The Taming of the Shrew

by alyjude_sideburns

Summary

Jack and his new SG1 find themselves in a battle for survival even as they discover new things about themselves.

Notes

Author's Notes: This is story 3 in the Shakespeare Series, an SG1/TS xover series. This starts up exactly where Measure for Measure left off.

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Laughing, Daniel, Jack, Jim and Blair walked up the ramp and through the Stargate.

And now, Taming of the Shrew-

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"Forward, I pray, since we have come so far...." - William Shakespeare

"So this is Abydos?" Jim said as he stepped out of the Stargate, Blair beside him.

"Where's the sand?" Blair joked.

"We're inside the pyramid," Daniel answered automatically even as he frowned. Walking down the steps, he looked around and, worried, said, "Jack, no guard. There's no one here."

"This isn't good," Jack said as he realized Daniel was right.

"Colonel?"

One eyebrow arched, Jack glanced over at his 2IC, who was kneeling near a broken pot. She held up her hand, showing a smear of something dark. "Blood, sir."

Teal'c immediately moved down the steps and began to search the ground, eyes alert for any clues. He stopped on the other side of the fire pit and said, "There are signs of a struggle here, O'Neill." Kneeling down, his gaze roving over the dirt, he added, "There were two wearing sandals—"

"The guards posted by Kasuf," Daniel guessed.

"Agreed," Teal'c said. "The other prints were made by heavy boots - Jaffa." He glanced up at Jack and said with certainty, "There were no more than four who came through the Stargate."

"That's it?" Jack asked, incredulous.

"Not so surprising," Daniel said. "When Heru'ur arrived to take... you know... he came with only a few guards."

"Heru'ur?" Blair asked. "As in ... Horus the Elder?"

Daniel nodded. "Exactly as in."

"So... Horus was a Goa'uld too, then?"

Again, Daniel nodded.

"Just how many Egyptian gods—"

"Hathor, Seth, Apophis, Osiris, Isis, Nirrti, Sokar, Ra--"

"I think he's got it, Daniel," Jack said. "And you forgot Cronus."

Daniel rolled his eyes. "Jack, Cronus was a Titan, not an Egyptian God."

"Oh, pardon me all to hell—"
"I'm just a lowly captain here, but don't we have a job to do? And don't we have enough evidence that there's a problem?"

"You are correct, Captain Ellison," Teal'c said as he straightened. "We should proceed with caution."

"I was just put in my place, wasn't I, Daniel?"

"I think so, Jack. Rank has no meaning anymore."

"Nevertheless, I'm going to try and give an order." He lifted his head and said regally, "Let's move out – with caution."

"Aye, aye, sir," Blair said with a salute.

Jim poked him in the ribs and muttered, "That's the Navy, Sandburg."

"What do they say in the Air Force?" Blair asked conversationally as he followed Teal'c.

"They say 'shut up, Sandburg'," Jack said jovially.

"Oh."

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Jim put up a hand and Jack said, "I'm guessing that's his signal for stopping because he hears something, right?"

Before Blair could answer, Jim asked, "Who's ... Kasuf?"

Daniel moved next to him and said, "He's the Abydonian leader."


"That explains why they're currently beating the shit out of him. They want something called an... utchat."

"The Eye of Ra," Blair whispered.

"Why on earth would they think Kasuf knows the whereabouts of this utchat?" Sam asked.

"Perhaps because he served Ra faithfully for so many years?" Teal'c suggested.

"Well, we'd better do something, and fast," Jim said. "They're now threatening to kill someone named... Skaara... if Kasuf doesn't give them what they came for."

"Can you lead us to their location?" Jack asked. At Jim's nod, he said, "Okay, let's go."

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Once Daniel realized that Jim was guiding them to Kasuf's home, he immediately suggested they approach from the rear of the city where they could approach with stealth and there'd be less chance of being seen. As they neared Kasuf's home, Jim stopped them again. He cocked his head and, after a moment, said, "Two in... two out." He looked over at Jack. "We'll need some kind of diversion to get the two outside with other two."
"I believe I can provide the required disturbance," Teal'c said as he lifted his staff weapon.

"Go for it, T. Carter, you and Daniel take the west side and wait for my signal."

Nodding, she and Daniel moved off.

"Jim, you're with me. Sandburg, you stay here."

"Whoa, wait a minute," Blair said. "Jim—"

Voice low but firm, Jim said, "Jack, where I go, he goes. You know that."

Jack looked at the two of them for a moment before finally whispering, "Yeah, but things are going to happen fast and, while I hate having to say this, the fact is... he'll be in the way."

Jim stepped forward but Blair put his hand out and stopped him. "No, he's right. And we're only talking a few feet. Go, I'll stay put. Not like I haven't done it before. Go."

Seeing the acceptance and encouragement in his eyes, Jim nodded and followed Jack around the other side of the building.

Blair waited, feeling exactly like he'd always felt when Jim went off without him -- namely like shit. This wasn't Cascade and there was no telling what the new smells and sounds of a strange planet -- no matter how much like parts of Earth it might be -- could affect Jim. Not to mention faced with several ... beings... that just happened to have snakes in their guts.

Damn. He needed to learn how to use a P-90. Although... Daniel didn't have one and Daniel was with Sam.

"But Daniel knows how to deal with the Jaffa and you don't, no matter how well you did in the exercises."

"Oh, shut up," he whispered to himself. He hated it when he was right.

The sound of a staff weapon discharging several times told him that whatever was going to happen -- was happening. Blair flattened himself against the side of the building and waited.

The staff blasts were followed by yelling -- which was quickly followed by gunfire -- the P-90 type -- which, in turn was followed by a deafening silence.

Normally at this point, there'd be more shouting, courtesy of Simon, not to mention the comforting sound of sirens--

"Chief?"

Blair nearly jumped out of his skin. Spinning around, he came face-to-face with his partner. "Jim?"

"Probably," Jim said as he smiled down at him. "It's over, everyone's all right, including Kasuf and Skaara. Come on."

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The first thing Blair noticed was how much cooler it was in Kasuf's home. The second thing were the bodies. For a moment, he had the ridiculous urge to laugh. Three years following Jim around had certainly exposed him to more than his fair share of them, but the four on the ground were not your typical dead bad guys. He found his gaze drawn not to their clothing, which he'd expected, but
to the marks on their foreheads. Painted on, he realized with a start. He looked up at Jim, to ask about it, but noticed the pallor and sweat beading his partner's upper lip.

"Jim?"

"Their symbiotes – two of them. Not... dead... yet."

"Maybe you should go outside?" Sam suggested from where she was kneeling beside an older man who had to be Kasuf.

Blair put his hand on Jim's forearm and said, "You need to concentrate on something else, Jim. Once that's all you can hear and feel, then block out what you're picking up with the symbiotes – like picturing a brick wall or something."

Jim nodded and, breathing harshly, turned away from the bodies in order to face Blair. He stared into his eyes, let himself drift for a moment in the shadings of blue and, just when he would be lost, Blair squeezed his arm. It was enough to keep him grounded and, like dialing down, he visualized an impenetrable wall between his senses and the dying symbiotes. Relief flooded through him as his world turned normal again. He closed his eyes for a moment and took a cleansing breath. When he opened them, it was to a gentle smile from Blair and quiet voices behind him.

"They would not say their god, would not say his name."

Blair glanced away from Jim and toward the speaker, a young man in his early twenties. He had to be Skaara.

"O'Neill, these Jaffa wear the symbol of Baal."

Jack, who was standing next to Skaara, said, "So what, Baal is also after this Eye of Ra?"

"I don't think so, Jack," Daniel said from where he was kneeling next to the bodies. "No First Prime. There's no way Baal or any other system lord would send only four Jaffa on something like this."

"But Anubis would?" Blair asked. "Why when a known system lord wouldn't?"

"That's a damn fine question," Jack said dryly.

Daniel rose to his feet, brushed off his pants, and said, "A scary as hell question too because it implies a certain confidence on his part. He's so powerful, he doesn't need a First Prime."

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Kasuf's injuries – mostly bruises as a result of the beating – had been tended to by Sam and he now sat next to the fire, his son by his side having just come from reassuring the rest of the tribe that all was well with their leader. Jack had suggested that several men be dispatched to the pyramid in order to alert SG-1 in case the 'Gate should be activated from off-world but a grinning Blair had pointed out that with Jim, that wasn't really necessary.

Now the dual suns had set and it was starting to get cold, hence the fire. Blair thought it was just his luck that they should arrive on a planet with a thirty-six hour day – a few hours before the end of said day.

"Good Father, did the Jaffa use any other term other than 'utchat'? Daniel finally asked, having waited until Kasuf was rested.
"No, only that, but I have never heard of such a thing. I could tell them nothing, Good Son. Is the term familiar to you?"

"It is. It refers to something called the Eye of Ra. Does that mean anything to you?"

Kasuf shook his head and then looked to his son, who also shook his head.

"Jack, I'd like to go back to the map room. Check out that other chamber I showed you originally."

"Now there's a request I'd never have expected from you," Jack said dryly. He caught Carter's eye and said, "You and Teal'c stay on your toes here and we'll head over to the map room. We'll let you know if Ellison picks anything up from the 'Gate before hotfooting back here."

"Yes, sir."

Jim got to his feet and looked down expectantly at Blair, who was still seated. "Well?"

Blair glanced over at Jack, one eyebrow arched.

"Oh, get up, Sandburg," Jack groused good-naturedly.

"Gee, I guess that means I get to come too. Oh, goody," Blair said as he stood.

Daniel quickly turned away in order to hide his blossoming grin from Jack.

Trying to look dignified, Jack started out but Skaara stopped him with a hand on his arm.

"O'Neill, I would also wish to accompany you to the map room."

"Hey, kid, the more the merrier – if you're father doesn't object."

Kasuf smiled indulgently and gave Skaara a wave of his hand. "Go."

Grinning, Skaara looked back up at Jack, who said, "I guess you're coming, Skaara."

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"Holy shit," Blair said as he turned in a circle, taking in the incredible sight before him.

Jim walked up to the nearest cartouche and reached out with a tentative hand, allowing his fingers to run lightly over the hieroglyphs. Daniel, watching him, nudged Jack and said, "I'm not the only one who needs to touch things."

Blair turned from the cartouche in front of him and said, "But he's a sentinel."

"And he touches things," Daniel countered.

"But he's a sentinel."

"Who touches things."

"I'm a sentinel who touches things and this square is different," Jim said, interrupting the "discussion" between Blair and Daniel.

Curious, Jack joined him. "Different how? Our scientists went over this room with the proverbial fine-tooth comb and found nothing unusual."
"What were they looking for?" Blair asked as he stepped in front of Jim and placed his hand on the cartouche in question.

"Daniel, answer the man," Jack said.

"How the hell should I know what they did?"

"Because you're a scientist? Hello?"

In answer, Daniel rolled his eyes.


"As opposed to... whatever Jim's feeling?" Jack asked. "By the way, what *are* you feeling?"

Looking confused, Jim said, "I'm not sure. The material is the same as this glyph and this one -- and I'm assuming all of them – but there's something...."

As his voice trailed off, Daniel took several steps back. He stared at the cartouche in question and then looked at the ones on either side. He rubbed his chin and said, "All right. Ra had this built—"

"Why Ra and not the Ancients?" Jack asked.

"Because if it had been the Ancients," Blair answered, "then all the addresses you downloaded when you—"

"How does he know about that?" Jack interrupted.

"I told him, of course. Remember?" Daniel made quote marks in the air as he added, "'Catch 'em both up, Daniel.'"

"Oh. Okay."

"As Daniel was saying," Blair interjected. "Ra had this built. Now it's kind of a given that his Jaffa would oversee it, but my question is: would the Abydonians have done the actual work?"

"No," Daniel said. "None of the Abydonians knew about its existence. If their ancestors had been responsible for this, there would have been accounts handed down—"

"Not if they were killed," Blair said. "And you told me that when you met them, the Abydonians weren't allowed to make any kind of markings. But that's not really my point. What I'm getting at is that Ra had this built, supposedly to house Stargate addresses, and yet, right there, at the far end of the room, is a gleaming symbol for the Eye of Ra."

"So you're saying it's here, then," Jack said.

When Blair nodded, Jim asked, "Why not just keep it with him? Why put it anywhere?"

"I think I can answer that one," Daniel said. "The constant wars, system lord against system lord?"

"Hide your best weapons where you can access them in an emergency," Blair added.

"Exactly. Ra somehow got his hands on all these 'Gate addresses, so had this created. And he had the Eye of Ra—"
"What makes any of us think that he didn't have it with him when he was blown to smithereens? That it was why he came here to begin with?" Jack asked.

"If he did," Jim said, his hand once again resting against the cartouche, "then we have nothing to worry about, do we? Anubis is looking for something that no longer exists." Without turning around, he added, "Unless it's something that not even our best bombs can destroy."

"You just had to say that, didn't you?" Jack complained.

Jim shrugged and turned back to the cartouche. "Okay, there's a hollow spot here," he noted as he tapped one of the symbols.

His announcement perked everyone up considerably and both Daniel and Blair started to circle around the pillar of addresses, searching for anything odd or different, anything that could disclose what might be hidden inside. When they came up empty-handed, they both moved back to the front to stare at the cartouche.

After several minutes, Daniel said, "Could it really be this easy?" He stepped forward and, one by one, pressed each symbol in the line Jim had identified. When he was done, he stepped back even as a slight tremor could be felt underfoot. Daniel immediately jumped back even further and smiled when Jim, Jack and Blair did the same.

"Okay, this is interesting," Jack said as dust fell from the ceiling. "Is that thing moving... or are we?"

"I don't think... I think something inside is moving," Blair said, eyes wide with wonder.

Sure enough, a moment later, the line of symbols that Daniel had pressed – recessed.

"All that drama – for that?" Jack asked.

Blair looked over at Daniel, who looked back at him.

"You want to?" Daniel asked.

"Not if you'd rather. You figured it out," Blair said magnanimously.

"Gee, thanks." Daniel looked over at Jim. "What are your senses telling you?"

Jim gave an exasperated shake of his head and reached inside the opening as he said, "I can see inside and there's nothing but this rolled up piece of something." He held up a tube for inspection.

"Parchment inside," Daniel said.

"A scroll," Blair agreed.


All three looked at him and he shrugged. "What, I can't guess too?"

Daniel took the tube from Jim and said, "I think we should probably open this back home – under controlled circumstances."

"Yeah, Carter will want to do all sorts of erotic things to it before its unrolled, Daniel."

"Erotic? Erotic?"
"Oh, shut up."

Jim, Blair and Skaara grinned.

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"Sir, what about the Abydonians?" Carter asked as she looked at the tube in Daniel's hand.

"I'm thinking it's time we relocate them," Jack answered. "None of us have been comfortable with the idea of the 'Gate remaining open anyway." He gave Daniel a pointed look. "I think this ball is in your court as far as convincing Kasuf that it's the right thing to do."

"Yeah, I know. I'm going." With that, he walked back into Kasuf's home.

"Do you believe he will be successful this time?" Teal'c asked.

"Yeah, I do. This was a close call and we know that as long as Daniel continues to 'travel the stars', Kasuf will want some method of being able to communicate with him. Skaara too."

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"Good Father, you know it's now the only way. We won't be able to provide protection in the long term, so please, it is time to leave Abydos."

"Good Son, this has been our home—"

"Your forced home, Good Father. The Land of the Light will provide a home that is green and beautiful, where life will be considerably easier. Please, Good Father. There is no other way to protect you."

Kasuf searched his son's face, noted the worry, and then glanced over at Skaara, who looked away, his face set in stone.

"Skaara would stay and fight should others return," he finally said, his implication clear. "I wish to consider your request, so I shall take a short walk about my city. I will return."

Daniel watched him leave, understanding exactly what he was doing. If Daniel could convince Skaara....

"This may be our 'forced' home as you have said, Dan-yel, but it is no less our home. I would not run or give it over to another false god."

Daniel considered turning this particular argument over to Jack – but quickly discarded the idea. It wouldn't be fair to him. He sat down across from Skaara and crossed his legs, signaling the need to talk. When Skaara remained where he was, Daniel took that as a good sign. He just hoped he could come up with the words necessary to change the younger man's mind.

He cleared his throat and said, "You will one day lead your people, Skaara. A wise man knows the right battles to fight – and those to put aside for another day. It will not be a few Jaffa that come next time. Because of us – Abydos will be considered more of a threat than originally suspected by the one who sent these last four. Therefore, in order to best protect your people, relocating is the right thing to do. It's what a good, wise and courageous leader would do."

Skaara looked at the flames that flickered between them, and Daniel could see the battle being waged between his own words of good sense and Skaara's desire to defend his home. Eventually
Skaara looked up and said, "What you ask is... it does not feel right, Dan-yel. It feels... cowardly."

"Sometimes we know something is right by its very difficulty. Your purpose is not to wage war, Skaara. And if you insist on remaining here – that is what you will be saying. To go is far from cowardly – it would be, in fact, the bravest thing you could do."

"Those are words with no meaning. In my heart, I can not hear them."

"Then your heart is closed, Skaara. And that will bring shame on your house and your father."

The words were hard and cruel, but necessary. He waited.

Skaara's hand clenched into fists and his gaze returned to the fire. Several heartbeats later, he said, "You have always been wise, your words heavy with truth. I would be a fool not to listen and ... I am no fool. I was allowing the past to govern the future, was I not?"

Daniel smiled. "I have done the same, Good Brother. We are fallible, which is why we must rely on each other for the truth where no others would give it."

Suddenly Skaara grinned. "This is true." He leaned forward and said, "Tell me more of the Land of Light."

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"How long to relocate them?" General Hammond asked.

"They have few belongings, General. The livestock will take the longest but we figure we'll have all the Abydonians settled by late tomorrow."

"Good, good. We have teams set up to assist in the building of their new city?"

"Yes, as well as agriculturalists to aid in teaching them new farming techniques better suited to a lush planet like the Land of Light than a desert home like Abydos."

"How's Doctor Jackson?"

Jack frowned at that. "He's... fine. Right now, he's down in Sam's lab awaiting the results of the tests on the tube we brought back."

"Abydos was his home for a year, Jack. I believe it would be safe to say that he loved it, and while he may know that this relocation is the right thing to do – Abydos is where his wife is buried."

"Of course... I ... I think I'll just head down to Carter's lab, see how he's doing."

"Before you do... I take it that Captain Ellison's special skills came in rather handy on Abydos?"

"They did, sir."

"Very good." He pulled several papers toward him and picked up a pen as he said, "Careful how reports are written, Colonel. We must protect our Jaguarandi."

Smiling, Jack got to his feet. "Yes, sir."

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"So nothing dangerous, then," Daniel stated as he stared at the monitor.
"We've done every possible test. No unusual energy readings and apparently nothing inside other than that," Sam said as she tapped the screen.

Daniel smiled. "Parchment."

"A scroll," Blair said, grinning. "Can we open it now?"

"Down, Rover, down," Jim said from where he was perched, namely on the end of Sam's worktable.

Sam walked over to the protected enclosure, opened it, and took out the tube, which she handed over to Daniel. With Sam and Teal'c on one side and Blair the other, Daniel started to unscrew the top.

"Boom!"

Both Blair and Sam gave startled little jumps but Jim just grinned, Teal'c raised an eyebrow while Daniel simply said, "Hi, Jack," and continued working on the tube.

"I thought it was funny," Jack pouted as he came alongside Daniel.

"Oh, yeah, a laugh riot, that's you. And not the least bit predictable either," Daniel said as the lid came off.

Jim immediately joined them just as the rolled paper slid into Daniel's gloved hand.

"Wow," Blair said. "It's real parchment – as in – parchment."

"And it's old, just like I said," Jack crowed.

"But it most certainly is not Kleenex," Teal'c observed dryly.

Leaning over the lab table, Daniel, with Blair's help, slowly spread the paper out. Sam reached up, adjusted the lamp, and put the magnifying glass within his reach.

Jack peered over Daniel's shoulder and said, "Well?"

"It's Ancient."

"Daniel, we know it's old. What does it say?"

"Oh, for heaven's sake, Jack. I mean that it's written in Ancient." He looked up at Sam and said, "If you can get me an enlarged photo of it, I can leave it here so you can confirm the age, etc.."

Sam nodded and quickly swung the lab camera over. She positioned it above the scroll, watched the screen as she adjusted the focus and size, and then pressed the button. She took several photos before swinging the camera out of the way and moving to the keyboard. A few moments later, several copies exited the printer. Teal'c lifted them out of the carrier and delivered them to Daniel.

"All right, I'll just take these over to my office and see what they say—"

"Right after lunch," Jack said.

"We can eat in his office," Blair said excitedly.

"You won't win this one," Jim said in a resigned voice.
"I know. Okay, why don't you and I go get the food and leave these—"

"Geeks?" Daniel supplied helpfully.

"Nerds?" Blair added just as helpfully.

"Geeks and nerds to their business."

"Sounds good to me," Jim agreed with a laugh.

"I'll get my people started on more tests, Daniel, and then meet you in your office. Sir, I'll take a salad and—"

"Blue Jell-o?"

Grinning, Sam nodded. "Yes, sir."

"Teal'c, which direction are you going? With us – or the geeks?"

"I believe I will remain here with Major Carter. I too will take a salad – the fried chicken salad with the dressing of many islands -- on the side."

"And sir, what might I get for you?" Jack asked Daniel as he gave him a slight bow.

"Uhm... a turkey sandwich with avocado -- barbecue chips, macaroni salad if they have it today – but only if it's macaroni salad with chopped eggs – and a diet Pepsi. Oh, and a slice of lemon meringue pie."

"Gee, is that all, sir? No soup? A nice fruit plate, perhaps?"

Daniel patted him on the arm and said, "No, thanks. I have all the ... fruit ... I can handle."

Eyes narrowed, Jack started to give up with a very witty retort when Jim said, "Chief? What do you want?"

He looked up at Daniel and asked, "How's the egg salad in this joint?"

"Fine, if you want to die young," Jack answered for Daniel. "The tuna is very good, especially if you get the tuna melt on rye."

"Mmm, that sounds good. Okay, I'll have the tuna melt on rye – no onions – an order of fries, extra crispy, and ... I'll take the fruit plate," Blair finished with a grin. He looked over at Daniel, who was peering at the photos of the scroll, and asked, "You do have tea available in your office, right? And hot water?"

When no answer was forthcoming, Jack said, "Ignore the rude geek. Yes, he has tea and hot water. And Blair, you'll have to lead him to his office because he'll never find it on his own now – he's too immersed in that." Jack pointed at the scroll.

"Don't be an ass, Jack," Daniel said as he started for the door. Walking into the corridor, he said without lifting his head, "You coming, Blair?"

Scratching his head, Blair said, "I hope you're wrong and he *does* know the way because I sure as hell don't." With a goodbye-look thrown at Jim, he hurried after Daniel.

Now worried, Jim said, "Should we——"
Laughing, Jack said, "Daniel could find his way blindfolded. Don't worry, I was just pulling Blair's leg. Thought it might make him taller."

"I heard that!" came a shout from the corridor.

Laughing, Jack and Jim headed out and down to the Commissary with promises to bring back food for Sam and Teal'c before joining Daniel and Blair.

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"So it's a map," Blair said in an awestruck voice. "A map that'll lead us to the Eye?"

Daniel smiled at the younger man's enthusiasm. "That I don't know yet. I've still got quite a bit more to translate."

Blair sat back and made a zipper motion across his mouth, a motion that Daniel doubted would be binding. He bent back over the copy, pen in hand. He was just getting into it again when Jack and Jim arrived with the food. Knowing any further work would have to wait, he put the pen down and started clearing a space so they could eat without destroying half the artifacts on his table.

"Okay, gentlemen, lunch has arrived, as ordered. Tips, while not required, would certainly be appreciated," Jack said as he and Jim rolled the cart up to the table and started to unload the food.

"Tips on base? Thought that was verboten," Blair said as lifted the lid on one of the plates and nodded in satisfaction. "Fries extra crispy – that might be worth a nice ... tip. Or something. Later."

Eyes sparkling, Jim pulled a chair over from the desk behind him and sat down next to his partner as he said, "I've always appreciated your tips, Chief. I'll look forward to later."

"All right, it's getting a bit thick in here," Jack said, his back to the video camera. "You're lucky there's no sound."

"Wait," Blair said, waving a French fry. "That was a perfectly respectable comment about a subject *you* brought up, Jack."

"He's got you there," Daniel said as he pulled his food and Diet Pepsi toward him. "And the tea is in the drawer next to the coffeemaker."

Blair was about to get up when Jim set a covered mug in front of him. "Tea. Your favorite, with an extra bag."

"Wow, for this, you get a really – big – tip," Blair said as he sniffed the heavenly brew. "Oh, man, it's perfect. You even added the honey and cream."

Jim shrugged lightly while favoring Blair with a mushy grin.

Jack picked up half his bacon burger and, before taking a bite, asked, "So, how much do you know?"

Blair jumped on answering by saying, "There's a map but we don't know if it will lead us to the Eye."

"If this turns out to be some kind of treasure map, Daniel," Jack warned after swallowing his bite of burger.

"I think I'd better clarify – the first two paragraphs reference a map but whether the map is
included in the parchment, I don’t know yet, and as Blair said, we don’t know what it might lead to, okay?"

"So you haven’t progressed all that much since you got down here?” Jack said, doing his best to look very innocent.

"Well, I admit – I’ve been at it for a long time – Blair, how long were we working on it before Captain Ellison and the Neanderthal arrived?"

"That would be... twenty-one minutes, Daniel. And thank you for not including Captain Ellison in the Neanderthal category."

"My pleasure. How’s your sandwich, by the way?"

"Excellent, as are the fries and the fruit plate. Yours?"

"Very good. Hit the spot, actually."

Jack looked over at Jim and said, "I hate it when he pretends I’m not here."

"Why do I have the feeling that happens a lot?” Jim asked.

"Why do I have the feeling that you know the feeling?” Jack countered.

"Because we’re both put upon by our partners?” Jim suggested.

"That must be it. Younger, shorter, and they think they own the world."

"Jack, old buddy, old pal – they do."

"Oh."

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Jim sat in his office – still shocked that he had one – and contemplated the folders in front of him. Blair sat on the other side of the desk, an equally large pile in front of him. He was studiously reading what basically represented the live and times of SG-1. It had been one thing for Daniel to take them briefly through the last few years, but in all reality, if Jim and Blair were to do their job, they needed to understand what was beyond the circle that was the Stargate. And there was no better way to get a handle on that than to read up on the adventures of Jack, Sam, Teal’c and Daniel.

"Okay, how am I so blessed that you’d leave Daniel and the parchment copy and join me?"

"What, I’m going to sit there and stare at Daniel while he does what no one else is qualified to do?"

"So you were bored?"

Still reading, Blair nodded. "I was bored – and I knew these were still here and we’d only gone through a couple dozen each, so here I am."

"And you missed me."

Blair grinned but didn't lift his head. "And I missed you."

"I wonder what Simon is doing right now?"
"Not reading the further adventures of SG-1 – like you."

"Ha-ha."

Jim picked up another folder and went back to reading.

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Daniel sat back and just stared at the paper in front of him. This was... this was too weird. Slowly he reached under his shirt and fingered the pendant given to him by Catherine.

He was wearing the Eye of Ra.

Daniel reached for the phone.

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Jim put the phone down and said, "That was Jack. Briefing room in ten minutes. Daniel's had a break-through."

Closing the folder, Blair said, "Cool. Let's go."

Jim rose to his feet and, as they exited his office, said, "What year are you on?"

"Just finished nineteen-ninety-nine."

"What did you think of the Nox?" Jim asked as they turned the corner.

"Oh, I have *got* to meet them."

"You would say that." The walked up the stairs to the briefing room and, as they approached the door, Jim asked, "How many times have any of SG-1 died?"

"I stopped counting."

"You've already got a start on catching up to them, Chief. I don't want—"

Blair turned at the entrance and said, "Jim, we've had this conversation. We both know the risks and we've accepted them, okay?"

Jim stared at him for a minute... and finally said, "Right. Sorry. Just... don't try and play catch-up, all right?"

"I won't if you won't."

Blair held out his hand and, smiling, Jim took it and they shook.

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"You're saying that you have the Eye of Ra?" Hammond asked.

"Yes, sir. Which explains why Ra reacted the way he did when he tore it from my neck. I must have surprised the hell out of him. He hid it at Giza centuries ago and I show up on Aybdoes wearing it."

"But why? Why hide it at all?" Jack asked, clearly puzzled.
"Because from what I've translated so far, this," Daniel tapped the parchment copy, "told him that by itself, it was nothing, but with the Eye of Thoth, it became the key to a powerful weapon. So until he could find the second eye, he kept the 'directions' separate from the Eye of Ra."

"But both Eyes were created by the Ancients?" Hammond asked.

"According to what I have so far, yes, sir," Daniel said.

"Okay," Blair said, "so an Ancient weapon falls into the hands of the Goa'uld, namely Ra. At some point, he also comes into possession of a parchment and learns that he needs the left eye, the Eye of Thoth, which, if we follow mythology, went from Seth, back to Thoth and then to Osiris. Now I'm guessing that the parchment doesn't reveal the location of the Eye of Thoth, right?"

"On the nose, Blair," Daniel said.

"So we need to find the Eye of Thoth, but even if we don't – Anubis can't do anything because we now have two parts of the threesome," Jack said.

"That's certainly one way to put it," Sam said, barely holding back her grin.

Teal'c noticed the expression of intense concentration on Blair's face and asked, "ChiefBlairSandburg, is there something wrong?"

When he didn't answer right away, Jim gave him a gentle nudge and said, "Chief?"

"Wha'?"

"Care to share what had you so deep in thought?" Jim asked.

Blair looked at Daniel and then Jack, and then General Hammond. Finally he cleared his throat and said, "Uhm, Seth? You ran up against him back in ninety-nine? And if I remember the report correctly, you have everything taken from his stronghold, right?"

Sam leaned forward and said, "Yes, at Area 51, why?"

"Because mythology says that Seth killed his brother, Osiris. Now what that means in Goa'uld history could be anything from imprisoning him to god knows what, but Osiris and Isis are not system lords you've run into yet, right?"

"No, they aren't," Sam said.

Blair looked to Teal'c and asked, "Have you run across any Jaffa from Osiris or Isis?"

"No, I have not. There are legends, yes, but no activity in my memory or in anything my father ever mentioned."

"So if the Goa'uld Seth did, in fact, get his hands on Osiris and Isis, then isn't a reasonable assumption that he got the Eye of Thoth back at the same time?" Blair asked, eyes darting from one member of SG-1 to another.

Jack finally turned to Hammond and said, "Sir, I think a trip to Area 51 might be in order for SG-1."

"I agree, Colonel. I'll arrange immediate transportation."
"What the hell is he doing?" Jack asked with a nod in the direction of Blair.

"Oh, that? He's bouncing. It's this little thing he does, no explanation. Up on the toes, then down on the heel—"

"And that's the way to do the Varsity Drag," Teal'c intoned seriously.

All eyes turned to him, including the bouncing anthropologist. Teal'c canted his head and said, "I am quite certain I said it correctly."

"Good News," Blair finally said.

"Why is it good news that Teal'c said something correctly if none of us know what he said, and therefore couldn't possibly know if he said it correctly?" Jack asked.

"No, that's a lyric from the MGM musical, Good News. It starred Peter Lawford and June Alyson," Blair explained. He then hummed some of the song, ending with, "Here is the Drag, see how it goes, down on your heels, up on your toes, and that's the way to do the—"

"...Varsity Drag," Teal'c finished with him.

They smiled at each other, Teal'c giving him a small bow in the bargain.

Jack glanced over at Jim, one eyebrow arched in a clear question. Jim shook his head and said, "I swear to you, he has never once watched that movie in my presence. Nor any other musical – although – Chicago – we both enjoyed Chicago...."

"Hey," Blair said defensively, "it was one of my mother's favorite movies."

Sam looked at Teal'c and asked, "So what's your excuse? I know it wasn't your mother's favorite movie."

"DanielJackson rented it for me during one of his attempts to share your culture. I enjoyed it immensely."

All eyes now turned toward Daniel, who shrugged. "Hey, I showed him Gigi too, so sue me. And Yankee Doodle Dandy, and An American in Paris, and On the Waterfront and the Godfather and —"

"We get the picture, Daniel," Jack said as the elevator came to a stop.

"... and Out of Africa—"

"I enjoyed Out of Africa immensely as I enjoyed On the Waterfront...."

They exited and Jack turned right, the others following.

"...I coulda been a contender," Teal'c said in a damn fine impression of Brando.

"Daniel, I may have to kill you."

"Me? What about the Star Trek movies you showed him? And do I have to remind you of the time when, in front of the Isolas, Teal'c said, and I quote, 'Du-oh'?"

"You showed Teal'c the Simpsons?" Jim asked.
"Yeah, so?" Jack challenged.

"Nothing, I think that's great." Jim held up his hand and he and Jack immediately high-fived one another.

"So," Blair said pointedly. "This is Area 51?"

Jack had led them to a large storage area and they now stood at its entrance. Blair looked around and said dryly, "And I suppose the Ark is buried somewhere in the middle of all of this?"

"Ha-ha," Jack said as he flicked on the lights. He glanced down at the paper in his hand and said, "According to this, all of the items taken from Seth's stronghold are in quadrant four."

"Which would be, I'm guessing, no where near quadrant three or five," Jim said.

"That would be accurate," Jack said with a grin. "The military mind can't be beat. Come on, let's spread out. Whoever finds quadrant four first gets a free steak at Hilliard's in town."

"Is this a good thing?" Blair asked. "'Cause if not...."

"It's a very good thing," Sam said as she smiled down on him. "Best steaks this side of the Mississippi."

"What about lobster? Do they have lobster?" Blair asked.

Jim bopped him on the back of his head and said, "Move it, Sandburg. You know damn well you're dying to look around, lobster or no lobster."

"They do indeed have what is called 'all-you-can-eat lobster'."

"Cool," Blair said as he and Teal'c moved off to the left.

Grinning, Daniel took Sam's arm and said, "Partners?"

"I'd be delighted, Daniel. After you."

"No, after you."

Together, they moved off to the right, leaving Jack and Jim.

"So the center aisle is ours, then?" Jim asked.

"Looks like," Jack said. He held out his arm, which Jim took. "So, we're off to see the wizard about an eye," he said as the two of them started down the center aisle.

"You have this thing for the Wizard of Oz, don't you?"

"Ya think?"

***

Blair was astounded. Over half the alien legends going back to the forties could become fact if the stuff he'd seen so far were to be made public. It was simply amazing. Of course, he still hadn't found anything that looked like "quadrant four" but hey, he was having fun.

"ChiefBlairSandburg, we should go this way," Teal'c said from behind him.
Blair nodded and followed him, his eyes peeled for anything that looked like ... anything. Which reminded him, in a round-about way, he was still curious about Jaffa tattoos.

"Hey, Teal'c, I've been meaning to ask you – back on Abydos, those Jaffa. Their tattoos weren't like yours. How come?"

"I was the First Prime of Apophis – only First Prime wear the gold tattoo."

"But the other kind – it is a tattoo as well?"

"Not... precisely. It is as permanent, but is actually a paint that is applied at birth—"

"If you're not born free."

Teal'c looked down at him, his eyes dark and unfathomable. "That is... correct. If one is not ... born free." He tilted his head and asked, "What does it feel like – to be born free?"

Blair, who even while talking, was looking all around him, now glanced over at Teal'c. With a thoughtful expression on his face, he said, "You know, I wish that question could be answered, but it can't. Not by someone who's known no other way of life. I can't begin to appreciate what it means for you, but, I can say this: no man is truly free, let alone born free. It's not a natural state, and remaining free requires that one remain ever vigilant. It also, often, means giving up certain other freedoms in order to maintain a greater one." A quicksilver grin crossed his face as he added, "I think it's probable that freedom is a synonym for responsibility."

"You are saying that should my people one day be free, it will not be over."

"Just beginning, Teal'c. Just beginning. And never ending."

"But it is worth the struggle, is it not? Surely, one as wise as yourself, even though you've never known any other kind of life, can tell me that."

"The answer doesn't lie with anything I can say. It lies here," he tapped Teal'c's chest. "You tell me, Teal'c. You're free now but sacrificed much to gain said freedom. Was it worth it?"

A soft smile touched his lips. "It was – and is."

"You have your answer then."

"I believe I do. Thank you, ChiefBlairSandburg."

"I'm not sure why you're thanking me, but look up."

Teal'c did as asked – and smiled again. "Quadrant four, ChiefBlairSandburg."

"Yep. You want to spread the news?"

"Indeed."

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Daniel rubbed his eyes under his glasses, the dust driving him crazy. So far, they'd been through several boxes and nothing that could possibly have been the Eye of the Thoth had been found. Fortunately there were several boxes to go, so Daniel still had hope.

"Yo! I think I've found something!"
Daniel peered around the boxes he was seated in front of to see Jim holding up a necklace that looked very much like Catherine's. He got up and hurried to Jim's side, just beating everyone else. Hand outstretched, he said, "Let me...."

He didn't need to finish, the necklace already in his hand. Slowly, he smiled. "This has to be it." He reached up and pulled the chain from around his neck and slowly brought the two together in his hand, chains dangling between his fingers. "This is definitely a representation of the Eye of Thoth."

"How can you tell?" Jack asked from where he stood looking over Daniel's shoulder.

"Uhm, well... one is clearly the ... right eye and ... you know, this one is obviously... the opposite? As in?"

"Oh. Right. The left eye," Jack said sheepishly.

"So we now have both, right?" Blair asked.

"It would seem so," Teal'c said.

"I guess that means it's time for dinner and since you and I found quadrant four, we get the freebie."

"Indeed."

***

They had a large table in the far corner of the restaurant, something SG-1 realize they'd have to get used to with a sentinel on the team. Jim was seated so that he had a view of the entire restaurant, which felt odd to Jack, since that was usually a seat fought over by Teal'c and him. They'd ordered and were now discussing everything under the sun but work and their recent discovery. True to his word, Blair had ordered the lobster while everyone else, Sam included, had stuck to steak. Of course, Sam had ordered the eight ounce New York as opposed to the sixteen ordered by Jack, Jim and Teal'c, but still, at least it was steak.

"So, just how many lobsters can he take care of?" Jack asked Jim as he gestured at Blair.

"You're about to find out," Jim said mysteriously.

Their waitress arrived bearing food and, for the next several minutes talk was rare as they all dug in. Blair finished his first lobster before Sam got halfway through her steak and was on his second when she took her last bite. Jack had stopped eating in order to watch the youngest member of their team tear into the crustacean, an act that almost seemed... violent -- which given the man's character – surprised the hell out of Jack and his other teammates, who were watching just as shocked.

"I can't... he's ...."

"I know," Jim said. "It's amazing, isn't it?"

"I don't have the words," Jack said as the third lobster was set before Blair.

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Five total lobsters later, Blair sat back and grinned. "Now that was a great dinner," he said as he patted his flat stomach. "How were the steaks?"
"They were great," Jack said. "But I feel so ordinary now that I've watched you eat lobster. I wish I'd been able to video the whole experience – show it at the next briefing. It was very—"

"Warlike," Teal'c supplied.

"Exactly. A video would inspire the troops," Jack said, his lips twitching upward.

"We could show the new recruits," Sam offered, her eyes sparkling with humor.

"Jim, you're not jumping in here," Blair said, eyes narrowed.

"Oh, right. Sorry. I was thinking something along the lines of 'How to tear apart the enemy – underneath, they're just lobsters.'" He looked at Jack, one eyebrow raised. "What do you think?"

"Jim, that's not what I had in mind," Blair huffed. "You're supposed to defend your partner. That's how it works."

"Defend you? Oh. Okay... how's this: you eat lobster like a girl. There, feel better now?"

"You are so going to regret that. I have the power, man."

"I'd like to get into this whole power trip you've got going, Sandburg, but our flight leaves in two hours so we're outta here," Jack said as he checked his watch.

"What about dessert?" Blair nearly whined.

"Order to go," Jack said with a disbelieving shake of his head at the idea that the man had anyplace to put anymore food.

"Oh, yeah, I can do that."

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"Content you, gentlemen. I will compound this strife" - William Shakespeare

On the flight back, Daniel studied the parchment copy and worked on finishing the translation. Which he did fifteen minutes before they set down, with the finished product nearly taking his breath away.

One hour after touch down, they were back in the briefing room, both pendants sitting on the table in front of General Hammond.

"Well, Doctor Jackson, I believe you stated that you'd finished the translation. Would you fill us in?" Hammond said.

Daniel took a deep breath and said, "The purpose of the parchment was to accomplish exactly what it has: to give us an advantage over the Goa'uld. As we know from my contact with Oma and Sam's with Orlin, the Ancients refuse to interfere in any world – think of it as their prime directive."

"Nice one, Daniel."

Ignoring Jack, Daniel went on. "Some Ancients, while believing whole-heartedly in the so-called prime directive, realized that as we grew and matured, we'd venture out among the stars and encounter the Goa'uld. These particular Ancients, who had a soft spot for us, saw nothing wrong with 'arranging' things so that we'd have assistance without any real intervention on their part. You could say that they obeyed the spirit of their law – if not the letter." He reached over and picked up
one of the Eyes. "This is how they decided to help us – by allowing us to help ourselves. They figured that some day, we'd find these, and the parchment, and that we'd be smart enough to put it all together."

"That was kind of risky," Jack said, clearly disgusted. "But why am I not surprised? Superior beings always think they're so ... you know... superior." He took in the strange looks being shot his way and shrugged. "What? Am I wrong?"

"Yes, well, as I was saying," Daniel said. "These Eyes are, together, the key that will unlock what I can only term as an Ancient repository—"

"Oh, no, not another brain thing. Tell me, Daniel, we're not talking about another trip down Ancient Memory Lane. Just tell me that."

"We're not talking about another trip down Ancient Memory Lane. Feel better now?"

"Yes, thank you."

Shaking his head, Daniel went on. "We're talking about a repository of Ancient technology and it's right here... on Earth." He sat back and allowed his words to penetrate.

Eventually, Hammond said, stunned, "Earth? Here on ... Earth?"

"Yes, sir." Daniel took a piece of paper from his folder and slid it across the table to Hammond. He then took another copy and handed it to Sam. "These are the coordinates, General. Sam will have to do her thing to give us the exact location."

Hammond nodded at Sam, who immediately got up and headed downstairs to the control room.

"I'm wondering," Jack said as Sam disappeared, "what kind of Ancient technology. Are we talking weapons? Because if all we're talking is a new and fancy way of drying hair, for instance, then I say phooey on the Ancients, you know?"

Daniel bit back his grin even as Hammond shot Jack what could only be called a patient, paternal look, the kind bestowed on a son who never quite grew up.

"I suspect, Colonel, that the Ancients wouldn't have gone to all this trouble to simply show us how to dry our hair in a more convenient manner," Hammond finally said.

"I wouldn't put it past them," Jack muttered.

Jim exchanged humorous glances with Blair as they all settled back to wait for Sam's return.

When she reentered the room, her expression was one of distaste. She took her seat and said, "Antarctica."

"You did not just say 'Antarctica', Carter, and that's an order," Jack said with a mock shiver.

Jim glanced at Blair, who mouthed, "Second Stargate on Earth." Nodding, his memory clicking in, Jim said, "But surely if there'd been a repository anywhere near where you two found the second 'Gate, it would have been discovered?"

"The coordinates aren't even close to where the colonel and I ended up, General," Sam explained quickly.

She passed the sheet with the results toward Hammond, who gave it a quick perusal. "I would have
"to assume," he finally said, "that there's no visible structure which means this repository is probably buried under the ice."

"But these are the keys," Blair mused. "So there has to be something there, something to indicate how or where to use them." He looked over at Daniel. "No clue in the parchment, just the coordinates?"

"Oh, there's a clue, all right. It reads," Daniel picked up his notes, "'The mirror reflects only what is shown; a reflection's mirror, however, is more than the total for he can see beyond.'" He looked up. "'Clear as mud, right?"

"'Typical Oma," Jack said with a roll of his eyes. "Just once, it would be nice to run into an advanced species that doesn't talk in riddles."

"I don't talk in riddles," Blair said with a straight face.

"'Well, I can't deny that you're a different species, Sandburg," Jim said. "But whether advanced—""

"Yes, well," Jack interrupted. "The question now becomes – do we mount an expedition to these coordinates?"

"This is going to have to go to the Pentagon, people. The expense of such an expedition, the equipment needed, requires a full report to the Joint Chiefs. I'll—"

Blair raised his hand. "Excuse me, General?"

Smiling for the first time, Hammond said, "Son, you don't have to raise your hand here, just say what you need to say."

Blair sheepishly lowered his arm. "I realize that I'm not completely familiar with all aspects of the SGC, but I know I remember reading... in one of Jack's reports... about certain crystals possessed by the Tok'ra, crystals that would come in pretty handy – and lower the expense – not to mention the agreement with the Tok'ra to share information and it certainly seems as though this fits the bill, so maybe this is something for our new liaison to tackle -- along with Sam's dad?"

Hammond's expression reflected his total astonishment while Jack, Sam and Teal'c were staring at Blair as if he were an alien.

Blair glanced quizzically over at Jim, who explained, "No breath, Chief. They're just amazed you got all that out without taking a breath. They're not used to it yet."

"Oh. I should probably come with a warning label."

"It's not too late," Jack said. "Carter can put something together and Teal'c and Daniel can translate it into both Goa'uld and Ancient."

"Why would I want to warn the Goa'uld?" Blair asked reasonably.

"Good point," Jack conceded.

Hammond watched his four-person – now six – flagship team and wondered how he'd lost control – and when. Before or after the Sentinel and his sidekick?

***

The Stargate revolved half a turn and Sergeant Davis said, "Chevron six locked."
Blair watched, still amazed and in awe as the seventh symbol locked into place and, a moment later, the wormhole burst forth like a dam breaking in on itself. He could feel the excitement building in both he and Jim; an excitement rooted in the fact that at any moment, Simon would walk through the event horizon.

"Boy, Jacob was right," Simon said as he and Jacob stepped onto the ramp. "You guys just can't make it for any length of time without us."

"Us?" Jim said as he moved forward, a huge smile on his face. "It's us now, is it?"

Grinning, Simon, wearing an outfit similar to Jacob's, walked down the ramp and gave Jim a huge hug. "You bet it is," he said as he and Jim stepped back from each other. He looked down at Blair and said, "Looking good, Sandburg. How's it going?"

"Great, Simon, just great. How's life living in a tunnel?"

Simon gave out with his booming laugh and said, "It's terrific and no train at the end."

Jacob came along side the three men and said, "Okay, we've had the reunion now, guys. What's up?"

"Everyone's in the briefing room," Jim said, causing Jacob to look up.

Staring down at them were Jack, Sam and Teal'c. All three were grinning even as they wiggled their fingers at him. Jacob rolled his eyes and said, "Simon, you were right. Sandburg is not a good influence on the SGC."

"Me!? Don't you mean Jim?"

Jim tugged at a curl and said, "No, he doesn't. I'm a responsible adult – you're a short – whatever."

"I get no respect," Blair groused as the four walked out of the 'Gate room.

"Live with it, Dangerfield," Simon teased.

***

"So that's it," Daniel finished. "That's why we need your help in the form of those crystals."

Jacob studied the two pendants before finally saying, "This could be very big for all of us. I seriously doubt that I'll have any difficulty convincing the Council to release several for your use," he glanced up at Hammond, "provided I have your usual assurance that we'll all share, share and share alike."

"And we all know how good the Tok'ra are at sharing," Jack said dryly.

"You have my assurance, Jacob," Hammond said as if Jack hadn't spoken. He got to his feet and said, "I have a call to make but I suspect I know the answer I'll receive from the Joint Chiefs. This has the kind of potential that would justify this program for the next fifty years." With that, he turned and walked into his office.

Once the door was shut, Jacob said, "I'll head back and see what I can do with the Council, Simon. Why don't you remain here for now?"

Simon nodded as they all stood up. Sam took her father's arm and said, "I could join you, help explain?"
"Now there's an idea," Jacob said, smiling.

"Well then, let's get you two down to the 'Gate room," Jack said.

"I would deem it an honor to also accompany you and Major Carter, Jacob Carter," Teal'c said.

"The more the merrier, I always say," Jack said as they all trooped out.

"He actually never says that," Daniel said.

***

"All right, what was up with Teal'c actually wanting to be anywhere near the Tok'ra?" Jack asked as the iris slid shut.

"I take it that was unusual?" Jim asked.

"Very. So unusual, I'm thinking a trip to the Infirmary when he gets back."

"I just assumed he'd always go where Sam went," Blair offered as he followed Jack, Daniel, Jim and Simon out of the 'Gate room.

Jack came to a standstill. "Excuse me?"

Looking suddenly uncertain, Blair's gaze darted back and forth between the three men as he said, "You know – Teal'c and Sam? Sam and Teal'c?" He held up his hand and crossed his fingers. "Teal'c and Sam?"

Jack reached over and separated Blair's digits. "There is no 'Teal'c and Sam', Sandburg."

"Oh. Okay, so I ... you know, misread things. Not like I haven't done that before."

Jack started walking again as Blair shot Daniel an apologetic look even as he said, "But Teal'c ... did want to go with her...."

At the look Jack shot him over his shoulder, he added helplessly, "I'm just sayin'...."

***

"Okay, I officially hate these rooms, Jim," Blair complained as he balled up his jacket and tossed it across the room.

They'd just left Simon in his new quarters following a nice long session of playing catch-up and were now in theirs and getting ready for bed. As Jim picked up the thrown item of clothing, he asked, "Whoa, where did the sudden anger come from, Chief?"

"I said, hello, I hate these rooms. I need a window," he said as he started to pace. "Sure, it's a nice VIP room and we even have a 'sitting' room and a television, but damn it, I hate it. I'm throwing in these crappy green uniforms too. I hate them as well."

"Ok-ay, so tomorrow, we'll get you a set of the blue. How's that?" Jim asked from where he now sat on the couch.

"We have to get a place of our own – and soon," Blair said as he continued to pace. "This is too claustrophobic. Makes my old room under your stairs seem open – huge – spacious, even."
Jim reached out and snagged the younger man during one of his passes. He pulled him down on the couch and said, "What's going on?"

"I told you, I hate—"

"What's really going on?"

Blair started tapping his fingers on his thigh as his eyes darted around the room. "I really am feeling claustrophobic, Jim. When we're busy, it's okay being down here, when we're in your office, or Daniel's, or even the Commissary -- it's okay, but then we come here and I can feel every single floor above us -- all pressing down on me...."

Jim's senses were telling him that even though Blair really was feeling as he described, there was something else going on and, until he could find out what, well, one problem at a time. He picked up the phone, dialed out, and then dialed Jack's number. He double-checked his watch and nodded. Yep, Jack and Daniel would have had time to drive home – if they didn't stop anywhere along the way.

"O'Neill."

"Jack, it's Jim. I've got a problem here and have a big favor to ask."

"Shoot."

***

"Daniel, we can't thank you enough," Jim said as Daniel unlocked the front door of his apartment.

"Hey, we should have thought of this from the beginning," Daniel said as he handed the keys over to Jim. "This is actually a great idea. Once things settle down, I'll move some things out and you guys can take over the lease -- if you like the place, that is."

Blair's mouth was open as he walked up the couple of steps and into the main part of the loft apartment. "Daniel, this is... and look, Jim, a balcony... and a study... and okay, this is ... odd. Your refrigerator is in the dining room, but you know, it works... and the bedroom, it's huge...."

Jim stood shoulder to shoulder with Daniel as they both watched Blair move effortlessly around the apartment, poking his head into closets, cupboards, and drawers even as he kept up an endless steam of words.

"Yes, well," Daniel said softly. "I think I'll head back to Jack's. We'll see you in the morning, okay?"

"Right. Tomorrow. And thanks again, he was going crazy down there."

"He'll get used to it eventually, but I understand, believe me. Sleep well."

With that, Daniel quietly took his leave and Jim was finally able to look around himself, which left him as impressed as Blair. And more importantly – for the first time since he and Blair had made the decision to join the SGC – he felt like himself – like Jim Ellison, formerly of Cascade, now of Colorado Springs.

Suddenly he noticed that Blair was stripping on his way to the bedroom.

Damn fine idea, actually.
"They settled in?" Jack asked as Daniel slipped under the covers.

"Oh, yeah. I swear, the two of us had to have had our heads up our butts not to have figured this out. Jim and Blair in my place? It's a natural and my apartment is so similar to Jim's loft that... well, we're just plain stupid not to have thought of it." Daniel rolled over so Jack could spoon up behind him, but kept talking. "I wish you could have seen Blair's face as he walked through the place. He's one happy man."

Wrapping his arms around Daniel, Jack kissed the back of his neck before saying, "Same here. And heads up our butts? I'm thinking... no."

Chuckling, Daniel ran his hand up and down Jack's arm. "Okay, maybe not our head--heads."

"We still have to be careful... but we have time now," Jack murmured, his breath ghosting over the skin of Daniel's shoulder.

"I know. But this could work, Jack. This could be the answer."

"Mmm...."

Since Jack was choosing to speak in tongues, Daniel decided to shut up and enjoy the conversation.

The drapes were open, the window as well, albeit just a crack given the temperature outside, but Blair was one happy camper. And the fact that he and Jim had just had pretty incredible sex was the icing on the cake. Okay, the sex was the cake and the icing. The fact that he was on top of something instead of thirty floors below, and that reality was just outside the window... that constituted the candles buried in icing that topped the cake. He grinned against Jim's oh-so-solid chest.

"You ready to talk now, Chief?"

The smile faded.

"I'm not going to let this go, Blair, so talk now."

Blair rolled away from Jim and onto his back. Hands behind his head, he mused, "I miss the skylight."

Jim turned over and propped his head up with his hand in order to see his partner. "Was that code for you think this move was a mistake?"

Blair grinned. "No, I'm just looking at the ceiling and it was the first thought that popped into my head. This is the adventure of a lifetime, Jim, and we're now part of something huge. This is right – very right – I feel it in my bones."

"Ok-ay. So what's wrong?"

Blair sat up and rested his arms on his blanket-covered knees. "You're not starting over, Jim."

"I need more information, Chief. I'm close to understanding what you're saying, but I need more."
"I am -- starting over, that is. From scratch. I'm back to being ... tolerated... you know? Because I'm your... because they know, in a weird way they don't understand, that you need me." He turned his head and looked down at Jim. "I'm the joke again – and I'm too old for that now."

"Jesus," Jim whispered.

"Oh, I'll adjust... get used to it again, but you asked, and we talk now, so I told you."

Jim reached out and ran his hand up Blair's back. "Chief, you always talked. The only difference now is that I talk too and, more importantly, listen."

"Thanks."

"But I don't agree. I don't think you're being 'tolerated' by anyone and we've both justified our existence, not to mention our pay, since coming on board." He kept his hand on Blair's back as he added, "Actually, I think Jack has continually paid you the highest compliment by ragging on you unmercifully. That's a sure sign of respect in his book."

"Oh, is that what it is? Gosh," Blair said, his tone sarcastic. "You do realize that Teal'c is crazy about Sam, right?"

"Well, I didn't ... until you pointed it out. Then, yeah, it was obvious."

"So why didn't Jack want to see that? And does it mean trouble for Daniel? Or was it simply because the idea came from me?"

"Whoa, back the train up here, Chief. Why would ... no, you need to explain, I'm not even going to try to guess."

"Jack... having feelings for Sam, thus not wanting to hear about any Teal'c-Sam ideas? Thus bad news for Daniel? Hello?"

Jim sat up for that one. "Okay, you're a good judge of people, Chief. You size them up pretty quickly and very accurately. I think you know Jack now, and you know Daniel very well, so what do you think about them?"

"I think Jack and Daniel are very much in love – very much. I think they're soul mates, like us. Which means that it was because it came from me and thus – nonsense."

"Chief, I bet they're talking about it right now and Daniel is showing Jack the way to Teal'c-Sam, okay?"

"Which only means that from me, it was nonsense, but from Daniel, it'll be fact – real."

"And you find this surprising, why? Who has Jack known longer?"

Blair gave Jim a slow, thoughtful nod. "Okay, yeah, that's true."

"It's the reason, Chief. We're both the newbies, but Jack and I have a short history so I have a slight edge with him, but hey, you have the same edge with Daniel. Don't obsess over this, Chief. Just give the whole thing time, all right?"

"I'm still starting over... but you're right," he said grudgingly. "Which is kind of a miracle in and of itself. You being right, I mean."

"Come here," Jim growled as he pulled Blair on top of him. He palmed the back of Blair's head and
pushed until Blair's lips were within reach. He kissed him hard and possessively until he was pretty
certain Blair was breathless and then he flipped them both over. "Insult me, Sandburg," he
whispered, "and you pay the price."

"Oooh, I'm scared," Blair said, his laughter deep and throaty.

"Jaguar animal spirit, here. Be afraid, be very afraid," Jim warned.

"Grrrrrr...."

***

"You know you screwed up today, right?"

Jack opened one eye to peer at an out-of-focus Daniel, whose nose was an inch from his face. "I
screw up everyday, Daniel. What was different?"

"There is something between Teal'c and Sam and you shut Blair down as if he were an
insignificant Goa'uld."

"Oh, that screw up."

"Yeah, that one."

Jack bit the tip of the nose in his face and said, "You're crazy."

"No, I'm not, but I'm beginning to think... what exactly is the reason for this blind spot where Sam
is concerned?"

"Blind spot? No blind spot, Daniel. I just don't know where you're getting this Teal'c-Carter thing,
that's all."

"So even though I see it and someone brand new to the team sees it – you don't?"

Jack sat up, swung his legs over the side of the bed, grabbed his robe, slipped it on, and got up.
Without another word, he walked out.

Frowning, Daniel watched him disappear. He stayed where he was, wishing fervently that his
apartment was empty because he'd very much like to get in his car and make it un-empty

***

Jack drummed his fingers on the counter while he waited for the coffee to brew. He expected
Daniel to show up any minute – but the house was silent, with no sounds heralding his arrival. The
coffeemaker pinged and Jack poured himself a cup, set it down on the kitchen table and then took
the rest of the chocolate cream pie out of the fridge. Pulling a fork from the drawer, he sat down
and started eating. He figured that between the smell of the fresh brewed coffee and the chocolate,
Daniel would have to join him.

He'd just taken his fourth bite when....

"You're eating the rest of the pie?"

Jack looked up and shook his head. "No, only my half of it. Grab some coffee and a fork."

Daniel shuffled over to the drawer, took out a fork, poured his coffee and, as he added some sugar,
said, "I think you have feelings for Sam."

"Don't be ridiculous. It's Teal'c I'm in love with. You're just an 'instead'."

Daniel set his coffee down, scooped up some of the whipped cream from the top of what he considered his half of the remaining pie, and smeared it over Jack's face.

Licking his lips, Jack said, "Jealous, are we?"

Daniel sat down, pulled the pie over, and dug in. Jack continued to sit across from him with... pie on his face.

"Daniel," he finally said. "There's you and me... and Jim and Blair... and now you guys are telling me there's also Teal'c and Carter? What kind of team am I leading? How the hell do I lead it? Everywhere I look – a couple."

"Thank God Hammond and Janet aren't part of the team. Although... for awhile, I thought Davis would win her heart."

Jack's fork landed with a clatter on the tabletop. "Excuse me?" he squeaked out.

"Gotcha."

Jack's eyes narrowed as he picked up his fork again, took a nice chunk of the dessert, and then proceeded to flick the forkful of pie at Daniel. It hit him on the stretch of chest not covered by the robe.

"Gotcha," Jack said happily.

Daniel looked down, took his index finger, swiped up the chocolate and whipped cream and popped the digit in his mouth. "Mmmm...."

Adjusting himself under the table, Jack said, "I hate you, Daniel."

Daniel licked his finger and asked, "Why is it okay to have two couples on the team and not three? Why is it okay to have two team members in uniform be a part of those two couples, but not okay for the third member in uniform to be a part of a couple? Why is it—"

"Daniel, if you don't stop, I'll have to gag you and I won't use our usual toys to do it – I'll use one of my used Government Issue socks."

Daniel made a face and said, "Eewwww."

"I think we understand each other."

They continued to finish off the pie and then Daniel took their mugs and forks, washed them and left them in the drainer. He turned around, rested back against the counter and crossed his arms over his chest. "Jack, you need to answer me."

"Damn, I thought we were done."

Daniel just waited.

"Okay, okay, you had a good point." He scratched the back of his head and said, "We've always been a weird team, I accepted that – embraced it. It's what made us so good, but now – now we're just -- too weird. And the idea that Carter and Teal'c are now a couple --- or about to be -- well, that
was the straw that broke the weird camel's back, okay?"

"So it's the weird factor, then?"

Miserable, Jack nodded.

"But ... you're ... you know... weird. What other kind of team would you have? I mean, can you honestly see yourself leading, for instance, SG-9? Or how 'bout McNamara's team? Or Ellsworth's?"

Jack shivered and said, "Oh, God, please."

"So there you go. And for god's sake, be happy for Sam and Teal'c. They need each other, deserve the happiness. And you know damn well it won't interfere one iota with the team, or hamper their performance. You know that."

"Iota, weird word. And what the hell does it mean?"


"So Carter and Teal'c, eh?"

"Yep."

Jack shook his head, got up, pulled Daniel into his side, and said, "Wonders never cease."

"Let's go back to bed, Jack."

"Good idea. Best one all night."

Daniel turned off the light and, arms around each other, they headed toward the bedroom.

"I thought the chocolate pie was a great idea," Daniel said as they entered Jack's room.

"Yeah? Well, you ain't seen nothing yet, babe."

***

Blair pulled the bulky, Government Issue sweater on over the black tee-shirt and hoped he'd be warm enough. One of the coldest places he'd ever lived had been Cascade and he was pretty damn sure Antarctica would make that city seem like Florida in the dead of August. He looped his jacket through the straps of his backpack and figured he was ready. He closed his locker – a much nicer one than he'd had at the PD – and headed out.

Jim was just on the other side of the door, leaning languidly against the wall. He straightened when Blair stepped out, looked him up and down, and nodded. "You'll do. Wearing the thermals?"

"Yep."

"Okay, we're off. Everyone's already up top so we'd better hurry."

"Sorry, man, I just—"

"No apology necessary, Chief. Not your fault the Arctic gear was better suited to Paul Bunyan."

"They do have short people in the military, right?" Blair asked as they got into the elevator.
"Oh, I'm sure they must... somewhere. Somewhere – short -- like Ceuta, for instance. Short soldiers in Ceuta."

"I don't think we have any soldiers in Ceuta, Jim. In fact, I'm sure we don't."

"Oh, I'm sure we do."

"We don't."

"Are you sure?"

"Positive."

"Oh. Okay."

***

The flight was uneventful but did provide plenty of opportunity for Simon to pass on more information on his time with the Tok'ra. He also shared the phone call he'd made the previous night to Daryl, who was thrilled to know he was back and actually "doing the job, Dad."

As lunch was passed around – boxed – with either ham or turkey sandwiches – Blair smiled and said, "I'm thinking the whole sentinel thing is a drop in the bucket for Simon now, Jim. Tame stuff, eh?"

Simon laughed at that and, nodding, said, "That's an understatement. Oh, and that reminds me, I brought a something back with me – after receiving permission from the Council. It's about sentinels and I think you'll find it very interesting, Sandburg."

"You're kidding? Do you have it with you now? I could—"

"It's back at the Mountain, sorry. I'll tell you this, though, what you seem to instinctively know to help Jim – well, it's not a simple thing and not even remotely instinctual. The journal talks about the many trials and errors in helping sentinels or 'Custoios', as they were referred to—"

"Custoios?" Daniel asked. "That's familiar... wait, that's Ancient... and based on the fact that we have a Latin word that's very close -- custos – which means 'watchman' -- well, you see where I'm going with this."

"We never know where you're going with anything, Daniel," Jack said from his slouched down position in his seat, long legs stretched out in front of him, cap pulled down over his eyes.

Ignoring him, Daniel said, "If sentinels are called Custoios in this journal, than obviously not only did the Ancients know about sentinels, but the Tok'ra had to have communication at some point with the Ancients." He turned in his seat so that he could see Simon and Jacob. "Are you certain this journal was actually written by a Tok'ra?"

"Actually, we are uncertain of the author," Selmac said, Jacob's eyes glowing briefly. "What we do know is that it was translated from another source by Darmel, who was our queen's mate. That's how far back it goes." He bowed his head and when he looked back up, it was clearly Jacob.

Simon was nodding at Selmac's words and now said, "Palam is certain that it was written by an Ancient. He believes—"

"Oh, not again," Jacob moaned.
Jack pushed his hat back on his head and gave Jacob a quizzical look. "Difference of opinion, Jake?"

"Oh, yeah. Bone of contention among the Council members."

Jack's scarred eyebrow rose, letting Jacob know he'd better be a bit more forthcoming. Smiling, he said, "Palam believes that Queen Egeria was influenced by an Ancient—"

Simon's eyes glowed and when he spoke, it was with the voice of Palam. "That is not an accurate statement of facts, Selmac. And it's not as if you do not also find some merit in my theories."

"Uhm, Palam?" Blair said tentatively. "Feel free to share?"

"My apologies, Blair. You see, I believe that Egeria's final host was an Ancient and it was that symbiotic relationship that convinced our Great Queen to break from the Goa'uld -- specifically from Ra -- and form the Tok'ra."

Palam ducked his head and when Blair looked again into the brown eyes, he knew he was looking at Simon, who shrugged and said, "Makes perfect sense to me. Especially when you know that it was the host who approached Egeria."

Daniel rubbed his jaw thoughtfully and said, "It makes more than just sense. It's actually the only possible explanation. When we first learned of Egeria, I wondered how it was possible for her to overcome all the knowledge of the Goa'uld and the inherent – evil – for want of a better word -- and accomplish what she did. But if she melded with an Ancient, that would explain it."

"Then it's equally probable that it was the host who documented sentinels – which would explain why it was Egeria's mate who then translated it," Blair mused. "The only question is – why? What was the purpose?" He glanced over at Simon. "Does the journal explain any of this?"

Simon shook his head. "Afraid not. It's strictly a kind of treatise on sentinels and nothing more."

"Okay, okay, I know this is going to sound weird, but I have a feeling all of this is tied in with the Eyes. It's just too... coincidental."

"Meaning what, Sandburg?" Jack asked as he sat up, clearly interested in the conversation now.

"I don't know yet, but if I had the journal—"

"Why can't you?" Simon asked. "We're landing at McMurdo, right?" At Jack's nod, he said, "So have it faxed. It's on the desk in my quarters."

"Jack, do it," Daniel urged. "I think Blair's right – this could be important."

"Don't need convincing, Daniel," Jack said as he got out of his seat and headed for the cockpit.

***

_Have I not in my time heard Lions roar? Have I not heard the sea, puffed up with winds?_ - William Shakespeare

"You okay?" Blair asked as he leaned toward Jim.

"Yeah, yeah. Cramped, stir crazy, but fine. What about you? This is pretty claustrophobic, Chief."

"Not even, man. This is better than first class, although the food leaves a great deal to be desired,
Jim chuckled. "Military meals have never been known for perking up the taste buds, Chief."

The cabin lights had been dimmed and pockets of the plane were fairly dark, indicating a sleeping member of SG-1. Simon and Jacob were also dead to the world, but Teal'c was near the rear of the plane and in the middle of his kel-no-reem. Both Jim and Blair should have been asleep, but in Blair's case, well, he was just too excited to relax. Jim, on the other hand, was another matter entirely.

Keeping his voice low, Blair said, "What else is bothering you?"

Jim looked down at his hands, gave a small shake of his head, and said, "Call it sentinel intuition, but I think... I have a very bad feeling and it's not unlike what I was going through before I knew about ... Alex."

Startled, Blair said, "You mean... what, another sentinel?"

He shook his head. "No, I know the difference between how her presence made me feel versus the general sense of danger I experienced at the same time."

"Jim, Alex was the reason for that danger – how can those feelings be separated?"

Absently rubbing his temple, Jim tried to find the words to explain but was coming up short.

"Wait, okay...."

Jim looked up to see Blair's "I've got it" expression. "Chief?"

"I think I get it," Blair said softly. "I get it. As a criminal, Alex represented a huge danger to your tribe and you were keyed into that. But as a sentinel, her danger was more personal. Separate but equal dangers."

Jim nodded. "The criminal end of it was like fingernails on a chalkboard. I was on edge, near panic and didn't know why. I just knew on a level I wasn't even aware of, that everything I held dear was in jeopardy."

"But at some point, Jim, your mind connected the two dangers, combined them, but that's neither here nor there. The point is, you're feeling that same kind of panic, right?"

"Oh, trust me, Chief, this time... it's way worse."

"It would be. Your tribe is considerably larger. But... I think there's something else going on, Jim. And it's the scariest thing of all."

Frowning, Jim leaned forward so his knees touched Blair's. "What?"

"Last time, you felt Alex – what if this time – you're feeling Anubis?"

***

They landed at Christchurch and, unfortunately for Blair who really wanted to see this part of New Zealand, were immediately transferred to another plane, this one with skis for landing gear.

The flight to Williams Field was short, the landing, outstanding. Blair kept his face plastered to the window as they began the descent, his eyes widening at the sea of white below. When the plane
touched down and "slid" to a stop, he had to pinch himself to make sure it was real.

Of course, once outside the warmth of the plane, Antarctica was all too real – and all too cold. Bundled up like an Eskimo in the military issue cold-weather gear, he felt like a short, over-dressed penguin. Which was considerably better than the orange popsicle he'd resembled on the Cyclops Oil rig. Moving about was easier too.

He stood next to Jim, actually, a bit behind him, allowing the older man to act as a buffer against the wind for him, while Jack made nice with someone who'd introduced himself as "Major Winston".

The wind made it hard for Blair to hear the conversation, but every now and then, a word would be captured by the arctic "breeze" and carried to his ears.

"... storm... wait it out... transportation in the morning... dorms...."

Blair looked upward and thought that between the wind and the clouds, well, he sure didn't need some Air Force guy to tell *him* there was a storm brewing. Hello? So obviously they were spending the night at Williams and travel to McMurdo in the morning. And they'd be sleeping in dorms. Oh, goody.

A large orange vehicle that looked like a giant tractor on steroids stopped several feet from where Jack and Major Winston were standing. More words were exchanged with the end result that Jack raised an arm and waved them all forward. Pulling his fur lined hood closer around his face, Blair ducked his head down against the biting wind and followed Jim. They all climbed aboard, the doors were shut, and the big, lumbering vehicle rolled away from the ice strip.

"At least it's warm in here," Jim almost yelled over the noise of their transportation.

"Yeah, must be... ten degrees... at least," Blair said dryly.

"Hey, that's warm considering."

"Trust me on this," Jack said. "This is very warm. Carter and I are experts on the Antarctica, aren't we, Carter?"

"Yes, sir," Sam said with an almost bittersweet grin.

"Oh, right. Malfunctions and all," Blair said, careful not to divulge more since they weren't alone in the huge snow vehicle.

The snow tractor bumped to a stop and the door was opened, letting in a blast of ice cold air and snow flurries. They climbed down and Blair could just see a series of low buildings from around the tractor; buildings that looked exactly like tin cans – cut in half. He felt Jim snag his arm and the next thing he knew, he was being led toward them and finally inside.

"Here's your home-sweet-home for tonight, Colonel. In the morning, you'll be hitching a ride on another Delta to McMurdo. As I understand it, your expedition is outfitted and ready for your arrival and you've been assigned some of the best personnel possible. This storm is supposed to give way to clear skies in the morning so the short trip should be relatively easy."

"Thank you, Major," Jack said as they divested themselves of snow and jackets. "What about a meal? We could all use some stick-to-the-ribs food right about now."

"It's all been taken care of, Sir. Airman Reynolds here will show you to your quarters and the
kitchen has been alerted and will have a hot meal ready for you in thirty."

Jack nodded, returned the salute and they all followed the Airman down a long drafty hall. Sam, Jack and Jim, as officers, were all shown individual rooms, while Jacob and Simon – at Jack's request – were shown the same room. Which left Daniel, Teal'c and Blair, who, as civilians, were given one large room with two sets of bunk beds. Jack gave Daniel a shrug, Jim favoring Blair with its twin. Jack didn't miss the Jaffa version received by Sam. With a shake of his head, he followed Daniel into their room.

***

"Well, this is the pits," Daniel said as he tossed his pack onto one of the bottom bunks.

"Tell me about it," Blair groused. He sat down, did his 'test the mattress' bounce and groaned. "Hard as a rock."

"They usually are," Daniel said as he took off his jacket. "Hey, Teal'c, didn't we have our own rooms last time?"

"We did, indeed, DanielJackson."

"So why don't you rate this time?"

"It's possible the number of personnel has increased," Daniel guessed.

"Maybe we could do some... room shifting," Blair mused. "No security cameras."

"It's one night, Blair. Suck it up," Daniel said with a grin.

"You had to use that word?"

Daniel, with a exasperated look in Teal'c's direction, threw a pillow at Blair, who, laughing, caught it.

"What, you don't think Teal'c is thinking about playing a game of musical rooms tonight?"

Daniel rolled his eyes and said, "Come on, they're setting dinner up for us and I can hear your stomach all the way over here."

As they walked out, Teal'c said, "What is this thing ... musical bedrooms?"

***

"Wow, this is not normal military food," Blair said as he cut into the chicken fried steak. "This is really good."

"They need hearty food up here and, given the conditions and the length of time they spend here, they get the best we have to offer," Jack said as he looked out the window at the storm. He pointed his fork at the scene and said, "And that does not look like it will end by tomorrow."

Jim grabbed the bowl of corn and added another spoonful to his plate as he said, "It will, though. Trust me."

Jack looked over at Daniel, who looked at Blair, who said, "Trust him."

Sam poured herself another Diet Pepsi and said, "If Captain Ellison says this storm will be over by
tomorrow, I believe."

"As do I, Major Carter," Teal'c agreed.


"Speaking of tonight," Blair said. "Not that anyone was... but—"

"Blair," Daniel said in warning.

"This place is crawling with the military, Sandburg. Do you get the meaning behind what I'm saying?" Jim asked, the same humorous warning in his tone.

Blair gave out with a dramatic sigh and said, "Loud and clear, Captain, sir, Captain." He gave Jim a mock salute and promptly followed it up by sticking out his tongue.

"How many mature members on my team again?" Jack asked of no one in particular.

"Counting Teal'c and me – one," Daniel answered.

***

"Goodnight, Blair."

"Goodnight, Jim."

"Goodnight, Daniel."

"Goodnight, Jack."

"Goodnight, Major Carter."

"Goodnight, Teal'c."

With a look of undisguised longing, Jim stepped into his room and shut the door.

With a look of undisguised longing, Jack stepped into his room and shut the door.

With a look of undisguised longing, Sam stepped into her room and shut the door.

Daniel sighed and walked down the hall to the dorm room.

Teal'c sighed, turned on his heel and followed Daniel down the hall to their dorm room.

Blair frowned and chewed on his bottom lip.

Jim's door opened and he stepped out.

"Chief, go to your room."

"Actually, Jim, I have a question about tomorrow. Do you have a few minutes?"

"A few minutes?"

"Maybe... thirty?" Blair said with undisguised hope in his eyes.

"Thirty? Sure, I can stay up a bit longer. Come on in."
Blair scooted past him and into the room. Jim looked down the hall and, when he spotted Daniel and Teal'c staring at him, he waved jauntily before following Blair inside.

Daniel chewed on his bottom lip. "You know, Teal'c, I have some questions about tomorrow – I should probably go ask—"

"CaptainEllison?"

Daniel looked up at Teal'c, eyes narrowed. "You've been around Jack far too long, Teal'c."

"Indeed."

"And I seriously doubt that it's Captain Ellison that you want to ask about tomorrow – or even Jack. Right?"

"I believe you have upped me one."

"Indeed," Daniel said as he walked down the hall toward Jack's room.

***

Daniel slipped into his room and, without turning on the light, made his way to his bunk.

"You don't have to be quiet, I'm not asleep and Teal'c is still asking Sam questions about tomorrow."

Laughing, Daniel sat down on his bed. "How long have you been here?"

"Just a few minutes. I haven't even undressed yet."

"I hate Chulakian warriors. All that staying power," Daniel muttered as he removed his boots and unbuckled his belt.

Blair sat up and dangled his legs over the edge of the bed ... thus hitting Daniel in the head.

"O-ww?"

"Ooops, sorry." He scooted down and said helpfully, "Maybe Teal'c could pass a few techniques to Jack?"

"Blair, he'd have to pass Junior over, okay? And I didn't say there was anything wrong with Jack's staying power, did I? Jack stays just fine," Daniel defended.

"Oh, I'm sure he does, I didn't mean—"

"Maybe Teal'c can pass a few pointers Jim's way?"

"Hey, let's not get personal here," Blair said as he choked back his laughter.

"You were first back," Daniel said as he slipped out of his pants and draped them over the end rail of his bed.

"Hello? I was first in a bedroom too. I barely gave him time to shut the door and then only beat you back here by a couple of minutes. Jack is the one who gets Junior."

"I can't believe we were ever friends," Daniel said as he got under the covers.
"You love me and you know it," Blair said as he started to undress.

"Yeah, but I can't believe we were ever friends."

Laughing, Blair tossed his pants in the general direction of the lone dresser. Hearing the satisfying sound of them hitting their target, he got under the covers and turned on his side facing the door. "You know, Daniel, we have to be the weirdest outfit in any military organization in the world – hell, in this or any other galaxy."

"Well, I have to admit, the weird factor did go up a notch with the addition of you and Jim. Okay – you."

"Ha-ha. You're lucky you're out of reach, buddy." No sooner had he said it, then inspiration struck. He quickly divested himself of his socks, balled them up, leaned over the bunk – and dive-bombed Daniel.

"Eewwww," Daniel complained as the offending items hit him smack in the face.

"Man, I'm good."

Before Daniel could retaliate, the door opened, allowing in a stream of light – that was immediately blocked by Teal'c's bulk.

"Hey, Teal'c, my main man," Blair said as he propped his head on his hand. "Did Sam answer all your ... questions?"

Teal’c shut the door and walked over to the other bunk beds where he immediately sat down and started to remove his boots. "She did indeed. She was most ... forthcoming."

"So was Jack," Daniel said, barely containing his laughter.

"So was Jim," Blair added, his own chuckles filling the room and forcing Daniel to lose it all together.

Setting up his candles and stripping down to the black tank and his boxers, Teal'c sat down on the floor. He listened to their laughter for a moment, smiled enigmatically, and lit the candles for his kel-no-reem session. As their laughter died away, he said, "We are most fortunate, are we not? To have friends who would allow us to interrupt their rest in order to ... answer... all our questions? And so thoroughly too?"

He wasn't surprised that both men burst into laughter again.

***

Jim and the weathermen were correct about the storm as all members of SG-1 awoke to cloudless blue skies over their white world. After a very fortifying breakfast, they piled into the waiting transportation and were on their way to McMurdo.

The trip was short, something for which Blair was very grateful. The view of snow and ice and more snow and more ice got boring fast. He grimaced at the idea of several days of it once the expedition got going.

When they arrived at McMurdo, they were again met by an officer, this time a Colonel Richards, who led them into a large hanger. Inside, there were three much larger versions of the enclosed Catepillars, each surrounded by a crew doing last minute preps for the expedition, or so Blair
assumed as he followed Jim.

In the far corner, several tables had been set up and two men were currently cataloging the items piled on top of them. It was to the tables that Richards led them.

"Colonel O'Neill, this is Major Walters and Captain Fuentes. They'll be part of your expedition team and they're two of the best out here, Sir. The very best."

Major Walters, a tall, good-looking man in his early forties, said, "Colonel O'Neill, it's an honor to meet you officially. Last time, you were unconscious."

"I take it you were here when Major Carter and I were airlifted out of that cave?"

"Actually," Walters said cockily, "I led the rescue operation."

Jack found himself bristling at the man's words. Especially since there'd have been no rescue operation if not for Daniel – and in all reality – General Hammond had been the leader. Calming his inclination to punch the guy who was, albeit temporarily, a part of his team, Jack said, "I take it, then, that you know Dr. Jackson, the man who found us and made a rescue operation possible?"

"Actually, Jack, I don't think we were introduced," Daniel said, clearly uncomfortable. "Things were kind of hectic, you know?"

"Of course," Jack said, backing down as he honed in on Daniel's discomfort. "So, Major, our departure time would be?"

"We'll be ready in less than three hours, Sir," the man said, not even remotely cowed by being put in his place.

"Then we'll be leaving in less than three hours. Thank you, gentlemen."

***

There was nothing for SG-1 to do but look around, which they did. Sam remained with Fuentes, a good-looking Hispanic in his late thirties, while Teal'c, Daniel, Jim and Blair checked out the tractors that would be their transportation. Jack had walked off with Colonel Richards and they were now standing on the other side of the hanger.

Blair nudged Jim and whispered, "What are they talking about?"

"Sandburg, I am not going to eavesdrop on my commanding officer."

"What? You never had any qualms about listening in on Simon. What's the big deal?"

Jim gazed heavenward as he said, "He wants Walters removed. He's asking who their next top guy is, okay? Happy now?"

"Yep. I don't like Walters – not one bit. And I sure as hell wouldn't trust my life to his care. Not that I'd have to. But still."

Jim gave Blair a strange look as he said, "That's not like you... to make such a snap judgment about someone."

"What, you liked him?"

"I don't know him, Chief."
"Give me a break. You're a freaking sentinel and a cop. Did. You. Like. Him?"

"No. Satisfied?"

Grinning infectiously, Blair said, "Very."

Before Jim could say anything else, Jack walked back to them.

"We have a slight delay. Richards will be bringing in another man so it will be closer to five hours before we're ready to head out."

"Jack? Why another man and where is he that—"

"Walters isn't the guy for this expedition, Daniel, it's that simple. As it happens, he wasn't even the first choice. But the man who was, Major Kobashi, is being sent for. Evidently he's doing some mumbo-jumbo ice study about an hour out so they're getting him back here." He indicated the nearest building. "Let's head inside and relax for a few hours."

Daniel looked over at Sam, who shrugged and looked at Teal'c, who shrugged and looked at Jim, who shrugged while grabbing a hunk of Blair's hair and pulling him toward the building before he could say, "I told you so."

***

The good news about the delay was that it gave Blair plenty of time to check out the Commissary and, when Jack delivered it, to read the faxed "journal" on the Custoios. He gathered it lovingly to his chest, found a secluded corner in the hanger, huddled down into his parka, and started to read. As he immersed himself in the material, the activity in the hanger, the noise, voices and even the cold – faded.

***

"Jeez, Sandburg, don't ever lecture me about my zone-outs again. They're nothing compared to what you do when you're studying something," Jim complained good-naturedly as he hustled him toward one of the Caterpillars. "Do you have any idea how many times I said your name?"

"Er, once?"

"Try eight times, Mr. Peepers."

Blair came to a dead stop. "Mr. Peepers?"

"Never mind, before both our times."

They climbed aboard and, six hours after their arrival, SG-1 and a crew of Antarctica experts headed out.

***

As it happened, Major Kobashi was an excellent fit, thanks not only to his knowledge, but his excellent sense of humor as well. A Hobbit remark – aimed good-naturedly at Blair – had immediately won Jack over since it was obvious that Kobashi had to have just made the height requirement himself. Kobashi also spent time giving them all an idea of what the next few days out on the ice would be like and he took time to go over the special arctic equipment, which he claimed was not just top-of-the-line, but so far ahead of the curve that their comfort level would be
improved by eighty percent over currently in-use equipment. He had then winked while stating that the exact method behind the improvements in the gear was "unknown", which was his way of acknowledging that he knew exactly what SG-1 did – and that finding defensive weapons would be nice but that it wasn't all that the program was about.

Blair knew that even with all the new "comforts", the journey would be barely tolerable for him, especially since their diet would consist of nothing but MRE's. In addition, he wasn't overly fond of the whole rationing thing Kobashi had explained, but he figured that he'd stuffed enough supplemental food (having caught Daniel doing the same) like chocolate bars, nuts, packets of processed cheese and crackers and a few bags of chips, that he thought he'd be okay. He was very grateful that the Commissary at McMurdo had stocked bags and bags of their version of GORP and he, like Daniel, had purchased said bags and bags of the stuff, which were now residing happily at the bottom of his pack.

The one good thing about their transportation was that it did provide a fairly smooth ride – if you liked riding a camel on steroids competing in an Olympic track and field event. But hey, it was warm – for being in Antarctica. He could at least push his hood back off his head, kept the gloves on. He knew Jim was comfortable, thanks to dialing down, and he could assume that Teal'c, Jacob and Simon were okay too, thanks to their symbiotes. Jack was unusually pale and Blair didn't miss the constant worried looks shot his way by Daniel. Blair didn't think Jack was suffering the cold so much as his memories. He imagined it was the same for Sam.

Casual conversation was pretty much a non-entity, the tractor's engine being nice and loud, so Blair decided to take out his journal and the papers from the Tok'ra. He flipped the journal open to his most recent musings on Anubis, their current mission and what they all hoped to find. He looked at his last entry....

*If Anubis is half-ascended – it's a fairly safe bet to assume that while he's retained some of the knowledge learned when ascended – he doesn't have all the knowledge of the Ancients. But by the same token, even retaining half the power of an Ancient makes him a pretty serious threat to Earth. And to us since we're about to put ourselves right smack in the middle of his path.*

*It's altogether possible that he knows the location of the ... what shall I call it? Outpost? Yeah, that works. It's possible he knows the location of the Antarctica outpost, but he needs the Eyes and, without them, why would he venture to Earth? We should be safe, right? Sure. Right.*

Except... the Tok'ra know now.

Blair felt a chill make its way up his spine – right alongside his broad yellow streak. Not that he was a coward – or anything. No, he preferred to think of himself as a very smart and wise man, and anyone who wasn't afraid of Anubis was a fool. So there.

Funny, he trusted the Tok'ra and didn't think for a minute that they'd willingly betray the fact that SG-1 had the Eyes. But what if captured? He glanced over at Simon, who seemed to be ... reading. Blair craned his neck and tilted his head in order to see....

'Cigar Aficionado.'

Blair nudged Jim and pointed to the magazine. Jim grinned, reached out, lightly kicked Simon in the leg and indicated the reading material. Simon shrugged and yelled, "What can I say? I missed quite a few things while I was away. I have back issues of 'Fish and Stream' too."

Laughing, Jim wiggled his fingers in a "give me, give me" manner and Simon, after huffing a bit, reached into his pack and withdrew the magazine, which he handed over to Jim.
Smiling, Blair went back to his work.

As he moved from his journal to the Tok'ra translation of Ancient writings on sentinels, an obvious connection formed in his brain. A connection that he decided not to share – just yet.

***

Their first night was a real lesson for Blair. Tents were erected and he was extremely pleased to note that they were all either two or three-man shelters. He and Jim would be able to share. Curious about Sam and where she'd be sleeping, he dropped his stuff inside the newly put-up tent and sought her out. She was checking out, under the guidance of a Sergeant Wilkins, an advanced piece of electronic equipment that supposedly measured the depth of the ice below their feet. He really hoped it was accurate and that the white stuff was really thick under his tent.

"Hey, Sam," he called out as he approached.

Excusing herself, she met him halfway. "Is it cold enough for you, Blair?" she asked, grinning.

"Not really. A few less degrees would suit me better," he said. He nodded at the equipment that the sergeant was working on and asked, "It's ... you know... accurate, right?"

"Very. We're on what's called a shelf – solid as the Rock of Gibraltar. We've been traveling on it since we left McMurdo."

"Okay, I feel better now." He stepped closer, looked around, and asked in a low voice, "Uhm, couldn't help but notice that, as usual, you're the only female ... so what are your sleeping arrangements? Do you get your own tent? And is that what you do in the field?"

"Does Captain Ellison know about this unusual interest in my sleeping habits, Blair?" Sam asked with a twinkle in her eye.

"Probably," Blair said with a nudge into her shoulder.

"Well, then, to answer your question, I usually share a tent with Teal'c but we're rarely in it at the same time, what with our watch schedule and all. On this mission, I'll be sleeping in one of the Cats."

"Ah. Okay. Gotcha."

She hooked her arm with his and said, "Come on, let's join the others."

***

"General, we're receiving a message from the Tok'ra. It's Aldwin."

General Hammond nodded and said, "Put it through." Standing behind Davis, he waited, wondering what bad news the Tok'ra were about to share. He gave himself a mental shake – he'd been around Jack far too long. There was no reason to assume that it was bad news.

"General Hammond?"

"Yes, Aldwin, what can I do for you?"

"I'm afraid I have some rather disturbing news."

Damn, even when Jack wasn't here – he was right.
"Go on."

"One of our operatives was captured by Baal, who, unfortunately, now serves... Anubis. And yes, to anticipate your question, the operative in question was aware of SG-1's current mission and that... they are in possession of both Eyes."

Hammond caught himself before he channeled Jack by offering a smart retort. "I ... see. What do you suggest we do, Aldwin?"

"It is now a race against time, General Hammond. The Council has agreed to order two of our ships to head for Earth. We would suggest you do the same with the Prometheus."

"Thank you, Aldwin. How long before your ships can be here?"

"They will be over your Antarctica in a little over two days time."

"Very good. Tell your Council that we are grateful for the assistance."

As Aldwin signed off and the 'Gate was shut down, Hammond hurried to his office. He had a phone call to the President to make. He had every intention of requesting temporary command of the Prometheus.

***

Jack took off the ear phones and set them down. He made no move to leave the Cat, choosing instead to sit back and ponder Hammond's message. Major Kobashi tilted his head and asked, "Bad news, sir?"

"You could say that, Major. We're no longer a secret to the bad guys."

"So we could have company, then," Kobashi stated softly.

"'Fraid so. It's now a race and one that we have to win."

***

Blair huddled down in his sleeping bag and thought about all that Jack had told them after he'd returned from accepting a message from General Hammond. Seemed as though Blair's premonition had been spot on. Damn it. Everyone seemed confident that they'd prevail – would arrive at the coordinates ahead of Anubis, but all Blair could think was ... so what? They had no idea what they'd find or what they'd do with what they found if they found it.

"Chief, stop thinking – you're keeping me awake," Jim whispered, punctuating his words with an elbow to Blair's ribs.

"If that's supposed to impress me, it didn't."

"What, you're not even remotely curious how I knew your mind was going a mile a minute?"

"No, because I know how."

"Speaking of know-how – learn anything earth shattering from the papers Simon had faxed to McMurdo?"

"Wow, you're finally asking. I'm amazed."
"Like you're surprised that I'd ignore those papers?"

"Nope, not surprised in the slightest." Blair found himself debating whether to tell Jim his theory – knowing damn well it would scare his partner. On the other hand, Jim had come a long way as evidenced by the fact that he'd actually asked. Taking a deep breath – Blair plunged into the pool, feet first.

"I think... I think sentinels are ... Ancients."

There was absolute silence – as in the absence of breathing, thanks to the fact that Blair was holding his breath – and so was Jim.

Jim gave out with an exhale first. "Would you care to repeat that?" he croaked out.

"Okay, it was an oversimplification... and I kind of mixed up some ideas... so... I think... what I'm trying to say here is that I think the Ancients enhanced certain individuals – enhanced existing abilities, namely sentinels, but I also think the Ancients passed their genes onto certain humans."

With those words, Jim got up and turned on the lantern. "Okay, okay, just where the hell did you come up—"

"Jim, ssh. Not so loud. It's just a theory and I don't particularly want to make an ass out of myself if I'm wrong, you know?"

Even in the dim light of the lantern, Blair could see the relief on Jim's face.

"A theory? That was just a theory? Not something said in those papers?"

"Uhm, no, no, of course not," he hurried to reassure Jim. "Just one of my lamebrain theories, man."

Jim flopped back down, seemingly relieved. There was silence for several minutes and Blair wondered how long it would be before Jim turned off the lantern. Sleep was not something he'd had a lot of lately and his eyes were starting to feel grainy. Jim turned over onto his side, hiked himself up on one elbow and propped his head on his hand. "Chief, you don't have lame brain ideas or theories, so maybe you'd better let me in on this."

Blair reached over and knocked on Jim's forehead. "Hello? Calling the real Jim Ellison, will the real Jim Ellison please stand up?"

"Blair? Spill."

"Huh-oh, you called me Blair. Not good."

"Dunderhead, spill. Now."

"That's better. I feel way more comfortable as 'Dunderhead'." He sat up, crossed his legs, was too cold, got partially up in order to pull the sleeping bag around his shoulders and then back down. "Okay," he finally said. "Here's what I think."

"'Bout damn time. I didn't think you'd ever get settled," Jim said.

"Ha, ha. Anyway – you remember how, when we first met, I told you about all my case studies on people with one or two hyper-active senses?"

"Yeah. The perfume experts, chefs, yadda-yadda."
"Right. Okay. So I think – maybe – there was never a full-fledged sentinel until the Ancients showed up here. I think it's altogether possible that they looked at this trait and... kicked it up a notch... or two or three."

"So you're saying that at least one of the Ancients was Emeril Lagasse?"

Blair pulled his air pillow out from under him and tossed it the short distance between him and Jim. It hit Jim in the nose. "If you don't want to know, I can get nice and comfortable again and go to fucking sleep, Jim," Blair said without a trace of anger in his voice.

"Okay, okay, go on."

"Look, we already know that the Ancients found a way to help us, so why not take that idea a step further? Why not assume that they made it possible for full-fledged sentinels and that they passed their gene on to us? Look, you read the report on Jack and the Ancient's Repository, right?"

Jim nodded, curious now as to where, exactly, Blair was going with this.

"Okay, you also read the medical reports. What happened to him was literally impossible. No human brain should have been able to survive for even a few minutes, let alone the amount of time that Jack did. In addition, according to both Sam and Doctor Fraser, his brain shouldn't have been able to handle the information, let alone use it."

"I'm not sure I follow – which is exactly how I felt when I read the report. I mean, once it's there, why shouldn't he be able to handle it?"

Excited now, Blair leaned forward, the sleeping bag falling from his shoulders. Jim immediately lifted the edge and pulled it back up. Smiling at that, Blair said, "Okay, think of one of the really old and first computers. Now imagine downloading one of the new programs -- what would happen?"

"It would probably blow a gasket – or should I say a motherboard?"

"You got it. But just as important – the old computer wouldn't be able to run the new, faster, more intricate program. And that's what should have happened with Jack. But it didn't, Jim. He not only absorbed the information, but his brain allowed itself to be rewritten and then to rewrite his programming. It literally took over because his brain could handle it. Sure, I have no doubt that sooner rather than later, it would have killed him, but that's because he's not an Ancient, but he's something, Jim. He's something. Like you. Get it now?"

Jim dropped back down on his bag and folded his hands on his chest. Slowly, he nodded. "In a way – I do. You think that they did more than just offer up ways for us to protect ourselves, you think they did something to us."

"Yeah, in a way. I think they the took the gene responsible for enhancing certain senses and—enhanced it, thus creating sentinels as a way to protect us. They knew that in the future, they'd be drastically needed. But come on, Jim. The Ancients were here. Are we supposed to believe that they didn't... you know... get involved with us? And maybe even deliberately? To pass a part of themselves onto us? To some of us?"

"But why? On the off chance one of 'us' with part of their genes would stumble onto a repository? Come on."

"I don't know yet, but I'm betting the answer will be found where we're going."
"The Sandburg Sixth Sense?"

"Call it what you will – hey, I like that. Way better than the Sandburg Zone."

"Sandburg, the Sandburg Sixth Sense couldn't exist anywhere but within the Sandburg Zone."

"Which just so happens to reside within the 'Ellison Zone'. So there."

"Works for me," Jim said with a smile.

"So... you're taking this well. The idea that you might be a direct result of genetic engineering as done by the Ancients."

"Does it really matter why I'm the way I am?"

Looking shocked, Blair said, "Wow, you really have changed."

"I'll take that as a compliment."

"It was."

"Then I should probably be insulted."

"Undoubtedly." Blair waggled his eyebrows.

"Oh, no, you don't. We're surrounded by the military – hell, I'm the military. Don't give me that look and do not waggle those eyebrows of yours, that's an order."

One scruffy brow rose in disbelief. "An order?" Blair asked, a note in his voice Jim didn't like one bit.

"You heard me."

Blair pushed the sleeping bag off his shoulders, got to his knees – and crawled s.l.o.w.l.y over to Jim, whose eyes were narrowing.

"Blair, you heard me."

Blair rose up slightly – wagled his eyebrows again – and pounced.

Hands on Jim's shoulders, holding him down, not for a minute thinking he could win if Jim really wanted up, Blair asked in a sultry, yet commanding tone, "Who gives the orders in this relationship, Captain Ellison?"


Blair glanced down and between them – and smirked. "Nice salute, Captain."

"I do my best, sir," Jim said, choking back a laugh. "But you'd better lower your voice, wouldn't want the enemy to hear us."

"I have no intention of doing any more talking, Captain," Blair murmured, his lips close to Jim's ear.

"You're one hell of a leader," Jim whispered. "And my kind of man."

"I should hope so."
The next morning, not that Blair could tell it was morning, they continued their rolling trek across the ice after semi-hot slop that Daniel told him was oatmeal. He'd have called him a liar, but the package confirmed the information. On the other hand, the coffee was greatly improved by adding two squares of one of his chocolate bars. He didn't miss the furtive 'dumping' of chocolate that Daniel managed into his either. Now he sat miserably uncomfortable, his butt sore from the bouncing, and too cold to describe. His only comfort was in the fact that Daniel looked as miserable as he felt. Which was cruel since he shouldn't be happy at someone else's misfortune. Much.

Damn, he wished he had something to read. He supposed he could study the manuscript again, but really, he knew it by heart now. Sleep was out of the question, thanks to the movement, which left... and that was out. They weren't exactly alone, after all.

Suddenly he had a brainstorm: Cards. He had a pack in his junk... somewhere.

"Chief, what are you doing?" Jim asked, his voice loud to be heard over the engine.

"Looking for cards. Thought we could play to pass the time."

Jim and Jack perked right up, as did Daniel. Five minutes later, they were all hunkered on the floor of the Cat, using anything and everything as chips, and playing Poker.

It worked.

The trip to the co-ordinates provided by Daniel and Sam took three days. What they weren't yet privy to was that on the morning of day three, the Prometheus registered a Goa'uld mother ship. Hammond, now in the commander's chair, grimaced when he was told that the ship would enter Earth's atmosphere in approximately five hours.

The race was tangible now. He barked out an order and the Prometheus was on its way to intercept. He didn't know what they could do once they were over Antarctica, their weapons hardly up to par with a mother ship, but they'd do what it took to give SG-1 the time they'd need.

When they were an hour away, the President sent fighters into the sky to back them up.

The wind had picked up to the point that the Cats had been placed in a circular pattern in order to create a windbreak around the area that represented their destination. SG-1, along with Simon, Jacob and Kobashi, stood in the snow, staring down at the ice.

"So this is it?" Simon yelled.

"This is it," Sam affirmed, the state-of-the-art equipment having confirmed the fact for her.

Everyone looked expectantly over at Jacob and Simon, both of whom pulled their packs around. Simon said, "You want to take the first one, Jake?"

Jacob nodded as he took out a long, blue crystal. He motioned for everyone to step back and, when they had, he tossed it down as if throwing a dart. It hit the ice, there was a cracking sound – and slowly the crystal disappeared.
“What’s happening?” Jack asked.

“That crystal will continue on a downward angle until it hits an opening.”


“As in... a cavern, or an underground structure,” Simon supplied.

“Ah. Gotcha. Then what?”

“Then we use the rest of the crystals to create a series of tunnels down to the structure, following the path made by--”

“Big Blue?” Jack offered helpfully.

“Yes, Jack,” Jacob said, clearly used to his way with words. "Big Blue."

“So we just stand here and... what, wait? How will you know?”

Jacob held out his hand to reveal a clear, round crystal. "This will light up."

“Amazing. All these years and we're just now finding out the intricacies behind the crystals?”

“You never asked, Jack,” Jacob said reasonably.

“He's got you there, sir,” Sam said with an impish grin.

“Jack, don't stick out your tongue,” Daniel warned. "Number one, not very professional, and number two, it'll freeze."

"Gee, thanks, Daniel."

“My pleasure."

Before anything else could be said, Kobashi yelled out, "We've got incoming on radar, Colonel!"

“Oh, shit." Jack hurried over to the Cat and stuck his head in the door. "Tell me."

“Large ship, estimated arrival ... fifteen minutes, Colonel.”

“Can you reach—"

“No. Too much interference.” He slid the earphones back and said, "We're on our own, Colonel."

“Major, I've got another blip.”

Kobashi turned back towards his radar tech and said, "Identifiable?"

“Yes, sir,” the young man said excitedly. "It's the Prometheus. They're right on the other ship's tail."

"Jack! We've got it, we're starting the tunnels now!” Jacob yelled over the wind.

Jack waved his understanding and said to Kobashi, "Okay, get everyone down. No one stays here, got it?"

Nodding, Kobashi started to move as Jack went back to Jacob and the others.
"Do we know how far down?" Jack asked as he came alongside Jacob.

"Not as far as I would have thought," Sam said.

"We'll reach it in less than ten minutes if we jog," Jacob added.

Jack looked down at the opening, at the new tunnel that slanted downward at a distinctly walkable angle. "All right, get all the supplies and let's go. You can close this up as we move, right?"

"As soon as the last one is in, yes," Jacob said.

"Let's do it then."

In minutes, they were moving down an impossible hole in the ice floor of Antarctica.

***

Blair was amazed and yes, a little spooked, when Simon planted a green crystal in the ice wall and the opening they'd just descended through – closed up. Talk about revisiting his claustrophobia. He also felt silly with the weird Air Force issue headband on his head. Sure, the light was damn helpful, but still – hell, with his long hair, he had to look like some kind of new-age, lit-up Indian. In blue Air Force fur. But he really liked the plastic thingy he was carrying. It gave off better light than the one on his head and all he had to do was snap it.

And was it warmer down here?

Jim was, naturally, right behind Jacob, who planted a new crystal each time they came to the end of the tunnel trail, which meant Blair was right behind Jim, and all three of them were several feet ahead of the others. Blair didn't have a problem with that, but he did, as usual, have a problem with Jim's legs. Or rather, their length, which forced him to walk double time to keep up, even under the Antarctica. Which was a story for the grand kiddies.

Someone's grand kids, anyway.

Suddenly Jim stopped and, of course, Blair thudded into his back. He really should be used to that – but no, it surprised him every time.

"Jim?"

"Jacob?"

"End of the line," Jacob said. "The path of the original crystal ends a few feet ahead of us."

Jim frowned even as he cocked his head. "Do you hear that?"

Jacob looked over at Blair who shrugged. "He does that all the time."

***

"Colonel, according to the calculations based on dad's information, we should be nearing the end of the line."

Before Jack could respond, the tunnel was filled with a loud rumbling and the ground began to shake. Sam immediately pulled something out of her pocket, aimed it upward and, even as Teal'c held onto her to keep her from falling, the device lit up. When the rumbling stopped, she looked at it quickly and said, "Based on the triangulation... it came from the surface, Colonel. I'd say Anubis
just bombed the heck out of our transportation home."

Everyone looked upward, they couldn't help it.

"Here's hoping Hammond can hold them at bay long enough for us to do what we need to," Jack said softly just as another rumbling sounded and the ground shook even more, tossing them about like rag dolls.

Daniel could just see Jim, Blair and Jacob, Jim holding on tight to Blair, legs splayed wide for balance.

A moment later, the shaking stopped.

***

"Jim?"

"I'm guessing Anubis just arrived and our transportation is now dust."

"I'm afraid you're correct, Captain Ellison," Selmak suddenly said as Jacob's eyes glowed in the semi-darkness of the tunnel.

But Jim was no longer listening. He moved toward the spot where the tunnel came to an end, his head cocked. Blair followed close behind, his eyes fastened on the same spot.

"My God," he breathed out. "That is not ice."

"No, Chief, it isn't," Jim said as he ran his hand over the smooth, metallic surface. "And... I'm feeling something... some kind of energy emanating from it... making the hair on the back of my hand stand up."

"What the hell is it?" Blair asked even as he moved around Jim to touch it.

Jim leaned forward and inspected what appeared to be a seam. He ran a finger over it, stepped back, and said, "It's ... tubular."

"Yeah, yeah it is," Blair agreed. He put his hand on what looked like a rough patch of metal next to the seam and said, "Is there someway to clean this up? Get the ice off? I think this is the control mechanism."

At that moment, Jack and the others joined them and the rumbling sound returned, as did the shaking. Everyone braced themselves again until it stopped.

Sam, who'd caught the last of Blair's words, moved in next to him, inspected the square, felt it, nodded thoughtfully and said, "This should work." She took something from her pack, flicked it on, and a small, blue flame appeared. She began to run it up and down the square, thus slowly melting the ice.

"Okay, that should do it," she announced as she stepped back.

Daniel moved in then and said almost immediately, "Ancient. The symbols are Ancient."

"Can you get it to work?" Jack asked.

Daniel didn't bother to answer as he fingered one of the larger symbols. He turned it and the metal started sliding around and open.
"Yep, he can get it to work," Blair said.

Jack peered inside and said, "Elevator."

"Duh." Daniel pointed to the side wall. "Control panel – one button -- down."

"Duh," Jack said. "So, can you get it to work?"

"Allow me to repeat: one button – down."

"So you can get it to work and I'm betting it goes – down."

Jim looked down at Blair and said, "Why do I feel like I'm in a vaudeville show?"

"I often feel the same," Teal'c said.

Sam looked up at Teal'c and asked, "Do you even know what vaudeville is?"

Teal'c looked pointedly at Jack, Daniel, Jim and Blair.

"Yes, well," Jacob interrupted. "Can we get this particular act on the road?"

Jack looked inside again and said, "Only room for six – maybe eight if we really squeeze and put Blair in the front." He glanced over at Kobashi and said, "We'll go down and send it back up should we remain alive and well and the dang thing doesn't take us to China or something."

Smiling, Major Kobashi nodded. "We're not going anywhere, Colonel."

"I'm just the anthropologist here, and the short guy, but what if you can't – you know – communicate once we're down wherever we're going to be down at?"

"Good point. Okay, Major, give us ten minutes and if this thing comes back up but you don't hear anything, well, the decision is yours. Jacob, you want to leave them some crystals?"

Jacob pulled out several and handed them over, giving a brief explanation of each. When he was done, Jack said, "Okay, folks, pile in."

Simon, Jack and Teal'c took the back, with Jim and Daniel filling in the next layer. Finally, Sam and Blair squeezed in – squeeze being the operative word – and, as the door slid around, closing them off from Kobashi and his men, Jack said, "Women's lingerie on Two, Men's Wear on Three —"

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Blair, who was the closest to the panel, pushed the button – the only button – and the "elevator" began its descent, which was actually more like "whooshing" than descending.

"Okay, this is cool," Jack said as he unobtrusively braced himself against a smooth wall.

Sam, looking down at the DME device in her hand, said in a disbelieving voice, "We've already descended five miles, Colonel."

"Nice mode of travel. I think I could get to like the Ancients," Jack mused.

The elevator slowed to a gentle stop and the doors automatically slid open, the whole trip down taking less than forty seconds.
Sam slipped out, P-90 raised and, after a quick look around to ensure they were alone and it was safe, she indicated the all-clear.

Blair, smiling from inside the elevator as he watched the "soldiers" doing their recon thing, singsonged, "Oh, Ji-im, is there anyone out there?"

Smiling, Jim shook his head. "Nope. It's just us."

"Okay, okay, so we forgot," Jack said sheepishly.

Everyone exited the elevator only to find themselves in a huge cavern that looked as though it had been carved out of ice.

Blair made a full circle around and muttered, "Fortress of Solitude."

Jim, seeing everyone's look of puzzlement, said, "Superman comics?"

"Oh, right," Daniel said, remembering. "And if I remember correctly, he created his Fortress using... crystals."

"I'm not going there, Daniel," Jack said as he moved toward the far end of the room and the chair that took center stage. "Look."

Everyone started to follow, but just as Jack walked under an archway of ice that delineated the chair from the larger part of the cavern, a crackling sound filled the space and a dark shape suddenly materialized and quickly took the form of a shrouded figure, thanks to a flowing, black, hooded cloak. Jack immediately brought up his P-90, Teal'c right behind him with his staff weapon. Sam, Jacob, Daniel and Jim fanned out, taking defensive positions.

"You are too late. The power that is Ra is now mine," the figure said.

"Anubis, I presume?" Jack asked.

"Uh... Jack? I don't think—"

Before Daniel could finish, Jim brushed past Jack and swiped his hand through the robed figure.

"Hologram, Colonel," Sam said.

"That is just so rank," Blair said even as he walked through the hologram and approached the chair, Daniel hot on his heels.

Jim, on the other hand, walked over to what looked like a work table of some sort. He took in the assortment of etched squares that covered its surface as he said, "You know, this looks like what you described in one of your mission reports, Daniel. The one where Jack and Teal'c were caught in the time loop?"

Daniel turned from the chair and, with Jacob, moved to join him. Daniel looked at each square, at the engraved symbols, and said, "It's Ancient and yes, I'd say this is very similar to the control panel that Malikai was using."

"But this can't be a time control device, so what does it control?" Jim asked. "The chair?"

"No," Blair said softly. "Not the chair."

Because his voice sounded so strange, everyone turned their attention to him. He was running a
hand up and down the arm and suddenly whispered, "Jack, you need to sit in it – and now. We don't have much time."

Jack looked over at Daniel, who gave him what was becoming his patented "Sandburg shrug" and said, "Don't ask me."

"Uhm, guys? One of these squares is giving off ... energy," Jim said, his hand hovering over it. "Daniel, can you—"

"Press it, Jim, and Jack, you need to sit down – now," Blair commanded, his voice still distant and strange.

Even though Jack remained unsure of what to do, Jim didn't hesitate. He pressed the one square and the wall of ice behind the control faded away to reveal a mirror.

"What the hell?" Jim asked as he stepped back in surprise.

Daniel stared at his reflection even as he said softly, "The mirror reflects only what is shown; a reflection's mirror, however, is more than the total for he can see beyond."

"Jack, you need to sit down – now," Blair said again, this time with more than a hint of desperation in his voice.

"Do it," Daniel urged.

Jack handed his weapon to Jacob and, with some trepidation, walked over and rather gingerly -- sat down.

The huge and ornate pedestal beneath the chair immediately lit up.

"Whoa," Jack said as he jumped out of the seat.

The light faded.


"Jack, right now, above us, Anubis is working hard to get down here, and I suspect that the only reason we haven't seen those rings -- would be the Prometheus," Daniel warned.

"I'm not getting back in that—"

"Teal'c, would you sit in it? Quickly?" Blair asked.

Teal'c moved to the chair and sat down.

Nothing happened.

"Sam, now you."

Teal'c got up and Sam took his place.

Nothing happened.

"Jack?" Blair said again.

Looking very suspicious, but somewhat mollified, Jack retook his seat and the pedestal lit up again.
Blair held out his hand to Daniel. "The Eyes?"

Daniel took the Eye of Ra from around his neck, pulled the Eye of Thoth from his pack and dropped both into Blair's palm.

"Jim, look into the mirror," Blair instructed. "Specifically, at the chair and Jack."

Daniel nodded in excitement as he repeated, "The mirror reflects only what is shown; a reflection's mirror, however, is more than the total for he can see beyond. You're saying that the mirror – the 'reflection' – will reveal something that only a sentinel will be able to see it."

Blair nodded. "Jim, look at the pattern of the reflection and then look... beyond it."

Jim nodded, narrowed his eyes and concentrated on the strange patterns of their reflections... and something within the mirror shifted... "I've got it – the arms of the chair, Blair. I can see you putting an eye face down on each arm – Thoth on the left – Ra on the right."

Blair quickly pulled the medallions off the chains and, as Jack lifted his hands, placed them on the ornate pattern of each arm. They fit like perfect pieces to a puzzle. "Now what?"

"Jack's placing his hands over them," Jim said.

Jack, again with some trepidation, replaced his hands on the arms, and thus covering the Eyes. This time, the chair itself lit up -- and tilted back as Jack closed his eyes, his expression going lax.

At the same moment, the elevator opened and Kobashi and his men stepped out, guns up. Jacob immediately said, "Stand down, Major. We're okay."

"Sorry, sir. I know it hasn't been ten minutes, but the tunnel was beginning to erode and I figured this would be our best chance. What's--"

Before he couldn't finish, the sound of rings could be heard and, a moment later, several Jaffa were deposited in the chamber. They brought up their staff weapons and, the moment the rings disappeared, began to fire.

Thanks to the split second warning the rings provided, SG-1, et al, were already moving to protect and defend. Simon pulled out his zat and was already returning fire as Jacob tossed Jack's P-90 to Daniel. Teal'c took out two with his staff weapon while Carter, who'd ducked to the left of the panel, fired and took down another one.

Unfortunately, the rings descended again, discharging even more Jaffa.

For Jim, the world slowed as Blair turned to face the new threat, deliberately placing his body between the warriors and Jack. One of the Jaffa aimed his staff at Blair – the only clear shot he had – just as Blair yelled, "Get back to this side of the arch!"

Everyone moved quickly, covering each other and firing, but all Jim could think was that he was too far from Blair – an eternity too far. He watched helplessly as the discharge traveled toward Blair....

... and thudded soundlessly against an invisible shield.

***

"Shields at maximum!" Hammond ordered.
"Sir, two Tok'ra ships have just entered Earth's atmosphere!"

"It's about damn time. What about the F-302's?"

"They've engaged the enemy, General, but the mother ship is moving toward SG-1's position again."

"We can't let that happen, people. Let's slip this baby between them and SG-1."

"General, the mother ship just fired – " The Lieutenant looked up from his instruments and said, "Sir, they just destroyed the Cats and they're in position to use the rings."

"Damn. All right, change of plan. We're about to become a very persistent mosquito. Let's go in."

***

Still in shock from the fact that Blair was alive, Jim rushed to his side and said, "What just happened?"

Blair turned back to Jack and said, "I think... I think Jack's successfully interfaced with the chair. He got the force field up."

"You *think*?" Sam asked angrily even as she was getting to her feet.

"Sam," Daniel warned softly.

"Look, I just want to know one thing," Kobashi said. "Is it going to hold?"

Everyone looked toward the now very angry Jaffa who were firing – uselessly – even as more Jaffa were ringed down.

"And if it does," Simon said, "how do we get out?"

At that moment, the color of the chair changed to a glowing orange and jagged forks of light shot out, passed easily through the shield – and struck at the Jaffa – who then simply -- disappeared.

"Wow," Kobashi said as he looked back toward Jack and the chair. "Is the colonel doing that?"

Blair nodded.

***

*Tush! tush! fear boys with bugs!* – Taming of the Shrew – William Shakespeare

"We're taking damage to the outer hull, General!"

"All the remaining F-302s have expended their ordnance, sir!"

George shook his head and said, "We can't take them aboard. They'll have to divert to McMurdo."

"General, we need to break off in order to recharge the shields."

They were losing, but winning had never been the goal. Eyes narrowed, knowing that he was dooming the Prometheus and her crew, General George Hammond gave the only order possible.
"Hold our position."

***

The dark-robed figure rose from his 'throne' as his first prime turned toward him.

"My Lord, the Taur'i ship has moved back between us."

"Then I suggest you fire upon the vessel, Her'ak, after which, you will continue to send my warriors through the ice."

"Yes, my Lord."

***

On board the Prometheus, Hammond held on as they were hit again. Sergeant Davis, the only member of the SGC that George had brought with him, yelled over the din, "Shields collapsing, General!"

"Hold her steady, people. Hold her steady. SG-1 needs all the time we can buy her."

***

The cavern on the other side of the force field was – empty. Nothing was left of the Jaffa.

"Now what?" Simon asked as they all turned back toward Jack.

"I ... don't know," Blair said softly.

"What about the Prometheus? They're in a battle up there – to protect us. Eventually—"

Sam didn't finish her thought as the chair once again began to change colors, this time with a burning white light. It began to concentrate itself into a single beam – which immediately shot straight up, so powerful and bright, everyone had to shield their eyes.

Jim, totally unprepared, groaned out loud, sank to his knees, and covered his face as the light seemed to burn into his eyes. He felt someone drop down in front of him and, a moment later, cool hands were placed over his. But the pain was too intense to do more than be grateful for the additional protection of the second set of hands.

***

"What the... General, look!" Davis called out.

Through the view screen, the bridge crew of the Prometheus could see a beacon of light shoot up from the ice below. Tendrils of it broke off and began to attack Anubis' fighters, destroying them on contact.

"People, I think now is the time to make a graceful exit. Colonel Kirkland, take us out of here."

"Yes, sir!"

The Prometheus moved away from the mother ship just as the beacon reached it. It was destroyed within seconds.

***
Anubis watched the strange light take out his fighters and understood. He was too late – they had the Eyes.

But it wasn't over – not yet.

He moved out of the throne room, leaving his First Prime and all his Jaffa behind.

***

The chamber was dark and silent.

Sam was the first to move, to turn on her helmet light, while at the same time, pulling out a flashlight. The others quickly followed suit.

"What... what happened?" she asked as she moved toward the chair.

Blair was kneeling in front of his partner, hands still over Jim's. Now he slowly removed them and said, "Please, everyone, keep your lights away from us." Leaning in even closer, he said softly, "Jim? Can you dial down the pain?"

Jim, hands still over his face, slowly nodded.

"Okay, when the pain is down to a five, let's remove the hands, all right?"

Daniel rushed to Jack's side even as he kept part of his attention on Jim and Blair. He placed two fingers against Jack's carotid artery... and breathed a sigh of relief. Strong and steady – he was alive – unconscious but alive.

On the floor, Blair was gently pulling Jim's hands down. "Keep them closed until I say different, Jim. Now, you're going to have to do some work here. Your eyes are probably still seeing the brightness of the beacon as it was burned onto your retina, but you can replace that, Jim, it's nothing more than a memory. You can do it, Jim. You'll probably have to piggyback using another sense. Maybe smell?"

Jim was listening, as evidenced by his nod. "Smell," he whispered. "You."

Smiling in the semi-darkness, Blair said, "Okay, whatever works, man. Just take your time."

Daniel was listening to the two men, but concentrating on Jack, who was still unconscious, which was causing the knot of fear in the pit of his stomach to swell to gargantuan proportions. Sam and Teal'c were on the other side of the chair, Sam's hand on Jack's shoulder. Simon was now standing behind the kneeling Jim and Blair, almost as if guarding them, while Jacob stood close to his daughter while the rest of the men took up defensive positions around SG-1 and the two Tok'ra.

Sam, without taking her eyes from Jack's pale face, said, "Blair... what should... what should happen now?"

"Give it a moment – Jack's recouping, just like Jim. I think he probably expended a great deal of energy destroying the Jaffa and whatever he... destroyed... above us."

"Blair... is he going to be all right? This is just like the repository device," Daniel said, clearly worried.

"No, not quite the same... no downloads, okay?"

"Understood," Daniel said.
"Jim, how ya' doin'?"

"Almost there," he whispered.

"Okay, just go easy."

"You guys do realize that we're ... basically trapped in here, right?" Kobashi said from where he was standing guard near the shield. "Not that I'm worried – or anything."

***

"What's our situation, Sergeant?" Hammond asked.

"We've lost the shields and life support is down thirty percent, but we're diverting power from the weapons, sir. We're stable."

"Good. What about ring capabilities? We're SG-1's only way home."

"Yes, sir, we're working on them."

"All right, keep trying to re-establish contact with Colonel O'Neill and maintain current position."

"Yes, sir."

Hammond settled back in the chair. Whatever SG-1 had discovered under the ice, it had destroyed every single fighter, every alkesh ... and finally the mother ship. So what was happening down there now? He felt helpless, hovering over the Antarctica – over SG-1. Helpless and uninformed.

***

Jim could feel Blair's warm breath on his hands while the scent of his partner led him to a cherished memory – the first time they'd made love. He could feel the velvet darkness that had surrounded them, caressed their skin even as eager fingers had explored territory only previously dreamed about. But the darkness, as friendly and comfortable as it had been, couldn't hide Blair from him, and Jim called on that vision now. Blair's hair, a tumbled tangle on the white pillow case, Jim's own fingers combing through it... and Blair's eyes... Jim concentrated on those eyes, the dark lashes, the pupils constricting with pleasure....

Slowly... Jim removed his hands and ... opened his eyes.

"Jim, man? Can you ... see me?"

The memory-Blair melted into the real one and Jim could see those eyes again, worried, concerned... waiting. Jim smiled and said, "Looking good, Sandburg. Looking good."

Relief flooded through him as he helped Jim to his feet. Too close – way too close and his fault. Damn. But recriminations could come later -- now it was time to turn his attention to Jack.

With Jim by his side, he stepped over to the chair and put his hand on Jack's leg. He could feel the warmth of his blood beneath his palm and thought that was ... very odd. Jack's leg should be cold – like everything else in this place. The heat in Jack's leg transferred itself to Blair's hand, traveled up his arm – and he blinked in surprise. What the hell was happening? The heat made it to his chest – to his heart – and he took in a deep breath even as he heard Jim's voice from a great distance....

"Blair? What's happening?"
Blair closed his eyes, let the heat take over – felt himself drifting for a moment – clouds behind his eyes, moving fast through blue skies....

"Jim, go to the mirror," he said, his voice sounding odd even to himself.

Jim glanced over at Daniel, then back at Blair. He put his hand on the younger man's shoulder, squeezed, and then, reluctantly, walked over to the panel.

"You know what to do, Jim."

Jim nodded. The reflection. Look... deeper.

His eyes were still stinging a bit, but that didn't stop him from concentrating. After a moment, surprise in his voice, he said, "Daniel, I need you."

After giving Jack's shoulder the same kind of squeeze Jim had imparted to Blair, Daniel moved to Jim's side. "Okay, what now?"

"I'll say a word, you touch the corresponding panel."

Understanding, Daniel nodded. "Go."

"Fire."

Daniel looked down at the Ancient symbols on each square, found the one that represented 'fire' – and pressed it.

"Ice."

Daniel repeated the process, pressing the square three to the left of the one he'd pressed for 'fire'.

"Sun."

Daniel pressed another square.

"Moon."

And another.

Jim, still staring into the mirror, frowned. "I... you need to ...."

He shook his head as if not believing what he was seeing even as he said, "Daniel, you need to stand behind Blair."

Confused, Daniel nevertheless walked over to stand behind his friend.

Jim turned from the mirror to look at Blair. "I... that's all. There's nothing else to see."

Blair's eyes were on Jack as he said, "It's okay... it's okay."

At that moment, the chair lit up again – and Jack opened his eyes. The chair tilted so that Jack was sitting straight up. Blair stepped sideways and said, "Everyone, shield your eyes again, and Jim, turn away and close yours, now."

Jim did as instructed and Blair then said, "Daniel, put your hands over Jack's, quickly."

Daniel did as ordered – and a flash of light burst forth from the chair, seemingly emanating from
both Jack and Daniel. A moment later, the light turned soothing, its silvery tendrils spreading out
from their chests to move about the room. The tendrils passed through the shield and began to
travel up the walls as Kobashi and his men, eyes now opened, moved instinctively closer to the
chair.

More tendrils spread out from Jack and moved upward and around the chamber, melting the ice
away and leaving corridors, rooms and equipment in its wake. Everywhere the light traveled, more
was revealed, and everything the light touched -- changed, shifted, and became something else.

Everyone watched, wide-eyed, at the miracle before them -- until finally -- the tendrils faded, the
chair went dark, and Jack sat up, looked around, took in the changed chamber and said, "Sweet."

***

Sergeant Davis looked at the screen below his hand in total disbelief. "General, you're not going to
believe this."

"Oh, I think I will, Sergeant."

"The readings are off the chart, sir. There's something... something huge down there, and I'm
registering...."

Davis turned in his seat and said jubilantly, "Sir, I'm registering sixteen heat signatures."

"Sixteen? You're sure?"

"Positive, General. They're all alive."

"Can we ring down yet?"

Kirkland nodded. "Yes, sir. Rings now functional."

"Get a medical team along with—"

Kirkland got to his feet and said, "Permission to lead the team, General?"

Smiling, Hammond nodded. "Least I can do."

Grinning, Colonel Kirkland headed out.

Hammond turned his attention to the screen, the oddly fluid reddish-orange figures moving across
the screen – at SG-1 and friends.

It was time to call the President. He was going to have to come up with one hell of a cover story.

***

"My God," Sam said as she and Teal'c moved around what had once been a huge ice cavern and
was now – some kind of lab. "Daniel, are you going to be able to translate the symbols on the
equipment?"

Daniel was helping a shaky Jack to his feet, but at Sam's words, he took a quick look around.
"Eventually," he finally said. "And if not me, others will, I'm sure."

Jack stepped down off the pedestal with Daniel's help and said, "Anyone want to let me know what
happened?"
Daniel scratched his chin and said, "Well... let's see. First you sat down, and then you lit up, and then you took out about fifteen or twenty—"

"More like thirty," Jacob interjected.

"Or thirty – Jaffa, And then you decided to really shine and you sent up this wild searchlight thing and we think you might have taken out Anubis, along with just about everything else up top. Oh, then you and I decided to do a duo, and when we were done – all of this was here."

"Oh," Jack said. "I... see. So I was a busy little bee, then."

"Pretty much," Daniel agreed.

"And do we know... how... I did all this?"

Daniel looked around for Blair and frowned when he spotted him on the ground, back resting against the panel. He'd pulled his knees up and had his head cushioned by his arms, which were crossed and resting on his knees.

"Jim," Daniel said worriedly as he indicated Blair's position.

Jim turned around, expecting to find Blair right behind him. When he saw him on the ground, he moved quickly. Squatting down in front of him, he said, "Chief? What's going on?"

Blair lifted his head and smiled wanly. "Not feeling so hot, man. How's Jack?"

"Hey, kid, I'm fine. What I want to know is, if I did all this, how come you're the one that's tired?"

Blair didn't have a chance to answer as the unmistakable sound of rings caught all their attention and, a moment later, five crewmembers led by Colonel Kirkland were standing in the middle of the cavern.

Kirkland did a quick "healthy-headcount" and, supremely satisfied with the results, looked around and said, "Nice place you've got here, Jack. When does the next tour leave?"

***

The cavern was bustling with various technicians and scientists, courtesy of the Prometheus, but SG-1, Jacob and Simon were huddled in a corner while the medical personnel checked out Jack, Jim, Blair and Daniel.

One of the first things Kirkland had done was to have his people sweep the cavern for radiation and, finding nothing harmful, had let his medical team loose on SG-1. Sam and Teal'c had been quick to point fingers at the others and, because all four were refusing to be ringed up to the ship and Sick Bay, the medics were checking them out where they stood – or sat on the floor. Blair was doing better and had already explained that he'd felt much like he had back at the SGC when he'd taken his two weird "spirit walks" and that he'd be fine, but they were going through the usual steps to confirm his words.

Jack was back all the way and grumbling about the fussing, especially since he could see how much Daniel wanted to join the other scientists in exploring the cavern. Finally he'd had enough and literally pushed Daniel away from the medic taking his blood pressure *again*.

"Go, Daniel. Go forth and translate. I'm not going anywhere anytime soon, and I'm fine. You're fine. We're all fine. Go."
The medic, a man who looked young enough to be everyone's son, started to complain, but one look at Jack's face and he backed down like the good puppy that he was.

The medics packed up their equipment, suggested everyone get some rest, and headed over to the rings while Jacob, who'd been exploring with Sam, now rejoined Jack. "One of our ships is going to ring us up, Jack. I need to fill the Council in on all of this. I assume you'll share?"

"Now Jacob, how could you think otherwise?" Jack said dryly.

"So if I suggest to them that we send a couple of our best scientists to join in the investigation of this place, that wouldn't be a problem, right?"

Serious now, Jack shook his head. "I suspect Tok'ra scientists would be most welcome and undoubtedly needed."

"That was my thinking as well. Take care, all right? And I promise to discourage any Council thoughts of dissecting you for scientific purposes."

"Gosh, thanks, Jacob. You're a peach."

***

"I'll be back, don't look so unhappy, Sandburg," Simon said. "We're just going to fill the Council in on all of this and the newest developments. By the time you get back to the SGC – I'll be right behind you."

"Okay, okay. It's just that – you know," Blair said softly.

His eyes warm with affection, Simon nodded. "I know, Sandburg. I know. See you in a couple of days."

"Take care, Simon," Jim said as he hugged the older man. "You too, Palam."

Simon's eyes glowed briefly as Palam said, "Thank you, Captain Ellison. I, like Simon, look forward to returning to the SGC. I find humans much more interesting than my own people."

Jim looked down at Blair and asked, "Were we just complimented?"

"I was," Blair said cheekily.

"On that note," Simon said, "We're off." He stepped over to Jacob and a moment later, a set of rings appeared and, in a flash, they were gone.

"I'm going to miss him," Blair said.

"Two days at the most, Sandburg. Suck it up," Jim said, grinning.

"Later," Blair said as he turned away and headed for Daniel.

***

He'd given them two hours to play with their new toys but Jack knew they needed to get up to the Prometheus and report to Hammond. Time to gather his chicks and head home. Naturally, Carter, Sandburg and Daniel complained, as he'd known they would, but grudgingly joined him and Jim to be ringed up to the Prometheus.
Besides, he really needed a nap.

***

Jim glanced at his partner, who looked, to put it kindly – washed out – and said, "I'm heading to wherever they keep food in this thing and get us both something solid to eat. Why don't you lie down and try to rest until I get back, all right?"

"You know, I'm not even going to argue about that. I'm just going to do it. But I'm not going to sleep – we have a report to write and I don't even know where to start."

Halfway out the door of their just acquired quarters, Jim said, "Hey, isn't that my line?"

"Maybe once, but as long as I've been riding the trails with you, it's been mine."

"But it's your fault this time, your fault we don't know how to report what happened, not mine."

Blair dropped down on the small metal bed and said, "You always know just what to say to make me feel all warm and tingly inside."

"On that note, I'm closing the door, Sandburg."

"Good," Blair said – to the closed door.

***

"I see we weren't alone in needing food," Jack said to Jim as the other man joined him and Daniel at the small table.

"Yeah, Sandburg's stomach was making so much noise, I figured I'd be doing everyone a favor by getting him something to eat asap. Any idea what's good?"

"Everything," Jack said. "You can't go wrong on the Prometheus. Like the guys at McMurdo, they're out here for weeks on end, so receive the best we've got. And fresh too as they replenish at the Alpha site."

Jim nodded appreciatively. "Sounds good. I'm going to check it out, see if anything strikes a chord where Sandburg's stomach is concerned."

He started to leave, but Daniel stopped him. "Is he all right? He looked a little pasty when we got on board."

"He'll be fine."

"And he has a logical explanation for everything that happened, right?" Jack asked.

Jim grinned. "Logical? Sandburg? No such thing." He held his arms out and said, "But look at what he usually has to deal with, if you know what I mean."

Daniel shot a knowing look toward Jack and said, "I know exactly what you mean." He promptly jerked in his seat. "Ow, you kicked me," he accused.

Jack, looking not the least bit innocent, said, "Your point?"

"On that note, I have a hungry short guy to feed. See you at the briefing."
Jim, still smiling, headed over to the line, got a tray, silverware and started down the line. He checked out the salads and thought that while Blair would probably prefer greens, he needed something more solid after three days of MRE's. He moved further along and liked the looks of the sautéed spinach so picked up two small bowls. Continuing down the line, he had the man behind the counter put together two plates with baked pork chops, scalloped potatoes and applesauce and to round out the meal, two pieces of custard pie, milk and two coffees joined the tray. Satisfied, he headed back to their quarters.

Nearing the room, he realized that if not for his sentinel abilities, he'd have been lost, which was extremely embarrassing to acknowledge. But he was a sentinel and by honing in on Blair's heartbeat – a technique that still blew his mind – he went straight to their door. Balancing the tray on his knee, he slid the key card down the line and, when the door sprung open, he pushed his way in, kicking it shut behind him before putting everything down on the small table opposite the two bunks. Turning back towards the bottom bed, he wasn't the least bit surprised to find Blair dead to the world. Expression softening, he moved to Blair's side and placed his hand gently on his forehead, checking for fever. It was a silly thing to do, but ... it felt right. Finding Blair's skin cool to the touch, he breathed out a sigh of relief and turned back to the food. He was starving and figured if Blair was more hungry than tired, he'd wake up when Jim started eating.

He was right.

"What do I smell?" Blair asked about four minutes later.

"Pork chops, sautéed spinach, scalloped potatoes, apple sauce and custard pie. Coffee's still hot and I got milk for your pie."

"Okay, MRE's do not smell this good," Blair said after a wide yawn. He sat up, swung his legs over the edge and ran a hand through his hair.

"That's because," Jim said as he picked up the silver dome protecting Blair's meal, "it's real, honest-to-god food."

That got his interest. Perking up considerably, Blair craned his neck to check it out for himself. His eyebrows crawled up into his hairline as he said with the brilliance that marked his lengthy education, "Wow."

Laughing, Jim waved him over. "Come on, get that cute ass in the chair and eat."

Blair got up slowly, which worried Jim, but then he was seated and shoveling the food into his mouth in such a way that made Jim began to doubt the possibility of further intimacies between them. He was glad he didn't really care about finishing his potatoes as he watched Blair, now finished with his own, fork them into his mouth.

"From now on, we eat separately," he groused as some of his applesauce disappeared too. "And if I ever see you eat like this again – separate bedrooms too."

"Ha-ha," Blair said during one of the few moments his mouth wasn't full.

Fifteen minutes later, Blair, the human vacuum cleaner, was done. After a nice and rather musical burp, he sat back, clearly satisfied, and smiled benignly at Jim.

"That was great, man. Thanks."

Jim looked at the plates and shook his head in disbelief. "I could have sworn there was once food
in this room, but now there isn't enough to pique the interest of a starving dog."

"Letterman better start watching his back."

"So," Jim said, ignoring Blair's little joke, "you going to tell me what happened? How you knew what you knew?"

"Sure, Jim. In fact, the minute *I* know how I did whatever I did – you'll know."

"Blair? I know you and you have a theory, an idea. Give it up. If what happened under the ice couldn't blow my mind, nothing you say will now."

Blair crossed his arms over his chest in what Jim recognized was his, "Oh, yeah? You just wait" posture, and said, "Okay, here goes. But don't get mad at me when you blow that mind of yours. I'm only the theorizing messenger."

Jim made an 'x' over his heart and smiled in what he hoped was an encouraging manner – but suspected was more of a sick, "I know I'm not going to like this" grin.

"Right," Blair said. "Okay, I knew things because – the answers just popped into my brain in exactly the same way I always came up with 'stuff' to help you and your senses. That's it. All of it. Nothing more, nothing less. And I knew Jack was the only one who could operate that chair because of what we discussed earlier. The gene idea thingy."

"Wow, all those years in front of a classroom has really improved your instructional abilities. I'm sure your students felt truly blessed."

"What do you want me to say? I don't have any other explanation. The moment I spotted that chair, I just knew – what I knew. Then Daniel repeated the phrase about the mirror and reflections and I could see you going beyond the reflection and I don't know why you could see what no one else could, because you were basically seeing the future, but I think the mirror was designed with a sentinel in mind, which means, under certain circumstances, such as those set up by the Ancients, you can see – you know – whatever. Okay, really, you weren't seeing the future so much as," he bit his lip, "so much as instructions – yeah, that's it – instructions. See?"


"Har-har."

"So how do you plan on writing this one up?"

"Obfuscation, man, what else? It's not like I'm not good at that – or used to it – when it comes to reports. And come on, since we've been here, it's the way of the paperwork."

"In that case, don't you think we'd better get together with the rest of our teammates – something we rarely had to do in Cascade – and make sure we're all on the same obfuscating page, buddy?"

Blair burped again and said, "So call 'em. We can meet," he looked around the closet that served as their quarters, "somewhere."

"They have phones on space ships, do they?"

"Don't make me think of everything, Jim. This brain is half dead now."

"Right. So I guess I'll take care of this."
Blair went back to the bunk and dropped down on it. He was still tired, not that he'd any plans of sharing that information with Jim. He also had a whopper of a headache that he'd hoped eating would cure – but it hadn't. He was glad he'd become very adept over the years of hiding his true physical condition from Jim – most of the time. It kind of worried him though. The headache, that is. If all of this was related to the whole shamanistic thing, combined with his new ability to help Jim by absorbing some of his – whatever --and he was going to have to deal with it every time he had a shamanistic thing or Jim had a whatever – well, it was going to get awfully old. Of course, he could take some aspirin – gosh, what an idea. Except – no aspirin. And he'd be damned if he was going to the Infirmary. Hey, did a space ship have, like, a market, or something? What were they called on bases? A PQ? No... PX. Yeah, a PX. Did the Prometheus have one?

Er... no. Just ... no. The idea of a store on a spaceship just wasn't right. Like he'd find a barbershop or a clothing store? Just... no.

Wait. The big ships, the cruisers and battleships, they had all of that, didn't they? And the Prometheus was a helluva lot bigger than a battleship, right?

But his head hurt and he didn't really want to sound dumb by asking, and he'd have to get up to ask....

"Hey, I'm back. We're going to meet in some conference room down the corridor, Chief. And here, I got you some aspirin."

Blair winced as the door shut and then shook his head in wonder as Jim dropped the small tin of pills onto his chest and handed him a bottled water. Sitting up, Blair said, "Okay, how did you know? I thought—"

"Your pupils, Chief. The pain was in your pupils. Now, take two, rest your eyes for the next thirty minutes, and then we meet and plot."

"You're really something else, Jim."

Jim sat down and put his feet up on the table. "I know," he said complacently. "I know."

"Okay, so Jack, being Jack," Daniel said, "he just naturally sat down in the chair because it was... like... there, and when he did, it lit up, which clued us all in, right?"

Jack glanced over at Carter and said, "Should I be insulted?"

"I don't think so, sir. Facts are facts and no matter what – you'd have sat in the chair."

"But I didn't want to," Jack argued.

"But if Blair hadn't told you to," Daniel argued back, "you would have."

"Would not."

"Would."

"Oh. Well, can't argue with that," Jack said sarcastically.
"Can I go on now?" Daniel asked with a sickening sweet smile on his face.

"By all means, Daniel," Jack said with an exaggerated wave of his hand.

"Not to be the balloon-puncturing pin in this little group, but what about Ken and his men?"

Everyone looked at Blair, their brows furrowed.

"Ken?" Jack finally asked.

"Er... you know, Major Kobashi?"

"You know his first name?" Sam asked, somewhat surprised.

"Well, ye-ah. I mean, three days on the ice? You talk, you know?" Blair answered as he looked at each team member in turn.

Jack twisted in his seat to face Daniel and asked, "Did you know Major Kobashi's first name?"

"Well, ye-ah," Daniel said in a perfect imitation of Blair. "Three days on the ice? You talk, you know?" He winked at Blair and added, "Then there's Wes, Lionel—"

"Brad, Carl—"

"Mick," Blair and Daniel finished together.

"Yes, well... I'll talk to good old Ken and, since his report comes to me, there shouldn't be a problem."

"You don't need to, sir. Major Kobashi and his people arrived after you sat down in the chair. They really saw nothing to contradict our slightly altered version of what happened," Sam noted.

"Good point. So, we give the verbal truth to Hammond, and the simpler version goes in writing," Jack said. "I can live with that."

"Too bad Simon isn't here," Blair said. "He could warn Hammond and help him with the more creative reports that come along with having a sentinel in the mix. He's got considerable experience in that arena."

"Don't worry, Sandburg, Simon'll be around enough to do just that," Jim said.

"All right then," Jack said as he checked his watch. "We're due to meet with the general right about now, so I suggest we get going."

***

Hammond listened first to Jack, then Daniel and finally Sam. By the end of their reports, he wasn't feeling at all well. He looked over at Blair, who'd turned red and was currently picking at a fingernail. "You know, I expected difficulties upon adding a sentinel to the mix, Mr. Sandburg, but I'm a bit uncertain as to how you've become the puzzle on SG-1."

"Er... you see... uhm, well—"

Jim jumped in without a chute. "General Hammond, Blair's had years to work on my senses, but this whole shaman thing is new. I think it's understandable that for a while – we'll be kind of ... winging it."
"I'm not sure 'winging it' fits within the military mindset, Captain Ellison," Hammond said with a hint of a smile.

"Oh, I don't know, General," Jack interjected. "We've been winging it here at the SGC for years."

Hammond gave a little cough. "Yes, well. So where does that leave us with regards to Mr. Sandburg here?"

"I believe ChiefBlairSandburg has a gift as real as CaptainEllison's, or MajorCarter's, or DanielJackson's. I believe—"

Jack made a loud 'clearing of the throat' sound and, when Teal'c glanced in his direction, said, "Hello? Colonel here. Mucho gifts here."

Smirking as only he could, Teal'c bowed his head slightly and said, "You do indeed have certain – gifts – which can not be denied. Your love of ... trees ... for instance."

Jack frowned and said, "I'm not sure that's a gift, T. I was thinking more of my sparkling personality, wit, charm, leadership abilities, generous—"

"As I was saying," Teal'c continued. "I believe that having a shaman as part of the team will continue to be a great weapon in our fight – as has already been proven. And we shall learn together, as SG-1 has always done, General."

Smiling, Hammond said, "I can go with that. Now, as to Mr. Sandburg's theory regarding the possibility that the Ancients passed on their gene—"

Sam leaned forward and said, "Sir, I think that will be the easiest to test. Using SGC personnel, we simply sit our best down in the chair—"

"And if it lights up – we've got a winner," Daniel finished.

"Basically," Sam said, "that's about it. There are twelve down there now, sir. Why not simply tell each of them to sit in the chair?"

"All right. Of course, it would be very nice if we could simply isolate this gene and then test for it."

"So why not?" Blair asked. "It would make sense that the gene would, once you knew you were looking for it, be easy to spot. Let's test Jack."

"Gee, thanks. And don't I just love being the guinea pig," Jack said.

"He who makes the chair bright – must do right," Daniel intoned.

"He with big mouth, gets size twelve boot," Jack snarked back.

"Only a twelve?" Blair asked, the picture of innocence.

A very put upon sigh coming from General Hammond fixed everyone's attention back on their commander. "Colonel O'Neill, I believe the lab here can handle the testing. As soon as we're finished here, I want you to get down there. Do whatever—"

"Actually," Blair interrupted. "Testing Daniel might be a good idea as well, sir."

Total silence met his suggestion – until Daniel, eyes wide with shock, said, "Are you saying that I
Daniel asked, clearly astounded.

Blair looked distinctly uncomfortable as he nodded. "Yeah, in a way, sort of. Maybe." He glanced at Jim, saw only trust and encouragement, and gathering himself together, added, "Okay, I've been thinking about all of this and... well... basically, others have been studying the Ancient language, right? I mean, everything you guys find, goes somewhere and is studied, right?"

"That's an accurate assessment," Hammond agreed. "And yes, there are others who will be sent to the Antarctica to translate. We could hardly be expected to rely solely on Dr. Jackson."

"Of course. So you have people who have devoted themselves to learning it, right?" Blair asked again.

Hammond, clearly puzzled by where Blair was going, nodded again.

"And yet – Daniel remains the foremost expert – in spite of having little to no additional time to become an expert. Now granted, he's one of the most gifted linguists in the world, but even so – it would take more to reach the level of expertise that he has." He looked around the table again.

"Am I wrong?"

Sam turned in her chair to look at Daniel – and it was clear she was seeing him in a different light. "I think... I think Blair has a point, General."

Feeling suddenly freakish, Daniel looked down at his hands, which he had clasped tightly together.

"Until we have definitive answers," Hammond said in a very no-nonsense voice, and thus bringing everything back to normal, "we'll proceed as planned. And on that note, I'll call this briefing to an end." Hammond pushed back his chair and stood.

***

The technician put the cotton on the small puncture and said, "Hold this, Colonel."

Jack did just that while she turned to Daniel. A minute later, he too was holding a small cotton ball on his arm. The vials were turned over to Carter, who gave them both a jaunty salute before disappearing around the curtain.

"Gee, that was fun," Jack said as the tech placed a bit of tape over the puncture.

Daniel flexed his hand and said, "Wasn't it? We should do it again, real soon."

Looking around and, satisfied that they were alone, Jack waggled his eyebrows suggestively and said, "I can think of lots of things we should do again – real soon."

"Aw, get on with you, O'Neill."

"Nice, Daniel. Very nice. Now I'm homesick for a bit of the old sod."

"I could say something very dirty right now, but coming out of my mouth? You'd just laugh."

Jack hopped off the gurney and, with a wicked grin, said, "I think we need to rest, don't you? All that blood missing and all?" He leaned in close and said, "Besides, I want to see your... sod."

"On the Prometheus, you're all words and no action, so cut it out. Let's go eat instead."

"Alas, you speak the truth. And eating is good." He tossed Daniel his jacket, slipped into his own
and, together, they headed out, certain that their blood – and DNA – would be safe in Carter's hands.

***

They were only a few hours away from the Alpha site and Jack was pacing – endlessly and nervously. Daniel tried to take it for as long as he could, but his patience finally gave out. He slammed the book he'd been trying to read, and said, "Jack, so help me, if you don't sit that most excellent ass of yours down, I'm going to tie you to the chair."

Hands on his hips, Jack stopped dead and said, "That was totally unfair, Daniel. You mentioned 'ass' and 'tie' in the same sentence while on board the Prometheus, which, as you so eloquently put it earlier, means I have to be all words and no action."

"Well, at least I got you to stop wearing a hole through the decking," Daniel huffed.

Jack started pacing again.

Daniel groaned. "Okay, I know it's not the days without being able to enjoy my sexual prowess that's making you edgy, which means I'm at a loss."

Jack stopped again. "Sexual prowess?"

One eyebrow rose.

Jack nodded. "Right. Sexual prowess. You've got that in spades, can't deny it. But you're right." He pointed down at his feet. "This is more than just the result of a horny colonel aching for the," he cleared his throat, "sexual prowess – of his bedmate. This," he pointed downward again, "is the result of a man who so does not want to have the Ancient gene."

Daniel gave him a questioning look. "Excuse me? Why the hell not? It doesn't change you, and if you have it – whatever it is – you've always had it, so what's the big deal? Sure, it's ironic as hell, but no big deal."

"Ironic? How?"

Daniel smiled. "Oh, come on. We've been looking for a way to defeat the Goa'uld all these years – and the best possible weapon was leading SG-1 all the time? You have to admit—"

"Ironic," Jack agreed with a grin. "Only you would think of that."

"I'm thinking we wrap you up in big red bow," he looked down at Jack's groin and then back up again, "and present you to the President, the Secretary of Defense and the Joint Chiefs."

"Hey, don't get so carried away – I'm not alone in this whole Ancient gene thing. You're a part of it too."

"Maybe I'm a part of it, but if I am? I want a purple bow."

Jack sank down into the chair by the small table. "You realize what SG-1 has become, don't you?"

"A team of ... six?" Daniel offered helpfully and far too cheerfully.

"Daniel, if all of this pans out, SG-1 will be led by," he held up one finger, "a guy with a weird-assed gene that allows him to manipulate Ancient technology, has a swell ass and a snarky sense of humor." He added a second finger. "Team member number two: his 2IC an expert with Goa'uld
technology, has the memories of an important Tok'ra, takes techno-babble to new heights, and knows more about wormholes than anyone on Earth." A third finger joined the other two. "The third member is a Jaffa warrior with knowledge of the Goa'uld and who speaks Goa'uld. He also has a snake in his belly that protects and heals him. And if that weren't enough, the warrior has the strength of ten men—"

"Maybe five."

"... or five and the endurance of... whatever." Fourth finger leaped to life. "Number four on our hit parade is the ever-popular and handsome—"

"Go on with you—"

"Dr. Daniel Jackson, holder of not one, but two—"

"Oh, please, you're embarrassing me—"

"... doctorates in linguistics and archaeology, who also may possess the same weird-assed gene, has an even better ass than the leader, speaks Goa'uld and Ancient, has a grasp of alien languages that is the envy of linguists all over the world—"

"Not that many linguists all over the world know this—"

"But if they did, they'd be full of envy—"

"Undoubtedly."

"And he's cuter than a bug in a rug—"

"Euwwww."

Jack was holding up all five fingers now as he said, "Then of course, there's the newest member of the team: a guy who has a history in the military to rival mine; was one of the best cops with one of the best arrest records in the country and just happens to have five heightened senses, possibly due to Ancient intervention." He waved the index finger of his left hand next to his right hand. "And now we add the final ingredient to this improbable mix – the short guy. An anthropologist and the foremost expert in sentinels and, if that weren't enough – he's a shaman with really spooky skills. And is – apparently – the only one who has nothing to do with the Ancients or Goa'uld or Tok'ra, but can talk to artifacts – who coincidently—talk back. He also takes hippy-dippy, trippy spirit walks." Jack put his feet up on Daniel's legs, clasped his hands behind his head, and asked, "Does that about cover it?"

"Pretty succinctly. And people say you're dumb. Ha."

"Of course, I left off the best bits. Like how the leader is head-over-heels for the linguist, and the Techno-babble Queen is head-over-heels for the Jaffa, and the Sentinel is head-over-heels for the short, weird, spirit-walking guy--"

"You don't really think Blair is weird, do you? I mean – you like him, right?"

"I'm almost old enough to be his father and I love the guy, truly. But that does not negate the weirdness factor. For some reason, I seem to be able to handle the whole Ancient thing, Tok'ra, Jaffa, and Sentinel thing way better than the spirit walking thing."

"You don't know the source. It's less quantifiable and more... mystic. And we all know how well
you deal with all things mystic."

"Oh, yeah? How?"

"Mmm, to quote a famous, finely-assed person, 'Rumors, lies, fairy tales,' end quote."

"Yes, well, I was ... younger, then."

"So you recognize now that mythology is—"

"Rumors, lies and fairy tales perpetrated by either the Goa'uld, the Ancients, the Asgard and probably some other race we've yet to run into," Jack said, supremely proud. Daniel snorted at that.

"Which leaves ... spirit walking," Jack added. "And no doorstep at which I can lay the blame, damn it."

"Shamanism is older than the hills, Jack, and has been scientifically proven to exist, so relax." At Jack's skeptical look, Daniel added, "All right – Blair goes a bit beyond what's been studied and validated – but then, so does Jim. Hell, so do you."

"So do you," Jack said in a petulant, 'so there' tone.

"Don't be ridiculous. I've never been studied or validated—"

"Oh, yeah? How 'bout every time I make love to you?"

"All right, I admit you do a great job of studying the 'form' beneath or above you – can't argue that. But validate?"

"What, my 'Oh, Danny, yeah, harder, baby, harder' followed by a mind blowing orgasm isn't validation?"

"All righty then, moving on... the point is that SG-1 is still the most normal thing you'll face when going through the Stargate and isn't that what's important?"

"Dr. Jackson, you have a valid point there. I shall persevere, and think of my life as utterly normal and it's only the people I associate with on a daily basis – that are weird."

"Why don't I think you were listening to me? Oh, hell, what am I saying? You never listen to me."

"Daniel? Were you saying something?"

***

"Jim, how did I go from being the nobody on the team to being the puzzle?"

Jim grabbed Blair's black t-shirt and used it as leverage to pull the younger man onto his lap. As Blair squirmed and wiggled to get up, he said, "Enough, Sandburg. I don't want to hear anymore of this 'pity me' crap, understood? You're as valuable as any other member of the team, but let's face it, shamanism isn't exactly a known quantity within the military."

"Wind talkers," Blair said grudgingly even as he crossed his arms stubbornly over his chest.

Puzzled, Jim cocked his head and said, "I'm supposed to somehow connect the Navajo code talkers
of World War II to shamanism?"

Blair, now sitting stiffly and somewhat precariously on Jim's legs, huffed a bit of hair from his eyes and said, "So, Mr. High and Mighty Ellison, you don't know everything."

"So there is a connection. Swell. I suppose you're going to tell me that some of them were shamans?"

"Such a brain. So intelligent."

"Blair, if you don't start acting like the incredible man that you are, I'm going to dump you on that cute, but stubborn, ass of yours."

"There are certain stories surrounding the Navajos chosen during World War II – stories about how they communicated without the code, how they knew things about another's location – and how they pulled a few miracles out of their hats." He leaned in close to Jim and said, "Shamanism. In World War II. So there."

Jim put his hands on either side of Blair's flushed face and kissed him. Hard. Passionately. With every ounce of his love. When he was done and they were both breathless, flushed and brain dead, he murmured, "What were we talking about again?"

Blair got up, stumbled a bit, grabbed Jim's arm and pulled him toward the bottom bunk. As he fell back, Jim on top of him, he said, "Who cares?"

Later – quite a bit later considering how long it had been since they'd made love – Jim whispered into the mass of curly hair on his face, "Who won?"

"Me, of course."

"Oh. Okay."

***

*There's small choice in rotten apples* – William Shakespeare

Sam unlaced her boot, pulled it off – and tossed it at the door of her cabin. The colonel and Daniel: together. Jim and Blair: together. She and Teal'c? Separate rooms. Sometimes it really sucked being the lone woman. If she'd been a man, she and Teal'c would be bunking together and thus – doing other things together. But no-o, she was a female and had to have her own room.

Of course – if she were a man – then there'd be – three-- gay couples on SG-1?

Grinning, she pulled off her other boot. As it dropped to the floor, she started to laugh.

Don't ask, don't tell, my foot. Two gay couples on one team? Based on that math, the percentage of gay couples within the SGC was definitely higher than anyone would have believed. So... who might the other couples be? She dropped back on the bed and stared up at the ceiling. Okay, how 'bout Captain Erskin and Major Thorwald? Oh, yeah, they were definitely an item.

Trying to figure out the other SGC couplings among the single members wasn't a bad way to finish off the trip to the Alpha site. Not the best way, just not the worst.

Wait. Maybe there was a more pressing question to figure out.

Who was hotter naked and in bed together: Jim and Blair or the Colonel and Daniel?
Oh, man, that was a tough one. For one thing, she loved men with hair on their chest (sorry, Teal’c, but what could she say?) which meant that really, the colonel should be with Blair. All that hair. She giggled. No, Blair was definitely Jim's. And vice versa. She would bet a million bucks that Jim loved running his fingers through all that hair – head and chest. She would. And Blair's lips?

Oooh, Daniel's lips or Blair's?

No contest.

Teal’c's.

All the way.

And those eyelashes of his? Hubba-hubba.

But she liked Blair's ass better than anyone's.

But Daniel's legs.

The Colonel's hands.

Jim's smile.

Teal'c's – yes, well. 'Nuff said there.

She grinned again.

Eyes.

Hey, wow, thanks to Jim and Blair – blue eyes ruled! The colonel and Teal'c were now in the minority. Yeehaw!

She rolled onto her side and tucked her arm under the pillow.

You know, maybe it wasn't so bad being the only woman on a team with five – count 'em – five -- incredibly handsome, virile – and okay, yes, mostly gay – men, but still -- she was damn lucky.

But she also missed Teal'c.

***

Jack closed the door to their cabin and sighed dramatically. Daniel got up, reached for his black tee, and pulled it on over his head. "Better get dressed, Jack."

Looking almost crestfallen, Jack nodded and walked over to the bed. He sat down next to Daniel and sighed again.

"Jack, cut it out. We've had the discussion and you're all better now and looking forward to hearing that you have the Ancient gene."

"Says you. I say," he sighed dramatically again, "I'm not going to like this."

An Airman had just informed them that General Hammond was requesting their presence in the conference room and both men were assuming that the results were in on the DNA and now a very disgruntled Jack started dressing. When they were both ready, they hurried out of the cabin.
Well, at least Daniel hurried. Jack dawdled.

***

"So... I really have this... this—"

"Gene, Jack. Ancient gene."

"Thank you, Daniel. Thank you so much." He turned his attention back to Hammond. "So what happens now, General?"

Hammond gave him a slight smile. "Well, this would appear to be much bigger than we originally anticipated." He gave Daniel a strange look before adding, "As soon as I received the results, I contacted the President and several items were decided, one being that testing of the Prometheus crew and SGC personnel would begin immediately. In addition, a plan for staffing the Antarctic site is in the works. To put it bluntly: this is the biggest thing to come out of the Stargate program since its inception."

Blair glanced over at Daniel and wasn't surprised to see the disappointment in his eyes. He understood completely. Hammond was talking about technology – specifically alien defense technology. He suspected that Daniel was thinking of all that they'd learned culturally in over four years. Looking back at Hammond, he asked, "What about Daniel's test?"

"Yes, well, that's part of the reason things are a bit more -- complicated."

"I don't have the gene," Daniel stated matter-of-factly. "Which means there must be some other explanation for why it took Jack and I together to—"

"Not exactly, Dr. Jackson." He turned to Sam and asked, "Would you explain, Major Carter?"

Sam nodded and got to her feet. Walking over to the dry erase board, she picked up a black marker and, after shooting Jack a knowing look, said, "I'll make this as easy to understand as I can." She faced the board, drew a chain of links and said, "Imagine this is your DNA, Colonel." She took up a blue marker. "But now I add this." She drew an oddly shaped blue link at the end of the chain and then followed it with several more black links. Sam faced them again. "The blue link represents the one – and only – odd gene and it's this marker," she tapped the different link, "that we've identified as the Ancient gene."

Sam turned back to the board and drew another black chain, but this time, she shaded them with the blue marker. "This," she said, "is Daniel's DNA."

"Uhm... that doesn't look... I mean...." Daniel shoved his glasses up his nose. "That would imply...."

"We're not sure what it means, yet, Daniel," Sam said. "But," she looked over at Jim and Blair, "we now feel that we should test both Captain Ellison and Blair."

Blair looked at Jim, who was frowning, before asking, "Why?"

"Well, for one thing," Sam said. "We need to confirm your hypothesis that Captain Ellison doesn't possess the gene while at the same time, try to identify the Ancient enhancements by comparing--"

"I get it. You think Daniel's DNA could be enhanced and need to see if Jim's matches, right?"

"Exactly," Sam agreed.
Blair studied the board a moment – and finally said, "I don't think so, Sam. I mean, it's certainly possible, but I'm thinking there's another explanation." He looked over at Daniel and said, "I think – maybe – you're an Ancient – or rather, half Ancient."

"Whoa, where did that come from?" Daniel asked, clearly not enamored of the thought.

Blair shrugged almost apologetically. "Daniel, there's such a thing as an open mind and then there's your mind. Now I figure I have one of the most open minds in the world—"

"I'll second that," Jim murmured. "Stuff's falling out all the time."

Not even bothering to give Jim a dirty look, Blair went on. "But the way you handled things on Kheb, the immediate connection between you and that Oma person? The way you knew – what you knew? It wasn't just your rampant curiosity or ability to accept just about anything, Daniel. At least – not entirely."

"Blair, that would be... impossible. That would mean that one of my parents was an—"

"Ancient. Right. Now I know your mother had relatives, background – history, ancestors, because you shared that with me back in school – but you also told me that your father was an orphan – that there were no records of him prior to his being found by the Jackson's when he was thirteen. Am I remembering correctly?"

Everyone was now staring at Daniel, whose face turned bright pink. Blair's expression softened as he added, "I'm sorry, man. But it could fit."

"Okay, now I'm thoroughly confused. How the hell could Daniel be half Ancient and not know it? And if he is, why wasn't he the one to sit down in the chair instead of me, Sandburg?"

"Come on, Jack," Blair said somewhat impatiently. "You could be part Indian and not know it if you hadn't investigated your family tree, and Daniel has no history on his father's side of the family. And as to why it took both of you – yeah, I have a theory – but that's all it is and it holds the same amount of weight as everything I've posited so far – which is zero. Zilch. Just a bunch of ideas." Blair walked over and sat down. "Jim and I will offer up our blood, but I'm telling you now – you'll find nothing but black links. However, I would bet my last dollar that if we had something considerably stronger and more powerful than say, a CAT scan, we'd find something different in Jim's brain besides the marbles, that is."

Jack, Jim and Daniel all started to lean forward, ready to say something, but Hammond beat them all. Smiling gently, he said, "Mr. Sandburg, you do yourself an injustice. You were the first to suggest that Colonel O'Neill possessed the Ancient gene and were proven right. You knew there was something different about Daniel – and you were proven right. I could go on, but I think you get the idea. And there *is* a stronger version of a CAT scan, thanks to the Stargate program and, upon our return to Earth, we'll use it. So we're listening, son."

Now it was Blair's turn to go pink. Seeing his discomfort – and knowing he was partly to blame – along with Hammond's unexpected military version of praise – Daniel said, "It's okay, Blair. It's okay. I think... I think I see where you're going. I've thought a great deal about the Ancients and I have a few 'theories' of my own – and now that I look at it dispassionately – I can see the possibility of Ancients right here on Earth, living with the rest of us – and yes, marrying, having children, the works."

"Are we talking an Ancient like... Orlin?" Sam asked.
"No," Daniel and Blair said together, but then chuckling self-consciously. Daniel finally said, "You want give us your theories and then I'll share mine?"

"No, you go first and we'll see if we're reading the same book, let alone the same page."

"Fair enough. Okay, we know that a plague threatened the Ancients and that as a result, they tried various methods of undoing the illness that was slowly destroying them, including the time travel concept. We also know that they learned how to ascend to a higher plane of existence – but there's nothing to say that every Ancient did so. They had the ability to travel all over this and other galaxies so is it so hard to believe that many remained in their normal or corporeal state because they weren't threatened by the plague?" He couldn't help but notice the excited nodding that Blair was doing and he grinned. "Are we in the same library, Blair?"

"Same book, same page, man."

"I'm still not sure I understand why it took both of us, Daniel," Jack said.

"It's simple," Blair said. "Neither of you are full Ancients. The gene is probably enough to operate most of the equipment we found, but that uncloaking the repository required much more energy, thus, when you two worked together – it was enough." He took a breath and added, "The real irony is that even if Anubis had managed to get both Eyes before we did, well, he's only half ascended so he probably would never have discovered the rest of that cavern."

"But he'd have had the weapon and the ability to use it," Sam said.

Everyone was silent as they considered that possibility. It was a frightening thought.

***

Frowning, Blair looked around the 'Gate room of the Alpha site. Finally he nudged Jim and hissed out, "Serious decorating problem here, Jim."

"Since when was décor a worry of yours?" Jim whispered back.

"Oh, come on, man. This place sucks. Dark, gloomy, icky—"

"Ssh."

"Colonel Pierce, this is Captain Ellison and Blair Sandburg, the two newest members of SG-1."

Jim saluted smartly as Blair nodded awkwardly.

"Captain, Mr. Sandburg." Pierce turned back to Hammond and said, "General, I assume you'd like us to dial Earth immediately?"

"I'm afraid so. We'd love to stay, Colonel, but I think the President is rather anxious to hear from me."

Pierce grinned. "General, from what we were able to monitor – may I say that you and the Prometheus kicked some major Goa'uld ass?"

George looked behind him, specifically at the six people that made up the new SG-1, and said, "No, Colonel Pierce, I did not kick some 'major Goa'uld ass' as you so eloquently put it – SG-1 did. We once again owe them our lives. And speaking of ass kicking, how did the battle play with the news media?"
"Our cover story is that the Air Force was conducting a special training mission involving practice combat strategy in the skies along with a combined search and rescue training mission."

"And just how was a huge Goa'uld mother ship explained away?" Jack asked dryly.

"It registered for such a short period of time, that it was chalked up to a problem with equipment," Pierce answered.

Blair nudged Jim and whispered, "Romulan cloaking device."

"That is correct, Chief Blair Sandburg. The Goa'uld do, indeed, use a cloaking device, but whether it is this Romulan version, I do not know. The Goa'uld have stolen technology from many."

"Er, no, that wasn't...." Blair sighed. "Star Trek, Teal'c. An old scifi show from the sixties?"

"Ah, yes. To boldly go and live long and prosper. I know of the Klingons, but I must have missed the episodes with the Romulans."

"Gentlemen?" Hammond said brusquely. "I think we should move forward and out of the way of the Stargate. I've heard rumors that an exploding wormholes can be dangerous to your health."

Jim tugged at Blair's blue Air Force issue jacket and walked him down the ramp with the others as he muttered, "I can't take you anywhere."

As Blair stepped in between Jim and Daniel, the dialing sequence began. He watched in amazement as the huge ring rotated, still not immune to the miracle. Suddenly, he whirled around, eyes searching the room even as he grabbed Jim's arm.

"Chief?" Jim started to say before he broke out in a cold sweat. He frowned in consternation as his breathing grew ragged and he stomped down the urge to pull Blair behind him, to protect him.

"Something... there's something—"

"I ... know, Chief. I ... know," Jim gasped out.

Daniel immediately said, "General, have them stop the dialing sequence!"

Hammond nodded at Pierce, who turned toward the control room and barked out the order. The Stargate slowed to a stop – and was quiet. SG-1 quickly surrounded the two men and, his arm on Jim's shoulder, Jack asked, "What's going on?"

Sweat trickling down his face and now doubled over, Jim could only shake his head, but Blair said, "Someone... the same threat Jim felt before." His worried gaze met Daniel's. "Anubis."

"That's not possible," Jack said. "The ship – his ship – was destroyed."

Sam looked up at General Hammond and asked, "We're certain that no pod escaped?"

"We will be," Hammond said, voice firm. "Major, if you'll accompany me?"

Sam, with a concerned glance at Jim and Blair, nodded and followed Hammond to the control room. Jack, still holding Jim, asked, "Blair, what can we do? How do we help?"

"Give... me ... a moment," Blair answered. "Just a ... moment." He closed his eyes, took several deep breaths, and finally turned to Jim. "Okay, man, we need to get control here or it'll be the white rubber room for us. Now latch onto whatever you need to get centered. Touch, scent, sight,
whatever, man, just do it."

Jim nodded again and reached out with his hand, his fingers gripping Blair's arm – tightly.

"Okay, good, it's touch. Go with it, set the anchor, concentrate on how the jacket feels, each thread and then go deeper, past the threads to my arm, to the skin and then deeper still until you can feel the blood rushing through my veins—"

"Got it, Chief," Jim said, his voice stronger now. Slowly he straightened, took a deep breath, and exhaled loudly. "Okay, that was... weird."

Smiling up at him, Blair said, "Middle name, man. Middle name."

Jim stared at Blair for a moment before his eyes narrowed. "Chief, you and I need to have a talk later."

Blair gulped. "Right, sure, Jim. Sure." Evidently, his being able to absorb some of Jim's sensory issues when faced with a threat of major proportions was no longer a secret.

"So now maybe you two would like to share what the hell just happened?" Jack asked.

Without taking his eyes from Jim, Blair said, "You've heard of Spidey-sense? Well, Jim's got his own version of it. When there's a major threat to his ... territory, he gets kind of weirded out. Kind of."

"So there's some kind of immediate danger here, at the Alpha site?"

"Not just some kind – the Anubis kind," Blair said. "At least, that's what I think Jim's feeling."

"Wait, you're saying that he was sensing... Anubis?" Daniel asked, shocked.

"That's what I think, yeah."

Hammond and Sam returned at that moment, both with expressions that boded bad news.

"We found an anomaly that Major Carter was able to isolate and identify as the signature from an escape pod. It came from the Goa'uld mother ship as it exploded, which is why it was missed. At least one individual made it out."

"How does that place Anubis here?" Jack asked. "It's a pod, for crying out loud, not a fighter—"

"There are escape vehicles with navigational capabilities, O'Neill," Teal'c said. "And I would expect no less from a system lord, especially one such as Anubis."

"But the Prometheus would have—"

"Not necessarily, sir," Sam offered. "We don't know if it had the same cloaking abilities or if it simply trailed in our wake or a combination of both."

"So – what? We're saying that Anubis is here, on this planet?" Jack asked, still astounded by the possibility.

Sam and Hammond both looked over at Blair and Jim – and Blair nodded.

"Why?" Jack asked. "Why would he come here? Why not – you know – go home?"
"He might be a bit... ticked off," Blair said, almost cringing in the face of Jack's puzzled ire.

"And if he is a half-ascended being – he could have incredible powers," Daniel said. "Even possessing half of what we witnessed on Kheb would be pretty formidable."

"So you're saying what?" Jack asked.

"Well, I'm saying he could be pretty – you know – formidable."

Blair nudged Jim again and whispered, "Have you noticed how often these guys use the word 'formidable'?"

Jim rolled his eyes. "You're impossible, Sandburg."

"He must believe we have his weapon," Sam posited. "He couldn't know that it's the Colonel—"

"Hey, I am not the weapon, Carter. A chair is the weapon—"

"Actually, the chair is nothing more than the—"

"I was being facetious, Daniel."

Daniel pushed his glasses back up and said, "I knew that."

Hammond sighed. Oh, for the good old days.

***

"We've got his pod, General," Sam said, her eyes fixed on the screen in front of her. "It's not visible to our UAV, which confirms some sort of stealth mode, but the residual heat signature matches."

"Any other type of energy reading that shouldn't be here, Major?" Hammond asked.

"No, sir. Which could mean he's still in the ship."

"Sam, I'm thinking you need to—"

Daniel got nor further as Colonel Pierce walked brusquely up to Hammond and said, "General, you might want to take a look at our monitors that screen the area around our entrance up top." He pointed at the screens overhead.

Everyone looked up and a moment later, Daniel said, "That's ... the hologram... that's the same figure as the hologram."

"Anubis," Jim said, his voice oddly flat.

***

*And do as adversaries do in law -- strive mightily, but eat and drink as friends* – William Shakespeare

"Can you tell if we're looking at the real thing or a hologram?" Daniel asked.

"Whatever that is, it isn't a hologram," Jim said. "But it's not human either. No heartbeat, no blood flowing through veins, no breathing. I'm getting ... there's energy – but it's dampened somehow. But I'm still feeling it."
They were all standing at the entrance to the facility and viewing the cloaked figure that stood approximately a hundred yards away. The sun-dappled ground seemed at odds with the very sinister-like being.

"It hasn't moved," Jack noted. "Not so much as a twitch."

"General, I don't know what Captain Ellison is experiencing, but we're registering absolutely nothing from it. No energy, no heat signature – nothing," Carter said in disbelief as she stared at one of her hand-held gizmos.

Daniel took a step closer to the open door. "You know... that would make a kind of sense. If he's half-ascended – he's basically uncontrolled energy. Maybe that hooded robe and the mask work as a containment field."

He started to go outside, but Jack grabbed his jacket to stop him. "What do you think you're doing?"

"I'm, uhm, you know," he pointed at Anubis, "going out there?"

"Oh, I don't think so, Daniel. Nope, don't think so," Jack said while keeping a firm grasp on Daniel's jacket.

"Jack, he's waiting for us, he wants to talk," Daniel almost whined.

"And you know this how?"

"I think he's right," Jim said, his eyes on the dark figure. "I think we should go out – face him down."

"You're mostly right, Jim," Blair said. "We should, but not you. Don't ask why, but I don't think we want to risk Anubis finding out what you are – and he could if he actually saw you."

"I'm so glad I have SG-1 to make the hard decisions," Hammond said. "However, I really think this one is mine. Colonel, we need to find out what he is, who he is and what he wants so I'm inclined to allow Dr. Jackson," he held up his hand to forestall Jack's argument, "with you and Teal'c watching his six, to approach that... whatever he is."

Looking every inch the smug archaeologist, Daniel said, "Thank you, sir. Well, Jack? You ready?"

Colonel Pierce turned to the SF behind him and said, "Get us a P-90, Sergeant."

The SF nodded and a few moments later, returned with said weapon, which Pierce handed to Jack. "On the house."

"Gee, thanks." He checked the weapon over, slung the strap over his neck and, once the weapon was comfortably settled, said, "Teal'c, you ready?"

"I am."

"Daniel, do your thing."

That was all Daniel needed. He was striding out the door and toward the figure, leaving Jack and Teal'c in his wake and forcing them to jog in order to catch him.

Blair looked up at Jim and said, "Sorry, man, but I really think—"
"I know, Chief. I know. It's all right. I just wish we were dealing with a human. I'd be of more help."

Blair glanced over at Hammond and gave a slight jerk of his head indicating Pierce and the two SF's. Hammond frowned, but understood.

"Colonel Pierce, would you take these two SF's and supply Colonel O'Neill and Teal'c with additional back-up?"

Only slightly surprised, Pierce nodded. As soon as they were outside, Blair turned to Jim and said, "He doesn't need to be flesh and bone, Jim. You're sensing his energy – start to gauge it, man. What are you feeling right this minute? He's watching Daniel approach...."

Eyes closed and running his right hand up and down his left arm, Jim said, "A spike, but of interest – not – no threat...."

"And now he sees Jack, Teal'c.... and now the other three...."

Jim slowly nodded – "He doesn't like seeing one of them – there was a burst and my impression is of ... red."

"Teal'c," Sam said softly. "The Sholva."

She and Hammond were watching Jim and Blair, amazement easy to read in their expressions, doubly so for Hammond was watching Jim in action for the first time.

***

"I'm Daniel Jackson—"

"I know who you are. I am Anubis."

The voice was definitely Goa'uld, Daniel realized. Definitely.

"You know who I am?"

"You are the Taur'i of SG-1. Behind you is Colonel O'Neill and the Sholva, Teal'c. But one is missing."

"Why are you here? With no Jaffa, nothing to back you up," Daniel asked, ignoring the identification of Jack and Teal'c and the inherent question in the observation of the missing member.

"I have come to propose an alliance."

Daniel had never worked so hard to hide his emotions as he did at Anubis' words. Outwardly calm, and showing only the slightest bit of curiosity, Daniel said, "You want an alliance with the Taur'i? I find that hard to believe."

"And why is that, Daniel Jackson?"

Daniel regarded him for a moment, his mind working swiftly. Finally he smiled. "You're not only a Goa'uld, but a frustrated half-ascended one at that. You don't need us, Anubis."

The silence that greeted his words was enough to tell him that he'd surprised Anubis. He managed not to smirk.
"How is it that you know this?" Anubis finally asked.

"It's enough that we do."

Anubis took two steps closer to Daniel, causing Jack and Teal'c to move as one, Teal'c opening his staff weapon and Jack clicking off the safety on his P-90.

"They are oddly protective of you, Daniel Jackson. I wonder why?"

"It's how we Taur'i are made. I come to you without a weapon so they foolishly believe they can protect me if your motives are less that friendly."

"And yet...." Slowly Anubis raised his arm to show a gloved hand. Palm facing Daniel, he said, "I sense... a kindred spirit in you, Daniel. Are you the one who faced Oma at Kheb?"

Somehow knowing it would be useless to lie, Daniel said, "I spoke with her – we exchanged – ideas."

"And this is how you discovered what I am?"

"You know better than that."

"I do," Anubis said. "But she took your son – the Harcesis."

"Took? No. I gave him over to her for safekeeping."

"Then perhaps you made a grave error. All is not as it seems, Daniel. You see, it was Oma who struck me down and thus destroyed my host. He was a beautiful man – much like you. His dreams of Kheb haunted me and I was tired of the wars, the losses, the patricide, infanticide – all of it. I wanted what he longed for – death and Kheb. Another system lord, Yu, gave me my wish, and in the dying – Oma Desala came to me and I was granted the ascension. Until she discovered that I was Goa'uld. It didn't matter that I wanted release from the life of a Goa'uld – it only mattered that I was Goa'uld. And as the system lords had done – she then did -- and I was cast out before the ascension was complete."

He lifted his hand again – this time toward his face. "Would you like to see what was done to me, Daniel?"

"I don't need to. I know what you are, I know that what you're wearing contains you."

Anubis dropped his arm slowly and Daniel had the feeling he was being studied as he'd never been studied before – not even by Jack.

"You have ... figured out ... a great deal, Daniel. Then perhaps an alliance is indeed possible?"

"I can't speak for my government, but maybe you could tell me just what we'd gain by aligning ourselves with you?"

"You wish to defend your world, do you not? I could prove invaluable in that arena."

Daniel smiled slightly. "Oh, we're fine now. Defense is no longer a worry so you're going to have to come up with something else."

"Of course – you have both Eyes."

Daniel didn't answer – choosing instead to simply wait.
"So perhaps my knowledge of the Ancients would be of help?" He stepped closer – carefully closer – and added, "The Ancients have touched you, Daniel, but they are not all that they seem. I am proof of that. But I am half ascended and as such, I possess a great deal of knowledge that you would otherwise be unable to access."

"And how would you benefit from an alliance with the Taur'i?"

"Your enemies are mine, mine – yours. And you possess the Eyes."

***

"I need him to say something we know is true, Chief," Jim said.

Blair nodded and immediately started out the door. Jim snagged the back of his jacket and said, "Whoa, Chief Hot Foot, where do you think you're going?"

"I'm going to ask Anubis—"

"I don't think so, Sandburg."

Blair pulled away, did a quick sidestep and was out the door.

"I hate it when he does that."

"Does he do it often?" Hammond asked.

"Far too."

"Then I'm very grateful he's not military. Although – I'm exceedingly pleased he's a part of SG-1. Colonel O'Neill deserves him."

Jim caught the glitter of humor in the pale blue eyes of his commanding officer and, smiling, turned back to the door – and his wayward partner.

His smile faded.

***

Bluff was his middle name. Blair walked easily up to – and past – Jack and Teal'c to stand by Daniel's side just in time to hear Anubis' last words.

Ignoring the looks Jack was throwing him – after all, he'd been the recipient of far better from Jim – Blair smiled, held out his hand and said brashly, "Blair Sandburg, friend of Daniel's. Pardon my interruption, but I'm curious as to why we should believe that you're Anubis, let alone a half-ascended being. Now, don't get me wrong – we know there's an Anubis and we know he's half-ascended, but how do we know that you're him?"

To everyone's surprise, Anubis actually took a step back – a quick and rather nervous step back. Blair looked at his still-outstretched hand, chuckled and stuffed it in his pocket. "Sorry, of course you're not going to shake. So – are you Anubis?"

"I am. And if you need proof of my abilities, I'd be happy to show you." Anubis raised his arm, spread his gloved fingers wide – and then slowly began to squeeze them shut.
Blair immediately felt a constrictive tightening around his throat and coughed harshly in response. He brought his hand up to his neck as his vision began to blur and his blood pulsed, dampening his hearing....

***

"Hey, what the hell do you think you're doing?" Jack angrily asked even as he stepped in front of Blair, his P-90 up and ready.

"He wished proof, I am providing it."

"STOP now!" Jack demanded.

"You're not helping your cause, Anubis," Daniel said desperately as he tried to help Blair, who was now bent over and gasping for breath.

Suddenly – Blair straightened. His breathing eased and his color began to return.

And strangely enough, Anubis took another step backward as he quickly said, "Think about my offer – I will return for an answer." He touched a wrist device almost hidden by the wide, floppy sleeve – and disappeared.

***

"You're certifiable, Sandburg," Jim said as he ran up to them. "Certifiable."

The look on his partner's face caused Jim to rethink yelling at his partner. Concerned, he said, "Blair, what is it?"

"Inside, we need to ... inside," Blair said.

Everyone hurried back inside.

***

"I'm fine," Blair said as he again struck Jim's hand away. "Jeez, get a grip, Jim."

"Get a grip? Get a grip?! Sandburg, he was squeezing the life out of you—"

"And... I stopped it," Blair said softly and as if he still couldn't believe it.

Daniel shot him a sharp look. "Say again?"

Eyes on his folded hands, Blair said, "I stopped him. I just... stopped him. I could feel his fingers squeezing my throat shut and I just thought – "No, no way, man. You are not going to use me to show off with," and wham, it was over. Just ... over."

"He seemed ... oddly afraid the moment you walked out," Sam noted thoughtfully.

Hammond turned to Jim and said, "What can you tell us, Captain Ellison?"

"He was lying about the whole Oma thing – no, let me rephrase that. He was telling partial truths. He had no desire for death – only power. It was Oma who ascended him, though. He told the truth about that."

"What did you sense when Sandburg showed up?" Jack asked, bringing it back to Sam's original
Jim gave Blair a strange look and said, "Fear. He was afraid." He glanced back at Jack and added, "Fear seems to be a constant. I could almost smell it on him as if he'd been human – and there'd been no sign of it until Blair joined you."

"Where does that leave us, people? We don't actually have any method of defeating him should he try something here, not that he knows that. But facts are facts and we're very vulnerable right now," Hammond said.

"We could string him along," Sam suggested. "Tell him we have to get clearance, red tape, etc.? Tell him—"

"General Hammond?" Pierce stuck his head in the door and, at a wave from Hammond, walked in. "Sir, Anubis' pod just took off. He's gone."

"He could return," Teal'c said when no one responded to Colonel Pierce's announcement.

"He won't," Jim said with a great deal of certainty. "Something – or someone -- scared him off."

It was said in a flat, but definite, tone of voice, and Jack, hearing it, whistled low. "I don't think I want to know what could scare someone – something – like Anubis."

Everyone studiously avoided looking at Blair.

***

Blair sat on the Infirmary bed at the SGC, legs dangling, Jim on the bed across from him. Dr. Frasier had just taken blood from Jim and was now siphoning off a nice amount from Blair, who hadn't said anything since they'd received the news that Anubis had left the Alpha site. Jim was worried – very worried, but here, on base, was not the place to talk to him.

The question of why Anubis left the Alpha site so abruptly was left hanging, the game of guessing and theorizing no longer holding the charm it usually did for SG-1, specifically for Daniel, Sam and Blair. But as soon as they got to the apartment – Jim would be sitting Blair down and they were going to have a heart-to-heart – about several things. But for now, he was going to make it as easy on Blair as possible by simply letting his silence continue while letting him know – with frequent touches – that the silence was understood and that he was loved.

"All right, that does it, Mr. Sandburg. I think we have enough blood from the two of you to start up our own blood bank," Janet said with a smile. She pulled off her gloves and dropped them into the hazardous waste container before turning back and cocking her head. "Mr. Sandburg? Are you all right?"

"He's fine," Jim said as he got to his feet. He picked up Blair's jacket and insinuated himself between the doctor and Blair. "We're both tired, like the rest of SG-1, that's all. We're on our way home now."

Looking from one to the other, she finally nodded. "Okay, but if you need anything, let me know, all right?"

Smiling gratefully, Jim said, "We will. Thanks."

Blair slid to the ground and took the jacket from Jim's hand and, together, they headed out. The fact that Blair hadn't said anything to Janet doubled Jim's worry.
"I don't suppose you noticed how quiet Blair was," Daniel said as Jack unlocked the front door.

"I noticed." Jack stepped in, set the keys on the table and walked down into the living room. He stripped off his jacket and let it drop to the ground as he made a beeline for his three week old lounger. Sinking gratefully into its plush comfort, he sighed, pushed back until the leg rest came up, and said, "He's scared."

Daniel picked up the discarded jacket, hung it up in the closet and walked back into the living room. It was cold so he left his own jacket on as he regarded Jack. Anyone observing the older man would see someone relaxed and drifting off – but Daniel wasn't anyone, and thus he saw the real Jack -- the worried team leader. A tight jaw, the thin lips – oh, yeah, he was concerned.

Daniel walked into the kitchen, took down two shot glasses and then the bottle of Jack Daniels. He poured, recapped the bottle, and carried them into the living room. He set his down and then lifted Jack's hand and put the glass into it. Jack opened his eyes, glanced down at the drink, and smiled.

"You're all right, Dr. Jackson."

"Yeah, I know," Daniel said as he sat down and picked his own drink. "Cheers."

Jack raised his glass and they both drank. Setting the glass down on the end table, Jack said, "He's afraid of what he is, what he might be."

"Something you can relate to."

"Something Jim can relate to."

Jack looked pointedly at his glass and, with a sigh, Daniel got up and retrieved the bottle from the kitchen. He poured for Jack, then, with a shrug, gave himself a bit more as well after returning to his seat.

Swirling the amber liquid in the glass, Jack said thoughtfully, "You're certainly taking the fact that you're half alien and half human well."

"Well, duh. I'm me," Daniel said reasonably.

Chuckling, Jack said, "Right. Forgot who I was dealing with for a moment." After a few seconds of silence passed, he asked softly, "Do you think the kid's going to be all right?"

"He's not a kid, Jack. He's thirty."

"He's a kid. A short kid. To me, anyway. And you're not answering my question."

"He's Blair."

"Right. The same way you're Daniel."

"Exactly."

Jim followed Blair inside and wasn't surprised when, after removing his jacket and dropping it on the floor, his partner headed straight for the dining room. While Jim hung up his jacket and retrieved and hung up Blair's, he could hear him opening the fridge and taking out the beer they'd
purchased before leaving for Antarctica. As Jim walked by the dining room, a beer flew through the air and he caught it.

"I could have missed, could have been hit in the head and then where would you be?" he asked as he sat down and popped the top off of the can.

"You never miss, you knew exactly what I was doing, and if that weren't enough, you were watching me. But if – by some strange fluke – you should have been hit in the head by the flying beer can, I'd be running out the door to avoid being slaughtered by you."

Blair dropped down next to him on the couch and took a healthy swig. After swallowing, he said, "You think I'm afraid, don't you?"

"Aren't you?"

Blair shook his head. "Nope. Curious, but no, not afraid. Not the way you mean, anyway."

Jim cocked his head at Blair and said, "And just how many ways could I mean it?"

"Afraid like you were when I told you what you were."

"Whoa."

Blair shrugged. "Look, I've always been different and you excelled in trying to be so not different, so you were afraid when you found out that you were different. I, on the other hand, figure it's just one more different thing about me. Not that I know what's going on with me, because I don't. And I don't know why Anubis was frightened of a Jewish guy from Earth with long hair and a tattoo of a jaguar on his ass, you know? I don't really know if I stopped Anubis from choking me or if Anubis just stopped because Jack told him to, okay? I don't know anything – which is pretty much par for the course where I'm concerned. So we'll just take it one day at a time, man. It's all we can do."

"So you're not in the least bit worried about your DNA?"

Blair spewed out his beer. After wiping up, he finally said, "My DNA? Oh, please. There won't be anything weird about my DNA – or yours either. This is a shaman thing."

"Look," Jim said reasonably. "I spent eighteen months with Incacha, okay? I know from my shamans and what you've been able to know – and perhaps do – goes way beyond your basic shamanism. Why couldn't you be enhanced too?"

Blair shook his head. "Nope."

"You're not even going to consider it? The possibility of it?"

"Of course I am. It's a possibility, but so are a dozen other things. I'm just saying that I don't believe I'm enhanced, that's all. Okay, let me rephrase that: I'm the most enhanced guy I know – but not because of the Ancients."

Jim had to smile at that. "Right. It's your shampoo—"

"And after-shave."

"And after-shave."

"Enhancing after-shave," Blair said as he lifted the beer can to his lips.
Jim was sound asleep – finally. Blair glanced down at the head on his chest and rested his palm against the top of the soft, fine hair.

He hadn't lied.

Not exactly.

He wasn't afraid of being different – but he was afraid of power.

And he'd felt power within him as Anubis had tried to choke the life out of him. And yes, he'd known that it hadn't been a demonstration --- no, Anubis had wanted him dead even if the guy – was "guy" even the correct term? Oh, well. Anyway, Anubis hadn't been aware of the reason why, only that his instincts said to kill the short Taur'i.

And he'd stopped him.

Okay, he'd lied to Jim about that, but again – God, Jim could barely handle being a sentinel – how the hell would he handle whatever Blair was?

Blair closed his eyes. Maybe it was over. Maybe there'd be no more weird knowings or artifacts that talked to him. Maybe Anubis had gone underground to lick his wounds.

Yeah, and maybe he'd wake up as a woman tomorrow.

Damn, now he'd never get to sleep.

***

"Dr. Frasier, this just arrived from the lab."

Janet looked up at the young Airman and nodded. "Thank you." She took the sealed, 'confidential' folder, set it down and finished the rotation schedule on her computer. Once she'd saved it, she then turned back to the report, knowing it had to be Captain Ellison's and Blair Sandburg's DNA test results.

In the four years Janet had been a part of the SGC, she'd seen quite a few ... odd... things, to say the least, and when she opened the folder, the most she expected to find were results similar to either Colonel O'Neill's or Daniel's. Or nothing unusual at all.

Like Captain Ellison's. Completely normal human DNA. She figured he'd be very glad to hear it.

Then she flipped over the page to Blair's results.

"Oh, God."

After five minutes of staring, she pulled out his medical file and studied it like she'd never studied a file before. She went over every single detail – and found nothing out of the ordinary.

"All right – we've got a mistake, that's all. Just a mistake."

Janet got up, took the folder and headed down the corridor to the lab. She poked her head inside.

"Marina?"

Dr. Marina Collier swiveled around on her stool and, smiling, said, "I wondered how long it would
take you to get down here."

"There has to be a mistake," Janet said as she walked up to her friend.

"That's what I thought too, which is why I ran the test three times. As you know, it's my policy that each sample be divided in four separate samples in case of an accident or – like now – a question regarding the results. When I got the first rather astounding result, I ran the next sample. And then I ran the third one. Same exact result all three times, Janet. All three. Naturally, since I was expecting you, I ran" she held up a vial, "sample number four and here's the printout."

Janet took the offered strip... and one glance told her it was an exact match to the one copied into the report. She looked up and asked, "Chain of custody?"

"Never broken. You delivered to me, and no one has touched them, as you requested."

"This strand – it isn't—"

"No," Marina said, "it isn't."

"You understand that you can't—"

"I know, Janet. I know. This is the SGC – we've seen – okay, nothing like this, but still, I know. No one else in my lab knows or will know."

Janet touched Marina's arm lightly. "Thank you, Marina."

She walked out, her goal: General Hammond.

***

He stared down at the paper in his hand -- and only one phrase – one his daughter would have disapproved of – repeated itself over and over and over again....

"ohshitohshitohshitohshitohshit...."

"I'm guessing," he finally said, "that I don't really need you to tell me what this means, what with having seen Colonel O'Neill's and Dr. Jackson's DNA reports." He put the report down and looked up at his CMO. "He's not... human."

"No, sir, he isn't – exactly. There are similarities but basically – Blair Sandburg is an alien, General."

Looking back down at the results, Hammond sighed and said, "We're going to need his mother...."

***

Entering the mountain, both Jim and Blair felt much better than they had when they'd left. Of course, Blair thought, sex will do that for you. Sex several times on surfaces Daniel would be better off not knowing about will do that for you too. Although, come to think of it – surely Jack and Daniel had... okay, best not to go there.

They both showed their ID's – three times – a fact that always made Blair think of the old spy show, The Man from U.N.C.L.E. Elevators, each one taking Napoleon Solo deeper underground... not that he or Jim were Solo or Kuryakin. Nope, not hardly. Those two old timers should be so lucky.
They stepped out of the last elevator only to come face-to-face with Jack and Daniel.

"Jack."

"Blair."

"Daniel."

"Jim."

Blair rolled up on his toes – a habit of late – and said, "Well, that was nice. Now, care to tell me why you both look so dour? Are they out of glazed donuts?"

"Hammond is waiting for us," Jack said.

Blair bit his lip and then sucked it up and said, "Our results are in."

Both men nodded as Daniel hastened to add, "We don't know anything, Blair, only that the general and Janet are waiting."

Blair felt Jim's hand on his back – protectively so -- and he smiled to himself. Man, you just gotta love the guy.

"Well, okay then," he said. "We'd better not keep him waiting."

***

Blair felt as though he'd just been kicked in the stomach – by the Hulk. Or Teal'c. Same difference.

There was obviously a mis--

"There's no mistake, Blair," Janet said gently. "Your sample was run four times."

He sat back and dropped his hands on the table. "So fine – I'm not human. Cool. Great. But if anyone tries to take a surgical knife to my brain or I end up in some lab somewhere and no one knows where I am—"

"Blair—"

"I'm serious, man. That's just the kind of thing—"

"Blair," Janet said, "the people at this table, plus Dr. Marina Collier, are the only ones who know. And I'm sure General Hammond will do everything in his power—"

"I'm just saying, no experiments." Then Blair brightened as he said, "Hey, Teal'c, you're no longer alone. You can no longer claim to be the only alien assigned to the SGC."

"This is true, ChiefBlairSandburg."

"He's taking it well," Jack observed dryly.

"You just let a kid loose in a candy store, what did you expect?" Jim said.

"Hello? I'm here, in the room? Just because I'm an alien and you're not doesn't mean I'm suddenly invisible," Blair huffed.

"Chill, Martian Man," Jim said with a smile.
"Mr. Sandburg," Hammond said in an attempt to regain some measure of control. "As I understand it, your family members consist of—"

"There's just my mom. She's the only blood relative," Blair said. "Robert isn't really a cousin and—"

"Wait, what about that uncle you trucked with that one summer?" Jim asked, surprised.

"He's – you know – a family friend? The kind you end up calling uncle?" Suddenly Blair paled. "Oh, shit. Mom. Mom."

***

"Mom, I'm telling you that this is important, okay? A car will come for you—mom, I'm serious here and no I can't discuss it on the phone, just trust me—yes, this involves Jim too, but he's not the reason you have to come to Colorado Springs—mom, are you listening to me? The freaking car will be there in less than thirty minutes, mom, all right? And you need to get packed—mom—mom? MOM!"

Jim closed his eyes and sent up a small prayer of thankfulness – a surprise in itself -- that William Ellison was his father as opposed to having Naomi Sandburg as a mother.

Ten minutes later, when Blair hung up the phone – after Naomi finally agreed to come-- he dropped his head on the desk and pounded the surface twice before Jim stopped him by sliding his hand in between the metal and Blair's forehead.

"Chief, take it easy. She's coming and that's what's important."

Blair looked at him with bloodshot eyes and said, "No, Jim. No. That's not what's important. Because if she's not an alien – then she's not my mother and she's been lying all these years. And if her DNA comes out like mine – she's been lying all these years. My problem is that I don't know which lie I prefer right now."

Jim pulled his chair close to the side of the desk, sat back down, and said, "Naomi will always be your mom, no matter what, and you know it."

"But not my mom, which means I may never know who my real parents are – hell, I may never know what they are." Suddenly Blair's whole demeanor changed as he peered suspiciously at Jim. "You're not going to suddenly wig out on me now that I've turned out to be an unknown alien, are you? Holding back touches because you think my skin might zap you, or maybe decide that only you can top from now on because as an alien, I could get you pregnant? Or maybe—"

"Wouldn't I be more likely to want to bottom? For fear that as an alien species, you might have the ability to get pregnant?" Jim asked conversationally.

Blair started banging his head against the table again.

Jim didn't stop him.

***

Blair stood nervously outside the complex and waited for the car that held his mother. It had just been cleared through the front gate and should be arriving any second... and there she was. He knew how he must look to her – in the blue fatigues – the just that-much-too-big fatigues, and his hair pulled back. Oh, and the boots. He knew she was looking at the boots. He just knew it. And
she wasn't happy. He knew that too and it had nothing to do with being a shaman or a Martian and everything to do with being her son.

Oh, damn. Being her son.

Being. Her. Son.

The car slid to a stop and a young Airman – so young he made Blair feel old – jumped out and rushed to open the door.

Naomi looked up at him, smiled, and said, "Thank you, Henry. You've been wonderful."

He reached in and took her overnighter and then helped her out, saying, "It's been a real pleasure, Ms. Sandburg. A real pleasure."

"And you'll consider what I said?" Naomi asked as she got out.

"I sure will. I'll think real hard before re-upping."

"Good boy. Oh, this is my son, Blair. Blair," she said, looking at him for the first time, "this is Airman Rogers. Henry."

"Mr. Sandburg," Airman Henry Rogers said stiffly as he saluted smartly.

"Hey, man," Blair said as he took his mother's bag from the young man.

"Well, I need to get this vehicle back to the car pool, so again, it was a real pleasure."

"Bye, Henry," Naomi said after giving him a quick peck on the cheek.

Blushing, Airman Rogers hurried around to the driver's side, got in, and took off. Naomi then turned to her son and said, "You know I'm not happy about this."

"Mom, I'm not happy about a lot of things, okay? None of which we need ever go into again and -- by the way -- it's good to see you too."

Naomi suddenly smiled and both Sandburgs kind of melted into each other – and if Blair hugged a bit too hard, Naomi pretended not to notice – but her alarms went off.

When they stepped back from one another, she looked around and said, "Where's Jim, honey? I assumed he'd be here with you."

"He would have been – but I wanted it this way. We're going to go inside and down," he blew out a breath, "a loooong way, and then to Jim's office so we can talk. Then I'll introduce you around – kind of. Sort of."

"That was ... clear," Naomi said as her son took her arm and began to lead her inside.

"Oh, by the way, you need to wear this," Blair added as he handed her an ID badge.

Taking it, she clipped it on without even breaking stride, and then glanced up at the entrance to Cheyenne Mountain. "I have to say, sweetie, this is the last place I ever expected to be when visiting you."

"I know, mom. I know."
They moved inside, Naomi was signed in, and then they were going down and he couldn't help but smile at her expression as she observed the elevator floor numbers grow. When they got out and he steered her to another elevator – after signing in a second and third time – she nearly choked. When they got out on thirty-one, her voice trembled as she asked, "How far down are we?"

"I haven't had the nerve to find out, to be honest," he said as he led her to Jim's small office.

"I can see why not," she said, her eyes wide. "How can you stand it, honey?"

Blair ushered her inside, shut the door – and locked it. When he turned back, he said, "It's okay during the day, but when we were staying here overnight – it was hard. But really, it's okay now."

He pulled up a chair for his mother and as she sat down, he said, "I don't know where to start, mom."

Maybe it was the expression on his face, or the fear she saw in his eyes, but whatever it was, she stayed quiet – and encouraging. Blair sighed, sat down opposite her, and took her hand in both of his.

"Mom, did you... did you give birth to me?"

It was so completely different from anything she'd imagined he'd be telling or asking her that all she could do was stare at him. When he said nothing more – just continued to wait, the fear in his eyes threatening to drown her, she found herself saying defensively, "I don't know what these military people have been filling your head with—"

"Mom, did you give birth to me? Am I your biological son?"

She could feel her heart pounding in her temple, in her throat and behind her eyes. The sudden desire to run was so great she was surprised she wasn't already. Sweat began to gather along her spine and upper lip and she could literally feel the color drain from her face – but damn, no matter what – she couldn't tear her eyes from Blair's. But she couldn't answer him either.

A thirty year old lie had just risen up on its hind legs and slapped her in the face.

***

"What do you suppose is happening?" Jack asked.

"I suppose he's asking her a few questions," Daniel said as he moved a chess piece.

Jack, who was sitting backwards on a chair bumped up against the same table where Daniel and Teal'c were playing chess, glanced sideways at Jim and asked, "You okay?"

"I will be – when he and Naomi finish. I just need to look at him – to look into his eyes. That'll tell me all I need to know."

Jack nodded wisely. It was the same for him with Daniel. No amounts of "I'm fine" could fool him anymore. And the nice thing was that Daniel could do the same with him.

"What if... I mean, if Blair is Ms. Sandburg's biological child, then she must know what they are...."

Sam's words trailed off as Teal'c said, "Then we will know the truth, will we not?"

Sam sighed. "That would be the natural conclusion. So for all concerned – I should pray that Blair
is her biological child."

Jack looked over at her. "You still pray?"

Serious blue eyes met his browns. "I do. Every day. Now – more than ever in my life, sir."

He looked back at the game and rested his chin on his arms, which were folded across the top of the chair. "Sweet."

***

"Blair, I... I—"

"The truth, Mom. Just the truth. I wouldn't be asking if it were just a question of biology, of you actually giving birth to me versus somehow adopting me and making me yours. If that were all it were – I wouldn't be asking because you're my mother and I'm your son no matter how we got to that point, okay?"

She lowered her head and whispered, "Oh, God."

Blair took a deep breath. "So I'm not your biological son, then. Am I?"

***

*Tis the mind that makes the body rich* - William Shakespeare

Tears streaming down her face, Naomi said, "I always meant to tell you – but the years slipped by and it became easier ... not to, sweetie. I'm so sorry – so sorry."

He handed her a Kleenex and watched as she dabbed her eyes and blew her nose. "Tell me now," he urged softly when she threw the tissue away. "Tell me now."

More composed, Naomi told him.

***

**Summer – 1969**

Laughing, Naomi ran through the woods, certain that she was far ahead of Joe and Janelle. She couldn't believe life was this good. She was free, had friends, lived in a place where they were all happy and worked together to create a home -- and she was loved.

Hair flying behind her, she continued to run, feeling the breeze against her face and hearing the ocean thundering against the rocks below. Big Sur was everything she'd ever dreamed and it was home now.

Suddenly a sound caught her attention. How she heard it over her own breath and the ocean, she'd never know – but hear it she did -- and it sounded like a baby. She skidded to a stop and waited breathlessly, trying to orient herself and figure out where the crying was coming from – exactly.

To her right.

She started forward -- carefully, cautiously – and when her mind accepted that it was – indeed – a baby, she ran the remaining distance to a clump of bushes that surrounded a huge pine. With the urgent sound of a truly miserable baby ringing in her ears, Naomi dropped to her knees. Feeling much like the Pharaoh's daughter who'd discovered Moses, she parted the long, green stalks – and
there it was.

Small, vulnerable, wrapped in a blue blanket with small stars on it, fists waving in the air and face all scrunched up with crying: a baby.

Gingerly, she reached in and lifted the bundle, remembering old words about babies and fragile heads and necks. She cushioned its head and instinctively brought it to her chest. She patted the swaddled back – gently, reassuringly, even as she began to croon.

The crying stopped.

She carefully lowered the child so she could get a good look at it – make sure it was unharmed -- and found baby blue eyes – still shining with tears -- staring up at her. It gurgled and she could have sworn it smiled at her.

It was all over.

That was all it took. Baby blues, a gurgle like soft, light music, and a smile.

"You're mine, sweetie. I don't know who left you here like this, but they just gave up all rights to you by doing so." She brushed a few small leaves and pine needles out of the beguiling curls and smiled. God, the hair was so soft. Downy soft. She brought the baby up and kissed one cheek only to have it gurgle happily at the touch.

She couldn't keep thinking of – it – as – it, which mean that she needed to know if she held a boy or girl. She didn't care which, but giving the baby a name would be relatively dependant on the sex. She pulled aside the strange – and incredibly soft blanket – to find the child wearing only a white baby t-shirt and a diaper. Feeling ridiculous, she nevertheless peeked.

Grinning proudly, she said, "A boy. You're a little boy. My little boy." He kicked out then, obviously somewhat happy to be free of the blanket, and his arms waved in the air again. Naomi thought it was the cutest thing she'd ever seen. A small hand reached out and tiny fingers curled around a bit of her hair and he smiled again.

"Mine, baby, you're mine," she crooned. "But you need a name, sweetie."

Suddenly she remembered a story told to her by her grandfather, just before he'd died. It was about a boy from the Old Country – born in a field of a poor family, but blessed by the earth – and with the powers of Mother Earth. He'd been named "Blair" and had grown to be not only a great scholar but one of several guardians of Ancient Ireland. She smiled with the memory of not only the story, but life with her grandparents. Her grandfather had been an Irish Catholic, her grandmother, a German Jew – and while both were dead now, her early childhood had been magical with Blair's story one of her most enchanting memories.

"Blair. You're name is Blair. Blair Sandburg."

***

"... and the others felt the same – that anyone who'd left you deserved to lose you and none of us wanted to see you in the system so it was accepted that you were mine. After your second birthday, one of my friends got her brother, a young lawyer, to file all the appropriate paperwork to make you official. I just told everyone that I'd had you while living on the commune – which was very easy for everyone to believe. And that's it. Except," she looked up at him then, "except that I loved you immediately and knew you were mine. As far as I'm concerned, you came from my womb."
Blair closed his eyes for a moment, as much to squeeze back tears as anything else. When he looked at his mother again, her head was bowed. He reached out blindly and took both her hands in his. "Mom, it's okay. It's okay. I love you."

She raised her head, hope showing for the first time. "Honey?"

"Mom, I need to ask a couple of questions. Do you have – I mean, the blanket – I don't remember any blanket with stars on it – do you still have it? And maybe the t-shirt?"

"Oh, sweetie, if you think there's a clue to your identity, trust me, there wasn't."

"No, no, mom, that wasn't what I was thinking. I—"

"Although, the blanket was very – I kept it and – but of course you don't remember, do you? Don't remember Keebo? That's what you called it. Keebo. It was your first word, in fact. I was very disappointed that you didn't say 'mama', but you cried if we tried to take the blanket from you. You took it everywhere until you were... must have been about three ... when we went to Hazel's for the summer. Don't you remember that?"

"I ... no, I don't think... so you don't have the blanket?"

Her cheeks went pink. "Well, actually, losing Keebo was Hazel's idea. But it's what I found you in and carried you in for months, on my back, like a papoose, so I couldn't toss it. I have it, packed away. Silly, isn't it? All these years and this is the first time I've thought of it since you went away to Rainier in '85. I used to take it out quite frequently back then, when I'd miss you so much... you know, now that I think about it ... it was a very unusual blanket. We never did find any material that matched, and it had rounded corners but no stitching – none what so ever. It was truly beautiful."

"Mom, where is it?" Blair asked, knowing instinctively that the blanket was important.

"Honey, don't you think it's time you told me what's going on? What prompted all of this?"

"I... mom, you need to stay calm, all right?"

"You should know better than to say that to me – or anyone. It guarantees the opposite."

Blair counted to ten – twice. "All right, here goes. Blood tests – DNA testing – on me – showed that I'm—"

"They found your parents," Naomi said, her voice dead.

"No, mom, not even close. It appears that I'm... that my DNA isn't...."

He couldn't go on. It was that simple. He couldn't say it. Blair ran a hand through his hair and was just about to suggest they both go out and get drunk, when someone knocked on the door. The knock was followed by a quiet, "Chief?"

Sighing in relief, Blair jumped up, unlocked the door and let his eavesdropping partner in. "Hey, man," he said as Jim touched him gently on the shoulder.

"Thought maybe you needed some help explaining the situation."

"Hello, Jim," Naomi said as she got to her feet and faced him.

Giving Blair a look of encouragement, Jim walked over to her and kissed her on the cheek. "Hello,
Naomi. Thank you for coming so quickly."

"Correct me if I'm wrong, but I don't think I had a choice."

"That's true, but we'll pretend otherwise," Jim said as he guided her back down into her seat. Noting that Blair had closed the door again – and locked it – Jim said bluntly, "Naomi, Blair's DNA wasn't human – as we know human DNA. That's why you're here. We need all the information we can get on this, as you can well imagine."

Naomi smiled – and the smile turned to a chuckle – and finally to an outright laugh. "Oh, Jim, leave it to you. You could just tell me the truth, you know."

"I am," he said simply.

Naomi's smile faded as she searched his face and then looked over at her son, who nodded. "The truth?" she said, her voice faint.

"The truth," Jim said again. "Blair has had a couple of instances of what we thought were shamanistic events and these events led to a couple of other – discoveries. And as a result, both his DNA and mine were tested."

"Jim's normal," Blair said for no real reason. "Of course – normal is a relative term where he's concerned," he added.

"Ha-ha, Chief."

She looked from one to the other and saw no fear, no horror, just... acceptance. This didn't surprise her about her son, but Jim? She could remember only too well how he'd handled life under a microscope when the world thought they knew what he was. But as he looked at her son now – she could see only love in his eyes. Real, deep, soul-reaching love.

"I take it," she finally said, "that we're not overly worried about what kind of non-human my son might be? No one thinks he's going to turn into a blood-thirsty, human-killing cabbage anytime soon?"

Blair burst out laughing and quickly pulled his mother up and into his arms. "Mom, I love you so damn much."

Holding him tight, she murmured into his hair, "Me too, sweetie. Me too."

***

Naomi looked around the table and found herself – stunned. She was sitting with a group of people who routinely walked on other worlds. And her son was now a part of them. To her left, Teal'c – the Jaffa – an alien. From another world. She liked him. Sensed a protectiveness in him toward her son. A kindred spirit.

Next to him, Colonel O'Neill, a very handsome man with her kind of humor -- and clearly besotted with the person next to him – Dr. Daniel Jackson. She remembered him – remembered the pain he'd caused her son so many years ago. If it were possible, he was even more handsome than all those years ago when she'd showed up at Rainier to visit Blair. There was something else about him too, something special she couldn't quite put her finger on... but she would, eventually. Obviously things had changed as far as Dr. Jackson's sexual preferences were concerned because it was just as obvious how he felt about O'Neill. She couldn't help but smile inwardly.
The only other women at the table earned her admiration almost immediately, if for no other reason than that they were women in a man's world.

Dr. Janet Frasier of the gentle brown eyes and Major Samantha Carter, a scientist and soldier. Both smart and clearly capable women. Leaders, respected, and both fond of her son. She liked that.

In fact, everyone in the room cared about Blair – that was obvious. And they knew about Jim, didn't look upon him as some kind of freak, but rather, she felt a sense of awe and respect directed at him. Then her gaze fell on the man at the head of the table: General George Hammond.

She liked his eyes. They were good eyes – eyes of an honest man. He was speaking to her now and she had to give herself a mental shake to draw her concentration back to the moment.

"... so if we could just be given the location, we'll retrieve it."

"Retrieve it?" she said, clearly lost.

"The blanket, mom. They need the blanket, to study it. You said it was different and it's the only thing that could offer up any kind of clue, see?"

"Oh, of course. So I need to go home and—"

"Not at all. That is if you'll trust the United States Air Force?" Hammond interrupted. "Just give us detailed instructions and we'll have it here in a few hours."

"Oh, of course. Of course. Yes, I can give you that information. I could write it down?" she said, looking for something to write on.

Daniel opened his notebook, took out a sheet of paper and, after taking a pen out of his pocket, passed both down to Naomi.

She took them and began to scribble and talk. "The boxes are in the hall closet with the blanket in the box labeled 'Baby Blair'. It's wrapped in red tissue and stored in a plastic bag." She looked up and asked, "You'll need my key, won't you?"

"I gave them mine, mom," Blair said, his face red with embarrassment.

Jack grinned and said, "Don't worry, Sandburg. Anyone even starts to hassle you about 'Baby Blair' and I'll shoot 'em."

"This could be detrimental to SG-1, O'Neill, since the only one likely to hassle ChiefBlairSandburg – is you," Teal'c said with one high-rising eyebrow.

"Give me five, Teal'c," Blair said as he reached behind his mother's chair to high-five the man.

Naomi looked with confusion at O'Neill only to hear Major Carter say, "Don't worry, Ms. Sandburg – it's always like this."

"Although," Blair said as he resettled in his chair, "when I turn into that killing cabbage head, things might change."

Jim looked at his commander and teammates and said, "You had to be there."

***

She looked around the apartment and smiled. "It fits Daniel – and oddly enough – works for both
of you as well."

They were home, following a tour of the base and yes, of the Stargate thanks to having her sign the typical non-disclosure agreement following the receipt of her top security clearance – courtesy of the President himself. She'd also given some of her blood – to double check – confirm its difference from Blair's. As it happened, Naomi's only regret about leaving the SGC – which she'd found fascinating – had been that she'd had no chance to see Simon, who she now knew was something it would take her some time to wrap her mind around.

Now she looked around, and nodded in satisfaction. "Very comfortable."

"Do you want to go out for dinner, fix it or have it delivered?" Blair asked as he sat down.

"I don't think any of us feel like cooking, do we?" Naomi asked with a gentle smile playing around her lips.

"Not really," Blair agreed.

"Jack said there are a several take-out places nearby – I think he said Daniel keeps the menus in this... yeah, here they are," Jim said as he pulled a half dozen pamphlets out of the drawer in the dining room. He walked down into the living room as he said, "We've got Thai, Italian, American, Armenian, Indian and Chinese." He looked up. "Any preferences?"

Naomi looked at her son, who smiled back at her as they both said, "Indian." And as soon as he said it, Blair added, "If they're willing to control the spices for Jim."

"Of course," Naomi agreed with a knowing smile.

Jim discarded the other menus, checked the Natraj menu, made his decision and then handed it over to Naomi and Blair. As they both perused it, Naomi said, "Ooh, I'll take the Dal Makani with a side of the Sabji Koftas."

"Chief?" Jim asked, clearly asking for a translation.

"She's having the curried lentils with rice and the vegetable dumplings."

"Ah, gotcha. What about you?"

"Well, the vegetarian appetizer platter sounds good and a couple of them are very mild, so I think we should all start out with those—"

"Chief? Vegetarian?" Jim said dubiously.

"Oh, come on, we're talking fritters, Jim, okay? Some are stuffed with potatoes, and others are just really good fried gram flour. Trust me on this."

"Oo-kay – so what about you?"

"Well, I don't want overly spicy tonight either... so I think I'll go with the lamb version of what you're having. The Shahi korma."

"How do you know what I chose?"

Blair gave him his patented "Oh, please" look as he got up and headed for the phone.

"He's such a smarty pants," Jim said to Naomi.
She laughed lightly and said, "And you're stuck with him."

Smiling almost sweetly, Jim said, "I know, lucky son-of-a-gun that I am."

***

"I'm just saying that we shouldn't leave them alone tonight – that maybe company would be good. And no, I don't mean right now – but later. We can stop at Mrs. Penny's and pick up a cheesecake – or something. Maybe a nice bottle of wine."

Daniel looked across the table at his other half and smiled fondly. "You are so transparent. You're really worried about him, aren't you?"

Fiddling with his straw and trying to look innocent, Jack said, "I don't know what you mean."

"Of course you don't," Daniel said sarcastically. "Okay, okay, so we'll 'drop by' after dinner."

Going from innocent to smug in 'breaking the sound barrier' type time, Jack said, "Of course we will."

***

"You're worried."

Teal'c grunted only slightly, and more in exaggeration than anything else, as Samantha Carter sat down on his lap.

"I am. Are you not as well?"

"Oddly enough – no. I think we'll eventually discover that Blair is something wonderful—"

"Is he not already? As are we all?"

After kissing his cheek, Sam said, "We are, but I mean his origins. I think this was all planned – no, that's the wrong word – the pieces were put into play in hopes that they'd all come together for the betterment of Earth. And I think all the pieces have come together. Don't you?"

Teal'c wrapped his arms around her and said, "I do indeed, Samantha. But that does not relieve my fear for ChiefBlairSandburg. He does not fear being different – in that, he is very strong. But he does fear what it could mean if he develops even more ... abilities."

"So, we'll have to do our best to reassure him, be there for him. Convince him that we're okay with all of it."

Resting his head against her breast, he murmured, "You are a very wise woman, Samantha."

Glad that he'd finally allowed his hair to grow, she rested her cheek on top of the dark, soft, springy hair and said, "Lucky too."

***

"It was nice of him to leave us alone for a while," Naomi said as she put the last dish in the dishwasher.

"He can be like that," Blair said. He gave the sink a last swipe with the sponge and tossed it on the counter. Walking into the dining room and the table, he sat down and patted the seat next to him.
Naomi joined him and said, "Are you really all right?"

"Are you?"

"If you are."

"I am if you are," he said, grinning.

She took his hand and said, "I'm kind of ... jazzed, actually. I always knew you were special, but even I never envisioned that you might be from another world. Why do you suppose you were left like that? Do you think something happened to your real parents? Did they crash land? Did they —"

"Mom," Blair said, laughing. "We can suppose all we want – but we're not going to be getting answers any time soon. At least, I don't think we will."

"Honey, half the fun is supposing. You could be—"

He held up a hand. "Aht! You go ahead and suppose – but me, I'm just going to go on being Blair Sandburg, okay?"

Her smile softening, she said tenderly, "No better person to be, sweetie."

The front door slammed shut and Blair smiled. "Jim's so subtle, isn't he?"

"Like a concrete boulder crashing into the side of a house."

A moment later, Jim entered came into view, his cheeks flushed with the cold.

"Have a nice walk, man?"

"Very. Come back too soon?"

"Not at all. Join us," Naomi said.

He sat down next to Blair and said brightly, "Have a nice chat?"

Mother and son looked at each other and smiled.

"Guess you did. Great. By the way, while I was out canvassing the neighborhood, I came to a conclusion – which – if we can get a hold of some Kryptonite, we can prove."

Blair's eyes narrowed. "Kryptonite, Jim?"

"Yeah, you know, that green stuff that always takes down Superman."

"Jim? Dear? Superman isn't real," Naomi said, sounding a great deal like a doctor just before committing someone to the loony bin.

"Oh, that's what everyone thinks, but like I said, I have a theory."

"I am not from Krypton, okay? And I will so not swoon if you put me within reach of Kryptonite, all right?"

"Don't be silly – the only thing that makes you swoon is me."

"Mom, do something," Blair pleaded.
"I would, but I'm totally lost. If Jim is the only thing that makes you swoon, than why would he need kryptonite?"

"Because Superman never swooned – he just lost his powers," Jim said patiently.

"But Blair can't fly or anything. And I'm pretty darn sure he doesn't have x-ray vision and come on – he's not a sentinel, that's your grove, so what would kryptonite prove?"

Letting his mother and Jim talk about the merits of kryptonite and aliens, Blair pulled his journal back toward him. He'd been working in it while they'd awaited the delivery of their dinner and now he flipped through it, trying to find his last entry. As he did, his attention was caught by one of his drawings and he paused to stare at it.

He'd made it while writing down his thoughts on the four races and, while it was nothing fancy, just a large block squared off by four, he felt something tugging the edges of his mind. He'd written a race into each square: The Nox, the Ancients, the Furlings and the Asgard and now, staring at it, he had the urge to add to it. He always kept a pen tucked into the journal so he took it out, studied the square – and then, off to the side, he drew a large circle into which he printed the word "Goa'uld". He followed it up with a second circle, smaller and interconnected, into which he printed the word, "Jaffa".

Inspiration struck and he began to add more shapes – and more names.

***

"No, no, I'm sure kryptonite exists," Jim said.

"I don't think so," Naomi countered. "Which means it could hardly be a threat to Blair because he's real and it isn't."

"That sounds very reasonable, but I'm certain it's a real mineral – or something – and Shuster and Siegel simply used it for the planet—"

The doorbell interrupted Jim's thoughts on kryptonite and he cocked his head to listen – before breaking out in a smile. "Cheesecake. Jack and Daniel have brought cheesecake." With that, he was up and heading for the door.

Naomi turned to Blair and said, "Honey, looks like we have company—"

"Go, mom, I'll be right there. I just need to finish this...."

Smiling and shaking her head at the typical single-mindedness of her son, she got up and followed Jim down to the living room where she waited while he opened the door. She smiled as Daniel stepped up and, with a charming and hopeful grin, held out the bakery box.

"We brought gifts," he said, clearly uncertain as to their welcome.

"Yes, we did," Jack said as he and Jim joined Daniel. "And wine to go with the—"

"Cheesecake," Jim said.

"How did you—"

"Don't ask, Jack," Daniel said as he pointedly tapped his nose.

"Oh. Right. Well, we'll just put this in the kitchen and ... where's Sandburg?"
Jim indicated the dining room. "Right behind you. He's doing something in his journal and when he's got a bee in his bonnet, you can't blast him away from it."

"Sounds familiar," Jack said as he followed Daniel into the kitchen. "Only Daniel wears a booney. No bonnet for my macho man."

"Too bad. You haven't lived until you've seen *my* macho man in a bonnet," Jim said as Jack and Daniel rejoined them. "Make yourself at home while we wait for Einstein in there to finish. Oh, wait. This is your home."

"Not any more," Daniel said, grinning. "In fact, that's something we should talk about later tonight. Right, Jack?"

When Jack, who was watching Blair, didn't answer, Daniel kicked him.

"Hey! Why'd you kick me?"

"Just felt like it," Daniel muttered.

Frowning, Jack turned back toward Jim and said, "He's not writing, you know. He's just sitting there."

"He's reading, Jack, you know what that is, don't you? Letters strung together to form sentences and paragraphs, and then placed on paper?"

"You're such a card, Daniel," Jack huffed.

Before Daniel could say anything in return, Blair got up, closed the journal, but kept his finger in it to hold his place, and walked over to Daniel.

"Could you look at something for me?" He indicated his journal and then jerked his head toward the study.

"Hello to you too," Jack said with a jaunty wave.

Blair blinked a couple of times, ducked his head and said, "Sorry, man. Got kind of involved in something."

"And only Daniel can help?" Jack asked, his tone softer.

"I... think so. I could use his mind...."

"Oh, well, then, take him," Jack said airily. "Use him, discard him—"

Daniel hit Jack on the back of the head.

"Yes, well," Jack said as he rubbed his head.

Blair grabbed the bottom of Daniel's dark blue sweater and tugged him toward the study even as he said warningly, "Jim?"

"Don't worry, Chief."

Nodding, Blair disappeared into the study with Daniel and closed the door behind them.

"I assume you were just told not to listen in?" Jack asked.
"'Fraid so, Jack."

"Damn." He looked apologetically at Naomi. "Sorry, Ms. Sandburg."

"Please, it's Naomi," she said with a dimpled grin.

"Naomi. And I'm Jack." He to his feet and added, "How 'bout we dig into the dessert while we're waiting?"

Jim and Naomi answered by getting to their feet and heading toward the kitchen.

***

Once the door was shut, Blair ran a hand through his hair and then nearly stuck his journal in Daniel's face. "Tell me what you think of this, okay? And maybe you can figure out what it is – what it means."

Knuckling his glasses back up his nose, a puzzled Daniel took the leather-bound book and started to read – and study -- the diagrams. He found himself nodding in surprise at the accuracy – although – given that Blair's IQ was equal to his, he shouldn't have been surprised that Blair remembered so much and so well. When he was done, he went back over it again – and then again – and then again. Something was beginning to take shape in his brain causing him to finally let out with a breathy, "Wow."

"What?"

Daniel closed the book thoughtfully and said, "I think – I think – I know what you are, but there's absolutely no proof."

Blair sank down into the comfortable reading chair next to the window. "I'm thinking probabilities and purpose and you come away with thinking you now know what I am?"

"What can I say? It just all gelled, and you provided the clues because I think you're right in your probability/purpose theory and my theory actually supports it."

"So do we share with Hammond or could this be too out there for the military mind?"

"Commanding the SGC – and Jack – has left Hammond with a mind that is actually quite open. As for Jack – hell, you know him. He'll squawk but ultimately buy it. As for Jim, he'll believe anything you say, as will Teal'c. Sam, on the other hand, will immediately say, 'Oh, I don't think so, Daniel'."

Blair's frown dissipated. "That was an excellent imitation."

Daniel preened. "It was, wasn't it? I've certainly heard it enough," he finished with a chuckle.

Blair laughed with him, but then asked, "So what am I?"

***

"Okay, this is the best cheesecake I've ever...."

Jim stopped, cocked his head, and said, "Here they come."
Jack turned in his seat to see Daniel and Blair step up into the dining room.

"Leave any for us?" Daniel asked as Jack pulled out a chair and he sank down into it.

"We did, barely," Jim answered as he did the same for Blair.

There were two clean plates, glasses and forks waiting for them and, while Jim cut slices of the peanut butter-chocolate cheesecake, Naomi poured the dessert wine.

"Wow, this looks great," Blair said as the plate was slid over to him.

"I'll say," Daniel agreed.

The other three watched them eat but Jack, being Jack, lasted only until Daniel had taken his fourth bite.

"Okay, so do we get to know the big secret?"

Daniel glanced sideways at Blair and grinned. Blair smiled back, took a sip of his wine, and said, "Sure, eventually."

Jack looked at Naomi and said as sweetly, "Has he always been a brat?"

"In a word: yes."

"Thought so."

Jim, laughing, got up and headed for the door. Confused, Jack said, "Jim?"

"Sam and Teal'c just got out of the elevator." He paused, sniffed, and said, "They brought a Snickers cheesecake."

Blair looked at the crumbs of their dessert and muttered, "Good thing because we didn't leave any for them."

Jim opened the door before Teal'c could knock and said, "Welcome, welcome. Come on in, guys."

"We're not intruding?" Sam said as she preceded Teal'c inside.

"No, no, not at all. Jack and Daniel are here too – and no, they didn't call either," Jim answered, his eyes glittering with humor.

"But we brought cheesecake," Sam said hopefully.

"We brought cheesecake and wine, Carter," Jack said smugly.

Sam elbowed Teal'c. "Told you we should have stopped for wine."

"There's plenty, Sam, honest," Blair reassured. "Come on up."

"Let me get more plates and glasses," Naomi said as she started to get up.

"Oh, no, please, don't bother—"

"It's all right," Jim said as he motioned for Naomi to sit back down. "I'm up, I'll get everything. Make yourselves comfortable and I'll be right back."
Jack tipped back in his chair, surveyed his people -- and Naomi -- and said, "Gee, just like any other team night, eh, kids?"

Naomi took a sip of wine, smiled, and then said, "Unless Blair turns into a human-eating cabbage-head right before our eyes."

***

They were preparing to move into the living room for coffee and Blair's "big secret" when Jack's beeper went off. The numerical message indicated that it was the SGC so, with an apology, he immediately phoned in. It was the lab with the information that the results on the blanket -- which they'd received a few hours earlier -- were in.

Jack thanked them and hung up the phone even as Daniel said, "Well?"

He turned to face him – and the others, who were now standing behind Daniel. He looked at Naomi and Blair and said, "The material isn't anything found on Earth."

"I have to see it," Blair immediately said.

"Me too," Daniel said, followed closely by Sam's enthusiastic, "Me three."

Checking his watch, Jim said, "It's after nine -- can you guys wait until tomorrow?"

Blair, Daniel and Sam all answered together with a resounding, "NO!" causing Jack to press a finger to his temple, close his eyes and intone, "I see the future and it holds... a trip to a mountain named... Cheyenne."

"He's just so amazing," Daniel said. "Not."

***

They waited in Sam's lab while Jack retrieved the blanket, with Sam giving Naomi a tour and a couple of project explanations as Teal'c added a few words here and there. Jim sat close enough to Blair for their legs to touch, hoping his presence would give some comfort to his partner when Jack returned with the only thing left of a baby that wasn't quite the child Blair had always believed he'd been.

"You going to be okay?" he whispered.

"Yes. But only because you're here. If you weren't, I'd fall apart and succumb to an attack of the vapors."

"You putz," Jim said tenderly.

Blair just grinned.

"Hello, campers," Jack said as he walked in and over to the table. "Here you go, Sandburg. One definitely alien baby blankey."

"I wouldn't be so funny about it, if I were you," Blair said mysteriously. "For all you know," he pulled the item out of the lab-provided plastic baggie, "this is a sentient being and is recording everything in order to report back to the Big Kahuna Cabbage Head."

"No doubt," Jack said.
Sam, Teal'c and Naomi had gathered around the table at that point, with Naomi standing behind Blair, hands on his shoulders.

"That's it, honey. That's what you were wrapped in – and later – wouldn't be without. Have you ever felt anything more soft?"

Blair rubbed it between his fingers even as he spread it out so the others could do the same. Shaking his head, he finally said, "This is – unbelievable, Mom. Jim, what do you think?"

"I could zone on the feel. It's ... there's a natural warmth to it as well, for all of its remarkable thinness."

"What about your sight? What does that tell you?" Sam asked, her natural curiosity in full bloom.

"You won't believe me."

"Oh, gosh, give us a try," Jack said.

Jim rolled his eyes but said, "There are no threads. None."

Jack looked at the lab folder that he'd picked up with the blanket and opened it. Scanning the notes and printout, he looked up and said, "Hell, that's exactly what this says. The process for creating this thing is as unknown as the material itself."

Suddenly Daniel asked, "Can I have it for a moment, Blair?"

"What? Sure, sure, here."

He handed it over and Daniel immediately turned to the other worktable to spread it out, smoothing it and straightening it as he did so. After several minutes of study, he finally said, his voice holding a tone of wonder, "Guys, I think this is a star map."

Blair was first by his side. "A map?"

"Oooh, let me guess – directions to Mary Steenburgen's home?" Jack asked.

"You'll pay for that one later, Jack," Daniel promised.

"If we hang it up, I can run the program Thor gave us right over it," Sam suggested. "See if there's a match."

"Do it," Jack directed.

With Teal'c's help – and a consenting nod from both Naomi and Blair, they clamped it to the top edge of the white erase board. Sam then went to her computer, brought up the downloaded program, connected the projector and, after a few minutes of programming, explained, "It will play the various star systems Thor provided over the blanket and we'll hear a ding if there's a match. It could take sometime though."

"In that case, Blair can fill us in on the big secret," Jack said.

"Actually," Blair replied with a pleading look in Daniel's direction, "I think Daniel should do the honors. It's really—"

Daniel nodded and indicated the journal Blair had brought with him. "Can I borrow that? This might go down easier if I use your drawings."
Blair fingered the leather cover of the book, looked uneasily around the room – and finally handed it over.

Daniel took it, flipped through to the important page and walked over to the other erase board in the lab. "This will make more sense – and won't bore Jack into the floor – if I put Blair's work on the board, so give me a minute."

"What about... me?" Naomi asked. "Is this something I shouldn't—"

"Nah, it's okay, but we'll have to kill you when he's done," Jack drawled with a wink. "On the other hand, your son is a cabbage head from Mars so I think you're safe."

"Not to mention the small fact that Naomi has top security clearance – and how do you know the President, anyway?" Sam asked.

"Oh, well, Pierre, the man who does the First Lady is also my hairdresser and I gave him some advice regarding her cut and she loved it and he told her it came from me, so she invited me to their house in upper New York for tea and from there – well, things just kind of happened and it certainly didn't hurt that her guru is mine, Blair, honey, you remember Baba Tenaka, don't you?"

"Uhm, yeah, mom, sure."

Everyone was staring at Naomi and both Jim and Blair couldn't help it – they started laughing. It was somewhat refreshing to actually watch others experiencing the woman.

Daniel gave a discreet cough at that moment and everyone turned their attention to him – and the board. He'd drawn a large, near-perfect square and, like Blair's sketch, had divided it into four smaller squares with each of the four great races printed into each one.

"The four great races?" Jack observed as he took it all in. "The big secret involves—"

"In a word – or seven – yes," Daniel agreed. "Basically, Blair linked all of this," he waved his hand at the large square, "with this." Daniel then drew a circle off to the right of the square and inside, printed the word 'GOA'ULD' followed by a smaller circle with the word 'JAFFA' and finally added a final square to the larger one and printed the word 'Earth' inside. Off to the side of that, he wrote Catherine's name, his own, Jack's, Hammond's, Sam's, Teal'c's, Jim's and Blair's. "Blair has connected the dots, putting all the facts as we know them together -- with one critical one: that the Ancients traveled in time."

Facing everyone, he elaborated, "Let me start with what we know via our various sources. We know the Ancients traveled in time. We know they were here, on Earth. We now know they were aware of our future and the battle we'd wage with the Goa'uld and with Anubis. We know that on several levels, they attempted to help us without really interfering. They accomplished this by salting the mine, so to speak, with the provision of their gene. In addition, they left repositories -- and yes, both Blair and I are pretty sure there are many more sprinkled throughout the galaxy -- in the hope -- no, that's wrong," he corrected himself. "They knew that we'd eventually find them and that thanks to the gene present in many of us, we'd be able to utilize what we'd find to defend ourselves."

He pointed to the four squares. "But the Ancients weren't alone, were they? They were part of something they'd hoped would be a wonderful experiment. The whole 'meaning of life' thing. Four great races -- four highly advanced races -- coming together for the betterment of all." He walked over to the table and put the marker down. "Blair thinks -- as do I -- that it's a fair assumption that we, meaning Earth, would have been discussed. Information perhaps shared? And don't we have a
certain degree of proof for that assumption?" He looked down at Blair's open journal and tapped the Asgard square with his finger. "They did their part, didn't they? They set up protected planets, even entered into a treaty with the Goa'uld to protect our ancestors. And of course--"

"Okay, this is all real nice – and great drawings, by the way -- but come on. If you're saying that the four races somehow got together to help us, I can puncture a hole in that little balloon right now and with one word: The Nox."

"That's two words," Blair interjected helpfully.

Shooting him a killer look, Jack went on. "Let's face it, the Nox haven't been exactly forthcoming, now have they?" Jack asked.

"Not exactly, but the Nox simply chose another path for themselves – and both Blair and I agree that the choice was made when the Ancients were struck down by the plague. That's probably when the Nox chose to be isolationists. But – they've come to our aid on two different occasions and look at how they've treated us. I think, in their way, they did – and do -- help us."

Blair stood up then and walked over to the board. "Look at it, guys. Just look at it." Facing everyone again, he said, "I mean, consider the odds involved here. Think about it... think about the discovery of the Stargate in the first place and then the events that led to Daniel's involvement, let alone yours, Jack. Two men, both with biological ties to the Ancients and possessed of very special skills particularly valuable to the program, coming together? And what about Sam? A genius with a Ph.D. in Quantum Mechanics and a plasma/particle physics expert who helped get the program up and running to begin with? And Teal'c, Apophis' First Prime with specialized knowledge of the Goa'uld and ready to turn against everything he'd ever known just as you show up? But hell, we can go back even further -- to the odds on Daniel meeting up with me all those years ago, or Jack and Jim knowing each other, or hell, my meeting Jim -- a sentinel – in the first place. And finally, all of us coming together at this precise moment in time?" He glanced back at the board. "The odds against all of that are literally astronomical."

There was silence for several minutes as everyone digested both Daniel's and Blair's words, but finally Jack said, "There's a light at the end of the tunnel here, but I get the feeling there's more. Daniel?"

Daniel shrugged. "You could say that." He picked up the marker again and moved back to the board. "All right, so if we accept this theory that odds and fate don't play a major part in anything Blair just mentioned, if we accept that the four great races worked together – okay, each in its own way – but with one goal: to protect and prepare Earth, then isn't it fair to say that we have the Asgard, the Ancients and the Nox accounted for? So who's missing? Which of the four great races isn't represented in any way, manner, shape or form? The one race we've yet to run into?"

Sam joined Daniel, took the marker from his hand, and circled the box labeled 'Furlings'. "We don't have a clue about them," she said as she handed the pen back.

"Exactly. The missing race." But then Daniel looked pointedly at Blair. "Or are they?"

Daniel watched as each of them caught the implication and slowly turned their attention to Blair, and it was Jack – as anyone could have predicted – who gave the implication words.

"Sandburg's a Furling?" He reached over and tousled Blair's hair. "Well, if an alien name ever fit someone, it would be you, Sandburg. Furling? Oh, yeah."

Blair swatted his hand away. "Hey, no one touches the hair! And it's only a theory—"
He didn't finish as Sam's computer chose that moment to 'ping'. All eyes went to the blanket and, sure enough, there, superimposed over it, was a match.

Sam rushed over to view the location and, with a smug smile, said, "It's not a theory any longer. What you're looking at is what the Asgard call the Ran Galaxy – or the original home of the Furlings."

Daniel and Blair moved as one, both walking up to the blanket to touch the stars.

"Ran," Blair murmured. "The Norse goddess of the... drowned."

***

"So how do we get there?" Blair asked.

They were in the briefing room with Hammond, who'd just been filled in on the new information and Blair's natural thought was to *get* to the Ran Galaxy.

Sam shook her head. "I'm afraid there's no 'Gate address in the information provided to us by Thor in the map program."

"So... we can't go there." This time it was a statement, not a question.

"Not through the Stargate, no. But we've sent out a message to the Asgard in the hopes that they have an address. And of course, it's possible in a ship," Sam said, her gaze moving to General Hammond.

"It's doubtful that the Pentagon will grant permission for such a mission via the Prometheus. We're talking a lengthy voyage with no evidence that there's anything at the end of the trip. Since the Prometheus is our first line of defense...."

He didn't need to say more.

"So unless the Asgard come through," Blair started to say.

"There's always the Tok'ra," Sam offered. "We can check with Dad."

"So we have a couple of options, Blair," Jack assured, the use of Blair's first name a dead giveaway as to his true feelings about the younger man.

Naomi patted her son's arm and said, "Honey, I can't help but think that if they're – if your – I mean —"

"I know, Mom. I know. If they're out there, they'd have contacted me by now, right?"

Miserably, she nodded. She hadn't been able to use the word "family" – because she was his family.

Blair shrugged and said a bit more cheerfully, "Hey, we have a possibility now, right? That's something, anyway."

Jim squeezed his shoulder. "It sure is, Chief."

After a few more minutes of discussion, Hammond called a halt to the impromptu briefing and suggested everyone go home and get some rest. As they were all leaving the briefing room, Jack mused, "You know, we have no proof that the Furlings *aren't* flesh-eating Cabbage heads."
"Comfortable, Mom?"

"Very. This couch is pure heaven," she said as she pulled up the comforter. "Now, go to bed, I'm fine."

Blair bent down and kissed her on the cheek. As he straightened, he said, "You do know that thirty years of being my mom isn't going away, right?"

Fighting back the emotion, she nodded. "I know."

"I'm not who I am because of alien DNA – I'm me because of you and no other reason."

She sat up and held out her arms – needing more than anything to have her baby within them. He sat down on the edge of the couch and she enfolded him, cupping the back of his head with her right hand and holding him close.

"That day, all those years ago, was the best day of my life, Blair. The best."

He tightened his hold around her.

"And thereby hangs the tale" – William Shakespeare

Jim pulled back the bedspread and the blanket, kicked off his slippers and slid in. As soon as he was settled, Blair walked in and shut the door. He quickly stripped down to his boxers and then got in on the other side.

"You really okay with everything?" Jim asked.

"You ought to know. You've been monitoring me continually," Blair said as he punched up his pillows.

"Guilty as charged. So you're okay."

"I'm okay." Blair rolled over on his side and propped his head up with his hand. "You do remember what you get to do tomorrow, right?" he asked.

"CAT scan."

"Yeah, but not your typical scan. Ultra powerful and kicked up a notch thanks to naquada."

"What do you think they'll find, smarty-pants?"

"Exactly what I told you and everyone else. You're enhanced, Jimbo." He snuck a hand under the blanket and between Jim's legs. "In a whole lot of wonderful ways."

Chuckling, Jim said, "I take it making hot monkey love with your mom on the other side of the door doesn't bother you."

"Nope."

"Good."
They were both thoroughly exhausted in the best way, but neither were asleep yet. Blair had his head on Jim's shoulder, legs entwined with Jim's, and content to simply enjoy the afterglow. Not so with Jim.

"Now that we're both adequately exercised, you need to explain how you knew that I was feeling Anubis before I did, back at the Alpha site."

"Damn, I was hoping you'd forgotten that."

"No way, Sandburg. Spill."

"I'm not sure. I wanted to help you when you got freaked out, you know? And I found that if I tried – I could kind of, sort of, take some of the edginess from you so you could function. That's all."

Jim sat up so fast that Blair was literally rolled away toward the edge of the bed. He caught himself on the sheets and headboard as Jim said, "That's all?"

"Well, yeah," he said rather lamely.

Jim turned on the light, got up and started pacing, muscles rippling and ass clenching. Blair just naturally found his concentration ebbing away....

"I can't believe you were doing that and you didn't tell me, Sandburg. I thought we were going to talk, to share, remember? But no-o-o, you keep something like that to yourself. Is that how you want this relationship to work? Is it, Chief? Is it?"

When he got no answer, Jim whirled around to face the bed. "Are you listening to me, Sandburg?"

Eyes below Jim's waist, Blair nodded. "Sure, man. Sure."

Following Blair's gaze, Jim looked down at his groin and then back at Blair. "You're incorrigible."

"Insatiable," Blair argued.

"That too."

"Wanna come back to bed, by any chance?"

Shaking his head in a hopeless gesture, Jim nevertheless climbed back into bed. "I still can't believe you didn't tell me."

"But I did. I just kind of... well, we've been kind of busy, you know?"

"Oh, yeah, that's a good excuse – not. For God's sake, Blair, we're together 24/7."

"Sorry, man. I just... I was going to tell you, but there was so much to absorb that I thought I'd wait until things quieted down, that's all."

"All right, all right, I get it." Jim pulled Blair toward him and then on top of him. "I probably shouldn't get mad since we don't know that the Furlings aren't cabbage heads and you know how I hate the smell of cooking cabbage."

Getting comfortable and resting his head over Jim's heart, Blair said, "What, you think the Furlings are cooked cabbage heads? They're walking around all limp and steamed?"
"Boiled."

"Or boiled?"

"I'll tell you what I think – I think we could be doing something right now besides talking about cabbage and the Furlings."

"You up for that already?"

"Enhanced, remember?"

Blair slid his hand down the inside of Jim's leg. "Oh, yeah," he breathed out.

***

Jack swiped the towel across Daniel's chest one final time and then tossed it over his shoulder and nestled down next to his bedmate.

"I'm not sure how I got the clean-up duty this time," he groused as he gave his pillow a plumping.

"You lost the tug-o-war and I got to top."

"Oh, yeah."


"You're so modest."

Before Daniel could answer, the phone rang. Groaning, Jack sat up and said, "It's after midnight – this can't be a good call." He lifted the receiver. "O'Neill."

"Colonel, I need you and your team to report to the Mountain, asap. Jacob and Captain Banks just returned through the 'Gate. It's important. Anubis is on the move."

"We're on our way, General."

Jack hung up and faced Daniel. "It's not good, let's go." As he got up, he said, "Use your cell and call Carter while I tackle Jim and Blair."

Nodding, Daniel got up too. He hated the look on Jack's face. Least favorite look in the world.

Damn, just when things were starting to calm down.

The End.

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