

Sacrifices

By

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TITLE: Sacrifices

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CATEGORY: Action, Drama

SPOILERS: Reference to The Fifth Race. Introduces original characters seen later in stories 'The Rescue', 'Deception's Kiss', 'Judgement Day' and 'Interactions'.

SEASON / SEQUEL: Season 3.

RATING: PG-13

CONTENT WARNINGS: None.

SUMMARY: When Jackson and Carter elect to study the ancient Aztec society they discover on their latest mission, Jackson realises they may have placed themselves in real danger. Will Jack O'Neill return in time to save them?

STATUS: Complete.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS: Without the constant support, critique, and honesty of my beta reader, Rach, this Fanfic would never have been written. Meus amicus, my eternal gratitude.

FEEDBACK: Welcome.

[Part One](#)

[Part Two](#)

[Part Three](#)

[Part Four](#)

Sacrifice - Part One

Jack O'Neill slumped back into his favourite armchair, feet up on the coffee table. He began to read the magazine on gadgets that he'd bought hours earlier. He was thinking of maybe building a model aeroplane, it had been a while, and what with the

Stargate program taking up so much of his time, relaxing appeared to have been merely a figment of his imagination.

Puccini's *La bohème* emanated from the stereo, something else he'd missed; real music. Having had the misfortune of turning on his car stereo hours earlier and being subjected to some kind of weird and deafening maelstrom, he found Puccini's company much more satisfying.

The doorbell interrupted his scrutiny of a particularly cool looking remote plane. He raised both eyebrows ceremoniously and sighed to himself.

"Great," he complained, taking his time to lift his feet from the comfort of the coffee table, time enough for the impatient visitor to sound the chimes again.

"Alright, keep your pantyhose on," he yelled.

Opening the door, he was greeted with a smile from Daniel Jackson. He nodded his head forward. "Daniel?"

"Jack, I'm sorry I hope you don't mind?" Jackson apologised.

Jack, sensing only something of great importance to Jackson could have made him drive the distance between their two places of residence, pushed the door open.

"No, I don't mind, come in," he said, offering a smile in return. "What's up, Danny?"

"I was having trouble sleeping, kept dreaming about Sha're. Could I get something to drink?"

"Um," O'Neill remembered Daniel's dislike of beer. "Alcohol? Or coffee?" he asked.

Daniel's eyebrows shot up. "No, alcohol is sounding good, um, bourbon if you've got it."

"Oh, I've got it. Have a seat, I'll be right back."

Wandering into the kitchen. "You want anything in that or just ice?" O'Neill called out.

Daniel had already made himself comfortable. "Puccini," he said, more to himself, surprised at O'Neill's musical tastes.

"What?" O'Neill shouted. "Ice, okay."

Daniel sighed heavily. "No, I, er..." He got up and joined O'Neill into the kitchen.

"No, I said you listen to Puccini," Daniel corrected. Immediately looking slightly alarmed at the glass O'Neill held out. "You'd better put some water in that if you don't want me to pass out."

"Oh, sure," O'Neill confirmed, taking iced water from the cooler. Then with a look of disdain, he added, "I'm not a complete Neanderthal, I have my moments."

"Want to sit here or in the lounge?" O'Neill asked him as he offered Daniel the drink.

"Actually, here's fine," the archaeologist responded.

Jack felt more concern than he let on, and waited for Daniel to seek his advice or counsel.

"So, you came to enjoy my great company then?" he joked.

Daniel's discomfort evident on his face, he tried to offer a smile to his colleague.

"Like I, er, said, I was having these nightmares, and I didn't want to be alone."

Jack looked delighted. "Daniel, I'm touched. I was the first person you thought of? Or am I being a little premature there?" he added with a guarded expression.

"No, I, well to be honest Jack, even with our constant disagreements, which, by the way, I'm sure that I enjoy as much as you do, you're probably the only person that understands. I mean," he offered quickly. "I don't want to go over old ground here or anything, but we've been through a lot of, er, stuff."

Daniel let out a heavy sigh. "No. Actually, that's not it either. Remember when you told me that you would help get Sha're back? I believed you. Well, I'm trying to."

"Daniel, will you just stop? I know what you're trying to say. You wanted some company and you picked me, 'cause despite our differences, we're kind of the closest thing we both have to family... right?" O'Neill offered, with sincerity in his tone as well as his face.

"Yeah, that's it, in a nutshell, er actually!" He stopped, taking a sip from his beverage. "I guess I was waiting for..."

"Sarcasm? Oh, come on Daniel, I left that back at the base. What's on your mind? You want to talk, or play chess?" Jack asked. " 'Cos I still haven't beaten you, and, well that's kind of bugging me," he confessed.

Daniel smiled. "I knew that," he said, another hurried sip from the glass he clutched. "You hate to lose. I guess that's one of the reasons I believed you."

"Yeah, y'know, some people call that stubborn," Jack quipped. "So, after I beat you at chess, I can cook us something to eat, and we could talk about whatever it is that's bothering you. Deal?"

"Okay, deal," Daniel replied.

Major Carter, still at the SGC and studying some samples brought back by SG11, stood bolt upright from the microscope she peered into. "Whoa," she exclaimed. Sergeant Siler looked across from his own studies. "Ma'am?"

"There's gold in this sample, Sergeant, give me a hand, I'm going to try and isolate it, see how pure it is."

She looked again. "No, wait, it's some kind of carved... it's a winged serpent," she said.

Sergeant Siler looked into the microscope. "You're right," he agreed.

Daniel woke up hearing sounds of what was obviously someone showering. He rolled over and checked his watch. He vaguely remembered drinking far too much, and then nothing.

He was still dressed, lying on top of the bed, in what he deduced must be the spare room.

The phone starting to ring. He listened to see if Jack was going to hear it, then realised with great amusement that his friend was singing in the shower. He got up and left the room, walking past the bathroom, where "New York, New York" was ringing out.

"Oh, now I know why he joined the Air Force," Jackson quipped, holding his head. "Ouch."

He found the phone at the top of the stairs and lifted the receiver. "Hello, Jack O'Neill's residence," he answered politely.

"Sir," It was Carter's voice.

"Oh, hi, Sam, I meant to add I'm not him," Daniel said.

"Daniel?"

"Yes."

"General Hammond asked me to telephone both of you, and tell you that we have a briefing at 11:00 hours," Sam informed him, adding, "I left a message on your answer phone."

"Thanks, but, er, I'm here, and now I know, so, okay, look, I'll tell Jack, and we'll be there in time for the briefing," Daniel stammered, his head still throbbing. "Er, what time is it?"

"Zero seven thirty," Sam informed him. "Daniel, are you okay?"

"I'm er, fine, I just need to find a large supply of aspirin. I'll see you then." He put the phone down and headed downstairs into the kitchen.

"Neat person," he acknowledged, as he opened one meticulously tidy cupboard after another in search of his aspirin.

"Morning," O'Neill exclaimed. "Shower's free..." his eyes widening, a grimace now on his face. "oh, Danny boy, you look like hell."

Daniel's whimsical look of acceptance at that comment made O'Neill smile.

"Thanks. Aspirin?"

Jack pointed to the one place Daniel was yet to look; the first aid box was on top of the icebox.

"What happened?" Daniel asked.

"You don't remember?" Jack's face was now beaming broadly. "Well, after I beat you at chess, which took over three hours and plenty of bourbon, I might add. And, you owe me a bottle!"

"A bottle?" Daniel looked horrified.

Jack laughed. "Yeah, you told me you wanted to forget, so I got the bottle. Then you had something to eat, threw up all over the kitchen floor, and passed out. You're quite a date Danny boy."

"Oh," Daniel looked even more mortified. "Sorry. Er, how'd I get upstairs?" he asked.

"Well, thankfully for both of us, well you, really, 'cause, well never mind. You missed diving into the interesting cocktail you deposited on the floor, so I carried you up there, and dumped you in the spare room," Jack replied, scratching his head thoughtfully. Adding mischievously. "Want some breakfast?"

"No. Could I borrow some clean clothes?" Daniel asked, adding without pause. "We have a briefing at 11:00."

"Sure. Check the closet, help yourself. There are clean towels in the linen closet, and whatever else you need you should be able to find. Like I said, help yourself."

Daniel stood there for a moment, almost in a daze. "Thanks."

Jack took a glass from the cupboard and filled it with water. Handing it to Jackson "Here! You're not much of a morning person, are you?"

Daniel stared at him for a moment, struggling to come to terms with his king-size hangover. "What?"

Jack smiled at him. "Never mind, have a shower, you'll feel better," he said.

Daniel found Jack outside the back of the house, eating breakfast and reading the newspaper.

"Feeling better?" he asked. "Listen, Daniel, don't feel bad, it was probably my cooking," Jack quipped.

"No. I'm just not used to drinking. Can I have some of that?" he asked gesturing towards the ample supply of juice, scrambled eggs and toast that O'Neill was tucking into.

"Dig in, I made plenty."

O'Neill didn't intend to bring up the stuff that Daniel had told him once under the influence, or mention the fact that once or twice he'd broken down.

He understood the pain; it was his own constant companion. Even if it would probably have helped Daniel to discuss it in less inebriated circumstances, O'Neill felt it better left.

"Jack?"

"I know, Daniel. It's appreciated," Jack said, seeing the apologetic look on Jackson's face. "So, how's the head?"

"Oh, wow!" Jackson exclaimed. "Never let me drink that much, EVER again." He shook his head, and raised his hand up to gesture as he spoke. "Never, ow!"

Jack smiled at him. "Well, it's about time you chilled out," he said, the smile turning into a grin.

"Chilled out?" Daniel repeated.

"Yeah, come on, Daniel, when was the last time you really let your hair down, had... fun?" O'Neill remarked "Last night, I have got to tell you, every time you took one of the pieces at chess."

"What?" Daniel had that same horror-struck expression he had had when O'Neill confirmed that he'd accounted for half a bottle of bourbon.

"Well, I hate to tell you this, but you kind of laughed at me. Which, under the circumstances, made finally beating you sweet!"

Daniel smiled then. "Oh... but only after the, er..."

"Yeah okay, but hey! I learned a lot. Thanks, it was an enjoyable evening," O'Neill told him, standing now. "Better get to the base... you done?"

"Er, yeah, Jack?" Daniel's expression was now one of his usual enquiring ones.

"Yeah?"

"You did beat me; you're not just saying that?"

"Oooh, yeah, I beat you!"

Sam Carter greeted the two men as they left the elevator.

"Sir, I've found something in the samples that SG11 brought back. At first, I thought...."

"Major!" O'Neill snapped. "Whilst I would ordinarily find this fascinating." His expression indicated the opposite. "Daniel has a hangover, and I'm feeling a little delicate myself, so..."

"Yes, sir," Carter confirmed.

"Thank you, Major," O'Neill responded, offering her one of his more sarcastic smiles. He then muttered to Daniel. "Boy, if I'd have known it would be that easy..."

Teal'c stood in the briefing room, drinking coffee, waiting for the rest of SG1 to arrive.

"Morning, Teal'c," O'Neill announced cheerfully, stretching his arms up over his head.

"Good morning, Colonel O'Neill, Daniel Jackson," Teal'c greeted.

"Yeah, hello, Teal'c," Daniel replied meekly. "Sorry, um, hangover."

Teal'c raised a quizzical eyebrow. "What do you wish me to hang over, Daniel Jackson?"

O'Neill's face was a picture. "Er, Teal'c, hangover is a term we use when we've had too much alcohol... you know, got drunk?"

"I do not know that term, O'Neill, of what did he drink too much?" Teal'c asked, looking even more intrigued.

O'Neill's face screwed up. "Teal'c you just have to experience it. Don't know if Junior would like it though."

"It's a narcotic type, um, alcohol, you drink it and it makes you feel, um, happy, yes?" Daniel attempted to explain.

"I am not sure, Daniel Jackson, why would you drink narcotics?" Teal'c asked, looking a tad concerned now.

"Oka-ay," O'Neill said. "We'll, um, we'll do that real soon." He smiled at Teal'c and shook his head at Daniel. "Guess Jaffas don't party much," he said raising his eyebrows.

"Colonel O'Neill," General Hammond said, "Doctor Jackson, good morning. Colonel, you're late," he said, pointedly.

"Ten minutes, sir, unscheduled stop off." He grinned. "Apologies for that, sir. Hopefully it won't happen again."

"Sorry about the car, Jack," Daniel stated, looking considerably uncomfortable.

"Doctor Jackson, are you okay?" General Hammond asked.

"Well, er, I'm feeling a lot better. Thank you, General."

"Not sure my car is," O'Neill quipped. "Anyway, what's the mission?"

Jack changed the subject quickly, attempting to deflect further enquiry towards Daniel. "You know, I've missed this place, it seems like only yesterday I was here."

Teal'c raised his right eyebrow. "It, in fact, was only yesterday, O'Neill."

O'Neill shook his head. "You know what? You're right!"

"Can we get started?" Hammond asked.

"Of course, sir. Major, you wanna fill us in?" O'Neill concurred.

Sam Carter began to brief the team on her findings, finally bringing up the image she had discovered concealed within one of the 'rock' samples brought back from PJ5-909.

Daniel looked carefully at the image. "Whoa," he declared, getting to his feet. "That's, um, that's Quetzalcoatl."

O'Neill's eyebrows disappeared into his forehead. "What?"

"He was a feathered serpent, god of air and water, worshipped in many early, um, native American civilizations. Especially by the Aztecs, who used gold predominantly to fashion their gods," Daniel explained. "Did you find anything else?"

"No, we sent the UAV through and got these images," Carter showed them the next slide.

"Whoa!" Jackson exclaimed, as the image of a vast city appeared on the screen.

O'Neill looked across at Teal'c. "Ever been there?" he enquired.

Teal'c shook his head. "No, O'Neill, I have not."

"Great. Daniel?" Jack asked. "Dare I risk saying that looks like a pyramid?"

"Ooh, it is, but not in the same way as the Egyptians used them. Aztecs, Toltecs and Incas used their Pyramids for places of worship and sacrifice," Daniel enthused.

"Sacrifice?" O'Neill sounded less than impressed. "Great, but Goa'uld inspired right?"

"Well, given the penchant of the Goa'uld to assume the identities of our Gods, it's possible. Yes."

"Sweet. Goa'uld town! Whose is it?" Jack asked. "And, Daniel, the basics please."

"Yeah, um, well, I don't, actually know, but there is one way to find out." He gave General Hammond his most winning smile. "That is, if you agree, General?"

"Whoa, Danny boy. You did say sacrifices?" Jack asked. "Don't you think that might be just a little bit... life threatening, unless we go in with a division?"

"Well, we really don't know if they've maintained that way of life, Jack," Daniel replied. "And before we go in with the, er, intentions of starting something, we really should do just a little snooping around first?"

Jack's eyes rolled. "General, sir, permission to take this man to the infirmary?"

Hammond tried to contain the smile. "Well, Colonel, I agree with Doctor Jackson. I'm going to authorise a recon mission to the planet. I'll give you three hours to report back. If we receive no report, we'll send in support."

Jack shook his head quickly as if trying to clear cobwebs from his mind.

"Hello, I think if we don't report back, we're probably fish bait!"

"Well, Colonel," Hammond began.

"Jack, please. Let's go take a look?" Daniel asked.

Jack regarded him with scepticism. "Arrgh. Daniel," he growled. "Okay, sir, we'll go take a look."

Jack kitted up in the armoury; his favourite MP5, a Zat gun, six spare clips, and for good measure he had included an M16 rifle, which he now slung over his backpack.

Daniel, who was collecting his side arm, smiled to himself. "Er, the UAV indicated the city is about six miles from the Stargate, Jack, are you gonna make it with all the stuff?"

Jack regarded him for a moment. "Daniel, if I could carry one, I'd have a tank with me too. You can never have enough fire power, know what I mean?"

Daniel's head tilted to the side, acknowledging Jack's thoughts. "Well, I guess. But um, do you think we could try peaceful contact first?"

"Sure Daniel, I'm open to that," Jack agreed. "Diplomatic stuff, but if there's a snakehead there, who wants to shoot first, and ask questions later, these babies will do all the talking for me."

O'Neill patted his MP5 and made his way past Daniel, who shrugged and followed.

End of Part One.

Sacrifices - Part Two

The planet was of modest climate, Jack noted, as they stepped through the Stargate. He pushed his sunglasses onto his head. "Okay, the UAV indicated it was about 6 clicks in that direction, let's move out people."

Daniel, as fascinated by the surroundings as a child in Disneyland, stopped on occasion to enjoy the planet's wildlife and scenery.

Teal'c silently observed, whilst Carter studied her readings and kept a watchful eye for hostiles.

A long trek later, the vast pyramid structure became visible. Jack halted the party and knelt, took out his binoculars and proceeded to view the city a little closer. "Okay, we've got men in skirts," he commented. "Seem to have swords for weapons, should be a walk in the park. Let's go make friends."

The group moved on, entering the city, where a group of Aztecs, their golden swords drawn, immediately confronted them.

"Okay. Daniel, you're on," O'Neill ordered.

Daniel began to speak in the Nahuatl language of the ancient Aztecs, a language still used in Mexico to this day.

One of the Aztecs responded, the two exchanged greetings, and the Aztec man gestured for the party to follow him.

"Daniel?" O'Neill asked.

"He's offering us their hospitality," Daniel said.

"Well, now, isn't that nice," O'Neill replied, ever the sceptic. "So, do we trust them?"

"Yes, I think so."

"I hope you're right," O'Neill stated with a heavy sigh.

The 'feast' that was laid on for SG1 was impressive. O'Neill relaxed a little, but kept a wary eye on what appeared to be the guards of the city.

Daniel tucked into the feast heartily. "You should try some of this?" Daniel told him.

"Um, no," O'Neill said. "I really shouldn't, watching you redecorate the interior of my car this morning was enough for one day, thanks all the same."

Carter was attempting to communicate with one of the party that had greeted and offered them the food and wine, whilst Teal'c, like O'Neill, declined the food and beverages.

One man, dressed in robes of feathers, appeared to be offended; he spoke to Daniel quite abruptly.

Daniel replied, whilst O'Neill looked on. "What?" he asked.

"He's offended that you aren't eating and sharing the hospitality. I, er, I told him that you were fasting, on religious grounds."

O'Neill raised a wary eyebrow, checking around the vast hall once again.

Listening to Daniel speak in the foreign dialect, Teal'c moved closer to Jack now.

"O'Neill," he said. "I am uncertain of this place. The figure at the far end of the hall, I have seen it before."

O'Neill's eyes were drawn immediately to the huge depiction of an eagle.

"Where?"

"It is shown in teachings. This is not a Goa'uld planet, the Goa'uld do not come here anymore," Teal'c explained. "They fear this place."

"Well that's usually a good sign, Teal'c," O'Neill pointed out.

"As you say, O'Neill, usually I would agree with you, but..."

"Ah, ah, ah. No buts! We've got to make contact with Hammond anyway, so I'm ready to lead us all back to the Stargate."

Teal'c bowed his head, acknowledging that statement, and seemed pleased by O'Neill's decision.

"Daniel, time to go, Hammond's expecting our report," he told the archaeologist.

"But, Jack!" Daniel was about to argue.

O'Neill's hand shot up, a single finger waved side to side.

"No arguments, Daniel, you know what'll happen if we don't send a report," Jack warned.

Daniel Jackson stood up, approaching the colonel. "Jack, let me stay here a while. It's a great opportunity for me to learn something more about their culture..."

"Ah ah. Don't do the 'please, Jack' thing," O'Neill threatened. He considered the request for a moment, a resigned heavy sigh.

Carter was approaching him now, too. "Sir, I think some of those weapons and statues are forged from pure gold, I'd like the chance to study it closely, I'd like to stay too, sir, they've shown no tendency towards hostility."

"Why do I go along with these fanatical ideas?" O'Neill complained. "Alright, Teal'c and I will go back and make a report to Hammond, we'll be back tomorrow at daybreak, and that's my final concession. Keep your heads up, okay?"

"Understood, sir," Carter acknowledged, before Daniel could protest further.

O'Neill and Teal'c made their way out of the city; the curious Aztec citizens watched them but made no attempt to prevent their leaving.

"Teal'c, why do I let myself get talked into these things?" O'Neill enquired.

Carter was studying the great golden carved eagle; its magnificence stared down across the hall where they had earlier feasted.

"Sam, this is terrific," Daniel said, joining her. His face lit up with the discovery and fascination he felt. "That deity you're studying is Huitzilopochtli, a great warrior god, who was worshipped as the God of War and Courage. He's the guardian deity of the city," Daniel enthused.

"The carving is almost perfect," Carter said, as enthused as Daniel about the obvious technology required for such perfection. "It hasn't been cast, it's carved, probably with laser technology."

Daniel was silent for a moment. "Oh," he said. "Um, Sam, I have just remembered something else about Huitzilopochtli."

"What?" Carter asked, feeling a little uneasy at Daniel's concerned expression.

"The Aztecs sacrificed thousands of human lives to him, especially during the festival of Panquetzalitzili, the, er, 'Raising of the Banners' that celebrates his supremacy as a God of War and Courage."

"Daniel, what are you saying?" Carter's concern grew.

"I, er, think we may have partaken of the festival, and now I think we might be part of the um, offering. I'm hoping not, but I'm sure that's why they greeted us. They think we've been sent here, by Coatlicue, another god, well, um, goddess actually, as a part of her offering to her son."

"Well, we'd better get out of here, the Colonel's not going to be back until morning. Daniel, are you sure?"

"Ah, that it's the festival, yes. One of the people we ate with mentioned it, only at the time, well, it didn't quite... well, anyway, I'm thinking that we ought to try and leave, if they let us go," he added.

"If?" Carter began to gather her stuff. "We're going, come on."

They made their way through the great hall, two Aztec soldiers moved to bar their exit.

"Oh dear," Daniel said.

Sam looked at him, horrified. "Now what?" she asked.

"Hmmm, I have no idea. Guess we better hope Jack gets back before that."

Carter looked angry. "Why did they let the Colonel and Teal'c go?" she asked.

"Well, I'm guessing it's because they didn't partake, so they probably thought that Jack and Teal'c were the Guardians entrusted with bringing us from Coatlicue," Daniel said, looking apologetic, then adding, "Damn it."

Carter's expression changed. "What?"

"I hate it when Jack's right." His face screwed up like a petulant child. "He gets to do the 'Daniel' thing," the archaeologist stated, doing his best impression of O'Neill.

"Daniel, exactly how did they sacrifice these people?" Carter asked, joining Jackson who had seated himself on one of the large cushions supplied for the purpose.

"Well, um, priests usually tore the heart out of the living victim," he said quickly. "Or they flayed you to death." His face muscles twitched at the thought of either.

"Oh nice. Hurry up, Colonel," Sam noted.

Jack O'Neill strode through the corridors of the SGC, already kitted up and ready to embark back through the Gate to collect his colleagues.

"Morning, Teal'c," he greeted the Jaffa. "Ready? Where's your kit?"

"I am not returning, Colonel O'Neill, I have to perform Kel No Reem, that planet has had a strange effect upon my symbiote."

Janet confirmed the information to O'Neill, who had gone with the Jaffa to the infirmary for precautionary blood tests.

"So, I guess it's a long trip talking to myself," O'Neill told Hammond.

"No, Colonel, you'll be accompanied by SG2, Major Coburn and his men."

"Thank you, sir," O'Neill enthused. "I'm sure the Major will make jolly company." O'Neill doubted that particular statement; Coburn was very military minded and he knew this to be an instant humour killer.

O'Neill joined SG2 in the embarkation room. "Good morning, campers," he announced. "The sun will be up in approximately 1 hour on the planet we're visiting, so you'll need your night vision glasses. I'm hoping that will be about it, but hey! I've been wrong before."

The SG2 soldiers stared back at the Colonel, unused to such levity from a commanding officer, and nodded one at a time.

O'Neill raised his eyebrows. "And a sense of humour." he muttered to himself. As the Gate splashed into life, he ordered. "Let's move out."

The darkness on the other side, improved by the night vision goggles that he wore, seemed to be denser than that on Earth, or any other planet he'd visited. O'Neill led the way, his MP5 cautiously held like a baby in his arms.

"Major," he snapped. "It's a long way."

"Yes, sir," Coburn replied.

"Keep your wits about you, I'm still not 100% sold on this idea that these people are that friendly."

"Yes, sir," Coburn replied.

"Sweet," O'Neill said and marched on into the darkness.

"Sun's coming up," Carter told Daniel as she woke him. "Colonel is probably on his way."

"I hope so," Daniel replied. "I'm kind of wishing that we'd gone back with Jack in the first place."

Carter was suddenly curious, needing to think about something other than what might happen to them. "So, Daniel, why were you over at the colonel's place?"

"Oh, we were playing chess, we're trying to learn how to communicate, you know, Jack can sometimes be good company. Did you know he liked Puccini? Surprised me, he was even reciting some of it later on."

Carter smiled. "No I didn't. Reciting it?"

"Yeah, he knew all the words, especially to Madame Butterfly, I've never really listened to it much before."

"I never figured the colonel as being a culture buff," Carter laughed.

"Well, um, no, it's not culture," Daniel said. "Jack said it was peaceful and powerful, which is why he liked it." He smiled then. "I guess it is," he added.

Jack O'Neill felt uneasy; he noticed the smoke coming from the top of the pyramid, almost a mile away. "Major, do you have any archaeologists in your unit?" he asked, bringing the group to an abrupt stop.

"Lieutenant Fairfax is our archaeological expert, sir."

"Okay, Fairfax, why would that smoke be coming off the top of that pyramid thing?" O'Neill questioned.

"Aztecs used their pyramids as places of worship, sir," Fairfax responded.

"Okay, so, let me put it another way, why is smoke coming from the top of that thing?" O'Neill snapped, his expression reinforcing the question.

"Could be sacrifice, sir," Fairfax responded. "They offered up human sacrifices to their gods, flaying was one of the methods of sacrifice."

"Thank you, Fairfax. Major, I want one of your men double-timing it back to the Stargate and bringing reinforcements. Tell Hammond I think we're gonna need whatever SG teams are available to us, and Teal'c if he's able," O'Neill ordered.

"Yes, sir. Jacobs, you heard the colonel. Double time it, and get us some back up," Major Coburn snapped.

O'Neill looked at the pyramid and sighed heavily. "See, now I did the 'you stay with Carter thing'," he cursed. "Knew I shouldn't have done that. Okay, let's go, and be ready to meet some resistance, these hostiles appear to have primitive weapons, swords, arrows, that kind of thing, but I have a sneaking suspicion that that's not all they've got."

O'Neill moved forward. "Someone watch our six!" he barked.

The Aztecs were being taken, bathed, and changed into ceremonial robes.

Jackson took a deep breath. "I don't think we've got any choice," he stated to Carter, as their turn came. "We'll have to go along with this and hope that Jack makes it back in time."

Carter shook her head. "Even if he does, he and Teal'c will be no match for an army. In case you didn't notice, they took our guns whilst we slept."

"Yeah, I noticed," Daniel looked around him. "We don't have any choice, Sam, I just hope Jack got up in a bad mood!"

Jack strode into the hall, leading Coburn and the two remaining SG2 members.

"Jack!" Daniel declared. "How did you get in?"

Jack looked at him in his usual deadpan way. "We walked. Daniel, are you gonna tell me what's going on here?"

"We appear to be part of a ritual sacrifice to their god Huitzilopochtli," Daniel informed O'Neill. "Um, I don't think you'll be able to get out as easily," Daniel told Jack as he saw the massed ranks of Aztec soldiers file in behind them.

"Ya think?" O'Neill snapped.

"Oooh. I've so missed that," Daniel replied.

"Daniel, next time I want to be cynical, no arguments, okay?" O'Neill informed him.

"Major Carter?"

"I'm fine, sir," she informed him.

"Sweet. Okay, Coburn, we're getting out of here. Carter, take this." O'Neill handed her his side arm and offered Daniel the Zat gun.

"I'm sorry, Colonel," Sam said.

"Yeah, later, right now we've got to go," O'Neill snapped. "Major Coburn, cover our six, let's go."

Jack led them towards the exit and the Aztecs came forward, weapons drawn and raised.

"Sweet, I feel like I just stepped into an Errol Flynn movie." O'Neill complained, firing his Zat gun at the advancing masses.

Daniel did likewise; the Aztecs momentarily confused by the weapon.

"Sweet," O'Neill said. "Let's go." The sudden surge of guards split the group up. Daniel, close to Jack, was forced to flee with the colonel, whilst Carter, Coburn and his team fled down another route.

"Where did? For crying out loud," Jack complained. "Daniel, did you see which way they went?"

"No," he replied firing the Zat at more oncoming Aztecs.

"Alright, I've had it with this," O'Neill said, raising his MP5 and opening fire.

As many of them fell, others moved back, shocked.

O'Neill saw the opening and grabbed hold of Daniel's jacket, dragging the archaeologist behind him. O'Neill continued to use the MP5 to forge his way through.

"Coburn, come in?" O'Neill demanded.

"Reading you, sir. We're on our way back to the Stargate, as ordered."

"Good, we're not that far behind you. Keep going."

The masses of screaming and terrified people seemed to part like the Red Sea as O'Neill blasted his way through, still keeping a firm grip of Daniel.

They were forced to retreat from the city, in exactly the reverse way they had come in. O'Neill was less concerned about the location than actually getting out in one piece.

Once in the clear, O'Neill allowed Daniel his freedom from the tight, almost protective grasp.

"Thank you," Daniel said. "You almost dragged me over."

"Welcome."

O'Neill continued to put as much distance between them and the city as he could.

"You realise we're heading in the wrong direction?" Daniel pointed out.

"Yeah, Daniel, I knew that. Right now I'm a little more concerned about keeping you from becoming another sacrificial statistic," O'Neill commented.

"No I told you so? No caustic remarks?" Daniel asked.

"Daniel. I told you so, can't think of a caustic remark right now. Are you happy?" Jack concluded.

"They should have been here by now, try them again," Carter insisted as the group waited for Colonel O'Neill and Daniel at the Stargate. There was no reply.

"We've got to go, Major, those hostiles aren't going to take long to figure out where we came from."

"We wait for back up and hold the Stargate, Coburn, or else they'll figure out that that if they cut off that route the colonel and Daniel are trapped, plus we'll have more trouble trying to come back through," Carter argued.

"I disagree, Sam. We need to go back through now and make sure the backup's coming," Coburn snapped.

The lieutenant and the sergeant of SG2 stood watching the debate. Finally, Sergeant Peters, a seasoned campaigner stepped forward.

"Major Coburn, sir, with all due respect, Major Carter is right. If we go back through the Gate and the hostiles get control over it, it will give them the advantage."

Major Coburn looked from one to the other. "Okay. Better take cover then. If our people come through we'll be their first line of defence."

Carter looked satisfied.

"They're still some way behind," O'Neill told Daniel, as they trod a careful path through the swampy forests to the north of the city.

"Well, that's comforting," Daniel stated.

"It wasn't meant to be comforting," O'Neill pointed out.

"Jack, how long is it gonna take us to get back to the Stargate?" Daniel asked.

O'Neill considered the question. "Truthfully, I have no idea. See, in case it slipped by you, we're being chased away from the Gate."

"Well shouldn't we try and double back?" Jackson asked.

"Yes, Daniel, right about the time they stop following us, anymore stupid questions?" O'Neill snapped.

"Here we go," Daniel complained.

"Here we go what?" Jack echoed. "In case it didn't sink in. Remember, the 'Jack, I don't want to be with you' thing?"

"Yeah, um, I think so," Daniel replied. "What's your point?"

"My point is, this time we did the 'Daniel, you're with Carter thing', and it didn't work out too well, did it?"

"See, see, I knew you were going to blame this on me again!" Daniel emphasised the last word.

Jack stopped, turning and facing Jackson. "Well, who else? You did the 'we should go' thing. We go, then you do the 'please, Jack' thing. Who else exactly was that, Daniel?"

Daniel looked furious. "Well..." There was a long pause. "*You* let me do the 'Jack, please' thing."

"Yeah," O'Neill confirmed. "The 'Jack, please' stuff is wearing a little thin right now, Daniel," Jack concurred. "Wouldn't you say?"

A heavy sigh from Jackson. "If we listened to you, we'd probably never go anywhere," he snapped.

"Excuse me!" O'Neill vociferated. "I'm not the one that keeps getting us into these fixes! You've got a damn short memory, Danny boy."

"Oh, please. What about?" Daniel struggled for a moment, thinking of exactly what had been O'Neill's idea. "What, about the fact that you never have any?"

"Any what?" O'Neill demanded.

"Ideas or thoughts of your own, that is, that aren't orders," Daniel remonstrated.

"Sweet. Head still hurting is it?" Jack replied sarcastically.

"You're always putting me down," Daniel protested.

"Oh, it's crossed my mind a few times," O'Neill warned, referring to the physical kind.

A long silence followed as the two men made their way out of harm's reach, deeper into the swamp.

"How far do you think we are from the Gate really, Jack?"

"About 40 klicks I guess," Jack responded. "Wait here, I'm gonna climb that tree and see if I can see anything."

"Okay, try not to fall," Daniel quipped.

"Oh, and what's that supposed to mean?" O'Neill asked.

"Mister Defensive," Daniel grinned.

Jack's scornful expression broke into a smile. "Yeah, okay, Danny, if I do, it'll be on you!"

Daniel raised his eyebrows. "And, I suppose that would be by accident?"

O'Neill took his backpack off. "Something like that," he responded pushing the MP5 around behind him.

Daniel kept a weary eye on the surrounding marshland; he hadn't heard any noises in a while and felt a degree of comfort from that.

Jack climbed as high as he could, looking in all directions. He couldn't see any movement, but what troubled him more was the fact that he could no longer see the pyramid either.

"Great," he said, as he hit the floor with both feet. "No sign of anything."

He reached into his backpack and found his compass. The compass was spiking in all directions. "Oh, what's wrong with this thing," he moaned.

"What?" Daniel looked over his shoulder, "Um, strong magnetic field around here, I suspect."

Jack's face screwed up, realising Jackson was right. "I knew that," he said. "I just meant where was it coming from."

"No you didn't," Daniel argued.

"Did," Jack countered.

"Did not!"

"For crying out loud, Daniel."

"You know, Jack, that ranks right up there with being called in for a dressing down by an adult" Daniel commented.

"Well sometimes, Daniel, you have the tendency to be a little... childish."

"Good," Daniel snapped.

Jack raised his eyes heavenwards. "We're gonna be sleeping rough tonight," Jack said.

"I, um, gathered that."

"So, er, since you don't have your kit, and I'm probably used to this more than you are, you can have mine," Jack said, trying to avoid making it sound like Daniel might be somehow inferior, and judging the reaction from the archaeologist.

"Okay, now, see I've offended you haven't I?" Jack said quickly, "Go on, you can admit it."

Jackson took a deep breath. "No, I'm not offended."

O'Neill threw the blanket out of his rucksack. "So, you want it or what?"

"No, Jack," Daniel insisted. "I'm fine, it's not exactly cold here."

"Temperature's gonna drop," Jack pointed out. "Always does in this kind of climate. But hey, guess you're right."

Daniel looked at him through the gloom of the falling darkness. "I'm right? Right about what?"

"Night, Daniel," Jack collapsed on the ground, wrapping the blanket around him, grinning from ear to ear.

Daniel sat propped up against a tree, trying to get comfortable. Sure enough in the early hours of the morning, he awoke shivering.

He considered suffering the cold, if only not to rouse his companion from what might be a deep sleep, into a complaining grouch.

"Er, Jack," he said. "You awake?"

"What is it, Daniel?" O'Neill asked.

"It's, um."

"Cold?" O'Neill said. "Want the blanket?"

"Um."

O'Neill sat up. "Daniel, for crying out loud, just ask." He was already untangling himself, standing up and stretching. "I don't sleep well outdoors anyway. I'm gonna check around, make sure they're not lurking."

Jackson accepted the warmth happily, and exhausted, slipped easily into sleep.

End of part two.

Sacrifices - Part Three

Sam Carter sat, leant up against a tree, Coburn close by. "Wish we could raise them on the radio," she commented.

"Can't think why we can't, these things are good for over 50 clicks," Coburn told her.

"They can't be that far away?" Carter said.

The Stargate's activation immediately snatched the attention of the group from thoughts of the communication failure.

Teal'c strode boldly through, leading SG3 and fifteen more marines who Hammond had put in reserve, for just such crisis.

"Teal'c," Sam greeted.

"Major Carter, is there still no sign of Colonel O'Neill and Daniel Jackson?" the Jaffa asked, his eyes sweeping the horizons.

"No, Teal'c, and no radio contact either. What's the plan?" Carter asked.

"General Hammond has put Colonel Stuart in charge," Teal'c added, gesturing towards the new colonel.

"Colonel?" Carter enquired. "Do we have orders to look for Colonel O'Neill?"

"Negative, Major. We're to give Colonel O'Neill exactly 12 hours to find us, or we're pulling out."

"Pulling out!" Carter exclaimed, and even Major Coburn was about to protest.

"Relax, Major, I'm not gonna let O'Neill buy it, even if he is an ass for leading you into this in the first place," Colonel Stuart spat. "Was always gonna happen. I've never known someone who puts up with so much crap from his command. Jack's getting soft."

Carter looked furious. "With all due respect, sir, Colonel O'Neill got us out of this... crap. If it hadn't been for him, Daniel and I would probably be dead, sir."

"Ah, Jackson, another prince amongst fools," Stuart stated.

"Begging your pardon, sir," Carter said. "But do we actually have a purpose here?"

Stuart looked Carter up and down. "Yes, Major! We do, you're here to follow orders, understood?"

"Yes, sir, understood," Carter felt like responding in the negative, but recognised the attitude. She'd seen it many times before, but still it never failed to annoy her.

Jack knelt quietly down beside the sleeping form of Daniel Jackson, an evil glint appearing in his eyes.

"Danny boy," he whispered, taking his water bottle from his pack. "Daniel." He lifted the bottle over Daniel's head.

"Jack!" Daniel said, his tone tired and weary. "I swear if you pour that over me...!"

"You wanna stay here the rest of your life, or would you rather go home?" Jack asked with a look of smug satisfaction beaming across his features.

"Well Jack," Daniel sighed. "Much as I love to sleep in, um, such comfortable surroundings I think I'll opt for the latter." He sat up now, rubbing his hands over his face abruptly, hoping that the friction would aid his seemingly slow recovery from slumber.

"Good! Want some breakfast?" Jack asked, glancing over at Daniel from the position he now squatted in.

"I, er, don't suppose we have any coffee?"

"Ah. Whatever gave you that idea," O'Neill beamed, having already set up the small portable stove. "Listen, I did some recon, we're in the clear here."

"Wherever here is," Jackson commented.

Jack raised an eyebrow. "Sorry, no sugar," he said, as he handed Daniel his coffee.

"And, in a tin cup, sort of, um," Daniel noted. "So, did you get an idea of where the Stargate is?"

O'Neill sat, his back pushed against the tree. "I've got a rough idea, yeah."

"Good," Daniel acknowledged. "How long will it take?"

Jack's face screwed up as he tasted the coffee. "Oh, this could be better," he complained. "You know, I've kind of gotten into that instant stuff lately, less like treacle."

Daniel's expression was suddenly one of complete surprise. "And, the coffee's through the Stargate, so... how long?"

Jack finished the coffee. "Ah! Now, see, that is the bad news." His head cocked sideways, his lips pulled together tightly, that old familiar O'Neill expression

sweeping over his face. "To get back to the Stargate, we're gonna have to go around the pyramid thing."

Jackson nodded; he already knew where this was going. "Yeah," he agreed at length.

O'Neill took a deep breath. "Which means we're gonna have to go about 30 klicks North West, before we can turn South." He pulled on that amused expression then.

"You have no idea, do you?" Daniel asked.

That expression turned to a frown quickly. "Yeah, I do, it's gonna take us about two days."

"Two days?" Daniel exclaimed. "You do have your GDO?"

O'Neill nodded. "Look, Daniel. Relax, I have the codes. I've got enough rations in here to last for three days. It'll be cool, you and me in the wilderness. More downtime, no bourbon, come on, have some fun."

"Whoa!" Daniel was guarded. "Almost being sacrificed is not fun, Jack, neither is having one blanket, lousy coffee and... um."

O'Neill frowned again. "Being stuck with me?" he finished for Jackson.

"Well, no, I wasn't exactly gonna say that!" Daniel back-pedalled quickly.

"Oh, really," Jack said, his eyebrows shooting upwards to underline the comment.

"Jack, please, can we not do this? I had a lousy night," Daniel complained.

"*Jack, please,*" O'Neill retorted. "I seem to remember that expression from somewhere. Now where was that? Oh, could it have been '*Jack, please, can we stay and get to know these good folks better?*' "

Daniel's expression blackened, then he looked seriously amused. "I hurt your feelings, didn't I?" A hint of achievement in those words.

"No," O'Neill sneered.

"Yes, I did. That was... '*change the subject*' wasn't it?" Daniel felt accomplished suddenly.

Jack regarded him with disdain. "I don't have feelings, I have orders. Now let's go."

Daniel smiled to himself. His relationship with the colonel had always been precarious, between respect and misunderstanding. Now finally, he was beginning to see past the soldier. Congratulating himself on this achievement, he helped Jack pack away their supplies.

"Okay," O'Neill confirmed. "Let's move." He threw the pack on his back and picked up his MP5.

"Jack, I was thinking about that magnetic field that threw the compass off."

"Yeah?" O'Neill replied, glancing back at the archaeologist.

"Well, I think Sam could be right, I think they have some kind of technology here," Daniel informed the colonel.

"So?"

"So, I don't think we actually saw the gods, the rulers of this planet."

Jack stopped, he looked completely vexed. He turned and regarded Daniel.

"Is it me?" he asked his face screwing up in that familiar, 'this is about to be really annoying' way. "Or, did you almost get to meet your god back there?"

Daniel looked perplexed. "All I'm saying is..."

Jack waved his finger at Daniel. "No. See, you do this all the time. Have you ever heard that old expression 'curiosity killed the cat', Daniel?"

Daniel considered this for a moment. "But, shouldn't we at least find out?"

Jack's eyebrows shot up so quickly, the effort made him blink. "Is that before or after we find the Stargate?"

"Well I'm just saying, that if this is not a Goa'uld world, they obviously have some technology that might help us?"

Jack considered it for a moment. "Yeah, Teal'c seemed to think that the old snakeheads don't come here, so something pretty advanced must be behind it."

He looked away from Jackson for a moment. "Okay, tell you what, we'll find the Gate, go back to the SGC and brief Hammond. If he's agreeable, we'll come back and try to make contact with the 'gods'." Emphasising the last word, O'Neill's hand gestured in the air. "Okay?"

"Okay," Daniel agreed. "Hadn't we better start walking?" he asked.

Jack's eyes widened. "For crying out loud!" He turned and began to lead Jackson off, through the forest.

"Of course," Jack began, keeping his attention firmly on their surroundings. "We might also end up in some quicksand, recaptured by those friendly locals, or eaten by wild animals."

"I thought I heard something," Daniel said, stopping suddenly.

O'Neill turned around sharply. "Where'd it come from?" he asked.

"No, I, er, thought it came from my radio," Daniel looked apologetic. "Yours is switched on isn't it?"

"Daniel, please, of course it's switched on," Jack looked at the area where a red glow would indicate its function. "Ah!" His head tilted sideways and he looked slightly embarrassed. "It might also not be switched on, which is why I haven't been able to reach Carter. Damn!"

He pushed the on button. "No, it was switched on, it's just got dead batteries. Great, gimme yours."

Daniel undid the retaining clips and took the earpiece plug out.

"O'Neill to Carter. Come in, Carter." He shook his head and looked frustrated.

"O'Neill to Carter, Major, do you read this transmission?"

"Er, guess not," Daniel replied. "Do you think they're still here?"

"I don't know," O'Neill replied, a sour tone to his voice. "Hammond might have ordered them off to wait and see if we make it back through. I guess they'll send in the marines if we're not back in a couple of days."

Daniel's eyes suddenly went wide. O'Neill looked at him, shaking his head, the expression he wore was questioning.

Daniel's eyes flicked to his right, then back to O'Neill.

"Friendly?" O'Neill mouthed, no sound omitted.

Daniel's eyes rolled down.

Again, without the words spoken, O'Neill asked how many. Daniel blinked twice.

The colonel, acknowledged. "Well then I guess we'd better get moving. Gotta let the dog out." He moved quickly, rolling down to the side and turning at the same time. His MP-5 lifted towards two very curious looking creatures.

Although human in form, their skin was almost golden in colour, they had no lips, a mass of hair growing down the sides of their faces, and the nose was similar to that of a lion. Huge eyes housing blue tinted, vertical pupils, almost like those of a snake.

"Whoa!" O'Neill exclaimed, looking up and down the aliens. "Hello." Cynically. "You folks seen a Stargate anywhere round here? Big grey thing kinda round."

It appeared to Jack that one of them replied to him, although he saw no movement that would indicate speech. "In that direction?" he asked, confused, looking around at Daniel.

"Great, er, thanks," Jack acknowledged. "Daniel, shall we," Jack looked warily back at the archaeologist, then towards the aliens.

"No, no," he said, leaving Daniel looking quite perplexed. "Thank you."

"Daniel," Jack said, beginning to walk away. Daniel was caught between wanting to attempt his own communication with them and following his colleague.

As he caught up to O'Neill. "Jack. What just happened? Were they communicating with you?"

O'Neill looked slightly flustered. "Daniel, not now, let's just get as much distance here as possible," the colonel insisted.

"Jack, please."

O'Neill looked heavenwards, stopping. "Daniel, for once can we not do the, '*Jack, please*' stuff!" he snapped, "Argh. No argument, you just have to trust me in this."

Daniel looked at him, his head inclining to the left, eyebrows drawn down like a petulant child.

"And that won't work either," O'Neill said.

"It really spooked you didn't it?" Daniel began, walking after the irate colonel as he threw his hands up in the air and continued to walk.

"What did they say?"

"Daniel, they told me where the Stargate is, only, did you see their lips move?" Jack's expression showed no fear, just his usual degree of sarcastic confusion.

"Well, well... what else did they say? Did they tell you who they were?"

"No, we didn't get into small talk, Daniel," Jack replied. "But I'll guarantee you those folks are probably the gods." His free arms gesticulated wildly as he spoke, the pace now quickened.

Daniel looked around. "Um," he said, grabbing the colonel's shoulder. "Jack."

"What!" O'Neill spat angrily, turning around and seeing exactly why Daniel had attempted to stop him. The creatures were following them.

"Great, this is like giving a wild animal pup a snack and explaining it to angry folks later." he complained.

Daniel looked even more fascinated. "Are you telling me those are just the kids?" he asked.

The creatures stood almost 5'8" tall, Jackson noted. He lifted his glasses for a moment rubbing his eyes. "Jack?"

"Yeah, these are the kids. They say hi, you can't hear them?" Jack looked even more disgruntled by that.

"Well, no, not anything. What do they sound like?"

"I don't know, they sound like me, talking to myself," Jack responded his voice a little louder. "Oh, no, no, don't do that, I like him," Jack spoke directly to the aliens. "Even if he is a bit... well, he's okay. Okay?"

Daniel looked from Jack to the aliens, as they appeared to be communicating. "This is amazing. They're telepathic, and they're using your own voice?" he asked.

Jack looked resigned, smiling at the aliens. "Ah. We've got to get back through the Stargate," O'Neill informed them. "It's very important to us. But, we will come back."

Daniel was fascinated, studying the aliens. Their eyes were mesmeric, if a little cold looking, and the fine hair that grew from the sides of their heads was silken. Even the long robes they wore matched the golden tan colour of their skin.

"No, no. You can't keep me," Jack was saying. "I have to go back." At that moment, O'Neill let out a cry of pain, and fell unconscious to the floor.

"Jack!" Daniel was alarmed, kneeling down beside the colonel.

"What did you do to him?" Daniel asked the aliens.

One moved forward, rested its hand on O'Neill's forehead, and the colonel instantly came round.

"Whoa," Daniel said, watching the alien retreat. "How did you do that? Okay, why am I talking to myself? Jack, you okay?"

"Sweet. That was a little too much information all at once, don't ya think?" O'Neill said in the direction of the two aliens. "That's okay, just try not to do it again."

He climbed to his feet. "Okay. I think it's safe for us to go now."

"Well, what did they do? Hang on," Daniel insisted, as O'Neill began to walk away. "Jack!"

He acknowledged the aliens. "Well, um, goodbye, we'll be back."

The aliens watched them go, not moving, no signs of acknowledging Jackson's remarks.

End of Part Three.

Sacrifices: The Conclusion.

At her position, close to the Stargate, Major Carter prowled up and down. "Teal'c, you said you'd been to this planet?"

The Jaffa stood from where he had perched, his eyes for once straying from the horizons where he hoped he might see his friends. He was concerned, but he kept that, like most things, in check.

"No. Major Carter, I am only aware that the Goa'uld stay away from this planet," he informed his equally concerned colleague. "However, I do believe that Colonel O'Neill and Daniel Jackson will return soon."

"Thanks, Teal'c, I just wish I knew why their radios aren't working," Sam confided.

"Major Carter?" It was Colonel Stuart who spoke. "I want you to take SG2 back through the Stargate, inform General Hammond that I am leaving several of my team here, and the rest will go and sweep for O'Neill."

"But, sir," Carter protested.

"Major, did I hear myself give you an order? I think I did, and you better damn well follow it," Stuart snapped.

Jack O'Neill and Daniel Jackson approached the group through the trees to the right of the DHD.

"Belay that order, Carter," O'Neill barked. "David, your team is now dead." he said to the colonel raising his MP5, a sardonic look sweeping across his handsome features.

"I'm in charge here," Stuart argued.

O'Neill moved directly up to him. "Of what? Your men are all over the place. The only one that saw us coming was Teal'c."

The Jaffa, bowed his head, the merest hint of a smile crossed swiftly over his lips.

"Teal'c," O'Neill acknowledged. "Now, what do you say we all go home?"

Colonel Stuart nodded. "Sure, Jack, let's do that."

"Sam," O'Neill added, "thanks for waiting. Danny here needs some real coffee, and me, I want a nice long hot shower."

General Hammond had scheduled the briefing for 0800 hours the following morning. SG2's Major Coburn, Colonel Stuart, and Major Dale Harris of SG9 sat in.

"So, after Jack and I became separated," Jackson explained, "well we found some interesting, um, aliens, who had the ability to communicate with Jack, through some form of advanced telepathy."

"Colonel O'Neill," Hammond enquired. "Exactly what did they communicate?"

"Well, sir, stuff... they were curious about us, thought Daniel was... sir, could I be excused? I'm feeling a little sick all of a sudden."

"Take yourself down to the infirmary, colonel, stat!"

"Thank you, sir," O'Neill got up and left.

"Doctor Jackson, exactly what did transpire between Colonel O'Neill and these aliens?" Hammond asked.

"Well, General, they seemed to appear out of nowhere, and Jack just started talking to them. I was a little taken aback, because, well, they weren't actually speaking, they were putting their thoughts directly into Jack's mind," Jackson began.

"And you couldn't communicate with them at all?" Sam Carter asked.

"No, well, um, yeah, they could understand me, I just. Well, they apparently told Jack where the Stargate was. So we starting making our way back, I turned to look back, and there they were again, behind us."

"They followed you?" Colonel Stuart asked.

"Yeah, they were just there. So Jack tells me that they are actually juveniles."

"Kids?" Major Coburn enquired.

"Yes, and Jack was concerned that they shouldn't follow us, in case it upset the adults. Anyway, during the course of the conversation, the colonel seemed to just,

for no reason pass out, and the alien touched his forehead and brought him round. It was very, um, curious, sir."

Hammond looked concerned. "Did Colonel O'Neill tell you why he passed out Doctor Jackson?"

"Yeah, he, er, said that was a little too much information," Daniel replied, his eyes flicking back and forth to the occupants of the room.

"I see, but he seemed fine once the alien had touched him?" Carter asked.

"This is very curious, Daniel Jackson," Teal'c said. "I know of no being that can heal simply by touch."

"Well, yeah," Daniel enthused. "That's what I thought, so, with your permission, General, I'd like to go back and see if we can make some kind of meaningful contact with this race."

"I'll take it under advisement, Doctor Jackson," Hammond confirmed. "Is there anything else?"

"No, nothing that, er, well yes, I think the aliens were blocking our radio communications. And Jack's compass wouldn't work, so they must have some form of jamming device, or, er, something." Daniel said, looking at Sam, waiting for her to offer up an explanation of what might do that.

"Sir," Carter began. "It's possible that Daniel's right. We should definitely find out what kind of technology they have."

"General Hammond, I too believe that we should attempt to make contact with this race. The Goa'uld fear them, they may be a powerful ally," Teal'c said.

Hammond was more impressed by the Jaffa's statement. He knew Teal'c to speak only when he felt there was something important to be offered.

"I want you all back here at 1300 hours. Major Carter, check over the equipment that Colonel O'Neill and Doctor Jackson were carrying. Colonel Stuart, your team will be backing them up."

Stuart nodded.

Sam and Daniel smiled at each other.

"Come on, Doc, it's just a little stomach upset. Do we really need all these tests?" O'Neill complained as Janet drew a sample of his blood. "Gimme some Pepto or something."

Janet Frazier smiled at O'Neill patiently. "Colonel, you're possibly the most impatient patient I have."

"Gee, Doc, thanks, but I'll bet you say that to all the boys," O'Neill offered her a smile. "Or is it just the ones who rank higher?"

"There, Colonel, you can go and relax now," Janet said. "I'll rush these through the labs and hope they come up negative."

"Oooh, doc, you fill me with such confidence." O'Neill said, climbing down from the gurney.

Teal'c appeared in the doorway of the infirmary.

"Teal'c," O'Neill said. "Come to bust me out?"

"I am not familiar with that term, O'Neill, I have merely come to see if you are well," the Jaffa replied, raising his right eyebrow. "And I see that you are."

"Now see, Doc, that's what you should be saying!" He beamed at Janet for a moment, then back to Teal'c. "What's going on? Did I miss anything?"

"General Hammond has requested that we return to this planet and make contact with the aliens you discovered."

O'Neill began to walk towards the Jaffa. "And, that was Daniel's idea?" Jack confirmed.

Teal'c looked at his friend quizzically for a moment. "I too believe that we might gain something from making contact with this species," he stated.

O'Neill stopped and looked directly at the Jaffa. He leant back, a bemused expression on his face. "You do?" he asked. "Well, Teal'c, that's great. You want some coffee, cause right about now I could sure use some."

"Are you sure you are well, O'Neill?" Teal'c asked, his concern showing across his proud forehead, as both eyebrows knitted into a frown.

"Well," O'Neill responded, his left hand raised, flat against Teal'c's shoulder, a friendly pat. "I'm tired, didn't really get much sleep. So if it's all the same to you. I think I'll catch some now."

As O'Neill walked away, Teal'c pondered how one would 'catch' sleep.

13:00, Briefing Room.

"Where's Colonel O'Neill?" General Hammond asked.

"I told him about the briefing, sir. He was on his way to get some sleep at the time," Sam Carter informed. "Do you want me to see if he's overslept?"

Teal'c looked across at Major Carter. "It is most unlike O'Neill to be late."

"Yeah," Sam agreed. "Sir, with your permission?"

Daniel Jackson stood up. "Er, I'll go," he said, already making his way out of the briefing room.

"Thank you, Doctor Jackson."

Daniel entered the darkened sleeping quarters, to find them empty. "Oh boy," he muttered. "Okay, where else would you be?" Daniel checked several places before he discovered O'Neill, sitting in his own lab.

"Jack, did you forget about the briefing?" he asked.

O'Neill was sitting at Jackson's computer, he looked round. "Yeah, I heard you the first time," he said. "Sorry was looking something up, fascinating bunch, these Aztecs."

Daniel looked startled. "Ah, yeah." Then he realised that O'Neill had actually apologised to him. "Sorry?" he repeated slowly. "In here?" Surprised still, to find the colonel in the last place he'd even considered looking.

"Yeah, I was on my way to the briefing, got a little sidetracked, you know how it is." O'Neill looked at him abruptly then. "Daniel, that's not a first at all."

"What?" Jackson's surprise at the comment was clearly etched all over his face. He thought hard to himself.

"Of course I heard what you said, Daniel, yoi, stop talking nonsense, we're gonna be late for the briefing." O'Neill seemed impatient.

"Jack, wait." He prevented O'Neill from leaving.

He thought the words. "You can read my mind."

Jack looked confused. "Daniel, can we just get to the briefing? Of course I can't read your mind."

Jackson's face went blank then. "I, er, I never actually said that, Jack, I thought it."

His hand habitually moved to his face, fingers caressing his forehead. Again, thinking rather than actually sounding the word. "Jack?"

O'Neill looked directly at him. "What?" he asked.

"Oh, wow. Oh, um, we'd better, er, get to the briefing."

Jack looked confused and annoyed all at the same time. "Daniel, you know. You really can be just a little wacky at times." Jack began to walk out now.

"Yeah, as well as being a geek," he concurred, with the thought Daniel had, at the very same time that Jackson had intentionally thought it.

"Oh, boy," Jackson said to himself again, looking both dubious and fascinated at the same time.

"Something more important on, Colonel?" Hammond asked.

O'Neill glared back at Daniel, for the remark he had thought to himself, as they entered the room.

"No, sir, sorry, I got held up," he said, looking directly at Daniel, "in the men's room."

Daniel's eyes widened, men's room? '*You were not in the men's room!*' he immediately thought.

Jack smiled at Daniel.

"Sir, actually, we've made a little discovery here," Daniel interrupted, just as Hammond was about to give them the orders for the mission.

"Doctor Jackson?"

"It appears that Jack can read my mind," Daniel informed the gathering.

"Oh, for crying out loud, Daniel," Jack vociferated. "General Hammond, you know, I think Daniel needs some rest or something, he's been acting a little odd since we got back."

Daniel's face screwed up, he thought quickly. 'Oh no you don't, Jack.'

The room, in silence, waited for one or the other to speak. "Oh no I don't what?" Jack asked.

General Hammond looked at O'Neill. "Colonel?"

Teal'c and Sam looked from one to the other.

"What, sir?" O'Neill snapped.

Daniel thought, quite innocently. 'You can't read his mind.'

Jack flashed a look at him. "Of course I can't read his mind!"

"General, um, Jack appears to have the ability to read my thoughts."

"Getting a little paranoid there, Danny boy, don't ya think?" O'Neill responded.

"Now, alright that's enough, Colonel, Doctor Jackson," General Hammond remonstrated. "Just what in the hell is going on here?"

"I don't know, sir, I think Daniel might need some tests of his own." Then to Jackson, who to all those assembled had clearly not said anything back. "No Daniel, I'm not being an ass."

Daniel looked triumphantly at the assembled, bemused SGC personnel. "See, see, you know I didn't say anything, but Jack just responded to the thought that I had about him behaving like an ass."

"Colonel?" Major Carter asked, concern sweeping across her eyes. "Are you okay, sir?"

"Daniel, would you just shut up for a second," Jack yelled at his colleague.

Everyone in the room now looked searchingly at each other.

"Major Carter, get Doctor Fraiser up here, I want to know just what came back in those tests."

"Yes, sir."

"Doctor Jackson, in my office." Hammond got up and led the archaeologist to his office. "Now what in the hell is going on here, Doctor?"

"General," Daniel began, his eyes and face full of wonderment. "I don't know. I just know that before we came back here, there was nothing wrong with Jack. But just now, when I went to find him he was in my lab, and it occurred to me by what he was saying that he'd read my thoughts. My, um, my mind."

Hammond regarded Jackson. "How is that possible, Doctor Jackson?" he asked.

"I don't know, but it's, er, it's fascinating and disconcerting all at the same time," Daniel elaborated. "It must have something to do with the experience he had with the aliens. Something that they did, um, I don't know."

"Well you were there, Doctor, could they have done something to the colonel without your seeing it?"

Jackson looked at the General. "I, don't know, I mean, who knows what kind of life form we're dealing with here. They could be telekinetic or anything, the possibilities are endless."

Hammond took a deep breath. "Well find out, Doctor, I'm authorising the mission to go ahead, but without Colonel O'Neill."

"Um, no, sir," Jackson protested. "I don't think you understand. Whatever links are there, Jack's the key."

"Doctor Jackson, I can't risk sending Colonel O'Neill anywhere without knowing what's wrong with him. I'm sorry, but your request is denied."

Daniel looked frustrated then. "General, whilst I know what you're saying here, being able to read someone's mind isn't exactly going to put anyone in danger."

Hammond considered it for a moment. "Alright, Doctor Jackson, I just hope you know what you're doing."

Daniel, smiled one of those tight-lipped smiles, and his eyebrows danced up momentarily. "Ah, thank you, General." As he left, he added in lower tones. "So do I."

Doctor Fraiser held up the test results from the MRI scan. "Well it appears that your cerebrum is extremely active, Colonel," she told O'Neill who was, as usual, totally disinterested.

"Doc, do I have anything physically wrong with me?" he asked.

"No, Colonel, apart from this heightened activity, nothing at all. But, since the cerebrum controls the ability to input and output sensory perception, I guess this explains your condition," Fraiser told him.

"So, okay, since the last thing I want is Daniel in my head, how do we get him out?"

Fraiser frowned. "Colonel, I have no idea. Whatever did this to you is probably, hopefully, capable of undoing it."

"Sweet, so we go back to the planet," O'Neill concurred.

Daniel checked his gear in the locker room, O'Neill walked in, looking slightly vexed with his own situation. "Hello, Jack," Daniel said.

"Could you think a little faster, Daniel, I heard that already," Jack told him. "God!" he exclaimed loudly. "Stop thinking, okay. Just, argh. Yeah, Daniel, I'm sorry too."

"Great, so are you ready?"

"Yep," Jack responded. "No, I think you left them in the briefing room."

Daniel looked up sharply, a smile sweeping across his face. "Thanks. Probably gonna need them." He collected his glasses from the briefing room, before entering the embarkation room.

Hammond and the others were already assembled inside.

"Colonel O'Neill, aside from hearing Doctor Jackson's thoughts, is there any reason why I shouldn't give you command of this mission?" Hammond asked.

"None, sir," O'Neill replied. "Worse comes to the worse, I'll just bore everybody to death with observations."

Daniel looked across at Jack. "Um, can you hear me at a distance?" he asked.

"Nope, now that's an idea."

Daniel raised his eyebrows. "I'll do my best."

They made their way up the ramp, twelve marines and Colonel Stuart accompanying them.

"Teal'c, are you gonna be okay?" O'Neill asked. "Since the last time we spent any amount of time on the planet, Junior found it disagreeable."

"I will be fine, O'Neill," Teal'c confirmed.

"Sweet, let's move out."

Once through the Stargate O'Neill assembled the group. "Okay, we want to avoid the city, sweep around due south, and see if we can make contact with our new friends. David, your people fan out and watch our six. I don't want anyone shooting anything unless it's necessary. Is that understood?" He directed that comment at Colonel Stuart, then turned quickly and looked at Daniel.

"And then some," he smiled.

Daniel smiled back; he had thought that Stuart looked like the typical marine, with attitude.

Sam Carter looked at Teal'c. "Wow, this is weird," she imparted.

"It is indeed very strange, Samantha Carter."

Almost an hour into their trek Jack began to hear voices, he knew no one was talking, and it most certainly wasn't Daniel.

"Daniel," he said, his tone kept low enough for no one else to hear.

Daniel regarded the Colonel. "What?"

"We've got to go this way," O'Neill told him, his gaze intense. "Without them!"

"Wait a minute, Jack, are you sure?" Daniel replied, looking nervously from the group back to the colonel.

"Yeah, just make like we're having a conversation, let the rest get a way ahead. Okay?"

"Sure, if you think it's what we should do," Daniel told him, feeling like he could trust O'Neill not to lead him to any danger, and equally understanding that he had the connection with the aliens.

Suddenly the two men found themselves in a completely different place.

"Thanks," O'Neill said to Daniel, examining the room they stood in.

"For what?" Daniel asked.

"For trusting me," O'Neill replied. "Come on, we have to go see the Sengo'lians."

"The what? Jack, do you know your way around here?" Daniel took off after him, slightly confused.

The architecture was almost moulded, everything was rounded. No sharp edges anywhere in the halls and rooms they walked through. Silver and gold decorated structures breaking what would otherwise have been completely empty spaces.

"Daniel, I'd like you to meet the Sengo'lians. They're the 'gods' of this planet," Jack said, once they were inside a vast hall, empty but for a huge fountain in the centre that appeared to have some form of energy, rather than water flowing from it.

Daniel's eyes swept the hall. "Where?" he asked.

"We are here," Jack said, and the moment the words left his lips, the creatures they had seen before began to appear, much taller than the juveniles they had earlier encountered.

"Whoa!" Daniel exclaimed. "Jack, you're still you?"

"For crying out loud, Daniel, of course I'm me. I just have to speak for them because you can't hear them," Jack explained. He shouldered his MP5.

"Right," Daniel said, his eyes darting from one to another, as it seemed over fifty of them now stood, surrounding the two. "I'm pleased to meet you."

"You wonder why I can hear them?" Jack asked him.

"Er, yeah, I mean, if they can communicate with you, why not with me? It's a little, um," Daniel said.

"Disconcerting," O'Neill finished for him. "We are able to speak through this one, because he has the imprint of the Ancients. We were as surprised as you are."

"Okay, then you are friends of the Ancients?" Daniel asked, directing his speech towards the Sengo'lians.

"We are, you wonder who they are," O'Neill said. "Well, Daniel, we can't tell you that."

"Um, okay, why did you Jack give the ability to hear my thoughts then?"

"You were exposed to our technology, but your mind has not been expanded in the same way. Thus the bond between you creates the ability for O'Neill to hear and

read your thoughts," Jack told him. "Sorry, I've got the ability, I was quoting directly," he apologised to Daniel.

"No, that's, that's okay, Jack. So, is there a possibility for an alliance between our two races?" Daniel probed. "We are enemies of the Goa'uld."

Jack shook his head. "We understand your race well. Perhaps in time we will be able to consider this."

"But, not now, right?" Daniel sounded slightly disappointed.

Jack turned now and looked at one of the Sengo'lians. "Folks, whilst I appreciate the 'gift' of being able to hear Daniel's thoughts. It's kind of making me a little cranky here. So, I don't suppose? Ah, thanks."

"Jack, what did they say," Daniel asked.

"They're gonna turn the volume down," O'Neill told him. "Well, it's been great meeting you folks. Any chance that you could get me and my team back to the Stargate?"

Daniel's eyes moved back and forth. "Wow, this is..."

"Fascinating, yeah, Daniel, I know," Jack responded.

One of the aliens moved forward. Standing over seven feet, it reached out and touched O'Neill's forehead.

"Thank you," Jack noted, happy now that at last he couldn't hear Daniel's constant observations. "Yeah, I'll do that." He turned now and looked at Daniel. "Okay, time to go."

The two men found themselves back at the Stargate, a confused party of Marines, along with Teal'c and Carter, looking at them as they made their way from the trees.

"Sir, we thought we'd lost you for good that time," Carter said.

"Okay folks, time to go," O'Neill announced.

"But, Colonel, we haven't made contact with the aliens," Carter reminded him.

"Oh yes we did, Carter, I'll tell you all about it some time. Dial us home Daniel," Jack instructed.

Daniel pushed Earth's symbols, moving back towards Jack as the wormhole burst into life.

"Er, Jack, exactly what did we discover here?" he asked. "And do you remember any of it."

O'Neill looked at him. "Any of what?" he asked, a blank expression covering his face. "Haven't got a clue what you're talking about... as usual."

Daniel raised his eyebrows high into his forehead. "Great," he said. "We came, we saw and we heard... nothing."

"Yeah," O'Neill said. "Should make great reading." A wide smile crossed O'Neill's face then. As the last man, before him stepped through the Stargate, he turned and looked back at the hovering ship that now uncloaked.

Nodding his head, and offering them a salute, he turned and retreated through the Gate.

The End.

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