

# PROLOGUE

JANUARY 1, 2001

The dinosaurs were causing a traffic jam in downtown Pasadena. The Brontosaurus's tail had stopped wagging and the Stegosaurus was blocking the progress of a giant bald eagle flying over an enormous American flag. The 112th Annual Tournament of Roses Parade was not going well.

The White Suits (the old-money Pasadena volunteers who were supposed to keep the street clear and make the parade run on time) were milling about and starting to panic. Fortunately, this was happening far down Colorado Boulevard, near the end of the parade route. If they could get things moving soon they would be saved the embarrassment of a televised delay back by the Norton Simon Museum where Bob Eubanks and Stephanie Edwards hosted the Tournament on KTLA Channel 5 with their usual disdain for each other.

Ray Dorsey, in his white Armani suit and red tie, made his way to the well-hidden back cockpit of the Zerbe Enterprises float named, oddly, The Age of Fossil Fuel. He wanted to see what the holdup was. Inside the rump of the Brontosaurus was a tiny command post where the man in charge of working the tail was seated. That man

was actually a seventeen-year-old boy named Caleb Rush, and he was beginning to regret volunteering for Dinosaur Tail-Wagging Duty. As a matter of fact, he was beginning to regret everything he'd done for the last six months.

Sitting on a small plastic chair, encased in a claustrophobic little cell, surrounded by the deafening sounds of twenty-two high school marching bands, Caleb couldn't see anything of the outside world but a tiny patch of pavement beneath the float as it traveled down the street. A line of pink paint marked the middle of the road and was supposed to show him that they were going the right way.

The line of pink was nowhere to be seen.

Tournament rules forbade anything as high-tech as a video feed of the parade inside the float itself, so Caleb had no idea of the ruckus the stalled dinosaurs were causing. He had a radio monitor in his ear, but since they'd made the turn from Orange Grove to Colorado it had been blasting nothing but static, so he'd plucked it out. The instructions he'd been given were pretty simple anyway. Wag the damn Brontosaurus's tail at regular intervals until the float stopped moving.

Caleb had a big, muscular frame and looked much older than his seventeen years, which was why he had been selected for this job. It took strength to keep pulling the lever that operated the huge tail. It was reasoned that he could handle a prehistoric monster's rear end. There were other considerations, of course. Family considerations.

Caleb's mother had recently married the head of the Zerbe family, Emil Zerbe. Caleb thought that Emil giving his new stepson the job of piloting the hind part of the Brontosaurus was either an honor or a humiliation, depending on how one chose to look at it.

Caleb knew how he chose to look at it. Especially since the tail

had stopped working halfway down Colorado Boulevard and he knew who would be blamed for this malfunction. Not the designers or the builders of this monstrosity. No, it would go down as pilot error, and Caleb was the pilot.

As it was, he was almost relieved when the bigger fuckup occurred and the float drifted off the pink line and came to a stop far from the parade's finish line. He sat calmly in the cockpit and waited for someone to tell him what had gone wrong.

Instead he heard a hammering on the hatch and someone on the street asking him what the hell was going on, as if he knew anything about it. He raised the hatch (a definite breach of parade protocol) partly to talk with the White Suit who was bothering him and partly because the claustrophobia was beginning to get to him. He had been trapped inside that dinosaur for the better part of an hour and a half.

"What's going on?" the White Suit asked him. Caleb recognized him as Mr. Dorsey, the vice principal of his school. This New Year's Day was getting more nightmarish by the minute.

"How should I know?" Caleb asked. "I just run the tail."

"Well, where's the goddamned driver?" Dorsey asked.

"At the base of the volcano." To show him, Caleb climbed out of the dinosaur's ass, which was an absolute violation of all that the Rose Parade held holy. No one was allowed to emerge from the floats except in a dire emergency. Caleb didn't know if this was dire, but as he looked back at all the floats bottling up behind them (the spaceships and Tom Sawyers and cute enormous panda bears), he guessed this at least qualified as an emergency.

Looking at The Age of Fossil Fuel float, Caleb saw that it had driven partway onto the curb, forcing the onlookers to the sides and driving the head of the Brontosaurus inappropriately close to

the window of the last remaining adult bookstore in Old Town Pasadena. It seemed to leer at a mannequin dressed in a lacy bra and panties.

Caleb led Dorsey up around to the front of the daisy-and-marigold-covered volcano, which spewed smoke out of the crater on top. He hesitated before tapping on the well-camouflaged hatchway, and speaking to the driver, Victor Zerbe. Victor was Emil Zerbe's brother and his partner in industry and, in general, tearing this city down and building it back up again.

"Mr. Zerbe? Is something wrong?" Caleb asked. He couldn't quite bring himself to call the man Uncle Victor, not after four short months of being his stepnephew. There was no answer from the volcano, so Caleb rapped harder and called louder. Finally, he lifted the hatch and looked inside. Victor sat there, head tilted back, staring blankly. And not blinking. Or breathing. With a little red hole in the middle of his forehead.

Dorsey crowded against Caleb, trying to see in. "What's wrong with him?" he asked.

"I think he's dead," Caleb said.

Dorsey was silent for a moment. Then his true White Suit-ness came to the fore. "Well, can you get in there and drive the float?"

The parade must go on, after all.