



An excerpt from *The Drifter in 4-D*,  
available at Amazon as an [eBook](#),  
or in [print](#) as part of *The Collected Wade Thruitt*.

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NOTE: This story uses film language to describe action as if it's unfolding on a screen. I call pieces written in this style novies (novel + movie = novie).

It's late afternoon but still sunny. Wade's Cadillac is one of many parked at the end of a long, freshly mown field, but his is the only car with horns on the grille. Wade stands beside the car and folds the Juneteenth flyer from earlier. He puts it in a pocket of his yellow western suit. He's wearing the yellow suit, a red shirt, red cowboy boots, and his dalmatian-skin hat.

Then Wade is walking through a crowd of people at the other end of the field. He carries his guitar case at his side and is surrounded by talk, laughter and boombox music with a drum-heavy African sound. He stands out because of his attire and because he's the only white face in the crowd. Everyone else is black.

A woman Wade speaks to points to an old army tent beside a wooden stage at the far end of the field. Wade heads toward the tent and passes a group of kids gathered around an old man. The man tells them, "Word of Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation reached Texas on June 19th, 1965, so we made that date a holiday. Juneteenth."

One of the kids says, "No, grandpa, the Emancipation Proclamation was 1865, not 1965."

"Well," the old man says, "1865 was when *black* folk heard about it."

Wade reaches the tent and stops at the front door flap. He clears his throat and says, "Hello? Is Mr. Tater in there?"

"Wha...huh? Oh. Come in."

Wade lifts the flap and steps into the tent.

It's semidark inside, but Wade sees movement. A man sits up on a cot and the cot creaks.

"Hello?" Wade says, still holding the tent flap

open.

The man gets to his feet and reaches up to click on a lightbulb that's dangling from a cord in the center of the tent.

Dick Tater is black and nearly seven feet tall. He has to stoop slightly so his head doesn't brush the top of the tent. He's about forty and muscular, but putting on weight around the middle, and he's dressed in a white undershirt, black slacks and black shoes.

"Well looky here," he smiles. "Come on in."

Wade steps in and lets the tent flap fall shut behind him. Muffled crowd noise continues outside.

Wade blinks as he adjusts to the change in light. He looks at Tater, then around the tent. A cot's against one wall, two folding chairs against another. A suitcase and a guitar case are on the ground between the chairs. Wade and Tater are alone in the tent.

"Do you remember me?" Tater asks.

"No. Are you Dick Tater?"

Tater chuckles and points to one of the chairs. Wade sets his guitar case on the ground, removes his hat and fans himself with it as he takes a seat. Tater picks up the suitcase and walks to the cot.

"Call me Big Dick. That's my name now, thanks to you."

Wade watches Tater lay the suitcase on the cot and snap it open.

"I'm afraid you have the wrong man, Big D. . . Mr. Tater. We've never met."

"Think back," Tater says as he digs through his suitcase. "You used to play with a band called The Tail Wagoneers."

"Well, you got *that* part right. That was the first road band I was ever in. But that was a long time ago."

Tater takes a long-sleeved white shirt from

the suitcase and faces Wade. He slips the shirt on and buttons it while he talks.

“It was a while back, all right, and one night The Tail Wagoneers played a club in Arkansas where I was the bouncer. I was trying to get started with my *own* music at the time, so I went backstage during one of your breaks to get some pointers on touring, but you were all busy so I didn’t bother anyone. The rest of the folks in the band were taking naps, visiting the bathroom and the like, but you . . . you were sitting in a corner, picking guitar and writing a song. I sneaked a listen, and the first line was, ‘All you big dictators and generals and. . .’ I forget what else, but that’s where I got my name.”

“Oh. ‘Big dictators.’ You took your stage name from the first line of my song.”

Tater nods. He tucks in his shirt and pulls a black tie from the suitcase. He slips the tie around his neck and begins working on a knot.

“I remember that song,” Wade says. “Sort of. ‘The Big Bang Solution.’ That was the one where I ask all the people that make their livings with guns to come to a party I’m throwing and bring their firearms. And one bullet each. I get them drunk and then, at the stroke of midnight, they all put their guns in their mouths and pull the triggers. One of my pacifist songs.”

Wade stares off into space, remembering.

Tater finishes with his tie and takes a black suit coat from the suitcase. He steps to the empty chair as he puts on the coat. “You still writing songs?” he asks. He turns the empty chair so it’s facing Wade’s, then he sits, leans down and opens his guitar case.

“Yeah, I’m still writing,” Wade says. “I’m working on a song right now. Planning it.”

Tater takes a black semi-acoustic from the guitar case. He produces a handkerchief and begins

polishing the instrument. The crowd sounds outside the tent fade to silence during the following. The action Wade's about to describe is silent too.

"The song's called 'The Drifter in 4-D,'" Wade says, "as in the fourth dimension. Time. It starts out with a drifter sitting around a motel room one night. . . room 4-D. . . and he's just relaxing on the couch, playing his guitar, but then some cops bust in. They break down the door and run in with their guns blazing."

We see Wade, dressed in his yellow western suit, sitting on a couch. He's strumming a guitar lazily. Strum, strum, and then the pillow at his elbow *explodes* in a burst of stuffing. He tosses his guitar aside, jumps up and runs to the back door. Police in SWAT gear and black ski masks follow him through the door in hot pursuit.

"So he runs into the past," Wade's voice says, "and the cops follow him."

Wade stops to look around and sees that he's in a dimly lit, rock-walled cave. He's dressed from shoulder to knee in bear skins, caveman-style.

"But now the cops don't have guns," Wade continues, "just clubs and spears."

A spear flies past Wade's head and he takes off running again.

"They chase the drifter and almost catch him, but then they stop to beat up a kid painting graffiti on a wall."

The police, in bear skins now too, club a boy beneath a picture of a mammoth on the cave wall.

"So," Wade says, "the drifter escapes and runs through a hole in the wall, and then he's in the *future*."

Wade stops running. He's wearing a black body stocking with multicolored electrical wires woven through it. A satellite dish hat is on top of his head. He's standing in an empty, brightly-lit silver corridor that curves away ahead of him and

behind. We don't hear anything, but suddenly he does, and he takes off running again.

"The cops enter the future right behind him," Wade narrates, "and now they have laser guns."

Bright red beams shoot past the future Wade and ricochet off the walls. He drops to a crouch as he runs.

"They chase the drifter down a steel hall, shooting, but they only manage to lobotomize and castrate themselves with the ray beams bouncing around, and one even loses his pecker."

Wade runs until he comes to a door in the side of the corridor. He opens the door and ducks through it.

"Then the drifter escapes back into the present. . . the motel room. . . but things aren't right."

Reentering the motel room, Wade is still dressed in the futuristic body stocking and satellite hat. He doesn't slow down in his running, and as he turns a corner he comes face to face with himself—his present self, wearing the yellow western suit.

Wade is leaning forward in his chair, in Tater's tent. There's no return of the crowd noise outside.

"You see," Wade says, gesturing enthusiastically with his hands, "the first person the *future* drifter runs into in the present is himself. His *present* self. Naturally both drifters are surprised, and they try to talk to each other, but they're duplicates, so whenever they open their mouths they say the exact same thing. Together."

Back to the drifter's motel room. The two Wades look at each other and move their lips in sync. We can't hear them, but they both look frustrated.

Wade's voice says, "This makes it impossible to hold a conversation, but it's a great device for harmonizing."

The drifter from the present notices his guitar where he left it on the couch. He picks it up and begins to play and sing a song. We can't hear but it's obviously upbeat. The drifter from the future joins in, and the two Wades move their lips in perfect sync.

Then we see that they're being backed up by a huge orchestra swinging in time to the song. Lots of energy, lots of motion, all in silence.

"So they sing up a storm," Wade says, "and the song turns into a duet about . . . something or other. I haven't got that far yet."

The crowd noise outside the tent returns. Tater's still sitting in his chair, holding his guitar in his lap, and he's staring at Wade. It takes him a moment to organize his thoughts.

"Damn, boy. You think too much."

The tent flap opens and two beautiful young black women enter.

"Ah!" Tater says. "My escort!"

Tater gets to his feet and smiles at the women. He hands his guitar to one and holds his arm out to the other, then he looks at Wade. "I sent for you because I wanted to play at least *one* gig with the man who gave me my name before I die."

The woman on Tater's arm says, "*He* named you Big Dick? I was hoping you liked *girls*."

"No," Wade protests, "you don't understand."

Tater winks at Wade and chuckles. "Your name's done wonders for my social life, too. Get tuned up. I'll call you onstage later. There's a bottle under the cot if you get thirsty."

Tater and the women exit the tent.