back window was shattered as well, but he couldn't see through it; the carno on top obscured his sight by hanging over the edge.

He could *hear* the other one, though. It began to close in on the front again, this time on his side of the car, sniffing its way to Daniel.

He checked the side mirror and noticed the dinosaur sniffing the side of the car, closing in on him. Daniel swapped hands, now holding the pistol in his left as he aimed to the missing window on his right. He stayed completely still. Predators had excellent sight, so they could

spot any kind of movement. For now, it was still distracted by the car itself, so it hadn't paid attention to what was *inside* the car.

Finally, after what seemed to last an eternity, the beast's snout came into view on his right just centimetres from his shoulder, sniffing loudly. It was clearly trying to find the source of Daniel's blood. Then it paused, having found its target. As it lowered its head, Daniel began to squeeze the trigger, until finally, the beast looked directly at him through the missing window.

"Hello," Daniel said with a grin, and pulled the trigger fully. The recoil of the pistol met his hand as a suppressed shot went off, the bullet digging its way through the dinosaur's skull above the eye. Red blood exploded from its face as it crashed into the ground and fell still.

Daniel sighed in relief and leaned his head back against the seat. Then, dreading to see the actual damage to his car, he tried to open the door. Obviously, it wouldn't, so he began to climb out through the window, making sure neither of the dinosaurs were moving as he did so. When he finally stood outside, he nearly sunk through his leg, pain shooting up.

He groaned, leaning on the car door. Something was definitely bruised, hopefully not broken. Then, stepping back around the dead carnotaurus, he checked the damage.

His heart sunk. The Range Rover was *destroyed*. It was nearly half as high as it had been before the dinosaur had fallen on top of it, and the front had been flattened from the impact. It was unsalvageable.

Then, he noticed with shock, the dinosaur on top was still breathing. He immediately stepped back further and rounded the car and dead carno towards the rear, where the beast's head hung down. Its eyes didn't even turn to him. They just stared down at the ground, clearly dazed. It was on its last breaths. Daniel almost felt sorry for the beast. One of its legs was quite clearly broken and it was probably bleeding internally from the crash.

Daniel raised his pistol, wanting to ease its suffering. Then, however, he was reminded of how little ammo he'd brought, and what this animal had done to his only way home.

"You don't deserve to go easily," he said, lowering his pistol.

Then again... they were only animals, acting on instinct. This creature wasn't evil. He'd ease a dog's suffering in this case, wouldn't he? So why not a dinosaur?

He raised the pistol again. "Your death is costly, mate. Bullets don't come cheap, and neither do cars." He pulled the trigger.

Daniel looked around himself, making sure nothing had snuck up on him. It was quiet, but that knee-high grass looked ominous. Anything could hide in there. He'd have to find shelter, tend to his wounds, and begin to think of a way to get home.

He sighed, shaking his head, and returned to the side of the car to retrieve his M4 from the back seat. He had to reach through the broken window, and when he pulled it out he noticed something was different about it.

The suppressor, he realised in horror. It was gone, cleanly broken off at the quick attach mechanism that was still threaded onto the barrel. He hastily inspected the barrel for more damage, but knew that regardless, it was *very* unwise to use without a suppressor.

"You can't be serious," he mumbled as he hung the rifle over his shoulder by the strap. "Stranded in carno territory with an unsuppressed rifle. I *knew* I should've waited a week so Claire could come."

He forced open the door angrily and searched the back seat for his ammunition. Both M4 magazines were on the floor, and he stuffed them in his technical vest next to his 9mm ammo. That left him with three mags for each weapon.

He turned to the village in the distance. The structures were all ruined, that much was clear, but perhaps he could find shelter until he figured out a plan. He'd probably have to rely on Claire to come save his arse. Again.

The village was exactly as expected: ruined homes, most walls collapsed, and grass covering the streets. This town would be completely gone in another decade. In fact, he could already see straight through the village and see the fields on the other side. His stomach twisted as he noticed movement in that field. Another pack of four carnotaurus approached, walking slowly.

He paused. "Oh, hell no."

Without hesitation, he drew his pistol and opened fire. He counted his shots as he fired in rapid succession, holding the weapon with both hands.

None hit. Were his hands shaking, or were the animals simply too far away?

The dinosaurs paused in their step as they spotted him.

"Well, I suppose there's no other way." He holstered his pistol and took the M4 off his shoulder, flicked off the safety, and shouldered it in a fluid motion. Then, sparing no time, he began to fire in deafening single shots. It was much easier to aim with the rifle, though the first few shots missed. After all, the carnos were well over a hundred metres away.

They immediately started to sprint, however, and approached rapidly. That only helped Daniel. He continued to fire until he ran out of bullets. Fortunately, one carno had dropped by this point and he had plenty of time to reload. The beasts were incredibly fast, but not fast enough to reach him before he could open fire once more.

Now that they were closing in, he was able to line up his shots more easily, taking out the one in front in a short burst. The other two had to get out of the way of the dying dinosaur, giving Daniel even more time to line up his weapon and fire.

One crashed into the ground as Daniel shot it in the head from thirty metres away. The last one died as Daniel emptied the rest of the magazine in its direction, and slid through the ground in a mix of grass and dust.

Daniel exhaled in relief, ears ringing. He knew he should've felt bad about using an unsuppressed rifle, but adrenaline kept him going, heart pounding in excitement.

"What the fuck are you doing?!" a voice said from his left, barely audible over the ringing of his ears.

Daniel spun. A black girl with shoulder length hair stood in one of the ruined houses. He blinked, wondering if he was hallucinating.

"Are you an idiot?!" the girl asked. "You'll alert every goddamn dinosaur in the area!"

Daniel stood, frozen, adrenaline rushing away. Was there actually a girl standing in these ruins?

"I kind of had to," he said uncertainly.

The girl shook her head. "Come on, this way."

"To where?"

"To safety, of course. Do you want to wait until more of them show up?"

He didn't. He hastened in her direction, realising the pain in his leg again. He reloaded the M4 before hanging it over his shoulder as he walked, and followed the girl through the ruins at a quickened pace.

"This way," the girl said and ran through what used to be an alley. Now it was just a strip of grass in between two collapsed homes. She entered the former house on the other side of the alley.

Daniel followed as fast as he could until they reached a hatch in the floor, on which the girl knocked twice. It opened, and another girl—probably her sister—appeared.

"Go ahead," the first girl said. "Quickly now."

Daniel hastily entered the hatch and nearly fell down the steep, wooden steps. He ended up in a small, dark basement. Behind him the hatch closed and the girls came down the steps.

Daniel panted a curse and sunk to his knees.

“What the hell were you doing out there with the carnos roaming around?” the first girl—the one who’d found him—said. “You want to die?”

He looked up at her. “I followed you in here, didn’t I?”

The girl walked over to an old, flimsy looking table in the corner of the square basement. “Here,” she said, picking up a bottle of water from it.

Daniel waved it away and took out the small bottle of water from his technical vest. It only had enough for a few good gulps, but it’d do for now. He wasn’t going to put himself in more debt with these girls. He knew the rules outside the cage. You help someone, you expect help in return.

“Who are you?” the first girl asked.

Daniel crouched to the wall and settled down against it, wincing as he stretched out his leg before him. He took his rifle off his shoulder and placed it down beside him on the floor along with his pistol. “Daniel Shaw,” he said, looking up at the two. Yes, they were definitely sisters. The one who’d found him was the older one and was probably in her twenties. The younger one was in her teens, still. She had longer hair than her sister, but otherwise they looked alike. Their complexion was exactly the same, as was the shape of their eyes and brows.

“What are you doing here?” the older girl asked.

Daniel rubbed his face and tried to stay focused. The room was spinning somewhat. “On my way to a job,” he said, blinking his eyes and shaking his head. He drank some more from his small bottle.

“What kind of job?” the younger girl asked.

“Uh.” It became more difficult to think. “To retrieve something from the next town over.”

“Retrieve what?” the older one asked.

“Heirloom... as usual.”

The two sisters shared a look, but Daniel couldn’t see their expression. Dark spots formed in front of his eyes, and felt the bottle slip from his hand as he lost consciousness.

*

“Twenty-four hours, yeah?” Claire said from the passenger’s seat.

“Yep, come look for me if there’s no lunch waiting for you tomorrow,” Daniel said from behind the wheel. He was wearing his full combat outfit; black trousers with an army green shirt under a black technical vest. His pistol was already holstered on his hip, while his assault rifle and ammunition lay on the back seat.

Claire narrowed her eyes at him skeptically. *Lunch? From you?* those eyes said.

Although they usually worked as a team, Claire was to stay home this time. Dinosaurs would pick up her scent from hundreds of metres away. Going alone didn’t bother Daniel-- they did it occasionally whenever one of them was injured, or in Claire’s case, it was *that* week. Still, it always felt better to have her watch his back.

They were driving underneath London’s enormous dome-shaped cage towards the city gates. A grid of shadow was cast over the city, dividing the streets into tiny squares of warm sunlight. The streets were busy with people walking this way and that, uncaring of what was road and what was pavement. They shot glances at the Range Rover; cars were a rare sight for them. Fuel was limited and very expensive, and everybody knew Daniel and Claire, the famous mercenaries, were inside.

“Not gonna be necessary, though,” Daniel said as they drove past the Tower of London, which now functioned as the City Watch’s headquarters. It was an old and large reinforced building with tall stone walls around it, ready to retreat behind in case the cage failed. Beyond, Daniel saw the blades of the rarely used military helicopter peek over the wall. Not only was the chopper far too expensive to use regularly, but the sound made it impossible to arrive anywhere without also alerting every threat in a few kilometre radius.

“I’ll be the judge of that,” Claire said. “I’m leading in the saving-your-idiot-spouse-from-unnecessary-risks race, you know.”

“Yeah, yeah, no need to rub it in,” Daniel said. “It ain’t fair when you’ve got the City Watch owing you favours, anyway. I could save anyone if I could get help from heavily armed people.”

“*You’re* heavily armed,” Claire noted.

“That’s why I save people. Sometimes. When I’m asked.”

“You mean when you’re being paid for it.”

“Same thing.”

“Not really.”

Daniel shrugged.

Claire rolled her eyes. “You’d get favours if you helped them once in a while, you realise.”

Daniel continued to drive towards one of the city gates, unable to think of a proper argument. Damn those rational thoughts of hers!

“How much ammo did you bring?” she finally asked when they arrived at the gates and entered the safe zone, where they’d have to wait between two checkpoints.

“Three mags for the M4, three for the 9mm.”

“That’s it?” she asked.

“Should be more than enough,” Daniel said.

“Daniel,” Claire said, “You’ll be driving through tyrannosaurus territory.”

“Exactly,” he replied. “I’ll be driving, so I’m way faster. Besides, T-Rex territories are hundreds of kilometers squared. They’re probably spread all over the area. I doubt I’ll run into any of them.”

“And if you do?” Claire asked.

“If I do, I’ll have a car. Trust me, I’m not going to need any more ammo than this. We need to save it up anyway. We can’t keep bringing so much every time.” He offered a reassuring smile and took off the dogtag he wore around his neck, handing it to her. As long as it was with the guards they knew he’d be out in the field. A safety measure to keep track of which citizens were outside the cage.

Claire sighed softly through her nose. “I’ll take care of the tag business. You go on ahead. The more daylight you save, the better.” As she opened the car door, she turned back to him. “Don’t be an idiot, alright?” she added lightheartedly.

“I’ll be back before dark,” he answered, before she kissed him goodbye and left the car.

Daniel drove ahead towards the second gate, which began to open automatically, the armed guards stepping aside. With a quick glance in the rear view mirror he saw Claire step into the guardpost, where his tag would await his return.

*

He woke to a wet rag being dipped on his forehead. He lay in a dark room lit only by an oil lamp, which he soon recognised to be the same basement he had escaped to. It was mostly empty, save for the flimsy table on one side, the chair next to it, and the mattresses across from it on which he now lay. There was also a pile of clothes collected on one side of the basement.

“You were mumbling,” the older girl said. She was sitting next to him, holding the wet rag. Daniel swallowed and rubbed his eyes. His head was pounding.

“Someone named Claire?”

Daniel didn’t reply.

“Sound familiar?”

“My wife,” he groaned. He carefully pushed himself up to a sitting position. “How long was I out?”

“A while,” the girl said. “I cleaned your head as much as I could. We don’t have alcohol, though. You also have a nasty bruise on your ankle.”

“Who are you?” Daniel asked.

“My name is Jill.” She nodded to her younger sister, who Daniel now noticed was sitting on the steps that led up to the hatch. “That’s my sister Veronica.”

“You got lucky we saw you when we did,” the younger girl said. “We usually don’t leave the basement when we can hear the carnos. And there’s a lot of them around - I think it’s because of the herbivores that are attracted to the ferns here. It’s like a feast for predators.”

Daniel nodded slowly. “Aye, I wasn’t expecting so many. We need to get back to London.”

“We’, huh?” Jill noted.

“What, you think I’d leave you after helping me?” Daniel said, carefully rising to his feet and walking past the table, on which lay a collection of knives of different sizes, to the stairs. Veronica stood up from the steps and circled around him back to her sister, as if cautious. He didn’t blame her. They probably met more than enough wildlings that tried to rob them, or worse.

Daniel looked up the stairs, but the hatch was closed. No light came from beyond. He checked his watch.

5:06 AM.

He’d been out for nearly *twelve hours*. And he’d promised Claire he’d be back before dark. What would she be thinking now?

“My wife will be looking for me within twenty four hours,” Daniel said, checking his short distance transmitter. He could see there was no one on this frequency within the device’s operating radius of a few kilometers. “Let’s just hope she hasn’t already passed us.”

“Your wife, huh?” Jill asked.

“Aye, it’s one of our rules.”

“What can we do if she has?” Jill asked. “Go out and *walk* back to London?”

“I suppose,” Daniel said with a sigh as he sat down on the stairs, “that’s something we’ll have to decide. London is a three day walk away and I barely have any ammo left. The road will not be easy. On the other hand, Claire--that’s my wife--will expect me to be closer to the job location and might never find us here.”

The sisters looked at each other thoughtfully as they all contemplated their situation.

CHOICES:

WAIT FOR CLAIRE

HEAD FOR LONDON ON FOOT

CHOICE: SWERVE RIGHT

[\(BACK TO PREVIOUS CHOICE\)](#)

Daniel turned the wheel to the right a second before he collided with the dinosaur's leg. Hopefully the wall would keep him from flying off the road. He avoided the carnotaurus by a hair's width and ended up skimming the wall with the side of his car. The screeching of metal met his ears as his doors connected with the wall, and the car vibrated wildly as he tried to keep up his speed and control the car, all while keeping half an eye on what the two carnotaurus were doing beside him.

They were catching up. Again. And faster, this time. Daniel clenched his jaws, turning the car away from the wall. The motion, along with the instability of the road, caught him in a sudden spin, the car falling out of his control. Within seconds he faced the other way as the car came to a violent slipping stop.

The carnotaurus were on him in less than a second. One rammed its gigantic foot down on the hood, flattening it and breaking the car's axles. The other smashed its head into the side of the car, flinging it towards the wall. Daniel covered his head as he was thrown about, glass chunks flying this way and that. He hit his head against the ceiling and the door, and felt a warm liquid pour down from his eyebrow immediately. As the car fell still again, Daniel waited a moment, dazed, trying to get his bearings. The car was still upright, facing back the way he came. He only had a second of rest, however, as the next attack was already imminent.

I have to get out, he thought, fumbling with his seatbelt.

Heavy running footsteps came from the side. Daniel turned in horror and watched two enormous dinosaur feet disappear as the beast jumped up. The world fell still for a split second as Daniel realised what was coming. He held his breath as he waited, his life flashing before his eyes, and the windshield collapsed on him.

Nothingness followed.

[BACK TO PREVIOUS CHOICE](#)

[BACK TO START](#)

CHOICE: FIGHT

[\(BACK TO PREVIOUS CHOICE\)](#)

Daniel inhaled sharply through his nose and pushed himself off the wall, rising to his feet. It was time to show these animal who was boss. The world belonged to humans, not animals. They were just borrowing it. And no animal was above a bullet to the face.

Daniel rounded the wall and entered the former street of the village, stepping straight into view of the carnos. They spotted him immediately, pausing in their steps. They were at least a hundred metres away, making it difficult to aim. That didn't scare Daniel, though. His well considered decision had given him a boost of confidence, despite his low amount of ammunition.

He opened fire without giving them a chance to begin their charge. Suppressed shots sounded in the overgrown street as he emptied his pistol's magazine. He took his time between shots, making sure to keep the weapon steady. His first few missed, and he growled at himself in disappointment. The animals began their charge, not realising the danger. Daniel continued to shoot, but none of his shots met their target. They were simply too far away.

Were his hands still trembling? Confidence, damn it!

When he heard the familiar click of an empty magazine, he tossed his pistol and took the M4 off his back, taking off the safety in one fluid motion as he shouldered it and aimed down the sights.

Please let the barrel be intact, he wished, slowly squeezing the trigger.

The M4 fired with deafening shots, flashes coming from the muzzle. He fired in short bursts, the beasts charging. His first burst seemed to only graze one of the beasts, but the second made the one in front crash into the ground, throwing up dirt as it slipped through the grass. Daniel continued to fire, aiming at the dinosaurs in quick succession. They were still a fair ways off, however, and it was difficult to choose a target. He *really* needed Claire with him here.

Another carno fell, which meant there were just two left to deal with.

His weapon stopped firing. He stared at the weapon, frozen. Out of ammo. He'd miscalculated. Thirty rounds were nothing in an assault rifle, and he'd been too inefficient with his shots. As the beasts reached maximum speed and approached rapidly, Daniel dove for his pistol, digging in his technical vest for his final magazine.

He dropped the empty mag and hastily loaded in the full one. Heavy footsteps approached from behind. He rolled to his back and raised his pistol.

He'd underestimated their speed once again. They were already on him, and he felt his bones break as the two-thousand kilogram dinosaur slammed its foot down upon him, shattering his ribcage.

The beast's open maw came for his face, revealing rows of razor sharp teeth, but he couldn't feel the pain.

Everything was gone.

CHOICE: STAY HIDDEN

[\(BACK TO PREVIOUS CHOICE\)](#)

No, he couldn't risk it. He had to wait and let them pass. Saving his ammo was a priority if he wanted to survive this. With his car destroyed he was either going to have to wait for Claire to realise the job went sour, or preserve his ammo for the way back, which was going to take a *long* time.

He carefully felt at his head and found a cut in his hairline. It stung and was bleeding heavily. That was probably going to have to be stitched if he could miraculously find the supplies. He wished he could tell himself that too was a worry for later, but knew from personal experience that blood was the one thing that attracted dinosaurs. They could smell it from a distance. And they would smell Daniel if he didn't quickly clean the cut and stem the bleeding.

Yet, here he sat, hidden in a long forgotten village, with just under three magazines' worth of ammunition and no way home. He'd lost the rest of his supplies in the crash. Had he even brought his med kit? Was it an option to go back and look properly?

No. *Don't forget the rules*, he thought. *Shelter first. You promised Claire to be careful.*

He searched in the pockets of his technical vest. It was getting worryingly light. With the suppressor and ammo taken out, the only things he had left was a small bottle of water, his short distance transmitter, which was really just an upgraded walkie-talkie, and...

Bandage. He sighed in relief as he took it out, unrolled it, and ripped off a small part. Then he wiped his face clean before pressing it against the cut carefully. It'd have to do for now.

Meanwhile, he could hear the dinosaurs approach in the street. They weren't running yet, so it was clear they hadn't pinpointed him yet. But that was only a matter of time. They'd smell him before they'd smell the dead carnos. If they had been rotting they may have masked his scent, but they were fresh. He was not even close to being safe.

"Psst!"

Daniel blinked at the sudden sound. Then, to his right, he heard it again. He squinted when he saw her, and wondered if he was hallucinating. A young black woman with shoulder length hair peeked over from behind a partially collapsed wall and gestured him over.

"Hurry up!" she hissed. "Come on, follow me if you want to live."

Daniel didn't think and simply jumped up to his good leg, though that one wasn't entirely painless either. He stumbled to the wall and climbed over it with some effort, almost falling down on the other side.

"This way," the girl said and ran through what used to be an alley. Now it was just a strip of grass in between two collapsed homes. She entered the former house on the other side of the alley.

Daniel followed as fast as he could until they reached a hatch in the floor, on which the girl knocked twice. It opened, and another girl—probably her sister—appeared.

"Go ahead," the first girl said. "Quickly now."

Daniel hastily entered the hatch and nearly fell down the steep, wooden steps. He ended up in a small, dark basement. Behind him the hatch closed and the girls came down the steps.

Daniel panted a curse and sunk to his knees.

"What the hell were you doing out there with the carnos roaming around?" the first girl—the one who'd found him—said. "You want to die?"

He looked up at her. "I followed you in here, didn't I?"

The girl walked over to an old, flimsy looking table in the corner of the square basement. "Here," she said, picking up a bottle of water from it.

Daniel waved it away and took out the small bottle of water from his technical vest. It only had enough for a few good gulps, but it'd do for now. He wasn't going to put himself in more debt with these girls. He knew the rules outside the cage. You help someone, you expect help in return.

"Who are you?" the first girl asked.

Daniel crouched to the wall and settled down against it, wincing as he stretched out his leg before him. He took his rifle off his shoulder and placed it down beside him on the floor along with his pistol. "Daniel Shaw," he said, looking up at the two. Yes, they were definitely sisters. The one who'd found him was the older one and was probably in her twenties. The younger one was in her teens, still. She had longer hair than her sister, but otherwise they looked alike. Their complexion was exactly the same, as was the shape of their eyes and brows.

"What are you doing here?" the older girl asked.

Daniel rubbed his face and tried to stay focused. The room was spinning somewhat. "On my way to a job," he said, blinking his eyes and shaking his head. He drank some more from his small bottle.

"What kind of job?" the younger girl asked.

"Uh." It became more difficult to think. "To retrieve something from the next town over."

"Retrieve what?" the older one asked.

"Heirloom... as usual."

The two sisters shared a look, but Daniel couldn't see their expression. Dark spots formed in front of his eyes, and felt the bottle slip from his hand as he lost consciousness.

*

"Twenty-four hours, yeah?" Claire said from the passenger's seat.

"Yep, come look for me if there's no lunch waiting for you tomorrow," Daniel said from behind the wheel. He was wearing his full combat outfit; black trousers with an army green shirt under a black technical vest. His pistol was already holstered on his hip, while his assault rifle and ammunition lay on the back seat.

Claire narrowed her eyes at him 21 kilometres. *Lunch? From you?* those eyes said.

Although they usually worked as a team, Claire was to stay home this time. Dinosaurs would pick up her scent from hundreds of metres away. Going alone didn't bother Daniel—they did it occasionally whenever one of them was injured, or in Claire's case, it was *that* week. Still, it always felt better to have her watch his back.

They were driving underneath London's enormous dome-shaped cage towards the city gates. A grid of shadow was cast over the city, dividing the streets into tiny squares of warm sunlight. The streets were busy with people walking this way and that, uncaring of what was road and what was pavement. They shot glances at the Range Rover; cars were a rare sight for them. Fuel was limited and very expensive, and everybody knew Daniel and Claire, the famous mercenaries, were inside.

"Not gonna be necessary, though," Daniel said as they drove past the Tower of London, which now functioned as the City Watch's headquarters. It was an old and large reinforced building with tall stone walls around it, ready to retreat behind in case the cage failed. Beyond, Daniel saw the blades of the rarely used military helicopter peek over the wall. Not only was the chopper far too expensive to use regularly, but the sound made it impossible to arrive anywhere without also alerting every threat in a few kilometre radius.

"I'll be the judge of that," Claire said. "I'm leading in the saving-your-idiot-spouse-from-unnecessary-risks race, you know."

"Yeah, yeah, no need to rub it in," Daniel said. "It ain't fair when you've got the City Watch owing you favours, anyway. I could save anyone if I could get help from heavily armed people."

"You're heavily armed," Claire noted.

"That's why I save people. Sometimes. When I'm asked."

"You mean when you're being paid for it."

"Same thing."

"Not really."

Daniel shrugged.

Claire rolled her eyes. "You'd get favours if you helped them once in a while, you realise."

Daniel continued to drive towards one of the city gates, unable to think of a proper argument. Damn those rational thoughts of hers!

"How much ammo did you bring?" she finally asked when they arrived at the gates and entered the safe zone, where they'd have to wait between two checkpoints.

"Three mags for the M4, three for the 9mm."

"That's it?" she asked.

"Should be more than enough," Daniel said.

"Daniel," Claire said, "You'll be driving through tyrannosaurus territory."

"Exactly," he replied. "I'll be driving, so I'm way faster. Besides, T-Rex territories are hundreds of kilometers squared. They're probably spread all over the area. I doubt I'll run into any of them."

"And if you do?" Claire asked.

"If I do, I'll have a car. Trust me, I'm not going to need any more ammo than this. We need to save it up anyway. We can't keep bringing so much every time." He offered a reassuring smile and took off the dogtag he wore around his neck, handing it to her. As long as it was with the guards they knew he'd be out in the field. A safety measure to keep track of which citizens were outside the cage.

Claire sighed softly through her nose. "I'll take care of the tag business. You go on ahead. The more daylight you save, the better." As she opened the car door, she turned back to him. "Don't be an idiot, alright?" she added lightheartedly.

"I'll be back before dark," he answered, before she kissed him goodbye and left the car.

Daniel drove ahead towards the second gate, which began to open automatically, the armed guards stepping aside. With a quick glance in the rear view mirror he saw Claire step into the guardpost, where his tag would await his return.

*

He woke to a wet rag being dipped on his forehead. He lay in a dark room lit only by an oil lamp, which he soon recognised to be the same basement he had escaped to. It was mostly empty, save for the flimsy table on one side, the chair next to it, and the mattresses across from it on which he now lay. There was also a pile of clothes collected on one side of the basement.

"You were mumbling," the older girl said. She was sitting next to him, holding the wet rag.

Daniel swallowed and rubbed his eyes. His head was pounding.

"Someone named Claire?"

Daniel didn't reply.

"Sound familiar?"

"My wife," he groaned. He carefully pushed himself up to a sitting position. "How long was I out?"

"A while," the girl said. "I cleaned your head as much as I could. We don't have alcohol, though. You also have a nasty bruise on your ankle."

"Who are you?" Daniel asked.

"My name is Jill." She nodded to her younger sister, who Daniel now noticed was sitting on the steps that led up to the hatch. "That's my sister Veronica."

“You got lucky we saw you when we did,” the younger girl said. “We usually don’t leave the basement when we can hear the carnos. And there’s a lot of them around - I think it’s because of the herbivores that are attracted to the ferns here. It’s like a feast for predators.”

Daniel nodded slowly. “Aye, I wasn’t expecting so many. We need to get back to London.”

“‘We’, huh?” Jill noted.

“What, you think I’d leave you after helping me?” Daniel said, carefully rising to his feet and walking past the table, on which lay a collection of knives of different sizes, to the stairs. Veronica stood up from the steps and circled around him back to her sister, as if cautious. He didn’t blame her. They probably met more than enough wildlings that tried to rob them, or worse.

Daniel looked up the stairs, but the hatch was closed. No light came from beyond. He checked his watch.

5:06 AM.

He’d been out for nearly *twelve hours*. And he’d promised Claire he’d be back before dark. What would she be thinking now?

“My wife will be looking for me within twenty four hours,” Daniel said, checking his short distance transmitter. He could see there was no one on this frequency within the device’s operating radius of a few kilometers. “Let’s just hope she hasn’t already passed us.”

“Your wife, huh?” Jill asked.

“Aye, it’s one of our rules.”

“What can we do if she has?” Jill asked. “Go out and *walk* back to London?”

“I suppose,” Daniel said with a sigh as he sat down on the stairs, “that’s something we’ll have to decide. London is a three day walk away and I barely have any ammo left. The road will not be easy. On the other hand, Claire--that’s my wife--will expect me to be closer to the job location and might never find us here.”

The sisters looked at each other thoughtfully as they all contemplated their situation.

CHOICES:

WAIT FOR CLAIRE

HEAD FOR LONDON ON FOOT

CHOICE: WAIT FOR CLAIRE

[\(BACK TO PREVIOUS CHOICE\)](#)

Daniel rose to his feet again and hobbled to the table as several possibilities flowed through his mind. Finally, he just shook his head. "I think we should stay here. Rather be safe than sorry. Besides, with this little ammo and no suppressor," he nodded to his weapons on the floor, "I doubt it's a good idea to go out there."

Jill nodded, but Veronica didn't seem as pleased with the idea.

"How long will we wait for her?" she asked quietly.

"We'll see," Jill replied to her before rising to her feet and offering Daniel some water. "How does your head feel?"

"Like I headbutted those carnos to death," he replied, gratefully taking the bottle as he leaned on the table with his other hand. It creaked ominously under his weight.

"You held yourself up pretty well against them, though," she said.

Daniel settled down on the chair beside the table and drank before replying.

"You think? I ruined my car and I'm nearly out of ammo. This is about the worst scenario I could've imagined going on this job." He offered her a weary smile.

"Still, you survived. I imagine you can take care of yourself rather well."

Daniel snorted, happy to find a distraction from his worries in conversation. "Then I'll keep all the stories of my wife saving my ass to myself."

"She's a mercenary, too?" Veronica asked, looking up.

Daniel nodded slowly as he drank.

"Why isn't she here, then?" she said.

"Well, uh..." How to put this? "Have you noticed increased dinosaur activity at least once a month? Possibly twice a month, seeing as there's two of you?"

"Ah," Veronica said understandingly. "I see."

"Usually we're together," Daniel continued. "Fighting alongside each other, covering each other's backs. Didn't want to risk it this time."

"Sounds like you made a mistake," Jill said casually.

"You'll find I'm good at them." He grinned at her. "But I'm even better at fixing mistakes, so I've got that going for me."

"What was the job this time?" Veronica asked. "Why here?"

"Rich folk pay good money for worthless stuff," Daniel said with a shrug. "Emotional value is greater than monetary, or something along those lines. I was sent to retrieve an old locket with a picture in it. Best thing about it is that I'll get paid regardless of whether I succeed."

"They pay you even when you fail?" Jill asked, sounding incredulous. "What stops you from pretending that you went to look for it?"

"It's more difficult to fake than you might think," Daniel said. "For one, I'm a high profile mercenary, and the City Watch keeps track of how long you were outside the cage. That's all public record. Secondly, I was hired to do the job for my success rate. If I fail all my jobs, no one will hire me."

"So you drove all the way here," Jill said, "for a stupid heirloom? A piece of jewelry?"

"Like I said, rich folk paid stupid money for stupid things. Attached to their families' belongings from before the outbreak and all that."

"So you're just a glorified treasure hunter," Jill said, slightly teasingly.

"It's not all I do," Daniel said defensively. "Companies hire me, the City Watch hires me. Any job that needs to be done outside the cage, my wife and I are the people you want."

"Except this time," Veronica noted.

Daniel shrugged. "They knew the risk and my success rate. When they see how much I've lost on this job I'm sure they'll understand."

They continued to talk a while longer. It was good to have something else on his mind than the uncertainty of getting home. Even if Claire showed up, they still had to get back. She'd bring weapons, of course, and a safer way to get back to the city, possibly even some extra City Watch soldiers. But no matter how many people you brought, being outside the cage remained dangerous. The outbreak fifty years ago was proof enough of that.

The girls were interested in his life, about London, and about the jobs he'd done in the past. He didn't even get the chance to ask about their lives as they bombarded him with questions about civilisation. It was obvious that they had been out here for a *long* time, possibly even years. Yet, they had survived so far, so what had kept them from making their way back to London?

"So how did you meet her?" Veronica asked. It had been an hour since Daniel had woken up, and his headache was slowly getting less intense. "It can't be easy to find someone who is willing to leave the cage with you."

"Known her since we were kids," Daniel said. "Funny story, actually. She used to hate me because I was a loud kid. But when I actually took her to the edge of the cage and showed her the ruins outside, it was like she was entranced. She wanted to go out there immediately. But we couldn't leave the cage until we were eighteen, so we had to wait a few yea--" he paused as he heard a beep from his technical vest.

"What is it?" Jill asked as Daniel frantically searched in one of the pockets. Veronica stood up as well.

He finally took out the transmitter and checked the frequency. His stomach turned around as he saw it.

One other person connected.

"Yes!" he said, jumping up. He immediately regretted it as his leg complained at him, pain shooting up. "Someone is nearby! It has to be her. There's no way it's someone else. This is it. We need to leave this basement and make sure they find us."

"Can't you just contact her?" Veronica asked.

Daniel blinked and looked up from the transmitter. "Good point."

The girls waited silently as Daniel tried to contact Claire. His hands were trembling again, but this time it wasn't in stress. It was excitement. Hope. Nervousness.

She answered.

"Hello?" a female voice said somewhere in the distance. There was a lot of noise, like she was almost out of range and the transmitters had trouble connecting to one another.

"Claire!" Daniel shouted.

There was a vague reply, but Daniel couldn't hear what she said. He ran up the stairs, closer to the hatch.

"Claire!" he repeated.

"Shhh!" Jill said from below.

"Is that you?" Claire said over the noise. She was barely even audible.

"Find the car!" he shouted. "Dead carnos and the car!"

The connection was cut off. Daniel cursed.

"Was it her?" Jill asked, coming up the stairs.

"It was her alright," Daniel said. "But there was too much background noise, like the connection was unstable."

"So what now?" Jill asked.

"We need to go outside," Daniel replied immediately. "Now's our only chance. We've not heard the carnos since I woke up, so I'm willing to take the risk. Are you?"

Jill looked back to her sister, who stood at the bottom of the stairs, her eyes hopeful. Then she turned back to Daniel and nodded.

“Then let’s go home,” he said with a grin, and went to collect his weapons.

Less than a minute later they stood on the steps, ready to open the hatch. Daniel had holstered his pistol and held his M4. He didn’t care about subtlety anymore. If anything, Claire might be able to hear his shots if he needed to fire.

“If there’s anything you want to take with you,” Daniel said, “now is the time to get it.”

“I don’t want to take anything that’ll remind me of this place,” Veronica said. Jill nodded in agreement.

Daniel drew his pistol and offered it grip-first to Jill. “Ever shot one of these?”

“Once,” Jill said. “A long time ago.”

“That’ll do,” Daniel said. “Be careful, you don’t have much ammo.”

Jill nodded once, and Daniel shoved the hatch open with his shoulder. He stepped out into the broken house, rifle at his shoulder, checking his surroundings. The sun had finally come up.

The place was deserted. In fact, it was completely silent. “It’s clear,” Daniel said quietly.

The two sisters followed him outside, and Daniel took point, checking around corners and walls as they began their way through the overgrown town. The first few corners were stressful. Daniel expected a dinosaur to jump out at him at any moment, but it soon became evident that there were no animals in the village.

In fact, it was eerily quiet. Where had the carnos gone? He’d expected them to circle the area, trying to find the source of the blood they must have smelled. But there were none.

He watched the area outside the town, where his car lay in ruins. The dead carnos were partially gone, but for some reason no other dinosaurs were scavenging, as if they had all up and left.

“Something is wrong,” Daniel said.

“What do you mean?” Veronica asked, staying closely to her sister, eyes darting around the area. “Isn’t it good that they’re not here?”

“It should be,” Daniel said. “But there is probably a reason for it. Either way, let’s make use of it, come on.” He began to walk back toward his car. With some luck Claire would come from the same direction as he had.

They left the ruins and entered the field of grass. Daniel immediately felt more exposed. He quickly checked the transmitter and saw Claire was still in range.

Good. So they weren’t going in opposite directions.

Up ahead in the distance on the other side of the road, the herbivores were still roaming the fields; a herd of the long-necked brachiosaurs and a few of the spiked ankylosaurs.

They reached the barely visible road and began to follow it the way back to where Daniel had come from. Ahead, some of the herbivorous dinosaurs raised their heads, and for a moment Daniel thought they’d been spotted. Then, however, when the dinosaurs began to call out in alarm, he realised it hadn’t been them who’d spooked the creatures.

He turned back, scanning the area. He didn’t have to look long. His heart skipped a beat as he spotted an enormous, bipedal dinosaur standing on the road behind them, about two hundred metres back. He hadn’t been able to see it from the town, but now that they were on the road it stood in plain sight. It was partially covered in brown feathers, particularly over its head and torso, and was at least twelve metres long.

T-Rex.

“Are you *actually* fucking kidding me right now?” Daniel said.

Jill and Veronica followed his gaze and gasped.

“Okay, we found the reason why the carnos left. Go, go, go, let’s go.” He began to walk at an increased pace. The T-Rex hadn’t spotted them yet, and he preferred not to run as long as it was oblivious to their presence. A T-Rex could run fast, but walked slow. As long as it hadn’t seen them, they would be faster. The beast would be more likely to spot the bigger creatures first.

Thunder rumbled beyond the hills in the distance ahead.

Great, Daniel thought. *As if my day couldn’t be any worse.*

He continued to walk, ignoring the pain in his leg. The hospital bill was going to be absolutely dreadful. There was no time to think of that now, though. Getting out of the T-Rex’s sight was priority.

He glanced over his shoulder every other step. The Tyrant King--or rather, Queen, going by the colour of the feathers--still stood in the same spot, scanning the fields of grass, as if it was deciding which of the herbivores would taste the best. T-Rexes were dangerous and feared hunters, but they were known to scavenge as well. Perhaps it would go for the dead carnos instead, if enough was left of them.

Finally, the T-Rex began to move. Daniel wasn’t quite sure if it had spotted them or a different random prey, but it was moving in their direction, and it was increasing its pace.

He cursed and clenched his jaws together against the pain in his leg, which grew with every step.

“If it goes for us,” he said to the girls, “You run ahead. I’ll try to take it out.”

More thunder rumbled in the distance. In fact, it hadn’t stopped at all.

Wait, Daniel thought. *Thunder? There aren’t any clouds...*

“Okay, run!” he shouted, shifting his attention back to the T-Rex, which had come frighteningly close. “Lead it to the other dinosaurs!”

The two girls began to run while Daniel limped after them, and the air itself vibrated as the T-Rex roared loudly from behind. The animal was less than fifty metres away at this point.

The dinosaurs ahead spread out in panic, making all kinds of noises. Daniel felt the ground tremble as the T-Rex closed in on them. However, just when he considered to stop and begin shooting, the source of the thunderous rumbling came into sight in the distance.

A black military helicopter rose up from behind the hill ahead of them and came in their direction. For a moment Daniel forgot his fears and nearly burst out in tears in relief. He knew it. She had to pull something as ridiculous as this. He began to shoot his M4 up and to the side, making sure they spotted him, and waved his other hand as he tried to run.

The helicopter approached rapidly and passed over them at a low altitude, winds blowing hard in its wake. Once they were no longer in line of fire, it began to unload its machine guns at the T-Rex. Daniel stopped and looked back. Dirt rose up in a line ahead of the helicopter until the bullets found their target, ravaging through the T-Rex’s body as if it was made of paper.

The helicopter required just a single fly-by. The Rex crashed down in a cloud of blood, feathers, dirt and grass, and the helicopter circled around in a wide arch.

“Fuck yeah!” Daniel yelled. “That was fucking awesome!”

Jill and Veronica had stopped as well, and were staring in disbelief at the helicopter, which began to sink to the ground some fifty metres back, not far from the dead tyrannosaurus.

“I told you!” Daniel shouted to the two sisters. “I told you she’d come! And what an entrance! I *knew* she’d pull something like this!”

As the gunship landed, the side door slid open and a heavily armed figure hopped out.

“Keep your head low!” Daniel shouted as he began to run back for the helicopter. “Come on!”

Jill and Veronica followed him and quickly passed him as they sprinted for the chopper. His leg was truly beginning to wear him down at this point. They climbed into the helicopter with

the help of the soldier, and it wasn't until Daniel arrived and the woman turned around that he recognised her to be Claire herself, wearing a full military outfit, including the helmet.

He stopped in front of her, panting, and let himself fall into her arms as he failed to keep the tears of relief from bubbling up. "You wanted my lunch so badly that you came to get me early?"

She helped him into the gunship and slid the door shut behind herself. She said something to the pilots and the helicopter began to rise. He didn't realise how exhausted he was until that very moment, despite sleeping for hours. Claire helped him to a seat before assisting Jill and Veronica with their seatbelts, and finally crouched down in front of him.

She actually smiled.

"Is this it?" she asked over the noise of the helicopter, which Daniel now recognised to be the same noise as he'd heard through the transmitter. "Are there any more people?"

Daniel shook his head.

"Are any of you wounded?" Claire asked.

"Nothing that can't wait until we're back in London," Daniel said.

"So you're not in any danger?"

He shook his head again.

Claire slapped him. Not hard, but it took him by surprise.

"Don't fucking scare me like that again!" She pointed a finger at his face.

Daniel swallowed. He probably deserved that. "Yes, ma'am."

Next to him, the two girls seemed amused, which was good to see.

"You think that's funny?" he asked.

"Just a bit, yeah," Jill replied.

Daniel shrugged. "Yeah, fair enough."

Claire took a seat next to him, and Daniel rested his head on her shoulder. She gently ran a hand through his hair, and despite the uncomfortable armour she wore on her shoulder and the helicopter's loud noise, he found himself drifting off to sleep within a minute of closing his eyes.

THE END

[BACK TO START?](#)

CHOICE: HEAD FOR LONDON ON FOOT

[\(BACK TO PREVIOUS CHOICE\)](#)

Daniel finally just stood up again and collected his rifle. “We should go,” he said, checking the ammo, just to be sure. One full mag, locked and loaded. “We can’t be sure that my wife is going to pass through here, and I’m not willing to take the risk.”

Veronica immediately stood up as well and nodded, looking eager-- desperate, even, to leave. Jill, however, remained seated. She looked thoughtful.

“You don’t agree?” Daniel asked, picking up his pistol and holstering it.

“You know what’s out there,” Jill replied. “If something happens, it’ll be my fault.”

“No, it won’t,” Veronica said. “We can take care of ourselves, like we’ve done all this time.”

Jill sighed. “I’m not going to be able to convince you to stay, am I?” she asked, looking between Daniel and Veronica.

Daniel remained silent while Veronica firmly shook her head. He didn’t want to say that he was going no matter what, because truth was, he wasn’t sure if he would. He’d never be able to live with himself if he left them behind. Still, he needed her to believe that this was their only chance.

So instead, he drew his pistol and held it out to Jill grip first. “Would this make you feel better?”

Jill slowly rose to her feet and carefully accepted the 9mm, her index finger resting along the barrel. Trigger discipline. Nice.

He looked into her dark brown eyes. There was something in there that told Daniel that these girls were tougher than they seemed. How else could they have survived out here?

She nodded once, stiffly.

“Let’s go,” Daniel said. “Take everything you need with you, but travel light.”

As the girls collected their own weapons, Daniel reached inside his technical vest and took out his short distance transmitter again. Still no connections. Wherever Claire was, she wasn’t nearby.

A few minutes later they left the basement, stepping into the pale moonlight. It was already sinking towards the horizon. It would be light within the hour. Best to get out of carno territory before then.

Daniel checked his corners as they walked through the small town. It was quiet, however, apart from the crickets. The dinosaurs that still lived probably still slept. It took them only a few minutes to reach the broken road, which they began to follow the way Daniel had come from. He considered for a moment to stop and search his car, but decided against it. It was more important to put distance between them and the carnos. Sure, they’d soon pass into T-Rex territory--in fact, it seemed to overlap with the carno territory--but at least the T-Rexes should be more spread out.

“Ever been this way?” Daniel asked as they walked the road, some herbivorous dinosaurs grazing the ferns on their left.

“Never went north, no,” Jill said beside him.

“Where are you from, anyway?” Daniel asked.

“A small, walled-off settlement near what used to be Brighton,” Jill said.

“I’ve seen some of those,” he replied. “Never seemed entirely safe to me.”

“It wasn’t so bad,” Veronica said. “It felt safe, at least. Dinosaurs couldn’t get to us, except for pterosaurs, and we just hid inside when they showed up.”

“Yeah, but pterosaurs aren’t--”

“Aren’t dinosaurs, I know,” Veronica cut in.

They continued to walk for while, cresting a hill and leaving the forgotten village behind. The air was slowly lighting up over the horizon, and the fields of knee-high grass waved in the faint summer breeze.

“Wait,” Jill said fifteen minutes later, pausing. She crouched down in the grass. It was shorter here than in the carno territory, even though it was fairly close by. She was looking at something on the ground. “Dinosaur footprint.”

“What is it?” Veronica asked, joining her sister.

Daniel remained where he stood, hoping she wouldn’t figure it out.

“This is a Tyrannosaur print,” Jill said.

Shit, Daniel thought. *She knows*.

“Gotta be a Rex,” Veronica said, running her hand over it. “Tarbos are smaller and live in the southwest.”

Daniel blinked. “How do you know that?” he asked.

“We’re not *entirely* uneducated,” Veronica said defensively.

“Besides,” Jill added. “Living out here, you pick up a thing or two.”

“It’s probably just an old print,” Daniel lied. A white lie, but hopefully the girls wouldn’t know better.

“No,” Jill said, shaking her head. “Look at these claw marks. They’re too defined to be old. The grass hasn’t recovered enough.”

Daniel drew his lips to a line. He’d hoped to pass further into the T-Rex territory before they’d figure it out. What if they wanted to turn back?

“Did you know this?” Jill asked, rising back up.

Daniel glanced at the pistol in her hand. “I mean... It’s not like I knew they’d be *here* exactly,” he said.

“But you knew this was their territory,” Jill said accusingly.

“Yes,” he admitted.

Jill inhaled sharply, growing angry.

“Look,” Daniel said quickly. “I only did it because I knew you’d refuse to come if I had. We’re not going to encounter one. I *drove* through this way yesterday and I never even saw one. It’ll be even easier on foot.”

“And what if we *are* noticed?” Jill snapped.

“Then you’ll have a good story to tell in London. Can we go now? The longer we stay, the bigger the chance is we’ll run into one.”

Veronica, surprisingly, followed him as he walked on. Jill shot her a glance, but finally shook her head and mumbled something about not believing that she was going through with this.

“How did you recognise that print so quickly?” Daniel asked Veronica, trying find a distraction.

“We’ve seen them before,” she replied. “They tend to stray beyond their territory. I mean, they’re the apex predator, so they don’t even really *have* a territory.”

“So you did learn about them,” he said.

“Back in the settlement,” Veronica explained. “They wanted us to learn about dinosaurs, at least.”

“Why’d you leave?” he asked.

Veronica remained silent for a moment. “The settlement fell,” she finally said. “Overrun by a group of armed people.”

“*People* took down your settlement?” Daniel asked incredulously. “Why?”

“We had things they wanted, I guess,” Veronica said. “I don’t remember much of it.”

Daniel frowned. “How long ago was this?”

“Six years,” Jill replied from behind.

Daniel’s jaw dropped. “You’ve lived out here by yourself for *six years*?” he said. “How did you survive? Why didn’t you come to London?”

“We survived by eating dinosaurs,” Veronica said. “We built traps and killed the small ones.”

“And after what those people did to us,” Jill added, “we weren’t going to try and find more people.”

Suddenly Jill’s reluctance to come with him made sense. It hadn’t just been about protecting themselves against dinosaurs. It had been about protecting themselves against *him*. And now he’d given her even more reason to distrust him by lying about the territory.

“I’m sorry,” Daniel said. “For lying to you about this area.”

Jill nodded once in thanks.

“So why’d you help me?” Daniel asked.

“I don’t know,” Jill replied. “I still have a conscience, I guess.”

“It was my smouldering good looks, wasn’t it?”

“Oh shut up,” Jill said, pushing past him and walking up a low hill ahead.

Daniel smirked and tried to ignore the pain in his leg as he followed her. “I’m also a fantastic cook, you know!”

Jill paused as she crested the hill and gasped.

“What is it?” Daniel said, hurrying his pace. When he and Veronica joined her, he froze, his stomach twisting.

Down in the valley below the hill, about three-hundred metres away, stood an enormous bipedal dinosaur covered in black and white feathers.

The tyrannosaurus was looking in their direction. It must have already smelled them.

Veronica turned, looking to flee.

“*Don’t. Run.*” Daniel said.

Veronica paused, looking up at him.

“I know running feels like the most logical thing to do,” Daniel explained without taking his eyes off the animal, “but if you do, it’ll chase you. Let’s wait and see what it does.”

It wasn’t until that moment that Daniel noticed something by the rex’s feet. A nest. And in it huddled a group of smaller, light grey dinosaurs.

“I don’t think it’s hunting,” Daniel said, squinting. “It’s... protecting its young. If we don’t split up and keep our distance, it won’t see us as a threat.”

The T-Rex took a step in their direction.

Daniel glanced at the girls. Jill’s hand was firmly clenched around the pistol, finger on the trigger.

“Don’t worry,” Daniel said. “It just wants to put itself between us and the nest. Let’s slowly back off.” He gently guided Veronica to the side, taking slow steps.

They walked down the hill on their right, keeping the dinosaur in their line of sight, circling it from a distance. As they walked, the rex continuously repositioned itself in between the potential threat and its young, never averting its gaze from the interlopers.

“Why doesn’t it just attack?” Veronica whispered.

“Too risky,” Daniel said quietly. “It’d have to leave the hatchlings. Keep walking.”

“This is insane. I can’t believe it’s not attacked,” Jill mumbled.

“Don’t jinx it,” Veronica squeaked.

“Don’t worry,” Daniel reassured them, even though his heart beat out of his chest. “We’re nearly there.”

As they crested the next hill over, they stopped and took a moment to sigh in relief. The rex was out of sight, and there was plenty of distance between them and it.

“I thought you said it was unlikely we’d run into one,” Jill said, turning to him..

“To be fair,” Daniel said with a grin. “That wasn’t *one*. That was six of them.”

Jill frowned at him, and he could see Veronica’s face had visibly paled.

“Okay, fine, I was wrong,” he said. “But look, we’re fine, and it’s not coming after us.”

Jill just shook her head at him in disbelief.

“Let’s keep g-”

He paused when he heard a *beep* from his technical vest.

Curiosity formed on the sisters’ faces as he frantically fished the transmitter out. His heart lurched when he saw the message.

One other person connected.

“That’s it!” he exclaimed, and immediately regretted it, looking back over his shoulder.

“It’s her!” he added more quietly. “It has to be. She’s in range!”

But how? This hadn’t been the way he’d driven. Why would Claire take such a strange route?

It didn’t matter. He had to make sure she found them, which was going to be difficult between all these hills.

“Claire!” he said, trying to contact her.

There was a response. “Daniel?” someone said on the other side, somewhere far away.

There was a loud noise in the background, like the transmitters had difficulty connecting to one another. Still, it was enough to make his breath catch in his throat.

It was her.

“Claire!” he repeated. “Where are you?”

Another response came, but he couldn’t tell what she said.

“We went directly northwest of the job!” he said. “Ignore the car and go northwest!”

The connection was cut off. He sighed. Claire was still connected to the frequency, but no further reply came.

“What do we do?” Jill asked. Her voice finally sounded hopeful.

“We find high ground,” Daniel said. “And get further away from that T-Rex.”

They hurried to the next hill, which reached higher than the previous. In fact, compared to it, the previous hill was more like a mosquito bite. As they slowly climbed higher, Daniel heard thunder rumble in the distance.

Odd, he thought. I can’t see any clouds.

He ignored it for now. Rain was the least of his worries. He had to make sure Claire found him.

Behind, far off in the distance, he saw the tiny shape of the T-Rex still in the valley. If only he had the equipment to kill it. They made for valuable trophies.

Don’t be an idiot, he told himself. You’d never take that risk if it wasn’t necessary.

“See anything yet?” he called ahead.

“No,” Jill called back. “What is that sound, though?”

Daniel noticed it too. The thunder was still going, and it was rapidly coming closer.

Wait, he thought. That’s not thunder. That’s--

A black military helicopter crested the hill and passed over.

“Holy shit!” Daniel called out, and quickly took the rifle off his shoulder. He aimed it up and to the side as the chopper passed and continued on, and immediately began to unload his last magazine. “Here!” he yelled. “We’re here!”

Within moments, the chopper turned in a wide arch and kept hovering in place. Daniel began to run back down the hill, which proved much easier than up with his injured leg. In the distance, the T-Rex was also looking up at the loud object in the air.

She’s done it, he thought. She’s actually done it. Of course she had to pull something as ridiculous as this. No half measures with that woman.

The chopper sunk down and landed in between the two hills as the trio arrived at the bottom of the hill, and a heavily armed figure slid open the side door before hopping out. She gestured them over as she held an assault rifle, checking her surroundings while she waited for them.

The girls arrived first, covering their heads against the rapid winds that the rotor blades were causing, and climbed into the chopper with the soldier's help. When she turned around, Daniel allowed himself to fall into his wife's arms. His leg had finally gotten the better of him.

She helped him in before climbing after him, and slid the door shut.

The chopper began to rise, and Daniel found his way over to a seat with Claire's help.

She crouched down before him and... actually smiled.

She just scored another point, Daniel thought. Damn it!

"Is this it?" she asked over the noise of the helicopter, which Daniel now recognised to be the same noise as he'd heard through the transmitter. "Is there anyone else?"

Daniel shook his head.

"Good," she said. "'Cause you owe me lunch!"

Daniel couldn't help but laugh.

Claire helped the two girls with their seatbelts before asking them about injuries and, when ensured they were fine, sat down next to Daniel.

"I never thanked you," he said to Jill and Veronica, who sat across from him.

"I think we're even now," Jill said.

Daniel grinned before closing his eyes and, despite having been out for twelve hours, found himself drifting off to sleep within minutes.

THE END

[BACK TO START?](#)