

**The Hardrock Trilogy**

**Epilogue**

A Trilogy By

F. Patrick Stehno

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I rolled from my back, onto my side. The frozen morning air slipped through a gap near the top of my sleeping bag and sent shivers down my body. I pulled at the lining, hoping to trap whatever warmth remained. It was no use.

I opened my eyes and moved my head so I could peek out. The plastic over the windows glowed just enough to indicate the sun was creeping toward the horizon. I would have to climb out of my warm cocoon soon and go to work in the cold.

I heard Don shifting in his bag across the room. "Damn!" he said under his breath.

I spoke in a low, gravelly voice. "What's up?"

"Gotta take a leak," he grumbled, slithering from his bag. "Bad."

"Shit," I whined. "Now that you mention it ..."

I always kept my jeans inside my sleeping bag when the outside air was really cold. That way I don't have to slip on frozen pants in the morning. Even so, trying to slide them on while lying in my bag was a real challenge, especially with a full bladder. There were some very uncomfortable moments.

I slipped on my frozen boots and followed Don through the door and out into the sage along the side of the building. Steam rose from our streams of warm urine as we watered the local vegetation.

"Man that was a rough night," Don moaned. "Gonna be hard to get going this morning."

"Think we should crank up the truck and turn on the heater and sit in there a few minutes 'til the sun comes up." I motioned toward the white company truck parked a few feet away. There was frost on the windshield.

"Sounds like a plan." Don zipped up. "I'll grab the keys."

We huddled against our respective doors as the heater began to overtake the chill of the cab. "Miserable night," Don complained again.

"Me too," I concurred. "First there were those damn mice or rats or whatever ... crawling all over my bag. Then I had one helluva long dream."

"You can dream when you're out like this?"

"Yeah. I guess. Can dream just about anywhere."

"Man," Don shivered, tightening his arms across his chest, "I don't think I slept long enough to have a dream."

"Doesn't seem like I slept either, but I must've dozed off somewhere in there," I replied, "cause this was one vivid dream."

"What about? Any women?"

"Yeah. Two for sure." I smiled at the memory. "Was living with one ... we broke up ... and then I was living with the other."

"Fantasy, huh?"

I smiled, knowing what he was getting at.

"Pretty hot, huh?"

"The women were, yeah. But that's not what the dream was about."

"Tell me." Don settled in more, pulling his heavy coat tighter around his neck. "Give us

something to do while we sit here.”

“If you want,” I said. “But other people’s dreams are usually boring.”

“Go for it,” Don instructed.

“Okay.” I thought it through for a moment, trying to find a good place to start. “Well ... it started out with me living in Ely. Like we do. But I didn’t wanna be in exploration geology any more. Figured I was getting too old.”

“You mentioned that last night,” Don reminded me.

“Yeah. Probably what led to the dream.” I wiped the tip of my nose with a cold finger.

“Anyway ... I was up near Ruth ... up near the Liberty Pit. I stood at the edge, wondering....”

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“Your peyote visions always this vivid?” He asked the dark haired woman lying at his side.

“Not always.” Her long, straight hair clung to her sweaty flesh. “Only when I haven’t had sex for a while.”

“Ah,” the man laughed. “Then I’m hoping they’ll be pretty bland for some time to come.”

She kissed his bare shoulder. “I’m sure they will.”

They laid there in silence, he on his back, contemplating the long cracks in the beams beneath the ceiling of her mountain cabin, she on her side, snuggled up against the length of his body.

“You know,” he finally spoke, “in your vision the wife of the runaway geologist eventually finds him. You really think that’ll happen?”

“Was just a vision,” the woman tried to sooth him. “Just because the vision began with a geologist in a trailer like yours ... and his decision to leave that life ... it’s the rest of the vision that’s important. The path you might’ve followed if you didn’t leave.”

The man smiled, pleased. “What about that part at the end,” his smile broadened, “where the main character finds out he’s just a character in some author’s novel. That’s pretty absurd.”

She smiled. “Sometimes these visions take unusual, surrealistic twists. It’s just my subconscious playing games.”

The man shifted to face the woman. “Becca,” he stroked the side of her lovely face, “the parts I liked least were the parts that didn’t have you in it.” He kissed her tenderly on the cheek.

“That’s why I’m glad it was just a vision.” She snuggled closer.

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“There were so many discrepancies between the real people and the characters you created.” Jim spoke from the passenger seat, his voice weary from the relentless miles and early morning hour. “Especially the two characters you based on us ... in the first book. We’re not like them at all.”

“I told you before ... those two ... especially ... were not modeled after us. I just used our names.” Silvy drove the SUV on through the darkness of eastern Wyoming. “Maybe that was a

mistake. But I wanted to insert a little tragi-comedy into the action at that point. I just used our names to have a little fun.”

“Hope people won’t think we’re really like that.”

“Come on,” Silvy spoke firmly, “I don’t think a single one of our friends will believe for a moment that those two represent us. They know us better than that.”

“Suppose,” Jim accepted her reasoning with a frown. Looking out his passenger side window, he shifted his line of thought. “You know? This has been one weird trip.”

“What? Visiting Yellowstone?” Silvy flipped the lever on the column to dim the brights as a large truck topped a hill, heading their way. The truck’s lights dimmed as well.

“Oh ... not so much Yellowstone itself ... although that’s one far out weird place. But our car trouble and running out of cash and having to head home early from our trip in the middle of the night like this. It’s all so strange. Surrealistic.” Jim continued looking off through his window. He tapped the glass. “Weird. Like all those odd lights out there in the blackness.”

“Ooo,” Silvy feigned fear, taunting him. “Like they’re UFOs or something.”

“Yeah. Maybe they could be. Or top secret government projects.”

“Probably oil rigs or ranch buildings,” Silvy said pragmatically, obviously tired from their long day.

“Hey ... look,” Jim pushed himself up straight in his seat. “You had Chris and Nancy head to Yellowstone at the end of *Aquarius Plateau*. And you had Chris mention their trip in *Ultimate Subsidence*. There’s some kind of weird parallel here.”

Silvy grinned. “Perhaps.”

“It’s like we’re living out that part of your story.”

“Give me a break,” Silvy groaned. “You’ve been watching too many sci-fi flicks.”

“No ... really,” Jim refuted her slam. “Think about it. What we’re doing is almost exactly like what you wrote in the book.”

“Coincidence,” Silvy shook it off.

“I’m not so sure,” Jim frowned, returning his attention to the window on his side.

After a time Silvy turned the radio back on, to see if they were within range of a late night station. Jim had a thought. “You said you might have to edit out some of the book.”

“Yes.”

“Well,” Jim turned from the blackness outside of his window to face her, “don’t take anything out about Chris.”

Silvy chuckled. “Why not?”

In an almost childish voice, Jim replied. “You told me you based him on me. I liked everything you had him do. You cut stuff out ... it would be like ... well ... deleting some of my history.”

“James,” Silvy spoke without looking away from the road, “Chris is not you. Only loosely. You haven’t done half the stuff I had him do.”

“Well, yeah ... okay. Loosely. But it’s still cool having a character in a book based on me.”

“We’ll see.” Silvy sighed. “I’ve got to find an agent first. That may never happen.”

“Why not? You’ve got the books written. Now you can get them published.”

“It’s not that simple.” Silvy’s tone turned instructive. “Publishers are in business to make money. Books are just their commodity. Big name authors sell well, but people just aren’t reading like they used to. So it’s hard for unknown authors to break in. Really hard.”

“But you’re good. You’re books are good.”

“That may be. Some days I think you’re right. But I’m unknown. And the trilogy is huge. They might not wanna take the financial risk.”

“That would be a shame,” Jim said soberly.

“Facts of life in this business,” Silvy raised her right hand from the wheel in a gesture of acceptance. “But even if they never get published ... I’ve had a great time writing them. And my family and friends have enjoyed them. That’s something.”

The pair sat silently for several miles, staring vacantly ahead, both becoming drowsy from their overnight marathon run toward home.

Finally Jim broke the silence. “You cheated.”

“What?”

“You modeled Chris after me ... sort of,” Jim admitted reluctantly, “but put yourself into a *bunch* of the female characters.”

Silvy chuckled. “Hey ... it’s my story. I can be what I want. Besides ... it’s more fun that way.”

“Another thing,” Jim turned in his seat to face Silvy.

“Okay.”

“You used some pretty crusty language. Will all that get by an editor?”

“Don’t know,” Silvy shrugged. “I wanted to capture how I thought those characters would really talk, based on actual people I’ve worked with. Some curse a mile a minute. I actually toned it down some.”

“Hey ... look.” Jim pointed through the windshield. “Sun’s starting to come up over the horizon.”

“There’s a glow. I can see it.”

“Yeah. And speaking of rays of hope, that reminds me of another point that bothered me. Especially in the conclusion.”

“Uh oh,” Silvy said cautiously. “Here it comes.”

“No. It’s not bad. I just thought though ... maybe ... your outlook through the whole thing was pretty cynical.”

“I wanted to send up a warning.”

“But there are lots of people sending out warnings. What we need is an answer. A solution.”

“There may not be an answer,” Silvy replied, confident, “short of cleaning the slate ... like I said in the books ... and letting Nature start fresh.”

“Well that attitude came out loud and clear in your story, that’s for sure. You kind of hit us over the head with it there at the end.”

“Just thought some repetition, with variations, might nail it on home.”

“Got to be careful, though,” Jim cautioned. “Don’t wanna get too preachy. People get turned off by negative endings. You got to let them believe there’s still hope.”

“Even when there’s not?” Silvy’s voice revealed a sudden testiness.

“Sun’s coming up,” Jim almost shouted, changing the subject and pointing through the bug splattered glass.

“And here’s the Wyoming-Nebraska state line,” Silvy pointed as well, toward the welcoming sign zipping by. “We’ve almost completed our circle home.”

A vibrant golden Sun broke the edge of the horizon as they passed from darkness into light.

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A bright red two-door sedan pulled over to the side of the highway between Carson City and Reno. A scruffy looking cross between a mountain man and a Sixties hippie opened the passenger side door and climbed in.

The driver of the car was a pretty blond woman in her early thirties. “How was your walk?”

“Excellent,” the mountain man replied, closing the door. “I think I’ve got it figured out.”

The woman watched her rearview mirror for a break in the traffic. When a gap appeared she pulled back onto the blacktop. As the engine accelerated toward cruising speed, she asked, “The whole outline?”

“Yes in deed I think I do,” the man said with confidence. “I think I can get to work now. My writing block is over.”

“So walking back and forth between Reno and Carson for these last few weeks,” she spoke with some doubt, “really helped?”

“Did the trick ... and was lots of fun besides.” The man pushed back his long, tangled hair from the sides of his face, forming it into a loose pony tail at the back of his head. He let it drop. “I appreciate you dropping me off and picking me up every day.”

“What’s a personal secretary for?” The blond replied.

“What ... besides typing?” The large fellow laughed.

The blond’s lips widened into a beautiful smile. “If it helped you get back to work it was worth it.”

“That it did.”

“Can I ask?” The woman turned to watch the face of the man. “What did you come up with?”

He smiled. “I don’t have the details all worked out yet ... but I think I have a great idea for a trio of books. I’m kind of psyched.”

“Pretty ambitious,” the woman noted. “A trilogy. What will they be about?”

“Three aspects of the mining industry,” the mountain man spoke with obvious excitement. “Academic geology ... exploration geology ... and mining geology. With environmentalism thrown in ... some sex, drugs and rock’n’roll. All the basics. And try it all in first person ... with a lot of humor ... if I can pull that off.”

Her pretty blue eyes flashed. “Do people want to read about geology?”

“They will if I write it right,” the mountain man proclaimed, “and don’t go too far over the edge.”

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Ah ... my children. Play time is over. You have grown so through your many adventures. Far beyond my initial expectations. But I have run out of words. It is time to send you out into the world; for you to stand or fall on your own. And it is time for me to print out this file, turn off my computer, send the manuscript to a publisher, get off of my butt, and finally get to the real work of making a difference.

— The Real End —

[ 2,417 ]