

Hellrider

By Blue Jay

An easy street race turns into the fight of Rob's life as he faces a truly terrifying opponent.

You ever see or read about a really great car chase or outright car battle, like Stephen King's *Christine* or Quentin Tarantino's *Death Proof* or Walter Hill's *The Driver* or Roger Corman's *Death Race 2000* or 1977's *The Car* or Serathin's *Adrenaline Rush*, and you really love what you find and want more of it? You ever wonder what would happen if you mixed them together for one savage little beast of a tale?

I do.

Also, I very highly recommend those films/book and online story series. Absolutely worth it. (Yes, I'll be making a journal entry about the above-mentioned entertainment).

Quick facts: the dragon, eagle, and husky are based on three main characters in Serathin's *Adrenaline Rush*; the Mustang is my favorite car; Perry's license plate is from *Christine* (book); Rob's license plate is a W.A.S.P. song, as is West's.

Anyway, enjoy this short, wicked little romp, why don't you?

"Who's the laughter?"

Pyro cringed, pausing in his adjustments of the engine to look over his shoulder.

Behind him stood the speaker, Rob. The dragon wasn't looking at the husky, his gaze towards the third car in tonight's race. It was an older Mustang, maybe '60s, but Rob had never given much of a shit about "ponycars" or the people who drove them. By far he preferred the sleeker designs more suggestive of modern supercars, especially the Italian-made designs that were really built for nothing but nerve-shredding speed.

"Well?" the dragon asked.

Sighing internally, knowing the reptilian male wouldn't give up until he had an answer, the rust-and-cream canine set his tool down carefully on the engine of Rob's Chevrolet Corvette Stingray Z51 and stood up. He was a head shorter than the horned lizard, who was cobalt with dark yellow underside scaling, and fairly muscular.

"I don't think you should talk like that," he warned Rob in a low voice. "Not tonight. That guy over there...he isn't right."

Rob frowned, glancing from the husky to the other canid, a male hyena who was crouched at the driver's front tire, polishing it. The dragon had never liked white walls, thin or wide, and the spotted newcomer's wide ones, bright white to the point of glowing, made his eyes ache. His wheels were solid steel, that much was clear, a highly-polished chrome that warped its surroundings even as it reflected them, like a miniaturized funhouse mirror.

The driver himself wore dark gray jeans and a worn black leather jacket, though it did nothing to make him seem the least bit intimidating. As the dragon studied him, he appeared to be at odds with not only the race but himself: he wore broken-in attire while appearing to be fairly young, and drove a car that was fifty years old but had been modernized in a bizarre mish-mash fashion.

To Rob, the whole thing was like a self-destructive anachronism. Just who was this guy?

"What about him?" he asked his mechanic. "Doesn't look dangerous."

Pyro shrugged. "I mean, his car's old, yeah, but he clearly has a good rebuild to it. He showed up half an hour or so ago, maybe forty-five minutes. When Nocturne asked for his registration and down payment, he just took him aside, said something to him, and then Nocturne told everyone all races were shuttered except this one. He even ordered the other racers for *this* race to back off."

Rob stared, bewildered by the news, and then searched the crowd for any sign of the imposing stallion. He found him a ways off, arguing with a stag Rob recognized as an organizer and spotter. He thought about going over and asking just what the hell was going on; cancelling any race meant a lot of lost money on any night, since a ton of revenue was gained by both the big shots who ran the underground racing circuit and the drivers who participated.

"Rob, bastard, there you are!" a gruff voice called from behind the dragon.

Turning, he found his mood much improved: West was a good friend and a damn fine racer, the eagle almost as big as Nocturne was. Together, both the reptile and the bird had dominated many contests, raking in quite a bit of cash.

"Been wondering if you'd be here, with what I've heard," Rob said. He jerked his head back to indicate the hyena. "Some idiot is ruining tonight's fun. We should have six guys running tonight, but apparently this newb told Nocturne to shaft three of them."

West shrugged. "I don't get it. Money's lost, rep is tarnished, and for what? I saw Tanner right after this guy showed up, and I want to say that rat's got his paw in this whole thing, a drug smuggle or something like he's always involved in, but I'm not finding any evidence of it."

Rob shook his head. "Yeah, I was gonna ask Nocturne what the fuck, but now I don't know if that'd be a good idea either." The corner of his mouth twisted into a dark grin. "Want to dominate the little boi?"

Even though he'd raised the question, the memory flashed immediately into his own mind, a subby leopard he'd beaten years ago being double-teamed by the both of them during an after-race celebratory party at West's home. If the night went as usual, then the hyena would share that fate.

Picking up the obvious line of thought, the avian smirked. "Hell, he's probably the kind to enjoy a couple of studs like us pushing him around. He may have a Mustang, but it's a '65 GT350 Shelby; that thing's ancient compared to our rides. This'll be a piece of cake."

They shared a laugh before an organizer began calling out for racers to prepare themselves. Pyro finished his minor adjustments and closed the hood of the silver Stingray before joining the onlookers, Rob ignoring his mechanic as he confidently got into the driver's seat.

Between the Corvette and the Mustang was West's prized baby, a canary-yellow SRT Viper GTS. The eagle had a taste in cars that Rob heartily approved of, and had an engine one could only envy; even Pyro had admitted the work done to the Viper was nothing short of astonishing, and that was high praise indeed from a serious gearhead like him.

Lastly was the hyena's Mustang. Its body was such a dark purple that it might as well have been black. For a moment, Rob could see the canid a glow inside the cabin, a soft electric blue that was probably from the lighting of all the console bits, but then everything was shielded by the pitch-black of the ponycar's windows.

For just a second, Rob could perfectly see his reflection in the utterly dark glass, and weirdly had trouble making out West's image. It was as if the hyena's car didn't *want* to reflect the bird.

Snorting, telling himself to dismiss the little prick and just win the damn race already, he turned his full attention to the electronic display ahead. The circuit had erected a frame that arched over the entrance of the warehouse that was their headquarters, a huge flat screen television with crystal-clear picture acting as their traffic light.

The trio revved their engines, Rob and West making it clear they were eager to seize victory and the hyena's muscle car sounding almost casual in its assertion of its prowess.

The light turned yellow: the dragon's breath quickened, his nerves tensing as he tightened his grip on the steering wheel, unconsciously turning it ever so slightly to either side as if he was already upon the road. He felt a drop of sweat, a single tiny bead, form on his temple. It began to roll down his scales—

The light turned green.

The dragon's reflexes acted immediately, his feet doing their jobs and the Stingray darting forward and through the triple-wide warehouse door in a flash. Right on his heels was West, the Viper never far behind. The Mustang was in third, but kept pace.

Rob kept glancing up to his rearview mirror, almost wanting to laugh as the race went on. It was the Out-of-Towner route, taking them from the industrial sector of the city to the outskirts and back again, covering nearly six miles of road.

Once they were away from the circuit's headquarters, Rob opened up, letting his baby streak like a living bullet down the streets, heading for the first checkpoint. The inertia wasn't affected him very much, securely strapped in as he was, but the pure speed and the thrill of the ride (not to mention the lovely prize money) was making it feel stronger than it really was.

He took a hard turn, his Stingray sliding a bit and narrowly missing the unlucky motorist who had been about to pull forward on a green light; had Rob been even a second slower, their cars would have smashed into each other. As it was, he curved around the other driver, leaving the poor old lion to gape in utterly disbelief, followed quickly by a yelp of fear as West took a "shortcut" by cutting around the lion's other end, nearly clipping Rob's bumper in the process.

"You prick!" the dragon chuckled darkly, enjoying their little game; the two often messed with each other during easy runs, to spice things up.

Behind them, the Mustang caught up, the rising growl of its engine an annoying buzz in Rob's earholes.

Frowning as he felt his good mood soured, Rob let up on the gas for just a heartbeat and then floored it. He and West had worked out a system of maneuvers and signals to each other for when to act in particular ways, blocking rival racers and helping one another out when the advantage had to be theirs.

Doing exactly as needed, West swerved into the Mustang's path, keeping it from gaining any ground. The hyena nearly got around him with a hard left, but the eagle surged ahead and blocked him again, preventing him from reaching first place.

Another dark smile creased the cobalt male's face and he pulled even farther ahead, making the next turn with ease. They had this in the bag.

He glanced into the rearview mirror again, and his eyes widened slightly as he saw the Mustang drifting right next to the Viper, almost touching it.

Something was wrong.

As the race drew on, it became more and more impossible for West to pull away from the hyena, the both of them neck-and-neck, the unending howl of their engines somehow making the sweat bead faster and in greater amounts on Rob's brow. Both of his chasers were close enough that the seasoned street racer could easily distinguish the license plates on each set of wheels: West's "Savage," which went along with Rob's own "Harder, Faster;" and the Mustang's "Rock And Roll Will Never Die," the words ominously written with a leering canine skull behind them on a dead-black field.

Something was very, very wrong.

He almost missed the next turn, a hard one, but he made it, if only just barely. As he glanced back, he saw West come into sight...and then felt his pulse stop as the Mustang suddenly appeared, its headlights demanding his unwavering attention.

Rob could only stare, feeling time slow down, as the dark purple ponycar clipped the canary-yellow snakecar, sending it into a spin.

Shit!

He could only imagine what was going through his friend's mind as his car was sent wildly out of his control, certain death coming his way. Rob was only barely able to stop himself from whipping his own ride about and doing something—hell, he wanted to plow right into that spotted son of a bitch!

But as he continued to watch, West forced control back into his hands, the Viper twisting to one side and returning the clip, smashing apart the driver's headlight of the Mustang and sending it careening over the curb (twisting the wheel, very likely). The aged auto smashed into a street light, one that did not have a concrete base, tearing the illumination device from its base even as the device cut a vicious wound into the front of the car.

Rob hit the brakes, fully turning to watch the wreck as it happened. He didn't even notice West coming to a rest next to the dragon. Each of them now watched, wholly enraptured as the older vehicle, its passenger front wheel apparently completely gone, painfully swung around in an open and empty parking lot in front of some low-grade pizza place, coming to rest facing the friends.

With an easy view to the damage, the experienced male could only cringe, feeling the spite he'd held earlier become replaced by internal soreness. He didn't like the driver, or any of his kind, really, but shit, that had to hurt like a mother. The Mustang's front passenger wheel was indeed gone, causing it to tilt unnaturally; the windshield was a train wreck of cracks, like cocaine on a black mirror, just goddamn everywhere; the driver headlight was smashed to nothing, the grill next to it crushed in and beyond that, where the light had touched, pushed in so far that no mechanic would be able to tell grill from engine; and the engine was no doubt cracked to bits and hemorrhaging fluids and entire chunks of itself.

Swallowing, not sure what to do next, Rob could only stare at the result of the accident. This sort of thing had never happened before. Should he tell Nocturne? Someone even higher up? Should they call the cops?

Movement caught his eye and brought him back to reality, West pulling up, keeping away from the hyena's car as he parked and leaned out his window.

"Fuck you, pal!" the eagle laughed, going so far as to give the wreckage a single-finger salute. "You ruin a race, you clip me, you get what you deserve!"

Rob blinked, trying to figure out whether he should yell at his friend to get his shit together so they could get the fuck out of there, but as he opened his mouth to say something, he heard a noise.

It was the Mustang.

The dragon's throat went dry and tight, his mind struggling to grasp the very concept of what his eyes saw as the ruined car's front pushed itself out, broadening and straightening until it was right. The polish seemed to flow back to the bars even as the headlights pieced themselves back together, the wires retracting deep into the sockets as the bulbs retook their places. From down the street behind the Mustang, its missing wheel rolled up and around its front, sidling into position; the car gave a jerk as it was reattached.

"No...fucking...way..." was all Rob could get out. This was not possible, this was not goddamn fucking possible.

The cracks in the windshield healed up, and the headlights blazed to life. The engine turned over, and this time it wasn't the sound of a car straining for its former glory in the modern age, it was the sound of an infuriated beast facing its enemy.

West seemed to get the memo, ducking back into his Viper, his tail lights flaring as he tried to back up.

He wasn't fast enough.

Its engine practically roaring, the Mustang surged forward. It plowed into the side of the other car, and fully carried it across the street. The Viper smashed into the side of a building, heavily cracking the thick granite exterior in all directions.

"No!" Rob gasped, but he was unable to move, enthralled to the sight of his friend being killed.

The Mustang did not relent. Its wheels smoked, the scent of burning rubber filling the air and Rob's ears as he watched in terror. Pouring on the force, the older vehicle pressed harder and harder against the Viper, slowly crushing it and its driver into the building's side. It must have gone on for nearly a minute, and then, with the eagle's car squeezed to half of its natural width, the ponycar stopped, pausing for just a moment before pulling into reverse.

It dragged the Viper with it for a second, the two viciously merged, and then broke free, whipping about to face its next prey, its engine gunning in a predator's snarl.

Rob.

He watched still, unblinking, as the grill and headlights repaired themselves again, the shrieking of metal clearly audible, the soft tinkling of glass healing just on the edges of his awareness.

GET THE FUCK OUT OF THERE MOVE MOVE MOVE MOVE MOVE!!!

He slammed the gas down as hard as he could, the Stingray practically leaping forward as his desperate flight began. He had to get back to the warehouse, tell everyone what happened, get lots of fucking guns and kill that damned maniac and his unholy monster of a car—

The Mustang gave chase, exhibiting a speed and surety of movement that belied its (supposed) age. Whatever it was, and whatever its driver was, it gave the nightmare machine everything needed to get the dirty work done.

Rob twisted the wheel this way and that, nearly hitting several over vehicles as he barreled with reckless abandon down the roads. Gone from his mind were all thoughts of the race: he took any avenue he saw, trying to lose his pursuer, not remembering that the course had spotters—but then, he would have questioned if they were even there that night if he thought of them at all. Hadn't the hyena forced Nocturne to alter the races drastically with mere words? If so, what else was he capable of?

A bump brought his mind back to the present. The Mustang was right on his ass, giving him love taps that were strong enough to crack his fender.

"Fuck me!" Rob yelled, vainly trying to force the pedal through the floor. His Stingray was at top speed, and with the treatment he was giving it, it wasn't about to go any faster.

Another bump, this time with a frightening effect: his car got faster. The Mustang hadn't backed off with this blow, instead staying pressed tightly to its target, pushing it at ever-greater speeds.

"God, fuck, I'm sorry!" Rob screamed, turning to face the rear windshield. "I'm sorry I called you a laugher!"

Whether the other driver heard him, whether he even cared at all, Rob had not the slightest clue. The Mustang only drove faster, pushing both cars to a speed exceeding ninety miles per hours.

Turning back, Rob saw his fate: a hundred yards ahead, a motor pool for a construction crew's various machines, with a particularly large and heavy-looking one clearly reserved just for him, a massive block of steel that would seal his fate.

The Mustang-forced Viper blew through the chain-link fence and shot towards the machine, the second car not breaking away even at the last second. Both smashed into the huge machine, causing it to shudder from the severe force of the impact.

The Stingray was crushed in much the same way as a can in a compactor, pressed against an immovable object by an unstoppable force. It exploded, but there was no fire: parts went everywhere as it was forced into itself, and parts of Rob went with them, though much of him was reduced to a grisly dragon-paste.

The Mustang's front was reduced to crumpled foil, its entire front half a memory rather than a reality.

There was no noise. With both cars destroyed, silence consumed the motor pool. For several long minutes, nothing happened aside from small bits falling from the destroyed rides.

...But then the Mustang pushed itself back from the Stingray, its engine coming to life step by step until it was wholly alive again, its housing restoring itself to perfection.

This time the Mustang moved slowly away, not because it was weakened from the ordeal, but because its driver was savoring his victory.

Once it reached the streets, it turned towards the industrial district. After all, there was still the prize money to collect.

The End