

SG1-HG



Fan-
zine

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"So you like the character, but you like to see him beat."

- Michael Shanks at SG-4 Wolf con

Finally we made it to Blackpool!

It is my great pleasure to introduce to you the SG1HC-fanzine.

Why?

Last February at the SG-4 Wolf convention the Sam-Daniel-Rebellion treated us to a Drabble Zine. It contained an array of little fanfics and provided a lovely reprieve from all the hustle of the convention.

I so enjoyed this zine that the idea grew to try something similar for the SG1HC group. My suggestion was met with so much enthusiasm that before I realised it, we were creating a SG1HC fanzine.

The SG1HC group is a nice place devoted to the H/C genre and the talents of its members never cease to amaze me.

H/C is a crude term for something that has captivated our imagination throughout history: putting a character in jeopardy and the resulting comfort. Homer did it to Odysseus, Charlotte Brontë did it to Jane Eyre, Spielberg did it to E.T., and we like to do it to SG-1.

Mr. Shanks was certainly right in his observation, but with the genre of Hurt/Comfort stories, the second element is as important as the first.

We challenged the writers of the SG1HC-list to write stories that would feature both elements, but with a limit of three zine-pages. As you will be able to read, they succeeded... and how! I am very proud to have their work featured in this fanzine.

Who to thank; the list seems endless. Producing a free fanzine like makes you entirely dependent on the goodwill of people, and we thankfully received that in abundance. The list is long and your eyes may glaze over, but there is simply no one in there who does not deserve our gratitude.

First of all the Sam-Daniel-Rebellion members. Their Zine gave me the idea for this one and they were more than happy to give me a few pointers when I started. They are a lovely bunch. Be sure to look for their new Drabble Zine, premiering at this con as well! For every episode, a new drabble. I can't wait to see it.

Without the authors and artists this fanzine wouldn't exist.

Thank you, Aurora, Brionhet, Carrie, Corby, Dangerprone, Ivanova, Jingles, Jmas, Kaz, Lin, Nancy, Sandra, Seanchaidh, Sheila, Siamkatze, Tiv'ester, and Wilma for meeting the challenge and producing these amazing little pieces of fiction and gorgeous artworks.

We can be contacted at sg1hc_zine@yahoo.co.uk

Feedback on the stories, artwork or the fanzine in general will be highly appreciated and forwarded to those involved. Flaming will only get you a Smokey the Bear attitude.

WARNING

We'd say PG. The whole fanzine is strictly gen (no relationships between characters).

The stories may contain spoilers up to and including season 5.

As the H part of H/C suggests, some not-so-nice things might happen to the team. Some stories carry an extra warning, which will be below the title. The stories are aimed at adults.

MISSED OUT ON A COPY?

The fanzine will be online shortly after the convention so you can print out your own copy.

The Comfort Zone will host the fanzine and you can find even more stories there, at:

<http://www.sg1hc.com/>

DISCLAIMER

This fanzine was produced solely for the love of the show. We do not intend to infringe on the rights of any individual or organisation. This is a non-profit publication (D'uh, we give it away for free.); we lost a bit of money but gained a lot of fun making this. Stargate SG-1 and its characters are the property of Stargate Productions, Showtime/Viacom, MGM/UA, Double Secret Productions, and Gekko Productions.

The stories and art are the property of the authors and artists. Please do not publish any of them without their consent.

Thanks to all the hard work of the beta-readers and thanks to all the writers and artists within the fandom, you never leave us wanting for another good story.

Maurice just casually offered to do the layout for this fanzine, making it without doubt much better than when I would have tried to figure that out. Richard, without me even asking, found us a good deal on the printing. What are friends for... Gentlemen, you have my gratitude.

A huge thank-you to our sugarmommies and daddies; thank you for your never-ending support, your undying interest, your constant encouragement to us to strive for perfection, and most of all: thanks for sending cash!

A big thank-you to the rest of the Zine Team: Dawn, Karin, Lisette, Sandra, and Wilma. Thanks for all the work done, the constant support, and maybe most of all for putting up with Henry and me throughout the making of this fanzine.

Thank you to the people who make this convention possible. SG4 was an incredible three-day party and I know SG5 won't be anything less.

Last but certainly not least, the people that made all of this possible. Stargate SG-1 combines adventure and action with a intriguing storyline; presents us with aliens, archaeology, astrophysics, friendship, action, humour, and characters we've come to love.

My thanks to the cast and crew of Stargate SG-1. They made a series that inspired this fanzine, this convention, and all of us to come to Blackpool and party.

You still here? Good. Thank you for listening to me and I gladly invite you to turn to the next pages. I assure you they will be much more entertaining than my little speech.

Let's Party!!!!!!

With warm wishes,





SIMMER

by Carrie

Warning: intense situation

He vaguely remembered Teal'c commenting a long time ago about the Goa'uld romping around the universe, terraforming planets to meet their own tree-loving specifications. It was an odd predilection that was simply a fact of his gate-hopping life - one he didn't care for and bemoaned often. Trees, trees, would the trees ever end? So it was particularly humorous, in a kick-him-when-he's-down kind of way, that Jack was now stuck wishing for trees. To be fair, he wished for a lot of things: trees, clouds, rain and sparkling fresh water got top billing. None of which were found on the intergalactic cesspool the SGC so lovingly referred to as P9J 426. His sleep-deprived, dehydrated, nourishment-impooverished mind and body still somehow managed to find the coincidental irony in the designation - on a telephone, the last three digits spelled H2O. It set him almost giggling again. That, and his temptation to burst into a rousing verse of some nautical song like... 'Row, Row, Row Your Boat' every other minute kept him distracted enough to forget he and his team were Screwed. Almost.

Nothing but blue skies above, blue salt water all around. For forever and then some. Infinity and beyond? Jack snickered under his raspy breath and wearily lifted his head off the bottom of the ramshackle raft to see how his companions fared. Unsurprisingly, Daniel and Carter were huddled under the scant protection of their tented jackets. Terrifyingly, now Teal'c was too. It was only seconds ago the Jaffa had insisted Junior would take care of him. Seconds...no, minutes, maybe or hours. Days?

From his prone position, he could see the ragged condition of each of them and knew he mirrored their physical states. Panting out of his mouth had become mandatory hours ago, which only served to dry out his lips to the point thinking about touching them together induced misery. And each open-mouthed exhalation made them all lose more valued moisture than they could afford; he was pleased to see they all were regulating the water loss as much as possible by taking shallow breaths through almost closed lips. Daniel's were bleeding again, he unhappily noted, prompted by the split the younger man had obtained before they'd begun their involuntary journey across the sea. They'd all learned not to speak unless spoken to from that experience. Not that talking would have done a lick of good.

"I'm going in," Daniel hoarsely gritted out. His voice sounded loud compared to the waves lapping at the edges of the vessel but Jack knew it was barely a whisper. He refrained from refuting Daniel's assertion only because he knew it would be a wasteful use of air and hydration. "I can't take it."

"Daniel, I don't think that's a good idea. We're all too weak. It's too..." Carter cut off in a dry, weedy cough. "It's too risky now."

"What have I got to lose?"

"Your life?"

Daniel cleared his throat and Jack winced in sympathy at the frayed sound; it had to have hurt. "Hate to break it to you, but that's already going quickly."

"Daniel..."

"Daniel Jackson. Major Carter. Speaking only serves to draw upon your remaining strength. It would be wise to abstain from doing so."

What he said.

Jack saw both sides of the argument and sat precariously on the fence. Splashing around in the water was a hazard in their debilitated shape but if they didn't, heat exhaustion or stroke weren't far off. To make matters more interesting, he swore the last time he'd indulged in a dunk he'd felt something brush by him. Something antagonistically BIG. He imagined it had had oversized teeth and a malicious, carnivorous attitude. It definitely was more than just an it - more like its. And the its

territorially swam around the raft, scaring away anything they might have caught for food. Tipping right over the fence to the negative, he swiped his hand across his drenched forehead to prevent some of the sweat from stinging into his eyes. He brought his palm up in front of his face, studying the glistening wetness there before flitting his gaze back to his friends. Daniel was slowly dragging himself toward the water, ready to pitch himself in.

"Just remember that you're standing on a world that's evolving and revolving at nine hundred miles an hour..." Jack croakily sang.

Daniel froze mid-crawl and gawped. Actually, all three of his team members stared at him as if he had four heads; it was hard to tell which was most startled. Truth be told, he had no idea why the words were coming from his parched mouth and throat but if he gave it thought, it made a certain amount of sense. Chuckling, Jack raised himself up on both elbows to weakly grin at his team as they exchanged worried glances.

Still under the full glare of the sun, Daniel warily asked, "Jack, are you feeling all right?"

Suddenly Carter and Teal'c were at his side, poking and prodding and just generally fussing. Flopping back down, Jack waved a dismissive hand and hoped they'd shrewdly get back under the sparse shade. It didn't work, Carter upping her ministrations by placing a shaky hand to his forehead. He pulled back with a growl - a completely innate reaction but it only made her stick her face about half an inch in front of his and examine him like she did her astrophysics or whatever stuff. Like he was about to blow up. Seeing his reflection in her sunglasses, he was stunned to note he *did* appear close to detonation. He looked away.

"Are you all so uncultured you don't recognize..." He had to stop to allow a tiny trickle of saliva lubricate his mouth before he could go on. So not good. "...Meaning Of Life stuff?"

"O'Neill appears to be delirious. Perhaps we should partake of our water rations before schedule."

Jack groaned, the humor all dried up now. Dried. Huh. "For crying out loud, I'm fine. Don't you people know Monty Python? Long song short, it ends with - pray that there's intelligent life somewhere up in space, 'cause there's bugger all down here on Earth."

"But we're not on Earth," Daniel unintelligently murmured. "I don't get it. Are you calling me stupid?"

"I just don't think it's a good idea to go swimming around in Thing-infested waters."

"Thing-infested?"

"Jeez, would you have rather I said 'here there be monsters'?"

"Well... yes. At least that would have made some sense!"

Biting back an irritated rejoinder, Jack paused long enough to understand they were definitely showing signs of heat stress. The anger might be stemming from being carted miles and miles out into sea and dumped to die agonizingly slow deaths but it was becoming harder not to take it out on each other. Fantastic. He was both relieved and worried their physical capacities had weakened to the point they couldn't really fight.

"There are indeed creatures I believe to be malevolent lurking below the water's surface," Teal'c helpfully intoned, clenching his jaw muscles and fixing his eyes upon a distant point. Something akin to interest sparked there but Jack couldn't tell what caused it. "It is unfortunate we will not be able to reduce our body temperatures by submerging ourselves."

Well, that was the understatement of the decade. Unfortunate? Deadly, more like. Drinking seawater was a provisional and very dangerous solution and their time was running out. There wasn't a thing he could do about it - no last minute heroics to save his team. Jack fisted his hands and limply

pounded them into his thighs. They were leaden and uncooperative, his brain instructing his body to cool down by whatever means possible.

"Yeah. We should drink." Jack cringed, not at all thirsty. Stay alive as long as possible, hope for salvation. He struggled to sit, scowling at Daniel and Carter for remaining in the sun so long. They bleakly returned his stare, apparently seeing something disturbing in his appearance. "Right back atcha, kids."

They all dutifully took their small sips of water, Daniel hissing as the salt contacted his lip. Jack could see he wasn't the only one alarmingly not thirsty - Carter almost spit hers out - and desperate fear surged. Too close, too fast. But still too soon to say things he had to say to them before...no. Voicing what could only be coined a farewell was confirmation of defeat. He wasn't ready for that - he never would be. Watching his friends douse their faces and necks in water, he was filled with regret at the evidence of frailty in trembling hands.

Closing his eyes, he crawled back under cover, trying not to think about the horrors soon to set upon them. Dizziness, delirium, cramps, vomiting...until their bodies overheated beyond repair and their kidneys failed. This wasn't how it was supposed to happen. If SG-1 were going to die on a mission, he had always pictured them going out in a blaze of glory, not withering away in excruciating pain. Drying up into desiccated husks. The more he tried not to think about it, the more his mind supplied new Technicolor tidbits. Cruel waves splashed rhythmically into the raft, taunting the ability to carry them ashore but taking them nowhere.

He drifted.

"Oh, God!"

Jerking weakly, Jack's heart raced at the tormented whisper screaming out and pulling him from his dazed slumber. Disoriented, he couldn't tell who it had come from, couldn't get his body to move. He heard a scuffle and bump as someone edged slowly, then he finally managed to roll over.

"Sam?" Daniel croaked, slithering his way over to Carter. Jack flopped over onto his stomach and mirrored the other man's action. "It's okay, let me help."

Fumbling, he clutched Carter's shoulder while Daniel targeted her right calf. Jack saw the muscles buckling even through the coarse material of her pants and he grimaced. She whimpered again, a dry, miserable sound, and sour breath wafted across his face. Rubbing her shoulder in an attempt to calm her down, he studied her scrunched up, scarily un-sweaty face and realized she wasn't even conscious. The pain was enough to make her cry out in her sleep. Daniel quietly cursed and Jack looked down to see the archaeologist grappling unsuccessfully with kicking legs as if he couldn't get his hands to work properly. No, he *couldn't* get his hands to work properly. Crap.

"Daniel?"

"I can't..." Daniel moaned, resting his forehead on Carter's leg.

Even through blurred vision, Jack could tell the other man was suffering similar cramps as Carter as his face contorted; it was probably due to slighter body masses. Daniel wasn't that much smaller than him and he knew his own bout would be coming soon. He wondered how long Teal'c would last, didn't envy the last man standing. Wait. Teal'c...was nowhere to be seen. Frowning, he tried to assure, "I know. Where's Teal'c?"

Daniel snapped his head up in alarm and Jack automatically surveyed the craft. Racing uncontrollably in his chest, his heart threatened to come up into his throat as he realized they were one person short of a team. Teal'c was gone. God. Letting go of a still feebly writhing Carter, he twisted onto his side in an attempt to rise up. He failed miserably, getting about six inches before his body rebelled, stabbing and wrenching and burning. Wheezing, he caught and held Daniel's uncovered eyes and saw terrible truth there. Dying, all of them. Teal'c already? Pain from that knowledge far surpassed the physical torture.

Jack groaned, reaching out to the other man while letting his head drop onto his ZIC's shoulder. His fingers contacted blisteringly hot skin and he wrapped them around a forearm,

lulled toward unconsciousness by a distant mechanical buzzing from above. All around. Voices followed, familiar and impossible. Brightness flared as his sunglasses slid off his nose, the sun coloring his vision a gruesomely vivid white. He felt himself turning over onto his back, swore he saw a concerned face hovering above, darkened by the backlit luster. Hallucinating. Daniel cried out again and that was real. Closing his eyes, he mourned the deaths he could not prevent. Lost his team forever. Daniel's fingers folded around his arm in a fragile, ever waning grip. So sorry.

He floated.

"O'Neill awakens."

The voice was strong and sure. His heart beat with hope, wanting to believe it was Teal'c, that his friend was somehow alive - not torn to pieces by some marine beast, not literally cooked in his skin. Had to open stubborn eyes to see for himself but was afraid it was only an apparition created by his dying mind. Jack heard a grating sound and realized it came from his own throat. Startled, he registered he was no longer hot, the pain was not quite so great and clicks and whirs of medical equipment surrounded him instead of goading waves. Something wet and cool pressed onto his closed eyelids and he started faintly.

"Easy, Colonel," a soft, female voice whispered. "You're okay."

The dampness vanished and he cracked his eyes open to see Doctor Fraiser smiling down at him. Confused but relieved, he smiled back and winced when his dry lips stretched painfully. Teal'c's beautiful bald head sprang up behind the doc's. Face marred by an ugly gash. Scowling, Jack leaned up caught sight of a slinged arm. Not unscathed. He needed to know what had happened, couldn't muster the question.

"How're you feeling?"

Stupid question. His body felt like it had been put through a garlic press. Multiple times. Throat scoured by steel wool.

"Like crap."

"I'll bet."

"Carter? Daniel?" He frowned worriedly.

"Right next to you, worse for wear but they'll be fine," Fraiser said, nudging her head toward his left.

Twisting his neck where she pointed and saw his other two team members, lying still and pale beneath ugly sun blisters. But alive. He wanted to whoop, ended up coughing so hard tears sprang into his eyes. Abundant wetness. Coughing switched to laughing at the simple fact he could again produce moisture and overwhelming, embarrassing happiness that SG1 had survived. He felt four hands pulling at his shoulder, forcing him onto his back but he didn't care. His team was still alive and soon they'd be kicking again. Exhaustion swooped in, carrying him back into sleep along with comforting, indistinguishable words from Fraiser and Teal'c.

He smiled.

The End

A STRANGE NEW WORLD

by Jingles

A cool gentle breeze coming down from the mountains brought some comfort to the hot, arid heat of the afternoon sun. The pre-teenager could feel the soft blades of grass tickling her toes as the wind's passage caused their movement. It was a lazy, sunny Colorado summer day and the twelve-year-old's bare feet dangled a bit, barely touching the ground from her place on the lawn chair. Dressed in the outfit of summer, shorts and a tank top, the girl watched the action on the road in front of her, one of her legs swinging idly back and forth in a slow rhythm, dispelling some extra energy she didn't even know she had.

Cassy reached down, picking up the Pepsi bottle sitting next to her chair, and took a large gulp without really looking at what she was drinking. Her eyes were focused entirely on the figures moving back and forth in front of her.

This was the event she had waited for all week, the big street-hockey face-off between SG-3 and SG-1. It was no secret who she was rooting for. She heard a whistle blow and then a...

"Sam, I'm warning you, anymore high sticking and I'll give SG-3 a free shot at the goal," came the voice of her adopted... well... she couldn't quite bring herself to call Janet her mom, not yet. It was too soon; it would feel like she was betraying her own mother if she did. Instantly a sense of sadness swept over the child, the wound was still fresh, the loss of her family, her people, still new.

But that didn't stop Cassy from caring deeply for the people in front of her, who had taken her in and loved her even though she had been a complete stranger to them. Every time things got too difficult for her, one of them would be there, usually Janet. The redhead chief doctor of the SGC had not only taken her into her home but would listen to her for hours as she talked about her family, her life, her mother... and then would hold her afterwards as she cried.

There was a *Whack* and a *Thud* on the street as the puck ricocheted off Daniel's legs.

"Oops... sorry," came a not-very-sincere sounding apology from one of the SG-3 marines. The victimized archeologist glared back at the man with a 'yeah, well-thanks-a-lot' look with its own obvious sarcastic undertones.

There was a growl at the other end of the pseudo-rink that made a young SG-3 lieutenant skate back a few paces. He had gotten too close to the SG-1's goalie, Teal'c. The large Jaffa was giving the man a look that said if he even attempted to get close to their goal again, Teal'c would disembowel him.

Cassy smiled to herself. She found it a minor miracle that Teal'c was managing to protect the SG-1 goal at all, which in reality was two orange cones about three feet apart, strategically placed at one end of the street. Granted, the man was doing it by using all his six-foot four-inch, 265 pounds mass to block it; that and by intimidating the hell out of the members of SG-3. It was working on most of them except for Makepeace, who was making a great effort *not* to notice.

Cassy had been there last week when SG-1 had tried to teach Teal'c to skate. Her grin deepened as she remembered it...

Teal'c was holding on to the side of the garage like it was the only thing between him and a bottomless pit. His eyes showed his distress even if he didn't voice it.

"O'Neill, I do not believe this is a wise course of action."

"Come on, Teal'c, let go. You'll be fine." When it became apparent Teal'c had no intention of letting go, he added.

"...Come on. If Daniel can do it, anyone can."

"Hey!" came the hurt voice of Jack's victim, who had not appreciated the comment.

Sam, in the meantime, skated up and down Jack's driveway. Sometimes forward, sometimes backward, practicing turning in a circle, very gracefully. She tried talking to Teal'c while at the same time not stopping her movements. "Think of it as training for combat," Sam called over her shoulder to the distraught Jaffa.

"Captain Carter, I doubt I will encounter an enemy while on skates."

"Teal'c, you just need to learn balance." After a moment she added, "After all, it's a matter of honor. SG-1 has been challenged to a street-hockey match by SG-3. You wouldn't want us to be a player short, would you?" she finished sweetly, waiting for the fact he'd be letting his team down to sink in.

The colonel gave Sam a look of 'that's-right-Carter, use-the-guilt-approach', silently encouraged her.

That did it. Teal'c squared his shoulders and pushed off from the garage. Although his attitude had improved, his balance had not. He promptly lost his footing and fell into the rest of SG-1, knocking them all off their feet.

Bodies flew everywhere. When the dust settled, Sam was on top, laughing so hard she was almost crying. Directly underneath came Daniel, with a slightly dazed expression that changed to a smile as he began to laugh along with Sam.

Jack, unfortunately, was on the bottom looking extremely uncomfortable.

"I'm glad you think this is so funny... Now GET OFF!... I can't breathe."

"I am sorry, O'Neill. This exercise does not seem to be a success."

"Teal'c... MOVE, you're killing me here."

The preteen was glad she had been there, if for no other reason than to see them all piled on Jack. Cassy took another sip of her drink, the corners of her mouth still uplifted at the remembered amusement. It also made her feel a little better knowing that someone else was having trouble adjusting to life here on Earth. She knew beneath Teal'c's fierce exterior, there was the soul of a gentle giant, her gentle giant. Just like all of SG-1 were hers, at least that's the way she liked to think of it. She had adopted them, and they her. It had only been a couple of weeks ago that she had awoken to a slight swaying, only to find that Teal'c was carrying her to Janet's car. She had fallen asleep while they were at Jack's for the evening.

"Yes... Score!!" the triumphant sound of Colonel O'Neill's voice broke her out of her reverie as he drove the puck in between the feet of the SG-3's goalie and into the goal for a point.

The fact these people went out of their way to include her in things warmed the girl to the very core of her being. Only last week, she and Janet had gone with SG-1 to the Cheyenne Mountain Zoo. The colonel had said it was for her and Teal'c's education about Earth society. Secretly, Cassy believed that Jack just liked to see the animals. It seemed strange to the young girl that they would place a zoo so near to where they hid the Stargate, but then again, the zoo had been there first. As she wandered around the zoo grounds, she kept thinking how ironic it was that none of the people here had any idea they were so close to this world's greatest secret.

Cassy had to admit she had not known that such beasts could exist in the universe. It had concerned her greatly until Janet assured her that most of the animals' wild cousins lived half a world away. On her homeworld, they'd had only some domesticated farm animals, nothing even remotely as dangerous as the wild creatures found here.

There had been a strange conversation when they'd first arrived and she'd asked what kind of animals they would see there. Sam had replied with a, "Well, there are some very large animals... elephants, rhinos..."

When Cassy showed no signs of recognition, Sam kept going, determined to find some earth creature the girl had heard of.

"...giraffe...lions..."

Then Jack had added, "And tigers, don't forget tigers... big huge cats with stripes and claws that..." O'Neill had bought his hands up to form imitation claws.

It was at this point that Daniel interrupted with a... "And bears... oh, my."

A mischievous glint had lit the archeologist's eye as he had spoken. Both Janet and Sam had thought his words were funny but Jack had immediately growled a warning of "DANIEL!"

Cassy didn't understand Jack's fuss; after all, they did have bears there.

Janet told her later that the colonel was just jealous that Daniel had stolen his line, which of course led to a discussion of where the line had come from. Cassy wanted to see the movie immediately, but Janet had been against it, saying it would be better if Cassy waited a few more months, adjusting to her new world first. The twelve-year-old, however, would have none of it and had won the argument by insisting that she wasn't a little kid anymore. She was almost a teenager for crying out loud, much smaller children watched The Wizard of Oz. (Janet then pointed out that Cassy was picking up Jack's speech patterns and said she was going to have to have a talk with him about that.)

The doctor had been right however, Cassy had started crying before the movie's end. There was just too much about going home in it... and she couldn't, not ever. This time it was Jack who had gathered her up on his lap and she threw her small arms around his neck and sobbed into his shoulder. Hours later, she had awoken still in the same position having cried herself to sleep. The colonel had not moved, the whole time... man, she loved him for that, and for everything else that made him special. It had taken her about two weeks before she realized that Jack's 'Earth Rules' were just his way of being able to make a fuss over her without her knowing. She loved him for that, too.

"Yes!... Yes!..." another excited cry came from the playing field as Sam successfully guided the puck into the SG-3 goal.

Cassy studied Sam dreamily; Sam had been her first real friend here. She was such a wonderful person. She had been Cassy's safe harbor in the midst of a very big storm. The captain came and spent a lot of time with her, taking her shopping, or to the movies. In some ways, Cassy wished she could live with Sam, but understood the reasons she couldn't. Besides, there was a part of her that was not ready to give up Janet, truth be told, she wanted them both.

There was always someone from the SGC that stayed with her during the day. Janet didn't think it wise that she be left

alone just yet. The small redhead woman did her best to make it home each night to be with her, and when an emergency would hit, her guardian would always send someone to keep her company. This didn't bother Cassy, at least not right now, for even though she was old enough, she didn't want to be alone, not yet.

When they were on-planet, one or more of SG-1 would come to stay with her when Janet was called to an emergency, like last Saturday. Daniel had come to be with her then.

They had gone up to Seven Falls and after climbing all the stairs, they had hiked along the top rim and then found a place where they could see the entire valley from their spot on the mountain. It was an awe-inspiring sight. You could see for miles, not only all of Colorado Springs and its sister town Manitou Springs, but also for miles and miles of plains after that. Everything looked so tiny from their place in the sky. It was there Daniel had told her of his childhood, and how he had lost his parents, and she had talked of her family and how much she missed them.

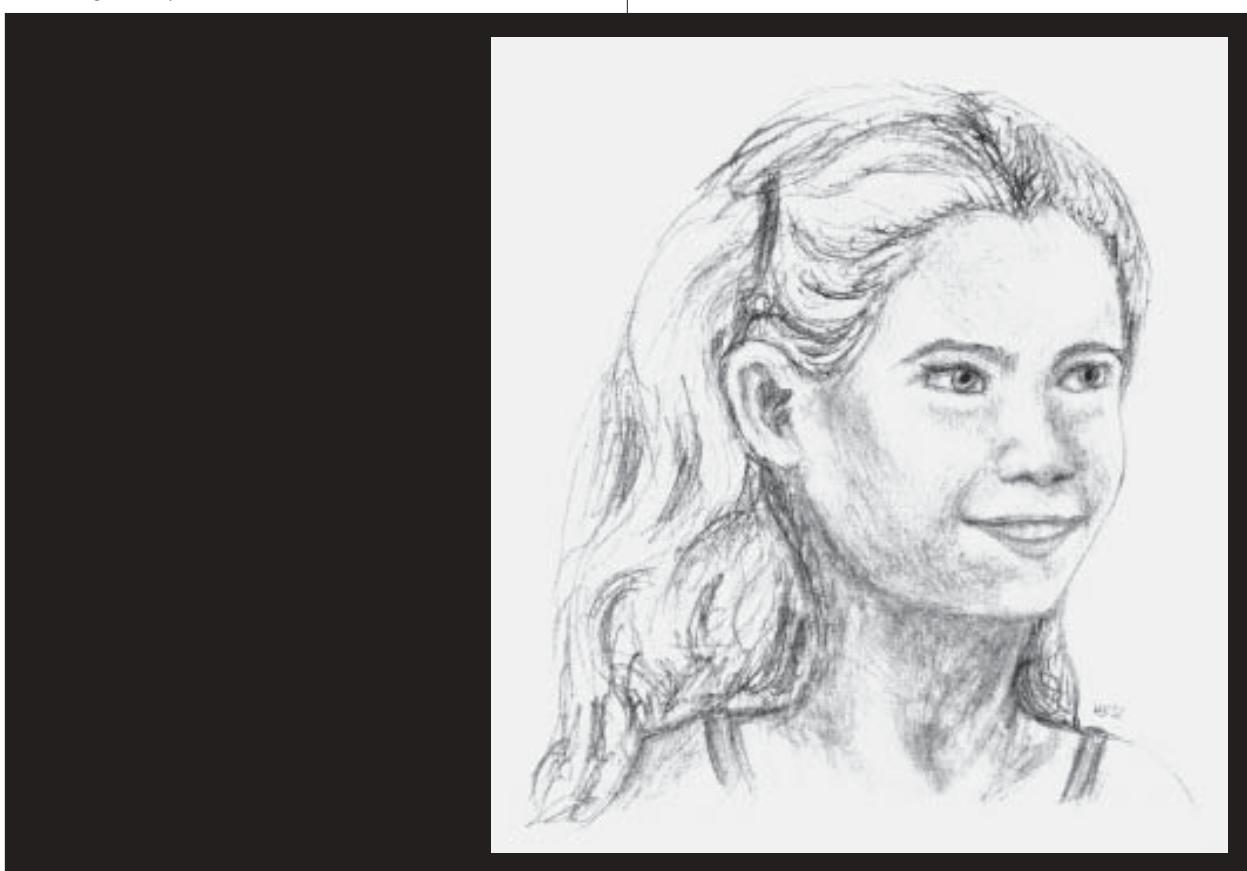
The pre-teenager reached down, grabbing the Pepsi bottle, taking another long sip.

"EXCUSE me!" Daniel said as he shoved the SG-3 marine that had hit him with the puck earlier out of his way with his shoulder as he went after the disk, not sounding like he meant it anymore than the marine had in his apology.

Cassy's amusement grew as she watched the interaction on the street. A feeling of belonging and warmth swept over her. She was glad to have such people to care for her.

Tomorrow at sunrise, she and Janet were going with Teal'c to a place just outside of town. It was a place that the colonel had introduced Teal'c to when he had first arrived, and Teal'c felt Cassy should see it. It was called The Garden of the Gods. Teal'c said at sunrise the light reflecting off the red sandstone formations would bring 'music to your heart' and 'medicine to your soul'. See, she knew she was right, her gentle giant did have a poetic soul. The twelve-year-old snuggled back into the lawn chair, eager to see what the sunrise might bring here in her strange new world.

The End



FOOLS RUSH IN

by Kaz

A tag for Forever In a Day

Jack stormed through the tent flaps and immediately froze.

"Oh, God," Sam sighed, lowering her weapon and pulling up beside him.

"Teal'c?" Jack looked to the Jaffa for some inkling as to what had happened, apart from the obvious.

"Daniel Jackson will be fine," Teal'c assured them.

Yeah? And exactly which definition of 'fine' would that be, Teal'c? Jack kept his sarcasm to himself, feeling his heart lurch. If he ever wanted confirmation that life just plain sucked, he'd been handed it for certain by the sight that lay before him.

Daniel was curled on his side, one shaky hand reaching out to stroke the side of his dead wife's face. Jack winced, commiserating with the younger man's need.

"I love you too," Daniel said softly, too late for Sha'uri to hear.

Whatever had transpired while the SGC's forces dealt with Ammonet's Jaffa, Jack figured he would find out some way... sometime, but for now all he needed to know was if Daniel was okay.

He knelt beside the motionless, fatally-coiled bodies, noting the rough circle of singed flesh on his friend's forehead. "Daniel?"

There was no response. The archaeologist's eyes remained fixed on the cooling form, the purpose for his continuing association with the SGC, his mission in life. In all the scenarios that had no doubt played out in Daniel's head over the last three years, Jack didn't think anything quite like this would have been one of them.

"Ammonet was attempting to kill Daniel Jackson with the ribbon device," Teal'c told him. *Finally*... information Jack could utilize, and he nodded his understanding at the big man.

"Daniel, look at me," Jack persisted, his concern growing at the unnatural silence emanating from his friend.

"I want to go with her," Daniel whispered, barely stifling a sob.

Jack felt a sudden spear of fear spike him. Did Daniel mean...?

Even dazed and distressed, Daniel still seemed to comprehend Jack's anxiety and quickly put his mind at rest by expounding, "I want to take her home. Has Kasuf already gone?"

"Yes, Daniel," Sam answered. "SG-6 are accompanying the Abydonians back."

"Teal'c, would you...?" Daniel's outstretched fingers twitched close to Sha'uri's hair.

"I will." Teal'c bowed solemnly in assent and then stooped to lift the young woman's body.

Jack grimaced at the dark stain on the rug where she had been, a bloody testament to the drastic action Teal'c had taken to save Daniel's life. Talk about a double-edged sword...

"Jack," the archaeologist requested hoarsely, holding up his hand as if it were a lead weight.

Frantic fingers snatched at Jack's arm as Daniel hauled himself to his feet. Swaying dangerously, he fought to control his frail limbs, until the colonel braced him.

"Are you sure you're up for this?" Jack asked, looking critically at the debilitated young man.

Daniel panted, the effort just to get upright having clearly tested the bounds of his resilience. "Don't try to change my mind, Jack."

"Daniel, you can hardly stand..."

"You ought to go the infirmary first," Sam chirped, backing the colonel's apprehension.

"Jack, Sam..." Daniel whispered beseechingly. His eyes, lacking focus despite his glasses, flitted from one to the other. "Just... help me, please."

"Okay," Jack surrendered, and shrugged his defeat at Sam.

Opting for support rather than confrontation, he wrapped an arm around the younger man's waist and pulled one of Daniel's across his shoulders.

Sam rummaged in her vest and brought out some Tylenol.

"Here," she said, handing them to Daniel with her canteen.

"Thanks," he murmured, swallowing the tablets gratefully. "I have to do this..."

"I know," she replied with understanding.

There was little co-ordination to Daniel's steps as they made their way to the Stargate. Jack could feel the tremors vibrating through the younger man's frame and wished he hadn't agreed to his plan.

When they neared the DHD, Jack gave his 2IC her instructions. "Carter, go back to the SGC, brief Hammond, then meet us on Abydos." Daniel was almost unconscious, his head resting on the colonel's shoulder. Not wanting to alarm him, Jack mouthed his next words, "Bring Janet."

Having laid Sha'uri in a side niche off the main aisle of the pyramid's Stargate chamber, Teal'c stood silently by a column awaiting Kasuf to prepare her body for burial.

Daniel sat beside his wife, staring, almost willing her to stir. Tear tracks glistening on his pallid cheeks, he trembled constantly.

Worriedly, Jack paced. He'd watched Daniel's countenance change dramatically over the last hour, skin becoming translucent and eyes sunken, lids squeezed to bare two faint lines of blue until he could hardly differentiate between the living and the dead beside him. He tried to imagine the physical pain responsible for Daniel's appearance, while the emotional side of the archaeologist's anguish he knew well. Either could fell Daniel permanently, and he hoped Carter would bring the doctor soon.

Daniel's face suddenly scrunched, and he let out an agonized cry.

Jack stopped pacing and raced over. "Daniel, you're hurting, you need help."

"God, Jack, how the hell do you put up with me being such a liability?"

Jack was expecting some kind of protest from his friend, but not such self-damnation.

"It's my fault," the archaeologist continued, in utter despair. "She might still be alive... if I'd waited for back up, if I hadn't rushed in like a fool thinking I could be the hero and save her myself." He thumped frustratedly on the stonework and then doubled over, as if holding back the urge to spew. "Teal'c wouldn't have had to shoot her to save my life. We might have been able to capture her... taken her to Thor's Hammer, or something."

Jack rubbed the young man's back as he stayed hunched, cramping intermittently, but expelling nothing. "You don't know that."

But Daniel was inconsolable. "And now I'll never have another chance. I didn't deserve her, did I? I messed up. Let her be taken away... twice... Why, Jack? Why couldn't I *just once* have followed your orders?"

"I don't think I ever said you couldn't go after her."

"No, but *you* wouldn't have done... not like that... not alone. It wasn't the *military* thing to do, was it?"

"Who's to say what I'd do given similar circumstances? Besides, you'd do the same tomorrow, even with the benefit of hindsight from today."

"You're probably right. *I* would. *You* wouldn't though, would you?"

"What do you want me to say, Daniel? That you were an idiot for trying to save her?"

Daniel blinked, tearful and owlish without his glasses.

"Fairy tale endings are pretty hard to come by, you know..."

"Oh, yeah. I know..." Daniel retorted acrimoniously, making

Jack pondered other wounds cutting so deep into the young man's psyche.

"I'm just saying... You did everything you could. Never gave up. I know it didn't work out the way any of us wanted, but no one's going to blame you for that, and you shouldn't either. Teal'c fired the staff, are you going to..."

"I've forgiven him already," Daniel interrupted. "At least... Sha'uri..." he swallowed and dropped his gaze, "She didn't hold him responsible. He did what he thought was right. But whatever anyone says, it's going to be a long while before I can forgive myself... maybe I never will."

"Doctor Jackson?" Janet stepped cautiously into the alcove, Sam following behind.

"At last!" Jack exclaimed. "What kept you?"

"I'm not going back yet," Daniel howled and jumped up, lurching unsteadily away.

"Daniel, sit," Jack barked. "If you don't let the doc check you out, I'll sedate you and carry you back through the 'gate myself."

Grudgingly, Daniel sat back down and allowed Janet to examine him.

Jack could tell something was coming. The expressions flashing across his friend's face as Janet probed and prodded had nothing to do with her ministrations.

"Janet," Daniel abruptly spoke, catching the doctor's hand, "I want you to take the symbiote out of Sha'uri."

"What?" Janet reeled. Jack's reaction was similarly horrified and from the others' faces he guessed the request hadn't gone down well with them, either.

"Daniel... You do realize what you're asking me to do?" Janet's voice trembled.

"It was never a part of *her*. Please. I don't want it to be inside her when she's buried. I'm sure Kasuf will agree."

Janet looked across to Jack, who nodded reluctant approval. "Okay."

"Thank you."

"Now, you should be in the infirmary," Janet told the archaeologist reproachfully.

Ignoring her, he returned to his vigil.

She faced Jack. "Colonel, tell him."

Ranked at being singled out, he retorted with a fact he usually forgot unless it suited him. "Hey, don't you outrank me, medically?"

"Yes, but he's not listening to me."

"And you think he listens to me... ever?"

"Daniel's dehydrated and this heat isn't doing him any good. He's dizzy, has muscle spasms and tremors. He can barely stand, let alone walk, and the painkillers aren't having much effect." Janet took a breath before summing up. "In short, Colonel, I need Daniel back at the base where I can run tests to determine how best to treat him. This delay could be very dangerous. He's badly traumatized."

"I know that..." Jack confirmed acerbically. "The guy's just lost his wife. Killed right in front of him to be exact. What the hell else would you expect him to be?"

"I'm aware of the circumstances, Colonel," she answered firmly, "but there's a possibility of brain damage, and the longer it goes undetected and untreated, the higher the chance of very serious... maybe permanent... consequences."

Jack expelled a sigh of resignation. "Okay, I'll talk to him, but I can't promise anything."

As he approached, he could see that Daniel's face was pinched with pain, his eyes reddened by grief. Jack saw his hands involuntarily curl into tight fists and instantly knew he had to get the young man home.

Daniel shifted restlessly within the crisp linens of the bed. Jack held one clenched hand, Sam the other, as the young archaeologist's body continued to suffer aftershocks from Ammonet's assault.

"J-jack?"

Pained blue eyes were suddenly awake, questioning, and Jack told Daniel the awful truth once more. "It wasn't a dream, Daniel." The succinct answer sounded so harsh, but Jack hoped that eventually one of its many reiterations would

sink in. At this point, he couldn't decide whether Daniel was simply in denial, or genuinely could not remember what had happened on P8X 872.

Janet's many scans and tests since they returned had revealed a severe swelling of Daniel's brain and inter-cranial bleeding. Luckily, these problems seemed to be resolving themselves, albeit too slowly for Jack's liking, but Janet had warned them that Daniel may never fully recover the memories of his encounter with Sha'uri.

However, in a peculiar way, Daniel was too accepting of his wife's fate for him to "not" know, and each time Jack verified what he'd witnessed, Daniel responded with the same plea. "Help me find him, Jack."

Jack listened carefully, not at the words, but for the lucidity and rationale behind them... concrete indicators of his friend's improvement. "It's what she wants... the last thing I can do for her... make sure he's safe. Must find Kheb."

Skeptical of Daniel's schemes at the best of times, Jack found himself oddly keen on this quest. He didn't want Daniel to lose faith in himself, or to be a soul devoid of hope... a casualty of his own perceived failure. If finding Sha'uri's son gave Daniel a new purpose and another reason for continuing with the program, Jack was all for it, though he doubted he'd be able to show enthusiasm... that was just not his way.

Well, wherever the hell Kheb was, *if* it even existed, they wouldn't be going anytime soon. Janet said they could be encouraged by Daniel's progress, but he wasn't out of the woods yet.

Jack wandered quietly into Daniel's office, rather surprised at not finding the young man asleep over one of the many huge tomes currently littering his desk. While Daniel was still grounded 'gate-wise, he no longer needed constant medical supervision and so had taken to his office where his new investigations occupied virtually every second of their downtime.

At least Daniel had stopped recounting the fantastic story of messages being sent to him from Sha'uri through Ammonet's ribbon device. Jack didn't think Daniel had ceased to believe the possibility, but was tired of Jack's refusal to accept it. He couldn't see it at all, but it had given Daniel the impetus to start his fact-finding about Kheb. As far as Jack was concerned, that was okay... for Daniel engrossed in research was better than Daniel in despair, was way better than Daniel delirious in the infirmary... whatever the source of his quest.

The scorch mark on Daniel's forehead had faded, but the open tub of Tylenol poking out from between the books told a tale of its own. Jack filed the image for later bribery should he need it, but decided on a more sympathetic line for now. Trying to sound interested, he asked, "So, you gotten anywhere yet?"

"Not really," the archaeologist sighed, his gaze not leaving the pages of the nearest book as he leafed through the index. "I've only found one reference so far and it doesn't mean much at the moment. But I owe it to Sha'uri to keep looking."

Finally, Daniel lifted his head, giving the colonel a steely glare that bordered on defiance. "I'm not going to give up, Jack."

Cards on the table time. Trust or suspicion? Faith or treachery? Alone or together?

Was the foundation of their relationship so shaky that Daniel couldn't fathom Jack's loyalty to it? Of course, Jack had never said just how much his friendship meant to him. In fact, he positively dreaded the day when he *would* have to find the words to let Daniel in on the depth of his feelings.

Fools did indeed rush in, but only where Angels feared to tread. Daniel was neither and yet both... he never feared to rush to someone's aid... even at his own expense. What did that make him? Fool to himself, yet Angel to the saved. Jack had been there, done that.

"You know, Danny-boy?" Jack slapped the younger man on the shoulder with all the glib reassurance he could inject. "I never thought you would."

The End

LIKE FAMILY

by Aurora

Guilt - one little word. How could it have such huge meaning? I'd felt guilty before... or I thought I had.

This... this was so much more than anything I had felt, ever.

The moment I looked at Martouf in the gate room, I knew what the end result would be. I just didn't imagine it would come down to me. He looked at me, fear and tears in his eyes, and he begged me to stop him. I must have switched to autopilot because the next thing I knew, I was kneeling on the floor, cradling Martouf's dead body in my lap.

Daniel reached me first; helping me lay Martouf on the floor. He helped me up and took me away from the scene, down to his office. It was quiet there. We didn't speak. I couldn't. Once I'd gathered myself, I looked up at Daniel, and he knew what I wanted. I needed to see Martouf... she, needed to see him.

I only carried Jolinar for a short time, but it feels like a lifetime to me. I hold her memories, all of them. They're not always accessible to me, but somehow she's always with me. Not like a voice in my head or anything weird, just... there. Sometimes I get confused... what are my memories and feelings, and what are hers?

Daniel walked with me down to the infirmary and we found Anise was already there. Persis was in his meeting with the President, or he would have been paying his respects too, so Anise told us. I asked her to leave and she refused. I turned on her, my anger mixed with Jolinar's grief causing me to spit vengeful words at her. Daniel escorted her out eventually, leaving me alone with Martouf, and Lantash.

I stood over his cold body and my anger faded to a deep sense of sadness. His face was so peaceful now, no sign of the pain or fear that had been in his eyes earlier. Reaching out my hand, I smoothed the skin across his forehead, trying to erase the lines that had appeared there. I could hear Jolinar practically screaming in my head and I couldn't bear it. I traced my hand down his face, the skin cold and already turning blue. Such a handsome, strong, good face. I'd known him barely two years, yet I had memories of a lifetime spent with this man. I knew all his secrets. All *their* secrets.

I knew in that moment that I would never experience the depth of feeling I remember Jolinar having for Martouf. Not for myself, only vicariously through the relationship this tragic couple had.

I stood with Martouf for some time, but I didn't cry. I had to stay strong, I couldn't let the grief I was feeling out on base. Daniel came to fetch me away, telling me I needed to rest. After everything I had gone through that day, the whole Zatark thing, being drugged by Janet and then awakened, I was exhausted.

He took me back to his office, persuading me to lie down on the couch he has in there. Again, he didn't speak, I guess he didn't need to. Daniel has experienced enough grief in his own life that he understood a little of what I was feeling. He has such a calming presence, it was enough to lie there while he

pottered about his office, reading and checking translations.

I was lying there when the tears came. Daniel was there, he held me for what seemed like hours. Waves and waves of sobs consumed me, but he was always there.

In the end, I wasn't sure whether I was crying for Martouf, Jolinar or myself. When my tears were spent I lay in Daniel's arms, and realised that he was the one who'd been there for me. No-one else, just Daniel.

He was there for me for a long time after that day. On nights when the nightmares kept me awake, he was there. During night watches off-world, he was there, giving up his own sleep so I wouldn't be alone.

I never really thanked him for that, but I know he knew how grateful I was. We have that kind of almost-psychic bond. Like families have, where you can say everything you need to with a look, or a hug, or a touch.

The End



SPECIAL INGREDIENT

by Ivanova

Warning: intense situation

Two days! Jack shook his head. Two days in some backwater swamp of a planet so Daniel could dig around in the dirt was not his idea of a good time. Even worse was having lost his temper and telling Daniel exactly what he thought of this mission. It seemed he'd done a lot of that lately; he didn't have to think back very far to be reminded of what had transpired on Euronda, not to mention the whole situation with the Enkarans less than a month ago. And..., wincing, he had to admit Daniel had nothing to do with this mission. Although usually these missions were strictly for Daniel's sake, this particular mission was all Carter's idea.

Three days ago they had sent a MALP and a UAV though the gate here and discovered it held a wealth of mineral deposits. Mineral deposits that could be Naquada, or as Carter had said repeatedly, any other number of as yet unknown substances that could be helpful in their fight against the Goa'uld. And who was going to argue with that?

The ruins Daniel was so happily digging up they had just happened upon on the way to Carter's targeted location. So Jack had suggested that he, Feretti, and Daniel camp here while the rest of SG-1 and 2 went ahead to the target site.

So here they were. And here he was, missing the hockey game of the year and fighting with his best friend over something that neither of them could do anything about. And just because he wasn't enjoying this trip, why should that mean that Daniel had to be miserable, too? Looking up, he spotted Daniel kneeling next to one of the massive stone pillars surrounding their camp. Taking a deep breath, Jack stood up and walked in his direction.

He was ten feet away when he saw Daniel's body tense up. He was three feet away when Daniel told him to go away without even stopping what he was doing.

"Daniel..."

"Jack, I'm really not in the mood for this."

Wincing at the anger in the younger man's voice, Jack was determined to finish what he had started. "I know Daniel, and I'm sorry."

He was a little startled when Daniel shot up from his position, anger written on his face.

"And you think that makes it ok? You can just come over here and apologize and everything's back to normal? Good 'ole Danny, forgive and forget?"

In the brunt of Daniel's anger, Jack fell back on his tried and true self-preservation method, sarcasm. "Well, now that that's all settled." He could have counted the seconds on one hand with fingers left over when he realized that perhaps sarcasm was not the way to go.

"Unbelievable!" Daniel grabbed the strap of his backpack and roughly shouldered past Jack.

"Now wait a minute!" Jack really was out of his depth here. Yes, he'd taken out his frustration about this mission on Daniel and yes, he'd said some things that weren't true, not of this mission anyway, but here he was trying to apologize for it and damn if he was going to let Daniel spit it back in his face and walk away.

Daniel looked down at the hand gripping his arm. "Let go, Jack."

Taking a deep breath, Jack tried to back-peddle the conversation, "Look, I said I'm sorry. This mission has me all wound up and I took it out on you. Again, I'm sorry...but Daniel, this isn't like you..."

"I'm tired of arguing with you , Jack. It seems that's all we've been doing lately." Some of Daniel's anger seemed to die, but not all of it. "Look, this isn't my choice for an ideal mission either, I'm just trying to make the best of it. Now let me go, because I think the best thing for us right now is to not have this conversation."

Defeated, Jack let his arm go, "Are we ok now?"

"Not yet, but we will be." Daniel never could stay angry, not at Jack, not at anyone..."Why don't you go relax or something, I'm going to finish this."

Never in his right mind would Jack have thought he would ever say it but... "Ah, I'll stay..."

Daniel looked at him, smiling. "Jack, you really don't have to..."

"No... No, I'll help. Ah, just... tell me what to do."

Jack could see the conflicted confusion skittering across Daniel's features, clearly at a loss for words. Damn, had it really been that long since he'd been civil to the other man? His gut churned from the thought.

"Um, ok...Uh, how about you start..." Daniel grabbed some graphite and paper and shoved them at Jack. "Yeah, start rubbing that side and I'll finish up this one."

Half an hour later, Jack looked down at the paper in his hands; he had seen Daniel do this a hundred times. His friend made it look so simple. "Daniel, I don't think I'm doing this right."

Daniel poked his head around the pillar. "Let me see?" Giving Jack some pointers, Daniel went back to translating his side of the pillar.

They worked that way for the rest of the day. Every once in a while, Feretti would make a pass with coffee and they would all take a break together. Jack had to admit that the day was definitely turning out better than it had started. He was even starting to see, not that he would ever admit it to Daniel, why the kid enjoyed his work so much. It was relaxing. Daniel had even taken up the lecture mode and taught him what some of the symbols on the pillar meant. Normally Jack would have just zoned out right about then, but Daniel had looked so happy that he seemed interested, and after their earlier arguments Jack felt he owed it to him. And if he was completely honest, it was sort of, kind of, well, some people found that kind of stuff interesting.

He was startled out of his thoughts by a hand on his shoulder. "Hey, Jack, I thought I was the workaholic."

"What?"

Daniel pointed over his shoulder and Jack saw Feretti by the campfire. "Dinner."

"Oh, yeah. Let's go."

Daniel helped him up as Jack complained about his knees. After stiffly walking over to the campfire, they sat down to what turned out to be one of the most enjoyable evenings any of them could ever remember having during a mission. They were all that was left of the original Abydos mission and that gave them an instant sense of ease around each other.

They talked through the meal and were enjoying yet another round of coffee when Jack glanced over at Daniel. "Hey buddy, you all right?"

Daniel slowly turned to Jack. "Yeah, I'm just..." His movements were uncoordinated, as if he were feeling jittery. "I'm fine, but I think Feretti's coffee gave me a buzz. What's in this stuff, Feretti?"

Feretti smiled as he took the cup from Daniel. "My own secret recipe. I could tell you but then..."

"You'd have to kill me." Daniel laughed. "You black ops guys have got to get some new jokes."

Both Jack and Feretti made a grab for him as he swayed while getting up. "Are you sure you're okay?"

Daniel shook off their concern with a smile. "Yeah, I'm just a really tired all of a sudden. I think I'll turn in."

Daniel didn't seem to notice the concerned looks Jack and Feretti exchanged, concentrating on making it to the tent. Even if he had, Jack doubted the younger man would admit to anything. After the ribbing he'd gotten when Feretti had taken him out for a few drinks last time, Jack didn't blame him. He shook his head, watching the archaeologist stumble into the

tent. It was nothing to worry about, he told himself, just evidence of Daniel's inability to hold his alcohol.

The next morning, Jack and Feretti turned to see a flushed, bedraggled Daniel stumble from the tent. "Hey Danny, you okay?"

Daniel cleared his throat and rubbed at his reddish eyes. "Yeah, I just slept too heavily."

Feretti laughed and nudged Jack. "You were right, colonel. Daniel is a cheap date."

Daniel plopped down next to them with an exasperated sigh. "Yeah, yeah, just pass the coffee."

Feretti started to hand him the pot when he snatched it back.. "I don't know Daniel, do you really think you should be drinking on the job?"

Jack laughed as Daniel grabbed the pot, making Feretti fall on his rear. "Don't you know better yet, Feretti? Never get between Daniel and his coffee."

"Ha, ha, Jack." So Daniel was really feeling poorly. He eyes were red, and watery, and his constant coughing suggested he was about to spit up a hairball. The guy seemed to be peering into a world a little more blurry than usual.

"This sucks, I think I'm coming down with the flu or something."

Jack instantly put his hand on Daniel's forehead. Relief showed on his face. "Well, you don't have a fever or anything."

Daniel knocked Jack's hand away. "I don't know, maybe I just stayed up too late."

He took another long draught of coffee and suddenly paled "Oh, I don't feel so good..." Getting up, he stumbled and would have fallen had Jack not caught him. "Jack..."

Jack was worried by the sudden turn of events. Everything had been fine just a minute before. Daniel hadn't had a temperature and had even been starting to perk up a bit. "Daniel...I got ya. I got ya." He sat him back on the ground and looked at Feretti, who was now hovering on the other side of Daniel.

"Jack...I think I'm...gonna faint..."

Jack grabbed his canteen and unscrewed the cap. "Here, Daniel, drink some water."

"I think he's out, Jack," Feretti suggested.

Oh, God. What the hell was going on?

"Daniel...Daniel, can you hear me?"

"He's out, Jack. Come on, let's lay him down."

Jack eased Daniel down and straightened his arms. Reaching for his pack, he addressed Feretti. "Okay, I don't know what this is, but get on the radio and get the rest of the teams back here." He rummaged through his pack until he came up with what he was looking for. Snapping the ammonia capsule, he vaguely heard Feretti talking to Carter as he waved it under Daniel's nose.

Instead of waking up, Daniel shifted restlessly before suddenly arching off the ground.

"Shit! Daniel!" Jack held Daniel down until he noticed that Daniel's jaw was clenched and he wasn't taking in any air. Trying to pry his friend's jaw open, he was helpless to do anything else as Daniel's lips started to turn blue. "Come on! Daniel, you have to relax! Come on, breathe dammit! Feretti! Ask Carter if they've had any problems there?!"

Feretti yelled over Jack into the radio. Carter was on the other end asking what was going on and Jack was yelling the questions Feretti should ask Carter.

"Colonel! Carter said no problems."

Jack was desperate. Rummaging through the medikit he found the morphine.

"Jack, No! That won't help his breathing! Major Carter suggests no drugs until we know more!"

Shocked, Jack threw the morphine down. He knew he was panicking and he'd almost shot Daniel with a drug that would likely have killed him! *Geez Jack!* he reprimanded himself. *Snap out of it and think!* He concentrated once again on trying to get Daniel to unclench his jaw. "Tell her he's not breathing! Tell her he's tensed, convulsing!"

Watching in horror as Daniel's whole body convulsed again, he saw that Daniel's eyes were open but they weren't focused

on anything.

Feretti yelled back into the radio as Jack finally got Daniel to respond some. He yelled at Carter, Feretti and Daniel all at the same time. There was something in the back of his mind, something important, screaming to be found. What the heck could have caused this? It had happened so quickly.

Daniel finally relaxed his jaw, and Jack encouraged him to take deep slow breaths.

"Ja'k..."

Jack smoothed Daniel's sweaty hair away from his forehead. "It's okay, Daniel... I got ya... just breathe... deep breaths..."

Feretti leaned over just as Daniel's eyes were starting to focus. "Carter says it could be an allergic reaction."

Shoot!! Way back when when Daniel had joined his team, Janet Fraiser had given him a briefing on all the members of his new team. Among the endless list of Daniel's allergies there had been one important one. One Daniel always had to travel prepared for...

Daniel was shaking with chills now.

"Damnit! It's starting again!" Jack tried to hold the younger man as his body convulsed again. Jack gripped Daniel's jaw again, trying to force it open. All he got were clenched teeth and a low growl from the younger man before he went limp.

Too limp.

"No! Come on, Daniel! Don't do this!" Jack placed shaking fingers on Daniel's neck. "I can't find a pulse!"

Feretti quickly dropped the radio and started doing chest compressions as Jack breathed for Daniel.

They kept it up for what felt like forever when suddenly Jack remembered. He yelled to Feretti that he had to take over breathing, as well. The major didn't hesitate and Jack started to pat down Daniel's pockets.

"What are you doing?!"

Jack ripped open all of Daniel's pockets but still didn't find what he was looking for. "Damnit! Where is it?!" Jumping up, he ran over to the pillar they had been working on the night before and found Daniel's backpack. Grabbing it, he ran back to where Feretti was still trying to keep Daniel alive before dumping the contents on the ground.

Feretti came up from breathing for Daniel and yelled at Jack as he started compressions again, "What are you doing?!"

Jack shifted through the pile of stuff that had come from the backpack until he found what he was searching for. He quickly ripped open the plastic packaging as he turned back to Daniel. "It's okay, Daniel...It's okay..."

Feretti looked hesitant as Jack ripped open Daniel shirt and pulled the cap off of what looked to be the biggest needle he had ever seen. "What are you doing, Jack?! What is that?!" Carter said..."

Jack plunged the needle into Daniel's chest. He winced as he felt it pierce the sternum. Pressing down on the plunger, he prayed that he had done it right.

As Jack had stabbed the needle into Daniel's heart, Feretti had been working on Daniel for almost five minutes, without result. Feretti probably thought that it had been too long. "Jack, it's over..." Feretti tried to pull him away from the body but Jack pushed away. Hearing the radio burst to life, Feretti quickly snatched it up, his voice cracking as he reported the tragic news.

"Come on, Daniel..." Jack counted out the seconds in his head...25, 26... "Damnit, Daniel...not like this..." 28, 29... He could have cried when Daniel's chest suddenly lifted off the ground and a huge inhalation could be heard...

"Daniel!"

Daniel's eyes snapped open as he gasped for air. He gaze seemed unfocused but soon it settled on his friend.

"J'ak..."

"I'm here, Danny. Everything's okay..." Jack let out a deep breath and sank back on his rear with his knees up, elbows on them. His body shook as the adrenaline left him and he quickly put his head down, taking a few deep breaths to keep from passing out.

It was at that moment that Carter, Teal'c and the rest of SG-2 burst through the bushes.

A hand on his shoulder made Jack look up. "That was close."

Sam nodded at Jack and then bent down to check Daniel out. He was a little more lucid than before and he tried to smile at her. "Hi, Sam..."

"Hey yourself." She smiled as she carefully checked him over. She gently ran her hands behind his head and down his neck. "Did you hit your head as you fell? Does anything hurt?" "No."

She checked the entry point of the needle in his chest. "This might hurt a little." With that, she swiftly pulled the needle out with a little cry from Daniel. "Sorry..."

Daniel swallowed and cleared his throat a little. "That's okay..."

Sam brushed his hair away from his face, out of his eyes. "I want you to try to sit up for me, okay?" She coaxed him up, and Feretti, who had now mostly recovered from the shock of the whole thing, knelt behind him to keep him steady.

After Sam had a chance to finish checking Daniel, Jack ordered everyone back to Earth.

Thirty-six hours later, Daniel woke up in the infirmary. Turning his head, he spotted Jack asleep in the chair beside his bed. He really didn't have a clear memory of how he had ended up in the infirmary this time but if the ache in his muscles was anything to go by...

"Hey, you're awake."

"Hi, Jack. What happened?"

"You don't remember?"

Daniel shook his head.

"Oh, well, Feretti tried to poison you." Jack had a good laugh at the look on Daniel's face before he went on. "Not intentionally, of course."

Now the archaeologist looked really confused. "What are you talking about, Jack?"

"Well, it turns out that you are allergic to Feretti's secret ingredient, and you went into anaphylactic shock."

"Oh. Sorry."

Jack smiled, only Daniel would apologize for almost dying. He ran a hand through his hair. It had been a long day, one he was glad was over. He couldn't help thinking he'd almost lost his best friend twice in two days. The first time through his own stupidity and the second time to... He wasn't even going to think about that. From now on, he was going to appreciate what he had right in front of him. Daniel's friendship. "Hey, Doc says you'll be out of here in a couple of days. Want to go up to the cabin? Do a little fishing?"

Daniel smiled. He knew Jack. This was his way of trying to assuage any guilt that either of them had over everything that had happened recently, and not just on the last mission. A fresh start. "Yeah, sounds good. Is Feretti going?"

"I don't know, do you want him to?"

"Sure, just as long as he doesn't make the coffee."

They were both laughing as Feretti entered the infirmary. "Hey, what's so funny?"

The End

ACCIDENTS WILL HAPPEN

aka Daniel-does-a-Babs

by Sandra

Note from the editor:

So I have a little accident with a pencil, which has me cycling to hospital and a snickering night-doctor. At least when I got home I thought my friends would be there to comfort me, send me a nice get-well card, maybe a batch of chocolate-walnut cookies, even a inappropriate question to see the scar might have been nice...

But what do I get?

Read for yourself...

Babs (muttering, "I get no sympathy at all.")

Jack O'Neill frowned at the sight of the pile of documents and files in his intray and wished there was something else he could be doing instead. There was no getting away from paperwork!

He'd just opened the first file when his phone rang.

"O'Neill."

"Good morning Colonel," came his second-in-command's voice.

"Carter! Is it a good morning?" He thumbed through the contents of this file. "I have an intray with what looks like a year's worth of papers in it."

"I just thought you ought to know Daniel's in the infirmary."

"What's he done now?"

O'Neill went through the catalogue of injuries and experiences SG-1's archaeologist had suffered: addictions, concussion, cuts and bruises too many to catalogue, various infections and falls; he'd had his brain fried; been on the receiving end of staff weapon blasts and other weapons fire; and, of course, not forgetting the man had died a few times too. The list just

went on and on. So what was his latest misadventure?

"Apparently he's cut his hand open."

"What?" O'Neill groaned. "How?"

"Sharpening his pencil."

"Sharpening his pencil? Oh, fer cryin' out loud! How did he cut his hand open just sharpening a pencil?"

"He was using a knife and the knife slipped. Doctor Fraiser is just about to stitch it up."

"Hasn't he ever heard of a pencil sharpener?"

"Apparently he always sharpens his pencils with a knife."

"This place is full of pencil sharpeners!" He sighed loudly.

"Thanks for telling me."

"That's okay, Sir."

"Bye, Carter."

"Bye, Sir."

He put the telephone down and closed the file in front of him. The title on the cover, written in pencil, was 'On-based Accident Reports, April'. He re-opened the file and flicked through the sheets. He saw reports of numerous falls, trips, sprains, and broken bones; minor burns from physics experiments; an exploding 'rock' injuring two archaeologists; one of SG-1 tripping on the ramp in the gateroom before the team had left for a mission and tearing ligaments in both of his legs; yada yada yada. It was dangerous to just work for the SGC without ever going off-world.

Strangely enough, Daniel's name hadn't appeared on a single sheet in this file, something which would certainly be rectified in the file for this month.

The End

FOLLOWING THROUGH

by Seanchaidh

Tag to Forever in a Day

"It is our duty to comply with the last wishes of a dying person."
~Talmud

Sha're was dead.

That was the only truth Daniel's mind could grasp. He was aware of many things - the hard ground beneath his body, the heavy silence from his friends, the stench of so many horrible things in the air - but the touch of his wife's cooling flesh against his trembling fingers was the only thing he could comprehend.

He hurt in so many ways, body and soul, and his only comfort was this was real. It was finally real, no more strange happenings to jar his reality, and no more dreams within dreams. His stiff fingers stroking along Sha're's cheek told him how final this was, but something new was already beginning.

"You will continue your travels through the Chaapa'ai, but first you must forgive Teal'c." Sha're's words came back to him, repeating frenetically in his mind and mingling with glimpses of images - P8X873, Earth, Abydos, that purple planet, Sha're dead, Sha're alive - that kept eluding him. *"Only then can you find the boy."*

Her last request was a challenge to him, one he barely addressed in his... vision or whatever it was Sha're had given him. By showing him what may have been, she'd helped him realize what he needed to do... all over again. In his dream, he grieved and tried to move on with his life in the days after Sha're's death. But now here he was, back on P8X873, about to begin it all over again.

How much could he actually grieve?

There was only one thing left he could actively face - if reluctantly - and that was the incredible agony in his head. The nauseating pain from the ribbon device felt worse this time around, and he lay still, trying to prevent more sickening vertigo from overwhelming him. It didn't work - someone moved into his blurred field of vision, cutting off his view of Sha're's body as hands moved him to a stretcher.

His head exploded, and Daniel gave into the darkness tinting the edges of his world. The rest could wait.

Sha're smiled when her Danyel entered the tent, even if the warmth could not touch her lips. 'He comes for me!' she proclaimed, relief at seeing him overwhelming what part of her could feel. How he had changed, her beloved husband, with hair short like Oneel and the wary look of an older man on his face. But he was present, asking about the boy they had hidden on Kheb, and advancing slowly toward them with his weapon drawn.

Good, he knew self-preservation but would he use the gun? Sha're knew the answer, and it saddened her.

"Where you and the System Lords will never find him," Amaunet taunted, the demon asserting her control over their body even as Sha're joined her silent voice to Danyel's demands for them to remain still. And though Sha're tried to gain command, to stop what she knew would happen, Amaunet brought up the ribbon device and began to destroy Sha're's beloved Danyel.

And he never once tried to defend himself, dropping instead to his knees as he pleaded for Sha're to help him.

'Oh, my Danyel, I am trying!' She stared down at those blue eyes, the much-loved face tightened with pain even as the skin between his brows began to redden and burn. She fought! Amaunet's will outweighed her own, and all Sha're could do was send her thoughts and her being through the demon's concentration into Danyel himself.

'Find my son. Keep him safe.' And as Teal'c entered their

tent, shock registering on his face at the sight of Danyel before Amaunet, Sha're gave him one more desire. 'Forgive Teal'c, he acts only to help you, my Danyel.'

Teal'c acted, his actions first stopping Amaunet by surprise, then finally with his staff weapon. Sha're felt no pain, only relief as she fell, secure in the knowledge Danyel was safe, and he would find her child, her burden, her shifu...

Daniel woke with a start, Sha're's final moments still replaying in his mind with ghoulish detail. He took a deep breath, trying to clear them from his consciousness, wanting to gain some kind of inner equilibrium. He was going to experience *déjà vu*, for the third time. Was there a term for that? Maybe, but what mattered was he'd need his wits if he wanted to keep his sanity.

Voces called to him - some louder than others - and encouraged him to open his eyes. He tried, and despite the familiar pain centering in his forehead, he managed to peer up at the assembled blurs around his bed. It was similar to the last times, with Jack and Sam near the head on his left, Hammond and Kasuf further down, Teal'c near the foot, and Fraiser opposite on the right-hand side with her penlight.

She shone it in his eyes, right on schedule. He winced, not recalling pain like this last time. He tried to bat it away but missed. Fraiser noted his reaction, continuing with her brief exam as his friends prompted him on what he remembered - Kasuf's distress call, the voyage to P8X873, and Sha're. Daniel looked at Teal'c at that point, the dark and solitary figure determined to keep a distance.

What would he say to his well-meaning friend, besides what he'd been able to utter in the tent?

"I'm so sorry about Sha're, Daniel," Sam was saying, her hand a quick, comforting warmth on his shoulder. He wasn't sure, but her eyes seemed bright in the infirmary's light. "If you need anything..."

"Daniel, I'm sorry," Jack added, voice unusually gruff

The others added their own condolences, and Daniel watched them and wondered at the feelings their words brought. It wasn't that he felt nothing - the grief was there, nestled in his chest. What was missing was the intensity; the deep, wrenching sense of loss, failure, and overwhelming anger weren't eating at his insides like in the dream, or even when Sha're first went missing three years before.

He'd moved on in his grief, and he didn't know what to make of it. Daniel frowned in concentration and looked at Teal'c again. He met the dark gaze and offered a tentative smile.

The olive branch.

Every now and again, Daniel Jackson looked in Teal'c's direction, a calm expression on his face. There was no anger, just a sense of resigned acceptance. This was not the reaction Teal'c expected, and he could not begin to understand why his friend was not angry. Daniel Jackson was a strong man, and compassion ran deeply within him.

And yet, Teal'c could not believe there was no anger at his actions. His instincts, combined with the knowledge three years of friendship had given him, all told him there was more beneath the surface. Teal'c thus chose to remain silent, to observe and otherwise condemn himself to the guilt he so deserved.

O'Neill sent Teal'c after Daniel Jackson, last seen heading in the direction of Amaunet's tent. Knowing the scholar would attempt to find his wife, Teal'c pursued in anticipation of supporting his young friend's endeavor.

He did not expect to find Daniel Jackson held captive under Amaunet's ribbon device, moments from death. The amount of time he hesitated from shock was perhaps too long. He simply reacted then, using Amaunet's distraction to his advantage as he aimed and fired.

Sha're died free, and with her, Teal'c feared, the friendship he had with Daniel Jackson.

Time had healed the rift between them at the beginning, caused by Teal'c's culpability in choosing Sha're as a candidate for Amaunet. Sha're's death would be the irreversible blow between them, and Teal'c would accept his fate calmly if only because Daniel Jackson still lived.

He would need to discuss this development with O'Neill, for perhaps a transfer to a new team would be required...

What was this? Daniel Jackson caught his gaze, blue eyes somber yet friendly, and smiled at him.

The visit was over quickly, cut short by Fraiser's insistence that Daniel rest. He surprised her by echoing the prognosis from his vision - mild inflammation from the ribbon device, shock, and a first-degree burn to his forehead. He'd be kept for overnight observation in case something developed from repeated exposure to the ribbon device, but if everything went well, he would be released the next day.

"That's exactly what I had in mind," Fraiser said, looking at him oddly. "How did you know?"

Jack saved him from explaining things too early. "He's been here often enough. You're just predictable, Doc."

She seemed satisfied and began shooing everyone out. Jack squeezed Daniel's shoulder in support, and Sam kissed his forehead. General Hammond smiled gently, offering a friendly ear if ever Daniel needed one. Kasuf promised to return, to discuss the funeral and other items of family business.

Teal'c stood silently, watching and avoiding Daniel's gaze until the others were on their way. Once they were alone, the Jaffa moved closer to the bed, hands clasped behind his back.

"I wish you a hasty recovery, Daniel Jackson."

"Teal'c...!" Daniel called after him as Teal'c strode away. He really wanted to sit up, but his head spun if he moved. "Wait a minute."

"Do you require something?" he inquired, a gentle look on his face.

"Yeah, um..." Frustrated at his prone position, Daniel slapped the mattress and smiled slightly in embarrassment. "I need help with my bed."

"You are supposed to rest," Teal'c chided, even as he found the control that brought the head of the bed up. Daniel let out a relieved sigh as the pressure in his head slowly lessened, and more of the room came into blurred view.

"I know, but this is easier on my head." Worried Teal'c might take that as a cue to leave, Daniel reached out his hand. Teal'c was just out of reach, but Daniel hoped he would take the cue. Moments passed, and Daniel could feel tremors of fatigue running through his fingers before Teal'c finally took the proffered reach. His huge hands grasped Daniel's, holding carefully as though Daniel might break. "Thank you."

"I am pleased to assist you, Daniel Jackson," Teal'c nodded, a faint smile on his lips that quickly faded. "I am truly sorry that I was the one who ended Sha're's life."

"I know." Daniel squeezed his hand, trying to show what words might fail to tell. "Amaunet didn't give anyone a choice, Teal'c. At least..." He stopped, the words touching the grief nestled within his chest. Tears sprung in his eyes, and he fought them, determined to finish this conversation before he could weep in private. He forced himself to keep an even voice, but he knew Teal'c saw through the struggle. "At least Sha're is free now, and, uh, we're here to keep her memory alive."

"Always," Teal'c agreed, his voice nearly a hoarse whisper. Daniel was surprised to see tears glistening in Teal'c's dark eyes. "I will leave you now to rest."

"No." Daniel held on tightly and, with as much conviction as he could muster, said, "Teal'c, I forgive you, and... thank you. If you had hesitated..."

Teal'c shook his head. "I understand, Daniel Jackson. We need not speak of this further."

"Okay." Letting out a sigh, Daniel tried to smile. "I need you to do me a favor."

"I will attempt to do so."

"Sha're's son is still missing. I know she wants me to find him." Daniel studied his friend's face for a moment. In the vision, Teal'c had known the boy's true identity, but when the child was born on Abydos, Teal'c hadn't known then. "Sha're called him a Harsesis. It's a term I know from Egyptian myth, but do you know what it means for the Goa'uld?"

"I do not," Teal'c said. "I only know a child of two hosts is something I have never seen. It is forbidden."

"Do you know why?"

"I do not," the Jaffa admitted.

"She said it's because the child would have the Goa'uld genetic memory. I'm not sure exactly why or how, but..." Daniel paused, wetting his lips as he wondered how to continue. "The boy is in danger, Teal'c. We need to find him. She said he's on Kheb, but she couldn't say where it was."

"And I have not heard of a world by that name," Teal'c told him.

"That's okay," Daniel said, letting out a sigh. "Look, Janet's probably going to kick you out in a minute, but please, see if you can find anything. Is it possible to go to Chulak to see if you can learn anything?"

"I will see what I am able to do," Teal'c promised. "Now rest, Daniel Jackson."

"Oh, and would you mind bringing me some of my books?" Daniel let go of Teal'c's hands to count titles with his fingers. "Um, Budge would be a big help, as much as I hate to admit it. Maybe something of Petrie's, too. Ask whoever's in the archaeology lab for suggestions, and..."

"Only after you have rested," Teal'c interrupted, a fond smile appearing on his lips.

"Right," Daniel sighed, and he yawned. "Thank you."

"You are welcome." A warm hand rested on Daniel's shoulder, and he smiled, letting himself relax. "I will see you later."

Eyes closed, Daniel listened to Teal'c's heavy footsteps cross the infirmary to the door. Once he was sure Teal'c was gone, a tear forced its way from his eyelid and coursed down his cheek.

This won't be easy, Sha're, he thought. This might be the hardest thing I've done, but we'll do our best to find him. I guess you were right all along.

And as he fell asleep, he saw his wife in the homespun robes of Abydos. Hands on her hips, dark hair loose about her shoulders, she smiled patiently at him.

"Did I not tell you so, my husband?"

The End



MAELSTROM

by Lin

Warning: intense situations

Jack ran for his life. Sweat poured down his face, stinging his eyes. His heart pounded, trying to out race the searing wind raging around him. The bandana wrapped across his nose and mouth wasn't enough to protect his lungs from each scalding breath. The dry, spiny branches of bushes and saplings clawed at him as he raced through the underbrush. The dense growth snagged the thick cloth of his BDUs, dragging at his boots, slowing him down. The mat of pine needles underfoot was made all the more treacherous by the fine layer of falling ash. His boots slid in the mess, tripped up by a hidden tree root. He fell. Pushing himself forward as he landed, he turned his downward momentum into forward action. He had to keep going. He didn't need to look over his shoulder. The roar of the fire in the treetops, the crash of flaming branches, the howling wind told him all he needed to know.

How far to the 'Gate? Two hundred feet? Even a hundred was too far in this inferno. They'd never make it.

He risked a glance towards the others. Through the shower of sparks and debris, he could see his teammates staggering out in a rough line. Carter was on his heels and to his left. Sweat streaked trails through the grime on her face between her cap brim and her bandana. Blue eyes met brown in a moment of silent encouragement before she turned back to fighting her way through the brush. Beyond her, Jack spied Daniel struggling through the tangle of bushes. He couldn't see the other man's face. Daniel's head was bent, his back bowed in his effort to forge his way. Teal'c was just past him. The big man must have sensed his gaze, because he looked over. A message flashed between them. Reassured, Jack went back to forcing his way through the thicket. Teal'c would see to it no one fell behind.

Jack stumbled over a ridge. The loose ground crumbled under him, throwing him to his knees in the sandy bottom of a dry streambed. Fingers sank into the yellow grains. This was it, their only chance. Sand didn't burn.

"Deploy fire shelters!" he yelled as the others broke through the brush and scrambled into the sand. He pulled off his pack, digging out the bright yellow package inside, and clawed open the plastic-encased shelter. From his peripheral vision, he saw the others doing the same. The thin silver material unfolded with a snap. Bubbles of silver flashed in the hellish wind as his team scrambled to cover themselves. He pulled his over his head, dragging it down as he dropped to the sand, and tucked the edges under his legs. He anchored the rest with his arms, pushing down into the sand to form a seal against the monster rushing at them at breakneck speed.

No sooner was his shelter in place then the fire was on him like a ferocious beast going for the kill. Wind-whipped flames beat against the fragile barrier arched over him. Debris rained down, banging against him. The tin-foil tent held firm, although the pocket of air he'd created inside was quickly reaching an unbearable temperature. It was getting hard to breathe. He pressed his face into the sand, desperately seeking even a shallow breath that wouldn't fry his lungs. He sucked in burning grit.

The heat dried his sweat-soaked clothing, leaving a hot, stiff cotton layer between his skin and the fire-resistant material of his shelter that was collapsing around him under the onslaught. He bucked, trying to throw off the aluminum shelter without dislodging the edges trapped under his arms and legs. He could feel the blisters forming along his back and shoulders where the silver material touched him. It was too late to wish for the backpack he'd tossed aside, the additional layer of protection lost to the fire.

The noise became a living thing, a demented soul screaming in his head. It pushed and shoved at him, biting with sharp fangs of painful sound. The wind tore at his puny shelter, trying to rip it from his grasp. He fought to hold it down, denying

entrance to the raging firestorm outside. His hands hurt. The heat transmitted through the sides of the tent burned past the thick leather of his gloves. He thanked the stars that he'd had the presence of mind to exchange his usual fingerless gloves for the heavier work gloves in his pack. As it was, his fingers felt like they were being roasted. He could imagine the flesh blackened and splitting open in the heat, the seared skin curling backward to expose the delicate white bones inside. Instinct screamed at him to remove his hands from danger, to draw them against his body, to protect himself. He didn't dare move. He gritted his teeth and wrestled his mind away from the pain in his hands, the worry in his mind, and the suffocating heat in the shelter.

The faces of his teammates swam behind his eyelids. Carter's bright blue eyes, alive with intelligence and humor, sparkled in his memory. He heard her laughter ghosting through the roaring flames. The thought of Daniel's rare grin brought the hint of a smile to his own lips. The firestorm outside had nothing on the younger man's fierce determination and indomitable will. Teal'c, alien warrior turned freedom fighter, had a century of hard earned experience and combat honed nerves to carry him through the roughest situations. They were each strong in their own right. As a team, they'd proved to be a force for their enemies to reckon with. Mother Nature with a bad case of PMS wasn't about to take them down.

When they'd gated to this world, they'd figured they knew what to expect. MALP data had prepared them for a forested world suffering from the effects of a severe drought. The plant life was brown and limp. The canopy high overhead was still green, but the tall trunks of the trees wore mantles of crispy dead moss. The thick underbrush was more thorns and sharp twigs than broad leaves. They'd pressed on, each step crackling underfoot as they hiked to the rock outcroppings where Carter wanted to test for minerals. It had been a long hot walk. While they collected their samples, the wind picked up, throwing dust in their faces. Jack had walked to a small clearing in the forest to get a better look at the sky. What he'd seen hadn't reassured him. Dark, ugly clouds were blowing in fast. When he saw lightning leap from one thunderhead to another, he called a halt to the gatherers. They quickly packed up, and started back for the gate. Just as they topped a small rise, Jack saw a lightning bolt strike a tree. It exploded sending burning shrapnel in every direction. Like a book of paper matches, the surrounding trees burst into flames. Falling debris spread the flames to the dry underbrush.

Jack didn't have to order his team to run. As lightning continued to strike the tinder-dry trees, they took off towards the gate at top speed. The forest went up in flames. A rain of ash fell from the sky as overhead the fire swept through the treetops. They skidded to a halt at the bottom of a small hill to catch their breath and snatch a sip of precious water. Jack ordered everything to be left behind. They dumped the samples and tossed their weapons aside. Turning out their packs, they saved only GDOs, med kits, and emergency fire shelters before taking up the race to the gate. Hands free to tear away obstructing brush, and bodies lighter by the loss of their usual equipment, they ran.

The wind began to shriek as they got closer to the Stargate. It whipped back and forth, buffeting them from all sides. Smoke rolled between the trees. A hellish thunder made Jack look over his shoulder. What he saw made his stomach knot. A tornado of flames roared behind them. It twisted and spun through the trees. More blazing funnels danced into existence, spinning paths of destruction through the forest. They were still too far from the 'gate, and they were out of time.

An insane scream filled the fire shelter. Whether it came from the fire outside or from his own parched throat, Jack wasn't sure. His fingers felt as if they were being deep fried in

oil. His back burned. Sandpaper rasped his nose, throat, and lungs. His head throbbed with the noise of the storm. Every nerve in his body twitched in time with the wind and flames battering his thin tent. Adrenaline poured through his veins, making the urge to throw off the stifling silver shelter and run hard to resist. He screwed his eyes shut tighter, and ground his burning hands deeper into the sand. It had to end. One way or another, it had to end.

And it did.

The tent stopped pressing down on him. The mind-numbing roar dropped to a more tolerable level. Opening his eyes, Jack thought the red glare coming through the thin walls of his shelter was now stronger on the other side. The fire had passed over him. He'd made it, but what about the others?

Risking movement, he slid his arm up so his elbow continued to hold the edge of the shelter down, just in case, and worked his abused hand under him to reach his vest. He keyed his radio, craning his neck to bring his mouth close to it.

"Sound off," he ordered in a rusty voice he didn't recognize.

"I'm here, sir," Carter's scratchy voice came through the radio.

"As am I, O'Neill," Teal'c's deep voice sounded so normal, Jack felt a smile stretch across his face. He took a deep breath as he waited for his fourth teammate to check in. He took another. Fear caught the breath and held it in a tight fist.

"Daniel? Answer me, Daniel."

"I'm here. I'm here," Daniel choked out at last.

Relief washed through Jack like a cleansing wave. They'd made it. He had to clear his throat before he could speak again. "All right everyone, stay put. I'm going to check our status. If you don't hear from me, give it five, then, Teal'c, you check. Got it?"

A subdued chorus of agreement crackled over the radio. Satisfied, Jack let his hand fall away from the link to his team. He gripped the edge of the fire shelter and lifted it. When flames failed to blast their way in, he lifted it some more until he could stand. The fire had passed through the area. The canopy still burned. All around him, he could hear the crash of falling limbs. He keyed his radio. "Everyone out."

He scrutinized his teammates as they threw off their deflated silver coverings and stood. They were tired, dirty, and singed, but alive and whole. Jack watched as three sets of eyes swept first one teammate, then another before turning to survey their surroundings. Blue eyes widened in shock while brown ones gazed stoically at the ruins around them. What had once been a forest of living plants was now nothing more than charred cinders. The thick underbrush had been reduced to smoking charcoal underfoot. Skeletal trunks reached high into the sky, their tops aglow. Several feet in front of them lay the smoldering carcasses of several small animals. The wind blew the heavy smoke around them, blanketing the dead landscape in a choking gray haze. A burning limb crashed to the ground behind them, breaking the spell. Without speaking, they began to move forward.

The Stargate loomed out of the smoke. Daniel hurried to the DHD,

inspecting it for damage before dialing Earth's address. The splash of the 'Gate's vortex seemed unnaturally bright against the wind-swirled ash. Carter punched the iris code in the GDO. As soon as the green light indicated it was safe, she nodded.

Jack rubbed the back of his arm across his grimy forehead, blinking the sweat out of his eyes. "I don't know about you kids, but I've about had it with this marshmallow roast. What do you say we go home?"

"Indeed," Teal'c said. He marched through the rippling event horizon without a backward glance at the ruined forest.

Carter took off her cap and ran a filthy hand through sweat-slicked hair. "I call dibs on the infirmary shower."

"You got it," Jack said, gesturing her toward the gate. "See you on the other side." She stepped through and disappeared. Daniel had tugged his bandana off when Jack turned to him and said, "I've worked up an appetite. Want to grab a steak or something after the debriefing?"

Daniel blinked at him from behind smeared lenses, and then he shook his head. A small smile tugged at the corners of his mouth. "As long as it isn't barbecue."

"I don't know. Smoked ham sounds good to me."

"If you hang around here any longer it'll be crispy fried colonel," Daniel said before vanishing into the flowing blue surface.

With a chuckle, Jack followed his team home.

The End



IN SOLITUDE

by Jmas

In solitude, where we are least alone.
~ Lord Byron

Tag to The Light

Sitting here watching Daniel think is getting a little old.
He's good at it... thinking. Damn good in fact.

He just does it so damn *much.* It has to hurt after a while... like now, that little crease is starting between his eyebrows... He's got a headache.

It's like a reflex... the left hand puts down the little statue thingie he's holding, the right never pauses in its note-taking as the left unerringly seeks the jumbo economy-sized bottle of Tylenol at the edge of his desk. The cap is off like always and he pulls out two by feel, popping them into his mouth and swallowing them with a drink of water without missing a comma.

Yep... Daniel is really good at thinking.

What he's *not* good at is taking it easy. That's what I'm here for.

He knows why I'm here too, knows he's officially on borrowed time, which is why he's turning multitasking into a timed Olympic-level event. He's trying to finish what he can before I figure he's had enough and haul his ass topside and then home.

He'll put up a token argument, wouldn't be Daniel if he didn't, but in the end he'll go because he knows I wouldn't bother if I didn't give a damn, and he knows as well as I do he's still recovering from the latest in his long line of 'deaths'.

Now there's a concept guaranteed to blow even a genius-sized mind like Daniel's... considering it's him that's doing it you'd think he'd drive himself nuts trying to get a handle on it all.

Daniel dies a lot, has died a lot, but will not - if we have anything to say about it - be doing it again any time soon.

Thought this time was it, though; sure as hell felt final.

He flatlined on the way to the gate, for crying out loud. Considering the rest of SG-5 really did die, I don't think anyone could blame me for thinking this was time his luck had run out. Don't really give a damn if they do, it isn't every day your best friend dies right in front of you, permanently or not, although Daniel seems to do it at alarmingly frequent intervals.

They weaned us all off that damn light thing, but Fraiser says it will be a while before all the "physical manifestations" go away. I hate the clinical words she uses for some very not so

clinical things like gosh-awful headaches, nausea, mood swings...

Hell, it's like terminal PMS. At least Carter has experience with things like that. Having been around her at some of the worst of those times I can state with some authority that Daniel and I are at a definite disadvantage. There are certain times that woman should not be allowed around firearms.

It's worse for Daniel though; he had a longer exposure than the rest of us. At least the rest of us who are still alive.

Damn, I think time is up. I sit here thinking like this much longer and I'll need something a lot stronger than Tylenol.

Making a throat clearing noise to put him on alert, I stand up. He raises his left finger into the air, the one that isn't writing, asking for one more minute. I unobtrusively turn my wrist to time him...

Maybe not so unobtrusively, I catch him grinning as he signs off on his research with a flourish and stacks it into his 'out' bin.

I made a promise when we were stuck back on that so-called pleasure planet. The effects of the light may have pushed along what Daniel almost did to himself, but there's a basis for it in reality. Both of us know it. We drifted for a while, ended up on opposite ends of the equation way too often. It wasn't us, but now that we've had a wake-up call, we're working to get it back.

We'll make it, too. We're making it right now...

With a long, tired sigh, Daniel shuts off the lights, and I follow him out into the corridor and down to the elevators. I figure I'll give him until we get to the last checkpoint before reminding him I gave him a ride in this morning, then push for Chinese at my place. He needs to eat, I need to eat, it all works out in the end.

He'll go for it, I think. The last hour has been pretty good quality time, even though neither one of us said a word. We could use some more of that. We don't need a lot of noise to connect, Daniel and I; we just need us.

Us we can do.

The End

HORIZON

by Carrie

Every year on this date, he felt excruciatingly alone.

Staring at hands that had become old without his knowledge and certainly without his permission, General George Hammond went through his annual ritual of wishing he could turn back time. It was the same thing over and over again, and he knew it was foolish even as SG-1 related the tale of one sad, lonely archaeologist wanting nothing more than to do the same thing he coveted. He didn't know if it was mere happenstance that made this particular mission fall a day prior to the reason for his own sad, lonely tale. His heart twisted in his chest with empathy for Malakai and he couldn't blame the man for putting them through what was probably months of the same day. In a sense, he should thank the man for granting him postponement of his own misery.

He now regretted delaying the briefing until this day of all days; he had hoped to glean some amount of comfort in having his mind and body occupied, he supposed. Fool. That never worked, not in the eight long years it had been since his beautiful wife had died. August fifth, a day destined to always come with wretchedness in tow. Apparently there was truth in the cliché about not being able to teach an old dog new tricks. This couldn't be avoided anymore than income taxes or dust bunnies and he was a coward for wanting escape from it even temporarily.

"Sir?"

Jack O'Neill's voice pulled his attention back to the here and now. Looking up, George was embarrassed to realize the whole of SG-1 were staring at him with mixed expressions, concern being dominant. Years of training enabled him to halt the flush from spreading past his neck and into his face, though it didn't appear as though they bought his attempt to remain official anyway. He gave a short nod, dismissing questions he saw forming on Major Carter and Doctor Jackson's lips. Surrounded by people and so alone. Alone is what he wanted to be.

"If there's nothing further?" he virtually snapped, thankfully gaining no response. "Very well. Good job, people. Dismissed."

Hesitating only a moment while the group rose with varying degrees of efficiency, George retreated to the sanctuary of his office. Where he could be alone. The irony of his withdrawal was not lost on him; some would argue he brought his incredible loneliness upon himself as a form of self-punishment for living. For not being able to prevent the death of the greatest love he had ever known. Necessary penance. So be it. He'd much rather suffer alone than bring undue melancholy to those around him, a justification he knew he employed as a means to privately lament. Life owed him a scrap of selfish grief, didn't it?

Muffled voices reverberated through the doorway and he wasn't surprised to find SG-1 still gathered around the briefing table, probably discussing the fascinating scenario they had all just lived through, dissecting it over and over. Ignoring the chatter, George fingered the photos on his desk, lovingly caressed her face with an old finger. Later on, he'd go visit her and update her on the goings-on in his life, tell her how fast Tessa and Kayla were sprouting up, how his other group of kids continued to bring so much joy and frustration into his life. Relaying these things did help but never totally eliminated the solitude. Until he could leave the base, he'd do as always - work. He gave the picture one last stroke before halfheartedly picking up the file for SG-1's next proposed mission.

"General Hammond?" Daniel's voice intruded, and he glanced to his open doorway to find the young man hovering there. "Could I have a word?"

"Come in, Doctor Jackson," he beckoned, trying to get himself to express interest. The interruption would pass quickly, leaving him alone once more. "What can I do for you?"

"Actually, sir..." There was a pause, a tentative step into his office. Conflict and indecision twisted the archaeologist's features for a moment. He thought perhaps he would be

spared, but the hope was dashed. "October eighth."

"What?"

"October eighth," the date was repeated. "The only day of the year I truly dread."

"I'm sorry, son. Either say what's on your mind, or I'll have to ask you to leave. I'm very busy," George belligerently stated, voice gruff and ruder than he'd intended.

"No, I'm sorry. This was a bad idea," Daniel mumbled, pivoting around again.

He connected the dots, understood the mysterious reference and slumped his shoulders, shamed at his callousness. It was a day that found the archaeologist conspicuously absent, even when he was on base. Quiet and reserved and purposely alone, just as he himself was alone today. Bless that man. Clearing his throat stopped the departure, yet he still hesitated to invite another into his privacy. Grief had always been something for him to experience alone but it didn't grant him the right to be discourteous. Sighing, George said, "Doctor Jackson."

The shoulders lifted slightly as the younger man carefully turned them back, twisting at the waist to face him, ready to flee again if needed. He was a foolish codger, unmeritorious of the second chance being bestowed. Waving Daniel to one of the chairs in front of his desk, George silently watched and waited. The effort may be for naught but he couldn't deny the attempt, nor overlook the concern behind it. It had been tried before by one Jack O'Neill, and summarily rejected. In the back of his mind, he was grateful and touched they considered it worth their time.

If asked, he would describe his relationship with the inquisitive archaeologist as tenuous. His goat had been got by Daniel on more times than he could count, almost more often than Jack, yet there was some underlying facet to him that always made George soften. Looking at the man now, he began to understand that aspect even more. Daniel fidgeted in the chair, attempting to find a comfortable position physically and mentally. Ruefully, he acknowledged Maggie would have chided him for being so blind for so long. It was likely he had more in common with Doctor Jackson than any outsider could possibly imagine, at least in regard to personal loss. From his first introduction, he had unconsciously recognized the similarities of Sha'uri's plight to his own struggle to help his wife. An uncommon bond, between two opposite men and born of the fates of two strong women whose stories were worlds different and yet so alike.

"What was her name?"

The question was filled with hesitancy, Daniel still obviously uncertain this topic was one he should broach. So the younger man knew he was treading on dangerous ground. A pang shot through George, both from instinctual habit to quell further discussion and his own hesitancy to accept the olive branch and let someone truly in. Four years working with the archaeologist, and he'd never even shared the name of his wife. He knew suddenly he had been wrong all these years to squirrel away his anguish, hoarding his memories instead of sharing them as they deserved to be.

"Maggie. She was quite a woman," he answered, almost unconsciously opening the door he preferred to keep locked. His wife smiled encouragingly.

"I can imagine," Daniel lightly said, just on the fine line of teasing.

George found himself relaxing, the tightness constricting his chest and throat edging back just a notch as Daniel picked up the photograph with tender care. Nodding at the younger man as encouragement, he saw a bevy of emotions flicker across Daniel's expressive face - sadness, wistfulness, joy, and delight. So many of the things he had been able to see in his wife now translating into a person who was a stranger to her, and always would be. His throat tightened again. A stranger to her, family to him.

"Could you tell me a little about her?" Daniel made the request with nervousness, following it by offering an escape clause. "You don't have to."

Handing the photo back to him, Daniel leaned closer to the desk looking like a man who'd inadvertently crossed a line drawn in the sand, knowing it was too late to go back now. Smiling sadly at Maggie's face, George nodded once. This wouldn't be so hard. There was need coloring the younger man's features along with the trepidation, and he wondered at the seemingly misplaced emotion.

"I've been in the military most of my life, as you well know," he began, swallowing past the lump at last. The archaeologist slid back in his chair, expression instantly rapt. Bless him again. "You can't tell from this picture but Maggie was a very small woman - about Doctor Fraiser's size. Neither her petiteness nor my military standing ever deluded anyone into thinking she wasn't the one running our household. I could bellow until the cheap Air Force housing roof shook and my kids would pay no mind. Maggie snapped her fingers and they were at full attention within seconds. She struck the fear of God into those poor kids; I really was a teddy bear."

"She wasn't all bluff and bluster, though. One of her favorite things to do was to lie in a meadow and watch the clouds float by. I found her once, tears streaming down her face with the sheer splendor of it. That was more her than anything I can think of. By the same token, we spent countless hours strolling under skies lit by a full moon. Romantic dinners for us were sirloins broiled and garlic bread toasted after the children had been put to bed, in the comfort of our modest kitchen."

"Sounds nice."

"It was, though on many occasions our interludes were interrupted by one or both of the kids pattering down and simpering with the unfairness of our treat. Romantic dinner for a party of four," he softly chuckled, remembering how Maggie had always automatically made enough for all of them.

His smile widened as he lost himself in an assortment of images, thoughts and smells. Freshly fallen snow, rainbows bright in a green and rain-kissed sky, white tulips, chamomile tea, and his kids when both young and grown. Happiness tinged with longing. Oh, how he missed her.

"She was beautiful, sir," Daniel whispered, breaking the spell. The young man's eyes were riveted on the photograph.

At that, George choked. God knows he had adored the ground Maggie walked on, but she could never have been described as beautiful by any traditional standards. Shaking his head, he silently refuted the statement. No, she had not been striking in face or form but she had been so vital to his existence.

"Yes, she was. I didn't have the good fortune to know her, but I can see her more in you than at any photograph could ever capture; in the way your face lights up in some memory, in the love you will always carry for her. Beauty isn't about the outside, as cliché as that sounds. It's about life and love and she gave that to you, and you to her. That's beautiful, and so was she."

He blinked at the precious truth of those words, comforted by their soft-spoken delivery and their deliverer. On a day

designated for loneliness and solitude, George had suddenly been gifted with the knowledge he had been abusing this particular anniversary. By saving up the sadness for one day of the year, he had been disrespecting the memory of his wife. Every day of his life, he thought of her with bittersweet fondness and happiness until the day in which it was most appropriate, when he became a shut in of self-inflicted torture. Maggie's life was a treasure, not something to mourn in isolation. To do so was unbefitting, did no justice to a remarkable woman.

"Thank you, Daniel."

Befuddled at the unusual use of his first name made the archaeologist look like a deer in headlights, eyebrows shooting above his glasses to mid forehead. George gave another soft laugh, and it felt so good to do so at long last. Smiling into his wife's eyes, he set the picture down, his spirit lightened.

"Sir?" Daniel managed at last, still appearing as though he might have bitten clear through his tongue.

"For helping me see," George simply said.

"You already saw, sir."

"I'm not so sure I did, son." An idea began forming in the back of his mind, a niggling thought about how to fully turn this most lonely of days to one of happy commemoration. "Would you like to meet her?"

There was a long pause as confusion transformed into understanding on Daniel's face, a slight blush creeping across his cheeks. Ah, Maggie would have eaten this boy alive, and then smothered him with all kinds of doting.

"Very much. It would be an honor, in fact," Daniel accepted shyly.

"I have a few things that need to be taken care of, then I was planning to visit her. Will you be in your office?"

"Where else?"

"Good. Give me a couple of hours," George smiled, ridiculously excited at the prospect of sharing his secret solitude with someone else.

"Yes, sir," Daniel smiled quickly, then awkwardly rose from the chair and fled.

For the first time in eight long years, he did not feel alone and he knew the following years would be much easier to face. He lovingly looked to Maggie, her smiling face no longer haunting. George turned his gaze to Daniel making his way through the briefing room, wondering how he could ever repay the young man for forcing him to see the reality in which he should view this day. Wondering how easy it had been for him to accept it from the often perplexing man. Smiling, George thought about how happy Maggie would be to receive another visitor, and how happy he was to experience this new horizon.

His eyes swept over the stacks of paperwork spread out on his desk, no longer so odious and miserable to consider, and then his perusal landed on his calendar. Flipping forward a few months, he stopped at October and circled the eighth day in red ink.

Perhaps he could find a way to thank Daniel after all.

The End

MORITURI

by Poss

Warning: Dark subject matter

Jack O'Neill sat quietly in his office, the folder open on the desktop in front of him. It wasn't really as big a folder as he might have imagined. Ten thousand names were more easily confined than he suspected. He was silent; he'd finished talking.

The folder had opened to a spot halfway through the K's. Idly, his gaze travelled down the list, reading each one, smiling inwardly at the absurdity of human names. Kerensky. Betty Anne Kerensky. You couldn't get more Russian than the last name, nor more Bible belt than the first. He wondered, briefly, if she'd been the young mother with the four-year-old sitting on her lap. Mother and daughter had been wearing matching outfits. In all that long session hazy with lies, that was the detail that stood out for him the most.

He heard footsteps - hard, fast footsteps - and sighed. Here it was at last.

The door to his office banged open.

"Dammit, Jack! You can't do this!"

Jack lifted his eyes slowly from the pages before him. "I'm not, Daniel. The Pentagon is doing this."

Daniel Jackson was sputtering, a brilliant candle almost at its end, sinking into its own melted substance and flaring at the darkness around him.

"Did you see them, Jack? Talk to them? All those people... How can you do this?"

Ah. Doctor Jackson's listening skills needed some work.

"The Pentagon is doing this, Daniel. I'm following orders."

"Orders!" Supreme contempt in that voice, and Jack winced slightly. "Orders! W-w-what, Jack, they *order* you to drop trou and bend over the bonnet, huh?"

"That's enough." But his voice said *go on, go on, because I want your words to flay me alive here, I want them to sink deep into my flesh over and over and over and maybe they'll kill whatever it is that's inside me now.*

"No, it's not." Daniel was pacing, the room not big enough to contain the anger that was spilling from his every pore. "It's not, because this is wrong. This can only ever be wrong, Jack. You are deceiving these people, sending them through the Gate to the Goa'uld, to God knows what horrors. They'll implant them or enslave them and you're - you're telling them what?"

Jack closed the folder. He really didn't need to read all their names again. He'd done it once, as they checked in, clutching one suitcase apiece, eyes huge in the artificial lights.

"We're telling them we've detected an ELE. Comet, heading for Earth. They've all seen 'Deep Impact'. They bought it."

And they had. The shrinks had been right for once. Well, it was the end of the world, Jack thought grimly. The two hundred Travellers, as they'd been termed, had sat in the gym with their pathetic belongings and listened to him as he told them that they'd been selected at random by a computer to begin colonising New Earth, through the Stargate. He'd shown them film of past expeditions, told them that Gate travel was nothing to fear, and he'd watched as their horror and grief for friends and family left behind was subtly supplanted by the relief that they and their immediate family would survive. No-one doubted, because the Stargate was right there, and because Jack could ooze sincerity when he wanted to.

Two hundred Travellers, and the process had been repeated five times, and then ten times more by other briefing officers.

"They bought it because they were terrified and they wanted to be reassured. What did you people do, wake them in the night, tell them to pack one bag, that there was no time to ring their families?"

You people. Oh, Danny - the divide has never been bigger than it is tonight, has it?

"What do you want, Daniel?"

The question seemed to stun him with its obviousness. "What

do I -? Jack, we have to fight back. We're handing our people over to the Goa'uld. Just - sending them up the ramp like cattle. God, Jack! 'Not acceptable'. Those were your words. 'That would be un-acceptable,' you said, when we were negotiating the protected planet treaty and mention was made of sending people to be hosts. Your words, Jack!"

"And how do you propose we do that? Huh?" For the first time a spark of anger was in Jack's voice, and he welcomed it. Anger had got him through some foul things before - maybe it would carry him through this, leave him a burning pillar of hate that could do this thing demanded of him. "I saw it, Daniel. I saw what they can do now."

Daniel made a dismissive gesture, and Jack almost purred as the anger crackled up his spine.

"I saw an entire planet's population destroyed. And it wasn't quick, Daniel, it took them days to die in agony."

"The Asgard - "

"The Asgard were right beside me as we watched. New kid in town. Bigger stick. New order round here, and that does not include the Asgard swooping in and saving our rosy little butts."

Daniel's eyes seemed luminous, huge with a blue ire that would never cool. "I never thought I'd hear you say this, Jack. I never thought I'd be the one demanding we fight back." He brought both fists up, clenched in front of his chest, before taking several deep breaths and turning way. "You know, when I was in Israel I met a Jewish survivor of the Holocaust. We became friends, and I asked him what I'd always wondered - why didn't you fight? Why didn't you run? Why did you just walk to your deaths instead of fighting for your families? And of course he said that some had, but the truth was they had nowhere to go, and no strength to get there if they had. Well, Jack, we have places we can go." He waved in the general direction of the Gateroom. "We have a whole computer full of addresses. We could be sending every second group to an Alpha site, or something. All we lack is the strength of will."

The same old arguments. Wearily, Jack tilted back in his chair. "They're monitoring the Gate. They'd know the first time we sent a shipment some place else."

"Shipment?" Daniel spat at him. "Don't you mean 'train load'?"

"Dammit, Daniel!" Jack rocked forward, to his feet, and was pleased to feel the anger was burning through his bones now, a bitter fury big enough to fill the room, the planet, the galaxy. "I have fought all my adult life, and all it's bought these people is a few more years of peace."

"So now you give up?"

"Yes, Daniel. Now I give up." Jack leaned over the desk, rigid with the intensity of his restraint. "Part of being a soldier is knowing when it's over. I would have fought to the end, but what you don't seem to grasp through your over-educated skull is that this is the end. This is Hiroshima, pal. We've got nothing left."

"And that's how you rationalise it, huh?"

"Rationalise? Tell me, when Sha're died, what was the first thing on your mind?" Daniel's face had stilled, but Jack ploughed on. "I bet I can tell you. A sarcophagus, right? Get her to a sarcophagus. Well, I know all about that. I know all about the promises and bargains you make when your kid has just shot himself with your gun and you're sitting in a hospital chair and you just know you saw brain on the carpet but you're promising yourself that doctors can do amazing things these days..." He breathed out suddenly, almost a gasp, then steadied. "Comes a time when you just have to accept that it's a done deal and there's nothing more to bargain for."

Daniel had gone very pale, but he tightened his lips.

"We're not talking about one individual, here. We're talking an entire planet!"

"No, Daniel, that's the one thing we're not talking about. Not if we give them what they want."

Ah, hell, Daniel, where in God's name do you get all this righteous energy? It was tiring just to watch.

"And what's that? Ten thousand people a month? God, Jack, that's too high a price and you know it!"

"I'll tell you what I know, Daniel. " Jack leaned onto his knuckles on the desktop. "I know that the Gould can now melt every human being on this planet in slow motion. I know that right now is not the time to fight."

"Oh. Right. Sorry." The bitterness hurt to hear, and Jack saw that there were tears of agony in his best friend's eyes. He wanted to reach out to him, to hug him, maybe say something about working through this, finding a way; but it all seemed too blasphemous. "So I guess we're the Nazis this time. Will we be handing them postcards as they go through the Gate, telling them to write home soon?"

"No." Jack straightened up, sour and old. "That wouldn't fit in with the cover story."

Daniel stared at him. Silent. Angry. Then, with one nod, he turned and left the office.

Jack stayed where he was, frozen with a kind of grief that was familiar, the bastard child of despair and frustration; then he sank down into his chair and leaned to open the desk drawer. At the back was a bottle of Irish whiskey, Bushmills, the one his father used to drink on hunting trips. He picked it up, poured three fingers into the water glass on his desk, and began to swallow.

Below him he heard the Gate begin to fire up. That sound had always been a mixed blessing. It had heralded adventure and success and exploration and threat. Now it sang a Kyrie Eleison for the first offerings to the Goa'uld, their first ransom payment for the planet. Blood money, thought Jack, and he almost laughed when he realised the term was completely accurate.

He swallowed the rest of the whiskey in one gulp, then carefully placed the glass back on the desk. Something compelled him to rise to his feet, to walk out of the door and down to the viewing window. Some Travellers had already gone through, he saw; others were waiting, not quite patient but quiet, subdued, anxious. Trusting. One of them turned and saw him at the window, and her hand rose in a tentative wave.

Watch this, he told himself, savagely. *You deserve to watch this.*

How had they reacted when the circle first burst into life? With fear, awe, excitement? He should have been there to see it, to witness every face of every person who passed through the 'process', who began his or her final journey up the ramp. Now he could only see their backs as they bent to shoulder baggage straps, to grip their children's hands. "I'm watching your back," he said, softly, and the Airman beside him smiled uncertainly.

"Sir?"

"Nothing, Airman." *I'm watching your back.* For twenty-eight years that had meant something. If Jack O'Neill was watching your back, you better believe he's gonna do everything in his power and then some to get you back home safe.

Son-of-a-bitch! Jack's face twisted into a grimace as he fought down the snarl of rage. This was wrong. This was so wrong. He'd lost his nerve - hell, they all had. He would never forget the sight of those people dying, thousands of them, millions. It had been Nightmare beyond anything his imagination could supply. But the Cartagoans had it right - we all

survive, or none do.

Daniel had been right. Again. *When will I buy a clue, hey, Danny?* he thought, but the taste of defeat had gone from his mouth. He knew what he had to do. Find Daniel. Get Carter, Teal'c. Hammond. Ferretti. Work out a plan. They'd been waiting for him to lead them, and he'd failed. For the first time, he'd counted the odds and listened to the math. Not any more.

"Airman." The young man's head swivelled around, his spine straightened.

"Sir?"

"I need you to find Doctor Jackson, Major Carter, Teal'c. Get them to meet me in my office. ASAP, Airman," he added as the young man hesitated.

"Sir? Um - Doctor Jackson?"

"Yes, Airman. Doctor Jackson." The look of confusion on the airman's face began to annoy Jack, and the next order was snapped. "On the double."

"But, Sir - " the airman was obviously concerned about the effect of his next words, but he continued. "Doctor Jackson put his name on the first list. He was the first one through the Gate. I - we thought - he said you authorised it, Sir."

And that was when Jack O'Neill learned that pain was infinite, that it could blossom exponentially and forever.

He blinked, twice, as the second biggest blow of his life rocked his being; then he gave the airman a crisp nod, and left the viewing room.

It took him three minutes to reach the armoury; two to sign out a zat'n'ktel, two hand guns and a P-90; five to push his way through the crowd of Travellers queuing through the corridors leading to the embarkation room. Some of them recognised him from the briefing, and gave him worried smiles or nervous glances. Some saw the weapons and gave him thumbs up signs or relieved nods. Some bowed their heads, as if he were somebody worth respecting.

It didn't matter. He had a purpose, and a mission. No point in taking a vest, in calling Carter or Teal'c. This was his job alone.

"Coming through, people," he called, and they parted for him, leaving a clear view of the ramp and the swirling blue water of the Gate. His boots made that familiar clang on the metal as he marched toward the event horizon. He wasn't surprised when he heard the amplified voice echoing through the crowd, and he smiled at how fitting the send-off was.

"Colonel O'Neill? What the hell do you think you're doing?"

Ah. So Hammond didn't know about Daniel's jaunt either. Otherwise, he would never have asked.

"Sir." Jack raised his eyes to the General's, far above him in the control room. Hammond would want to know, of course; he deserved that. And come to think of it, these would probably be his last words. At least on Earth. So something spectacular would be in order, Jack.

He shrugged. Somewhere along the line he'd missed the 'Grand Gesture' classes at the Academy. Morituri te salutant, George.

"Daniel's gonna need some back-up, General." And he threw a parade ground salute before stepping into the infinite possibilities of the Stargate.

The End

STARS

by Dangerprone

Colorado's cool springtime breeze swirled around him, whisking away the dampness caused by the exertion of the climb. Normally, this might cause a chill, but tonight it only warmed him through and through. Alive. He was alive, his team was alive, and for the moment, that was enough to make his world right.

Jack O'Neill sat on his rooftop in the crisp night air, the stars twinkling brightly like the universe was winking at him with its own private joke. This time, the laugh was on it. They had made it home.

Barely.

Jack felt the stubborn little twinge that wouldn't bend to the will of the painkillers radiating from the staff wound on his calf. Fraiser would never hear this from his lips, but the ground still did the occasional loop-de-loop as well. He'd surely taken harder knocks to the head, but he couldn't say when. If he was being honest, he was glad he'd been out for the worst of it. The one thing harder than not being able to protect your crew was watching them suffer because of it. He could hear snatches of conversation taking place in the living room below and clutched the solace coming from the sounds to him.

Another man might have wanted to stay close, immersion in the familiarity of friends giving him strength and reassurance. Not him. Jack admitted freely he was not a man of words. He knew his team knew how he felt and he in turn knew how they felt about him. They would give him the time to clear his head, and then they'd hunt him down and pull him back into the fold.

Daniel. That's who'd come find him first; it always was. Daniel was a man of words, only in his case, it was everybody else's words except his own. Jack had watched the young man beat himself up enough in the past to know Daniel would somehow sense the precise moment in time his self-reflection would turn to self-recrimination. And since Jack was starting to think he had no right to take comfort in the sounds of his team's safety, he figured he'd see the man any second.

Ahh, yes, there it was. The soft huffing sound as someone with several broken ribs and fingers clumsily made his way up the ladder. Jack found Daniel's timing to be both damn uncanny and oddly comforting. He also felt a bit guilty for not getting off his backside and saving his friend the climb, but it was too late now. Besides, it was a beautiful night and the view was heartening. Maybe it would have the same salve-like effect on Daniel as it was having on him.

He turned just in time to see the familiar head pop up into view, obviously working hard at not looking down. Daniel was fine when up high as long as he was sure-footed; it was the precarious process of getting there he had a problem with. Even in the dim light of stars and quarter moon, Jack could see the set of Daniel's jaw as he finished the ascent and moved over to lean against the rail, trying for nonchalant, and failing miserably.

Soon enough, however, Jack saw the calmness of the night wash over his battered friend, his stance becoming more relaxed. They sat in silence, Daniel with arms crossed, watching the sky above, Jack watching him. No remnants of the shaggy-haired dweeb he'd watched unlock the secret of the Stargate were left, except for the eyes. The unadulterated wonder that shone in them as he'd stepped into the event horizon that first time still occasionally made an appearance, like tonight. The wrapped fingers and the way he held one hand protectively over the left side of his abdomen were the only giveaways to the hell they'd just been through. If Jack was forced to choose one thing about his friend that he admired, it had to be the man's ability to marvel despite all the crap that had been thrown at them over the last few years.

Finally seeming to notice he was being scrutinized, Daniel met Jack's eye.

"Nice night."

"Yeah."

Daniel looked down at his feet for a minute and Jack knew he was trying to decide which tack to take, heartfelt or bottom line. He saw Daniel shooting him a tentative look before beginning.

"You planning on coming back inside? You know, Teal'c worries if you're gone too long."

Ooh, great call. Bottom line followed by heartfelt sprinkled with humor and a teensy dollop of guilt. The boy was improving, but of course he had been learning from the best the last few years, if he said so himself.

"And you wouldn't want any of us to panic and call Janet. I don't think she'd be too pleased to find out you've been climbing ladders with leg and head injuries and while on painkillers."

Maybe he'd learned a little too well. "Daniel. That's blackmail."

"Yes," the archeologist stated matter-of-factly, batting his eyes at him in mock innocence.

Pushing Daniel off the roof seemed a little extreme, although the thought did have some appeal. If he went back inside at least he'd have a cane to whack him with. Fortunately for the young man, Jack expected visitor number two to make his appearance soon, which would take his mind off revenge. He didn't know if it was concern for his mental well being or if Teal'c figured left alone too long Jack and Daniel would most certainly get into trouble. Either way, the Jaffa was never too far behind the archeologist in seeking him out. In fact, right now Jack could hear the groan of abused wood as Teal'c made his way up to them.

Jack always felt the size of the warrior was at odds with the tiny platform, but Teal'c was as taken with stargazing as he. The large man had no visible signs of injury, but Jack knew the exact number of stitches he had around his symbiote pouch. Seemingly unbothered by the wound, Teal'c nodded to his two companions before moving his eyes to take in the sparkling canopy above. In a moment of utter purity, the wind whispered around them as they soaked in the majesty of the night sky, and Jack remembered why he had been called to come up here in the first place. It suddenly hit him that they needed Carter. She was late by her standards and he wanted his team whole and together and he wanted it right now. He turned to Teal'c just in time to see the reprimand on his face that went along with his words.

"O'Neill. I believe you and Daniel Jackson should move back to a ground level location. I do not believe Doctor Fraiser would approve of your activities."

It figured Teal'c, unlike Daniel, would bypass heartfelt and go straight for the big gun. Jack had sworn on many occasions the good doctor was a gremlin; all little and sweet looking, but there was no question she could tear you to shreds in an instant if she deemed it necessary. Teal'c was obviously well aware the wrath of Janet Fraiser was the ultimate threat and had gone directly for the verbal kill.

"Teal'c, why don't you tell Doctor Fraiser to kiss my-"

"Sir?"

The major stepped onto the landing, joining her teammates like he had known she would. In this light, the bruising looked more like shadows dancing across the fine features, the split lower lip nearly blending away. Too bad he knew differently. She'd actually come out the best of the bunch on this one, but would still take a while to get back to whole.

"What are you guys doing up here?"

Oh yeah, she was nearly as good as Daniel at playing the innocent card. He was supposed to say nothing and head down to the area that she had deemed 'safe'. God he loved his team.

"Nothing, Carter. Why don't we head back down?"

"Oh, hey, look!" Sam was pointing just behind them. They

all managed to turn in time to catch the tail end of a shooting star lighting its way across the black canvas.

"Is it not Tau'ri custom to proclaim a desired outcome upon the viewing of such an occurrence?"

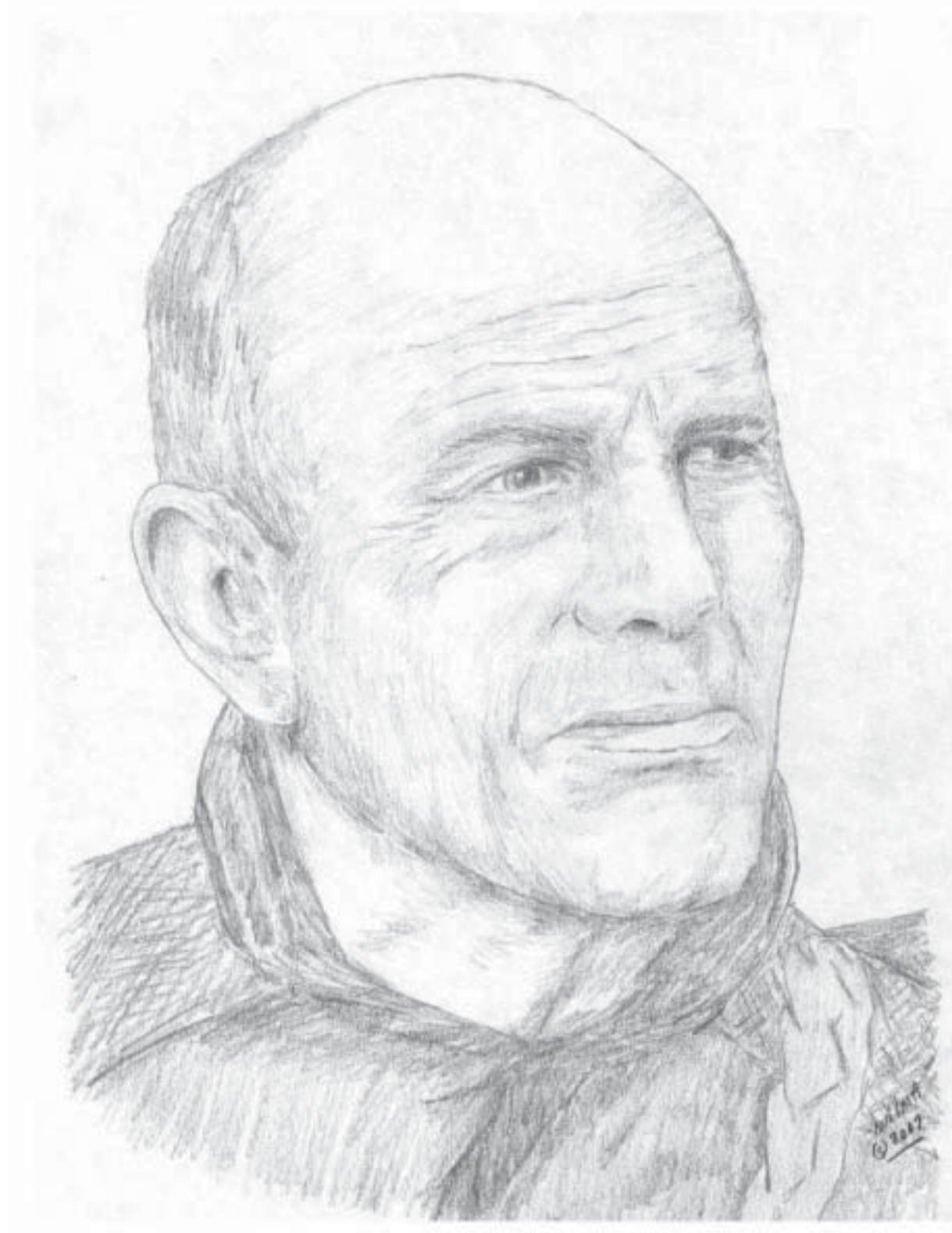
Jack knew Teal'c had just played the alien card for effect but he went along anyway. "That's 'make a wish,' Teal'c and yes, it is."

He glanced again at the fading trail that glittered through

the night sky before looking back at the smiling faces of his team. He could tell them his wish had already come true; that he'd found a family in them and sharing nights like this was all he wanted. He could, but he wouldn't. Jack was not a man of words.

With family, he didn't need to be.

The End



ON DANIEL

by Brionhet

Tag to The Light

I hate what we've done to him.

That moment when he first saw the Gate burst into life is burned into my brain, never to be forgotten. All the astonished awe on the faces around him paled to nothing next to his wonder and fascination. And as our hard-assed team walked slowly up that ramp, the rest of us grim and tense with what an honest man has to admit was fear, his wide eyes reflected the blue glow of that wall of glistening pseudo-fluid, vivid with eagerness. The same gentle joy radiated from his entire body as we stared down that dune, witnessing our first alien civilization as the Abydonians slaved, mining a mineral unknown on Earth. And again as the three of us were folded into their celebration.

I'll define the essence of Daniel by those moments for the rest of my life. He was a revelation to me, though it took me a while to understand just how profoundly he was destined to impact my life.

In those first heady months of the Stargate program, the purity of his motives put a gloss of higher purpose on the spirit of the operation. Not for him the need to find more and better ways to kill. For Daniel, it was the exhilaration of discovery—cultures long vanished on Earth living and breathing, pathways long dead carried forward, extrapolating themselves not in theory but in reality.

And the passion of his vision infused itself into our more grim military objectives. For a while.

But the military perspective is a juggernaut. And with the growing realization of the scope of the opposition, Daniel's higher vision was swallowed, inch by painful inch, by the harshness of our tunnel vision.

I try hard to convince myself that the changes are the result of the truly awful things that he's had to survive. Hathor. Nem. Shyla. Machello... twice. The agonizing loss of Sha're... twice. Staying behind to die alone on Klore'l's ship. In fact, dying... several times. Reliving surely the most traumatic event a child can experience... several times.

Horrible, awful things. Enough to shatter the spirit of the strongest man.

To my sorrow, dreadful as these things were, they didn't do the real damage. We did that.

I can't believe I didn't see what was happening, that it took me so long to realize that we were gradually destroying him. How long has it been since I've seen that joyous wonder radiating from his face? How long since his tongue has been tied by the excesses of excitement, rather than outrage?

The evidence was there. It was expressed in the increasing rarity of that shy little smile. And in the escalating desperation of his opposition to our obsessive search for more and meaner technology—particularly weapons technology—and the growing edge of hopelessness that became so evident in his pleas to be allowed to pursue the gentler obsessions that motivated his life. He craves peaceful exploration; we give him duplicitous exploitation.

See, Daniel? I can use words, too.

I will never cease to rage against myself for my personal contributions to this damage. In retrospect, I see so clearly how focused I was on getting what I wanted. Jack O'Neill does not lose, and I was absolutely convinced that the only way to win this one was to get better toys than the bad guys, and blow them to smithereens. Daniel's constant opposition drove me insane. Every time he'd plead his case, I'd want to smack him. A relationship that had been a warm, reassuring friendship became increasingly confrontational. And in sheer self defense, he pulled back from the hurt that replaced camaraderie. I drove a wedge between us that has left a possibly unbridgeable gulf. And he's all by himself on the cold far side of that chasm.

Daniel has always been such a man alone. No family that matters, alienated from the professional friends who should have supported him and instead kicked him in the face. We became his family. He let himself learn to count on us. Then we carelessly, ruthlessly pushed him back out on his own.

I pushed. I pushed him right out onto that balcony.

Oh, God... when I walked past that piano and saw him, perched outside the rail, bare toes hanging out over the edge... I don't ever want to feel that kind of panic again. And what he said...

"It all goes away..."

Oh, Daniel. What a blinding wake-up call. Did we go away? Did we leave you to suffer the raging aggression of the universe without us?

To have a man like you in my life... that's an overwhelming privilege. To neglect that stewardship must be one of the great universal sins.

He's sitting there on the step, hands clasped behind his bowed head, rocking forward and back in exhausted pain. When I lurched through that Gate, I was sure we'd waited too long. Convinced that I carried a body finally, irrevocably dead. My thanks to any real god in the universe that he beat off that foe one more time.

I'm so sorry, Daniel. So sorry. We've failed you—and thus the finer part of ourselves.

Unfixable? I hope to hell not. I need you. I need the brightness you brought me. Surely, surely we haven't completely extinguished that glow.

Realizing what I've done is the hardest part of repairing the damage, right? The rest has to be easier, doesn't it?

Doesn't matter. If it takes the rest of my life, and every scrap of energy and determination I have, I will fix this. Having experienced his brilliant illumination, I can't face life back in the darkness.

I'm coming for you, Danny. Don't give up until you feel my hand reaching for you.

The End

EVALUATION

by BabsN

Tag to Threshold

I must redeem myself.

I have done my friends great injustice. I betrayed them and again they have suffered at my hand.

The intent of my alliance to the people of Earth has always been just, but I now realise I may cause them harm, instead of being an asset to their continuing fight for freedom.

They showed me Apophis was a false God and I was relieved, ready to fight an equal opponent: not a deity, but merely a parasite who hides in the body of an innocent scribe.

Yet my mind is weak. I was captured and through trickery and torture my former God regained my loyalty within days.

I despise myself and I expect those who offered me a home here on Earth will feel the same about me.

I am in the infirmary, regaining my strength after Master Bratac freed me from my false beliefs. Dr. Fraiser insists the price was high. Too high to her liking as I almost lost my life in the process, although at this point I think that may have been a better solution. Her oath to protect and sustain life is of great importance to her and my fight against my delusions almost made her break that oath.

She watches me like an eagle, protecting me from the impending wrath of my former comrades.

They all visit: Major Carter, Daniel Jackson, O'Neill. They sit at my bedside and hide their discomfort behind what they refer to as chitchat, but I am weak. My body is tired and my mind does not yet seek this confrontation. I add to my dishonour by pretending to slip into Kel'Noreem until they leave.

It is late and the infirmary is quiet as I try to blank my thoughts to gain some rest.

Footsteps approach this side of the ward. Their hesitation tells me they don't belong to a member of the medical staff. The warm rich smell of coffee, which reaches my nose seconds later, tells me my late visitor probably is Daniel Jackson.

"Teal'c? Are you awake?"

I do not react to his whispering, hoping he will let me be for the moment.

He is hovering above me for a few moments before he gives up. A chair scrapes over the floor and I hear him settle next to my bed.

Silence again descends on the infirmary, only broken by the occasional sipping of coffee.

I make sure I stay relaxed and keep me breathing even, but my attention is focused on the man sitting next to my bed. I am dreading and yet longing for his lashing.

Minutes pass and Daniel Jackson is getting restless, fidgeting in his chair. "Listen, Teal'c. I don't know if you are in Kel'Noreem or not." His tone of voice is slightly accusing. "You've been sleeping every time I come down here. I just wanted to tell you that if you blame yourself for what happened, don't. We all know what kind of a rat bastard Apophis is and what he must have done to you. He probably got some sick joy out of making you go against your beliefs... and against us."

He bends closer as I feel his breath brush against my arm. "You are my friend and I'll be damned if I'm going to let some snakehead change that."

I cannot ignore his words and I open my eyes. "I have wronged you again, Daniel Jackson"

He jumps back as if stung, coffee sloshing over his sleeve. "Shit, Teal'c!!! Are you trying to give me a heart attack?"

He does not mean that, but I want to make sure. "I would do no such a thing."

"Well," he wheezes, "you almost did."

"Then I have wronged you once more, Daniel."

His expression changes from shaken to angry. I do not quite understand.

"See? SEE? I just knew you were going to take the blame for this. All this sleeping, I knew it was a crock. I've seen you bounce back from far worse! Why the hell would you do that?"

I answer truthfully, as he deserves. "I hoped to gain strength so I would be able to accept your anger without your sympathy for my weakened state."

"Geez, Teal'c! Get it through your big skull: there is nothing to be angry about." Daniel Jackson's finger pokes me in the chest, as his aggravation rises. "After Sheila drugged me with her sarcophagus, did you hate me when I left you to rot in those mines? Did you hate me when I attacked Doctor Fraiser? Or when I was ready to shoot Jack?"

"You had not wronged me before, Daniel. You forgave me the unforgivable. You would have been in your right if you had killed me, even without intending to do so."

That seems to release some of the tension as he shakes his head. "You chose Sha're to become a host but that was even before we met. Then you killed her in order to save my life. I have thought about it, believe me! And you never actually intended to do me harm. So what should I forgive you for?"

"The results of my actions."

Daniel snorts and he pulls his glasses off to pinch his nose. "Listen Teal'c. I do appreciate your thoughtfulness, but this my-life-is-yours-attitude is really not what I want. I just want us to be friends and that means we don't hold the past against each other." He looks up. "I'm not saying we forget what happened, just that we have dealt with it and now I'd really like to move on."

"If that is your wish, I will be honoured to be your friend, Daniel Jackson." And I am deeply honoured that he values our friendship that much.

"So am I, Teal'c." He slaps my arm lightly before moving away. At the door he turns. "If it is forgiveness you seek, I forgave you the moment you pulled that zat on us."

I knock and wait for Major Carter to acknowledge my presence.

"It's open!"

She does not look up from the microscope. "Just dump it somewhere, will ya? Thanks..."

"I have nothing to dump, Major Carter."

Her head raises quickly and she smiles. "Hey Teal'c. Good to see Janet let you out of the infirmary."

My encounter with Daniel Jackson has only increased my uncertainty. His demand for a continuation of our friendship was unexpected and now I have difficulty reading Major Carter. Daniel Jackson has many more reasons not to forgive me than she has, but unlike him she is a warrior. The honour and duty of soldier are things she lives by as well, so she understands how I failed to uphold mine.

Her smile seems one of friendship, yet she hides her emotions well when she wishes to do so.

"Major Carter. I must speak with you about my illness and my betrayal."

Her smile fades, yet her posture is still not one of anger. She gets up from behind her desk and points to the seating area.

"If you do not mind, Major Carter, I would prefer to stand."

She makes a face but leans back against her desk so we stand facing each other.

"Sure. What's on your mind, Teal'c?"

I take a deep breath as I try to order my thoughts, but my conflicting theories about her attitude towards me refuse to comply. I will just have to wing the conversation.

"Major Carter. I feel I must give you the opportunity to gain retribution for my recent acts. I have betrayed you as well as our team and placed all your lives in great danger. I was under the imposed impression that you were the enemy. I now know this was false, yet that does not excuse my relapse into my former faith. Therefore I ask what I can do to regain your trust and friendship. I do not know if you will ever feel able to rely



on me again, but if there is any course of action I could take that would help to regain some of your trust, I would be glad to take it."

She seems to hesitate, uncertain of how to handle my request.

I stand tall, ready to accept whatever her wish might be.

Her mouth opens as if she is about to speak but closes again as she raises herself from the desk and moves towards me.

I am shocked when her arms envelop me and pull me close.

"I never stopped trusting in you, Teal'c. You were ill and the only thing I wanted was to see my friend well again."

I cannot express the sheer pleasure of her arms around me.

Her respect for me as a fellow warrior has always been evident but this embrace speaks of more than that.

I feel myself relax into her arms, surprised how much relief this physical contact brings me.

Her actions speak of a trust I feared I had lost. I realise how much it has meant to me these past years. My team is my unit, is my family.

"You are still my friend, Teal'c," she murmurs as she pulls me close once more before letting go.

We both are shaken by our actions and she awkwardly backs off and heads for her desk. "Daniel warned me you were blaming yourself. I am glad you came, so I could make it clear to you how I feel." She rummages through her desk draw and pulls out a package of sweets. "Want one?"

As I pick out a strawberry-flavoured Jolly Rancher she continues.

"We all knew you were ill, Teal'c, so I knew that wasn't really you. Don't eat those! Try Lemon."

Somehow we end up in the seating area discussing what happened during my alliance to my former God and the variety of flavours among Earth's candies. This confuses me even more, but I am at ease, knowing Major Carter is still my friend.

I am slipping into the first stages of Kel'Noreem when I hear the door to my quarters open and close. The crude fabric of fatigues is crumpled as someone sits down opposite me.

Daniel Jackson has joined me in meditation before and although he cannot reach the stages of deep Kel'Noreem, he usually seems to find peace here as much as I do.

I focus on my breathing while he moves restlessly.

Recent events must still weigh heavily on him, because his unusual scuffling breaks my concentration. I let myself surface and open my eyes to stare in the apologetic face of O'Neill.

He smiles and points down. "The knees. Sorry!"

"O'Neill," I state, hoping he will clarify his presence.

"Am I disturbing you, Teal'c?"

"You are always welcome here, O'Neill."

He shifts uncomfortably. "So... Continue."

I raise an eyebrow, and his open hands point at me.

"Well, what you were doing, Kelnoreeming and stuff. Making Junior happy!"

"Do you wish to join me in Kel'Noreem, O'Neill?"

"Oh... yeah. Sure, buddy."

"Uhm, is it necessary to sit on the knees?" He shifts, freeing his legs and sitting back down.

"The knees are crap but the butt's fine," he grins.

"Kel'Noreem is a state of mind, O'Neill. It does not require a certain physical position."

"Right, right." He sighs deeply before squeezing his eyes shut tightly.

I smile. His posture is one of complete tension. He will not meditate today.

"Do you wish to talk, O'Neill?"

One eye opens to peer at me for a second, before O'Neill sighs. "Listen, Teal'c. First of all I'm not blaming you for anything. Snakehead did some really bad stuff to you and I'm

just glad that when Bratac took Junior away you were able to fight it." He seems to struggle for words.

"I thank you, O'Neill, for your understanding, yet I feel there is something else you wish to speak about."

He is about to deny it when suddenly he slumps down.

"You know? I just gotta wonder. Do you ever long for the good old days?" O'Neill asks avoiding my gaze.

"I don't know what you mean."

"When you were Apophis' First Prime, you were the man, the big chief. That must have been good?"

I frown. "I worshipped a false God. I was forced to kill the innocent, take people from their communities."

He drags his hands through his hair. "I know, I know. I just... Well, doesn't it ever annoy you that I am leading the team? I mean, when we are talking experience here, I'm just a kid compared to you. Even though I don't look it anymore."

The joke is weak; his usual defense to his emotions is failing. I did not expect this, but now I must repair any damage done. O'Neill's leadership is important to our mutual cause and self-doubt will undermine it.

I speak. "O'Neill. It is true you are much younger than me and you sometimes make mistakes which experience might have prevented. Yet it was you who showed me the way to fight for freedom. I followed you because I believed you might be the one capable of changing things for my people. Now after years of serving with you, I am even more convinced the Tau'ri hold the key to the demise of the Goa'uld.

"You are young, O'Neill, but age does not define the qualities of a leader. I am honored to serve under you and I am glad my experience serves you as well."

"I have never looked back to my days as First Prime with regret. My days were filled with the power over my subordinates, now they are filled with the honor of friendship and fighting for what is just."

I bow my head slightly. "And for that I am truly grateful."

I see the change as my words sink in. A genuine smile slowly spreads across his face as his shoulders straighten.

"That's good. That's really good to hear, buddy."

"Well. I'll just run along than, before you have a chance to change your mind."

He opens the door and raises his hand. I nod in return and he is gone.

I must redeem myself. I have misjudged my friends. I have known friendship before, but the Tau'ri seem to interpret the concept differently.

Among the Jaffa, friendship was as deep as it is here, but always second to honor, often second to duty as well.

I sinned against that. But then I am a Shol'vah.

The Tau'ri seem to value friendship above honour and duty. They will do their duty like the Jaffa would, but it never seems to end their compassion for those they have let come close to the heart.

I will try to repay them with the same respect.

So tonight I will call for pizza.

I have invited my friends to join me at O'Neill's residence. O'Neill and Daniel Jackson will have a discussion about fruit as a topping. Major Carter will giggle about unimportant things after they have shared the wine. O'Neill will invite us all to come fishing and I will shock him with my acceptance. Maybe I will help Major Carter when she's working on her motorbike and I will surprise Daniel Jackson with the Murene-fish I have ordered for his aquarium.

None of these things bring me pleasure by themselves. But they will pleasure my friends and in that will lie my fulfillment.

The End

HOW MANY TIMES

by Nancy Richardson

Jack closed his eyes and leaned back against the cave wall, breathing slow and deep. *We'll get through this. Carter and Teal'c should be at the Stargate. One more night, Daniel, and we'll be home.* A muffled moan penetrated Jack's thoughts. He turned his head to the side.

"Daniel, are you awake?" he asked softly.

Silence and a small twitch from the huddled form answered Jack's query.

"Didn't think so," he said, laying his hand on the fevered brow. "You've got enough morphine in you to keep you on cloud nine for a few days... God willing. Christ, Daniel. I've done it again, haven't I? Promised you the trip of your dreams. A veritable archaeological orgasm. But what happened? Shit happened and it landed right on you. Damn it, I never learn, do I? I was right from day one. Civilians in the military. It doesn't work. How many... damn it," Jack muttered, fighting back tears he wouldn't allow. "How many times do you have to die or get injured before I get that through my thick skull? God help me, Danny, but I can't do this anymore. Every time you get hurt, I lose a little more of my soul. Every time... every time you lose someone, my heart bleeds for you, but I don't know what to say or what to do. I'd give you the freaking universe if I could. No one deserves it more than you do. For crying out loud, I'm blubbering like a baby. That's it, I'm telling Hammond you're off the team. Right, who am I kidding? You are the team. I said it a long time ago and I'll say it again. You're the heart and soul of SG-1. You're what makes us work. Okay, you're on the team but you stay planet-side. You're always saying you never get to finish a job. Barely get going on something and you get yanked off to another planet, another crisis, another near-death experience. God, listen to me. I could sell tickets to this. Front row seats to the Jack O'Neill pity-fest. Yeah, it's what I do best. Crap, Daniel. Tell me to shut up, will ya?"

Jack looked down at his injured companion and shook his head.

"How many times have I had this conversation? I need you, Daniel. Probably more than I've ever needed anyone or anything. I wasn't lying when I said I lose a little bit of myself each time you get hurt. The ironic thing is, every time we go through that 'gate together I feel, I don't know, a kinship or something. It's special, I know that. I feel I have a purpose. I look over at you and I just feel... better. And when you solve a riddle? God, Danny, I am so damn proud of you it hurts. Sometimes... sometimes, when I look at you I can't help thinking of Charlie and all my protective instincts kick in. I know you don't need protecting, Daniel. Well, maybe from me. But sometimes I just have to do it... for me. Can you understand that? Listen to me. You're six sheets to the wind and I'm trying to have a philosophical debate. Typical though, right? When you want to talk it's, 'Shut up, Daniel', 'This conversation is over, Daniel', 'I don't have time for this, Daniel'. Oh shit, here I go again. So, how many tickets do you think I could sell? Okay, give away then? Maybe one of those charity gimmicks where you hit the target and my ass lands in a tank of water or mud. Yeah, I think a lot of people would line up for that. You and Carter could fight for first 'dibs'. Carter's a good kid, isn't she? Kids. You're all just kids. Well, except for Teal'c. Guess we're all kids to him. Anyhow, you're still my kids and I'm damn proud of every one of you. Prouder to be your friend. I am your friend, aren't I, Danny? I want to be. I mean to be. I need to be. Hell, you're the reason I'm here. Was it worth it, Daniel? Oh crap, I really need to shut up. I'm going to go outside and check on the weather, okay? I won't be long."

Jack absently ruffled his friend's hair and then stood up, wincing slightly as his own cuts and bruises reminded him of their presence. He quickly checked Daniel's torso, pleased to see the dressing dry and clean.

"It looks good, Daniel," he whispered softly. "You're gonna be fine." *Till when? The next time? How many more times, Jack?*

Are you keeping count? When is it enough? When he's dead and stays dead?

"Shut the hell up," Jack gritted between clenched teeth as he turned and stumbled out of the cave.

Jack squinted into the darkening sky. A light drizzle was falling. He stepped out into the warm rain, closed his eyes and looked up, relishing the cool, cleansing sensation. He released the sob in his throat and allowed himself the luxury of tears.

Wake up. Wake up.

Daniel tried to get up. He knew he should get up. God, he felt like he'd slept for days.

Please don't let me be late for a briefing, or worse, a mission. I'm sorry, Jack, but I really can't seem to wake up. Just a few more minutes, okay?

Jack watched in concern as Daniel moaned and twitched in his sleep.

"Daniel? Shh, go back to sleep," he whispered, patting his shoulder. "There's nothing happening here, buddy. Just me, myself, and a whole lot of bullshit."

Daniel murmured as if in response and settled back into a deep sleep.

"That's it," Jack said approvingly, pulling the sleeping bag up around the younger man's shoulders.

Daniel sighed and burrowed into the bag.

"You'd make a great cat, Daniel," Jack said fondly. "All fiercely independent but still happy to get a tickle and a rub. Me, I'm a dog kinda guy, or I was. Always needed people around me. Maybe that's why I took to the military so easily. Feed me, water me, give me a bed, tell me what to do, and reward me when I do good. Pretty simple. Until Iraq. They hung me out to dry on that one, Danny. Balls flapping in the breeze. Never looked at Uncle Sam the same way after that. Then Charlie. Sara. God, Daniel, you've seen me at my worst. You couldn't have come at a better time or a worse time. I like to think it was the right time. That you and I were destined to come together. Do you believe in destiny, Daniel? I never gave it much thought myself. Not until the Stargate. There's gotta be a reason we're here...doing this. You've got all the answers, Daniel. Why are we here? It can't be some big cosmic fluke. Come on, help me out here. This is that meaning of life stuff you love so much."

Jack gazed at the still, silent form beside him.

"I was going to stay, you know. On Ernest's planet. I think that was the first time you really scared the hell out of me. I knew you'd die if you stayed behind. I also knew I'd never let you stay alone. No goddamned way I'd do to you what they did to Ernest. Unforgivable. Fifty years. Jesus. Can you imagine us stuck together somewhere for fifty years? Hey, maybe you'd finally understand hockey."

Daniel stirred in his sleep, a frown creasing his face.

Oh, God, I'm dreaming about hockey. I'm trapped in a nightmare. Wake up, wake up, wake up.

"Mmhp."

"Daniel?"

"Mmhp... no... help."

"Daniel, take it easy. You're okay. Try not to move," Jack soothed, crouching over his awakening friend.

"Jack?"

"Yeah, it's me. Just be still. Go back to sleep."

"Sleep? No... bad dreams," Daniel muttered, forcing his eyes open.

"Bad dreams?" Jack asked worriedly.

Daniel frowned in his half-asleep stupor. "Yeah, hockey... or something."

Jack laughed and shook his head.

"Okay, but stop moving around until you're awake, okay?"

"'kay," Daniel conceded, lying still while his brain caught up

to his body.

Jack turned the lantern up which cast a warm glow over his injured teammate.

Daniel blinked rapidly as he responded to the sudden brightness. He looked around cautiously, turning his head slightly. His gaze settled on Jack and the older man smiled at the clarity in the blue eyes.

"We're in a cave?" Daniel asked.

"Yep."

Daniel nodded, closed his eyes then opened them again.

"Sam and Teal'c?"

"They're fine," Jack said easing the worry in his friend's eyes. "They're back at the SGC. They'll be here tomorrow with some help."

"Help," Daniel repeated and frowned. "Why do we, ow."

"Easy, Daniel," Jack admonished, pushing him down gently.

"I'm okay, I'm okay," Daniel gasped, his hand clutching Jack's shoulder. "I just... forgot."

"Do you remember what happened?"

Daniel nodded and grimaced. "Like a bad scene out of an Indian Jones movie. Booby-trap, and I walked right into it. Think I'd know better by now," he said, relaxing his grip on Jack's arm as the pain subsided.

"Hey, it wasn't your fault," Jack said, grasping the hand on his arm.

Daniel looked into the warm, caring eyes. He smiled and said, "Well, it sure as hell wasn't your fault. Let's blame Teal'c, okay? He's big. He can take it."

Jack laughed and patted his friend's hand. "Easy for you to say. You're injured. He won't go after you, but me? Crap, I'd be looking over my shoulder every five seconds. No, thank you."

"Ah, right, that Jaffa revenge thing."

"Exactly."

"Well, we can't blame Sam as she probably patched me up," Daniel declared.

"And a damn good job she did," Jack amended.

"One of those crappy days then," Daniel said weakly.

"Yeah. Look, you should rest," Jack said, uncomfortable with the conversation.

"Can't... thirsty."

"Okay, but just a little," Jack cautioned as he reached for the canteen.

"Help me," Daniel said as he tried to sit up.

"For crying out loud, Daniel. Take it easy. Carter's good but she's no Doc Fraiser," Jack reprimanded as he helped the younger man sit up. "Here, lean on me," he said, as he wrapped his arm around Daniel's shoulders and pulled him in slightly. "There, how's that?"

"Good. This is good," Daniel murmured, his head lolling on Jack's chest.

Jack could feel his friend's weight getting heavier and he smiled.

"Hey, I thought you were thirsty," he admonished lightly.

"Hmm? Oh, sorry. Yeah, I am."

"Lean back a little," Jack instructed. "That's good. Okay, small sips. Easy."

Daniel did as instructed and savoured the cool liquid on his lips and in his mouth. He swallowed carefully, pleased with the results.

"Thanks."

"You're welcome," Jack said, placing the canteen down and wrapping both arms around Daniel.

"Warm enough?" he asked, resting his cheek on Daniel's head.

"Yeah. You're nice and warm," Daniel murmured sleepily.

"Let me know if you get uncomfortable, okay?"

"Okay."

Jack held his friend and teammate close. Several minutes later he was sure Daniel had fallen asleep and he felt himself drifting. Daniel, however, had other plans.

"Jack?"

"Daniel?"

"I need to do this."

Jack frowned in puzzlement as he tried to decipher the cryptic words.

"Sure... okay," he said hesitantly.

Daniel snickered softly. "You don't know what I'm talking about..."

"No, no I don't," Jack sighed.

"I'm good at that, aren't I?"

"You, Danny-boy, are the best at that," Jack conceded.

Jack could feel Daniel try to sit up so he helped him and gently eased him back against the wall.

"Okay?" Jack asked.

Daniel nodded as he pushed the pain down. He opened his eyes and looked at Jack.

Jack could see the pain even in the dim light, but it was overshadowed by a fierce determination that he could only define as 'Daniel Jackson'.

"What is it you need to do?" he asked, acknowledging the look.

Daniel visibly relaxed and his gaze softened.

"I need to go through the Stargate. With you, with Sam, and with Teal'c. I can't go back to what I was. I can never go back. I don't want to go back. I've never felt more alive, even with all the dying," he added ruefully.

Jack swallowed hard and looked away.

"Jack," Daniel said gently. "I know how much it hurts you when things go wrong, when one of us gets hurt... but shit happens."

"Damn it, Daniel," Jack whispered, unable to articulate his thoughts.

"I trust you, Jack. I always will. I know I take chances, but that's because I know you're there watching my back. This," he said, pointing to his bandaged chest, "this was just pure bad luck. It could've happened to any one of us."

"I doubt that, Daniel," Jack said grimly, "but lucky for you, or unlucky for you, I'm a selfish bastard."

Daniel furrowed his brow in puzzlement.

"I'm sorry, Daniel," Jack explained, "but I want you on my team. I can't imagine SG-1 without you and God knows I've tried."

Daniel closed his eyes and smiled. "Finally, we're on the same page."

"Let's try to keep it there," Jack said.

"Got my vote," Daniel agreed.

"Colonel O'Neill, do you copy?" Jack's radio crackled in his ear.

"Yeah, Carter, I copy. What's your status?"

"We're three hours from your position, sir. How's Daniel?"

Jack smiled and leaned towards Daniel.

"I'm fine, Sam," Daniel said into the radio. "You did a great job."

"Daniel!" she exclaimed and they could hear the grin in her voice. "It's great to hear your voice. I'll pass on the good news and we'll be there soon."

"We're not going anywhere, Major. O'Neill out. Well, you just made her day," Jack smiled.

"Three hours," Daniel commented. "What should we do?"

"Get comfortable?" Jack shrugged, shaking his friend's shoulder.

"Sounds like a plan," Daniel said, settling into the shelter of Jack's embrace.

"Need anything for the pain?" Jack asked.

"No, I want to remember this."

Jack chuckled and kissed the top of Daniel's head.

"Get some sleep. I'll be here when you wake up."

Daniel nodded sleepily and closed his eyes.

"Jack?"

"Yeah?"

"No hockey talk."

"Promise," Jack said, holding his friend just a little tighter.

The End

AND AN ISLAND NEVER CRIES

by Sheila Paulson

"He will live," the shaman said. "But it will not be easy. He must endure the gor-an-wyle."

Jack's flushed, feverish face turned to Daniel. Another of the spasms racked him, and he curled into a tight ball. Teal'c tensed, and Sam bit her lip in anguish. Daniel felt his own muscles tighten. The poison had worked so quickly. Who would have guessed that Jack would have an allergy to the native food, especially after Sam's tests had indicated it contained nothing harmful to humans? Jack had insisted it wasn't her fault, and it wasn't. It was just one of those things.

One of those things that might kill Jack....

O'Neill's eyes fluttered open, instinctively seeking out Daniel. "D-daniel? That... means what?"

Daniel hadn't learned a lot of the native language on P4V-115, but he'd picked up enough to grasp that. It sounded vaguely Welsh, but it had its roots in Akkadian. Strange. "Uh... shield of... of... honor. Shield of honor, Jack."

Jack twisted in fresh pain, and sudden revulsion. "No way." "Shield of honor?" Daniel asked the shaman.

"The walls that protect him. Only one of you can remain with him, one in which he reposes complete trust."

"Trust... all my kids," Jack muttered. His eyes met Daniel's, and Daniel was humbled to see the complete reliance in them. The natives meant them no harm. Unless they were all budding Oliviers, their distress at Jack's sudden attack was valid. Some of the women had even wept as Jack was borne into the tent of Malvarn, the shaman.

"I'll stay," Daniel said half a beat before Teal'c or Sam could speak.

The shaman saw acceptance in Jack's eyes. "It is well. Wait without." He waved a long-fingered hand at the door.

Sam hesitated, eyes on the writhing O'Neill, then she nodded and left, shoulders bowed. No time for more. Teal'c said, "It will be well. I know of this ritual, O'Neill," and followed her.

"I don't," Daniel said in a small voice. "What am I to do?"

"What your heart tells you," Malvarn said and placed his fingers on Jack's face. Daniel could almost feel the heat rising off Jack; he wondered if the touch scorched the old man.

"Vulcan... mind-meld," Jack grunted, and Daniel smiled as he knelt beside him.

"Do not touch him yet," the shaman ordered. Eyes closed, he muttered to himself in the ancient language of his people. Daniel didn't know all the ancient words, but they sounded cloaked in ritual.

Jack screamed. There was no other word for the desperate, agonized sound he made. His body arched up, taut as a bow-string, then he sagged. *Teal'c knows of the ritual*, Daniel reminded himself. *It will work. It has to.*

Sweat beaded Jack's face and his muscles relaxed. He lay, flaccid and tranquil, for a full five seconds, sucking in grateful, pain-free breaths. The fever had broken.

The shaman lifted his hands from Jack's face. The places he had touched glowed red, like welts, already fading. "Remember, Daniel Jackson, do what your heart tells you. He has surrendered the gor-an-wyle."

"Will he... get it back?"

Malvarn nodded. "One mark of daylight." He left the grass hut.

"One mark..." Daniel translated that mentally to about half an hour. Whatever they'd done to Jack would last half an hour? What could go wrong in half an hour? God, so many things... *What my heart tells me?* He frowned, then he sat beside Jack and put a hand on his forehead. Already, his flesh felt cool, normal. "Jack?"

O'Neill's eyes opened, and they were in torment. "Oh, god, Daniel," he groaned and launched himself at Daniel. When the colonel's arms encircled his neck, Daniel blinked in surprise and went with his instincts. He wrapped his own arms around Jack and guided the older man's head to rest against his shoulder.

"You're gonna be fine, Jack. The fever's broken. Half an hour and the shield will be back." He didn't know yet what it meant, but he knew he had to be here. Leaving Jack to face such agony on his own was unthinkable. Daniel hadn't run out on Jack yet. He'd refused to leave him alone when the knowledge of the Ancients had been placed in his head, and he wouldn't now. Just as Jack hadn't left him when he'd been fighting the sarcophagus addiction.

As Jack had held him in the storeroom, he held Jack now, muttering soothing words. He could feel his friend's grief and anguish as poignantly as if it had been his own. "It's okay, Jack, you're gonna be okay."

Jack snuffled against his shoulder, then harsh, racking sobs shook his body. Daniel flinched. For a long time, he just held on and offered whispered comfort. Half an hour of this? The shield was well and truly gone if Jack could weep in front of him like this. He knew how deeply Jack could suffer, but O'Neill generally bore his griefs in private. The pain he lived might show in his eyes to someone who knew him as well as Daniel did, but he didn't allow it free rein. Daniel understood. There were times when he had to stagger blindly on without stopping to face his own demons, or they would run wild, overwhelm him. If he let himself dwell on Sha're, lost to him out there, Amaunet inside her, controlling her, the burden would be unbearable, so he focused on retrieving her, on *believing* he could retrieve her. But Jack could never retrieve his dead son....

"Charlie." As if Daniel's thought had conjured him up, Jack moaned the name. What had he said back there at his house after Daniel's return to Earth after his year on Abydos? That he could forget for a little while but that he could never forgive himself? Daniel tightened his grip with one arm and let his other hand soothe the sweaty spikes of Jack's hair.

"Shh, I know, I know," he soothed. "It's okay."

"... killed him," Jack groaned. "My own son, left the damn gun. Should have used it on myself, saved everybody else the grief."

Daniel's stomach twisted. Shield of honor? Natural emotional barriers, more likely. Had whatever Malvarn had done loosed all his protection? Shield of honor? They all had shields, every one of them. How could anyone live with his griefs if he didn't find a way to protect himself from the constant pain? *Oh, God, Jack....*

"It wouldn't have helped anyone for you to die," he soothed.

"Sara—" Was Jack talking to him? Was it a conversation, or was O'Neill simply letting the pain out. "Left me."

"Come on, Jack, how would it have helped Sara for you to die?"

"Hated me...."

"No. You said she forgave you."

"Yeah... just couldn't... live with me." Another sob tore free and he tried to tunnel his face into Daniel's shoulder. Daniel's stomach twisted. How could he offer comfort when nothing he could say would ever soothe this wound?

"Maybe you couldn't have lived with her, either, Jack, not after that. You were both hurt. It could have... pulled you together, but it pulled you apart." He tried to make up for the truth of his words with a gentle touch. This kind of comfort came easier to Jack than it did to him, which was odd when you thought of it. But, until Sha're, there had been no one Daniel *could* reach out to. He had needed to learn how to let himself feel and care. If not for Sha're, he wouldn't have known what to do now.

No, that was wrong. If not for Sha're—and Jack.

"I know what it feels like to lose someone, Jack," he said. "And I know what Malvarn did brought it all back to you as if it were new. I'm here." He gave a faint, choked laugh. "I know that's not much, but—"

"Not... much?" Disbelief soared in Jack's voice. "'s every-

thing."

Under normal circumstances, he would never have admitted that. Their understanding, while deep, was of a peculiar order, since their attitudes were so far apart. No matter the situation, they'd each see it differently, sometimes in utter conflict with each other. Yet, once the crisis was resolved, their unlikely friendship was still there, sturdy enough to endure the weird knocks life threw at it. Here was Jack, open and unprotected, admitting it. Daniel bowed his head against Jack's hair, shaken by humility.

"I'm here, Jack," he said again. "I'm staying. It's all right."

"Thought you'd died...."

"No, I'm right here." Died? Had he been hallucinating?

"When Nem snatched you." Jack's speech was smoothing out, but the pain wasn't gone yet. He quivered in Daniel's soothing grip, and his voice still tore with anguish. "You were dead, Daniel. Son of a bitch. Don't you ever do that again."

"I won't. Uh, at least I'll try not to."

".... lost too much already." Jack's voice was a thin, pained thread, muffled by the fabric of Daniel's jacket. "Gotta protect..."

"I know, Jack. I know I drive you nuts sometimes."

"Sometimes?" Jack's laughter sputtered out, but he choked on it and another sob spilled free. "Can't stop crying...." he groaned.

"It's all right, Jack. I'll still respect you in the morning."

O'Neill's head lifted, and he gave a bark of amused laughter that didn't go well with the impossible shadows in his eyes. "Geek," he said with such fondness that the sting of the hated word eased away.

"I thought I was a space monkey."

New tears spilled out and ran down Jack's face. "Had to leave you on Klore's ship." He lowered his face so Daniel couldn't see his expression, but there was new torment in his voice. "You were... dying. All I had left and you were dying. Had to kill Skaara, had to leave you to... die alone."

"But I didn't die. It's okay, Jack. I told you to. What else could you have done?"

There was a silence, then Jack went on, punishing himself. "Hell of a world when the only thing I can do is leave my best friend to die alone." His arms tightened around Daniel, almost fiercely enough to impede breathing. "You wouldn't leave me when I had all that weird stuff crammed in my head."

"That was different, Jack. I had the luxury of staying with you. You didn't. You don't think I mind that you had to go? I survived, remember?" He recalled the doubt, hesitation, unwillingness to believe, and then the sheer and utter joy that had lit Jack's face when Hammond had told the rest of SG-1 that there was someone to see them. He remembered the exuberant force of Jack's embrace, there in the gate room.

"Yeah, I remember that. But I left you to die alone."

"It's okay, Jack. It's okay." His shoulder was damp from Jack's tears.

"You're staying with me now."

"Where else would I be?"

"God, I don't deserve it. I killed my own son. I walked out on you when you were dying. And you've always stayed with me when I needed you."

"I screwed up on Ernest's planet," Daniel reminded him.

Jack gave a choked sputter of laughter. "Yeah, you did. God, I hated that meaning-of-life stuff. Mattered to you more than the rest of us did."

"Wh-what?" Daniel reared back and stared at Jack in disbelief. O'Neill bowed his head and refused to meet Daniel's gaze. "Oh, god, no, Jack. No, no, no. Never that. It was something that could have helped all of us—just like when you had to go over to Apophis's ship and blow it up. Sometimes you have to give up what matters most to save it." He shivered. "It could have helped us against the Goa'uld, maybe even given me answers to save Sha're."

Jack tugged at him, trying to pull free.

"Jack, I had to try. It's what I am." He didn't let go. *Remain with him*, Malvarn had said. He'd meant so much more than that, words there hadn't been time to say.

"Wouldn't have helped Sha're if you'd been stranded there for fifty years like Ernest." He ducked his head again. "All the rest gone. Charlie. Sara. Kawalsky."

"I'm not gone, Jack." He looked inside himself and found a truth. "You weren't going to leave me there. I couldn't let you die. That's why I gave it up, Jack, gave up the 'meaning-of-life stuff'. I could choose to take the risk for myself—but I couldn't take it for you."

"God, Daniel...." Jack hugged him again. This was... strange. Uncomfortable. Even embarrassing. But he couldn't let Jack down, not now.

"You would have stayed if I had refused to leave, wouldn't you?"

Jack's head bobbed against his shoulder. He lay against Daniel, drained and spent, but not uncomfortable to be there.

"I went... for you."

"Thanks, Daniel." He drew an unsteady breath. The tears were finally easing, and the pain that lived in his eyes had shrunk to manageable proportions. Was the half hour up? It felt like a year had passed. How long had he held onto Jack before he had roused enough to talk?

"I... made a total idiot of myself just now, didn't I?"

That sounded like the Jack O'Neill Daniel knew best.

"Uh, honest answer?"

"When didn't you give me an honest answer loud and clear, whether I wanted to hear it or not?" Definitely Jack.

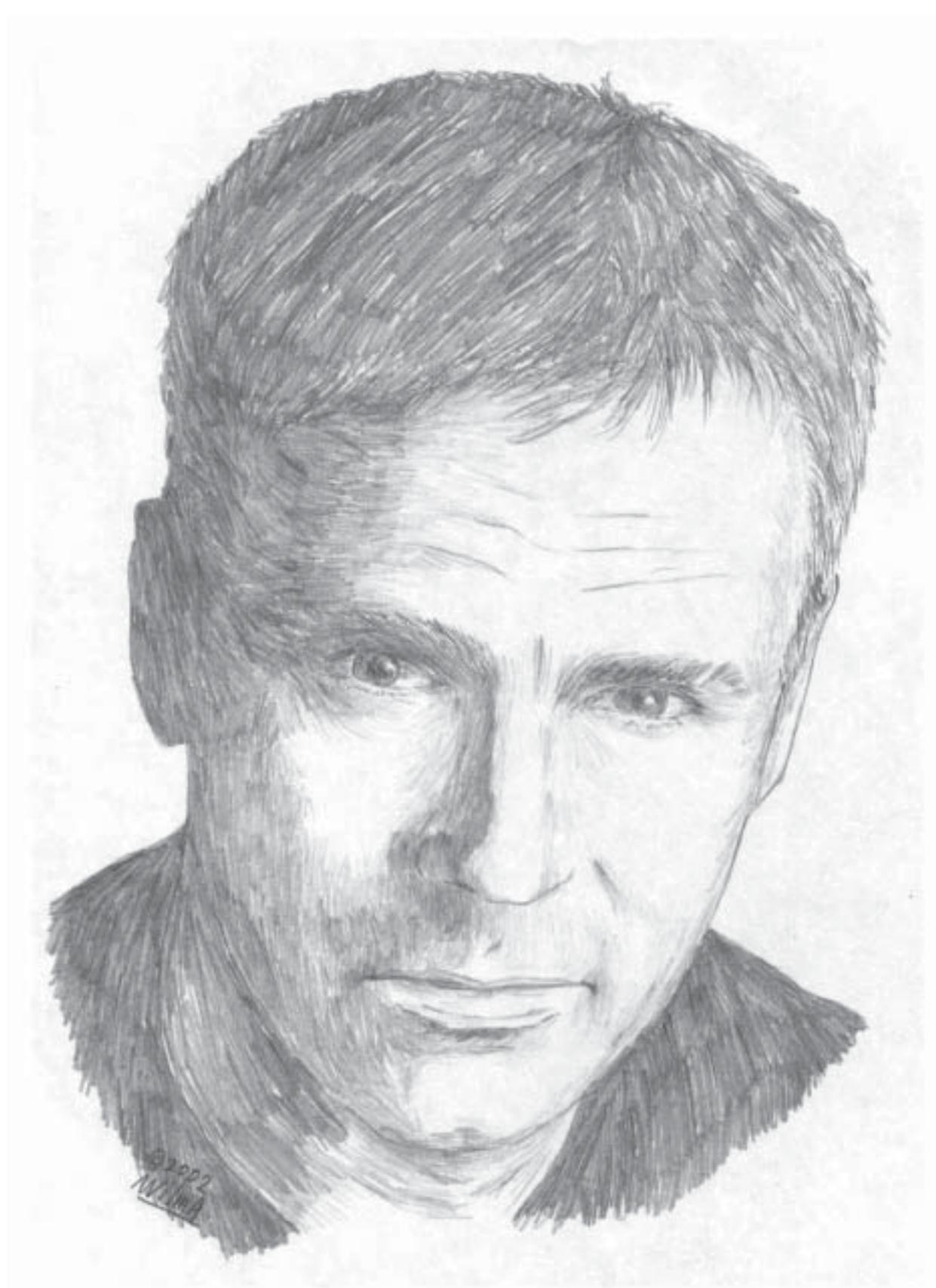
"Okay. No, you didn't. Not unless I did, too." He was glad when Jack looked up at him. "It's okay, Jack. You're alive, and that's what matters."

"You sure about that?"

Daniel realized the question meant far more than it sounded like. Jack could pack layers of meaning into the twitch of an eyebrow, so why not this, too? All that mattered? It was the willingness to stand at each other's side that mattered. That was the bottom line. Alive, yes, went without saying. But together? Friends? They never could actually say it. But that didn't make it any less immutable.

"Yes," said Daniel, delighted when Jack found the strength to return his smile. "I'm positive."

The End



THE POWER OF THE @

(Or The Best Way To Annoy A Colonel)

by Tiv'ester

Popeye had a saying, "I've had all I can stands – I can't stands no more!"

That's exactly the way Jack felt. He had almost no patience when it concerned scientists. He could barely tolerate Carter's techno-babble at the best of times, but he suffered through it since she was his second in command. Daniel, well, he had put up with a lot from Daniel because 1) Daniel was his friend, 2) he owed Daniel his life several times over and 3) Daniel was way smarter than he was. All right, Jack would get fed up and testy and yell, but he knew that Daniel knew more than he did about everything from the Goa'uld to kitchen cabinets, so he'd let the archaeologist go off on tangents whether he was interested or not. Usually, it was *not*.

But this...this...*this* was too much! Okay, it wasn't Daniel's fault that he'd twisted his ankle so badly two missions ago that he couldn't go on the last one. It was Jack's fault. He knew that. He admitted it. He'd found an interesting looking artifact in the temple and did the one thing he was always warning Daniel about not doing. He'd touched the damn thing. How was he to know that it was some sort of alien crossbow? He never knew Daniel could move that fast! Of course, his landing after avoiding an arrow wasn't as graceful as anyone could have hoped, and Daniel's ankle had borne the brunt of the mad dash. Jack, however, had borne the brunt of Daniel's temper – and he did have one!

Jack had apologized several times in his own unique fashion (which meant never once uttering the words that he was sorry), but Daniel wasn't feeling magnanimous. He was annoyed about having his foot in a walking cast for two weeks and felt slightly vengeful. He temporarily assigned Robert Rothman to SG-1 with orders to take his place on the next mission.

Daniel was confident in Robert's work. Why wouldn't he be? He'd trained Rothman himself, and they both agreed that Budge shouldn't be in print anymore. So SG-1 was the lucky recipient of a Jackson-trained grave robber that the commanding officer had a difficult time tolerating any time. Jack fumed during the entire mission, but he knew better than to say anything 'unprofessional' to Rothman since he was the one who got them in the situation. He also didn't want to give Daniel any incentive to choose Rothman again if Robert came back telling Daniel that Jack had been a pain in the...

But *this* was too much!

Jack knocked on Daniel's office door and heard a rather distracted "Come in" before opening it. Daniel was sitting at his desk, as usual, delicately studying an artifact.

"Daniel, got a minute?" Jack asked nicely. He wasn't going to give Daniel any more reasons to be mad at him. One Rothman on one mission was one more than Jack could tolerate.

Daniel glanced up at Jack and motioned him toward a chair. He put away the artifact and gave Jack his full attention. Jack didn't think Daniel was angry, but he knew just how well his friend could hide his emotions. "What's up?"

"Uh, this." He handed Daniel a folder of the last mission. This was a first time event. Jack had never asked Daniel to translate an archaeological report before. He'd never had to. He had always let Carter read his long-winded accounts and write up a summary for the final mission synopsis. "It's Rothman's report. I can't make any sense out of it."

"When did you start reading scientific mission reports?" Daniel scanned the pages then handed it back to Jack. "Looks like a typical archaeological mission analysis. What are you having trouble with?"

That was blunt. Okay, Daniel was still a little miffed and hadn't forgiven Jack yet. Usually, he'd hear a polite *Hi Jack, how are you? What can I help you with?* Instead, he got a curt less-than-friendly reply. "I have absolutely no idea what he's talking about. It's supposed to be about all those scribbles he found on the wall."

"Jack, I write reports about 'scribbles on the wall.' You don't have any problems reading mine. That is, if you actually do read them."

Ouch, that hurt. Yes, he was still angry with Jack. "Daniel, I do read some of yours. I may not understand what you're talking about, but at least they're not this confusing! I can pretty well guess what you're writing about. This one is gibberish!"

Daniel took the folder back and opened it up on his desk. "Okay, okay. What's the first problem?"

"What the hell is a qwert? He mentions it about ten different times, it means something different every single time."

"A qwert is a generic term used by archaeologists meaning an artifact that is unidentifiable. Once it's identified, it's given a proper name. Robert found a lot of artifacts that you didn't give him the time to analyze or catalog on the planet, so he has to refer to them as qwerts."

"Okay. What about this?" Jack pointed to a symbol on the first page.

"This?" Daniel asked.

"That! What's Rothman talking about?"

"That's an @, the symbol for A'at. He was a powerful Goa'uld and a contemporary of Ra's. He was the god of all things above – that's the sun, moon, sky, stars, planets, and clouds. He wielded some sort of magic known as the power of the @. No one knows

what it was, but it was rumored to be some all-powerful ability granted to his acolytes. The thought was, the path of those who follow the @ is uncertain, but the abilities gained therein will make masters of those who attain the knowledge."

"Why is Rothman using the @ symbol?" Jack wanted to know.

"Do you have any idea how cumbersome and time consuming it is to write out ancient names when we have symbols that will do the job just as well?"

Oh. "It's some kind of archaeological shorthand?"

"Yes, you could call it that." Daniel glanced up at Jack, knowing well what Jack would never admit. "That's right. You wouldn't know it since you don't read archaeological reports. We routinely use symbols like this. The symbol is referenced at the beginning and then used repeatedly afterwards."

Jack knew he should have paid a little more attention to Carter's summaries. "What's that?" he pointed to the next symbol.

"That's an &. It's the symbol for the goddess Amp'sand. She was the goddess of the earth, consort to A'at. Together they created the world and all living things, ruled over them until they were defeated by a great enemy. They fell into the oceans they created, and they turned to sand which was washed up on the shores of the great waters."

Amp'sand was a goddess with an & for her symbol? If Jack didn't know that Rothman didn't have a sense of humor, he'd swear that this was just a joke. "Okay, what's that?" He indicated the next symbol.

"That's an *, symbol for the demigod Arstrix. He –"

"Now wait just a minute! Qwert? An & for Amp'sand, an @ for A'at, and an * for Arstrix? Daniel, those are all symbols on a keyboard! We use them."

"Yes. So?"

"So? Daniel, do not sit there and tell me that we're using Goa'uld symbols on our keyboards!"

"Jack, everything we have is influenced by our history. Language, architecture, mythology, astronomy, astrology. Why is it so difficult to imagine that some of the Goa'uld symbols have survived, and we use them in our everyday language?"

Daniel did have a point, but Jack still wasn't convinced. "Rothman's doing this on purpose, isn't he? He's bound and determined to drive me crazy."

"Don't worry, Jack. It'd be a short trip."

"What?"

"Robert's used to writing reports for me, not the military. These are the types of reports I get. He didn't realize that you wouldn't be up on archaeological shorthand since you're supposed to be reading my reports, so he wrote them as he usually does." Daniel closed the folder. "How long have you been trying to read this?"

"About an hour."

"An hour? You tried for that long?"

Jack knew his reputation for avoiding anything scientific would come back to haunt him. "Look, you said Robert knows what he's doing. Fine. I tried to read this report, and it was gibberish then and it's gibberish now. Maybe you know what he's saying, but I think this must be language number twenty-four for you!"

Daniel smiled, obviously pleased with the goings-on.

"It's not funny!" Jack protested.

"All right, all right, I'll ask Robert to rewrite it, but he's working on a project for SG-5. I'm sure he'll get to it when he can, but since you have to send the completed mission summary to General Hammond today, you'll have to try to remember what Robert told you he found on the planet."

"I wasn't listening when we were on the planet."

"You weren't listening when I told you not to touch the alien crossbow either."

Revenge. That's what this was. "You did this on purpose, didn't you?"

"No, I didn't. Jack, our work is every bit as important as the military's. I wouldn't let any of my people act unprofessionally no matter what the situation. That little accident sidelined me, so SG-1 had to have a temporary replacement. Robert knows the Goa'uld language, and his expertise is invaluable to the SGC. That's why I've assigned him to the mission to 888 next week. We've been given the go-ahead for a three-week archaeological excavation. We may have found the planet where the Goa'uld originated."

"That's next week?" Jack didn't realize that he was going to be Daniel-less again that soon. That means they'd have to have another temporary replacement, and Jack didn't like any of the other scientists at the base. They were too...geeky.

"Yes, Jack. It was in the report I sent you two weeks ago. Remember?"

"No. I —"

"Didn't read it," Daniel finished for him.

Enough was enough. "Look, I'm sorry I touched the artifact. I'm sorry you had to sit here while we went on a mission. I'm sorry I don't understand anything you write. I'll try to read every one of your reports as long as you don't ever stick us

with Rothman or any of the other grave robbers again! Deal?"

Daniel looked at Jack, seeing true remorse for the first time. Daniel finally got his real apology. "Deal. Besides, you don't have to worry about any of the archaeologists. Hammond told me that he's grounding SG-1 until I get back. Something about Sam needing to work on experiments and you needing to catch up on paperwork."

Jack just shook his head and sauntered out of Daniel's office. He didn't know if anything had been accomplished, but he had the feeling that he'd just been bamboozled by the best.

After Jack left, Daniel picked up the folder and limped his way down to Robert's office. His friend didn't need to ask why Daniel was there.

"How'd it go?"

"Pretty well," Daniel said as he threw a fifty-dollar bill on Robert's desk. "I think Jack has a new respect for the power of the @."

Robert folded up the money and stuffed it in his pocket. "Next time, get one of the other archaeologists to pretend he wrote something when you want to drive O'Neill crazy. It's not exactly conducive to my health if he thinks I wrote that. Where did you come up with the power of the @ anyway?"

"Easy. Have you ever gone to an IRC chat room?"

"No."

"The moderators have an @ beside their names. They have complete control during the chat, which means —"

"They have all the power of the @." Both men grinned at the joke.

Robert took the folder and handed Daniel the real mission report. "What have you got in mind for O'Neill next time?"

Daniel thought for a moment, and then said, "I think I'm going to introduce him to the word tilde."

"Won't he know what that means?"

Daniel just looked at Robert until his friend realized the absurdity of that statement. "So what are you going to tell him it means?" Robert was curious.

Daniel smiled a mischievous smile as he limped out of the room.

Rothman sat back and relaxed for a moment. So many times he'd witnessed Daniel and O'Neill and their very unconventional friendship. Only Daniel could get away with playing jokes on the colonel and not worry about being seriously harmed.

Robert wondered, given Daniel's imagination, what would he tell O'Neill the word tilde meant?

The End?