

Raptor

cleanwhiteroom

It's raining.

It's raining, and it's hot, and they're in the jungle, and a pack of hyperintelligent lizards with very sharp teeth who are also very goddamned fast are cutting them off from the gate.

They're also, somehow, missing Park.

That sums it up nicely, Rush thinks.

Pure. Fucking. Dead. Fucking. Brilliant.

This is not a good day.

"If we're going to make it back to the gate," Young says grimly, "someone is going to have to provide a distraction. Draw them off, somehow, and then double back."

Of course. The scintillatingly brilliant elegance of the colonel's plan, as always, astounds him. No one wants to hear this but, frankly, Park is probably dead by now, which is a pity for three reasons. One, on principle, no one with an IQ of greater than one hundred and forty should die by being eaten for fuck's sake. Two, no one is as militant about taking care of the hydroponics lab as Park is, and their entire diet is going to go to shit in about two months if she's dead. Three, this is going to completely throw off the entire dynamic of the science team.

Also, Rush will miss her.

He's getting distracted.

Back to critiquing the colonel's plan.

"Yes," Rush says, going for civil, "I'm sure that will work out well. Say goodbye to whatever fucking idiot is stupid enough to agree to that plan. I'm certain being brought down and then eaten alive by a pack of carnivorous, warm-blooded reptiles is a peaceful way to go."

He's looking out into the jungle as he says it. A few seconds go by before he realizes that no one has made an inane counter-observation.

Everyone—Young, Scott, Greer, Varro, Volker, and Brody are all looking at him.

"What?" he hisses.

They keep looking at him.

Scott is injured, his left leg bleeding sluggishly. Greer fucking got himself concussed. Varro's likely the only person with the wherewithal to get the party back to the gate. It's perfectly obvious that Volker and Brody wouldn't last two seconds against a velociraptor. Young isn't really dispensable.

Shit.

"No." Rush says. "No." The stupidity of sending him is almost too much for his mind to process.

"Figures," Greer says.

That really fucking pisses him off.

"Fine," he snaps. "I just pray to god that the next time you have some kind of problem with the FTL drive that you will all think of this moment just before the shields fail and you're torn apart by enemy fire or gravitational shear forces, or whatever the hell it happens to be. I hope it's fucking painful. I hope its orders of magnitude more painful than getting eaten alive."

"Rush," Young says, clearly trying to sound reasonable.

"Nope," Rush snaps, reaching over to pull Young's sidearm out of his holster. "I'm done here."

And with that, he propels himself over the massive tree blocking the entrance to the cave that they appropriated as cover and launches himself into the jungle. Young makes a last minute grab for him, but he's too slow.

No surprises there.

Rush is fair fucking fast, and always has been.

For a human.

Too bad that, categorically, humans aren't faster than alien velociraptor-equivalents.

Branches whip past his face as he rips through the humid air, pulling it into his lungs by sheer force of will. It resists him. It's heavy and wet—like trying to breathe underwater.

There's a train of thought that he doesn't need.

He's heading away from the gate, deeper into the thick greenery of the jungle, toward the last place they saw Park alive. If he's going to be risking his life anyway, he's going to fucking find Park. She's a good scientist, and even if he just finds her dead, or being god damned eaten, well, fine. At least he'll know. At least they all will.

Scratch that.

No one's going to believe anything that comes out of his mouth.

Fine.

He deserves that.

Mostly.

He can hear the lizards closing around him as he tears through the underbrush. The entire pack, or at least the majority of it, must be following him. Good. Hopefully Colonel Young et al. are smart enough to go for the gate and get back. He hopes they leave him the dialing device.

They'll probably fucking forget.

Maybe Brody won't.

Whatever his personal flaws may be, and he's certain they are manifold and profound—he has a philosophical objection to being eaten by anything less intelligent than he is.

So.

When he is taken down, and he is sure that he shortly will be, he needs to end up on his back. That is absolutely essential. Face down, and it will all be over.

His breath is burning in his throat.

Branches tear at his clothing.

The thing comes at him from his left side, exploding out of the greenery with a snarl and knocking him off his feet.

He's been waiting.

He twists in the air, wrenching his shoulders around and going down hard, really fucking hard, and he achieves priority number one and priority number two, which though he hadn't yet had time to enumerate it as such, was to hold onto his fucking gun. The thing has a grip on his left shoulder with its teeth, but he's conventionally, disappointingly right-handed so, out comes the gun.

Handgun meets bone and soft tissue as he punches it in the eye out of pure instinct. He shifts his hold and cocks the weapon, preparing to fire.

Oddly, the velociraptor backs off. Like it knows what a gun is.

Well.

Isn't that interesting?

Slowly, he gets to his feet, gun still trained unerringly at its head.

It snorts at him. Like a fucking pony. Horse. Whatever. It lowers its head.

He lowers his gun.

And that was a mistake because fucking of course it lunges straight back at him and again buries its teeth in his shoulder.

Yes, thanks, that's painful as fuck.

It yanks him off his feet, and now he's getting dragged through the jungle on his back. He tries to twist around to get a clear shot, but that's not really working out for him because of all the shit underbrush that he's getting dragged through.

He is going to be so angry if he gets eaten.

Isn't he supposed to be a merciless, heartless, icy, piece of shit, son of a bitch, bastard? He really tries for that. He does. But what kind of Machiavellian-level player fucking lowers his gun because a velociraptor seems nice? It just goes to show that: a) disappointingly, he has his occasional moments of idiocy, b) he is not a cold-hearted bastard, and c) everyone around him is completely deficient in the critical thinking department.

Suddenly, it lets him go.

He's in a clearing, and there are a whole lot more velociraptor-equivalents present.

And Park.

Well fuck.

Park does not look normal. They've been separated for what? Less than four hours? But her hair is undone and her uniform is a mess and she's crouching in a predatory manner next to one of the velociraptors.

"Park?" He turns slightly to face her, trying to ignore the blood inexorably ruining his shirt.

It's not like he has a lot of shirts.

She snarls at him.

Well this is just great.

Just fucking great.

But—they haven't eaten him. This is positive.

New priorities. Number one, get Park out of here. Number two, get to the stargate. Number three, gate back to Destiny. Number four, attempt to maroon Colonel Young on velociraptor planet to be eaten, if convenient.

"Park," he says, holding his hands up. "Lisa. Hi. It's Rush. Nick."

She's never called him Nick. No one on Destiny calls him Nick. Does anyone besides Wray even know his first name?

Park snarles at him, bearing her teeth.

He's panicking slightly.

No he's not.

Yes he is.

No he's not.

He's talking to Park. He's trying not to die. He's executing his plan. That's what he's doing.

"Are you—"

She lunges at him, knocking him back, pinning him to the jungle floor. And yes, actually, that really fucking hurts, considering he was recently bitten, but what can he do about that? Nothing. He tries to ignore it.

"We need to go." He tries not to sound nervous as he holds his hands up, palms open. She crouches over him, smelling of perfume and civilization. "It seems like you've effectively connected with the indigenous population, and congratulations, that's very interesting, but—"

She presses down mercilessly into his injured shoulder and he breaks off, clenching his jaw. She brings her hand to her mouth, tasting his blood, her expression concealed by the tangled mass of her hair.

He is not excited about this development.

"Aren't you a vegetarian?" he asks her.

She snarles at him again. He takes that as a 'no, not anymore'.

She climbs on top of him, still licking the blood off her hand, and fuck, this is getting extremely uncomfortable for everyone concerned. He's sure, he's absolutely positive that Park is going to be endearingly mortified about this later, presuming the both of them don't die in the next thirty seconds to half hour. He has to get her out of here. She's clearly under some kind of alien influence, as he's pretty sure that being queen of the velociraptors is not one of her life goals.

It's time to stop acting like Colonel fucking Young and more like Nicholas fucking Rush.

He backhands her as hard as he can, feeling acutely guilty as he does it, but it knocks her back, and he finally manages to reverse their positions and he pulls her up so that their faces are inches apart.

"Your name is Lisa Park," he says, shaking her. "You're on my fucking science team, so pull yourself together."

It doesn't seem to be working.

He tries to think of something personal that he can use to pull her back from her velociraptor alter-ego.

She likes plants.

He knows fuck about plants.

She likes Greer.

He knows fuck about Greer.

She likes—the sensor console?

He slaps her to buy himself more time.

She snarls at him, and the oddly quiescent velociraptors hiss menacingly from around the clearing.

"Mathematically define the directed, three dimensional perimeter of the long-range sensor sweeps," he snaps, shaking her.

She looks at him, and there's something startled at the back of her eyes.

"It's the lateral surface area of a right circular cone," he repeats, shaking her with each word.

"Pi—" she whispers, some semblance of rationality coming back into her expression.

"Yes," he says impatiently, eyeing the velociraptors out of the corner of his eye. They seem—restive. "Pi is an irrational number, not a formula, woman, keep going."

"Pi times r times the square root of r squared plus h squared," she whispers back at him. "Doctor Rush?"

"Yes," he hisses at her. "Can you tell your new friends that we need to go?"

"You are not in charge here," she snarls at him suddenly.

"Hate to break it to you," Rush snaps, "But yes I am. Greer is going to be very upset if I don't bring you back," finally finding a way to work the other man into their exchange.

"Ronald," she whispers, her eyes wild, looking out into the jungle.

"That's the one." His eyes scan the clearing, settling on her radio. His is long gone, a casualty of the painful, dragged-through-the-jungle-by-a-velociraptor adventure he just had. Slowly he reaches over, picking it up. He flips it to broadcast on all channels.

"This is Rush," he says. "Park is alive. I repeat, I have found Park. If anyone is still on the planet—"

Park spin-kicks him in the face from a crouch.

He thinks.

He's not entirely certain that's what happened, because the next time he's fully cognizant of what's going on, she's on top of him again, and snarling, and yes, there's got to be some kind of telepathic bleed-over from the velociraptors to her because, granted, he's possibly not made his best effort on connection socially with the science team, but Park has never showed any inclination to spin-kick him before for pity's sake.

He does not feel right.

Some commotion from his peripheral vision attracts his attention and to his intense relief he sees that Greer has also been dragged into the clearing. By his fucking backpack, rather than his fucking shoulder.

Figures. Son of a bitch.

"Rush," Greer snaps angrily. "What the hell are you doing?"

Yes.

Good question.

Rush is lying on the ground, slowly fucking bleeding out through his subclavian artery as Park is doing who the fuck knows what. Asserting her status as leader of the human pack? Well, she can have it, as far as Rush is concerned. Anyone is better than Colonel Young.

That's not true.

Volker would be worse.

Probably.

"I tricked the colonel into sending me on a suicide mission so that I could convince your significant other to cheat on you," Rush snaps back at him. "So far, my plan is a brilliant success."

"Asshole," Greer says, dragging Park off Rush.

She snarls at Greer. That's fine with Rush. That's preferred, actually.

"Lisa," Greer says, his hands closing around her upper arms. "Lisa. Come on."

Rush shoves himself up to his knees. Park looks over at him, hissing, as if she objects to him being vertical. Fortunately the arrival of Young, Brody, Volker, Scott, and fucking Varro in the clearing distracts her.

"Rush." Young growls his name, like this is somehow his fault.

"I see everything is going according to plan," Rush says imperiously, raising his eyebrows.

Colonel Young seems to find this somewhat amusing.

"Lisa?" Volker asks despondently, like he's a fuckin' Dickensian lad o' parts.

Rush backs away from Greer and Park, edging over towards Brody. Brody is at least reasonable, and probably the only person besides Rush who is thinking this situation through at all.

"Hey," Brody says. "I see you're not dead."

"Not today," Rush replies. "Do you have the dialing device?"

"Yeah," Brody says shortly, eyeing the velociraptors that are still surrounding their position.

"Ideally Greer will convince Park to get us out of here."

"Yeah," Brody replies laconically. "That would be good. She seems a bit—weird, though."

"A bit," Rush echoes, the irony almost drowning out the words.

"I have the feeling," Brody says, "That we're not going to be able to take her anywhere by force. She, however, could probably take us back to the gate. These velociraptor-things seem to think she should be in charge. Maybe because she's a woman?"

"Possibly," Rush says, eyeing Colonel Young and Varro, who look like they are concocting a stupid, stupid plan.

He shifts forward, toward Greer and Park.

"Park," he says quietly, catching her attention. She looks over at him. "We need to go to the gate. The gate," he repeats, drawing a circle in the mud underfoot. It's maybe a bit primitive when it comes to the range of intrapersonal communication that humanity is capable of, but Park seems to be cognitively impaired at the moment.

"Rush?" She hisses.

He nods. "The gate. We have to go to the gate. You can take us there. They'll let you."

He hopes that's true.

He has no evidence of any such thing.

She hisses at him, but suddenly takes off, pulling away from Greer with unnatural strength, heading unerringly in the direction of the stargate. They are hard pressed to keep up with her. She sprints ahead, the velociraptors surrounding her in a lethal entourage. Greer is keeping pace with her. Young and Varro are helping Scott. Volker and Brody are keeping an eye out for each other.

No one fucking bothers to help Rush.

Fine.

He doesn't fucking care.

It's not like he got mauled by a fucking velociraptor.

He's fine.

He has no problem keeping up, and they make it to the gate in less than ten minutes. Brody dials it up and everyone goes through. In the end, it's just Young and Park and Rush and Greer who stand together in the shadow of its dark arch.

They all want Park to go through first. As if any of them go through first, she won't follow. She'll just stay with her newly-adopted, moderately-intelligent, velociraptoresque...friends.

"Rush," Young says. "Go."

Oh how he wishes he could.

He shakes his head.

He knows something the colonel doesn't.

As always.

Destiny won't leave without him, but as soon as he steps back on board, that wormhole will almost certainly shut off, stranding anyone left behind.

Young narrows his eyes.

"Lisa," Greer says. "Lisa, we've got to go."

She hisses at him, but oddly, it's a sort of peripheral hiss. Like she's telling him not to bother her. She turns, looking back at the jungle, at her adopted pack. One of the velociraptors comes forward, dipping its head to her. She reaches a hand toward it—and she's so fragile and so delicate and so vulnerable—that he can't entirely control the reflexive tic of a muscle in his cheek. The raptor doesn't hurt her. It tolerates her touch, snorting softly.

Saying goodbye.

Not one for sentimentality from alien carnivores, Greer drags her through the gate.

Greer has grown on him.

Hopefully being removed from this place will dull their influence on her thoughts.

He is now alone on the dinosaur planet with Colonel Young. It's difficult, but he resists the urge to let even an edge of haste color his stance or his demeanor. Instead, he looks at Young, making his gaze as icy and collected and without fear as he can. Young, that bastard, gives him an amused smile, like he knows exactly what Rush is nervous about.

They walk forward together, and enter the event horizon at the same time.

Upon rematerializing, the first thing Rush notices is the crowd of people gathered around Park, who is on her knees at the base of the ramp, crying, or having a panic attack, or something.

Frankly, he doesn't blame her.

He and Young move out of the way, standing off to the side, watching from a distance as TJ and Greer talk her down.

"So," Young says, conversationally. "I wasn't actually going to send you."

"Oh really?" Rush says in a tone that implies that he thinks the colonel is full of shit.

"I was going to go."

There's an awkward silence between them.

"Ah," Rush says.

"Are you okay?" Young asks him. "I know you and Dr. Perry—"

"I'm fine," Rush says shortly, bringing his left hand up to push his hair out of his face. He shivers slightly. Compared to the planet, Destiny is freezing.

Young glances over at him, and something makes his eyes widen in alarm. The colonel's gaze tracks down, toward the floor. He steps in suddenly, a hand closing around Rush's right arm.

Rush pulls away, snapping his arm out of the colonel's grip. As he does so, he nearly slips on the suddenly treacherous floor. His boots slide subtly as he backs away.

"What the fuck?" Rush says to Young.

Young steps forward again, and Rush backs up again.

He looks down.

Interesting.

That is—a lot of blood on the floor.

That's fine.

He's never been the kind of person who is bothered by the sight of blood. Mandy is fucking dead. Gloria is dead. Lots of people are dead.

So he's bleeding.

Fair fucking appropriate.

"Varro," Young snaps. "Grab him. He's gonna go down."

The fuck he is. He finds it infuriating to the point of farce that Young has the audacity to act like he gives a damn that Rush got mauled by some kind of lizard creature. Also—as if Young knows that he's going to pass out. Right. As if Young is so experienced with Rush and his vasovagal episodes. Rush doesn't fucking pass out. He's never passed out in his life. Except for one time when he was withdrawing from caffeine and nicotine and sleep contemporaneously—and that had not been his fault. It

could have happened to anyone who drank eight cups of coffee per day, smoked a pack and a half of cigarettes and then stopped abruptly while at the same time foregoing sleep for two days for reasons that no one could have predicted.

Anyone.

Varro grabs him from behind, but before he can get a good grip Rush jerks away. "Don't fuckin' touch me," he hisses.

His diction could have been better but Varro backs off slightly.

"Rush," Young says, clearly annoyed. The other man is standing less than two feet away from him, hands extended, palms out, making no move to grab him this time.

"I'm fine," Rush fires back at him, steadying himself as his feet skid slightly in the thin sheen of blood on the deck plating. He looks down again, and maybe that was a mistake because—

It is an awful lot of blood.

He wakes up in the infirmary.

He feels like shit.

Colonel Young is seated next to his bed, his reading glasses on, distorting the hell out of the cover of someone's paperback copy of—

Rush isn't sure but he thinks it might be Kafka's *The Trial*.

Who the fuck brought that with them to Icarus?

It only takes the colonel a few seconds to notice that he's awake.

"So let me get this straight," Young says, without any preamble. "You freaked out, stole my sidearm, ran into the jungle, got mauled by a velociraptor, punched it in the eye, figured out it was intelligent, it dragged you into the forest, you communicated with Park, you found her radio, you convinced her to take us back to the gate, and then, to top it all off, you nearly bled out in the gate room and despite all of that," Young pauses to regard him wryly, "Still, no one likes you."

Rush narrows his eyes subtly.

This seems to amuse Colonel Young.

"I'd say that's an accurate summary, yes."

They are quiet for a moment.

"Are you done with that chess set yet?" Young asks into the awkward silence. "I play chess, you know."

"I'm sure you don't play it very well," Rush replies acidly.

"Keep telling yourself that," Young says as he stands to leave, tucking his book under his arm. "Maybe you'll start to believe it."

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