

## DAY OF THE BARNEY III: SPECTRE

=====  
Prologue  
=====

\* Earth, 65 million years ago, Mesozoic Period.

The air was moist and hot, titanic green plants rustling in the breeze. Primordial cries and calls filled the valley, as tall, lumbering behemoths nestled near the lake shore. At the water's edge, large clusters of crested reptiles knelt down to sample the lush cool grasses growing out of the water. Further away, upon the sloping crags and knolls, stood the flesh-eaters.

But one particular carnivore was not occupied with eating. Not for the moment, anyway. This particular creature, whom scientists eons later would label Tyrannosaurus Rex, was eyeing a small patch of earth very intently. Buried under the dirt rustled her hatchlings, cracking open their egg-casings and clawing for the open sky. There were about six in the litter, and as the last one struggled free of its shell, the mother dinosaur nodded intently, satisfied at their emergence. She instinctively lowered her head and sniffed each infant. The smell was fresh and healthy for all of them, but she hesitated.

The first five baby tyrannosaurs were lanky, scaly creatures with bright yellow eyes and mottled grey and green skin. The sixth was...different. The mother leaned closer, examining the last infant dinosaur with a suspicious gaze.

The tiny baby tyrannosaur stared back at her. She felt an instinctual loathing, but wasn't sure why. This particular newborn had definitely been hatched from her litter, but it had very little in common with the rest of its siblings.

It was purple.

The mother tyrannosaur reeled back, confused and afraid. The purple baby gurgled and smiled. She hesitantly approached it again. She then noticed that besides being purple, it was smooth, chubby, and had dead, empty eyes. And when it smiled, which was often, it had a sinister, threatening chuckle that startled her and the other newborn tyrannosaurs. The mother was struck with a sudden urge to crush the little beast under one of her heavy, taloned feet, but her mothering instinct kept her from doing so. At least for the moment.

\* \* \* \* \*

Under a sweltering sky filled with the fading rays of the sun and swarming pteryodactyls, the two giants roared and lunged at each other upon the marshy field. The tyrannosaurus rex kept herself away from the thick, knobby tail of the ankylosaurus, who squatted below her, wary of her massive jaws filled with jagged sharp teeth. Around the edges of the field, a

lone triceratops and a pack of lambeosauruses watched.

The battle had lasted for several hours, and both opponents were exhausted. The tyrannosaur realized that if she couldn't feed her children soon, they may starve or wind up devouring each other. With a final effort, she lunged towards the ankylosaur and snapped at its head.

The armored dinosaur turned away and slapped its hard, bony tail into the firm thigh of the flesh-eater. She growled in rage and whipped around toward the front of her opponent, her flesh sore and broken where it had been struck. She flung her powerful leg over the shell of the ankylosaur and clasped it over the edge, just above its hindquarters. She yanked it towards her, flipping the foe onto its back and knocking it breathless. It desperately flailed its thick stumpy legs in the air, trying to right itself upon the ground, but it was a futile effort. The next moment, the tyrannosaurus bore down upon the exposed underbelly of the ankylosaur and ripped out its entrails. In a spray of blood and bone, the tyrant lizard claimed her prey and roared in triumph. The sound echoed throughout the valley and hills, resounding her victory.

It was not much longer when she returned to her nest, dragging a large chunk of the ankylosaur's flesh towards her hatchlings. The baby tyrannosaurs chattered busily and scampered upon the bloodied morsel, and the sounds of their eating pleased the mother. Then she looked upon the purple one. It was not eating. Rather, it was staring blankly at her and smiling. She growled back as a retort, but it did not appear to phase the fat, stocky creature. She turned away and helped herself to the rest of the meat.

\* \* \* \* \*

At a neighboring nest, a styracosaur was facing a similar dilemma. Though she too had given birth to a fine litter of hatchlings, there was something odd and unsettling about one of them. It was a female creature, with starry blue eyes and a high, squeaky call. Unlike its siblings, it had smooth green skin and bright pink dots. It also walked about on its two hind legs, not on all fours like the rest of the family. It preened and giggled constantly, and all of the other babies in the litter ignored it, as if afraid. And while the styracosaur-mother had sharp, spiky horns, it noticed this one did not. In fact, she wasn't even sure it was of her kin.

She went about her way, the newborns following after her, munching on ferns and flowers. Other styracosaur in the herd raised their gaze at the family, then stared at the green, bubbly one at the end. They too, were sensing a great deal of discomfort and insecurity.

\* \* \* \* \*

Dawn rose and the mother-tyrannosaur rose from her slumber. Her gaze rested upon the litter. She noticed that many of the hatchlings were now able to run quite steadily through the dense brush and many snapped at the flies

and gnats that filled the dense air. She shifted her gaze uneasily upon the fat purple dinosaur, who sat on a rock, rocking back and forth, smiling serenely at the yellowish sky. She had noticed it had not even eaten once, but was still plump and growing rather rapidly. She began thinking more and more of plodding over and wrapping her jaws tightly around its firm belly, she found it easier to fight the maternal instinct given the loathsome nature of this purple miscreant. Had she not been staring so intently at the purple baby, she would have noticed a green, bubbly creature faintly resembling a styracosaur approaching the knoll.

The purple infant began giggling and smiling even more when the green dinosaur appeared alongside it. The mother tyrannosaurus reared back in alarm. The mother styracosaur, who had been searching for the baby green freak, came upon the scene and reacted likewise. As the two behemoths watched in rapt fascination, the purple and green dinosaur faced each other and began an odd call. It was a series of sounds, repeated over and over in a continuous rhythm, and as they continued, the two newborn creatures clasped their hands together and began swaying back and forth. A song and dance.

Moments later, the sky turned a turbulent red, and volcanoes began erupting with unbridled ferocity. Lava and smoke spewed into the sky. The ground shook, causing great cracks to emerge and forests were shattered into splinters. Cries of confused and frightened dinosaurs filled the air, and a tremendous heat began to build in harsh intensity.

The mother tyrannosaurus fought to approach the purple and green lizards. She was filled with an immediate desire to kill them and rip their flesh off of their skeletons. But as she struggled, she became aware of a more immediate menace and looked towards the sky...

Steadily approaching the earth blazed a gigantic, fiery orb. The light was blinding and the heat incredible as it broke the atmosphere, igniting it and causing a tremendous upheaval in the soft surface and rolling oceans. The next instant it exploded against the earth's fragile crust.

The tyrannosaurus was thrown off of her feet and she roared in fear and confusion. The entire valley was filled with the cries and howls of terrified and wounded dinosaurs, many who stampeded blindly into the center of the explosion, which had sent a billowing, rumbling column of smoke and fire into the violent sky. Great clouds of dust and debris began darkening the horizon, and as the tyrannosaurus struggled back to her feet, she noticed with great dismay her newborn children, dead on the ground. They had either been trampled to death by panicking herds or suffocated by the intense heat and debris. She bellowed in rage and despair, then fixed her gaze upon the purple and green dinosaurs below her. She lurched after them, but suddenly found herself gasping for air. Her lungs began to burn and swell from inhaling the hot dust and smoke, and within seconds the mighty giant fell to the ground and died.

By the end of the day an eerie silence had fallen upon the land. The sky was

a mosaic of blacks and blues, clouds rolling in fantastic patterns over the landscape. Dust and ash gently floated in filmy clouds upon the surface, lightly coating the dead and dying bodies of dinosaurs. The temperature had fallen rapidly and some of the marshes had begun to freeze over. A faint breeze whistled mournfully through the racked forests, and off in the distance an unusual sound was heard. At the edge of the valley two stocky figures waddled off into the distance, hand in hand, singing the very song that preceded the comet's impact....

I love you, you love me, we're a happy family...  
With a great big hug and kiss from me to you, won't  
you say you love me too?

=====  
Prologue, Part 2  
=====

\* Earth, Mediterranean Region, 19 A.D.

The little boy was temperamental, uncontrollable, and rash, thought the servant. It was hard to believe he could grow to become one of the Empire's leaders. How often the child would run about waving a toy sword, stomping about in his riding boots, ordering ridiculous commands at her and the others. And they once believed that he was a fine young man, a boy destined for greatness and leadership. But that was before the appearance of the so-called demigod, "Barnichus". After his arrival, the youth took on a more sinister, unbridled behaviour that the servant feared would cause great hardship for the people.

She quietly peered into the next room, to observe the boy playing with Barnichus, a fat, squalid, and purple beast loosely wrapped in a green toga. Since his mysterious arrival at the palace, the future emperor and the chubby monster had played for hours on end, singing mindless little tunes and performing perverted little dances. It was surely this creature, this demon-god, that had warped a promising youth into a future madman. It would weigh heavily upon Rome when this child took the throne.

"Dulcinus," whispered a fellow servant, "we must prepare for tonight's banquet at the throne room. The boy will be alright."

"I wish that were true, Nera," she replied. "but I have great fear for the empire. Ever since that Purple Beast arrived with his little green companion, I fear our precious Caligula has been corrupted ."

\* Southwestern Europe, late thirteenth century

The little boy was lonely, he watched the sailors unloading the boats from the distant countries. Various spices and metals were taken from the bellies of the great ships, and the child wondered if he would grow up to become a great sea-traveler. His thoughts were disoriented when a small, fuzzy rat

came scampering down the rampway towards him.

His father told him to kill any rat, since they ate precious grain and ruined various cargo with their foul droppings. The boy kept his eye on the rodent and grabbed a heavy stone off the ground. He raised it high above his head and-

"Now hold on there, little boy. Don't you know it's not nice to hurt small animals?"

The boy turned around, and saw an immense, grinning purple beast. Alongside stood a smaller, green dinosaur with thick lashes and pink dots.

"Who are you?" asked the child, lowering the stone.

"Our names aren't too important right now," giggled the dinosaur, "what is important is that you learn that all animals are special and can even make great pets!"

Suddenly the two creatures began singing a little tune about the love and affection a housepet can give, all the while dancing gleefully about the dock. The little boy looked on, entranced.

When they had finished, the little boy said, "I believe you two are right. I'm not going to kill this poor little rat. In fact, I'm going to sneak him into my house and feed him grain and milk!"

"Why that's wonderful!" bellowed the fat purple beast. "And as it gets older, it'll share love and affection for you, though not as much as I have for you. Let me sing another song for you, my little friend".

The boy listened on in rapt attention as the two dinosaurs sang:

I love you, you love me, we're a happy family....just collect  
more rats and give them a home, you'll find a love you've  
never known....

"I just loooovvveee little pets!" bubbled the smaller, green dinosaur, cradling her blanket. With that, she and the purple dinosaur leant down and hugged the little boy. They fondly waved good-bye and quickly disappeared behind the huge stacks of cargo.

The little boy picked up the rat, and several others on his way home. His heart was filled with joy and happiness, he hoped he would see the fat purple creature (was it a dragon, maybe?) again. When the boy got home, he crept to his room and let the rats loose upon his bedding. He immediately got bread and milk to feed them, and soon the small pack was gurgling happily, their scaly tails draped lazily over the boy's thigh. A moment later, the boy felt an itch. Did these rats have fleas? Or lice?

The Black Plague swept through Europe like wildfire that season. Hordes of

scaly rodents feasted upon the diseased corpses and countless millions died within a short period. It would become one of the greatest disasters in recorded history.

\* Northern Europe, early 20th century.

The corporal scrambled madly through the trenches, the Allied troops were closing in on his position. He had no weapon with which to defend himself, and most others from his regiment had already successfully retreated from the charge that threatened the entire encampment. Biplanes bearing the Allied insignia flew overhead, doing battle with triplanes emblazoned with the iron Cross. All signs showing that World War I was coming to a gradual end.

The corporal looked behind him. In the distance he could see dozens of olive-clad British soldiers filing through the trench. It was likely that he would be caught, possibly killed. Many Allies had a certain deal of resentment to unleash upon the Germans.

Suddenly, the corporal was lifted off his feet and yanked behind a collapsed munitions shed. He turned around and to his surprise saw a huge, stocky purple dinosaur smiling at him.

"Now just be quiet," whispered the blubbery beast, who was clad in a grey trench jacket and spiked helmet. "Follow me and I'll get you back to your regiment."

The astonished corporal nodded and followed the huge purple reptile. The two of them wandered through acres of barbed wire and foxholes, until they could hear the distinct rumblings of trucks and tanks in orderly retreat.

"There you go, friend!" said the dinosaur. "Here are your friends, pulling back to Germany. It's too bad that you have to be on the losing side".

"Maybe for now," grumbled the corporal. "But maybe one day I'll make the orders. My country is in ruins, but I'll bring it back on its feet and make those guilty pay for our suffering. We won't be beaten for very long".

"Well that's a wonderful attitude!" reeled the purple creature, exposing his clean, wide teeth. "You certainly are a good stuuupenndousss sport! I wish you luck, and want you to know I \_love\_ you." And with that, the purple beast hugged the corporal, who looked a bit uncomfortable with the gesture.

"By the way, who are you and why did you save me?" the moustached man asked.

"Private Barney at your command, sir!" chirped the dinosaur, snapping to attention and saluting. "I saved you because you are my special friend!"

"Thank you, Herr Barney," replied the corporal. "My name is Adolf Schicklgruber. But I have grown wary of that name. You may address me as

Adolf Hitler. And soon I will make my mark upon the world, I promise."

\* North-centralized Europe, early twentieth century

The little girl had known of the war for quite some time, sometimes she heard the distant buzz of bombers high overhead or saw the occasional flare in the distance. She was part of a big secret though, that she kept to herself and within the family. Well, actually there was someone else.

She had spent so many months in the upper attic, sheltered from the rest of the world and fleeing oppression. Yet it was a lonely existence, which is why she was so happy to have a magical visitor come to her recently. He was big, fat, purple, and always so cheerful, and the two spent many hours singing and dancing. But not too loudly, as they might be discovered. Occasionally he would bring his green companion, who talked like a three-year old and had a high, squeaky voice. Who ever they were, she was glad they were there to keep her company.

Just that night her fat dinosaur friend, Barney, had talked to her about secrets. Why was her existence so hidden from the rest of the world? She couldn't really tell him, only that this way she and her family were safe. He laughed and said friends never keep secrets from each other, especially when they really, really, really loved one another. Finally, she gave in and told him who she was, what their family was doing stored up in an attic, and what her hopes and desires were. He hugged her and thanked her for being so honest and open, and for the moment, she felt good too. But then he left shortly afterwards and hadn't been back since. That was just last night.

Suddenly, there came a pounding at the door. She was alarmed. Was it her purple friend? He had never approached from the attic entrance before. What was it and why were her parents so terrified? The door was suddenly kicked in, and a squad of black-uniformed men came in. Sirens rang from outside. The man in front, brandishing a 9mm luger and swastika said, "If it wasn't for our informant, we'd never have caught you miserable bunch!" He laughed cruelly at the little girl and dragged her downstairs.

Anne Frank and her family were seperated and shipped away from their native Holland. Anne was never seen again.

\* North American continent, later twentieth century

Kids nation-wide flocked to the TV screens and watched the premiere of a whole new PBS show, "Barney and Friends". The show peaked in ratings and millions poured in as children watched the antics of a fat, purple dinosaur named Barney and his squeaky, child-like green companion Baby Bop.

\* \* \* \* \*

Years later, Barney performs a live concert broadcast from Washington D.C.. During the show, he incites children everywhere to riot and kill any person

over the age of twelve. In the resulting holocaust, children become his unwitting servants and Barney reigns supreme from the former White House. Baby Bop is put in charge of overseeing the Purple One's secret nurseries, which breed deplorable mutant creatures known as the Loved Ones.

After several years of absolute rule and dominion, Barney and Baby Bop are killed by Jeremy Phillips and his sister, Fran. Both were respectively marked for execution and impregnation, following their thirteenth birthdays. Jeremy escaped his execution, rescued Fran, destroyed the nursery, and shot and killed Baby Bop. Fran killed Barney while saving her brother from his murderous talons. After the incidents, children and surviving adults reunite to refound civilization, completely free of the Great Purple Beast and his minions.

Or so they thought.

End of Prologue

## DAY OF THE BARNEY III: SPECTRE

### Chapter One: Fossils

\*\*\*\*\*

Jeremy Phillips sat back in his chair, feet propped upon the table, his eyes glued upon the news. On live TV police were busy lifting a colorful, drenched, serpentine creature out of the river. Upon resting the body upon the banks, one investigator lifted the creature's headpiece off, revealing the bloated and pale young man inside.

"This is Barbara Stanford coming to you live from the Potomac River, D.C. where police have just discovered the remains of Tony Lopez, found dead in the costume that made him famous to children all over the country. Known to many as "Derrick the Dragon", Lopez is the fourth kid's show emcee found murdered in the past five months..."

The phone rang. Jeremy's wife Lana lifted the receiver and handed it to him. They both knew who it was.

"Hello?" said Jeremy.

"Kee-risst! Jeremy, are you seeing what I'm seeing on TV right now?"

"As a matter of fact, Bill, I am. Four in five months. How's Reggie handling it?"

"He's pretty shaken, I mean, like, who wouldn't be? We're taping a show right now, I guess he's doing okay with the kids and all. How about coming down so we can talk after today's run?"



"Sure, I'll be there within the hour." He hung up and looked over at Lana. "Bill's running headless about this murder thing. I need to go down and keep him and Reggie calm. Tuck the kids in for me, will you hon?"

"No prob, dear," she replied, sitting up and straightening her blouse. "It's almost their bedtime anyway. She leant over and kissed him. "Don't be up too late, now."

"I'll try," he replied, and made his way out to the car. The station wagon sputtered and farted black smoke, then chugged its way down the quiet lane.

Jeremy Phillips had seen quite a few strange things in his thirty-four years. He had lived through the Age of Barney (a.k.a The Purple Holocaust), which he felt could prepare him for anything. Once he had found Lana, fathered two beautiful kids, and landed a job as a programming consultant for a childrens' television station, he thought he could put it all behind him. But he had an uneasy feeling something was afoot. He parked his car at the station and walked into Studio C, filming area for "Chester Owl and Friends".

Reggie was downing a glass of bourbon when Jeremy walked in, still wearing his owl costume. He looked up and mumbled a nervous hello and stared ahead at the wall. Bill, the director and co-producer of the show approached Jeremy.

"There are only so many more kid-show hosts in this town," began Bill. "If they don't catch who's responsible, Reggie may be next. Then what? No more Chester Owl and television grants!"

"Let's get him out of town for awhile," whispered Jeremy. "We can carry the ratings on a few weeks worth of reruns. Kids love Chester, they'll get along fine until he gets back."

Jeremy never thought he'd be consultant for a kid's show of all things. Not after the horror that the Purple One had brought upon the world. But then Jeremy had figured that the whole problem was not a kids' show, but how it was done. It was his idea to have the emcee be modeled after a real creature, not a mythical or extinct one. The owl symbolized wisdom, common sense, and most kids liked the feathery, wide-eyed features of Chester. But most importantly, Chester never made false gestures of love or unconditional acceptance. This set him apart distinctly from the Beast of Purple, who had used such gestures to sway and warp children's minds until they were programmed disciples. Not to mention Chester didn't giggle excessively, smile idiotically, or talk in a moronic fashion. It was these qualities that had gained "Chester Owl and his Friends" tremendous praise from critics and families alike.

But now the recent kid-show murders had put a damper on things. First victim was Melissa Mouse, who was found beaten to death under one of the prop pieces for her show. A few weeks later came Magical Merlin of the Wonder Universe, who was pushed down an elevator shaft in his own

apartment building. The last one before Derrick the Dragon was Doogie Dog, who had been run over consecutively by a heavy diesel truck. Who was doing this and why was anyone's guess, Jeremy was absolutely clueless.

Moments later they got Reggie into a van, the venerable owl was quite inebriated but insisted on driving home on his own. Jeremy demanded that he call upon getting home, then the next day they'd book him for a flight back home. As the van drove off, Jeremy and Bill became aware of someone else in the studio. They looked up and met the blistery gaze of Thorton Marshall, one of the creative consultants of "Chester" and the least liked employee of the staff.

"Take it easy now," he said with a mild sneer. He walked down the stairwell and fixed his thick glasses upon the two men. "I was just watching the great creative genius at work. Such concern you show for your employees, Mr. Phillips. Pity those other kid-show creatures didn't have you around, most may be alive today. But I imagine if you have the gall to blow away some fat purple dinosaur who never did you an ounce of harm I suppose-

"What the hell are you chiming on, Marshall?" said Bill, his wrinkled brow flashing red. "How many times do I have to tell you never to bring up that bloated sack of-

"Sorry, just forgot," smiled Marshall. "You know, Jeremy, there are quite a few people out there now who claim the so-called Great Act of Love and the Purple Holocaust never occurred. That it was all fabricated, and you are one of the biggest liars around."

"You are absolutely pathetic, Thorton," stammered Jeremy. "Get out now if you want to have an office tomorrow. One more word out of you and you can kiss your poorly-earned paycheck goodbye!" "Point taken, Mr. Phillips," said Marshall, backing towards the rear of the studio. "I don't know what made me say such terrible things." The next instant Thornton had gone downstairs.

"You gonna be okay, pal?" asked Bill, resting his hand on Jeremy's shoulder.

"I'm gonna be fine".

"Let's go grab a small bite and drink," suggested the older man, "then we'll call Reggie later on and see if he made it back okay." The two went outside and down to a roadside tavern.

\* \* \* \* \*

Thorton Marshall was by definition, a fanatic. Not drugs, not cars, not women, not even money. Though he was rich, he didn't exclaim his wealth upon such material items or possessions. Rather, he was an eclectic gatherer of forbidden objects, items that were banned or prohibited from cultured society. When he had heard his two co-workers leave, he scampered down to the vaults, where voice/retina access scanners opened up his private cache. He leeringly fingered the contents inside, and pressed them tightly against

his face and body in the darkness of the deserted studio. He lit an antique torch and looked the doors outside the vault. Again he cradled himself against the vault's contents...

A plush, purple Barney doll. A Baby Bop blanket. Several pirated Barney and Friends videos. A "Barney's Greatest Hit's" CD. Barney balloons, lunch boxes, tote bags (with the infamous lead paint), books, comics, figurines, party favors, and of course, the ever-lovin' Barney SONGBOOK and TAPE. He pulled out a recorder and placed the tape in. Syrupy, flimsy music chimed out of the speaker and flooded the vault...

I love you, you love me, we're a happy family, with a great  
big hug and kiss from me to you, won't you say you love me too?

"Yes, yes, oohhh Gooddddd, YES!! I love you Barney, I love youuuuu!!" squealed the man, reeling in orgasmic frenzy and sweating excessively. "Oh do I love you, let me love you for now and forever, my friend Barney, be mine, be mine forever!!"

The next instant, Thorton Marshall shrieked in ecstatic abandon and collapsed to the floor, unconscious.

\* \* \* \* \*

It wasn't until he saw passing motorists' amused expressions that Reggie realized he was still wearing Chester Owl's bodysuit. Damn, he thought, how embarrassing. Still, he was almost home and then he could let his bosses know he had made it home okay. In some ways he hoped the police could be more available, the idea of an armed patrol surrounding his house sounded comforting.

Suddenly, he felt the car lurch from under him, and he heard a tremendous hissing sound. The van fought him for control and weaved into a thick old tree by the side of the road. The collision shook Reggie out of the seat and onto the floor. When the dust cleared, he picked himself up and went out to review the damage. Both front tires where shredded to thick shards of rubber.

"Damn, damn, why now?" grumbled the emcee. As he was ready to start walking home, he saw a pair of headlights approaching in the distance.

Within seconds a huge purple van had pulled up alongside the wreck. There were two people (?) in the front, but it was so dark Reggie couldn't make out their features. The driver seemed to be pretty obese, though.

"My goodness, it appears that you're in a wreck!" said a low, dopey voice. It sounded faintly familiar to Reggie.

"Good drivers and passengers always wear their seat-belts!" giggled another voice. It was oddly familiar as well.

"Uh, hey, do I know you guys? Maybe you could give me a ride home or something?"

"Why, absolutely!" chirped the bigger passenger. "I sense you and I are going to be Special Friends. And do you know what I want to give you?"

"Uh, look man, all I want is a ride, I don't need any gifts," muttered Reggie, who was still trying to remember where he had heard that voice before.

"I want to give you a stuuuppppeennnddouuuss hug! Then we'll take you home, won't we?"

"Oh yes, I weally like to wide in cars!" squeaked the shadowy passenger.

"Oh cripes, let's just do it. Here's your hug and let's go..." the man walked over to the driver's side and leaned into the window. Fat purple arms enveloped him and Reggie caught a glimpse of gleaming, perfect white teeth. On the passenger's side beamed a pair of bright blue and starry eyes. Weren't there a couple of dinosaurs on television a long time ago who had-

"Oh God, let me go you fat purple bastard!"

The man was pulled in through the driver's window, his legs thrashed desperately against the door. His cries were quickly drowned out by the sound of ominous laughter and as the immense white jaws closed upon his head, all sound was drowned out as his skull was crushed and chewed to hard, grainy chunks. The two passengers feasted upon the dying man's twitching body, and were someone to observe from a safe distance, they might suspect they heard singing....

I love you, you love me, we're coming for Jeremy...it's been  
so long, I hope he doesn't mind, Barney has an axe to grind....

An hour later the purple van drove off into the night, leaving a puddle of blood and feathers upon the road. Meanwhile, up at the young man's house up the grade, a telephone was ringing into the dead silence.

## Chapter Two: Veil

\*\*\*\*\*

Jeremy Phillips and his co-worker Bill were shown the remains. Had it not been for the bloodied feathers and the wallet left behind, no one would be able to even remotely guess that they were of Reggie Middleton, formerly known as "Chester Owl". The two men stared at the grisly pile of flesh, speechless.

"It's like the poor fellow was chewed by some giant dog or something," said the coroner, replacing the sheet. "What we can't figure out is how the bites are so clean and sharp. When a dog or other animal devours food, the bites

are ragged, torn, and uneven. But not this one. In fact, the bites more closely remember those of a person with perfect teeth. But no one could have jaws as wide as that."

As Jeremy and Bill walked back to the car, Bill muttered, "It's over. No more Chester Owl, and probably no more kid shows for a long time. We can stand by reruns for awhile, but there's no denying the media will jump on this one. I've got a statement prepared already, it's just a matter of finding a respectable reporter who isn't going to have every family in America scared to death."

"It won't be hard, Reggie's death was the most horrendous," replied Jeremy, scratching his neck. "God, Bill, what kind of creature does a thing like that to a man? His head was chewed to bits, not even a full dental record could be obtained. We're dealing with a lethal maniac or deranged animal of some sort, and the police should be notified. How many kid-show emcees are left in the area?"

"About five more, assuming they still want to go on the air. There's Flubo the Clown, Ricky Rabbit, Sally Strawberry, the like. I think they're all pretty much into revised contract negotiations, bargaining for more security."

"You know, there was a time where a certain kid's show host would look great getting his skull broken and chewed up on the air."

"Only you were too young to know better," chuckled Bill. "Jeremy, how you survived that killer dino is beyond me. Then again, I'm glad I survived myself. However, what Marshall said yesterday is true, I'm afraid. There are some skeptics, all young and cocky as hell, who are saying the Purple Holocaust never occurred."

"I know," said Jeremy, unlocking the station wagon. "But that's the price for removing all evidence that it ever occurred. Every Barney song, video, toy, and suit has all been outlawed and burnt. We're not talking censorship, Bill, we're talking about keeping a lethal beast from Hell away from our children".

"I think Marshall would like to put the fat purple ass back on the tube," grumbled the older man, "his kind scares me. Where is he today anyway?"

\* \* \* \* \*

Thorton Marshall called the receptionist, and said he wasn't feeling right and would be gone all day. Actually, he was calling from the basement of the studio and hadn't felt better. Upon hanging up, he gleefully made his way back to his secret vault and foraged through his forbidden collection of Barney and Baby Bop paraphernalia.

He slid a copy of "Barney and Friends" into the VCR and watched enraptured for several hours. Occasionally he had to stop the tape as he would begin hyperventilating and spastically wriggle in perverse glee at the purple

dinosaur's antics. More than once he would wrap his arms around the television set and smother the screen with kisses, or he would caress his plush purple Barney doll softly and lovingly.

"Barney, Barney, oh my one and special friend Barney," cooed the middle-aged man, his thick glasses steaming over. His hot sweat drenched the little doll and he would teasingly wrap the Baby Bop blanket over its eyes, playing "peek-a-boo" for several hours more. Finally, once he had exhausted all possible yet unspeakable pleasures from the videos and doll, he collapsed upon the floor and eyed the tall wooden box in the corner.

It was time.

The man rose and began tearing away his clothes. Stripped bare, he flung himself towards the box and unlocked it. Upon seeing the contents the man sighed loudly then giggled. With a child's glee, he hurriedly slid into the Barney costume and donned the headpiece.

"Our fun and learning never ends!" he cackled.

\* \* \* \* \*

Lana sat on the couch, watching the news. The anchorwoman announced the death of Reggie Middleton, and the newscamera rudely focused in on the poor man's remains. Lana disgustedly turned away from the screen and decided it was time to check on her children, Stacy and Mark. She didn't know where Jeremy was, he had missed dinner and hadn't called to say where he would be. She checked her watch and decided it was time to put the kids to bed. Maybe afterwards she could call Jeremy's sister Fran and see if she knew what became of him.

\* \* \* \* \*

Fran sat before the gravestone and placed the flowers upon the cold, marbled stone. Jeremy had told her that one day she would have to get over it but she couldn't. She had hoped for so many years that they would find their parents alive and well following the Purple Holocaust, yet when the phone rang it wasn't them. It was the coroner who had discovered the remains in a destroyed section of Baltimore.

The couple had been shopping in a toy store when the Great Act of Love occurred. Packs of frenzied, mindless children had broken through the front doors and made off with every available Barney toy they could find. And, true to the spirit of the Great Act, they killed any adult they could lay their clutching hands on. All the coroner could say to console Fran and Jeremy was that it appeared to be quick. But she could never forgive herself for being so swayed by Barney, at least she was there to pull the trigger when Barney attempted to kill her brother. She could still feel the recoil of the pistol and the sight of the bullet disappearing between the fat reptile's shoulder blades.

She sat another moment in silence and made her way out of the cemetery. When she got back she could call her boyfriend, then maybe drop a line to

Jeremy and see how he was doing in light of the whole kid-show murders. The radio blared the violent and gruesome murder of Chester Owl, she wondered who would be so cruel and insane to do such a gruesome act.

\* \* \* \* \*

"I'm not sure if this is going to work, but it's worth a shot," said Bill, holding the recorder and portable television. He walked ahead of Jeremy as the two men made their way down to the vaults.

"The resolution on the players are pretty good, I think we stand a chance," answered Jeremy. "We gotta see what Marshall's been into down here, and I could care less about company privacy. He's up to something".

On Jeremy's cue, Bill turned on the television and the recorder. He hit "simultaneous play" for both machines and faced them towards the retina/voice access unit for the vault. Thorton Marshall's wiry, bespectacled face appeared on the screen, and the player muttered, "Thorton Marshall".

The two men held their breath. The access unit hummed and scanned the screen. It chirped and green lights began flickering. The next instant the vault door unbolted and slowly pried itself open.

"Hot damn!" whispered Bill. "I knew Marshall's video resume tape would have merit someday!"

Jeremy nodded in agreement and the two men stepped into the vault. Jeremy beamed the flashlight and stared aghast at what he saw. Bill gaped in disbelief himself.

Barney and Baby Bop paraphernalia littered the floor, covered the walls, and hung from the ceiling. Every available doll, book, toy, party favor, video, and clothing known in existence. In the center of this disorder stood a tall, empty box, it's latch undone and its contents...gone.

"That sick S.O.B," muttered Bill, "he's got a whole stockpile of Barney crap down here."

For Jeremy, it had been years since he last saw a Barney doll. The sight of it made him feel creepy and hollow inside. Just twenty years ago, he used to sleep with one just like it. Staring into its dead, evil eyes made him shudder. He picked it up and hurled it against the vault wall, where it bounced back upon the floor.

"Call the police," said Jeremy. "We've got a lunatic collecting forbidden material here."

\* \* \* \* \*

Lana looked back in the bedroom. Stacy and Mark were fast asleep, tucked firmly into their beds. When Stacy turned seven next year, she'd get her own

bedroom. Mark, who was five, would probably like the idea. They were beautiful children, she thought Jeremy had done a great job being a father for them. She blew the two children a kiss and went downstairs to make herself some dinner and watch TV.

Moments later, the children were awakened by a curious scratching at the window. In the faint moonlight they could see a curious silhouette pawing at the latch. The two kids stared at each other for a moment, then steadily approached the figure. Upon a closer look, they saw it was a fat, smiling, purple dinosaur. It was smearing blood upon the glass.

### Chapter 3: Masquerade

=====

When Jeremy returned home, the lawn was dotted with blaring, flashing police cars. Investigators were combing the yard and surrounding area, making out what they could in the harsh glare of strobe-lights and high-beams. Lana was inside, talking to the chief investigator. Jeremy came in and embraced her, she was shaking and her face was wet with tears.

"It happened sometime in the last hour," she stammered, "go up there Jeremy, tell me what you think..."

Jeremy slipped past the flimsy tape barricade at the foot of the stairs and went up into his children's bedroom. A few photographers were just leaving, having shot a few good rolls of film. Jeremy surveyed the scene, dumbfounded and afraid.

Blood was spattered against the window, thick, scabby prints impressed upon the glass. No breaks, however, it seemed that the window (which was always kept closed at night) had been opened voluntarily, not forced. There didn't appear to be any signs of struggle, though the blood was evident of some foul play. And then, as Jeremy's eyes fell upon the beds, he hesitated, then shuddered. He backed away from the object propped against the pillow, aghast. He left the room, never lifting his gaze off the hellish figure that was left behind, either as a message, maybe a warning.

It was a Barney doll.

\* \* \* \* \*

"Mr. and Mrs. Phillips, I know things don't look exactly bright at this moment, but I have reason to suspect your children may be unharmed", said Chief Davies. He scrunched his brow and adjusted his glasses. "The blood found on the window was smeared on the \_outside\_, and our lab techs just finished analyzing it. It doesn't match the blood types of your kids. Rather, it matches that of Glenda Pattikin, also known to her viewers as "Melissa Mouse". She was found dead tonight in her studio, bit in half at the waist. The time of death was about a full hour before your kids disappeared."



"Meaning that who ever is killing the kid-show emcees is now kidnapping children?" asked Lana.

"It would appear that way. The only real connection is that Jeremy here is a consultant for children's programming, maybe it's a statment of some sort. But to date, we've not received any calls or messages demanding ransom or making any clear declarations. But rest assured you two, the whole force is out tonight coming the grounds."

"There...there was a doll left at the scene," said Jeremy, still feeling uneasy.

"A Barney doll, yes, I saw that," said Davies. "I understand you are the one who liberated the children during the Purple Holocaust?"

"Yes, my sister and I pretty much killed Barney and helped reunite the children and adults. I think who ever did this has it in for me because of that. Earlier my friend Bill and I ran across some Barney and Baby Bop memorabilia in one of my employee's personal vaults. Name was Thorton Marshall. Any word?"

"We got your call and sent out an APB on the man, but we haven't turned up anything. Reasonable to guess that this man may be the killer, though nothing's circumstantial. Do I understand right that you saw an empty box in the fault?"

"Yes, right in the center of the floor. Nothing in it, I don't know what he'd have in there."

"My hunch is that Mr. Marshall had a costume in there. If he was a Barney-fanatic, enough to keep practically every toy, book, and CD there, chances look good he'd have a costume as well. If he's not parading around in a purple lizard suit, he may be dressed up as Baby Bop. I'll call dispatch right now and alert the force."

\* \* \* \* \*

When Fran heard the news, she left her dwelling immediately. She didn't want to be left alone, and terrifying thoughts swelled back in her head. Visions of Barney and Baby Bop, the hordes of scampering, blubbery Loved Ones, the murder of thousands of adults....

She stepped on the accelerator and made her way toward Jeremy and Lana's house.

It was only a few blocks later that something caught her eye. As she waited for the green light at the intersection, she saw something large and puffy dancing in the city park. At first she couldn't tell what it was, but as it passed under a dim streetlight, it's fat purple body was perfectly illuminated and Fran felt the blood pumping through her temples. She slammed the pedal against the floor and spun the car after the big bloated reptile.

The car knocked trash cans and small bushes into the air, and the vehicle rocked and swayed over the uneven ground. It wasn't until her headlights were right on the creature's back that he seemed to notice her. Suddenly the chubby dinosaur screamed in terror and began running away. His fat, stocky legs could only carry him so far however....

"Eat steel you worthless slab of purple lard!!" screamed Fran, as the plump lizard bounced off of her fender, smacking into a tree. She slowed down, threw the car into reverse, and backed over him again for good measure. Seeing that her quarry was knocked senseless, she stopped the vehicle and secured a crowbar from the trunk. She approached the groaning dinosaur steadily and cautiously, brandishing the heavy iron bar before her. "So, Mr. Happy-saur, where's my niece and nephew? Why did you kidnap them, huh?"

The fat purple creature coughed and wheezed, it had inhaled a lot of dust and was bleeding at the mouth. Then, to Fran's surprise, its stocky purple arms removed its head and only then did she realize it was a costume...

Thorton Marshall looked back at her through thick, sweaty lenses, rolled his eyes, and collapsed upon the ground, unconscious.

"Oh my God," Fran whispered, leaning over to examine the frail man. She checked his pulse. Steady, but he may need some immediate attention.

"Why Fran, don't you know it's not nice to run over people, especially if they resemble your old pal, Barney?"

Fran froze. The voice had come from behind her. So clear, so close, so very familiar...

"Mean, mean, Fran! Wun over nice helpless man in fun Barney-costume! Bad as brother! Mean, mean, Fran!" scowled a squeaky voice, also from behind, also as familiar.

Fran leapt to her feet and tried to escape, but only after a few steps she felt a heavy blow against the back of her head. She saw lights flash and flicker before her eyes, then her head hit the grassy earth. In a roar of demonic laughter, the world turned black.

\* \* \* \* \*

Jeremy was feeling panicky. He was unable to reach Fran, and no one was answering calls at the studio. No one had called from the police, meaning Thorton Marshall had not yet been found. Lana was in bed, sleeping off a tranquilizer. Here he sat alone, fidgeting and restless, waiting for a call or visitor. He decided to go into the basement and fetch himself a cold beer out of the cooler.

He went down the creaky wooden steps and turned on the light. He pulled open the cooler door and pulled out a frosty, wet can of beer and popped it open.

As he guzzled the frothy cold brew, he suddenly became aware of a presence in the basement with him. He paused and listened.

"What has befallen the Great Liberator?" said a raspy, almost scratchy voice.

Jeremy spun around and faced a creature, perched upon a cluttered old card table. It stood about four feet tall, had light, scaly skin and fine serrated teeth. Its appearance was reptilian, though its overall shape was man-like. It wore a moth-eaten, green and purple robe and wielded a staff emblazoned with amethyst and emerald gemstones. It scrutinized the human with piercing yellow eyes. A thin, wispy tail rolled back and forth behind it. Fine silvery hairs trailed down the back of its head and neck.

Jeremy sucked in his breath. For the first time in twenty years, he was face to face with a Loved One.

#### Chapter Four: Remnants

-----

The two beings eyed each other suspiciously for several moments. The air was filled with an uncomfortable silence, one that grew increasingly unsettling. Jeremy had never seen a Loved One who looked so tall, so lizard-like, so..... ..stately. Had he been a young man of thirteen again, he most likely would run away or try to kill the beast before him. But there he was, unsure of himself. It was as if he knew the creature somehow.

The Loved One sensed his hesitation. "Jeremy Phillips, the Great Liberator, freer of children and destroyer of Barney's First Incarnation. You do not know me, but I have known you for quite some time." The creature's yellow eyes narrowed, the black crescents adjusting to the light. " I am known as Maca'hzar, Acolyte of the Underworld. What your kind refer to as sewers and tunnels, basically. "

"Where are my children, and what have you done to them? Tell me, or I can kill you here and now!" demanded Jeremy.

The Loved One scowled at the threat, and scratched his chin with thin, scaly fingers. "I could've killed you anytime. You and your whole family if I desired. I've watched you for years, Jeremy Phillips, I know many things about yourself but have always let you live untouched, in peace. And now you would threaten the wisest and most powerful of the Loved Ones? Were I the Purple Beast himself, you'd be dead long ago."

"You speak," said Jeremy, who had just observed the creature's ability, " you speak English, and fluently. No other Loved One has done that."

"By definition I am a freak, a rare exception to my kind. My abilities are far above most others of my race, but I didn't come to talk about my traits with you."

"Alright then," Jeremy said resignedly, "what does your master want and will he let me have my children back?"

Maca'hzar chuckled a deep, throaty laugh, then fixed his gaze back into Jeremy's strained eyes. "I am not servant to anyone, especially the Beast of Purple. I am not here to represent him, only myself. We had, say, a disagreement some time ago, and I have been cast out from his rule ever since. Rather, I am here to warn you, Jeremy Phillips, of the impending doom that awaits you."

Jeremy looked back at the Loved One in surprise. For some inexplicable reason, he could not bring himself to disbelieve the scaly, razor-toothed creature. He listened with rapt attention.

"Barney is back, Jeremy. He has your children and your sister. Baby Bop has returned as well, and the two of them are back for your blood. Barney is immortal, he can never be permanently destroyed. His life essence is that of the most pure, unrefined evil in the universe, there is no existence outside of that. But, there are ways to defeat him."

"I don't understand you."

Maca'hzar reached into the folds of his tattered robe and produced a dull, jagged shard that looked like stone. One side was smooth and marbled, the other was dull and rippled. He placed it into Jeremy's hand, and closed the human's hand around it tightly. "For sixteen nights I prayed and meditated by the light of the moon, burning ancient roots and oils, awaiting an answer. The message I give to you, Jeremy, came in a dream I had the sixteenth night."

The Loved One leant over to Jeremy, and placed his scaly, reptilian hands over his temples. His cold reptilian eyes burned into Jeremy's, and the creature hoarsely whispered, "The mother shall break the cradle".

Jeremy stood in dumbfounded silence. Maca'hzar smiled, exposing a thin line of yellow, jagged teeth. He made his way off of the table and began shuffling into the darker corners of the basement. Before Jeremy could completely regain his senses, the Maca'hzar had disappeared. All Jeremy could do was lean back against the wall, contemplating the odd shard in his hand, and the mysterious phrase...

"The mother shall break the cradle."

\* \* \* \* \*

The next morning Jeremy arranged for Lana to go visit her mother down south. He managed to stay behind on the excuse that he needed to work with Bill and plan out a continuation of "Chester Owl and Friends". They saw each other off at the airport and then Jeremy drove home. A phone call from the police mentioned the odd disappearance of his sister Fran and that Thorton Marshall was still unaccounted for.

The entire day Jeremy boarded up the windows and doors to the house, loaded and stocked a shotgun and 9mm pistol, and waited. Within time he would have the answers he desired.

\* \* \* \* \*

Bill called the Phillip's residence several times that day, but no one answered and the machine was off. He desperately wanted to reach Jeremy and inform him that several thousand dollars worth of studio equipment was gone, and that investigative reporters wanted to talk to him regarding Fran and his missing children.

Work had been tedious that day, auditions for the new Chester Owl were pretty mild given the recent emcee murders. Finally he closed shop a few hours early and decided to collect Marshall's Barney collection and torch the damned pile. The police had already had seen the evidence, Bill wanted it gone and out of mind.

Within the hour Bill had poured gasoline over the entire vault and ignited the evil collection of dolls, toys, records, and books. Purple flames rose high, and as the older man watched, he thought he began to see odd, disturbing shapes forming in the plumes of smoke and fire. He also began to feel uneasy, as if he was being watched and condemned by an unseen force.

\* \* \* \* \*

Jeremy started abruptly at the noise. He darted off of the couch and swung the shotgun back and forth, looking for intruders. After a moment he realized that what he had heard was the clock striking midnight. He nervously laughed, and sat back down. He hurriedly drank a canister of cold, bitter coffee, and listened in the somber darkness of the house.

All was silent. The home stood still and empty, Jeremy rechecked his firearms and waited anxiously. He had an intuition that something was out there, outside the house, waiting for him to lose his guard and become vulnerable. What Maca'hzar had said greatly disturbed him, and Jeremy wondered what chance he stood against the Beast of Purple and his green companion, Baby Bop, if they were truly back from the dead.

An hour later Jeremy was asleep. His hands held the shotgun loosely and he never heard the curious scurrying noises coming from the attic and the basement. A few moments later the gun was lifted out of his hands and his head tightly wrapped in a thick green blanket. At this point Jeremy suddenly awoke and felt warm, pudgy, taloned hands pressing his arms against his back and tying his legs with rope. The man kicked and screamed, but he was overpowered. Seconds later a hot, toxic liquid was poured over his head and he lost consciousness.

\* \* \* \* \*

When Jeremy regained his senses, he became aware of a damp, yet metallic smell, and felt his back pressed against a cold, unyielding surface. His eyes adjusted to the dim lighting and it was then that he realized he was inside an immense cavern, deep under the surface. His arms and legs were firmly bound together, and the ropes steadily burned into his wrists and ankles. The sound of dripping water could be heard from unseen corners of the chamber, and as Jeremy strained, he began to hear a distant melody, one that unnerved him and brought back a multitude of horrifying memories...

I love you, you love me....we're a happy family...  
with a great big hug and kiss from me to you, won't  
you say you love me too?

"Damn you!" cried Jeremy, struggling to retain himself, "We killed you! We killed you and your hell-spawned servants! You're dead, do you understand! Dead! Dead!" His screams echoed throughout the cavern. "Where the hell is my sister and my children you sick, pathetic bastard?!?"

There was a long silence. Suddenly, he felt a huge, fat, stocky paw run its fingers through his scalp. The voice he heard shattered his nerves.

"Why, Jeremy! What a way to talk about your old friend Barney! Why, if I didn't know any better, I'd think you were mad at me!"

"If you don't let me go, you fat purple bucket of scum, I'm going to rip you apart piece by piece myself!"

The sleepy, moronic voice laughed long and loud. "Jeremy, don't be silly! With your arms and legs tightly bound like that, I wouldn't think you could even snap your fingers! Such a temper, I never knew you'd grow up to be such a spoilsport!"

"I want my children back, Barney...come on, you've got me now, why don't you let them go? They haven't anything to harm you, you can't justify holding them here against their will...."

"Why Jeremy, I'm surprised at you," said the voice. The chubby paw pushed Jeremy around so he could see behind him. "Why should I get rid of my new friends?"

Jeremy looked up and saw the horrible, familiar figure of Barney, the Purple Destroyer of Worlds. Jeremy's children, Stacy and Mark, were both beside him, hugging the fat bloated reptile around his waist. They looked down upon their helpless father with looks of remorse and disdain.

"We don't love you anymore, Daddy," said Stacy. "Barney's the only one we love anymore, and he loves us."

Mark, wrapping his arms even tighter around the dinosaur's waist added, "Barney loves us more than you, and we're staying with him...forever."

"Well, that's wonderful!" chimed Barney, wrapping his arms lovingly around the two children. "I guess you're not much of a father, are you Jeremy? Seems to me that Stacy and Mark, my Special Friends, are much happier here!"

Jeremy stared in horror and disbelief. His own children, whom he had loved and cared for since their birth, were now rejecting him before the very creature who had destroyed his childhood, wrecked his world, incited riots that killed his parents, and haunted him in countless nightmares that he glimpsed in shadows....

Barney had returned with the ultimate vengeance.

## Chapter Five: Apocalypse

=====

Jeremy Phillips hung suspended from a thick, sinewy rope, his body slung in a tightly woven net. He stood motionless in the air, about fifty feet down a lightless, bottomless chamber. The dark was impenetrable, the coolness stark and constant. Up above, the Purple Beast's gibbering, chittering servants, the Loved Ones, adjusted the coils and would occasionally hurl stones or mud down at the helpless figure. Jeremy cursed the creatures under his breath, and struggled to escape his bonds. Yet, were he to loose himself of his restraints, there stood the chance he could loose his balance and plummet into the inky blackness below him, to an unseen fate.

Occasionally, Jeremy heard singing up above, and he recognized the voices of his children, Stacy and Mark, coupled with that of Barney and Baby Bop. He still did not know what became of his sister Fran, and he wondered too what had become of Thorton Marshall, who he originally suspected of kidnapping his children.

What Jeremy couldn't figure out was why he was alive. As an adult and original destroyer of Barney, he figured the fat bloated lizard would have killed him in a similar fashion of the murdered kid-show emcees. Perhaps Barney wanted him to suffer, to see his own children reject him? Jeremy's train of thought was momentarily broken when he heard singing again, just outside the cavern mouth.

I'm Barney, you love me, I am here for eternity...open your hearts now, let me inside, by my laws you will abide....

"Wonderful singing, everyone," said Barney, "but let's try it again from the top, with a bit more pitch and less pause between the verses."

Jeremy listened and understood immediately. They were rehearsing. But for what?

\* \* \* \* \*

"Over here," motioned Bill, "this studio and studio A and B were looted sometime yesterday. They didn't take everything, but everything needed to do an independent broadcast and beam it off our main satellite. Whoever took this stuff plans on doing their own show, and on a large scale!"

Chief Davies finished writing his notes, and clapped the pad together." So you're saying that who ever works the stolen equipment will be able to broadcast all over the D.C area?"

Bill shook his head, his eyes upon the floor. "More than that, officer. Who ever works that stuff will be able to broadcast uninterrupted...nationwide if they wanted to. Our relay station ties into forty-seven others, all across the country. Who ever did this had some outside help."

"Do you think it could have been Jeremy Phillips? He just disappeared."

"No, not Jeremy. Jeremy's the most solid character on the face of the earth. I've my suspicions, but time will tell I reckon."

\* \* \* \* \*

"Why Thorton Marshall, look at you!" beamed the Purple Dinosaur. "I do believe you're in a lot of pain!"

Thorton Marshall looked up at the chubby reptile and weakly smiled. The man lay on his back upon a thick, high, concrete slab under a sickly green sheet. His body was covered in blue, purple, and black spots where the flesh had been bruised and broken. Various sections of his body twisted and bent in painful positions, indicating the injuries he had sustained when Fran Phillips ran over him in her car. Were it not for the dense padding of his Barney Suit, the damage may have been much worse.

Barney and Baby Bop stood cheerfully over the broken man's limp and broken body. Barney was garbed in a surgeon's smock and headpiece, and gleefully applied a cold steel stethoscope in various areas of the patient, eliciting an occasional groan and short cry of agony. Baby Bop was donning a nurse's uniform, and held a tray of rusting, jagged, surgical blades and dingy sponges. Off in the corner sat a trio of Loved Ones, preparing their instruments. Fran, who had struck Thorton in the park with her vehicle, sat strapped to a chair and was gagged. With a nod to the musicians, Barney began to sing...

Thorton Marshall got run down, ee-i-ee-i-o!  
And boy is he in loads of pain, ee-i-ee-i-o!  
With a crushed rib there, a fracture there, here a break,  
There a break, everywhere a break-break,  
Thorton Marshall got run down, ee-i-ee-i-o!

The purple dinosaur began applying bandages and removing fragments of debris from the injured man's wounds. Thorton began to beg for morphine, but Barney just laughed and pushed the man's head back upon the slab.



Baby Bop cut in with the next verse...

Thorton Marshall is a mess, ee-i-ee-o!  
I doubt he'll be the same again, ee-i-ee-i-o!  
He's lost some blood, his pulse is weak, here a clot,  
There a clot, everywhere a clot-clot,  
Thorton Marshall is a mess, ee-i-ee-i-o!

Fran watched in horror and revulsion as the two dinosaurs began wrapping Thorton in old tape and applying crude splints to his shattered limbs. He would be better off getting medical care in the hospital, thought Fran. This form of medicine was barbaric.

At the close of the song, Barney and Baby Bop laughed long and hard. Thorton, in his delirium, began laughing too. The Loved Ones who had playing the instruments, only looked on in partial interest. They gibbered to each other and began to pack their weathered instruments.

"So Thorton," beamed Barney, "you'll be feeling stuuuupppeeennnddousss in no time! Just let Dr. Barney thank you for letting us acquire all of that wonderful studio equipment!"

Thorton gasped under his bandages, he was having a hard time breathing. "You...you're welcome, Barney....anything for a Special Friend....I hope it makes....you...happy..."

"Happy?" chirped the dinosaur. "You bet your life it makes me happy! C'mon, Baby Bop, let's give our good friend Thorton an extra-special hug!!"

The two gaily-colored lizards knelt down around Thorton and wrapped their arms around him. The two creatures squeezed the injured man tightly, causing him to scream in unbridled agony. Snapping and popping noises protruded from under the tape. Finally Barney and Baby Bop ended their hug and danced arm in arm out the room. Thorton reclined back on the slab, coughing up blood and suffering flashes of light before his eyes.

Fran had worked off her gag and caught her breath. She eyed Thorton scornfully and said, "Some 'friends' you have, you sick fool. Don't you know they use people like you?"

"Shuttup," wheezed the pile of bandages on the slab, "you don't know what true friendship is..."

\* \* \* \* \*

Jeremy was awakened by the sensation of rising upward. He realized that his cage of rope and darkness was being lifted out of the chamber, and his eyes steadily adjusted to the cave lights at the opening. He was immediately restrained by a few packs of blubbery, goggle-eyed Loved Ones, and the creatures propped him against a thick, leathery-chair. Before him stood a chair and a television set.

A moment later, Barney appeared on the screen. Jeremy grimaced and spat at the picture.

"Now, now, Jeremy, that wasn't really nice," chuckled the purple dinosaur. "I hope you have been comfortable with your new home, I've got so many wonderful things to tell you!"

"Like what, you bloated sack of-"

"Your cage for instance. Did you know that the chamber you've been hanging over is a gateway to an entirely different world? One cut of the rope that binds you, and you'd be falling into a different time, a different place...there'd be no return for you. If you remember watching my old programs, you should know I'm really good at magic. That chamber's my best example!"

"Why am I still alive? Make it easy for all of us and kill me now."

"Why Jeremy," gaped Barney, pressing his hands against his face in obvious disbelief, "I can't believe you said that. Surely you want to stick around for the premiere of my new show. I'm making a comeback, and I want you to be there as my Special Guest of Honor!"

"Like Hell I will. No network is going to run your crummy perverted program, and I'm not going to be on it, either!" snapped Jeremy, his disgust steadily increasing.

"Oh, but we're not using a network. My special friend Thorton lent me all kinds of super-great studio equipment, with which we can broadcast anytime, anywhere. People will have no choice but to watch my program. And I also insist you appear on it!"

"And if I don't?"

The Beast of Purple sighed. "Well Jeremy, I guess if you don't, I'll have to get very, very upset. Maybe even take it out on those you love..." With that, Barney pulled Mark and Stacy onto the set with him. The two children smiled and waved at their father from the television screen. "Well kids," continued Barney, "looks like your father refuses to be on my show, so I guess I'll have to.....eat you!"

Before Jeremy's horrified eyes, Barney's gigantic maw enclosed the tender young heads of his children, biting them off and crunching the tender morsels between his teeth. The headless bodies dropped to the floor, spitting blood upon the camera.

"Nooooo! Oh my God, nooooo!!!" shrieked Jeremy, flailing madly in the chair. He clenched his teeth in rage and horror, and began to sob uncontrollably...

"April fool, Jeremy!" chuckled the fat, bloated dinosaur. "Those were just examples of our new special effects models, superimposed and animated

upon the screen. Sure was convincing, wasn't it?" Before Jeremy's relieved eyes, Stacy and Mark walked onto the screen, unscathed. They were giggling uncontrollably.

"Boy Dad, you sure were scared!" said Stacy, holding her sides. "As if Barney would really do anything bad to us!"

"Yeah," said Mark, his face red with glee, "he loves us too much for that. What I wouldn't give to see your face again when you thought he bit our heads off!!"

Barney leant towards the screen and winked at Jeremy. "But let's not press our luck, shall we?" He then returned to the two children and the trio began to sing...

I love you, you love me, we're a happy family...  
with a great big hug and kiss from me to you, won't  
you say you love me too?

Jeremy slumped back into his chair, broken and distraught. The Loved Ones placed him back into the net and lowered him back into the chamber, into the icy stillness. As Jeremy disappeared under the thick veil of black, he heard Barney's voice calling after him from the television monitor:

"See you on the set tomorrow, Jeremy!"

## Chapter Six: Vendetta

=====

Jeremy slid his watch over to the thin shaft of light that trickled from above his netted cage, and learned that he had been Barney's prisoner for four days. It was only a matter of time before the Loved Ones would hoist him out of the chamber and escort him to the studio, there to be a special guest on the all-new "Barney and Friends", co-starring Baby Bop and his own children, Stacy and Mark.

His thoughts hearkened back to the time when he was a lone thirteen-year-old, put against the bloated purple monster. Back then he had the element of surprise and decision, it was hard to have those when your foe had you dangling from a rope and your own children rejected you. It had seemed for the moment that Barney had all the cards.

Suddenly Jeremy became aware of a scraping noise, of stone against stone, coming not from above, but just below him. He fidgeted uncomfortably and strained his eyes, but all he could see was blackness. Was this the end? Was this some faceless denizen of an alien dimension, come to devour him as he lay helplessly bound in rope and darkness? He bit his lip and waited.

The sound of stones shifting became clearer, and suddenly a thin orb of light shone from below, accenting two yellowish eyes with thin black slits for

pupils.

It was Maca'hzar.

The weathered, reptilian Loved One motioned Jeremy to be very quiet, as he produced a thin, platinum blade from under his cloak. He quickly began to cut Jeremy's bonds and as Jeremy's eyes got accustomed to the light, he saw that the Acolyte had constructed a tunnel that opened out into the chamber itself. Another moment he was free and was crawling down the tunnel following Maca'hzar to freedom.

\* \* \* \* \*

"What do you mean he escaped?!" bellowed Barney, his eyes focusing on the frantic and uneasy Loved One. The pudgy, balloon-faced creature shifted back and forth on its elephantine feet and chattered out excuses and apologies. In his rage, Barney lifted the creature off of his feet and flung him down the chamber shaft. The pathetic creature shrieked as it plummeted into the horrid darkness. Its fellow Loved Ones backed away in fear from the enraged Beast of Purple.

"Stupid, stupid, servant!" stammered Baby Bop, who pounded her feet against the cave floor. "Fall forever, down big, big, scary hole! Same thing for all of you others, if you lose Jeremy! Fall forever!"

Thorton Marshall came into the room, pushed along in a wheelchair by two Loved Ones. His bandages were filthy and speckled with blood the man had coughed up on himself following his "surgery". He gingerly cradled a Barney doll in his lap. "Barney and Baby Bop," he began, "we're ready for recording if you are."

"Why that's wonderful!" chimed Barney, completely changing his demeanor. "I can't wait to get my show back on again! Are the musicians, children, and technician ready to go, Thorton?"

"Yes, Barney, they are," wheezed the chair-bound fanatic. "And every available Loved One is out searching the tunnels for Jeremy Phillips. Trust me, Barney, he won't leave this cavern without his children and sister."

"OOooooohhh, I just love making television shows!" squeaked Baby Bop, wrapping her favorite blanket around her shoulders. "Let's go everyone, time to play!"

\* \* \* \* \*

"I didn't think I'd see you again," said Jeremy, washing his face before an old cracked mirror.

"My respect for you is very strong," replied Maca'hzar, reclining against a pile of velvet cushions. "I see the Purple One suspended you above the Dimensional Chamber, a gateway to many planes of existence. It was my

design and invention, though he likes to take credit for it. What he doesn't know about is the secret passageway and den I installed during its original construction. Allows me to see and hear many things." The silver-haired Loved One ran his claws over the jewel-encrusted edge of his staff. "The second dawning of Barney is almost underway."

"He's got my kids, my sister, and is ready to make television shows again," muttered Jeremy. "But I've no weapons and very little idea on how to take him on."

"The mother shall break the cradle," said Maca'hzar. He lit another candle.

"God that's ambiguous", Jeremy grumbled, drying his face and sitting across the scaly creature. "Can't you give me something more tangible, more concrete to work with rather than this mediocre Dungeons and Dragons lingo? What's your impression of the message?"

Maca'hzar whistfully shut his eyes and sat in silence for a few moments. When he opened his eyes again, they blazed with a mysterious fire and he spoke as if from the bottom of a deep, hollow well.

"All creatures great and small, Jeremy Phillips, share one thing. Despite one's strength or power, all must lower themselves before the dawn of their existence. What we hold dominion over cannot precede us. Rather, we are vulnerable to the era that came before our destiny.

"A child subverts to the will of his parents. A masterpiece of art is nothing when reduced to the mere canvas. Every dawn is but a pale afterglow of the night before it. Salmon fight to find the grounds they were born in, and either die or die trying. A tree, when reduced to the merest sapling-

"Whoa, whoa whoa," interrupted Jeremy. "Please, Maca'hzar, you're losing me here. I didn't want talks on fish, art, kids, whatever. What does this all have to do with destroying Barney?"

"Is it still with you?" asked Maca'hzar. "The fragment I gave you back in your dwelling."

Jeremy fumbled through his pockets, he produced the flat, textured shard from his shirt. "Yeah, it's here."

"Good, you will be adequately prepared. When the time comes, all will be known to you. I wish I could help you Jeremy Phillips, but the Great Beast of Purple is of my own flesh and blood. My power will not be of much use against him. It is upon you, the Great Liberator, to destroy his second incarnation and save your world again."

\* \* \* \* \*

"My Loved Ones have not been able to find Jeremy," bubbled Barney, "but as I remember Thorton, you are quite handy with some of this equipment. Show

me what you've done!"

Thorton idly wheeled himself over to a monitor and keyboard. He paused to take a deep, hoarse breath, then began punching keys as fast as his shattered hands could muster. "Just like the effect we did with the kids getting their heads bitten off," he began, "we've taken a superimposed image and manipulated it to simulate movement. In a sense, enriched animation. We got a video clip of Jeremy head on. With some voice enhancement, we can make this computer simulation say and do anything we want. Do you have your statement handy?"

"I absolutely do!" beamed the purple dinosaur. "Punch that in and let's see the magic!" Thorton punched in the text and hit the return button. The computer monitor flickered and whirred for a few seconds. Then, a computer simulated image of Jeremy Phillips blipped onto the screen, looking incredibly life-like. Thorton hit another series of keys and the computer-Jeremy began talking....

Hi, my name is Jeremy Phillips, and I welcome everyone out there in television land to watch "Barney and Friends", coming back after twenty stuuupppennnddouuusss years! I now realize it was wrong to destroy Barney's reputation, and Baby Bop's too, but now that I'm older and more responsible, let me be the first to say that Barney is my very special friend and I hope you all watch his show, tomorrow night at 9:00 pm. Barney's back from the dead and he loovvveesssss you!

"That's wonderful!" chirped Barney, jumping up and down in glee, "Thorton, broadcast that clip every half hour on every major network. I just can't wait!" The purple lizard's ecstatic giggling and dancing filled the studio. The bloated creature sagged downstairs to share the news with Baby Bop.

Thorton finished the rough editing and prompted the relay stations back on the earth's surface. Towers across the globe hummed and flickered as the signals began pouring in. Antennas across the country's homesteads hissed and spat static as the video blips surged into television sets.

\* \* \* \* \*

Bill had just sat down with a cold beer and TV dinner, and eagerly switched on the tube to catch the closing moments of the Chicago Cubs and the Minnesota Twins. With the score tied and the bases loaded, the batter lobbed a high ball into center field, the field man raced desperately to catch the ball plummeting to the earth, the crowd held its breath as the ball and the fielder's mitt raced against each other and then...

Hi, my name is Jeremy Phillips and I welcome everyone out there in television land to watch "Barney and Friends"....

Bill about choked on his beer. He coughed up foam and it speckled against the fuzzy surface of the television screen. "What the hell-?"

.....Barney's back from the dead and he loooovvvveesss you!

"Damn, that was Jeremy," muttered Bill, wiping off the excess foam. He called the central studio in the downtown area. "Hello Susan, this is Bill. You just saw it too? Good. I've an idea they're gonna be broadcasting this ballyhoo a lot in the next day, get Mace and his crew to track down that signal. Pronto!"

\* \* \* \* \*

"You aren't going with me?" asked Jeremy uncomfortably.

"I've done all I can for this battle," said Maca'hzar, opening the portal entrance. "Jeremy Phillips, you are strong and of pure soul, I remind you to keep on your guard and remember all that we've talked about. If it is meant to be, you will triumph over the Great Beast of Purple once more."

"Maca'hzar, you know, I don't know why, but normally I would be drawn to kill a creature such as you. But you're not a typical Loved One. I don't feel any inner desire to destroy you..."

The creature's eyes squinted, and he smiled a thin, tapering smile. "As it should be. Here, I've one more thing to give you." Maca'hzar unfastened a tarnished, slightly rusty firearm from behind his shoulder. He unstrapped a few clips from his belt and handed it to Jeremy. "Magic is magic," he said, "but there's something to be said for technology. You will need this time to time, Jeremy Phillips." He turned and went back into the tunnel.

Jeremy watched the dwarfish figure disappear, speechless. The next instant he slammed a clip into the main chamber of the gun. He scurried down the hall and towards the main cavern.

\* \* \* \* \*

"Three, two, one!" called Thorton, adjusting the camera field. The Loved One ensemble immediately began playing a rollicking, clumsy melody and a chorus of children's voices could be heard:

Barney is a dinosaur, come back to be your good friend, and  
if you love him as much as I you'll want to make it happen!

Barney loves us very much, Barney loves us always!  
Let him in your empty heart and enjoy lots of fun days!

"Ugh, that's some horrible stuff," groaned Fran, strapped into the chair next to Thorton.

Thorton snorted under his bandages. "Shuttup, miserable wench! He's a genius, and he's gonna make the world a happy place once more!" He got so worked up he started coughing and wheezing, hacking thin spackles of blood upon the control panel. Fran observed some of the exposed areas of his

body, and saw some where turning a spongy green.

Gangrene.

\* \* \* \* \*

Five hours later, the cast and crew decided to take a break. Barney and Baby Bop were especially jubilant. They had already taped the performance segments of the show, now all that was left was the live segments. The broadcast would begin in just a matter of minutes. The two creatures hobbled about the set merrily, dancing with Stacy and Mark, and giggling uncontrollably. As the band of prancing children and dinosaurs romped about the stage, they did not notice the human figure up above them in the lighting rails.

Jeremy peered down at the small ensemble, and readied his gun. He had to stop the broadcast and do so without harming his kids. A few feet back dangled a Loved One technician, whom Jeremy had strangled with some leftover electrical chord. Its eyes bulged out of its sockets, the pasty orange tongue hanging down upon its plump, blubbery chin. Jeremy eyed the creature with disgust, Maca'hzar was a much dignified creature than the majority of Loved Ones he'd encountered. Not fat or blubbery, but sinewy and covered in broad, jagged scales. In some ways like a miniature dinosaur...

\* \* \* \* \*

"There it is again!" yelled Bill, pointing to the screen. "Whoever's broadcasting this junk is doing it every half hour on the hour! Mace, you any closer to locking onto that signal?"

"One more transmission should do it," said the haggardly man, scratching his head. "It's definitely within a twenty-mile radius, and below the ground. Must be a hell of a transmitter".

Bill checked his watch and counted down for the next half hour. The time just rolled by and by...

\* \* \* \* \*

Jeremy heard laughter and chuckling below him. Barney, Baby Bop, and his two children, Stacy and Mark, had just finished another song and were making the final adjustments to the set and props. Loved One technicians scampered about the studio, preparing for the live broadcast, which would begin in a matter of minutes. Jeremy pried his mind for a plan, but nothing came to light. The gun begun to feel heavier and heavier in his grip, but he knew he could hold on. As long as he went undetected.

\*\*\*\*\*

"Thorton," began Fran, "you are one sick guy. Those two beasts bandaged you up like the Middle Ages or something. Your whole body's began to



blacken and spoil. If we don't get you to a real hospital you'll die!"

"Quiet, woman," said Thorton, staring into the monitor. "Obviously you've never experienced true love before. Barney came to this world to love us all, unconditionally and without expectation. People like you and your worthless brother don't understand that, in fact you're scared of it." He pressed the Barney doll against his chin. His voice suddenly grew syrupy and infantile. "My pwecious wittle buddy Barney woves me and would never hurt me."

"Ooh, God help me," said Fran, rolling her eyes and turning away in embarrassment.

Suddenly the lights dimmed and the Barney soundtrack chimed in. The monitors flashed to Barney and Baby Bop, coming out of two respective tombs, dusting themselves off, and looking about in a lush green meadow with blue skies and flitting butterflies. Stacy and Mark came out and the four of them began dancing hand in hand. Fran looked down at the set but saw nothing. She then realized this was a pre-recorded segment. The song was an obvious rip-off of "Yankee Doodle"....

Barney and Baby Bop, having risen from the dead, want to dance and laugh and play, and become your loving friend....

The music was off-synch, miscalculated, and poorly played. Fran grimaced at the sound and became ill. Thorton swayed around in his chair, tapping his dingy fingers in tempo. Once the music was over, the lights flared up upon the soundstage, illuminating Barney and Baby Bop in all their glory. Thorton checked the frequency monitor. The signal was getting out. TV stations across the continent were picking up the broadcast, on every major network. He giggled in delight and kissed his Barney doll.

"Why, hello everyone out there! It's me, Barney the Dinosaur!"

"And \*me\*, don't forget \*me\*, Barney! I'm Baby Bop, and I just loovvveee being back on television!"

"It's been twenty years, boys and girls, but we're back! More songs and love for everyone! And I know some of you out there watching right now are in need of a special friend. Do you know what? I want to be that special friend with you!" The sagging, purple lizard slurred the last few words with a saccharine emphasis that made Fran lose control and she began throwing up. On Thorton.

"You vile wretch, you've vomited on my precious Barney doll!" screamed the bandaged lunatic, his thick glasses steaming over in rage. He immediately tried to rise and strike Fran, but his injuries kept making him stumble. He fell on the floor and kicked around in desperation.

Back on the set, Barney and Baby Bop paired together and began expressing their love for all of the viewers.

"You know, Baby Bop, I feel so much love for our new and old viewers, I feel just like-"

"Pwaying with my blanky?" cooed the spritely green dinosaur.

Barney chuckled. "No, but that sounds like a stuupppennddooussss idea too. But what I was really going to say was that I felt just like \*singing\*!"

The Loved One ensemble picked up the cue and began playing the opening chords of the most powerful, infamous, familiar song of the Purple One. The two dinosaurs began swaying and holding hands. Barney opened the piece...

I love you, you love me....

The next moment there was a loud resounding crash. Barney turned around and noticed Baby Bop had been struck by a huge metal strobelight, that had been dropped from above. The impact had pretty much snapped Baby Bop's neck clear in half, and the petite green dinosaur lay gurgling at his feet. Barney looked up just as another light fell his way. He caught it in mid-air and saw Jeremy dangling above him, brandishing a thick metal blade.

"Why Jeremy Phillips, what a long time! Were you the one who dropped the light upon poor Baby Bop? That wasn't very nice! Didn't your parents tell you cutting tension chords on light equipment could be dangerous? Come on down and let's sing a song about safety!"

"Bite me, you worthless purple gasbag," snarled Jeremy. "I'm cancelling your show right now!"

A horde of Loved Ones had scampered up the balcony, after Jeremy. He saw them approaching and leveled the gun at them. Bullets blazed and sparks flew as Jeremy gunned down the whole lot. Orange and pink blood spattered all over the set like rain.

"Get him!" bellowed the fat purple reptile, and several more packs of Loved Ones scampered up the rails. As Jeremy inserted a new clip and prepared to level it at the oncoming horde, the entire railing lurched under the combined weight and was completely torn out of the wall the next instant. Jeremy, the Loved Ones, and several hundred pounds of lighting and sound equipment plunged towards the soundstage below. Screams filled the air as the hapless bunch fell all five stories....

## Chapter Seven: Revelations

=====

The lighting rails struck the soundstage with tremendous impact, the resounding clap of steel meeting rock cracked the atmosphere as sparks and debris were flung everywhere. Great clouds of dust obscured the set, filling the on-line monitors with thick static. A few seconds later they came back

on, illuminating the disastrous scene.

Thorton watched in disbelief, his jaw hanging wide, his eyes staring out from under the bandages. Fran stared at the destruction also, mortified at the carnage. From the back areas of the soundstage, Stacy and Mark watched in terrified silence.

A moment later a Loved One rose from the wreckage, gave an ear-splitting cry and pointed at Jeremy Phillips, thrown back against a twisted railing. The next instant the man ripped a volley of bullets through its pudgy belly, orange and pink innards bursting from the impact. The creature fell backwards, flattening out against the cold unyielding surface of the rocky floor.

"Why Jeremy, that wasn't a nice thing to do," quipped a low, moronic voice from under the pile of debris.

"Show yourself, you grinning hunk of lard!" shouted Jeremy, picking himself off the floor. He nervously looked around and surveyed the damage. The Loved Ones who had fallen with him were either dead or bleeding excessively. To his surprise, he felt a hand grasp him by the ankle and he was yanked off of his feet. His chin hit the floor. Hard. The gun slipped out of his grip and rattled across the floor.

"Bad, bad, bad Jeremy! Try to kill Baby Bop and Barney! Silly Jeremy, we never die! Gonna teach you big lesson! Real, real, real \*big\* lesson!"

Jeremy looked by his feet and saw Baby Bop, her neck still snapped in half, clutching his ankle. Her head wobbled crazily and a large segment of bone jutted out of her shoulder. It was her vertebrae. Yet, the frenzied baby-like creature cursed and clawed at him.

Barney's titanic purple head rose out from under a pastel-painted flat. He saw Jeremy's dilemma and grinned widely, his gleaming white teeth shining cruelly. Jeremy frantically kicked at Baby Bop, but the green dinosaur hung on with incredible strength. Jeremy reached behind him for the gun, but when he looked, he saw it was gone. Instead, a man wrapped up in dingy tapes and bandages and sitting in a chair was there, leveling it at him.

Thorton Marshall. Jeremy couldn't mistake the thick glasses and the lunatic eyes. Not even under those soiled bandages.

"I-I've got him, Barney," said Thorton, a quivering smile coming across his bruised and swollen face. "You can take him prisoner again, he's not going anywhere!"

"Thorton, you are indeed my Special, Special Friend! Thank you for getting the gun and capturing Jeremy. As a matter of fact, I've a special, super-ka-duper favor to ask of you!"

"Oh Barney, you know I'd do anything for you! Anything at all, because

you're my Special Friend and you love me so. What is it?"

The bloated violet reptile rose from the debris and waddled over to the bandaged man. With a fresh smile and a paw placed lovingly upon Thorton's shoulder, he replied.

"Kill him. Shoot him through the face."

Thorton paused. He looked back at Barney and laughed, nervously. "What?"

"Shoot bad, bad, Jeremy! Make him bleed! Teach Jeremy super-good lesson, you can!" squealed Baby Bop ecstatically.

Thorton raised the gun and aimed the sights at Jeremy's face. Torrents of sweat began trickling down both men's faces, and Thorton began twitching uncontrollably. "But Barney," whispered Thorton, "killing is...bad. I..I've never killed before. It's not right....I can't do it."

Stacy and Mark huddled from a distant corner of the set, mortified at the scene. Fran sat up in the control booth, desperately trying to free herself of her restraints.

"Thorton, you *\*are\** my Special Friend, aren't you? Wouldn't you do anything that I asked you too? You know, if your good old pal Barney asks you to do it, that doesn't mean it's bad at all! You know how much I love you, don't you?"

Thorton shook his head. "But in the videos, and all your books, you never did anything to harm anyone else...you taught us that fighting was bad, and that we should apologize if we hurt someone, and we can all be friends and love one another-" The next instant Thorton lowered the gun and began crying uncontrollably. Tears rushed down his face and soaked his glasses and bandages. "Oh God, I'm so sorry. For all of this," cried the man.

"Weak, fraidy-cat Thorton is crying! Like big baby! Big little baby! Can't do it! Scared! Scaredy, scaredy Thorton!" hissed Baby Bop, pulling herself out of the collapsed set, her head dangling upon her shoulder. "Gonna cry, now? Want Mommy? Mommy don't love big weak worthless crying-Thorton babies!"

"Shuttup!" screamed Thorton. "Just shuttup and leave me alone!" The man's reddened face cringed and he collapsed into Barney's arms.

Jeremy was free of Baby Bop's grip, but he couldn't leave. He sat on the floor engrossed in the emotional spectacle before him.

Barney soothingly stroked Thorton's head, patting him on the back with the other hand. "Why Thorton, there's no need to cry. Don't you know that I still love you? It's okay, don't feel ashamed. I will love you always."

Thorton sniffed and looked into Barney's dead, empty eyes. "You...you really mean it, Barney?"

"Why of course!" chirped the fat dinosaur. "I will love you Thorton, even if you're scared, or if you're angry...."

Jeremy sensed it. He darted away and hid.

"...or even if you're \_dead!"

Thorton reacted too late. The moment he looked up he saw the huge, powerful teeth enclose him and the man screamed and thrashed madly. His whole upper body was thrown back as Barney reared his head and bit clear through the hapless man's chest. The lower portion fell to the floor, spraying crimson upon the floor and Baby Bop, who giggled and jumped up and down with glee. Stacy and Mark screamed in terror, Fran averted her eyes in repulsion. Barney sat upward, guzzling Thorton's upper body, cracking bones and snapping ligaments. Bandages and entrails seeped down the chin and neck of the Great Purple Beast, who merrily swallowed the remaining portions of the unfortunate man.

"Good, good bloody Thorton! No cwy no more!" squeaked Baby Bop. Barney relaxed his head and wiped excess blood and foam from his lips with his hand. Suddenly the two dinosaurs made a horrid realization...

They were still on the air. Live. Broadcast all over the country.

"Shut down the system!" screamed Barney in intense panic. He swooned at the thought of all his television disciples watching him kill his biggest fan, coast to coast, in the sanctity of their own living rooms. He barked orders at the Loved One technicians working the monitors and satellite-access systems, then noticed a camera pointed directly at him. Behind it was Jeremy Phillips.

He scowled at the lone human and began racing after him.

Jeremy backed away from the camera. He had managed to focus in on Barney's cold-blooded and grisly murder of Thorton, zooming in on the creature's gleeful expression as he devoured the chair-bound man. But now Barney was enraged. Jeremy raced out of the studio and down the central tunnel.

Baby Bop finished licking Thorton's blood off her face and started yelling commands to the surviving Loved Ones, who were scampering everywhere in confusion. Fran watched from above, and realized it wasn't long before Baby Bop would send the foul servants after Stacy and Mark. If only she could undo the restraints...

A second later she wrested her right arm from under its strap. She began punching buttons on the console. Immediately, a piercing, deafening hum hit the stage, causing Baby Bop and the Loved Ones to clasp their ears and grimace in agony. It had worked. Fran had set all the sound amplifiers and distortion units on maximum. In the control booth, she was insulated from

the ear-splitting roar. She only hoped Stacy and Mark were out of the area. As the creatures below her writhed and screamed about the destroyed set, she unfastened her other hand and worked herself free. What she needed now was the gun, back on the soundstage floor next to Thornton's scattered remains. But to get down there she'd have to turn the amplifiers off. If she made it before they recovered...

Fran hit the "OFF" button on the speaker console. The blaring siren shut off. Fran scurried down the stairs and began looking for the gun amidst the crumpled bodies of Loved Ones. She found it, still speckled with blood, and released the catch lever. As she did so a trio of Loved Ones lunged for her. She aimed low, cutting the bunch down instantly. The other Loved Ones scrambled around the desolate wrecked set for cover. She picked off a few behind the props table, and gunned down another trying to climb up the safety ladder. Still, she was uneasy. Where was Baby Bop?

"Gotcha mean Fwan!" squawked Baby Bop, clasping her powerful arms around Fran's delicate neck. "Snap your head off like mine I will! Snap, snap, snap!"

Fran spun around frantically, trying to shake the green creature off. She felt Baby Bop's teeth sink into her shoulder, and she screamed in pain. Blood drizzled down her arm and chest, yet the agony she felt gave her the strength to clutch the infantile dinosaur by the head and wrest her off. She spun around and jammed the muzzle into Baby Bop's bloodied mouth.

"Eat steel, you slimy green bitch!"

The resultant force of the burst flung Baby Bop's head completely off, and the head smacked into a concrete wall behind her. Fran heard a nauseating crack as it did so, and the green reptile's head slowly crawled down the wall, leaving a thick, pasty green trail behind it. Fran backed away, repulsed by the sight.

To her surprise and horror, the shattered head opened its thick-lashed eyes and scowled at her. "Mean, mean Fwan!" it squealed. "Gonna go now, but when Baby Bop come back, gonna make you hurt. Bad hurt!"

As Fran watched on in disbelief, the decapitated body sat upright, and ran towards Baby Bop's head. The fuzzy green arms picked it up and ran down the central corridor.

"I'll be damned," muttered Fran. "The little green swat's immortal." She checked her weapon and saw she was almost out of ammo. Jeremy would have it, she figured, and made off in the direction he and Barney had run minutes before. With luck, she thought, Stacy and Mark would be okay.

She had barely gone more than a few hundred yards when several packs of Loved Ones leapt out at her, from all directions. The pudgy creatures groped for her gun and tried to pull her down, but Fran managed to wrest free and mow down several. The survivors scurried back, enclosing the woman in a

tight circle.

Fran knew her ammunition was pretty near depleted, and began to wonder how long she could bluff the Loved Ones before they caught on and charged her. Just as the bloated, cloaked monsters began edging closer, the cave was rocked by an enormous blast. Fran was knocked off her feet.

When she looked up, she saw a huge gaping hole in the corridor ceiling. The next instant heavily armored soldiers and patrolmen began lowering themselves into the cavern with cable, shining their lights about the area. Sensing an intrusion, the Loved Ones began hurling rocks and small articles at the troops, who returned the gesture with rampant gunfire.

Fran shielded herself from the ensuing bursts, hoping that they could see her and wouldn't hit her. The bullets fell like hard, stinging hail, she saw Loved Ones literally chopped to pieces under the relentless barrage. Pasty pink blood splattered everywhere, and smoke filled the corridor. Cries of humans mingled with inhuman gurglings, and within moments the soldiers and patrolmen had secured the area. One woman, clad in an infantry uniform and decorated with lieutenant's bars, came over to Fran.

"You Fran Phillips?" she asked. Fran nodded her head. "Lieutenant Chelsey McKintyre, 3rd Division. I'm here with several platoons, we're gonna take this whole operation down pronto. How are you?"

"I'm fine, I guess," replied Fran. She was still a little overwhelmed. "My brother, Jeremy. Barney was chasing him."

"What direction, Fran?" asked McKintyre, her grey eyes glancing at the various corridors.

"I think that one," said Fran, pointing at the trail that led to the main chamber. "Baby Bop may have gone the same route."

"Tell you what, Fran," said the lieutenant, "we're going to leave an escort here with you in case any more of those loving lizards comes back this way. These people are trained for anything. Trust them. And there's someone else who you need to stay with." McKintyre motioned to an aging gentleman wearing a turtleneck and checkered pants.

"Aren't you Bill, Jeremy's co-worker?" asked Fran.

Bill knelt down and put his hands on her shoulders. "Sure am, Miss. Don't think we've ever been formally introduced. We'll talk more later. Just be glad we were able to lock onto the Purple Creep's transmission signal, we may have never found this place. You know you guys are 300 feet underground? So where's Jeremy?"

"Barney was chasing him, he looked pretty sore," she answered.

"And Thorton Marshall?"

Fran swallowed. "Dead. Barney killed him after Thorton refused to shoot Jeremy. It was all on television. God, it was a horrible sight."

"Well," said Bill, "it's almost over now. And it's good to know even a stoolie like Thorton had his good side. When this all gets cleared up Fran, you won't have anything to worry about."

Suddenly, the older man froze. Fran, McKintyre, and the troops in the chamber all heard the noise. It came from down the southeastern tunnel. It was Jeremy, and he was screaming.

\* \* \* \* \*

"Maybe after this, I can get you a whole super-filly-duper box of Barney Band-Aids!" joked Barney, twisting Jeremy's arm tightly behind his back. Jeremy gritted his teeth in pain. Any more pressure his arm could be torn right out of its socket. The man frantically kicked and pulled against the Purple One's incredible grip, but it was no use.

"You're not much up on wrestling, Jeremy," mused the purple dinosaur, "maybe you'll be more enthusiastic about flying!" With that, Barney picked up Jeremy and flung him across the main chamber. Jeremy hit the ground with a pulverizing thud, the air knocked out of him. He tried pulling himself off the ground, but he couldn't breathe and stars flickered before his eyes.

"Look like Jeremy falling asleep! Going beddy-bye! I go help him wake up again!"

It was Baby Bop's voice, but Jeremy couldn't place her location. Suddenly, a deep, piercing pain engulfed his left hand. He looked down and saw the disembodied head of Baby Bop, bearing down on his lower arm with knobby white teeth. The sight terrified him and he shouted in pain and fright. As he wrestled with the head, the pink and green body of the squeaky dinosaur waddled over and began kicking Jeremy repeatedly. The injured man flailed at the body, then drove the head encasing his hand against the cave floor several times. The creature's thick, lassy eyes glared at him malevolently. The mouth began to bear down even tighter.

"Say Jeremy, would you say that Baby Bop's trying to help you *\*get ahead\**?" chuckled Barney. "Two heads *\*are\** better than one!"

While Jeremy fought with Baby Bop, and Barney cracked joke after joke, Stacy and Mark snuck closer and closer to the ghastly scene. The two children were confused and scared, and no longer trusted the fat, flabby Beast of Purple. They noticed that Barney was standing fairly close to the deep, dark shaft that Barney had suspended their father over, what if they could push him down it?

On Mark's signal, the two children rushed and butted into Barney. The two children plunged into the downy flesh of the plump reptile, but the dinosaur



stood his ground. Before the children could escape, the purple lizard grabbed them both by the hair and pulled them back.

"Stacy and Mark, my Special Friends! Were you trying to do a fun joke on Barney, push him down that Dimensional Chamber? What will you silly children think of next?"

"Oww, let us go Barney, you fat ugly freak, let go of my hair!" screamed Stacy.

"Dad, help us!" yelled Mark, desperately trying to pull Barney's fingers out from his scalp.

Upon seeing his children in danger, Jeremy found new strength. He thrust his free hand into Baby Bop's mouth, and popped her jaw apart by prying both arms against the sides of her head. The mouth drooped open, releasing Jeremy's hand. The head fell to the floor, and with a swift kick, Jeremy sent it flying against the cave ceiling, impaling it crudely upon a nest of stalactites. He sent a swift blow the body's stomach, and it doubled over and hit the floor. With a bloodcurdling yell, Jeremy flung himself at Barney, who was taken completely by surprise.

\* \* \* \* \*

Just minutes away, Lt. McKintyre and her troops were leveling down hordes of Loved Ones, who charged the troops armed with knives, broken glass, boards, and rocks. They had obviously never prepared for such a massed assault on their lair before. The Loved Ones descended upon the troops and patrolmen like a thick, blubbery sea. Pink and orange ichor splashed everywhere.

"My God, it's like shooting a wall of pudding," McKintyre muttered to herself as she reduced a Loved One to glistening, gooey chunks.

As the last Loved One was gunned to pieces, the attackers advanced towards the main chamber. When they got there, they were met with an unusual sight.

\* \* \* \* \*

A headless green and pink body rolled around the floor. Two human children were trying to free their father from the unyielding grasp of a huge purple dinosaur. In the center of the room was an immense gaping pit of total darkness.

"Check your sights, I don't want anyone firing on that plum-colored lizard S.O.B until Jeremy Phillips is safely out of its way," whispered Lt. McKintyre to her troops. All the startled group could do was watch, helplessly.

Blow after blow fell upon Jeremy. He wasn't sure, but he felt he may have a serious concussion. Barney clutched him tightly against his body, in the

manner of a bear hug. Jeremy tried to break free but couldn't, and his ears were filled with the Purple Beast's laughter and the terrified pleas of his children.

"Corporal," said McKintyre softly, "train your sights on the back of Barney's head. Get a good clear shot at it, we can't wait. Another moment and Jeremy's as good as dead."

The corporal nodded and fixed his barrel carefully upon the back area of the dinosaur's skull.

"Fire!"

The bullet blazed and tore the back of Barney's head clear off. The jolt snapped Barney backwards, and the bloated creature released his grip from Jeremy, who fell to the floor, gasping for air. The children screamed and ran away from the sight, into the company of militia.

"Jeremy's free, focus all fire on that gutless blob!" commanded McKintyre.

Dozens of rifles, pistols, and machine guns blazed the next instant, tearing off shards of flesh and bone from the Great Beast of Purple. Jeremy frantically crawled away from the onslaught, his ears ringing with the sound of explosions, his nostrils stinging from the bitter acrid smoke that filled the air.

"Cease fire!" barked the lieutenant.

The smoke cleared slowly. McKintyre squinted. She could see nothing. "Halverston."

"Yes sir?"

"Go check him out. Smith, Olson, Rimiski, you three cover him."

Private Halverston warily made his way to the site where the Beast of Purple had stood just a few moments before. The stout young soldier disappeared in the thick plumes of smoke. "Sir, he's dead, he's all blown to pieces and there's simply no way- ahhhhh!!!!"

The private's scream alarmed the entire squad.

"Halverston, speak to me!"

"Oh goodness, me, I appear to have killed him!" chirped an idiotic, lethargic voice from the smoke. "I like this game, though I must admit, I've an unfair advantage. Maybe it's only fair to mention, that I'm \*immortal\* and your guns won't kill me at all!"

"Don't fire yet," ordered Lt. McKintyre. She waited as the smoke and dust dissipated.

When the air cleared, she was taken back by the sight of Barney. Only a mere skeleton remained, bloodied fragments of flesh clinging to the wide frame. Yet there he stood, chuckling and staring back at her. Halverston lay by his feet, his neck broken. Suddenly, at the snap of what was left of his fingers, chunks and slabs of flesh began flinging themselves back upon the giggling carcass. As if a film wound backwards, Barney suddenly regenerated, intact and without a scratch.

"Jesus," muttered McKintyre.

"Now if you'll excuse me," said Barney, "I need to teach Jeremy a very important lesson." Before the astonished soldiers, Barney strolled over to where Baby Bop's body lay. He whistled at her head impaled against the ceiling, and it drifted gently off the stalactite and into his hands.

"Gosh Baby Bop, you look beat! You know, I'm feeling a mite tired myself, and can use a picker-upper".

Baby Bop's eyes bulged in surprise, she certainly appeared to understand what Barney meant, and she tried to scream. Only a wispy gurgle came out of the creature's mouth, and laughing merrily, Barney squeezed the head tightly between his hands.

Spores of energy began bursting in air, surrounding the fat bloated dinosaur. As Jeremy and the soldiers looked on, Baby Bop's head and body began to shudder spasmodically and shrivel. Within seconds they had caved in on themselves and disintegrated into dust. Barney sighed and gave a tremendous smile.

"Sorry about that, Baby Bop, but I thought a little extra life-force couldn't hurt at the moment," quipped Barney, shaking the excess dust off of his paws. "Boy do I feel sttuupppeenndddoouuusss!" he shouted in glee.

Jeremy stared at the fat bloated Beast of Purple in awe. He was so taken by the fantastic sight he couldn't move. The very next moment Barney grasped him by the collar and heaved him into the air with murderous strength and speed.

"Let's resume our flying lesson, shall we, Jeremy?"

Jeremy hit the ground, hard. He felt his chest heave and realized that some of his ribs were cracked. A sharp shooting pain shot through his upper chest. His hands instinctively pressed upon the area, whereupon he discovered that he had landed on an object in his pocket. He pulled it out. It was the curious shard Maca'hzar had given him a few nights before. Smooth and marbled on one side, rough and rippled on the inside. He remembered the words the weathered Loved One had spoken to him, that gave the clue for the shard's purpose...

"The mother shall break the cradle."

Jeremy had barely a moment to think upon this when Barney picked the man up by his heels and flung him through the air again. The force of the fall sent waves of pain through Jeremy's body, and he realized he hadn't much longer.

"Lieutenant, can't we do anything to help him?" asked a patrolmen.

"I don't know, I really don't know!" snapped McKintyre. She was exasperated at the futility of the situation. Chances were that the Purple Demon was unstoppable. The idea made her cold and frightened inside. "It's between them," she mumbled.

"Gosh, Jeremy, you sure are a slow learner. I'd think you'd be flying high and mighty, like a bluebird of happiness. Let's try to make you fly just \_one more time\_". The purple dinosaur began shuffling towards the injured man.

Jeremy began crawling towards the deep shaft in the center of the cavern area. Maca'hzar had called it a Dimensional Chamber, was it this that would help him destroy Barney? The stocky reptile's footsteps were closing in.

"Dad! Dad! Get away from there! He's on you!" shrieked Stacy, as she and Mark struggled to help their father. The two children were held back by several soldiers.

Jeremy clutched the shard between his scraped fingers. He'd seen something like this before. If only he could remember where from. He looked up into the dead, evil gaze of Barney. The creature leant towards him, prepared to fling him through the air again, but stopped.

Barney had noticed the shard.

"Where did you get that?" he bellowed. "Give that here, give it to me!"

Jeremy paused. Whatever the shard was, it scared Barney. Did it have some power over Barney? Was it connected with his primordial origin? Then the realization flashed across Jeremy's wracked mind. He immediately knew what it was.

It was a piece of eggshell. A dinosaur eggshell, petrified and preserved.

Barney flung himself upon Jeremy, the sheer weight causing Jeremy to cry out in intense agony. The Purple Destroyer of Worlds clutched and clawed for the shard, yet Jeremy held on with all of his might. The two beings wrestled near the mouth of the shaft. McKintyre and several of the patrolmen carefully aimed their weapons at Barney, firing in a desperate hope of immobilizing the fat, frantic dinosaur. While their aim held true, Barney fought on in a horrid frenzy. Jeremy was almost dead.

Something about the chamber, Maca'hzar hinted at its powers before. Barney feared the shard, what could it do? Jeremy, in a final, random act of desperation, fought his arm free of the Purple Beast, and flung the shard down the shaft.

Barney's eyes bulged in raw, stark, terror. "\_Nooooooooo\_!!!!!"

The plum-colored lizard released Jeremy and dove into the shaft, in a hopeless effort to reclaim the shard. The chubby, repulsive beast plunged into the darkness, his scream echoing into eternity.

"Get him away from there, quick!" barked Lt. McKintyre. "Evans, call for a medic down here now!"

Several olive-clad soldiers ran to Jeremy's aid. The poor man was broken and bleeding, almost near dementia. One soldier felt his pulse and checked his eyes. "He's stable, but barely. Need to get him outta here quick, Lieutenant!"

Jeremy looked about him in dazed confusion. Strangers, surrounding him and barking orders left and right. In the distance, Stacy and Mark, crying and calling him. He thought that he saw Fran and Bill coming around a distant barricade, but then he felt the earth surge under him and suddenly the air turned sickly and violent again, and he prayed that soon the world would return to normal.....

"What the hell's going on?" yelled a private. The whole cavern began shaking. Stalactites began falling from the roof, and McKintyre noticed the shaft. Something was coming up it like a locomotive. Fast and powerful.

An explosion shattered the atmosphere, sending everyone off of their feet. Blinding, flashing light flickered throughout the cavern. As people began recovering their senses, they became immediately aware of another being in the cavern area. It was huge, and caused the ground to tremor below its feet.

McKintyre was the first to get a sharp, distinct look at it. It stood over twenty feet tall, upon two thick, powerful legs with immense talons. It's overall coloration was a mottled grey and green, and it rolled a large, muscular tail behind it. It's head was reptilian, with piercing yellow eyes and jagged long teeth. The brash lieutenant recognized what it was, but couldn't believe it was here.

It was a damn dinosaur. A tyrannosaurus rex.

The soldiers and Jeremy backed away from the gargantuan creature. Through the blinding light, one could see the dinosaur clutched something in its mouth. At first Jeremy thought it was a small hippopotamus or ox. But upon a closer look, he realized that he was wrong. The hapless prey was Barney.

The fat purple dinosaur screamed in terror and pain. Flailing wildly with his chubby arms, Barney pounded on the tyrannosaurus's snout. If this bothered the dinosaur, it didn't show any sign of it. In fact, it clasped its teeth deeper into Barney's plump purple flesh, spraying ichor and steam into the damp cavern air. Barney's face wore an expression of incredible anguish and horror, an expression that unsettled Jeremy. As he watched, Barney ceased pounding on the tyrannosaurus's snout and struggled to free himself from its

jaws. This only enraged the dinosaur, and it shook Barney violently, tearing skin and bone from the plump reptile's body.

"Help me, oh please, someone help me!!!" shrieked Barney. "Stop it \_Mother\_, stop it!!!"

No one moved to help Barney. The crowd watched, enraptured in the ghastly spectacle before them. The tyrannosaur eyed its demonic spawn trapped helplessly in its titanic maw, feeling its hot blood cascade down its throat. She gained an unusual satisfaction from watching it thrash and struggle, and deep within her bestial mentality, she knew it was good. Another moment she pressed her upper teeth into its soft belly, disemboweling it. She guzzled the steamy intestines and watched the purple reptile cringe and shudder in shock. It was a slow, painful kill.

Even if there was something Jeremy or the soldiers could do to help Barney, it was too late now. The tyrannosaur began grinding him slowly and thoroughly with unforgiving might, and as the Beast of Purple began sinking under her razor-like teeth, he sobbed weakly, thick tears streaming down his face.

"....I love...you, you love.... me... we're... a.... oh... mother... how... could you..... mother..."

Moments later the mighty dinosaur roared in triumph, bloody purple strings of flesh and entrails dangling from its teeth. Suddenly there was a crack of lightning and the tyrannosaur and its prey were gone.

The crowd stared in confusion and awestruck silence. A team of medics came running into the chamber, and began administering aid to Jeremy. He was cold and sweaty, his eyes bloodshot and dilated. One of the doctors injected a clear solution into the broken man's arm.

"C'mon, Jeremy, pull through for us here," he said. Suddenly he saw Jeremy's lips move and he bent over to hear him. Upon hearing the patient's words, he sat upright with a puzzled look on his face. He signaled the remaining medics to take Jeremy back up to the surface and the team hastily carried Jeremy out of the cavern.

Lieutenant McKintyre walked over to the doctor. "Doc, why the strange look? What did he say?"

The doctor looked back at her. "I'm really not sure, lieutenant. Unless my ear's going out, would've sworn he said, 'cradle broken'".

\* \* \* \* \*

Epilogue

=====

Jeremy Phillips suffered multiple injuries, internal and external, and when he

arrived at the hospital, the surgeon made no promises. The next five hours he and his team worked to save the man's life, as Fran, Lana, the children, and Bill watched in unbearable suspense. Pints of blood were ushered in, and finally the surgeon appeared from the operating room. Chances were good Jeremy would pull through.

The story of Jeremy's ordeal with the Beast of Purple spread worldwide. Many had seen the horrid broadcast emitted from Barney's subterranean studio, and it was unlikely the bloated dinosaur would ever make a comeback again. Letters and flowers arrived from all sections of the globe to Jeremy's hospital room, and he was never short of visitors.

Lana came in and visited her husband frequently, as did Fran. Jeremy often asked about Stacy and Mark, Lana said that treatment had just begun and it would be about a week before the children could come and visit their father. The kids had been severely traumatized by the entire ordeal and would be in therapy for quite some time. The news didn't bother Jeremy, he knew it could have been a lot worse. And he knew they loved him, which helped him sleep at night.

Fran was doing alright, she didn't think there was any need for therapy on her part. She had her housework and boyfriend to keep her occupied, just the thought that the squalid Purple Demon had met his end made her well. Once Jeremy was out of the hospital, she promised him dinner at her apartment.

Bill checked on Jeremy twice a day, and updated him on the development of "Chester Owl and Friends". They found a suiting candidate to take the part, and recording would begin in just two weeks. Would Jeremy like to be the first guest of the new season? Jeremy laughed and told Bill to get home, he'd consider the offer.

It was on the night before Jeremy's release when he awoke in the middle of the night, to discover his window had been pried open. The curtains billowed in the room, and he became aware of an unearthly presence beside him. His hand clutched for the signal button that would alert the evening nurse, but it was gone. When a scaly, taloned hand rested upon his shoulder, Jeremy gasped.

"Jeremy Phillips, I took you for a human of stronger nerve".

The startled man breathed a sigh of relief. It was Maca'hzar.

"God, man, do you have to make that kind of entrance?"

"Only to remain undiscovered, my friend." The Loved One turned on a small table light, illuminating his distinguished reptilian features. He gazed a steely stare into Jeremy's eyes, his slivered black eyes shrinking to thin crescents in the bright glow of the light. He smiled, revealing a row of yellow, jagged teeth.

"If it wasn't for you, Maca'hzar, we'd all be dead," whispered Jeremy. "Barney would've started another age of conquest."

"Perhaps," replied the gaunt, sinewy creature. "As I am of his flesh and blood, my sorcery would've been ineffective against him. A human, pure of soul and resilience, would prove his ultimate undoing. In that light, Jeremy Phillips, I owe gratitude to you."

"What's going to become of you?" asked Jeremy.

"I will leave this world and travel among the planes," replied Maca'hzar, cradling his jewel encrusted staff. "I have no need of this world for the moment. I will return time and time again, to check on you and several others."

"Others? Like who?"

"The one you call Fran."

Jeremy hesitated. "My sister? What ever for, I didn't think you had any particular concern for her."

"I hold a great deal of concern for her, Jeremy Phillips. Largely why I sought to help you, so you could protect her from the Purple One's devices." He saw that Jeremy was confused. He scrunched his scaly brow. "Jeremy, do you remember the nurseries? What they did to those young human females during the time known as the Purple Holocaust?"

Jeremy remembered. Young girls, upon hitting the early stages of maturity, were impregnated by the Beast of Purple, later to give birth to the dreaded gibbering creatures largely referred to as the Loved Ones. The birth was violent and usually fatal, as the infants tended to claw their way out of the mother's stomach upon the beginning contractions. But he failed to see how this would connect Maca'hzar to his sister.

"Jeremy," said the hoary Loved One, "I always wondered if you would be ready for this knowledge. By the time your sister had hit her maturity, Barney had devised a new way to breed his servants. The old process was wasteful, he was losing potential mothers one to every Loved One born. He sought out new ways to spawn his kin, and turned to the abandoned technologies of your former world. Fran Phillips was the first one he used the knowledge on. Her body and mind had begun the essential maturity, and it wasn't long before the Beast of Purple encountered success. A Loved One embryo was conceived, outside the womb with no risk to either parent....."

"A test-tube baby," said Jeremy. "God Maca'hzar, you mean to tell me you're Fran's-"

"It is best that she not know," replied the scaly acolyte. "The egg was extracted from her while she slept. Within seven months the gestation had been complete. But by this time, you had destroyed Barney's first incarnation



and the rage he and his servants felt for you was directed upon me. Child of the Great Liberator's sister. They spared my life only to curse and humiliate me. But in time they realized I was above them in intelligence and power, where upon I was cast out to live the rest of my days, alone. Whence upon I developed my powers."

The two beings sat in silence. Jeremy didn't know what to say. Maca'hzar smiled at the human, and lowered his staff.

"We may meet again, Jeremy Phillips," said the Loved One. "Whether or not we do, I will leave this with you. It is yours forever, to remember the trials you've endured." He clasped a smooth, egg-shaped dome of amethyst atop the staff and twisted it off the head of the heavy stick. He placed it into Jeremy's hands and stared into the young man's eyes. "You watch over her, and live well."

Moments later Maca'hzar climbed out of the window and disappeared into the gentle stillness of the night.

Jeremy looked down at the amethyst jewel he held. It was beautiful. He raised it up to the light and suddenly winced. There was an object encased in the center, somewhat stocky and reptilian. Upon a closer look he saw that it was a purple dinosaur, frozen in an expression of agony and terror. Its mouth was wide open, screaming a silent scream, forever.....

END