



TITLE: A Cold Day (Working Title)

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RATING: PG-13 (Violence, Language, Mild Sexual Innuendo)

CONTENT WARNING: Violence, Language

SUMMARY: Another ad hoc SG Team discovers a Goa'uld Ha'tak embedded in an ice floe on another planet. Why was it left and is there anything left to be afraid of?

NOTES: This story uses non-SG-1 characters and Second Lieutenant Jennifer Hailey as primary characters. And yes, fan fiction with footnotes.

ATTACHMENTS:

A Cold Day

The team trudged up the snowy slope toward the vee in the ridgeline leaving a single trail with their snowshoes and ski poles and pulling an ahkio¹ with them. Cloaked in overwhites² over their cold weather gear and large rucksacks, only the goggles they wore under their parka's large hoods, their tactical vests, and the weapons slung across their chests contrasted with the overwhelming white around them and the snow blowing in the wind.

Drawing up into the vee, the leader paused as soon as he could see down the far slope. His breath had encrusted his black polypropylene lined balaclava³ with ice condensed from the moist air he exhaled. He stabbed his poles into the snow and pulled his dark tinted goggles free to reveal his glasses and the grey eyes of a middle-aged white man.

"Whaddya' see, Killer?" the last man in the team asked over the radio.

¹ Ahkio - A small sled drawn by 3 or more people used for transporting tents and survival gear in Arctic environments.

² Overwhites - simple white, non-insulative parka and pants to make it easier to blend with the snow.

³ Balaclava - "Ski mask", in this case black and polypropylene lined.

"A Ha'tak... At least the tip of one... encrusted in an ice floe."

"Holy shit!"

"That's what I thought, Wild Bill."

It looked for all the world like a miniature golden pyramid projecting up from the ice roughly 10 meters, only 2000 meters from the end of a wide ice floe that filled the valley below and the large body of blue-green water it dropped icebergs into.

The climb down onto the floe took over an hour and another 20 minutes to cross the ice to get to the tip of the Goa'uld mothership. The ice and its slope downward toward the cliff at the end of the floe forced the team to rig a rope guideline across the ice floe and work carefully across tied to it with carabineers⁴.

Master Sergeant William Cody reached the tip of the vessel and, after turning the last ice screw into the upslope side of the peak; he made his way around to the far side and looked up.

The bridge's opening, exposed above the ice, had its blast shield closed.

"Any luck, Wild Bill?" Captain Karl "Killer" Kellogg asked over the radio.

"No dice. Blast shield's closed." The NCO answered. He cleared some of the snow off the ice with his big white Mickey Mouse boot and could see the dark shape in the ice where the ship extended deep into the ice. "Unless you got a ring set in your hip pocket... It's either dig and try to find a hull breach or burn through the hull somehow."

"C'mon back. We'll throw up the tent for a bivouac and phone home in an hour or two. See what toys the General might let us have."

The tent went up quickly after they cleared some flat ground on a nearby rocky shelf and found the frozen ice, gravel, and silty mix that passed for dirt in this area. The civilian with them climbed into the tent even as the others continued to seal the tent's base with snow and set up the boxy Yukon Stove and its fuel can. As Cody lit the stove, the other two military personnel moved the ahkio and their rucksacks inside on the canvas groundsheet that they used as a floor.

The civilian, Doctor Roger Hochstetler, PhD, sat on his rucksack still bundled up and shivered.

Unsnapping his carbine from his sling, the team leader sat the weapon against his rucksack and pulled off his mittens, goggles, and balaclava. A short-haired man with glasses, he ran his hand across the red-brown hair that covered his scalp.

"Stove's on, Doctor. You'll feel warmer if you lose a couple of layers and move around some." He said and unzipped his own overwhite top and parka.

The smallest member of the team removed her own balaclava and hood to reveal a pale young woman with severely drawn back blond hair. She shook the ice free of the front of her balaclava towards the entryway.

"I'm an Egyptologist, Captain. I *love* the desert. I *love* the flood plains of the Nile. I do *not* like the cold." Hochstetler said as his teeth chattered.

"We'll put in a request to the Goa'uld to keep their abandoned ships on warm planets for ya' then, Doc." The white-haired NCO said as he put a water-filled pan on top of the stove. "Mebbe' you'll get lucky next time."

"You can go back to the gate with me, if you like." Kellogg offered. "Should warm you up."

"No thank you."

"I'll go." The young female officer said in a deadpan tone.

"OK, Hailey."

"I have some ideas for getting into the ice, sir."

"Cool." The Captain answered as he wiped the condensation and bits of melted ice off his carbine. "As long as it doesn't involve a hair dryer and a really long extension cord..."

"Actually, in a way, it does, Sir. Just no extension cords."

"This should be interesting."

A quick warm up and the two officers strapped their magnesium snowshoes to their Mickey Mouse boots and headed back towards the vee and then the Stargate.

⁴ Carabineer - "snap-link" or a small oval with a spring loaded gate used for attaching ropes to one another.

As soon as they left, Hochstetler turned to Cody making coffee in his canteen cup and growled, "How can you and that Captain treat this damned cold like a walk in the park?"

Sipping carefully, the older NCO considered it a moment and petted his bushy, white regulation-challenging mustache.

"Well, Doctor... It ain't that bad, really. After you've lived with it for a while, you get used to it."

"Where's he from? Alaska?"

"Nah, he's a native desert rat like me. But his first enlistment as a soldier was Alaska. Earned a Soldier's Medal for facing down the cold, among other things."

"Soldier's Medal? Like I'm supposed to know what that means."

"You get 'em for savin' someone, mostly. *His case*, it was another soldier and most of the aircrew from a C-130 that went down over the coast in the Gulf of Alaska. When they found 'em a week later, he had all but the copilot, who'd bought it on impact, rounded up in a shelter on one of the little islands in the archipelago. They were warm, sheltered, and eatin' bear meat." The man laughed. "Not only that, but he'd performed himself a brain surgery and another half-a-dozen medical procedures in his spare time."

"Harrumph!" the Egyptologist grunted. "Pretty good for a dumb soldier boy, I guess. If it isn't BS."

Cody's blue eyes sparkled as he looked the other man in the eye.

"Dumb, he ain't."

The reactor sat on a square metal frame about two meters to a side with cross pieces and a ceramic base that held the actual reactor housing above the framework. Attached to the four corners by a short length of chain were the ends of four high-pressure vacuum hoses, the power cables, and the control cables all tied into four reels setting angled towards the leveled patch the team had cleared several meters up-floe from the Ha'tak's peak. Each hose both provided the suction to clear the water melted before it could re-freeze and also controlled the depth of the frame. To keep them even, each hose was marked with a rotating set of matching colored marks.

It melted through the ice slowly, exhausting a plume of steam that made them unzip the underarm vents in their Gore-Tex Parkas. Down the slope, the topside ends of the vacuum hoses spouted rooster-tails of water that seemed to turn to fog in the air and never hit the snow.

The shaft formed steadily as Hailey monitored the reactor and Cody operated the four motors that controlled the hose reels and announced the depths from the markings on the hoses.

At about 30 meters of depth, he stopped, let the pumps finish drawing out the water they could and reversed the reels to draw the compact reactor back up the shaft they had made.

They took a lunch of re-hydrated Arctic Rations as they waited for the water left in the bottom of the shaft to refreeze.

The team leader double-checked the way his ropes fed through the carabineer snapped to his Swiss seat and leaned back over the shaft. Only the crampons⁵ attached to his white Mickey Mouse boots⁶ gave any traction at all on the smoothly melted ice wall. Keeping the line taut with his right hand behind his back, he slowly started walking backwards down the wall leaving a series of white superficial pockmarks in the glassy surface.

Looking into the ice wall, it started a deep blue-black deep in the ice, but as he got closer to the basin-like bottom of the shaft, his headlamp penetrated far enough to see the golden mass of the Ha'tak's hull trapped deep in the ancient ice. At the bottom, he tested his footing, jumping up and down a bit, before disconnecting himself from the rappel line.

Free of the ice, the external access hatch they were looking for was a circular piece of metal recessed a hand's width into the rough outer hull. To the side was a simple raised blue crystal set into a recessed plate. The power to the external hatch had long since failed, yet that was not the only reason it would not open.

⁵ Crampon - Cleated frames attached to boots for getting traction on ice.

⁶ "Mickey Mouse boots" - Officially "Vapor Barrier" or "VB" boots. These are large white or black rubber coated and felt lined boots used for extreme cold. They resemble the cartoon characters over-sized feet.

Someone had taken a plasma torch to it and welded it shut from the outside, reinforcing the welded hatch with a pair of crossed metallic plates across the opening.

Kellogg pressed the PTT⁷ switch on his radio and said, "You're not gonna' believe this, but this baby's been welded shut... *from the outside.*" He stood up and looked up at his team looking down the hole at him. "Someone did *not* want this baby opened again."

"What would we need to get in?" Dr. Hochstetler asked over the radio.

"At least a plasma cutter to break the welds and open up the plate over the switch. Then a power source for the door controls and system, assuming the rest is intact. Otherwise, several rather large shaped charges⁸ and probably another shaft when this one collapses from the blast."

"The question is," Hailey started, "How did they weld it from the outside and what were they trying to keep in?"

"With a plasma torch." Hochstetler answered condescendingly.

"I'm sorry, Dr. Hochstetler, let me explain." Hailey said with a hint of sarcasm, "We just melted our way through 25 or 30 meters of ice to get to the hatch. Now, if they'd welded it before the ice entrapped the ship, they would have had to climb an even greater distance to do the welding. Either way, that's a lot of effort when you could do the same from the inside, assuming it was the original owners who did it. If it was someone else, why not the bridge blast shutter also?"

"You think too much, Lieutenant." Dr. Hochstetler told her and walked back towards the tent.

"Regardless, Doctor, it's a lot of effort to secure this hatch." The Captain put his hands on his hips and looked at the hatch. "Something just doesn't feel right about this."

"Demo⁹ the bridge shutter?" Cody suggested.

"Demo the bridge shutter." The Captain agreed. "Looks like another trip to the 'Gate for a demo kit."

"Fire in the hole!" Kellogg yelled as Hailey twisted the initiator on the 10-cap blasting machine.

She grinned as the concussion from the rather sizeable charge she just fired hit them through the ice an instant before the boom. The echo off the far ridge started a minor avalanche. This second blast of the day left a nice man-sized hole in the metallic shield covering the bridge's triangular view port. The first, a set of linear shaped charge¹⁰, had been adhered to the blast shield and cut a set of rectangular channels to prepare for this charge.

"Careful! Use the guideline. The charge may've cracked the ice or opened a crevasse!" the Captain yelled as Cody headed out towards the ship.

He took the blasting machine from his junior officer, pulled the firing wires loose, and put it back into the large steel packing case that held the engineer demolition kit they had traded the reactor for. He put the cover back on it and latched it down.

Lieutenant Hailey looked up at her team leader and smiled.

"That was fun... *Satisfying.*"

"Instant gratification, if you do it right. The hard part is doing it right." He said, grinning childishly. "We'll just leave this here near the safety guideline. I doubt anyone around here'll walk off with it."

The team quickly crossed the ice. Looking up at the bridge, they could see the rectangular hole they had cut with the explosives, still giving off steam and smoke.

"Cover the hole, Hailey." The Captain said as he and Cody erected the aluminum folding ladder they had used to set the charges. Hailey raised her P90 and centered it on the opening.

As soon as it was up and steady, Kellogg mounted it, but Cody put his arm in his way.

"Uh-Uh, my turn. You got the hole in the ice."

⁷ PTT - "Push-To-Talk". A button on the radio that allows you to talk when it is pressed.

⁸ Shaped Charge - An explosive charge designed to focus most of its blast on a small area. Used primarily for cutting or penetrating.

⁹ Demo - Demolitions or their use. In this case, using explosives on.

¹⁰ Linear Shaped Charge - Rollable strips of explosive that can be adhered to a surface for use as a cutting charge.

Hailey watched the interaction curiously out of the corner of her eye, knowing how insubordinate it made the NCO look.

The Captain stepped back and said, "After you." with a flourish of his arm and a bow.

The Doctor looked on, unimpressed.

Keeping his carbine up and ready, the NCO climbed the ladder using only his left hand to keep steady. When he drew even with the opening, he flipped on the Streamlight attached to the carbine's¹¹ rail adapter and used it to look inside. He panned it around, smelling the cold metallic air emanating from the interior as the burnt smell from the explosives faded in the icy wind. Inside, the bridge appeared dead, lightless, but intact. Rime covered most of the flat surfaces, organic shapes looking to him like caricatures of Cholla cacti in white, grown and not formed. At the expected place, a golden throne with faux palms arched over it sat on a dais. It was deathly quiet except for the wind coming through the opening.

After a moment, he turned and called down, "All clear. I'm going in."

Careful of the sharp edges of the hole, Cody stepped one leg in, then the other, kind of hopping from the ladder to the floor between the bridge console and the view port.

Kellogg quickly climbed up after him and followed him inside.

Inside, the older man moved around the bridge console as he scanned with his light in an up-down-left pattern. Suddenly, he raised his carbine as if to shoot.

Kellogg raised his own weapon.

"What ya' got?"

"Looks like a corpse... Froze stiff... A Jaffa... and he's got a blade in his gut."

"Cover." The Captain directed as he moved around to the other side of the console.

A Jaffa, his forehead bare of any mark and wearing only an armored kilt, neckpiece, and a white cloth tunic, lay against the console. Buried to its hilt in his abdomen where his pouch lay, was a blade of some sort leaving the tunic below it stained black with frozen blood. Around the corpse's legs was a large frost covered pool of frozen blood. Across its lap, stained with blood, was a yellow-tinged Goa'uld control crystal of some sort. Beside the corpse, the console lay open and the original position of the crystal was obvious.

Kellogg leaned down and pressed against the corpse's chest with the leather palm of his trigger finger mitten¹².

It was solid.

"What do you see, sir?" Hailey asked over the radio.

"A Jaffacicle and a removed control crystal. Wait one." The Captain replied.

Together, the two men moved to the doors and checked them, trying all of the raised symbols beside the door until they found the right one, and it did nothing but turn.

"All clear, come on up." The Captain said over the radio.

Hochstetler and the Lieutenant came up quickly. As she entered, Hailey turned on the weapon light on her P90 and shouldered it. Coming around the console, in spite of knowing it was there somewhere; the young Lieutenant still paused when her light lit up the corpse.

"You wouldn't happen to know what that crystal does, would you Lieutenant?"

It took her a second to pull her eyes away from the Jaffa, frozen almost as if he had nodded off, and turn her high-powered light to the open console panel.

"Ummm... I would have to check against the schematics we brought with us, but from its location, it seems to be part of the secondary power control system."

"Any idea why it was removed?" the Captain asked.

¹¹ M4A1 Carbine - Compact version of the M16. These are similar to the GAU-5A/A's used by the SF's in the gate room except with a removable carrying handle and a longer barrel (14.5") Typically fitted with a rail adaptor system to allow accessories like lights, lasers, optics, and forward hand grips to be securely attached.

¹² Trigger Finger Mitten - Cold weather handgear with a soft leather palm and separate sections for the trigger finger, thumb, and the rest of the fingers (en masse). Worn with a polyester-wool OD insert of the same form, it allows the use of a weapon while being a generally warmer design.

"Without seeing exactly which crystal it is, I would guess... Well, sir... The Goa'uld systems are designed to be very self-maintaining and very resistant to tampering. Shutting down the primary power systems, for example, doesn't affect the secondary systems that maintain back-up life support power and keep the reactors start-able. That crystal may be a control crystal from the secondary system..."

"Ergo...?"

"Someone... that Jaffa..." she continued, pointing at the corpse, "Wanted to shut everything down completely. Cold..."

The Captain looked down at the corpse, illuminated in the Lieutenant's weapon light.

"You're not kidding. See how the blood flowed. He died while it was still warm. There's no decay or disfigurement in the corpse, very little lividity in the lower extremities... He froze very soon after he died."

"Lividity?" Hochstetler asked.

"Sorry... Lividity is the purplish color in whatever part of the body is lowest where the blood settles after someone dies."

"Oh." Hochstetler said, "I had to ask."

Quickly, he lost interest in the console and turned to the throne, producing a military issued angle-headed flashlight from under his overwhites.

"This isn't usual." He said as he looked over the throne.

"What?" Cody asked for everyone else.

"There is no name or symbol on the throne or around it. What symbol does the Jaffa have?"

"Ummm... None." Hailey said.

"Odd, don't you think?"

"Ra?" Kellogg suggested.

"Potentially. He didn't seem to care to mark his." Hochstetler said. "I'd love to see their logs, if I could."

"OK..." the Captain said. "Hailey, do you think putting that crystal back in will get us some heat and power to access the logs, assuming they are still accessible?"

Hailey looked off into space for a moment.

"Assuming that the crystal's what I think it is..."

"Is it a good bet, Lieutenant?" Kellogg interrupted.

"50-50, sir?"

"Not likely to... say... start an auto-destruct?"

"Not likely, sir. Otherwise, the Jaffa on the floor wouldn't have had to use a knife."

"Good point, Lieutenant, I knew there was some reason I liked you."

"Ya' know Killer..." Cody said.

"Please, it's bad enough the guns and the corpse!" the Doctor interrupted as he reached out to touch the throne with an unmittened hand, "Do you need the macho nicknames too?"

"Don't touch that with your bare hand! The ambient temperature in here is about minus 40 degrees. Contact frostbite, very nasty." The Captain ordered and then turned to the NCO. "You were saying, Wild Bill?"

"I was gonna' say that the Jaffa seemed to make quite an effort to keep something in here *in* here and to turn the power *off*..."

"Good point. Lieutenant?"

"Sir?"

"You wouldn't happen to have the method to selectively select what to power up or not in that busy little brain of yours, would you?"

"Ummm... No, sir. The system should be automated and without the primary control systems online to selectively shut down systems or physically removing the control crystals for the individual..."

"No?"

"No, sir."

"Thanks... I don't really mean to cut you off so much and it is, honestly, fascinating stuff to me... but it's damn cold and I trust you to get the right general idea why I'm asking the questions. You understand, right? Lieutenant?"

"Oh, yes sir."

"Cool." He looked around the bridge. "We have a severely frozen ship that was intentionally made that way. We have something in here, or there was something in here that the Jaffa really wanted to keep in here... but not enough to self destruct this tug..."

"They may not have been able to." Hochstetler pointed out.

"True, but historically, that hasn't seemed the case. Besides, whoever came up with pulling the crystal had more knowledge than the typical Jaffa. Hailey, how hard to overload a Naquadah reactor?"

"Not hard, sir. If you know what you're doing."

"So... Whatever it is or was or they are or were, it or they are small enough to need to seal the access hatch but not bad enough to destroy the ship. If it's human, Jaffa, or Goa'uld, the cold should have killed it. If it's not, whatever it is, it wasn't able to break through into the bridge or out the access hatch. The Jaffa, who probably knew what it was, seemed to be confident that the cold would stop it." The Captain pointed at the corpse with his weapon light. "Otherwise, our friend wouldn't have been left behind."

"Maybe he was the last survivor?" Hochstetler said, joining the others in a small group in front of the bridge console.

"Then he was a busy bastard and still more afraid of something outside."

"Why do you think that?" Hochstetler asked confrontationally.

"The Stargate is just over the hill. This ship is within walking distance of it and has been for at least several hundred years, assuming a similar rate of movement for glaciers here as on Earth. If he was *alone*, it's not that hard to get to the 'Gate and go... wherever. Either something was out there keeping him in, like some more Jaffa or a Goa'uld or something or that bastard felt this was his duty for some reason."

Hochstetler sneered and went back to look at the rear walls of the bridge.

"Regardless. Let's see if we can get the heat going and the logs up. Find out if they left us a little explanation we can access."

"Here we go..." Hailey said as she carefully lined up the crystal with its socket with contact-gloved hands. After she got it started, she pulled back her hands and shook them as if they burned as Cody leaned over the petite officer and applied the necessary pressure with his mittened hands.

The crystal, still with flecks of dried blood on its smooth surfaces, started to glow as did the others around it.

They waited patiently for a few moments and the displays in the top of the console glimmered with a dim light. A few seconds later, the overhead lights blinked once and rose from dim light to an indoor level. Everyone snapped off their weapons' lights.

Hailey stood and closed the panel before turning her attention to the still dim displays and the open military ruggedized laptop computer setting on the raised border of the console. The Captain opened his mouth to speak and she dismissed him with a raised hand.

He shrugged towards the others.

"Hmmm..." she said, noticing the displays were slowly getting brighter and displaying what looked like an iconic representation of the power system. Several icons linked to the rest by glowing lines in a pattern suggesting they were reactors or power storage of some sort were showing a variety of colors. Touching one brought up a bar-display in a smaller display inset into the top of the larger panel and the one beside it. By selecting several of different colors, she was able to interpolate the meanings of the colors and add sense to the original schematic.

The others watched her closely as she tried different combinations and learned.

"So?" the Captain asked.

"It looks like... Sir... This control console functions a bit differently than the ship the schematics the Tok'ra and the SGC have seen..."

"And?"

"It looks like a slightly more advanced model... At least the control software. Anyway... It looks like there is very little energy in the... batteries, or whatever static power supply technology the Goa'uld use instead of them and the system is failing its startup sequence."

"We have lights." The Doctor pointed out.

"Yes..." she continued. "Hold on..."

She worked the console, faster now. She had figured out how to control what the displays showed her and use the controls in the system, at least for this display set. The ship seemed to start vibrating at an almost imperceptible level, merely enough to say, "I'm alive."

"Feel that?" Cody asked.

"I used all of the remaining 'batteries' to start the secondary reactor for the Pel'tak¹³ and the first few levels of the superstructure. If I'm reading this right, we've got power for life support..." Everyone looked up as the air in the bridge seemed to gain a slight charge and the bits of metal from the blast shield where they had blown the hole were annihilated by the bridge force field as it came on. "And force fields."

"Heat?"

"Coming up slowly, sir."

"Can you get at the logs?" Hochstetler asked impatiently.

"Not yet. Sir?"

"Yes?" Kellogg answered.

"There isn't enough power for anything but minimal systems operation. The reactor we've got running is a small... probably tertiary one. I'm shunting some of the power from it into the 'batteries' so we can start a larger one eventually. I can't tell you yet how long. Everything is frozen and unresponsive."

"Pity we already returned our own reactor... Can you shut down the bridge force field so we can get in and out?"

"Ummm... Yes... and..." She ran her gloved finger across a triangular icon on the bridge systems display she brought up on the second large panel and the blast shield, hole and all, slid down out of the way to leave the large triangular opening visually open.

"Very good, Lieutenant. As soon as it gets warm enough in here, we'll cycle down to the bivouac and move our rucks and sleeping gear in here. We'll set up housekeeping and catch 'Z's' so we're fresh when we start trying to find out why someone parked this thing here."

"I'd like to keep working on this, sir." Hailey said as she unzipped her tactical vest and overwhite parka.

"Carry on, Hailey. C'mon, Wild Bill. We need to peel that guy off the floor and move him outside before he gets a chance to thaw and start stinking."

"A bathroom, Captain?" Hochstetler suggested.

Stripped of overwhites, the team wore their goggles over balaclava's rolled like watch caps on their heads and had their mittens, hung by a cord, snapped together behind their back. They had removed their parkas and rolled them under the black nylon buttpacks attached to their vest along with their ponchos and poncho liners leaving them wearing their vests and belts over their brown polypropylene tops and the OD¹⁴ cloth suspenders that held up their ECWCS¹⁵ Pants.

"Weapons check." The Captain said after checking his own and handing his carbine to Cody to double check. "With the warmth, at least in the upper parts of the ship, we need to keep an eye on these things when we go from warm to cold or cold to warm. Condensation turns to rust fast and ice faster."

¹³ Pel'tak - Goa'uld for the bridge and its immediate adjoining rooms.

¹⁴ OD - Olive Drab - A color somewhere in shade between green and brown.

¹⁵ ECWCS - Extreme Cold Weather Clothing System - Military issue clothing including polypropylene underwear, a Gore-Tex parka and pants, vapor barrier boots, polyester pile intermediate garments, 2 types of mittens, Gore-Tex lined gloves, cloth suspenders, and Gore-Tex lined balaclava. They are suitable for operations down to -60 or -70 degrees Fahrenheit.

Hailey unloaded and unsnapped her P90 from her H-harness and handed it to the Captain. He popped the butt plate off and looked into the fire control mechanism before putting it back together and cycling it manually a few times.

Handing it back, he turned to Dr. Hochstetler.

Reluctantly, the older man handed the Captain his pistol.

"You're a bright guy Doctor. You know you're supposed to unload it first."

"Captain, it isn't like I would ever shoot anyone."

The Captain grinned.

"That's exactly why you need to unload it before handing it to someone." He unloaded and pulled the slide off and looked down into the magazine well. "Run a rag through it to get out that lint and oil. When you're done, we'll leave." He turned to the other two. "Gadgets up?"

Cody handed back his carbine and he snapped it back to the one-point sling he wore. "Mine are up."

"Mine too, sir." Hailey said adjusting the shoulder pieces of her vest and shrugging. "I downloaded the main portions of the schematics and character recognition into my and Cody's Palmtops so we can leave the laptop here."

"Good idea. We're just looking around and trying to figure out what happened here today. Without a ship's log we can find in the control system, we're back to good old 'sneak and snoop'... So keep your eyes open."

Hailey continued to fidget with her vest and weapon harness while they waited for the surly Hochstetler to finish with his pistol.

"Do you have a problem, ma'am?" Cody finally asked.

The lieutenant blushed crimson.

"It's these shoulder straps... and having only the polypropylene top on."

The Captain and NCO grinned.

"Strange, huh? Ma'am." The NCO said. "Very *comfortable* for a military uniform... or did you run your polypro's through the dryer?"

"No, Sergeant, I didn't run them through the dryer. Why? Is that a problem?"

The two men laughed.

"Lieutenant," the Captain explained, "the pile on the inside melts a bit and it gets phenomenally itchy."

"Aaah!" the Lieutenant said.

"It'll be fine, Hailey. Just don't get yourself distracted."

The Lieutenant blushed again.

"Can we go?" Hochstetler asked, annoyed.

"Are your canteens full?" Cody asked.

"Yes." Hochstetler whined.

"Follow me." The Captain said and moved to the door.

The team moved out into the first level of the ship with the Captain in the lead, Cody backing him up, Hochstetler in the middle, and Hailey pulling sweep in the rear.

The tall, trapezoidal cross-section hallways were oddly bare in decoration. The black floors still had stains where the ice that had formed from the moisture in the air had melted and then evaporated leaving behind whatever impurities it had in it. The reinforcing arches defining each section were golden, as were the walls, with a repeated pattern of hieroglyphs engraved into them. The same reinforcing arches bore torches in holders that had long ago burned out. The ceiling lighting made them unnecessary.

Room by room, they checked the first two levels and found everything as if the previous owners had just cleaned up and left. They saw no half-eaten meals in the mess areas. No bodies and no damage, except for where sealed containers containing water had cracked apart when they had froze.

No radiation beyond the normal traces given off by the lights and the power system was detected.

As they moved through, they marked the doors to the rooms they had checked with a large red carpenter's crayon. Rooms with functioning water or other facilities were marked with what it was in a blue crayon.

The last room they checked on the level was the Pharaoh's suite. They found a wax-encrusted seal over the door actuator.

A short titanium pry-bar the Captain carried on his tactical vest made short work of it.

"No VIP's on this trip." Hailey noted as they entered and found the divan stripped and not even a single moveable artifact inside. Only a large "Eye of Horus" inlaid with a blue gem as its pupil in the wall over the divan gave any sense of the purpose of the room.

"This is getting disappointing." Hochstetler grumbled as he stood in the center of the room and turned around in place. "There is *nothing* here for me. A total waste."

The others just looked at him sadly.

"Moving right along." The Captain finally said.

Not too far away, they rounded a corner and found a side room containing a man-high semi-circular projection from the wall with an eight-crystalled control panel above it.

"Door controls?" the Captain asked.

"Or some sort of power system control component." Hailey answered. Lowering her P90 and using her handheld magnetometer, she continued, "And it seems to be powered."

Putting the sensor back into its pouch, she moved with a purpose toward the control panel. She stopped and looked up at it.

"Can't you open it?" Hochstetler asked.

"Yes." She said with a hint of crossness.

The Captain walked up to her and knelt in front of her, his leg forming a step.

Wordlessly, she used it and punched a combination of three crystals.

The front of the projection opened with an audible whoosh to reveal an illuminated white panel with a large number of sockets and a variety of primary-colored crystalline cords.

The Lieutenant dropped back to the floor and said a quiet "Thank you." As the Captain stood and moved back from her personal space.

Hochstetler shook his head, mumbled something incoherent to the others, and went back down the hallway they had just come from.

"Some of the jumpers are removed." Hailey pointed out. "If the same colors are used in the other ships... A large number of doors, some life support, some others that could be anything."

"There's those pesky closed doors again." Cody observed.

"Can we tell which doors, Hailey?" the Captain asked.

"No, sir."

"Well, we'll keep going until we find them then. Remember where we are, 'cuz when we run into these doors..." he pointed at the pulled jumpers, "You're coming back to try each one until the right one opens."

"Sir, isn't that a bit dangerous? I mean, they secured the doors shut for a reason." The Captain shrugged. "That's why we get hazardous duty pay." Turning, he said

"Hey, Wild Bill! Round up Hochstetler so we can get moving. Next mess hall we find, we'll stop and chow down."

The NCO nodded and started back the direction Hochstetler had gone.

"Permission to speak freely, sir?"

"Sure, go ahead, Lieutenant."

"We were taught at the academy to avoid over-familiarity with our subordinates."

The Captain grinned.

"True. In many cases, it isn't a good idea. It can give the misconception of favoritism and bias or give the junior person the wrong expectation."

"So why do you do it, sir?"

"A couple reasons, Lieutenant. First, Master Sergeant Cody bleeds Air Force Blue. He knows the regulations that I have to follow... probably better than me. He holds his own station and does his duty accordingly. Second, I'm a Mustang."

"Mustang, sir?"

"I'm a former enlisted person. I earned my commission through the Officer Training School. I was an Army Staff Sergeant and then Air Force Tech Sergeant before I earned a commission. That kinda' changes your perspective some about enlisted and officer relations. A different sort of respect... A different form of authority because he knows I don't need to pay my dues, I already have."

"Oh."

"Most of my service time has also been in units with very little distance between officers and enlisted personnel... Special Forces... Explosive Ordnance Disposal... Most of the time, the enlisted personnel know more and are better educated than the officers appointed over them. Officers have to learn from and earn the respect of the enlisted troops at the same time they lead them."

"Laissez faire¹⁶."

"After a fashion. Of course, this mission may be considered a bad example for your impressionable young mind, Lieutenant." The Captain said with a grin.

Hailey grinned back.

Hochstetler came around the corner with a hangdog expression followed closely by Cody.

"You found him! Excellent!" the Captain said. "What was he doing?"

"You don't want to know." The NCO answered stoically.

The two officers gave each other a curious look.

The Captain shrugged.

"Let's go then." He said and started to lead off.

"Sir?" Hailey asked.

"You want point, Lieutenant?"

"Yes, sir."

"By all means." He said and stepped aside, watching the petite young woman lead off with her weapon at the ready. Watching her a little too carefully for too long, when he looked back at the others, Cody scowled at him and shook his head with a wide grin.

The Captain shrugged and followed Hailey.

An hour later, they sat down in a mess hall and ate rehydrated Chicken Noodle Soup from their arctic rations. The three military personnel sat together around one end of a long benched table, spooning from the pouches the soup came in.

Dr. Hochstetler made a point of sitting across the large room facing away.

"So, there we was, Lieutenant... Standing on this little ledge, halfway up the side of this here cliff and lookin' down at this town and we drop the second rope over to make the second rappel, ya'know? Anyways, the civilian we had with us, Doctor Kim, same guy's that over in SG-11 now, kneels down at the edge, and looks over to make sure the end of the rope's touchin' down. He's like that, ya'know, checkin' to be sure, an' he reaches back and grabs the leg of my pants and starts screamin' in a really high-pitched voice 'Cut the rope! Cut the rope!'" The MSgt paused to sip some coffee from his canteen cup with a gleam in his eye. The young Lieutenant waited on pins and needles.

"So, I ain't one to argue with Kim, he's a good man that way, so I pull out my Buck and cut rope." He made a cutting motion with his brown plastic ration spoon. "Bout that time, the Captain here finishes his rappel onto this ledge and he sees the cut rope and a pale Doc Kim and asks 'What the fuck?'" Cody chuckled and the Captain grinned. "So we lean over and look. Down there at the bottom of the cliff, it's kinda' dim an' somethin' was movin' 'round. So the Captain here turns on his weapon light."

Cody sipped his coffee.

"What was it, Sergeant?" Hailey implored.

"Bout a *million* rats. Bigguns', some of 'em chewin' on each other, some dead. See, they'd been livin' in this cave ta' other side of town when it flooded. Near as we could figure, they'd ate the bottom of the stairway

¹⁶ Laissez faire - USAF term for a style of leadership where the people led know their jobs well and can manage their usual tasks with minimal supervision or leader input. "Noninterference" in French.

up the side of the cliff and couldn't get out. They'd been livin' on whatever stored foods the people'd stored, the people of the town, and each other."

"Nasty." Hailey said.

"Yes, ma'am."

The Captain got up and walked over to Hochstetler.

The scientist furtively tucked something behind his vest panel as the Captain approached.

Ignoring it for the moment, the Captain straddled the bench across from him and looked sideways at the older man for a moment.

Beady eyes stared back through tinted lenses.

"Doctor... Roger... May I call you Roger?" the Captain asked.

"I *prefer* Doctor."

"Okay then... *Doctor*... Maybe we got off on the wrong start, but we are several million... billion... *whatever* miles from anyone else who gives a damn and I'd like it a lot better if we could all work together, even if we can't get along personally."

"I thought we were... *Captain*." The civilian made the last word sound as much like an epithet as he could.

"Doctor... I know why you're here. You have a reputation of being one of the best. You *are* one of the best and all of your peers know it. You're here in search of something new that can keep you ahead of the pack. Something you can write up or analyze or decipher that no one else has. *Excellent*... We run into anything like that here, you want to write it up, take credit for it... it's all yours. All I ask is that until then, you share anything you find with the rest of us and that you cooperate with us."

The Doctor snorted.

"Look, Doctor, our survival is, by no means, guaranteed here. Whatever that Jaffa up there killed himself because of *may* still be around. Whatever you find or know or can offer can be what keeps us alive... and what the *rest of us* find, know, or do may be what keeps *you* alive. You know this, I taught you it in training, and you're a bright guy."

The Doctor stared back.

"Whatever it is you were looking at when I walked up, is it important?"

"Not really, it's a..." the Doctor started snidely, before he realized what he was saying.

"A...?" the Captain said, leadingly.

"It's a Goa'uld palmtop of some sort."

"Where'd you find it?"

"In the throne on the Pel'tak."

"Is it the log we were looking for?" the Captain asked, concealing his anger.

The Doctor looked down at the ration pouch he had folded neatly into a square after eating.

"Doctor?"

"Yes."

"Okay, what's it say?"

"I don't have all the resources I need to translate it completely. It is either a technological subset of the language or a parapsychical subset. It says this ship was one of Ra's and that they landed here and were forced to abandon the ship when *something* escaped and that they had planned to come back for it."

"Any clue what?"

"It's a modified form of the Goa'uld word for the *symbiote*... but it also says that the same *individual* symbiote or Goa'uld was and, from what I gathered of the last entry, still is here somewhere in some sort of containment."

"Anything else?"

"Only that it mentions an artifact associated with Apophis or something related to him... maybe a consuming serpent or snake or symbiote or something."

The Captain looked the man in the eyes and said, "Thank you Doctor. When we get back, I expect you to complete the translation and write up."

Kellogg got up and walked back to sit with the others and tell him what the Doctor had found.

Rounding the corner of a bottom end of an emergency ramp, they found their first blocked door.

"Here we are. Ready to go back upstairs, Hailey?" the Captain said.

"Wait a sec', Killer." Cody said and pulled a handheld sensor out of a pouch. Pressing a probe to the door with a gloved hand, he said, "Okay, the doors about minus 40 Celsius. No big thermal drop on the other side and probably not chock full of water."

Hailey looked at the man curiously, noticing the lack of flavor in his speech about technical matters.

"Excellent. May be filled with *ice* but probably no freezing water to pour out on us." The Captain added with a smirk. "I say... we've covered enough for the day since breakfast. If the Doctor's right about what the log says..."

"I am." Hochstetler said.

"...I want to be as awake as possible before we proceed."

"Back to the bridge?" Cody asked.

"Back to the bridge."

Hailey worked through the menus she could access on the console, trying to find a readable reference for what doors were for what jumper. Standing beside her, Doctor Hochstetler split his attention between the Goa'uld palmtop, his own laptop, and the displays that Hailey brought up.

"No, that's some sort of temperature record."

"No, that's... a... planetary something-or-other."

"No, that's for the water system or something."

Outside, the wind had picked up and the snow obscured everything outside the view port. Even the sound was inaudible through the force field.

The other two rolled out sleeping bags, cleaned their weapons and themselves before racking out for a few hours.

The Captain woke, moving quickly from dream to alertness.

All was quiet, so he opened his eyes and sat up. Stretching to ease the slight ache from sleeping on a hard deck cushioned by a thin foam mat and a sleeping bag, he took in his environment again.

Outside, it was pitch black.

Around the walls were his team members.

Master Sergeant Cody propped up against his ruck with his sleeping bag under him, his head lolling, and from the contour of his poncho liner, his carbine across his lap under the green camouflaged blanket.

Lieutenant Hailey was sleeping on her side against the far wall, her vest laid out over her neatly closed rucksack and her VB boots, as if on display, in front of the ruck. Her weapon was out of sight, and her sidearm was not in her vest holster.

Doctor Hochstetler, on the other hand, seemed to have used every soft piece of gear he had under his sleeping bag, and was still rolling back and forth restlessly every so often. He even had what appeared to be an airline pillow and blanket the Captain could see peeking out of his unzipped sleeping bag.

Climbing out of his own sleeping bag, Kellogg brought his sidearm and carbine out of the bag with him as he went to use the facilities barefoot and only wearing his polypro's.

When he came back, feeling more comfortable, he found Cody brewing coffee over a small folding burner and Hailey awake and sitting up in her sleeping bag, watching what the NCO was doing and wiping the sleep out of her eyes.

"Sir?" she said.

"Bathroom's still coed, Hailey." The Captain said.

"Actually sir, we found the right file. I can open just *that* door. I also started another reactor and got life support for the lower portions of the ship."

"Hailey, you're incorrigible." The Captain told her with a smile.

She scowled back.

"Incredible too."

"Thank you, sir." She said as she yawned and stretched her arms.

"We need to wake up Hochstetler. I want to eat breakfast and SP¹⁷ in an hour."

"I'll wake 'im up, Killer." Cody said with a grin.

"And tell him to leave the Goa'uld palmtop here. I would *hate* for him to misplace it like half the other stuff he's supposed to have."

"This..." Hailey said as they went through a staggered doorway, "should be the main... *cargo bay*?"

She paused because the large room, in the exact center of the ship, was *not* supposed to have a catwalk down the center and Deathgliders stacked vertically like soft drink cans in racks along the walls.

They were not the conventional hawk-like design either, but a central cockpit and fuselage surrounded by a circular form of wing.

"Hmmm..." Cody said as he entered and looked around.

"Bra'tac, the Jaffa used one of these not too long ago." The Captain observed. "He *did* say they were an older design, according to the report."

He walked up to the railing of the catwalk and looked over. Below, sunk into the floor level, were four tube-like constructions the Deathgliders fed into one at a time and appeared to lead outside from the ice that seemed to have flowed into two of them. There was also ankle-deep water covering the subfloor under the grated flooring on the bottom level.

"See the tubes, Lieutenant?"

"Yes, sir." She replied, looking up from editing on her Palmtop.

"That probably explains the reason for the round wing form."

The team climbed down ladders to the lowest level and looked around.

Hochstetler shivered.

"Colder down here."

"Hmmm..." the Captain said and shrugged his shoulders. "Let's see what it's like out in the hall."

They went out the doors at the lower level and it was not quite as cold, but it was still colder than comfort level.

"We're probably below the powered levels, sir." Hailey pointed out.

Kellogg nodded and ordered, "Parka's on, trigger finger mittens; if you think you need them."

They upgraded and moved out, Cody in the lead.

The corridors wound around the central core, some extending radially toward the outer bulkheads, others budding off into pods of compartments. Most were simply empty.

The team searched for anything out of the ordinary.

"What's this?" Hochstetler asked, kneeling down in the center of the corridor.

Bypassed by the others, he pointed out several small patches of metallic droplets on the decking. The others, minus Cody who kept his eyes on the ends of the corridor, gathered around him.

"Is it a liquid?" Hailey asked, kneeling.

The Doctor looked at her crossly.

Kellogg unsnapped his sheath knife and prodded a droplet with its double-edged tip.

"Nope, they're solid." He answered. "Hmmm..."

"They look like footprints." Hailey observed. She stood and looked around at the patches. "See... There are two over there... another pair here... two more sets side by side... by that doorway."

Kellogg went to the door, a smaller door opening off the main corridor, and turned the latch piece.

The door slid open smoothly and released the odor of rotting flesh.

¹⁷ SP - In this case "Start Point" or to start on a planned trip...

Hailey gagged and wretched before catching herself. The Doctor did not and let loose his lunch all over the floor. Cody and Kellogg merely turned green and covered their mouths and noses with bandannas.

"This guy didn't get too far." Kellogg finally said through the rag. "I guess he started thawing when we turned on the heat." He knelt down and pointed. "He's missing a good chunk of his left side... Arm... Shoulder... A slice of his ribcage... Looks... cauterized or burnt."

"What... do you think... caused it?" Hailey asked slowly, stifling her urge to vomit.

"No clue." Kellogg said plainly. "Cut through his armor too."

He closed the door.

The team moved on.

"Where do you think this ship was going?" Hailey asked Hochstetler as they paused in a small corridor opening on some storage rooms.

"I do not know." The Egyptologist said. "It appears that the ship may not have been fully manned. Perhaps it was a courier ship or, considering it landed here and was abandoned, in need of repair for something."

"Or, they were afraid that whatever was on this piece of junk might contaminate the crew or something and just put on a skeleton crew." Cody suggested, chewing on some trail mix in a white foil-lined envelope. "I mean, really... This is a pretty big ship and I would think that a full crew of Jaffa would have been able to handle whatever cooked that guy upstairs and the ship would've been recovered."

"I'm not sure, Sergeant." Hailey said quietly. "Perhaps a full crew didn't matter. I don't think it's a disease or anything. The survivor, if you can call him that, we found upstairs must have been pretty rational when he disabled the control system. Whoever sealed the outer hatch must've been pretty healthy and motivated. Still... Whatever it is that caused... You know... What happened to that Jaffa in the room, maybe it's something that can be carried? Like some sort of symbiote."

"The logs *did* mention something like that." Kellogg agreed.

"The syntax is wrong for that." Hochstetler said sagely. "Similar words, but it is something else entirely."

"Get down!" Cody roared as he rounded the corner toward the rest of the team. Even in the oversized boots they wore, he moved fast. As soon as he cleared the reinforcing arch, he threw himself down into the corner behind it.

Hailey had only started to move when Kellogg bodily shoved her down into the corner along the base of the wall and pressed down behind her.

Hochstetler, lagging beyond the others' reach, froze and only got out a mumbled "Wha-what?!?!?" when the burning glow snaked around the corner.

Pressed into their corners, the others could feel the temperature skyrocket and see the bright light of whatever it was tinted red through their clenched shut eyelids.

Then came the sizzling sound and quickly ended shriek of agony from Doctor Hochstetler and half a dozen pops that everyone left recognized as 9mm rounds cooking off.

As quick as it came, the light passed, leaving behind the odor of cooked flesh and melted synthetics.

"Wild Bill?" the Captain asked hopefully.

"Here..." his friend replied. "But I don't think Hochstetler made it."

The Captain tried to look back.

"I can't breathe, sir." Hailey panted, her body still pressed into the tightly angled corner by the mass of the Captain's body.

"Sorry." He mumbled distantly and rolled into a kneeling position.

Hailey rolled away from the wall and took a deep breath, only to start coughing.

"What is that smell?"

"It's the vaporized remains of all the nylon, Gore-Tex, and polyester Dr. Hochstetler was wearing." The Captain explained.

"Don't breathe too deep, ma'am." Cody said absently.

She sat up and looked back.

Where the civilian scientist had been were only two blackened splatters of smoking rubber where his boots had been on the floor.

"Oh God!" she said.

The Captain looked her in the eyes when he spoke.

"Don't think about it yet. We need to move and move *now*."

Her face more pale than usual, she nodded though she looked like she wanted to throw up.

"Let's go Wild Bill, back upstairs, double time. We need to put some blast doors between us and whatever that was."

Out of breath and sweating through their polypropylene tops under their parkas, the three remaining teammates crossed back into the heated upper levels and pulled the jumper to drop the blast door.

"Let's get out of the corridors." the Captain suggested in a forced normal breathing rate.

Trying to catch her breath, Hailey said, "Pel'tak... sensors..." The exertion with their tactical gear, the thin air here, and the large cartoonish boots was more than even she was accustomed.

"Good idea, let's go."

The bridge of the enemy starship actually seemed homey with their gear stowed against the walls when they arrived.

Even Hochstetler's still unrolled sleeping bag.

"What was that?" Kellogg asked Cody.

"No fuckin' clue." The older man said as he dumped his vest and then his parka on the deck leaving his polypropylene top visible with large sweat stains under the arms. He paused a moment, glancing toward Hailey frantically working the console to figure out how to get internal sensors of some sort. Then he pulled his sweaty top off to reveal a wiry framed torso with a shock of salt-and-pepper chest hair.

"All I saw was somethin' bright and hot coming on fast from 'round the corner." He adjusted his suspenders across his bare chest. "My rad sensor¹⁸ started chirpin' and I turned and hauled ass. Ain't no *symbiote*, far as I could tell."

Still pale and visibly sweaty, the young Lieutenant breathed audibly through her nose as she furiously worked the controls.

"Lieutenant, stand down a few and catch your breath."

"Sir, I can do this!"

"I'm sure, if it can be done, you can do it. For the next ten minutes, you *will* stand down."

"Sir!" she said and flashed him a glare.

"That's an order, Lieutenant." The Captain said in a commanding tone.

She took a deep breath and held his gaze.

"Lieutenant, we're down a man. We're in a hostile environment, and there are no battle drills to follow for *this*. What we need now is some good old fashioned brainstorming and figuring." He continued in a fatherly tone.

"Yes, sir."

"And you'll think better if your pulse rate isn't sky high and you're a bit calmer."

"I *am* calm, sir."

"Lieutenant!"

She moved away from the console.

He then proceeded to strip off his own parka and top, digging baby wipes and a spare top out of his rucksack. He then changed tops; using baby wipes to clean up. As he did this mundane task, he used a slow meditative pace and focused on his breathing.

When he finished he looked over at the others.

¹⁸ "Rad sensor" - A device used to detect hazardous and near-hazardous levels of radiation.

Cody had a clean top laid out over his ruck, and sat bare-chested against his ruck with his carbine across his lap facing the door. His long legs apart with his elbows on his knees, the NCO chewed his lower lip absently.

Hailey sat on her own ruck, parka off but with the same polypropylene top on. She sat with her arms across her chest staring at the console.

"Change the top, Hailey. If we need to bug out, you risk frostbite."

"I'm not wearing a bra, sir."

"We know." The Captain said.

Hailey blinked.

Kellogg rethought and said "Sorry, we won't look. Clean up."

Securing his carbine and vest, he headed for the door to the bridge. Cody rolled to his feet and followed.

"Sir?" Hailey said.

"We'll be just outside. Anything knocks that isn't us, shoot it." The Captain replied with a wan smile.

The two men stepped outside.

"Dead meat." Cody said in a dull tone.

Kellogg looked at his friend and nodded.

"I'd hoped that this mission would sour Hochstetler's lust for the teams and get him to ask to be in the follow-on research pool." The Captain explained.

He sighed.

"What do you think it was?" he asked Cody.

"No clue, Killer. I ain't the genius you lot are... I *do* know it wasn't runnin' or walkin'... no footsteps."

"Captain!" Hailey yelled urgently from the bridge.

Both men burst in with carbines raised to find Hailey standing at the console...

...Topless except for the OD suspenders holding her pants up forming an "x" across a very pale and finely muscled back. They could see the swell of her left breast from the angle she stood at, facing away from them.

"Oh." She said when she remembered her state of dress, blushed pink, and crossed her arms across her chest.

The two men exchanged an amused glance and turned around.

"What did you need Lieutenant?" the Captain asked.

"I'm sorry, sir. I was washing up and it hit me how we can get internal sensors, sir."

"And you had to drop what you were doing and do it."

"Ummm... Yes, sir." She said as she put her fresh top on and adjusted her suspenders.

"I admire your veracity, Lieutenant."

"And her figure." Cody said quietly.

Kellogg scowled at his friend.

Hailey, who had terrific hearing, raised her eyebrows, but left it alone.

"What can you give us?" the Captain asked.

"I'm decent." She announced and the two men turned around to find her back at the console. "The typical Ha'tak carries a number of probes."

"You launched one?"

"No sir. I activated one in its launch bay or tube or wherever they're stored. Somewhere near the base of the ship it appears."

"Lieutenant?"

"Sir?" she said without looking up.

"He was an accident waiting to happen, you know that."

"Yes, sir." She took a deep breath and brought up the projected display across the bridge view port. It showed a fuzzy series of horizontal lines connected occasionally with vertical lines but with a large horizontal gap of black. Interspersed were a number of different colored blobs. "I've got the probe's sensors focused back across the mass of the ship. As far as I can tell, this is a combination of some sort of radar or ultrasonic

data overlaid with either heat, electrical, or radiation. The black band should be the landing hollow in the base of the ship."

"The blobs?" the Captain asked.

"Most likely part of the life support or shield systems tied into the superstructure." She made a series of complex motions on the console's display and the main display's image morphed with the dark band narrowing proportionally. "I'm panning up."

"Whatever it was, was moving pretty fast, and seemed to be pretty large." Cody pointed out.

The Lieutenant glanced back at Cody and asked, "Did your dosimeter go off?"

"It chirped. Some rads, but not enough to be serious."

"There's a lot of interference, but I've got something. I think it's what got... Hochstetler."

They looked at the display.

The black band was now a small trapezoid in the middle of the display and just above it was a snakelike purple blob that seemed to be nestled around a yellow, smaller ovoid blob.

"That's the base of the superstructure?"

"Just above the top of the landing void, sir... Several levels below where we were and a level or two below the glider bay, but..."

"Can we refine or clear up the distortion?"

"I'm not sure, sir. I can try."

"A sense of scale might be nice, too."

"Yes, sir." She answered, deadpan.

The Captain walked over to stand beside her, watching the console display.

The complexity of the display was not great, although all the text was in Goa'uld and the functionality was not completely intuitive. As he watched, the display got less and less distinct and the younger officer got more and more flustered.

"Hey, let me try something." He said.

She gave him a look like he was stupid.

He motioned for her to step aside.

She did.

He cycled back through the last few screens she had been through to one she had dismissed and started methodically trying the possible combinations of movements for the display.

The display quickly gained clarity and then morphed into a squared display of that level of the ship.

Hailey gave her team leader a shocked look.

"What?!?!?" the Captain asked.

"How did you do that?"

"This is going to sound bizarre, but that screen... the way the controls were laid out, reminded me of something."

"What?"

"The manual controls of a particular type of automated Russian self propelled gun-howitzer."

"And they happened to be operated the same way as the controls of a Goa'uld sensor probe?" she said cheekily.

"In a way..." the Captain grinned. "You see, there are two primary types of control methodology: One for experts who think for the system and one for amateurs who need the system to think for *them*. The Russians tend to use the latter... except when absolutely necessary. You were fighting against whatever semi-intelligent control processor the sensor system was using... telling it to do something that was locked out because *the system* would do it for you."

"So, what does it say?"

"Don't know, don't read much Goa'uld."

They looked at the display.

The ovoid shape was distinct now... and recognizable as that of a Goa'uld Sarcophagus.

The snakelike apparition was still indistinct yet actually curled around the sarcophagus.

Both seemed to be inside a large rectangular room, a cargo hold if the similarity to other Ha'taks held true.

"Whatever the sensor's picking up, the Sarcophagus is emitting some of it, but the 'snake' is emitting or reflecting or 'whatever-ing' much more." Hailey pointed out.

"It looks like we found Hochstetler's Goa'uld-in-a-box, people. And whatever it is that made the Jaffa bug out. I *want* that bad boy."

"It *cooked* Doctor Hochstetler, sir."

"I noticed."

"How do you propose to stop whatever it was?"

"We find some way to draw the thing away from the box and blow the shit out of it."

"What? The Sarcophagus?" Hailey asked.

"According to Hochstetler, whatever we encountered had the same name as whichever one's in the box..." The Captain pointed at the display. "And it's *guarding* the box. My bet is we pop the box open, drop a few frags¹⁹ in it, we get what's guarding it."

"Just how do ya' propose doing *that*?" Cody said.

"Don't know yet, Wild Bill. Don't know yet..."

"Why don't we go for help?" Hailey asked.

"We're here. We can do this. No one else needs to risk it. Can you get the rings working?"

"Ummm... Sure, but they were one of the systems disabled at the junction box downstairs and we don't know what condition the set downstairs is in. There *should be* a vertical tunnel that forms part of the drive and shield system. It should start just below the glider bay and run straight down the core of the ship to the landing alcove. We might be able to use it to bypass whatever that thing was, sir. It should be shielded enough to stop whatever that is."

"As long as it goes looking for us and not stay put around the Sarcophagus."

"Yes, sir."

The team members made their way back down into the ship's depths. They moved cautiously and quietly, now aware they were not alone. Hailey reset the door and put the jumpers back in for all the doors they thought they might need.

They moved through the glider bay, into the hall, pausing every few minutes to stop and listen for the rad sensor to pick up something more than background radiation or to scan with the spectrometer.

"I've got some emitted particles that most likely are from the ship's drives, sir. It might lead us to the entrance of the tunnel, sir." Hailey said as she looked intently at the screen of a handheld sensor.

"Lead away, Lieutenant." The Captain ordered.

She led them quickly, pausing at each possible change in direction and taking a quick directional count of the particles they tracked.

It led them directly into a corridor with blackened rubber footprints.

Hailey blanched when she saw them, and used the spectrometer to double check the source.

"The particles must have been released when the thing took Doctor Hochstetler. Odd." She put the sensor back in its belt pouch. "Whatever that thing was, it must use energy similar to Goa'uld drive systems... I don't know where to go from here."

"It's OK, Hailey. It was a good idea. It's just *this* ship... Just similar enough to the plans to get us lost." The Captain reassured her. "We know where the glider bay is from here and that it's over the tunnel. We'll just drop down a level and move back the same direction. Maybe we'll get lucky." He looked towards Cody and said, "Lead out, Wild Bill."

The two men started to walk around the corner and away from the glider bay.

Hailey paused a moment longer and looked at the melted boot prints.

"Doctor Hochstetler, you were an ass, but you didn't deserve *that*."

¹⁹ Frags - Fragmentation Grenades.

The petite airman turned and found the others gone, but she could hear their footsteps on the hard floor. She walked around the corner toward them.

The two men had paused on the far side of an intersection.

The Captain motioned for her to hurry up.

She took two steps towards them when the crossing corridor started lighting up.

The Captain saw it at the same time and she saw him flex and ready himself to run.

She took a sharp breath and looked sideways at a door actuator that would cut the corridor she was in off from the cross corridor.

And the other two.

The Captain read her eyes, remembering what was there and how close they were to the glider bay.

"Go!" he bellowed. "Get help and close the door behind you!"

"Sir!" Hailey yelled, frustrated and turning paler with anger.

"Now, God dammit!"

She hit the door actuator hard enough it hurt through her lined glove.

Even as she ran for the Pel'tak and the way out, she resented the Captain's order to leave her teammates in danger. She blamed herself for letting them get too far ahead and not being with them.

On the other side of the door, the two men scurried down one corridor after another, punching any actuators on the walls they could as they passed and dodging behind whatever structure they could when the energy creature came close.

The only thing saving them was the creatures seeming blindness and its refusal to slow down.

Finally, one of the actuators clicked and a nearly transparent force field jumped into existence across the arch behind them.

They hazarded a glance back and saw the glowing creature hit the force field.

Where it started to penetrate the field, it seemed to disintegrate like the wind blowing against a dry sand castle and leaving a long serpentine tail and an insistent chirping from Cody's rad sensor.

The men paused and watched.

Stopping, the creature ceased its self-destructive motion and the tail reversed itself, reforming as it pulled out of the field. It grew nominally larger in diameter and had a brighter glowing fringe and then the head formed...

...with the leonine crest, pectoral fins, and four-part maw of a Goa'uld symbiote.

The creature reared back and gave a soundless shriek at its temporarily inaccessible prey. Then it turned around and flew back the way it came.

"Now what?" Cody asked.

"We run, before it finds another way around. Then we head for the cargo bay."

Sweating and breathing hard, the two men found the cargo bay the Sarcophagus was in and threw themselves into the alcove on either side of the day.

"Ready?" Cody breathed, holding his hand over the door actuator and drawing a baseball-shaped fragmentation grenade from his vest.

The Captain nodded and held his carbine ready.

Cody tugged the grenade's pin with his thumb and pressed the actuator.

The door rose quickly and Cody bowled the grenade straight into the large room. They heard it hit something metallic and waited the 5 seconds for the grenade to go off before moving.

The Captain led, crossing the doorway and pressing his back to the wall, scanning for motion. Cody crossed the other way, scanning far to near.

The large room reeked of death and rotting flesh, making the men nauseous and their eyes water.

A large silver Sarcophagus inlaid with gold and jewels was in the center of the room, and all around it were the corpses of an uncountable number of Jaffa in various states of decay. Black and bloated pieces,

recognizable only as limbs heads, or torsos, were scattered. Some seeped pus as it decomposed, some of it showed blackness and drying from heat of some sort.

Against one wall were the charred remains of a Jaffa slumped down with his back to the wall and the shattered remains of a staff weapon across his thighs. The burning radiated from the chest outward, away from a tarnished golden medallion that was melted into his sternum.

Cody turned to the side and vomited on the floor.

Kellogg looked pale as he looked at his friend.

"Stay here, cover the door."

The Captain stood up straighter, steeling himself, and began to walk slowly towards the Sarcophagus.

"Not again." The young officer repeated in anger as she followed the safety line hand-over-hand through the snow. Reaching the end, she saw the corner of an olive drab case sticking out of the snow.

"I won't leave anyone behind." She said and fished in the snow for the sling rope they had used to drag the case through the snow before and headed back across the ice.

She dragged the heavy case up the angled side of the ship using a longer piece of rope.

Inside, where it was warm, she opened the case and looked around. She knew enough from watching the Captain rigging two charges to do the job normally, but she did not want to make a mistake. After a moments looking, she found what she wanted secured in a pocket on the underside of the lid.

Field Manual 5-250 Explosives and Demolitions.

"Follow me." The Captain said and led Cody out of the Cargo bay and into the hall. He closed the door behind them and led the way into a smaller room down the corridor.

"What's the deal?"

"No dice. The thing is *welded* shut and covered by a force field."

"We can find a way back upstairs and kill the power..."

"Sounds good, except none of the doors work between here and there, and I have a feeling this force field's not powered by upstairs."

"Why?"

"There's a power conduit coming out of the base of the box and goes into the floor inside the force field. And it doesn't look like original equipment. It's half-assed and looks like they made the hole in the floor with a Staff Weapon."

"What now?"

"We can either start trying to find access to the levels below or we wait for Hailey."

"The central core's shaft?"

"Not sure that's a good idea. Remember the ice in the Glider bay?"

"Shit! We need to start looking somewhere."

Kellogg shrugged and said "Follow me."

The ventilation conduit was not designed to accommodate adult humans with load bearing equipment and carbines, but the two men made do. The route down was a slick vertical shaft.

Lying on his back in the close shaft, Kellogg asked his friend quietly, "What do we need? What do we have?" as he looked down between his feet.

"How far?"

"To the next level?"

"All the way down?"

"Not sure. Can't see that far."

"Shit."

"That's what I thought."

"We can rig a rappel line; we just don't have anything to tie off on."

"I've only got 20 foot of rope... 50 Meters of 550 cord though..."

"This..." Cody said, tapping the wall of the shaft with the hilt of his K-Bar "doesn't seem to be too thick."

Kellogg attempted to shrug. "Try it."

Cody turned the blade downward, held it a few inches above the floor and rammed it down. The tip of the blade only marked the metal.

"Hmmm..." Cody said. "With a little work..."

"We don't have a lot of time." He looked up at the ceiling. "I have an idea. Did you bring your earplugs?"

Cody grimaced and fished the orange rubber plugs out of his vest. Both men put them in their ears.

Kellogg drew his SIG Sauer P226 and pulled a field dressing out of his first aid pouch. He pressed the dressing to the roof near the vertical shaft. He pressed the pistol's muzzle to the dressing and pulled the trigger.

The blast made their ears ring. The odor of burnt cotton and bits of cotton filled the shaft. The hot brass casing ricocheted around the shaft before adhering to the Captain's poly-pro top. Kellogg moved the pistol to the other end of the dressing and fired again.

The dressing started smoldering. He dropped it down the vertical shaft and holstered his pistol.

"Carabineer?" he asked his friend a little too loudly.

He threaded the carabineer through the two bullet holes, threaded the 550 cord, folded over twice, around it and then attached it to his rigger's belt. Additionally, he rigged the 20 feet of rope between Cody and himself.

Slowly, he rappelled down to the next level, bracing himself on the walls of the shaft.

The level they found below was an even greater change than above. The corridors were small, barely wide enough to walk side by side in. They found many side halls ending in a huge array of doors. Deactivating the force field sealing the end of one hall, they entered a hall.

"Let's try one." Cody suggested.

Kellogg hit the actuator, his carbine up and ready.

The door didn't budge.

"OK... We have power." He observed, looking around the door frame for another switch.

Cody went to the next door and tried.

It didn't work either.

They looked at each other, trying to work out what to try next. Cody looked back towards the entrance to the hall.

"Let me try something." He said and walked back out to the main corridor.

Across the corridor from the hall's entrance was a control pad with two rows of touch-sensitive buttons. He looked down the hall, counted doors, and pushed a button.

The door in front of Kellogg whooshed open.

The room was small. A narrow bed was built into the wall on one side, a desk with an open closet at the other, and a commode and basin in the Jaffa style crossed the back of the room. Under the bed was a long heap of clothing.

Kellogg turned on his weapon light and knelt down.

The bundle ended with a pair of skeletal human feet still in slippers. The skin looked dried, desiccated, and gray. The room smelled musty, but not like the half-rotted corpses they had found before.

Kellogg jumped a little when Cody showed up at his shoulder.

"A mummy."

"Let's check the others."

The two started at the front and inspected the rooms.

Sitting in the corridor, the two men sipped water from canteens and talked.

"It's a prison ship." Kellogg pointed out. "The doors were secured from the outside. One person to a cell."

"You might be right, Killer." Cody agreed. "But, what's the use of one like this? When they punish people, they kill 'em off or put 'em to work. Either way, it's in big numbers, often times, and all together?"

Kellogg went into a cell and knelt next to the partially mummified corpse. Using the tip of his fighting knife, he opened the dried, leather like skin at the back of the neck. Carefully, he splayed the flesh open to reveal a fine set of bones wrapped around the sturdier human vertebrae in the neck.

"They're Goa'uld." He pointed out. Biting down on his lower lip, he looked around the room as her thought aloud. "This was a prison ship for Goa'uld. Probably to take them to be programmed or something."

"Or punished."

"You may be right, Wild Bill. Maybe that's what the energy creature thing was supposed to be?"

"What?!?!?"

"A form of punishment. I mean, that thing didn't seem to be too *happy*, did it?"

Cody shook his head and scowled. "Hell of a way to *punish* your enemy... by turning him into something *that God-damn powerful*."

"I have no clue, Wild Bill. Still... it fits with what Hochstetler figured out."

"And the sealed hatches."

"Do you smell something?" Kellogg asked, standing up and sheathing his knife. "A faint burnt electrical smell."

"Christ, I think it's caught up to us."

"Let's go!"

The scraping of the metal box on the floor made her worry about drawing attention to herself, but the spectral Goa'uld didn't seem to be able to sense anything more than life energies... and even then, not through the ship's sealed doors.

Rounding the corner into the glider bay, she paused to decide where to start, scanning the room.

She smiled.

She knew what she was going to do, but first she needed to go back to the Pel'tak.

The FM²⁰ could have been better titled "The Idiot's Guide to Blowing Things Up." except the writers had never needed to demolish a Goa'uld Ha'tak... or at least, gut it.

The last of the charges were set, all of the C4 and det-cord²¹ from the kit were ready to turn the entire bay into a giant flame-filled pachinko²² game. She secured the ends of the det-cord set to start the several trains of explosives in the room she had laid into a large knot around an electrical blasting cap.

She wished she had the supplies to put in a second, backup, set of detonators like the manual advised, but she was left with having to take that chance.

Snubbing the end of the electrical wire to a railing post, she took the handle of the wire spool and started backing toward the glider bay's bottom entrance.

The men ran and hid, searching out the rooms and corridors with functioning doors and force fields.

None of the working doors and force fields seemed to be in a pattern that left the Goa'uld on one side and them on the other. They quickly realized that the creature was using some other way to bypass the doors and force fields.

Each barrier was only a temporary respite and for shortening periods of time as the creature re-learned the rules of its habitat.

As they tired, it was only a matter of time.

"Captain Kellogg! Sergeant Cody!" their radios rang out, surprising them.

²⁰ FM - Field Manual - A type of Army publication, many of these are used by the other services to avoid redundant printing of duplicate material.

²¹ Det-cord - Detonation cord - A flexible, cord-like demolition material that explodes at a very fast rate and is used to set off other explosives in a very rapid sequence.

²² Pachinko - An oriental pinball-like game where steel ball bearings drop down through a maze of pins...

Sprinting down a corridor and into a side room, the two men both hit the door actuator at the same time.

"Captain Kellogg! Sergeant..." Hailey's voice rang out excitedly over the radio until Cody interrupted her by pressing his PTT switch.

He coughed and breathed, "Here, Lieutenant. Both of us."

"Can you make it to the rings, Sergeant?"

"Damn Skipppy! But we're a bit turned around right now, Ma'am."

"Unless you've discovered the thing is attracted to sound, I'll call out for you."

The men chuckled tiredly.

"On our way, ma'am."

Both men gathered their strength to go.

"God dammit, calling a girl young enough for me to have whelped 'ma'am!'" the older man muttered.

They both started laughing hysterically before getting up and moving out once more.

The older man stumbled and yelped in pain as his foot turned at an unhealthy angle against the floor as they rounded a corner. He looked up at his friend, knowing what it probably meant.

The glow of the creature got brighter around the corner and the rad sensor's chirp quickened.

Kellogg grabbed Cody by the vest and slammed him back into the corner of an arch, pressing his own body as close as he could.

The creature came around the corner, missing them, but not before the heat of the beast melted the Captain's polypropylene top to the skin of his back.

The Captain growled through clenched teeth, his friend seeing the pain in his eyes.

"In here." They heard distantly as both held their breath because of the pain. "Over here!" Hailey's voice said.

Kellogg, still holding Cody's vest, started propelling him towards the voice, the same direction the creature had went. The white haired NCO went forward in a perpetual stumble his friend would not let turn into a fall.

"Sir! In here!" Hailey yelled, her voice going hoarse.

Kellogg rounded the corner into the ring room, pushing Cody in front of him.

"Whatever you're gonna' do, do it *now*, Lieutenant!" he yelled before he noticed the 10-cap blasting machine in her mittened hands.

"Start the rings!" she ordered.

The Captain hit the initiator and jumped into the ring's platform.

As the rings dropped, the creature came into sight, and Hailey twisted the initiator.

Pausing, almost as if it knew what she had done, the glowing apparition reared back and looked as if it might bellow.

In a flash of blue, its prey was gone.

The rings dropped back into the floor depositing the three humans and a column of icy air even as the rumbling from the demolitions caught up to them through the floor.

"Let's go! Hailey, the force field. Wild Bill, start throwing the rucks out!"

Even tired and injured, the team moved with a purpose.

The rumbling stopped, but the feeling of motion continued as the humans inner ears told them they were moving in a different direction in addition to the one they had chosen for themselves.

The rucks went out the view port followed by Cody, sliding down the steep incline of the hole into the snow.

"Out!" the Captain yelled at Hailey. "Get to the guideline!"

He himself watched as she turned and went, pausing for a moment to look at Hochstetler's ruck. Even as the queasiness from the ship's motion and the implication hit him, he grabbed it and took it with him out the view port.

The icy wind cut through his sweat soaked and melted polypropylene top as if he was naked from the waist up as he slid down the hull. He knew it was not too long in this temperature before it could be lethal. He could barely see ten feet in front of him from the ice fog, only his rucksack, the other's footprints, and the end of the safety line were in sight.

Quickly, he shouldered his own ruck, crying through the pain as it rubbed the crisped synthetic top and his burned back, dragged the Doctor's, and grabbed the end of the safety line. He headed off into the fog.

Almost to the stone of the ridge, the ice under him started moving toward his left. He twisted his left hand into the safety rope and his right into the Doctor's pack strap then waited for it.

With an intense cracking sound and then a sound like a thousand windows breaking at once, the ice floe separated and the ice under him disappeared. As he fell, he flexed his arm and knew when the rope went taught, it was going to hurt.

It did and he let out a growl as his left shoulder took the shock of his own weight and that of the rucksacks and he slammed into near vertical rock wall of the ridge that bordered the floe. Under a waterfall of loose snow, he listened and tried to sense if either of the others were falling by him.

When he did not hear anything, he held on for dear life and looked around.

He hung along the face of a glacier several hundred meters thick. To his left, the rest of it, downstream of the ship, was flowing slowly away and shedding immense chunks of ice the size of small skyscrapers. Straight down, a fog of ice and snow, still settling, shrouded everything.

As the fog settled, he could see the peak of the Ha'tak, listing severely towards the receding ice.

"Hello!!!" Hailey's voice came from the top of the rock wall.

"Yeah, I'm here." He yelled back. "I'm freezing my balls off! Drop another line with a snap-link."

Sitting in the tent and warming up around the Yukon stove before making for the Stargate, Cody made coffee as Hailey put a dressing on the Captain's burns.

"Whaddya' think, Killer?" the grizzled NCO asked, sipping his coffee from a canteen cup."

"About what, Wild Bill?"

"Think we got the bastard?"

"Definitely." Hailey interrupted.

The other two considered the young Lieutenant.

"Yeah." The Captain agreed. "Still, I say we come back with a SADM²³ and drop another chunk of glacier on it."

"Just to be sure." Hailey said.

"Want some coffee, ma'am?" Cody asked, reaching for his stash.

"Sure, Sergeant." She accepted with a smile.

²³ SADM- Special Atomic Demolition Munition - A man-portable nuclear device, similar to what Jack O'Neill used in the movie.