

Spoilers: "The Crystal Skull", "Meridian"

Warnings: None, unless you really don't want to deal with "Meridian"

Disclaimer: These wonderful people belong to a bunch of companies and, unfortunately, not to me. *Sigh*, I wish...

Feedback: Please, please, please

Archiving: Penemuel's Nest, anyone else just ask first.

Summary: Nick Ballard receives an unexpected visitor.

## Coo by Leviathan

*It is a tragedy to bury your child, Nicholas Ballard thought, but to outlive your grandchild is complete absurdity.*

He looked down at the flag; even this simple triangle of cloth would outlive his family. He remembered being in the giant's library when he heard footsteps echoing in the transport chamber. Looking down from his vantage point, he saw a small parade of men in fancy uniforms, 3 carrying flags, approach the crystal skull. Anonymous in their uniformity, he knew that one of them had to be in the know, for he peered into the eyes of the skull without hesitation, awaiting the transporter that brought them to the giants' realm.

"The enemy of my enemy is my friend," Quetzalcoatl boomed at them as Nick looked on.

"We're from Earth and we're enemy of the Goa'uld," a familiar voice said. "We need to see Nick Ballard."

Quetzalcoatl stepped from the imaging chamber. Though he still loomed over his student, he was nowhere near the monstrous height the men below had seen. "You have heard?"

Nick nodded absently, wondering what had happened to bring Air Force men in fancy uniforms to this world. The giant motioned towards the transport that would take him to the platform below. He had only returned to this pedestal once since he had come here and was almost unprepared for the dizzy assault to his senses. When he blinked his eyes, he found himself face-to-face with Colonel Jack O'Neill.

The man's face was set in stone. Quite the opposite of the lively, sarcastic man he'd met nearly 2 years ago when Daniel had vanished in this very spot. Clutched to his chest was a flag, folded into a neat triangle which seemed somewhat familiar to Nick, though he couldn't immediately come up with a reason why that would be so.

"Nicholas Ballard," Colonel O'Neill said in a flat monotone, "I regret to inform you of the death of your grandson, Dr. Daniel Jackson. He died...died in honor, Sir. He saved countless lives - an entire planet. You can be proud of him, Sir." It was obvious that O'Neill was being torn apart, only his duty saved him from giving in to the emotions that boiled under the surface. Crisply, he

held out the flag, then saluted as Nick took it from him.

Nick stared at the man. O'Neill did not release his pose, eyes riveted to the cloth that Nick suddenly crushed in his hands. "How?" he asked, desolation creeping into his quavering voice.

O'Neill broke the salute, but still he did not relax. Nick was touched that the man came on his own, feeling the need to perform this duty himself. "Radiation poisoning," he said succinctly. "A world we visited had just discovered a variant of naquadah and were building a weapon of mass destruction. The experiment failed and Daniel...Daniel," the eyes flinched, but he refused to crack, "Daniel manually stopped the detonation. He died from the radiation released by the bomb."

"Was it quick?"

O'Neill shook his head. "No, Sir. Daniel suffered for several hours We tried to save him, but it wasn't meant to be."

Nick felt his heart growing heavy in his chest. "Thank you, Colonel O'Neill, for coming here yourself. I appreciate it."

"It was the very least I could do for him, sir. Daniel was my best friend and I'll miss him." The brown eyes were suspiciously bright under the pulled-down brim of the Air Force cap. "We'll all miss him."

"Thank you, Jack."

Military to the end, the Colonel knew when he was being dismissed. Striding swiftly over to the skull, he peered into the eyes again. To the Air Force eyes Nick vanished, which he knew as soon as the other men shifted a bit uneasily. O'Neill barked orders in a voice that would have done a drill sergeant proud and the little group marched back out of the pyramid on their way to the stargate.

Nick found himself back in the library, the flag still clutched in his fingers. He had to consciously let it go, smooth the fabric back to a semblance of its former state. He sat down at his usual table, staring at the red, white and blue that was all he had left of his grandson.

He could still hear Melburn's voice, distorted by the distance between Cairo and Belize. "We had a son, Nick. He's so beautiful We named him Daniel, after your father." There was such awe in his voice over such a simple thing. Such a wonderful thing. "He's got your eyes."

"Really?" he remembered asking excitedly. He could hear Claire's voice in the background, demanding to talk to her father.

"Daddy?"

"Princess, should you be up and running around so soon?"

She laughed, "Dad, this is the first time we've been able to get to the city. Danny's already a several days old." She laughed again, which sounded so strange to Nick. Claire had always been such a quiet, solemn child - to hear her amusement was not something Nick was used to. He guessed he had Mel to thank for that. "Daddy, he's so beautiful. Mel took a bunch of pictures; we'll send you some as soon as we get them developed. Hey, Danny, say hello to grandpa."

There was a soft "coo" from the phone that Nick nearly missed. "He knows you already!" Claire chortled, replacing the baby's voice. "Dad, we've got to go. Love you. Say bye to Grandpa, Daniel."

"Coo."

Nick remembered that sound. It was always the first thing he thought of during the years when the boy was growing up. Pictures from Egypt, New York, Turkey, Libya which eventually caught up with him at whatever dig he was working. His grandson was as beautiful as his parents had boasted. People at the digs would flock around him when he got the pictures, "ooing and ahing" over Nick's lovely grandchild. The letters were full of the boy's exploits, his precocious adventures and his brilliance. As soon as Daniel could write, he was always adding his own messages in the many languages he absorbed.

Daniel was 5 years old by the time that Nick actually saw him as a living, breathing boy. The pictures had never done him justice. He was so full of life, laughter and enthusiasm that Nick could hardly contain his own joy to see him. Daniel had spoken to him in Dutch, probably at his mother's coaching, but he effortlessly switched to French, Egyptian and Arabic when he needed. He wrote in hieroglyphics. And everything fascinated him. Questions flowed from him like a river. He wanted to know everything Nick had seen, had done and wanted to know why he himself had Grandpa's eyes instead of Mom and Dad's. He was exhausting. But unlike other children Nick had ever met, he wasn't bored spending time with his grandfather. It was as if he wanted to absorb all the knowledge of the world as quickly as he could and instinctively realized that an older person could tell him so much more than younger people.

Nick sighed. *Oh, Daniel. I wish I could have been with you more. I really wish I had adopted you, but I was such a selfish old man. I never knew I would have so little time with you.*

Strange that he couldn't cry. He didn't cry when he'd heard of his daughter's death, either. Part of him wondered if he was so cold and dead inside that he couldn't even show the least

response to such a tragedy, but he dismissed it as his inability to wear his heart where anyone could see it. Even here amongst aliens who would probably not understand, he could not let go. It was something he and his doctor had discussed over his very long incarceration. The man just never understood. Feelings were something to be avoided. Perhaps it made him old-fashioned, but he couldn't let go of so many years of discipline. It had served him in too many bad situations to blithely overturn.

No, no one understood, least of all the boy he'd just lost.

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The flag still lay on the table 3 days after Nick had dropped it there. He couldn't touch it, the symbol of the grandchild he'd lost. Strange, he'd had his grandchild for nearly the same number of years he had had his child. The universe was such a perverse place sometimes. He would get over this, like he had everything else, but right now all his thoughts were centered around Daniel. Had he been less a scientist, he would have missed the sudden change in his teacher. The alien stiffened and looked up as if he could see through the grey ceiling.

"The Great Teachers approach," Quetzalcoatl intoned.

Nick felt excitement for the first time in 3 days. He had heard of the Great Teachers - the old race that had built the Stargates and had ascended beyond the needs of the physical world. He couldn't contain his curiosity at how such a being would appear. As he stood on the balcony of the library, his gaze followed those gathered in the central amphitheatre below. At first Nick saw nothing, then he could see two creatures floating gracefully down towards them. They glowed from within - a brilliant white. They looked vaguely jellyfish-shaped to Nick, ethereal as the sea creatures he'd seen in the oceans of earth. The pair flowed towards a group of giants as his own guide vanished from the library to join his brethren below.

"You honor us, Great Teachers. It has been too long since we have had the honor."

There was the softest of sounds, a musical tone that sang a language that Nick did not know. The giants bowed to the creatures. *Wait until Daniel hears about this*, he thought automatically, then with a stab of pain, he remembered. Never again. He would never be able to tell Daniel of the wonders he'd seen, including this newest of momentous sights. His lips thinned as he closed off the pain, sent it where he had sent all his grief, his sorrow.

He studied the pair still singing to the giants. One was smaller than the other, a little less bright. A child? It hovered patiently at the larger one's side which would seem to belie that theory, but Nick couldn't let the impression go. Suddenly, the smaller creature rose higher, away from its companion, floating over to the balcony where Nick stood, watching in utter astonishment. Nick could only react to it as any explorer would. He reached for it, ignoring the part of his mind that

chided him that such behavior could possibly be considered quite rude. A tendril of it met his hand, twining around his fingers. It felt to Nick like those lightning balls seen in Grade-B movies as part of the mad scientist's lab. Energy sang along his nerve endings, but it certainly did not hurt. Nick could not be afraid, the experience too fascinating to fear.

As he stood, his hand entwined with glowing white tendrils, the being began to coalesce; fingers plaited with Nick's even though he didn't feel flesh, just the same insubstantial caress. The transformation moved up to create an arm, a torso, the rest of the limbs. *Is this how they communicate?* he thought, wondering if the creature would end up looking like him or something else entirely.

Coo.

Nick's knees turned to water. "*Mijn gott!*"

"Hello, Nick."

"Daniel? How?" Without conscious thought, he moved to his child's child, reaching out to touch his beautiful face, only to watch his hand pass through him. "You're a ghost?"

Daniel smiled. "No, Nick, not a ghost. I'm...travelling a different road."

Nick backed up to one of the benches and dropped hard onto it. "Colonel O'Neill, he said you were dead. Daniel, he came here a few days ago..."

The smile became a little lopsided, a little chagrined. "Well, technically, I am dead. My body is dead, Nick, but my 'self' lives on."

Nick stared at his grandson, who was no longer glowing. He was dressed in ordinary clothes that Nick could have seen him wearing on Earth. No strange outfits, no otherworldly raiment, no angelic robes. If he had not seen his hand pass through him, he would have thought that Daniel was standing there as flesh and blood. Too similar to the circumstances that had returned him to the giants. That time Daniel had been out of phase with the material plane, caught in the process of transporting to the giants' realm. Since Nick had once gone through the actual process, he had been able to see Daniel where his friends could not. They had returned to this world where Nick now lived, learning more about the giants he had been obsessed with for so long.

But this had all cost him time he could have spent with his child's child. The boy who stood before him not dead, but not alive. Not in the sense Nick understood. "Daniel, your friend, Jack, does he know?"

"Jack was the one who let me go." He watched Nick's expression begin to dissolve to anger. "No, no, Nick, he did as I asked him. I wanted to go. If you had any idea of what I've seen, what I've learned, what I've seen in so little time...oh, god, Nick, the universe, it's so, so...amazing, so huge, so wonderful. The words just don't exist for it."

Claire, though she was a scientist, was never quite like her father, Nick knew. Although she had the passion to learn, had married a fellow seeker, she had never gone quite the distance that her father had to drag history out of the sands of time. She had never trod the line that her father had between brilliance and insanity. Not like her son. In many ways, Daniel reminded Nick of himself. In many ways, he thought of Daniel as *his* child. Nick laughed.

"Daniel," he said quietly, stopping the flow of excited words. "I'm glad you came."

"I had to, Nick," the young man said sadly. "I couldn't *not* tell you what happened. I didn't know that Jack would come to you first. It's been kinda...busy."

"How long?" At Daniel's questioning head tilt, he clarified, "How long will you live?"

"I don't know, Nick. Oma's thousands of years old. I could...I could conceivably outlive the human race." Stunned, Daniel stared at his grandfather. "I hadn't thought of that. I hadn't...wow, that's a long time."

Nick laughed, "And here I was worried that I'd be the last of the family left."

A small smile didn't reach the blue eyes. "Technically, you are. To Earth I have to be considered dead. No one outside of the SGC would ever understand what happened to me. I stuck around for a little bit, but couldn't stay too long. I guess that's where we're so much alike, Nick. I couldn't ignore the chance to learn."

"More than anything else that has happened do I understand that, Daniel."

Daniel "sat" beside his grandfather. "It's so strange. I understand so much more now. I forgive you, for everything, Nick. I understand that it wasn't as easy for you to let me go as I thought it was. I was hurt and I had believed you didn't care. But I did the same things you did. Emotional upset always drove me into working too hard until I could fall into sleep without dreams. I understand how not wanting to face the pain makes us seem completely insensitive. I never understood that until I started doing it myself, but I couldn't face the fact that you felt the same way. That I was only following your footsteps."

"In more ways than one." Nick could only shake his head. Irony at its finest.

"Except in this," Daniel smirked. "This is my path now, Nick. I don't know if we'll ever see each

other again, but I couldn't leave you believing that I hadn't forgiven you. I want to see you again, but time passes so differently in this state. For all I know, the next few days may be years for you."

The old man stared, suddenly aware of just how old he was and just how old Daniel could be. He had lived such a full life. Adventure, love and knowledge had all been his, even now in the twilight of his years. Daniel would have so much more. The universe would give him her secrets. He would live to see the deaths and births of millions of stars, thousands of civilizations, histories made and buried. Again he reached for Daniel's face, knowing he would not feel flesh, but tingly energy. Still too close to his human thought processes, Daniel leaned into his touch.

"I will miss you, Daniel. If you don't return, I'll know that you wanted to. I will leave you all my notes, all my writings. It's all I can give you now - my knowledge. And my love. I'm sorry I was such a selfish man. I'm sorry that I never told you how much I love you and how proud I was of you, even when I thought you were crazier than I was."

Daniel laughed. To Nick, it was as strange as hearing his daughter's laughter - her reticence, her silence, her legacy to her son. It heartened him to hear it. To know that his grandson would finally be where he would be completely accepted for everything else he was.

"Go with my blessing," he told his grandson solemnly. "Learn, explore, teach. It's been in our blood for generations. Remember that I love you and I envy you your new journey. And, for as long as I can, I'll wait to see you again. But I can't promise anything. If time passes as rapidly as you think, I may be gone before you come this way again."

"I love you, Nick," was all Daniel said before his form dissolved back into the glowing being he'd become. With so much pride, he knew that it was written on his face, he followed Daniel back to the balcony where they parted ways. Daniel floated back down to the other, then the pair rose away from the giants to disappear into the grey ceiling of the tremendous cavern.

"Goodbye, my child," he said, wiping tears from his eyes.

The End