

HERDING WITH THE HADROSAURS

Michael Bishop

In '08, my parents—Pierce and Eulogy Gregson of Gipsy, Missouri—received permission to cross the geologic time-slip west of St. Joseph. They left in a wood-paneled New Studebaker wagon, taking provisions for one month, a used Yard-Off scent-generator, and, of course, their sons, sixteen-year-old Chad (me) and five-year-old Cleigh, known to all as “Button.” Our parents rejected the security of a caravan because Daddy had only contempt for “herders,” detested taking orders from external authority, and was sure that when we homesteaded our new Eden beyond the temporal divide, reptile men, claim jumpers, and other scalawags would show up to murder and dispossess us. It struck him as politic to travel alone, even if the evident dangers of the Late Cretaceous led most pioneers to set forth in groups.

That was Pierce Gregson's first, biggest, and, I suppose, last mistake. I was almost a man (just two years away from the vote and only an inch shy of my adult height), and I remember everything. Sometimes, I wish I didn't. The memory of what happened to our folks only two days out from St. Jo, on the eycad-clotted prairie of the old Dakotas, pierces me yet. In fact, this account is a eulogy for our folks and *acri de coeur* I've been holding back for almost thirty years.

(Sweet Seismicity, let it shake my pain.)

The first things you notice crossing over, when agents of the World Time-Slip Force pass you through the discontinuity locks, are the sharp changes in temperature and humidity. The Late Cretaceous was—in many places, at least—hot and moist. So TSF officials caution against winter, spring, or fall crossings. It's best to set out, they say, in late June, July, or August, when atmospheric conditions in northwestern Missouri are not unlike those that hold, just beyond the Nebraska drop-off, in the Upper Mesozoic.

Ignoring this advice, we left in February. Still, our New Stu wagon (a sort of a cross between a Conestoga wagon and a high-tech *Ankylosaurus*) plunged us into a strength-sapping steam bath. All our first day, we sweated. Even the sight of clown-frilled *Triceratops* browsing among the magnolia shrubs and the palmlike cycads of the flood plains did nothing to cool our bodies or lift our spirits. It was worse than going to a foreign country knowing nothing of its language or mores—it was like crawling the outback of a bizarre alien planet.

Button loved it. Daddy pretended that the heat, the air, the grotesque fauna—all of which he'd tried to get us ready for didn't unsettle him. Like turret-gunners, Mama and I kept our eyes open. We missed no chance to gripe about the heat or our wagon's tendency to lurch, steamroller seedling evergreens, and vibrate our kidneys. Daddy, irked, kept his jaw set and his fist on the rudder knob, as if giving his whole attention to steering would allow him to overcome every obstacle, physical or otherwise.

It didn't. On Day Two, twenty or thirty miles from the eastern shore of the Great Inland Sea, we were bumping along at forty-five or fifty mph when two tyrannosaurs—with thalidamide forelegs dangling like ill-made prosthetic hooks—came shuffle-waddling straight at us out of the north.

Sitting next to Daddy, Button hooted in delight. Behind him, I leaned into my seat belt, gaping at the creatures in awe.

The tyrannosaurs were stop-motion Hollywood mockups—except that, gleaming bronze and cordovan in the ancient sunlight, they weren't. They were alive, and, as we all soon realized, they found our wagon profoundly interesting.

“Isn't that 'Zard-Off thing working?” Mama cried.

Daddy was depressing levers, jiggling toggles. “It's on, it's on!” he said. “They shouldn't be coming!”

The scent generator in our wagon was supposed to aspirate an acrid mist into the air, an odor repugnant to saurians, carnivores and plant-eaters alike.

But these curious T-kings were approaching anyway-proof, Mama and I decided, that our scent-generator, a secondhand model installed only a few hours before our departure, was a dud. And it was just like Daddy, the biggest of scrimps, to have paid bottom dollar for it, his perfectionism in matters not money-grounded now disastrously useless.

“Daddy, turn!” I shouted. “We can outrun them!”

To give him credit, Daddy had already ruddered us to the right and was squeezing F-pulses to the power block with his thumb. The plain was broad and open, but dotted with palmate shrubs, many of which looked like fluted pillars crowned by tattered green umbrella segments; we ran right over one of the larger cycads in our path before we'd gone thirty yards. Our wagon tilted on two side wheels, tried to right itself, and, failing that, crashed down on its passenger box with a drawn-out *KRRRRR-ack!*

Mama screamed, Daddy cursed, Button yowled like a vivisected cat. I was deafened, dangling in an eerie hush from my seat belt. And then Button, upsidedown, peered quizzically into my face while mouthing, urgently, a battery of inaudible riddles.

Somehow, we wriggled out. So far as that goes, so did Daddy and Mama, although it would have been better for them—for all of us—if we had just played turtle.

In fact, our folks undoubtedly struggled free of the capsized wagon *to look for* Button and me. What Button and I saw, huddled behind an umbrella shrub fifty yards away, was that awkward but disjointedly agile pair of T-kings. They darted at Mama and Daddy and seized them like rag dolls in their stinking jaws, one stunned parent to each tyrannosaur.

Then the T-kings—lofty, land-going piranhas—shook our folks unconscious, dropped them to the ground, crouched on their mutilated bodies with crippled-looking foreclaws, and vigorously tore into them with six-inch fangs.

At intervals, they'd lift their huge skulls and work their lizardly nostrils as if trying to catch wind of something tastier. Button and I, clutching each other, would glance away. Through it all, I cupped my hand over Button's mouth to keep him from crying out. By the time the T-kings had finished their meal and tottered off, my palm was lacerated from the helpless gnashing of Button's teeth.

And there we were, two scared human orphans in the problematic Late Cretaceous.

Every year since recrossing the time-slip, I see a report that I was a feral child, the only human being in history to have been raised by a non-mammalian species. In legend and literature, apes, wolves, and lions sometimes get credit for nurturing lost children, but no one is idiot enough to believe that an alligator or a Komodo dragon would put up with a human child any longer than it takes to catch, chew, and ingest it. No one should.

On the other hand, although I, Chad Gregson, was too old to be a feral child, having absorbed sixteen

years of human values at the time of our accident, my little brother Cleigh, or Button, wasn't. And, indeed, it would probably not be wrong to say that, in quite a compelling sense, he was raised by hadrosaurs.

I did all I could to pick up where our folks had left off, but the extended tribe of duckbills—*Corythosaurus*—with whom we eventually joined also involved themselves in Button's parenting, and I remain grateful to them. But I jump ahead of myself. What happened in the immediate aftermath of our accident?

Button and I lay low. A herd of *Triceratops* came snuffling through the underbrush, grunting and browsing. Overhead, throwing weird shadows on the plains, six or seven pterosaurs—probably vulturelike *Quetzalcoatl*—circled our wagon's wreck on thermal updrafts, weighing the advisability of dropping down to pick clean the bones of Pierce and Eulogy Gregson. They stayed aloft, for the departed T-kings may have still been fairly near, so Button and I likewise stayed aloof.

Until evening, that is. Then we crept to the wagon—I held on to Button to keep him from trying to view the scattered, collopy bones of our folks—and unloaded as much gear as we could carry: T-rations, two wooden harmonicas, some extra all-cotton clothing, a sack of seed, etc. TSF officials allowed no synthetic items (even 'Zard-Off was an organic repellent, made from a Venezuelan herb) to cross a time-slip, for after an early period of supply-dependency, every pioneer was expected to "live off the land."

A wind blew down from the north. Suddenly, surprisingly, the air was no longer hot and moist; instead, it was warm and arid. We were on a Dead Sea margin rather than in a slash-and-burn Amazonian clearing. Our sweat dried. Hickories, oaks, and conifers grew among the horsetails along the meander of a river by the Great Inland Sea. Button and I crept through the glowing pastels of an archaic sunset, looking for fresh water (other than that sloshing in our leather botas) and shelter.

Which is how, not that night but the following dawn, we bumped into the hadrosaurs that became our new family: a lambeosaurine tribe, each creature bearing on its ducklike head a hallow crest, like the brush on a Roman centurion's helmet.

Becoming family took a while, though, and that night, our first beyond the divide without our parents, Button snuggled into my lap in a stand of cone-bearing evergreens, whimpering in his dreams and sometimes crying out. Small furry creatures moved about in the dark, trotting or waddling as their unfamiliar bodies made them—but, bent on finding food appropriate to their size, leaving us blessedly alone. Some of these nocturnal varmints, I understood, would bring forth descendants that would evolve into hominids that would evolve into men. As creepy as they were, I was glad to have them around—they clearly knew when it was safe for mammals to forage. Q.E.D.: Button and I had to be semisafe, too. "Where are we?" Button asked when he awoke.

"When are we?" or "Why are we here?" would have been better questions, but I told Button that we were hiding from the giant piranha lizards that had killed Daddy and Mama. Now, though, we had to get on with our lives.

About then, we looked up and spotted a huge camouflage-striped *Corythosaurus*—green, brown, burnt yellow—standing on its hind legs, embracing a nearby fir with its almost graceful arms. With its goosy beak, it was shredding needles, grinding them into meal between the back teeth of both jaws. Behind and beyond it foraged more *Corythosauri*, the adults nearly thirty feet tall, the kids anywhere from my height to that of small-town lampposts. Some in the hadrosaur herd locomoted like bent-over kangaroos; others had taken the posture of the upright colossus before us.

Button began screaming. When I tried to cover his mouth, he bit me. “*They wanna eat us!*” he shrieked even louder. “Chad—please, Chad!—don’t let them eat me!”

I stuffed the hem of a cotton tunic into Button’s mouth and pinned him down with an elbow the way the T-kings, yesterday, had grounded our folks’ corpses with their claws. I, too, thought we were going to be eaten, even though the creature terrifying Button had to be a vegetarian. It and its cohorts stopped feeding. In chaotic unison, they jogged off through the grove on their back legs, their fat, sturdy, conical tails counterbalancing the weight of their crested skulls.

“They’re gone,” I told Button. “I promise you, they’re gone. Here—eat this.”

I snapped a box of instant rice open under his nose, poured some water into it, and heated the whole shebang with a boil pellet. Sniffing, Button ate. So did I. Thinking, “safety in numbers,” and setting aside the fact that T-kings probably ate duckbills when they couldn’t find people, I pulled Button up and made him trot along behind me after the *Corythosauri*.

In a way, it was a relief to be free of the twenty-second century. (And, God forgive me, it was something of a relief to be free of our parents. I hurt for them. *Imissed* them. But the possibilities inherent in the Late Cretaceous, not to mention its dangers, pitfalls, and terrors, seemed crisper and brighter in our folks’ sudden absence.)

The asteroid that hit the Indian Ocean in ’04, gullywashing the Asian subcontinent, Madagascar, and much of East Africa, triggered the tidal waves that drowned so many coastal cities worldwide. It also caused the apocalyptic series of earthquakes that sundered North America along a jagged north-south axis stretching all the way from eastern Louisiana to central Manitoba.

These catastrophic seismic disturbances apparently produced the geologic divide, the Mississippi Valley Time-Slip, fracturing our continent into the ruined Here-and-Now of the eastern seaboard and the anachronistic There-and-Then of western North America.

Never mind that the West beyond this discontinuity only existed in fact over sixty-five million years ago. Or that you can no longer visit modern California because California—along with twenty-one other western states and all or most of six western Canadian provinces—has vanished.

It’s crazy, the loss of half a modern continent and of every person living there before the asteroid impact and the earthquakes, but you can’t take a step beyond the divide without employing a discontinuity lock. And when you do cross, what you see is fossils sprung to life, the offspring of a different geologic period. In Europe, Asia, Africa, South America, Australia, Antarctica, it’s much the same—except that the time-slips in those places debouch on other geologic time divisions: the Pleistocene, the Paleocene, the Jurassic, the Silurian, etc.

We’re beginning to find that many parts of the world we used to live in are, temporally speaking, vast subterranean galleries in which our ancestors, or our descendants, stride like kings and we are unwelcome strangers. I survived my time in one such roofless cavern, but even if it meant losing Button to the Late Cretaceous forever, I’d be delighted to see all our world’s cataclysm-spawned discontinuities melt back into normalcy tomorrow. . . .

The *Corythosauri* were herding. The tribe we’d just met flowed into several other tribes, all moving at a stately clip up through Saskatchewan, Alberta, and the northeastern corner of old British Columbia. Button and I stayed with them because, in our first days beyond the divide, we saw no other human pioneers and believed it would be more fun to travel with some easygoing nonhuman natives than to lay claim to the first plot of likely-looking ground we stumbled across.

Besides, I didn't want to begin farming yet, and the pace set by the duckbills was by no stretch burdensome—fifteen to twenty miles a day, depending on the vegetation available and the foraging styles of the lead males.

It was several weeks before we realized that the *Corythosauri*, along with six or seven other species of duckbill and a few distant groups of horned dinosaurs, were migrating. We supposed—well, I supposed, Button being little more than a dumbstruck set of eyes, ears, and boyish tropisms—only that they were eating their way through the evergreens, magnolias, and cycad shrubs along routes well-worn by earlier foragers.

Where, I wondered, were our human predecessors? The time-slip locks at St. Joseph and other sites along the divide had been open two full years, ever since Tharpleton and Sykora's development of cost-effective discontinuity gates. To date, over 100,000 people had reputedly used them. So where was everyone? A few, like our parents, had met untimely deaths. Others had made the crossing elsewhere. Still others had headed straight for the Great Inland Sea—so trap pelicanlike pterosaurs, train them on leads, and send them out over the waters as captive fishers. It beat farming, said some returning pioneers, and the westerly salt breezes were always lovely. In any event, Button and I trailed our duckbills a month before happening upon another human being.

How did we become members of the *Corythosaurus* family? Well, we stayed on the lumbering creatures' trail every day and bedded down near them every night. At first, sighting us, the largest males like fourlegged, thirty-foot-tall woodwinds—would blow panicky bassoon notes through the tubes winding from their nostrils through the mazelike hollows in their mohawk crests. These musical alarms echoed back and forth among the tribe, alerting not only our family but every other nearby clan of hadrosaurs to a possible danger. At first, this was flattering, but, later, simply frustrating.

Button got tired of dogging the *Corythosauri*. They stank, he said, "like the snake house in the St. Louis Zoo." He griped about all the mushy green hadrosaur patties along our route. He said that the insects bumbling in clouds around the duckbills—gnats, flies, a few waspish pollinators—were better at "poking our hides than theirs." He whined that we couldn't "become duckbills because we don't eat what they eat." And he was right. We were living on T-rations, tiny rodentlike mammals that I caught when they were most sluggish, and the pulpy berries of strange shrubs. We often had tight stomachs, loose bowels, borderline dehydration.

But I kept Button going by ignoring his gripes, by seeing to it that he ate, and by carrying him on my shoulders. Weirdly, it was after hoisting him onto my shoulders that the duckbills stopped running from us at first sight. By that trick, we ceased being two bipedal strangers and became a single honorary hadrosaur.

When he sat on my shoulders, Button's dilapidated St. Louis Cardinals baseball cap gave us both the crest and the bill we needed to pass as one of their youngsters. Then, in fact, the *Corythosauri* let us travel at the heart of their group, with all the other juveniles. There, we were relatively secure from the flesh-eaters—*T. rex*, *Daspletosaurus*, and *Albertosaurus*—that would track us through the Dakota flood plains or try to intercept us in the lush Canadian woods.

The *Corythosauri* did a lot of noisy bassooning. They did it to warn of predators, to let the members of other duckbill clans—*Parasaurolophus*, *Hypacrosaurus*, *Maiasaura*, etc.—know of their nearness (probably to keep them from trespassing on their foraging grounds), and to chase off rival duckbills or timid carnivores.

Button and I took part in some of these performances with our wooden harmonicas. I'd sound a few notes, echoing the call of an upright male in a register too high to make the imitation precisely accurate,

and Button would blow an impromptu score of discordant notes that, totally silencing our duckbill kin, would drift across the landscape like the piping of a drunken demigod.

Anyway, by the time we had hiked almost five hundred miles, we were adopted members of the family. Or, rather, one adopted member when Button rode my shoulders, but tolerated hangers-on when he didn't. Trapping small mammals, picking berries, and digging up tubers that we could clean and eat (our T-rations ran out on the twenty-seventh day), we scurried about under the duckbills' feet, but made ourselves such fixtures in their lives that none of the creatures had any apparent wish to run us off.

Thus, we came to recognize individuals, and Button—when I asked him to name the creatures—gave most of them the names of his favorite anserine or ducky characters: Daffy, Mother Goose, Howard, Donald, Daisy, Huey, Dewey, Louie, Scrooge McDuckbill. Adult females, because of their bulk, got monikers like Bertha, Mama Mountain, Beverly Big, Hulga, and Quaker Queen. (I helped with some of these.) We spent the better parts of three days baptizing our *Corythosauri*. Button had such a good time that he wanted me to help him come up with last names, too. I protested that we'd never be able to remember them all. When Button began to sulk, I told him to do the stupid naming himself.

Anyway, we wound up with three McDuckbills, some O'Mallards, a Gooseley, and a covy of Smiths: Daffy Smith, Mama Mountain Smith, Hulga Smith, etc. If, that is, I remember the baptisms correctly. On the other hand, how could I forget any aspect of the most vivid period of my life?

About a month into our trek, we ran into Duckbill Jay McInturff and Bonehead Brett Easley, self-proclaimed "dinosaur men," hunters who traded "lizard beef" and "'gator skins"—welcome supplements to a marine-based economy—to the people in the fishing villages along the northern coastal arc of the Great Inland Sea.

We ran into them because they leapt from the forest through which we were hiking and filled Dewey O'Mallard, a lissome juvenile, with handmade arrows. They shot their arrows, fletched with *Hesperornis* feathers, from polished bows fashioned from *Centrosaurus* ribs and strung with rodent gut. The other duckbills yodeled in dismay, reared, thrashed their tails, and trotted off bipedally in twelve different directions at once. I'd been walking four or five animals behind Dewey, with Button on my shoulders, and when Dewey trumpeted and fell, causing general panic, I simply froze.

The dinosaur men emerged from their natural blinds to butcher Dewey. When they saw Button and me, they started. Then they began asking questions. I took Button, now crying hysterically, from my shoulders. He spat at the men and ran off into the woods. I would have chased him, but the shorter of the two men caught my arm and squeezed it threateningly.

I spent that night with the two dinosaur men. They made camp near Dewey's corpse, tying me to a cycad with a rope of hand-woven horse-tail fibers. Why were they tying me? Why weren't they helping me find Button? As they field-dressed Dewey, I shouted, "*Button, come back!*" realizing, even as I yelled, that it would be stupid for him to return to the uncertain situation he had instinctively fled. I shut up.

McInturff and Easley, who had politely introduced themselves, built a fire and roasted over it a white-skinned portion of their kill. They tried to get me to eat with them, but I refused, not because I wasn't hungry or despised dinosaur flesh, but because Button and I had *named* Dewey. How could I turn cannibal?

Despite their Wild West nicknames, Duckbill Jay and Bonehead Brett weren't uneducated yahoos. (To receive permission to use a discontinuity lock, you couldn't be.) But they had separated themselves from other pioneers, dressed up in spiked *Nodosaurus*-hide vests, duckbill-skin leggings, and opossum-belly mocassins, and begun a two-man trading company inspired by North America's rugged trappers of the

early 1800's. Playing these parts, they had come to believe that a selfish lawlessness was their birthright.

Unable to coax me to eat, McInturff, a slender, sandy-haired man with a splotchy beard, and Easley, a simian gnome with a high, domed forehead, tried to talk me into joining them. They could use another set of hands, and I'd learn to make arrows, shoot a bow, skin Parkosauri butcher duckbills, and sew "fine lizardly duds"—if I let them teach me. They'd also help me find Button so that he, too, could benefit from their woody self-improvement program.

I talked to the hunters, without agreeing to this proposal. So they began to ignore me. Easley left the clearing and returned a little later with a half-grown panoplesaur to which was rigged a travois. On this sled, they piled the hide, bones, and butchered flesh of Dewey, after conscientiously treating the meat with sea salt. Then they ambled over to the cycad to which I was bound.

"Any idea where those flute-crests of yours happen to be going, Master Gregson?" McInturff said.

"No, sir."

"Four months from now, the middle of June, they'll hit the Arctic rim, the shore of what Holocene-huggers used to call the Beaufort Sea."

"Holocene-huggers?"

"Stay-at-homes;" Easley said. "Baseline-Lubbers."

"You want to traipse eighteen hundred more miles, kid? That's what's in store for you."

"Why?" I said. "Why do they go there?"

"It's a duckbill rookery," McInturff said. "A breeding site. Quite a ways to go to watch a bunch of lizards screw."

"Or," Easley said, "you could link up with some boneheads in the Yukon and tail them across the land bridge into Old Mongolia."

"Where are we now?" I asked.

"Montana," McInturff said. "If Montana existed."

"Its relative vicinity," Easley said. "Given tectonic drift, beaucoups of climatic changes, and the passage of several million years."

I had no idea what to reply. The dinosaur men put out their fire, lay down under the chaotically arrayed stars, drifted off to sleep. Or so I thought. For, shortly after lying down, McInturff and Easley arose again, walked over, unbound my hands, and, in the alien woods, far from any human settlement, took turns poking my backside. I repeatedly cried out, but my tormentors only laughed. When dawn came, they debated whether to kill me or leave me tied up for a passing carnivore. They decided that the second option would free them of guilt and give a human-size predator—a dromaeosaur or a stenonychosaur—several hours of amusing exercise.

"Wish you'd change our mind," Bonehead Brett Easley said. He prodded the sleepy panoplosaur out of its doze.

"Yeah, Master Gregson," Duckbill Jay McInturff said. "We could make good use of you."

Guffawing, they left. The woods moved with a hundred balmy winds. A half hour after the dinosaur men

had vanished, Button came running into the clearing to untie me.

It took us most of the day, but using the telltale spoors of shredded vegetation and sour-smelling *Corythosaurus* patties, we tracked our family—Scrooge McDuckbill, Mama Mountain Smith, etc.—to a clearing in the Montana forest. There we tried to rejoin them. But our arrival spooked them, and it was two more days, Button on my shoulders like a tiny maharajah, before we could catch up again, reconvince the duckbills of our harmlessness, and resume our communal trek northwestward.

Long-distance dinosaurs, I reflected. We're going to walk all the way to the Arctic rim with them. Why?

Because the Gregsons had always been loners, because I had good reason not to trust any of the human beings over here, and because we had already forged a workable bond with our “flute crests.” Besides, I didn't want to homestead, and there was no one around—close to hand, anyway—to tell us we couldn't attempt anything we damned well pleased.

So Button and I traveled on foot all the way to a beautiful peninsula on the Beaufort Sea, where we heard the duckbills bassoon their melancholy lovesongs and watched hundreds of giant lizards of several different species languidly screw. The males' upright bodies struggled athwart the females' crouching forms, while the tribes' befuddled juveniles looked on almost as gaped-beaked as Button and I. The skies were bluer than blue, the breezes were softer than mammal fur, and the orgasmic bleats of some of the lovesick duckbills were like thunder claps.

Button was dumbstruck, fascinated.

“Sex education,” I told him. “Pay attention. Better this way than a few others I can think of.”

The males in the mild Arctic forests blew rousing solos and showed off their crests. Those with the deepest voices and the most elaborate skull ornaments were the busiest, reproductively speaking, but there were so many dinosaurs in the rim woods, foraging and colliding, that in less than a month Button and I could see through the shredded gaps as if a defoliant had been applied. We saw boneheads—macho pachycephalosaurs half the size of our duckbills banging their helmeted-looking skulls in forest sections already wholly stripped of undergrowth. The clangor was spooky, as were the combatants' strategic bellows.

Button and I stayed out of the way, fishing off the coast, gathering berries, trapping muskratlike creatures on the banks of muddy inlets, and keeping a lookout for the human hunters that prowled the edges of the herbivore breedinggrounds. We did well staying clear of godzillas like *T. rex* and the *Daspletosaurs*, but, more than once, we narrowly avoided being kicked to tatters by an eleven-foot-tall midnight skulker called—I've since learned—*Dromiceiomimus*. Resembling a cross between an ostrich and a chameleon, this beast could run like the anchor on a relay team. And so Button and I began weaving tree platforms and shinnying upstairs to sleep out of harm's way.

Sexed out and hungry for fresh vegetation, our *Corythosaurus* clan stayed in its breeding haunts only until late July, at which time Scrooge McDuckbill, Daffy Smith, and Donald Gooseley led the group southeastward. Button and I, more comfortable with these lummoxy herbivores than apart from them, tagged along again.

In October, catching the placental odor of the Great Inland Sea, the gravid females (including Quaker Queen, Beverly Big, Mama Mountain, Hulga, Bertha, and several demure ladies from clans that had joined us after our run-in with MeInturff and Easley) split off from the unperturbed males and led their youngsters into a coastal region of northern Montana. We went with the females rather than with the males because the females, seeing Button and me as one more gawky kid, matter-of-factly mother-henned us on this journey. Their bodies gave us protection, while their clarinet squeaks and oboe

moans offered frankly unambiguous advice.

Then, at an ancestral hatching ground, they dug out mud-banked nests that had fallen in, or fashioned new nests near the old ones. Working hard, the ladies built these nests at least a body-length apart; each nest was about eight feet in diameter and four feet deep at the center of its bowl. When the nests were complete, the female duckbills squatted above the bowls and carefully deposited their eggs (as few as few as twelve, as many as twenty-four) in concentric rings inside the drying pits. Then they left, cropped ferns and other plant materials, waddled back, and conscientiously covered their tough-skinned eggs.

Although I tried to discourage him, warning that he could get trampled or sat upon, Button got involved. He carried dripping loads of vegetation back to the hatching grounds to help Beverly Big and Quaker Queen incubate their lizardings. And when their eggs broke open and baby hadrosaurs poked their beaked noggins out, Button not only helped the mama duckbills feed them, but sometimes crawled into the muck-filled nests and hunkered among the squeaking youngsters. No mother seemed to resent his presence, but what *almost* cured Button of this behavior was having Quaker Queen drop a bolus of well-chewed fruit on him. Even that accident didn't keep him from stalking the mud bridges between nests, though, watching and waiting as our dinosaur siblings rapidly grew.

Button and I stayed with our *Corythosauri* for more than three years (if "years" beyond a discontinuity divide have any meaning). We migrated seasonally with our duckbill family, going from south to north in the "winter" and from north to south toward the end of "summer." We saw the hadrosaurs mate in their breeding grounds, and, after the females had laid their eggs, we stayed in the muddy hatching grounds like bumbling midwives-in-training.

On each seasonal trek, we saw animals for whom we had developed great affection—Daffy, Bertha, a host of nameless youngsters—run down and murdered by the T-kings and the *Albertosauri* that opportunistically dogged our marches. During our third year with the duckbills, in fact, I figured out that only sixty-four of over eight hundred hatchlings made it out of the nest and less than half the survivors reached the Arctic breeding grounds with their adult relatives. Agility, stealth, and even simple puniness often saved Button and me, but the hadrosaurs weren't so lucky. Many of those that didn't fall to predators succumbed to parasites, accidents, or mysterious diseases. The forests and uplands of the Late Cretaceous could be beautiful, but life there wasn't always pretty. (Maybe our folks, escaping it so soon, had known true mercy.)

As for human pioneers from the blasted twenty-second century, A.D., Button and I had no desire to consort with them. At times, we saw smoke from their villages; and, on each of our migrations, bands of human nomads, archers in lizard-skin clothing, helped the T-kings cull the weakest members of the herds, whether duckbills, boneheads, fleet-footed hypsilophodonts, or horned dinosaurs. In large bands, though, the archers sometimes risked everything and went after a *Tyrannosaurus*. Once, from a mountainside in eastern Alberta, Button and I watched a dozen Lilliputian archers surround and kill an enraged Gulliver of a T-king. Neither of us was sorry, but it isn't always true that the killer of your greatest enemy is automatically your friend.

Mcfnturff and Easley came into our lives again the year that Button—who had long ago given up talking in favor of playing duckbill calls on his harmonica—turned eight. Along with nine or ten other raiders, they targeted the duckbills' Montana hatching grounds, shooed off as many of the mothers as possible, and killed all those inclined to defend their nests. The men were egg gathering, for reasons I never fully understood—restocking the fishing villages' larders, providing a caulking substance for boats—and Button and I escaped only because the men came into the nesting grounds shouting, banging bones together, and blowing *Triceratops* trumpets. There was no need for stealth; they *wanted* the females to flee. So Button and I hurried out of there along with the more timid hadrosaur mothers.

The next day, I crept back to the area to see what was going on. On a wooded hillside above the main nesting floor, I found an egg that had long ago petrified, hefted it as if it were an ancient cannonball, and duck-walked with it to an overlook where the activity of the nest raiders was all too visible. Easley, his bald pate gleaming like a bleached pachycephalosaur skull, was urging his men to gather eggs more quickly, wrap them in ferns, and stack them gently in their sharkskin sacks.

The sight of Easley's head was an insupportable annoyance. I raised myself to a crouch, took aim, and catapulted my petrified egg straight at his head. The egg dropped like a stone, smashing his skull and knocking him into one of the hollowed-out nests. He died instantly. All his underlings began to shout and scan the hillside. I made no effort to elude discovery. Three or four of them scrambled up the overlooks slope, wrestled me down, secured my hands with horsetail fibers, and frog-marched me back down to the hatching site to meet Duckbill Jay McInturff.

"I remember you," McInturff said. "Brett and I had a chance to kill you once. I'll bet Brett's sorry we didn't do it."

It seemed likely that McInturff would order me killed on the spot, but maybe the presence of so many other men, not all of them as indifferent to judicial process as he, kept him from it. After finishing their egg collecting, they tied my hands at the small of my back, guyed my head erect with a lizard-skin cord knotted to my bindings, and made me walk drag behind an ankylosaur travois loaded with egg sacks and another hammocking Easley's corpse.

At a village on the Great Inland Sea, I was locked for at least a week in a tool shed with a dirt floor. Through the holes in its roof, I could sometimes see gulls and pteranodons wheeling.

I had lost my parents, I had lost Button, I had lost our family of hadrosaurs. It seemed clear that McInturff and his egg-hunting cohorts would either hang me from a willow tree or paddle me out to sea and toss me overboard to the archaic fishes or ichthyosaurs that yet remained. I was almost resigned to dying, but I missed Button and feared that, only eight years old, he wouldn't last too long among the harried duckbills.

The last night I spent in the tool shed, I heard a harmonica playing at some distance inland and knew that Button was trying to tell me hello, or good-bye, or possibly "It's all right, brother, I'm still alive." The music ceased quickly, making me doubt I'd really heard it, then played again a little nearer, reconvincing me of Button's well-being, and stopped forever a moment or so later. Button himself made no appearance, but I was glad of that because the villagers would have captured him and sent him back through a discontinuity lock to the Here-and-Now.

That, you see, is what they did to me. The sheriff of Glasgow, the fishing settlement where I was confined, knew a disaffected family who had applied for repatriation. He shipped me with them, trussed like a slave, when they made their journey back toward the Mississippi Valley Time-Slip, just across from St. Jo, Missouri, and the unappealing year known as 2111A .D. Actually, because of a fast-forward screw-up of some esoteric sort, we recrossed in 2114. Once back, I was tried for Easley's murder in Springfield, found guilty of it on the basis of affidavits from McInturff and several upright egg raiders, and sentenced to twenty-five years in prison. I have just finished serving that sentence.

From the few accounts that sometimes slip back through, Button grew up with the *Corythosauri* . Over there, he's still with them, living off the land and avoiding human contact. It's rumored that, at nineteen, he managed to kill Duckbill Jay McInturff and to catch in deadfalls some of McInturff's idiot henchmen. (God forgive me, I hope he did.)

Because of my murder conviction, I'm ineligible to recross, but more and more people in our desolate

century use the locks every year, whether a gate to the Late Cretaceous or a portal on another continent to a wholly different geologic or historical time. This tropism to presumably greener stomping grounds reminds me of the herding and migrating instincts of the dinosaurs with whom Button and I lived so many “years” ago. And with whom Button, of course, is probably living yet.

One gate, I’m told, a discontinuity lock in Siberia, debouches on an epoch in which humanity has been extinct for several million years. I’d like to use that lock and see the curious species that have either outlived us or evolved in our absence. Maybe I will. A document given me on leaving prison notes that this Siberian lock is the only one I am now eligible to use. Tomorrow, then, I intend to put in an application.