

# The Forsaken

*The Apocalypse Trilogy*  
Book Two

G. Wells Taylor

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Edited by Julia C. Moulton

Email: books@gwellstaylor.com

Website: www.gwellstaylor.com

Cover Design by G. Wells Taylor

**For my sisters:**  
*Alphabetically*  
**Kelley, Kerry and Wendy**

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## 31 – The Wild Bunch

The man stood on the porch of an old farmhouse in the middle of a muddy gray desert. His suit and tie refused to fit in with the surroundings but he always wore them. It had just stopped raining which made the hot day humid. The house behind him was never built for the rain. The crazy old farmer must have been patching the roof for a hundred years right up until this man and his friends arrived and killed him.

Six months back, the law in Greasetown was closing in so they headed for the desert—a ferry across the Mississippi Sea, then a long drive south. The trio stopped to buy ammunition and supplies in Imperial—an oil town before the wells dried up, it was a cracked main street of empty buildings now. The desert around it had grown green and gray and heavy with all the rain.

After re-supplying they stumbled on the farmhouse. The old man was as crazy as a *red rug*—as Driver put it. He was a decent enough sort at first, until he introduced them to his wife. She had been dead for about fifty years and was wrinkled into a knot of reanimated, greasy leather that moaned. Bloody was moved by their story, so he killed the farmer and burned the pair of them on a pile of fence posts.

Tiny had just hung up the phone. He had forwarded his new number to a gangster friend in Vicetown in case anyone he could trust came looking. Tiny and the boys had been out of work for almost a year and he had to get something going. He was on the porch gearing up for the tough sale ahead.

*Driver would be an easy sale.* The Texan was ready to lock and load. But Bloody was getting worse. The big gunman spent his days, whisky bottle in one hand, .45 Colt in the other. He had an old cassette player and a warbling tape of Roy Orbison's songs. He'd hide out with a big box of ammunition in the driving shed out beside the ruins of a barn. "Crying" and gunfire haunted their nights.

Tiny sold television advertising before the Change. He was good at it. People could call him a no good son of a bitch and tell him to get the hell out, but he would only smile and sell them whatever he wanted.

One night—a good five months before the Change—his life had started over when he first met Driver and Bloody at a bar in Houston. Driver was a fast talking Texan of average height and build with dazzling blue eyes. Bloody was a tall flat-faced man who joked in a cynical way, until the booze made him dark.

Neither of them was very drunk when they met, but for whatever reason—*fate*—Bloody had said, they sidled up beside Tiny and began drinking with him. That bar led them to another, and another, until they ended the day, or began the next at an all night strip joint. About fifteen other men following similar empty hallways of life sat around the stage. Tiny didn't remember much of what led up to his new life. He just remembered Bloody crying.

"What is it, brother?" Tiny asked. They had all become *brothers* after the sixteenth drink.

"Look," Bloody had said, pointing to the stripper looming over them. The small Latino woman ground her naked pelvis in their direction. "I can't take it!"

"Yeah, beautiful..." Tiny replied. "What, you want some?"

Driver jumped in then. "Hey! Hey! Whoa there! Hey there! Tiny, brother. Bloody's just feelin' a little down." Then the Texan put his bearded face close to Bloody's. He whispered something into his friend's ear where his forehead rested against the bar. Bloody grunted. Then, Driver stepped back shaking his head.

"Shit!" The Texan cursed, wiping a hairy knuckled hand over his bristly scalp. "Bloody's feelin' bad for the girl." He slid a chrome-plated pistol with a six-inch barrel out of his coat and handed it to Tiny.

"There may be some shootin'. You fire that little darlin' with both hands. *Both*, you hear? Hey!" Driver pushed it under Tiny's coat. "Keep it down now. What you've got there is a .357 magnum with enough killin' power to drop a goddamn Texas steer. You see the barrel, that extra length and those ribs? That's to keep her cool for lots of shootin'. She's a som' bitch!" Driver whispered with a wink.

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Without warning, Bloody lurched to his feet. He glared at the dancer through his sunglasses.

“You poor bitch!” he growled. “Who’s doing this to you?” Tears slid effortlessly down his flat cheeks.

The stripper stopped, her hand instinctively covering her abdomen. A few shouts came from behind the trio as other revelers called for the show. Bloody turned.

“So.” His eyes squinted behind black lenses. “*You’re* making her do it.” With speed that belied his drunkenness, Bloody pulled a gun from his jacket. It looked like Tiny’s but was jet black, and its barrel was longer.

“Careful, brother!” Driver yelled at Tiny, as he pulled a pair of guns from shoulder holsters.

The dark room had erupted in flashing gunfire and noise. Tiny remembered few particular actions, just Bloody firing into the crowd before spinning to shoot the stripper between the eyes. Driver fired rapidly with twin .9 mm automatics—chewing an escape route through the screaming patrons.

Tiny’s strongest memory was the feeling of power warming his hand through the chunk of forged steel. It was something he had never felt before. And his new brothers shared it freely with him. So his life changed. Married to the gun and his talent, no one would ever rake this salesman over the coals again.

Bloody wept in the rear seat of the car as they tore away from the scene. He didn’t explain his actions. Neither did Driver. The Texan worked the wheel of the big black Chevelle with his hot guns in his lap.

Tiny didn’t want an explanation either. They screamed across the state throwing lead. The law was just rounding on them, when the Change came. The boys managed to lose themselves during a storm where tornadoes corkscrewed across the landscape. The sirens of pursuit faded; the law was needed elsewhere. Liberated by the Change, Tiny and his brothers drove, scored and killed. And Tiny never lost another sale.

He calmly considered the sale he had ahead of him. He had just received a call from history. It was like the phone had rung across two decades. It was a job, but there were sticky elements to it. Tiny was a salesman, and he knew his product: Money. It was good timing. They were dipping into the last of their savings. But it would be sticky.

“Shit!” Tiny said, as he walked into the house, across the kitchen and to the bathroom mirror. He pulled the door shut.

“You handsome Devil.” He smiled at himself with twin rows of bottom teeth—like a shark’s. His blue eyes twinkled from beneath a small forehead on either side of a large nose. His bony hands retied his

tie, and then straightened his jacket. He primped a little styling mousse into his hair, just to tame the curl, and then felt his thin cleft chin for stubble.

He walked to the base of the stairs and yelled: "Driver!" The Texan slept during the early part of the day, partly because he liked late nights and tequila, but mainly because that was how they did things in Texas.

"Do I need my guns?" came Driver's calming tenor.

"Yes. I've got to talk to Bloody!"

"Well, shit, he's okay. Just the other day he didn't shoot nothin'." A pause. "You got work?" Cowboy boots thumped on the floor. "I heard the phone."

"Yeah, and Bloody may not like it." Tiny lit a cigarette.

Driver appeared at the top of the stairs. His black hair and goatee were wild as he walked down. He wore denims over a pair of tattered pink long johns. "Why? Bloody's okay." He flicked twin index fingers at Tiny's chest. "Besides, any problem? *You* can talk him into it."

"I know, brother." Tiny held out his cigarettes. Driver took one. "But this is a tough sale."

"Why?" Driver stared through the cigarette smoke. "Who we workin' for?" The Texan smoothed his wiry hair and beard. He was tired of spending more than he was making. "A big job?"

"Big money." Tiny walked over to the sink, drained off the last of his coffee. "Providing protection."

Driver helped himself to a piece of bread and then paused for his ritual morning toast of tequila—to break the tension.

"Who?" Driver mumbled, digging his palms into his eyes.

"The heat's on a guy so we'll earn our money. We got to keep him and a girl safe." Tiny knew that money and girls mentioned in the same breath always sold Driver.

"*Girl?*" Driver picked at the edge of his goatee. "Hell, Tiny I don't mind earnin' my keep."

"I know." Tiny flicked ash down the drain. "But we need Bloody."

"Hey, a job will get Bloody out of them Orbison blues." Driver straddled a kitchen chair like it was a horse. "Who's hirin' us on?"

"He just called." Tiny leveled his gaze at the Texan.

"Who?"

"Him and you got on well in the day." Tiny dropped into a seat across from him. "Felon."

"Felon?" Driver's face dropped.

"Said he's in shit." Tiny watched Driver's face. "He'll pay us a hundred grand each to cover him."

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"Whoa!" Driver breathed, "A hundred grand!"

"He's going to need protection, about a month. We might have to move around." Tiny stood up. "Would be good to have Bloody along."

Driver shook his head. "That's sticky."

"Think I don't know?" Tiny released a little pressurized ire.

"Som' bitch." The Texan squeezed his forehead with thick fingers. "Poor old Bloody."

"It was Bloody's fault!" Tiny hissed. He knew they might have to take the gunman out, and they had a long history.

"Yep. Bloody never did know better." Driver reached for another cigarette, got up and walked to the window. "We ain't his nursemaids. Let's go tell him. If he don't want to come in with us, he can go to hell. I'm gettin' tired of his shootin' and cryin' and that damn old tape... This Change just screwed everythin' up, otherwise we'd be droppin' flowers at his grave." A whimsical look passed over his face. "You know, we'd have got him a nice piece of marble or some such, could'a carved somethin' sweet on it about tiptoeing through them tulips like we done after Killer got blowed to smithereens."

"Yep." Tiny checked the action of his gun. It was the same one that Driver had given him a century before. Much of it had worn away and been replaced, but the body of it belonged in a museum. "Do you know what they were fighting about when it happened?"

"I believe it was a squabble over a gun," Driver sighed, and looked out toward the driving shed. "Felon was always a straight shooter. I just wished he hadn't pumped eight bullets into old Bloody." He looked at Tiny. "Didn't need eight."

"If you were killing Bloody, wouldn't you put eight into him?" Tiny joined him at the window. "Felon was always an overachiever though. He was the best because of it. Eight's a lot to you and me and Bloody, of course; but to a guy like Felon it's just doing business the right way."

"Still, *one* bullet and we could'a sold Bloody on it bein' a crime of passion." Driver studied his nails. "*Eight* is just plain *mean*."

"You got to be mean in this business." Tiny smirked, studying the round stones of the barn's foundation.

"Let's tell him." Driver's face was dark. His eyes flashed like cash registers.

"Let's tell him in the desert. We got to meet Felon in the City of Light in two days." Tiny grabbed the first hint of a sales plan.

"Two days? With them bad roads, and only one rusty ferry to cross the Mississippi Seal?" Driver frowned. "That's quite a drive."

"That's why we call you Driver." Tiny laughed.