Interactions

by

Jaclyn

Colonel Makepeace checked his watch, standing in the embarkation room, awaiting the rest of the team bound for P3J 435, it was the third time he had done so. Allowing himself to be completely honest, if only in the solitude of his own thoughts, he felt a degree of trepidation.

Taking a large civilian contingent to a proposed off-world colony, meant that he alone would be saddled with the responsibility of their safety, as well as that of the men and women of the SG teams that Hammond had allocated for the mission.

Ultimately Dr. Mark Flowers would lead the scientists. But still, security was his domain.

Major Samantha Carter, and Teal'c would be joining him. Carter had been given the temporary command of SG6 for the duration of the mission, whilst Teal'c preferred the idea of using his time productively, and had thus passed on the opportunity of several days leave.

Flowers' team numbered over fifty. Makepeace's concern was perhaps due, in part, to the attitude of that contingent. These people were a little too flip for his liking, having accompanied Flowers on a previous recce to the planet, he knew exactly what to expect.

He'd intended to bring up his reservations at the briefing, but each time he'd attempted to raise the subject, albeit without too much conviction, something had come up and he'd ultimately become side-tracked.

He shook his head.

"Sir?" Carter questioned.

"Major?" Makepeace was askant, unaware of the expression that dwelt on his features.

"Everything all right Sir?" Carter enquired.

"Sorry Major, I was just thinking that Jack got off lightly," Makepeace commented.

"How so Sir?" Carter asked.

"Working with Dr. Jackson on that Ancients stuff, whilst we're trying to corral a bunch of civvies intent on running around, setting up testing and sampling stations, with little or no regard for the fact that we're on an alien planet!"

Carter smiled. "I know Sir. We'll just have to do our best 'cowboy' act; besides, Colonel O'Neill wasn't exactly thrilled with his assignment either!"

Makepeace grinned then. "Thank you Major, you just made my week!" He laughed.

Carter concealed her own mirth, turning to Teal'c. "All set?" she asked.

Teal'c nodded. "Indeed, Major Carter."

Makepeace looked toward the control room. "All right Sgt. Dial those coordinates and let's get this show on the road!"

Major Coburn looked across at Carter. "Should make a pleasant change," he pointed out. "Body-guarding instead of being on search and rescue missions."

Carter smiled at him. "I guess," she admitted. "It's exciting, working with these people in setting up our first off-world base of operations. Imagine what can be achieved here?" she enthused.

"Yeah," Coburn agreed. "Except it's in the middle of a Galaxy over a million light years away from Earth and a lot harder to defend."

"Jim," Carter told him. "Earth isn't exactly a fortress."

"Yeah, but it is a protected planet!" Coburn replied, checking his earpiece as he climbed the ramp. Carter shook her head.

"That's what I like," she muttered to herself. "Optimism."

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Jack leant back in his chair, his hands thrown over his head, ruffling his own hair.

"Daniel!" he exclaimed; his tone sounded close to exasperation.

"I'm trying Jack," Jackson declared, his eyes intentionally meeting O'Neill's. "It's just, I thought." He paused then, giving consideration to his words. "You change the diction so much. The speech order follows no kind of pattern at all. It's..."

"Well I can't exactly tell you any clearer Daniel, oh for crying out loud...you're the linguist!" Jack berated, looking at Jackson's scalded expression.

"You know, you might be a little more patient. I am when you're being...." Daniel's voice trailed off then.

"What?" Jack challenged. "Go ahead Daniel...what?"

"Dense...irritatingly so," Daniel uttered.

"Dense?" O'Neill replied, his askant expression exaggerated by the arch of raised eyebrows.

"Yeah!" Daniel pouted. "You, er might want to cut me a little slack."

"Well I guess," O'Neill ventured. "A little slack?" he asked then, standing up and turning his back on Jackson. "What's that got to do with you being dense?"

"What?" Daniel looked completely non-plussed suddenly.

"You heard me?" Jack remonstrated. "I'm not the one who can't work out basic Ancient!" A protracted, heavy sigh.

Daniel's amazed expression appeared to be both indignant and angry.

"Excuse me?" he questioned. "I'm dense?"

"You have the capacity for dense, yeah!" Jack exclaimed.

Wide-eyed, and almost speechless, Jackson stood now too. "I don't suppose it could have anything to do with your poor teaching skills?" he suggested.

O'Neill laughed. "My?" he chuckled. "My, teaching skills? Admit it, you're a poor student!"

Daniel looked suitably exasperated now. "I'm a poor student?" he uttered. "Oh, yes, lets just look at that shall we...."

O'Neill moved closer to the archaeologist now, "Daniel, look." His expression, like his tone, softer. "Let's just get some coffee...losing your temper isn't gonna solve this."

Jackson considered the offer, unable to shake the accusation of his learning ability inferred at by his colleague.

He looked away for a moment, then back at O'Neill. "Yeah, okay," he agreed.

"Great...so," Jack began, as the two men approached the commissary. "I wonder how they're doing on P3J 435?"

Daniel looked suddenly perturbed. "You're being useless on purpose, aren't you?"

"No Daniel," Jack replied. "It's my natural state...apparently."

Daniel stopped now, eyes closing, head shaking. "You're hoping that I'll get completely disheartened...and all that ...that ...dialogue you've been giving me is false isn't it?"

Jackson looked really peeved now, the innuendo, the insults, the criticism reeling about in his head, it dawned on him slowly. "Oh, that's so." he began.

A twinkle entered O'Neill's eyes then. "Took you long enough," he grinned.

"Oh, oh....that's just. Thank you so much for taking me seriously!" Daniel looked both hurt and furious all at the same time.

His hands thrown into the air in exasperation, he turned and walked away from Jack, who stood there his head dropping suddenly, in a mock realisation of defeat.

"Oh crap!" he whispered. "Daniel?" he called out. "Where are you go.....oh for crying out loud!"

O'Neill, having lost sight of the errant archaeologist, pursued him down the hall, his hands thrust into his pockets.

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"All right Doctor. Your people have a week to set up all the necessary equipment. I'll be leaving three teams here with you and the rest of us will be scouting for hostiles and other life forms."

Mark Flowers nodded. "Okay Colonel Makepeace. I trust your security precautions are in order. I'm sure my team will be perfectly safe here."

"Major Coburn will be in charge of this area Doctor, your team will be under his command, and as such will follow his orders, is that clear Doctor?" Makepeace used his voice and his expression to underline that command.

"I'm aware of the chain of command here Colonel. I only hope you're aware that my team needs to be left alone in order to achieve its primary function here," Flowers responded.

"Good enough. Coburn you've got command; I want your team to ensure the safety of the perimeters. Major Conner, SG8 will assist the civilians with installation. Major Kelly, SG12 will be tasked with internal security and ultimately, if the shit hits the fan, you'll be in charge of communications with the SGC. SG15 and SG6 will accompany my team in recon. Let's get set up!" Makepeace ordered.

He looked over his shoulder, a heavyhearted sigh escaping pursed lips. "Major Carter?" he enquired. "Are there any readings of any kind yet?"

Carter shook her head. "No Sir. UAV is still flying a search pattern scanning the nearby area for anything the MALP didn't detect, it'll need to be refuelled Sir!"

"Well Major, I guess we'd better get that done before we head out. We wouldn't want to be UAV-less now, would we?" Makepeace told her.

Carter smiled to herself, Colonel Makepeace was an ordinary nuts and bolts soldier, being a marine, he had a brashness about him, yet she did not detect any intentioned sarcasm. He'd saved them from certain death at the hands of Hathor, and she had respect for that, even if she was still a little intrigued by his role as an undercover operative, attempting to root out bad apples from the SGC and its counter-parts.

"Right away Sir!" she said.

"I will assist you, Major Carter," Teal'c offered, bowing his head to Makepeace, who indicated his sanction.

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Daniel paced up and down his lab, still furious with himself for allowing O'Neill to get the better of him. Jack appeared in the doorway, waving a white hankie and Daniel was forced to smile.

"You ass!" Daniel told him.

Jack smiled. "Glad to see you don't hold a grudge Danny boy," he replied, moving closer to the archaeologist now. "Come on Daniel, wouldn't you rather be out there?" he enquired, with an enthusiasm in his tone that Daniel found hard to resist.

"Well....I guess. General Hammond doesn't quite see it that way though." Daniel admitted.

Jack winced. "Yeah, see your point," he agreed, a shake of his head. "Okay, well, there are ways around it."

"There are?" Daniel asked, almost as relieved as O'Neill that both men actually wanted to go to P3J 435

"We could," Jack began, a little hesitantly. "Tell Hammond you've learnt as much as you need for now?"

"Actually, you know what?" Daniel replied. "I think that's a good idea. Lets do that!"

"Great! - Daniel," Jack paused now, turning to face Jackson before leaving his lab. "Thanks!"

"Yeah..." Daniel said, his eyebrows twitching upwards to emphasis the comment.

"I mean it!" Jack emphasised.

"You do?" Daniel's turn to sound dubious.

"Sure," Jack smiled.

Daniel regarded the Colonel cynically. "Exactly what are you, um, thanking me for?" he enquired.

"You know, for taking the patronising thing so well...I'd have found that a little, well, irritating!" Jack told him.

"Oh, um that. Well I did," Daniel pointed out. "But, since you'll now be forced to teach me this in your spare time..." A big grin exploded over Jackson's boyish features then.

O'Neill considered that for a moment, nodding, that well worn grimace enveloping his face.

"Yeah," A heavy sigh. "Thanks!"

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"Absolutely not!" Hammond insisted.

"Ah, come on General. Daniel can't learn anymore than I've already passed on!" O'Neill argued, his expression mirroring that of a scalded child.

"That's as maybe Colonel, but there are six SG teams already deployed. I do have another mission heading out to P9X 232, consider yourself and Dr. Jackson assigned to that. Briefing is at 08:30 hours tomorrow morning." Hammond ordered.

Jack looked away from Hammond then, arguing with the General at that point, was useless. He playfully scuffed his left foot into the carpet.

"Gee Sir!" he said. "Thanks."

Hammond concealed a smile, maintaining the pretence of a scowl.

"Dismissed Colonel."

"Yes Sir!" O'Neill replied, his right hand automatically forming a salute.

Hammond reciprocated, shuffling some paperwork on his desk as O'Neill departed.

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Makepeace lowered the binoculars. "Well," he concluded. "Still no sign of trouble."

Major Collins smiled at Carter. "Pity, I fancied a nice fight," he joked.

"Yeah," Carter agreed. "Be nice to have a quiet mission for a change."

"All right, let's keep heading north, then we'll make a wide sweep West." Makepeace ordered. "Major Coburn come in?"

There was a long silence, the marines looking to one another. "Major Coburn do you read, over?"

Carter and Teal'c exchanged concerned glances. "Did someone say quiet!" Carter remarked.

"Alright! Lets double-time it back," Makepeace ordered. "Major, send the UAV over that location."

"Already configuring Sir!" Carter replied.

"Swell," Makepeace replied with a heavy sigh. "I hope sat-comms are down!"

Collins looked dubiously toward his commanding officer. "Never seems to be that simple, Sir."

"No Major it doesn't. Major Carter, anything?"

"Just bringing the UAV around sir - Whoa!" Carter exclaimed, as the video feedback suddenly distorted.

"Carter?" Makepeace demanded.

"Something just took out the UAV Sir!" Carter explained. "Some form of energy beam struck the camera...I'm switching to motion sensors."

"Great! Just great!" Makepeace remonstrated. "I knew this was a bad idea."

Teal'c took a deep breath. "We should leave immediately. Our position makes us vulnerable."

"Yeah, I heard that," Makepeace concurred. "Anything on those sensors Major?"

"No readings Sir," Carter told him. "I think we lost the UAV."

"Swell. Lets go!"

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"He turned you down?" Daniel questioned, turning around in his chair and looking toward O'Neill.

O'Neill shrugged. "Flat refusal."

"P9X 232, that's the planet they've discovered traces of Naqada on," Jackson recounted from memory.

"Sweet! Mining operations with SG7 and 14. Can't wait," Jack replied sarcastically.

Daniel looked, and felt as perplexed as his colleague. "What if I spoke to him?" he asked.

"Daniel, he was adamant. I can't see anything you've got to add swaying him," Jack pointed out. "Said they already have enough people. So we're going mining. Again!"

"Well there has to be something Jack?" Daniel's tone almost beseeching. "I mean, it's a big operation."

Jack sighed heavily. "Apparently we're not required Daniel," O'Neill told him, a hint of sarcasm sneaking into his tone as he moved things around on Jackson's work station. "So I guess we can leave, show up bright and early tomorrow....and go mining!"

Jackson flinched. "Ouch!" he exclaimed. "When you put it like that....let's go and try to talk the General out of this shall we?"

O'Neill grinned. "Why not. You lead with reasonable, and I'll..."

"Yeah, I know," Daniel agreed.

O'Neill regarded the archaeologist for a second, waiting on the undoubted insult that might follow, when none came he smiled.

"Yeah, ok," he conceded, putting a book down and following Jackson from the lab.

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The encampment was completely deserted. Makepeace frowned, looking at his watch. "Five hours," he said. "Does everybody have the same?"

Carter nodded. "Yes Sir," she concurred.

The equipment was unpacked, no tents had been erected, as the SGC personnel searched the length and breadth of the camp, no discernable trace of their colleagues could be found.

"Colonel," Collins called out. "I've found the UAV Sir, it's wrecked."

Carter made her towards his position, examining the wreckage. "Looks like some form of energy blast alright," she concluded. "Sir we'd better let General Hammond know."

"Major Turner, dial home and take a message through to General Hammond," Makepeace ordered, turning and looking over the site. "We'd better see what we can find here. There has to be something," he mused.

"Colonel Makepeace!" Teal'c called out.

Makepeace looked over towards Teal'c, who was standing close to the DHD, he raised his eyes heavenwards exhaling a long slow breath. "Now what?" he muttered.

Joining the Jaffa at the DHD, Makepeace saw the damage for himself. He groaned inwardly, his right hand sweeping over his face as he considered this new development. "Yeah!" he acknowledged. "That figures."

Carter began examining the damage more thoroughly.

"Can you fix it?" Makepeace enquired.

"No Sir, they've smashed the crystals. It's useless," she told him.

Makepeace turned, and saw the expectant faces of his men. "Right, we'll just have to leave a team here and wait for the SGC to attempt to make contact. SG15 will stay with the gate. The rest of us will begin a quadrant search," Makepeace commanded. "Let's be on our toes here!"

Teal'c looked around the area. "There appears to be no trace of resistance," he stated.

"Yeah, I noticed that too," Makepeace replied. "So whatever took our people, used some form of transportation beam." He turned and looked at Carter. "You're getting no readings of any kind of energy?" he enquired.

"Nothing Sir," Carter sighed. "Who, or whatever took them is either using some form of advanced technology that's way beyond our capacity to read, or," She paused then.

"Or?" Makepeace demanded.

"Or, they're not on this planet anymore Sir," she advised.

"Well that's a switch!" Makepeace sounded agitated now. "Just when I thought things were going so well."

Carter looked reticent. "Yes Sir," she agreed. "Makes a refreshing change."

Makepeace regarded her for a moment, a smile forming on his face. "We'd better get moving. Major Anderson, SG15 will report without fail, every fifteen minutes."

"Yes Sir!"

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"Dr. Jackson, Colonel," Hammond acknowledged the two men as they entered his office. "I suppose you're here to talk me around to your way of thinking with regard to P3J 435?"

"Alarmingly perceptive, General, Sir," Jack noted, risking a smile at his CO.

"Ah, actually General, um, yes," Daniel began. "I've read the mission briefing, and um, I am convinced that we'd be wasting our time, when we could actually be helping Dr. Flowers and his team on P3J 435"

"I see," Hammond replied. "And since when did either of you make command decisions?"

Jack's lips contorted sideways as he considered the question.

Jackson able to be a lot more direct. "Well it's not that we're questioning your orders. It's just that personally, that is to say, I believe that the mission to P3J 435 is better suited to our, um...." He regarded Hammond now with an air of askance. "You're not buying this are you?"

"No, Doctor Jackson. You'll proceed, as ordered with the mission to P9X 232 as ordered at ten hundred hours."

"Damn it Sir, it's a mining operation," O'Neill complained.

"I'm well aware of what it is Colonel. Now, I don't expect to see either one of you again until 08:30 hundred hours tomorrow," Hammond instructed. "Dismissed."

O'Neill turned, a heavy sigh escaping his lips, not for the first time that day. "Sweet!" he muttered.

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Teal'c scouted ahead of the main group. Ten SGC personnel, like the Jaffa scanned the distance, looking for a trace of the 55 civilians and the 12 SGC operatives.

"Anything Teal'c?" Makepeace enquired.

"It is as you said before," Teal'c responded. "The planet appears to have no inhabitants."

"Colonel Makepeace check call 18:50 hours, over," Major Anderson's voice over the radio.

"Received Daryl, next contact at 19:05, Makepeace out." He looked at Carter. "Well at least the team we left at the gate hasn't disappeared," he commented. "Alright, let's step it up, Teal'c we'll bear East."

Teal'c acknowledged with a nod of his head, turning east and beginning to lead the group in that direction, he stopped suddenly, deep concentration sweeping over his face.

Carter moved along side him, "Teal'c, what is it?" she asked.

"I sense a presence," the Jaffa replied.

"What kind of presence?" Makepeace enquired pausing beside Teal'c, his binoculars raised and sweeping the horizon.

"I can not be sure," Teal'c informed them. "It is almost as if......." he stopped mid sentence. A low-pitched whining sound began to fill the ears of the team, Makepeace winced. "What the hell?" he exclaimed, as his team began to drop to their knees all around him. The Colonel shook his head, trying to dispel the sound, his hands clasping his ears, face screwed up with the discomfort he felt.

Teal'c appeared immune, kneeling beside Carter. "Major Carter?" he questioned, immediately concerned, he placed his hand on her shoulder.

"Major Anderson come in," Teal'c spoke quickly into his radio, to the SG15 commanding officer.

There was no response. Teal'c looked around the men, now unmoving, each sprawled unconscious upon the ground.

Beams of energy began to claim each one, Teal'c held onto Carter, but she too was taken from him, his eyes darting back and forth, finally he looked toward the sky, nothing was visible, and yet the beams had most certainly come from above.

Teal'c stood alone in the expanse of the open countryside, digesting information he'd been able to absorb in the brief time it had taken to envelop his colleagues. He was certain of only one thing, a ship, either cloaked or in a high orbit, was responsible for the disappearance of the civilian and SG teams.

He turned then and began to make his way back towards the Stargate.

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The clock on the wall read 07:35 hours.

Daniel sat opposite Jack O'Neill in the commissary, as the pair ate breakfast. "So I'm thinking that maybe the whole language is actually the original basis for Latin, which would mean that at some point the Ancients must have visited Earth," Jackson declared.

"Who hasn't?" O'Neill quipped.

"Jack?" Daniel was askant.

"Sorry," O'Neill replied, putting his fork down on the plate in front of him. "Just wondering."

"Wondering?" Jackson enquired. "Wondering what?"

Major Paul Crane, SG7 commanding officer pulled up a chair at their table then. "Hope you don't mind Sir?" he enquired of O'Neill.

"Nope, not at all. Paul, you know Daniel Jackson?" O'Neill responded.

"No Sir, not had the pleasure. Nice to meet you Dr. Jackson," Crane greeted.

Daniel smiled, extending his hand, his attention immediately averted as the alarm was raised - the tannoy declared.

"Colonel O'Neill and Doctor Jackson - report to the control room, stat!"

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The control room buzzed with activity as technicians and security personnel reacted to the distress call received from P3J 435.

Jack O'Neill, with Daniel Jackson trailing in his wake, climbed the steps into the control room, two at a time.

"What's going on?" O'Neill demanded.

"We didn't receive the scheduled communication from P3J 435 Sir, we established a wormhole and Teal'c appears to be the only remaining member of the expedition," Sgt. Davies told him.

"What?" Jack exclaimed.

"Well why didn't he come back?" Daniel asked.

"Apparently Sir," Davies kept his attention on the Colonel. "The DHD on the other side has been sabotaged. Teal'c can't dial out sir."

"Where's General Hammond?" O'Neill's tone became authoritative now, the soldier taking over.

"We've been unable to contact him Sir...apparently he was called to an emergency meeting with the joint chiefs this morning at 06:00"

"Sergeant, get Major Davis on the phone now!" O'Neill ordered. "Daniel, apprise Davis of the situation. I need Hammond to authorise an immediate search and rescue operation for our people. In the meantime, I want anyone that's capable of operating a Naqadah reactor ready to go in twenty minutes."

"Sir?" Sgt. Davies queried. "We're not authorised to open the gate to send anyone through."

O'Neill's expression darkened. "Sergeant, be ready to open the gate on my command," He snapped, his glare emphasising the order.

Nothing else needed to be said, Sgt. Davies nodded. "Yes Sir!" he replied apprehensively.

"Daniel?" O'Neill shrieked, as the archaeologist disappeared up the stairs towards the briefing room.

Daniel bent low, looking over the railings. "Yeah?"

"Tell Davis I want an answer before you hang up. Clear?" Jack ordered.

"Yep," he replied, about to continue on his journey, stopping. "Jack?" he yelled.

O'Neill turned looking back at Jackson, a nod. "I won't leave without you Daniel....and tell Davis if we can't get Hammond back ASAP, he's gonna have to come over and handle operations from this end."

Daniel smiled. "Will do!"

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Carter was still dazed, she tried to look around but found the lighting too bright to make out much.

"Teal'c?" she called.

"He wasn't transported with the rest of us Major," Colonel Makepeace's familiar throaty tone answered.

"What the hell happened?" It was Major Collins who now spoke.

"Beats the hell out of me," Makepeace replied. "But whatever it is, I get the feeling I'm not gonna enjoy it too much!"

Carter sat up, at last able to see her colleagues. Every member of SG3, SG15 and SG6 were in the vast circular room.

"Well it doesn't look Goa'uld," Carter said, still groggy.

"One possible hostile down, several thousand to go Major," Makepeace commented.

"Where are the rest of our people?" Collins asked. "I assume they were brought here too?"

"That's a fair guess, maybe in a similar holding cell?" Carter ventured.

"Is everybody conscious?" Makepeace yelled.

Several replies, some muffled, others alert, responded to the Colonel's question.

"Are we on a ship?" Carter enquired.

"I'd say so," Makepeace replied. "So we'd better start looking for the exits!"

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Captain Michael Kincade dumped his kit on the ground in the embarkation room, looking up towards the control room, his insignia denoting his SG9 status. Sergeant Siler, checking through the necessary equipment, at his side.

"We're ready to go, as ordered," he announced towards Sgt. Davies.

"Waiting on Colonel O'Neill, Sir, and sanction from Major Davis," Davies replied.

In Hammond's office, Daniel explained the situation to Major Paul Davis. "Look Paul, we don't exactly have much time," he insisted. "Jack is going through that gate with or without authorisation. I'd kind of like to avoid him getting a court martial."

At his office in the pentagon. Major Davis took a deep breath. "Daniel, I'd love to just say go ahead, look just hold on one second."

O'Neill appeared in Hammond's office then, looking expectantly at Jackson. "Well?" he asked.

"Waiting, um, Jack you look suspiciously ready to leave," Daniel pointed out, indicating to O'Neill's attire, and the MP5 he cradled in his arms.

"What ever gave you that idea?" O'Neill quipped, immediately pausing as Jackson's hand shot up to indicate communication from Davis.

"Daniel, you have a go. Primarily, at this stage you're authorised to go through the gate and retrieve Teal'c. General Hammond is going to be unavailable all day, so I guess I'm on my way!"

"Great, thank you. We'll, er, see you when you get here I guess," Daniel replied, hanging up. "We're authorised to bring Teal'c back," he told Jack.

"Good enough, get your stuff," Jack snapped brightly.

In the embarkation room, O'Neill joined Sgt. Siler and Captain Kincade. Checking his watch, he took a deep breath. "Sgt. Davies, enter those coordinates." O'Neill ordered.

Siler looked a little nervous, it would be his first trip through.

O'Neill smiled to himself. The Gate began to rotate, the chevrons locking one by one.

Daniel finally appeared, still strapping his webbing in place, inserting his handgun into its holster.

"Finally!" Jack chided playfully, an attempt at levity to calm Siler, as much as to goad the archaeologist. "All right, everybody keep your heads up on this one."

"Why didn't they take Teal'c," Daniel wondered out loud.

"Beats me," Jack replied. "Guess they don't care for Goa'ulds either!"

The Colonel patted Sgt. Siler on the shoulder. "Piece of cake," he told him, then led the party up the ramp, Daniel walking faster to join him, the two men stepping through the event horizon side by side.

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Teal'c was investigating the damage to the UAV when the wormhole exploded into life. He glanced around, seeing O'Neill and Jackson appear through the gate. Daniel raised his hand. "Teal'c," he yelled.

"Alright Captain, Sergeant, start getting that thing rigged up to get us home. We'll be taking a look around," O'Neill ordered.

"Yes, Sir!" they replied in unison.

"Siler?" O'Neill questioned. "Looking a little green around the gills there, you okay?"

"I'll be fine Sir," Siler told him.

"Sweet...well carry on then," Jack said, already walking towards Teal'c.

"Daniel Jackson, it is good to see you," the Jaffa said as Jackson reached him.

"You too Teal'c. Um, what exactly happened?" Daniel asked.

"I am unsure. We left the base camp, proceeding with our mission. We had been gone six or more hours. When Colonel Makepeace attempted to make contact with Major Coburn, there was no response," Teal'c explained.

"Sweet! So they all just disappeared, but whoever, or whatever took them left their stuff?" O'Neill questioned.

"It is as you see it O'Neill," Teal'c confirmed. "Colonel Makepeace ordered SG15 to remain at the gate, when we learned that the DHD was not functioning. We continued to look for any signs of the teams."

"So...where did Sam and Makepeace go exactly?" Daniel enquired.

"As we searched, the rest of the team seemed to be affected by some form of sound," Teal'c explained, his eyebrow raised. "I could not detect this sound, although I had become aware of a presence."

"A sound?" Jack looked intrigued now. "That you couldn't hear, kind of curious don't ya think!"

"Indeed O'Neill. I therefore assumed that whatever was responsible for their abduction was able to target the human contingent, I attempted to prevent them taking Major Carter," he continued. "But without success."

"So, they were beamed aboard a ship?" Daniel surmised.

"I believe so Daniel Jackson," Teal'c replied.

"Great....an invisible ship," O'Neill paused, lifting his cap from his head and ruffling his hair. "We're gonna need some help with this one!" he observed at length, then indicating at the UAV. "What happened to that?"

"Major Carter attempted to use the UAV to check this location, when we lost contact," Teal'c said. "As you can see, those responsible did not wish that to happen."

"Yeah, listen, if they're beaming people out of here, we'd better stay close to the gate," Jack told them, scanning the area, then looking up into the sky. "Didn't they check this place out?"

"That is correct O'Neill, three missions were undertaken with no sign of other life forms," Teal'c stated.

"Well maybe these 'life-forms'," Jackson suggested. "Aren't actually from here. Maybe the intention is curiosity?"

"Daniel, if they were just curious why beam the whole damn party up?" O'Neill demanded, that cynical sarcasm, he used so often, lacing his tone heavily. "Kind of overkill don't ya think - not to mention rude!"

Jackson considered this for a nano-second. "What, like we do on Earth you mean?" he responded.

O'Neill stared at him through his familiar sunglasses. "Great. Mister reasonable!" Jack exclaimed.

Teal'c watched the two men, a wry smile creeping into his eyes, then he turned and walked towards Sgt. Siler's location.

"Well just beaming them off the planet doesn't necessarily indicate that their intention is nefarious!" Daniel argued.

"Well it's not exactly the right way to go about first contact either is it?" Jack persisted. "And since we don't exactly know what the heck we're dealing with here, the point's kind of moot!"

"I'm sorry, I thought we were speculating?" Daniel countered.

"Speculating about what?" O'Neill exclaimed.

Sgt. Siler and Captain Kincade looked across at the two men, as their voices grew louder with the debate.

Teal'c stood close to them. Kincade looked at the Jaffa, who appeared oblivious.

"Are they always like that?" he asked.

Teal'c raised an eyebrow, considering the question. "Indeed," he replied at length.

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Major Paul Davis, sat in the control room, as the team came back through the gate, a sigh of relief escaping his lips. "Welcome back Colonel" he announced.

O'Neill nodded, looking across at Jackson. "Daniel, get in touch with the Tok'ra, specifically Jacob. See if they know anything about that planet!"

Daniel nodded, disappearing immediately. O'Neill looked at Davis, shaking his head.

Major Davis nodded, understanding O'Neill's frustration with having to wait.

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Jacob Carter sat across from Jack O'Neill in the briefing room. Teal'c began explaining the circumstances to the assembled personnel.

Major Davis standing. "I've been authorised to take whatever action is necessary to locate the 28 SGC personnel, and the 55 scientists. Floor's open," he told them.

"Jacob?" Jack enquired.

"There are a number of races capable of the kind of technology you describe, but only one race that uses high frequency ultra-sound waves to disable their enemy." There was something in Jacob's tone that bothered O'Neill.

He took a deep breath, exhaling slowly. "So!" he exclaimed. "Not good!" His gaze now falling on Daniel Jackson, who looked as concerned as he felt.

"That's an understatement Colonel. The Frearazi are an ancient race who have no planet of their own, it was destroyed in some kind of internal conflict. They were pretty advanced space travellers, they roam the galaxy taking whatever they find from species less advanced."

It was Selmak who now spoke. "The Tok'ra have come across them many times. Our level of technology means we are able to successfully combat them, however, they are difficult to detect and once they have you aboard one of their ships, almost impossible to stop!"

Jack stared at him for a moment. "Alright, almost impossible sounds encouraging." he said. "You've obviously got something that might help, what is it?"

"We have the ability to track their ships, but getting aboard one is another matter!" Jacob told him.

"What about the Asgard?" Daniel enquired. "Would they be able to help?"

Jacob shook his head. "Can't help you there. The Asgard are as secretive about their technology as we are of ours."

"Ok," O'Neill said. "Are you prepared to help? Take one of your ships into orbit and track the damn thing?"

"We have no ships in that part of the galaxy Colonel, it would take us months to get there," Jacob said.

"Jacob!" Jack snapped. "Carter's aboard that thing."

"Colonel, if we had a ship in that area...." Selmak told him.

"Yeah, yeah...I know all that. Can you contact the Asgard?" The Colonel's patience wearing thin.

Jacob looked from Daniel to Jack, then to Major Davis. "The Tok'ra high council is willing to offer assistance in securing the safety of your people, however, we have no means of contacting the Asgard. I will report back and we will bring a team to the planet that will be able to ascertain if the ship is in orbit," Selmak stated.

"Thank you," Major Davis acknowledged.

*****

Colonel Makepeace walked the walls of the room they found themselves in, checking almost every inch.

"Well there's not a whole hell of a lot we can do in here!" he stated.

The walls that surrounded them suddenly became transparent. They could see what looked like the entire group of scientists and the remaining SGC teams then, in a similar holding room as their own.

"Major Coburn!" Carter exclaimed.

Makepeace spun round. "What the...!" he exclaimed.

Coburn moved as close to them as the invisible partition allowed. "Colonel can you hear me?" he asked.

"Loud and clear Major. What the hell happened?" Makepeace demanded.

"Beats the hell out of me Sir. One minute we were on the planet...and now we're here," he explained. "We're missing four of our scientists Sir, they were beamed out of here a while ago."

Carter and Makepeace exchanged worried glances. "Major?" Makepeace asked.

"I'd say we're in a whole lot of trouble Sir!" Carter replied.

"How'd you figure?" Major Collins enquired.

"They've not attempted to make any form of contact. I mean do these things," She gestured her arm around in a sweeping motion indicating the area they were held. "Look like giant test tubes to you?"

Collins took a deep breath. "Damn," he sighed. "She's right sir...I think the shit just hit the fan!"

"Well that's not acceptable," Makepeace argued. "I don't intend to be a lab rat for a hostile too afraid to show itself!"

Carter raised an eyebrow towards the Colonel. "I doubt goading them will have much of an effect Colonel," she stated. "If they even understand us."

Makepeace marched across the room, standing in front of Carter now. "Major, are you always this damn defeatist?" he demanded. "Because I'm about this close to ordering you to shut up!" He indicated a minute amount between his finger and thumb.

Carter looked reticent. "No Sir," she replied. "I'm sorry Colonel, it just doesn't look good!"

"No shit Major," Makepeace was even closer now. "But I don't think these people need to hear that...do they?"

Carter shook her head slowly. "No Sir," she replied.

*****

Jack sat in the locker room, lacing his boots. Teal'c and Daniel similarly dressing to accompany the Tok'ra team to the planet.

"O'Neill, there is nothing you could have done," Teal'c ventured, sensing O'Neill's anguish.

"Yeah, I know Teal'c," Jack agreed. "It's just so damned frustrating having to rely on the Tok'ra."

"Why didn't they take Teal'c?" Daniel asked, his brow furrowed as he considered his own question.

"Maybe they hate slimy assed Goa'ulds as much as we do," Jack responded.

"Or maybe... Teal'c, didn't you say you could sense the presence?" Daniel enquired of the Jaffa.

"I did, Daniel Jackson," Teal'c replied.

"So?" Jack retorted impatiently.

"So there has to be a good reason. I mean if they're as technologically advanced as Jacob says, why not take Teal'c along with the rest of them? It doesn't make any sense!" Daniel concluded.

"And, you are?" Jack questioned sarcastically.

Daniel frowned across at O'Neill. "Jacob said they roam the Galaxy taking from cultures far less advanced than they are...they used some form of ultrasound or high frequency waves to disable everyone, but it had no effect on Teal'c."

"Daniel," Jack pleaded. "Just cut to the chase!"

Daniel looked at O'Neill. "If they use sound, maybe that's the weakness?"

Jack's hand engulfed his face then. "Oh for crying out loud!" Jack vociferated.

"Indeed Daniel Jackson," Teal'c concurred. "If their technology is ineffective against the Goa'uld and Tok'ra it would indicate that the sound they use is of a much lower technology."

"Does anybody want to explain just how the hell that helps us?" Jack enquired.

"Ok, look," Daniel said. "We need to get aboard that ship. We don't have the technology to beam them out, or locate the ship if it's not in orbit of P3J 435. So we gate to the closest planet using some form of frequency devices to prevent the technology from affecting us."

"Brilliant!" Jack snapped. "And this does what exactly, assuming they head in the direction of the next available planet?"

"It gets us aboard the ship. Sam, and the others were beamed aboard leaving everything behind their weapons, everything. If we can some how create some kind of harmonic field around us their technology might not detect if we have weapons. Look Jack, I know this probably sounds crazy...but," Daniel stopped then, looking at O'Neill.

His askant grimace returned by the Colonel. "You're right Daniel, it's nuts," Jack argued, his expression suddenly becoming quizzical. "And, when did you become Carter, exactly?"

"Daniel's right!" Jacob Carter stood in the doorway of the locker room.

"I....am?" Jackson looked as surprised as O'Neill, who regarded the archaeologist with an expression of wide-eyed amazement, Jackson shrugging back at O'Neill.

"It was just a theory," he told his surprised colleague.

"The whole principle of their technology is based on harmonic frequency generators. They use a similar matter conversion technology as the rings we use, to transfer solid matter from one place to another."

"So what he's saying is possible?" Jack enquired, looking from Jacob to Daniel, still astonished.

Not only possible Jack, it's about the only way we're going to bring down that ship!" Jacob informed him.

"Hold on a minute. You said you could detect their ships," Jack probed. "Forget to mention the little matter of bringing it down?"

Jacob Carter sighed. "Look Jack, I'm sorry. But politics are the same the whole galaxy over."

"With all due respect Jacob, spare me the diplomatic crap. Our people, Carter, is aboard that ship. I'm getting a little tired of permissions!" Jack remonstrated. "So, if it's all the same to you...shall we?"

He gestured toward the door.

"I assume you have brought the required technology with you?" Daniel asked Jacob, as he followed him from the locker room.

"I have, along with a dozen of our operatives, we're uniquely qualified to stop this race."

"The symbiote?" Daniel questioned.

"Yes. Daniel, our race is capable of detecting their presence. They use cloaking technology which creates polarization imbalances," Jacob explained.

"Vibrations?" Daniel asked.

"Yes," Jacob responded.

Jack led the group into the embarkation room. Twelve Tok'ra operatives armed with weapons the SGC personnel had never seen before, were grouped at the bottom of the ramp leading to the Stargate.

"Major Davis," O'Neill ordered. "Keep the door open for communications. We'll keep you updated."

"Yes Sir," Davis replied. "Good luck."

"Yeahsureyabetcha," O'Neill retorted. "Daniel?"

"Jack?"

"Good work!" O'Neill told him, offering a smile.

Daniel smiled back.

*****

The Jaffa bowed down before Nyerti. "You are sure?" she snarled.

"They were taken aboard a Frearazi vessel," the Jaffa explained. "The Shol'vah was left on the planet."

"You are positive the human O'Neill was not among them?" she demanded.

"Yes my Queen. We observed the human O'Neill and Jackson come through the Stargate and return to the Tau'ri with the Shol'vah."

"Prepare to leave, we will be waiting for them at their return," Nyerti ordered, a satisfied smile crossing her face. "They will pay for what they have done to me," she added.

The Jaffa bowed before her.

*****

Dawn had just broken on P3J 435 as the teams stepped through the gate.

"Pleasant planet," Jacob Carter remarked. "I can see why your people wanted to set up here."

O'Neill smiled to himself, his growing distrust of the Tok'ra making any comment he might have ordinarily had, muted.

"I'll begin scanning," Jacob told him, almost sensing that the Colonel wasn't about to be drawn on the matter.

The Tok'ra contingent began setting up the harmonic field generation disrupters, some distance away from O'Neill and Daniel Jackson, whilst Teal'c, at O'Neill's behest, was keeping a watchful eye on the surrounding area.

"This will take about twenty minutes or so," Jacob told them, "These readings," he held a small device in his hand, offering it up as proof. "Indicate they're still here. I just hope they haven't processed any of your people."

Jack looked sharply at the Tok'ra liaison then.

"Processed?" A curious, yet reticent expression settled quickly on his face.

Selmak stared back. "Colonel, these creatures basically harvest living beings for nourishment." A bitter expression covered the normally mild features of his host.

O'Neill's sudden and apparent horror was mirrored on Jackson's face.

"Food?" he exclaimed.

"Yeah that's pretty much what nourishment means Daniel!" O'Neill stated.

Daniel shook his head, a heavy sigh escaping his lips.

"Jacob?" Jack enquired. "How long does that take.....exactly?" Almost hesitant suddenly.

"No way of knowing - hopefully not anytime soon!" Jacob explained, clearly sharing O'Neill's concern and impatience. He attempted a smile, then spun around barking orders at the other Tok'ra.

"Well, this just keeps getting better," Jack commented.

"Doesn't it always?" Daniel asked. "I mean, we step through that gate and, well...."

"That's kind of our job, Daniel," O'Neill snapped, regarding the archaeologist with an expression of disdain.

Jackson glared back at him. "I know that!" he barked, almost like a scalded child.

"Getting to ya?" O'Neill enquired, with a hint of concern in his tone.

Jackson looked away, taking a deep breath. "No....not getting to me exactly," he replied. "Just getting a little...um.."

"Daniel," O'Neill said, his lips smiling that lopsided smile. "It's okay to be scared, I mean it's not a sign of weakness."

Daniel regarded him for the longest time, his eyes seemed to empathise with O'Neill's words - but the contorted, almost tortured expression appeared more in keeping with a deep sense of resentment.

"I'm not scared!" he announced finally. "I'm worried."

Jack O'Neill nodded his agreement, looking down at his feet now. "Yeah, I know," he agreed, glancing across at the hurried activity of the Tok'ra. "Think they're worried?"

"Hard to say, they never seem to give much away," Jackson replied. "I guess all we can do is wait, which is the hard part."

"Well Jacob said twenty minutes, which pretty much means...we wait," O'Neill concurred.

Jacob approached the two men. "I've been able to detect a number of biological readings from within the ship," he told them. "Which pretty much indicates that there are still people aboard."

"Well that's encouraging," Daniel stated, looking from Jacob to O'Neill. "Right?"

"So Jacob, exactly what happens when you set those thing's off?" O'Neill enquired.

"Basically the ship's ability to cloak will be limited - once that happens we can target the main drive core and keep it on the ground," Jacob explained.

"It's on the ground?" Daniel asked, looking around them.

"Yes Daniel, they tend to stay on a planet and strip it of any useful resources before moving onto the next. They didn't leave your equipment, they just haven't gotten around to taking it yet - the ship's probably fairly close by."

"Swell so why aren't they bothering with us?" Jack probed.

"How many in the party?" Jacob asked.

"Ah, well over 70 I guess," Daniel responded.

"Yeah, that'll keep them busy for a while," Jacob confirmed. "Look, once we disable the ability of this ship to cloak and run - the Frearazi are going to get a little aggressive, they're not exactly skilled warriors or anything - but watch yourselves."

Jack O'Neill nodded. "We'll keep our heads up. How long?"

"About another five minutes," Jacob replied. "Our people know what they're doing - so we'll go in first."

"O'Neill!" Teal'c yelled.

O'Neill barely had time to turn and reply, as a single death glider descended on their position.

"Oh well here's good news!" Jack exclaimed.

"Now what?" Daniel snapped.

Jack looked perplexed, moving away from the Tok'ra - Jackson instinctively following him. "Jacob, you and your people keep working on that ship. Teal'c?"

"A scout vessel O'Neill," the Jaffa told him, as O'Neill caught up to his position.

"Yeah, well they've got some pretty impressive fire power in those boxes. We're gonna need to buy a little time," Jack told him, heading towards a large grouping of containers.

"There will likely be a Goa'uld mothership orbiting this planet O'Neill, capable of launching a thousand gliders," Teal'c told him.

"Jack, Teal'c's right, we can't hold off that kind of attack," Daniel stated.

O'Neill turned sharply. "Then what do you suggest we do Daniel, head back through the Stargate and abandon Carter and the rest of our people?" he snapped.

Daniel stared at him, a hapless regard crossing his features. "I don't know...but.."

"But nothing, open the gate and tell Davis we're gonna need some back up," Jack ordered, already opening one of the crates. "Tell him to send whatever we've got available."

Daniel took off towards the DHD. Teal'c assisted O'Neill in unloading a SAM launcher.

"These babies will take a few of those things out," he told Teal'c, with a boyish glee in his eye.

"Jacob?" he yelled. "How much time?"

Jacob Carter was already making his way towards them. "About another two or three minutes," he declared as he reach them. "Got any more of those?"

"Oh yeah! Goa'ulds want a war...I think we'll give 'em one," Jack announced.

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"What the hell are they doing with our people?" Makepeace asked, impatiently pacing up and down near to the divide. "That's another three."

"I don't know Sir, but since they haven't returned the first group, it can't be anything good," Carter replied.

"We've got to do something," Major Collins stated. "We can't just sit here and let them take us one by one."

"What do you suggest Major?" Makepeace asked. "Since we have no weapons, and no way of even knowing what we're dealing with here, I'd say it's a pretty moot point wouldn't you?"

Collins took a deep breath, looking at Carter who looked away. "Well I guess if we're gonna die..."

"Major, can it... right now!" Makepeace snapped. "The SGC isn't going to let that happen - we've got some pretty powerful allies out there that might be able to help."

"The Colonel's right Billy, we just have to hang tight. Colonel O'Neill isn't going to give in without a fight!" Carter encouraged. "Just try to relax."

An enormous shock wave suddenly rocked the ship, knocking all those standing from their feet.

"What the hell?" Collins exclaimed.

Makepeace and Carter exchanged a glance. "Might be our rescue," Carter smiled.

"I hope you're right Major!" Makepeace responded, attempting to get to his feet.

****

"What the hell did they do that for?" O'Neill demanded, as the Goa'uld weapon struck the area close to them. The ship uncloaked almost as he spoke. "Whoa!" he uttered.

"Here's our chance. Jack, you and Teal'c attempt to hold off any glider attack, we'll attempt to get aboard that ship and locate your people," Jacob barked, already moving towards the stricken vessel.

"We'll keep the door open," Jack yelled, spinning in the direction of Jackson now. "Daniel?"

Jackson turned and looked at the Colonel, his focus too had been trained on the ship.

"Jack?" he shouted, beginning to head towards O'Neill. "I sent the message - Major Davis is assembling some teams now...he said about thirty minutes."

"Sweet, well let's hope we're out of here before that happens - Daniel can you fire one of these things?" O'Neill asked, indicating the SAM launcher he rested on his right shoulder.

"Um...you need to ask?" Daniel's dubious reply an answer in itself.

"Alright, look," Jack dropped the weapon from his shoulder, extending it towards Jackson. "This is a surface to air missile - you sight through this and push this to launch it....and Daniel, brace yourself and stay in a kneeling position," A smile sweeping O'Neill's face momentarily. "These babies kick real hard."

"Er..." Daniel muttered. "Jack, are you sure? I'm not exactly um..."

"Daniel!" Jack snapped. "You'll do okay, just point the damn thing at the glider and push the release...it's simple."

Jackson looked sceptically back at the Colonel. "If you say so!" he responded.

"Once you've released the thing - reload - just put one of those," he indicated to the small box containing the missiles. "In the tube and you're ready to go."

"Yeah right," Daniel looked apprehensively toward O'Neill. "Aim, press this and then reload?"

"Sounds about right," Jack replied, he offered Jackson a smile then. "Look Danny boy, we're running out of time and options here, if they launch gliders we're in trouble - do the math! So...you just became an expert!"

Daniel peered at O'Neill through his glasses, eyes squinting, a # distinct look of doubt rested upon his brow.

"Yeah I guess," he sighed.

O'Neill lent forward then, patting him on the shoulder. "I'm counting on you Daniel," he told him, then looked across at the Jaffa. " Teal'c, you cover our six," Jack ordered, he glanced around to see the Tok'ra using some kind of laser technology to burn their way into the Frearazi ship.

A second energy blast struck the earth closer to their position. Jack spun around, looking at Daniel. "Getting closer," he observed, looking up at the sky around them and seeing three gliders on an approaching attack formation.

"Here they come," he whooped.

Jackson span around, the weapon braced on his shoulder, pointing toward O'Neill - who looked mortified, gesturing wildly with his left hand.

"Daniel for crying out loud...up there! Not at me."

Daniel looked through the sight, targeting one of the gliders - pushing the button, the missile exploded from the tube, sending Jackson sprawling from his feet backwards forcefully onto the ground.

"Ow!" he cried out, looking up in time to see the missile strike home, the glider exploding spectacularly.

"Wow!" he gasped.

O'Neill, knelt not far from Jackson, allowed one of the gliders to move into his sights, releasing a second missile, glancing around at Jackson as he did so.

"Don't just lay there..." he vociferated. "Lock and load."

"What?" Jackson sat up rubbing his head. "Yeah I'm fine. Thanks!"

Teal'c accounted for the third glider as it banked left of them.

Jack made his way towards Daniel, still wary of the skies above them. "You okay?" He enquired, taking Jackson's outstretched hand and dragging him to his feet.

"Whoa...what a ride!" Daniel exclaimed.

"Didn't I tell you to kneel?" Jack lectured, his head inclining to the right then. "Teal'c - any idea which Snakehead that is?"

"The gliders resemble that of those used by the Goa'uld Nyerti!" Teal'c replied.

"Well, there's a switch," O'Neill commented. "Thought our old buddy Heru'ur had tracked us down again."

"Well she isn't exactly going to be happy to see us either!" Daniel pointed out.

"It is likely Daniel Jackson, that she will seek to destroy us," Teal'c stated.

"Why only three gliders?" Jack enquired of Teal'c. "If that was her intention why not get it over with?"

The noises of voices coming from the direction of the ship alerted O'Neill of Jacob's successful retrieval of the SGC personnel.

"Daniel, dial it up...let's get out of here before she decides that three wasn't enough," Jack ordered, shouldering his SAM launcher and heading towards the ship.

Colonel Makepeace smiled, shaking his head as he and O'Neill stopped.

"Makepeace, are our people ok?" Jack enquired, a nod at Carter laced with a smile.

"We lost six people Jack - what's with the missile launcher?" he enquired.

"We've got company, I want those civilians through the gate now. Get your people armed," Jack ordered.

Makepeace turned, locating Major Collins. "Alright, let's move - strap up and be prepared for multiple bogies."

"Carter. Get those people and yourself through the Gate," O'Neill ordered.

"Good to see you Sir," Carter remarked.

Jack smiled. "Nice to see you too Major...love to stay and chat...." he remarked, turning and looking up at the five incoming gliders. A heavy sigh. "But!"

"Yes Sir, right away Sir!" Carter remarked, saluting him.

Jack looked at her quizzically. "Carter, we need to talk!" he chided with a grin before he disappeared to assist with the incoming hostiles.

"Daniel, go with the others," Jack ordered.

"If it's all the same to you Jack...I'd rather help out here," Daniel argued.

"Damn it...we've got enough people now, Daniel do as I say," O'Neill spat at him as he raised the SAM launcher to his shoulder, kneeling quickly and firing off a missile.

Collins leapt sideways as the gliders fired their energy blasts, the earth spitting into the air around him - he turned in time to see Teal'c fall under a similar strike.

"Colonel," he yelled at Makepeace.

Makepeace spun around. "Ah damn it. Jack?" he bellowed. "O'Neill!"

Jack looked across at the Jaffa. "Damn it. Daniel help me!" he screamed at the archaeologist.

Jackson dropped the launcher and took off after O'Neill.

Jack knelt down beside his friend. "Teal'c?" he asked softly. "Talk to me buddy."

"O'Neill," Teal'c replied.

"Yeah Teal'c, it's me. You alright buddy?"

"Teal'c?" Jackson's tone as soft and concerned as O'Neill's.

"Jack we've got to get him through the Gate," Makepeace said.

Jack looked up at him. "Yeah, get some people over here now. Daniel, watch our six." He and Makepeace carefully lifted the Jaffa to his feet.

"Okay!" Daniel replied, looking around for the discarded weapon, locating it quickly.

Coburn and Collins continued to cover the party as Carter shepherded the last of the scientists through the gate.

Jacob Carter, two of his Tok'ra operatives in tow, came to the assistance of the Jaffa.

"We'll take him," Jacob said. "Watch our backs."

Jack reluctantly allowed the Tok'ra to take over. The launcher that was slung over his back pulled into position, he aimed at another incoming glider.

As the party carrying the wounded Jaffa disappeared through the gate, two gliders swooped in from behind it..firing toward the remaining marines and SG1 members.

Carter saw them coming, unarmed she screamed toward the Colonel.

Jack turned quickly. "Carter go...now!" he yelled.

Carter hesitated, a tortured expression masking her face. Finally, as O'Neill glared at her she turned and dived headlong through the event horizon.

"They're trying to cut us off from the gate!" Makepeace yelled.

Daniel began to move towards it, the explosions impacting all around him.

"Daniel get down," O'Neill yelled, the DHD exploded just as Jackson hit the deck.

"There's too many!" Collins cried out dropping his weapon.

Jack took a deep breath, they were surrounded. He raised the launcher above his head, indicating his willingness to surrender. Makepeace followed his lead.

Daniel Jackson sat up, shaking his head slowly, hands raised onto his head as the gliders hovered above them.

"Nice rescue Jack!" Makepeace remarked, a wry moment from the Marine, the irony of which was not lost on O'Neill.

"Yeah," he commented, with a heavy sigh. "Payback!"

*****

Major Paul Davis stood to attention as General Hammond entered the briefing room, flanked by Sgt. Siler and Major Harry Dawson.

Jacob Carter smiled, "Hello George," he greeted, his hand outstretched.

"Jacob - at ease," Hammond told the military personnel. "Alright, let's get started. Major Carter," he instructed. "Just what the hell happened to our people?"

"Sir, we lost six of the scientists aboard the alien space craft. Colonel O'Neill, Daniel, Colonel Makepeace, Major Coburn, Major Collins and Lt. Sands didn't make it back through the Stargate. The

last thing I saw before the Colonel ordered me to come through was the team being over run with death gliders. They're likely captured," She concluded.

"No casualties?" Hammond asked.

"I didn't see any Sir," Carter responded. "Aside from the whereabouts of the scientists, that is."

"It's not entirely hopeless George," Jacob said, his hands now clasped firmly together. "We have several operatives working within Nyerti's ranks - we should be getting a report any time."

"With all due respect Dad," Carter argued. "The Tok'ra haven't exactly been forthcoming with assistance in the past. Or information, for that matter."

Jacob Carter smiled. His patience with his daughter was endless, even at her most trying he admired her spirit.

"What can I tell you Sam, the Tok'ra are no different than our own Government. Need to know," he retorted.

"All right, that's something positive," Hammond agreed. "So now what, are we talking about days or hours here Jacob?"

"General Hammond, it is likely that she intends something," Teal'c stated, entering the briefing room, his left arm in a sling.

All those present focused on the Jaffa.

"Teal'c should you be out of bed?" Hammond asked.

"I am fine General Hammond, my symbiote has already begun the healing process," Teal'c acknowledged.

"Jacob, I don't need to tell you the importance of Colonel O'Neill and his team to the SGC. We would appreciate any assistance the Tok'ra can offer us," Hammond added. "For now, we'll send a MALP through the gate and try to assess the situation."

"Nyerti isn't stupid George, she'll have them on her ship - probably take them to her home world," Jacob informed him. "Which is a good, and a bad thing!"

"How so?" It was Major Davis who made the enquiry, feeling ever more a part of the team, his concern equalled that of his colleagues. "A Goa'uld home world is going to be a pretty tough place to crack."

"Firstly, we know where it is - which means we can get there by ship - Stargate is out, too heavily guarded, and secondly, we have some pretty heavy infiltration in that area too!"

"So we might be able to put some kind of rescue mission into action?" Major Davis asked.

"Whatever we do will be contingent on the situation. I'll return to the high council and see if there is any news," Selmak told them.

******

Jack O'Neill sat with his back against the far wall of the now familiar holding cell. He knew from experience that there was no way out, not without some pretty heavy artillery.

The Colonel deliberately kept an air of calm around him - the two younger officers, although both at a rank to denote their service to their respective regiments, had never encountered a situation of the like that they now faced. "Well this is one habit I could find easy to break," Jack expressed, "Daniel, remind me would you? Just how many of these damn things have we been aboard?"

"I've lost count, too many?" Jackson offered.

"Sounds about right," Jack retorted, keeping a constant, if not obvious, watch on his charges.

Collins shook his head. "One well placed nuke!" he spat. "That would be all it would take Sir."

"Got one of them?" O'Neill enquired.

"No Sir," Collins answered, anticipating the same barrage from the Colonel, that he would have expected to get from Makepeace.

Major Coburn observed the Colonel almost in awe.

"Damn! Never got one of those things when we need one!" A smile towards the tense looking Major Collins.

He turned his attention back to Jackson. "So, okay Daniel. Care to avail us of your endless knowledge on this particular Goa'uld?" he asked.

Jackson, leaning against the wall opposite his team leader smiled. "Ah, yeah," Daniel began, pushing his glasses against the bridge of his nose. "She doesn't like us very much - which probably means, er, let me see. Some torture, followed by the usual Goa'uld invite to join the party, or even killing us," Jackson surmised, with a shrug. "That aside, I think we'll be ok."

"Yeah I pretty much figured the same. Ok, let me do the math here..." Jack quipped, making a point of counting the SGC personnel. "Six, against...ooh a few thousand. I'll take those odds."

Colonel Makepeace frowned. "Do you ever take anything seriously?" he asked.

Jack tilted his head sideways, regarding Makepeace with an askant expression, that turned quickly into one of his treasured grimaces. A lopsided, half hearted smile suddenly sweeping his face.

"Nope," he concluded. "Well one thing actually. Getting our people home safe."

"That it? No grand plan of escape?" Makepeace enquired, getting to his feet and once again pacing the circumference of the cell.

Major James Coburn watched the exchange, he felt a strange mixture of fear and exhilaration, his experiences to date had been primarily babysitting jobs.

Although he recognised the danger, he couldn't help but find the experience was seemingly underlining the reasons he had joined the military in the first place.

The thought of doing battle with their most deadly enemy was almost intoxicating - and now, perhaps finally, he felt like a part of the team.

The adrenalin rush as they had been confronted with the death gliders had still to fade, he was almost too eager with the notion of once again confronting the Goa'uld.

"So what do you usually do?" he asked O'Neill, expecting the tales of dramatic escape and heroism to be forthcoming.

"Well," Jack began, pausing for a moment. "We don't usually do anything. Not that we plan!" he admitted. "Kind of just falls into place."

Coburn looked a little surprised, almost deflated. "Sir?" he questioned.

"That's true," Jackson agreed. "Fate generally takes a hand." "Fate?" Makepeace echoed. "We could use some of that right now."

O'Neill's vigil in assessing the state of mind of his charges had borne fruit. He had sensed that Coburn was still struggling to control his adrenalin rush from combat, and hoped his words had diffused the situation.

He couldn't have Coburn playing at heroics - Carter had already briefed him on Coburn's apparent interest in his activities.

"You know James," O'Neill said, deliberately using the man's first name. "In these situations I generally tend to kick back - take in the scenery, enjoy a little torture...that kind of thing," he continued.

"I say we kick some Goa'uld ass and bust our way out of here," Makepeace, ever the marine, insisted.

Jack O'Neill's peaceful looking expression turned to a grimace.

"Robert...can I talk to you for a minute?" O'Neill summoned the colonel to him.

The two men stood in direct opposition to each other - Makepeace's expression expectant.

"Look, let me bottom line it for you," O'Neill told the colonel. "We've got zero weapons, and since we're on a Goa'uld mothership, heading who knows where - we'll do absolutely squat."

"That's productive!" Makepeace noted, a frown crossing his rugged features. "But, it's your show, run it how you want. What about the death gliders on this thing? If we could get to them, that's a way out."

"Oh I can fly a death glider Robert, question is can the marines?" Jack enquired.

Makepeace shook his head. "Always left the flying to you boys!" He pointed out.

"Not a real good time for a flying lesson then hah?"

Another shake of the head. "Any other way off this ship?"

"Thor would be nice, not holding my breath though. We'll just bide our time, we're not dead yet, that's a start," O'Neill pointed out, observing Jackson as he came closer. "Coburn's a little hyper Makepeace, lets try to keep it calm," he advised.

"Affirmative," Makepeace agreed.

Jackson reached the two men then. "We'd better think of a way out of this."

"No, really?" O'Neill spat.

"You could try bargaining the knowledge of the Ancients?" Makepeace offered.

Jack and Daniel, who were glaring at each other, both looked in sheer amazement at the marine colonel.

"Are you nuts?" Jack began, Daniel quickly taking over.

"If they knew Jack had that knowledge, they'd make him a host for sure!" Daniel lectured. "They don't need to make deals or bargains Colonel Makepeace."

"All right!" Makepeace exclaimed in self-defence from the two mildly perplexed SG1 team members. "I get the point, so?"

"So what?" Jackson asked. "We'll think of a plan, we generally end up with one." He turned and looked at O'Neill. "Right?"

"Yeah, right. Heads up here we go!" Jack agreed, pointing out the two Jaffa who now entered the cell.

"You come with us!" One told O'Neill.

"See I knew you were gonna say that," Jack quipped, following the two Jaffa from the cell.

Daniel shook his head, kicking the floor petulantly. "Well, hands up if you've been in this situation before," he said, the words punctuated with a heavy sigh.

The three military men looked at him calmly, wondering if he was about to lose control.

Jackson turned, smiling at them. "Well - guess that's just me then. Any questions?" he enquired.

Makepeace looked away from him. "Just one," he said.

"And, that is?" Daniel asked, moving over to their position and kneeling in front of Makepeace.

"How the hell do we get off this ship?"

Daniel looked at him. "Colonel, if I knew that we wouldn't be having this conversation would we?"

Makepeace nodded. "Whatever you say Dr. Jackson, you're the expert!"

"Thank you. Which reminds me, do any of you remember anything about the Frearazi?"

*****

Nyerti did not have O'Neill taken to the grand locations generally preferred by the Goa'uld. Instead, he was led into a much smaller chamber, lavishly filled with silks and satins, resembling an Indian temple.

Nyerti sat on a bed of cushions, similarly fashioned. A quick sweep of the chamber revealed it to be empty but for the Goa'uld system lord.

"Enter O'Neill," she beckoned. "Leave us." Directed towards the Jaffa.

"Well can't say it's a pleasure," Jack commented.

"You are foolish O'Neill, to ever consider you could challenge us."

"Yeah I get that a lot," Jack retorted. "So what's the agenda - death, new Goa'uld to go?"

Nyerti smiled at him. "I have no wish to make you as a Goa'uld O'Neill, you are far more valuable to me as you are," she told him. "Sit, hear what I have to say before you answer. Then it may well be death."

"Sweet, well I'll stand if it's all the same to you," Jack replied.

"You will sit O'Neill. Do not pretend to be so obtuse as to your true value," Nyerti stated.

"Okay. I'll sit," Jack agreed.

"The Tau'ri are protected by the Asgard on your home planet. But here you are merely slaves. I could change this, what I offer you is an alliance."

Jack raised his eyebrows. "You're offering Earth an alliance with you? Oh please...you don't expect me to believe that do you?"

Nyerti moved closer to him, close enough to touch him. "The system lords are seeking you to destroy the Tau'ri, to infiltrate Earth and rule once more. This will be merely another Goa'uld colony - I do not offer an alliance with slaves O'Neill, I offer you the chance to live and become a god."

Jack looked mildly surprised by her statement. "Me?" he answered. "Ok look, I don't know what little scheme you've got running through that snaky mind of yours but I'm..."

"O'Neill, consider what I offer. If you serve me, your friends will live - if you do not." Her eyes glowed then, flashing anger and arrogance. "You will all die...a pity."

She reached forward then, touching his face. "Consider what I offer O'Neill," she encouraged.

Jack flinched at her touch, looking away from her momentarily. "You know, I've got to wonder what the hell you'd want with me?" he asked.

"Consider this O'Neill. At my side you can rule a galaxy, perhaps even spare the Tau'ri. At my side you will have power - without me, you are nothing."

"Excuse me?" Jack exclaimed. "At your side?" A look of amazement crossed his features, wide eyes regarding the Goa'uld system lord, slowly showing amusement. "At your side?" he said again.

Nyerti smiled at him. "I offer you your life and your freedom to take your place at my side. A true alliance O'Neill."

Jack sat back, his hands resting on his knees. "Well that's just fascinating Nyerti, but forgive me if I'm just a little suspicious of your motives!"

"I will let you into a secret O'Neill, between us," Nyerti told him. "Whilst we are gods, we also require companionship, I find the company of humans far more stimulating than that of Goa'uld."

She stroked his face once again, causing O'Neill to swallow hard and flinch once more.

"Yeah, you know, um, that's really nice. But..."

"Consider it O'Neill, if you decide you do not wish to enter into such an alliance then I will have you killed quickly, as a show of my mercy," Nyerti imparted.

"Gee thanks, I'll give it some thought," Jack answered. "Listen, whilst I'm thinking is there any chance of some food, or something?"

"Of course, I will have it brought to you and your companions," she replied, another smile.

****

Daniel was quickly on his feet as O'Neill entered. "Well, this is a switch," Jack said.

"What happened?" Daniel enquired. "You don't look tortured?"

"Oh but that comes later, the worst kind," he replied, turning and watching the door close behind him. "Ok, here's the deal. If I form an alliance with Nyerti, you guys get to live, and I become a god!" Jack told them, with no hint of amusement.

"What?" Makepeace demanded. "An alliance with a Goa'uld? President would never go for it."

"Oh, you don't get it," Jack looked across at Makepeace. "She doesn't want an alliance with Earth - with me, and I don't think alliance is quite the right word."

"She wants to.." Daniel asked incredulously. "Um."

"Oh yeah, she wants to um, alright," Jack completed the sentence.

"Yuk!" Daniel said. "Er, Jack what exactly did you tell her?"

"Daniel for crying out loud!" Jack vociferated. "What do you think?"

Coburn and Collins exchanged looks. "Sir?"

"I told her I'd think about it," Jack replied. "Look, I don't know what scheme she's planning, but if it keeps us alive long enough to get out of here, then I'm thinking I'll go along with it."

"But she's going to make you into a Goa'uld Jack, you can't!" Daniel argued.

"No Danny, she's not. She wants me, not a Goa'uld," O'Neill responded, a moment of reflection, the familiar grimace as he considered it. "Which is a little suspicious, and kind of weird. But hey!"

"So, then I guess you go along with it," Daniel suggested.

"Are you crazy?" Makepeace enquired. "How do you know she won't make you a Goa'uld anyway?"

"I don't," Jack replied. "But, if I say no, she could do that anyway, along with all of you. Let's just play it her way for a while and see what happens shall we?"

"How do we know you're not already a Goa'uld?" Collins enquired.

Jack looked heavenwards. "Collins, if I were a Goa'uld we wouldn't be having this conversation, now would we?"

"How can we trust him?" Collins insisted. "He could be a Goa'uld."

"If Jack were a Goa'uld he'd hardly come back in here and pretend to be Jack, you know nothing more than he could tell Nyerti - right?" Daniel argued.

"Makepeace, your man suffering a little paranoia there?" Jack asked, pausing long enough to give Makepeace one of those standard O'Neill ironic glances.

"Look Billy, since we don't have an instant check for Goa'uld detector, you're just gonna have to take my word for it....hey there's a point - we need one of them!"

Daniel smiled at him. "Well I don't think that will happen anytime soon."

He indicated to O'Neill that he wanted to speak to him privately, his eyes flicking to his left.

"Are you going to be okay with this?" Daniel asked, once the two men were secluded enough from the others not to be heard.

"What do you want me to say to that?" Jack enquired.

"Well depending on how long this takes," Daniel told him. "You might have to um..well, you know." His expression almost apologetic.

Jack took a deep breath. "What can I tell you Danny boy, can I fake it? Sure I can do that - will I like it?" he laughed then. "Hey! How bad can it be - right?"

Both men looked dubiously at one another. "Yeah," Jack said finally. "I know."

******

Jacob Carter returned through the wormhole accompanied by two other Tok'ra. Sam Carter and Teal'c waited in the gateroom.

"Any news?" she asked immediately.

"Well there's good and bad news," Jacob imparted. "They're still alive - in fact from what we understand they're being treated fairly well."

Carter looked concerned now. "And the bad news?" she asked.

Jacob studied her, discerning the obvious concern she felt for the safety of the other SG1 team members, but detecting something a little more intense.

"It seems that Nyerti has had spies looking for your Colonel O'Neill," Selmak now spoke. "Apparently, she's taken a shine to him."

"What?" Carter exclaimed. "Exactly what does that mean?"

"From what we can gather, she intends keep him as a mate," Selmak stated.

"A mate," Carter repeated. "As in?"

"Exactly as it sounds Major Carter," Selmak replied.

Teal'c raised a considered eyebrow. "Indeed. It has often been the case with Goa'uld. Apophis himself keeps several women in a harem."

"A harem?" Carter snapped.

Jacob looked at his daughter. "Sam, until we can find a way to get the Colonel and the others out, it might be his safest option."

"The Colonel would never do that, he hates the Goa'uld," Sam argued, passionate in her tone, her eyes betraying her feelings..

"You are mistaken Major Carter," Selmak responded, freeing his host from having to say the obvious. "Colonel O'Neill is a survivor, he will do whatever it takes."

Carter drew in a deep breath, attempting to contain her emotions. "Yeah, you're right. I'm, just...er...we should brief General Hammond," she said at length.

"Indeed," Teal'c responded, his expression, whilst sympathetic, appearing to indicate to Carter that she was allowing those emotions to become too obvious.

****

The food O'Neill had requested was brought in on several trays, the entire group regarded it with an air of suspicion.

They sat together in the furthest corner of the cell. "It might be drugged?" Makepeace noted.

"Yep! Could be laced with any number of Goa'uld mind bending stuff," Jack concluded. "So - I guess we need a taster."

He winced at the others. "I guess I'm it," he accepted.

"Oh this is ridiculous!" Daniel observed, taking something resembling fruit from one of the dishes and biting into it.

Jack looked at Makepeace, who did likewise.

"It's not bad," Daniel confirmed. "Anyway, I've been thinking we might find out a little more of Goa'uld society whilst we're here..." he paused, regarding the disdainful expression of Jack O'Neill.

"Daniel, you never cease to amaze me with your enquiring mind. But in this case - it's kind of a little more than I'd like to know!" he told the archaeologist. "Anyway, I still don't trust her motives, she's up to something."

Makepeace grinned then, O'Neill looked perplexed. "What?" he asked.

"Well I was just thinking Jack, for your sake I hope you don't have to find out too many times!"

O'Neill shook his head. "Well I'm glad you find the whole thing so funny."

"Hey O'Neill philosophy at work. What's that you said Jack - keep it light?" Makepeace chuckled.

"Oh yeah, it's hilarious!" Jack responded.

The door opened then, two Jaffa guards stood either side of a hooded figure.

"You will please come with me," the male voice said.

Daniel looked at Jack. "He means all of us right?"

"Oh yeah," Jack replied.

The five men were led towards the Pel'tac, the control room of the Cheops vessel. Nyerti stood there, surrounded by serving women and Jaffa.

"O'Neill, come," she told him, holding out her hand.

Jack looked sideways at Daniel. "Rings?" he asked.

"Looks like it, bye."

"Vale meus amicus," Jack said, a smile crossing his face.

Daniel smiled back at him. "Not this time!" he replied.

"Glad to see you're keeping up," he told Jackson, as he walked toward the Goa'uld.

"I want you to see my world," she told him, as the rings enveloped them.

Daniel looked at Makepeace. "Guess we're here," he pointed out.

"Yeah, and it ain't exactly Kansas anymore," Makepeace retorted.

"Our turn," Daniel commented, as he was pushed forward by the Jaffa.

"Did you catch that smile?" Collins asked Coburn.

"Hah?" Coburn enquired, as the rings covered them.

 ****

Finding themselves in what resembled the inside of an ancient Indian civilisation, the four men looked around.

Daniel's eyes widening. "Wow!" he exclaimed. "This is amazing."

"Fascinating." Makepeace remarked. "Been meaning to visit India for a while - just didn't know I'd have to travel so far."

"You will follow me, I shall take you to your quarters," the hooded Goa'uld said.

Daniel turned and looked curiously at the disguised figure. "Um, sure," he replied.

*****

Nyerti led O'Neill through the palatial setting of her home, her hand still grasping his, something that made him very uncomfortable.

"I have lived here for centuries. There are seventeen planets within this system, each one serves me," she told him.

"That's nice," Jack commented, unsure of exactly what to say to such a statement.

"In time, O'Neill they will worship you too," she said, pausing now, turning to face him - her eyes staring up into his.

O'Neill felt even more uncomfortable suddenly, struggling with a way to somehow regain control of the situation.

"So er, you wanted that decision?" he asked, moving back slightly, enough to ensure that she was forced to free his hand.

"You are agreeable?" Nyerti enquired.

"No choice really was there?" Jack stated. "But I do have one condition. assuming I get to make that?"

"I am prepared to hear your condition," Nyerti agreed, her head tilted back now, she moved closer to O'Neill once more.

Jack looked surprised at her accession, looking down into her eyes, catching his thoughts quickly lest she notice how deeply he despised her.

"Okay...I'll stay here and do as you ask, contingent on your letting the others go back to Earth through the Stargate?" His features contorted, doubting she would even hear of such a request.

Nyerti regarded him, her eyes seemed to look deeply into his, Jack almost instinctively soften his gaze.

"I will let three of your people go. Daniel Jackson will remain. I have no need of the others," she said.

Jack sighed. He had intended to secure the safety of all his companions, but his surprise at her acceding to his request caught him off balance.

"I get to send them through myself?" He pushed now, wondering how far he could. "Why not, Daniel?"

"Understand this O'Neill, in time you will come to worship me, as all others do. Until then, I shall keep Dr. Jackson around as a reminder to you of what it is you risk, should you retract your promise, your pledge to me," she explained in a cold and callous tone, well fashioned for the purpose of such an illustration.

"Ok, I get it, so Daniel's the one who gets threatened with death every time I say no - don't agree?" Jack enquired. "Or forget to tell you how honoured I am to be your slave?"

"I do not want a slave," Nyerti roared at him, her eyes glowing wildly now with an unbridled fury. "I want a mate."

Jack watched her with a sense of loathing, something he caught very quickly.

"Okay, but the others get to leave?" he asked, keeping his tone level.

"Very well," Nyerti conceded. "I will have my Jaffa take care of it."

"Thank you. Now would be good?"

"Your impatience suits you well, O'Neill," Nyerti told him, an amusement entering her eyes. "Jaffa Kree - Shel, noc Chapp'ai," she instructed.

Nyerti's statuesque first prime stood close by, towering over O'Neill.

He bowed his head.

"Daniel Jackson, will also teach you our dialect O'Neill," she told him. "Now go with the Jaffa, O'Neill, he will see that my instructions are carried out, then you will return here."

"Yeah, er, listen. Since we're going to be, um," he paused then, unsure of the right word to use. A smile. "It's Jack," he told her.

She nodded a hint of pleasure at this request for familiarity exactly what O'Neill had wanted.

*****

"Jamal, stay here," Jack ordered the Jaffa, who had instantly revealed his name at the Colonel's request.

"Hi guys," he announced, a smile sweeping across his face at the confused expressions of his companions.

"Jamal?" Daniel repeated, his eyebrows raised slightly.

Jack looked at Daniel, inclining his head to the right. "Yep! First Prime," he leaned closer to Daniel. "You were right!" he said.

Daniel looked askant, his brow creasing down as he wondered exactly what O'Neill referred to, hoping he didn't mean host.

"Makepeace, you, Collins and Coburn are getting out of here," Jack told them finally.

"What?" Makepeace sounded surprised.

Daniel, and the others looked curious toward O'Neill.

"Look, we don't have time for this. Go back, brief Hammond and let him know where we are," O'Neill ordered. "Now all I've got to worry about is Daniel."

"She agreed?" Daniel was almost dumbstruck.

O'Neill nodded. "Yeahsureyabetcha!" he told Jackson, "I'll tell you later."

"What exactly did my being right have to do with this?" Jackson enquired.

"The Latin farewell," Jack pointed out. "Ain't gonna happen, but I did try," he insisted.

"Oh. Thanks, and I'm staying why?" Daniel probed.

"Insurance Danny boy. She doesn't want me taking off, or attempting it - she figures if she keeps you here, then I'll be forced to stay," O'Neill explained.

As the group approached the Stargate, Daniel kept his attention on the mysterious figure that had led them from Nyerti's ship, something about this Goa'uld seemed familiar.

"Daniel, dial it up," Jack instructed.

Still under the watchful gaze of the first prime Jamal, the Goa'uld who had kept his identity hidden and six other Jaffa guards, who deployed to prevent O'Neill and Jackson following their companions back to Earth.

"Don't worry Jack," Makepeace said. "We'll find a way to save your ass!"

"Well judging by your more recent accomplishments, I won't be holding my breath. Give my regards to the General," Jack replied.

The two SG1 team members turned from the gate, as their colleagues and the event horizon disappeared.

*****

Colonel Makepeace sat opposite Sam Carter in the briefing room. Despite the obvious urgency, General Hammond had insisted that the men be checked out and allowed to shower before de-briefing.

"Basically sir, she agreed to let us go on Colonel O'Neill's agreement to be her consort," Makepeace explained. "She appears to have decided that Jack was worth the deal!"

Carter moved uneasily in her chair. Makepeace's gaze was on her, and she didn't feel in control of her emotions. She looked away from him, toward Teal'c, who offered her one of his vague attempts at a smile.

"Um, well," Sam began. "She has to be up to something, she despises us. Why would she suddenly want the Colonel? It just doesn't add up Sir."

"Doctor Jackson has a theory on that," Major Collins stated, looking toward General Hammond for his sanction to continue.

"Go on Major," Hammond encouraged.

"Well Sir, he claimed that the Goa'uld experiences an almost ecstatic state from the release of hormones and the endorphins, or more specifically, the Beta-endorphins," Collins explained. "Apparently the host transfers these chemical releases to the symbiote during a sexual, um experience."

"Major," Carter interrupted. "Those endorphins are released through light exercise. That just doesn't add up."

"Maybe Major," Collins countered. "But, the host's natural sexual attraction, according to Dr. Jackson, acts as a powerful stimuli - hence I guess, Colonel O'Neill being able to dictate to her the terms of his cession."

General Hammond looked slightly perplexed now. He shook his head, watching the brief exchanges between Major Davis, Colonel Makepeace and Major Carter - the looks and the expressions, similar to his own.

"Are you saying," he asked, with an air of bemusement. "That the host was attracted to Colonel O'Neill, and that attraction was powerful enough to influence the Goa'uld?"

"Sir," Sam Carter offered. "According to Daniel's reports on Hathor, the um, physical involvement seemed to have a powerful effect on the Goa'uld. I just don't see how that would induce a Goa'uld, like Nyerti, to actively pursue an involvement to this extent."

"She did let us go because Jack asked her to," Makepeace pointed out. "She could have killed us, or made us hosts. With all due respect to what you think you know Major, she isn't exactly acting very Goa'uld like!"

Hammond shook his head, a smile crossing his face then.

"Colonel Makepeace, how did Colonel O'Neill appear to be taking this?" he enquired.

"Well Sir, he wasn't exactly thrilled with the idea, but he seemed in control," Makepeace responded.

"And Dr. Jackson?"

"Colonel O'Neill's main concern appeared to be our welfare, and Dr. Jackson's, Sir. The Goa'uld appeared to perceive this as a way of keeping Colonel O'Neill subservient," Makepeace stated.

"Er, Sir, I might be wrong," Major Collins began. "But I'd say this Goa'uld's love sick."

"Love sick?" Hammond responded, unable to contain his amusement. "Jacob?"

Jacob Carter tried to control his own urge to laugh. Selmak told him that even a confused Goa'uld was a dangerous creature.

"Anything's possible George, Nyerti is probably the greatest advocate of wiping out Earth. Everything she's done up to now is totally out of character, I believe that Colonel O'Neill is taking the right course of action in playing along with her, the question is, how do we get he, and Dr. Jackson back?" Jacob told him.

The entire briefing room was suddenly silent - from Major Davis, to Major Coburn - Teal'c to Carter, any amusement at the idea of a Goa'uld wanting Jack O'Neill, dulled at the real danger he and Daniel Jackson still faced.

"Ok, brevity aside, let's get to work on that people!" Hammond ordered.

******

Daniel sat in the gardens of the palace, the sun coming up behind him. He had begun to explore the grounds almost as soon as he'd awoken from a broken and disturbed slumber.

His attention was firmly fixed on some of the footstones which depicted Goa'uld dialect, etched into them. Although worn, Daniel was able to make out some of the text.

He took a deep breath, nothing of interest. His mind wondering back to that which had been the reason for his tormented attempts at sleep - he'd been surprised to find no guard preventing him from exploring, but his mind still returned back to O'Neill.

Daniel had more reason to loathe the Goa'uld than anyone on Earth, he knew O'Neill felt the same way. To actually, maybe, probably - have such close contact with such a creature, whilst in full control of your faculties, it made Jackson shudder to think about it.

Two feet appeared in his line of sight then, a smile crossing his face as he recognised USAF issue boots.

"Jack," he greeted, wondering if he should mention anything about O'Neill's night.

"Morning Danny," Jack replied brightly. "Sleep well?"

"Um, no actually. You?" Daniel asked, his tone apprehensive.

O'Neill shrugged, his eyebrows drawn down, sitting next to Jackson on the stone wall.

"Ah - no!" he replied pointedly.

"Jack, you didn't?" Daniel's surprised expression, animating his face, becoming almost stricken at the thought.

"Oh yeah, I did," Jack replied. "And, don't look at me like that, you think I had a choice?" He cringed then, shaking almost.

"I'm sorry, it's just, yuk!" Daniel exclaimed.

"Hey! You didn't have to kiss the snake!" Jack complained.

"You kissed her?" Daniel enquired, his face screwing up in horror.

"Daniel for crying out loud, it took every ounce of imagination I had, please don't make me think about it!" Jack vociferated.

Daniel looked horrified, turning his head away from O'Neill, taking a deep breath.

"I'm sorry, I know this isn't easy for you." Daniel said softly. "It's just so hard for me too."

Jack looked askant then, "What is?"

"Knowing that you're going through that to save my life," Daniel confessed, a look of sorrow sweeping his brow. "And before you say anything, don't ok?"

"I wasn't gonna argue," Jack confirmed, staring off into the distance now. "But, I'm not a saint Daniel."

"What are you saying?" Daniel probed, an expression of concern now dwelling easily on his face.

"I mean, I've been around," Jack stated, a deliberate attempt at flippancy. "One woman's the same as the next." He turned then to see Daniel's frown, an ironic smile rising in his eyes.

"You're not buying this are you?" he asked, his right hand now reaching Daniel's shoulder, an affectionate grasp, shaking the archaeologist gently. "Look Danny, I'm handling it ok?"

"But, Jack," Daniel sighed heavily. "Handling it is one thing, what if..."

Jack's hand shot up in the archaeologist's face then. "Ah! Don't say it," he warned. "We are getting out of here."

Jackson attempted a smile, but his face was unable to comply. He felt a deep sense of loathing for the Goa'uld and an almost despaired state for his friend's predicament.

"Danny look," Jack said, "I know you feel bad, and I would too..." His voice trailed off then, as Nyerti appeared in the distance.

Daniel averted his gaze, and stared at the Goa'uld. A knot of hatred in his throat, he could barely speak.

"Well she looks..."

"Yeahsureyabetcha," Jack chimed. "She's a happy camper." He lifted his hand and waved at her. "I, on the other hand..."

"Yeah," Daniel acknowledged. "Need a bath in antibiotics!"

Jack looked at Daniel with a perplexed expression. "Does acid sound too extreme?" His features contorting into a mock smile.

"Er...no!" Daniel concluded. "It sounds about right actually."

"Here she comes," Jack groaned. "Smile, or something."

"Or something?" Daniel grimaced.

"Daniel Jackson, I am surprised to find you here. I had asked that you be shown the entire palace," Nyerti spoke with her host's voice.

"Um, well, I haven't exactly seen anybody around," Daniel began. "Which is a little um, surprising."

"How so?" Nyerti enquired, a pleasant English voice, sounding almost innocent as she spoke.

"Well, um...I figured you'd be inclined to keep us confined," Daniel said.

"On the contrary Daniel, I would like you to feel at home...as this will be your new home for a while at least," she replied, her hand reaching across and stroking the side of Jack's face.

He took a deep breath, holding it to prevent his revulsion, and the instinct to move away from her touch.

"I have matters of which I need to attend," she told Jack, a smile sweet enough, ordinarily to melt a man's heart, yet this smile made Jack's blood run cold.

"Yeah, ok," he responded, managing a smile, albeit one forced and without genuine intent.

Daniel watched her go, shaking his head. "This is so wrong! Jack what are we going to do?"

Jack closed his eyes. "Daniel, I know, what can we do?" he asked, frustration building inside him that he found hard to control.

He stood now, flexing his hands, his fingers closing and opening.

"Let's find somewhere to eat...don't suppose they have a burger bar?" he quipped, searching within his own levity for some relief from that frustration.

"Er, no. I doubt they have a franchise this far out," Daniel replied, sensing Jack's situation and feelings were worsening. "Coffee?"

"Doubt it, we do have our ration packs," Jack remarked as he led Daniel towards the palace.

"Yeah, good point, don't suppose she'd let us send out for any either," Jackson added.

******

Teal'c sat in Carter's lab as she and Major Davis discussed ideas on a possible rescue attempt, along with Jacob Carter and Colonel Makepeace offering input.

"Ok!" Carter surmised. "Let's suppose her intention is a genuine attraction to the Colonel, that could be as fatal as anything else she might have planned."

"From a perspective of woman scorned, I'd have to agree," Major Davis commented, looking quizzically at the others when they regarded him with an air of disdain.

"What?" Davis asked.

"Yeah subtle," Makepeace noted. "So, let's get back to the problem, we can't go through the Stargate - the lay of the land is way too restricted - the gate's positioning is perfect for an ambush, even if the MALP showed nothing."

"I agree," Jacob said. "And to land a ship, we'd probably have to go in cloaked and some distance from her palace."

"She has quite an army of Jaffa too," Makepeace pointed out.

"Ok, so what do we do - we're not really progressing here are we?" Carter complained, her frustration incorporated into her expression.

"Major Carter, I believe that our only option is to wait on the report of the Tok'ra agent inside the facility," Selmak stated.

"How long Jacob Carter?" Teal'c asked.

"Hard to say," Jacob replied. "Should be within the next 48 hours or so."

"48 hours?" Sam snapped. "Dad, we don't know that they'll last that long."

"Major I don't think getting irate is going to help the situation," Colonel Makepeace lectured, "General Carter may be your father, but show him the respect his rank deserves."

Major Davis drew in breath sharply. "Ok, if we can just get back to deciding exactly how we are going to deploy."

"Well that pretty much depends on the Tok'ra intel Major," Makepeace said.

"Exactly what the hell are we doing here then?" Major Davis snapped.

"All right people," Jacob interceded. "Let's keep a lid on it. Colonel, we're here looking at alternatives to direct action - since, in the absence of any new information, you are our only source of intelligence, I suggest we get down to it."

Makepeace conceded, shrugging. "Ok, let's go back over what I remember," he suggested.

******

Jamal greeted O'Neill and Daniel as they entered the palace.

"I am to assist you," Jamal told the two SG1 men. "How may I do this?"

"Er, getting us the hell out of here would help," Jack said, "Kidding, we need the food ration pouches from our kit, can you help with that?"

"I can, you will follow me," Jamal responded.

"Of course we will," Daniel said, grinning at Jack. "So, no sense of humour then?"

"It's a Jaffa thing," Jack pointed out, "so, Jamal, how long have you um, worked here?"

"I have been in the service of Nyerti for over one hundred years," the Jaffa responded.

"Whoa, you barely look a day over eighty!"

The Jaffa paused then, looking at O'Neill. "This is humour?" he enquired, with a puzzled expression.

Jack and Daniel stopped in their tracks. "Ah, yeah," Jack responded.

"I have heard much of the Tau'ri," Jamal informed them, beginning to walk once more.

Jack and Daniel exchanged glances. "Yeah, we're a popular topic just now," Daniel told him. "Mostly the one that ends in death."

Jamal brought them to a room that obviously served as the kitchens, the great iron stoves glowing, yet without an obvious source.

"Wonder if they've heard of a percolator?" Jack enquired.

Daniel raised his eyes heavenwards. "I doubt it, probably have to boil water the old fashioned way."

"Wait here, I will bring you that which you seek," Jamal instructed.

"Nice fella," Jack remarked. "Wonder if I could bat 1000 on turning first primes?"

Daniel shrugged, "Who knows, he seems pretty affable," he intoned. "Guess we're in the kitchen."

"I guess?" Jack agreed

"Forgive me for saying this," Jackson began apprehensively, "but um, she seems kind of keen on you, and since you're obviously communicating."

"Spit it out Danny?" Jack insisted.

"Have you considered asking for anything else?" he continued, wandering around the room, away from O'Neill.

"Like?" Jack probed, following Jackson now, his curiosity peaked.

"Well, a guided tour of a Goa'uld mothership and how it works?" Daniel suggested, his tone vague and distracted.

"Danny, you know I know you well enough to know that that wasn't what you were thinking, right?" Jack remonstrated "So?" His hands gesturing for Jackson to be more direct.

"Alright...ah, ok. I guess what I'm wondering is, since she is a 'Queen' and reproduces...I expect..." Daniel fell over the words.

"Jesus!" Jack exclaimed. "No Daniel, she's not procreating loads of little Goa'ulds."

Jack looked angry for a moment, almost as if the notion of such a scenario offended him to the core. "Let me spell it out for you," he told Jackson. "In big, plain, painful words. Her intention here is purely gratification - I'm something to fulfil a whim, a need...a damn lab rat for her to experiment with...clear enough?"

O'Neill's anger flashing in normally calm, soft brown eyes.

"Jack I'm sorry, I never..."

"No Daniel, you never do," Jack spat at the archaeologist. "Don't you think this is just about as humiliating as it gets?" he enquired.

Daniel took a deep breath. "You're right. I'm just...well, having a hard time." He offered a smile to his friend then, moving closer to him - hands raised in a mock surrender. "I'll shut up."

O'Neill tried to smile back, "Yeah, I'm finding it a little difficult too...maybe we should stay off that particular subject," he advised, struggling with the anger he still found difficult to contain.

Daniel felt the same frustration, he wanted to continue, to talk it through - maybe in some way help, but it seemed everything he said just made his friend feel worse.

Jamal's reappearance with their rations brought the moment to a speedy conclusion, for which Daniel felt some sense of relief.

****

Nyerti stood before Cronos. "You have two of the people from the Tau'ri?" he demanded.

"I attempted to destroy them, they escaped through the Chapp'ai before this was possible," Nyerti lied.

"You are sure?" Cronos asked. "It would not be the first time you had attempted to deceive me!"

"I have no reason to lie, Cronos. You summoned me here for this?" her tone and attitude, deliberately supercilious.

"Apophis is becoming troublesome. We will need to consider a strategy for his eventual defeat. I summoned you here to discuss this matter, but know this - if you are keeping something from me, there will be a heavy price to pay," Cronos warned.

Nyerti regarded him. "When you have something you truly wish to discuss, I will be ready," she snapped, turning and departing for her own ship.

*****

Daniel had drained the last drop of coffee from his cup. "I wonder what they're doing at the SGC?" he asked O'Neill.

Jack raised his eyebrows, considering it. "Probably doing the same things we're doing, drinking coffee and trying to figure out how the hell to get us out of here!" he observed.

"Yeah, well I don't see how..." Daniel began, seeing O'Neill scowl he stopped instantly. "Well, I'm sorry if I'm being Mister Negative Jack, it just seems a little hopeless right now."

"Daniel, whilst I'm still breathing, I don't intend to ever give up." He stood now. "I suggest you do the same."

There was an air of despondency about O'Neill that Daniel felt strongly. He just couldn't find the right words, or attitude to express at that moment. He stared at Jack as the man turned away from him, walking out of Daniel's room.

Jackson's head dropped. "Damn...not exactly helping are you Danny boy," he said aloud to himself.

"Daniel Jackson?"

Jackson looked up, he recognised the voice vaguely, a familiar Goa'uld tone.

"Er, can I help you?" he asked, once more looking upon the cloaked Goa'uld.

The figure stepped forward, dropping the hood back away from his face.

"Martouf!" Daniel exclaimed.

******

Teal'c sat quietly, listening to Carter talk about some of her experiences at the Pentagon. He had made it his business to remain as close to her as possible, he felt his support was as important right now as it had ever been.

"You know I really wanted to work on this project," she continued. "I guess I never felt like I really belonged anywhere this much before."

"Indeed," Teal'c said. "As do I."

"Teal'c!" Sam exclaimed suddenly, loud enough to make the Jaffa raise an eyebrow in response. "What do you really think? Is she gonna make the Colonel a host?"

Teal'c reflected on the question, a deep breath. "I believe that this Goa'uld is one of the most devious and cunning I have ever known. Yet her actions, releasing Colonel Makepeace and his men, do not seem in keeping with her usual behaviour."

Carter sighed heavily. "So you think there's hope?" she asked.

"Indeed, I believe there is always hope. Colonel O'Neill is a skilled and cunning warrior, he will find a way to out smart this Goa'uld," Teal'c observed.

"With all due respect Teal'c, the Colonel may be smart, but I think it might take a little more than his usual escapology talents," Carter replied. "I just hope he's alright."

Teal'c smiled, "I believe that Daniel Jackson and Colonel O'Neill will succeed in freeing themselves from this predicament, with or without the help of the SGC and the Tok'ra."

"I wish I had your faith Teal'c," Sam said. "I really do - I just don't see how."

"Then you are looking with your heart, and not with your head," Teal'c stated. "The heart never sees very much Major Carter, merely emotions."

Sam averted her gaze from the Jaffa then, a smile crossing her lips. "Can't get much past you can I?" she acknowledged.

Teal'c sat quietly once more, a warm smile crossing his face.

******

"How?" Daniel asked; standing and approaching Martouf. "You were dead, I saw it with my own eyes," he paused then, "But then again so was Apophis...Sarcophagus?"

"The Tok'ra high council decided I was far more valuable to them alive. They have the Sarcophagus for just such an emergency," Martouf imparted. "But this is not why I am here."

"Yeah, yeah. I know that, it's just great to see you. I must tell Jack, we'd better find him." Daniel's excitement forcing him to his feet quickly.

"No, you can not tell Colonel O'Neill of this - he is compromised, should Nyerti use any kind of Goa'uld mind control he will surely reveal my presence," Martouf warned.

"Look Martouf, Jack isn't compromised, a little pissed off maybe, but he's Jack!" Daniel snapped

"Daniel, I understand your feelings for Colonel O'Neill, and your loyalty. But should my presence here become compromised, I would be of no assistance to you. It must remain a secret for now," the Tok'ra explained.

"Great, so what do you intend to do?" Daniel asked, feeling a little animosity toward the Tok'ra for his attitude.

Martouf sat next to Jackson, who, slightly deflated had slumped back down.

"Has Nyerti revealed her purpose to Colonel O'Neill?" he enquired.

"Just that she wants him for a...er, companion, or something," Daniel told him.

"This is true, she wishes to keep Colonel O'Neill here - but she intends to let you go Daniel, only after she has created a virus that will wipe out Earth, and sends you back with it." Martouf told him.

"Oh," Daniel muttered, his eyes expanding wide open, sending his eyebrows towards his hairline. "That's more like the Goa'uld we've come to love!"

"Her top scientists are working on it now, thus far they have been unable to hide the virus well enough to prevent it's immediate detection," Martouf explained.

"And, Jack?" The archaeologist asked.

"From what I have learned, and this is, forgive me - almost extraordinary. She intends to seduce him into falling in love with her, apparently her host has had this effect - her visit to the SGC and the contact with the Colonel stimulated the host to an extent that she has been unable to prevent." Martouf looked apologetic, raising his hood as he heard sounds of someone approaching. "I must go now, I will keep you informed as much as I can."

"No wait, um, what am I supposed to tell Jack?" Daniel asked.

Martouf turned and looked at Jackson. "Tell him nothing, Daniel," he said, before turning and leaving Jackson to ponder the conversation.

"Hey Danny, consorting with the enemy?" Jack asked, as he passed Martouf leaving.

"Hi, Jack. Um, no - I guess he's just doing his job, making sure I'm well taken care of," Daniel lied, he fidgeted then, unhappy about the deception.

"Sweet, nice to be taken care of," Jack commented. "So I've been taking a look around, we can pretty much go anywhere we want inside these walls, but outside is a no no."

"Yeah, I figured as much. Jack listen, about this morning," Daniel began, trying desperately to find the words.

"Forget it Daniel, I mean it. I know it's kinda hard on you too, I just thought I could handle this stuff a little more than I can," Jack explained. "And we don't wanna go all around the houses on them emotions."

"No, I get that, I really do. I was just wondering if there was anything I could, do, or say, or...I'm not very good at this am I?" Daniel confessed. "It's like I want to say something to help, and everything I say is useless."

"Ya think!" Jack replied. "Let's bottom line it, get it out into the open shall we?" he decided.

"If it helps," Daniel responded. "Then yeah, lets do that."

Jack walked over to Daniel now, sitting opposite him, a troubled expression crossing his face.

"You know I'm not real good with the sharing the feelings thing, right?" he stated. "Well this has got to be possibly, definitely," he corrected. "The worst case scenario for me, so here goes, and try not to interrupt me hah?"

"Yeah, I'll er, sure," Daniel agreed, his fullest attention now focused on O'Neill.

Jack looked down, searching for the words that might offer him the ability to explain his emotions.

"I'm feeling kind of," he struggled, hands wringing together. "I feel used Daniel, like a damn gigolo or something - dirty, that's a good word - disgusted...another damn fine word."

"Jack?" Daniel's empathy etched clearly in his face, in his eyes - his hands reaching across and taking O'Neill's firmly into their grasp. "I don't know what to say, or suggest that might help to stop you feeling that way." Jackson too struggled to find the meaning with which express the feelings of inadequacy he felt. "I mean, with Hathor, just knowing I'd done that made me sick to my stomach," he told the Colonel. "But I wasn't aware of what I was doing at the time, not like this, not the way you are....I feel so angry."

Jack sat up fully, his hands slipping away from Jackson's grasp. "Yeah, I know...just saying it don't make it feel any better, but there it is...said."

"You know," Daniel began, a heavy sigh escaping him as he did so. "In every instance, since we started doing this, I knew there was always a chance we'd get to a point where, luck, or whatever you want to call it would run out...I just don't think this is that time...all I can say is thank you."

Daniel turned his head away, unable to look into Jack's eyes, fearful of his emotions overwhelming him.

"Thank you for sacrificing your dignity Jack," he concluded, unable to stop those emotions now, the tears welling in his eyes.

Jack closed his eyes for a moment, unsure of what to say. The angst, the anger, suddenly swept away.

"Daniel, if I ever had any of that stuff in the first place, ya think I'd waste it on you?" he quipped, digging deep into his strength to prevent emotions taking over.

"Jack shut up!" Daniel remarked, quickly gaining control now.

"Yeah okay," Jack acknowledged, venturing a smile.

"Can I just say something without you making fun of me?" Daniel enquired, his eyes still wet from the tears he'd fought so hard to prevent.

"Something funny?" Jack asked, keeping a lid firmly on his feelings now.

Daniel regarded the Colonel with disdain. "You know, you can be really trying at times," he said. "But for all the times that you've been there for me.."

"Hey it's my job," Jack quipped, "I know what you're gonna say Daniel, and I love you too okay?"

Daniel's smile lit up his whole face. "Thank you, yes I was going to say that, and add; I've never met anyone so, arrogant, self centred, sarcastic bull-headed....I'd er, go on but I'm running out of nice things to say about you."

Jack grinned back at him, "You know you missed a couple of my finer points there Daniel, but hey, what can I say, me in a nutshell."

Daniel felt a sudden overwhelming feeling of guilt - with everything at stake, he couldn't stop himself from seeking redemption

"Jack, look I'm not supposed to tell you this, but we're in more trouble here than you thought we were," Daniel said it quickly, as if this would be an excuse for his confession.

"What d'you mean?" Jack's tone now concerned.

"The Goa'uld we've seen, or not, the one who doesn't show his face? Isn't a Goa'uld Jack, it's Martouf, and he gave me some pretty awful information," Daniel confessed.

"Marty?" Jack said. "You're kidding me?"

"No, look! Apparently Nyerti intends to keep you here until you fall in love with her,"

Jack's eyebrows shot up. "That is not gonna happen!" he spat. "And?"

"Infect me with some kind of virus to destroy earth, Jack the point is, things just got a little more complicated," Daniel told him.

"Why shouldn't you be telling me this Daniel?" Jack enquired, his eyes flashing anger.

Daniel looked apprehensively at his companion, "He, er thought you'd been compromised."

The Colonel's face drained of expression, he stared blankly back at Jackson. "And what about you Daniel?" he asked. "Do you think I'm compromised?"

Daniel shook his head slowly, a deep sense of disloyalty filling his mind. He looked slightly pathetic then, loathing himself for not instantly sharing the information, something which he had chastised O'Neill for in the past.

"No of course not, or I wouldn't be telling you," he replied.

Jack took a deep breath. "Okay, let's look at that shall we?" he asked. "I've been in here for long enough for you to have told me instantly Daniel, why the wait?"

"Jack look, I wanted to tell you okay? I'm sorry. I feel like I was betraying our friendship. I feel like a damn school boy now, Jack please don't make this feel any worse," Daniel implored.

"Yeah ok, you're right. Sorry. Well its about time for a little action don't ya think!" Jack suggested. "Time I put these feelings to good use."

"What are you gonna do?" Daniel sounded concerned.

"Kill the freakin' Goa'uld, that's what I'm gonna do Daniel," Jack exploded with rage now, his voice a little louder than even he had wanted it.

He looked at Jackson, a grimace. "Think anyone heard that?" he asked.

Daniel's eyes slid sideways, then heavenwards. "Well nothing like yelling at the top of your lungs to get their attention, but no - I think we're pretty much alone here," he confirmed. "Er, how exactly does killing Nyerti help?"

Jack considered that point. "Er...it doesn't actually, but it would make me feel a hell of a lot better."

"Yeah, but that's kind of moot right now, can you kill her later?" Daniel asked, keeping his eyes firmly on the door now.

Jack shrugged. "Yeah, okay," he agreed, "But I think it's time the Goa'uld and I had a little chat."

"Ah, is that a good idea?" Daniel enquired, standing now and approaching O'Neill.

"Look Danny boy, I've had being a Goa'uld play thing right up to here." His hand lifted to his forehead. "What can I tell you, she ain't gonna like it, but if its a quick death I'll take it over an eternity of her!"

Both men stopped suddenly, hearing a loud sound, seemingly coming from above them.

"What the hell is that?" Jack wondered aloud.

"Sound's like some sort of spaceship to me," Daniel told him.

The door opened then, Jamal stood before them. "You must come with me," he instructed. "Cronos is here."

"Ah, that's just great," Jack snapped, "So where are we going exactly?"

"We must conceal your presence here, come," the Jaffa ordered.

The two SGC men followed the Jaffa into the lower depths of the palace, a secret panel hid a doorway.

"In here, and be quiet, he must not find you here, he will kill you," Jamal told them.

"Well this just got better," Daniel observed.

"Ya think!" Jack replied.

*****

Martouf watched Cronos and his aides sweep through the palace, Nyerti, who had arrived just before him, watched without comment.

"I told you, you would find nothing," she spat as Cronos, after his unsuccessful search.

"Now we can discuss Apophis," Cronos told her.

"Very well," Nyerti agreed.

Her eyes flicked to her first prime, who bowed his head.

She smiled contentedly now. "He has amassed a mighty army, we shall need to infiltrate and begin the destruction from within," she told Cronos.

*****

Daniel sat on one of the many large cushions scattered around the room both men now found themselves in.

"Why would she need to hide us from Cronos?" Daniel asked.

"Obviously doesn't look good to have us around, might show some kind of weakness I guess," Jack offered. "Which could work in our favour, or not."

"You know, this whole thing is very surreal," Daniel stated, "Why let Makepeace go, and keep me here to infect Earth, I mean why not just keep all of us and make us into hosts, it would have been a damn cite quicker."

"I guess doing that might have ruined any chance she had of my acquiescence. Does that sound arrogant?" Jack asked awkwardly.

"Er, yeah," Daniel agreed. "But wholly justifiable in the circumstances, I mean, it's fascinating that despite the fact that she loathes us, she can't control something as simple as emotions. A Goa'uld probably doesn't even understand the concept of love, it's almost like the very nature of her being is challenged."

Jack raised his eyes heavenwards, illustrated with a heavy protracted sigh.

"Daniel, can we just stay focused on the problem in hand without the psych evaluation?" Jack enquired, almost as if the notion pained him.

"I'm just saying, that the host must be having a profound effect Jack," Daniel intoned, "And maybe that could work in our favour."

"How?" O'Neill stopped pacing, something that had happened almost involuntarily as Daniel had launched into his latest theory.

"Well, if she thought that you were in danger from Cronos, or anyone else, she might be inclined to letting you go...us, go!" Daniel stressed. "Jack it might be worth a try?"

O'Neill looked almost defeated then, his face wore an expression of cession - eyes seemed to become empty, he looked down at his feet, away from Jackson.

"Daniel, it took just about all I could find in me to do that..." His arms gesticulating madly now, almost out of control. "Thing, the last time and you expect me to do it again?"

"Jack I know, but it might be the only way," Daniel's voice trailed off then. "I'm sorry, meus amicus," he said.

O'Neill looked up sharply then, toward Jackson. "Meus amicus?" he challenged, his eyes narrowing at Jackson now, creased with anger. "I wouldn't ask that of you Daniel, it's not fair," he protested.

"And, er, normally I wouldn't ask it of you Jack, but we have to be realistic here."

"We!" Jack vociferated, "No Daniel, we don't, I do. For crying out loud."

O'Neill spun away now, slamming his fist into the far wall. "Ouch!"

Daniel regarded him with an air of sympathy. "Look I know what I'm asking, I do, I understand how you feel."

Jack turned now, looking at Daniel. "No Daniel, you really don't, you're asking me to share something of myself with a Goa'uld, something that I've always believed to be sacred."

Jackson stared back at his friend, shocked by the passion and anger that he displayed.

"I'm not like you Daniel, I don't have those easy to reach feelings," Jack stopped, looking at the bemused expression on Jackson's face. "Fine," he snapped. "I'll do it, I'll play up to the freakin' snake and see if that gets us anywhere."

Daniel took a deep breath, unsure of what to say, unused to seeing Jack in quite such a human light, he sat down once more to contemplate his feelings. He knew he couldn't do it, knew he was pushing O'Neill into a place he didn't want to go, but he felt somehow, deep inside, that it might be their only way of escaping.

"Maybe I'm wrong," he said at length. "I don't know, maybe we should try something else."

He looked across at O'Neill, the disloyalty clouding his head tumultuously. "Do you see another way out of this?"

O'Neill shook his head. "Not right now I don't no," he replied. "But make no mistake Daniel I'm working on it!"

The door open then, Jamal once more appearing before them.

"You are free to leave this place now, Cronos has departed," he told them.

"Well it's about time," Jack said, leading Daniel from the room.

Nyerti waited for them as they climbed the last steps. Jack offered another of his forced smiles.

"Miss me?" he asked.

Nyerti seemed surprised by what she saw as a genuine greeting, confused by O'Neill's apparent pleasure to see her. Her natural ability to discern his disgust in her presence easily shadowed by the joy the host felt.

"Daniel, we shall see you later," Nyerti told him, taking Jack's hand and leading him off.

Jack's pained expression looking back over his shoulder towards Daniel, made the archaeologist shudder.

A heavy sigh escaped him, as he wandered back alone towards the gardens. Martouf joined him.

"I have gotten a message through to the high council," Martouf told Jackson.

"Really, that's interesting, so?" Daniel's tone and body language smacked of animosity once more.

"Are you angry with me Daniel?" Martouf enquired.

"Whatever gave you that idea?" Daniel mocked, "You know, first the Tok'ra send us on fools errands, then you ask me to betray my best friend, well I'm happy to disappoint you but that just didn't happen."

"I see, you have told Colonel O'Neill of my presence here?" Martouf asked.

"Yep, and another thing, since the Tok'ra, you, have spies here - why weren't we informed of her intention? You seem to have known about the intent to kidnap Jack and bring him here?" Daniel challenged, his pent up frustration and anger spilling into the pernicious assault on Martouf.

"Daniel, I was unable to send information to the Tok'ra before now," Martouf assured him.

"Yeah, right," Daniel sneered. "Why don't I believe you?"

Martouf took a deep breath, Lantesh allowed his anger to spill out.

"Your attitude is unacceptable Daniel, we have give all the assistance we were able to," he spat.

"You do what suits you, Lantesh, you're just like our Government, bent on getting your own way and using other people to do it, you don't care who gets hurt," Daniel reacted with a bitterness the Tok'ra recognised.

"I understand your feelings, but this is a war and you are a very naive man whose passion is his weakness. O'Neill was expendable, as are you," he vociferated, "As am I."

"No, Lantesh, no one is expendable. Maybe you believe that but I certainly don't. Now if you'll excuse me I think I'll go anywhere but here," Jackson's eyes met the Tok'ra's, a deep seated anger glowing from the archaeologist. "Bye!"

******

"You surprise me Jack," Nyerti told him, now that they were alone in her chambers.

"Really why?" O'Neill replied, hoping against hope that the conversation might prevent any other activity.

"You are becoming fond of me?" she enquired, lying down on the large gathered cushions.

"Well, you know. Actually I wanted to talk to you about maybe letting Daniel go?" O'Neill ventured. "I mean he's just in the way here right?"

Nyerti looked suddenly angered. "You try to deceive me with your smile, yet your words speak the truth."

"Yeah, well words have a habit of doing that. Look, lets be brutally honest here shall we. I don't want to be here - trapped into some emotional entanglement that wasn't my idea," Jack stated, thinking as quickly as he could to bend those words to sound positive. "But since I am, and you've decided that I have to stay here, let's cut the bull...tell me what you want and I'll tell you if I can do that."

"I want you, as an equal, together we will defeats the system lords and reign over an entire galaxy," Nyerti boasted.

"Now see, I don't want to reign over an entire galaxy," Jack replied, "I have enough trouble controlling the dog...know what I mean?"

"I see," Nyerti told him, her eyes narrowed now. "What do you want?"

"To go home, see this could never work. No matter how bad you want it, you're not strong enough to over throw Cronos, and I'm not hiding under the sheets every time he decides to come calling. They'll kill me, and possibly you if they find out I'm here right?" Jack enquired. "Which kind of sucks. I've heard of the angry father with a shot gun, but this is a Goa'uld with an army, for crying out loud."

"I will never let you go Jack, you will never understand or recognise it. But I am able to give you everything you need," Nyerti declared.

"What like my own Goa'uld? Or maybe a swift execution when you get tired of having someone that doesn't worship you? Come on Nyerti, be honest, we're just not compatible," Jack argued.

"You are wrong Jack," she stood now, allowing her clothing to drop from her shoulders, standing naked in front of him. "We are very compatible, you and I. Daniel Jackson will not be allowed to leave, nor will you. You will honour us with your presence, now!" She demanded.

Jack looked directly into her eyes, avoiding her nudity. "And if I refuse?" he enquired.

"Daniel, will be made into a host," Nyerti replied, a wicked smile covering her face. "I am sure he will not enjoy such a fate, are you?"

Jack closed his eyes, turning his head away from her.

"Damn it." He cursed under his breath, a heavy sigh. His hands began under buttoning his shirt, his eyes filled with hatred.

"Why should I do this?" he asked her, looking up with all the loathing his features could express. "You want someone to fake it with you, is that so important?"

"No Jack, I want you to feel as I feel," she told him. "And in time you will."

"No, I don't think so, in fact I can't do this," Jack protested.

"A pity that you will not even try, a pity too for Daniel Jackson," Nyerti threatened.

Jack looked at her furiously. "Sure, fine - you want something cold and empty with no heart, here it is!"

Nyerti reclined on the cushions.

*****

Daniel sat alone in his room, he'd tried to close his eyes several times, but each time he found his mind going back over his pressurising O'Neill into something that he obviously found difficult - then found himself pondering what O'Neill had in mind, would he?

A deep sigh. "Yeah, he would," Daniel said at length. "Meus amicus."

Jack sat in the middle of the gardens, the heat from the sun burning into his back, yet it was still very early in the morning.

His face rested in the palms of his hands. He'd been unable to sleep, his mind racing with ideas on how to escape his current predicament, were he alone such was the depth of his hatred for the Goa'uld that he would have preferred death, a quick ending, anything but the intimacy he'd been subjected to. The constant threat from Nyerti to Daniel's safety added to the weight of responsibility he felt.

She had been less demanding on him, her gentility, soft speech, and tenderness toward him had served to make him resent her more. He had responded with a cold, almost brutal show of his hatred, but that only seemed to increase the pleasure she derived from him.

He shivered, even in the heat, his resentment and anger superseded any feelings of self-pity. He reasoned that he had no choice, but that reason felt empty.

"Colonel O'Neill?" Martouf enquired, approaching him cautiously.

Jack looked up, instantly recognising the intruder. He was pleased to see Martouf alive, but this pleasure was fuelled by an intense feeling of irony, here was perhaps one of only two Tok'ra he had allowed himself to trust, yet his insistence that Daniel keep his presence from O'Neill had left a feeling of betrayal.

"Well if it isn't Special Agent Marty. Got any more surprises for me?" Jack asked, his voice laced with disdain.

"I realise how my request must have appeared Colonel, but under the circumstances I have little choice but to be cautious," the Tok'ra tried to explain. "I fear Dr. Jackson's misunderstandings of my intentions have created a problem."

Jack regarded him, a smile crossing his face. "Danny get a little peeved with you?" he enquired, the smile becoming a grin. "He's an emotional guy Martouf, doesn't see things in black and white, lets his heart rule his head from time, to time."

"He was quite upset with what he saw as betrayal Colonel, I must stress that I in no way...."

"Marty, just let it go. Daniel's not exactly happy with the situation here. He just took it out on you. But I gotta say, this earth - Tok'ra alliance thing is a crock," he commented.

"A crock?" Martouf questioned.

"Let's just say you guys don't exactly inspire confidence," O'Neill told him, a grimace then. "In fact you've kind of given me a lot of reason not to trust you anymore Marty, which is a real shame...and, er, great to see you back from the dead by the way."

"Thank you Colonel, it is indeed good to see you've maintained your spirit also," Martouf stressed. "I do understand your trepidation, the council often perplexes its own members, but I assure you that I will do whatever is in my power to do in the future."

"Yeah, that's very nice Marty," Jack responded. He glanced off into the distance, his thoughts still plagued with the memories of yet another experience he'd prefer to forget.

"You must be unsure of your feelings Colonel," Martouf ventured.

"Excuse me?" Jack asked, hearing the question without perceiving the intent.

"Forgive me if I am prying into private thoughts, but I believe I understand how you must be feeling," The Tok'ra told him. "Knowing of your hatred and distrust of the Goa'uld, to share something so intimate must be almost unbearable for you."

"Yeah, whatever," Jack retorted, he had no intention of sharing his feelings. "So got any bright ideas on how the hell we get out of here?"

"I have contacted the Tok'ra high council..." Martouf begun, instantly pausing as he saw the statuesque figure of Jamal approaching.

"Hey Jamal," Jack greeted. "Having trouble sleeping too?"

The Jaffa bowed his head, first to Jack then to Martouf.

"I am to inform you that Nyerti, our Queen, wishes you to join her for breakfast," Jamal told him.

Jack raised his eyes heavenwards, he looked at Martouf. "Well, nice chat - maybe later you can fill me in on the planetary activities around here...wouldn't want to get bored."

Martouf bowed his head. "Yes my lord," Lantesh replied.

Jack looked at him curiously, "Sweet, Jamal, shall we?" He gestured for the Jaffa to lead the way, looking back at the Tok'ra with a smile.

"Kinda odd isn't it?" Jack asked of Jamal, as the pair walked towards Nyerti's chambers.

"My lord?" Jamal enquired.

"Yeah that, what's with that?"

"Our Queen has spoken, you are to be regarded with the rank of her mate. Once you are joined by the ritual of Samskarasteh, we shall be led by you in battle," Jamal told him.

Jack stopped. "What, the hell is Samska...whatever?" he enquired.

"The formal oaths and vows of a union my lord," Jamal informed him. "Now we must go your Queen awaits."

"My Queen," Jack snapped. "Can wait, when is all this supposed to happen?"

"At the coming of the next full moon," Jamal imparted. "There will be several days of celebrations in honour of your union."

"And the coming of the next full moon is?" Jack insisted, refusing to move from the spot.

"In the next week, why do you question of things you already know?" Jamal enquired.

"Now, see that's where you're wrong, I haven't got a clue. Marriage?" Jack remonstrated, "Does all that stuff mean marriage, two people married?"

"Indeed my lord, has your Queen not informed you of this?" Jamal looked slightly concerned.

"No, she kinda left that out," Jack told him, "Don't worry Jamal, I'm not gonna tell her you spoilt the surprise," he added. "Please lead on."

*****

Jacob sat opposite General Hammond in his office. "All right Jacob, what was so pressing it couldn't wait for the briefing?" Hammond demanded.

"A new development has been passed on from our spies working within Nyerti's palace," Jacob told him. "A very interesting development."

"Go on," Hammond encouraged.

"Well, it appears that Nyerti, or her host - one of them, is so besotted with Colonel O'Neill that she intends to form a complete union with him - which roughly translated means she wants to make him her permanent companion, or mate - marriage," Jacob explained.

"Marriage?" Hammond exclaimed.

"Er, yeah. Apparently, according to our operative this would mean that Colonel O'Neill would have her fullest trust and confidence, although I'm a little sceptical about that aspect of it myself," Jacob added.

"This is ridiculous," Hammond stated. "Have you got a plan to free Colonel O'Neill and Dr. Jackson?"

"We're working on that George, believe me. But in the mean time, depending on how Jack feels about it, this alliance could be used to great effect," Jacob insisted. "We've never known anything like this, for a Goa'uld of her power and rank to be besotted to this extent is frankly, well it's unheard of."

"Jacob, I don't care how the Tok'ra or anyone else perceives this. I know Jack O'Neill and this will likely be the hardest assignment he's ever undertaken, I can't see him agreeing to go along with this - now find a way to get our people out, or we'll be forced to do it the hard way!" Hammond vociferated.

"I'll put it to the council George, but I have to tell you, if Jack O'Neill can control her armies for long enough, I think we'd be in with a real chance of his commanding them in her absence," Selmak now spoke.

Hammond regarded the Tok'ra with a certain amount of suspicion.

"I'll tell you what, Jacob, you get the okay from Colonel O'Neill and I will be willing to allow him to attempt the mission, without extraction," Hammond agreed.

"George, I can assure you that no matter what your previous experiences with the Tok'ra have been, Selmak and I are not here to deceive you, you have my word on that," Jacob told him.

"Your word has always been good enough for me Jacob," Hammond acknowledged. "Let's just hope that it carries the same weight with the Tok'ra council!"

*****

"Good morning Jack," Nyerti greeted as the Colonel was led into her chambers.

A huge spread of exotic looking food laid out before her on a table.

"Morning," Jack replied. "And what's on the torture menu for today?" he grinned at her then.

"Torture?" she enquired, a smile sweeping across her face. "Tell me Jack, is it really so hard for you to allow yourself to see me, instead of caressing that hatred you have for my race?"

"Do I really have to answer that?" Jack asked, sitting opposite her.

"If you were able to see past your hatred and find a way to understand Jack, you would see that we merely exist as do you!" Nyerti attempted to remain as pleasant as she could in the face of Jack's obvious dislike and distrust.

"Now see, that's where you're wrong," Jack retorted, "We don't do what you do, we don't take hosts, enslave entire civilizations and wipe out others."

"You know nothing of Goa'uld history O'Neill," she spat her eyes glowing. "And we know all about your history, you judge too quickly."

Jack held his hands up. "Alright, lets not argue over breakfast. Feels like a damn marriage already!" he commented.

Nyerti smiled then, almost immediately calm. "Yes, it does," she responded, passing him some food, "And are you so inclined?"

"Toward marriage?" Jack asked. "Been there, done that, wasn't really my forte!"

"Perhaps the wrong woman Jack, perhaps the wrong circumstances," she offered.

"Yeah maybe?" Jack replied. "So you offering me marriage?" he ventured, breaking one of the bread-like rolls she had passed him.

"And if I were?" she enquired brightly, "Would such a joining be so abhorrent to you?"

Jack sighed, a smile crossing his face. "You know, this is all very surreal, I'm having a conversation with a woman," he raised his hand and gestured towards her, " A Goa'uld who tried to kill me, what the hell do you think?"

"I think that if you allowed yourself to learn more of me, you would see things from a very different prospective," Nyerti told him.

Another heavy sigh escaped O'Neill's lips. "Yeah I guess," he replied, drinking what looked suspiciously like coffee, and finding it to be exactly that.

"Consider this, Jack, I am an individual. It hasn't been easy for me, I am not treated as an equal by other system lords because I am a woman - they consider the males to be a far superior race," she explained.

"Sweet, sexism isn't just a human problem then." Jack noted, an askant expression crossing his features. "Can I ask you something?"

"Indeed, I would be happy to answer any questions," Nyerti replied.

"Do you need a man to get respect, and wouldn't it frowned upon if it was me?" he asked

"You are very astute Jack, I do need you for other reasons, but mostly I desire you," she replied honestly.

"Well, what do I say to that?" Jack responded, "Cronos isn't exactly going to like this is he?"

"None of the system lords can challenge you if you are my consort Jack, this is my purpose in wishing you to consider what I offer."

Jack nodded. "Yeah, sure. I'll give it some thought," he replied.

Nyerti looked surprised. "You will?" she asked, "This is not another one of your tricks?"

Jack almost spat out his food. "My tricks?" he laughed. "You're the one with the tricks."

"Forgive me, this is humour?" Nyerti asked.

Jack looked at her curiously then. "Um, you said something I found funny, yes," he replied.

"I see, perhaps you might teach me such things," she asked.

O'Neill sat back, swallowing some more coffee, regarding Nyerti. "You're serious?" he asked. "You can't learn humour, it just happens."

Nyerti smiled across at him, a heavy sigh. "Then we shall learn how to make this happen together," she told him.

Jack looked slightly confused then, a genuine smile rose on his face, something he hadn't planned.

****

Daniel wrote in the small notepad that Jamal had brought from his kit, listing the events of the past couple of days. He was concerned that he hadn't seen Jack all morning, but had kept himself occupied never the less.

Martouf had shown him most of the palace, places that he would find of some historic interest mostly, but now he sat alone in the picturesque gardens making notes.

"Daniel?" Jack's voice, he looked up and saw O'Neill approaching him.

"Jack, where the hell have you been?" Daniel enquired.

"Taking a guided tour of one of the motherships, like you suggested Daniel," Jack told him, sitting down next to him.

"You're kidding?" Daniel sounded excited, "How, why?"

"Well, get this," Jack explained, "She finally comes clean and admits that she needs a male beside her to be taken seriously - guess who she picks?"

"That's crazy, the Goa'uld aren't going to be afraid of you?" Daniel protested.

"Ya think!" Jack retorted, "But she has this plan, apparently there's a rule that says, if I'm her consort, they can't kill me - so."

"So, oh no don't tell me?" Daniel looked bemused.

"Oh yeah...here we go again!" Jack told him.

"So what happened last night?" Daniel asked, with an air of trepidation.

Jack sighed, looking off into the distance. "Well, I er," he began.

"Again?" Daniel looked sympathetically at O'Neill. "Jack, I'm sorry."

"Don't be, wasn't any easier, just getting used to the idea now is all," he told Jackson.

"Used to it?" Daniel snapped. "Jack, you've got to stop letting her manipulate you."

"How do I do that Daniel?" Jack remonstrated, standing up and walking away from the archaeologist.

Daniel put his notepad down and followed, grasping O'Neill by the shoulder to prevent him from leaving.

"What?" he asked.

Jack turned and looked at him, the serious expression masking his face enough to tell Jackson he'd once again leapt in before giving his statement enough thought.

"No choice!" O'Neill said, "I say no, there are consequences Daniel, big ugly consequences. Something I'm not prepared to do."

"Okay, and they are?" Daniel asked, already knowing the answers.

"They are things I'm not prepared to discuss with you!" Jack spat. "Not today, not now, not tomorrow - you got that?"

A fury rose in his eyes that he could barely control. "You know, just try to remember Daniel that we're fighting a war here - and sometimes there are some pretty awful things we have to do, put this at number one and drop it!"

"Drop it?" Daniel's own fury and frustration leaping to the fore now too. "It's me isn't it?" He turned away, arms raised slapping down on his sides. "You won't tell me, because you don't want me to feel responsible for you abasing yourself...that's it isn't it?"

O'Neill stood looking at Jackson now, the wretchedness showing in his face, in the way he had allowed his shoulders to drop slightly.

"Make you feel any better does it?" he asked Jackson, "To know you're causing me all this damn discomfort Daniel?"

"No!" Jackson replied. "No, it doesn't make me feel any better, but at least I know why."

"What did you think Daniel?" Jack asked him. "Did you think I was prepared to do that for myself? Well hope you feel just great knowing it, because it sure as hell doesn't make me feel any better to put it back on you!"

"Jack?" Daniel's tone calmer now.

"What?" O'Neill snapped.

"I'm sorry, you were trying to protect me...again, and..." he took a deep breath, "You know it's probably better if we're both suffering."

"Really, why?" Jack asked.

"I'd feel worse if it was just you. Kind of left out," Daniel told him, with a smile on his face.

Jack pushed Daniel playfully. "Yeah, I know Daniel. You do tortured well," he told the archaeologist.

"So what now?" Daniel asked, following O'Neill back to the wall both men had sat on earlier.

"I told Marty, Marty is passing it on...he thinks it might be an idea to play along...personally I think I know what the outcome is gonna be from that!" Jack told him.

"They wouldn't?" Daniel's tone as surprised as the expression he wore.

"Oh yeah, they would. Controlling her armies, you bet they would," Jack told him.

"You know, I hate the Tok'ra don't you?" Daniel stated.

"I kinda got that feeling, Marty told me you let him have it," Jack replied.

"Yeah I did," Daniel acknowledged this with a smile that lit up his face.

Jack returned the smile, pushing Jackson again. "You're picking up all my bad habits Daniel," he told him.

"Telling the truth is one habit of yours I like," Jackson replied. "So, do I get to be best man?" he asked, a rueful expression now adorning his face.

Jack looked at him, a smile widening into a grin.

"Well I guess, but only by default," Jack stated, "Lack of choices and all that."

Daniel grinned back. "Thanks!"

The two men sat side by side in the gardens of the palace, silently - both contemplating their own thoughts and feelings.

"You know, this isn't such a bad place really," Jack told Daniel, breaking the silence.

"Yeah, pretty pleasant I guess," Daniel agreed.

"If it was Goa'uld-less." Jack added.

"Anyway, what do I call you? My Lord? Mr. Nyerti?" Daniel enquired playfully.

"Wonder what the penalty is for killing the wife in Goa'uld town?" Jack responded.

Both men began laughing then, Jack slapping Daniel on the back.

"I'm so glad you're here," he told the archaeologist.

"I'm not," Daniel replied.

"Ah, come on Daniel, who else could I share these tender moments with?" Jack complained.

"Well, I guess," Daniel retorted.

"Yeahsureyabetcha," O'Neill replied, and the two men fell silent once more.

*****

General Hammond sat at the head of the table in the briefing room, the anxious expressions of several marines, Major Coburn, and Major Davis - as well as the two remaining SG1 team members, waiting expectantly for him to begin the briefing.

"Jacob has put a proposition to Colonel O'Neill via the Tok'ra operative on Nyerti's home planet - Ishkarata," Hammond began, "In short, it appears that Nyerti now wishes to extend the 'alliance' to a more permanent union, which we might as well call marriage; to Colonel O'Neill, which according to Jacob will give the Colonel full control of her armies."

There was a collective, if silent, amazement running through the minds of each of the SGC personnel that sat around the table, Makepeace shook his head, Carter looked almost distraught, whilst Teal'c raised both eyebrows in unison and swallowed hard.

"He wants to do this?" Hammond asked, directing his comment towards the Tok'ra liaison.

Jacob Carter nodded. "Our operative took the suggestion to him, just as you asked George and the Colonel pretty much said he'd already figured we'd make the suggestion. He's decided to go ahead."

Colonel Makepeace shook his head once more. "With all due respect Sir, I don't think this is a good idea."

"Colonel?" Hammond enquired.

"If the other Goa'uld system lords get wind of what's going on, they might decide to make Jack their prime target," Makepeace argued, turning more toward the General in his seat now. "And since when do we trust a Goa'uld Sir?"

"I believe Colonel Makepeace is correct," Teal'c concurred. "Colonel O'Neill has proven himself to be a courageous and clever adversary with limited resources - with the power of Goa'uld technology and Nyerti's armies, they would see him as a very powerful foe indeed."

"I agree with Teal'c, but, they also can't risk starting wars between the system lords with Apophis still lurking in the back ground like an ever present menace," Jacob looked from Hammond to Makepeace, to Teal'c - avoiding his daughter's gaze intentionally.

"Teal'c?" Hammond questioned, "Do you believe they'd risk such a war?"

"Jacob Carter may be right, however I am not comfortable with this mission," he stated.

"Sir, Teal'c is right, if we allow this to continue indefinitely the Colonel and Daniel might get caught up in the system lords war with Apophis, it's way too dangerous Sir," Carter argued.

"If Colonel O'Neill feels he can pull it off Jacob, then I have no objections. However, I want to be kept informed on his progress every step of the way," Hammond said. "Dismissed!"

Hammond paused, looking at the collective frowns of disapproving faces he saw before him, he added. "I don't like it either, but let's make the most of a bad situation."

Colonel Makepeace stared across at Major Davis. "Nothing you can say might sway him I suppose?" He enquired.

"Colonel, I'm just a liaison here, I keep the Joint Chiefs of Staff apprised. I don't get the luxury of making decisions," Davis responded.

"That's a pity Major, because as far as I'm concerned this whole mess just got one hell of a lot worse!" Makepeace remarked, a sneer of disapproval forming across his face.

"Look Colonel, I agree, but it's not up to us is it?" Major Davis pointed out.

"Looks like Colonel O'Neill has made the decision," Major Coburn stated, a heavy sigh. "Personally, if anyone could pull it off, I'd put my dollar on the Colonel."

"What makes you think the Colonel isn't under some kind of Goa'uld mind control?" Makepeace remarked.

"There are only three types - two of which the Colonel is immune to, and the third is the Zatarc variety, if she intended to use that - she would have done so already and sent Colonel O'Neill back here on a suicide mission," Selmak stated.

Carter looked at her father. "Gee thanks, I feel a whole lot better knowing that," she snapped.

Jacob Carter regarded his daughter; a smile was all he could offer.

*****

O'Neill stood in the centre of Nyerti's chambers, her servants waiting on him to remove his clothing, holding Goa'uld attire. His hands up in self-defence, he waved his shirt about as he spoke.

"I don't intend to lose my identity here," Jack remonstrated, "Now they can wash the damn clothes but I want my uniform back, intact, in fact - why can't you let me send Daniel back through the Stargate to get some clean clothes, a whole bunch of them?"

Nyerti turned sharply. "I am not that foolish Jack," she told him.

"And I'm not wearing some damn Goa'uld clothing either, now you said you wanted me. Well that means me, not some damn outfit I'd feel uncomfortable in! Look I give you my word - Daniel isn't going to stay on Earth if he knows you're prepared to kill me right? Or make me into some damn host, send Jamal with him if you want."

He approached her now, placing his hands on her shoulders. "Nyerti for crying out loud will you just trust me, please?" he implored, using his most sincere gaze.

Nyerti regarded him for a moment, turning back to her first prime. "Bring Daniel Jackson to us," she ordered.

"Thank you!" Jack replied.

Daniel appeared almost as soon as Jamal had left. In keeping with the plans he and Jack had made, he had softened his attitude towards Nyerti.

"What's up guys, I was working on something, is this important?" he asked.

"You will address him as my lord!" Jamal snapped at Jackson.

"No he will not!" Jack yelled, "Daniel's - well he's Daniel." Jack looked across at Nyerti. "Sorry you were about to say?" he asked.

"Daniel, I am prepared to allow you to go back to earth and retrieve the things of which Jack has asked. Should you fail to return within a day I will be forced to make your friend into a host," Nyerti told him.

Jackson had been impressed by O'Neill's handling of himself over the past few days, often remarking on it to Martouf.

O'Neill had made it clear to him how he wanted to proceed, and had seemingly stepped into the role with ease, his ability to disregard his own feelings in the company of the Goa'uld system lord, had allowed them far greater movement and freedom.

"Er, a day from now right?" Daniel asked.

Nyerti nodded her head. "You will leave now Daniel, do not forget what lies ahead if you fail to return."

"Ah, ok - Jack anything specifically you wanted?" Daniel enquired.

Jack's expression told Daniel he didn't expect to see him return. "Er, yeah, clothes mostly. Chocolate would be nice too," he remarked, another tool to persuade Jackson that he wasn't to be taken seriously on the return issue.

"Ah, right, well just popping to the store," Jackson quipped. "See you tomorrow."

"Er, Daniel, vale meus amicus!" Jack said, underlining his order.

"Oh yeah, I won't forget that," Jackson responded.

Nyerti looked at O'Neill then, "Are you prepared to die Jack?" she asked.

O'Neill smiled at her. "Wasn't planning on it anytime soon, no," he replied.

Nyerti nodded. "I am pleased to hear you say so."

"Here's an idea, why don't we go swimming or something? Would help with the clothes," Jack suggested, attempting to appear as relaxed as she had seen him over the last few days. Even with the knowledge that something bad may be lurking on the horizon, he knew he had to maintain the pretence.

"Swimming?" Nyerti questioned.

"Sure, you know dive into some water, swim around, it'd be fun!" Jack told her.

"I am not interested in such things, Jamal will take you. You require a vast amount of water yes?" Nyerti responded.

"Kinda hard to swim without it," Jack remarked a smile breaking across his eyes. "But then that's humour, and you wouldn't understand so...Jamal lead on."

"Yes my lord," the Jaffa answered, bowing before him.

"I really wish you'd stop doing that," Jack commented, as the two disappeared from the room.

****

Martouf accompanied Daniel to the Stargate.

"Colonel O'Neill does not intend that you should come back," he told the archaeologist.

"I know," Daniel replied.

"Then you understand," Martouf remarked, as they reached the Stargate.

"Yes Martouf, better than you think I do - that's why I'll see you in a few hours," Jackson said.

Martouf smiled at him then, bowing his head. "These are the coordinates to return," he said, handing Daniel a Goa'uld device. "Press this, and the coordinates will be shown in sequence."

"Thank you, keep an eye on Jack," Daniel asked as he stepped through the Stargate.

******

"Unauthorised incoming traveller," the Tannoys announced. As Hammond descended the last few steps, he saw the SG1 identification code flashing up on the computer screens.

"Open the iris," he ordered.

"It's SG1's code Sir," Sgt. Davis told him.

"Standby people," Hammond warned the defence crew in the gateroom.

Samantha Carter and Teal'c entered the embarkation room just as Daniel Jackson came through the event horizon, wearing the robes that O'Neill had refused to adorn, as he had been for the past two days.

"Daniel," Sam greeted, her face lit up with a warm smile.

"Hi Sam, Teal'c," Daniel replied, as the event horizon disappeared behind him, embracing Sam as she moved into his arms.

"It is good to see you well Daniel Jackson," Teal'c said with a bow of his head.

"Yeah, you too. General Hammond, we need to talk," Daniel yelled up at the control room.

Hammond nodded.

"Shall we?" Daniel gestured for Sam to go first.

In his office, Hammond listened as Jackson filled them in with as many details as he had been able to glean.

"I got the distinct feeling that Jack didn't expect me to return, but I'm afraid I'm going to have to disappoint him. General, I'm going to need some fresh clothing," Daniel informed them, addressing Hammond directly. "Jack's refusing to wear these um, clothes."

"Alright Dr. Jackson why exactly are you considering disobeying Colonel O'Neill's orders?" Hammond enquired.

"Because I'm not in the military, and I'm not about to have Jack's death on my conscience either," Daniel informed him.

"So how is the Colonel?" Sam asked.

"Jack's doing okay," Daniel told her, "He's pretty much handling things, a lot better now anyway, you know it's amazing, she's completely taken with him."

"Exactly what is your honest assessment, Dr. Jackson?" Hammond asked.

"Well, we've pretty much got the run of Nyerti's palace. Jack's got his own personal bodyguard, and despite getting off on the wrong foot with Martouf, he's been pretty helpful as well," Daniel informed them. "So I think, so far we're okay."

"Martouf?" Carter looked shocked.

"Yeah, he was apparently more valuable alive than dead, so, you know I'd love to do this but I'm kind of in need of a shower and a change of clothes myself," Daniel stated, "So with your permission General."

"Granted. Major Carter, see that an adequate supply of clothing is made ready for Dr. Jackson and anything else he thinks they might need."

******

Carter and Teal'c followed Jackson to the locker rooms.

"Tell me more of your current situation Daniel Jackson?" Teal'c asked.

"Er, well, I've been able to study a lot of the philosophy around the place. She is pretty accommodating, especially since Jack's been spending more time with her," Daniel began. "He's even been taken aboard and shown the latest Goa'uld design technology for her new fleet of motherships - says it's pretty impressive too."

"The Colonel's okay though, right?" Sam enquired.

"Yeah, pretty much. You know Jack, hard to get past the soldier and into his head," Daniel explained, he began taking the clothes off, pausing, his eyes making contact with Sam's. "Er, I'm going to have a shower now," he pointed out.

Sam looked at him, "Yeah, so - oh right, I'll get the stuff," she indicated to leave and did so a smile breaking out over her face. "Give you some privacy." As she closed the door.

Teal'c sat on one of the wooden benches. "What of the other System Lords?" Teal'c asked as Jackson slipped into the shower.

"What?" he called out, the sound of the water muffling the question.

Teal'c raised an eyebrow, it was slightly beneath his dignity to shout. He sat silently and waited for Jackson to finish.

*****

Jamal accompanied Jack to the depths of the palace, leading him to a pool of water which spanned across the large room they entered.

"Sweet," Jack acknowledged. "So you guys don't swim then?"

"We use water merely for drinking and cleanliness," the Jaffa told him.

"Really, don't suppose you do any fishing?" Jack enquired, sitting beside the pool and unlacing his boots.

"Fishing?" Jamal seemed intrigued, yet confused.

"Yeah, they swim around in lakes, hey don't worry about it. I'll draw you a picture," he intoned. Keeping the rest of his clothing on, Jack stepped into the pool finding it surprisingly warm.

"Whoa, this is cool. Always wanted my own heated swimming pool," he remarked.

The Jaffa regarded him, relaxing in the water, a curious expression on his face.

Jack looked at him, then suddenly submerged, diving under the water and swimming across to the other side.

Jamal looked alarmed, about to enter the pool to rescue his charge, when the Colonel reappeared on the other side.

"My Lord, are you alright?" he called.

"Oh yeah, just fine," Jack yelled back, muttering to himself. "If I didn't have a little snake problem!"

****

Colonel Makepeace assisted Carter in bagging as many fatigues as they could find in Jack's locker, as well as from the supply depot.

"So what did Dr. Jackson say?" Makepeace asked as the two of them carried the clothing towards the embarkation room.

"Well Sir, it appears that the Colonel is getting a crash course in Goa'uld technology," Carter told him.

"But how's Jack?" Makepeace pushed.

"Daniel said he was coping well Sir," Carter replied, looking at Makepeace.

"Yeah right, Jack hates the Goa'uld as much as I do - can't see him enjoying getting cosy with one that much!" Makepeace said.

"Yes Sir," Carter agreed.

Daniel, now wearing his own clothing again, appeared in the embarkation room.

"Oh did you get the coffee and chocolate?" he asked. "Jack specifically asked for chocolate."

Sam smiled. "The Colonel did always have a sweet tooth. We sent Sgt. Siler topside Daniel, he won't be long."

"Dr. Jackson," Makepeace greeted.

"Colonel," Daniel acknowledged.

"Jack okay?" Makepeace asked.

"He's doing well Colonel, and I'm fine too!" Daniel remarked, "Is this going to take much longer Sam?"

"No. Sergeant, has Sgt. Siler entered the complex?" Sam asked Davis in the control room.

"Yes Ma'am, he's on his way down now," Davis replied.

"Sure you're ok with this Daniel?" Sam enquired.

"Um, going back to Goa'uld town, er no. But it's kind of my lot in life to piss Jack off one way or another," he quipped.

The remark raised a smile from Teal'c, who nodded. "Indeed," he agreed.

Daniel looked round at the Jaffa sheepishly.

Siler's arrival prevented any further exchanges. "Thank you," Daniel said, taking the brown paper bag stuffed full with various brands of chocolate.

"Tell General Hammond that Dr. Jackson is ready to ship out sergeant," Makepeace ordered.

"Well, here I go - I guess," Daniel remarked, lifting the back pack with Teal'c's assistance and strapping it on firmly.

The two holdalls packed full of clothing weighed a little more than he'd thought.

"We put some of your things in there too," Carter told him by way of explanation. "Some boots, sugar for your coffee, the kind of stuff you'll need."

Daniel looked at her. "Nothing else right? I'm going to be searched, so I don't want to have to explain a couple of handguns, or grenades!"

"No Daniel, just what you asked for," Carter confirmed.

"Dr. Jackson, you have a go," Hammond announced from the embarkation room.

"Is there anything that you wish to say Daniel Jackson?" Teal'c enquired as the Gate began to dial out.

"Er, bye!" Daniel replied, as he began to walk up the ramp.

Carter looked at Teal'c. "Hate letting him do this," she told the Jaffa.

"I believe there is no way you could have stopped him," Teal'c replied.

******

Nyerti sat quietly whilst O'Neill went over the diagrams of the mothership once more, using a Goa'uld device she had supplied him with.

His shirt and tee-shirt discarded to dry out from his swim, along with his socks, he reclined on the cushions studying the device and the schematic it showed.

"Yeah, um you know what?" Jack told her. "This stuff is all very interesting, but it's not exactly telling me anything."

"You do not understand?" Nyerti enquired.

"Yeah, I don't. I'm not really into all this technology stuff," he admitted. "Now Daniel," Jack began, keeping up the pretence that Jackson would return. "He'd get this stuff in an instant, he's a smart guy."

"It is not Daniel Jackson who will be commanding our armies," Nyerti told him. "You will learn Jack, Jamal will teach you."

"If you say so," Jack replied, looking dubiously at her. "So, we'd better talk about exactly what you think it is I'm going to do here, right?"

Nyerti stood, indicating to her servants to bring the chair upon which she sat with her.

Sitting now, close to O'Neill, she reached across and caressed his hair. "Come sit back against this and I will tell you," she beckoned.

Jack sat up, moving across and leaning back against the seat. Nyerti resting her hands on his shoulders, then reaching up and stroking his hair, his grimace of disapproval unseen.

"It is simple Jack, you will accompany me to the next assembly and speak with the other System Lords - sharing your knowledge of strategy on how we will defeat Apophis," she explained.

"I don't think they're gonna listen to me," Jack told her. "Cronos hates me."

"You are mistaken, Cronos has the highest regard for your ability as a warrior," Nyerti stated. "Even Heru'ur has remarked upon your ability to escape his attempts at your demise."

"Really?" Jack questioned, disdainfully. "I doubt that."

"Just because we do not recognise your race as an equal, do not mistake this for foolishness Jack. We are able to discern your value to the Tau'ri, and we were most impressed with the way you dealt with Apophis's attempts to destroy your world," Nyerti continued. "My own attempts to defile the treaty were, if I am not mistaken, another of your discoveries."

"Yeah, I guess, still don't think they're gonna like having me around," Jack retorted.

"No one is asking for their sanction, they will recognise you because I wish it," Nyerti told him. "These are the ways of the Goa'uld Jack, you must come to understand and trust me in this."

"Kind of asking for a leap of faith here," Jack remarked, "But, since we're doing the whole bonding thing, I've got a couple of terms of my own."

Nyerti smiled to herself. "You wish the Tau'ri to be spared?" She guessed.

"Kinda hard for you to understand hah, compassion?" Jack asked, leaning his head back and looking up into her eyes.

"It is something with which we are unaccustomed, we have found that such feelings are weaknesses," she told him.

"Yeah, which brings me to you, kind of going against the grain here aren't you?" he probed, "Not exactly very Goa'uld like of you."

"As I have said, I have my reasons, do you not feel my thoughts when we are joined?" she enquired.

"Oh yeah, I get those alright," he retorted, removing his head from her lap and screwing his face up in displeasure. "So tell me how that works, you or the host?"

"It is a combination of both Jack, I am able to feel the physical aspects of my host's needs as she is able to my own," Nyerti told him.

"Okay, I get that, so who's responsible for me being here, the host or you?" Jack asked.

"Who do you think Jack?" she requested.

"I think you want the power, the host wants," he paused then. "The other stuff."

Nyerti laughed then, Jack turned quickly and looked at her.

"Now what's funny?" he asked.

"A warrior of your strength and cunning, is capable of becoming embarrassed, this amuses me," she told him.

O'Neill raised an eyebrow, nodding ironically at her.

"You know, of all the ways you could have found humour, why did I just know it'd be at my expense?" he stated.

"You are human," Nyerti spoke with the Goa'uld's voice, yet softer than Jack had heard it before. "I find you fascinating."

He stared at her, digging deep inside himself he smiled as warmly as his hatred would allow.

"Kinda of getting that way for me too," he lied, hoping that he hadn't just set something in motion.

"Leave us!" Nyerti demanded.

Jack looked heavenwards, once freed from her scrutiny. "Ah, crap," he muttered.

"My Queen," Jamal entered then.

"Yes!" Jack said under his breath.

"What is the meaning of this intrusion?" she spat angrily.

"Daniel Jackson has returned."

"Damn it!" Again, almost a whisper.

"Bring Daniel forth," she ordered.

Jack stood up, slightly dishevelled, his anger quickly masked as Nyerti turned and smiled at him.

"Our trust is almost complete, Jack - our union will make it so!" she stated.

Daniel, lightened of his load by the man-servants who had greeted him at the Stargate, looked surprised to see Jack standing, half dressed at the centre of Nyerti's chambers.

"Sorry!" he noted, his expression indicating Jack's appearance. "Did I catch you at a bad time?"

"I am pleased to see you have returned Daniel," Nyerti commented.

Jack shaking his head behind her back, giving Daniel the thumbs up - if for his timing alone.

"So, get everything?" Jack enquired, his tone flat and without any form of greeting.

"Er, yeah I think so - chocolate, coffee, sugar..." Daniel began.

"Clothes, tell me you brought clothes?" Jack asked.

"Oh yeah, lots of those," he confirmed, still bemused at the appearance of his friend.

"Well, sweet, where are they?" Jack questioned, walking towards Daniel now. "Um, if you don't mind, I'm gonna get some of those?" His request toward Nyerti.

She bowed her head. The two men leaving together.

"Daniel, damn it!" Jack snapped.

"I know what you're gonna say Jack, but Hammond made me come back. I told him you didn't want it, said it was an order..."

"Daniel, shut up!" Jack snapped. "Let's take this inside shall we."

*****

Jamal appeared before Nyerti once more. "I have sent the messages that you requested my Queen, Heru'ur has acknowledged and accepted your invitation."

"Did he send any other message?" Nyerti asked.

"He merely replied as I have told you my queen," Jamal insisted.

"Ensure that your lord O'Neill is well protected, I do not trust Heru'ur!" she snapped.

Jamal bowed once more, turning and leaving the Goa'uld queen alone.

She smiled then. "Finally, I have him!" she said.

*****

Jack closed the door behind them, turning round quickly to face Jackson, fury emanating from every muscle on his face.

"What the hell were you thinking?" he demanded.

"General Hammond...."

Daniel's attempted reply to Jack's anger stopped immediately as he was once again the victim of one of Jack O'Neill's verbal tirades.

"You could have saved yourself, saved me the responsibility of cuddling up with the damn snake every night," Jack shook his head, as he always did when Jackson frustrated him. He glared at Jackson wearing that familiar grimace, now coupled with anger that demanded recompense.

"You know just once Daniel, just once!" he accented heavily. "You think you would follow my damn orders!"

Jackson stared back at him, his eyes searching the room as he wondered what he could possibly say in his own defence.

"Jack?" Fell lamely from his lips.

"But oh no," O'Neill continued unabated. "Not you. You have to play the hero, and dump me right back in the bed with the enemy. Literally!" he remonstrated.

Daniel felt himself losing control now too, he had a lot of respect for O'Neill too much to ever show outwardly, but he felt somehow justified, almost afraid that O'Neill might have given up and he didn't like it. He strode quickly towards O'Neill quickly then, standing in his space, crowding him.

"You know I'm really sorry Jack," he barked back. "But I can't go through the rest of my life knowing that you might be out here with a Goa'uld in your head, or dead because of me!"

He removed his glasses, looking furiously into O'Neill's face.

"Oh, and by the way, you're welcome!"

Daniel moved away then, stopping almost immediately, turning and moving back into Jack's space, a deliberate attempt to rile his friend into action.

"Where do you get off Jack?" he demanded. "I mean is there some written SGC rule that I don't know about, only Jack gets to be the martyr?"

"What?" O'Neill exclaimed. "And, get out of my face will you!"

He moved away from Jackson now, towards the window.

"You're selfish!" Daniel spat.

"I'm selfish?" Jack repeated, a look of total bemusement. "Excuse me?"

"How could you even think I wouldn't come back?" Daniel asked, furiously rounding on the Colonel again. "And I'm so sorry if you're having to step beneath your dignity Jack, I really am, but my God, death in preference?" he paused, searching for something that might spark the right response. "Grow up Jack."

"Oh that's," O'Neill snapped, his hand waving in the air dismissively. "So intelligent Daniel. Grow up?"

Jack turned his back on the archaeologist now, disdain sweeping across his face - frustration and anger clouding his mind, his thoughts.

"Yes actually that's exactly what I said!" Daniel replied, his tone calmer now.

O'Neill spun around and stared at him. "Grow up?" he asked again, the tone in his voice strained as he fought to control his emotions, emotions that he had successfully held in check.

"Jack look, please listen to what you're saying here," Daniel implored. "Look at, at that, just for a moment stop and look!"

Jack O'Neill knew exactly what he was looking at, he'd fooled himself into thinking that saving Daniel was his only option, something noble - the soldier sacrificing himself for the cause.

He sat down on what served as Jackson's bed, his hands reaching up to his face, he took a deep breath, holding it in for a moment, then exhaling slowly.

"Jack?" Daniel's voice completely void of anger now, almost a whisper. He knelt down beside O'Neill, his hand on his friend's shoulder.

"Look Daniel, just leave me alone for a minute okay? I'll be fine," Jack's tone almost pleading with him.

"Ok. I'll just go over here for a while!" Daniel told him, realising that his presence was only hindering O'Neill's ability to deal with whatever demons he faced.

Jack closed his eyes, holding in the sounds of the screams that filled his mind, it wasn't fear, just the opposite - he hadn't felt so out of control since Iraq. The experiences of being held a prisoner, without hope of escape, returned like a ghost from the past.

It hit home with all the subtlety of a baseball bat against his skull, he had considered every possible scenario and found no hope, that was the one thing he'd needed. The one thing he had somehow overlooked.

"You're right Daniel, you always are," he conceded, looking over at the archaeologist.

"No, that was thoughtless and inconsiderate," Daniel began.

"Daniel, will you just shut up," Jack snapped. "You're right, we have a chance of getting out of this thing and I wanted to give up." He admitted, almost as if this might ignite the hope once more. "I was just feeling sorry for myself, which isn't like me, and I'm sorry."

Jackson allowed the breath he had held to slowly escape his lips. He looked over at his friend keeping a respectful distance.

"What, you mean you're not perfect?" he remarked, a smile crossing his face.

"Hey! I never said that," Jack retorted.

"Yeah, er, right. Sorry, what was I thinking?" Daniel chided, relief almost gushing out with the words.

Both attempted a smile, shaking their heads.

"Had me worried there," Daniel confessed.

"I did hah, cool.," Jack replied, standing now, the discipline returning. "Ah, clean fresh, smelling clothes."

"So any developments?" Daniel enquired as he watched O'Neill checking through one of the bags.

Jack stood up abruptly, clutching the brown paper bag filled with chocolate. "Can't believe you actually got the chocolate," he stated, selecting his favourite brand and discarding the rest.

"Sergeant Siler sends his compliments," Daniel told him.

"So, what's new at the SGC?" Jack asked, finally finding some SGC fatigues that he felt like wearing.

"Well, Teal'c and Sam are fine. Actually, everyone was pretty much fine, I guess," Daniel seemed preoccupied now, looking at the long scratch marks on O'Neill's back, marks he'd failed to notice during the heated exchange.

"Ouch!" he remarked, without thinking.

Jack, in the process of buttoning his trousers, turned to look at Jackson.

"What?" he asked.

"Your back, doesn't that hurt?" Daniel enquired, motioning towards the marks.

O'Neill looked over his shoulder as much as he could in response, raising a dismissive eyebrow, his head inclining to the left.

"Yeah, some. I guess," he noted.

Daniel's right hand swept across his face, a heavy sigh.

"Have I mentioned how much I hate the Goa'uld recently?" he asked.

"Like you needed to?" Jack responded, tucking into the chocolate bar. "Ok, here's the deal. The Goa'uld's invited most of the system lords to this little soiree she's planning, so we're gonna be knee deep in snakes."

Daniel looked surprised, "Oh! Well that's not, um good," he opined.

"Ya think?" O'Neill replied.

"So what exactly did you have in mind?" Daniel urged.

"Hey, we're playing in her ball park. I'm pretty much thinking, I'll let her worry about the snakeheads!" Jack answered, a dubious expression crossing his face now. "We'll pretty much have to be on our toes here though."

"Do we know who's coming?" Daniel enquired, sitting down and reaching for the discarded chocolate bars.

"Nope. Don't have a clue," O'Neill retorted, pulling on a tee-shirt. "Whoever it is, has bad news written all over them."

"Well I guess things just got a whole hell of a lot more interesting," Daniel intoned. "Remind me why I came back?" Instantly regretting the obvious invite of sarcasm he had so obviously sent.

O'Neill grinned at him. "Ah, that would be because you're three fries short of a happy meal, or," Jack added with a sly smile. "Putting it in your terms, one bone short of a dinosaur, a couple of," Jack's voice trailed off then, he almost sensed the door opening before it did so, revealing Jamal.

"Do you know the concept of knocking?" Jack asked. "As in, pardon me?"

Jamal bowed his head, "My lord, your queen asks that you both come now. Heru'ur has arrived to agree to your union."

Daniel and Jack both looked heavenwards.

"Sweet, my second favourite Snakehead," Jack complained.

"Oh not your first?" Daniel mused.

"No, that's definitely got to be Apophis!" Jack told him.

"Well, he's not exactly going to be happy to see us," Daniel agreed.

"Hey, you're kidding right? We're practically family!" O'Neill jested.

He walked from the room then, leaving Daniel to ponder the comment for a moment. A shake of his head, he raced to catch up.

******

Nyerti stood with the Goa'uld system lord at her side. Heru'ur barely seemed surprised to see O'Neill and Jackson, and if he was, he would certainly not reveal it.

"Tau'ri!" he sneered.

"Heru'ur kree, kel noc Tau'ri!" Nyerti hissed.

"Well, how's the hand?" Jack asked, his usual flippant sarcasm lacing the question.

Heru'ur nodded then, almost as if O'Neill's quip was recognised as a retort to his own greeting.

"I am to understand that you are joining us against Apophis?" he enquired then, quite to the surprise of both SGC men.

"Ah, yeah," Jack replied, looking across at Nyerti who appeared to be offering a look of encouragement.

"Then you have foresworn your loyalty to the Tau'ri?" Heru'ur questioned.

"Ah, no!" Jack responded. "The Tau'ri, Earth, still have my loyalty too."

Heru'ur looked at Nyerti then, turning instantly back to O'Neill. "The treaty protects the Tau'ri O'Neill, yet it does not protect those who would venture out into our domain."

"Yeah, old Cronos and I pretty much agreed on that point too," Jack replied.

Heru'ur nodded once more. "You will come with me," he said, without the usual supercilious attitude O'Neill and Jackson had come to expect.

"Where we going?" Jack enquired brightly, maintaining an air of confidence.

"I would speak with you," Heru'ur informed him.

"Yeah, listen," Jack's reply curtailed by Nyerti's nod of approval. "Sure, lets do that." He agreed.

"Ah, what about me?" Daniel asked.

"Silence!" Heru'ur roared, regarding Jackson with an air of contempt. "O'Neill you should teach him manners!"

Daniel looked completely amazed, waiting for O'Neill to say something in his defence.

Jack regarded Daniel too, a smile in those soft brown eyes. "Yeah, you know, haven't got around to that yet," he commented, following Heru'ur from the room.

Daniel looked at Nyerti. "I guess he wasn't that happy to see me," he told her.

"You are not considered as an equal Daniel," she replied. "Only in Jack's eyes."

"Yeah, well I doubt he'd agree with you either!" Daniel remarked.

******

Heru'ur paused in the gardens. "Your guile is indeed impressive O'Neill," he ventured.

"Hey! This wasn't exactly my choice," Jack replied, uncomfortable about sharing the same space as a Goa'uld he considered to be amongst the most deadly of all the system lords. "But since I am, why not? A little bit of power can't hurt," he added for good measure. "Right?"

"Impressive," Heru'ur stated, "And you believe you are capable of ruling galaxies, and waging war on Apophis?" he asked.

"Well I haven't done so bad against him so far, are we going somewhere with this?" Jack demanded, mustering as much arrogance as he felt showed his strength of character.

"You are a cunning creature O'Neill, but your words mean nothing," he told the Colonel. "I have agreed to this on one condition."

O'Neill was askant, maintaining his distance from the Goa'uld.

"A show of your loyalty to the Goa'uld," Heru'ur continued. "Once this loyalty is established, I will consider listening to your strategy on how to defeat Apophis."

O'Neill smiled then. "Listen, I'm not here to prove anything. My loyalty isn't to the Goa'uld, it's to one Goa'uld, if you could call it that."

"You are wise O'Neill, perhaps in time," Heru'ur said, walking away from Jack.

"In time?" Jack questioned.

Heru'ur turned, his eyes glowing. "In time we shall learn much from each other."

"Can't wait for that," Jack retorted, meeting the Goa'uld's steely gaze.

A smirk crossed Heru'ur's face then. He appeared to become taller suddenly. "I like your arrogance O'Neill, it may serve us both well."

Jack kept eye contact with the Goa'uld, waiting for Heru'ur to turn away, as he did so Colonel Jack O'Neill took a deep breath. "Whoa!" he muttered.

Daniel passed Heru'ur as he left the gardens, no acknowledgement of presence from either.

The archaeologist shuddering as he reached O'Neill.

"What did he want?" he quizzed.

"Beats the hell of out of me Daniel," Jack retorted.

"Great, glad we cleared that up," Daniel said. "So exactly what happens now?"

"You're asking me?" Jack replied.

"Well I don't see anyone else around," Jackson stated.

Jack sat down on what had become a favourite thinking place, considering his exchange with the Goa'uld.

"You know I get the distinct impression a deal might be on the cards there," he told Jackson suddenly.

Daniel spun around looking at the Colonel with an expression of disbelief.

"A deal? With Heru'ur?" Shaking his head. "Jack are you out of your mind?"

Jack O'Neill smiled up at Jackson. "Daniel, if there's one thing I've learned about these damn Goa'ulds is that none of them can be trusted, and they'd kill each other for a small piece of the galaxy. I think maybe our old buddy Heru'ur wants more than a piece of the wedding cake, if you know what I mean!"

Daniel looked at O'Neill then. "Jack, you're not thinking of doing a deal with Heru'ur?"

"I'm just thinking Daniel, don't worry about it!" Jack told him.

Jackson smiled, a cynical smile. "Um, yeah right. If you say so," he replied.

"Couldn't get any worse, now could it?" Jack ventured.

Jackson stared at him, in disbelief - O'Neill nodded. "Yeah, okay," he acknowledged. "I guess it could."

Martouf approached them now. "Colonel O'Neill, Dr. Jackson, the Tok'ra high council have sent a message of great urgency."

"Now what?" O'Neill and Jackson said, in unison.

"We have learned that Apophis intends to send a fleet of motherships to Earth," Martouf informed them.

"What the hell's he doing that for, he knows the system lords will have to stop it?" Jack snapped.

"Without knowing how many ships he has sent, the system lords will have to retaliate with a large number of their own armies," Martouf imparted.

"Which will basically leave their home worlds less defended right?" Jack grasped the strategy well.

"We believe this also," Martouf agreed.

"How soon?" Daniel asked. "I mean, he can't know that this is happening right?"

"We hope this information will assist you with the Goa'uld. I can no longer remain here," Martouf told them. "This will allow you to use the information, without their discovering and capturing me."

"Yeah that's swell Marty, thank the council if you see them," Jack remarked, "Don't suppose you can make a quick stopover on Earth and fill them in?"

"I had planned to do so, with or without the council's agreement," Martouf said.

Jackson watched the Tok'ra disappear from sight.

"Did I mention earlier that it couldn't get any worse?" Jack enquired of the archaeologist, an ironic glare as he stood.

"Something like that, what are you going to do - I mean we can't let Apophis...." Daniel began.

"Nope, let's go have a word with the in-laws shall we!" Jack stated. "Hope Marty gets the hell out quickly, I'm not waiting on this one."

*****

Heru'ur looked up from the table at which he now sat. Cronos, standing with Nyerti turned around to acknowledge the Colonel's entrance.

"O'Neill," he said.

"Yeah hi, listen we've got a problem," Jack stated, unwilling to wait for the niceties to be over.

"What is it?" Cronos demanded.

"Apophis is about to send some of his armies to Earth," Jack told them.

Heru'ur stood. "How can you know this?" he demanded.

"Hey! We know okay, so I think we ought to be doing something about that don't ya think?" Jack's attitude was deliberately arrogant. "I know you don't exactly relish the idea of a visit from Thor, so?"

"Apophis would not dare!" Cronos snapped, furious with the affront he perceived to his authority.

"Oh, he would, so shouldn't we be sending a few of your ships out there to stop him?" Jack suggested.

Heru'ur moved toward him. "If your information is correct, we will need all our ships to intercept," he told O'Neill.

Daniel stood back, slightly in awe of watching his friend collaborating with their greatest enemy.

"Now see that would be a mistake," Jack told the Goa'uld system lord.

"You know nothing of this," Cronos roared.

"Oh I think I do," Jack replied, "See you guys, thinking that he's sending his entire fleet, you are gonna send yours right?"

"Apophis controls the armies of Sokar, O'Neill, they are vast," Nyerti told him.

The Goa'ulds looked from one to the other, surprised at the information, as much as from the source.

"Yeah, look we've pretty much got better intel on this thing, so I think you're gonna have to trust me on this," O'Neill retorted. "Apophis isn't sending his entire fleet, he'll probably send about a dozen, enough to make you think that."

"He plans to divide our armies?" Heru'ur agreed, nodding at O'Neill.

"Sounds like the plan we got," Jack confirmed.

Cronos moved forward. "Then we will be ready!" he announced, launching off into the Goa'uld dialect that O'Neill couldn't understand.

Jack looked at Daniel. "What the hell is he saying?" he asked.

"He's basically telling them how many ships each Goa'uld System Lord should send to Earth. He um, thinks you're not to be trusted, but doesn't want to risk a war with the Asgard, so they're going to respond...Uh-oh!" Daniel said, an emphasis on the last sound.

"What?" Jack demanded.

"We would appear to be going too!" Daniel informed him.

Jack raised his eyes heavenwards, "Well isn't that special!" he remarked.

"Ah, yeah, with Heru'ur!"

O'Neill stared at him in disbelief. "You're kidding me right?"

"I wish I was," Daniel told him.

******

Daniel watched as Jack and Heru'ur disappeared into the rings energy. Nyerti stood close to him.

"You're um, confident that Heru'ur isn't going to dispose of him, right?" he asked, a feeling of approaching doom sweeping over him.

"Cronos believes you are valuable to us, as do I. Heru'ur would not dare risk such a deception," she told him.

"Ah, if you say so," Daniel remarked.

****

Heru'ur ordered his ship to leave the orbit of Nyerti's planet, looking across at O'Neill.

"Already she controls you!" he stated.

The statement sounded as if he intentionally wished to belittle the Colonel, but something in the eyes of this detested creature told O'Neill otherwise.

"That bother you?" Jack asked, leaning now on the control console of the mothership, appearing more relaxed than he felt.

"You are foolish to believe that I concern myself with such petty matters," Heru'ur replied. "Nyerti is powerful, but she is flawed and unable to command an army as great as those of many of the system lords."

"Yeah, she kinda told me that, your point?" Jack enquired, intrigued yet impatient.

"She has chosen wisely, O'Neill. You are known by Jaffa throughout the galaxy as the master of the Sho'vah - if your power is so great as to make Apophis's first prime turn against his god, then she will use this to strengthen her armies," Heru'ur said.

"Really? Kinda puts a whole new light on the god thing," Jack commented, adding with devilment in his eyes. "That god thing works pretty well for you doesn't it?"

Heru'ur regarded O'Neill for a moment. "Tell me, if not a god, how I am able to live through centuries when you and your kind have perished?" he demanded, a menace entering his tone.

"Well that's kind of down to the sarcophagus right? An advanced piece of technology doesn't make a god," Jack challenged.

"Technology that only the Goa'uld could have created. The power and the wisdom of gods is borne of such creations," Heru'ur spat, his eyes glowing.

"Yeah, listen this sermon is all very fascinating, but your wasting your time if you're looking for a convert," Jack retorted.

Heru'ur laughed then, the Colonel raised a surprised eyebrow, standing up right.

"What, I say something funny?" he asked, becoming more engaged in his verbal duel with the system lord.

"You understand much, O'Neill - but know this; you are a threat to the Goa'uld. With or without the protection of Nyerti, and the armies you will control, many will seek to destroy you," Heru'ur told him.

"Many, meaning you too?" Jack enquired, wondering exactly if he should perceive the Goa'uld's latest statement as a threat.

"Perhaps," Heru'ur responded.

"Are you being deliberately obtuse?" Jack probed. "Or do I watch my back here?"

"I have agreed to your presence here O'Neill because I respect your guile and ability as a warrior. The Goa'uld are not as near sighted as you would like to believe - our existence pre-dates your own by thousands of millennia, you would do well to remember that."

"You know, I'm trying hard to understand exactly what it is that you," he paused, searching for a word to describe the Goa'uld, giving the due respect to his current situation. "Folks want, aside from enslaving worlds and wiping out anyone who stands in your way."

"Your race is so compassionate?" Heru'ur questioned.

"Some of us are," Jack replied, "But you Goa'ulds seem hell bent on destruction, there are other ways to exist."

"You question our existence and yet it is we who have had the greater experience of life O'Neill," Heru'ur responded. "Your race is not as evolved as our own - you have not seen all that we have seen. But still you question us?"

"Oh come on," Jack argued, "Don't give me the we're too young bull, other races have existed as long, longer than the Goa'uld without making themselves out to be gods."

"The Asgard, the Nox. Will you cite these as your perfect races?" Heru'ur asked.

"Something like that," Jack retorted.

Heru'ur nodded. "Races who have come to understand harmony," he pointed out, with a hint of mockery in his voice. "But whose existence could be easily destroyed - do not make the mistake of believing these races are as humane as you think."

"Oh here we go - gonna give me a little lesson too?" Jack enquired, moving now away from the Goa'uld, towards the Jaffa who guarded the entrance to the Pel'tac.

"O'Neill, you are not naive. I have little interest in teaching that to you, which you should already know," Heru'ur claimed, following O'Neill now. "Come, Earth is at least two rotations from now."

O'Neill stood there, his hands thrust into his pockets, looking suspiciously at his enemy, and seeing something else for a moment. He considered what Heru'ur had said, without really wanting to.

"Yeah okay," he agreed.

He followed Heru'ur through the ship, it's design familiar to him from previous visits.

"So any modifications on this thing?"

"Such technology is beyond your understanding," Heru'ur told him. "Your interest in this is for what purpose?"

"Curiosity mostly," Jack replied. "It's what I do, I used to fly planes."

"Planes?" Heru'ur sounded curious now, finally appearing to have reached their destination, he stood aside and allowed O'Neill to enter first.

Jack was taken aback by his manners, yet still cautious of his motives.

The large quarters of this Goa'uld were impressively decorated with ancient Egyptian statues and lined with hieroglyphs.

"Yeah, a little less sophisticated than your death gliders," Jack told him.

Heru'ur gestured for him to sit on one of the two throne-like chairs at the centre of the room.

"A pilot," he mused. "Interesting, you would care for something to eat or drink perhaps?"

Jack considered the offer, nodding his agreement. "Yeah thanks. So Heru'ur, I'm not getting this whole Nyerti deal, and why you'd accede to it. You want to explain that to me?"

Heru'ur waited for his servants to leave them, handing O'Neill a golden goblet full of what appeared to be wine of some sort.

"This stuff okay?" Jack asked, dubiously. "You know, I think I'll pass."

"O'Neill, you have tested my patience since you have been in my presence, since I am trusting you, for the moment, share this with me," Heru'ur asked.

Jack stared at him for a moment, considering his words.

"Yeah okay," he agreed, tasting the drink. It had a fruit-like tang, similar to oranges. O'Neill sipped it once more. "Not bad," he acknowledged.

"You asked why I have sanctioned your union with Nyerti and accepted you as an equal?" Heru'ur spoke with a quieter tone now.

"Right, why is that exactly. We're not kidding each other here are we?" Jack replied.

"Very well, O'Neill. I believe that Nyerti is seeking to strengthen her position amongst the system lords, her ranking is based on the armies she controls," Heru'ur began, "Many Jaffa feel the female mind is weaker than that of the male, and follow gods of that gender."

"Yeah, she kind of told me that much herself," O'Neill concurred. "Doesn't explain why we're here exchanging small talk though."

"Her choice is wise, I respect your guile O'Neill. You are fearless, as a warrior I am able to realise you have a worth, but I am neither fooled, nor foolish enough to believe that you will not try to turn these armies against Nyerti, you do not desire this union do you?" the Goa'uld asked.

"Ok, can I be honest?" Jack speculated, the beverage he drank loosening his tongue slightly.

Heru'ur gestured for him to proceed.

"It's like making love to a...snake!" he admitted.

"You want your freedom yes?" Heru'ur enquired, well aware of the effects of the powerful narcotic he had served O'Neill.

"Yeahsureyabetcha!" Jack replied, a smile breaking out across his face. "Hey this is good stuff."

"What has she promised you?" Heru'ur asked, feeling more confident to push with the drug taking effect.

"Promised me?" Jack enquired, his eyes beginning to blur slightly. He tried to focus his mind, realising a little too late that he might be under the influence of something.

"Yes, O'Neill what did she offer in return for this union?" Heru'ur repeated.

"Ah, well she er, what time is it anyway?" Jack asked, his mind fighting the drug as hard as the training he had undergone could.

"Time?" Heru'ur asked.

"Yeah, you know time - zero eight hundred hours? Time?" Jack's voice obviously slurred now.

"Nyerti has promised you much O'Neill has she not?" the Goa'uld persisted.

"Ah, yeah," Jack responded finally. "Pretty much, wish you'd just kill her or something. Hey, I could do that right?"

Heru'ur smiled. "Wiser than I thought," he remarked.

Jack saluted him. "What ever you say snake boy!" he laughed then, chuckling at his own foolishness.

Heru'ur stared at him for a moment. "O'Neill you need more to drink," he pointed out, beckoning one of his servants forward.

Jack watched in his half doped state. "Why do they wear those stupid clothes?" he enquired. "And what's with those shoes?"

"Give him the other one," Heru'ur instructed, his eyes glowing at O'Neill with the satisfaction he derived from tricking the Tau'ri into confessing his true thoughts.

"Has anybody ever told you that the glowing eye thing is a dead give away?" Jack asked, accepting the second drink from the servant.

"O'Neill drink!" Heru'ur instructed.

Jack pulled one of his bemused expressions; he'd almost forgotten where he was. He took a deep breath and swallowed the second drink down.

Zipacna entered Heru'ur's chambers, momentarily taken aback to see O'Neill, who appeared to totally ignore his presence.

"My lord," he sounded dubious attempting to keep his face from O'Neill.

"What is it?" Heru'ur demanded.

"We have new information regarding the movements of Apophis," he said.

Jack looked over at the back of the Goa'uld who now spoke, through hazy blurred vision, his hearing wasn't too sharp either, everything seemed to be almost an echo.

"Very well, proceed," Heru'ur ordered.

"It appears he intends to send most of his forces to strike the Tau'ri, forcing the Asgard to retaliate against the Goa'uld," Zipacna continued, he glanced at O'Neill then, wondering if he recognised him.

"Hi!" Jack said. "Nice to see you again." His attitude and tone told Zipacna that he was under the influence of the Goa'uld Sharnak substance.

Heru'ur, however, noticed with interest O'Neill's familiarity with his aid.

"Very well, we will proceed as planned," Heru'ur told him. "Leave us."

Zipacna bowed before Heru'ur, turning as quickly as he dared.

"O'Neill, you have seen Zipacna before?" Heru'ur asked.

Jack was beginning to come around now, Heru'ur having ordered the antidote to the drug to be administered almost straight away, reversed the effect.

"What? Whoa - that stuff was..." Jack shook his head now, his eye narrowing into a grimace as he tried to regain his faculties.

"O'Neill?" Heru'ur said again. "The Goa'uld who stood before me. You know of him?"

"What Zippy?" Jack asked, "One of Apophis flunkies."

"Jaffa Kree!" Heru'ur roared.

His first prime entered immediately. "Kel Shak Heru'ur," he said, bowing.

"Kree! Zipacna kel moc," Heru'ur ordered, his tone raised, eyes glowing with anger.

"You didn't know?" Jack asked.

Heru'ur looked across at O'Neill then. "You are a valuable ally O'Neill, I will not forget this."

"Hey! You're very welcome!" Jack told him, still slightly influenced by the drug.

Zipacna entered now, his worst fears realised as Jack smugly waved at him.

"My Lord?" he asked, directing the comment towards Heru'ur.

"You remember O'Neill?" Heru'ur enquired.

"I have never seen this human before!" Zipacna lied.

"Very well, you may go," Heru'ur told him.

Zipacna bowed, sneering at O'Neill as he turned and left.

"You know he's a spy right?" Jack told Heru'ur.

The Goa'uld smiled at O'Neill. "O'Neill is your chosen name?" he asked.

"Yeah, Jack. It's Colonel Jack O'Neill," he told the system lord.

Heru'ur nodded at the Colonel. "Then it is an alliance Jack. You want your freedom?" he asked.

"Damn right I do," Jack told him. "And you didn't need to drug me to find out by the way."

Heru'ur laughed once more. "Very well, you are aware of that deception. I had to be sure of you O'Neill, your willingness to reveal your true ambitions falls very much into my domain."

"Yeah right, I've seen you in action remember?" Jack told him.

"I have never falsified my intentions O'Neill," Heru'ur stated.

"What like drugging your guests?" O'Neill questioned.

"It was necessary, you attempted to deceive Nyerti," Heru'ur pointed out.

"Hey wouldn't you in my position? I'm not exactly enjoying this!" O'Neill retorted.

The two stared at each other for a time.

"So what are we really doing here?" Jack asked him. "Are you offering me my freedom in return for Nyerti's armies?"

"Such an alliance, an oath would benefit us both," the Goa'uld agreed.

"You want to take over the galaxy right?" O'Neill countered. "I don't want that to happen."

"It is not your choice to make," Heru'ur snapped.

"Yeah, you maybe right about that," Jack agreed. "But let's not kid ourselves here, you'd just as soon kill me as deal with me right?"

"I would prefer to have you join me O'Neill," Heru'ur admitted.

"See I don't get this, what the hell is going on here?" Jack demanded, "You're all acting like, well it's a little un-nerving being this close to your enemy, don't ya think?"

"You have given me more reason to destroy you than most," Heru'ur stated, standing now. "You are Reel'ka, protected by the gods, for the time being."

"Now see that I get, thank you!" Jack responded. "So are we gonna leave Zippy roaming round the ship?"

Heru'ur walked from the room without reply.

"Now that I definitely get," Jack muttered, a heavy sigh. "What the hell am I doing here?" he asked himself, a headache beginning to form in his temples. "And a hangover, sweet!" he remarked.

Zipacna entered the room almost immediately.

"The Goa'uld consorting with a slave," he snapped. "Apophis will be pleased to hear of your death!"

"You know, I'm kind of dealing with a little headache here," Jack replied sarcastically.

"You are nothing," Zipacna snarled. "You will make an adequate host for Klor'el, since it was you who dared to remove him from his former host."

"Oh here we go," Jack remonstrated, "The snake in the head deal is getting a little old don't ya think?"

"Silence!" Zipacna warned. "You have interfered in the matters of the gods for too long Tau'ri."

"Zipacna!" Heru'ur roared. "Kree!"

Zipacna turned quickly, facing the enraged Heru'ur.

Jack stood now, his eyes moving from one Goa'uld to the other.

"My lord, forgive me my hatred of this slave," Zipacna implored.

"Silence!" Heru'ur spat, moving around Zipacna, regarding him with an arrogance that O'Neill had seen few match. "It is you who are nothing," he charged. "Deceit, that will be punished."

Zipacna spun quickly, raising his hand, the small weapon he had concealed now in full view of the Goa'uld System Lord, who moved between Apophis's servant and O'Neill, launching his right arm into the Colonel who was sent sprawling. Heru'ur activated his personal attack shield in one sweeping motion, the energy from the blast easily dissipated on impact.

Zipacna turned and attempted to flee. Heru'ur raised his left hand quickly, sending a powerful charge from his ribbon device into the back of the retreating Goa'uld.

"Jaffa Kree," Heru'ur roared, the response from his first prime immediate. "Put his body on a Tel'tac and return him to his Master!" he sneered.

O'Neill sat up, cringing as the pain in his shoulder bit in.

"Ah crap!" he complained.

Heru'ur turned, looking down at the injured SGC man.

"You were hit?" he asked.

"Yeah," O'Neill winced, "By you!" His face creasing with the pain. "I think it's dislocated." He held the top of his left shoulder.

Heru'ur took a deep breath. "Sarcophagus!"

"I think I'll pass on that, thanks all the same, just need a nice solid..." Jack dragged himself to his feet with his good right arm, standing and moving towards one of the walls. "...wall, to um." He braced himself, impacting his shoulder hard against it.

"Oh yeah," he winced loudly. "That hurts."

Heru'ur regarded him curiously. "The sarcophagus would have been less pain filled O'Neill." He told the Colonel, heavily accenting words, unable to understand the Colonel's desire to endure such pain.

"Yeah you're probably right about that," Jack told him. "Thanks."

Heru'ur stared at O'Neill then, his head tilted back, a derisive expression crossing his face. "How uncomfortable it must make you, to thank that which you loathe," he said, almost as if the notion gave him amusement.

"You know something?" Jack enquired. "I'm gonna take that as a compliment."

The Goa'uld's composure absolute, he allowed a measured amusement to enter his eyes, that told Jack O'Neill all he needed to know.

They finally understood each other.

Daniel reclined back on the cushions in his room, restless and unable to concentrate on the notes he'd attempted to write.

Jamal, his constant companion stood outside his room. Jackson had invited him in on several occasions, if only to have someone to talk to, but each time he had declined.

The archaeologist sighed heavily, putting the pen and notebook down. Standing, another effort to engage his chaperone once more.

"Jamal, any news on your lord Jack?" he asked, trying to maintain a serious expression.

"Heru'ur has spoken to our Queen; do you wish to do so?" Jamal enquired.

"You know, you've got this really irritating habit of answering all my questions with questions," Daniel pointed out, realising he was wasting his time again. "Yeah, um, I'd like to speak to our Queen," Daniel agreed. "Now would be good."

"Very well, wait here. I will ask our Queen to grant you an audience," Jamal told him.

Daniel frowned. "I wasn't planning on putting on a performance, but yeah okay, I'll er, wait," he replied.

*****

Teal'c approached General Hammond's office; he was concerned with the lack of news from the Tok'ra on the welfare of his friends. He knocked, waiting for Hammond to beckon him inside.

"Come in Teal'c," Hammond ordered. "What can I do for you?"

"General Hammond, I am concerned that we have not heard from the Tok'ra for some time," he explained, standing in the centre of the General's office.

"What can I tell you Teal'c, Jacob has kept us apprised of all he knows," Hammond replied, "Sit down Teal'c, please," he asked.

The Jaffa bowed his head slightly, taking Hammond's invitation and sitting.

"You don't trust the Tok'ra do you?" Hammond probed, a cynic of their so-called allies.

"I believe that the Tok'ra have only the interests of defeating the Goa'uld in mind," Teal'c told him. "I would prefer for the SGC to take it's own action."

Hammond nodded, lifting his phone. "Have Colonel Makepeace and Major Davies report to my office, stat."

Teal'c smiled. "I am sure there is more we could be doing General Hammond," he stated.

*****

Heru'ur stood at the controls of his ship, looking toward O'Neill who was leaning against the console with his back to the system lord, gazing at the blurred images of space through the force shield.

"It is time for remoc!" he said, his hand sweeping across the control sensors.

O'Neill braced himself, as the ship dropped from hyper-speed.

"Where are we exactly?" he enquired.

"Within your system of planets," Heru'ur told him, raising his left hand and gesturing.

O'Neill moved to the other side of the console, standing beside Heru'ur and looking out at the small planet in the distance.

"That would be Pluto. Which means we're roughly three and a half million miles from earth, or thereabouts," O'Neill stated, looking at the Goa'uld. "Give or take a few miles!"

"Impressive," Heru'ur remarked. "You study the planets well enough to recognise one so far from your own."

"Yeah, see it's got one moon - two planets in our system have those. Earth, and Pluto."

Heru'ur's gaze intensified. "And yet you do not seek to explore or conquer these planets?" His words almost mocking in their delivery.

O'Neill felt slightly challenged by this intentionally demeaning remark.

"Well, before we discovered the gate system getting that far out was a bit of a problem," he explained. "Don't think they support breathable atmospheres either!"

This information seemed to further intrigue the Goa'uld, although he turned away now.

"You could learn much from me, O'Neill," he told the Colonel, his attention now on the panel before him.

Jack considered that without recourse, looking back out into space. Being so close to his one of his sworn enemies still plagued his mind with doubt.

"So," he asked, deliberately changing the subject. "Are you detecting any other ships out there?"

"We have detected six of Apophis's ships in the vicinity of the closest planet to your Earth," Heru'ur imparted.

"Venus," O'Neill told him, Heru'ur's gaze falling upon him once more, he added. "That's the closest planet to earth."

*****

Colonel Makepeace nodded his agreement. "Teal'c is right Sir, we can't just sit back here and wait for the Tok'ra to come up with the information."

Hammond's attention suddenly switched, as the alarms at the SGC began to sound.

"What now?" he questioned, standing instantly and heading out of his office, followed by Davis and Makepeace.

Sergeant Davis began briefing him almost the moment his feet had left the stairs leading into the control room, Teal'c right behind him.

"Sir, deep space radar is tracking something big coming in past Venus," he said.

Makepeace and Davis exchanged troubled glances.

Davis moved forward to one of the telephones. "This is Major Davis, get me General Vidrine, at the Pentagon," he ordered.

"Sergeant, have them deploy Hubble," Hammond snapped. "And make it damn quick."

"Sir, deep space radar is picking up several more blips just passing Saturn." Sgt. Davis sounded alarmed.

"Well it's not the Asgard, and that's for damn sure," Colonel Makepeace remarked.

Sam Carter arrived in the control room as Makepeace spoke.

"Sir?" she enquired.

"Seems like the Goa'uld are back in force," Makepeace noted.

"The Goa'uld wouldn't risk the Asgard's retaliation Colonel. No, that has to be Apophis," Carter told them.

"I concur," Teal'c said.

*****

Daniel stood before Nyerti now, asking the question of O'Neill's progress.

The Goa'uld seemed distracted, almost irritable.

"I have received word from Heru'ur that they are about to engage the ships of Apophis," she stated.

Daniel looked slightly disturbed at Nyerti's apparent inability to function, without O'Neill at her side.

"This is going to be a lot harder than you thought isn't it?" he asked boldly.

The Goa'uld stared at him. "Of what do you speak?" she demanded.

"Ah, well, just that you're letting emotions overwhelm you here, must be a little un-nerving for you?" he charged.

Nyerti regarded Daniel, her eyes glowing defiantly. "Do not trouble yourself, Daniel," she spat. "Jack is mine already!"

Daniel looked concerned now. "Exactly what do you by that?" he asked.

"Since Jack is bound by this union, you will remain here. I will never let either one of you go!" Nyerti told him.

"Well, that's um," Daniel began. "Good news!"

******

"Er, listen," Jack began, to get the Goa'uld's attention after he'd finished broadcasting to his own ships, as well as those of Cronos and Nefertum. "I don't suppose we could lock into Earth's frequency and let them know we're here to help could we?"

"That is of little importance," Heru'ur commented.

"Ah well we wouldn't want them calling in the Asgard," O'Neill lied.

The Goa'uld seemed perturbed by the notion of their greatest foe mistaking his ships for those attacking Earth.

"Very well," he ceded.

Jack raised his eyebrows, pleased with his own small deception.

******

The computer screens began to disappear one by one.

"Sergeant?" Hammond demanded.

Carter sat at another terminal, furiously entering information and codes in an attempt to rescue the programs.

"We've got some kind of incoming transmission Sir!" Carter stated. As she did so Heru'ur's image appeared on the screens.

"Major?" Hammond asked.

Carter's face dropped. "That's Heru'ur Sir," she said slowly, her tone filled with dread.

Hammond looked at the amazed expressions of his personnel, finally resting on the SG3 commanding officer, who shrugged.

"We've got problems," Makepeace opined.

"Indeed!" Teal'c added, looking across at Makepeace, whose expression became an ever deepening frown.

"Tau'ri Kree! Kel Shak, O'Neill," Heru'ur's voice boomed out.

The SGC personnel looked from one to the other - the Kree, familiar, the easy recognition of O'Neill's name.

Teal'c released his breath then. "Heru'ur greets you, and wishes to allow O'Neill to speak!" he told them.

"Colonel O'Neill is aboard that ship?" Major Davis gasped.

Each of the expressions changing once more into a mixture of relief and bemusement.

"Hey folks!" Jack O'Neill appeared then. "General, Sir, just wanted to let you know that we're here to deal with Apophis, so you don't need to call in the Asgard or anything."

Carter smiled to herself, looking down to avoid her pleasure at seeing the Colonel becoming too apparent.

"Understood. We appreciate that Colonel, are you okay?" Hammond asked.

"Well Sir, Heru'ur here is taking pretty good care of me, and since we're almost family," he jested, his features contorting into a grimace, then. "We're both doing fine Sir!"

"Where's Dr. Jackson?" Hammond enquired.

"He's back with Nyerti Sir, preparing for the big event," O'Neill told them, his eyebrows almost touching his hairline now. "Can't wait for that!"

"Colonel how do we know you're not a Goa'uld?" It was Major Davis who asked the question.

"Well what can I say Davis? Except you'll just have to trust me, and hey, if my good buddy Heru'ur is trusting me, I figure you can meet me half way too!" Jack replied.

Heru'ur became visible beside O'Neill as he spoke to him. "We have no further time for this O'Neill," he said.

"We've got a little Apophis butt to kick here Sir," Jack told them. "So we'll be going now."

Heru'ur glanced across at O'Neill, about to say something as the transmission cut out.

"Whoa!" Sam uttered. "That was weird."

"You're telling me, how do we know he isn't a Goa'uld?" Makepeace asked.

"I believe you were speaking to Colonel O'Neill, Colonel Makepeace. Heru'ur would not bother to attempt deceit," Teal'c stated. "Such tactics would be considered beneath him."

"So, given the fact that he's up there!" Makepeace pointed out. "A little pointless attempting a rescue then!"

"It would seem so Colonel," Hammond remarked. "Lets hope Colonel O'Neill and his new allies can deal with Apophis!"

Carter reconfigured the computers, concerned now for the Colonel's welfare more than ever.

As Hammond and the others returned to his office, Teal'c wandered toward her, placing a hand on her shoulder.

"Colonel O'Neill will be fine," he said, with little conviction in that statement.

"Thanks Teal'c," Carter sighed, looking up at him. "Never thought I'd see the Colonel standing side by side with a Goa'uld," she said.

"Colonel O'Neill has found a way to prevent Apophis from attempting to destroy this world," Teal'c told her.

"It's not Apophis I'm worried about exactly," she admitted. "It's more what Heru'ur's involvement means!"

Teal'c regarded her for a moment, unsure of what to say. "Indeed."

******

"We prepare to engage," Heru'ur told O'Neill.

"Fine by me!" the colonel replied. "Anything I can do here?"

"You wish to destroy one of the ships of Apophis?" Heru'ur asked.

"Hey you don't need to ask twice!" Jack agreed. "Sure wouldn't mind flying one of these babies either," he admitted.

Jack looked through the force shield, finally seeing Earth, and the looming ships who sought to attack it.

"When we are in position, use this to destroy the vessel before us," Heru'ur told him, indicating to the console before them.

Jack paid close attention, waiting for the system lord to bring the massive Cheops vessel behind one of Apophis ships, levelling his hand over the device, waiting for the order.

Heru'ur nodded his wish for O'Neill to proceed, the colonel lowered his hand onto the device, watching the beam of energy race from the ship - as it struck home, the explosions within the opposing vessel lit up the darkness of space.

"Whoa cool!" O'Neill exclaimed.

"The battle will be brief," Heru'ur stated, with his usual arrogance.

O'Neill nodded. "Sounds good to me, listen, about this union business?" he asked the Goa'uld.

"You must proceed as planned O'Neill," Heru'ur told him.

"Sweet. Thanks!" Jack remarked.

The opposing fleet attempted to flee as the overwhelming forces of Cronos, Heru'ur and Nefertum rounded their collective might against them.

The battle continued until the last ship escaped into hyperspace, Cronos directing his ships to follow.

"So I guess we head back to see old Nyerti then?" O'Neill enquired, his adrenalin still racing from the battle.

Heru'ur had been intrigued by the relish with which O'Neill had taken to the battle.

"Tell me, Jack," The Goa'uld began, a more friendly tone to his accent now. "Do you wish to experience the power of the Goa'uld?"

O'Neill regarded Heru'ur for a moment, his eyes lighting up. "What did you have in mind?" he asked.

****

Cronos returned to Nyerti's planet, still revelling in the battle - his chest literally and figuratively puffed out. His face was bold with the success, thwarting Apophis's attack on Earth, whilst Yu and Nyerti had combined forces with the other system lords to prevail in a similar fashion, had made Cronos feel unbeatable.

He strode into Nyerti's palace. "We have once again proven the power of the Goa'uld!" he boomed. "Now it is time to celebrate this success and seal your union with the Tau'ri," Cronos declared.

Daniel frowned. "Um, where exactly is Jack?" he ventured, waiting for the anticipated and recently resultant tirade from the Goa'uld leader, at his daring to utter a sound in their presence.

"He has not returned with Heru'ur?" Cronos quizzed.

"Um, no. Heru'ur hasn't returned either," Daniel told him, unsure of how this affected his own welfare.

"Perhaps Heru'ur intends to deceive us!" Nyerti snarled. "I will not standby whilst he attempts to undermine our authority again!"

"Nor will I!" Cronos snapped.

"Well, I hate to be the one to point this out, but he's not exactly going to be easy to find," Daniel contended, now feeling more confident with his own contribution.

Nefertum and Yu had arrived together, both listening to the exchange as they entered.

"Heru'ur has gone to his home world with the Tau'ri!" Nefertum told them.

"What?" Cronos demanded. "He dares to defile this union?"

"O'Neill has the rank of consort Nefertum!" Nyerti scowled. "Do well to remember that!"

Nefertum bowed his head, indicating to Daniel that his rank must be lower than Nyerti within the Goa'uld pecking order.

"Daniel Jackson?" Cronos turned to the archaeologist.

"Yeah?" Daniel asked.

"O'Neill is willing to join in this union?" he enquired.

"Oh, yeah!" Daniel responded, with as much conviction as he could muster. "He's um, looking forward to learning much from the Goa'uld."

"Then we will despatch one of my ships to retrieve them!" Cronos stated.

****

Heru'ur led the Colonel through his palace, the magnificence of this Goa'uld's home suited it's master perfectly.

The statues of Egyptian Gods and deities stood at the entrance, falcon-headed symbols rose high in the halls, which were lined with Horus guards who snapped to attention as their ruler passed them by.

"Well this is pretty impressive," O'Neill observed, noting the pride on the faces of the Jaffa as Heru'ur acknowledged their greeting. "Doesn't seem like fear."

"My Jaffa have no reason to fear me O'Neill, I command the largest army of the Goa'uld system lords," Heru'ur told him. "Because I do not punish those who are loyal. Strength is not always predicated with fear!"

O'Neill raised his eyebrows, his expression one of surprise at the candour of his host.

"So we're here because?" Jack probed.

"I sense the warrior in you thirsts for more than diplomacy. You wish to make a difference to your world," Heru'ur offered.

"I doubt helping me achieve that is quite what you had in mind?" Jack challenged.

They entered a grand room then, dominated by yet more Ancient Egyptian artefacts.

"I am a conqueror O'Neill, it is my domain to rule over the Goa'uld, as my father did before me," Heru'ur stated. "Your intervention was timely, whilst Ra lived this would not have been possible," the system lord added. "I discovered recently that it was you, who was responsible for this."

O'Neill regarded the Goa'uld dubiously then. "You think that's a good thing right?" he asked an air of concern entering his tone.

"Had it not been so, I would not be commanding his armies now," Heru'ur pointed out.

Servants entered then, with trays bearing food and drink.

"Okay point taken," O'Neill responded, "So what now?"

"I hunger, we will eat," Heru'ur snapped.

*****

Apophis waited for Zipacna to rise from the sarcophagus and listened to his words with a fury building within.

"Allied with the Tau'ri?" he demanded.

"Yes, my lord," Zipacna told him. "O'Neill has been accepted as consort to Nyerti, he was aboard Heru'ur's ship. My attempt to destroy him merely brought down the wrath of Heru'ur, who shielded him."

"Then you have failed me?" Apophis charged. "The system lords were ready for my ships when they arrived to take Cronos and Nyerti's territory."

"I did not fail you my lord, the Tau'ri interference must have come from Tok'ra spies,"Zipacna told him.

"You will bring me these spies Zipacna, or you will perish for your incompetence!" Apophis warned.

Zipacna bowed before him. "Yes my lord," he acceded.

"Goa'uld lowering themselves to consort with slaves, I want this Tau'ri who turned my first prime against his god!" he demanded.

"But my lord, Heru'ur?" Zipacna stated.

"We will attack his world and destroy him and the Tau'ri with him!" Apophis stated, his anger burning with hatred. "The Tau'ri will trouble us no more!"

******

"Jacob, this has gone far enough now, we want out people out of there," Hammond insisted.

"Daniel is probably the only one we'll be able to extract. Colonel O'Neill might be a problem," Jacob admitted.

"Heru'ur?" Hammond enquired.

"Our people tell me he didn't return to Nyerti's home world, George," Jacob sighed heavily. "Jack apparently agreed to whatever Heru'ur offered him."

"I'm not buying that Jacob, are you telling me the Colonel is a host?" Hammond asked.

"No, but two of our spies think that whatever mind control techniques Heru'ur has in his possession, might have been used on the Colonel to get him to agree to an alliance with him," Jacob stated. "Heru'ur wants Nyerti's territory, her weakness for the Colonel might have given him the leverage he needs."

"Then I'd say it's just became doubly important to get the Colonel back, the Jack O'Neill I know wouldn't agree to any alliance with the Goa'uld and that's for damn sure," Hammond vociferated, the knock on the door expected. "Come in," Hammond commanded.

Teal'c, and Major Carter entered.

"Sir?" she asked, having been summoned on the arrival of Jacob Carter back to the SGC.

"Sit down Major, Jacob has news of our people," Hammond told her.

Sam and Teal'c listened as Jacob repeated the news of Colonel O'Neill's pact with Heru'ur.

"That's ridiculous, the Colonel hates the Goa'uld," Sam argued. "And if Heru'ur has used some kind of mind control on him he'll have all the secrets of Earth's defences."

"I'm well aware of that Major, which is why SG1's codes have been locked out!" Hammond stated.

"I don't mean to belittle the Colonel's value, but he's been captive by the Goa'uld now forever a month. In that time our spies have given us information about his behaviour and it's not good George," Jacob told them.

Teal'c listened. "The Colonel O'Neill I know would not give in to the Goa'uld," he stated. "Perhaps since he is unable to escape, he is merely using the access to discover as much as he can."

"Teal'c I'd like to believe that, but from what our spies on the inside tell us, it just doesn't sound that feasible," Jacob told him. "Heru'ur is one of the most devious of all the System Lords, and frankly the last one who would ever accept the Tau'ri as an equal. Jack's apparent ease with him doesn't bode well. Now I'm sorry, but we have to consider that he's been turned."

"I'm sorry Dad, but you're wrong, and your spies don't know the Colonel well enough to realise that in situations like the one he's currently in, the Colonel will use any and all means to get his freedom," Carter remonstrated. "And to be honest, I don't really trust the Tok'ra recently, anymore than I do the Goa'uld."

Jacob looked around at his daughter furiously. "Exactly what are you accusing me of here Sam?" he demanded.

"Alright, that's enough. Major, dismissed. Jacob, if you're able to extract Daniel Jackson then I suggest you do that."

Carter rose now, a scornful expression masking her face. "With all due respect Sir," She now looked at Hammond. "I think Colonel Makepeace was right, we should never have let the Tok'ra put Colonel O'Neill and Daniel in that position."

"Major, I realise that you're concern for your CO is paramount to you, but you're out of line now. Dismissed Major, that's an order!" Hammond snapped.

"Yes Sir," Carter conceded.

Teal'c looked at Hammond. "I believe that Major Carter is correct," he stated, before turning and following Carter from Hammond's office.

"George we'll do our best to retrieve Colonel O'Neill, that's all I can say," Jacob Carter told him.

"But I think you might have to resign yourself to the fact that the Goa'uld have technologies way above that of Earth. I know Jack would never willingly align himself with the Goa'uld, but the evidence of both his and Heru'ur's behaviour is a little damning."

Hammond nodded. "Well let's not waste any more time talking about it Jacob, perhaps retrieving Daniel Jackson might restore some of the faith we have in the Tok'ra!"

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"My lord," Nekhbet, Heru'ur's most trusted aid announced.

Heru'ur regarded him. "What is it?" he asked.

"Cronos has sent one of his ships to retrieve the Tau'ri and demands that you return immediately to Ishkarata so that Samskarasteh may take place," Nekhbet told him.

"That doesn't sound like good news to me!" Jack noted, frowning heavily.

"Send a message back to Cronos that we will be leaving for Ishkarata once O'Neill is healed by the sarcophagus," Heru'ur stated. "Explain that Apophis had placed one of his spies on my ship."

"Yeah thanks, but that's only gonna delay the inevitable right?" Jack told the Goa'uld.

"You wanted a way to destroy Nyerti, O'Neill?" Heru'ur asked.

Jack looked askant now, if a little cynical. "And you're gonna give me that way right?" he guessed.

Heru'ur nodded. "Such an act will enrage Cronos and the other system lords, you will need my help O'Neill, whether you trust me or not!" the Goa'uld told him.

O'Neill took a deep breath. "Yeah, look I'm getting that choice less feeling here, so you want to bottom line this for me?"

"Once you have partaken of Samskarasteh, you will be afforded the rank of consort and equal to Nyerti. In the eyes of her Jaffa, you will become their god, their leader. Once this is done you will have the freedom O'Neill," Heru'ur explained.

"The freedom to hand you her armies?" Jack replied.

"In order for you to return to your world O'Neill, you will need to free yourself of the union," Heru'ur continued. "Killing your consort would be that means."

"Now see, it's the killing her part that might be a problem," Jack responded. "Don't get me wrong, I'd love to just get the hell out of there, and I don't really care one way or the other if I've got to kill her to do that, but aren't the Jaffa gonna be just a little pissed off at me for doing it?"

"You are their ruler O'Neill. Nyerti's ways are despised by many of her own Jaffa, she has been responsible for the death of many of her own warriors when they failed her!" Heru'ur pointed out.

Jack looked confused for a moment. "Yeah I get that part, it's the what happens afterwards that you're gonna have to spell out to me, because let me level with your here, I'm about to trust my life, and Daniel's, on the word of a Goa'uld who's tried to destroy us both, right?"

"O'Neill," Heru'ur's tone was lowered and menacing. "You have but one choice here."

"Yeah, I get that a lot," Jack replied. "So you're giving me your word, right?"

Heru'ur laughed. "You would be foolish to trust me!" he said. "And foolish to defy me!"

O'Neill regarded the system lord for a moment. "I'm sensing that," he agreed.

"Know this, once this is done we will have no more pact, no more oath - should you face me again we will be as before," Heru'ur told him.

Jack nodded, his thoughts racing, he was faced with a catch-22. As near as he could figure, Heru'ur's intentions were apparent - he wanted Nyerti's armies, and her territory, but did that mean he would allow him his freedom or simply seal his fate?

The hatred he had for the Goa'uld only fuelled his inability to think straight, Heru'ur had stood in harms way and prevented his death, when he could have stood aside and allowed Zipacna to kill him.

There was something about this Goa'uld that didn't track with the others he'd encountered, and it put him off balance.

"Yeah, okay," he agreed. "Since I really don't have much choice in the matter."

Heru'ur stood now, gesturing for Nekhbet to inform Cronos's emissary of their impending departure.

Nefir, first prime to Heru'ur entered then. The system lord regarded him.

"My lord, Apophis's ships approach," he told the Goa'uld.

"Oh for crying out loud!" Jack complained. "Old snake boy just doesn't give up!"

"Jaffa kree! Kel, lan mac' ta!" Heru'ur roared.

The Jaffa bowed before him.

Heru'ur turned to O'Neill. "Our departure is delayed," he stated.

"Yeah, well at least a war is a good reason to be late for your own wedding," O'Neill remarked. "So we gonna stand around here talking, or go kick old snakeboy's ass again?"

Heru'ur's eyes glowed now. "You would make a good Goa'uld host O'Neill," he stated. "Your thirst for revenge and your hatred make you powerful."

"Hey! Lets not do the same dance here, I don't wanna be here, anymore than you want me here. Just seems that we have a little proximity problem," Jack told him, as they left the room. "Let's just play by the rules," O'Neill insisted, "Whatever the hell they are!"

The two walked side by side now, towards the rings that would once more send them onto Heru'ur's ships and into battle.

*****

Cronos spun around sharply. "What?" he demanded.

"The forces of Heru'ur and Apophis do battle my lord." He was told, by the emissary he had sent to retrieve O'Neill.

"We must act immediately," Cronos roared.

Nyerti had already begun ordering her Jaffa to her ships.

"Wait, what about me?" Daniel asked.

Cronos turned, sneering at the archaeologist. "You will be made into a host," he snapped. "As I had intended all along!"

Standing alone now and facing the Goa'uld, Daniel looked defiantly back at him.

"No I don't think so!" he replied.

"You are a slave, Daniel, and you will serve me, as your kind have served me for thousands of years," he told Jackson, with a glint of pleasure in his eyes. "Take him, I do not want to see him again until he is one of us!"

Two Jaffa guards dragged Daniel from the room, Martouf and his fellow Tok'ra operatives watched.

"We must act now, or it will be too late," he said. "Send word to the high council that we will be returning with Daniel Jackson to Earth."

*****

"My lord, Apophis hails you." Nekhbet told Heru'ur.

Apophis image appeared. "Kree Heru'ur, sar' del kol mak!"

"Kel noc Apophis, Shel re'to kilm," Heru'ur spat back.

"I say this to the Tau'ri, you will die with your Goa'uld master on this day!" Apophis roared.

Heru'ur regarded O'Neill with interest.

"Hey Pops, kind of need some new lines don't ya think!" Jack replied, looking across then at Heru'ur a grimace appearing on his features.

"Can we turn him off, it's like watching repeats!" he quipped.

Heru'ur nodded toward his first prime, the communication terminated immediately.

"Okay, so he looks like he has a lot of ships - how many do we have?" Jack enquired, in awe almost of the hundreds of Goa'uld motherships he saw before him.

"Enough talk!" Heru'ur boomed. "Nefir, Hol kree mel."

"Well," Jack sighed heavily. "I guess we'll just have to put this whole bonding thing on hold," he acknowledged. As the Goa'uld motherships engaged in battle, the soldier in O'Neill felt almost at home.

The gliders once again weaving in and out of the chaos around them.

Heru'ur's ships deployed against Apophis, strengthened by the arrival of Cronos and Nyerti's fleets, they began to overwhelm the aggressor.

"O'Neill," Heru'ur said, turning to the Colonel. " You will serve me this day and destroy Nyerti as we have planned and I will give you your freedom."

"You know, it's not that I don't appreciate the offer, or anything," Jack told him. "It's just that I don't trust you!"

"Apophis withdraws!" Nekhbet announced.

Heru'ur turned to O'Neill now, moving closer to him. "I could destroy you here and now O'Neill," He spat. "Instead I have made you an equal in the eyes of my Jaffa by my acceptance of you, do well to remember that and I will spare your life," he snarled.

Jack felt threatened by the venom in his tone, staring back at him, his own expression empty.

"You know, I'm getting tired of this," he told Heru'ur. "So listen, if you're gonna kill me or make me a host, then I'd go right ahead, because I'm about this close to not caring!"

Heru'ur smiled at him, a nefarious smile. "If I wished to make you a host O'Neill, then I would have done so already," he replied. "You can have your freedom, at the price of the armies and the space occupied by Nyerti - the universe is a far bigger place than you imagine."

"And that means?" Jack enquired.

"There are worlds out there to conquer, that even the Goa'uld have never seen. You are a small and insignificant part of it," Heru'ur told him.

"Compliment right?" Jack replied sarcastically. "You're trying to tell me I don't bother you enough to worry about?"

"Know this O'Neill, once I have conquered these worlds perhaps you would have something to fear," Heru'ur stated.

O'Neill looked surprised. "Yeah, okay," he conceded. "So we go to the wedding right?"

Heru'ur looked away from him at the moment. "Nekhbet, hail Cronos," he ordered.

Jack took a deep breath, listening as the two Goa'uld system lords spoke in their native tongue - they appeared to be arguing, although, from what he had seen during the treaty summit, the futile nature of the Goa'uld made this their only way of communicating.

He waited, Heru'ur turned now. "Cronos has ordered that Daniel Jackson become a host," he told Jack.

"Oh now wait a minute, if that happens no deal and I mean it," he snapped furiously, his eyes burning with anger and hatred.

Heru'ur turned once more to Cronos, a heated and venomous exchange.

Jack waited, hoping that the hunger for dominance that Heru'ur felt would suffice. In all that had happened over the past few days he had almost forgotten about Jackson, now he was once again the main concern.

*****

Martouf made his way slowly towards the chambers Jackson had been dragged too, a zat gun concealed under the robes he wore.

He heard the approaching Jaffa, pausing he turned and saw Heru'ur, Jack O'Neill at his side marching toward him.

He feared the worst, had O'Neill himself fallen victim to the introduction of a Goa'uld symbiote?

He lowered his head in an attempt to conceal his identity, as they passed him he glanced up to see O'Neill's sideways glance of recognition.

*****

Daniel was on his knees, restrained by the Jaffa, as one of the priests approached him with the symbiote in his hand.

Tears of pain streamed down Jackson's face, his struggles had resulted in some severe injuries to his head and shoulders. He prayed as hard as he could.

The doors to the chamber opened.

"Stop!" Heru'ur roared.

The Symbiote leapt at it's intended host at the moment. Heru'ur's hand shot up, the energy from the ribbon device swept toward the symbiote, disintegrating it before it had reached Daniel.

Jack breathed a sigh of relief, "Daniel, are you ok?" He moved forward, the Jaffa guards releasing Daniel almost instantly, as Heru'ur's own Jaffa aimed their staff weapons toward them.

"Jack?" Daniel questioned, almost as if he didn't believe it was really O'Neill.

"Yeah Daniel, it's me. You look a little rough," Jack pointed out.

Jackson slipped sideways then, unable to maintain his balance. Jack caught him before he hit the floor.

"Whoa Danny boy," he said.

"Will he live?" Heru'ur asked O'Neill. "His wounds are severe?"

Jack raised his hand to his face, looking at the blood.

"Ah, listen. Do you have a sarcophagus?" he asked.

"Jaffa kree!" Heru'ur ordered.

Nefir moved forward, kneeling beside O'Neill. "We will take him to the sarcophagus," he told the Colonel.

"I don't think he's breathing!" Jack sounded alarmed, attempting to follow the Jaffa who now carried Jackson from the room. Martouf watched from a distance.

Heru'ur placed his hand on Jack's shoulder. "The sarcophagus will revive him," he told O'Neill.

Martouf's eyes glowed, his symbiote Lantesh angry suddenly, telling the host that this was no longer a member of the Tau'ri - such gestures from Goa'uld to slaves did not exist.

Martouf watched O'Neill walk away, followed by the Goa'uld System Lord, his eyes narrowed.

"The council must hear of this," he muttered.

"Tok'ra IDC received Sir," Sergeant Davis reported.

Hammond nodded. "Well Jacob, looks like we've got company," he declared.

"It can't be good news George," Jacob stated.

Carter and Teal'c had joined them in the control room now, as the hooded figure emerged through the Stargate.

"It's Martouf," Jacob announced, leaving Hammond's side immediately.

"Selmak," Lantesh greeted, as the two Tok'ra hosts came face to face.

"Lantesh," Selmak responded, waiting for an explanation as to his presence.

"I come with news of Daniel Jackson and Colonel O'Neill," Lantesh told him, the symbiote immediately ceding possession to the host as Samantha Carter entered the embarkation room, a warm smile passed between them.

"Martouf, it's good to see you alive and well," Sam greeted.

"Thank you Samantha, it is good to see you also." He lowered his eyes then. "Although perhaps you will not feel so once I have told you the purpose of my visit," he told her.

"We'd better take this to the briefing room," Jacob suggested.

****

Jack sat in the corner of the room, the golden sarcophagus finally beginning to open. He stood, moving toward it, stretching as he did so, it had been an uncomfortable night. One in which, thankfully, he had been left to his own devices. He stood now, waiting for the sarcophagus to finally return the one true ally he had in his current predicament.

Daniel's eyes opened almost the moment the device had revealed it's occupant fully.

"Hey Danny boy!" Jack greeted. "How's the head?"

Daniel sat up. "Feels fine," he said, his hand reaching up to his face and massaging his cheeks, almost as if this might aid the waking process. "Jack, where the hell have you been?" he demanded. "I was worried!"

"Sorry about that Daniel, had Earth to save, again! And then went on a little sightseeing trip to Heru'ur's planet," Jack explained.

"What, why?" Daniel asked.

"Beats the hell out of me," Jack told him. "I can't figure the snake out," he confessed, helping Jackson climb from inside the Sarcophagus.

"Who Heru'ur?" Daniel asked. "Why?"

"He's just not. You know, I figured it was pretty much the same with these Goa'uld's, and don't get me wrong, he's looking at galaxy domination alright. But, here's the difficult part, he's offering me a deal."

"Oh there's always a deal," Daniel replied cynically, "Er, let me guess, he wants control of Nyerti's armies and space, in exchange for your, our freedom?"

Jack looked impressed. "Yeah, that about says it," he agreed.

"Don't tell me you agreed to that?" Daniel enquired, looking sceptically at O'Neill.

Jack looked heavenwards.

Daniel shook his head. "What the hell has gotten into you?" he snapped. "You trust a Goa'uld to keep his word?"

Jack sighed, walking away from Jackson now. "Call me a pragmatist Daniel, but I think we're dealing with a soldier here!" Jack told him. "And I think I'm qualified to understand that mentality a lot better than you are."

"Oh that's um, yeah that's good Jack!" Daniel finished the sentence for him. "Jack tell me you're not deluded enough to think that Heru'ur's going to just let us walk out of here?"

"Yeah Daniel, that's exactly what I think," Jack replied. "At least, I think I do!"

"Are you out of your mind?" Daniel asked. "Jack, he's a Goa'uld!"

O'Neill looked at him for a moment, then turned his gaze away.

"Yeah Daniel, the voice and the glowing eye thing kinda gives him away!" O'Neill snapped, looking a little apprehensive as he added. "He saved my life and yours, by the way."

"So?" Daniel argued. "He probably only did that to trick you into doing what it is that he wants - if he moves against Nyerti now, the rest of the system lords would have no alternative but to side with her."

"Why?" Jack questioned. "His armies are much greater than hers, you didn't see him stand up to Cronos, he doesn't fear the wrath of the other system lords. I'm telling you Daniel, it just doesn't add up that he'd need me, if that's what he wanted."

Jack shook his head. "You don't get it do you?" he stated. "Heru'ur wants something he can't take, so he's a Goa'uld - but obviously a pretty fine damn soldier too. He's not gonna risk winning a battle and losing a war Daniel, it doesn't make sense!"

"So what are you saying?" Daniel quizzed.

O'Neill's features contorted to a grimace. "None of this is making sense Daniel," he admitted. "I just want to get the hell out of here, and right now Heru'ur seems to be the only way we're gonna do that!"

Daniel considered O'Neill's statement, perplexed at his attitude. Here was a man that he knew loathed the Goa'uld as much as he did, and yet he seemed to almost be defending one of the worst Goa'uld he'd had the displeasure to encounter.

The thought that Jack might have been somehow altered by Goa'uld mind control swept over Jackson then, he stared at O'Neill unsure of what to say.

"Is it possible," Jack suggested. "That maybe, just maybe, Heru'ur's on the line here?"

"Why would he be Jack?" Daniel askant now, his inquisitive expression almost examining his friend for any change in appearance.

O'Neill stared back at him. "What?" he asked.

"What?" Daniel repeated.

"You're looking at me like I'm losing my mind here Daniel!" Jack snapped. "And I'm not exactly enjoying it. Are you questioning my loyalty, or my judgement?"

Daniel took a deep breath, not wanting to spell out his feelings, but compelled to by what he saw as madness.

"Well it's not exactly very Jack O'Neill like to be considering accepting the word of a Goa'uld," he stated. "And to answer your question. Yes, I'm questioning something, but it's not your loyalty Jack, I'm just wondering about your sanity!" Daniel vociferated.

"My sanity?" O'Neill conceded, "Could probably be called into question, how would it affect you Daniel? I've got one Goa'uld trying to marry me, for crying out loud, and the other one is walking around saving my life!"

Daniel shook his head, the gesture more at his own stupidity in failing to see what was staring him in the face. "It's the saving your life thing isn't it?" he asked. "That's what has you all turned around here isn't it?"

O'Neill looked furiously at him now. "I'm not turned around Daniel. I'm just being a realist!"

"A realist," Daniel argued. "Doesn't defend a Goa'uld!"

"I am not defending a Goa'uld, damn it!" Jack yelled at the top of his lungs.

Daniel closed his eyes. "Ok, I guess everyone in this part of the galaxy got that part," he said.

Jamal entered the chamber now. "My lord, it is time for Samskarasteh," he told Jack, bowing as he did so.

"Yeah, in a minute. I think the best man here just swallowed the ring," Jack remonstrated.

The Jaffa looked curiously at him. "The system lords await, my lord," he told him.

"Oh for crying out loud!" Jack vociferated. "Well tell them I'll be right out."

Jamal bowed once more, exiting the room.

"Now I'm telling you Daniel, you'd just better wise up here," he told the archaeologist, with an intensity to his tone that was hard to ignore.

"Ok, fine. Since I don't exactly have a choice," Daniel conceded.

"Finally!" Jack snapped. "Welcome to where I've been for the last month Daniel, nice place here, ain't it though."

Daniel looked at his colleague with one of those long suffering beleaguered looks that he wore so well.

"Jack?" Daniel called, as O'Neill began to walk towards the door.

"What Daniel?" O'Neill enquired, still seething from having his integrity questioned.

"Martouf told me that General Hammond suspects you've been compromised," he imparted "Our GDO codes won't work."

O'Neill's face dropped. "What?" he exclaimed.

The two men stared at one another. "I er, forgot to tell you," Daniel said, at length.

"Well isn't that special!" Jack replied. "You didn't try to send a message back to the contrary I suppose?"

Jackson shook his head.

"Well that kinda sucks!" O'Neill announced. "So what the hell are we supposed to do now?"

"I er, honestly don't know," Daniel replied. "Whatever happens, we can't go home."

There was a long silence between the two men then, as both realised the ramifications of that particular fact.

"Not through the Stargate no!" Jack told him finally. "So I guess I just have to hope that I'm right about this particular Goa'uld!"

He left the room then, leaving Jackson pondering that statement and headed towards the impending Samskarasteh.

****

"Colonel O'Neill's apparent alliance with Heru'ur was obvious to me, General," Martouf told the gathered SGC personnel. "They seemed almost friendly, no Goa'uld has ever behaved in such a manner toward a slave, let alone a sworn enemy."

"You're sure?" Hammond asked, still unwilling to accept the fact that they may have just lost what he considered to be one of the finest officers in his command.

Carter was speechless, she too harboured doubts, but Martouf's insistence seemed to be genuine.

"Then he's host to a Goa'uld?" Major Davis asked, his own personal concern superseded by the knowledge that the Goa'uld might have obtained by making one of the SGC's most trusted officers one of their own.

"What about Daniel?" Carter asked.

"Heru'ur and Colonel O'Neill saved him from being made into a host," Martouf told them.

"Then the Colonel's not a Goa'uld?" Major Davis asked, confused at exactly what the Tok'ra was inferring.

"Colonel O'Neill is not a Goa'uld," Lantesh rebuked. "He is in fact what we call a Reel'ka."

"And that is?" Hammond asked.

"In your terms, protected by the gods, which translated means a friend of the Goa'uld," Jacob told Hammond.

Major Davis shook his head, perplexed by what he perceived as conflicting statements.

"Excuse me, General," He implored Hammond. "But you're not making sense. Mow if we've got something to worry about here with regard to Earth's security being compromised I would appreciate it if you would just spit it right out!" he demanded.

"Amen to that!" Colonel Makepeace agreed.

"What we are saying is, that in these situations, exposed to the Goa'uld for as long as he has been, that the Colonel may well be a security breach, yes," Jacob replied directly towards Major Davis, aware of his responsibilities as JCS liaison.

"Thank you. So the only question now is how the joint chiefs and the President wish to proceed, I'll brief them immediately and let you know General," Davis said, excusing himself from the briefing.

Teal'c remained silent as the remaining personnel bickered about the possible implications of their former colleague joining with the Goa'uld.

"Look I'm sorry," Carter argued. "But the Colonel managed to persuade Heru'ur and the other system lords into defending this planet, and obviously coerced Heru'ur into allowing him to talk to us directly. I mean is it just me or did anyone else notice the reference to the Asgard that the Colonel made during that transmission?"

"Major I appreciate your loyalty to the Colonel and Daniel Jackson, but this has always been a risk. I'm going to report them MIA, at least until we have a clearer indication of their situation."

Teal'c stood now. "General Hammond, I believe that the Goa'uld are capable of overrunning this planet without using the iris codes. In locking them out you have possibly prevented the only means of escape for Daniel Jackson and Colonel O'Neill," he stated.

"I'm sorry Teal'c but if the Colonel or Daniel Jackson have been compromised, then we can't risk an infiltration via the Stargate," Hammond told him.

*****

Jack stood before Cronos, as instructed. Nyerti stood beside him.

"Well this is conventional!" he quipped.

Only Heru'ur offered a semblance of a smile, twelve others regarded him without expression on their faces.

Constant remarks made in the unfamiliar Goa'uld dialect caused the Colonel to look in the direction of the speaker.

"O'Neill, you have sworn your allegiance to Nyerti in this union, Nyerti has sworn her oath to you. Your union is recognised by the Goa'uld system lords, you will be treated with the same regard," Cronos offered, adding. "However, you will be closely watched, and should your allegiance become doubtful, you will be dealt with severely!" Cronos warned.

"You must kneel before Cronos and so pledge Jack," Nyerti told him.

O'Neill felt like replying to that, but kept silent, sinking to one knee. "I so pledge," he said with neither conviction nor sincerity.

Nyerti did the same, her pledge in the Goa'uld dialect.

Daniel leant up against the entrance to the hall watching, unsure of his role. Jamal stood close by.

"You fear for My Lord?" he asked.

"What makes you say that?" Daniel enquired.

"You fear the Goa'uld," Jamal said. "But you need not. They are gods!"

Daniel sighed heavily. "Well we'll just have to disagree about that," he concluded.

Jamal looked curiously towards Jackson now. "Perhaps we could speak of this later."

It was Daniel's turn now to regard the Jaffa with a measure of guarded curiosity.

"Yes, um, let's do that," he suggested.

*****

"Then it is done - welcome O'Neill to the Goa'uld alliance," Cronos boomed. He moved forward now, offering his hand to O'Neill who attempted to shake it, Cronos gripped the lower part of his arm - Jack followed suit.

This particular Goa'uld being so close made him feel uncomfortable. Heru'ur's intervention felt almost like salvation.

"O'Neill, we will speak more of your views on the destruction of Apophis," he interceded.

Daniel, paid close attention then, he had noticed from Jack's body language, how uncomfortable Cronos made him and seeing Heru'ur's reaction, he was intrigued. Was O'Neill correct about Heru'ur? Or was Hammond right about O'Neill?

"Thanks!" Jack told Heru'ur, as the two moved away from Cronos.

"It was for my benefit as much as for yours!" Heru'ur told him. "Cronos is wary of you. He will attempt to get information we would both prefer was kept between us!"

O'Neill raised his eyebrows, a heavy sigh. "I heard that. Listen, we've got a small problem."

Heru'ur stopped then, looking at O'Neill with an air of concern. "And this is?"

"Well apparently a Tok'ra spy reported back to my planet that I'm compromised, which means our codes, which we use to open our shields at the other end protecting our Stargate, have been deactivated," O'Neill imparted.

"You are unable to return to your home world?" Heru'ur enquired.

"Ah, yeah, that about sums it up!" Jack confirmed. "So, at a stretch and trusting you here, we need a ride home?" he ventured, his expression contorting with the emotions of actually trusting Heru'ur more than he had intended.

"I see," Heru'ur replied. "A Goa'uld mothership at your disposal?"

Jack looked partially intrigued by this offer, then realised that neither he nor Jackson could possibly hope to navigate, and shook his head.

"Ah, well that would be useful, but with no one to fly the thing, might be a little difficult to navigate our way across the galaxy!" he admitted.

Heru'ur considered this for a moment, nodding his head slowly. "Then you ask if I would take you back to the Tau'ri, O'Neill?"

"Pushing our deal too far?" Jack enquired, concern sneaking into his eyes.

"No it would be within the agreement. I find your company most intriguing O'Neill, your views and ideas amuse me!" Heru'ur told him.

Jack looked at the Goa'uld System Lord for a moment. "Yeah, I get that a lot," he told him, a look of bemusement crossing his features. "So listen, when is the right moment for this to all take place anyway?"

"You must wait O'Neill," Heru'ur said. "Such an act can not be immediate, this would look too contrived. It must seem as if the power of your new status has been appreciated and consumes you!"

"Damn it Heru, how long's that exactly, you know you're not the one who has to sleep with the snake!" Jack snapped, looking slightly apologetic. "Er, present company accepted, that is!" he stated.

Heru'ur was mildly amused. "You constantly refer to us as serpents, O'Neill?" he enquired. "Yet you see only our hosts. You have displayed a capacity for imagination in the past, I suggest you rely upon this humour once more!" the Goa'uld stated.

"Yeah, thanks for the pep talk, but how long is a while exactly?" Jack persisted.

"Several rotations," Heru'ur told him finally.

"We call those days, several would be three or more?" Jack pushed now.

"Six or seven O'Neill, you cannot act before this time," Heru'ur told him.

O'Neill looked at the Goa'uld system lord with disdain. "It's easy for you to say that, Heru, you're not the one who had to spend time with her."

"You are a warrior O'Neill, exercise some thinking!" Heru'ur replied, moving away from him now and heading toward Cronos.

Jack looked around, seeing Daniel close to the exit. He made his way over towards the archaeologist.

"Well that's the ride sorted out!" Jack told him confidently.

Daniel shook his head. "Jack I don't know about this?" he questioned.

O'Neill glared at him now, his face taut with the stress and anger of his emotions, emotions that he had managed to hold in check. With his options clearly becoming more limited, Jack was slowly running out of patience.

"Tell me something Daniel?" he asked. "Come up with anything have we, a way to get us out of this?"

Daniel looked at him, his expression hapless.

"Well um, no not exactly but.."

Jack didn't allow him to finish, his eyes burned into Jackson's with an intensity that seemed to silence the archaeologist without need for words.

"Then do me a favour Dr. Jackson, and shut the hell up!" O'Neill snapped.

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"No news is good news!" Makepeace chimed, leaning on the desk opposite Carter.

Sam Carter sighed. "I don't know about that Colonel," she replied. "Even the Tok'ra don't have the slightest idea of what the situation is now."

She stood upright then, taking her attention away from the microscope she'd been so intent on studying.

"It just doesn't make any sense to me!" she snapped, angry at herself for not insisting that they take more action earlier to secure the release of O'Neill and Jackson.

"Well Major, I guess nothing in this place makes much sense," Makepeace agreed. "It's not exactly like we're ever given a choice in the matter is it!"

"No Sir, but damn it!" she exploded then, unable to control the rage. "We should have done something sooner, I mean when the Colonel most needed our help."

"Major," Makepeace interrupted. "Your feelings are showing."

Carter looked apologetic then. "I'm sorry Sir, I just feel so useless. Daniel and Colonel O'Neill are out there, and we're looking at slides!"

"Let me give you some advice Major," the Colonel told her. "Don't ever stop those feelings, loyalty to your commanding officer, and others in your unit, saves lives!"

Carter looked relieved then, smiling at Makepeace. "Yes Sir," she replied.

******

"Why do you not heed my requests?" Nyerti demanded of Jack.

O'Neill spun around now. "Look, we did the wedding night thing, and that's it. Until I feel comfortable with sharing my bed with you, it's just not gonna happen!" he told her.

"I could force you, Daniel Jackson could still become a host O'Neill," she taunted.

"Yeah, you know what?" Jack spat. "Do it! Go ahead."

"You doubt me?" Nyerti responded, her eyes glowing.

"Doubt ya? Hell no, just think you'd run out of threats after a while is all!" Jack's tone was venomous, deliberately loud and aggressive.

Three days into the whole union thing had convinced Jack O'Neill that he had no need to bow down to her threats. His skin still crawling from the last event, he regarded her now with contempt, turning the self-loathing around, back toward the source.

His defiance, so openly displayed, confused her, the anger and resentment in his eyes disturbed her, she paused considering how best to deal with his attitude

"Very well," she conceded, attempting to keep some face, as she added with the most menacing tone she could summon. "But I shall be patient with you for a short time only O'Neill."

"Yeah, yeah, whatever," Jack replied dismissively. "I'm trying to work on this plan for our allies, would you mind leaving me in peace?"

Turning his back on her now, and looking at the Goa'uld device sent to him by Heru'ur, that had been loaded with possible plans the system lords proposed to use in battle with Apophis.

Daniel passed Nyerti on her way out, the strength of a Goa'ulded host employed by her rage, she easily knocked him sideways.

"Whoa!" he exclaimed. "What's wrong with her?"

"Ah, the host threat didn't work," Jack told him, a lot more comfortable with the situation now than he had been two days ago.

"You're kidding, you told her to make me into a host?" Daniel asked, looking slightly perturbed. "That's very um, comforting!"

He joined O'Neill now, looking down at the device and the plans.

"Heru'ur's advice Daniel, and he was right!" Jack told him pointedly. "The only power they have over you is fear!"

"Well, I'd prefer it if you didn't call her bluff on my account!" Jackson told him.

"Daniel, will you just relax," O'Neill snapped. "I've got to get my head around these plans!"

"Yes, um speaking of which, where exactly did you go yesterday?" Daniel probed.

"Why? Weren't any problems for you were there?" Jack asked. "Guards, and servants treating you alright?"

"Yes we should probably talk about that too, my lord!" Daniel's sardonic tone and remark making his own point succinctly.

"Hey! Nice to know you finally recognise that fact," Jack quipped, "So come on, what's eating you exactly?"

"Just that you seem to be getting really friendly with Heru'ur," Daniel remarked. "I surmised that's where you were, right?"

"Yep! I'll tell you Daniel, he's really different," Jack enthused. "His Jaffa actually respect him, they're not frightened of him. It's what makes him probably the worst of all the Goa'uld, he's a warrior, a soldier - call it what you like he's just not the same!"

"Oh really, well that's nice Jack, maybe he wants to come back to Earth with us?" Jackson retorted flatly.

Daniel's sarcasm seemed to rile Jack now, he rounded on Jackson like a missile.

"What the hell is that supposed to mean?" he demanded. "Am I detecting an accusation in there somewhere Daniel?"

"Well it seems a little odd that you're so enamoured of this particular Goa'uld, yes Jack!" Daniel replied.

"Excuse me?" Jack's tone incredulous. "Enamoured?" An emphasis on that word.

Daniel looked a little reticent then, exhaling a deep breath and puffing out his cheeks as he did so.

"Ok, so maybe that was a poor choice of words!" Daniel admitted. "But doesn't it seem just a little bit like fraternising with the enemy?" he persisted.

"Fraternising?" Jack looked askant. "I'm wondering exactly which Goa'uld I'm married to here?"

"Ok, another poor choice!" Daniel conceded.

"No please, don't stop there Danny boy! Not so close to a home run!" Jack remonstrated.

He was walking toward Jackson now, whose expression became suddenly dubious, wondering if O'Neill's aggressive posture would merely remain as such, or if he had perhaps pushed the Colonel a little too far this time.

"Jack, I just think that this whole thing has got you a little...er,"

"What, screwed up?" Jack demanded.

"Would be the right way of putting it I suppose," Daniel agreed. "And, I guess, under the circumstances, I should probably shut up!"

"Ya think?" O'Neill asked, shaking his head. "Everything's black and white to you Daniel, did you ever hear the phrase, the old saying, friends close, your enemies closer?"

Daniel looked expectantly at O'Neill, as if he was waiting for O'Neill to spell out his intentions.

Jack O'Neill wasn't about to give Jackson the satisfaction. He'd brow beaten him enough for the past forty or so days that the pair had been held captive, he didn't feel like holding Jackson's hand any more!

"My lord!" Jamal announced, bowing as he entered Jack's line of sight. "Heru'ur hails you."

"Ok," he replied, to Nyerti's first prime. Turning back to Jackson. "Daniel are we all done here?"

Daniel looked at him, feeling a little left out. "I guess," he replied, turning away from O'Neill to conceal the fact.

O'Neill looked pensively toward Jackson for a moment, in his heart he felt he was being hard on his colleague, but the situation called for him to be the professional soldier. Taking account of Daniel's feelings was the last thing he needed to concern himself with right now, but still it played on his conscience.

"Daniel?" he said, almost without thinking.

Jackson turned around, the downtrodden expression he wore, he found himself unable to mask.

Jack regarded him, "You know you could be doing something other than worrying about what I'm doing!" he suggested.

"Oh really?" Jackson enquired, expecting the sarcastic Jack O'Neill retort he so easily incited. "Exactly what is it that you think I ought to do?" Daniel asked, approaching him.

"Jamal," Jack ordered. "Take Dr. Jackson to the old sites, the ones outside of the palace."

The Jaffa bowed his head once more.

"You'll get a kick out of those Daniel," Jack offered.

"I guess, thanks my lord!" A deliberate emphasis on the title, designed to rile the Colonel, was lost, O'Neill's smile told him so.

"Have fun!" Jack retorted, leaving the room before Jackson had a chance to reply.

*****

The long-range communication device afforded Jack the opportunity to talk to Heru'ur without need for the system lord to be too frequent a visitor.

"Kel shak O'Neill," Heru'ur greeted, as his face appeared on the device.

"Heru'ur," Jack responded. "What's up?"

"Cronos has called a meeting of the system lords, we are to discuss moving against Apophis," Heru'ur informed him.

"Well it's about time you actually thought about a pre-emptive strike!" Jack agreed. "And this means?"

"Your attendance with Nyerti will be expected, the summit will not be held for another of your Earth weeks."

"Oh here's good news!" Jack complained. "Look, is it me or does this whole thing seem to be getting just a little too drawn out?"

"I too share your impatience O'Neill, but such tactics are often difficult to achieve," Heru'ur replied. "Nyerti had not told you of this?"

A scowl crossed the Colonel's face, then a shrug. "Kinda not talking at the moment," he confessed, the growing impatience he felt showing as his features contorted to a grimace. "Look, this is just not gonna work!"

"O'Neill, you will be patient, you are still the outsider here. A human allowed the position of a god for the purposes of a Goa'uld," the system lord barked. "The power you have is only through the Jaffa that serve you, to serve you they must see the strength you possess."

"Yeah, that's great Heru, still doesn't alter the fact that I do not want to be here!" O'Neill remonstrated. "And, by the way, those plans you gave me on the so-called offensive against Apophis, they suck!"

Heru'ur regarded the expression of his co-conspirator now with an almost comical resignation that O'Neill had never seen before. "What does this mean?" he demanded.

"The plans won't work, they're flawed," Jack told him. "You expect to go head to head with motherships? No coordinated battle plan, yours against his, way too many losses to be a good strategy, you know that's why you go around in circles here, power from one to the next."

"Intriguing, continue," Heru'ur encouraged, the soldier now speaking to a kindred spirit. A soldier whose tactics were far removed from the various strategies he had used in the past to defeat other Goa'uld.

"Tell you what," Jack told him. "Find me a way out of here a little quicker than a week and we'll talk!"

The Goa'uld took a deep breath then, keeping his normally mercurial nature harnessed. O'Neill's constant barbs and criticisms irritated him, but yet challenged his thoughts in a more provocative way.

The arrogance of the Goa'uld, of his race was well known to him. They however, possessed the power to be so contemptuous of their rivals. With their technology and the Jaffa who served them, the Goa'uld could afford to challenge one another. This human could not possibly hope to succeed, and yet like a true soldier he refused to accept defeat, such courage was, albeit reluctantly, what made Heru'ur admire his enemy, and perhaps what also made him so tolerant.

"O'Neill, I promise you this, I shall find a way to alleviate you of this burden. The oath that we now hold between us will be revoked the moment you step foot back on your planet," he stated. "I trust it will be the same for you?"

Jack regarded his foe for a moment. "You know, it's sounding better already!" he agreed.

Heru'ur nodded, his image fading as the device shut down.

"Well it's about time!" he said to himself.

******

"After speaking directly with the joint chiefs of staff until the early hours of this morning," Major Paul Davis told the gathering of SGC personnel and Tok'ra operatives. "It has been decided that should a rescue become possible for Colonel O'Neill and Dr. Jackson, then we're to take it."

"Well it's about time!" Colonel Makepeace declared.

Hammond was more watchful of the JCS liaison, sensing there was more to come.

"Is there something else Major?" He asked, unable to take the suspense any longer.

"Yes Sir!" Davis confirmed.

Teal'c raised his eyebrows expectantly, from the expression on Major Davis face he feared the worst.

"Colonel O'Neill and Dr. Jackson are to be treated as hostiles Sir, and turned over to NID for interrogation purposes," Davis sounded as apologetic as he looked.

"That's bullshit!" Colonel Makepeace vociferated.

"Alright Colonel, Major Davis is only the messenger!" Hammond told him.

"Have a good idea what to do with those Sir!" Makepeace replied defiantly.

Hammond looked down toward the colonel, a heavy sigh. "I know what the implications are here Colonel, and if I thought for one minute that there was any chance that the Colonel and Dr. Jackson could have survived over a month without some sort of mind control being established over them, I'd be in the President's office myself!" he snapped. "But let's not kid ourselves here, there is a possibility that one, or both of them has been infected with a Goa'uld parasite, or some kind of mind altering technology."

Samantha Carter's head sank into the palms of her hands.

"General Hammond, would it not serve the SGC to interrogate them first to determine whether or not such deception has been employed by the Goa'uld?" he questioned.

Hammond looked at Davis.

"General Hammond, I'd strongly suggest that before releasing either man they be thoroughly checked out here first for possible haz-chem infiltration!" he said.

"Thank you Major, I agree," Hammond smiled at Davis, his look of affirmation telling the officer he was finally on the inside of this incredibly close family.

"Ah, one small problem?" Sam pointed out. "We're assuming that we can extract them, or that without their GDO codes they can make it back to Earth!"

"Well that's where we come in!" Jacob ventured. "We happen to know that Colonel O'Neill's alliance with Heru'ur is sealed, from our people inside Heru'ur's camp. They don't know if there's been any tampering, but what they do know is that Heru'ur intends to allow O'Neill and Jackson go free once Jack kills Nyerti and hands her armies over to Heru'ur."

"So how does this help us?" General Hammond enquired.

"Heru'ur has got to get them to a neutral planet, once we know where that is, we can have our closest operatives locate them, and using our IDC, bring them back through the Stargate!" Jacob told them.

"Then there's the small matter of course of hoping that your reports, Martouf, were perhaps an intentional display by the Colonel in order to maintain the pretence of an alliance!" General Hammond stated. "One way or another, I want our people back by close of play this week!"

As Hammond stood, the three officers of NID entered the briefing room.

"Major General Hammond I presume?" Colonel Ian Short snapped to attention immediately the words had left his mouth. "Colonel Ian Short, Lt. Colonel Robert Lincoln and Major Newman reporting, Sir!"

"At ease Colonel, what exactly is NID doing here?" Hammond asked.

"We're awaiting the arrival of Colonel Jack O'Neill and Dr. Daniel Jackson Sir, we have the orders right here for their immediate release to our section!" Colonel Short told him.

"I see. Colonel Makepeace, Major Carter would you like to escort these gentlemen to their quarters," Hammond ordered.

"Yes Sir, my pleasure, always like to show these flyboys around," Makepeace chided.

Hammond and Jacob looked at one another dubiously.

****

Daniel read the scriptures in the temple that Jamal had taken him to with a measure of excitement, tempered only by the fact that it appeared to be a prophecy of impending doom.

"The gods will bring down their wrath upon this place like a great bird sweeping from the heavens to capture it's prey," he read aloud.

Jamal knelt beside him. "On this day Daniel Jackson, Heru'ur will be that god. He shall enslave this world and we shall serve him," he told the archaeologist.

Daniel regarded him, the Jaffa seemed to be almost pleased with that idea.

"My lord O'Neill will be the bird from the heavens, we are ready to follow him!" he told Daniel.

"You've been expecting this?" Daniel asked him.

"It is written Daniel, that we will be led by two great warriors to conquer the stars. My lord Heru'ur and my lord O'Neill will fight many battles side by side and will be victorious."

"Er, does my lord O'Neill, Jack, does Jack know of this prophecy?" Daniel asked, concern now engulfing him.

"It is as Heru'ur our God has foretold it," Jamal replied.

"Oh boy!" Daniel said. "Jack's gonna love this!"

"What did you have in mind exactly?" Jack asked Daniel.

The archaeologist's attempts to explain the meaning of the hieroglyphs, inscribed on the walls of the 'old' city, seemed like gibberish to O'Neill, who had already stated his disbelief in anything so removed from reality.

"Well I think trusting Heru'ur might have some serious flaws here after reading that Jack, don't you?" Daniel persisted.

"Reading a bunch of symbols from the walls of some ruins doesn't change a damn thing Daniel!" Jack argued. The expression he now directed toward Jackson, gave the distinct impression that he was not about to be swayed in his thinking.

"Heru'ur doesn't need any help conquering the rest of the Goa'uld, trust me on this Daniel!" he maintained. "Whether or not I trust his motives doesn't alter the fact that we're stuck in Goa'uld town with no way of getting out!"

"Jack, I don't know. I think you might be fooling yourself there," Daniel submitted. "I mean look at the Asgard, they needed our help!"

O'Neill's expression became attentive then, askant, prevailing upon Jackson to continue.

"I just think that maybe the Goa'uld aren't as all knowing as they'd have us believe," he told O'Neill. "And frankly, Jack, I'm a little worried by your attitude."

O'Neill looked almost lost then, boyishly innocent. The ambiguity of Daniel's statement, and the reasoning behind it, forced a deluge of emotions through his mind.

"Why?" he asked, with a tone and attitude so intensely genuine that it brought a smile to Jackson's face.

"You've embraced this like it's some huge crusade," Daniel stated. "You're taking it just a little too far Jack."

"Daniel, damn it," O'Neill snapped. "What the hell do you expect?"

The words seemed to say it all. There wasn't a solution that would make them feel more comfortable. Neither had been in a situation where circumstances had been so incredible before. They were precariously balanced between death, or enslavement.

Daniel looked at him with as much sincerity as he could muster. "Jack I know this is as bizarre as it gets," he said. "Not to mention bizarre, and."

"Life threatening?" O'Neill added, an ironic glare at Jackson. "Daniel, we're about this close to being totally choice less."

Jackson sighed heavily. "So what, we just abandon everything and throw in the towel?"

"Is that what you think I'm doing here?" Jack asked sincerely. "I'm finding us options Daniel, which is more than you've been doing!"

"Oh, I'm sorry Jack," Daniel snapped, once again feeling the Colonel's comments were unjustified. "But I haven't exactly been the one conspiring with a Goa'uld."

"Conspiring?" Jack enquired, incensed by the insinuation. "Why are we even talking about this?"

"Because you're not willing, as usual," Daniel added pointedly. "To listen to anyone else's opinions or views."

Jack was dumbstruck suddenly. "So give me your opinion Daniel. One that doesn't leave us sitting here on our butts, doing nothing and hoping that the SGC, who by the way locked out our codes, and have done squat to help, will come and rescue us!"

Jackson tried to digest those comments and realised O'Neill's anger and frustration also bordered on feelings of betrayal.

"So you're basing your decisions on what?" he asked.

"On getting us the hell out of here," Jack vociferated, his hands thrown into the air as the frustration got the better of him

"By making deals with Goa'ulds?" Daniel questioned, still unwilling to believe that his friend was willing, or even able to go to such lengths.

O'Neill took in a deep breath. "Alright Daniel, I'm gonna level with you here," he imparted. "I'm making deals with Heru'ur, for things I can't possibly do, or give him, because it gives us options and keeps us alive another day, that's a good thing right?"

"Yes, but," Daniel answered.

"No Daniel, no buts!" O'Neill snapped, "He thinks I can help him beat Apophis because I've got a different approach, just like the Asgard right?"

Jack looked at him intensely now. "See, I've seen Heru'ur's fleet, Daniel, and it's awesome, we're talking thousands of ships, tens of thousands of Jaffa. He's gonna move on Apophis and I'm thinking that's a good thing."

Jackson's amazed expression fell on the Colonel. "So?" he enquired, pensively.

"So I cut another deal. We'll turn over Nyerti's armies and ships, join forces with Heru'ur and go kick Apophis out of the galaxy!" O'Neill told him.

"You can't be serious?" Daniel insisted. "And, once he's conquered Apophis what then?"

"Well, I guess he's gonna probably take on the System Lords. Maybe," Jack's tone now laced with apprehension, then almost immediately becoming more confident. "Look Daniel, we've got a chance here to wipe that bastard off the face of...anywhere. Don't you want revenge for what he did to Sha're and Skaa'ra?"

"See!" Jackson remonstrated. "This is exactly what I mean! Jack what's gotten into you? You can't trust a Goa'uld, what if Earth's his next target? What then?"

"Hey!" Jack snapped. "We have the protected planets treaty, he's not gonna risk taking on the Asgard, besides, he gave me his oath!"

"Oh, well that's okay then!" Jackson exclaimed. "I mean if he gave you his word."

Daniel's frustration bordered now on anger. He couldn't comprehend how the Jack O'Neill that he knew was suddenly, and quite of his own accord going along with what appeared to be insanity.

"Whatever happened to, I'll never trust a Goa'uld?" he demanded.

"Yeah, well things have changed just a little don't ya think?" Jack replied. "And who said anything about trusting? I don't trust Heru'ur anymore than he does me, it's a convenient alliance Daniel."

"He got to you didn't he?" Daniel questioned then, unable to properly digest what he was hearing.

"No Daniel, I woke up. Why don't you?" Jack's tone flat now, intentionally so. "You think we have one chance in hell of defeating Apophis with the Tok'ra?"

"At least we know where they stand!" Daniel argued.

"Oh yeah Daniel, I really know where they stand. Getting a little near sighted suddenly? Or did you forget the Zanex thing, and the arm bands?"

"Zatarc, Jack, it was Zatarc," Daniel sighed, looking for words that might prevail over O'Neill's apparent transition to the dark side. "Jack you hate the Goa'uld," he offered.

"I hate a lot of things Daniel, it didn't stop me working with them when our best interests were at heart!" he pointed out, moving closer to Jackson now, his hands placed on the archaeologist's shoulders. "You're just gonna have to trust me here Daniel!"

Jackson nodded thoughtfully, his eyes meeting O'Neill's. "I have no idea what that means anymore," he admitted.

"Good!" Jack exclaimed, turning and moving away. "Kinda makes two of us then!" "Oh that's um, comforting," Daniel said, his manner a little lighter. "I guess we're back to plan A then?" Jackson ventured. "We can't get away from Nyerti with out a GDO transmitter, and we can't exactly fly a Goa'uld mothership either!"

Jack O'Neill leant back against the console he'd been studying. "I say we go with Heru'ur, kick the crap out of Apophis, and get home, maybe."

"And if you're wrong?" Jackson enquired. "What then?"

"Ah, pass."

Jackson shook his head. "Jack this is madness," he stated.

O'Neill sat down now, hands in the air shrugging. "Well, there you go," he retorted.

"Well this just keeps getting better and better," Daniel stated.

*****

Heru'ur regarded Cronos, his expression condescending. "I do not believe the Tau'ri can offer anything to this!" Cronos stated.

"Your narrow-mindedness is your greatest weakness," Heru'ur sneered. "O'Neill has led the Tau'ri against us with cunning and skill. He has already despatched Ra, Hathor, Setesh and had a hand in the demise of Sokar. Perhaps you have also forgotten his triumph over you in the protected planets treaty!"

"He is a thorn in the side of the Goa'uld, Heru'ur, and I will not tolerate his involvement in our affairs," Cronos responded, his tone laced with acrimony.

"Then you are a fool," Heru'ur spat. "His alliance with the Asgard makes him a powerful foe."

Cronos considered this information more carefully.

"But he cannot be trusted, his allegiance is not with the Goa'uld," he argued.

"I withdraw from the summit," Heru'ur told Cronos. "Nyerti will be allied with her consort."

"Heru'ur kree, shel noc!" Cronos vociferated. "The plan to dispense of this Tau'ri slave will go as I have stated." "Kree shak shel noc!" Heru'ur snapped back. "Since we are not in agreement Cronos, I will take any attempt to kill this Tau'ri as an act of aggression!"

"You ally yourself with this Tau'ri against the system lords?" Cronos asked.

Heru'ur's nod told Cronos all he needed to know. "I ally myself with victory!" he said.

"Then you are a fool," he sneered. "This Tau'ri slave will be your undoing!"

Heru'ur leant forward, imposing his presence more forcefully. "It is you who is foolish. When I have conquered Apophis, I will dispose of you!" The arrogance of Ra's heir underlined in the smirk he wore so well across his face. "Without my armies, you are nothing!"

Cronos contained his fury. "You dare to offer such a challenge to me?" he demanded.

The measured confidence of Heru'ur's gaze infuriated Cronos, yet he recognised that this Goa'uld shared his father's ability to rise to dominant power over the system lords. His armies were vast, his strategies far thinking. Heru'ur was perhaps the one Goa'uld that Cronos truly feared.

"I will spare the life of the Tau'ri, for now," he conceded.

*****

Nekhbet travelled back with Heru'ur to his home planet.

"My lord, O'Neill hails you," he informed his master.

"Leave me," Heru'ur ordered.

The long-range Goa'uld communication device activated, Heru'ur regarded his new ally.

"Kel Shak, O'Neill," he greeted.

"Hey!" O'Neill responded, beginning to finally grasp the meaning of that particular Goa'uld address. "Yeah, listen, I've had about enough of this waiting thing, so I'm just gonna get this over and done with."

Heru'ur regarded the colonel for a moment. "There is a problem?"

"Oh there's been a problem since I got here, I'm just thinking it's time we got this over and done with, so I can get the hell out of here!" Jack told him.

"Your impatience is understood O'Neill, perhaps it is time we were rid of the constraints of this alliance," Heru'ur agreed.

*****

Jamal waited for him in the hall, "You get me the Zat gun?" he asked.

"Indeed my lord," Jamal responded, handing the weapon to O'Neill.

"Guess it's time I got a divorce!" Colonel Jack O'Neill stated. "Let's go!"

Nyerti regarded Jack the moment he entered her quarters. "What is it?" she asked.

"Listen, I've been thinking, and this whole marriage deal, it's not gonna work," O'Neill told her.

"You are a fool Jack, I have given you everything. Power, knowledge a place alongside me."

"Yeah well thanks, but it's a little late for marriage guidance don't ya think?" Jack rasped.

"Fool, do you really believe that my own Jaffa would betray me?" Nyerti roared.

"Kill him!" Nyerti instructed.

The Jaffa raised his staff weapon, pointing it toward the Colonel.

Daniel had followed closely behind them, looking around now in desperation to find something that would make an effective weapon.

"You do not believe I would be foolish enough to allow you weapons that actually worked?" Jamal told O'Neill, as the colonel attempted to use the zat gun.

Jack saw Daniel then, a heavy object clutched in both hands, rounding the door.

Jamal smiled at O'Neill. "Gods can not die my lord, Tau'ri slaves, however, can!"

"I don't suppose you're gonna believe the old, look out behind you thing?" Jack asked the Jaffa.

Daniel swung the object then, smashing it into the back of the Jaffa's head sending him sprawling, Jack going for the staff weapon.

Nyerti reacted instantly, her ribbon device sending a powerful charge into the colonel, throwing him backwards.

Daniel, forced into her line of sight by the sheer momentum of striking the Jaffa, stood now defenceless, looking over at O'Neill who seemed to be unconscious but breathing.

"Whoops," Jackson said. "I don't suppose we're sorry, means anything does it?"

"You are fools," Nyerti snapped. She moved toward Daniel now, the ribbon device raised.

"Oh here we go again," Daniel muttered, wincing as he realised what was coming.

"A pity!" Nyerti stated.

O'Neill was coming around, his vision barely able to make out the form of the Goa'uld and Jackson, who was backing away from her.

"What no offer of hosts?" he called to her, through heavy gasps to get his breath back, each one painful enough to make him shake. "Kind of losing your touch there!"

Nyerti turned to look at the struggling figure of the colonel as he tried to stand.

"You have already provided me with the means to procreate thousands of Goa'uld Jack," Nyerti boasted, approaching him now, a sardonic tone entering her voice as she asked. "Perhaps you would like to become a host to one of your own offspring?"

Jack looked horrified, shocked by this revelation, his features contorting with pain and disgust.

Daniel edged toward the staff weapon gingerly, keeping his eyes on the Goa'uld.

"You are weak, Tau'ri," Nyerti told him. "Even now your emotions are so obvious to me."

Jack had managed to sit up, the intense pain in his rib cage easing. "Yeah, yeah whatever, just a few more Goa'ulds to kill right!"

"Did you really think I would deprive you of such an honour?" she asked, enjoying his suffering now.

O'Neill was aware of Daniel's painfully slow move toward the staff weapon, once more finding himself the only means of distraction for the archaeologist's attempted rescue.

"Well I guess they'll be the first really dense bunch of Goa'ulds then hah!" he stated, unable to find any other retort to her continued self-glorification.

She raised the ribbon device now. "I shall kill you slowly Jack, you will feel every moment we shared together as you die," she charged, wrapped up in her hatred for his rejection.

"Sweet!" Jack resigned now, gave one sharp glance at Daniel, whose eyes rolled then conceded. He made a dive for the staff weapon managing to bring it out from under his body enough to level it toward the Goa'uld - as she turned toward Jackson, hearing his movement, he discharged the weapon. The blast struck her in the left shoulder, sending her reeling backwards.

Daniel's shocked eyes meeting O'Neill's. "Don't just lay there damn it!" Jack snapped. "Finish it!"

Daniel stood up slowly, looking at the disabled Goa'uld. Her left shoulder so badly damaged she was unable to use the ribbon device effectively, her eyes glowing defiantly.

Daniel's expression almost immediately revealing his indecision in such a brutal task, Nyerti saw some salvation.

"Please don't kill me!" she begged, using the host's voice.

"Daniel!" Jack berated. "Do it!" He struggled to his feet then, his ribs still hurting, moving toward Jackson, who stood almost paralysed, staring down at the Goa'uld, but only seeing the host.

As O'Neill reached him, Jackson turned his head to argue, seeing Nyerti's first prime on his feet lunging toward them over O'Neill's right shoulder. Daniel brought the staff weapon round quickly, knocking O'Neill aside, sending another blast of deadly energy into Jamal's midriff.

Distant sounds of approaching Jaffa suddenly brought him out of his trance-like state.

"I think someone's coming," Daniel told O'Neill.

"Ya think!" O'Neill complained, groaning as he tried to stand. "Gimme a hand here."

Jackson looked back at Nyerti, still unable to put up any resistance, or pose a threat to them, he leant down and offered O'Neill his hand.

"Thanks," Jack gasped. "Damn ribs are broken," he told Jackson, whose face was masked with askance.

"Well, we've got problems now," he imparted.

"Gimme the staff weapon Daniel," Jack demanded.

Jackson looked at him suspiciously then. "What are you gonna do?"

"I'm gonna kill the damn Goa'uld," he spat, right into Daniel's face. "Now gimme the damn weapon, and get that zat gun!" He gestured at the dead Jaffa, whose Zat weapon had been dislodged from its clip, and now lay on the ground close by.

"Jack you can't," Daniel argued. "The host."

"Daniel, damn it we don't have time for this," Jack growled.

Jackson hesitated, his eyes filled with scorn then. "Sure go ahead," he conceded.

Jack took the staff weapon, turning and checking the approaching Jaffa. Daniel turning away, retrieving the Zat gun, arming the weapon, and pointing it toward the direction of the sounds.

O'Neill, suddenly torn between finishing off the Goa'uld or defending their position, had his mind made up quickly for him. Nyerti stood, her symbiote already beginning the healing process, she raised her hand, the ribbon device glowing.

Jack turned in time to see her, aiming the staff blast into her chest, sending her reeling back, O'Neill's eyes filled with hatred and loathing, he stared for a moment at her lifeless form. Unlike Jackson, he didn't see the host. Jack O'Neill saw the enemy, and all the suffering she had inflicted on him, and countless others.

Daniel looked horrified, staring at O'Neill who glanced at him, revealing the hatred only momentarily, before turning his attention back towards the advancing Jaffa.

"There are too many Jack," Daniel told him, laying down the weapon and raising his hands.

Jack took a deep breath, looking at the confused Jaffa who streamed into the room. Daniel, as he often was, was right.

"I don't suppose kree would work?" he asked Jackson.

"You just killed their god, what do you think?" Jackson retorted, still struggling with his own conflicting emotions.

"Yeah, okay," he conceded, allowing the weapon to drop from his hands to the floor.

"Well they're not exactly shooting," Daniel pointed out. "I guess they're a little confused."

"Jaffa Kree!" Heru'ur's voice boomed from behind the ranks of the massed guard. "Kel noc Tau'ri."

Horus guards now filed into the room, their impressive uniforms towering over the Jaffa of Nyerti.

O'Neill looked dubiously at the Goa'uld, as he strode through the parting army.

"Well here's the moment of truth," Daniel suggested.

The system lord scanned the room, finally seeing the dead body of Nyerti and, beaming his approval, turned to the vanquished Jaffa.

"Kneel before your god!" he commanded, watching each one cede to his order. "Nekhbet, you will take this message to all Jaffa in this domain, Heru'ur claims their allegiance."

Nekhbet bowed before him. "Shall I gather these forces in preparation for your conquest of Apophis my lord?"

Heru'ur nodded, his face glowing from such an easy acquisition. He turned now and looked upon the faces of the SGC men.

"You have done well O'Neill," He praised, noting the surprise with which both men greeted his acknowledgement. "It is time now to proceed with the conquest of Apophis. Once this is done, we will claim dominance over the Goa'uld."

"Okay, we?" Jack enquired, his face contorting into a grimace, eyes narrowing.

"Do you not wish to watch your enemies perish, O'Neill?" Heru'ur questioned.

Jack considered that for a moment, "Hey it's a tempting thought," he agreed. "But we're kinda anxious to get back home."

"You believe I will break my oath?" Heru'ur enquired.

Jack O'Neill looked past him now toward Daniel, who was staring at him in that familiar concerned and amazed way he did.

"I guess we're kinda expecting that yeah!" he admitted.

The Goa'uld looked from one man to the other. "I am a conqueror O'Neill, since my conquest of your world would undoubtedly place me in opposition to the Asgard, I would not be so foolish as to attempt such a task."

"So you're saying you don't intend to stick a snake in our heads?" Jack queried. "Just wanna be clear here."

Heru'ur appeared to consider that for a moment. "I have given you my oath. You will be returned to your home world unharmed," he agreed.

O'Neill shrugged, wincing from the sudden movement to his ribs. "Sweet," he said. "So, lets go kick the crap out of Apophis."

He began to walk gingerly toward the doors that led to the exit of the palace. "Can't say I'll be sad to see the back of this place either!" he commented.

Daniel took a rueful glance back at the body of Nyerti, he couldn't shake the feeling of remorse that he had for the host. Two Horus guards now appeared either side of him.

"Yeah, I'm um, coming," he told them, beginning to follow O'Neill and Heru'ur from the palace.

The rings claimed the Goa'uld and O'Neill as he emerged into the daylight, Daniel took one last look at the Palace that had served as a prison for so long, before being transported onto the system lord's ship.

Intrigued immediately by what met him there.

"O'Neill, your wounds must be healed prior to battle," Heru'ur insisted. "You will accede to my commands and use the sarcophagus!"

Jack nodded. "Yeah, I guess once wouldn't hurt would it," he agreed.

Daniel watched the eyes of the Goa'uld closely, unsure if he detected respect, or merely apathy.

"I'll come with you," he stated, not wishing to remain closer to Heru'ur than he had to, surprised, and alarmed that no argument was forthcoming.

"Jack, I just don't get this," he confessed, as Nefir led them toward the chamber housing the sarcophagus.

"What part exactly?" Jack O'Neill enquired, glancing across at the archaeologist.

Daniel considered that question for a moment. "Um, all of it actually," he admitted.

"Yeah!" O'Neill concurred. "Me either, but I'll tell you something Daniel."

"What?" Jackson replied, anticipating some form of sarcasm.

"That Goa'uld isn't acting very Goa'uld like!"

Jackson didn't respond. The two men continued their journey in silence, both contemplating what that meant.

*****

"It would seem that Colonel O'Neill was in league with Heru'ur, in order to orchestrate the demise of Nyerti," Martouf told General Hammond, in his office back at the SGC.

"So where are the Colonel and Daniel Jackson now?" Hammond enquired.

"We have information that they are now allied with Heru'ur in his conquest of Apophis," Martouf replied. "Our spies tell us that neither one appears to be Goa'uld. As for the reason for this alliance with Heru'ur we can only guess that the Colonel's decisions are based upon survival."

General Hammond stood, walking to the window that overlooked the briefing room, the three NID men talking amongst themselves.

He regarded them with disdain. "Not exactly much to come home for either!" he lamented.

"General Hammond, whatever the reason for Heru'ur's actions I believe my assessment of Colonel O'Neill's motives were wrong. I can only hope that we may find some way of freeing he and Doctor Jackson soon."

Hammond nodded. "So do I Martouf, so do I," he replied.

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Heru'ur spun around toward the image on the long-range communication device.

"What?" he demanded.

"Word reached us my lord, Apophis is no where to be found!" Nekhbet told the Goa'uld.

Heru'ur stood staring into the device, his eyes glowing furiously. "Find him!" he spat.

"There are other matters my lord," Nekhbet said.

The Goa'uld system lord had turned away, almost dismissively, his curiosity roused he returned his attention toward his minion.

"These matters are?" he enquired.

"Nefertum and Ouadjyt have learned of your conquest of Nyerti. They are planning on challenging for this newly acquired domain."

Heru'ur considered the implications of such a challenge, a sneer crossing his strong features.

"Then the lesson will be swift." He stated, "You will take the fleet you now control to the home world of Ouadjyt, I will deal with their advance myself."

Nekhbet bowed his head as the device terminated.

*****

"Hi Jack," Daniel greeted, as the sarcophagus opened, revealing O'Neill to the archaeologist.

Jack's eyes open now, he sat up quickly, pulling himself from the device and shuddering.

"Oh, that thing gives me the creeps," he told Jackson. "Hey! Did I miss anything?"

"I've no idea!" Daniel told him dubiously. "I've pretty much stayed in here."

"Daniel, I'm touched," O'Neill quipped. "I guess we'd better go find out exactly what's happening then, don't ya think?"

"I guess," Daniel agreed, hesitant then. "Jack, do you really think he'll let us go?"

O'Neill wiped the smile from his face now, regarding his friend. His eyes averted then, from the searching eyes that almost beseeched him.

"I have no idea, guess we're about to find out!" O'Neill offered.

"Well, at least that's honest," Jackson replied. "You know, it's funny, but in all the confusion of the last month or so, I'd forgotten how much I missed waking up in familiar surroundings, being able to get a cup of coffee," he lamented.

O'Neill listened, there really wasn't anything else he could say. He felt strangely at ease in a situation where he had no right to be. Jackson's reminiscence, however, merely reminded him of a place that he felt distant from, almost estranged in a way he couldn't fathom.

"Yeah, let's just go see what old snakeboy has to say shall we?" he offered.

Jackson sensed how uncomfortable O'Neill felt, he'd been different recently. Almost affected by the circumstances and drawn into the world they now found themselves in. Who wouldn't? He reasoned, the experiences of the past weeks had left an almost indelible mark on them both. He nodded then, stepping aside and allowing O'Neill past him to the entrance of the chamber. A rueful repose now resting across his troubled features.

*****

Heru'ur sat on the throne-like seat in the heart of the vessel, gesturing for his guards to allow O'Neill and Jackson entrance.

"Hey!" Jack announced. "All fit and raring to kick Apophis's ass."

"Kel shak, O'Neill," Heru'ur welcomed. "We no longer seek Apophis at this time. He has fled this quadrant."

"Ah! Well in that case what are our chances of actually getting out of here?" O'Neill enquired approaching the Goa'uld now.

"We engage Nefertum and Ouadjyt," Heru'ur told him.

Jack looked around at Daniel, raising his eyes heavenwards. "So what are our chances of getting out of here?" he asked again, putting more than a little emphasis on the word chances than he intended to.

"The oath is not fulfilled O'Neill," Heru'ur pointed out.

"Yeah, see I get that part. But, don't ya think we might start getting in the way a little here?" Jack pushed a little harder now, waiting to see the response.

Heru'ur considered this point. "I am unable to allow you the freedom that you seek O'Neill," he said at length.

Jack's expression threw scorn upon the system lord now. "See this is just what I expected. So what are the options?" he asked, that sarcasm he used so well entering into his tone. "Get your own snake? Couple of zat blasts?"

Heru'ur sneered at him, a heavy sigh. "Do you think my oath means nothing, one warrior to another?" he asked.

Daniel looked from O'Neill to the Goa'uld now, surprised by the response.

"Well I don't know you tell me?" Jack replied expectantly.

Heru'ur's features tensed. "I have sworn an oath. Whatever you believe of the Goa'uld, O'Neill, know this - I conquer, I am a warrior and my oath is my pledge. You will be returned to your home world, as you have requested."

Jack looked mildly surprised then, a more intense gaze falling upon the face of this peculiar and confusing foe.

"Well, um, sweet!" Jack acknowledged. "Er, when?"

"Jaffa Kree!" Heru'ur boomed. "Kel reem ta'keel, Tau'ri shree noc."

Daniel took a deep breath.

Heru'ur stood, approaching Jack O'Neill, his right arm thrown across his chest.

"You and I will meet again O'Neill," he stated.

Jack inclined his head now, looking at the Goa'uld system lord, unsure now of whether to offer the same tribute in return, yet offering his hand.

"It's one of our customs," he told the Goa'uld, by way of explanation.

Heru'ur nodded, extending his hand and accepting the gesture.

"Hey! What can I say?" Jack announced as the two took a step back away from each other. "It's been um....."

Daniel followed the three Horus guards and Jack O'Neill to the ring devices, transporting across to yet another Goa'uld mothership.

Nefir, charged with seeing them safely back to Earth, established communication with Heru'ur prior to their departure.

"Very odd," Daniel mused.

"What?" O'Neill enquired, watching as Nefir engaged the ship's hyper-drive.

"What he said to the Jaffa," Daniel replied.

O'Neill looked suspiciously at his colleague. "Daniel, is this a secret?" he enquired, a hint of frustration entering his voice, and crossing his brow.

"Oh, sorry!" Jackson responded, not realising he was being vague. "He, er, told them to guard us with their lives!"

"And that's odd why?" Jack queried.

"Ok, maybe not to you then!" Daniel conceded.

O'Neill shook his head, "You know Daniel, with all that's kinda of happened here, I think we should give old Heru'ur his due don't you?"

"Jack I'm sorry I just can't share your apparent, would like be a good word?" Daniel enquired then, almost petulantly.

"I never said I liked him exactly, just kinda refreshing to think he's a little different from your run of the mill greasy-assed Goa'uld is all!" Jack protested.

"Really? In what way?" Daniel questioned.

Jack screwed his face up. "Okay you're an intelligent guy, you figure it out!" he snapped.

"What, he didn't put a snake in our heads, so he must be okay?" Daniel argued, keeping his voice down so as not to alert or irritate their escorts.

"You're in one piece, safe and sound. I think that counts for something don't you?" Jack retorted.

Daniel looked cross now. "Because it suited him!" he replied.

"Oh for crying out loud!" O'Neill vociferated. "He could still have done what any other self respecting slimy-assed Goa'uld would have Daniel, but he didn't. Kinda different then right?"

Daniel stammered a few incomprehensible utterances, before the sting was taken out of his scowl.

"Er, yeah!" he conceded. "You're right."

"Thank you!" O'Neill sighed, saturating the words with relief.

Jackson raised his eyebrows, struck by the genuine relief of the Colonel's reply. "You like him don't you?" he asked, a smile sweeping over his features then, unable to contain the pleasure of his own detective work.

O'Neill frowned, a double take at Jackson. "No!" he snapped. "No." More forcefully.

"You do, I thought that was what the tantrums were about earlier," Daniel ventured, the excited tones of discovery entering into his voice.

"You are so far out," O'Neill protested. "You're on P3X 888!"

"No I don't think so!" Daniel insisted, glowing with his perceived success.

O'Neill scowled at him. "Daniel. Shut up!" he snapped.

Jackson held his hands up in mock surrender. "Okay, but I wouldn't go singing his praises back at the SGC. They already think you're compromised," Daniel warned.

The Colonel looked horror-stricken. "Damn it Daniel!" he vociferated. "Is that what you think?"

"Nope. I think it's more like Stockholm syndrome," he explained. "You know when.."

"I know what Stockholm syndrome is better than you do!" O'Neill snapped angrily. "And let me tell you something Danny boy, respecting some snake for keeping his word isn't becoming sympathetic with his cause!"

Jackson looked shocked at this verbal tirade. O'Neill's fury emanating through enraged eyes, the blood vessels in his temples swelling slightly as his emotions over took him.

"You have no idea do you?" Jack continued. "How damn lucky we are to get out of this unscathed? And yeah Daniel, it's crossed my mind exactly what it might be that we're looking forward to when we get back."

Jackson stared at him now. "I guess we'll be de-briefed?" he replied, unsure exactly what O'Neill referred to. "De-briefed? Wake up Daniel, we'll probably be isolated for weeks!" Jack told him.

Daniel reflected on that thought. "Why? We've got nothing to hide!" He sounded slightly concerned now.

"Oh and they're gonna take our word for that?" O'Neill stared at him in disbelief. "Daniel we're gonna be lucky if we're not made permanent guinea pigs!"

"They can't!" Daniel protested. "I mean..." He stopped then, realising that Jack O'Neill knew more about the working of the military than he ever could. "Well, that's just ruined a perfectly good homecoming."

"Ya think!" O'Neill replied, with acrimony lacing his tone.

"My lord!" Nefir exclaimed.

Both Daniel and Jack looked around surprised, expecting to see Heru'ur.

"Who me?" Jack asked, looking over his shoulder.

"Yes my lord," Nefir confirmed. "We are pursued by a Goa'uld mothership!"

"Oh here's news. Any idea who it is?" Jack asked.

"The vessel is of Apophis's fleet my lord, should we continue, or fight?" Nefir enquired.

Jack's eyebrows shot up, the soldier immediately excited at the prospect of battle with such a tool at his disposal, yet reasoning that Apophis wouldn't dare attempt to intercept one of Heru'ur's ships without back up!

"Sure it's just one?" he asked.

"There appear to be three my lord!" Nefir advised.

"Jack we can't fight three!" Daniel quickly offered his opinion, seeing the fire of battle clearly in O'Neill's eyes.

"No I guess you're right. Can we out run them?" he sighed.

"My lord, they are equipped with similar capabilities," Nefir told the Colonel.

"Well, this just got a little bit more interesting. Can we contact Heru'ur?" Daniel asked.

"Why?" Jack enquired quickly, turning to Jackson. "You think he's gonna abandon kicking Nefertum's butt in favour of saving ours?"

"Well he might, if he knows it's Apophis," Daniel said.

Jack looked intrigued then. "Good point Daniel," He admitted. "So Nefir, can we do that?"

"We can my lord, but any such transmission might be intercepted by Apophis!"

"Well we'll just have to risk that," Jack told the Jaffa. "Cause we're not gonna out gun, or out run three Goa'uld motherships in a hurry, are we?"

"No my lord! I will activate the communication device."

"Sweet! Let's hope he's taking calls!" Jack quipped.

The silence was foreboding; Heru'ur's ships were obviously beyond the range and scope of the Goa'uld communication device.

Daniel sighed heavily, exchanging concern with O'Neill in the form of a grimace.

"Well, I'd say we've got problems!" he intoned, moving away from the console.

Jack looked at the archaeologist again, the grimace wiped from his face now and that familiar intense mocking disbelief replacing it. Jackson frowned, such an expression generally acted as a warning of impending sarcasm.

O'Neill shaking his head, smiled to himself. The irony of the situation consuming any thoughts he may have had about abasing Jackson.

"Kind of puts a whole new perspective on the whole Heru'ur argument, though doesn't it," he commented, with a heavy sigh, as he moved away from Jackson and Nefir. He turned sharply then, struck with an idea.

"Alright, Nefir, the weapons won't work at hyper-speed right?"

"No my lord, weaponry will only function when the vessel re-enters normal space," the Jaffa concurred.

"Okay. So how long exactly can this ship maintain hyper-speed?" Jack enquired, his mind racing.

"This ship is able to maintain such a speed for over three days. It has never been required before," Nefir told him.

"How many Jaffa are on this ship exactly?" Jack continued.

"Four hundred Jaffa, my lord. Do you wish us to fight?" Nefir asked, ready to obey the wishes of the Tau'ri warrior for whom his god had such respect.

"Jack?" Daniel queried. "What are you thinking?"

O'Neill stared blankly back at the archaeologist, his ideas were still not fully formed in his own mind. "I'm just thinking Daniel, options. Don't worry about it!"

"Great, I'll um, worry about something else," Jackson concluded sardonically.

"Well go on then Einstein, give me something to use?" Jack demanded, short tempered now as he struggled to process the ideas. "Or shut up!"

"My lord, Apophis hails us," Nefir interrupted.

"Oh sweet, he's gotta be loving this!" Jack snapped, "Yeah, go on put the scum-sucking slimy-assed snakehead through!"

The image was that of Zipacna. "You would do well to concede defeat Colonel O'Neill!" he demanded, the moment his face appeared.

"Yeah, well I'm not exactly known for doing well, if you know what I mean," O'Neill retorted. "What d'you want Zippy?"

"You will not evade us, Tau'ri. Concede now, and I will kill you quickly," Zipacna boasted.

"Hey! Snakeboy, maybe you should be watching your six. Heru'ur's out there just waiting to blow your slimy little ass out of the sky." O'Neill bluffed.

"There are no other Goa'uld ships in this quadrant of space," Zipacna sneered. "You bluff poorly human!"

"Who's bluffing?" Jack warned, leaning ever closer to the device. "See we kinda thought you might happen out of the woodwork if we split up. Old Heru'ur's a lot smarter than your boss. Oh and by the way, did anyone ever tell you that outfit sucks!"

Daniel raised his eyes heavenwards. Jack O'Neill could never resist throwing in a couple of sarcastic insults where ever possible. but now was hardly the time.

The arrogant expression on the Goa'uld's face wavered suddenly, his confidence now beginning to ebb.

"What's the deal Zippy? Gonna keep this up and land right in the middle of Heru'ur's trap?" Jack enquired.

Daniel looked ever more concerned. Since they had been unable to contact the Goa'uld system lord, he felt it was inconceivable that Heru'ur, as O'Neill purported, would think like the colonel had of such a strategy.

"If that were the case Tau'ri you would not have warned me of such an ambush!" Zipacna countered. "Now Yield!"

"Ah, that didn't work!" O'Neill said quietly, towards Jackson.

Jackson's eyebrows climbed higher. "Um, I think you got that right!" he replied.

"Sweet! Nefir, turn that thing off! And take this damn ship out of hyper-speed. Let's kick his ass!"

"Jack, are you out of your mind?" Daniel demanded.

"Well we don't exactly have many options here do we Daniel?" O'Neill retorted sharply.

Jackson looked slightly resigned now. "Well no, I guess not. But shouldn't we at least keep trying to outrun him?"

"Which would take us further away from any possible assistance from Heru'ur! No Daniel I think we should play this snake-ass at his own game!"

"Oh well, if it was a game I'd agree but we're talking about suicide here!" Daniel argued.

"Daniel for crying out loud!" Jack vociferated. "We don't exactly have many options and this one is the best one I can come up with right now - unless you've got a better idea?"

Jackson considered the challenge for a moment, then shook his head. "I guess not, go ahead," he replied.

"Will they be able to detect when we start to slow this thing down?" Jack asked Nefir.

"Yes my lord," Nefir replied.

"Well that's a problem then. I was hoping we could get behind them, anyway of doing that?" Jack enquired.

"No my lord, to attempt to change course at this speed may make collision with a star or an asteroid a possibility," the Jaffa explained.

"Ah, crap," Jack complained. "How far are we from Earth?"

"Two rotations of your planet, my lord."

"Well I'm leading Zippy there. Go ahead and shut it down!" Jack ordered.

"My lord, Heru'ur hails you," Nefir interrupted.

"Well it's about time. Hey!" Jack said to the image on the screen. "We appear to have a small snake problem here."

"Kel shak O'Neill. Continue on your current course, we have moved to intercept," the Goa'uld told them.

Jack looked triumphantly at Daniel. "Now see, this is why I like this guy!" he remarked. "You heard him, let's keep it going!"

Nefir bowed, returning his attention to the controls.

"You considered this plan?" Heru'ur asked Jack now, studying the Colonel's expression.

"Well I was kinda hoping strategies might be the same the universe over," Jack replied, "You being a soldier that is!"

Heru'ur smiled, or what passed for a smile from the arrogant restraint of this Goa'uld.

"Then we are well matched," he remarked, the device terminating then.

"Well that was lucky," Daniel conceded.

"Lucky?" Jack stated. "Luck doesn't come into being that good a soldier Daniel. What the hell. I like him!" he admitted.

"You admit it?" Daniel asked, hesitantly. "That you like him?"

Jack considered that for a moment. "He's saved my life three times, it's got to be a compelling enough reason, don't ya think?"

"Well, I guess," Daniel agreed. "But so we're clear, we're not going to mention this to anyone else right?"

"Right!" Jack concurred, regarding Daniel curiously now. "I guess we should be a little careful exactly what we do share, like the, er, thing with Nyerti right?"

"You mean the," Daniel began.

"Yeah! That's what I mean, exactly Daniel," the colonel intoned.

"Jack?" Daniel asked now, his tone different, brow furrowed. "How exactly are we gonna get back to Earth, it's not like we can just land this thing on Cheyenne Mountain and no one will notice?"

"Well, I figure we contact Hammond and take a death glider," Jack explained. "Wonder if Heru'ur has those homing devices?" he remarked, as an afterthought.

"You're going to fly one of those things back to Earth?" Jackson asked, the alarm now showing clearly in widened eyes.

O'Neill pulled a face at him. "Want to stay here?" he enquired.

Daniel raised his eyes eyebrows, almost as if he was considering this option as opposed to trusting O'Neill at the controls of a Goa'uld death glider. "No!" he replied.

Heru'ur's image appeared once more on the long-range communication device.

"Kel shak shree O'Neill, Remoc!" he ordered.

"Remoc?" Jack asked, quizzically.

"We're about to slow down!" Daniel translated.

"Oh!" Jack responded, his hand reaching for the console to catch himself, as the dead stop was achieved.

Zipacna's three ships immediately entered the same area of space, surrounding the Cheops vessel housing O'Neill and the others.

Heru'ur looked at O'Neill. "Prepare to witness the power of your ally O'Neill," he stated.

The image shifting to one of the three ships, which were launching gliders, suddenly becoming one of many ships that appeared from the depths of space.

A burst of energy caused a small area of the ship to ignite, followed quickly by an explosion that filled the viewer.

"Whoa cool!" Jack O'Neill exclaimed. "Oh look out, they're trying to bug out."

A second ship was quickly despatched. O'Neill and Jackson exchanged glances, Jack inclining his head slightly as he did so.

"Not a bad ally hah!" Jack intoned.

"I guess, if you can call him an ally," Daniel replied, a dubious tone expressing the doubt far more effectively than the words.

"Hey I didn't!" Jack pointed out. "He did." Gesturing towards the communication device and the face of the Goa'uld System Lord.

"I have allowed Zipacna to escape," Heru'ur told them, "Since he will bring us closer to Apophis!"

"Smart move! Er, so back to Earth right?" Jack enquired.

"You still desire to remain among the Tau'ri?" Heru'ur asked, mildly surprised.

"Yeah, thanks. The offer is mighty tempting though!" Jack chimed. "But, I miss that old being defenceless thing, makes me feel kinda at home."

The device once more idle, O'Neill turned to Nefir. "We're off to see the wizard!" he remarked.

The Jaffa regarded him with a look of curious surprise. "My Lord?" he enquired.

"It's an Earth thing, don't sweat it," Jack told him, patting him on the back.

****

The alarms sounding around the SGC brought Carter and Makepeace to the control room.

Teal'c, Major Davis and General Hammond already listening to Sgt. Davies describing the large object that had just passed Saturn.

"Goa'ulds?" Makepeace enquired.

"Wouldn't be the Asgard, we'd never detect their ships," Major Davis stated.

"Great! How many?" Carter enquired.

"It would appear to be one," Teal'c told her.

"Colonel O'Neill maybe?" Carter offered.

"Since he's apparently with Heru'ur, according to the Tok'ra that is, it seems feasible," Major Davis agreed.

"Why would Heru'ur return to Earth?" Hammond asked.

"Dad did say the Colonel had struck a deal with Heru'ur Sir, maybe it was part of that deal?" Carter opined.

"It is unlikely that if Heru'ur now controls the armies of Nyerti, that he would have any reason to allow Colonel O'Neill to return to Earth," Teal'c stated.

"Well until they open fire, or contact us let's just reserve our judgement shall we?" Hammond told them.

Makepeace frowned. "We're going to do nothing Sir?" he enquired.

"Not much we can do, Colonel. I've already sent a message to the Pentagon, we're on the highest state of alert we could possibly be!"

*****

"Jack what are you doing?" Daniel asked, finally locating the Colonel in the lower decks of the ship, observing the technology below powering the ship.

"Checking out the propulsion system Daniel, why?" he replied.

"We just passed Saturn, Nefir is saying we should probably stop just past Mars," Daniel explained, looking at the Colonel. "Wow, how weird does that sound. NASA has been trying to explore Mars for years and we're just passing!"

O'Neill shrugged. "It's barren, no Stargate. No threat, no interest," he responded.

"Ah, yeah right. Well we should probably be prepping the glider or something?" Daniel said, beginning to move back towards the exit.

"Yeah, I'll probably need a refresher course in flying one of those things," Jack stated.

"As I recall," Daniel said, waiting for the Colonel to come alongside and then continuing on. "The last time you er, piloted one of those things we needed Thor to rescue us!"

"Hey! We were in the middle of a damn Goa'uld war," Jack protested.

"I'm just saying," Daniel retorted, a smile of satisfaction crossing his features, when O'Neill's response indicated he'd achieved his intended goal.

O'Neill glanced toward Jackson a couple of times as they continued on to the Pel'tac.

"Nefir, are we in range to contact Earth?" Jack enquired, as the two men entered side by side.

"Yes, my lord, disrupting the transmission waves now," Nefir told him.

"Disrupting?" Daniel asked.

"Yeah, they kind of break into our frequencies," Jack pointed out to the archaeologist.

"Well that's a little worrying?" Daniel remarked.

"Ya think!" O'Neill retorted. "Why?"

"Well they can probably, yeah, I see your point," Daniel noted. "It's um, not like they really need to do that!"

O'Neill's nod affirming his conclusion.

"My Lord, communication is established," Nefir told them.

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As the image of the Jaffa came onto the screen, the gathered personnel heard him say.

"My Lord, communication is established."

The image of Jack O'Neill, although a relief initially, each person wondered if this was merely a host now, none needing to express it in words.

"General Hammond Sir," Jack said, "Good to see you Sir."

"Colonel? Is Doctor Jackson with you?" Hammond asked.

"Yes, I'm here," Daniel answered, positioning himself closer to O'Neill in order to be seen.

"What's your status Colonel?" Hammond enquired.

"Well, we're more in need of a shower now than we've ever have been Sir, could use some coffee. Apart from that we're pretty good," O'Neill responded. "We're gonna have to use one of the death gliders to get down to Earth Sir. Just alerting you before we make descent."

"Colonel, we look forward to seeing you and Doctor Jackson. Hammond out," he barked, turning then he saw the three NID men. "Well some of us are!" he muttered.

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Nefir, led them to the glider bay, explaining the controls as they walked.

"Listen, it's been well," Jack told him. "Thanks for getting us home."

"My Lord!" Nefir replied, bowing his head.

"Alright Danny, get in," Jack told him, gesturing toward the closest glider.

Daniel climbed inside, feeling slightly giddy already at the thought of the impending journey.

Jack set the controls, closing the glider, watching Nefir depart the bay then, before beginning to lower the vessel from the ship to launch.

"Oh my God!" Daniel gasped.

Jack's eyebrows almost touching his hairline. "Will you just relax!" he complained.

"I'm trying to, believe me!" Daniel answered, his knuckles white as he gripped the console in front of him.

"Trust me, it'll only take a few minutes and we'll be back at Cheyenne Mountain drinking coffee!" O'Neill told him.

"Or sitting in a cell with tubes and electrodes poking out of our bodies," Daniel opined.

"Yeah, that too!" O'Neill concluded. "Hang on here we go."

The glider alighted from the ship at top speed, heading toward Earth like a torpedo.

"Woohoo!" O'Neill exclaimed, like an excited child.

Daniel's expression fixed and draining of colour, his eyes wide, as he registered what looked suspiciously like America coming up fast to greet them.

O'Neill's expression one of excited enthusiasm. "Hey! We could do a circuit or two of the Earth?" He told Jackson. "Pretty dark down there. Wonder what day it is?"

"Er, can we just land or something?" Daniel's beseeching tones reaching his ears.

"I'm gonna keep a high altitude until I'm sure we're over Cheyenne. Come on Danny boy relax."

"I am relaxed," Daniel snapped through gritted teeth.

"Whoa! Chicago!" Jack whooped. "My kinda town!"

Jackson's eyes closed tightly now, he could feel his stomach churning, a lump forming in his throat.

"Ah, Jack, hurry up!" he begged.

O'Neill sensing exactly what Jackson meant, accelerated now, Colorado growing larger, the glider slowing now, as O'Neill brought it lower. The lights from the SGC complex honing him in. "This imaging thing is amazing," Jack enthused, as the craft slowly descended.

"Yeah whatever, are we there yet?" Daniel urged, almost to the point of sickness.

"Touch down!" Jack exclaimed. "Whoa, cool or what!" he asked, turning back now to look at Jackson, whose expression and appearance told him that the archaeologist thought the journey anything but.

He smiled to himself, lowering the cockpit towards the deck to allow both men to climb out.

O'Neill regarded the gun muzzles all directed toward them. "Yep! Welcome home," he said, the humour now drained from his expression and replaced with apathy. "Daniel, you okay?"

"I don't know, ask me tomorrow," Jackson replied, regarding the Air Force personnel, none of whom he recognised. "Or maybe the next day," he added with a heavy sigh.

Hammond appeared then, apprehensively regarding the two men.

"Welcome home Colonel, Doctor Jackson," he beamed.

Jack O'Neill regarded him now. "Is it?" he asked.

Interactions Ends......Inquisition begins shortly.

The End.

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