

## A Mid-Afternoon Nightmare

It began with a rhythmic shaking. Mentally, I cursed my dog thinking it was he who had jostled me from the depths of my afternoon slumber; a nap too delicious to awake from. I managed a soothing, *shhh*, to squelch his movement and pursue my slumber. However, the pulsing continued followed by, what I assumed to be, a rumble from the ground. My eyes opened with the realization of an Alaskan earthquake in occurrence. At any moment I expected my dog to commence his bark of disagreement with this destabilization of his world. No bark came. I sat up on my elbows to observe the tremors and became alarmed; my dog was absent from the bed and the room.

Odd. Where's Che? I wondered. Typical, I thought. Che, our friendly pit bull, loved kids, people, other dogs and eating poop. Known as "the garbage gut gluten", he could sniff out a freshly gutted ptarmigan from a half mile away and escape from his collar to feast upon the entrails, then recycle his stomach contents on the carpet at 2am. When excited, his high pitched bark irked your ears akin to the squeal of a poked pig.

The rhythmic pattern of this quake was unusual; nothing I could compare to the basic seismic waves I had learned in my college seismology class. Suddenly, the room became eerily still.

Where is *that* dog?

I called his name. No answer. Che, our brave guard dog, would bark the alarm at "intruders", then dash to safety. We'd usually find him panting and drooling on our bed as if to say, "I knew you guys had everything under control."

The floor began to shake again. This time, violently. I couldn't stand. As I swung my legs to the reverberating floor, the copy of Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's, *Lost World*, fell from my chest. It landed with a *thud* on my toe. "Ow!" I cried out to my darkened room.

Rubbing my throbbing digit, I again called out for Che. However, the response was not Che's familiar high-pitched yap. Instead, a deep basso grumble, more guttural growl, rolled across the exterior walls of the house. The swaying ceased - all went still.

In the dimness of the room I watched as the afternoon spring sunlight that seeped through the gaps of the blackout curtains was abruptly blotted out.

A cloud from a threatening thunderstorm? A fallen tree? My mind attempted to deduce what had caused the sudden darkness. It was then I noticed light continued to flow in around the curtain of the window on the opposite wall.

What is going on?

I rose and cautiously walked to the light, taking care not to injure other extremities. As I reached for the curtain a noise I could only identify as a loud, long and forceful exhalation shook my being. I froze.

What the . . .

My hair stood on end and my limbs refused to respond. There came a measured breathing, heavy and loud. I sensed something had to be quite large in order to produce sounds of

that magnitude. It was my curiosity which mustered my courage. I raised my hand to grasp and slowly drew the curtain back just far enough to expose an eerie scene.

The late May sunlight reflected off the remaining snowfields high on the peaks of the Chugach Range which rose across the valley. My lawn, fanned by the wind and now thick with growth, waved to me from below, beckoning to be mowed. I saw nothing unusual, except a shadow. It moved and a great darkness stretched from the corner of the house, spilling across the verdant green; its outline sharp, yet indistinguishable.

This is weird!

A loud, and what I can only describe as an angry snort, made me jump. I was on the second floor of the house and the ground lay twenty feet below. By the length of the shadow, I estimated the figure creating it must be at least that tall, or larger.

How crazy! I couldn't tell if I had said that out loud or simply thought it. My hand trembled and I released the curtain. My feet were rooted to the floor and my heart pounded as I listened to those steady breaths.

Where is that damn dog?

What a silly notion, as if my dog would have any impact on an entity that large. The entire situation was absurd. Yet, there I was. The sweat began to drip down the back of my neck and my heart throbbed. Frightened and confused, I rushed to the darkened window. I had to see what this *thing* was. I attempted a couple of deep breathes to gain some sort of composure and ever so carefully lifted enough material to peek through a slit. What I saw made my heart-rate quadruple. In terror, I saw it. I could not remove my eyes from the beast.

How do you describe the indescribable? I would have to have you locate the page from a pictorial depicting the world's largest known prehistoric carnivore, specifically, the Tyrannosaurus Rex, for a basic description. It stood less than ten feet from of me. Its massive head moved from side to side. Occasionally, it cocked this way and that, reminding me of my canary when he investigates something or food.

Thinking of my canary, I didn't hear him singing on the floor below me. This was not good.

Sunlight coruscated off greenish-grey, scale-like skin with an iridescent quality. I stared in awe at the rainbows that rippled with each movement of his mass. His shoulders, assuming it was a he, were just below the window's ledge - I estimated their height at least fifteen feet.

If he raises his head, his head will be at my level - "Lions and tigers and bears, oh my!"

It was then, he swung his head to the left and I caught a glimpse of an amber eye that swiveled in a deeply set socket. It reminded me of a searchlight as it sweeps through the darkness, a homing beacon. He bore a facial expression, yes, there was emotion carved into that prognathous face with eight-inch plus teeth, of a hunter intent on finding his quarry.

He did not see me from where I watched. That is, until that probing eye rotated almost 180 degrees to meet mine. I dropped the shade like I had been shot and jumped back. Once again, I froze. This time my heart was in my throat. If I had to cry for help or my dog, nothing would have escaped. In terror I watched as the shadow shifted behind the shade; I knew he was trying to see what was lurking behind it. I panicked and fled down the stairs to the great room.

Where was I going to go? Certainly not out the backdoor. Out the front? And, expose myself to a deadly hunting-machine? Not a good idea.

I chose to stay inside with something between him and myself. At any moment I expected he would use that mighty head of his as a battering-ram and come through the upper window. I pictured gnashing jaws reaching for a morsel. But, nothing happened. I ran to a corner of the kitchen where I would be hidden. From there, I had a clear view of his muscular legs and clawed feet as he passed by the backdoor window. As one foot moved, then the other, the ground trembled, rumbling like thunder.

Where's he going? My canary, Connie, sat passively on his perch looking like a yellow tennis ball ready to be served.

The monster moved to the front of the house with amazing agility. His shadow filled the room as this behemoth walked by the window above the sink, obscuring the sky. I stayed in hiding until my hiding was compromised by the large windows which rose from floor to ceiling comprising the front walls of the great room. Through these, one or both of those piercing amber orbs could easily spy me.

Behind the couch! I must crouch behind the couch! These shouts echoed inside my head and I ran to the couch, compressing my body against its back as best I could. I can't let him see me! If he can't see me, he can't get at me! This thought made me giggle. How absurd. He had the power to come through any part of the structure at any moment. Maybe he doesn't understand that. Maybe he lacks the reasoning skills to figure it out or maybe, just maybe, he hasn't seen me yet. At that rationalization, I let my guard down and sighed in relief. All went very still.

Just then, the canary tweeted. Like the calm before the storm or the stillness preceding a thunder clap, this beast from who-knows-where, released a tremendous bellow. That is when the earth vibrated and the house shuddered. I slapped my hands over my ears in response. Through

my muffling hands, I could hear the pop-crack of the windows in their frames. Yet, they held fast. Fortunately for me, my ears remained covered when he let out a second bellow. This time, the potted plant atop the china cabinet fell and smashed onto the wood floor and the entrapped teacups toppled over one another, threatening to shatter the glass door-fronts.

He heard the noise!

From my position, I saw his head swing round and aim the eye through the uppermost windows. The black hole that was his pupil, dilated and scanned.

What is he looking for? What is he after? What about the neighbors? Surely they see him too! I hope they're safe!

The canary chirped again and at that instant, he spotted me. I knew it when I saw that black hole constrict. With pin-point accuracy, it focused on me! Like the exceptional hunter he was, and me, the cowardly prey, screamed. Only, it was more like a squeak. Geez! I couldn't manage a decent scream. So, I ran. I did not have to turn and look; I felt his attention on me and now, and knew his intention. Through the kitchen and down the basement stairs I flew. I heard the great room walls and windows give way.

Che. Where was Che?

I couldn't worry about that stupid mutt right now. Not when I had a monster on my own tail. Oh no! Poor Connie! I thought of my little feathered friend, helpless in his cage. A curious question pop to mind, Who's side is he on, anyway? Aren't birds derived from . . .

Guilt flooded my emotions, how could I think of such a cold-hearted . . . That's when I heard Connie squawk and his cage clatter against something firm, *thump!* I hear the bird voice

his terror as the beast's tail hit "one out of the park" with Connie and his cage arcing high across the yard, landing hard and clattering into the neighbor's drive - bird and cage slightly dented.

Oh dear! I hope the floor joists hold!

Under that weight, what, four or five tons, or more? I prayed the floor above would hold fast. No sooner had I landed at the bottom of the stairs and scampered underneath them were my hopes dashed. The beams groaned, creaked and then splintered. Debris of wood, drywall, glass and remnants of what used to be a teacup collection showered around me. As the dust cleared, I made out the terrorizing spectacle of one, then two large-clawed-toed-feet, attached to two overgrown grey-green drumsticks.

Now what?

Those ominous feet and legs were planted in front of me and I listened in terror as the room above was being taken apart. I imagined that massive head swiping at the walls, ramming and smashing, and those hydraulic-like jaws and sharp teeth, ripping and shredding.

Was his tail inside or out?

Hysteria distorted my thinking. My attention came back to the gigantic feet as they began to stomp, crushing everything - two oversized pistons from a stamp mill.

Oh my God! He's stuck and he's trying to free himself!

Somehow, I felt that thought was my undoing for his head, like a giant hammer, crashed to my level. Dust and debris displaced the air. I took that opportunity to recede into the deepest and smallest area under the stairs. Again, in hope of evasion from this implausible monster.

No sunlight reached this area of my house and in the darkness, I fumbled my way into hiding. As I neared what I knew to be the farthest reaches, I bumped into something warm and furry.

Che! There you are, dumb dog.

In a silly way I felt relieved. At least I knew where he was and understood why he was here. He did not bother to acknowledge me for the staircase vibrated violently, sending us both scurrying further into our protective cavern. I felt him tremble as I pressed against him trying to make both of us as small a target as possible.

I felt a desert-like wind, acrid and lifeless, rush across my face accentuated with the strong odor of . . . death. He was coming. I closed my eyes.

Maybe, if he can't see us . . .

Came this thought through my blackness.

. . . if he just can't see us, maybe . . .

A rhythmic rocking brought me out of my afternoon sleep. I felt my dog's warm body pressing against my leg. A deep rumble escaped his throat and he released a reluctant bark. I opened one eye enough to see him give me an anxious glance and then spring off the bed and attempt to crawl his way underneath it.

"Shhh . . .," I consoled, "It's only an earthquake." My eyes flew open. Or, was it?