Lepidoptera

Posted originally on the fanfiction.lol at https://fanfiction.lol/works/1516.

Rating:	General Audiences
Archive Warning:	No Archive Warnings Apply
Category:	General (non relationship-focused)
Fandom:	Psychonauts
Characters:	Otto Mentallis, Sasha Nein, Razputin "Raz" Aquato
Additional Tags:	AU, Angst, Hurt/Comfort, more comfort than hurt, Surprisingly, No Beta We Die Like Men, Spoilers - Psychonauts 2, Ghosts, Cross-Posted on AO3
Language:	English
Series:	Part 4 of Arthropoda
Stats:	Published: 2023-01-11 Words: 3,146 Chapters: 1/1

Lepidoptera

by DragonWolf

Summary

It’s quite possible to repair something torn to shreds. All you really need is thread and some patience.

Notes

Originally posted on ao3
Posted to Fanfiction.lol archive on 08.11.26

The experiment results stared at him in the face. He pushed the thick glasses further up his nose, peering at them with suspicion, trying to discern what minute thing he was missing that would make everything fail miserably.

His workshop didn't have any windows, but even if they were there no light would be coming in, the indication of 3:00am glaring at him from a digital clock on a shelf just barely within view.

He felt tired, the usual bags under his eyes now even deeper, as tinkering with this project had taken a lot of his nights recently.

No scientific progress without a little sleep deprivation, right?

This wasn't approved. Not many of his pet projects were ever directly approved, but this one. This one was special. He was all but forbidden from it, don't tamper with things no one yet understands, or some stereotypical bogus like that. The Grand Head wasn't a fan.

So he worked in the night, after hours, without any supervision. He doubled back after leaving work, he made sure no one, save for one other person, knew of anything that he was doing. He put up mental walls, just enough to hide what he was doing, not enough to arouse suspicion.

He was the main inventor at this facility, so it worked, of course it did. As far as he knew no one had yet caught on.

The psychically charged water stared at Otto indifferently. The miniature door floated on top of it effortlessly, outlined with a slight glow that indicated it was ready for use.

He had to build that entire thing from scratch, because a regular door was already working on a different principle than what was needed. It required a brain, not just a mind, so the process would have to be similar but different enough that modifying one would just be more hassle.

He had to invent a way to test it too. The water had been charged by a hunk of psytanium, and reprogrammed to simulate facsimiles of thoughts to see if this new door would pick up on it.

So far it hadn't. Most of them, many of them, just floated on the surface or sank without even interacting, or worse, some exploded from the overload of what they were trying to do.

This one. This One. This One.

Otto scrutinized it for a moment more. It didn't stop glowing. It didn't make any noise indicating it wasn't working as intended. The water around it didn't move or make any indication of being disturbed.

He reached out with his mind experimentally. The device seemed to be in order. The water was still full of psychic energy and constructs he put in it.

He waved his hand, ever so gently, as if afraid for once that any disturbance would break the rocky peace that seemed to settle on the whole experiment, and the door opened.

A lazy, slow, blue-ish vortex swirled behind it.

He reached through it, just slightly, dipped his toes in, so to speak. With no real mind attached it didn't lead anywhere real, no mindscape, but the constructed gibberish flowed through like it'd been intended.

He gently closed the door with his real hand. It clicked shut and he picked it up off the surface of the water and scrutinized it more, like it was hiding secrets from him. The pale blue, slightly rippled surface was indifferent and innocent.

Like it wasn't the heaviest result he'd gotten in a long time.

Like it was just another small invention in his arsenal.

Like it wasn't a success he yearned for but feared for months.

He'd have to do more testing. Even if it worked smoothly once that wasn't a guarantee that it would work again.

For now though he had someone to notify.

He reached out for a specific mental connection that he knew was secure. After a moment he felt the person on the other end respond despite the late hour.

"Sasha. We have progress"

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"Even after multiple successful tests in a lab environment I cannot guarantee it will work"

Sasha nodded. He held the door with two fingers. It weighed less than a usual door, almost feather light in his grip.

It'd gone through enough trials at this point that doing any more really wasn't productive. It worked as intended. Otto built more and more complicated thoughts, even custom scenarios for it to lead to, it allowed for use of smelling salts when needed, it really did work.

In laboratory conditions. With a fake 'mind'.

They couldn't test it in a real way. They most likely only had one shot.

If there was a mind to reach.

"I am aware" His response was somewhat delayed but it didn't matter. He'd made himself clear before.

They were already in the forgetful woods. They weren't turning back.

"All I ask of you is to provide backup in case that it is needed" He said in a dry tone.

In case something went wrong. In case the thing that'd been his protege became violent.

Otto hurried to keep up with his increasing pace "Of course"

They found him on the riverbank. What'd been recently dubbed the 'helpful water monster of the quarry' was laying on the sand, half curled up, its mostly featureless face resting on its front-most limbs.

A calm radiated off of it, like a pond on a windless day. The surface of its body seemed almost solid, if not for the fact that it wasn't even opaque, the moonlight shining right through the mass.

It seemed to hear them approaching and turned its face towards them without raising it, wet sand trailing its movement.

"Good evening, Razputin" Sasha called out. It reacted with an incline of its head but nothing more. Otto just waved politely in a way of greeting.

"We require your cooperation" The older man said instead "We have something we need to do but we first require help from you"

It seemed to understand, or at least enough to hustle to get its legs under it and start to raise itself up from the sand. Otto was quick to shoot his hands out in a gesture to stop "No no, you don't have to do anything. We just need your permission"

It seemed confused but settled down, keeping its head raised, at attention and ready for action. This was a good sign, it seemed to understand what they were saying, have an idea of the concepts they were using. It meant that there must have been something of a mind left there.

Sasha really hoped this was not wishful thinking.

"We want to go into your mind" He continued before Otto had the chance to "We made this" he showed off the psycho-portal he was holding "And we're sure it'll work"

"It won't hurt at all" Otto promised waving his hands around for emphasis "But we would like your permission to use it, if you don't mind"

It cocked its head to the side, as if processing what was said, or maybe considering it. After a few moments though it lowered its head to rest on the sand once again, in front of Sasha.

"Want… help… " It muttered in a voice that was a mountain stream and cicada song as one familiar hand reached out from behind where the jaws that made up its face all connected.

It gently took the door from Sasha's hand and placed it where its forehead would be. The door settled on the surface and after a moment began to glow.

"I think this is as good a permission as they get" Otto muttered, a smile creeping onto his face "Good luck in there, Sasha. Bring our boy back"

Sasha nodded. He adjusted his glasses one last time and went in.

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The mindscape was vast.

It seemed to go on forever in every direction, but felt so empty. No figments, no stray thoughts to connect to, no people, no nothing.

An endless starry night sky above.

An endless ocean below.

Sasha floated some way above the water. It seemed calm, but went deep, a heavy darkness that stretched down, down, down, invisibility far.

He knew that's where he was supposed to go.

It wasn't like there was anything up here for him anyway.

The water was cold, but somehow comforting. Like a breeze on a hot summer's day. It lapped at him gently as he lowered himself into it, not trying to pull him in, but not repelling him either. Almost indifferent, but almost curious.

It was nice not to be fought the entire way through the mindscape. At least this one didn't mind him being there.

He took a deep breath and dived down.

It turned out he needn't bother. The water was colder here, still not annoyingly so, but he found that he could still breathe. It felt weightless, like he was floating, but despite feeling like water on his face, it felt like air in his lungs.

Interesting.

Nothing immediately stood out to him under the surface. The ripples from his entry into the water were slowly dissipating, the surface becoming still once more without anything to disturb it.

But otherwise it seemed as empty as above the surface. He would have to dive deeper if he wanted to find anything.

He looked at the black abyss below. Then paddled slowly downward.

It didn't take too terribly long to finally see signs of life. The quiet had beer replaced with a gentle thrum of water against his eardrums. The endless nothing around him had gone from

monotone to textured, blues and greens mixing with each other in waves of see through colour.

A few feet below him floated a something. It almost seemed like a figment, but as he got closer it had more shape to it, it didn't move like a figment, just floated naturally in the depth.

When he could finally make it out it almost seemed like a piece of fabric. It was thin but sturdy, smooth, a sky-blue in colour with a vaguely violet stripe going through the middle.

Its edges seemed like they were torn.

He reached a hand out to it. His fingertips grazed the fabric.

It felt like disbelief. Like one feels when they find out they're psychic and they can't be, their family hates psychics, they've been cursed by them to die horribly, this has to be a mistake, they can't be one of them. Like one feels when suddenly a weight of an important task has been placed on their shoulders. Like one feels when they find out someone they'd loved wasn't who they said they were.

~~They couldn't be bleeding out.~~

A contradiction, and absence, dealing with something that cannot be real, cannot be happening, Cannot be happening to them.

Sasha opened his eyes. The piece of fabric was clutched in his hand. The memories, as brief and vague as they were, felt real. Like a newly reopened wound.

He shook the chill off. It seemed to cling to him at the edges of his mind.

He held the piece of fabric tight as he swam further down.

The water didn't seem to be getting darker as he went down like it was ought to do. Instead it seemed to almost… gain colours? A purple joined in the dance of the waves, and there seemed to be flickers of something like small figments within them that would dart away if he tried to get close to them.

There was another piece of torn fabric floating in place some ways to his left. He pivoted towards it and a small school of tiny figments hurried to get out of the way before he could reach it.

It looked almost the same. Same sky blue fabric, same consistency torn edges, same stripe, thought running along the edge instead of the middle. He mentally prepared himself and touched it with his free hand.

Questioning. How could one be psychic, do what they'd always wanted, without being a burden or a threat? How could one get out of a difficult situation without resorting to violence? How could one get through to the war crazed maniac without risking anyone's lives? How could something turn out not to be true even though there was all the evidence for it being that way?

~~How could one stay alive when he was on the brink of death?~~

A question, a puzzle, a search for another way, any different way, Anything.

The water had gotten noticeably colder. It made him shiver.

He swam ever deeper.

Figments were definitely all around now. Some were shaped almost like fish, swimming in schools or alone, curious of him but keeping their distance. Some were bits of lonely seaweed, waving around aimlessly in their colourful glory.

This piece of fabric was like all the others. The violet line was almost entirely off the piece, running just along some of the torn edge.

Sasha knew what to expect by now. He touched it.

Rage, all consuming and burning. Rage at his family for hating him and the things he loved. Rage at the coach for derailing everything and trying to take over the world. Rage at the brain tank and everything it held inside, at a man who he thought was a mentor and he could trust betraying them years ago, at a wanna-be leader who didn't listen to reason, at water, at life for being painful and unfair to everyone.

~~At the person who all but killed him.~~

Rage, burning like a fire that won't shut up and just got worse without doing anything about it.

The water was becoming freezing. The fire didn't make it any better. He continued on.

Figment sharks floated harmlessly all around. Colourful seaweed waved in the moving water without any care in the world.

This piece was much like the first but seemed almost duller in the suddenly vaning light. Its edges seemed somehow worse for wear than the others. The stripe went down its middle again.

Hopelessness, empty and dull. His father had been called and would come for him before his training was over. The big devastating fight that changed everyone's lives had concluded years ago and all he could do was witness its fallout, maybe pick up some of the pieces.

~~He was dying, and he couldn't reach no one to even ask for help.~~

Hopelessness that felt like ice, frozen over and unchanging without any warmth.

There was almost nothing now. The colours and the fish and the seaweed got left behind, and below them another black void had opened up.

A lone light shone at the center of his vision. A small angler fish figment circled the last piece of fabric. It scurried out of his way as he reached it, taking the light with it as it disappeared.

This almost looked… like a centerpiece? It didn't have a stripe but a smallish round spot in the middle, and he somehow felt it was different.

It almost glowed when he reached out to it.

Peace. Peace because he was ok, his loved ones were ok, the worst things were over. His help was useful, his efforts were not in vane, not for nothing. Oleander apologized. Ford was sorry for what he'd done and was trying to make things right. His family was ok. His friends, everyone was ok.

He was ok. He would be ok.

He was in an empty space now. The surface of the water far above was no longer visible. The figments were gone, the colours were gone, everything was gone. Only the cold embrace of water remained.

Sasha was alone.

He floated there, five pieces of fabric clutched in his hand, feeling both like progress and like nothing at all. Just torn up fabric.

Then.

The darkness lightened slightly. Just a bit.

A small light entered his vision. It was vague, seemingly winged, almost butterfly shaped, but slightly out of focus. Like a memory that hadn't been visited in a long time.

It floated for a moment, stopping just before him. Just within reach.

It felt… contented. Almost happy. A nice memory that wasn't visited much anymore.

It also almost felt tired. Lost. Displaced.

It floated closer to him, nudged the hand that all the fabric was clutched in. He took the hint.

They almost arranged themselves once he let them go. First four pieces around the last one in a circle. They didn't quite connect but held together. The outer edge of the formation was still torn, but it made the floating light happy it seemed, as it circled around him, jingling at him pleasantly.

He stared above the makeshift quilt to see a shape forming out of the water. A familiar, almost featureless face stared back at him, cascading jaws all closed, still as a statue.

For a moment he feared it would do something to undo what progress was made, but it just. Stared for a moment.

It had no expression. But it seemed… grateful.

The floating light circled him a few more times before stopping. It seemed to collect itself for a moment before floating, hesitantly, at the quilt.

It collided with it softly.

The world drowned in light.

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The night had passed. The dawn was upon them, the sky turning shades of orange and pink.

The ocean was vast and lonely. But now there was land.

Sasha gazed at the lightening sky. It was refreshing to see after so much darkness and night. The colours were beautiful. A snapshot of a favourite sunrise.

He sat on the newly formed beach, just a foot or so from the calm water, his legs tucked to one side.

Against his other side rested a boy. Real. Tangible. Peaceful.

Asleep.

There were subtle circles under his eyes, really not befitting of an 11 year old. He deserved to rest.

In the real world.

Sasha gently shook the boy by the shoulder "Wake up now, Razputin. Wake up"

They boy stirred and slowly, hesitantly, opened his eyes.

"Raz… that's my name, right?" His voice was real. A voice. A real voice.

"Yes, that is correct. Do you remember who I am?"

He thought for a moment, his eyebrows drawn "You're Sasha. Agent Nein. I… remember you, I think. It's a bit fuzzy, but I remember you."

"Do you remember anyone else?"

"I think so. It's a bit hard, but yes. I just…" He sighed. The blue and violet striped quilt lay in his lap and he pawed at it, deep in thought "I just need time I think"

"That is ok. Time is something we have"

Raz looked out at his favourite memory of a sunrise and leaned back against Sasha's side.

"Yeah," He muttered "Thank you, Sasha"

Time is something they had.

They would be alright.

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