

Brick Jackson Returns to the Land that Time Forgot

By Ian Toltz

If not for the smoke pouring out of the crashed Raptor-3 stealth helicopter, there wouldn't be a cloud in the sky. Brick Jackson trudged through the antarctic snow, pulling his supplies behind him on a Plexiglas window-turned-sled. The effort of dragging the gear provided all the warmth Brick needed. His coat was slung over his shoulder, and his dark muscles glistened with sweat in the harsh sunlight. Jackson was a monster of a man, standing over six feet tall (seven if you counted his signature 'fro) and he looked damn near as wide at the shoulders.

This was only Jackson's second time to the so-called "Preservation," an anomalous rain forest hidden in the center of the southernmost continent. It was one of the most well-guarded secrets on Earth; only a handful of governments knew about it, and they even doctored all satellite imagery to hide it. Luckily, he was able to get a glimpse of it before being shot down and thus had a bearing to head. This was fortuitous, as otherwise Brick would be stranded in the vast expanses of the antarctic tundra. The same strange power source which kept the Preservation verdant in these icy climes also prevented compasses and most electronics from functioning.

A couple hours later, the permafrost gave way to gravel and not long after Brick Jackson stood on a ridge overlooking the jungle basin below. Between the dew-soaked emerald tree tops and the omnipresent mists, few details could be made out, but Jackson could already hear the calls of exotic animals found nowhere else on the planet.

Based on his proximity to Hellfury Peak, one of the few landmarks visible from this height, Brick guessed that he was along the southern edge of the Preservation. The only safe way down was along the northeastern edge, a hike that would take several hours around the Preservation's circumference. On top of that, he was actually a lot closer to Scott Base here, meaning it would add another hour or so's hike to get back. Whoever shot Brick down knew he was coming-- time was of the essence...

Brick surveyed the slope below him, and decided on a path that looked most viable, or rather least suicidal. He grabbed the bag heavily-laden with his equipment, slung it over his shoulder, and positioned the slab of Plexiglas half-way over the rocky lip. Using the cords he'd been dragging it with as reins, Brick stepped on the glass and without

hesitation tipped it over.

Over the following thirty seconds, Brick experienced the wildest ride he'd had since he'd last seen the Kapowski Twins. The pack, weighing heavy on his shoulders, had upset Jackson's center of gravity, and it took all his training to keep his footing. Ferns and weeds quickly gave way to larger flora, and Brick Jackson soon found himself dodging low-hanging limbs of black booyong, gum trees, and even the occasional bunch of bananas.

Halfway down the slope, a coconut was embedded partway in the dirt and hidden by some ferns. The sled caught on the treacherous drupe, catapulting Brick into one of the Preservation's unique trees. The Spider Tree looked deceptively like a weeping willow, but was so named because its fine, whip-like vines would curl around monkeys and birds unfortunate enough to fly through it.

Before Brick knew what was happening, the tree had wrapped its tendrils around his neck. Inches before the vine would have pulled taut, snapping his neck, Jackson managed to grab hold of it. He held himself up with his right hand while his left hand retrieved the knife secured to his thigh. A quick cut and he was released, falling to the jungle floor below.

No sooner had Brick Jackson sat his bag down to survey his situation than he felt a new weight on his back, and a blade being pressed against his throat. "Idiot! You learn nothing since Taipei!" a sharp feminine voice chided him in a thick Chinese accent.

It was a voice Brick hadn't heard in years, but one he recognized nonetheless. "Lady Kwan? What the hell *you* doing here?"

Lady Kwan jumped off his back. "Same as you, most likely. Ministry of State Security send me check on Scott Base." The lithe oriental woman was dressed in a green floral print kimono. Between her harsh, unmoving face and abundance of makeup, you'd be forgiven for thinking she was wearing a porcelain mask.

"The MSS? I didn't know China had a presence here."

"I fill book with what you not know! Now follow quick, they not take long find you with all that noise and dust you kick up! I take you to Chubby." Lady Kwan darted off into the jungle.

Brick grabbed his bag and followed after. "Wait-- Chubby's here too? And who's 'they?'"

"The Chrono-Nazis!"

"Chrono-Nazis? But I sent their asses back to Dimension 12 last year!*" (**See Brick*

Jackson and the Chrono-Nazis from Dimension 12)

The zombies and cybots had been a pain, but were easy enough to neutralize. What Brick really wanted, though, was to never hear that mongrel German/British accent ever again. He was about to be sorely disappointed.

"Halt!" another familiar voice shouted. Lady Kwan and Brick Jackson stopped amidst the sound of soldiers rising from hiding and leveling their sonic rifles at the duo. There were at least a dozen of them, all cybots, surrounding Kwan and Brick. Despite having no need for warmth nor modesty, the black and olive Chrono-Nazi uniform hung on their titanium frames sharp and angular like some cubist painting of a soldier.

"Vell, vell, vell, old chap, I suppose you're surprised to see me?" Colonel Wilhelm Willis stepped out from behind a tree. Brick didn't recognize the man, if what stood before him could be called a man. Cold eyes like camera lenses stared at Jackson from a chromed metallic face. The voice, though synthesized and tinny as it was, was unmistakable.

"I-- no-- what the hell? I sent you through that dimensional portal! I watched you dematerialize my self!"

"Uh uh uh, Brick. You are mistaken, you see, for zat vas not a dimensional portal, but a *time* portal!"

"So I sent you a year into the future?"

"Nein! Ze past! Ten thousand years in ze past, to be exact! I had to turn myself into a cybot to survive, as you see."

"You've been here for ten thousand years, and you're only now making your move? Why not take over the world during the dark ages or something? I don't buy it."

"Your simplistic, unevolved mind could not possibly comprehend ze dangers inherent in time travel. Suffice to say zat to act before I vas sent back in time would risk a paradox which would tear time-space asunder, destroying all matter in zis dimension."

Some movement in the branches behind Colonel Willis caught Brick Jackson's eye. "Well, there's one thing you didn't count on," he replied.

"I find zat difficult to believe, Mr. Jackson."

"Oh, no, this is something you'll really wanna know."

"Very vell, vhat is this thing that I haff not accounted for?"

"Duck."

"Vhat could aquatic fowl poss--" A log swinging from vines cut the colonel off mid-sentence, sending him flying over Brick and Kwan and into the foliage behind them. The

other cybots turned to the direction the log came from just in time to see Chubby toss an EMP grenade into the circle. A blinding flash later and only Lady Kwan, Brick Jackson and Chubby were still standing.

"Hurry up," Chubby commanded, "they've upgraded. The 'nades don't last as long as they used to."

"Where we going?" Brick asked as the trio began running off.

"I got a boat, once we hit the river they won't be able to track us."

The inflatable raft cruised down the river, the outboard motor not quite drowning out the ambient sounds. Colorful birds, flowered vines, and lazy snakes passed overhead, and in the distance a band of chimps could be heard bickering over whatever it is chimps bicker over.

"I heard the you might be making an appearance," Chubby said. Chubby was an ironic nickname; the tall, lanky tanned man was every inch Brick Jackson's match. Most of his form was still hidden under the camouflaged ghillie suit, and his face was covered in green and black camo paints.

"Damn, did everyone know I was coming? The Chrono-Nazi's shot my Raptor down."

"We saw. Takes more than that to keep the 'Ebony Avenger' down, though." Chubby winked at Brick. "Been a while since we worked together, Brick."

"Too long. How's Marie?"

"Dead. Damn gill-men got her off Tanzania."

"Oh. I'm sorry."

"It's history. We got a job to do. The Chrono-Nazis are up to something big."

"What's that?"

"Don't know. Me and Kwan just got here earlier today. We'd barely started looking around when we saw your chopper."

"Have you guys been to Scott Base yet?"

"Yeah. All the brains are gone."

"They take scientists," Kwan clarified, "to work on their new weapon."

"Well, I knew it was probably a search and rescue when the CIA briefed me," Brick explained. "I just thought I'd have to save the eggheads from some ornery t-rex or something."

"It's never that easy," Chubby lamented, surveying the forest for the marker he'd left.
"Nope."

"There we are." Chubby relented on the throttle and steered the raft to the bank, pulling it in below a mangrove tree. After the three had debarked, Chubby pulled some netting he'd prepared earlier over the raft, camouflaging it with leaves and branches much like he himself.

Lady Kwan began moving through the jungle. Her speed belied the deftness of her steps, careful to avoid snapping any stray twigs or disheveling any flowers. Her habitual stealthiness was rendered moot, however, by Brick Jackson trudging along behind.

"You so loud, I not sure if you still following or if dinosaur eat you up and now chasing me!"

"We can't all be blessed with size two tootsies, Kwan."

"Laugh now, Brick, but we see who laughing when you need get captured by Chrono-Nazis again. Maybe I not save you next time."

"As I recall, it was Chubby who saved *both of us*. And he wasn't saving *us* so much as saving me the effort of kicking their asses while you es--"

Lady Kwan sensed something and stopped, shifting the weight to her back foot rather than taking another step forward. She held up a fist to signal to Brick. Brick crouched in place, careful not to make a sound, while Lady Kwan moved forward to investigate whatever had sparked her interest. A few moments later, Chubby arrived and took place behind Brick.

"What's she doing?" Brick whispered.

"Those tracks," Chubby pointed to some foot prints Brick had missed, "are fresh. You can tell because the edges still look moist. They dry out fast."

The small oriental woman returned a couple minutes later holding a cybot's severed head. "Chrono-Nazis find camp, take everything."

"Blast. Now what?"

"I got some stuff." Brick patted his bag. "Got a computer we can use to check out the 'bot's memory, too."

Lady Kwan tossed the head to Chubby, who took out a knife to begin extracting its memory banks. No sooner had he pried a panel open when he tossed it away from the group. The head exploded before it hit the ground.

"Bastards learned. They're booby trapping the 'bots now."

"Well, there goes that." Brick held up the laptop computer. It was shielded so that it

could operate in the Preservation and wouldn't be affected by low levels of electromagnetic energy, but piercing its body was a shard of the cybot's spinal column. Brick tossed the computer away.

"How many guns you got?" Chubby asked.

"Two P90s, 3 berettas. Some C4. Plenty of ammo." Brick grinned.

"Well then, let's go rescue the scientists and get our stuff back."

The fact remained that the explorers had no idea where the Chrono-Nazis had made their base, so watches were synchronized, a meeting place was specified, and the three of them split up. Brick had been assigned with scouting out the Pylon, one of the strange structures which were the focus of the research at Scott Base.

The Pylon predated all known human civilizations, and was believed to be of alien origin. The energy readings it gave off were a constant source of consternation for the scientists-- even rudimentary signal analysis yielded patterns and waveforms which could not possibly have been naturally-occurring, but they were as stoic and illegible as the monolith itself.

It didn't take Brick long to reach the Pylon. Its shiny exterior-- an unidentified, chrome-like alloy-- glowed orange in the twilight sun. In shape it was like an obelisk, like those of ancient Egypt or the Washington Monument. The Pylon stood twenty feet tall and was eight feet wide at the base.

Or, at least, so it was when Brick Jackson had seen it the first time he'd been to the Preservation. Now the Pylon was raised another 15 feet, and the slope of the newly-exposed portion had changed such that its base was now easily thirty feet. Set into the side facing brick was a doorway, and flanking the doorway on either side were two of Colonel Willis's cybots. By their stance, they were standing guard, and it seemed likely to Brick that there were plenty more inside. Whatever secrets the Pylon held belonged to the Chrono-Nazis now.

Brick considered charging in and taking them down. Unless they were packed in like sardines, there couldn't be more than five or six more inside the Pylon. At least, the visible portion. If that had been hidden under the ground previously, there's no telling how deep it went. For that matter, there was no telling what defenses the Pylon might provide either. After careful consideration, Jackson decided that this was one of those

rare situations where discretion truly was the better part of valor. The ebony avenger snuck off, headed back to the clearing with the purple jasmines to rendezvous with Chubby and Lady Kwan.

Time seemed to slow down to Brick. Sitting on a charred, pock-marked igneous boulder, a remnant from one of Hellfury Peak's long-past eruptions, he almost swore that the minute hand on his watch had actually moved backwards since he'd last checked.

A slight ruffle of leaves from behind him caught Brick's attention. Neither Lady Kwan nor Chubby would have announced their presence to him, so Brick spun off the rock and brought his fist around. It made a solid connection with the snout of the deinonychus in mid pounce, sending the dinosaur screaming to the ground. In a haze of cerulean feathers, it regained its footing. The flashing colors drew Brick's eye, and he didn't catch the other two circling around behind him.

Brick and the prehistoric beast stared each other down. It roared its challenge while he danced around with his fists raised like a prize fighter. A deinonychus was a formidable foe, but Jackson had tussled with them before and knew what to watch for. The teeth were the obvious threat, but what you really had to watch out for were the wicked dagger talons on its legs. He'd give the poor, misguided thing a thrashing, but he didn't see any particular reason to permanently harm it. It was just trying to survive, after all.

The deinonychus grew restless and charged. Brick feinted a dodge to the right, but whipped around and hopped on the dinosaur's back as it fell for the trick. Brick reached down circling his arms around its neck, both to keep his seating amidst its wild bucking and to choke it out. He never even saw the other one coming and it threw him to the ground, landing on him and knocking his breath out.

It was all Brick could do to stop this one from tearing his throat apart, but now the other two sauntered up to his prone form, savoring the hunt and their impending meal. A shot rang out, and all three dinosaurs turned to look in that direction. Chubby stood there holding a handgun above his head, and Lady Kwan was at his side. She caught the gaze of the deinonychuses, and a moment later they ran back into the forest.

Brick stood up and dusted himself off. "Damn, girl," he said. "You gotta teach me that

freaky mind shit."

"You not learn it. Need disciplined mind," she explained. "You got neither discipline or mind."

"Well, we busted out." Chubby had removed the clipped from his beretta and was inserting an extra cartridge to replace the one he'd just fired. "How'd you do?"

"I found 'em. They're in the Pylon."

"What do you mean *in* the Pylon?" Chubby questioned.

"You heard me. They did something to it, like raised it outta the ground or something. There's a whole big room underneath it now."

"Ah, hell. Well, I think I got an idea. I'll explain it on the way."

Brick wasn't really one for planning in the first place, but this idea of Chubby's just didn't seem right. Hell, Brick still wasn't even sure what exactly he was supposed to do. All Chubby had said was, "Hide here and wait for my signal." But then again, Chubby had come up with some crazy plans before, and they always seemed to pan out. So Brick laid, face down, as flat as possible covered by fronds, ferns and leaves.

On the bright side, Chubby was snappier than Brick had expected. "Brick, come on out."

Not exactly the sort of signal he'd expected, but Brick stood up from hiding. The detritus covering fell away, revealing the world around, and revealing three dozen cybots with their sonic rifles aimed directly at him. Chubby and Lady Kwan stood to the left and right of Colonel Willis, respectively. Each wore on their faces the blank stare of a mind-zombie without an active order.

"God dammit."

How could he have missed that? The whole short walk back to the Pylon, the exposed circuit boards on the backs of Chubby's and Kwan's necks taunted Brick. The Chrono-Nazis had engineered the zombie modules so that all was needed was to stab two metal probes into the victim's spinal column, and they'd follow every command given to them. Chubby's was at least obscured by his ghillie suit, but with Kwan's hair pulled into tight

buns there was no excuse for missing her. Brick had been sloppy, and he'd played right into the Colonel's hands. Worse than that, if he'd noticed the zombie modules before he could have saved the two of them.

Enough of that, though. Regret was not a luxury Brick could afford right now. He had to figure out how to get out of this. The Chrono-Nazis had taken all of his weapons and bound him. Even his feet were tethered together by a short rope, forcing him to waddle like a damned penguin.

Then something caught Brick's eye. He was no tracker, but it was hard to miss the yard-long print of a Tyrannosaurus Rex's foot. The edges didn't look totally dried out, either, just the way Chubby'd said. Maybe the thing was still around. At least, nothing else was presenting itself as an option.

Brick feigned a trip. It wasn't hard, hobbled the way he was it was a miracle he hadn't tripped sooner. When one of the cybots came to pull Brick up to his feet, he wrapped his bound hands around the Cybots neck and flipped it over. A few of the others began shooting at Brick with their sonic rifles, but Brick's 'hostage' served amply as a shield.

The soundwaves fired by the sonic rifles were too high for any human to hear, making them effectively silent. They were, however, well within the hearing range of dogs and, Brick hoped, T-rexes. A few moments later, the ground began to shake and indeed Jackson's knight in scaly armor made an appearance.

While everyone else dove for cover, Brick rolled to his feet. "Down here, you stubby-armed motherfucker!" he shouted. Sure enough, the massive thunder lizard leaned down for the easy target Brick presented and absconded with him in its teeth.

Brick wasted no time shredding the ropes binding his hands against the teeth of the tyrannosaurus rex. On the bright side, they were plenty sharp for the job. On the not quite so bright side, teeth equally sharp were currently embedded in his stomach, back and legs.

Casting a quick glance back at the Chrono-Nazis fading into the distance, he quipped, "Beats flying Delta."

Kidding aside, Brick *did* have to figure out how to get out of his new predicament. He'd have preferred not hurting the T-rex, one of only three in the Preservation, but it was it or him. Jackson surveyed its dagger-lined mouth and chose a tooth, then began punching it with all his might. On the third punch it finally wiggled loose, and Brick ripped it free.

"Sorry, Sharptooth, but this is my stop." With that he swung his arm around to jam

the tooth in the dinosaur's eye and it dropped him, shaking the surrounding jungle with its pained roar.

Brick rolled as he hit the ground, but he still hit it pretty hard. He'd lost some blood, too. But his plan worked. He was free of the Chrono-Nazis and the tyrannosaurus was fading into the mists. Now Jackson just had to get up, go rescue Chubby and Kwan, and then--

"Sorry, mate." The butt of Chubby's P90 slammed into Brick's head, knocking him out.

"Good, you're awake."

The world came into focus. Well, as much focus as possible. A flare burning on the ground was blinding in the darkness. "What...Chubby? What happened? Where are we?"

"Sorry, didn't have time to explain. We're at the base of Hellfury Peak. Had to get you out of there fast, and I didn't think you'd come along if I just told you I was okay."

"But you are okay, right? How'd you break their influence?" Bricks eyes started to adjust to the harsh red light, and he could make out the surroundings. They were underground, in a long cave, circular in cross section. A lava tube, he realized.

"I've got you to thank for that, actually. Before we got captured, I rigged up one of my EMP 'nades to go off if it got jostled hard enough. When that T-rex showed up and we all hit the deck, it went off and shorted out my zombie module."

"What about Kwan? You snap her out of it?"

"Ain't nothing to snap out. Her module's a fake, just for show-- she's working with the Chrono-Nazis. Heard 'em talking. She set both of us up."

"God damned traitorous bitch. You see where they've got the eggheads?"

"Yeah, the scientists are in the Pylon. It's got a second level beneath the exposed portion. Apparently the Pylon's some kind of alien weapon or something, designed to destroy the Earth. The Chrono-Nazis are gonna use it to hold the world hostage."

"Well, then, I guess we better stop them."

The flash of an EMP grenade disabled the sentries stationed in front of the Pylon. Brick

ran down from the cove of trees they'd been hiding in and charged the door. Just as one of the cybots opened the door to investigate what had just happened, Brick Jackson slammed bodily into it. Before anyone inside could react, he was back on his feet and gunning down anything that wasn't wearing a white coat. The P90 in his left hand knocked them down, and the beretta in his right took out their braincores.

For the first time, Brick took the time to survey his surroundings. Strange glyphs glowed neon pink, green and blue on the brassy walls. Three of the missing scientists had taken cover behind what he assumed was some sort of control for the device.

"Where are Lady Kwan and Colonel Wilhelm?" Brick asked them.

"D-d-down stairs." One of the scientists, a balding man with a laurel of dyed-black hair gestured towards another door with a shaking hand.

"Thanks. You know how to work this thing?"

"Uhh... no? Kinda? I--"

"Look, just set the self-destruct for sixty seconds and run."

"But-- no, I can't! Think of all the--"

"Do it, or else the Chrono-Nazis are gonna blow the whole fucking planet up!"

The man stood there frozen. After an awkward pause, another of the scientists spoke up. "Ok, I'll take care of it." She had a shock of red hair and delicate Irish features. "But there's more of us downstairs, too. You gotta go get them."

"Yeah, I got 'em." Brick went to the door, and inspected it for a moment.

"Wave your hand by that silver bubble," the same lady said.

"Thanks." He did and the door opened. "Now run, I've got someone outside who'll help."

Brick ran down the smooth stairs. Below, he found Colonel Wilhelm Willis and Lady Kwan overseeing a dozen more scientists poking and prodding alien machinery.

"Willis! Kwan!" His shout was emphasized by the room igniting in red and accompanied by a klaxxon alerting the imminent self-destruct.

"Vhat haff you done, you fool! You'll kill us all!"

Lady Kwan did what she does best. She disappeared.

"Nope, just you and me."

The scientists began to panic and run, but stopped when Willis blasted the one closest to the door. The unfortunate man's chest exploded with the force of the sonic blast.

Brick charged at Willis, firing at the Chrono-Nazi's sonic rifle to keep his aim off. Brick reached him and both tossed down their weapons and began grappling. The scientists

continued looking on in awe and fear.

"Run, dumbasses!" With that they retreated to the door.

As strong as Brick was, cybots were stronger. Willis raised Jackson up and threw him down into one of the consoles.

"Bloody dumbkoff! You haff ruined everything!" Wilhelm began fiddling with a device on his belt. "Paradox or no, I vill see to it that you are never born!" A swirling portal opened up in the air and he stepped through it.

Brick recovered and sprinted for the portal. He reached it and leapt through just before it winked out of existence.

"Where the heck you come from, boy?" someone asked in a slow, southern drawl. Brick looked up to see a man in a white suit pointing a Wells Fargo shotgun down at him. All around him, black men, women and children dressed in tatters and carrying bundles of tobacco stared on in shock.