

The Dinosaur Train by James L. Cambias

After Jim Cambias's tale of a plucky cargo ship, "Balancing Accounts," ran in our Feb. 2008 issue, we got a lot of inquiries about when Mr. Cambias would be writing a sequel. He hasn't answered that question yet, but in the meantime, he offers us this one, a very different sort of story that readers of all ages will enjoy. The title, he notes, was inspired by two of his five-year-old son's primary interests.

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Sean Sullivan rode the Dinosaur Train for the last time in the summer of 1980. When the show got to Chicago, his father was waiting at the siding on 114th Street. Sean spotted the beige Chevy copcar sedan parked at the end of the line of local rented trucks. During one of the interminable delays while the railroad crew got the train into place and secured, Sean swung down from the beat-up old Pullman car the Sullivan Show staff rode in and trudged over to say hello.

"Hi! I thought I'd come help set up. Took the day off." His dad hugged him a little awkwardly, then looked at the train. "How's your grandpa?"

"He's okay."

"Good tour this year?"

"Pretty good, I think. Grandpa says the whole Olympics thing will help us. For a while it looked like the Anderson campaign might hire one of the dinos to send to Detroit for the Republican convention. You know, because Reagan's an old guy. But Grandpa turned them down."

"Not like him to pass up free publicity. Jeez, how long are those guys going to take? It must be roasting inside those boxcars by now. Want something to drink?" He reached into the car and handed Sean a can—it was plain white and said COLA in blue letters. It was warm and tasted funny, but he was thirsty and drank it.

"How's your mother?"

"She's okay. Another year till she gets her degree."

"What then?"

“I don’t know. Whatever you do with a Ph.D. in Women’s Studies.”

“Teach Women’s Studies, I guess. What about you? Have you started picking out colleges?”

“Yeah, some,” said Sean.

The train men got the locomotive uncoupled and started to pull away. Barry, the crew chief, jumped down from the Pullman step and blew a long blast on his whistle. The Sullivan Show exploded into action. Roustabouts hustled over to the boxcars and started unlocking the doors and setting up the ramps. The rental trucks pulled up next to the car holding the tents and fencing.

Sean and his dad joined the trainers getting the animals out. As always, they started with Brenda. Sean’s dad shook hands with some of the older crew who remembered him, then they both took up goads and stationed themselves at her flank for the difficult job of backing her up before she could go down the ramp.

Grandpa was up at her head, holding her bridle and crooning to her in his deepest voice. She was fidgety and uncomfortable after the overnight ride from St. Louis, and it took all his weight on the bridle to keep her from trying to lift her head. Other trainers might handle the other animals, but Brenda was the show’s star attraction and Grandpa didn’t trust anyone else to manage her properly.

Getting a seventy-ton sauropod out of a railroad boxcar was a slow and delicate operation. First Grandpa had to lead her forward until the other trainers could nudge her tail out of the open door on her left, then back her and turn her gently until her head was pointing out the right-hand door. Then he whistled. Sean and his dad poked her with their goads, and Brenda the Brachiosaurus lumbered out into the daylight. Grandpa released the head bridle and Brenda raised her head to her full forty-foot height.

Only then did Sean’s grandfather come over to say hello. “Patrick!” he called out to Sean’s father. “I didn’t see you back here. Are you going to work the show?”

“I thought I’d come help with set-up, anyway.”

“Glad to have you. God, what a pit this is,” he said, looking at the grimy industrial landscape around the siding. “I remember when we’d pull right into Union Station downtown and parade to Soldier Field. Now we’re in

this Godforsaken slum. I had to hire security guards so that decent people wouldn't be afraid to come down."

The first of the rented trucks trundled out to the show site by Lake Calumet. Brenda stood placidly, enjoying the (relatively) fresh air while the trainers got the hadrosaurs and the styracosaur out of their cars. The forklift dropped off the crate holding Brenda's parade costume and the three Sullivans set to work putting it on her.

She stood calmly while they raised the ladders and put the harness over her body before attaching the draperies. The row of spines down the center of her back made it hard to get the leather-padded steel cables in place, but once in position they couldn't slide around at all.

Her caparison was canvas covered with green silk. Letters of gold braid two feet high spelled out "BRENDA: 8th WONDER OF THE WORLD! SULLIVAN'S DINOSAURS" on her vast sides. Sean's grandfather tapped Brenda's foreleg and shouted "Ho!" in his deepest voice. After a moment, she lowered her head so they could get the plumes onto her.

"Do you still have the electric outfit?" Sean's father asked when Brenda was all rigged out.

"Yeah," said Grandpa. "Still works. Changing the bulbs is hell, but she does look good. You'll see it at the opening tonight."

When all twelve dinos were in costume, Grandpa checked his watch and smiled. "Noon exactly. Just in time for the parade. Let's get moving."

Sean had seen old films and photos of the Sullivan Show's dinosaur parades in past decades. The greatest was the famous shot of twenty dinosaurs marching up Broadway in 1948—the twin brachiosaurs Brenda and Bob in the lead with a twelve-year-old Patrick Sullivan riding proudly on Brenda's shoulders and a dozen war orphans in the howdah on her back.

No more howdah, what with the cost of insurance. But Sean pulled on the old green-and-gold uniform which reeked of mothballs and put the horrible old turban on his head before mounting. There was a spot at the base of her neck where three of her back spines were sawed down to make room for a saddle.

Brenda wasn't really much fun to ride—she was just too damned big. A skilled rider could actually control the hadrosaurs and iguanodons with

reins and spurs, but on Brenda's neck Sean was just a passenger, waving at the crowd and grinning while Grandpa steered her by tapping her forelegs with the goad.

The pickup truck at the back of the line had a loudspeaker mounted on top of the cab. It gave off a blare of static, and then started to play the old Johnny Cash song "Dinosaur Train." In his scrapbook Grandpa had a photo of Cash posing next to Brenda at Opryland. The inscription read, "To M.S. from J.C.—Keep the Dino Train rolling!" Grandpa took that as legal permission to use the song without paying royalties. So far nobody had complained.

Led by a Chicago Police cruiser and a truck from the power company, the dinosaur parade headed down the block to 115th, then turned east. A sparse crowd of old white people and young black people watched Sullivan's Dinosaurs go past. Sean noticed that the very oldest and the very youngest watched with unconcealed delight. It was the same in all the cities they'd visited.

Grandpa got Brenda to lower her head so she could pass under the highway overpass, then the parade entered the show site. It was a former freightyard—a huge expanse of pavement with waist-high weeds growing in the cracks, surrounded by chain-link fence topped with razor wire.

The temporary corral for the smaller dinos was ready when they arrived, and the trainers led them in. Brenda stayed near the main site gate, right next to the big "SULLIVAN'S DINOSAURS" banner. She'd been the show's best advertisement since she was ten years old, and Grandpa wasn't going to waste that, not with a hundred cars a minute going by on I-94.

Sean got out of costume and rolled Brenda's drinking trough over to where she stood. The oddly colored water of Lake Calumet lapped at the bottom of the rusty fence, but Grandpa had arranged for a water truck to supply the dinos.

"Come on, girl, drink it," Sean called to her. She just stood there, head up, ignoring the water and the pile of hay. "Well, it's here if you want it," said Sean, and checked her leg shackle. The ankle chain was attached to a block of concrete. Personally Sean doubted it would hold Brenda if she really wanted to go someplace else, but fifty years of habit was harder for her to break.

Sean's father came over to admire Brenda. "Got all the electricals set

up. I keep telling your grandfather he needs to hire some real electricians. Those jerks couldn't change a light bulb without electrocuting themselves. How's my big girl?"

"She's a little off her feed today. Probably the heat," said Sean.

"Are you giving her enough water? Of course you are. Dumb question. Listen, I spoke with the boss and he's willing to let you come have lunch with me tomorrow before the afternoon show."

Sean hesitated. Visits to his father were always squirmingly uncomfortable affairs—but the chance to eat something that wasn't concession-stand hot dogs or diner take-out was very tempting. And after all, it was just for lunch. "Great," he said.

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Showtime on the first day was six o'clock. Cars started pulling into the lot at four-thirty. Sean helped direct traffic in the parking area until half past five, then went to the trailer he shared with his grandfather to get into his costume.

His grandpa was outside the trailer when he got there, cooking something in a big pot over a fire of scrap lumber and newspapers. It smelled vile. Grandpa kept tasting it and tossing in handfuls of leaves from a crumpled paper bag.

"What's that?" Sean asked.

"It's a tonic for Brenda. She's been looking droopy."

"What's in it?"

"Oh, a little of this, a little of that. Pine balsam, tea leaves, lettuce, lemongrass, burdock, and ten six-packs of Dr. Pepper."

"Does it work?"

"Of course it works! I've been using this stuff since the thirties. I got the recipe from Harry Raven for five dollars after we spent a night drinking at McSorley's. Harry was on both of Merian Cooper's expeditions to Tengkorak Island. He said it was the only thing that kept the dinos from getting seasick on the way to San Francisco. This'll settle her stomach."

Mike Sullivan added another handful of leaves and mopped his forehead. "Let it cook a little longer. Go tell Jackie she's going to be doing the balancing act with Mr. Duckbill instead of Brenda."

"It's more impressive with Brenda."

"Tell me something I don't know. Relax—a couple of gallons of this stuff after the show and a good night's sleep and Brenda will be fine. Any TV trucks tonight?"

"Not a one."

"God damn them. I sent every TV station in Chicago a set of free tickets and a press packet. They could at least show up."

Sean tasted the dinosaur medicine and made a face. "Say, Grandpa: there's a bunch of scientists here—at the museums and the colleges and stuff. Maybe you could ask them for advice about Brenda."

"No! No scientists! They're all like *that* with those crooks at the Smithsonian." He waved his crossed fingers in Sean's face. "If they find out Brenda's sick, pretty soon we'll have Wildlife and Fisheries people all over us, checking up on how we're caring for these *endangered animals*. They've been trying to steal my herd since the sixties."

"But what if she doesn't get better?"

"She's gonna be fine. I know more about taking care of dinos than anyone else on Earth. Especially those pinheads at the Smithsonian. Have you seen Johnnie?"

"Not today."

"Go find him and make sure he's awake and in costume. Dumb sonofabitch needs to remember that this is a show and not his private tour of every piece of high-school tail in America."

Sean blushed at that. Johnnie was a couple of years older than he was, and his ability to talk to girls and persuade them to go back to his trailer inspired Sean's admiration and envy. Sean himself was kind of old-fashioned about girls, and his grandfather's strict curfew was actually something of a relief.

The show began on time—Sean's grandfather had a horror of starting

late, especially on opening night. At the stroke of six the speaker system kicked in with “Dinosaur Train” and the animals began their parade into the floodlit space between the bleachers.

First came the trikes, Tina and Tony, followed by last year’s hatchlings, now three feet high at the shoulder and utterly adorable. Then the three hadrosaurs with streamers fluttering from their crests and girls in leopard-skin bikinis riding on their backs. Then Andrew the ankylosaur, escorted by four trainers with electric prods. Alice the allosaur showing her genuinely terrifying teeth—Grandfather refused to muzzle her for the show, instead making sure to feed her fifty pounds of dog chow and butcher’s offal half an hour before showtime; the chief problem was keeping her awake.

Johnnie the ringmaster announced them as they entered. Then the lights dimmed and the music switched to *Also Sprach Zarathustra*. “And finally, prepare yourselves to be astonished, prepare to be struck with awe, as the Sullivan Dinosaur Show is proud to present! Our star attraction! The largest creature ever to walk the Earth! The Eighth Wonder of the World! BRENDA the BRACHIOSAURUS!”

Sean could feel how slowly Brenda was moving. It wasn’t even her usual walking gait—Grandpa and the other trainers had to nudge each foot along to keep her going. It seemed to take forever for her to move into the arena. When her front foot hit the spray-painted mark on the concrete, Sean flipped the switch on her caparison and Brenda blazed with a thousand green and white bulbs. The crowd cheered, small children cried, and the show began.

Back in the Thirties, all Grandpa had needed to do was let people look at his dinos. By the Fifties he added some circus acts, and now in 1980 the show included a laser light display, disco music, a man in an explorer costume doing magic tricks while riding one of the triceratopses, a dance number by the girls, a motorcycle jump over five dinosaurs, and the baby trikes racing around a fenced track to the tune of a speeded-up *William Tell Overture*.

Amid all the glitz the dinos still did their turns; the hadrosaurs could do half a dozen stunts. An alert viewer would have noticed that the ankylosaur and the allosaur just stood around tethered to ringbolts set in the pavement. Alice was known to snap at fast-moving mammals even when she did have a full belly, and Andy was so damned stupid that standing in one place eating heads of cabbage was his best trick.

Brenda normally took a major part in the show. Jackie would pirouette atop her head forty feet above the ground, and Grandpa would pick children from the audience to come down and form a human chain as long as Brenda. Tonight she just stood at one end of the arena, looming impressively but doing nothing.

Sullivan's Dinosaur performances always ended with a chorus of dino music from the hadros, trikes, and Brenda. Tonight Mr. Duckbill and his two females gave their glorious French horn calls while Tony and Tina made their odd high-pitched cries. But the bone-vibrating infrasound of Brenda's song was missing. Only when the dinos fell silent and the applause swelled did she bend her long neck forward from the shoulder, as if taking a bow. Then she vomited twenty gallons of Dr. Pepper and cooked lettuce onto the pavement.

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Brenda was no better the next morning. Grandpa Sullivan and two of the other trainers were trying to get her to drink more potion as Sean waited by the gate for his father. It was far too late to call and cancel, and it would make everything more complicated if his father knew the dinosaur was sick. So when the beige copcar slowed to turn in at the gate, Sean ran out and got the door open before his father could even pull off the paved road.

"Restaurant okay? It's too far to go all the way back to my place. There's a pretty good cafeteria up on Fifty-Third." He got the car back into traffic, then asked, "How's the boss?"

"He's okay."

"Seriously? I worry about him. He's too old to be on the road in this heat."

"Nobody else can run the show."

"Because his only son shirked his duty and ran off to be an electronics engineer. I've heard it. Which reminds me—what colleges are you applying to?"

"I'm not going to college," said Sean.

"Oh, really? Does your mother know about this?"

"She says I should trust my heart."

His father made a noise. “How about using your head? What’ll you do if you don’t go to college?”

“I want to work at the Dino Park. Grandpa says I can start full-time next summer.”

“So you can spend the rest of your life shoveling hadrosaur manure and eating State Fair midway food? That’s crazy, Sean.”

“No it isn’t. It’s, like, the family business.”

“You’ve been listening to your grandfather too much.” They left the car in a pay lot and walked to the Valois Cafeteria. A large sign proclaimed see your food! Even though they were early for lunch, the place was already filling up, and they had to wait holding their trays while a table full of Chicago police finished up.

His father didn’t try to compete with a teenage appetite, and ate his own meal silently while Sean tore through a big plate of chicken pot pie, macaroni, and beet salad. But just when Sean began to hope they could let the subject drop, his father resumed the conversation. “Look, Sean, this isn’t an either-or choice. If you go to college you’ll have more options. You might find something else you want to do.”

“I know what I want to do! I want to work with the dinos! And when I’ve learned enough I can take over running things and Grandpa can retire. That’s a pretty good career right there.”

“I read the business pages—ask your grandfather how long he’s going to be able to afford to go on touring. This could be the last year. The railroads are all going containerized. You’ll be stuck at the park in Florida, running a glorified alligator farm.”

“Well, so what? I’ll keep it going somehow. I can carry on the tradition. Expand the park, maybe. Dinosaurs live a long time—maybe my grandkids will take over when I get too old.”

His father finished a piece of pie, and when he spoke again his voice was softer. “Sean, everything changes. Even the dinos. Sure, Brenda could live another hundred years—or she could drop dead tomorrow. You weren’t born when Bob died. He was about a year old when your grandfather bought him, already as big as a cow. God, he was a magnificent animal. At the end he was bigger than Brenda. Eighty tons and fifty feet high at the top

of his head.”

“I saw some of the movies Grandpa made.”

“They don’t do Bob justice. When he gave his call it made windows rattle all over the county. He was the biggest animal on Earth. And then some damned drunk idiot in Cleveland threw a firecracker at his feet during the parade. Bob bolted, tripped over a car, and fell down. Broke his leg and six ribs. Did your grandfather ever tell you about trying to move Bob? That was a nightmare. We had four cranes for the job, and when they lifted him he screamed. You’ve never heard a dino scream. It was like the door to Hell opened up.”

Sean shuddered.

“Your grandfather and I rode in the boxcar with Bob all the way back to Florida, but we knew he was dying. Pneumonia. When we got back to the Dinosaur Park there were three carloads of biologists from Yale and the Smithsonian waiting for us. Your grandfather wanted to chase them off, but I talked him into letting them help. They tried antibiotics—they were still new back then and nobody knew the right dosage for a full-grown bull brachiosaurus.”

“Grandpa says they were just waiting to cut him up.”

“Oh, probably they were. Nobody had ever gotten the chance to dissect a large sauropod. Tengkorak Island was already off-limits by then, so Brenda and Bob were the only brachiosaurs in captivity. The scientists were desperate to get samples before Bob spoiled. It was pretty gruesome. They used big butcher knives and pruning saws to cut through Bob’s hide. I remember there was one guy over in the corner with an electric grindstone, just sharpening knives all night while they worked. Everybody went for a different piece, depending on their scientific specialty. They were cutting out organs and muscles and dropping them in big tubs of iced formaldehyde. Even so, the liver and intestines rotted before they could get them out. You never smelled anything so bad in your life.”

“Was the creek really full of blood?”

“It was everywhere. Tons of blood—literally, tons of it. All around the carcass the ground turned to red mud a foot deep. After the museum people got the bones cut free there was nothing but a big pile of rotting meat, so we just got a couple of truckloads of fill dirt and some sod and

buried him where he was. Your grandfather kept some of the hide—I remember he tried to find someone interested in making dinosaur-skin boots or bags, but it was too thick for that. We wound up slicing it into rectangles and silk-screening a picture of Bob onto each one. There’s probably still a couple of hundred in one of the old trailers.”

Sean looked at the wall clock. “I need to get back.”

“Sure. Let’s go.”

Sean spent part of the next morning standing on a ladder, running a metal detector over Brenda’s abdomen to see if she’d swallowed anything.

“Any luck?” his grandfather called up.

“Nothing. Can this really work through something as big as her?”

“Oh, sure. Why do you think I have it? Happens once or twice on each tour—dino gets a pop top or a bucket handle or something. Sometimes some of these no-good kids will put a nail or a razor blade in an apple.”

“So what do we do if I find anything?”

“If it’s at the crop or in the gullet, get her to throw up again until it comes out. If it’s back in the intestines—get the hose.”

“What?”

“Give her an enema! Flush out her insides!”

“Jesus,” said Sean.

It took him more than an hour to work the metal detector over both sides of Brenda, and the search turned up nothing. They put the ladder away, then Grandpa Sullivan led Sean back to the trailer and got out the big pot.

“C’mere and help me with this batch. If you’re going to be taking care of the dinos, you’d better know how to make it.”

“She just threw it up last time. We’ve got to do something, Grandpa.”

“I am doing something. This’ll fix her right up. It’s never failed.”

“Maybe she’s got an infection, or she’s egg-bound, or—”

“She passed an egg just the other day. Her chest sounds fine, her crap was normal before she quit eating, and her eyes are the right color.”

“Is there anyone you could get to help?” Sean was thinking of his father, but didn’t want to mention him directly.

His grandfather snorted. “I tried calling up some guys I know at Sinclair—figured maybe they could use a little nice publicity, helping save a sick dino. Ship her back to the Park and go on with the tour. Nothing. Cheap Mormon bastards. The ads with Bob and Brenda *made* that company. They’d be nothing but a two-bit gas station chain without Sullivan’s Dinosaurs. Hell, the stupid dino on their signs used to be *green*, for God’s sake!”

“What about—”

“No! I said no scientists and I mean no scientists. They don’t know squat anyway. Most of ‘em weren’t even born when Mr. Cooper went to Tengkorak. Now why don’t you stop yakking and help get this batch of tonic ready?”

So Sean helped chop lettuce and open Dr. Pepper cans while his grandfather stirred the mix. The matinee began at the stroke of noon, and this time Brenda vomited it all up as she made her entrance.

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Sean went to get takeout for the crew from a fried-chicken place in a scary-looking neighborhood at Halsted and 102nd Street. The chicken cooks and cashier were sealed off from the customers by inch-thick bulletproof plexiglass, and the food came through a kind of rotating airlock. While he was waiting for them to finish putting together fifty orders he dropped a quarter into the pay phone by the door.

“Dad?”

“Hello, Sean! I didn’t expect to hear from you so soon. Everything all right?”

“I’m not sure.” He looked around to see if anyone was listening. “The big girl is sick.”

“Brenda? How sick?”

“Hasn’t eaten or drunk anything since we got on the train in Saint Louis.”

“That doesn’t sound good. Has the boss been giving her that damned tonic?”

“She couldn’t keep it down.”

“Probably a mercy. He used to dose me with that when I was a kid. What can I do to help?”

“I don’t know. He won’t let me call anyone at the Field Museum because he’s afraid the Smithsonian people will hear about it and take the herd.”

“They wouldn’t know much anyway—the only dinos they’ve got are fossils. Other than your grandfather the only people who know much about keeping dinos healthy are the vets at the Smithsonian preserve at Front Royal, and the Disney people in Anaheim.”

“Do you have phone numbers for anyone?”

“I can get them.”

“I’ll call you back after tonight’s show.”

“Sean—if you’d like, I could make the calls and explain the problem. It would save trouble with your grandfather. He gave up on me when I realized I like designing circuits better than shoveling dino dung.”

Sean thought about it for a couple of seconds. “No, I’ll do it. If they’ve got any ideas I can try them out on Brenda.”

His father started to argue, then stopped himself. “Okay. Call me when you get the chance—don’t worry about waking me up.”

Sean ate fried chicken with the crew and helped get things ready for the evening show. His grandfather drafted him to help give Brenda an enema, but even after her colon was flushed out for half an hour she still wouldn’t eat.

Mike Sullivan was getting desperate. He kept Brenda out of that

evening's show and kept thumbing through his reference books—a very beat-up and much-annotated copy of *Reptile Keeper's Handbook* and a Depression-era WPA guide to chicken-raising. Sean even noticed a rosary on his grandfather's bunk when he went to the trailer to change for the show.

With no dinosaur to ride, Sean served as a spare trainer, feeding the ankylosaur cabbages during the show and trying not to spook the beast. He passed the time thinking about some of the things his father had said.

Did he really want to spend his life with the show? Most of the crew were short-timers, making one or two tours before moving on to something else. Johnnie the ringmaster was going back to college in the fall, with plans to go into television. There were a couple of veterinary students among the trainers, and all the laborers were only hired by the season anyway. Ironically, it was only the hard-bitten old carny types who came back every year.

Andy snuffled and Sean handed him another cabbage. He watched the beast take the whole thing into its mouth and chew on it like a baseball player with a wad of tobacco. This was the part he liked best—not the frantic activity of setup and breakdown, not the forced enthusiasm of the performance. Just being with the dinosaurs.

As soon as the beasts were secured for the night, Sean borrowed one of the pickup trucks and went in search of a pay phone. There was a single phone at the show site, a temporary line to the ticket office. When the office was closed, Grandpa unplugged the phone unit and kept it under his bunk. “Or else every deadbeat on the crew's going to be making long-distance calls on my nickel as soon as my back is turned.”

He wound up at an all-night currency exchange on King Drive, where he had to wait for a man to finish a long and apparently emotionally devastating conversation in Spanish before he could get at the pay phone. His father answered on the second ring.

“Okay, here's what I've got. These are reasonably current—I heard from the Smithsonian last year when they wanted to see about trading breeding stock. The boss wouldn't hear of it, of course. Got a pencil?”

Sean scribbled down names and phone numbers in a free souvenir dinosaur coloring book left over from the 1974 tour. “Okay, thanks. Do you think I should wait till tomorrow to call?”

“No, do it now. If Brenda’s not getting any better you don’t want to waste any more time.”

“Right. Thanks, Dad.”

“The boss is going to blow a fuse when he finds out about this, you know. If you need a place to stay give me a call.”

“Thanks.”

He changed a ten-dollar bill into quarters and made his first call: James O’Reilly, in Front Royal, Virginia. No answer. The next name had a phone number which was the same except for the last digit, so Sean figured these were all office numbers. He stared glumly at a poster warning of the dangers of catching herpes from unprotected sex, then fed his quarters back into the phone and called Information. There was a residential listing for a James O’Reilly in Front Royal. Was midnight too late to call someone at home? Probably.

He put more quarters in the phone and dialed the number. After the fifth ring he was sure it was too late, and was about to give up when a hoarse voice said “Hello?”

“Is this Dr. O’Reilly of the National Dinosaur Center?”

“Yes, who is this?”

“I’m sorry to wake you. My name’s Sean Sullivan. I’m with the Sullivan Dinosaur show. We’ve been having some trouble with our sauropod and I was wondering if you’ve seen anything like this in your herd.”

“Just a moment.” He could hear a lamp click on and a sleepy protest from someone in the background at the other end. “Your sauropod?”

“A brachiosaurus. Brenda the brachiosaurus. She’s forty-seven years old, one of the original batch from Tengkorak Island. We’re on tour in Chicago right now, and for the past couple of days she’s been sick. She won’t eat or drink anything, and just stands there. She throws up everything we give her. We’ve already checked for any foreign objects in her gut, and she’s not egg-bound.” He tried to keep from sounding scared and desperate.

“Could be a virus. They can jump from one species to another, and in their native habitat dinosaurs don’t get exposed to many diseases. We think

that's one reason for the population decline on Tengkorak since the war. Especially from birds—was your animal at a state fair when she got sick?"

"No, we were in Saint Louis, at the speedway. The fair circuit doesn't really begin for another month."

"It might even be a human virus, then."

"Yeah, well, I'm not really worried about where she got it. I'd like to know what I can do to help her get better. She's not drinking and I'm afraid she's going to get dehydrated or something."

"That is a concern, although fortunately dinosaurs seem to be able to go without drinking much longer than most mammals."

"Dr. O'Reilly, I know all that. My family's been raising dinosaurs for fifty years." There was a clicking noise on the line and Sean fed a couple more quarters into the phone. "Have you seen anything like this at NDC, and what works to treat it?"

"Let me consult with the rest of the veterinary staff and see what we can come up with. I'll call you in the morning—what would be a good time?"

"Any time after nine." Sean gave him the ticket office number. "Be sure to ask for Sean."

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He hardly slept that night, and gave up trying by six. To pass the time he went on the big early-morning coffee-and-donut run, then did his usual chores—clearing dung with the little Cat mini-loader, and putting out fresh bales of fodder for the animals. The dinos didn't eat grass or grains, so the Sullivan show bought up waste produce from supermarkets, bags of peat moss, truckloads of pine needles, and whatever leafy odds and ends the advance men could find at garden shops and landscaping companies.

Once the ticket office opened he spent as much time as possible loitering nearby, but his grandfather didn't like loiterers on his crew, even family members who weren't getting paid. So Sean was packed off to help clean up the concession area, and he was still scraping gum off the pavement when he heard someone call his name.

He sprinted back to the ticket office, but wasn't fast enough. When Sean reached the door of the trailer his grandfather was already on the

phone. “Sean Sullivan? Who? O’Reilly? No, this is *Michael* Sullivan, the owner, and—”

“That’s for me, Grandpa,” said Sean.

His grandfather passed him the receiver but stood there glaring while Sean took the call.

“It sounds as if your sauropod has a spleen infection. At least, the symptoms match what the Disney iguanodons had last spring. They lost one animal, but the rest responded well to Furazolidone injections.”

“That’s a medicine?”

“An antibiotic.”

“Would it be available around here?”

“Chicago? Certainly. But if you’re concerned about that I could send you some from our supply. That brachiosaur of yours is too important an animal to risk.”

“That would be great, but—I don’t know if we can afford it.”

“Consider it a gift. I’ll send out the Furazolidone by Federal Express; can you pick it up at the Field Museum?”

“Absolutely,” said Sean.

“Good. Oh, and I’d like to arrange for someone to stop by for a follow-up. What’s your tour schedule?”

Sean gave him a list of cities and dates and hung up the phone, then spoke to his grandfather clearly and calmly. “That was Dr. O’Reilly at the Smithsonian. They think Brenda’s got a spleen infection which killed one of the Disney herd last year. He’s sending out some antibiotics.”

Sean hadn’t really noticed how much taller than his grandfather he was until the old man stood face-to-face with him. Mike’s fists were clenched and his face was bright red. “You dumb son of a bitch! What the hell were you thinking? Those bastards are going to close us down! Take the dinos! How could you be so stupid?”

“Brenda’s sick, Grandpa. Your home remedies weren’t working.”

Sean kept his voice even.

That only seemed to make his grandfather angrier. “You don’t know anything! If you take their charity you owe them something!”

“He didn’t want anything. They’re just going to send someone out to follow up.”

“Follow up! I built this show with my own two hands and now you’re giving it away—those bastards are going to take us over bit by bit. Whose side are you on?”

“I’m on Brenda’s side! I’m not going to let her die just because you’re too stubborn to ask for help!”

“This is still my God-damned show, and no good-for-nothing kid is going to tell me what to do!”

“You’re not going to *have* a show if Brenda dies!”

“Get out of here. You’re off the show. If you’re not off these premises in ten minutes I’ll get some of the boys to throw you out.”

* * * *

Sean dragged his suitcase to a gas station on King Drive and called his father. He considered trying to go it alone, working odd jobs to pay for a bus ticket, that kind of thing, but it was hot and he only had eleven dollars in his pocket.

On the drive back to the northwest suburbs he related what had happened. When he finished, his father asked him, “So now what?”

“I don’t know. I guess I have to go home now.”

“What about Brenda?”

“He’s probably going to keep giving her that stupid tonic until she collapses.”

“What about the antibiotics?”

“I’m supposed to pick them up tomorrow morning at the museum. But what good will that do if I’m barred from the show?”

“I’ll get you in; don’t worry.”

* * * *

Almost exactly twenty-four hours later, Sean sat in the back seat of his father’s car as they approached the gate of the show site. Beside him on the seat were an insulated cooler of antibiotics and a box of cattle syringes newly bought at a veterinary supply store. Sean had been amused to see that they sold Furazolidone as well. “Probably cheaper than what the Smithsonian pays, too,” his father had commented.

Barry was working the front gate, and unlocked it as soon as he recognized Sean’s father. He came over to the driver’s side as the window slid down. “Hey, Pat. You know the boss doesn’t want that one coming back.”

“The boss doesn’t know what he’s talking about, and I’m going to tell him that. We’ve got medicine here for the big girl.”

Barry took off his cap and wiped his bare head. “Tell you what: I’m gonna go take a leak now and if you sneak in it’s your fault, okay?”

“Thanks, Barry.”

The car bumped over the cracked pavement to Brenda’s pen. Grandpa and the other trainers were there draping wet towels on Brenda’s neck. He saw them pull up but ignored them until they were standing at the foot of his ladder.

“I see a couple of trespassers,” he said loudly. “They’d better get off the premises before I call the police.”

“Dad, we’ve got the antibiotics for Brenda,” said Sean’s father. “You and the others had better get clear; she could startle when we give her the shot.”

“I don’t think you heard me,” said Grandpa.

Sean’s father ignored him. “The inside of the leg, as high up as you can reach. Just jam it in as fast as you can.”

Sean took the big syringe and approached Brenda. His grandfather bellowed at the other trainers, then began climbing down when nobody

moved to do anything.

Sean stood underneath Brenda. Her immense rib cage was just above his head, flexing slowly with each breath. He went to her left front leg so he could climb up on the shackle for a little extra height.

A hand grabbed his arm. It was his grandfather. "I told you to leave!"

"This is for Brenda, Grandpa."

His grandfather made a grab for the syringe, but then he in turn was grappled from behind by Sean's father. Sean pulled free and stabbed the syringe into Brenda's leg just behind the knee. He shoved the plunger home and pulled out the needle.

"There!" he said. "The note says two shots a day for the next two weeks."

Sean's father let go of his grandfather and the three of them stood there a moment. Mike Sullivan glared at the two of them. Finally he took a deep breath. "Patrick, don't you ever lay hands on me again until you're dressing my corpse."

"As long as you leave my son alone."

"Now I want the two of you to get out."

"Brenda needs the medicine, Grandpa."

The old man breathed heavily for a moment, then shook his head. He wasn't red-faced any more; he looked tired and sad. "Oh, hell. Leave it. I'll give her the shots. Twice a day?"

"Morning and night."

"I'll do it. Now get out of here. Don't come back."

* * * *

Sean and his father sat in the beige car and watched the Sullivan's Dinosaurs crew loading the train after the Sunday afternoon show. The locomotive was hooked up and idling, the boxcars packed, the trailers on the flatcars, and the smaller dinos in their stock cars. Grandpa led Brenda into her boxcar last of all. She still moved slowly, but finally she was in the

car with her food and water handy by her head. They could see her drinking as he latched the door.

The Dinosaur Train pulled out on the way to Milwaukee. Sean's dad waved goodbye to it. Sean slumped in the passenger seat until the train was out of sight.

On the drive to the bus station, he turned to his father. "I thought Grandpa would change his mind after we got the medicine."

"Because you were right? That's one thing he never forgives."

"*Never?*"

"Not anytime soon, that's for sure."

They drove in silence for a time, then Sean asked, "Is it too late for me to send in my application? To college?"

"I'm not sure. You might have to start classes in January. Changed your mind?"

"I want to talk to Dr. O'Reilly again. I want to find out what major would be best if I want to get a job at the Dinosaur Center. If Grandpa's right, they're going to need someone who knows how to take care of Brenda."