

TITLE: A Bloody Nose

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RATING: PG-13 (Violence, Language, Inferred Sexuality)

CONTENT WARNING: Violence, Language

SUMMARY: The Tok'ra bring word of a Naquadah rich world imperiled by a rogue Goa'uld. SG-1 and SG-12 are dispatched to do what they can to help the population of P9X-455... Convincing the natives to fight the Goa'uld is surprisingly easy, convincing SG-12 not to fight is a bit harder, and what happens next isn't pretty.

NOTES: Intended as a stand-alone Part 1 of a 2-story arc. This story introduces non-SG-1 characters as pivotal characters.

ATTACHMENTS:

A Bloody Nose

In a distant galaxy, a worn looking pyramidal Goa'uld Ha'tak attack ship struggled from the gravity well of a high-gravity planet. Starting slowly, it accelerated out of the binary system...
Hidden nearby in the shadow of a large moon, a smaller craft watched.

"Hold the elevator!" Dr. Daniel Jackson yelled as he ran down the concrete and steel hallway, late again. Inside, Colonel Jack O'Neill pressed the "Doors Open" button without looking up from the latest edition of *The National Enquirer*.

"Thanks, Jack." Daniel glanced at his friend's choice of reading material and grinned. "So, do you know what this one's about? They called me back from my vacation in Egypt for this."

"No idea," he replied, turning a page. "Did you know that aliens are abducting people in Colorado...? Just beaming them up..."

Daniel waited for some sign that Jack was kidding.

The elevator doors opened and they made their way into the unusually crowded briefing room.

"Glad you could make it, Colonel O'Neill... Doctor Jackson..." Major General George Hammond said with a hint of sarcasm.

Self consciously, Jack rolled his paper and shoved it into the thigh pocket of his blue BDU's. He made his way to his seat at the far end of the table, opposite the General. Surveying the mix of familiar, semi-

familiar, and unfamiliar faces, Jack saw the Tok'ra Anise/Freya at Hammond's right and four semi-familiar faces wearing the patches of SG-12 on woodland BDU's along with a couple of technicians and his SG-1. Taking his seat, he cleared his throat and leaned forward with his elbows on the table.

General Hammond inhaled sharply and faced Anise as he started.

"We have received information from the Tok'ra... that a currently free planet in our sector is going to be... occupied... by a rogue Goa'uld not aligned with the System Lords. We cannot allow this to happen for several reasons. First, the planet is currently not occupied by or known to the System Lords. Second, the planet has been reported to be rich in Naquadah. Third, this incursion may prompt System Lord involvement and potentially draw enough of their forces from the current stand-off with Apophis to destabilize this region."

"Sir?" Jack raised his hand and waved.

"Colonel O'Neill?"

"De-stabilizing Goa'uld is a *bad* thing?"

Anise interrupted. "At this time, the System Lords are barely holding their own against Apophis' forces now that he has added Heru'ur's fleet to his own... and he is still consolidating and training his forces for an new campaign. An Apophis victory at this time could seriously jeopardize both the Tauri and Tok'ra long term survival."

"Okay..."

General Hammond waited for another question. When it did not appear, he continued.

"According to the Tok'ra records..." He nodded toward Anise. "This particular planet hasn't had Goa'uld contact for over a thousand years."

"Buried gate?" Daniel interjected.

Anise shook her head slowly.

"The Goa'uld that dominated this world kept its presence unknown to the others and its existence died with him when he and his sect fell victim to Chronos a millennium ago. We only discovered its existence about 20 Earth-years ago when the record of a Tok'ra agent in his forces' transmission was recovered from an Argorian communications array."

Teal'c raised an eyebrow.

Jack looked expectantly at Teal'c.

"I do not know of the Argorians." Teal'c answered.

"You would not have. Ra destroyed their civilization completely several hundred Earth years ago." Anise explained.

Teal'c nodded.

General Hammond stood up, put his hands on the long wooden table, and addressed SG-1.

"SG-1, your mission is to establish contact with the population on P9X-455, determine the best way to stop the Goa'uld from occupying the planet, and execute that plan." He turned to SG-12, specifically the red-haired woman in command. "SG-12, your mission is to accompany SG-1 to P9X-455, assess the local population's military potential, and report back your findings and recommendations for any assistance we can provide them. When complete, you will assist SG-1 in completing their mission." The General stood up straight and smoothed his uniform shirt. "Colonel O'Neill."

"Sir?"

"You have overall command. Time is of the essence. You have 5 days, a week at the most before the Goa'uld arrive in system by Tok'ra estimates." The big man sighed aloud. "I have a mandatory budget briefing to attend on Level 3. I will expect a preliminary report in two days."

General Hammond left.

Jack sighed aloud, unconsciously mimicking his commander.

"What do we know about the population?" one of the unfamiliar SG-12 asked in a soft and clear voice.

Jack considered the slim oriental man in un-marked Woodland BDU's.

"You are...?"

The man smiled.

"Doctor Johnny Kim, anthropology. Call me Kim. The military types around here have taken perverse delight in calling me by my last name exclusively... and I've become accustomed to it."

Daniel smiled knowingly as Teal'c raised his eyebrow.

"So you two know each other professionally?" Jack asked Daniel, indicating Kim with a wave.

"Umm... No, Jack." Daniel said with a concerned look. "Doctor Kim is an anthropologist with a modern Asian specialty. I'm an Egyptologist"

"Okay...and that means... what?"

"Colonel O'Neill, if I may..." Kim interjected, leaning forward as he spoke in a clear voice and smiled. "I study primitive peoples; usually Asian... Doctor Jackson studies dead peoples... current missions excluded." Kim added with a nod towards Daniel. "However, considering many of the cultures encountered through the Stargate are the descendants of these dead people... his areas of study are just as valuable as any other anthropologist."

Jack nodded thoughtfully.

Anise looked expectantly at Jack. Jack gave her a nod.

"We know little except that the population was originally from Earth and a small colony had been established to work on the mines. A Tok'ra scout ship passing through the system detected the presence of a Naquadah reactor operating on the surface and long-range visual scans revealed several small villages. A closer reconnaissance wasn't possible."

"Do we know the source of the original populations?" Daniel asked.

"If you mean 'Which planetary tribe are they from?' we do not. Although the same Goa'uld showed preference for the tribes you refer to as Euro-peons"

"Europeans." Daniel corrected.

"Europeans." Anise repeated with a nod.

"Naquadah reactors and small villages?" Major Samantha Carter thought aloud.

The others turned toward her.

"I'm sorry, Sir. I just thought that was a bit odd." Sam turned to Anise. "How long could Goa'uld reactors of that time run without intensive maintenance?"

"Several decades for the reactors available at the time the planet was last in contact."

"Could they be refueled in the field?"

"In the field?"

"On a planet with very limited technology."

Anise thought a moment. "If the properly processed fuel pellets were available and a trained technician..."

"Do we have MALP data yet?" Jack interrupted. An enlisted technician stepped forward with stack of glossy printouts. "Thank you. Any UAV¹?"

"Not yet, Sir." The technician answered.

Jack grunted a reply and glanced over the pictures and texts before passing half to Sam and half to SG-12's CO.

"More trees and a river... What are the piles of dirt... or whatever... piled near the Stargate?"

"The gray-brown coloring suggests raw Naquadah ore, Sir." Sam pointed out. "If it is, just the smaller pile on the right, properly refined of course, could power a good sized reactor for several decades. Um, *that* would solve the fuel question for the reactor."

"There are several trails from the clearing, but no apparent footprints." the compact female Major commanding SG-12 said with an almost imperceptible accent. "The smooth and flat silhouettes of the 'ore mounds' also imply they are weathered... and have been there for a very long time. Especially given the relative inertness of the Naquadah ore your team reported on from Abydos, Colonel."

Jack wrinkled his forehead and looked at her.

"Major...?"

¹ UAV: Unmanned Aerial Vehicle. Small remote control or automated reconnaissance plane sent through the gate.

"Chekurda, Sir."

"Major... *Chekurda*. You sound like an Intel officer..."

"Yes, Sir. I am."

"...And a Russian."

"I am first generation American, Sir." The woman stated with conviction, her dark eyes flashing in contrast to her pale skin and dark red hair. "My loyalty is beyond reproach, Sir."

"Major, it isn't Russians I don't like, it's intelligence officers."

SG-1 watched the interchange with quiet concern and a sense of *deja vu*.

The rest of SG-12 watched with well-concealed amusement visible only around the eyes.

Anise was visibly confused.

There was a long pause.

Looking around the table, Jack leaned back in his seat.

"Well, what we have is a lot of maybe and not much hard info. Pre-mission inspection in six hours and make sure and pack for several days, campers..."

With that, Jack stood up and turned to go.

"Will you be inspecting my team also, Sir?" Major Chekurda asked.

"Only if you can't handle it yourself, Major" Jack answered over his shoulder as he walked away, hands in pockets.

Major Chekurda fumed.

Two piled-high F.R.E.D.²'s, SG-1, and the previously silent half of SG-12 stood at the base of the ramp in the Gate Room with just a few minutes to gate time. Jack stood off to one side, looking at his watch and getting visibly irked.

Sam watched her commander, a little concerned. She adjusted her pack and moved over to the other side of the F.R.E.D.'s where the quiet Captain with gray framed glasses and the white-haired Master Sergeant assigned to SG-12 rested the weight of large Army-type rucksacks on the fender of their piled-high F.R.E.D.

Both straightened as she got close.

"Ma'am." The muscular Captain greeted, resting his arms across a flattop M4 Carbine³ slung diagonally in front of him.

"Major Samantha Carter, Captain."

"I know, Ma'am." The Captain said with the hint of a grin. "Captain Karl Kellogg, Military technologist. This is Master Sergeant Cody, bio-environmental engineering specialist⁴ and prematurely gray."

Cody scowled.

Sam ignored the Captain's attempt at humor.

"What can we do for you, Ma'am?"

"Just a question, Captain." Sam said while unconsciously checking the safety of the P90 slung vertically in front of her. "Is Major Chekurda usually so easily aggravated?"

Kellogg grinned at Cody who grinned back.

"Ma'am, it's not our place to criticize our CO..."

Sam nodded and started to turn.

"But, all things considered, Ma'am... Major Chekurda, once she sets her mind to something, gets really inflexible." Kellogg brought a flight-gloved hand up and checked a webbing covered watch on the inside of his right wrist. "Like with schedules..."

² F.R.E.D.S. - "Field Remote Expeditionary Device" is an electrically driven 6x6 vehicle that follows a remote controller carried by an SG Team member. It can also be manually directed with the same controller.

³ M4 Carbine: Common weapon with US Special Operation Forces. Compact version of the M16A2 and similar to the USAF GAU-5A/A submachinegun carried by Security Forces personnel on the show.

⁴ Bio-Environmental Engineering Specialists in the USAF detect, prevent, and handle countermeasures for environmental hazards like chemicals, noise, radiation, bio-toxins, and others.

Kellogg raised his left hand up, fingers out, and slowly closed fingers one at a time while silently mouthing a five-count until he had a fist and pointed to the door.

Major Chekurda, Doctor Kim in tow, walked purposefully in the sliding door and made for the rest of her team.

Kellogg dropped his hand and smiled as Sam walked back towards Daniel and Teal'c.

Sam had a vexed look.

"What is wrong, Major Carter?" Teal'c asked.

"I don't know exactly, but there are some *serious* problems going on in that team."

Jack walked up.

"Ready?"

Everyone nodded, still thinking over Sam's last statement.

Looking over the top of their F.R.E.D., Jack craned his neck and called out, "Are we ready to go *now*, Major?"

Without looking, Major Chekurda called back "Yes, Sir."

Jack pinched the push-to-talk key on his radio and looked up toward the Control Room.

"Ready to move out, General."

The Stargate quickly spun through the dialing sequence and the wormhole formed then stabilized.

Over the PA, General Hammond's voice boomed.

"Good luck and Godspeed, SG Teams 1 and 12."

Jack half-assed a salute and led SG-1 up the ramp, followed by the F.R.E.D.'s, and finally SG-12.

"We're off to see the Wizard."

Jack stepped off the Stargate's stone base to make way for the others and the F.R.E.D.'s. Seeing nothing that immediately screamed "threat", he took a moment to gather his bearings and zip his jacket all the way up against the gusting wind.

Like many others planets his team had visited, trees rose just beyond the bare gray-brown clearing, seemingly evergreens and indistinguishable from Earthen pines visually and by smell. The only the only sound in the air was the wind against the mountain and among the trees. He could not see or hear any birds. The sky was blue-green with the single, oddly normal appearing, sun only slightly higher than the dark gray ridge on the valley's far side.

The clearing, edged by man-and-a-half high mounds of gray-brown material, sat on a stony shelf at the base of one wall of a steep walled mountain valley several miles across. From the shelf, they could see the far valley wall rising several hundred feet over the tops of the intervening forest. Also visible, was the far edge of a lake or river at the lowest point of the valley and several smoke plumes rising from along it. To their left, the valley walls grew further apart and, beyond a large toe-like spur, the edge of an immense gray-brown pyramid projected into sight.

"Is that what I think it is, Daniel?"

Daniel looked up from inspecting the DHD.

"Is what is...?" he asked, looking around. Jack pointed. "Ooooh... yes, that looks like a Goa'uld landing platform... I wonder why the 'Gate isn't over there?"

Sam only glanced up to see the pyramid before turning back to her handheld spectrometer⁵ and the probe she was waving slowly over the side of a gray-brown pile.

"I'm getting... *residual* readings". She said with her face pinched in confusion.

"Excuse me, Major." Cody interrupted, suddenly appearing at her elbow. A somewhat startled Sam backed up a step and watched the white-haired NCO rock back with a pickaxe. The pick hit the surface leaving small cracks and wedging solidly. Wrenching it free with a strength she found surprising for a man of his stature and implied age, Cody tore a fist size chunk of a hard outer shell releasing a puff of warm air...

⁵ Spectrometers are sensors that detect chemical components by the radiation the sample emits.

Cody stepped back and Sam held her probe over the opening...

"Sir, it's roughly 15% Naquadah." She stood up and looked at the others. "It's been here a while, but if we can dig this out... or if we could find the source of this ore."

Kellogg walked back from the edge of the shelf. "There's a lot more of that ore over here. It looks like someone's just dumped it off the side of the shelf. 'Kinda' like dumping the trash."

Jack looked around once more.

"Well, campers. I don't want to be standing here when *those* guys..." He indicated the pyramid with a wave. "...arrive. *And*, we have some people to meet."

"We'll take point, Sir." Kellogg volunteered and indicated Cody with a wave.

Jack looked at the younger man with a measuring gaze before nodding.

"C'mon, Sarge." Kellogg motioned Cody towards the F.R.E.D. "Drop rucks."

The two quickly shucked out of their rucks, pulled their protective mask cases off them, and attached them to their black tactical vests. Kellogg removed a nylon scabbard with an oddly shaped rifle stock sticking out from the side of his ruck and had Cody attach it to the back of his vest.

"Think you'll need that?" Jack asked, unimpressed and concerned.

Kellogg grinned and shrugged.

"Just being prepared, Sir."

The two SG-12 members started down the trail.

"That officer's as subtle as a hand grenade in a barrel of oatmeal." Jack said to the other members of SG-1 as they watched the two men go.

Daniel mouthed the statement, confused.

"Why would someone desire a *barre*/of oatmeal?" Teal'c asked.

Kellogg led the way down the trail and Cody trailed him roughly 5 meters back. Both moved quickly and quietly with weapons at the ready, scanning the sides of the nearly grown over trail and to the limit of their visibility to the front.

Two hundred meters down the meandering trail, Kellogg stopped short, looked down, and motioned his teammate forward with a wave. Squatting down, he pointed out the first of a string of odd footprints pressed deeply into the hard-packed soil of the trail.

Worn by time and possibly rain, the spoor looked to be several days old. The prints were simply mirror imaged comma's, hard-edged and roughly six inches long.

"Those look a lot like a javelina... or maybe a boar..." Cody said quietly.

"Six inches long?" Kellogg asked incredulously. "That would make this one..."

"Several hundred pounds, Killer." Cody finished for him, using his nickname.

Kellogg snorted softly and shook his head.

They could hear the soft whine of the F.R.E.D.'s coming up behind them and started again, both keeping an eye out for the owner of the spoor.

The trail wound downhill toward the high end of the valley.

Cody saw it first: motion, *big* motion along the trailside to the right and masked by the trees. Before he could say anything, Kellogg stopped and looked around.

"Do you hear that, Wild Bill?" he asked and shouldered his Carbine, sighting through the optic⁶. "What is that *smell*?"

"Movement on the right."

Both men turned toward the motion and started backing towards the opposite tree line.

"Something *big*..." Cody said quietly.

They backed into the tree line and took up positions behind the first large pines that they found.

The motion...and smell...got closer.

⁶ "Optic" is a generic term for any visual sight attached to a weapon.

"Well, Wild Bill, we *are* on a 'meet and greet'..." Kellogg said before calling out in a booming voice "Hello? We come in peace!"

The motion stopped.

A snort emanated from the trees.

"I think we're 'bout to find out what a half-ton javelina looks like." Cody said quietly as he re-adjusted his carbine against the pocket of his shoulder. "What I wouldn't give for my .300 Win-Mag 'bout now..."

A six-foot high gray-brown furred mass erupted from the trees at an unearthly speed and let out a basso bellow.

Both men let loose long bursts center mass.

The beast ignored the bullets from their Carbines, continuing its charge. It put its head down, aiming for Cody but veering to the left at the last moment to avoid the tree he stood behind.

Kellogg stopped firing shortly before Cody's carbine ran dry.

Quickly, with long practiced and efficient moves, the gray-haired NCO reloaded as he watched and listened to the boar turn amongst the trees in a large loop to the right. He snapped the bolt release and raised his weapon towards the boar...

"Get down!" Kellogg ordered, breaking into the plan Cody had made for the next few seconds.

Cody threw himself flat behind a large tree.

THUMP...>Bam!<

Cody felt a blast wave pass over him and heard small pieces of shrapnel smack into the trees around him.

Jack led the others from the front of the F.R.E.D.S., keeping an eye on the remaining SG-12 people, when he heard the firing down the trail.

"Oh, *wonderful*." Jack growled. "Teal'c, Carter, Daniel, with me. Major Chekurda, stay here!"

He and the others took off at a run, checking their weapons and leaving a fuming Major Chekurda. They were surprised when the firing stopped and a muffled explosion erupted before two final shots.

SG-1 rounded a slight bend in the trail and stopped short.

An overwhelming odor hung in the air. It was like roasted pork tainted with a harsh metallic scent and mixed judiciously with the acrid fumes of detonated high explosives.

On one side of the trail was a twitching mountain of gray-brown fur. Toward them was what had been the face. The flesh of the face was flayed open and cooked, exposing a charred skull with a visible concavity crisscrossed with a spider web of small cracks and gouges. Grey-brown blood seeped around the edges of the skull wound and into the matted fur around many small bullet wounds.

Cody crouched next to the carcass, his carbine still held ready.

"What *the Hell* is *THAT*?" Jack asked.

"Near as I can figure, Sir..." Cody drawled, pointing towards the cloven hooves, "It's a half ton javelina."

Teal'c raised an eyebrow and lowered his staff weapon some.

"These 'javelina' do not normally reach this size, Master Sergeant?"

Cody sucked on one side of his bottom lip and shook his head slowly.

"Not the ones at home, anyways."

Kellogg stepped out of the trees on the opposite side of the trail. A small trail of blood leaked from his left nostril and he looked somewhat pale as he reloaded and put the short weapon with the odd-looking stock back into the sheath on his back.

Sam moved towards him. "Captain, you're bleeding..."

"Concussion, Ma'am." Kellogg grinned as he wiped the blood away with a thumb and looked at it. "Happily, my eardrums are intact."

"What happened, Captain?" Jack asked the younger officer in a commanding voice.

"Well, Sir." Kellogg sighed aloud. "We heard... and smelt... this thing in the tree line over there."

Kellogg indicated the side opposite where the carcass lay still twitching. "It was very close and I didn't know if it was the LBG's. So, I tried to say 'hello' and it charged."

"LBG's?" Sam interjected.

"Ummm, little brown guys, Ma'am." Kellogg explained. "We lit it up with the M4's and it seemed not to care. So when it turned in the woods there and came back, I hit it with the M79 in the face."

"40mm Rounds aren't supposed to arm closer than 14 meters, Captain." Sam pointed out.

Jack leaned toward Sam. "There are some models that arm in 3 to 5 meters, Carter."

Sam nodded thoughtfully.

"How close?" Jack asked.

Kellogg chuckled. "About 15 feet, but I was behind a tree."

"Check your arm, Captain." Jack said with a smile before turning his head and keying the radio in his shoulder pouch. "Move up now, Major. All Clear."

Kellogg touched a small hole in his left sleeve where blood seeped out darkening the material. He shook his head and sighed what sounded like "*sonofabitch*."

"There's something wrong with this thing's blood." Cody pointed out. "It's gray, and I don't think that's from being cooked."

Sam knelt down beside him for a closer look.

"You're right...," she said quietly, putting her hand on the still warm flank of the beast. Suddenly, she leapt backward to a standing position. "Whoa!" She exclaimed.

Immediately, Teal'c and the two members of SG-12 that were on hand raised their weapons and aimed at the beast.

"Stand down." Sam ordered. "It's OK. I just felt..."

"Felt *what*?" Daniel asked, with his hand nervously pulsing on the grip of his pistol.

Sam stepped forward again and touched the carcass again for a split second before pulling her hand away as if it was on fire.

"For a second, it felt like this thing had a Goa'uld in it."

Teal'c cocked his head and raised an eyebrow.

"But, the sensation was too strong..." Sam continued. "This thing seems to be... It *feels* like it has several dozen Goa'uld in it."

"Could the color of the blood have anything to do with you're sensing, Major?" Kellogg asked.

"Something *in* the blood?"

"Naquadah..." Sam said quietly.

Everyone looked up as the rest of SG-12 and the F.R.E.D.S. came into view.

"We'll get some blood samples." Kellogg said with a nod to indicate Cody. "Time to do your regular job, Sergeant." He added for Cody, "I'll lend you a hand."

SG-1 migrated into a small group further down the trail leaving the two shooters and Dr. Kim taking digital pictures, drawing blood, and taking tissue samples from the carcass and putting them into a field sample kit. Chekurda stayed out of the way and nominally pulled security.

"That's a *big* pig." Jack said, pointing with a black gloved hand. "What did the Captain mean about 'something in the blood'?" he asked Sam.

"Well, Sir... I think he was suggesting that Naquadah in the blood would account for the odd color and my sensing of Goa'uld."

"Can't that be... poisonous?" Daniel asked.

"Not particularly, in certain forms." Sam answered. "I have Naquadah in my system."

"As do I." Teal'c added. "In small amounts."

"Okay, so what does this *mean*?" Jack asked.

Sam shook her head and shrugged.

"We won't know until we get some samples back to the SGC for analysis."

Kellogg walked toward them pulling blue exam gloves off by rolling one into the other. "Do you want us to try and dispose of the carcass sir?"

Jack scowled.

The combined teams, sweaty and a little worn, took a short break while re-donning their equipment. Jack pored over a glossy map formed from digitally pasted film of the last minute UAV mission. He wiped his brow with a green handkerchief. For having spent two hours on planet, they had moved less than a click, accounted for exactly one large pig, and buried it in a very shallow grave. The others, minus the intrepid Kellogg and his partner in crime Cody, were drinking water and eating HOOAH Bars⁷ waiting for the order to move out.

"Hey, Daniel." Jack said without looking up.

Daniel came over to him.

"I see a stockade or fort or something along the other side of the river and some fortifications around the village... er, town... whatever." Jack looked up. "Is that 'normal' for these guys?"

"I'm not sure. We don't know exactly where they're from... and round structures aren't particularly uncommon to Europe, as far as I know."

"I'm just trying to decide if they're paranoid... or if there's something else out here to be worried about. Maybe something that eats half-ton pigs."

Daniel looked down the trail.

"Why don't we just ask them?"

Jack looked at him and saw where he was looking. Crouching in the ferns among the trees, fifty meters away were two grey-brown faces.

"*Sonofabitch*, they are brown." Jack mumbled.

"Hello!" Daniel called out to them and waved. "We're here to help you."

Jack scowled at Daniel. The two men in the ferns conversed, inaudible to the Stargate teams. Teal'c stood and moved towards his commander. The two men stopped talking and stared.

"We have information... from Earth." Daniel offered.

The two men stood up, ignoring Daniel. Instead, they pointed at Teal'c and a quietly argued.

Both were squat and barrel chested with dark, grey-tinted skin. They carried what looked like rifles of an unfamiliar type with complexly carved wooden stocks. For clothing, they wore simple earth-toned leather pants and long-sleeved shirts.

The taller one appeared to come out on top of the argument and started walking toward the Stargate Command personnel. The other stood his ground, his rifle held loosely but ready as apparent to anyone familiar with close combat.

"Hello!" Daniel greeted and added a convincing smile as the man neared him.

The man ignored him and walked by to stop in front of Teal'c.

Teal'c drew himself imperceptibly taller, already towering over the man.

The man dropped to his knees and lowered his head. In slightly accented ancient Egyptian, he spoke:

"Jaffa, we are at your service and await the gods will."

Teal'c raised an eyebrow and looked toward his commander and Daniel.

"What is your name?" Teal'c rumbled.

"Han, Jaffa." The man said quietly as he glanced around himself without looking up.

"I am called Teal'c. Stand up, Han."

The man stood, still without raising his eyes.

"I bear no tidings from your gods. They are false and I am free of them... as you will soon be."

The man looked at Teal'c, confused.

"The gods are returning soon to enslave your people. We are here to help you stop them."

Han stared at Teal'c a moment, aghast, before turning and looking at each of the others in turn. "The tales handed down through the season cycles...?"

"All PR..." Jack finished.

"Pee are?" Han asked.

Daniel cleared his throat. "Public Relations... it's a phrase in our language that means..." Daniel looked at Jack. "Lies told to make people think something is true when it's not."

⁷ HOOAH Bars are Military issued "Power Bars" that are shelf-life stable for years...

"The gods aren't real?"

"The gods are not real gods." Teal'c explained.

"You wear a symbol on your forehead and carry a stick weapon. Are you not a Jaffa?"

"I am Jaffa. This is how I know the gods are false."

Han stared in disbelief.

Jack stood beside Teal'c.

"The Goa'uld, that's what your 'gods' are really called, are real creatures, but they inhabit... *steal*/humans as hosts. Yes they can heal themselves and have doodads to throw people across rooms, but when you get down to it they're just body-snatchers with a god-complex."

Han turned to the one with clear circles suspended in front of his eyes.

"The gods... they are... hey Teal'c, show him 'Junior'."

Teal'c grimaced and lifted his black t-shirt to reveal his symbiote.

Han jumped backwards.

"Your 'gods'..." Daniel continued, "...are the adult form of 'Junior' here. They take over humans as hosts and they use things like Teal'c's staff weapon and flying ships to conquer peoples like your own."

Han looked at Daniel, then at Junior. He asked Teal'c "If what you say is truth, why do you leave it inside you?"

"It's a long story." Jack answered for him.

Teal'c tilted his head.

"You need to explain this to the Elder and the Council." Han said matter-of-factly. The dark-skinned man turned and started to walk away. "Walk this way."

"Oh, and I'm Colonel O'Neill, by the way..."

Dr. Kim walked up to SG-1. "He took the complete refutation of his religious base very calmly and logically."

Jack gave the advisor a surprised look and said, "That's what I thought."

Daniel pursed his lips.

Han motioned the others to follow.

Bringing up the rear with the F.R.E.D.'s, Chekurda looked around crossly and mumbled, "Where are Kellogg and Cody?"

Jack's quick headcount turned up the same question. As the others filed in behind Han, he keyed the PTT switch and called softly "Sierra golf one two bravo, this is sierra golf one niner. What's your 20? Over."

After a few seconds, the younger officer's voice came through his earpiece in breathy tones. "Sierra golf one niner⁸, this is sierra golf one two bravo. Saw you talking to your three new friends after a security sweep to the front, break." There was a short pause. "We're roughly parallel to the trail, moving fast and intend to make the bridge before you do, break." Another short pause. "We intend to try and get across first if unguarded, then shadow you. Over."

"SG-12B, this is SG-19. I concur. Listening silence until I call. Out."

"SG-19, this is SG-12B. Wilco, out."

The Stargate personnel followed the hunters, a third appearing out of the foliage as they passed. Jack picked up on some frustration in them caused by the slowness of the F.R.E.D.'s as they followed the wandering trail through the woods and ferns at a walking pace until they rounded a slight bend and the foliage opened to reveal the narrow river and the mossy stone bridge that crossed it.

To their left, the river widened into a lake, but for a several hundred meters in both directions, it was white crested and moving fast.

The bridge was rather unusual. Instead of a solid deck across it, two long stone runners roughly two feet wide, sloped on the outer halves and joined at intervals by crosspieces that transferred their weight to

⁸ In military radio transmissions, individual letters and numbers are pronounced using the standardized "phonetic alphabet" in order to avoid confusion. The pro-word "Break" means, "I am pausing and intend to transmit again." "Over" means, "I'm done transmitting and expect a reply." "Out" means, "I am done transmitting and expect no reply." "Wilco" is short for "I understand and will comply." In the SGC, the suffix "Niner" or "9" is added to denote the team's leader.

piers sunk into the water, carried the load. At each end of the bridge was another novel feature. Two vertical stone pieces joined by a sturdy log rested vertically between the approach part of the bridge and the first crosspiece, obstructing the bridge. About 15 feet in front of the bridge was a stone-lined rectangular hole sunk about 2 feet into the ground and crossed with two more sturdy logs. A heavy rope wrapped between the two logs in the box and the log in the bridge obstruction and a second disappeared into a rectangular hole in front of the obstruction.

Han's friends made themselves busy with the bridge. First, one looked down into the rectangular hole in front of the obstruction where the two joined stone pieces could pivot toward and land flat. Then the two of them started cutting a form of reed along the riverbank with long knives they wore at their belts, gathering it into bundles and tossing it into the hole, humming quietly while they worked.

Han waited for the F.R.E.D.'s to stop and paced off the distance between the wheels.

Jack tried to spot the two members of SG-12 without being obvious about it, but looked at Han when he started to speak.

"Your carts will fit across the bridge, if you are careful." Han announced.

Han's friends announced they were ready. The three of them took hold of the rope and pulled it. The obstruction moved slowly at first and then faster as gravity took over. It pivoted forward pinned between a rounded surface of the first crosspiece and something out of sight in the hole. It landed with a muffled thud in the hole with smattering of green reed juice. The two other hunters moved along a bridge rail in a single file toward the other side.

Han waited a moment, looking back at the SGC personnel, and followed his friends.

Jack glanced at the river shore once again before motioning the others forward.

Jack, Daniel, and Chekurda followed the hunters across. Teal'c started, but waited as Sam nursed the F.R.E.D. onto the bridge using the remote manually. Dr. Kim waited patiently for his turn with the SG-12 F.R.E.D. The work was slow, aligning the six-wheeled vehicle on the rails with only the outer half of each wheel on the bridge and inching forward before needing to correct it. They were halfway across when the other side's obstacle dropped with a thud.

Sam jumped, startled, one foot starting to slide down the sloped side of the rail. Dropping the remote onto the bridge, she turned to lunge at the crosspiece as her feet slid down toward the water.

Teal'c moved with an unlikely speed for his bulk, bridging from the bridge rail to the crosspiece and snatching Sam's black vest. Sam started a sigh of relief but stopped when she felt herself still sliding. Opened during the march, her vest started to come off and only the straps on her Zat holster and thigh ammo pouch held her... until they broke.

Sam slid into the fast-moving water leaving Teal'c holding her vest. She kept her head up for a moment before the current sucked her under the white crested flow.

"*Goddammit!*" Jack yelled and started pulling off his vest.

Teal'c was faster, tossing her vest and then his on top of the F.R.E.D. with the remote dangling on its strap.

One of the hunters started running along the shore, watching for her, until a man wearing a black t-shirt almost collided with him.

Kellogg beat Teal'c into the water by seconds, diving deep from the calmer edge of the river as Teal'c fought the current and stayed on the surface. Looking for Sam's OD uniform in the dark waters below the surface was difficult, but he found her where he expected her to be and swam up under her. He towed her to the surface and into Teal'c's waiting arms.

Breaking water, Kellogg blew the water and snot out of his nose before taking a deep breath. Teal'c had started towing Sam's mostly limp form toward the shore already and he followed.

Jack, his vest open but not off, reached down and helped pull Sam from the water. He was relieved when she looked up and said, "I'm Okay." hoarsely. Sam started to cough and spit out water.

Kellogg and Teal'c climbed out of the river, Teal'c ignoring the water running off him and Kellogg trying to speed the drying by running his hands down his T-shirt and BDU pants in an effort to squeegee some of the water away. Kellogg once more looked pale and had a clenched jaw as he worked.

Han and one of the other hunters stood back and watched the team check over Sam.

Jack looked at the younger officer with a thinking expression, trying to decide the appropriate action then he knelt beside Sam.

"How ya' doing?" he asked quietly.

"I'll live, Sir." She said, still spitting and coughing.

"I'll give you some antibiotics later, Ma'am." Kellogg stated quietly. "Most complications from near-drowning are infections."

Jack gave her a hand up.

"Captain?" Jack asked without looking at him.

"Sir?"

Kellogg stood a little straighter, still dripping.

"Go get Cody, your cover's blown."

"Moving, Sir."

Kellogg headed back into the woods.

Han watched with an amused look.

"You are also wily Ker-Nall, I like that."

The rest of the trip to the village was without incident. Sam steadfastly refused to take it easy and finished steering the F.R.E.D. across the bridge. Teal'c and some of the others lent a hand re-erecting the blocking stones on the bridge, endearing them to Han's men. The forest was cool and quiet, with little conversation exchanged. They passed over several small streams on stone slab bridges, drawing closer to the plumes of smoke... and a low, deep thrumming sound.

The trail broke into an open meadow bordered by the lakeshore on the left, the foothills of the ridge to the right, and a long fence-like abatis⁹ protecting the outer buildings of the village built along the banks with of a smaller river feeding into the larger one. Between the trail and the larger river, the fortress from the UAV photos stood.

Square in general shape; its walls stood two-and-a-half men tall around the outside with a taller structure overlooking the walls inside. Its walls were of precisely cut pale grey stones several meters long and almost perfectly squared.

Han noticed the Earthmen's interest.

"That is the Stores... where we store food and valuable things... and the bodies of the Jaffa."

"Bodies of the Jaffa?" Jack and Daniel asked in unison.

"There is Goa'uld magicks, like those in the stick weapons of the Priests and the devices of the Miners. There is a magick there that keeps the flesh of bodies cold and free from rot."

Jack mouthed "A thousand year-old Jaffa." to Daniel.

Daniel shrugged.

"Freezer burn?"

Men in woven tunics walked along the top of the outer wall with Staff Weapons.

"The Council takes their noontime meal soon and I would like to present you to them then. We need to hurry." Han said.

"I want to leave some of my people here until we talk to your Council." Jack told Han.

Han nodded.

Turning to the others, Jack gave orders in a very short form.

"SG-1, with me. SG-12, stay here, keep your eyes open, mind the F.R.E.D.'s."

With that, SG-1 left with Han and his Huntsmen.

Major Chekurda visibly fumed.

⁹ Abatis - A form of field fortification employing logs, often employing (as in this case) interwoven logs or poles with sharpened ends toward the enemy.

Finally, after SG-1 had taken the zigzagged path through the abatis and was out of sight amongst the village's outbuildings, she turned to her own team and said, "Stay here."

The three men stood in the middle of the trail and she headed off along the tree line of the clearing away from the river, moving quickly out of sight around a larger copse of trees.

"Potty break?" Cody suggested with a grin.

Kellogg shrugged and pointed to the nearest of three small stands of large trees in the clearing. "Let's move over there into the shade."

The NCO controlled SG-12's F.R.E.D.; Kellogg took manual control of the other and followed. Dr. Kim brought up the rear, with his hand on his P90.

In the trees, the Captain started the others on surreptitiously taking pictures of the visible structures; especially the Stores and a set of switchbacks that led up to what looked like mine openings in the side of the ridge.

"I wonder how deep those mines go?" he asked, thinking aloud. "If they've got another entrance, they might be useful as shelters later."

The Council was a somewhat informal group, at least as they ate outside in the shade of a large tree. Fourteen men and three women of ages ranging from young adult to the decrepit elderly sat clustered in small groups around the immense trunk of a tall evergreen. As varied as their ages, their dress ranged from brightly dyed cloth to rough-out leather in a number of styles.

The only common factor among them was they all seemed to defer to the plump middle-aged man dressed in a bright red shirt seated on a small stool and making them laugh between bites of what looked like a large gray carrot.

The plump man noticed them first even as Han brought SG-1 closer. He watched them approach with bright eyes.

He cleared his throat loudly and the others looked around.

The looks on their faces was one of concern or even fear when they saw Teal'c.

The plump man stood, only as tall as Teal'c's shoulder, and gracefully dropped to his knees with a lowered head. The others quickly followed suit, but much less gracefully.

In slightly accented ancient Egyptian, he spoke: "Jaffa, we are at your service and await the gods' will."

"Stand." Teal'c ordered. The man did as he was told, looking up at the much taller Jaffa. "I do not come here representing those you think are gods. I come to tell you of their falsehood and to prepare you to defend yourselves from false gods that mean to enslave you."

A glimmer of confusion flashed over the plump man's face... Noticed only by Han and the SG-Team.

"All of you, stand!" Teal'c continued.

"Jaffa...?" the plump man started.

"My name is Teal'c. I am the former First Prime of a false god who calls himself Apophis."

The plump man's eyes flashed to the sides as he tried to figure out how to handle the appearance of a messenger from long debated gods...

...and to rectify that this messenger declared the same gods as pretenders at the same time he declared them to exist.

"Look, all of you..." Daniel addressed the confused group of Council members, "We come from a planet called Earth. The... *beings* you call gods are a race of creatures called the Goa'uld and they take over humans as hosts. Some are on their way here as we speak..."

Panic took over many of the faces in the group. Several of the more finely dressed immediately dropped to their knees and began chanting in a crudely bastardized form of Goa'uld.

Daniel looked around at the group chanting prayers, sighed, and mumbled, "Not again."

The plump man seemed torn looking between the kneeling members of his council and the humans.

Several, the women and those in skins, looked faintly amused while they mimicked the others' praying.

Han shrugged as the plump man looked at him questioningly.

"My turn?" Jack asked Teal'c and Daniel. Teal'c just looked back at his commander with a raised eyebrow... Daniel shook his head slowly in disgust.

"People!" Jack started in a loud voice and walked in amongst them. Some began to look up at him. "It's not the end of the world here! These guys... the Goa'uld... like to play God and take slaves. Your people, a long time ago, somehow got lost in the shuffle and forgotten about. That's great! That means no Goa'uld snakes-in-the-head..."

Mass confusion, as if he had slipped into another language at the end.

"Goa'uld?" he asked.

They seemed to have gotten that, at least from context.

"Snakes?"

Confusion.

"Okay, you don't have snakes... small wiggly things with no legs that crawl around on the ground?"

"Worms?" the plump man suggested.

"Worms!" Jack echoed as he pointed at the Elder with a smile. "These *worms*-in-the-head are bad. They like power and don't give a sh... Don't give a *care* about who they hurt. They're not gods, but they make humans think they are."

"But... We've heard the stories of what they do!" said a voice from the middle of the group.

"Yeah" many others agreed in unison and started mumbling amongst themselves.

"Okay." Jack said. "They can do some nifty things like make their eyes glow and their voice go... *weird*. The rest is done with *science* like the Naquadah reactors... *power* doohickeys... machines... whatever you call them you have here someplace."

"Magick!" another voice piped in.

"Yeah, it lo..."

"They use *magick*!" more people jumped at the reason, not quite what Jack had expected. "They *are* gods!"

"Actually," Sam interrupted stepping to the front. "Any science sufficiently advanced as to be misunderstood looks like magic."

More confused looks.

"It's hard to explain, all right?" Jack went on. "Suffice it to say, you *don't* want these guys back in charge of you and we're here to help you." Jack turned to the plump man and offered his hand. "Colonel Jack O'Neill, US Air Force..."

The plump man smiled a sly grin and matched his hand up with Jack's.

"Domer the Elder."

The plump man led them to a building whose core structure had a roof resembling the shape of an old wooden ship turned upside down. The peak appeared to be a single, long carved piece of wood with reinforcing supports curving down to the vertical walls. Formed wooden pieces shaped to fit, many in complex curves, spanned between the supports and the entire structure appeared to be finished in dull brownish-grey paint.

Inside, they passed through a great chamber with benches on either side of an aisle, a raised dais along the outer walls with cushioned benches, and pair of raised podiums on either side of a wide door. Domer led them through the chamber and into a long hallway running the length of the building and terminating in a wide, squat door set under a single-piece arch. Domer drew them towards it, past many squat doors along the sides of the wooden floored hall.

Through the door was a comfortable office with a large desk facing the door, an overstuffed chair of some woolen cloth, and what appeared to be an electric candelabrum on the desktop.

"Come! Come! Sit!" the short man said as the team ducked under the door header and looked around the small room. Domer pointed to a pair of couches similar to his chair on either side of the doorway.

The team sat.

"I will not even claim to know what you are speaking about Ker-Nall. I am a simple man. I only try and keep the peace here." Domer said, cupping his hands together on his desk. "I do well because I leave the thinking to those that know better."

Jack raised his eyebrows and looked toward Daniel.

Daniel pursed his lips and tilted his head.

"I have a question, Domer. May I call you Domer?" Daniel asked.

"Yes, it is my name."

"Domer, I... We are strangers and we just told you that your *gods* are frauds and can be killed. You took that well. May I ask why?"

"Your name... I did not get."

"Daniel. Daniel Jackson."

"You are his *son*?" Domer pointed at Jack, confused.

"No. I... ah... in our culture we have three names..."

"At least." Jack interrupted.

"Three names." Daniel repeated. "Our first one or two are given to us by our parents for us to use. Our last names come from our father's line."

"Jack?"

"No... But, long ago, a man named Jack was the father to one of my great grandfathers."

Domer looked confused for a moment and then smiled.

"A *grant*father is your sire that granted you your name... long ago?"

"Er... yeah." Daniel agreed. "About your gods..."

"I am a simple man. I keep the peace. Gods... Fear of gods... It promotes peace by making the people peaceful. I am not a priest. I know this: I have never seen a god and, if the gods are truly like the priests say, they would not have left us to ourselves like they did. I only want peace for my people. If you help us to keep peace amongst ourselves, I will help you. You still have to convince my people."

Daniel nodded slowly.

"I think that gods would be bad for the people."

"They treat humans as cattle," Teal'c added. "Using them for their own pleasure and whims."

Domer leant back in his chair and looked over the team.

"I will ask the Guild masters to meet with you. If you convince them... I hope, together, we will be able to stop these... Goa'uld."

Domer pushed something behind his desk and a young man in loose cloth pants entered the room. Domer turned to his assistant and said, "Please show the Earthmen to the Trader's Lodge." To the team he explained "The Trader's Lodge is a guest quarters here. It is sparsely equipped, but warm and you should have room for the others in your party. I will make times with the Guild Masters to speak to you later today."

The assistant turned toward SG-1 and said, "Please, if you will follow me."

"That went well." Sam fumed sarcastically, coming in the low arched doorway and stripping off her tactical vest and P90 harness.

Daniel, right behind her, nodded as he looked over the rather Spartan accommodations. The Trader's Lodge was a good-sized, if low roofed, round structure made of huge warped timbers lined inside with painted clay. The ceiling domed higher in the center and was lit by what appeared to be an honest-to-goodness electric light bulb or crystalline piece shaped like one. Four rooms made up the interior. Three off the main room: a bathroom in the rear, a large empty room on the left from the entryway that took up almost a third of the structure and had its own wide outside door, and a small room with bunks along the straight interior walls.

The central room, currently occupied by Jack boiling water in a canteen cup over a large wood-burning stove in the exact center of the structure, lacked more than the stove, a box of firewood, and some bentwood benches.

"How's tricks?" Jack asked.

"Well, Sir..." Sam started, visibly annoyed. "I just spent almost an hour explaining the difference between science and magick to a bunch of half-deaf Mining Guild men."

Daniel grinned as he stood behind her.

"And?" Jack prodded.

"I explained propelling things using Bernoulli's Gas Law... and at the end, their leader just said 'I know'..." Sam finished.

"Oh." Jack said. "Come on... I've got something you might appreciate." he said with a beckoning motion and led her through the doorway into the bathroom. He pointed at the ceiling over one corner of the room. "Watch this." He stepped on a slightly raised tile in the clay floor with the toe of his boot and water came out of pinholes in the corner of the ceiling like rain.

"These guys may be primitive, but they have their priorities straight. It's even *warm*."

Sam turned red with anger and walked out of the room, almost shoving Daniel out of the way.

"What'd I say?" Jack mouthed to Daniel with a shrug.

Daniel shook his head.

"Coffee?" Jack suggested.

"Sure. Why not...?"

Someone tapped at the door.

Teal'c stood up, glanced at Jack eating applesauce from an aluminized plastic pouch.

"Wanna' get the door, big guy?"

Teal'c stood, drew his sidearm, and activated it. Holding his Zat'nik'tel held out of sight behind his thigh, he opened the door.

"Good morning?" Teal'c asked the man outside the door.

Dressed in long robes with a rough woven aba, the man bowed politely from the waist and spoke in soft tones.

"I represent the Priesthood. I have come to invite the members of your team to see the Stores. Come at mid-day."

The man bowed again and walked away.

Teal'c raised his eyebrow, watching the priest walk away. He closed the door. Turning, he looked at Jack.

"Cool. I'll get SG-12 right on that."

Sam sat on a bench outside the Trader's Lodge that had been sanded down from a single tree trunk.

Across the trail, children played in a wooden fenced field of grass shadowed by the multistoried bunkhouse. Gaggles of kids, watched over by the elderly women, played games and ran.

One group caught Sam's attention.

They stood in a wide circle, seven or eight of them, and tossed a stitched leather ball between themselves.

Except for their large rounded chests and gray-brown skin, the scene could have been on Earth.

"Sam...?" Daniel said, walking up behind her. He followed her eyes and saw the children. "Almost like home."

Sam nodded and turned.

"Want something to eat?" Daniel asked, holding out a tan plastic pouch. "Cheese Tortellini... Just like home."

Sam grinned, stifling a cough.

"Thanks, Daniel."

"You're welcome." He looked around. "This isn't too bad of a place... if the food wasn't so awful."

"It *is* really bad."

"Yeah... Really bad." Daniel agreed and sucked his breath in through his teeth. "How about you? How are you doing?"

Sam shrugged.

"I'm OK. A little congestion... A little fever... The shots helped."

Daniel looked concerned."

"Look, I'm fine. If I get worse, I'll let everyone know and let myself be sent home, OK?"

Daniel nodded.

"Just don't tell the Colonel, OK? Daniel?"

"I won't, Sam. As long as you stop if you get too sick."

"I will."

Daniel started back towards the Lodge and shrugged when Jack gave him a questioning look.

Major Chekurda stood before the Stores with her team, waiting for the senior priest to come out and greet them. Instead, after several minutes wait, a younger man in acolyte robes came out and beckoned them to follow. Though young, he carried a carved wooden staff taller than himself. When they got close enough, the Earth humans could smell the acrid scent of an unwashed body.

The junior priest led them into the wide main entrance of the Stores, genuflecting to a *bas-relief* representation in the Egyptian style of a man with the head of an animal that had lost its identifiable characteristics over the millennium that stood, free standing, inside the entrance. The stone looked older than the stonework around it, more weathered and a different, browner color.

Other priests lined the entry, dressed in rough woven robes and sandals, making way for both the team and the line of village people carrying woven sacks of some unidentified commodity suspended from a carved wooden crossbar across their shoulders. Two lines, one on each side, led around the set of stairs going down on either side of the open-roofed entryway.

Other people, in finer dress, came and went from whatever room lay beyond the entry. Too many people were in the way for the team to see more than the fact it was larger than the area they were in. Most either carried small crafted items or had servants bearing heavier items.

"It appears that more than worship and storage goes on here." Dr. Kim observed quietly. "A marketplace of some sort, from the looks of it."

"Quite so." The senior priest agreed, appearing from out of the crowd. A tall man, for his people's size, he stood about the same height as the Earthmen yet with the immense barrel chest and gray-brown skin of his people. "In the area beyond is our market. Dok-tor Kim." He smiled a wrinkly grin and pointed towards the next area with the head of his staff. "There, our village trades, buys, and sells almost all of what we make. Traders come from other villages, long ago settled by people from our village of old, and our local crafters come too. We arrange storage of stuffs that require cold using the magick the gods left us. We, the priesthood, oversee the transactions and tally the accounts to keep the people honest."

"The other villages, do they...?"

"Have Stores, like this...? No, not like this. We have Mission Stores and a few have the cold-magick, but none this size." The old man said, waving his staff in a broad arc as an accent.

"You seem to have taken our refuting your gods as pretenders rather well." Chekurda pointed out.

The old man laughed easily, but stared at her with burning eyes.

"It is not the gods you refute... It is the *pretenders* to the gods. Our true gods will return one day and be pleased at our faith and our recognizing the pretenders."

The Major gave an asking glance to Dr. Kim.

"True gods could not be killed by the means you bring with you. Our true gods will not need to send... *demons* to hunt us, as we've been the faithful." The priest continued.

"True." Dr. Kim added with nod.

"You will want to see our *true* Jaffa, will you not?"

"Of course." The Major agreed.

The priest led them toward the stairs going down, the crowd parted and two priests followed. The stairs showed signs of wear and of maintenance and the replacement of severely worn stone steps. The architecture was simple and completely in stone with the reinforcing areas angled in and of a slightly rougher texture, almost as if the final shape was cut of raw stone and not finished.

Bringing up the rear, Kellogg asked about it, causing the entourage to stop.

"I'm no expert on stone cutting, Captain, but I know this part of the story." One of the junior priests answered. "The Miners drill holes into the rock for water to flow and use the cold magick to freeze water and break the stone free as the gods imagined it to be when they put the stone there."

The senior priest nodded his assent and led them on into the well-lit subsurface floor.

Here, the floor was smooth and polished and the air was cooler than above, but with no hint of an icy chill. Turning around to face the direction they had come, the team saw what appeared to be an immense three-paned glass fronted alcove. Inside, along walls angled towards a narrower far wall, were eight Jaffa in blue green metallic torso armor and greaves, standing as if on guard with staff weapons held closely beside them. Three of their faces seemed to have parts reconstructed of some material only roughly matched in color and another had a false wooden leg.

Between the two lines of four spaced along the walls, were a stack of ornamented wooden sarcophagi, three wide at the base and six high with the bottom ones of a more rectangular shape and the upper levels of a squarer cross-section.

"The Jaffa, even in death, protect the High Priests in theirs, until the gods return and reclaim us all." The senior priest said in a wistful voice.

Kellogg went up near the glass and held his hand toward it without touching it.

It did not feel cold.

"The cold magick is stopped by the water barrier." The senior priest pointed out. "You are not permitted inside this alcove." He beckoned them to follow him. "Follow me."

He led them around the corner into a long hallway that transversed the Stores lower level and they found both walls at this end were of the same, clear material.

The Earth people reached out and touched it.

Instead of the glassy feel they had expected, the barrier felt metallic, as if it were clear aluminum.

"Watch." The priest said as he brought the head of his staff to the barrier.

Like water, the barrier rippled and melted away, seemingly into itself or the frame that held it, leaving a two-meter hole in the barrier, and releasing an icy chill into the hall.

The priest smiled at the team's obvious awe. He made a circle with the tip of his staff in the hole he had formed and the barrier sealed closed in a gradually shrinking circle.

"The boxes inside contain the excess meat and milk and butter and cheese from past years slaughtering of the cattle. Enough to help us over the slim years and to trade with."

Daniel and Teal'c walked through the village with Han, listening as he described his home.

"The fenced area your teams are staying in is the Trader's Lodge. It allows the Traders from other villages a safe and comfortable place to stay. It usually lowers their prices." Han said with a grin. "The three large buildings across the main trail are for the laborers who work the fields or in the unskilled crafts." He said, pointing to the large, box-like multi-story structures as they passed. One stood separate from the other two between the trail and the large irrigated fields that bordered the larger river. The other two stood close and bridges crossed between them above the first floor.

"The miners too?" Daniel asked.

"No, they have their own communal buildings down by the small river, closer to the factories over the river."

"Are your 'castes' rigid? Can someone... say... be born a laborer and become a miner?"

Han smiled.

"It's not usual, but it has happened. Sometimes they marry into another Guild. Other times, they convince a Guilder to take them in."

"The wooden structures that surround your village, are they only for the 'boar' creatures we encountered?" Teal'c asked.

"Yes, the boar." Han said. "Outside the Village, we travel armed because of them. It is not that they prey on us, more that they seem to want us to stay away from them."

"How about you?" Daniel asked, "What Guild are you from? Or is hunting a Guild?"

"The Huntsmen are sort of a Guild, as are the smaller crafts... But we are mainly from the Families. We are separate Families that live together, outside the Guilds. We live up the hill there," he said pointing in the direction of the mines, "and we contribute small crafts, grow special herbs and small crops on our own plots. We... fill out the little things the Guilds do not."

"You are still considered part of the village proper, right?" Daniel asked.

Han smiled.

"We are the village's prime source for Healers and for Hunters. We are a vital part of the village... And they let us keep to our own ways."

"Are your ways quite different from the others'?" Teal'c asked.

Han smiled.

"Our ways come from an older way of life." He pointed up the valley, toward the source of the river. "After the... Goa'uld... brought our ancestors to this place. Some of the people, the ancestors of the Families, escaped into the mountains in that direction. For many long years, we lived outside the knowledge of the Goa'uld and lived on native plants, poached boar and cattle. When the Goa'uld left, we alone had a hold on the old ways. My ancestors brought hunting, healing, and many other skills back to the villagers. It was difficult at first. Our people had already begun to turn the brown color we are today."

Daniel nodded.

"So, your religion..."

Han looked over his shoulders and down the trail.

"We do not worship as the village does. Ours is an elder religion."

Han handed the Captain Kellogg his own rifle.

It was heavy, heavier because of the smoothly carved one-piece wooden stock and balanced close to the shoulder.

"The aether goes in here." Han said and pointed out a circular opening in the weapon's butt plate. Han held up a cylindrical object about half the height of, but the same diameter as a soft drink or beer can with an indent at each end surrounded by what looked like a felt gasket and 12 small holes that ran through it top to bottom. "This holds the bolts. It goes in here." Han pressed the cylinder into a receptacle at the top of the weapon and it seemed to go in snugly because of the felt-like material.

He snapped a lever down on the left side and the cylinder aligned slightly better in the receptacle with a "thunk".

"You press the button inside the stock hole to fire it and make a new bolt move into firing position with the rod here by pressing it with your fingers."

Kellogg sat behind a folding table and propped the forearm of the native rifle on sandbags. Aiming through the lattice sights, he sighted in on the center of standard M16 zeroing target and pressed the trigger with his thumb.

The comparatively heavy weapon hissed, he heard the supersonic crack of the projectile, and it recoiled against his shoulder as his M4 did.

The red LED on the chronograph he had fired through read "662.2 MPS".

"What is that?" Han asked.

"The two standing things with the wire in front tell me how fast your bolts go."

He cycled the action of the weapon using a long pull with his index and middle fingers, almost like a lever action, aimed and fired again.

The red LED on the chronograph he had fired through read "661.8 MPS".

"Is that a good speed?"

"Considering the weight of the bolt, that is very good."

"Better than your rifles?"

"For shooting things like the boars around here, yes."

"Yes." Han said, smiling.

A third, fourth, and fifth shot produced statistically the same velocities.

He cleared the weapon and went to examine his target.

At 25 meters, he could cover the group with his thumb.

"Good, Captain. I think I would take you hunting with me."

"Well... There we wuz', me an' this guy name'a Lopez, drivin' up and down the hills surroundin' a base-not-allowed-to-be-named-without-killin'-anyone. See, we'd drive around in our Chevy Blazer, stop on top of the hills, and scan the fence-line with these big-ass binoculars for conspiracy theorists and X-philiacs. Well, this one day, we're up this hill, you could see for miles from up there, and we're lookin' around and sweatin' up a storm when I hear this low rumble behind us. Just as I started to turn around there's this BOOM! right over our heads and me an' Lopez get pitched on our faces in the dirt. I roll over, look up, and see this sonofabitch that buzzed us, couldn't 'a been more than thirty feet above the hilltop when he passed... Well he'd pulled up vertical right over our heads and just bails out." The older NCO illustrated the maneuver with his hand, grinning away. "The canopy sorta' came off and just stopped there, right there in mid-air over our heads, and starts fallin' back, sorta' right down on top of us. 'MOVE! LOPEZ!' I yelled at the kid. Good kid, didn't ask 'What for?', he just sorta' leaped forward and rolled down the hill. Me, I went right after him and got going a little too fast. So, when I got up at the bottom, I look back up the hill and I see this hotshot jet-jockey's chute drop down the other side of the hill... And the goddamned canopy frame hit the blazer like an axe. Straight down through the roof-like... Sounded like a really huge soda can gettin' stomped."

Everyone's eyes were wide at this point, except Kellogg's who was smiling. Cody took a slug of coffee out of his canteen cup.

"I was pissed. Shit! I was about to spit nails. So, I get up, see Lopez is in one piece, dust myself off, and head up this hill at a high rate of speed. I get to the top about the same time as the pilot."

Cody paused and looked at his cup, seeming to estimate how much coffee he had left and calculating how long it would last.

Cody continued. "Well, he looks at me and I look at him and I see he's one of the older guys I see around the base and drink with on occasion. He ain't really a bad guy. So, he looks at me... He looks at the Blazer, which looks like it has been stepped on... He looks at me again and he says..."

Cody took another slug of coffee.

"Damn, Sarge! I was hoping to catch a ride back with you and not have to walk!"

The assembled teams groaned aloud.

"So, I says to him, 'That's what the helicopters are for, Sir.' and pointed out the Huey chugging down the valley towards us."

"Did he get in trouble, Sergeant?" Sam asked.

Cody shook his head. "No, Ma'am. Considering the stack of paperwork to take it out of the poor sod's check would have to be classified beyond any pay clerk's clearance level... They forewent charging him. However..."

Cody sipped some more coffee, draining the cup.

"We did have the crew chief paint a Chevy Blazer on the side of his next bird and stenciled 'Not Over Friendlies' on his ejection handles."

Jack shook his head and walked off to lay out his rack.

Sam sought out Cody where he sat beside the stove.

"At the Stargate, how did you know to pick open that shell?"

Cody chuckled.

"Well, Ma'am, I was raised on a horse ranch and one thing you learn fast is the piles of manure and fertilizer don't stink so bad after a couple of rains."

Sam looked at him with an odd look for a moment before understanding.

They both shared a laugh.

From the outside, the landing platform looked like a gray version of the Abydos pyramid with the long ramp into it destroyed.

"The ramp seems to have been the source of the stonework in the piers of the lower bridge." Daniel observed as they drew closer. Looking back towards the river, he continued. "The ramp probably used to extend out to where the river shore is now, but erosion..."

"Cool." Jack interrupted without seeming to listen. "Looks like the door's closed." He said, pointing at the entrance.

Daniel scowled.

The two Huntsmen with them wandered off to the tree line as the team talked, seemingly bored.

"There appear to be a set of tracks going around the side." Teal'c pointed out with the base of his Staff Weapon.

The earthmen followed the trail around to the upriver side.

Cut into the side of the pyramid was a second doorway faced with noticeably less-worn stone. Above it, cut into the pyramid at an angle, were several cuts slanted toward the predominate path of the sun.

"It looks like someone's done some renovation not too long ago." Daniel remarked as the team made its way inside.

The entry hall was very similar to the Abydos pyramid in spite of the oddly cut windows. The installers had put the stone in flawlessly and the hall had only a thin patina of dust.

The team passed through quickly but cautiously to the darker, inner hall and then into the Gate room, switching on flashlights when it became too dark to see.

Instead of facing the Gate's dais as on Abydos, the hall faced the side of a DHD with the dais on the left.

The team spread out into the chamber, Sam moving toward the DHD.

Jack flashed his light at the raised dais.

On the dais, or imbedded into it, was an incomplete arc of a Stargate, sheared off at the 4 o'clock and 8 o'clock positions.

"Hmmm..." Jack wondered aloud. "What would do that?" He asked no one in particular.

"Here is the rest." Teal'c called out from behind the dais. "It also appears that this is not a standard landing platform."

"Whadya' see?" Jack asked, a little cautiously.

"It appears to have additional rooms cut into it behind the dais."

"And over here, where the original entry was." Daniel said across the room.

"Storage?" Jack asked.

"I will investigate." Teal'c stated.

"You do that." Jack said and walked over to Sam at the DHD.

"This DHD *looks* intact." Sam added. "But it doesn't seem to be powered."

"Okay..."

"Whatever happened to the Gate may have fried it too."

"That's why the new gate, right?"

"Yes, sir."

"Rings?"

"Haven't looked yet, Sir."

"They're here." Daniel said, walking up to them. "It looks like they use the old entryway as a sort of emergency shelter. There are no signs of any... religious ceremonies or anything other than storage."

"So, these people can't make steel, but they can cut and shape stone like nobody's business. Maybe we should take that tour of the mines." Jack observed.

Teal'c returned.

"The rooms are indeed storage rooms, O'Neill. Most are empty; however two of the six rooms contain the raw Naquadah ore in large wooden casks."

"Thank you Teal'c." Jack said to his friend. "Anything else we want to look at here?" he asked the others.

"I'd like to come back later with some instruments and find out the exact status of this DHD. If it's functional, we might be able to use it on Earth." Sam said.

"Fine, pencil it in, if we have time." Jack replied. "I want to take a look around outside a bit more; we might be fighting over this place in a couple days."

"Ladies and gentleman..." Kellogg started until he noticed confusion on the men's faces. "I'm sorry; 'gentlemen' is a word that means 'men' in a polite way where I'm from."

The people now understood.

"We will be demonstrating our personal weaponry and some of our carry items. Downrange, you will see six wooden targets and a large paper target. These are simple wooden posts, procured here from your Craft Guild. Our first demonstrated weapon will be the M4 Carbine." Kellogg said as he started his watered down briefing on the weapons. Leaving out the alien measurements and concepts most of the people receiving a similar briefing on Earth would understand, he still tried to make it a useful event for his audience.

Cody picked his unloaded carbine off the table and held it aloft to allow the 15 or so people present to see it.

"This weapon is air-cooled and selective fire... That means it can be fired one shot at a time or set to fire one after the other as long as the trigger is held to the rear. It is compact and aimed with the optical sight mounted to the rail on top. Through the sight, a red dot appears where the projectile will hit. It uses a thirty round magazine."

Cody held aloft a loaded magazine.

"The weapon has an effective range of roughly... Oh, about four hundred or five hundred long paces. Cody will now demonstrate the loading and firing of the M4 Carbine."

Cody inserted the magazine, pulled the charging handle to the rear and released it, and then shouldered the Carbine, aiming at the first target.

Quiet whispers passed amongst members of the audience.

Cody thumbed the selector lever to SEMI and pulled the trigger.

The audience jumped, some started screaming, and others let out a low moan.

All *except* the Mining Guild representatives.

Cody took aim at the splintered hole he had just made in the post and fired again.

This time, people started praying.

Kellogg tapped Cody on the shoulder. "Stop."

"Ladies and... er... Men." Kellogg said in a loud, hopefully soothing tone while noticing wet stains at the crotches of many of the people present. "I'm sorry. The carbine is pretty loud..."

The audience cleared out quickly, the Mining Guild representatives leaving last and concealing grins, until all that remained was Han.

Making an effort to not notice the dampness in the Huntsman's pants, Kellogg looked at the younger man and tried to offer a sympathetic look.

"I'm sorry." Kellogg said.

"We have no sounds like that here. Except in the mines." Han explained and then he walked out towards the woods.

"That went well, eh, Wild Bill?"

Wild Bill cracked a grin and then they both started laughing.

Major Chekurda sat in the main room of the Trader's Lodge behind a folding wooden field desk that predated the Vietnam War. On top, was a laptop. On the laptop's screen was a mission report that detailed her assessment so far:

"The people of P9X-455 would have difficulty repelling any form of Goa'uld attack without major reinforcement. The most difficult aspect is the fragmented nature of their society and their technological backwardness. In addition, they are unable to use modern weapons."

Across the room, Doctor Kim had his P90 stripped and cleaned it with a small bristled brush. The door opened without warning. Kim had his hand on his sidearm, but the intruders were Teal'c and Sam.

"...At least we got the satellites." Sam continued a conversation from outside. "We'll get an 'in system' warning."

"Indeed." Teal'c agreed.

"I still don't like the fact we haven't heard from the Tok'Ra scout ship that was supposed to check on their progress. It worries me." Sam unhitched her P90 and sat it on a closed crate. She started unfastening her vest.

"I would rather have more time to prepare than not enough, Major Carter."

Chekurda snorted.

"Major?" Sam asked.

"I don't think the Goa'uld will wait the six months it would take to mount a credible defense with these people."

"Six *months*?" Sam asked, incredulously.

"Six months." Chekurda restated. "These people would need that amount of time to become accustomed to the weapons we could give them and to be trained as a military unit."

Sam's eyebrows furrowed and she looked at Teal'c.

Teal'c raised an eyebrow.

Sam looked at Kim.

Kim, after checking Chekurda wasn't looking his direction, shook his head slowly.

"And, we would need a *proper* training team."

"You underestimate Colonel O'Neill." Teal'c stated. "I also have much experience training people like these. Your Captain Kellogg, is he not a trainer of men?"

Chekurda snorted, her Russian accent reared its head as she said "Kellogg's worthless. I don't know what you two can do, but Kellogg is a lost cause."

Sam turned red in the face and left the room.

Kellogg and Cody waited beside the Gate for the resupply.

The Captain stood, looking out over the river while chewing on a piece of jerky.

"That's not the native stuff, is it Killer?" the NCO asked.

Kellogg laughed.

"Hell no, that stuff tastes like shit."

"Hidin' the poge-bait¹⁰ again?"

"The *only* way to keep you out of my Red Vines, Wild Bill."

¹⁰ "Poge-bait" is a euphemism for civilian snacks brought along on military maneuvers. In this case, beef jerky and Red Vines candy...

The Gate started lighting up with an incoming wormhole. Once it established, the two men walked closer.

"Sierra Golf one two, this is Sierra Golf Charlie, over." Crackled out of their radios.

"Sierra Golf Charlie, this is Sierra Golf one two Bravo. Go for resupply, over."

Shortly, a 4-wheeled Quadrunner ATV painted woodland camouflage colors and towing two piled-high 4-wheeled trailers roared out of the gate, a helmeted support tech wearing a Sage Green flightsuit onboard. Without stopping, the small land train pulled down the stone stairs and looped around to face the trail. He was followed by a second very much the same. As soon as the second one cleared the gate, it closed. The second Quad pulled alongside the first.

The two support techs killed the engines and dismounted.

The shorter one approached the Captain and pulled her helmet off before quickly offering a sharp salute.

Kellogg smiled and returned it.

Pointing at the Quads with a flight gloved hand; she said, "*Those* are fun!" with a smile.

"They sure are." Kellogg agreed. "We get everything we asked for Sergeant?"

"Yes, Sir... Even the non-standard special request items." She said as she led them over to the trailers and pointed to four metal rifle cases strapped on top of one of the carts. "You really got pigs the size of elephants out here?"

The two SG-12 men grinned.

"*Small* elephants." Cody explained.

The female Sergeant shook her head with an impish grin.

"Anyway, Sir, it was Hell to pay to get those things on short notice."

"Tell Chief Brekkins I owe him, one." Kellogg said with a smile.

"Oh, Yes, Sir... and knowing him, he'll call you on it."

They exchanged salutes again and the two technicians headed for the DHD, Kellogg watched the spunky little Sergeant in her tight flightsuit go.

"You're married, Killer."

"That never stopped *her* or her backdoors..."

There was a pounding on the door.

Kellogg's mind woke, but he left his body slack, gathering his senses. The pounding had the fleshy sound of flesh on wood and was where he remembered it to be relative to his bedroll. The air was cool and dry on his face. The smell in the air was that of ash.

He sat up.

Cody looked over at him from his own sleeping bag with a haggard look.

Kellogg pulled his carbine out of his sleeping bag, pulled the charging handle back and released it to charge a round. He snapped the dust cover shut and stood up, heading for the door.

"Who's there?"

"Han of the Hunters."

Kellogg looked back to find Cody covering him with his Berretta.

Kellogg opened the door.

Han and two of his men stood outside in the misty morning air.

"Come hunting with us." Han said with a smile. "The boars are waiting."

"Let us dress."

Han nodded.

Carbines slung, Kellogg and Cody carried the customized rifles cobbled together by the SGC's master armorer. Chief Master Sergeant Brekkins had started with four stainless steel Marlin M1895's, lever action

carbines in .45-70 Government. He chose .45-70 because it was powerful enough to knock down bison and bear, yet not too powerful to put into a 7-pound rifle. To these, he'd added a long eye-relief rail where the rear sight had been to add an M68 Aimpoint red-dot optic, a side saddle mount to carry 6 extra rounds, and the mounting detents on the barrel for the Knight's Arms suppressor from the Mk 23 Offensive Handgun. The suppressor would not last many rounds, it was not designed to handle that much pressure, but it would be enough to keep the report from scaring the natives.

They followed Han, keeping a few meters back, as he led them off the trail and into the bush. The going was easy until they came across a small clearing that looked recently plowed.

Han motioned them toward two large trees.

The two teammates knelt down beside the trees and scanned the trees around them for motion.

Han moved a little further into the clearing and froze.

Off to the left, they heard a loud snuffling sound.

Han growled: a loud, low throat noise that resonated through the little man's body. He stomped, making as much noise as possible.

Slow thudding hoof beats drew nigh until the beast appeared out of the far tree line.

It was as big as the first one they had killed. Its snout dropped clods of loam as it moved.

"It looks like we interrupted its feeding." Han announced with a grin. After a long moment, he explained. "They are always eating or sleeping."

Han faced the animal and repeated the growl.

The pig charged the man at the tree line.

Han stayed put as it drew near.

The pig put its head down, long brown tusks up and ready as it moved to a thundering rhythm of hooves resonating on earth.

It closed...

...and suddenly twisted its head to the right and tumbled, rolling, until solidly stopping against a tree just left of the bait.

The two earthmen looked askance of their guide and Han nodded. They left cover and moved towards the pig.

The animal gave a great sigh and seemed to shrink as the wind left its body. Two of the legs broke in the tumble, but there was no sign of the cause of death until Han heaved the animal's head up and showed his guests the right side of the face.

Four small wounds just below the tufted ear seeped brown-gray blood.

"Damn! Those are some nifty air-guns." Cody mumbled. "Never even heard'em go off."

Kellogg just nodded.

"Guess we don't need the rifles." Cody continued.

Jack looked up from where he sat stretched out on top of his cot as SG-12 arrived. The red-haired major strutted in first and headed for the bunkroom. Doctor Kim and the others cleared the doorway and moved out of the walkway but still stood. Jack looked around at the others, his team sat on equipment cases that they dragged into the room as makeshift seating. After a moment, he made an impatient glance toward the door to the bunkroom.

Major Chekurda reappeared, her tactical vest and weapon left in the bunkroom.

"Have a seat." Jack ordered.

The Major took hers atop a large cooler chest, the rest of her team just sat down on the floor with their backs to the wall.

"We'll chop the formalities, I'm pretty sure we all know what SG-12's report will say. These people don't have much of a defensive capability themselves and unless we provide one..." Jack started. "We, luckily, haven't had to fight much with most of the villager's belief in the Goa'uld as gods..."

Doctor Kim raised his hand.

"Doctor?"

"I get the impression that there's a *second* religion at work here..."

Kellogg cleared his throat. "Many of them are *pagans*, Sir."

Both team commanders looked at the Captain, annoyed.

"Most of the hunters and the independent farming families and others seem to be in it. Talismans many of them wear, the rituals they perform during the hunt and some of the customs we've seen are very similar to neo-paganism back home." He continued to explain.

"*Devil-worshippers?*" Chekurda asked cynically.

"Major," Doctor Kim interrupted, "Paganism isn't..."

"People!" Jack yelled. "It *doesn't* matter! As long as they aren't worshipping Goa'uld, it helps us out. Right?"

"Actually, Jack, it does more than that." Daniel said. "It means we don't need to worry so much about those people turning on us at the last minute." Some of the others looked at him oddly. "The priests have been doing what Domer's been telling them to do, so far, but they continue to worship. If we take advantage of these *pagans*, we can keep the priesthood out of the fight, right? You guys are the tacticians here, what do you think?"

Jack thought a moment. "Captain, can you tell who the pagans are?"

Kellogg shrugged. "Not 100%, Sir. But almost all of the Huntsmen, most of the Craft guild, it seems, some of the others. *Maybe*, some of the Miners."

"I don't think the Mining Guild care one way or the other about the religious aspects of the fight, Sir." Sam said. "Honestly, they seem too tied into production schedules and the engineering aspects to go on religion. If anything, they don't want anyone telling them what to do."

"Good." Jack said. "We've got our fighters then. Can we make them into a credible force in the next few days though? Re-equip them from home and stand them up against Jaffa..."

"I'm not sure about giving the Huntsmen guns, Sir." Cody said.

Chekurda gave him a mad look and opened her mouth to speak. Jack held up his hand to her with a warning glare.

"Why do you think that Sergeant?" Jack asked.

"Noise, Sir. Some of them pissed their pants the first time we demonstrated our weapons. Some of them still 'bout do it. Most of 'em is still gun-shy."

"Sir?" Kellogg asked.

Jack nodded.

"For the Huntsmen, I think it'll be better to leave them with their pneumatics. From my evaluations, the weapons have about the same range and better penetration than your P90 there. As long as we can keep the Goa'uld forces out of hand-to-hand range, they'll be fine. The Miners, on the other hand, can't wait to get their hands on a rifle."

"And how are you suggesting we keep the Goa'uld forces at arm's length?" Chekurda asked.

"Mines and a mobile defense."

"Explain." Jack ordered the Captain.

"We mine the approaches from either entry point at intervals with anti-personnel mines. Overwatch the mines from range as the Jaffa come on. Pop a few at each stop, and then withdraw to the next minefield. Up close, we could use the miners and other volunteers at the abatis with rifles or machineguns to take out whoever's left. Stingers over the village or the Stargate."

"And we evacuate the village to either the caves near the Stargate or the mines during the battle." Doctor Kim added.

"We'd need some early warning capability for that." Sam pointed out. "We can ask the Tok'ra for an orbital satellite. *We might* get lucky..."

"That might work for a short battle." Jack said thoughtfully. "You can train the miners in just a few days?"

"As long as you give me Cody and maybe Teal'c to help out with training the Huntsmen, that's a 'Can Do', Sir." Kellogg said.

Jack looked at Teal'c.

Teal'c nodded.

"Now, hopefully General Hammond can get us some rifles on short order and another SG Team to run the Stingers over the Stargate..." Jack said, mainly for his own benefit.

Kellogg cleared his throat.

"What?" Jack asked him.

"If General Hammond can get the Big Red Phone Okay, Fort Carson's got a couple hundred M249A1 SAW's and a butt-load of rounds on pallets ready to ship south for a Foreign Internal Defense transfer in a couple of days. The right phone call from the right person could get us some of those and the ammo to run them."

"And you know this, how?"

"Connections, Sir." Kellogg said with a red face. "And I saw it in the *EarlyBird*¹¹."

"You want M249's?"

"They'll do the job, Sir."

"Good, you'll get 'em." Jack promised. "Which leaves us with a Goa'uld mothership..."

"We've done this before Jack." Daniel pointed out.

Jack looked at his friend and chuckled. "We need to get the ship out of the atmosphere, first... If it stays in orbit, we can use the rings. If it lands, we're screwed."

Sam said with a smile, "This time, you have someone that can put it back into orbit."

Everyone looked at her and Teal'c.

"Okay, so we wait 'til it gets here, stop them on the ground and send a nuke up with rings, if they still work."

"I'll test them, Sir." Sam volunteered.

"Which leaves us needing a strike team to clear the ship's Bridge." Jack said.

The room was silent for a long moment.

"How much overpressure can the Bridge controls of an attack vessel take?" Kellogg asked.

"Overpressure?" Teal'c asked.

"They're mostly solid-state and pretty sturdy." Sam answered. "Why?"

"Looking through the Stores the other day, the flour they have stored and the lightweight metal they use can be used to make an overpressure bomb. *Should* kill anyone in the room you set it off in, assuming the doors are closed, without too much secondary damage. At the very least, enough blast and pressure to stun and disorient anyone nearby."

"Have you tried one before, Captain?" Jack asked.

"Not with local components, Sir. But I could run up a test shot '*mucho quicko*' if you like and we can get the Priests to cooperate and kick us the components. Perhaps in the pyramid..."

Jack looked at Sam.

Sam bit her lip and nodded.

"Well, Captain, it looks like you'll be pretty busy tomorrow."

"Yes, Sir." Kellogg said with a grin.

"And, with that, we have a working plan..." Jack said. Standing up and snapping his P90 to its carry rig, he looked at the others. "First thing tomorrow, Daniel and Kim, talk to the Priests and get us the flour. Carter, you get the whatever-you-call-it metal and start conscripting miners. Major Chekurda..." Jack sighed. "Get with me; I'll have something for you. Captain, you and the Sergeant start in with training. Teal'c and I will make ourselves handy to help out and to supervise. Questions, anyone?"

There was another long pause.

¹¹ The EarlyBird is a newsletter put out daily in military circles with Defense-related stories of interest. Originally, it was faxed and contained the articles cut out of the appropriate papers and pasted onto blank paper then Xeroxed and faxed.

"Kellogg, Teal'c... let's go for a walk. We need to tell General Hammond the good news and submit our Christmas lists."

The three men stood in the clearing in front of the opened Stargate.

"Do you think this will work, Colonel?" Hammond's voice asked from his radio after Jack had explained the plan and the list of gear they needed.

"I feel good about this one, General." Jack replied confidently. "If we can catch most of the bad guys aboard ship when the bomb goes off, it should be almost painless."

"Understood. Is there anything else you think you'll need?"

"A couple of Zodiacs would be nice, sir."

"I don't think you have time for fishing, Colonel."

"Not for fishing, Sir. After we mine all the approaches between here and there, it'll make getting around a lot easier."

"OK, Jack. They'll be ready in a couple hours." The General replied. Then, with tense tone, he told Jack to switch to the command channel programmed into Team Commander's radios.

Jack looked at the other two with him and walked toward the edge of the shelf so they would not overhear whatever the General wanted to say confidentially. He pressed his ear mike into place.

"Ready to receive, Sir." Jack said over the new frequency.

"You need to keep an eye on Kellogg."

"Sir?" Jack asked, looking directly at the Captain watching the far side of the clearing.

"The Duty officer signed for a certified letter in his name yesterday... Because of security precautions, they opened and inspected the package. There were divorce proceedings and it contained a videotape that was pretty graphic stuff. I don't think he expected this, but if he did or finds out about it, it may make him a bit unstable."

"Do you want me to tell him, Sir?" Jack asked in a tone that screamed, *I did not want to know this and do not want to do this.*

"It's at your discretion, Jack, but, personally, I would wait until the action's over. If he doesn't know already, there's nothing he can do about it right now anyway."

"Yes, Sir." Jack said with a sigh. "Sierra Golf One Niner, Out."

When the transmissions ended, the wormhole dissipated.

Chekurda switched back to the primary frequency and smiled.

"I'll get that son of a bitch now." She said to herself as she looked across the lake towards the Stargate.

Kellogg stood in a clearing overlooking the trail from the pyramid to the village. Gathered with him were most of the Huntsmen, Cody, and Teal'c. The SGC personnel carried M4's with mil-spec KAC¹² suppressors fitted. On the trail were half-a-dozen cardboard silhouettes in wooden frames.

"Excellent." Kellogg said to himself as he looked over the twenty or so Huntsmen. Louder, he addressed them.

"First of all, you'll notice these long can-like objects mounted on our carbines. These are designed to get rid of the loud bang you heard at the demonstration the other day."

He quickly turned around, in one continuous flowing motion, aimed, and fired a short two or three round burst into the heads of the furthest two silhouettes. The supersonic crack of the bullets through the air and

¹² KAC - Knight's Armament Company - Producer of the Stoner SR-25's and supplier of USSOCOM sound suppressors for the M4 Carbine, Mk 46 SAW variant, and the Mk 23 Offensive Handgun. The M4QD used here is quickly detachable and can handle 210 rounds fired automatically in 3 three minutes without damage.

the mechanical cycling of the carbine was all they heard. He turned back to the Huntsmen and saw surprise on their faces, but no fear.

"Sounds like *your* rifles with this on." He chuckled.

Kellogg shifted the selector on his carbine to SAFE and let it hang on its sling.

"Today, we're going to cover how you will be your village's first line of defense."

Now fear was evident on their faces.

"Very little you will be expected to do will be new for you. To be totally honest, the only differences will be that your prey will have two arms, two legs, and will shoot back. The way you'll get around this will be to hide and shoot at them from a distance and then run back to a new spot and do it again."

"We don't have the sorts of weapons you do." A taller youth said. "Our rifles are lighter and... weaker."

"Actually, your weapons are heavier and quite a bit more powerful than these... *and* these Jaffa will be easier to kill than the boar you usually hunt. You are also pretty accurate with the weapons you already have, and near misses with an Earth carbine aren't nearly as deadly as a hit with one of your pneumatic rifles."

The Huntsmen laughed.

"A simple drill, really," He continued, "and we will be practicing the drill most of the afternoon."

Major Chekurda appeared around a bend in the trail, walking alone. She motioned for the Captain to come to her and he did, saluting as he reported.

"Word from the SGC is that they got a certified package for you and the Duty Officer signed for it."

The Major paused dramatically.

"Well... What is it, Ma'am?" the Captain said, knowing security procedures meant they had opened it.

"It was from your wife, Captain." She said with a gleam in her eye. "Divorce papers and a rather... *graphic* video tape."

In spite of actually *expecting* such a thing, Kellogg's face contorted in a mask of disappointment and frustration.

Major Chekurda turned and walked back towards the village, her face contorted into a vicious grin.

"You *bitch!*" he said, not sure, himself, if he meant the Major or his wife.

Even as his mind fought against the emotional trauma from the news, he knew that there was no reason for the Major to have told him *now*.

The bash was in full swing when the teams arrived. The lamp-lit common was crowded with the young people of the village, dancing in small groups around the array of bonfires to the rhythm of a small band that had large drums, a violin-sounding harp played with a bow, and a variety of tinny flute-like instruments and wooden recorders. Around the fringes and the banquet area, practically homogenous clusters of the village's major subsets gathered... Traders... Priests... Miners... Workers... the Families...

SG-1 in the standard OD uniform and SG-12 in BDU's, the Stargate personnel appeared without all their tactical gear, except Cody and Kellogg carrying Carbines slung renegade¹³ across their backs. Jack led the way to the edge of the common.

"All right kiddo's." Jack directed. "Split up. Mingle. You two with the rifles, don't scare the little kids."

Food was plentiful, served by the people themselves to each other, and the odor, except for the metallic taint, was mouth watering. Young people flirted and danced. Their elders gossiped. The oldest merely enjoyed the atmosphere and shared each others' company.

The village was happy.

Kellogg sat on the bridge, looking up at the pale stone pyramid just visible in the star glow from overhead. Below, everything except the surface of the water was inky black.

He sighed, alone once more and staring meaningfully at the stars.

¹³ "Slung renegade" - across the back, muzzle down on the strong side.

Soft boot steps drew closer on the road.

Looking back, he saw the faint green glow of NVG's on the face of someone.

"I'd ask you the challenge, but..." Cody said when he drew close enough to spit on.

"Yeah, I know Wild Bill, how many other dumb bastards are out here in the dark with a carbine and NOD's¹⁴."

They both laughed, noticing that they did not look at each other. Instead, they looked over each other's shoulder.

"That native woman's looking round for you, and the Major's wondering too."

"So you, logically, figured I'd be here." Kellogg stated, amused.

"Yup."

"That disrespectful attitude'll come back to haunt you someday, Master Sergeant."

"Yup, probably. Then again, Killer, we both know from which side of the tracks you come from."

Kellogg shook his head for his friend's benefit as he snapped his NVG's back to their harness and started walking back toward the village.

"We have the results back on the blood sample you sent." Hammond said.

"The blood you sent back was highly unusual." Doctor Frasier explained. "The red... or maybe we should call them *gray* blood cells were unlike anything we'd seen before and we had to send them to Area 51's labs for them to put them under an electron microscope. In normal human blood, the red blood cells contain a tetramer protein called hemoglobin that holds iron ions for attaching oxygen and carbon dioxide."

"O-kay..." Jack said.

"The cells you sent us don't have hemoglobin. Instead, they have a six protein hexamer containing two particles of naquadah covalently bonded to a pair of fluorine molecules in a way that's giving the biochemists at Area 51 fits."

"Okay, so what does this mean to us?"

"It means, Colonel O'Neill, that whatever you pulled the blood out of has somehow developed an alternate way to carry oxygen in its blood, along with the requisite co-agents to separate the Oxygen from the naquadah fluoride molecule and the genes to create only this variant of hemoglobin." Any creature with this adaptation can't survive without a significant source of this material in its diet."

"Can't we... I don't know... give them a blood transfusion or something?"

"Well... Have you ever put jet fuel in a Volkswagen, sir?"

"No. But I *do* know it would burn out the engine."

"It's a lot like that, Colonel. Hemoglobin and the iron in it are about half again as efficient as this type of blood cell. I would expect there are other adaptations, increased heart muscle size, blood vessel muscularity and diameter increases, something like that. If we tried to flush their systems with normal human blood, one of three things would happen. Death by oxygen poisoning, septic shock when their bodies tried to eliminate the foreign blood cells, or death by oxygen starvation as the normal blood pulls oxygen out of their cells quicker. It's hard to tell which would be lethal first."

"So, you're telling me we can't evacuate these people?"

"No, sir. At least not without a significant and long term source of naquadah fluoride in there food."

"Thank you, Doctor."

"Stand by for General Hammond."

"Anything else you or your team needs, Colonel O'Neill?" General Hammond's voice came through the radio.

"Another SG-team might be nice, sir." Jack replied. "We need someone to keep an eye on the gate for us."

"I can have SG-2 on the ramp and ready in twenty minutes."

¹⁴ NOD's are "Night Observation Devices", a common expression for Night Vision Goggles or other low-light devices like thermal imagers.

"No need to hurry, General. According to the Tok'Ra... We have two whole days left." Jack thought a moment. "Sometime tomorrow would be nice. So would half-a-dozen Stingers."

"I think we can handle that. Good luck, Jack."

"O'Neill, out."

The estimated arrival date of the Goa'uld ship came and went. Thankful for the extra time granted by the misestimated time of arrival, Kellogg and Cody invested it in additional training and wargaming with the natives, the Captain throwing himself totally into the task.

Teal'c and Cody were leading a practice run with the Huntsmen on the approaches from the Stargate to the village. Kellogg had the Miners running SAW's on the little firing range beside the Stores.

The smell of burnt powder, the buzz of the small caliber SAW's, and chiming of brass hitting the hard ground was Kellogg's element.

From where he was, Kellogg could see the two Doctors and the Team commanders sitting with the Priests of the village across the small river.

He thought about cutting the men and women loose a bit early.

"All SGC Personnel..." started Sam's voice from his radio, making him stop his train of thought. "We have a Condition Yellow alert from the Tok'ra early warning sensors. Begin moving to your ready positions now."

At that instant, the alarm began.

"All right, you men, gather up your guns, shoot s'more oil into them, reload, and head to your posts. Stay cool and remember to aim low."

Wavering on the edge of fear, Kellogg's matter-of-fact confidence encouraged the men and they followed his instructions, even as Kellogg moved out towards the village at a trot.

Five minutes later, the two Teams met at the village center, staying out of the way as Doctors Jackson and Kim shepherded the women, children, and livestock out of the village and up the hill to the caves.

Cody and Teal'c, last to arrive, showed a little sign of wear from coming down the hill fast.

"The Stargate is inactive, thus far, O'Neill." Teal'c reported. "SG-2 and a Mobile Attack Turret are in place, as we speak."

"Good." The Colonel said. "We shouldn't need more than them if this goes according to plan. No sign of Deathgliders, so far. Maybe Murphy's on vacation."

"Who is Murphy? Is he on one of the other Teams?" Teal'c asked.

Jack looked at Teal'c a moment. "I'll explain later, Teal'c. But I'm sure you know him *intimately*." Jack, ignoring Teal'c's confused expression, continued. "Let's go campers; these boys'll be here before you know it."

With the Quads camouflaged near the landing platform and the bridge mined, the Teams risked the crossing in the Zodiacs. The crossing went quickly and rather uneventfully ending with the two teams running the inflatable craft as far up the brown sandy shore as possible.

As they pulled them in under the foliage only a mile from the platform, Sam looked up and pointed.

High overhead, an ominous black square was growing quickly larger as the Goa'uld ship de-orbited.

"Let's go. Into the trees." Jack ordered, leading the way.

It took several minutes to make headway through the denser foliage near the water. The team moved quicker, in silence, once they were in under the older growth trees. Except for the wind, it was almost stiflingly quiet until the ship fell low enough for the sound of its decent to penetrate.

The characteristic windstorm from the ships drives being in an atmosphere seemed even more severe for some reason to the ones familiar with it. To the others, it was a reminder of how weak they could be as everyone scrambled to find at least a little shelter between the exposed roots of nearby trees or the single fallen tree nearby.

The electrical feeling to the air was also unsettling to one or two.

Not close enough to see it, the teams could still hear the loud groaning of the ship's weight settling onto the ancient platform... and as the drives stopped and silence fell...

...A horrendous cracking sound that echoed amongst the muffling trees.

The team-members all shared a confused look before restarting their stalk at a slower pace now that the ship had landed.

It took twenty minutes to cover a distance any of them could have run on flat ground in under three minutes. By the time they got close, sweat and dirt covered them despite the cool temperature of the day. Most surprising, when they crept to where they could see the ship, was the base of it.

The visible portions of the ship had seams crisscrossing the materials that made up the ship's exterior, even in different shades of the same materials. It looked cobbled together even though the contours matched the older Ha'tak's they had seen in the System Lords' fleets.

Down the rear slope of the visible part of the platform, was a huge man-wide crack in the stone pyramid.

They slowly moved into their positions near the doorway to wait.

At the Gate, Major Griff of SG-2 looked down the valley through his mini-binoculars.

It was almost surreal to watch a ship like that fall so slowly.

Even with his Airborne training and seeing the drop of almost everything that could be wedged into an aircraft fall out of the sky under a canopy, it just looked so *wrong* for something that size to resist gravity that way.

"Good Luck, Jack." He said quietly as he turned to check the status of his own men.

The combined team waited, concealed in the foliage near the cracked pyramidal landing platform. Looking up at the patchwork of repairs on the base of the Ha'tak, they waited, expecting Death Gliders. Collectively, they breathed a relieved sigh after fifteen minutes when a steady stream of 35 to 40 Unas and Jaffa in a hodge-podge of armor and clothing marched out of the base and down the trail toward the downstream bridge, leaving two Unas with Staff Weapons at the entrance.

Patiently, they waited twenty minutes to allow the Goa'uld forces time to reach and cross the bridge before initiating.

Jack looked over at his shooters and gave them a 5-count sign before rising a bit more for a good view...

Four...

Three...

Two...

One...

The shots ripped out in a ragged half-second burst and split the Unas' heads open like over-ripe melons. For a long moment, two Unas stood there, ragged remnants of skull and brain on their shoulders before they stiffened and fell woodenly.

"Go." Jack ordered and lunged out of the foliage, Teal'c, Major Chekurda, and Sam on his heels in a ragged line. He headed for the door at a measured trot, weapon at the ready. Jack paused at the door a split second to look over the bodies and nearly jumped out of his skin when Teal'c let fly with several Staff blasts into each corpse.

"Let's go."

Jack led the way, clearing the doorway rapidly and moving in behind the row of columns on the left with Sam. Chekurda and Teal'c went to the right and they quickly passed through the antechamber.

Outside, Kellogg and Cody split their attention between the route the Goa'uld force took when they left and the door ahead. A distant explosion and a series of Staff blasts from the direction of the bridge told them their allies were under fire.

Kellogg shared a grin with his friend and said, "How *did* we get stuck with this shitty detail?"

Inside, the other SG members cleared the gate room and checked the tell-tales they had left on the side chambers, finding no one and the threads intact.

Teal'c stood ready watching the ring transport, leaving the two Majors to cracking the seal on the two chambers with the carts in them.

Jack pinched the PTT on his radio.

"SG-12B, this is SG-19. Go Bravo, Out."

Kellogg and Cody moved back to the camouflaged Quads and fired them up. Moving quickly, they engaged the electric winches to help pull them and the loaded trailers up the sharp incline. The buried cables grew taught and freed themselves from their shallow trenches. The two Quads lurched up out of their trenches with much noise.

Elsewhere, Han watched the Jaffa and the monsters the SG members had told him to expect through the lattice sights of his pneumatic rifle and waited for most of them to clear the trees. They moved slow and cautiously. Some had obvious bleeding wounds from the mines the SG men had buried, some limped, and one of the monsters was missing a forearm.

His hunting party watched the Chief Huntsman anxiously from the corners of their eyes.

"Pick the uninjured ones; pick ones on your side." He spoke softly. "Ready..."

Han picked a tall monster in the middle of the group and led him just enough... His rifle popped and hissed and he watched as a wound appeared in the Unas' forehead. Two more, a Jaffa and a monster, fell toward the outside of the group.

The Goa'uld force started blasting the forest around them with Zat's and staff weapons in a near panic.

Han saw fear in his friend's eyes as several blasts came close to their hide.

"One more volley and we will move back." Han said. "They don't see us."

He cycled his rifle and started to aim.

Kellogg rode his Quad down the ramp into the gate room and circled around the ring transporter's pad where Jack was assembling the bursting charge for the flour bomb. Cody circled the other way with his trailers. The two SG-12 members dismounted.

Sweating through their uniforms, the two female majors stood to one side, breathing hard from moving the bagged pyric metal and flour.

"Captain, you have the blasting caps?" Jack asked.

Kellogg reached for the soft-kit bag on his Quad's handlebars to find it missing.

"No, Sir. It looks like the trees tore the bag loose... We can wrap det-cord around the block and use a grenade fuse..."

"Go find them." Chekurda intoned icily.

Kellogg looked at his commander, at Jack, then at his commander with a slightly surprised look.

"Ma'am?"

"Go find the blasting caps, Captain. Stick to the plan." The Major reiterated.

Kellogg started to dismount, a little too slow for the Major.

"You're on charges now, for disobeying a direct order." She continued, heading for the door at a run. "I'll find them myself."

Kellogg looked back at Cody, shrugged, and moved to follow her out of the chamber.

Jack shook his head and reached for the spool of detonating cord.

Major Chekurda sprinted through the antechamber and heard her two men behind her. Intent on finding the tin the caps were in and to finally and completely fry her insubordinate second in command, she ran through the doorway and out into the sunlight with a self-righteous grin on her pretty little face.

The two men behind her saw her silhouette in the doorway, moving fast, and heading for the foliage. She ran in a straight line, focused on where she knew the trenches were.

Two Staff blasts tore into her from the left only meters from the door.

She stumbled and then crumpled forward into the brown loam.

"*Sonofabitch!*" Kellogg yelled aloud, stopping short and throwing himself behind a column.

Cody followed suit and followed up by keying his radio and speaking quickly into his throat mike: "SG-19, SG-12B. The Major's down and hostiles are covering the doorway, over."

After a several second pause, a voice replied "Roger. Kellogg covers the door. You come back and forget the caps, out."

Cody exchanged a meaningful glance with his friend and headed back towards the gate room, leaving Kellogg pulling grenades off his vest and mentally bunkering down.

Jack stood up and moved out beyond the ring transporter's pad trailing a line of det-cord.

"Tape?" he asked Sam and she handed him a roll.

He quickly took the fuze assembly removed from a fragmentation grenade and taped the small pencil-sized fuze to the end of the line of det-cord.

"Ready?" he asked those around him.

They looked back without replying.

"Hit the transporter, Teal'c." Jack said, pulling the pin on the grenade assembly but holding the spoon down.

Teal'c pressed the brilliant blue crystal on the gauntlet he wore. The ceiling opened and the rings began to drop in a column of blue light.

Jack pitched the grenade fuze/det-cord line under the falling rings and yelled "Fire in the hole!"

The rings hit the floor with a resounding "thud" and stacked up higher than a man. Inside the rings, the pile of flour and pyric metal was visible as if in a searchlight beam one second and then replaced by a flash of brilliant blue-white light the next. Then, as quickly as they appeared, the rings rose back into the ceiling and were gone, leaving an empty circle behind.

Silence.

Jack looked at Teal'c.

"Ready to go, big guy?"

"I am ready, O'Neill."

Jack wheeled the handcart with the SADM onto the pad. Both men stood in the ringed area back to back on either side of the nuke, weapons at the ready.

"Let's go."

Teal'c pressed the crystal once more.

The rings appeared once more, only this time when they rose back into the ceiling they left behind an acrid plume of smoke.

"Let's go!" Sam echoed Jack as she and Cody manhandled the heavily laden trailers of Naquadah onto the ring pad.

Kellogg timed his throw just right, catching a pair of ragged-looking Unas in the doorway. The fragmentation grenade was not enough to kill them, but it slowed them down enough for him to finish them off with his carbine before they recovered.

He waited with another frag in hand. He saw a Jaffa sprint across the doorway, too quickly for the frag to be of use. A few seconds later, the doorway erupted in a series of searching staff blasts that blew chunks out of the columns on either side.

From cover, Kellogg pitched the frag towards the doorway and jumped up, heading for the right wall behind the columns. The frag detonated in front of the doorway, slowing the Jaffa coming in.

Raising the collapsing butt of his carbine to his shoulder, he cleared the last column closest to the door just in time to catch a Jaffa coming in.

They saw each other at the same instant, but Kellogg was expecting to see the Jaffa...

The first round glanced off the Jaffa's tarnished metal collar and let the Jaffa get his Zat to chest level. The second shot blew off his jaw and twisted his head to the left, still alive but howling in pain. The third took off the top of his skull and his grey skullcap.

The Jaffa crumpled to the floor.

Two more bodies lay in the doorway. Not knowing if they were dead or alive, Kellogg double-tapped them to the head to be sure before settling down beside the doorway. He reloaded, dropping the partial magazine into the front of his BDU blouse.

Outside, the Major's corpse lay where it fell. No blood touched the ground, her wounds cauterized by the blasts.

Han stood up from his hide amongst the trees near the fields and looked down at his hunt-mate. No longer would he fear noise of the loudest sort after witnessing the miners come to his men's rescue with the Earthmen's weapons.

It was not death that caused the monsters and Jaffa to flee in the end; it was the loud drumming fire from the miner's 'machine guns' that provoked the same fear Han felt when he heard it the first time.

It was not over yet, he knew, as he looked across the river at the triangle ship on its stone base.

While he watched, the ship began to rise off its base.

"The Colonel must have succeeded." He said with admiration to no one in particular.

He looked around at the trees lining the field and waved his hunters out and toward the direction the Goa'uld forces had went.

"We must finish." He told those closest to him.

The landing platform creaked as the attack ship's weight lifted from it. Sam wore a concerned look as she wondered if the stone structure would hold together. She waited nervously for Teal'c and Jack to ring back.

Kellogg dodged falling chunks of stone by ducking back into the doorway. The ship lifting off distracted the few remaining Goa'uld from their efforts as they watched their only refuge lift away. Coughing from the dust, the Captain raised his carbine and carefully shot two more before the Jaffa turned and fled back towards the bridge.

The attack ship rose slowly into the air, gathering speed.

"I hope this works." He said quietly to Cody as the man appeared at his left elbow.

"The N-stuff is ready to go. Just waiting for the Colonel and Teal'c. We should probably pull the Major's body in." The older man suggested.

"I'll get her. Cover me."

The landing platform stayed in one piece and Sam waited, P90 in hand, unsure of what she would see when the rings came down again... if they came down again.

She hoped...

The rings came down again and she took cover behind the Stargate's pedestal and waited.

'Thud'...>FLASH!<...Silence.

She stood to find a wary Teal'c, a fatigued Jack, and the Naquadah-laden trailers gone.

"It's done." Jack said simply and started toward the door.

Sam smiled briefly, gathered up her hat and followed.

They met the two SG-12 members in the anteroom...with their commander's corpse. Kellogg zipped the body bag and looked up to see the Colonel with a flash of disappointment on his face.

"Shall we go outside and look?" Teal'c suggested.

"Been there, done that, have the t-shirt." Jack answered with muted humor.

Teal'c looked at Sam.

Sam shrugged and nodded forward toward the door.

"Be careful!" Kellogg warned. "It's been clear for a while, but..." and then to Cody "Cover 'em, Wild Bill."

Sam and Teal'c moved out into the sunlight, cautiously scanning the trees and river vista before focusing up.

The attack ship was still a visible black square between them and the noonday sun.

Sam shaded her eyes as best as she could with her hand as she looked up.

"That's too low."

Teal'c also sounded concerned when he replied.

"You are right, Major Carter. We will surely not be shielded from the radiation at that height."

"Back inside!" she yelled at Teal'c and the SG-12 NCO covering them. "Go!"

They barely cleared the doorway when the sky lit up in a brilliant flash.

Something beeped in Cody's vest.

Jack and the Captain faced him with accusing looks.

"That was my *rad*-alarm..." the NCO explained. He dug the compact device out and looked at its display. "We're in trouble. The radiation spiked immediately, dropped...but it's rising again."

"Is it lethal outside?" Jack asked.

"No, Sir. But it's going to be soon." Cody explained.

"Go to MOPP-4¹⁵." The Colonel ordered, sending the SG-12 members back into the gate room for the chemical protective overgarments strapped to the Quads.

Jack turned away, pressed the PTT switch on his radio, and talked quietly into the mike as he walked back toward the Gate room.

Sam got a flustered look on her face, ran outside, and looked up.

There, in the sky, instead of a shadow was a burning flare dropping slowly back down onto the planet. She stamped her foot and angrily swore, "This shouldn't be happening."

"Major Carter," Teal'c said walking up next to her. "This may not be important, but the vessel responded slower than I am accustomed to. Colonel O'Neill adjusted the device to allow more time for this."

Sam looked at Teal'c, her eyes moving as if reading a page in front of her.

"The repairs!"

The Quads drowned out any opportunity for her to continue as they drove out the doorway. Jack was at the lead one's controls, the other Quad had Cody riding behind Kellogg. All wore protective mask and green camouflaged overgarments.

"Let's go!" Jack ordered in a voice made tinny by the bubble-faced protective mask he wore and tossed them the sealed packs containing CPOG's¹⁶. "Get on!"

Sam and Teal'c looked at one another for a moment without moving before ripping open the packs and donning them.

"Carter, you get on behind me and Teal'c can ride... can ride on the cargo rack. We DON'T have a lot of time and if either of you are considering having kids with the standard issue of fingers and toes..."

The two team members got on quickly.

Kellogg and Cody led the way to the bridge at high speed.

In the distance, a basso whistle called for the hunters.

¹⁵ MOPP-4: "Mission Oriented Protective Posture" is the standardized levels of protective clothing used against Chemical, Nuclear, or Biological Hazards. MOPP-4 is the wear of an M40 or MCU-2P Protective Mask, Chemical Protective Overgarment, Vinyl Overboots, and black rubber gloves.

¹⁶ CPOG: "Chemical Protective Overgarment" is a closely woven suit lined with activated charcoal that shields from alpha radiation, most biological agents, and acts as a filter against chemical agents. Typically, it is in woodland (green/tan/brown/black) camouflage.

The team passed the village center.

The village had emptied. Only Domer and two priests remained.

As they passed, they saw the dried marks of tears on his cheeks.

The SGC members drove by carefully, avoiding the surreptitiously marked minefields. Nothing else moved, even the livestock was gone. They picked up speed along the trail, also avoiding the obvious piles of manure, en route to the bridge. Travel was fast. The few remaining Goa'uld had seemed to disappear.

At the gate, they found Doctors Kim and Jackson herding the last of the villagers into the open Stargate, not wearing their protective gear. Around the edge of the shelf, airmen in radiation suits with picks and shovels loaded the weathered Naquadah ore into Quad-towed trailers.

Jack got close to Daniel so he could hear him and yelled, "Why aren't you masked?"

"Jack, none of the villagers have masks."

Jack shook his head.

"Get through the 'Gate, we'll handle the rest."

Sam stood to one side of the shelf with her handheld spectrometer. Cody brought over his more advanced model from the Quad.

She scowled at the readings coming in.

The ship had not vaporized... It was burning at the atomic level and being very dirty about it.

Jack herded the last of the villagers through the Stargate before ordering the military personnel through. He looked up. The ship hung low overhead, for some reason, its drives still intact but failing to lift the ship. He looked around and spotted Sam and Cody, still taking readings, and another suited figure watching the woods.

He ran over to Sam, grabbed her shoulder, and yelled through the muffling mask "Let's go! The SGC's got a MALP on the pad that they can't send until we leave."

Reluctantly, she turned to go.

Jack could make out the pained look even with most of her face hidden by her mask. He took up the rear, pausing only as the younger Captain did to look back towards the landing platform once more.

Jack almost ran into the MALP as he exited the Stargate. The Gate room was a mess, livestock and the last of the villagers still not moved out.

He waited patiently for the Gate to close before pulling off his protective mask.

"I hate these things." He said as he flung the pooled sweat out of the mask and onto the floor.

Wadding it up, he shoved it in its case and started rubbing the red ring around his face and the back of his neck where the charcoal in his CPOG stained it.

The Gate Alarm sounded and he moved quickly out of the way, looking for Sam and the Captain from SG-12.

The remaining members of SG-12 clustered together in the hallway just off the Gate room. Even though packed with refugees, there was a polite space left around them.

"Look, I don't think you did anything wrong." Kim said over the din around them. "But, you know it's not either one of our calls." He explained, indicating Cody with a gesture.

Kellogg still looked concerned. Both airmen in the team knew whose call it really was.

"Thanks for your support, guys." He said with a sigh. "If it comes down to it, just tell the truth, cool?" The others nodded. "Now, go get out of your CPOG's and head down to Medical. We got cooked pretty good and I'm sure Major Frasier's got something for us."

As he left, Cody gave Kellogg's arm a squeeze.

"Hang in there, Killer."

Kellogg looked up to see Colonel O'Neill coming toward him, unzipping his CPOG.

"Walk with me, son."

Jack took a deep breath.

He understood. He, out of anyone else in the Command, was the *last* person to criticize another officer for questioning orders...

...But someone died over this one.

"Look, Captain, you're pretty new to the Command, right?"

"Yes, Sir."

"I haven't read your file, but I'm going to give you the benefit of the doubt."

Jack stopped and put one hand on the concrete wall.

"I'm not going to continue the charges the Major wanted. However... Don't think I'm doing you any favors. I can guarantee you won't have a Command of your own any time soon."

"Yes, Sir."

Jack took a close look at the younger officer. He seemed... resolved to it. This was not the first time this Captain had been through something like this, and no one had told him about the divorce papers and video tape waiting upstairs, or so Jack thought.

Jack sighed and rubbed his neck again.

"Go get cleaned up and go to Medical. Make sure the rest of your team is checked through ASAP."

"Already on the way, Sir."

Jack watched the man walk away.

Unlike on the P9X-455, the man seemed out of his element here.

The Briefing room had an air of defeat as the two teams and support personnel crowded around the table.

Missing were the red-haired Major, her corpse left on planet, and Doctors Jackson and Kim, held in Medical for observation.

"What happened?" MG Hammond demanded. "Not to beat around the bush, you had their ground forces wrapped up with a minimum of friendly casualties *and this plan is almost exactly the same as your first Abydos mission!*" MG Hammond's face was red with anger. He kept the unidentified man in a dark suit and "Visitor" badge sitting along the wall in the edge of his vision at all times.

Jack took a deep breath.

"I have an airman *missing* and can't even recover the body, Colonel."

"Sir, maybe I... Can I try to explain, Sir?" an unusually flustered Sam interrupted, wiping her nose.

"By all means, Major."

Still not showered, black stains from sweat and charcoal still covered her neck and arms, staining the papers where she touched them as she shuffled through them. Sam gathered her thoughts before starting.

"The ship seems to have been constructed or *reconstructed* out of a material unlike anything we've encountered or..."

"And what does that have to do with my dead airman and the *several hundred* refugees in my command?" MG Hammond interrupted.

"Well, sir, the density of the materials in the drive sections slowed the nuclear reaction tearing them apart long enough for the ship to come back down somewhat intact... long enough for the ship to drop back into the valley. Until we lost MALP telemetry, spectral analysis showed a continuous nuclear reaction of a rate that implies the Goa'uld may have used a 'dwarf star' alloy or some other hyper-dense material..."

"That was a Mark V SADM with Naquadah enhancement, Major."

"Sir, the density..." Sam paused, trying to come up with an explanation that others would understand.

"Ma'am, Sir, can I try?" Cody asked politely.

Sam shrugged, lost, and coughed.

"General, it's like the pages in a book."

MG Hammond, accustomed to Senior NCO's with eccentric views, visibly chafed, wanting to chew the man out, but held back.

"If you take them out, one at a time, they burn real easy like."

Sam smiled; the old man understood and made the others understand also.

"But, if they're all pressed together, it'll burn for quite a while. Like a block of wood."

MG Hammond seemed to lose much of his fire in the distraction.

"This isn't something you could've determined up front?"

"No, sir." Sam sighed. "There were some hints, but until we set off a nuclear device..."

"Hints?" Jack asked, concerned there was something he had missed.

"Well, sir... *sirs*, there was the delay in them arriving. Increased density and the standard drives could be what slowed them. There were the repairs visible to the base of the ship..."

"And the cracked landing platform." Cody added.

"And the cracked landing platform." Sam repeated, lost in thought.

"OK, I still can't see how even you could've predicted this." MG Hammond said, in a calm voice. "I still have several hundred refugees and livestock in my base."

"And they can't go back, Sir." Sam concluded. "Before the last MALP *melted*, Sir, we got footage of the Goa'uld ship sinking into the river... and an explosive rise in geo-thermal temperature."

"Okay?" Jack asked.

"The ground... or rather, the pyrrhic metal that saturated the area's substrata most likely caught fire... and brought the Naquadah component to a liquid state. Even if the Stargate is still there, it's quite likely below the surface in molten Naquadah... *if* it didn't go critical. In addition, without some other form of observation, we don't even know if it's a local effect or not. We also don't know if the animals and crops these people derive their Naquadah intake from are only local or not."

"So, there's no chance of recovering Major Chekurda's remains?"

"No, Sir."

"Well, for now, the refugees will be moved to Area 51 for further observation and study." MG Hammond looked meaningfully at the visitor in the suit. "That's all for now. Major Carter, you need to clean up and get cleared by Doctor Frasier. You don't sound well."

"But, Sir, my analysis..."

"That's an order, Major."

"Yes, Sir."





