

CHAPTER TWENTY NINE – LEGION

The patrol boat was lost in a storm of crashing waves and stampeding animals. The bellowing of the triceratops herd deafened Ryan's screams. He clung to the railing as the boat was thrown from side to side by the bucking herbivores. A pair of horns scraped across the boat's hull, and a triceratops kicked its leg back into the boat's stern, shoving it forward. Waves sprayed over the side of the boat and crashed into the men on board. Unseen predators barked and hissed from the shoreline.

Ryan pressed himself against the floor of the boat as a pair of horns swung over the railing. He looked up to see a triceratops stretching its beaked jaws wide over his head, howling like a foghorn. The dinosaur's crest was a flare of crimson against the splendid blue sky. Water droplets shimmered in the air. Ryan barely had time to absorb the image until a second triceratops head-butted the boat from behind, sending the craft careening into the air.

Ryan fell towards the boat's dipping nose. Eli and Ibex tumbled past Ryan towards the open water. Another triceratops slammed its tail against the underbelly of the boat and tossed the ship back into the air. The boat crashed onto its belly in the rolling waves.

The triceratops herd trampled away down-river from the men. The boat evened out, and the current slowly carried them away from the panicked herbivores.

Ryan fought his nausea and pulled himself over the dented railing. He choked and spat beneath his mask. The majority of the herd was behind them; a few lingering triceratops were staggering ahead. Ryan did a quick head count and exhaled; nobody had been thrown overboard.

"Is-is everybody okay?" Ryan asked.

"Ozzie's out cold," Bishop yelled back. He was at the bow of the ship, crouched over Ozzie's unconscious frame. The other members of the black ops team were climbing to their feet beside him.

"Is Ozzie alive?" Ryan asked.

"Somewhat," Bishop said.

"Good enough," Ryan grunted. "Xavier, how is everyone?"

Xavier scrambled to his feet and looked over the others. Andrei was curled around the medical supplies. Eli was vomiting beside him. Logan seemed unnaturally placid. His eyes flicked across Ryan's face and he nodded quickly.

Ryan waited until his head stopped spinning and slowly stood on trembling legs. The stygimoloch colony fled the river banks and vanished into the jungle. The last of the triceratops herd stampeded around a bend in the south side of the river and vanished behind the walls of banyan trees. It was then that Ryan saw the shapes of the animals chasing the triceratops. He caught brief flashes of long, scaly pale-green bodies sprinting through the undergrowth, weaving around the tree trunks.

The ghastly, lithe carnivores poured from the tree line and dipped into the river, slithering through the water to pursue their escaping prey. More of the predators came bounding out of the jungle; they were long limbed crocodilians with bodies twelve feet long and six feet high. Their blunt snouts were full of teeth like warhog tusks. The beasts galloped along the shoreline with astonishing speed. Ryan stared, horrified.

"Andrei, what the hell are those things!?" Ryan shouted.

Andrei didn't answer.

Ryan turned around and saw Andrei clawing at the packaging of a morphine syrette. Ryan sprang across the boat and snatched the package from Andrei's hands. Andrei immediately dug his talons into Ryan's wrists and squealed, "No, I need it! *I need it!!!*"

"No, you don't!" Ryan shouted, and he shoved Andrei aside.

Andrei collapsed beside Eli and scrambled away like a feral rodent. His arched back was knotted with bulging vertebrae. Ryan was repulsed; Andrei was practically frothing at the mouth.

"Give it to me!" Andrei screamed. "*Give it to me!*"

"No, you goddamn coward!" Ryan yelled. "We need you now, and you're useless doped up. Face reality; we're fucked without you. Tell us what the hell is happening, what the hell these things are, or else we're all going to die!"

"I don't give a shit, just give it to me!" Andrei howled, and he dove for Ryan's legs. Ryan kneed him in the jaw and flung the syrette over the boat.

Andrei nearly threw himself overboard to catch the airborne syrette. One of the crocodilian beasts leapt from the water, its jaws opened wide to crush Andrei's neck. Ryan grabbed Andrei by the belt and yanked him back into the boat as the beast slammed its jaws shut with a powerful *crack*.

Ryan landed onto Andrei on the floor of the boat as the beast splashed back into the water. "You see?!" Ryan yelled.

"Get off of me!" Andrei screamed.

"Do you fucking see?!" Ryan barked. "That morphine isn't going to make this go away; it's only going to let you die in peace. Are you so selfish you won't let us live to die in a fucking bed? Do you think you're the only one who deserves to die peacefully? Fuck you, tell us how to survive!"

"No!" Andrei choked, shaking his head. "No, no, no, no-,"

Ryan slapped Andrei hard across the face.

"I know what you want," Ryan said. "Believe me, I want it even more. I'd give anything to have that feeling again. I know what it's like to be a fucking morphine addict, you sad sack of shit, and I know what you're going through. Fucking grow up and stop being a selfish prick! Help us!" He shook Andrei and banged his head against the floor. "*Help us!*"

The crocodile began climbing over the side of the boat. Its long arms squeezed the railing. The animal snapped its jaws like a steel trap as it looked at the men on the floor of the boat.

Xavier and Bishop fired their rifles at the animal, but their bullets barely penetrated its thick hide. The crocodile hissed at Xavier, and Eli snuck up beside the beast. He placed the barrel of his shotgun against the animal's neck and pulled the trigger. The slug burst through the animal's neck and sprayed flesh through the exit wound on the other side.

The crocodile went limp and slid off of the boat. More crocodiles started scratching at the metal hull, hoisting themselves up onto the railing. Other crocodiles leapt bodily into the air, thrashing their tails as the sunlight shimmered across their scales and scutes. The men in the boat started shouting and fired their rifles at the attacking

creatures. Ryan stared wide-eyed at the animals and looked back at Andrei, gripping him by the collar.

“Help us!” Ryan screamed.

“Kapatosuchus!” Andrei cried. “Kapatosuchus, boar-crocs! They’re prehistoric crocodiles; they run on land and swim even better. They travel in hordes and mob their prey to death. They’re drawn to movement. They see something run, and they chase it down and tear it apart like piranha! We’re fucking dead, man, dead!”

A bellowing triceratops barreled past, shouldering the boat against the river bank. Ryan watched as the kapatosuchus gave chase. There were dozens of them, all as big as full-grown bears with dragging tails. They pounced on top of the triceratops, agile as jungle cats, and started shearing hunks of flesh from bone.

The triceratops howled and tried to shake off the relentless predators, but there were too many. They climbed over the triceratops and ravaged it. The triceratops appeared to be melting beneath the dog-pile into a river of boiling blood. The air was filled with snorting, hissing, and the agonized cries of the triceratops.

The kapatosuchus attacked more aggressively with each torrent of spilled blood. A pair of the beasts gnawed on the triceratops’ horns and pinned its head beneath the water. Several other kapatosuchus tore the triceratops’ calves open and pried at the bone. The triceratops gurgled a hideous death rattle and descended beneath the crimson waves.

The dog-pile of hissing, writhing reptiles fought viciously for every morsel of flesh. The smaller kapatosuchus fell into the jaws of the elders and were torn apart with equal ferocity. Ryan stared, eyes peeled open, as he watched the beasts slink away from the carcass. All that was left was the badly broken crest of the Triceratops’ skull poking out of the water like an ivory sail.

The Kapatosuchus began swimming towards the boat.

“Bishop, get us out of here!” Ryan screamed. “Move this fucking boat!”

Bishop slung his rifle over his shoulder and ran to the steering column. The engine growled and the boat shuddered. The propellers churned mud and spat water. Smoke drifted from the engine. Bishop glanced over his shoulder.

“We’re mired in the mud,” Bishop yelled. “We can’t move!”

The kaprosuchus horde began climbing over the railing. The men opened fire and spent bullet casings tinkled like bells across the floor. Red water washed over the boat. Ryan knew they had to get out of the mud, but it would take everybody's help to push the boat off of the river bank.

There was no way they could defend themselves any longer; kaprosuchus were throwing themselves at the boat from every angle, spraying blood at the men, barking and snapping their jaws. Andrei curled in a ball at Ryan's feet. He said they were drawn to movement...

Ryan swallowed dryly when he realized what had to be done.

The rest of this chapter has been omitted for spoilers.
Stay tuned for more!
-Ethan, the Author