Deception's Kiss

By

Jaclyn

Deception's Kiss I

Teal'c walked side by side with Jack O'Neill down one of the many corridors at the SGC that led to his quarters. He paused now at the door, and looked at O'Neill. "I am pleased you made it back O'Neill," he said, referring to the colonel's latest brush with Apophis.

"Ah, Teal'c what can I tell you? Having friends in high places certainly helps," O'Neill responded. "Listen, um, sorry about the Zat. You, er, understand?"

"I understand, O'Neill."

"Yeah, thanks, Teal'c," O'Neill beamed. "I appreciate that."

Teal'c raised a guarded eyebrow. "Would you like to box, O'Neill? I found the last lesson most gratifying."

O'Neill looked dubious. "You did, hah?" He regarded the Jaffa. "I'm guessing that's Jaffa humour, right?"

"That is correct, O'Neill," Teal'c responded, barely a glimmer of a smile visible on his face.

"So, you don't want to box, or?" O'Neill prompted.

"I do not," Teal'c said. He turned and entered the room, closing the door behind him.

"Phew," O'Neill exhaled, almost mischievously. "Mental note, teach Teal'c how to play cards!" He beamed at his own sense of humour, and headed towards the briefing room.

Sam Carter was deep in discussion with Daniel Jackson. "Yeah, but you've got to admit it's interesting," she argued.

They sat across from one another at the long briefing room table.

"Interesting is not the word I'd use."

"Hi, kids," O'Neill barged in. "What are we talking about? 'Cause you know me, I hate to take sides."

"Yes, sir, we were discussing..." Carter looked at Daniel.

"Um, oh yeah. We were... Jack, back so soon?" Daniel toyed with the colonel intentionally.

O'Neill's attempt at a smile became more of a grimace; he pursed his lips, head cocked now to one side.

"Shouldn't you kids leave here occasionally and do that real-life thing?" O'Neill asked, his quizzical expression enough to raise a smile from both Carter and Daniel.

2

"You should go out dancing or something, I don't know," O'Neill suggested hesitantly.

"Well, sir."

"Ah, Carter, I know, to me this is fun!" Jack parodied earlier Sam references perfectly. "Well, since I'm headed in there for a nice heart to heart with General Hammond, I figured you'd want to wish me luck."

"Good luck," Daniel said, eyebrows knitting down into a frown.

Once Jack had disappeared into the general's office, Daniel looked across at Carter. "Is he in for a surprise!" he remarked, a smile sweeping across his face. "Well," Sam said.

General Hammond invited Jack O'Neill to sit.

"If it's a dressing down, sir, I prefer to stand, I take it better when I'm standing," O'Neill said, light-heartedly.

"Colonel, sometimes I don't know whether to court martial you or recommend you for another medal."

"Thank you, sir, is that all?"

"Jack, sit down."

O'Neill did as he was ordered. "Thank you, sir."

"Jack, what you did, and I appreciate the reasons, was both dangerous to the SGC and the safety of this planet."

"Yes, sir," O'Neill conceded. "Trouble is, sir, with due respect to both, and I take it very seriously, I have a problem with my people getting abducted, makes me a little cranky," the colonel explained, his features retaining a mirthful expression.

3

"Colonel, it's not just your general attitude. I've had Air Force command on the telephone to me, you were reported as speeding on the freeway, and absconding whilst police attempted to give you a ticket."

"Oh, for crying out loud, General, I gave them my driver's licence, and it was an emergency."

"Jack, I respect your loyalty to your people, I'd expect nothing less from you. But," General Hammond stood then. "It is with great regret..."

O'Neill's usually sardonic expression faded, his mind raced.

"That I have to inform you..."

"Sir?" he asked, unable to take the suspense.

"That today is your birthday, and don't think we all didn't know it." Hammond's stern expression broke into a huge smile.

"General, sir," O'Neill snapped. "Don't do that! I was trying to keep it a secret."

"Well, Colonel, you failed. Thought I was gonna can you, didn't you?" Hammond grinned.

"Well, sir, I don't know that many generals with such a warped sense of humour," O'Neill remarked. "But thanks for aging me, does wonders for the grey!" He gestured at his hair, a broad grin now enveloping his face.

Daniel attempted to conceal his glee as O'Neill walked from the General's office. "You!" O'Neill charged. "I should have known it. Daniel, for crying out loud."

Daniel handed Jack a bottle of beer. "I think they might forgive you drinking on duty this time, Jack," he said. "Happy..."

O'Neill's finger went up in front of Daniel. "Ah, no, no, don't say the B word, getting a little touchy in my old age."

"O'Neill," Teal'c said.

4

The colonel turned to face him; most of the command control staff were now in the briefing room. "Teal'c?"

"Happy Birthday."

O'Neill shook his head. "Teal'c, you…" He paused momentarily. "Are probably the only one that's gonna get away with saying that." He raised his voice. "Anyone else uses that accursed word gets a Zat blast, with all due respect to the General, who, of course, can say whatever he likes."

O'Neill's smile was more of a grimace, as they mingled, talking about the mission.

Daniel pulled Jack to one side.

"Listen, the glider aside, Jack, I really appreciate you putting your backside on the line for me, Sam told me you could have been in serious trouble."

Jack was shaking his head. "Daniel, what can I tell you? Forget it, don't mention it again, you'd do the same for me!"

"Well. Since it is your, um, well I, er, I got you a…" Daniel closed his eyes shaking his head. "Present."

"A present for me?" Jack looked seriously amazed, and pleased.

Daniel presented him with a box, wrapped in Egyptian design paper.

Jack looked reticent for a moment. "It's not a bomb is it?" he asked, giving it a little shake, attempting to reflect any embarrassment he felt about receiving it.

"No, no. Please, it's nothing like that," Daniel said. "Trust me."

O'Neill looked at him for a moment, dubious, but began to open the paper. "A model aeroplane, Daniel, how'd you know?"

"Well," Daniel mused. "When I was at your house, I saw the magazine and all the models, so I figured."

5

Jack reached his hand out and slapped Daniel on the shoulder, a genuine smile sweeping across his face. "Thank you," he said. "I don't know what to say, so..."

"Yeah," Daniel waved it off. "It's okay."

Three hours later, SG1 was getting ready for a recon mission to another new planet, P7X 919. The MALP had indicated that there were no life forms, but had detected a breathable atmosphere, with moderate weather.

Jack was still in a good mood; a beer did that for a guy! He was also looking forward to having the weekend off too, and maybe starting in on that model plane.

"Teal'c, you wanna do something this weekend?" Daniel enquired. "I was thinking of maybe visiting some museums in New York, haven't been in a while."

Teal'c looked at Jackson. "Museum? Daniel Jackson. I am unfamiliar with this term?"

"Places with old stuff in 'em," O'Neill quipped.

Daniel frowned. "Great halls with artefacts from our past," he corrected.

"I see," Teal'c replied. "I am afraid I have already made plans, Daniel Jackson, but thank you."

"Oh, plans," O'Neill satirized. "Careful, Teal'c, you're starting to sound like one of us."

The wormhole engaged as they spoke; O'Neill gave Teal'c a couple of rueful looks. "Yeah, right. Move out, kids," he ordered.

Daniel and Jack emerged on the other side of the wormhole and almost immediately, the wormhole disengaged. Jack turned quickly. "What the hell?" He and Daniel looked at each other. Both wondered the same thing, were Sam and Teal'c in there when it did so?

Sam Carter was only halfway up the ramp when the wormhole disengaged. "What happened?" She turned to the control room.

"I don't know," Lieutenant Simmons told her.

Teal'c frowned heavily. "They must dial it again, Samantha Carter," he said.

"Do it," Carter ordered.

The symbols were input again; the gate failed to engage.

Carter climbed the stairs to the control room. "Lieutenant?" she asked.

"It's just not engaging." He was mystified. "It won't accept the seventh chevron, Major."

Carter put the symbols in herself this time and as the chevrons linked in, the seventh failed to lock. She looked at Simmons, who stared back, amazed.

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"What just happened?" Daniel asked, looking from the colonel, to the Stargate, and back again.

"How does 'I have no idea' sound?" Jack retorted.

"Familiar," Daniel remarked. "Okay, so they'll just dial it back up."

Jack looked concerned. "No. Daniel, we should dial home right now," he ordered.

Daniel did as he was asked; the gate would not engage.

"You sure you put the right sequence in?" O'Neill questioned.

"Be my guest," Daniel replied, standing aside and watching Jack push the very same coordinates he had. Nothing.

"Well. Great!" O'Neill remarked. "Is it broken?"

"No, it's working," Jackson replied.

"Well try something else, try Abydos," Jack instructed.

Jackson dialled the Abydos coordinates. Nothing. "Oh," he said. "Well, we appear to be, um, stranded."

7

O'Neill's face screwed up as he realised the implications. "Great!" He shook his head, then reached under his cap with his hand scratched his head in disbelief. "Well this is becoming a habit."

Daniel regarded O'Neill with a reflection of the same disdain. "Well, er, what do we do now, maybe we should have a look around, Sam will figure it out," he offered.

"Figure out what? If the DHD is busted from this side and they can't dial in from their end, I'd say something's not right," Jack concluded.

"You're right, but what?" Daniel looked at O'Neill, whose face was blank.

"You're asking me?" he said, his eyes widening.

Jackson closed his eyes then. "Oh wait, remember when we gated to Klo'rel's ship, we couldn't dial home."

"That's a ship, Daniel, this is an entire planet, for crying out loud." Jack observed.

Jackson's hand shot up in self-defence of what he deduced as about to be an O'Neill tirade. "But it's the only thing I can think of, somehow there must have been a planetary shift, and it's thrown the coordinates off, way off."

"Sweet, so all Carter has to do is figure that out, and we're home." O'Neill sounded a little less stressed now; he turned and looked around.

"Ah, actually, Jack, it can take weeks to recalculate the shift. They'd have to decide how it shifted and try millions of calculations, Doppler's shift," Daniel said.

Jack stared at him for a moment. "Doffler's shift?" he asked.

"Doppler, Jack, he was an Austrian physicist, never mind. Look, Jack, we need to, um, do something."

"Like?"

"Well, we can't just stay here and wait," Daniel argued. "We can go take a look around at least."

"Yeah, you're right. Leave your pack, that way if they do open the gate, they'll know we're still here." Daniel did as he was asked.

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O'Neill moved slowly, keeping his eyes open. He hated surprises, perhaps with the exception of the earlier one, he mused to himself, and it brought a smile to his lips; a model he could build, when he got home. He sighed heavily.

"This place is great," Daniel enthused. "It's teaming with life."

"Life?" Jack responded. "You mean plants, right?"

"Yeah, I mean, maybe there's even animals here."

"Wild animals?" Jack asked. "As in what, Daniel, evolved?"

"Jack, you're, um, assuming the worst, why can't it just be a good thing, a good experience. Hello," Daniel said, his eyes wandering off to the left.

"Hello?" Jack repeated, looking at the archaeologist, like a screw had somehow come loose. He turned then, and looked where Daniel's gaze led him.

A cluster of stones, almost car sized, formed in a circle. "Daniel," Jack said, trepidation in his tone. "What's that?"

Daniel started to move toward them. "I, er, I don't know."

"Daniel, just, ah! Hold on for a second." He pursued the archaeologist. "I hate it when he does that," Jack mumbled to himself.

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Daniel walked around the circumference. "It's sort of like Stonehenge, but not really, a megalithic monument."

"Mega what?" Jack asked, eyes widening with a semblance of surprise.

"Megalithic. It's taken from the Greek, um, Megas 'Great' and Lithos 'Stone'. It's possibly Bronze Age, definitely Neolithic. Wow!" Daniel exclaimed.

"Wow?" O'Neill repeated sceptically. "Daniel," he pointed out. "They're stones!"

"Jack, they believe that Stonehenge was about 2500 BC, possibly older, but they have never been able to prove what the stones signified. The Druids were said to have used them for sacrifice and places of worship, but long after they were actually, um, laid, this, this is incredible."

Jack rested his arms on his MP5. "Great, does this mean we might not be alone, here on this uninhabited planet?" His cynicism was now evident in that lopsided expression, that seemed to twist and contort his features into disdain.

"God, I hate that UAV!"

Daniel looked around. "I don't know," he said. "But you realise that if the people that put these in place are here, wow!" Daniel said again.

Jack looked completely unimpressed. "Great, just what I needed, stranded on a planet with a geek on a mission. Daniel, for crying out loud, will you can it!"

"Why? Why are you always so negative?" Daniel demanded, moving round in front of O'Neill, challenging him.

Jack looked away from him. "I don't know Daniel, maybe because I'm just a little more focused on survival than you are!" he replied.

"But, don't you ever see past that, Jack?" Daniel argued, hoping against hope, and his better judgement, that just once, Jack O'Neill would abandon his usual proclivity toward anything other than fighting the Goa'uld and any other hostile.

"Daniel, look, as much as this is fascinating to you, to me it's, well frankly, Daniel, it's a bunch of big stones. Yeah, sure I admit that sometimes, only sometimes," O'Neill said, "this stuff you keep up there." He gestured towards Daniel's head. "Comes in handy. But, just not now, okay?"

Daniel looked squashed; a miffed expression worn over his boyish features. It felt familiar to him, always appearing as it did just after one of Jack's dismissive diatribes.

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Sam Carter studied the coordinates closely. "Sir," she informed Hammond. "I think the planet might have shifted out of its normal orbit."

Hammond looked concerned. "Does that mean that we can't get our people back?" he asked.

"Not exactly, sir, but realigning the coordinates to work properly is going to take a while, a long while." Concern crossed her brow now.

"Well, Major," Hammond ordered. "I suggest you start right away, if you need any help, just tell me who you need and I'll have them here."

Carter thought hard. "Sir, actually, I've got another idea, we could bring up the cartouche from the data we have, and gate to a planet in that galaxy. The coordinates wouldn't have put that gate's function far enough away to negate the original glyphs."

"Major?" General Hammond looked slightly bemused.

Carter's eyebrows shot up; her lips narrowed as she considered how best to explain it. "Okay, the shift is enough to throw our coordinates out from Earth, because of the distance," she began, "but, if we can find a suitable planet to gate to in the same system." She looked hard at the general, had she explained it well enough?

"I see. Okay, Major, go ahead," Hammond instructed.

"Thank you, sir."

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 "It's getting dark," Daniel observed as the two men wondered along, away from the circle of stones.

"I know, we'd better try and find somewhere to hold up," O'Neill replied.

11

"Well the circle of stones seems as good a place as any?" Jackson pointed out, gesturing at the surroundings. "There's really not much cover anywhere else."

O'Neill turned, askant in his expression. "You never give up do you?" he said, a heavy sigh leaving his lips.

"Well?" Daniel said. "It is the best place."

"Yeah, but what if the worshippers decide to put in an appearance?" he enquired, sceptically, a lopsided grimace adorning his face.

"We'll have discovered life?" Daniel offered.

O'Neill glared at him. "Knowing our luck, Daniel, hostile life. Come on, we'd better set up."

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Sam Carter stared at the computer screen. "That's it," she exclaimed. "P8X 917, it's the closest thing to the planet."

Teal'c, who had been sitting at another computer, attempting to ascertain the same, looked across with a faint smile.

"I believe you are correct, Samantha Carter," he stated, looking satisfied.

"Lieutenant Simmons," Carter instructed. "Inform General Hammond, we're gonna need to send a MALP through ASAP!"

"Yes, ma'am," Simmons snapped, immediately leaving his own seat and disappearing from the control room.

Sam looked relieved. "For a minute there, Teal'c, I thought we weren't going to find anything."

"I always believed you would find the solution, Samantha Carter."

Carter looked suitably impressed. "Thanks!" Her eyebrows shot up in surprise. "Wish you'd told me earlier!"

General Hammond appeared then. "Major?" he asked.

"Sir, P8X 917, it's the closest I've come to matching the glyphs of P7X 919, I'd like permission to prep and send a MALP through, sir."

"Go ahead, Major, I hope you're right," Hammond agreed.

"Yes, sir. Me too."

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Darkness now engulfed them. O'Neill had managed to build a fire, and the portable stove he always carried was now boiling water from his flask.

"Well, isn't this nice," he said in his usual unimpressed fashion. "We've got the stars, three moons and.... some stones." A shake of his head. "Yoi."

"So how long do you figure it will take Sam to work out the coordinates?" Jackson asked, attempting to make himself comfortable against one of the stones.

"Well, knowing Carter, not too long," O'Neill said, a sour expression adorning his features as he smelt the powdered substance from a pack of rations he'd extracted from his rucksack. "You want some of this soup-like stuff?"

"Er, yeah," Daniel replied. "You know, Jack, this planet wasn't on the Abydos Cartouche. Which makes me wonder..."

Jack mixed the substance in a tin cup with the boiling water, looking up at the archaeologist. "So?"

"Well, okay," Daniel began, a furrow in his brow as he considered his words. "Two reasons that I can figure. One, being they haven't discovered it yet."

Jack handed him the soup. "And the second?" he enquired.

"Yeah, right," A heavy sigh. "The second is the bad thing, the Goa'uld fear something here, so it was never written into their cartouche."

Jack sipped thoughtfully on the soup he clasped in both hands. "This stuff always tastes the same," he commented. "Look, Daniel, so far, apart from your alternate reality experience, we've seen nothing on any of those..." Emphasis placed on that word. "Planets that have been hostile."

"I know, but I'm just trying to, um, make, er, to, make..." Daniel struggled, looking directly at the colonel now.

"Conversation?" Jack asked; a smile swept across his strong features briefly. "Yeah, I know, it's a bitch, not much in common there, hah?"

Daniel shook his head. "Can I ask you a question?"

"Sure."

"Did you ever think of giving up, I mean when you were trapped on Edora?"

Jack considered it. "Well, I have to tell you. For a while there I was..." O'Neill's voice trailed off. He threw his soup over the fire, and scrambled some loose earth over it. "Daniel get down!" he hissed.

Daniel looked over his shoulder; he could see lights heading their way.

He crawled to Jack's position; the colonel had already doused the stove and collected the sundry items that were strewn close to his position.

The two men lay side by side. Jack managed to find his passive night vision goggles. He held them up to his eyes, watching.

"Do you think they saw us?" Daniel whispered.

"I'm not sure, the fire wasn't exactly flaring, but it's visible enough," Jack told him. He still couldn't see the source of the lights, too distant, but they were headed towards them.

"We've got to move now," Jack snapped. "Stay on your belly and crawl."

Daniel turned carefully, pulling himself along with his hands. Jack managed to get his rucksack over his shoulders, and keeping his MP5 firmly clasped in his right hand, he followed Jackson.

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Sam Carter directed the MALP probe in the darkness; she had switched to infrared. Nothing appeared to be moving around. She checked the readings for atmosphere. "Looks good so far," she reassured Teal'c.

"Yes it does," the Jaffa concluded. "We should be able to find Colonel O'Neill and Daniel Jackson immediately." He stood, ready to enter the wormhole.

"We'll have to wait till morning, Teal'c," Carter said. "General Hammond wants us to take SG3 with us for back up, they're flying in from a training op."

Teal'c did not look impressed. "The planet appears to be without hostiles," he commented.

"I know, Teal'c, but after everything that's happened recently, I just think the general would prefer to be safe!"

The Jaffa bowed his head. "As you wish, Major Carter, then I will return to my quarters."

Sam Carter nodded. She, like Teal'c, felt that a more immediate rescue would have been better, but had to bow to the general's wishes, she was, after all, merely a major, and unlike Colonel O'Neill, rarely did she question orders.

As she re-read through all the data, Colonel Stuart appeared behind her.

"Major?" he said loudly.

Carter turned round, looking up from her seated position. "Sir?"

"Still at it, eh? O'Neill picks well!" Stuart commented.

"Yes, sir, I wanted to make sure," Carter replied.

"Well, don't you worry. Guess we're just gonna have to rescue his butt again, eh, Major?"

"Yes, sir," Carter answered, Stuart's tactics obvious to her.

"So," he began, "I better get some sleep, wouldn't want to be late for the get go!"

Carter nodded.

"Same goes for you, Major, let's move out," he ordered.

"Yes, sir," Carter replied, reluctantly.

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"Can you see them?" Daniel enquired for the fourth time in the last five minutes.

O'Neill looked around at him. "No, Daniel, I can't!" He emphasised the reply curtly. "Now shut up and let me concentrate, please," he added for good measure.

Daniel's eyes flicked skywards. "Okay!"

O'Neill could now barely make out the outlines of what appeared to be cloaked human forms. "Well the good news," he whispered. "Is that they appear to be, well, look like humans, kinda."

"And the bad news is?" Daniel began.

"None so far," O'Neill replied.

"Er, Jack."

O'Neill turned sharply. "What?"

Daniel gestured behind them. "That's the bad news."

O'Neill spun round fully; two of the cloaked individuals stood behind them, piercing red lights where the eyes might be. "Oh, crap," O'Neill spat, his MP5 immediately aimed at them. "Okay, Daniel…"

"Um, we're from Earth, peaceful explorers," Daniel said hurriedly.

One of the creatures made a low hissing sound, and its hands came up from beneath the robe, long sharp fingernails adorned elongated bony fingers.

The hood was pulled down, and both men stared up in horror at the thin gaunt face, high cheekbones, and very, very pointed incisors, protruding from a thin mealy mouth.

"Oh crap," O'Neill said again.

"Oh boy!" Daniel declared.

The creature stood, observing them for a moment, and then made a high pitched wailing sound that emanated without the use of its mouth. "Don't suppose you speak that language?" O'Neill asked, his face twitching from a semi-grimace into a curious, yet disdainful expression.

"Uh, no," Daniel replied. "Jack, lower the gun," he advised.

"No," Jack spat, like a school kid told to behave.

"Jack, if that's what I think, the bullets won't work," Daniel informed him.

"And that would be?" Jack enquired, keeping his eyes firmly on the creature.

"Vampiric in appearance saying anything to you?" Daniel asked.

The creature now stared into O'Neill's eyes; the colonel attempted to avoid its gaze, but somehow those incredible red beams drew him in. His head felt light, almost humming with the intensity of the gaze that now held him.

Daniel, too, had succumbed to the gaze of the creature's companion; the two men now surrounded by the creatures.

The gaze broken; O'Neill shook his head. "Whoa!" he exclaimed, his eyes shutting tightly.

"We mean you no harm," one of them spoke in a deep tone.

O'Neill flicked his eyes open.

17

"You are of the first world, as once were we."

O'Neill was unsure, watching them with scepticism.

Daniel was more trusting, wanting to believe in their words. He stood now.

"Yes, you are from Earth originally?" he asked.

"Many millennia hence," the creature replied. "We were forced to leave our home. Those that came knew of us, and would destroy us."

"Okay, um, you're what we would call on Earth vampires?" Daniel enquired, fascinated now at the concept that the legends might have had a solid foundation.

"You will come, we must feed," another spoke.

O'Neill leapt to his feet. "Oh no you don't," he said quickly. "I'm not becoming a creature of the night." He lifted his gun, its muzzle raised in front of him protectively.

One of the creatures moved forward. "You believe in stories told to frighten those who would not understand?" he asked, curiously searching O'Neill's eyes.

"Nope," O'Neill said.

"Then you will come." He beckoned O'Neill to follow.

Daniel was already doing so, he turned. "Jack, if they wanted your blood, they could have taken it a minute ago."

O'Neill considered this remark, and then raised his hands in surrender. "Okay," he agreed, following on, slower than his companion, still keeping a watchful eye on the mysterious creatures.

Stopping at the stones, they gathered in a circle, every creature now uncloaked, their humanoid appearance startling, yet finely chiselled, greyhound like.

Their arms reached into the night sky, and a beam of light swept from each gathering in the centre of the stones.

"Whoa," O'Neill exclaimed. "Cool." He turned to Jackson. "What are they doing?"

"It's amazing, almost as if they were drawing power from the moons," Daniel suggested, as he watched the focal point of the beam rise high into the night sky and emanate an almost hazy cloud.

"So, what's with the teeth then?" O'Neill asked.

"I don't know," Daniel replied slowly.

"Sweet!" O'Neill replied.

Daniel watched, still fascinated. "They feed on lunar energy, Jack," he observed. "Not quite biological. The moon has a lot of different effects on our world, Jack, it must be the same for them."

Jack raised both his eyebrows at once. "What?"

"I, er, I don't know, what would you call what they're doing?" Daniel asked. "They said feeding, and they're all reaching in one point towards their moon, right?"

Jack shook his head, a heavy sigh. "Daniel, can we talk mythology?" he enquired. "Like vampires? That's what you said, right?"

"I'm not sure, not in the sense we know them," Daniel concluded. "Jack, vampires didn't actually start out as bloodsuckers," he continued now, desperately searching for the right words. "They started out as fables, who could drain the life, the soul from the body, and, um, judging by what they're doing now, that probably wasn't too far out."

Jack's lopsided expression appeared to be one of cynicism. "Daniel, bottom line," he stated in his matter of fact, judgmental tone. "They're not exactly human, are they?"

"Er…" Daniel considered this. "No, they're not."

Jack looked satisfied by this assertion, continually switching his attention back and forth.

"So?" he asked.

"They asked us to wait," Daniel pointed out.

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Colonel Stuart stepped through the gate, his eyes searching the immediate area for hostiles. "Clear," he called to his marines, acknowledging each one as he confirmed what Stuart already knew.

Teal'c, carrying his favoured staff weapon, stepped through moments later, side by side with Sam Carter.

"Colonel, with your permission, I'll dial P7X 919, sir," she said immediately.

"Go ahead, Major, we'll keep you covered," Colonel Stuart snapped back in complete military mode. Carter entered the coordinates and the wormhole's familiar barrage roared out from the Stargate.

"Okay, Major, give me and my men a 10 count and come on through," Colonel Stuart ordered.

"Yes, sir."

Teal'c drew down those impressive eyebrows, yet said nothing.

Sam looked at him, a faint smile sweeping her blue eyes. "I know, Teal'c, but I don't have to like him!" she said.

Teal'c bowed his head slowly; Carter had quite correctly assumed that the Jaffa had little respect for Colonel Stuart.

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Daniel rose slowly, looking around him. The darkened area he now resided was large, almost cavernous.

"Whoa, where are we?" he asked.

Jack, heard the voice, recognised it, and attempted to drag himself from the depths of unconsciousness.

"The Count Dracula's brought us here, it's where they live," Jack informed his drowsy colleague. "Oh, my head," he moaned.

"Exactly where is here?" Daniel asked, regaining some of his senses.

Jack stood slowly, still grasping his head in both hands. "Wow! What a ride," he said.

"Jack?" Daniel enquired. "What ride?"

Jack's expression was one of surprise. "You don't remember what happened last night?" he questioned. "When Dracula and company finished howling at the moon?"

Daniel looked woefully at the colonel. "No. Not a thing."

"Well, isn't that special," Jack responded, sensing hours of endless teasing. "Okay! So we're about a 100 miles up the side of a mountain, in a deep cavern they call Sanctuary, cool name, hah?"

"So, what happened?" Daniel queried. "I mean, I don't remember anything especially."

"Oh, Danny boy, you're gonna love this," Jack insisted, in his own gleeful way.

Daniel's eyes closed with a minor headshake. "Are, um, you gonna tell me, or do I have to spend all day guessing, Jack, because you're being slightly irritating now."

Jack tried to prevent the smile that was forming on his lips from invading his face and failed. "Okay. We flew up here."

"We, er, did?" Daniel looked sceptical. "Jack?" It was a long, dull sound that he used.

"Hey, I'm on a high," Jack told him, looking as if he meant it.

Daniel looked dubiously at him now. "You are?"

"Oh, yeah!" Jack enthused; he was walking around with a spring now. "Daniel, did you know these folks are completely made of energy?"

"Well, I, um, tried to tell you that last night, Jack what the hell happened?" He sounded impatient now.

"Well, Daniel," Jack began in his own inimitable style. "It seems our friends have the ability to read, er, see into our minds, they know where we're from, and they feel responsible for leaving us to the Goa'uld, sounding good to you, so far?"

"Um, yeah, so?" Daniel's intrigue drew him closer to Jack. "What exactly does that mean?"

O'Neill smiled his crooked lopsided smile. "Well, they need our help with their enemy, and in return, technology to help fight the Goa'uld," he said, his lips parting into a generous grin.

"Oh, I knew there had to be something," Daniel complained.

"You know, Danny boy, you can be a little cynical sometimes," Jack commented.

Daniel pointed to himself. "I can be cynical? I mean, coming from you, that's um, that's got to be a compliment, right?"

"Hey!" Jack exclaimed. "I take my title as Mister Positive very seriously, and right now, I'm thinking positive."

"Great," Daniel sighed. "Well whilst you're on the subject of positive, Jack, how do we get out of here?"

"We don't," Jack told him, sitting now.

Daniel walked toward him hurriedly. "We don't?" he asked, kneeling in front of the colonel.

"Daniel, just try and have a little faith, okay?"

Jackson's eyes slid from side to side as he thought, and then he looked directly at O'Neill. "Sure, why not?"

He stood, walked away from O'Neill and found a suitable position to sit. "Here I am, having faith."

<p style="text-align:center">*********************</p>

Sam Carter found Daniel's kit the instant she was through the Gate. "They're here… somewhere," she insisted, sounding a lot more enthusiastic than was intended.

"Major, whose kit is that?" Colonel Stuart demanded, not in the habit of actually politely asking anything.

"It's Doctor Jackson's, sir, Colonel O'Neill must have left it as a marker," she explained, still holding the backpack in her left hand, gesturing with it.

"Well, I don't see them, Major, do you?" Stuart responded sarcastically.

Major Samantha Carter bit her tongue; she wanted to reply in kind.

"Colonel Stuart," Teal'c remarked. "Perhaps then, instead of waiting here, we should look elsewhere for Colonel O'Neill and Doctor Jackson, do you not agree?"

The colonel regarded the Jaffa with a sneer. "Okay, let's move out. Major, try using your radio," he snapped.

Carter was already doing so. "Sir, I'm picking up the signal, it's due south," Carter said.

Teal'c waited for a few seconds before following. Something was on the planet, he sensed it. "Major Carter," he said, catching her easily at his now lengthened stride. "I believe this planet may be inhabited."

Carter looked around at the Jaffa. "Why?" she asked, curiously. "Have you been here before?"

"I have not, but I sense a presence, a very powerful one," Teal'c confided.

Sam Carter took a deep breath. "Let's hope it's not hostile Teal'c, the colonel and Daniel have been here all night!"

****

Daniel had grown tired of waiting; his mind not as disciplined in such matters as O'Neill, who sat deep in his own thoughts, unspeaking, and moving only occasionally when his body ached from being static.

Daniel wandered away from the vast cavern, towards where a beam of light was streaking in, and stumbled forward as his feet struck something.

O'Neill looked up, able to barely make Jackson out in the dim light. "Daniel?" he called.

"I'm, er, alright, tripped," Daniel explained.

"Well don't go wandering around too far and fall down a hole!"

"I'll only have to come look," O'Neill warned, more to himself.

"Like I said, thanks, Jack, I'm fine," Daniel acknowledged.

A high-pitched whine filled the cavern then, and one of the creatures appeared in front of Daniel, its red eyes piercing the darkness easily.

Daniel faltered, falling back towards Jack. "Um, guess exploring is out of the question," he observed.

"Ya think!" O'Neill spat, standing now, alert to possible danger. "It's okay, Trodous, Daniel's just naturally clumsy," he added, his hands raised gesturing to the creature.

Jackson turned sharply. "What did you call him?"

"Trodous, why?" O'Neill replied.

"Aiestrodous?" Daniel asked, towards the creature now.

"I am he," the vampire replied.

"I've only read about you in legends and folklore," Daniel said quickly, "the Master Vampire..."

Jack shook his head. "Oh, here we go, I know a song about that too," he goaded.

"Jack, will you shut up for one minute," Daniel snapped.

"You know of a legend that I had taken great lengths to erase?" Aiestrodous asked. "How is this so?"

"Um, not from Earth, from Abydos. You fought the Goa'uld, you know how to beat them. I found the legend written inside one of the pyramids. He shall rise from the darkness, a fierce god of wrath," Daniel began. "An evil such as no god could master, he is Aiestrodous."

The vampire moved closer. "I am as you are, Daniel Jackson, flesh and bone. A true vampire as you know them."

Daniel looked around at Jack, who was looking slightly dubious at that moment.

"Ah, excuse me, the bloodsucking kind?" Jack enquired. "'Cause, your friends, well they forgot to mention that in the brochure!"

Aiestrodous moved closer to Daniel. "I mean you no harm, my needs no longer require human blood, I have long since been free of that burden."

O'Neill eyebrows shot up simultaneously. "Well, sweet, so, um, you fought the Goa'uld, hah?" he asked.

"I have fought many Goa'uld. My power is within me, Colonel, I am unable to transform this into a weapon that you would use," the vampire explained.

"Sweet!" O'Neill snapped. "So, um, your friends mentioned something about helping us if we helped you, what did they mean exactly?"

"We are able to offer one thing. A weakness. But this knowledge, this weakness will only be in return for your help."

"Our help?" Daniel asked. "So do you want to tell us something about your enemy?"

"They are here now, on this planet," Aiestrodous told them. "They search for us for our power, and ultimately they destroy us, they are the Inimicus."

"Inimicus, that's um, that's Latin for enemy," Daniel said.

"Yeah, alright," Jack replied. "It's a little too early for a language lesson, Daniel. Exactly what are we up against here?"

"A being that is able to locate our power. They are formidable. But, would not be able to withstand your weapons," Aiestrodous said.

"Speaking of our weapons?" Jack mentioned. "Where exactly are ours?"

"They are here," Aiestrodous told him. "The Inimicus have shields against our ability to drain the life force from them, this is why, without any weapons technology of our own, they are such a formidable foe. But their shields guard only against our ability to take this energy from them, not against projectiles such as yours."

Jack sighed. "Okay, so that's it, right, no other surprises?" he enquired.

Aiestrodous shook his head. "I have lived for centuries, O'Neill, I know all there is of the Universe. You must trust me!"

"Yeah, well I'm a little conservative in the trusting thing, but we'll give it a shot."

Aiestrodous bowed his head and vanished.

"Cool, again!" O'Neill remarked.

"Jack," Daniel began. "There are only two of us, how are we going to take on this all powerful Inimicus?"

"Well, I figure by now Carter's probably discovered a way to reach us, so we wait for our team, get a message back to Hammond and..." He looked at Daniel, whose sceptical expression was beginning to shroud his own features. "Okay, I have no idea, but if Carter has worked it out, our odds just got a little more favourable, don't ya think!"

Jackson raised his eyebrows. "Oh, yeah," he said at length.

<p style="text-align:center">********************</p>

26

Colonel Stuart knelt down by the site of O'Neill's camp. "Well they were here, probably last night some time, footprints lead off in that direction and then disappear, nothing." he said, looking up at Carter.

"Vanished?" she asked. "Well that's not possible, there must be some explanation."

Teal'c's eyebrows drew down. "Perhaps a Goa'uld vessel with ring devices?" he suggested.

"I hope not, Teal'c," Carter stated. "If Apophis escaped the system lords, I doubt he'll leave them in one piece this time."

Teal'c regarded the major. "This galaxy is a long way from that of Delmar," he informed.

Colonel Stuart listened intently. "Okay people. It's about time to make a decision."

"Sir, I recommend we leave one of our men here and..." Sam Carter stopped in mid flow.

"Major, when I said time to make a decision, I meant me, Major!" he spat.

"Colonel Stuart," it was Teal'c who spoke. "I believe Major Carter is right. I will remain."

Stuart was taken aback by this sudden challenge to his authority.

He stared at Teal'c for a moment, considering its implications.

"No, Teal'c, Major Carter will remain, you and I, and two of my men will search. Mitchell, you remain, is that clear?"

"Sir, yes, sir," Captain Mitchell replied.

Teal'c raised an eyebrow at his response and offered Carter the merest hint of a satisfied smile. Sam turned away, unable to conceal her own smile.

****

"So, what now?" Daniel asked.

"They can't get us out of here until nightfall, Daniel," Jack told him; he looked confused suddenly. "I thought you were the Vampire expert, anyway?"

27

Daniel's features elevated. "Well, I, um, didn't want to bore you!" he jested.

"Fine!" He leant back against the wall, regarding Jackson with a humourless expression. "So, you doing all right?"

Daniel looked surprised. "Who me? Yeah, aside from the fact that Aiestrodous' legend is whirling around my mind."

"Wanna share?" O'Neill asked.

Jackson did a double take, a searching expression crossing his eyes. "Um, yeah." He moved closer to O'Neill. "Okay, it was pretty broken, but the legend was pretty impressive. Aiestrodous was, ah, is, a creature from the dark world who could tame the souls of men."

O'Neill watched him closely, strangely fascinated.

"He, um, walked among the ancients, a spirit of vengeance whose power was mightier than the gods, for he drew his power from the soul of the earth. A mighty warrior, feared by all."

O'Neill's head tilted to one side, his eyes widening. "Sweet, sounds like our guy," he mused. "So why the problem? You do have a problem, right?"

"Okay, yeah, you're right. Aiestrodous was betrayed by his closest companion, I'm assuming this meant his mate. Anyway, he, er, he was then called the Slayer of Men's Hearts. Apparently, he turned on all, aligning himself with the darkest of all forces," Daniel said slowly. "They said they could no longer trust him to purge the evil, that he would slay all who came into his path."

O'Neill's eyebrows twitched upward quickly. "All," he repeated. "Okay, so use extreme caution and don't expect anything in return, right?"

"Jack, can I ask you something," Daniel's tone changed.

O'Neill greeted this with an immediate nod. "Yeah."

Daniel's expression suddenly looked uncomfortable, his features contorting into a grimace. "Can I, er, look at… can I check your neck?"

"What?" O'Neill uttered. "Are you kidding me?"

Jackson shook his head slowly, trepidation sweeping over his face.

"It's, um, a peace of mind thing, um, please?"

"No!" O'Neill's expression screwed up in disbelief. "Daniel, for crying out loud, do I sound like a vampire to you?"

"Well," Jackson said quickly. "I don't know, what do vampires sound like?"

"Not me!" O'Neill insisted, getting up and moving away from Jackson.

"So, then you won't mind if I look, will you?" Daniel probed ruefully.

"Ah, for crying out loud1" O'Neill changed direction, moving toward him, showing Jackson his neck. Daniel's jaw dropped. "Oh," Almost a gasp.

"What?" Jack demanded. "No bites, right?"

"Um, not exactly, no bites, no," Daniel was guarded now.

O'Neill's confused expression greeted Jackson then, his hand shot up to his neck. He could feel the small puncture wounds, his amazement clearly stamped into his eyes.

He stood there looking at Jackson. "Sweet, great," he said, in lowered tones. "Care to let me check yours?"

Daniel shook his head. "I don't, um, have any marks that I can feel, Jack, but whoa!"

Jack closed his eyes for a second. "Great!" he emphasised. "So I'm a menu item, what now?"

"I, er, I don't know," Daniel's conviction in that statement swept over him. "Ah, according to everything we know about vampires, you've only been bitten once, right? So, hopefully, it takes a couple of sessions to, um, well, you know?"

"Sweet. We're getting out of here, Daniel. Right now!" O'Neill snapped.

29

"Jack, I think this was a trick, the fighting the enemy thing," Daniel told him. "Aiestrodous is also considered to be the master of deception."

"Ya think!"

Images buzzed around O'Neill's mind. "Night fishing… yoi!" he exclaimed.

End of Part One.

<u>Deception's Kiss II</u>

Major Carter tried using the radio to locate O'Neill every twenty minutes or so, listening to Colonel Stuart's constant updates. Her mind tried to focus, but her concern for the welfare of her two colleagues weighed heavily.

"Major?" Captain Mitchell enquired.

Sam Carter sighed. "I'm sorry, Pete, I'm miles away," she admitted.

"Major, I'm sure Colonel Stuart will find them, despite his, er, attitude, he's a damn fine soldier, ma'am."

Carter smiled at him. "It's alright, Captain, Colonel O'Neill has been in a few scrapes himself. So far, both he and Daniel have come out of it, so..." She finished the sentence there, and had no intention of saying more.

Captain Mitchell nodded. "Yes, ma'am. I was hoping to get on Colonel O'Neill's team, not SG1, but in Special Forces. Most of the men in his command never talked about anyone else," he confessed. "So, I know how much he means to you."

Carter looked at him closely then. "And Daniel, Pete, both of them."

Pete Mitchell found that comment a little intriguing. "Tell me about Daniel Jackson. Is it true he and O'Neill hate each other?"

Carter laughed. "No, Captain, far from it. Daniel and Colonel O'Neill are very close, almost like siblings. Their differences of opinion, well, that's something else."

<p style="text-align:center">********************</p>

Jack led the way through the cavern, pausing only to be certain of his footing, and to check that Daniel followed; it had taken them almost an hour to find the right direction.

"Is it me," he asked, his voice a little stressed. "Or do you feel exhausted too?" Concern creased his eyes.

"No, I, er, feel fine," Daniel asserted. He too looked concerned now. "Jack."

"What?" O'Neill snapped, leaning against one of the damp walls of the cave.

"Are you feeling, er, sleepy?" Daniel enquired.

"A little. Kind of weak, why?"

His quizzical expression worried the archaeologist. "I'm just wondering if you're gonna be able to go out into the light is, um all, I mean, they appear not to be able, like vampire legends on Earth, and if you've been, well you have been... it might affect you?"

Jack looked suddenly determined. "Well, there's only one way to find out, eh, Danny boy," he said. "Let's go."

Daniel followed warily. He felt more apprehension in Jack's company, suddenly, than he'd ever felt before; a fear that was buried deep was surfacing, and it made him feel completely helpless. If Carter had managed to find a way to gate to the planet, then at least they could get Jack home and monitor any side effects.

"It's kind of odd that they just bit you," Daniel offered, as they wandered through yet another long passageway, where a dim light seemed to loom.

"What's up, Daniel, you feeling left out?" Jack quipped. "Listen, you really don't want to be where I am right now, take my word for it."

Daniel suddenly more concerned. "Why," he asked quickly. "What's wrong now?"

31

"Daniel," Jack turned. "Will you relax, for crying out loud, I'm not gonna turn into one of those things."

Daniel nodded, and then a quizzical expression crossed his face. "How, how do you know that?" he asked.

Jack leant against the wall again. He felt light-headed, his stomach churned, and a sickness was rising up in his throat. "I just do," he gasped, his tone rasping. "Now will you just shut up and let me navigate."

"Okay," Jackson replied, keeping a careful eye on his companion just the same.

As the light struck him, Jack winced. "Oh man, I need my glasses," he moaned.

"Jack?" Daniel was concerned now. "You're not gonna, um, explode into a ball of flames or anything?"

Jack raised his eyebrows philosophically. "Well, I'm kinda hoping not at this point! Only one way to find out though," he suggested. "And that's to walk out there."

He stepped onto the ledge and looked down; his skin felt suddenly hot, burning all over. "Jesus! Whoa!" he exclaimed, moving back quickly into the shadows.

Daniel followed.

"Um, this is gonna be a problem," Daniel said.

"Oh, really," Jack winced. "What was your first clue?" His expression was masked with pain, and one side of his face creased up. He regarded Jackson. "Well, I guess the whole sunlight thing's not a myth," he stated.

Daniel bit his tongue, wanting to give O'Neill some verbal grief back, but realising at the same time, that despite sounding very like the Jack O'Neill he knew, clearly he wasn't exactly himself.

"Jack, you'll have to stay here, I'll um..." He looked excessively dubious now. "I'll climb down and try to find help."

"No, look, if I stay here..." Jack began to protest.

"Well, you can't leave, can you?" Daniel argued assertively. "And, um, as much as I hate heights, I can't stay here and hope neither of us joins the night club!"

Jack's grimace turned into acceptance. "You're right, but the climbing down bit, Daniel? I don't know," Jack said, concerned now more for Jackson's safety.

"Look, we need help, right?" Daniel began. "I've been on digs where I've had to do some climbing. I'll be careful, okay?"

"Yeah, okay," Jack agreed reluctantly. "Why don't I wear a cross?" he sighed.

Daniel smiled. "Kind of late to find religion, hah!" he commented light-heartedly.

"Ya think!" O'Neill replied.

"Okay, look, just try and stay out of sunlight, okay, um, I'll get help."

Jack watched him as far as he could, then wandered a little back into the caves and sat down. He felt tired, like he needed to sleep, but it scared him too; if he slept, might he wake up as himself? The whole vampire issue began to cloud his mind now, and he felt the kind of fear he'd only ever felt as a child; something was under his bed, and he didn't like it!

****

Daniel checked his watch, squatting now on a wide ledge. It was almost 13:30; he needed to move faster. Although he couldn't be sure if this world shared the same daylight hours as Earth, he felt a sense of urgency nonetheless, but his legs were barely able to carry him now, such was his fear of heights. He steadied himself; at least he had managed to get halfway down, even if it had taken him an hour.

"Okay," he said to himself. "You can do this."

Teal'c saw him first as they rounded a large formation of jagged rocks.

"Colonel Stuart, up there," he said gesturing his staff weapon in the direction he saw Daniel Jackson.

33

"Where's O'Neill?" Stuart asked instinctively, not seeing the colonel.

"I do not know," Teal'c replied.

"Let's move, boys," Stuart ordered.

The four-man team jogged toward the bottom of Jackson's cliff face.

As the archaeologist finally reached low enough he could see the rescue team, and the familiar frame of Teal'c.

"We've got a huge problem," he told them, the moment he was close enough.

"Jack's been bitten by..." He stopped then, considering how it would sound, then decided to throw the words out anyway. "By, um, a vampire."

Colonel Stuart glared at him like he'd lost his marbles. "Excuse me, *a what*?" he exclaimed.

"Yeah, I know, but there it is and he can't come out into the light, it's affecting him badly, we need to, um, cover him and get him down, before they wake up," Daniel blurted out at a hundred miles an hour.

Teal'c raised both eyebrows. "A vampire," he repeated. "I will go to Colonel O'Neill," he said and, without waiting, he moved off in the direction Jackson had descended from.

Daniel nodded. "Um, yes we should all go, there's safety in numbers..." Then he stopped again. "Where's Sam?" he asked.

"Major Carter is close to the Stargate. Tell you what, Doctor Jackson, you stay here and we'll go get Colonel O'Neill. Go round those rocks and keep heading south," Colonel Stuart told him. "You know which direction that is, right?"

"Um, yes, probably better than you do!" Daniel snapped. Taking insults from Jack he would do, but not this GI Joe. He stared back defiantly waiting for the colonel to answer with some smart-ass remark.

Instead Stuart looked at him. "Just leave it to me, okay?"

"But what about Jack?"

"I told you, Doctor Jackson, we'll bring him down, now go!"

Daniel watched them follow Teal'c up the cliff; it wasn't a difficult climb, but he did wonder how they would get Jack down without exposing him to the light.

His radio suddenly flared into life. "Colonel, come in, Daniel, can you hear me?"

"Sam, it's, um, Daniel," he said, depressing what he considered to be the correct button.

"Daniel, are you okay?" Sam's voice sounded relieved.

"Um, well I am, but Jack's in a bit of a problem, Colonel Stuart and Teal'c are going after him now."

"Do they need back up?" she enquired.

"Major," Colonel Stuart's voice boomed over the radio. "Stay put. Doctor Jackson will be joining you. Once he does, get back to the Stargate and secure your location, is that understood, Major?"

"Yes, sir," Carter acknowledged.

<p align="center">*******************</p>

Jack found himself dozing, and woke quickly. He could hear sounds now, and moved closer to the light. "You must come back," the voice told him. "You will perish without our strength."

Jack screwed his face up, and put his hands over his ears. "Hurry up, Daniel," he said.

Teal'c's appearance focused O'Neill; it had seemed like an eternity since Jackson has left him. "Teal'c!" His tone was excited.

"O'Neill, are you well?" Teal'c enquired, moving towards the colonel.

"Ah! No. Not exactly, Teal'c," O'Neill commented. "You on your own?" He attempted to stand now, and keeled sideways, bracing himself against the wall; Teal'c immediately moved forward to assist him.

"No, Jack," Stuart announced. "He's not. Man, you look like shit."

"Yeah, well I've been better," O'Neill responded. He looked at his watch. "It's getting late, you got a plan?"

"Yeah, we'll cover you in one of the tents and get you down. Don't worry. I'm not leaving you here," Stuart told him. "Even if I hate vampires!" he added for good measure, with a glint of humour in his eyes.

"Sweet. Me too by the way!"

"I will carry the colonel," Teal'c offered.

Stuart nodded. "If you think you can make it without killing you both, that's fine with me. Jack?" he asked. "Exactly what happened?"

"You're asking me?" O'Neill responded. "I have no idea. I just know that we need to go now!" An emphasis put on that word.

"Alright. Collins, unhitch your tent, let's get the colonel nicely bagged up here."

"Thanks, Teal'c," Jack said. "But I think I can walk." At that moment, O'Neill's knees seemed to fold under him.

Teal'c assisted Collins in wrapping the tent around the colonel, and then threw him over his shoulder.

<center>*******************</center>

Jackson had found his way back to Sam and Mitchell. "Daniel," she announced, her face lighting up. "What happened to Colonel O'Neill?"

Daniel's eyebrows twitched. "Um, he's been bitten by a vampire. Sam, I know, it's weird, but we need to get him back, he's, um, he's changing."

36

Major Carter's expression drained of any pleasure. "Daniel, are you sure?" she asked. "How? Why weren't you?"

Daniel shook his head. "I don't know, we made camp here, they came, they appeared to be friendly, but, um, anyway, I don't know what happened. We woke up in these caves and Jack was, well different, very positive about these creatures, not himself. Look, we should go and um, get ready, we're gonna need to get him back to the SGC as soon as we can, and hope that whatever is infecting his blood can be reversed."

Carter stared at him. "Vampires?" she said in disbelief. "Oh great. I hated those movies."

"Yeah, look, Sam, we should, um, go, I'll fill you in when we get back, okay?"

Sam Carter was still unsure of what she was hearing, but she nodded. "Okay, let's get back to the Stargate."

<p style="text-align:center">********************</p>

"We'd better hurry up," Colonel Stuart noted. "Light's starting to get a little hazy."

Teal'c paused only momentarily to look up. "Then we must move faster," he stated.

"Yeah and then some," O'Neill said from underneath his shroud. "Or else you'll all be joining me under this thing!"

"Colonel, come in please." Carter's voice over the radio.

"Yeah go ahead, Major," Stuart responded.

"Sir, What's your ETA?" Sam enquired.

"Unknown just now, Major, just stand by there and I'll update ASAP, and Major, make sure Doctor Jackson's not one of the living dead, will you." Stuart ordered, spitting to himself.

"Yes, sir?" Carter argued.

From under the shroud O'Neill said. "For crying out loud, Stuart, Daniel's fine, I checked him myself!"

37

"Hah! Right, coming from Dracula, Jack, I think I'll check it out, okay?" Stuart responded.

<p style="text-align:center">********************</p>

Daniel looked at Sam, then to Mitchell. "Go ahead," he insisted. "Check."

"Sorry, Daniel," Sam moved closer to him, checking all the areas she knew might conceal any sign of a bite.

"No, I'd check too," he confirmed, raising his eyebrows at Carter. "Trust me, though, if one of those things had bitten me, I'd know."

"Like the colonel you mean?" Sam asked.

"Ah," Daniel acknowledged. "Um, yeah. Good, er, good point." He nodded then, a smile crossing his face. "Still can't figure why they only bit Jack though," he mused. "I mean, unless my blood has something in it?"

"I don't know," Sam agreed. "Janet should though."

<p style="text-align:center">********************</p>

At the bottom of the cliff face, Teal'c laid O'Neill down, taking a breather.

"You want one of my men to take over?" Stuart asked.

Teal'c shook his head. "I will be fine," he insisted.

"Ah, Teal'c, is it any darker out there?" O'Neill enquired. The muffled sound of his voice immediately attracted the Jaffa's attention.

"It is not, however, the suns appear to be going down," Teal'c informed him.

"Okay you ready?" Stuart asked.

Teal'c nodded. "Indeed, I am," he said.

Major Collins assisted Teal'c in lifting O'Neill back onto his shoulders.

"Well," O'Neill said, from under the tent. "Isn't this special!"

Teal'c allowed a brief smile to cross his lips. "This is indeed very strange, O'Neill," he agreed.

"Er, Teal'c?" O'Neill asked.

"What is it, O'Neill?" the Jaffa responded.

There was no answer.

"Colonel O'Neill?" Teal'c said again.

Colonel Stuart looked round. "We'd better get a move on," he ordered. "He ain't sounding so good."

****

General Hammond sat at the head of the briefing table. "Does somebody want to make some sense?" he enquired.

"Look, um, General. I know this is a lot to take in but you had to be there, really, they were vampires," Daniel Jackson tried to explain.

Sam read Hammond's bemused expression. "Er, sir," she began. "It is possible."

"It is?" Hammond sounded sceptical. "And why's that, Major?"

"Well, sir, think of vampire bats. They live from drinking the blood of animals," Sam attempted; even she was having difficulties.

"Doctor Jackson, exactly what happened on that planet? And please, try not to leave anything out," Hammond instructed.

****

39

Jack O'Neill lay in a darkened room, armed guards outside the door. Doctor Fraiser hovered over him. "It's alright, Colonel," she reassured. "You're back at the SGC. We're trying to make you comfortable, but you're burning up."

O'Neill regarded her cautiously for a moment. "Is it bad news, Doc?" he enquired. His tone was extremely low, almost a growl.

"Well, Colonel, it's not good," she said. "Whatever infected your blood, it's changing your makeup quite dramatically."

"Sweet," O'Neill rasped. "I know I wanted to live a long time..."

"Don't worry, Colonel, we'll figure it out. Try to rest."

"That's alright for you, Doc, but everything's burning, could I get a drink?" he asked, attempting to sit up and finding his arms restrained.

"I'm sorry, Colonel, General Hammond insisted. I'll get you some water."

Fraiser tried to be as calming on him as she could, but she felt helpless, the blood results had not been good.

<p style="text-align:center">********************</p>

Doctor Fraiser joined the briefing. "General, Colonel O'Neill's condition isn't totally blood related," she told the gathering. "The parasite that appears to be in his blood is consuming his red blood cells at an increasing rate, but leaving the plasma and the white cells uninfected."

"Exactly what's happening in there, Doctor?" General Hammond asked.

"Well, sir, his red cell count is dropping drastically, other than that, I can't really say. His hypothalamus is badly affected, his internal body temperature is rising and dropping dramatically, and he's getting weaker."

"What about a blood dialysis?" Carter asked.

"The organism is attached to the tissue, Major, we'd just be feeding it."

"So what?" Jackson asked. "What do we do, we can't just do nothing." His tone was edgy, almost bordering on anger. "And, er, why didn't they bite me? Maybe there's something I take that makes a difference, something that might help?"

Janet looked at him. "Well, you have allergies, Daniel. The colonel doesn't take antihistamines, maybe that's why, but it's not going to actually help. The truth is I don't know what to do," Doctor Fraiser confessed.

"Well, if, um, it's vampirism, should you be giving him a transfusion? At least that would sustain him until we could find something to help?" Daniel continued. "I mean maybe the Tok'ra, or the Asgard have come across this, um, thing before, maybe they know how to treat it?" he suggested.

"Will giving Colonel O'Neill blood transfusions keep him alive, Doctor?" General Hammond asked.

"Yes, sir, I think it will, but we'll only be feeding the organism, and it certainly won't cure him," Fraiser said.

"I'm only concerned with making sure he stays alive long enough to find a cure, Doctor, do whatever you need to do," Hammond ordered. "In the meantime, Major Carter, I want you and Teal'c to contact our friends, maybe Doctor Jackson's right. They might know how to treat this... disease." Hammond rose then.

"Sir," Doctor Fraiser pointed out. "We may need to get a sample of the pure disease." She chose the word Hammond had, deliberately. "If we can find out how it works, then maybe we stand a chance of breaking it down."

"Colonel Stuart, are you and your men up to attempting to catch one of these creatures?" Hammond asked. "Without getting infected?"

"Yes, sir, we are," Stuart replied, puffing out his chest.

"I will accompany them, my symbiote will protect me," Teal'c insisted.

Hammond nodded.

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Daniel pulled a chair alongside Jack's bed.

"Hey, Jack, how you feeling?" he asked.

O'Neill attempted a smile; he opened his mouth. "Am I growing teeth?" he asked.

"No," Daniel replied, trying not to laugh.

"What's so damn funny?" O'Neill enquired, looking slightly vexed.

"I'm sorry," Daniel smiled. "I just remembered that film, you know 'Dead and Loving It', and it's kind of an easier image to take in."

"Sweet," O'Neill responded. "Fraiser's given me a blood drip." His eyes gestured up towards the plastic bag filled with blood. "Makes me feel so much more human!"

"Glad you're, um, keeping your sense of humour," Daniel said. "Teal'c's going back to the planet to try and catch one of them, hopefully, they'll get the right one without being, um, well you know. And we've also sent urgent messages to the Tok'ra and the Asgard, maybe they can help."

"Yeah, Daniel, strangely enough I do," Jack responded. He winced then, suddenly struggling against his restraints.

"Jack?" Daniel called out in alarm. "I need some help in here," he yelled.

The two guards came running through the door, just as Jack managed to break the restraints. All three men struggled with him, trying to hold him down.

Daniel, thrown clear of the fray, lunged for the alarm.

"Jesus!" he exclaimed, as O'Neill easily threw the other two away from him.

One of them reached for his gun. O'Neill was so fast Daniel barely saw him move. The guard fell lifelessly to the floor. Jack turned then, his eyes red. Daniel, sensing he wasn't going to be able to get through to his friend, slammed the door, as another six SFs appeared.

"We've got to find a way to stop him," Daniel snapped. "Do you have a Zat?"

One of the SF's turned and headed back for the armoury just as O'Neill began to attempt to break down the door.

Daniel had been joined by Sam and Doctor Fraiser. "We need to sedate him," Fraiser shouted at the SFs.

"Er, good luck!" Daniel remarked. "He's already overpowered me and the two guards, and I think he may have killed one of them."

Fraiser and Sam looked horrified. "I don't even think Teal'c would be strong enough to restrain him," Sam said.

The SF returned with a Zat gun, handing it to Major Carter. "Okay," she said dubiously. "Hope this works. Get ready."

The SF's all took aim. Daniel moved forward and opened the door, jumping back to avoid O'Neill's lunge. Sam opened fire with the Zat. O'Neill fell backwards, stunned, but almost immediately he was getting up.

"Oh, that's not good," Daniel observed.

Two SF's raised their weapons to fire at O'Neill. Daniel, thinking quickly, stood between them. "Jack," he said softly. "If you can hear me, and god I hope you can, I need you to calm down."

O'Neill's eyes were blazing red, blank and glazed. The colour drained from his face. Unmoving, but menacing, he regarded Daniel without the slightest sign of recognition.

"Jack," Daniel said again. "It's Daniel, listen to me, I know you're in there." He moved closer now.

"Daniel?" Sam warned. "I don't think he cares, back away from him."

Daniel gestured for her to be silent, and moved closer still. "Jack, please, you can fight this."

"Aim for his legs," Colonel Stuart called out, arriving in answer to the distress signal.

43

Teal'c was not far behind him.

The SFs aimed low. "No!" Daniel snapped. "Not unless he moves… don't."

"Sir," Doctor Fraiser said. "I don't think shooting him is the answer."

"Nor do I, Doctor, but if he can't be controlled..."

"Stand down," Hammond shouted. The SFs backed off immediately.

Colonel Stuart turned and looked at Hammond. "Sir, with all due respect."

"Shut up, Colonel," Hammond warned.

Daniel was close enough to reach out now and touch him. "Jack, you have to listen or they're going to shoot you. Fight it please." His tone was calming, he kept eye contact.

Jack's eyes seemed to widen then, almost in a sign of recognition. "Come on, you don't want to hurt me," Daniel soothed. "Think how upset you'd be without me to rag on?" He smiled then.

Jack leant back against the wall, his eyes closing, he sank down slowly.

Daniel breathed out a huge breath. "Okay," he said. "I think someone in there, needs medical attention."

Hammond's expression turned from tension and concern, to anger. "Colonel Stuart, I believe you have a mission!" he snapped.

Stuart nodded. "Yes, sir!" he replied, heading back towards the embarkation room.

Teal'c looked at Hammond. "Do you wish me to stay, General Hammond?" he enquired.

"No, Teal'c, I think we have it under control now. Go on, son," he urged.

<center>********************</center>

Heavier restraints now held O'Neill in place. He had woken several times during the night, and fought them hard; this time they held.

44

Each time, Daniel had been there, once falling off his chair in shock as he dozed.

Doctor Fraiser and Sam Carter had been close by too. "This is too weird," Sam told Janet, as they stood in the adjacent room, watching on a monitor.

"I know," Janet sighed. "I just wish I knew what to do, other than sedate him. I mean it's attacking the red blood cells, which make up over half the blood in the body. Pretty soon, even the sedatives aren't going to work."

"Well that's what vampires do, isn't it? And…" Carter shook her head. "I still can't believe I'm saying that word."

"I know, but come on, we've seen a lot worse," Janet told her. "The Goa'uld… I guess it's just so close to home, and supposedly a myth!"

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 "Daniel?" Jack's voice was low, weak.

"What?" he asked, in a waking sleep that somehow managed to hear Jack's voice. "Jack?"

"What the hell happened to me? I feel like I've done a couple of rounds with Teal'c?" He tried and failed to sit up.

"Er, well, the good news is, the guard you nearly killed lived," Daniel told him, taking off his glasses and rubbing his eyes.

"What's the bad news?" Jack asked, seeming to be more himself now than Daniel had seen in a while.

"Um, we haven't found a cure, and, er, Teal'c and Colonel Stuart were unsuccessful in tracking down Aiestrodous, seems they've moved caves, or something."

"Swell," Jack complained. "Could I get a drink?"

"Of, um, er water?"

45

Jack's face screwed up then. "For crying out loud, of course water, what did you think I meant?"

Daniel bit his bottom lip. "Well last night, you wanted blood. Actually, not just any blood, you, er, told me you were going to drink mine."

Jack looked horrified. "God." He almost spat the words out. "I must be really sick." His eyes narrowed as he regarded Jackson.

Daniel looked offended. "Thanks, Jack, I kind of thought the same thing. I'll um." He stood now. "Go get you some water, and Doctor Fraiser, I'll be right back, okay?"

Jack looked heavenwards. "Well, I'm not exactly going anywhere, am I?" he pointed out, lifting his hands as far as the restraints would allow.

"No, um. Be back," Daniel said, as he shuffled out of the room.

Both Sam and Janet were sleeping on the gurneys in the infirmary. Daniel, considered waking both, then opted for Doctor Fraiser. "Janet?" he whispered, gently pushing at her arm.

"What?" She startled, looking up at Daniel, her senses taking a moment to recognise him.

"Jack's awake, and actually complaining," he jested.

"Ah," Janet gave a warm smile. "Now that's more like the Colonel O'Neill I know," she said, following Daniel the short walk to the room that housed the heavily restrained O'Neill.

"Well, Colonel, how are you feeling?" she asked.

O'Neill raised both his eyebrows and yet still managed to sneak a downtrodden expression in. "Well Doc, I've been better," he confessed. "Daniel, did you get me that water?"

"Ah, yeah. Um, eyes are still red though," he pointed out.

"Great, am I glowing in the dark? Do I have a reflection," he joked. Then more seriously, his tongue slid over his teeth. "Are my teeth changing?"

His quizzical expression brought a smile from Doctor Fraiser.

"No, Colonel, they're fine. Temperature's going down, that could be a good thing," she began.

"I sense an 'or' in that statement," Jack commented immediately.

"Well, I'm afraid you still look anaemic, Colonel, and the eyes."

"Yeah, I get it," Jack agreed. "Not exactly my normal shade of brown!"

Daniel put a straw in the water glass and proceeded to assist O'Neill in taking a drink. "Throat's burning up a bit, Doc," he said.

"I'm sorry, Colonel, at this point, I don't know what else to try. I'm giving you antibiotics which seem to help, but the parasitic nature of this infection is proving a little difficult to combat."

O'Neill nodded slowly. "Well, if it gets too bad, a stake through the heart might work!" he said.

Fraiser and Jackson both frowned heavily. There was no levity in O'Neill's tone, he looked and sounded extremely serious.

"Um, well if it comes to it, Jack, I guess we could try the old garlic remedy too!" Daniel attempted levity.

Jack winced then, beginning to strain against the restraints.

"Er, should we worry?" escaped from Daniel's lips.

Teal'c entered the room. "We have received a message from the Asgard, Thor is coming here," he said, then immediately moved towards O'Neill to hold him down. "Is he not any better?"

"Well, he was for a moment there, Teal'c," Janet said.

"Thor, great!" Daniel exclaimed. "Maybe the Asgard know what we're dealing with?"

"I hope so, Daniel. If this keeps up his body might go into shock!" Janet sounded concerned.

"Exactly where are we with this?" General Hammond asked the assembly of people that included all of the remaining members of SG1, Doctor Fraiser and Colonel Stuart.

"Well, sir, I'd like to go back and attempt another recon," Stuart announced. "Only this time set a trap in the dark, sir."

"A trap?" Hammond directed this towards the colonel.

"Yes sir, have one of my men at that circle of stones, a unit standing by."

"Colonel?" Daniel interrupted. "You have no idea what you're dealing with here. Jack said these things can fly, added to the fact that the ones guarding the flesh and blood version that bit Jack, are made up of pure energy, anything you fire at them would be useless. To, um, risk, someone else would be stupid."

"Well, Jackson, guess that's why you're not in the military then hah!" Colonel Stuart replied. "Because unless we try and catch one of those things, Jack doesn't stand a chance in hell, does he?"

"Alright, that's enough, let's wait and see what the Asgard can do, shall we?"

At that moment, a beam of light entered the room; it was Thor. "Greetings," he said. "Your message sounded urgent, the Asgard high council send you their warmest regards. How can we help?"

"Hello, Thor," Sam acknowledged. "Colonel O'Neill has been bitten by a vampire and we can't seem to find a cure. Wondered if the Asgard might know of such a thing?"

"A vampire?" Thor questioned. "What is a vampire?"

Daniel stood, approaching the Asgard high commander. "Um, it feeds on the blood of humans and other creatures to survive, infecting the host with its own, and causing a metamorphosis, changing the victim into one of them."

"I see, and where is Colonel O'Neill?" Thor asked.

"Um, I'll, er, take you to him," Daniel suggested.

The moment the location entered Daniel's mind, the pair were beamed into the room.

"Jack O'Neill," Thor greeted. He approached the colonel, his hand sweeping over his face and body.

"It is indeed an infection," Thor told Daniel. "A parasite."

"Can you cure it?" Daniel asked immediately.

"The Asgard cannot cure such parasites. However, we may be able to assist in the capture of the vampire so that you may find such a cure," Thor explained.

The others, suspecting that Thor had beamed directly to O'Neill's bedside, now approached.

"Doctor Jackson?" Hammond enquired.

"Um, Thor says he can't cure it. But he will help us capture Aiestrodous, which I'm hoping will, um, help."

"Thank you, Thor," General Hammond said. "Major Carter, Colonel Stuart, you go with Thor."

"General Hammond," Thor stated. "I will take Colonel O'Neill and Daniel Jackson." With this, the three beamed from the base.

****

 "Ah, god," Jack exclaimed, as they arrived on Thor's ship. "What the hell?"

"It's alright, Jack," Daniel said. "Thor's here to help."

Jack looked around at the Asgard high commander. "Thank you," he said.

"You are welcome, Jack O'Neill," Thor responded. "I will place you in a pod until we arrive, for your safety."

Jack nodded, and disappeared into a beam of light.

49

"Um, he will be alright?"

Thor shook his head. "I regret that unless you are able to find a cure for this organism, that he will become as a vampire."

Daniel looked horror stricken. "Thor, surely with all your technology, you must be able to find something?"

"The Asgard have studied many different races, Daniel Jackson, but we have yet to encounter this one."

Within an hour, Thor's ship orbited the planet. Daniel, having been told by Thor that they would need to beam O'Neill to the surface in order to locate the vampire, was now sitting with his companion; a silver disc had been placed on O'Neill's upper arm.

"This will prevent the organism from consuming too much of your energy," Thor explained.

Jack nodded. "Sweet!" O'Neill jested. "Does it prevent excess teeth growth as well?"

Thor regarded O'Neill.

"It's Jack's sense of humour," Daniel offered by way of explanation.

"Are you ready, Jack O'Neill?"

"Yeah, beam down to sucksville," Jack agreed.

<center>********************</center>

Jack sat amongst the circle of stones, comforted slightly by the fact that he knew Thor was up above, watching his six.

"You return?" Came a voice from the darkness; O'Neill instantly recognised it as Aiestrodous.

"Did I have a choice?" he replied, standing, instantly aware suddenly of the vampire who had used the shadows of the moon to conceal himself.

"I regret my actions, however," Aiestrodous explained, "I needed a companion."

"Excuse me?" Jack vociferated. "And you picked me?"

"The other one was impure," Aiestrodous explained. "Your life force is strong."

"Yeah, well my life force is mine, know what I mean? So, if you don't mind? I need to get unvamped?" O'Neill demanded, moving closer.

"That is not possible. In time you will understand," Aiestrodous moved closer to O'Neill now.

The colonel looked suddenly uncomfortable.

"Okay, Dracula, back off," he warned. "Um..."

As Aiestrodous was close enough, mesmerising O'Neill, the pair were beamed aboard Thor's ship; the vampire surrounded by a force field of some kind, that Daniel was able to barely make out.

"Gotcha!" O'Neill declared.

Aiestrodous attempted to breach the force field. "What have you done?" he demanded. "I will be free; I am the darkness."

"Yeah, yeah," O'Neill satirized. "We got that part, and our buddy Thor here, well he's our Van Helsing."

Aiestrodous looked infuriated; his eyes glowed red, a yellow tint appearing in the centre.

"Whoa," O'Neill said. "Is that thing gonna hold?" he asked Thor.

"It will hold, O'Neill, his own energy now contains him," Thor explained.

Daniel moved closer. "Look. We don't want to kill you, we just want Jack back. So if you want to suggest something now, um, we could just send you back to the planet?"

The vampire regarded him, his expression barely changing. "There is only one way," he said slowly.

51

"And that is?" O'Neill asked, moving alongside Daniel now.

Aiestrodous looked at O'Neill. "It would mean your death," he told them. "The life force that was mine, and that lives within you, may only be destroyed by no living blood to feed upon."

"Um, well, er, that's not an option," Daniel commented.

"Ya think!" O'Neill exclaimed.

Aiestrodous turned to Thor now. "Do you have the means to revive him, should he be dormant for more than an Earth day?"

Thor nodded slowly. "We have such technology," he agreed.

"You, er, do?" Daniel asked. "Great, so how do we do this?"

O'Neill shook his head, his expression one of complete surprise. "Now, hold on a minute, kill me?" he enquired. "As in dead?"

"It is the only way to prevent my life force taking over," Aiestrodous confirmed. "No other alternative is known."

"Um, so how do we, er, kill him?" Daniel asked.

Jack looked at Daniel then, his favoured lopsided expression, disdain and disbelief. "Don't sound so enthusiastic," he said.

Aiestrodous suddenly disappeared into a beam of light.

"Whoa!" O'Neill shouted. "Wait... Thor?"

"Colonel O'Neill," Thor said. "The Asgard cannot take a human life, this must be done by you, Daniel Jackson, you are his friend."

It was Daniel's turn to look dubious. "Um, me?" he asked. "How?"

Jack looked at him. "You're asking me? Stake through the heart? Gun?" he added. "It's not gonna be nice either way, is it?"

"I am sorry, O'Neill, with death will come pain," Thor said.

"Yeah," O'Neill sighed heavily. "So, +I get a choice, right?"

Thor nodded.

Daniel was still looking reticent. "Um, Jack, I don't know if I can do this," he declared, his tone shaky now.

"Daniel, for crying out loud, you have to," Jack encouraged and berated, all at the same time. "A quick shot to the head ought to do it." He grimaced. "And, Danny boy, try to aim straight."

"Small problem, I, er, don't have one?" Daniel pointed out.

Jack shrugged his shoulders. "Well isn't that special, okay, Thor, now what?"

A gun appeared in Daniel's hand. His eyes closed for a second, taking a deep breath. "Um, well that, er, solved that problem," he said, swallowing hard.

Jack now looked slightly afraid, it crept into his eyes and he couldn't conceal it. He drew in a deep breath. "Okay, Daniel," he ordered. "Do it."

Daniel raised the gun. "Oh, this is ridiculous, I can't do this," he said.

Jack, who had closed his eyes anticipating the shot, opened them wide. "Daniel, you have to, just please, do it."

Daniel looked across at Thor. "You're sure?" he said.

Thor bowed his head.

"Yoi," Jack snapped. "Will you just do it?"

Tears were welling up in Daniel's eyes. He knew that Thor would bring Jack back to life, but it felt like what it was; he was killing his friend.

Jack opened his eyes, looking into Daniel's. He tried to offer solace but he felt afraid, and it was written all over his face. A weak smile covered that fear for a moment.

Daniel moved closer. Aiming for the heart, he pushed the nozzle into Jack's chest. His eyes closing, his finger squeezed the trigger.

Almost immediately Jack was gone; Thor saved Daniel the sight of seeing his friend's body.

Daniel walked away, dropping the gun to the floor. Finding one of the many 'windowed' areas, he stood there, his forehead resting on the alloy bar that crossed it. Tears that he couldn't control streamed down his face. Images of the many times he'd spent arguing, talking and laughing with his friend.

He sank down, and sat on the floor, gathering his knees into his chest and wrapping his arms about them tightly.

<p align="center">********************</p>

Thor's ship stayed in orbit of the planet. He did not want to risk moving the ship whilst honing the technology to revive, and mend his friend.

He had watched Daniel Jackson's agony with a sense of loss, and sympathy, but he was far more a pragmatic being than his human counterpart.

Yet still, it fascinated him, how emotive humans were with their friends.

He had not wanted to intrude on Daniel's grief, but had kept a watchful eye on him, as he now did with O'Neill. The 24 hours almost up, he began to engage the technology and watched the wound closing around O'Neill heart, monitoring the instruments that told him the second O'Neill drew breath.

He opened the pod. "Colonel O'Neill?"

O'Neill's eyes opened. "Thor," he gasped. His eyes were sensitive to the light, and he half closed them. "Did it work?" He began to sit up, looking around him at the strange room he was in. "Where's Daniel?"

"Indeed, O'Neill. My sensors do not detect the organism."

"Great. Wow!" O'Neill said, feeling the effects of the technology, making him feel almost in perfect health. "Thanks."

Thor regarded him; a simple nod his reply.

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Daniel looked at his watch, his tears, long since dry, stained his face. He stood up now, from what had been an uncomfortable sleep.

Jack suddenly appeared in front of him. "I'm back," he said, a smile sweeping across his face.

Daniel beamed back at him. "Jack, are you okay?" he asked.

"Well, considering I was dead, I feel great," he told his colleague. "Nice shot!"

Daniel's eyebrows flew up. "Yeah, um, about that, I, er..."

"Daniel, don't mention it, for crying out loud, you were just saving my life," Jack told him.

"Yeah, well, don't take this the wrong way, but please never ask me to do that again," Daniel stated. "Because, I, um, I couldn't."

Jack smiled at him. "You know, Daniel, I'm impressed," he said.

"You are? Why?" Jackson asked, moving a little closer to his friend now, and jabbing him with a playful fist. "Definitely alive," he noted.

"It took a lot of guts to do that," Jack insisted. "And, well, thanks."

"Um, don't mention it. Are we going home now?"

Jack looked around. "Ah, yeah, Thor said something about dropping us off."

"Great, because I could use some sleep. I think I got about, oh, four hours in the last two days." Daniel's blatant subject change didn't go unheeded by O'Neill.

55

"Well, I wondered why you looked so awful," he said playfully. "Me? I slept like the dead."

Daniel nodded, a grimace covering his expression. "Yeah, ah, very funny," he commented. "Just, er, do me one favour?"

"Hey!" O'Neill exclaimed. "After what you did, how can I refuse?" Jack said, warmly placing his arm around Daniel's shoulders. "What is it?"

"Could you leave the part about me shooting you out of your report?" Daniel asked sheepishly.

Jack smiled. "Why?" he enquired, in his own charming style.

"Er, well because it, um," Daniel stammered.

"It sounds harsh and un-Daniel like?" Jack intervened. "Or, you're afraid someone might actually believe you enjoyed it?"

Daniel turned away from Jack's brotherly embrace then. "Jack, doing that was the hardest thing I've ever had to do in my life. It's personal." He stared at his companion. "You know what I mean?"

Jack nodded thoughtfully. "Tell you what," he suggested. "We'll say I shot myself, how's that sound? And then you and Thor did the ER thing and saved my life?"

Daniel smiled. "See, that's what I missed when you went dark side," he confided. "That wonderful sense of humour that so often manages to get right under my skin."

"Well, isn't that nice, back to normal so soon," Jack said, walking away from Daniel, a smile across his face. "Return of the geek!"

Daniel slid his tongue into the side of his mouth, looking ruefully after the colonel. "Better a geek," he said. "Than a sarcastic, condescending, overbearing..."

Jack turned. "Member of the US Air Force?" he concluded.

Daniel smiled. "That's not it, but it's close enough, Jack, it's close enough."

The End.