Child of the Ancients

by Marcus_S_Lazarus

Summary

The discovery of the Alterian counterpart to the Ori changes the entire course of Earth's war with the Ori and the Wraith, as well as revealing a secret of Sam and Daniel's past that not even they knew.
Leaving His Child

Four years ago…

On a higher plane of being, transcending most of the conventional limitations of the physical form, two beings stood, facing each other- or at least, as much as two people could be said to 'face' each other when they existed as pure energy.

There was silence for a moment, and then one of them- the male one- spoke.

"Thanks," he said simply, as he looked at the other being- this one female- standing before him. His tone was fairly neutral, but the woman understood that he was thankful to her for what she had done, and that was enough.

She simply wished that she did not have to do what came next.

"You are welcome," she replied, 'nodding'- for lack of a better term- at him, before she looked critically at him. "You realise that there will be consequences for what you tried to do."

"Yeah, and trust me, I'm prepared to accept them; at least I actually tried to do something," the man retorted, glaring at her. "You know I could never understand these rules; why have all this power if you can't do anything with it?"

The woman simply stood there, silent, until the man sighed.

"OK, let's move past the part where you explain about the non-interference rule, and answer the question of the hour; what happens to me now?"

The woman began to speak again, but the man stopped her. "If you're going to say we can keep this from the Others and go back to the way things were, I can't do that; it's not who I am. All this standing by and watching everything going on back home, it's…"

He paused, as though trying to find the right term to use, but could only find one word that fit the bill. "It's wrong."

The woman nodded in acknowledgement of his statement.

"I understand," she said, a trace of regret in her voice. "You cannot put your mortal life into the proper context as of yet."

"What 'context' is there?" the man retorted, as he looked back at the woman. "You know as well as I do that I can't let it go… not so long as she's there."

As he stopped talking, he looked down at whatever passed for the floor on this level of existence, and sighed. "Even if she doesn't remember what happened between us… I love her."

"I know," the woman said, nodding at him as she moved closer, placing a 'hand' on his 'shoulder' as she looked down with him. "Which is why I can offer you an alternative."

He looked over at her once again, a new light of hope in his eyes.
"Which is?" he asked.

"You become human once more," the woman explained. "Your body shall be restored to you, and you can return to the mortal plane, to live your life as you see fit."

There was a brief pause, and the man spoke again.

"What's the catch?" he said, looking critically at the woman. "I mean, obviously there must be one; I don't think these 'Others' would let me off that easily for breaking the rules."

The woman nodded. "Your memory of your time with us would be taken from you, as well as your memory of your corporal life," she said, as she looked at him. "I will do what I can to allow you to retain the memory of your life prior to Ascension- you shall be able to relearn your prior knowledge in time- but it can only occur when something has taken place to prompt its return."

"You mean… I'll only remember it when I come across a reminder of my past?" he said, looking at her with an almost neutral expression. "I mean, I'll start remembering who Sam, Jack and Teal'c are when I meet them, but I won't remember them on my own?"

"Exactly," the woman replied simply.

"But… I'd forget everything about being up here?" he asked, looking back at her with a newfound earnestness. "Everything?"

The woman felt she could understand his fears. While there were many impersonal things she was sure he wanted to remember- the fate of two of his friends and allies, held captive by their enemies and forced to work as slaves doubtless preyed on his conscience- but there was something more personal she knew he wished to remember.

He had done something that no other had ever done, but she had kept it secret from the Others so far, and she would continue to do so.

She had to.

"The information will be retained in your subconscious, but I would not recommend you attempt to access it unless you only seek a specific piece of knowledge; it would be dangerous for knowledge of this scale to be made available to a human mind," she said, as she removed her hand from his shoulder and waved it slightly. As she did so, a small ball of energy- smaller than either of them, but seemingly growing all the while- appeared beside them, moving slightly every so often as the two of them watched.

"And… him?" the man asked, indicating the ball, sounding like he was ready to start crying. "Will I remember…?"

The woman shook her head.

"Not immediately," she said, regret evident in her voice. "But be assured; there shall soon come a time when you shall be reunited with him once more. He has a great part to play in your world, and you must help him take the path that will guide him in that direction."

"How… how soon?" the man asked, as he looked anxiously between the small ball and the
woman, who smiled reassuringly at him.

"Only a few years at best," she said reassuringly. "Believe me, the events that will bring him to you will take place; the exact date is uncertain, but the confrontation itself will happen."

The man just nodded slightly as he stared at the ball before him, a faint smile on his 'lips' as he reached out to tenderly, briefly, touch the ball.

"I'll see you someday…" he whispered to the ball, so low that the woman could barely hear him. "I promise."

He stood there for a moment longer, and then sighed and stood back.

"I'm ready," he said, as he looked at the woman before sighing awkward. "I'm… well, I'm sorry, Oma. I know I've disappointed you."

"A flower rises from the earth, blooms in the warmth of summer, then fades and returns to the earth when winter arrives. One cannot be disappointed when the flower is gone, for that is the way it must be. All things must be true to their nature."

"Yeah," the man said, chuckling slightly. "I know what you mean."

For a moment, the two of them stood facing each other, and then the energy that formed the 'body' of the male gathered together and hurtled downwards, leaving the woman alone, staring at the ever-growing energy ball before her.

"Come along, little one," she said, as she reached out to take the ball to her. "Your time is near, and your home must be made ready for you."

And, with those words, Oma Desala, the Ascended Ancient who had served as a mentor to Doctor Daniel Jackson of SG-1 for the past year, vanished from the higher plane that was the natural home of the Ascended, taking with her something that, in the not-too-distant future, would play a crucial role in the history of the galaxy itself.
As they stepped through the Stargate and came out the other side, Daniel smiled slightly in relief at what was on the other side; a large forest, filled with various examples of plant life (Including a few things that definitely didn't look like they had originated from Earth) and what looked like a fairly technologically advanced city a short walk from the Stargate, maybe no more than a few hundred metres away from them.

"Not bad," Mitchell said, smiling approvingly as he studied his surroundings, a broad grin on his face. "I can definitely think of worse places to drop into after diving through the 'gate."

"Indeed," Teal'c said, nodding briefly in agreement as he studied their surroundings.

"Yeah, there have definitely been less pleasant sights on the opposite side of several Stargates," Daniel smiled, as he stared at this new planet, even as a part of him wished he could just forget about the military purpose behind him being here and focus on appreciating the natural beauty of their surroundings…

"That's true enough; at least there's not a Prior standing directly opposite us on this planet," Vala commented, shuddering slightly at the thought; evidently, the Ori remained a particularly touchy subject with her. The fact that they'd been responsible for her nearly getting blown in the destruction of the Ori beachhead, causing an explosion that had left her out of contact with Earth for several months, was bad enough, but actually impregnating her with their child just because she was convenient…

Even maternal instincts couldn't help her get over the disgust she felt when she thought about Adria, the new 'leader' of the Ori forces. Adria may have been Vala's daughter, but she could never see the child as anything other than an enemy, no matter what kind of biological connection the two of them shared due to sheer chance.

"Can we focus on our main issue here, please?" Sam asked, indicating the city some distance away from them as she looked critically at Daniel, who was still looking at their surroundings. "We have to find out whether the Ori have made contact with this world yet; what good is it to have reached a new planet if it's already been taken over?"

"Oh… right," Daniel said, chuckling in a sheepish manner as he looked back at Sam. "Sorry about that."

As she looked back at Daniel, Sam casually shook her head as she smiled at her friend.

"Just keep it under control, OK, Daniel?" she said, a grin on her face as the two of them began to walk towards the city, the others close behind. "If you get caught off-guard because you were admiring the scenery, I'm not pulling you out of trouble."

"I'll bear that in mind," Daniel said, smiling back at Sam with his typical small grin as they made
their way through the trees towards the city.

Behind them, Mitchell and Teal'c exchanged glances, a small smile on both their faces, prompting a confused expression from Vala as she looked between the two men.

"What?" she asked, looking critically at both of them. "Is there something going on that I should know about?"

Mitchell just chuckled slightly as he looked at the couple in front of him.

"Just thinking how cozy those two can be at times," he said, as he glanced back at Vala. "You know, you really should have made Daniel the groom in that wedding scene you suggested to Martin; personally, I never got why you thought Sam'd be happy with General O'Neill on a long-term basis…"

"What?" Vala said, looking in confusion between Mitchell and Teal'c; Sam and Daniel were a couple of metres ahead of the others, leaving the three of them free to talk so long as they weren't too loud. "I'd heard they were practically already a couple before he left the SGC!"

"Let's face facts here, Vala," Mitchell said, smiling slightly as he looked at Vala with an expression that could almost be pity for making such a mistake. "Sam's the pioneer researcher in the field of Wormhole Physics- probably knows more about the how of the 'gate than anyone-, helped in the construction and develop of everything from the X-301 to the Daedalus… and General O'Neill? Well, from what I've heard about him- and seen, really- the guy's default explanation of a complex advanced technology is 'magnets'. If they ever tried dating, someone'd probably kill somebody out of sheer frustration at not being able to talk to the other about what they're interested in.

"With Daniel…" Mitchell shrugged. "Well, he's not in the same field of scientific research as Sam, but at least he makes more of an effort to understand what's going on even when the science stuff is out of his league. They're not in the same fields, but they can really understand each other's passion for learning about what's out here."

"Indeed," Teal'c said, nodding in agreement as he looked after Sam and Daniel, a small smile on his face. "I have long been surprised that there has not been more indications of their feelings for each other; Colonel Carter's grief over Daniel Jackson's Ascension was clearly more than one would experience for the passing of a friend."

"Well… they've always been close; every member of SG-1 seems to remain close!" Vala pointed out, knowing she was being a bit loud, but unwilling to admit that her attempts to win Daniel over were pointless. "You can be close without lusting after each other, you know; I mean, you all talk about O'Neill often enough, and Cameron's never even met him!"

Teal'c shook his head as they drew ever closer to the city.

"Not in this case, Vala Mal Doran- and in any case, the term you use is inaccurate; Daniel Jackson and Colonel Carter do not merely desire each other sexually, no matter how unaware of their feelings they are at present," he said, as he looked back at Sam and Daniel, who were still talking casually with each other as they approached the city. "I have worked alongside the two of them for many years now, and, having witnessed their closeness, it is evident to all who merely look long enough that the two of them."

Vala's eyes took on a brief flash of anger and jealousy at Teal'c's words- Mitchell privately noted that away for future contemplation- but, to her credit, her face remained otherwise calm.
"What are you trying to say here; that you think they're 'meant to be' or something like that?" she hissed at Teal'c, waving a hand after Sam and Daniel. "But-"

"We're here!" Sam's voice yelled back at the three of them, breaking off the train of discussion that had been going on between the three. Looking up, Mitchell noted that the five of them had arrived in front of some very sizable gates in the walls surrounding the city, although how anyone was meant to get any further was something that eluded him for the moment.

"Any recommendations for getting through that thing?" Mitchell asked, looking quizzically over at Daniel as he jerked his head towards the door.

"Uh… knocking seems to be the best option at the moment," Daniel said, as he reached out one hand to knock on the door in front of him…

And then, much to his surprise, just as his hand was approaching the gates, the door began to open. Surprised, Daniel drew his hand back, and the door instantly began to swing shut once more.

"What the…?" Mitchell said, stepping forward and raising his own hand to the door before Daniel could react himself. However, this attempt failed to receive any reaction; if anything, the door seemed to shut at a faster rate, and, once closed, seemed to be more secure against visitors than it had been earlier.

"That's odd…" Sam said, as she raised her own hand to the door. It shifted slightly as her hand approached it, but, despite this brief response, it refused to open any further; it was as though the door thought it was prepared to open for her, but wasn't sure if she was who it was expecting.

A curious expression on his face, Daniel stepped forward and once again raised his arm to the door, and watched in surprise as it swung fully open, until it was of a size that would allow the five members of SG-1 to walk into the city.

"OK," Vala said, after a moment's pause, "that was… interesting."

"Mmm," Mitchell mused, as he glanced over at Daniel. "Any ideas, Jackson? I mean, you couldn't have met someone from this place and made a significant impression without knowing it?"

Sam shook his head. "That's unlikely, Cam; we're several light-years away from the nearest planet with a Stargate, and the odds of someone from this planet having met Daniel on a chance trip through the 'gate are pretty slim."

"Look, can we stop debating the whys of it and just go through the damn door already?" Vala asked, looking critically at Sam for a moment, although whether this was because of what she, Mitchell and Teal'c had just been discussing or because Sam had been wasting time with idle speculation when they could be going into the city wasn't entirely clear.

"Vala…" Mitchell said, glaring briefly at Vala before looking back at Daniel, Sam and Teal'c. "OK, since Jackson seems to be expected, he'd better take the lead on this one; might as well find out why that door seems to respond to him and not us."

Nodding in agreement, SG-1 stepped through the gates before them, Daniel in the lead, and were greeted by the sight of several assorted buildings, all of them gleaming a brilliant silver colour that reminded Daniel of their visit to Atlantis. The city wasn't quite as technologically sophisticated as the Lost City of the Ancients, of course- Daniel doubted they'd manage to find anything that advanced located at a seven-chevron address- but it was pretty close to what they'd seen of Ancient technology.
In the streets around them, several people had turned to look curiously at the new arrivals. They were of mixed genders, both male and female, and each dressed in long coats made of what looked like leather, with outfits made of a similar material underneath the coat. Their hair typically came down to around their necks whether they were male or female, but a few people had shorter haircuts, as well as a white gem hanging on a chain around their necks.

It was one of these people who stepped forward to talk to SG-1. He was a man, tall and in good physical health, his muscles evident under his coat. However, like Daniel, he gave the appearance of being a scholar first and a fighter second, his expression as he studied SG-1 resembling a scientist curious about a new discovery rather than a soldier eyeing up the latest threat.

"Greetings to you, my friends," he said, bowing slightly as he looked at Daniel. "I am Daanar; I speak for the city."

"Good to meet you," Daniel said, smiling at the man. "I'm Doctor Daniel Jackson, this is…"

However, further introductions were cut off, as Daanar's expression suddenly changed from the appearance of relative calm to the face of a Christian who'd just seen Jesus walking into his living room.

"Doctor Daniel Jackson?" he breathed, as he stared incredulously at the archaeologist before turning to Sam. "Tha… you are Samantha Carter?"

"Uh… actually, that's correct, Daanar," Sam replied, as she and Daniel exchanged confused looks. "But… how do you know my name?"

For a moment, Daanar looked confused, but then the expression passed and a look of understanding appeared on his face.

"She said you would not know until the time was right…" he said, half to himself, before he looked back at Sam and Daniel. "You seek a means to vanquish the Ori, correct?"

If Daniel had been surprised before, he was becoming increasingly confused now.

"Uh… yeah, we do," Mitchell said, looking in confusion at Daanar. "Why do you ask?"

"Because we have been asked to protect something that you will require in your struggle against the Ori," Daanar replied, smiling at the team's leader as he turned slightly to look at the rest of SG-1. "Follow me, and I shall take you to what you seek."

The five members of SG-1 exchanged curious glances with each other at first, but eventually Mitchell shrugged and nodded.

"OK, Daanar; lead on," he said, as he looked back at the man.

"Thank you," Daanar replied, nodding back at Mitchell before he turned around and began to walk towards one of the nearby buildings. Glancing up, Daniel noted that it was fairly tall—probably around twenty or thirty stories in height—but it didn't appear to be all that different from most of the buildings around it, as far as he could see.

As they reached the door of the building, Daanar raised the gem he wore on his necklace, and, as light glinted off it, the door opened, revealing a long corridor with dazzling white walls, two silvery metal doors at the end of the corridor that looked vaguely like a lift.

"We take our duties as the guardians very seriously, Doctor Jackson, I assure you," Daanar said,
noticing Daniel's curious expression, as he began to lead SG-1 down the corridor. "Only those of us who have been contacted directly are allowed to see what we protect, and even then only a select minority of those- of which I humbly count myself as one- are permitted regular access."

"Regular access to what?" Vala asked, looking in frustration at Daanar as the six of them stepped through the doors- which actually were a lift, Daniel noted with a small smile on his face- and began to rapidly ascend upwards.

"Patience, my dear," Daanar smiled as he looked over at Vala. "Simply wait…"

The 'lift' stopped, and Daanar smiled as the doors opened.

"Here we are," he said, waving SG-1 out of the 'elevator' into what at first appears to be a shorter, wider corridor with no other doors on it, until Daniel glanced to his right and saw what had to be the reason why they had been brought here.

There in front of them, on the other side of what Daniel presumed was a one-way mirror of some kind, sitting in a chair and reading a book- the title of which Daniel couldn't make out- as though he hadn't a care in the world, was a young boy.

He was maybe no more than eight or nine years old, dressed in a simple brown robe that looked like it would be better suited on Abydos than on this planet, and wearing sandals. The boy had blue eyes and light brown hair that hung down around his head, somehow managing to look both shaggy and sleek simultaneously, and had a dark red bandana casually looped around his neck.

Several other books were positioned on shelves around the room itself, and there was a bed in one corner with a chest of drawers, presumably containing changes of clothes, at the end of the bed. Glancing around, Daniel estimated that the room took up almost the entirety of the floor of the building they now stood on, and was filled with everything from books to exercise equipment; he even saw some kind of shooting gallery in one corner, although the targets were significantly larger than anything they had in the SGC. Evidently, this room served as the boy's primary living accommodation, although he must have left the room if only to eat judging by the lack of any kind of food dispenser.

"What the…?" Mitchell said, as he looked back in confusion at Daanar. "Are you sure this is the right building? This isn't exactly what I was expecting you to be 'guarding' for us…"

"Naturally it is not; we have gone to great pains to ensure his existence is kept secret, and I did not want to go into too much detail until I could be sure we would not be overheard," Daanar said, smiling slightly at Mitchell. "I assure you, Colonel Mitchell, he is what you have been looking for, even if you did not know it. We have long been aware that you and your friends would come to our world; the child has been waiting for you to take him back to where he is needed."

"And the reason he can't just go where he's needed himself is…?" Vala asked, staring critically at their self-appointed guide.

"Why, the time was not yet right for you to be aware of him, of course," Daanar replied, smiling slightly at Mitchell. "We were told that you would come when the aid of the child was needed; evidently, such a time is now, or you would not be here."

Sam opened her mouth to try and ask another question, but, before she could say anything, Daanar had reached over, triggered some kind of switch on the wall that SG-1 couldn't see, and suddenly, the wall that had been separating SG-1 from the child had vanished. Sighing slightly, without looking up, the child shook his head in an almost bored manner, as though he felt like he was tired
of repeating himself, as he picked up a nearby bookmark, placed it in the book, and put the book off to one side.

"Y'know, Daanar, I thought we'd had today's lesson already?" he said, sounding slightly annoyed as he raised his head to look at the new arrivals. "I get that it's important that I learn about my limits and all that proverbial jazz, but I wouldn't mind a bit more time to myself on."

As his eyes fell on the forms of SG-1 standing outside his room, the boy's eyes widened in surprise.

"Oh my God…" he whispered, half to himself, as he stared at the six people before him, as though he couldn't believe what he was seeing in front of him. "It's… it's you…"

Then a massive grin split his face as the boy leapt onto his feet, charged towards the open window, and practically flew up to wrap his arms around Sam and Daniel's necks, bringing them together so rapidly their heads nearly collided with each other.

"God, Dad, it's so great to see you and Mum at last!" the boy smiled, as he leaned back slightly to smile at Daniel. "I've been wanting to meet you two for ages!"

It was a good thing the boy had grabbed onto him on his own; if Daniel had been holding the child up right now, he probably would have dropped him in shock at what he'd just said.

_Did… did he just call Sam 'Mum'?_ Daniel asked himself, staring incredulously between the child in front of him and the woman on his left side.

_And… I'm 'Dad'?_

It was official; this had just become the most _bizarre_ mission SG-1 had _ever_ been sent on…
The Introduction of Liam Carter Jackson

"Uh…" Sam said, looking at Daniel awkwardly as she raised her arms to take hold of the boy's body and place him back down on the ground. For a moment, the boy continued to smile brightly up at the two of them, but then he began to take in the confused expressions on their faces and his eagerness was replaced by concern.

"Is something wrong, Mom?" the boy asked, an almost apprehensive look in his eyes as he reached out to take her left hand in his right. "I'm sorry if I startled you and Dad much; I was just really pleased to see you at last…"

"Uh… right…" Daniel said, exchanging confused glances with Sam before he crouched down so he was eye-to-eye with the boy. "Look… young man… I'm sorry if there's been a misunderstanding, but… Sam and I can't be your parents; we've never even been to this planet before."

The child looked disappointed for a moment, but then smiled broadly as though he'd just remembered something.

"Oh yeah; Daanar told me she said it'd take you guys a while to remember me- all that 'keep me secret from everyone' for my own protection until the time comes when I'm needed' crap can really be a pain in the neck at times, know what I mean?" he said, a broad grin on his face as he studied the two people in front of him.

"Don't swear," Sam said, almost automatically, before she clapped her hand to her mouth in shock as she realised what she'd just said. For a moment there, she'd automatically slipped into what she thought of as a 'Mom' mode; criticising 'her' child about his language, even though she had practically no evidence beyond a strange certainty that he was who he said he was…

"Sorry 'bout that, Mom," the kid said sheepishly before looking back at his father. "Look, sorry if I was a bit of a surprise there, Dad; she always told me you'd need a bit of time to remember me, I just forgot all about that when I actually saw you…"

This is just way too confusing, Daniel thought as he stared at the young boy before them. Then again, maybe I ought to think about some of the other details we haven't been given information about yet before I tackle the bigger one…

"Uh… this 'she' you mentioned… who is she?" he asked, looking awkwardly at the child as he tried to avoid Vala's glare in his direction. She evidently wasn't happy to learn that he'd had a child with another woman, not that he particularly cared about her opinion of him when he had more immediate concerns to deal with…

"Oh, Daanar said that she asked him to tell me to think of her as 'Aunt Oma', so I generally call her that," the boy explained, as he continued to smile brightly back at them, apparently ignorant of the shocked glances exchanged between his 'parents' and Tealc. "I think her full name's-"

"Oma Desala?" Sam said, turning to look back at Daanar, the confusion that had been on her face since the child had greeted them now joined with a more-than-slight amount of anger. "You're telling me that Oma Desala told you to look after… him," she said as she indicated the child- she knew she should ask for his name, but she was too flustered to ask about details like that at the present and could only hope he'd understand she didn't mean to be rude- before continuing, "until we showed up here?"
It wasn't that Sam was ungrateful to these people for- apparently, at least- looking after her 'son'; she just wished that, if it had been this 'Oma' woman who'd been behind it, she'd actually told her Daniel what was going on…

"Indeed," Daanar said, smiling as he looked down at the child. "She gave us the duty to guard this child for you until the time came when he would be needed. As always, we were ever grateful to accede to her request, knowing what it must mean to her, and besides…"

He smiled and shrugged casually. "What can I say? After what she and her kind have already entrusted us to do in the past, and what she and her kind have given us in return, we could hardly refuse such a simple request."

He looked back at the child with a grin on his face, stopping any chance one of the team might have had to ask him to elaborate on what he'd just said about receiving 'help' from what sounded like the Ascended. "Well, I have done what I needed to do for the moment; I'll just leave you to talk to your parents and their friends, shall I?"

"Yeah, I'd appreciate that, Daanar," the child replied, grinning at the man who seemed to have spent the most time with him. Nodding once at the child, Daanar turned back to the lift, the doors closing behind him as the child turned back to look at SG-1.

"So," he began, a more serious expression on his face as he looked at SG-1, "since the time's come for-"

"Uh… could we back up a few paces for us newer guys here?" Mitchell asked, raising a hand as he coughed slightly.

"Yes," Vala stated, glaring harshly at Daniel as she took a step towards him. "Specifically, I wouldn't mind knowing exactly why, Doctor Jackson, you never told me that you had a son!"

Before Daniel could reply, the child had stepped forward, his right hand raised slightly as a faint glow surrounded the hand in question.

"Step away from my dad, lady," the child said, glaring angrily up at Vala as he flexed his fingers; if he'd been older and bigger, he might have looked like he was thinking about squeezing Vala by the throat. "If nothing else, if you'd been listening to me rather than getting all worked up about the situation, you'd have heard that he didn't even know about me until now; don't blame him for something he couldn't control. Got me?"

Vala nodded dumbly, and the boy stepped back, a satisfied expression on his face as though he'd done what he needed to do right now.

"Oh my God…" Daniel said, staring at the child's still-glowing hand, half-raised as though the boy was about to throw a rock.

Noting his 'father's' confused expression, the child lowered his hand, causing the glow to fade, and looked anxiously in Daniel's direction.

"Something wrong, Dad?" he asked.

"Your… your hand…" Daniel said, indicating the hand in question as he spoke. "You… how could you do that?"

The child looked at his hand, and then smiled brightly as he looked back at Daniel.
"Dad, Aunt Oma stuck me here, and you and Mom can't guess the truth about when I was born from that little clue?" he asked, an almost teasing grin on his face.

"Hold on a minute… look, I'm sorry, but what's your name anyway?" Sam asked, looking awkwardly at the child, as though worried he'd be upset at her ignorance of that detail.

"Oh, it's cool, Mom; it's not like you were there when I was named," the child said, smiling at her. "Aunt Oma called me Liam Carter Jackson."

"Liam, huh?" Mitchell said, smiling approvingly at the child. "Nice name."

"Thanks," Liam replied, smiling back at the commander of SG-1 before turning back to Sam. "You were saying, Mom?"

"Are you saying… you're one of the Ascended?" Sam asked, looking in increasing surprise and shock at the child before her.

"Well… partly, I guess," Liam said, grinning at his 'mother' before looking over at Daniel. "I mean, Dad was one of them when you two did… whatever it is that creates a kid… but you were totally human, so it's not that simple; think of me as partly Ascended, just not quite as… freaky… as that Anubis guy was, based on what I've heard about him."

"Excuse me; you're saying you were conceived when I was Ascended?" Daniel said, staring incredulously at Liam. "But… you look…"

"Sorry to interrupt this genuinely fascinating discussion, but, getting back to my original request, can you please explain what the hell's going on here?" Mitchell asked, looking in frustration between Sam, Daniel and Liam. "Does all this… Ascension… stuff Liam's talking about have to do with that year Daniel spent on some higher plane until that thing with Anubis blowing up Abydos?"

"Yeah, that's right; Dad visited Mom while he was on the higher planes, they spent some time together, and bingo- you got me," Liam said, nodding in approval at Mitchell's assessment before a puzzled expression crossed his face as he studied the SG-1 commander. "Sorry to be blunt, but who are you, by the way? You can't be Jack O'Neill; Aunt Oma always told me he had grey hair and a thinner face than you do, as well as being at least a decade older."

"Really?" Mitchell said, chuckling slightly at the child's description of SG-1's former commander before his face became more serious and he held out one hand to the child. "To answer your question, I'm Lieutenant Colonel Cameron Mitchell; I'm the new commanding officer of SG-1."

Looking back at Mitchell, Liam cocked his head to one side for a moment, as though studying the man before him, before finally smiling at him and shaking the offered hand.

"Cool," he said, a grin on his face as he took his hand back and turned around to look at Sam. "I never really liked what I heard about Jack flirting with you, Mom; from everything Aunt Oma told me about him in her visits, I just didn't get what you'd ever see in him."

"Uh… right…" Sam said, trying not to pay too much attention to the fact that her 'son' was criticising her romantic prospects in the SGC when she wasn't even sure about them even before he added an extra dynamic to consider …

Shaking her head to clear that particular train of thought from her mind for the moment- it wasn't getting her anywhere but round in circles, and they had more immediate issues to deal with right now than Jack's potentially non-existent feelings for her- she turned her attention back to Liam,
who had turned away from Mitchell to look at Teal'c.

"You'd be Teal'c, right?" the young boy asked, a small smile on his face as he looked at the tall Jaffa before him. "Former First Prime of Apophis, pivotal player in the Jaffa uprising against the Goa'uld, and all that stuff?"

"Indeed I am, Liam Jackson," Teal'c replied, inclining his head slightly in acknowledgement of his identity. "It is a pleasure to meet you."

"Same here; nice to know some things I've heard about this team haven't changed," Liam said, grinning broadly at the Jaffa before he turned back to Vala, who was looking at him with a glare that looked like it could have frozen Liam in ice, it was so cool.

"And you are?" Liam said, as he folded his arms to look at Vala. His tone was polite, but the whole of SG-1 recognised from his stance that he wasn't exactly thrilled with having to talk to Vala; evidently, her aggressive tone when talking to Daniel earlier had done little to endear the former thief to the young boy standing before her.

"Vala Mal Doran," Vala replied, as she stared back at the small boy before her; she was trying to act as though she didn't care about his presence, but, like with Liam, her body language demonstrated a significant amount of pent-up aggression towards the child. "I became a member of SG-1 after I was rescued from the Ori earlier this year; actually, they impregnated me to create a kind of human/Ori hybrid to lead their forces, rather like-"

The effect on Liam was instantaneous; drawing back one hand, he summoned a burst of glowing white light, and then thrust that hand forward, pinning Vala to the wall behind her by large glowing 'rings' that surrounded her neck and wrists.

"If you even think about comparing me to that… thing you were just talking about there," Liam stated, glaring up at Vala as she stared back at him, "I'll tighten these things just enough to make it hard for you to even breathe. Got me?"

Vala nodded dumbly and Liam withdrew his hand, allowing Vala to land back on the ground as Liam turned to look at the rest of SG-1, only realising as he turned around that they were all staring at him in shock.

"What?" he asked, raising an eyebrow as he stared at the four of them. "Is something wrong?"

"You… you used the powers of the Ascended just to hold Vala down?" Daniel said, staring incredulously at Liam; actually summoning their powers was one thing, but the fact that Liam could use them raised all kinds of extra questions. "But… the rules of non-intervention-"

"They don't apply to me, Dad," Liam said, smiling back at his father before his face fell slightly. "Well, that's not entirely accurate; I can use my powers fairly often without having those guys breathing down my necks, but if I tried anything particularly big I'd be in real trouble…"

"You mean… like Merlin?" Sam asked, as she looked curiously at Liam.

"Merlin?" Mitchell said, looking over at Sam in confusion. "What's he got to do with this?"

"Cam, we know from the Arthurian legends alone that Merlin used his powers extensively, even if it was only ever on a relatively minor scale rather than something that would affect the fate of the galaxy," Sam explained, as she looked over at her commanding officer. "We also know that the Ascended couldn't actually stop him doing anything like that as, after his Descension, he was, technically, human, even if he retained the knowledge and power he'd acquired during his..."
Ascension, so stopping him would have violated their own rules. Maybe the same ability to 'bend' the rules applies to… Liam… as it did to Merlin?"

"What, you mean, because the kid was born human, using his powers doesn't actually count as one of them breaking their rules?" Mitchell asked, jerking one thumb up to indicate the higher planes where the Ascended were meant to exist.

"That would appear to be the case, Colonel Mitchell," Teal'c said, as he looked at where Liam was standing casually in front of them, Vala shakily getting to her feet behind him.

"You got it, Teal'c," Liam replied, smiling at the Jaffa before turning to look at Daniel. "Actually, you've really got Aunt Oma to thank for that little benefit, Dad; apparently she managed to help convince any of the Others who came close to finding out about me to follow the precedent set by the Merlin situation and just leave me where I was, as what I was, rather than try and take my abilities away or something like that."

"Ah," Daniel said, as he looked at Liam for a moment, an expression on his face that looked like the expression he got when he was trying to translate something, until he finally spoke in an apologetic, awkward tone. "I'm sorry, I just… this is all too much. I… how do we even know you're telling us the truth?"

Liam's face fell slightly at his 'father's' words.

"What?" he said, his voice losing his earlier confidence as he looked at Daniel. "You think I'm lying to you and Mom, Dad? Why would I do that?"

"Well… I'm sorry for sounding harsh, but how do we even know that you are our son?" Sam asked, as she stepped forward to crouch down in front of Liam, the better to look at him. "I mean, Daniel and I have never… done something like that… as far as we can remember… and your story about our memories having been erased… well, it could just as easily be a cover to let the Ori get an agent into the SGC…"

"Exactly!" Vala said, a broad grin on her face as she stared triumphantly at Liam as though he'd already been shown to be lying about his past. "This could just be some elaborate attempt to get into Stargate Command and blow us all to kingdom come! We can't trust him!"

"I do not think that likely, Vala Mal Doran," Teal'c put in, looking over at the former host to the Goa'uld Qetesh before continuing. "If the Ori truly wished to trick us into bringing an agent of theirs into the facility, there are easier ways to do than to create an elaborate deception involving the forgotten child of Colonel Carter and Daniel Jackson, particularly one that could be easily proven false; to my recollection, the Ori have never had the opportunity to acquire the DNA of either of them, so it is unlikely the child is a binary clone of some kind. A Prior who appeared to have found a way to survive forsaking the Ori and wished to aid us would be a more convincing deception than this, if only because it would appear less random than the story that we have been told today."

Looking at Liam for a moment once more, Teal'c then smiled slightly at the child as he looked back at Daniel. "In any case, as you said yourself, Daniel Jackson, regardless of his origins, he indeed appears capable of using the powers of the Ascended; if he was truly an Ori creation, they have gone to such lengths to make him authentic that we would be foolish indeed not to see if there is a way we can take advantage of that fact to give ourselves that power."

"Yeah…" Mitchell said, nodding thoughtfully as he looked at the dejected Liam, before he finally nodded. "OK; we'll take him back with us, but I'll want Doctor Lam to run a DNA test before we
make any decisions about what we do next."

Daniel looked up at that, opening his mouth as though to say something, but Mitchell raised a hand to stop him. "We'll be coming back to this place once we've got a better idea of what's going on here, Jackson; until then, I'd rather not stick around for longer than we have to."

For a moment, Daniel thought about insisting they stay where they were until they'd found what they needed to know…

But then he looked at the confused, upset child standing in front of Sam, and, as Sam turned to look at him as well, for a moment, the light shone on their hair in the same manner, making it look exactly alike…

His mind was made up in that moment.

He had to know the truth about this child.

He had to know whether he'd actually visited Sam while he was Ascended…

And, if so, whether he'd actually acted on the feelings he'd had for her since shortly before he'd actually Ascended the first time, or if something else had happened, something that would make him hate himself for using the woman he… cared for… like the Ori had used Vala all those months ago…
As General Landry walked up to the Dialling Room, the Offworld Activation warning siren blaring loudly throughout the entire complex as he did so, a part of him wondering how Generals Hammond and O'Neill had ever managed to cope with this job on a long-term basis. He'd only been in charge of Stargate Command for a few months, and already he was finding everything rather complicated; how they'd managed in this role for even a year he wasn't sure he'd ever understand. This unscheduled activation alone had to be the fourth one this week, and he didn't even want to think how many similar occurrences had taken place in the last month…

"IDC?" he asked Sergeant Walter Harriman, who was sitting in his customary place at the dialling computer, fingers hovering over the iris controls as he waited to see whether it should be opened or closed.

"Just coming through…" Harriman said, checking the computer briefly, before nodding and looking back at Landry. "It's SG-1, sir."

Landry could only roll his eyes slightly at that; somehow, he wasn't that surprised that it was the premier team of SGC that were the cause of this. They had saved the planet more times than any of the other SG teams- possibly only the Atlantis team had done as much for humanity as SG-1- but they did seem to run into trouble on a remarkably regular basis. Quite frankly, if a week went by without SG-1 being responsible for at least one unscheduled offworld activation, it was because they were on leave for that particular week.

"Open the iris," he said to Harriman, smiling slightly as the metal shutters that acted as the prime line of defence against infiltration via the Stargate folded back, revealing the brilliant blue water-like formation of the event horizon…

Then SG-1 stepped through the gate, a young boy walking after Lieutenant- Colonel Carter and Doctor Jackson with a small grin on his face as he studied his surroundings, and Landry somehow knew that things were just about to get even more complicated around here.

A few minutes later, SG-1 were sitting in the briefing room in front of General Landry; Liam was currently waiting in the medical wing with Doctor Lam until the results of the DNA tests she was putting him through were complete.

"So you're telling me that, according to this… child, he's the result of you two becoming… involved… during that year when you were Ascended and Jonas Quinn was on SG-1, and he's been living on this planet until we went there and made contact?" Landry asked, looking critically at Sam and Daniel. "And neither of you have any memories of this, so the final result is that we have nothing to show that his story is anything other than an elaborate hoax of some kind?"

"Well, sir, we'd already established that I don't have many, if any, conscious memories of my time Ascended, so the story does seem at least partially possible," Daniel explained, wishing, not for the first time, that Hammond or Jack were still in command.

True, it would still have been awkward to discuss his… personal life with Sam… with either of them- given that one was a close friend of Sam's father and the other had feelings of his own for her- but at least it wouldn't have felt so impersonal; a part of Daniel couldn't help feeling that Landry was like a detective asking witnesses to a crime for the details of their experience.
"And the reason for Colonel Carter's lack of memory about the child is meant to be… what?" Landry asked, looking over at Daniel critically. "She had a bump on the head or something?"

"That is one of the many questions we are hoping the natives will be able to answer upon our return to the planet, General Landry," Teal’c said, looking over at the general. "What little information we have acquired so far suggests that Colonel Carter's memories were erased by Oma Desala to protect the child's existence until the time came when he would be needed, but that is a mere assumption at best until further information can be acquired."

"That's the other thing I don't understand; what do these people mean when they say that they were told to protect the child until 'he would be needed'?" Landry asked, glancing over critically at Daniel. "Assuming the kid's telling the truth and he was sent to that planet by this 'Oma Desala' woman, what do you think she meant by that comment?"

"Just a suggestion, but maybe Liam was protected because she was trying to prepare us for the Ori and thought he might be able to help?" Mitchell put in, looking inquiringly over at Daniel. "I mean, from what Jackson's told us about her, just because Oma couldn't actually interfere in our problems didn't stop her trying to help us out with little details here and there; maybe she… guessed, or foresaw, or something like that… that we might have to deal with the Ori in the future, and hid Liam away because she thought that he could help us out if we were ever actually up against these guys?"

Noting the curious expressions of his teammates, Mitchell shrugged. "Well, he's apparently got the powers of the Ascended without the usual limits; you can't honestly say we wouldn't find something like that helpful, huh?"

Sam nodded slowly in agreement of her commander's assessment- despite her instinctive dislike of the notion that her child had been protected solely to fight a war- before turning back to Landry.

"It does fit, sir," she said, as she looked back at Daniel. "As Cam said, from everything we've learned about Oma, she genuinely did want to help us if the chance came; she was just limited in what she could do by the rules of the Ascended. It would make sense for her to try and protect something- or, in this case, someone- that could make some kind of difference in a fight like this."

"I see…" Landry said, simply nodding as he looked at the entire team before finally coming to a decision. "All right; I acknowledge that the possibility of him being genuine is too promising to ignore, but we should determine whether we're being told the truth or not. In any case, we'll wait until the results of the DNA tests come back, and then you'll all go back to the planet; if this is a hoax, I'm sure we'd all appreciate knowing who put them up to this, and if it's real, there's definitely a few more things we'll need to know."

"Agreed," Mitchell said, nodding as he stood up and looked around at the other members of SG-1. "OK, you heard the man; take a time out for a little while, and we'll call you when we know what the situation is either way."

Another few minutes later, Sam was sitting in her office, staring listlessly at the data on her computer screen concerning the possibility of finding a way to prevent the development of another 'Supergate' by developing some kind of defence for a Stargate that would stop it being transformed into one. Her reasoning was that, if they couldn't stop the Ori coming to their galaxy in the first place- after all, their main forces were already here- they could at least limit the amount of damage that their fleets could do, particularly if they were restricted to only the three ships that had come
through the previous Supergate when it was first activated…

But Sam couldn't focus on the information in front of her right now.

Even if she still didn't know if the story he'd told them was definitively true or not, her mind kept going back to Liam.

Specifically, to the possibility that, if he was her child, then Daniel was his father…

And she couldn't even remember having sex with the man she'd come to… care about… more than any other.

Care about…

It was an inadequate term to fully describe how she felt about Daniel, she knew, but it was all she would allow herself to use to describe her feelings for him. Given her past track record with men—Narim dead in a Goa'uld attack, Martouf killed after he was revealed to be a za'tarc, Joe Faxxon captured and possibly killed by the Aschen when their deception was revealed—she just found it safer to be content with what she had with Daniel rather than risk trying something more only to lose him…

Sam sighed in frustration as she leant back in her chair, staring up at the ceiling.

When she got down to it, however, there was no denying that, if it had ever come down to her having to make a choice between Jack or Daniel to share the rest of her life with, both in the Stargate program and outside it, she would have gone for Daniel. Jack, no matter what feelings she might have for him, was just not as certain as Daniel was these days.

Oh, she wasn't denying that she'd thought about it sometimes, particularly in the first few years of the program, but she'd always known that it couldn't work long-term. Vala's little 'wedding fantasy' that she'd told them during that visit of Marty's a few days ago, featuring Sam getting married to Jack, had been… interesting… to say the least, but it could only ever be that; a fantasy. It made a pleasant image to dream about, but, when you got down to it, Sam just doubted that she and Jack would ever be compatible in a long-term relationship as more than they were now; baring the military, they didn't really have a great deal of common ground on which to build a relationship.

True, Jack and her had bantered around the occasional flirtatious comment during their time in SG-1, but for the first year or so at least, and the later year when she'd been dating Pete, Sam, had never been serious about it. It had just been a means of relieving the tension caused by their job, and she coped with it by focusing on the man who could understand why she was doing it and wouldn't be embarrassed. Besides, even if those other factors hadn't existed, both Teal'c and Daniel had been married when SG-1 had been formed, even if they were forced to live apart from their wives for various reasons, and Sam would never have tried to get between that.

The flirting between her and Jack had changed a bit as time went on, but Sam's feelings had never developed beyond a crush, even if she'd tried to lie to herself that there was more to it than that. As she'd realized while on the Prometheus, the flirting had never been totally serious; she was just using her feelings for Jack to avoid being hurt by other men. She still didn't know how Jack himself felt about her, of course, but she was fairly sure that the flirting was the same thing for him as it was with her; just a harmless means of relieving tension.

After all, Jack had been away from the SGC for nearly two years now, in his new position as head
of Homeworld Security, and yet, despite the fact that the barriers that would have stopped him doing anything in the past about any feelings he had for her- the chain of command, military regulations, that sort of thing- no longer applied, Jack still hadn't done a thing about pursuing any further relationship with her.

It couldn't have been shyness- Jack could never be accused of that- so the only other explanation that Sam could think of was that his reasons were the same as hers; he'd only ever flirted with her for the heck of it. Admittedly, Jack had confessed that he cared for her more than he should during the incident with the zartacs, but he cared for Daniel and Teal'c just as much; that was hardly evidence of any stronger feelings he may have had...

In the end, the simple truth of the matter was, no matter what feelings Lieutenant Colonel Samantha Carter had for Brigadier General Jack O'Neill, she certainly wasn't in love with him, and it was unlikely to be anything stronger on his part either.

For Daniel, on the other hand, it was a lot harder to pin down exactly how she felt, to say nothing about how he felt; there were times when Sam couldn't believe how complicated her feelings for Daniel had become since his return from Ascension.

It had all seemed so much more straightforward prior to that; they were close friends, possibly the closest either of them had ever had, but nothing beyond that.

Well, that hadn't been entirely true… shortly before the mission to Kelwona, Sam had been thinking about asking Daniel out at some time, if only to feel like she wasn't spending her life waiting for Jack to do something other than flirt with her all the time. However, then Daniel had Ascended, which, naturally, put a halt on any plans of that kind, and she'd been left feeling utterly devastated at the loss, to say nothing of the uncertainty about whether he'd actually come back some day or not.

Then, after Daniel had come back, she'd thought for a moment about asking him once he'd regained his memory, especially after he'd asked her if there'd been anything between them. However, she hadn't considered it fair to take advantage of him in that state, despite the opening such a query had given her; for all she knew, he'd just made the wrong conclusion after that glowing picture she'd painted of his personality before he lost his memory.

Then, when he'd remembered Sha're on his own, she had backed off, wanting to give him time to cope with his grief over remembering the loss of his wife all over again, and she'd just never been comfortable with broaching the topic again for a while. By the time she'd felt more capable, she had started dating Pete, making such a suggestion impractical at best, and her feelings had just become even more complicated after her return from Area 51, to the extent that she'd found it easier to say nothing than try and put her feelings into words.

Besides…

Sam sighed.

She had to respect the fact that he was still in love with his wife.

God… even after four years- seven, if you counted the years she spent as the host of Amaunet- Daniel had still mourned for and loved his wife; his evident grief as he remembered her again was proof enough of that.
No matter what Amaunet had done to him, he still loved Sha're, refusing to allow the actions of the Goa'uld who'd taken her body to corrupt his memories of the year he'd spent with her.

How could she compete with a love like that?

She could never even hope to inspire that kind of passion in Daniel, she was sure; after all, Sha're and he had come together despite being from two different planets and managed to be happy. Sam could never hope to capture Daniel's heart like that...

Except, apparently, she had at least come close; if Liam was telling the truth, Daniel had actually loved her enough to conceive a child with her, even if it was probably breaking several laws of the Ascended and he was on a level where he could have appeared to any other woman in the universe...

Or had he just paid a visit as a friend, learned about her feelings, and been unable to say 'No' to her? After all, for all he'd known, he might have never been coming back to her; maybe he'd felt as though she deserved one last memory of him, but then... something... had happened... and things hadn't gone exactly as he'd expected?

Had Oma been lying to spare Liam's feelings?

Had Daniel erased her memories himself... because he didn't want their friendship to be complicated by the knowledge that they had a child because he'd made a mistake?

A knocking on the door stirred Sam out of her thoughts and, glancing up, she saw Doctor Lam standing outside her office, some sheets of paper in her hands as she looked at Sam with an apprehensive expression on her face.

Staring at the various tablets before him, Daniel sighed in frustration as he leaned forward, clasping his forehead in his hands.

God, it hadn't been this stressful at the SGC since the Replicators had been active; at least with the Goa'uld, the main thing they'd had to worry about was arriving on a planet in the territory of a System Lord, particularly after Thor was able to convince Chronos, Nirrti and Yu to include Earth in the Protected Planets Treaty.

Indeed, the only difference between the Ori and the Replicators, baring the obvious detail of the Replicators being machines while the Ori were Ascended beings, was that at least they'd been able to hurt the Replicators with conventional weaponry; baring the destruction of the Supergate, nothing they'd tried so far seemed to have had a very significant effect on the Ori's forces...

No.

That wasn't the only reason why Daniel was stressed out right now.

Like Sam, his thoughts were totally taken up with the presence of Liam Carter Jackson, and the numerous questions posed by his very existence.

However, in his case, any feelings Sam may have had for him were only a secondary concern; right now, his main dilemma was simple.
When he and Sam had... conceived... Liam, had she known about it?

Had she been a *willing* participant in what happened?

Or had he just... *used* her... like the Ori had used Vala when they'd conceived Adria to lead their fleet?

Even as part of him hoped that it had been willing on *both* their parts, another part couldn't shake off the fact that Sam had been love with Jack- or at least had feelings for him- for as long as Daniel could remember; why, out of everyone else on the planet, would she have fallen for *him* instead?

Even with every dream he'd ever had of Sam being able to see him in *that* way, he knew that, in reality, the chances of it ever coming true were non-existent. After all, on the one hand, she had Jack, who she'd flirted with for as long as they'd both been assigned to the Stargate program, and shared an evident chemistry with; hell, they'd been *married* in two alternate realities, to say nothing of ...

But still, even with all that, a part of him couldn't resist pointing out that he and Sam spent far more time together than she and Jack ever could... a part of him couldn't help but reflect on the fact that *he* had never met Sam in those realities where she and Jack had married...

*No*, Daniel told himself harshly; if he allowed himself to get his hopes up like that, he'd just have them all shattered.

But even as he thought that, he still couldn't help but hope that he was wrong and Sam *did* feel that way about him...

Because if he'd just used her to create Liam like she was... a piece of earth for planting a seed... just because of some screwed-up *plan* Oma had to try and give the galaxy another means of fighting the Ori...

No matter what the reasons behind it, Daniel couldn't live with himself if he'd done something like that.

*Maybe it wasn't like that*, a part of Daniel couldn't help but point out. *Maybe you just came down to comfort her and got carried away...*

At that thought, Daniel couldn't retain a small sob as he collapsed onto his desk, arms crossed as he rested his forehead and stared at the metallic surface only a few inches away from his nose.

He wasn't sure which was worse; *forcing* Sam to have his child and then erasing it from her memory, or her having sex with him simply because she'd felt sorry for him...

A knock on the door stirred him from his depressed thoughts, and, glancing up, he saw Sam standing outside his office, some papers in her hands as she looked anxiously at him through the window in his door. Standing up, Daniel walked over to the door and opened it, looking anxiously at his friend as she stood there, looking at him.

"What is it?" he asked, his eyes briefly flicking to the papers in her hands before he stepped to one side, allowing her into his office as he closed the door behind her.

Sighing, Sam turned to look at him where she stood in front of his desk, before indicating the
papers in her hands.

"Doctor Lam finished the DNA tests, but she thought it would be best if you and I heard what the results were now rather than hear them with the others," she explained, indicating the papers she held in her hands. "She's run every possible test on Liam short of actually dissecting him, and she assures me that the results are totally accurate."

"And…?" Daniel asked, looking apprehensively at Sam.

Despite the seriousness of the situation, Sam smiled slightly at her friend.

"Congratulations; we have a son," she said, evidently making an effort to sound light-hearted about the fact, even as the tone of her voice alone showed her uncertainty.

Of course, Daniel couldn't exactly blame her for that; as soon as the words had left Sam's lips, he'd staggered back to lean against the wall, trying to collect his bearings once more. After all, it was one thing to be told that a boy was your son when you had no evidence to show he wasn't lying, but when it was conclusively proven to be the case…

"You're… she's sure?" he asked, looking anxiously at Sam.

Sam nodded as she looked at the files once more. "An exact match for the DNA of both of us; he even has traces of naquadah in his system, and there are some hints of an extra energy that matches what readings we have of the presence of an Ascended," she explained, looking back at Daniel. "If this is a hoax, it's an elaborate one. His cells may show signs of accelerated aging, but only for the first couple of years of his life; he's aged normally for the last two years or so."

"Ah, Daniel said, nodding as he processed the information before looking up at Sam. "So… what now?"

They both knew what it meant for the team, of course- they would have to go back to the planet to find out exactly how Liam got there in the first place- but what it meant for them personally? Daniel didn't know.

And it was evident, just from looking at her, that Sam wasn't sure what the answer would be either.

After a moment of awkward silence, Sam sighed and looked at the papers in her hands.

"We… we should probably just find out what happened to create him before we make any decisions like that," she said, as she looked back at her friend.

"Yeah…” Daniel said, nodding in agreement. "That works…”

He just hoped that, whatever they discovered on the planet, it wasn't as bad as he'd been imagining; if he discovered that Sam's 'pregnancy' (Even if she hadn't actually carried the child) had been under the same circumstances as Vala's, he'd already made up his mind to leave the SGC.

He literally couldn't live with himself if he'd… used Sam like that… and had to keep seeing her, always knowing what he'd done to her.

Even if it was for 'the greater good', nothing could excuse something like that.
It only took a few moments after the results of the test had been revealed to the rest of SG-1 for the entire team to be standing in front of the Stargate once again, Liam standing between Sam and Daniel as he stared eagerly up at the spinning 'gate before them; he had insisted on returning to the planet that had been his home for four years, even if it was only to say goodbye.

Landry had been reluctant to allow him to go through the 'gate- no matter what his origins, Liam was still a child, physically only eight years old and chronologically something like four, if he'd been conceived while Daniel was Ascended- but Mitchell had pointed out that Daanar might be more willing to listen to them if they could show him that Liam was unharmed. Landry had eventually agreed to Mitchell's argument and allowed Liam to accompany the team, despite the 'protests' from Vala about the necessity of bringing the child along.

Vala… Daniel thought to himself in frustration as he glanced over at the former thief; she was currently standing at the opposite end of the 'line' of SG-1 members from him, staring resolutely at the 'gate as though determined not to look at him.

He may not care whether she paid attention to him or not, but acting cool towards him certainly wasn't going to help her; she'd just cause friction among the team and make things even more difficult on missions than they already were.

Still, putting aside his concern over whether her new hostility to him would cause problems in the team dynamic, Daniel couldn't help but be grateful for her changed attitude; prior to Liam's sudden arrival in their lives, she had been seriously starting to get on his nerves. Ever since she'd come back from the Ori galaxy and become a probationary member of SG-1, Daniel had been lucky to get a few minutes by himself without having Vala doing everything but tearing her clothes off and pinning him to the bed to try and seduce him, despite his best efforts to tell her that he wasn't interested in her that way.

Had it ever occurred to her that, if he was interested in her like that, he'd have done something about it already?

If nothing else, he supposed he should be grateful to Liam for that; evidently, Vala wasn't interested in becoming a step-mother herself, assuming she'd been telling the truth about that part of her childhood when she named Adria during the initial confrontation with the so-called 'Orici'.

If only his existence didn't open up an entirely new problem for me, Daniel thought to himself, as he glanced over at Sam, standing to the left of him and Liam, Teal'c and Vala on her left while Mitchell stood to Daniel's right.

Even if this had to be the more confusing family grouping in history, a part of him still found a certain joy in the picture they created right now. For a moment, a part of Daniel wished that someone had a camera; baring their military uniforms, the six of them could almost have been a couple of parents and their child going for a walk somewhere with their friends (Or an acquaintance in Vala's case, Daniel's mind added), but he pushed it aside.

No matter how much he wished it was the case, the second he started thinking of himself, Sam and Liam as a family, there was a good chance he'd just be leaving himself open for further heartache.

If this whole thing turned out to be the worst-case scenario- that he had just used Sam because somebody thought that their child would be needed- he was just going to dial up a random address
and leave Earth for good as soon as the Ori crisis was over.

After the Hathor experience, he'd been an absolute mess; even if his motives had been better than Hathor's when she'd tried to use his DNA to create a new strain of Goa'uld, how would Sam feel if it turned out she'd been used by him like he had been used by Hathor?

He literally couldn't live with himself if he'd done something like that to the woman he…

No.

He wouldn't let himself think that.

Until he knew either way what had happened when Liam had been conceived, Daniel couldn't allow himself to think that word.

If he'd done the worst-case scenario, he didn't deserve to think that he felt that way about her.

Then the gate activated, the familiar Kawoosh! sounding as the unstable energy of the vortex was ejected before settling into the familiar appearance of a puddle that disobeyed all known laws of physics, and Daniel relaxed.

He was back in familiar territory once more; heading off to another planet to acquire answers to questions about the past.

True, unlike past trips through the Stargate, here he was trying to find answers to questions about his past, rather than the past of the Goa'uld or another culture, but the essential details about the nature of the mission were still the same.

Glancing back at Liam and Sam once more, hoping and praying that the story behind Liam's conception wouldn't turn out to be as bad as he kept on worrying it might be, Daniel stepped forward through the Stargate, the rest of SG-1 alongside him…

And, mere seconds later, they were back on the planet where they had met Liam, the city where Sam and Daniel's son had lived for the last four years (Apparently; there were still some questions to be answered about how he'd come to live on this planet in the first place) a short distance away from the Stargate.

The only difference was that, when they arrived on the planet this time, Daanar was standing in front of the Stargate when they arrived, his arms folded and his expression casual as the first of the team stepped through the event horizon of the wormhole onto the planet.

"Ah, Liam," he said, a small smile crossing his face as he looked at the child standing between Sam and Daniel. "How are you?"

Liam shrugged. "OK, I guess," he said, as he released his parent's hands to rub his left arm slightly, glaring up at Mitchell as he did so. Although a small twinkle in his eyes made it clear that he was joking, Liam was evidently doing his best to sound annoyed at the actions of SG-1's commanding officer. "Someone insisted I have a stupid amount of needles stuck in me before they let me go about without somebody worrying I'll turn out to be an Ori trick…"

Then his face brightened as he casually shrugged. "Still, that's Mom and Dad, I guess; if they didn't take precautions like that, who's to say they'd even have survived long enough for me to even be here in the first place?"
"Uh… yeah," Daniel said, an awkward expression on his face as he and Sam glanced briefly at each other before Daniel turned his attention back to Daanar. "Look, we're sorry to be bothering you like this, but we'd really like to know-

"How your son came to be here, and, indeed, why Oma Desala chose to send him here in particular?" Daanar replied, a slight smile still on his face as he looked at the first-contact team of the SGC.

"Please, follow me," he said, indicating the city behind him with a wave of his hand. "It is only natural that you should have questions about such an unusual chain of events; I shall explain all, I promise you."

A few minutes later, the entire team had arrived in the city, and were standing in front of a building that resembled the one that Liam had been staying in when the team first met him. The only difference was that, at the top of this building, there was a large, wide metallic-and-glass sphere, almost resembling a slightly thicker version of the CN Tower, if the restaurant had been rounder and the Tower had been made of metal.

"Nice place," Mitchell said, smiling over at Daanar as they walked up to the tower's main door, leading into a corridor identical to the one in the previous building; totally white, baring the metallic doors at the end that evidently led to some kind of lift. "Bit big, but I've always preferred small and simple for my homes myself; probably just a personal thing if it's anything."

"Thank you," Daanar replied, nodding politely in Mitchell's direction as he walked towards the lift, before glancing over at where Liam was walking between Sam and Daniel. "You'd better make the most of this visit, Liam; somehow, I doubt we'll be seeing each other for a while after this, so if there's anything you want from my rooms, you should just take it now."

Liam nodded, a slightly sad expression on his face at the thought as the six of them stepped into the lift.

"Yeah, I guessed it'd all be over after this," he said, before his smile brightened slightly, becoming almost teasing, as he looked at Daanar. "Still, at least you won't be egging me on to practice as much any more."

Daanar smiled good-naturedly at that comment as he turned to look at Liam, as though he was used to hearing Liam say things like that.

"You know, it wouldn't seem like so much if you'd just do it straight away," he said critically, before looking apologetically at Sam and Daniel. "I apologise if he seems a bit rebellious at times; we have done our best to insure he is capable of fulfilling his role, but it is hard to balance that properly with Oma's very- and trust me, I mean very explicit desire that his heritage not be allowed to define his life…"

"Oh… uh, that's OK…" Daniel said, uncertain what else he could say to such a comment. Glancing over at Sam, he was relieved to see that she was looking just as bemused by all this as he was; at least he wasn't alone in this situation.

Before anyone could say anything else, the lift stopped, and the doors opened to reveal a vast room, evidently located in the large glass room at the top of the tower. It consisted of an unusual
mix of technology and leisure activity, with one half of the room full of what looked like children's books and toys, although they looked like nothing Daniel had seen in his life.

Of course, if this city did maintain contact with Oma and her… associates, for lack of a better term to describe those she had helped Ascend… Daniel assumed that the toys might have been originally intended for the Ancients, particularly since Liam himself was at least close to the Ancients.

Since they had little idea about the Ancient family structure- had Ancient children even needed to learn, or were they just born smart?- Daniel acknowledged that his guess about the origin of the toys and books was all just a theory, but it seemed to fit smoothly with what information they had about the Ancients at the present.

The other half of the room appeared to include control panels similar to what Daniel recognised from the Atlantis control room, during SG-1's recent brief visit to the Pegasus galaxy that had resulted in the destruction of the Supergate. However, unlike the consoles in Atlantis, these looked more low-tech, as though the creators were somewhere between modern Earth and the Ancients in terms of technological advancement…

"It is intriguing technology, isn't it?" Daanar said, noting Daniel's distraction with a small smile on his face as the archaeologist turned back to look at him. "Don't worry about it; it is only natural that you should be curious about us and our way of life, after what we have returned to you."

"Yeah, about that; can we get back to the main issue of why you were picked to keep an eye on Liam all these years?" Mitchell said, looking curiously at Daanar. "Sorry to be blunt, but we do have quite a lot going on at the moment…"

"Naturally, if the time has come when Liam is needed," Daanar replied, as he indicated some chairs around the consoles. "Please, sit where you can, and I shall explain everything."

After exchanging glances, the five members of SG-1 each sat down in one of the chairs by the various control panels. Liam chose to stay with Sam, hopping up to sit on her lap, and Daniel sat close to them both while Daanar took a position behind one of the larger consoles.

"To begin at the beginning," he said, as he looked around at the SG-1 members, "I should inform you that, years ago, my people were much like the other civilisations I presume you have encountered as you travelled through the Stargate; we were taken from Earth centuries ago to act as servants for a Goa'uld, whose advanced technology led our ancestors to believe that she was a goddess. I believe that the Goa'uld was known as Hestia, but I cannot be sure as so few records of our time under her rule remain. All we have been able to ascertain is that she was already rather old at the time she took us, and any records from that time seem to indicate that she died only a couple of centuries after we were taken from Earth, leaving us to manage on our own."

Interesting, Daniel thought to himself; from what he recalled of Greek mythology, Hestia had been the goddess of the hearth and the first-born of the First Olympian generation, but had eventually sacrificed her position as one of the Twelve Olympians to Demeter to tend to the sacred fires of Mount Olympus. Allowing for obvious differences in the myth- for example, it was unlikely that a Goa'uld Hestia would actually retire to do something that would take her out of the eye of her followers- the idea of Hestia as one of the older Goa'uld would make sense…

"Regardless of her history," Daanar continued, "after her death, it was discovered that there was a vast… 'storehouse', I believe is the proper term in your language… of technology on that world,
which, as we later learned, came from the Altereans. Having discovered it, we were able to access information on how to work the Stargate, and, after some false tries, we were able to discover the address to this world, where we discovered what remained of this city."

"What remained of this city?" Vala put in, looking critically at Daanar, a harsh gleam in her eyes. Daniel wondered if the reason she was being so hostile was that she wanted to expose them as liars so that Liam would be removed from the equation once more. "It looks pretty intact to me…"

"It was not this way when we discovered it, I assure you," Daanar replied, as he looked over at Mitchell with a small smile. "When we discovered this city, there were very intact pieces of technology left; the buildings themselves were superficially intact, but their interiors had been practically demolished. Initially, our attempts to repair them met with failure, and we were also more than slightly hampered by the fact that many Goa'uld were attempting to claim us for their own- fortunately, they never realised the potential importance of the city, or we would have had serious trouble."

"If you don't mind my asking, how did you even get to this point?" Vala asked, still looking at Daanar as though he was a valuable artefact and she was trying to work out how to steal or destroy him. "After all, Goa'uld constantly attacking you must have made the reconstruction slightly difficult, right?"

Daanar simply smiled casually.

"The reason is simple enough, Miss… Val Doran?" he said inquiringly. Vala nodded, and he continued. "We had help from Oma Desala."

For a moment, there was a stunned silence from the five members of SG-1, until Mitchell broke it as he looked over at Daniel.

"Uh… isn't she meant to not be capable of interfering?" he said, looking in confusion at the archaeologist. "You know, their whole thing about thinking they shouldn't get involved because then they'd be just like the Ori, all that crap?"

"Normally…" Daniel said, nodding thoughtfully. "But… maybe the same rules apply there as apply to Anubis…"

"What do you mean, Daniel Jackson?" Teal'c said, looking inquiringly at his friend.

"Well, when I was almost ascended after the last fight with the Replicators, I was told that the main condition the Ancients imposed on Anubis after they partially sent him back to our plain is that he was never to use any knowledge or power he couldn't have theoretically acquired if he wasn't still a Goa'uld," Daniel explained, as he looked up at his friends. "Now, what if the same thing's true for a pure Ascended who chooses to get involved in our affairs without retaking human form? You know, they could help out so long as it involved something they could- at least theoretically- do if they were still human, but try anything that they could only achieve as one of the Ascended and they're in trouble?"

Sam nodded thoughtfully.

"It does make sense…" she said, as she glanced over at Teal'c before looking back at Daniel. "After all, when you appeared to General O'Neill and Teal'c while you were ascended, strictly speaking, all you were doing was being there for them; the only difference between being there for them
"Indeed," Teal'c said, as he looked over at Daniel. "The same conditions apply for the mission to Abydos that resulted in your descension; theoretically, we could have been alerted to the presence of Anubis by the Abydonians, and you simply told us about it before they could contact us for help. From what I was told by Colonel Carter and Jonas Quinn after the mission was complete, even when searching for the Eye of Ra, you only helped us by translating the writings on the wall; in other words, you were doing nothing that you would not have done if you had never Ascended."

"It works…" Daniel said, nodding thoughtfully to himself before he looked back at Daanar. "Is that how it was? Oma just gave you advice; she didn't actually do anything to help you?"

"Precisely," Daanar replied, nodding in confirmation. "She told us little things, such as how to make the technology more efficient, or what consoles did what, but she never activated anything for us; the closest she came to active intervention was when she stopped us activating anything that could cause serious damage to the planet if used improperly."

"I see…" Daniel said, before he indicated the gem around Daanar's neck. "And what are the gems for? Are they just symbolic, or is there something more to it?"

Looking at the white gem around his neck, Daanar smiled slightly as he took it in one hand and raised it to allow Daniel to take a better look.

"In a sense, it is both," he said to Daniel. "Tell me, are you aware that, on Earth, some are born who are capable of controlling Ancient technology due to a certain aspect of their genetic makeup?"

"Yeah, we call it the ATA- Ancient Technology Activation- gene," Daniel replied, as his gaze shifted from the gem to look at Daanar. "Are you saying you have that gene?"

"As do all who wear these," Daanar replied, as he lowered the gem back to his chest once more. "As much of our technology was originally Ancient technology, it was quickly decided that those who possess this… 'ATA gene', as you call it… should be quick to identify if the time ever came when the more potent Ancient technology may be needed to defend our world. The gems were chosen as a symbol both for their distinctive appearance, and also because they allow us to… up to a certain extent; we cannot do anything too great- channel and control the abilities that the Ancients came to possess following their Ascension…"

Here he chuckled as he indicated Liam. "Which, naturally, is useful in training this young man; even if he possesses more power than any of us, our demonstrations give him a better idea of what he is capable of."

"Plus, when you give me an actual goal it stops you worrying that I'll just blow you all to kingdom come when I just try and do stuff on impulse, right?" Liam asked, grinning over at Daanar.

"Well, there is that," Daanar said, shrugging noncommittally.

"And… that's why Oma asked you take care of Liam, right?" Sam put in, as Daanar turned to look at her. "Because she knew you could… train him… without risking him going out of control?"

"Precisely," Daanar replied, before he smiled slightly at Liam as he looked between Sam and
Daniel. "Of course, the fact that he had two very excellent role models to aspire to doubtless helped as well; with all the stories Oma told him about you during her earlier visits, he was always every eager to meet you."

"Ah," Sam said, as she and Daniel shared an awkward glance before turning back to Daanar. "About that… do you have any idea why-"

"Neither of you remember how Liam was conceived?" Daanar replied, smiling reassuringly at the two of them. "That, I regret, is something I cannot just tell you; I must show you instead."

Before anyone could ask Daanar what he meant by that, the man was on his feet and walking over to a nearby console. As soon as he reached it, Daanar placed both hands on the console and, raising his head, closed his eyes as though he was focusing on something only he could see. As SG-1 watched, the white gem resting against Daanar's chest began to glow, and a large panel opened in the floor before the console. As Vala stepped back in shock—she was closer to the gap than any of them—two large, reclining chairs rose from the floor, a small thin metal strip with a slight curve attached to a long metal ‘arm’ at the top of the chair.

Despite himself, Mitchell shivered; for a moment, he was reminded of the time he'd had the memory of committing murder implanted in his head, and had been forced to have those guys shuffle through his head until they found evidence that the memory had been implanted…

"What are these?" Teal’c asked, as he looked up at Daanar as the man stepped back from the console, letting out a breathless gasp as he staggered back, although he soon recovered.

"My… my apologies," he said, as he noticed Sam and Daniel's concerned expressions. "It took a great deal of energy for Oma to contain even one set of memories in this device; having to provide the power necessary for two of them to operate simultaneously is remarkably draining."

A small smile crossed his face as he looked up at SG-1. "Ironically, it is almost easier to operate our cities' defence systems; there, at least, we only use relatively small pieces of equipment. No matter how advanced they are, weapons are still, fundamentally, weapons."

"Hold on; did you say these contain memories?" Daniel said, staring incredulously at Daanar as he indicated the chairs. "As in…?"

Daanar nodded.

"Yes; they contain the memories of how the two of you ended up creating Liam, as well as why he had to be taken here for safe keeping," the man explained, as he indicated the chairs. "All you need do is sit in them, position your heads under these strips, and you shall experience your lost memories as though you were reliving the moment once more."

"Ah," Mitchell said, glancing at his team for a moment before looking back at Daanar. "And… you're sure this is safe, right? No side affects, nothing unorthodox, just them reliving a few lost memories and that’s it?"

"Precisely," Daanar said, before he looked inquiriingly at Sam and Daniel. "Shall we proceed?"

For a moment, as he looked at the woman he… liked… Daniel was tempted just to say no and live in ignorance…
But no.

He couldn't do that.

If he had… used Sam like that… he'd rather know about it than continue trying to fool himself into thinking that it had been a willing act on her part.

These people had been nothing but honest with them so far; he might as well find out what had or hadn't happened all those years ago.

Looking over at Sam, Daniel smiled in relief as he saw the same decision reflected in her eyes. For a moment, they simply stared at each other, knowing this would be the last time they could do that before discovering something incredible about themselves, and then Sam turned to look at Daanar.

"Let's get down to business," she said, a small smile on her face before something seemed to occur to her as she looked back at Daniel. "Do you want the right one or the left one?"
The Miracle Conception

Chapter Notes

1. I have no idea how the Ori battlecruisers operate as far as crew structure is concerned; for convenience's sake, I'm assuming that Adria is in undisputed charge whenever she is aboard a battlecruiser, but there are a few Priors here and there as well as the typical soldiers acting as the Ori's armed forces, with Priors normally taking command of the battlecruisers in Adria's absence.
2. When the writing style shifts to italics, it's a flashback to Sam and Daniel during the events surrounding Liam's conception. The flashback in this chapter is set between 'Nightwalkers' and 'Abyss'.

Hundreds of miles above the surface of the world that was presently being visited by SG-1, an Ori battlecruiser sat serenely in space, facing the planet before it as its crew awaited their leader's order.

On the command deck of the ship, chin in her hand as she stared thoughtfully at the vast globe before her, stood Adria, the Ori herself, already contemplating her next move in the ensuing fight to convert the Milky Way galaxy to the path of Origin. Having only recently detected this planet as she passed through the system, Adria had at first been greatly intrigued by the promise of the power she had sensed from this world, but it was only moments after arrival that she had determined the simple fact that these people would not bow to Origin.

The sheer amount of Altearan-related technology that she detected had made that fact clear to Adria instantly, but she had still felt a need to see the planet for herself, just in case these people were unaware of the blasphemy that their world represented…

But no.

The people below them knew well enough what was on their world.

They would not welcome Origin; it was doubtful that they would even begin to consider the possibility of making the correct decision.

That left Adria only one option.

"Launch the forces," she said, turning to look at the Prior standing beside her. "This world will not accept the promise of Origin; it must fall before it can corrupt this galaxy."

"As you command, Orici," the Prior said, nodding briefly at her as he turned to address the forces.

However, even as Adria turned to look at the planet before her, she couldn't stop a slight tingle at the base of her skull, as though, down on the planet before her, was something that would have a significant impact on this upcoming struggle…

"So, what does this whole 'restore their memories' thing involve, exactly?" Mitchell asked, as Sam and Daniel sat in the chairs Daanar had indicated, straps closing over their arms lightly; to Mitchell's eyes, the straps seemed tight enough to hold someone down only if they weren't actually
trying to escape, so they were probably just to make sure nobody fell out of the chairs or got hurt or something. "They just get plugged into the chairs for a few seconds, and then… what? They'll wake up and they'll remember everything?"

"Not exactly," Daanar explained, as he stood behind the console that seemed to control the chairs. "It will take… longer than that."

"In what way?" Sam asked, looking inquiringly back at the man who had helped train her son for the past four years.

"Well, these chairs will restore your memories, but it is not a simple matter of sticking the memories back into your heads and leaving it at that," Daanar explained, pausing in his study of the console to talk to Sam and Daniel. "As I told you, these chairs will allow you to- almost literally- relive your lost memories; both of you will experience your lost memories relating to Liam's conception in real time. Indeed, from what Oma has told me, it should seem to you as though these events are taking place at this moment; you will only be aware that they are not occurring now on a subconscious level at best. There may be some parts that have been slightly… compressed… for lack of a better term, but that is simply because they are not relevant to the overall story as to how Liam came to be and your memories came to be taken from you both."

He looked over at Sam apologetically. "The majority of those 'compressed' memories belong to you, apparently; if I understood Oma Desala correctly, she had to erase your memories of certain… hints, I believe were her words… that allowed you to realise that you were pregnant in the first place."

Sam opened her mouth as though to say something, but Daanar raised his hands to stop her. "You shall still receive those memories, I assure you; it is simply that, when you and Doctor Jackson relieve the memories after those particular events take place, you shall automatically remember these events as though you had never forgotten them in the first place."

"Ah," Sam said, uncertainly as she went over the sentence in her head, just to make sure she understood what she'd just been told.

"And the reason you can't just do that trick for the whole thing?" Mitchell asked.

"Compressing the memories of one person about various events is possible, but it is more difficult when the memories of two people about the same event are involved," Daanar explained. "The memories must be relieved fully and simultaneously for them to be restored properly; it is easier to keep both sets of memories as they were than to compress them as one and divide them to the correct parties."

"Ah," Daniel said, nodding in uncertain understanding of Daanar's speech.

"Well…" Sam said, as she glanced over at Daniel one last time before everything would change between them, "let's go."

As their three teammates, their son, and Daanar watched, Sam and Daniel sat back in the chairs, the metal bands lowered over their foreheads, a brief flash of white energy filled the room…

And then the two of them lay on the tables, their eyes closed but twitching rapidly, as though they were having a particularly vivid dream.

_Sighing in frustration, Sam slumped down onto her desk in the SGC, grateful that she was back at last._
As far as she was concerned, if she never saw or heard from Adrian Conrad, or anything related to his work on Goa'uld symbiotes, it would be too soon. As far as she was concerned, that entire mission had been an absolute pain in the neck from start to finish; if it hadn't been the NID trying to tackle the Goa'uld town on their own, regardless of the consequences, then it was getting pricked with all kinds of needles, and if it wasn't the needles, then...

Sam sighed as the thought crossed her mind.

Then it was Jonas Quinn, trying far too hard to fit in.

She knew it was unfair of her, of course- Teal'c had found it even harder to adjust to Earth culture back when he'd first defected from Apophis to fight with them- but at least in his case that was because of a significantly different upbringing, to say nothing of the fact that he wasn't even totally human (Not that she'd ever thought much about it, really; Teal'c was just Teal'c, and that was all there was to it).

Jonas, on the other hand, was human, but that didn't seem to be making it any easier for him to blend in; his amusement at the digital camera when they knew they were going into a potentially Goa'uld related situation, if nothing else, hadn't won him many points with her. She just wished that, sometimes, Jonas would try to focus a bit more...

No, a part of her told herself- the honest part of herself, she knew. It's not his attitude that's the problem... it's what he represents to you.

Sam sighed in frustration at herself once more.

It was the truth, though; she couldn't deny that.

She could never bring herself to fully like Jonas.

Oh, she could manage to be civil to him, of course; whatever else had happened, she knew that what had taken place wasn't the deliberate fault of him or anyone else.

It was just that...

Every time she looked at Jonas, she remembered that Daniel Jackson, her closest friend (And more, a treacherous part of her said, even if the part was so small she barely even registered its existence), had practically died to save Jonas' people, and now she might never see him again.

Everything we've been through, Sam thought to herself, despair once again taking her over as she remembered all of her old missions with Daniel. All the Goa'uld we've killed... all the challenges we've overcome... and he died because of some stupid planet that didn't know when to leave things alone.

Jonas might try his best to make up for Daniel's loss, but it was like having a man attempting to fill the shoes of a giant; Jonas could never hope to measure up to Daniel. He lacked the archaeologist's keen insight, his ability to jump straight to Z when everyone else hadn't even managed to get beyond A, and he just tried too hard to fill Daniel's now-empty place on the team.

But, even if he did succeed in that attempt, there was still one empty place left by Daniel that could never be filled.

His place in her heart.

A place that had been totally emptied when Daniel... left them.
OK, so her best friend wasn't, strictly speaking, dead- from what she understood about ascension, he could, at least, still interact with the living- but, as far as Sam was concerned, he might as well have been.

After all, he had the entire universe available to him now; why would he even want to come back to her?

At the door to Sam's lab, hovering on the brink of visibility even as he stopped his body going the whole way, Daniel could only reflect on why he came here.

It wasn't as though she needed him to be here; he wasn't even going to let her know that he was in the same room as her. So why had he come…?

Even though he didn't even need to breath any more, Daniel sighed.

He knew why, really; he just didn't want to have to admit that he knew.

All his 'hopes' when he'd Ascended… that he'd be able to leave his love for her behind with his dying body… that he'd finally be able to stop feeling like his wrists had been cut every time it looked as though she was interested in Jack…

They'd all been for nothing.

Achieving enlightenment didn't get rid of the pain he felt at knowing Sam didn't love him the way he loved her; it just made it harder. Whenever he looked at all the wonders he had available to him now, he knew, as easily as he'd ever known anything in his life, that it all meant nothing to him without someone to share it with.

He would have given anything if Sam could have been that person.

But it wasn't to be; she was in love with his best friend.

Even if there had been times when Daniel was prepared to forget their friendship and just hit Jack for taking the heart of the woman Daniel had fallen for himself, he couldn't bring himself to get in the way of what Sam wanted.

Eventually, when the chance came to leave, and do something more with a life that had begun to increasingly seem like a failure…

He'd taken it.

It just hadn't worked out like he'd been hoping it would.

Sighing once again, Daniel took one last look at Sam, and was about to turn to leave, when he heard Sam say something he'd never dreamed she would ever say.

"Would he have stayed if I was Sha're?"

Spinning around in shock at what he'd just heard, Daniel saw Sam staring at a picture on her desk, a dejected expression on her face as she touched the glass with one finger; he'd been so occupied in his thoughts that he'd never really registered the picture's presence earlier.

Keeping himself invisible, he moved around to stand behind Sam, crouching down to look at the
picture she held…

And his eyes widened.

It was one of the pictures that Teal'c had taken of him, Sam and Cassie shortly after the little girl had first arrived on Earth.

The picture that Daniel had kept a copy of in his bedside drawer in secret, because it always let him imagine, just for a moment, that he, Sam and Cassie had been an actual family, even if only for a brief while…

"So," Mitchell said, after a moment's pause, looking up at Daanar inquiringly. "How long is this thing going to take?"

Just as Daanar opened his mouth to reply, however, a loud explosion sounded from outside the building.

"What the…?" Mitchell said, anxiously glancing over at Daanar. "Please tell me someone might've been experimenting with something you didn't quite get at the moment."

"No…" Daanar whispered, his face growing pale as he stared at the smoke rising off in the distance; Mitchell thought some kind of skyscraper had been there earlier, but he couldn't be sure. "We already know so much about the technology of the Ancients that we see no need to experiment further with what we have discovered on the planet… and nothing is taking place that might cause that…"

He looked gravely at Mitchell. "There is only one explanation."

Mitchell sighed; he should have known these guys were going to show up some time soon.

"The Ori are attacking this place, right?" he said, looking over at Teal'c and Vala in frustration; he knew that they, at least, would understand what he was talking about. "Honestly… just once, would it kill the universe to let something happen to us that goes perfectly smoothly?"

"Indeed," Teal'c said grimly, before looking back at Daanar. "You mentioned that your people know how to work the weapons of the Ancients; if this is an attack by the Ori, can you not mount an appropriate defence using those?"

"Maybe…" Daanar said, hope briefly dawning in his eyes before it faded again. "No; based on that explosion, and judging by the information we have managed to acquire on the Ori from the Ancient databanks, it is evident that the Ori and their followers merely wish to destroy our world, rather than attempt to convert it. If they simply wished to subdue us in an attempt to convince us that the way of Origin is the true path, we might have a chance, but if the Ori truly wish to destroy us, I am uncertain we possess the means to destroy them, particularly if they have sent a battlecruiser."

"And, given that they probably know about the Ancient tech here- this kind of stuff's probably a massive warning light to those guys- I'd guess that you're assuming that they have sent one of those suckers to attack us, right?" Mitchell asked Daanar.

"Correct," Daanar said, swallowing anxiously as he looked down at Liam before looking back at Mitchell. "We have a means of stopping the battlecruiser- it is risky, but it should work- but, unfortunately, anyone on the planet when we trigger it would be… well, they would be unable to leave for a while; it essentially involves destroying our Stargate to move our world somewhere
"Ah," Mitchell said, groaning slightly as he looked at Sam and Daniel in frustration. A part of him was all for asking if it would be possible to unplug Sam and Daniel from those things and just make a run for it before the situation got any worse…

But then he looked at Liam, the young boy looking anxiously between his parents and Mitchell, as though wondering what the new commander of SG-1 was going to do, and Mitchell knew that he couldn't ask Daanar to do that.

His friends deserved to know where their child came from.

Hell, Liam deserved to know how he'd come to be (Even if they couldn't tell him the full details at the moment).

Unless it became clear that the alternative to learning the truth was to be dead, as far as Mitchell was concerned, Sam and Daniel would be staying in that machine, come hell or high water.

Sighing, he raised his gun and looked back at Daanar.

"Well, looks like we've got to buy these guys some time," he said, glancing back at Vala and Teal'c as he jerked a thumb in Sam and Daniel's direction before looking back at Daanar. "What can we do to help?"

Staring sadly at the picture on her desk, Sam sighed sadly as she stared at it.

She wasn't sure why she'd had it taken all those years ago, to be honest; even then, a part of her had known that she wouldn't get to retain guardianship of Cassie once everything was all over. Going through the Stargate on a regular basis did not make it easy to retain guardianship of a child, and, no matter how much she had loved Cassie, a part of Sam would have always wanted to continue going through the 'gate.

But still… whenever she looked at the picture, she could close her eyes, and, for a moment, dream that she, Cassie and Daniel had been an actual family on that day; mother, daughter… And father.

Sam knew that she shouldn't keep thinking about what could have been so much, of course, but still…

She couldn't help but feel that, somehow, if she'd been Sha're- the wife Daniel had loved so much that it took her death to make him even seem to think about dating again- he wouldn't have left.

He would have found a way to stay for her

"God, I'm an idiot..." Sam groaned to herself, as she leaned back in her chair, the photograph once again lying on the table before her. "Why did he have to leave... couldn't he have... have...?"

She couldn't continue.

Her eyes still fixed on the picture in front of her, the picture of Daniel with the family he'd never really had the chance to have for himself, the family he now could never have, Sam began to cry…

Then, she felt something.
More specifically, she felt someone, standing behind her, reaching out to gently caress her face with one hand.

"Sam..." a voice whispered softly.

Her eyes widened as she stared up at the speaker.

It was Daniel.

She almost couldn't believe it.

"Am... am I dreaming?" she whispered softly, staring up in surprise and confusion at her friend. Dressed in a simple cream-coloured sweater and trousers, if it weren't for the lack of his glasses, she could almost believe that he'd just dropped in on a day off and everything that had happened since his Ascension was some crazy dream...

"No," Daniel said, one hand still near Sam's cheek. Even though she knew Daniel didn't have a body any more, Sam could almost swear she felt the hand...

"I know you might not believe it, but I'm here," he said, as he stared at her. "I... actually, I've always been here; I just couldn't bring myself to let you know earlier."

Sam blinked.

"What?" she said, staring in confusion at him as she stood up, one hand on the desk as she looked at Daniel in confusion. "What do you mean, you've always been here?"

Daniel swallowed slightly as he looked at Sam.

This was it.

If he'd misunderstood her, he'd have pretty much ruined everything.

But if he hadn't...  

"I can do... incredible things now, Sam," he said, as he looked at her. "You can't imagine what it's like... I can create lightning, shake the ground, pass through barriers, light fires... but there's one thing I can't do..."

For a moment, he stopped talking, uncertain whether he could find the courage to proceed...

But then Sam looked at him, her own eyes slightly glistening with tears, and she whispered, "Tell me, Daniel."

And that was all he needed to here.

Regardless of whether or not she felt the same way... he had to tell her.

"Sam... I can't stop missing you," he said, reaching out with one hand to gently 'touch' her cheek. He vaguely noticed a faint glow link his palm and her face, but barely registered it; he was too caught up in saying what he'd never managed to say before. "I thought I could try and cope with it better if I wasn't here any more... if I didn't have to see you everywhere, thinking you were in love with Jack, but...it just doesn't work. I can find anything I ever wanted to know, but it means nothing without someone to share it with... and I just kept on wishing you'd..."
Suddenly, he stopped, as he felt something begin to happen.

The hand that he'd been holding by her cheek...

White energy was reaching from it to connect with Sam herself.

Oh God… he thought, as he realised what had happened. In his sheer relief at being able to finally tell her how he felt, he'd unintentionally reached out to her with everything he was, even if it was only on a subconscious level...

And he'd triggered a… 'sharing', he believed Orlin had described it as to Sam.

For a moment, he thought about pulling back, terminating the connection before it went too far- he didn't want her to know how he felt when he still wasn't sure how she felt, even if it was too late to stop that happening- but then, something in the connection changed...

And he felt Sam.

Just as she felt what he felt, he felt what she felt.

And what she felt for him… was love.

"Well, we have a few non-Alterean related long-range weapons that you might be able to use- they won't do as much damage to the Ori, but they should still have a significant effect on them," Daanar said, as he looked at Teal'c in a slightly thoughtful manner. "You would probably be the best choice to operate it, of course; most of our non-Alterean technology came from the remains of the Goa'uld ships that tried to attack our world in the beginning, and since you're… well…"

"A Jaffa?" Teal'c stated bluntly as he looked at Daanar.

"Well…" Daanar said, suddenly looking rather awkward as he looked at Teal'c; even without trying, there was no denying that the Jaffa was a rather imposing figure, even though Daanar himself was only a few inches below Teal'c in height. "I didn't mean it like that… we may be out of touch, but Oma did tell us you were setting up a Free Jaffa Nation that wouldn't be following the Goa'uld any more…"

As Daanar began to realise that Teal'c wasn't going to punch him for his assumption that, just because he was a Jaffa, Teal'c would automatically be fully aware of all the details of Jaffa technology, the man relaxed.

"So… you'll be willing to help us with those?" he asked, looking at Teal'c anxiously for confirmation.

"Indeed," Teal'c said, nodding at Daanar once again. "And, if you should wish, Vala Mal Doran will be equally useful in that regard; she was once host to the Goa'uld Qetesh, and thus retains the naquadah in her blood that enables her to efficiently operate Goa'uld technology."

"Ah, excellent," Daanar said, grinning broadly as he looked over at Vala, apparently unconcerned at the scowl on her face as she looked back at him. "We have a storage facility with some Goa'uld technology in it only a short distance away, you will be glad to know."

Mitchell turned to look at Daanar, but the man had already answered his question before the lieutenant colonel had even opened his mouth; either he was slightly telepathic, or he was good at anticipating people's reactions to things he'd said. "Given what Oma told us about Samantha
Carter's brief time as host to the Tok'ra Jolinar, it only made sense that Liam would have inherited the ability to use Goa'uld technology, so we thought it best to teach him about that 'talent' of his, as well as his more obvious abilities."

"On that topic…" Liam began, but Daanar raised a hand to stop him.

"Unfortunately, you'll be needed downstairs to trigger our… last resort," Daanar said, looking apologetically at his young charge. "You know as well as I do that you are the only one here capable of providing the power that we will require for that to be successful; under the circumstances, I doubt the Ori will give us the time to gather enough of us to provide the power."

Liam could only sigh and nod at that.

"Yeah, I know…" he said, staring briefly at his parents before nodding in resolution. "OK, let's go; time's not exactly on our side right now."

"Sam…" Daniel whispered softly in awe, as she opened her eyes to stare at him. "You… but Jack…?"

Sam smiled slightly at his almost endearing bewilderment.

"He's just safe," she said, reaching out as though to touch Daniel, but stopping herself just above his shoulder; she didn't want to embarrass herself by touching him and finding nothing there. "It was you… always you…"

For a moment, Sam just stared at Daniel for a moment, and then took a deep breath before looking at him once again.

"Can… can you do that again?" she asked, indicating where his hand hovered beside her cheek.

He smiled warmly at her, joy evident in his eyes, as though he was still unable to believe that this was really happening.

"If you're sure…" he began.

Nodding in confirmation, Sam took a deep breath, and then gasped slightly, a mixture of surprise and joy, as the pure white energy that was now Daniel Jackson enveloped her body, gently caressing her very soul as he seemed to sense and accept every part of her, even the parts she wasn't fully aware of herself...

And then something new happened.

Looking around her, Sam suddenly saw nothing but white light all around her. For a moment, she thought that Daniel had just expanded to surround her so fully that nothing else was visible, but then she felt something around her, on every part of her body, as though Daniel was somehow simultaneously removing her clothing and kissing her all over her body. For a moment, she almost panicked, but that she sensed Daniel's assurance that everything would be all right and relaxed slightly…

Only to gasp once more as she felt herself and Daniel literally becoming one. For a moment, she wasn't Major/Doctor Samantha Carter, and he wasn't Doctor Daniel Jackson; they were a single being in two different bodies, each one sharing and magnifying the ecstasy felt by the other at the moment of their joining, the pressure building like a Naquadah generator stuck on overload…
Until, finally, they both reached a peak, tearing through them like the discharge of energy that preceded the successful connection of a Stargate. As Sam and Daniel cried out in joy, the light around Sam vanished, and she found herself standing once more in her office, fully dressed once more (Assuming she’d lost her clothes in the first place), staring in awe at Daniel and what they had just shared.

"Oh God..." she whispered, staring at her friend as he smiled at her. "That... that was..."

"I know," Daniel said, smiling at her once more. "I love you, Samantha Carter.

For a moment, Sam almost couldn't breath at those words, the words a part of her had longed for even as she had never fully acknowledged the desire, and then she smiled at him once more.

"I love you too, Daniel Jackson," she said, reaching out to him once more...

Only for Daniel to step back, a concerned expression crossing his face as though he'd heard something that had left him concerned.

"What?" Sam asked, looking anxiously at the man she loved. "What's wrong?"

Daniel sighed apologetically as he looked back at her.

"I'm sorry, Sam," he said, regret evident on his face, "but I have to go. Something's come up- trust me, if I didn't think it was vital that I be there-"

Sam held a finger in front of Daniel's mouth, smiling reassuringly at him.

"I understand," she said simply. She knew Daniel as well as anyone could, even before the experience that they had just shared, and knew that, after what had just taken place between them, only something of great importance could draw him away.

Stepping back, Daniel smiled once at Sam, and then vanished into white light once more.

Briefly touching her lips with her fingertips, Sam smiled.

"Come back soon," she whispered.
Once again, everything in italics is part of the flashback; the flashbacks here take place shortly after the events of 'Abyss', when Jack was tortured by Ba'al and Daniel stayed with him to try and help.

It had barely been a week since Sam had been visited by Daniel, and in that time, she made a discovery that she could not believe.

It had started when she began to feel a little hazy in the mornings when she woke up; nothing serious, and it was commonly over after the first few minutes, but it was still enough to make her concerned. Once or twice, she'd almost felt like she was about to throw up, but every time she'd reached the toilet the feeling had faded and she'd just dismissed it as nothing.

Besides, given that they hadn't been going through the Stargate in the last week or so- what with the capture of Colonel Jack O'Neill by Ba'al, the rest of SG-1 had remained on Earth until they could come up with a rescue plan- it hadn't struck her as being something she needed to ask Janet about. After all, it didn't seem to be anything serious, and since they weren't travelling to other planets there was no risk of anyone else getting it…

Still, despite the fact that nothing seemed to be seriously wrong, it had been somewhat puzzling to her, given her typically good health.

Then, of course, Colonel O'Neill had been recovered from Ba'al's fortress, and Sam had no longer had a reason to put off figuring out what was happening to her. However, unwilling to bring Janet into it- for some reason she felt uncomfortable telling her friend about this after keeping it secret from her for so long- she'd gone to a local clinic instead, taking care that nobody she knew well saw her going there instead of talking to her friend…

And, given the results that the doctor's diagnosis of her symptoms had produced, she was glad that she hadn't talked to Janet about it; it would have been rather awkward to explain how this had happened.

It had taken the home test she had just taken to make her actually believe the doctor's diagnosis- it had been more than slightly hard for her to accept that this was actually happening to her- but there was now no denying it.

All she needed now was for him to be there…

Just as the thought was about to finish crossing her mind, she heard the slight sound behind her that she had come to recognise during that brief period when Orlin lived with her as an Ascended being using his powers to some extent.

Smiling in relief, she turned to look behind her and saw Daniel standing there, once again in the cream-coloured outfit that he had been 'wearing'- if you could call it that, given that he technically didn't have a body any more- the last time he visited, looking at her with a small smile on his face.
"Hey," he said, smiling softly at her.

"Hey," Sam replied, a soft smile on her face before it faded into a look of concern. "Daniel... I have to tell you something."

The moment those six simple words had passed Sam's lips, Daniel's mind instantly flew to the worst possible things she might have to say to him.

Last time was a mistake; we both just got carried away in the moment...

I'm sorry, but I do love Jack; I just didn't realise it until I nearly lost him...

This isn't going to work out; you should just leave...

Whichever one of those it was, he'd end up feeling like he was dying all over again if any of them passed Sam's lips right now.

Oh, he knew that the emotion he'd sensed from her was love, but he could easily have just sensed the love she had for him as a friend and interpreted it the wrong way.

For a moment, Daniel felt like leaving before she said it; it would save him the time and, if nothing else, there was that oh-so-small chance that, if he didn't hear it, he wouldn't end up feeling that one of the closest friendships he'd ever had was ruined because of a mistake that he had made...

But he had to know which one it was.

Even if it broke his heart... he had to know.

"What is it?" he asked her, trying not to betray his inner concerns; thankfully, a decade or so in the foster system had left him with a distinct talent into that regard.

"Daniel..." Sam said, taking a deep breath as she looked at him. "I'm pregnant."

If Daniel hadn't been so shocked at what Sam had just told him, he would have been grateful that apparently just being Ascended didn't mean he instantly had access to all knowledge in the universe.

But right then, he couldn't spare the mental energy to think about that; for a moment, he'd felt like he was back in his body, dying of radiation poisoning from disarming the naquadria generator all over again.

How could she? Daniel asked himself, as he stared at Sam, barely able to conceal his pain and anguish at the thought that the woman he loved was going to have another man's child. I'm away for a week... Jack was captured and being tortured... and she went and had sex with somebody else?

Even the happiness he felt for her, knowing that she'd always wanted to be a mother herself since they'd rescued Cassie, did little to help him right now; for once in his life, he could only think about the pain he felt, rather than the joy Sam must feel.

"Oh," he said in the end, staring at her with as blank an expression as he could manage, given the
circumstances. "Well... congratulations, I guess."

For a moment, Daniel thought that Sam was going to leave it at that, and raised his hands slightly in preparation to depart- he knew it wasn't necessary, but he found the motions helped him... adjust to his new powers, for lack of a better description- but stopped when Sam spoke once more.

"Daniel..." she said, looking at him anxiously, causing him to pause and look at her. For a moment, the expression on her face- a combination of fear and hope- only made him feel confused, but then she spoke.

"It's yours."

And with those two words, Daniel Jackson, the man who had unlocked the secret of the Stargate, and one of the few free humans in the galaxy capable of speaking fluent Goa'uld, as well as one of the few people in existence who could actually have any kind of conversation with an Unas, was left speechless.

As the two of them began to approach the building that Daanar had directed them to, Teal'c spared an anxious glance behind himself as he looked at the city before them. From what he could see, the Ori battlecruiser was so far doing some severe damage to the city that these people had brought together, as numerous laser blasts tore from the sky to strike the ground below.

So far, the majority of the city appeared to have come through the attack with just basic damage, but, knowing the Ori, Teal'c was fairly sure that this was only a matter of time.

And speaking of time...

Glancing over at Vala Mal Doran, Teal'c noted that she still appeared to be silently fuming over the issue of the existence of Liam Jackson, and what this would must likely mean to her apparent 'plans' for pursuing a relationship with Daniel Jackson.

Seeing that expression on his new ally's face, Teal'c knew that her feelings about Daniel Jackson could pose a threat to their continued operation as a team unless dealt with as soon as possible; her potential jealously towards Colonel Carter would doubtless pose a problem to their team dynamic.

"Something troubles you, Vala Mal Doran," he said, looking critically at his teammate.

"No," the former thief replied shortly, as the two of them turned a corner that would lead them down towards the building in question...

Or at least, they would have gone that road if Teal'c hadn't held an arm out, stopping Vala in her tracks as he stared critically at her.

"You are lying," he stated simply, as Vala turned to look at the ex-First Prime of Apophis in confusion. "You are angered at the presence of Liam Jackson in the lives of Daniel Jackson and Colonel Carter."

For a brief moment, Vala looked as though she was about to tell the Jaffa that he was wrong, but, seeing the fixed, critical gaze he was giving her, she just stayed silent for a moment before finally nodding.

"All right... you're right," she said, sounding like she was almost sulking as she looked back at her teammate. "It's just..."
She stared around for a moment, as though trying to find the right words, and then groaned as she looked back at Teal'c. "It annoys me, you know?"

"What does?" Teal'c asked, simply staring at Vala as she spoke.

"Everything!" Vala yelled, throwing her arms up in frustration as she looked at the Jaffa. "All that effort I made to try and fit in here in the first place, and then she just comes in and takes him from me in a matter of minutes? I mean, even now I'm back she still gets in the way?"

"When you say 'in the first place', I presume you are referring here to Colonel Carter returning to the Stargate program shortly before your time in the Ori galaxy?" Teal'c interjected politely.

"Yes!" Vala said, as she looked back at Teal'c, a brief smile on her face as though she was grateful to have someone who understood. "I mean, can you believe it? There was really something… there… between me and Daniel, and now-"

"There was not," Teal'c said, raising one hand to stop Vala's speech.

"What?" Vala asked, as she turned to look at Teal'c in confusion. "What do you mean?"

"There was never anything 'there' between you and Daniel Jackson, Vala Mal Doran- at least, not in the way that you wanted there to be something there," Teal'c explained, as he continued to stare at Vala, grateful that the Ori didn't seem to be hurrying with their attack; it gave him a little time to make his point. "He regards you as a friend, but that is all; no matter what you may wish to believe, the bond between you will never be anything more than the bond between friends. You are mistaking his patience for more, and, as a result, as General O'Neill would have said, you have made a domesticated donkey out of 'you' and 'me'."

Vala blinked briefly in confusion at that, but only took a moment to process what Teal'c had meant before he continued. "Regardless, you have nevertheless been given something that I count myself privileged to possess as well."

"Which is?" the former thief asked, looking critically at the ex-First Prime of Apophis.

"The friendship of Daniel Jackson," Teal'c replied, as he looked at Vala. "When I first knew Daniel Jackson, I had been responsible for selecting his wife as the new host for Amaunet, the Goa'uld that was the wife of Apophis, my former master, as well as choosing Daniel Jackson's brother-in-law as the host for Apophis' child. Yet, despite this, Daniel Jackson found it in himself to forgive me for what I had done, regarding me as a friend despite that, and he has never forsaken that friendship, even when I myself felt that I did not deserve it."

He paused for a moment to look at Vala, as though to make sure she understood what he was telling her, and then continued. "Like me, you have been given Daniel Jackson's friendship despite your first meeting suggesting you would never be regarded as such. You have spent too much time attempting to gain something that you shall never have, Vala Mal Doran; I advise you to recognise what you do have, and be content with it."

With that comment, Teal'c turned back to continue towards the armoury, leaving Vala Mal Doran to look after him for a few moments, a thoughtful expression on her face as she considered the Jaffa's words.

It was certainly something worth thinking about…

Then she shook it off and hurried after the Jaffa. Glancing up at the armoury, she could see what looked like transmitters for Goa'uld weapon satellites. They were a rarely-used weapon in the
Go'uld armoury - the time it took for them to be constructed made them impractical for regular use - but they were typically effective in holding off enemy spaceships.

Despite the current situation, Vala smiled.

She was going to enjoy this; Qetesh's thoughts on those weapons suggested that the satellites were very... effective at what they did...

The revelation of what Samm had just told him still fresh in his mind, the room having been silent since Sam spoke, Daniel was literally mute from shock as he stared at Sam, an uncertain smile on her face as she looked at the man who she'd just revealed was the father of her child.

"Wh... what?" he said at last, staring incredulously in her direction. "It... it's mine?"

Sam nodded, continuing to smile at him as she placed a hand on her stomach.

"I know; incredible, isn't it?" she said, looking down at herself briefly before looking back at Daniel. "I mean, I know you don't actually have a body any more, so strictly speaking you shouldn't be able to have done something like this, but you're the only one I've been... intimate with, for lack of a better term... since... well, since Orlin left... and, you have to admit, even that's stretching the description a bit."

"Ah," Daniel said, looking blankly at Sam as he spoke. He knew he should make more of a response than this- he had three different doctorates, one of them in philology, for crying out loud!- but, somehow, a part of him was still stuck in a kind of 'loop' at what Sam had told him at the beginning.

He was going to be a father

With Sam as the mother?

"We're... we're going to have a baby?" he said, his voice a soft whisper, as though he was worried that, if he spoke too loudly, the 'dream' would end and Sam would go back to telling him that it was all over...

"Yes..." Sam said, her smile fading slightly as she looked at Daniel, an anxious, uncertain expression settling on her face. "Daniel... are you... OK with this?"

That one query was enough to make Daniel's emotional defences completely fall down.

"OK?" he said, looking at Sam incredulously. "Sam, I am way better than just OK! I'm fantastic!"

Daniel wasn't even sure how he did it, but, frankly, he didn't care; even though his physical, flesh-and-blood body had gone now, and his current form was meant to be intangible, he grabbed Sam around the waist and hugged her for all he was worth, both of them laughing slightly in the euphoria of the moment before Sam's eyes widened as though at some sudden realisation.

"What the... you're solid?" she said, stepping back to stare incredulously at Daniel, who was still grinning at her in a manner she hadn't really seen on his face since he lost Sha're. "But... but how?"

"I don't know; maybe it's just part of my abilities!" Daniel replied, grinning as enthusiastically as
ever as he stared at Sam. "All I know is, as far as I'm concerned, you can expect me back as soon as I get the hang of the whole 'descension' thing!"

Sam's jaw dropped.

She'd expected Daniel to be glad upon receiving the news, but she hadn't expected him to just... descend for her, after all the effort it seemed to have taken Oma to convince him he deserved it in the first place.

"Daniel..." she began, staring at friend in a mixture of awe and uncertain. "Are you... sure about that? I mean... what you'd be giving up..."

Daniel raised a hand to stop her, smiling broadly as he did so.

"For once in my life, Sam, I'm going to say 'Screw the universe; I'm doing what's right for me right now'," he said, as he looked at her, his lips spread into so wide a grin that it almost looked as though his head would split in half. "Besides, for me, it's not much of a choice, really. Eternal enlightenment on one hand, and a life with the woman I love and our child on the other? Point out one good reason why I should ignore the second one?"

"Because you must," a voice said from behind them.

Spinning around sharply at that voice, Sam and Daniel found themselves looking at a woman, about as tall as Sam, with long, straight, dark brown hair hanging just past her shoulders, dressed in a light blue dress suit and holding herself in a manner that reminded Sam of some of the kings and queens they'd met during their trips through the Stargate.

"Oma?" Daniel said, looking in confusion at the woman. "What are you doing here?"

"What I must do, Daniel," Oma said, as she turned to look at Sam, a slight expression of regret on her face.

"I must take your child."

Standing on the bridge of the Ori battlecruiser, Adria allowed herself a small smile as she stared at the carnage and destruction unfolding before her, as her ship and crew fired all available weapons at the planet below them.

She truly wished she did not have to do this- the way of Origin should be used to unite the people of the Avernakis galaxy, rather than divide them- but that was the way of things.

As someone had once said on Earth, "The needs of the many outweigh the needs of the few."

For a primitive people, they had a very... apt way of saying things when the need arose.

On the bright side, it should not be long now until everything was over; these people did not appear to possess significantly powerful aerial defences, so it should only be a matter of time until...

A sudden shudder through the ship disrupted Adria's train of thought, and she spun around to glare at the Prior who was currently piloting her vessel.

"What was that?" she asked, glaring at the Prior before her.
"I am not sure, Orici," the Prior said, looking genuinely flustered as he studied the ship's sensors. "I-it appears to be an attack of some sort, but I cannot… wait! There it is!"

As he keyed in the necessary commands, an image appeared before him, showing around three or four satellites aiming at the battlecruiser, weapon systems active as they began to open fire on the ship.

"The technology matches what we know of the race called the Goa'uld, Orici, but the planet itself appears untainted by their presence," the Prior explained, as Adria studied the screen before her. "Do you have any ideas as to what this could mean?"

"Indeed…" Adria said, nodding slowly as she studied the planet below her. It was possible there were other explanations, of course- things were rarely perfectly straightforward in this galaxy, she had soon learned- but she already had an idea as to exactly who was on the planet below her.

The odds of Ancient technology utilising Goa'uld weaponry against her at this time with the aid of one of the remaining Tok'ra or Goa'uld were slim to none. The Goa'uld would never work with a culture that would blatantly reject them as the 'gods' they pretended to be, and the Tok'ra were not a race of open warriors- they favoured stealth attacks, not this kind of warfare.

It was hardly conclusive evidence, but if Vala Mal Doran, the Jaffa known as Teal'c, and/or Lieutenant Colonel Samantha Carter of Stargate Command were not down on that planet at the present moment, Adria would be very surprised…

Of course, that gave her another chance she would probably have lacked.

"Hold fire for the moment and prepare my shuttlecraft," she said, turning to look at another Prior. "I must go down to that planet; I believe there is something there that shall prove to be of use to us. Do nothing to the planet itself until I return, but concentrate fire on the satellites and other defence systems instead."

She was grateful that none of the Priors had questioned her further about why she was using the shuttle rather than the ring transporters; in truth, she did not entirely know why she was doing so herself.

All she knew that was that, for reasons unknown, some previously-unaccessed part of her Ori heritage was telling her that going down to that planet via the ring transporters would not be the smartest thing she had ever done.

As she headed for her shuttle, however, Adria put such matters aside; for the moment, all that mattered was the meeting that may well await her down on the planet beneath her.

*Here I come, Mother…*

As he stood in the elevator beside Liam, Mitchell once again found himself wondering why he'd wanted to accompany Liam and Daanar down to this 'machine' they were going to activate to try and 'save' this world from the Ori (However *that* was meant to work; he found it hard to imagine something that could effectively stop the Ori for long, much as he hated to admit it even to himself). He could have *easily* stayed with his friends while Liam and Daanar activated this 'escape plan' or whatever it was…

Unfortunately, the truth was that he couldn't.

And, looking down at the child behind him, Mitchell knew why.
Even in the short time they'd known him, it was apparent that Liam already meant a great deal to Sam and Daniel, and the kid was clearly attached to them; Mitchell had volunteered to keep an eye on Liam while the DNA samples were being collected, and, no matter how mature he acted at times, it was clear that Liam had been hurt at not getting to spend that time with his… parents (Mitchell still couldn't quite make the complete mental jump to cope with the revelation that Sam and Daniel had a son in a single go).

And, for reasons even he wasn't sure about, Mitchell had become attached to the child as well.

Even if he trusted Daanar, Mitchell still wanted to make sure he knew what Liam was up to before he went back to Sam and Daniel to wait for them to wake up.

All three of them deserved to know how Liam had come into the world, and why he hadn't been able to grow up with his parents.

As the lift stopped and the doors opened, however, Mitchell forced himself to stop thinking about that and pay attention to his surroundings; even if most of it was likely beyond his current understanding, any chance to see Ancient technology in action wasn't something he was willing to pass up, especially given the current situation.

As he studied his surroundings, Mitchell nodded in approval at the work that had apparently been done here. The consoles weren't quite as advanced as the stuff he'd seen in Atlantis, but they still looked like they were a few steps above even the stuff on the Goa'uld ships he'd seen in his time; based on what he'd seen in the files, these guys were probably somewhere between the Goa'uld and the Asgard in most cases, although there was probably a couple of areas where they even outstripped the Asgard, given their contact with the likes of Oma Desala.

As he watched, Liam walked over to a large machine in the middle of the room, closely followed by Daanar. There were already about three or four people standing around the machine- it was hard to tell exactly how many it was, and someone could have been on the other side out of his view- each one of them positioned in front of something that reminded Mitchell of a large satellite dish back on Earth. There were about five or six of them gathered around the main body of the machine, which stretched up to the room's ceiling and then seemed to expand outwards, as though it was some vast metal umbrella.

It had also several figures carved into the pole that Mitchell recognised from the Stargate itself- Mitchell thought he saw the symbols for Pisces and Centaurus at least, along with a few others- but he was left with no time to ponder this as Daanar and Liam took up position around the machine. Liam, Mitchell noted, was positioned in front of the largest of the six 'dishes', which was also a dark blue where the others were a silvery colour; indeed, his 'dish' also looked a little like the Atlantis Stargate in miniature, with nine blue symbols that could be the nine chevrons arrayed around it.

"Uh… what is this?" Mitchell asked, walking over to stand near to Daanar as the men raised their gems to point at their various dishes.

"It is… I suppose the best term would be a 'Stargate Enhancer', Colonel Mitchell," Daanar replied, as he looked back at the man standing behind him. "When it is fully powered by the energy of our 'gems', it shall enable us to enhance the power of our Stargate exponentially, thus activating our 'last resort' measure."

"And… then what?" Mitchell asked, looking at the people standing around him in confusion. "You all go through the Stargate before the Ori destroy your world and head off to another galaxy? No offence, but I don't think you'll manage to get everyone here before that happens…”
Daanar, fortunately, didn't seem too bothered by the question; he just smiled reassuringly at Mitchell as he and the others continued to stand around the machine, their gems beginning to glow slightly as time went by.

"No offence taken, Colonel Mitchell; however, that is not our plan at all," he said, as the dishes before them began to glow along with the gems in their hands. "I cannot tell you yet what it is, because it may not work and, in any case, I am uncertain as to what, precisely, shall take place myself; all I will say is that, should it succeed, our world will be inaccessible until the Ori have fallen."

At this, Daanar smiled slightly at Mitchell in a reassuring manner. "And they shall fall, Colonel Mitchell; if what Oma Desala has told us is accurate, you have all you need to defeat them at present, and simply require Liam's aid to find it."

Before Mitchell could ask the man to elaborate further on that, Daanar turned back to look at the machine before him, his face showing clear concentration as he did so. "Now then, I apologise if I appear rude, but you must return to your friends now; the memories will soon finish uploading, and then you must all leave our world as fast as possible."

"Yeah… I'll be fine… Uncle Cam," Liam said, smiling briefly over at Mitchell from where he stood by the main dish; he looked a little drained from the energy he was focusing into the machine, but otherwise seemed to be perfectly fine. "Please… keep an eye on Mum and Dad, OK?"

For a moment, Mitchell could only stare in surprise at Liam, as his mind tried to process what the young boy had just said to him.

More specifically, what the boy had just called him.

Uncle Cam? he thought to himself, as he stared at the young man standing in front of him, a small smile spreading across his face as he turned it over in his head. Mmm… I kinda like the sound of that.

He had to admit, being the 'uncle' of Sam and Daniel's child seemed like a pretty good deal, all things considered…

Then he shook his head, sighed slightly, and turned around to head back for the lift.

He could reflect on the possibilities of being part of Sam and Daniel's 'family' later.

Right now, he had to keep an eye on them for his… nephew.

"WHAT?" Daniel and Sam yelled, staring at Oma in horror at her last statement.

"But… but you can't!" Sam yelled at Oma, her hand protectively clutching at her stomach despite the fact that such an action was unlikely to make any difference. "It's my child!"

"I didn't do anything I wouldn't have done if I was still human, Oma!" Daniel said, stepping forward as though to protect Sam from the Ascended before him, even if Oma could probably get around Daniel before even he could do anything; after all, she was more experienced than he was at this sort of thing. "OK, so I may have used some of my powers, but it was only to make for the fact that I don't have an actual body right now! I DIDN'T BREAK ANY RULES!"

"That is not what is important right now, Daniel," Oma said, bowing her head slightly as though in apology. "I truly regret this, but it is not yet time for your child to be brought into your universe; he
"Not yet NEEDED?" Sam yelled, horror and outrage evident on her face as she stared at Oma. "What gives you the RIGHT to decide whether or not my child is NEEDED? We're not letting you do this!"

"Please, Samantha, Daniel, believe me when I say that I have no choice; I must do this," Oma said, looking regretfully between the two of them. "What you have conceived... it is a remarkable, wonderful thing, but it is not yet time for your child to be here."

It was the emphasis on those specific words, more than anything else, that made Sam and Daniel pause and stare at Oma.

"What do you mean... not yet needed?" Sam asked eventually, breaking the silence that had settled over the room.

"There shall come a time, Samantha Carter, when the child you have conceived- a child of Human and Ascended- shall play an important role in the history of the galaxy- indeed, in the fate of the universe itself," Oma explained, as she looked between the two people before her. "If the choice were mine, I would leave him here, but, so long as he remains here, he is in grave danger from the Others; they will regard him as a threat and a violation of the rules due to the powers he shall acquire from the nature of his conception."

"Wait; powers?" Daniel said, staring at Oma in sudden shock. "You mean... he'd have the powers of the Ascended?"

"Some of them, at least; I cannot say which ones they may be," Oma explained, looking apologetically at Daniel as she did so. "Understand, I do not wish to take the child, but, if it were not me, it would be the Others, and they would not be as... willing to adapt, shall we say?... as I am."

"They'd kill the child," Daniel said simply as he looked at Oma. There was no anger or incredulity in his statement; it was just the facts of the matter.

"Indeed," Oma said, as she looked apologetically at Sam. "I can protect the child myself- I can take care of the foetus and soul until it is ready to be born, and then leave him on a world that will care for him and train him in the use of what powers he shall possess- but there is a price; until the time comes when he shall be needed... you cannot remember this."

Sam opened her mouth to protest once again, but Oma held up a hand to stop her. "Be assured that it shall not be a permanent loss of memory; you shall merely have the memories relating to your child... blocked... until the time comes when he is needed."

"And what if that never happens?" Daniel retorted, glaring at Oma in a fixed manner.

"It will," Oma said, as she looked back at Daniel. "By your very nature, you shall some day require his assistance in the next few years. There is an enemy out there like nothing you can imagine. It is greater than the Goa'uld... more powerful than even the Replicators... and, with your thirst for knowledge- a fact that I commend, do not misunderstand me- you shall encounter it in the next few years, while you still have time to enjoy your child's time as an actual child, rather than as an adult. Your child shall play a crucial role in their defeat, but, until that time comes, I must keep him secret, and that cannot be done here."

As she spoke, she looked at Sam, an anxious expression on her face. "What is your choice?"
For a moment, as Sam sat there, she was tempted to just tell Oma to leave and let her and Daniel take their chances on their own. After all, if she forgot everything pertaining to their child's existence, that would include her memories of the time she and Daniel had spent together, memories of the most perfect time she'd ever had, memories of what may be her only chance to be with the man she loved...

But that was a fool's dream.

She and Daniel would have no chance against the Ascended, and she knew it.

If she would remember again in the future... and the alternative was to lose her child for good...

She would have to do it.

And just pray that her child understood that she had not been able to find another choice.

"OK..." she said, nodding in Oma's direction, tears in her eyes as she turned to look at Daniel. "Daniel... whatever else happens... I want you to know... I love you. I think I've always loved you."

His eyes brimming over with tears, Daniel reached over and hugged Sam close to him; Sam didn't even spare time to wonder how he could be solid at present, and just put it down as another part of Ascension.

Right now, she just wanted this one last chance to say goodbye while she still had all her memories.

"I love you too..." Daniel whispered into her ear. "And I just wish there was another way."

"I know," Sam assured him, whispering back, before she turned to look at Oma. "OK... let's do it," she said, her voice slightly shaky as she touched her stomach, knowing that this would be the last time she would feel her child there, even if the time came for her to remember what had taken place soon...

As the Ascended raised her hand, Sam vaguely saw Daniel vanish out of the corner of her eye, an expression of pain on his face as though he couldn't stand to be here...

Then blackness took her mind, and she knew nothing.
"Oh yeah!" Vala smiled, grinning broadly as she turned the satellite defences on the Ori battlecruiser above them, punching the air in victory as her lasers struck home. She and Teal'c had only needed to enter the facility that Daanar had directed them to find not only the remote control systems for the Goa'uld-based satellite defence network—similar to the Ancient chair control for the drone weapons, save for the fact that they required naquadah in the blood rather than the ATA Gene for the user to operate them—but also that everyone in the room was waiting eagerly for them, and had quickly shown them to the chairs they currently occupied. From what little briefing they'd been given before sitting down in the chairs— in the current

So far, Vala had to admit that she was enjoying herself. She and Teal'c had yet to do any actual damage to the battlecruiser, of course— no matter what they were using, the Ori were still pretty powerful, and satellite weapons couldn't do that much damage to them—but they were definitely doing enough to keep it occupied until Daanar could activate that… whatever it was this place had that could destroy the battlecruiser.

Despite herself, Vala couldn't help but wonder what, exactly, that 'weapon' could be. Based on what Daanar had said, it almost sounded like they'd be creating another Supergate of some kind while simultaneously repeating what Colonel Mitchell often referred to as the 'Pegasus Two-For-One' and blowing up the attacking Ori ship at the same time (Of course, the lack of a Wraith ship meant that it wouldn't exactly be the Pegasus Two-For-One, but the Ori ship had still been the more prominent victory; after all, the Atlantis expedition had defeated a dozen or so Wraith ships before that particular battle, but they'd never managed to destroy an Ori ship).

Of course, how a bunch of people with only Ancient technology to help them—lacking even the advice of the Ancients that the Ori might have been prepared to provide in their home galaxy—were meant to create a Supergate on their own in this galaxy, she had no idea, but she was looking forward to finding out. If nothing else, if she didn't find out soon, the chances were that she'd either be dead or captured once again, and Vala was not going to let that happen.

Praying that they'd be finished here soon— even if she was simultaneously praying for the chance to do some serious damage before she had to go—she continued to fire the satellite's weapons at the Ori battlecruiser, her fingers occasionally tapping at the buttons controlling the satellite's manoeuvring thrusters to make it evade the counter attacks of the Ori ship...

Then, on the viewscreen that was all that allowed her to see what she was actually shooting at, Vala spotted something depart the Ori ship, and her eyes narrowed as she enlarged the area of the screen in question to focus on the object.

She noted, with only slight surprise, that the object was not a missile of some kind, but what looked like a modified version of the 'Puddle Jumpers' she'd seen in the hangers of Atlantis; the only differences were that this 'Jumper' was darker in colour, and had what could almost be described as gold 'trim' around the edges of the viewscreen and the engines.

Despite her usually calm, controlled attitude—although she admitted freely that other people may find her hard to get along with, she liked to think that she could remain professional when the need arose—Vala couldn't help but swear under her breath.

If that 'Puddle Jumper'- or whatever it was called by the Ori and their followers; she'd gathered that the ship had just been given that name by the military commander of Atlantis—wasn't the equivalent of a royal yacht for the so-called 'Orici' who was the new leader of the invasion of the
Milky Way- she refused to think of that… thing… as her daughter- she would be very surprised.

"Uh, Teal'c?" she said, glancing anxiously over at her Jaffa ally where he sat close to her. "I think we have a slight problem…"

"If you refer to the approaching Puddle Jumper, I have already noticed it, Vala Mal Doran," Teal'c replied, his hands continuing to fly over the controls of the satellite defences in front of him as he spoke. "I am endeavouring to target it, but the systems appear incapable of maintaining a lock of any kind. I would venture a guess that the so-called 'Orici' encountered by you and Daniel Jackson is on board, as I cannot conclude of another explanation as to this inability to maintain a connection that would also account for the unnecessarily elaborate decoration on the ship itself."

"I thought as much…" Vala replied, her voice low as she turned her attention back to the satellite controls before her. "Leave it, Teal'c; this ship is mine."

As far as Vala was concerned, it was time to see just what this thing could really do…

Just as she was about to fire her first shots at the Jumper, Vala suddenly felt something grab her shoulders and yank her out of the chair, causing the satellite she had just been operating to shut down; she vaguely registered that Teal'c had just been yanked out of his seat as well, but, as far as she was concerned, the more immediate matter right now was in the why that had just taken place.

Standing up as rapidly as possible, Vala turned around to look at the person who'd just pulled her out of the chair. She opened her mouth in an attempt to give him a piece of her mind, but no sooner had she done so than the man held up a hand to stop her and began speaking himself.

"Sorry about this, but we really don't have the time to wait; you and the Jaffa must leave now," he said, looking anxiously between her and Teal'c as he spoke, one hand anxiously fiddling with the gem he wore around his neck. "We just received a signal from the main building; your friends have finished with the memory chairs and will be ready to depart soon. You all need to get going as soon as possible; our escape measure will be activated soon, and you cannot be here when that happens!"

Vala was prepared to protest- she wanted to see what she could do about hitting that stupid Puddle Jumper before it could reach the planet, rather than have to get out now- but then Teal'c grabbed her arm and began to run, leaving her with little choice but to follow him.

"HEY!" she yelled, in an attempt to put up at least some form of resistance to her Jaffa teammate's current attempts to drag her away. "What are you doing? We had them-!"

"Vala Mal Doran, you are not foolish; you know as well as I do that we did not 'have them', nor were we likely to achieve such a goal in the foreseeable future," Teal'c said, glaring back at her as they exited the building and began to hurry down the street. "You know as well as I do that we did not 'have' the Ori Battlecruiser, nor are we going to achieve anything by remaining there other than continuing to buy time. If Daniel Jackson and Colonel Carter are indeed finished in those chairs, we have no choice but to depart this world and return to Stargate Command."

Noting Vala's anger as she looked back at him, he shook his head in an attempted reassuring manner. "I acknowledge that you wish to kill the Orici- if that is indeed who is within the Puddle Jumper we witnessed before we were forced to depart- but it is not advisable to focus on desires and forget your responsibilities to others. I made that mistake once, and, were it not for the efforts of Daniel Jackson and Colonel Carter, I would have lost my life through my own need to achieve revenge."
He glared at Vala in a fixed manner. "You can either allow yourself to give into a desire for revenge that may accomplish nothing, or you can depart now and take a chance that we shall soon learn something that will enable us to defeat the Ori with less casualties."

Vala didn't reply to that comment.

She didn't need to; Teal'c had made a valid point, and she couldn't even try to deny it without being a liar to herself. She may have made lying pretty much a profession, but she was the only person she'd never lied to in her life (Not deliberately, anyway) and she wasn't about to start doing so now.

Of course, she refused to give Teal'c the satisfaction of knowing that he'd gotten through to her; she just nodded in a resigned manner and continued to run, as though she just couldn't spare the time to come up with a convincing argument right now.

As Daniel's eyes blinked open, for a moment he was uncertain where, exactly, he was. Where had he wanted to go to avoid seeing Sam forget the time they had spent together again…?

Then he remembered that, in reality, this was some years after that incident, and it was simply that he and Sam had only just now been allowed to remember what had taken place all that time ago.

And speaking of which…

Glancing over at the 'table' beside him, Daniel smiled softly at Sam as she looked back at him, her eyes unable to conceal the pain that she had only just been allowed to remember…

The pain of a mother having to give up a child, coupled with the pain of knowing that she would have to forget what might have been her only chance to be with the man she loved.

But, at the same time, there was something there now, as Daniel looked at Sam and she looked back at him, that almost seemed as though it had always been there, unacknowledged by both but present all the same…

Love.

The love that Sam and Daniel both felt for the person lying opposite them, the person with whom they had defied all the odds to conceive a child that could only be described as a miracle, and consummate their passion for each other when all hope of doing so had seemed to be lost. Even if they had only managed to share it in one meeting, in that meeting, they shared a moment that they had never imagined they could experience, giving them both something that so few people apart from the Ascended ever actually managed to experience; the feeling of being one with their partner, rather than just two separate entities.

For a moment there was silence as the two of them looked at each other, each one trying to find the words to talk about what had just taken place, but then the sound of a door opening broke the silence and drew their attention away from the person they loved, forcing them to push that conversation aside until a later date.

"Uh… you guys done in there?" Mitchell's voice said, sounding slightly uncertain as his footsteps became clearer in the room; he evidently wasn't sure if his coming in now would be interrupting anything important or something like that. "Just, things are getting pretty ugly out there, and we should really consider getting going…"

Exchanging a final glance, mentally promising the other that they would discuss what they had just discovered at some later time, Sam and Daniel both sat up in the chairs and looked at Mitchell,
who was standing at the door of the room.

"No worries, Cam; we're finished here anyway," Daniel said, as the two of them stood up and walked over to join the latest 'commander' of SG-1 (Even if it was more of a title than anything else; these days, more than it had been in the past, SG-1 was more of a group of friends than a simple team).

"Ah," Mitchell said, looking awkwardly between his two teammates, his face looking like he was torn between his natural curiosity and his equally natural politeness; he was clearly uncertain as to whether he should ask them what they'd actually remembered, or just leave it their little secret in case they didn't want to actually discuss it with anybody.

A brief glance at the other was all that Sam and Daniel needed to do to come to an agreement; their friends might as well know some of the details about the events that had resulted in Liam's existence, even if the more… specific details… would remain strictly between them.

"It turns out that Daniel visited me while he was ascended and Colonel O'Neill was being held captive by Ba'al, and… well, one thing led to another, and, when the Colonel was back about a week later, I spent the day away and discovered that I was pregnant with Liam," Sam explained, as the three of them headed for the 'lift' that had taken them up to this floor in the first place. As Mitchell didn't direct them somewhere else, Sam assumed that this was the way to wherever Liam, Teal'c and Vala had gone as well.

"Ah," Mitchell said, as the three of them stepped into the lift and he pushed a control that started their descent. "And he ended up here because…"

"Oma- the Ancient who served as my main 'mentor' for the two occasions when I was Ascended- told us that she had to take our child away to protect him from the Others," Daniel explained, as the lift rapidly began to take them down to a lower level of the tower. "Apparently, Liam's meant to play some important part in the war against the Ori- at least, Sam and I assume that's what she was referring to when she talked about; all she told us was that something was coming that Liam would be needed for- and so, when he was… conceived… she had to take him away and hide him here in case the other Ascended beings tried to take him away because his creation might have counted as 'interference with the human world'."

"Ah," Mitchell said again, nodding in a thoughtful manner as he briefly studied his surroundings before looking back at his teammates. "So… essentially, Liam's meant to be… a counterpart to that 'Adria' chick who's in charge of the invasion these days?"

Sam seemed about to nod, but shook her head uncertainly before she could finish it.

"I… we don't know for sure if that's what he's meant to be, Cam," she said, looking back at her commanding officer apologetically. "All Oma said was that Liam would be… 'necessary'… if we were to succeed in defeating the Ori; she didn't give us much more than that. It could just be as you said- he's meant to act as a counterpart to Adria- but we can't actually know for sure either way."

Mitchell could only shrug slightly at that; it may be more than slightly annoying that they didn't know for certain what Oma had intended when she protected Liam, but, from what Mitchell had seen, the kid was more than tough enough to make an impact in a fight despite being only four/ten/however you wanted to judge his age (Chronological or physical? It was a good question; as far as Mitchell could see Liam acted a bit older than either, although there were still moments when he seemed like an average child of his physical age, at least).

"Well, it's more than we had before," he said to his friends as the lift stopped. As the door opened,
he smiled slightly as he took in the sight before him; Liam, Daanar and the others were still standing around the machine they'd been at when he left, but, this time around, Liam looked a lot more relaxed, apparently generating the 'power supply' for… whatever it was that the machine in the middle of the room was supposed to do… with only one hand, looking back at the door as though waiting for someone.

Of course, the identity of the person- or rather, persons- the boy had been waiting for wasn't hard to guess; the broad grin on his face as Sam and Daniel stepped into the room made it clear that he'd been waiting for his parents to finish upstairs.

"Hi Mom; hi Dad," he said, grinning at them with a broad smile as he lowered the hand he'd been holding in front of him and walked over to them. "So… everything OK?"

"Yeah… it's fine," Sam said, crouching down to look her son in the eyes with a smile on her face. "We know what happened at your… conception, Liam."

"Really?" Liam said, looking at them with a suddenly anxious expression. "Uh… Aunt Oma was telling the truth, right? You know, you didn't want to get rid of me or anything…?"

"How could you even think that?" Daniel asked softly as he crouched down beside Sam to look at Liam, an almost awed smile spreading over his face as he placed a hand on Liam's shoulder. "Sam and I… we wanted you to stay more than anything, Liam; I promise you that. But Oma told us that… well, the Others… would've wanted me to exist in an obvious manner because it would have been screwing with their stupid rules of neutrality?" Liam said, shaking his head slightly as he looked up at the ceiling as though looking at the Ancients. "You know, I may have access to their knowledge, but I will never understand those guys; all that power and all they do is sit around and watch as all this stuff happens down here."

Noting Sam and Daniel's suddenly anxious expressions, Liam smiled reassuringly. "I don't actually use it; it's… well, Aunt Oma told me it's 'locked in my subconscious' or something like that."

"You have access to the Ancient knowledge?" Sam said, staring in surprise at her son. "How?"

Liam shrugged slightly as he turned to look at his mother. "Aunt Oma told me I'm a bit like a Goa'uld harcess; I was pretty much born with all that stuff in my head."

Noting Sam and Daniel's suddenly anxious expressions, Liam smiled reassuringly. "I don't actually use it; it's… well, Aunt Oma told me it's 'locked in my subconscious' or something like that."

"Is that why you sometimes… well, seem a bit older than you actually look?" Daniel put in, looking curiously at his son. "You just… well, you act a bit mature than most kids your age that I've met."

Liam shrugged. "Maybe; with all these powers available to me, I never actually stopped to think about what was normal for a kid my age, to be honest," he said, as he looked at his father before he smiled slightly. "Anyway, with all this done, shall we go?"

"Daanar?" Sam said, walking around the machine to look at the man who had taken responsibility for their son when she and Daniel could not. She noticed anxiously that he was shaking slightly, fine trickles of sweat running down the sides of his face as he held his gem in front of him, white energy pouring from it, and he looked slightly unsteady on his feet, as though he had taken a bad
beating and was forcing himself to keep walking. "What do you mean, 'time is running out'?'"

Daanar simply smiled apologetically at Sam as he continued to focus his energy into the dish before him.

"I cannot tell you… there is not enough time," he said, shaking his head apologetically as he looked past her to stare at Daniel. "Daniel… in my pocket… take the tablet that you find there…"

Staring curiously at Daanar, Daniel did as he was told and, reaching into Daanar's right pocket, pulled out a small stone tablet, about the size of a conventional notepad, covered in various scrawls of Ancient. The tablet had evidently been kept in remarkably good condition, but Daniel couldn't see anything about it that particularly merited such attention in the first place.

"What's this?" he asked, looking curiously at the man who had raised his son for the last four years. Even as a part of him felt like he wanted to resent the fact that this man had been there for his son when he himself couldn't have been, Daniel could respect that Daanar had done a good job of it, based on what he'd seen of Liam in the time the child had spent with him and the others back on Earth.

For that, if nothing else, Daniel would always be grateful to the man standing before him.

"It shall tell you… what you need…." Daanar gasped, as he continued to generate the energy that was absorbed by the device in the centre of the room. "Now… you must go… Teal'c and Vala are already on their way… the chairs sent out a signal… to the facility they are in when you finished… you must run…!"

Even amid the shaking and the violence around them, the three members of SG-1 took what might be their last chance to look at the man who had raised the child standing beside them when none of them could have done it…

Then the moment passed and the four of them ran back to the life, leaving Daanar to smile briefly in their direction before turning back to the machine before him.

*Goodbye, Liam Carter Jackson…* he thought to himself, as his thoughts turned to the boy who had become practically a son to him over the last few years. *And good luck with whatever path life takes you on.*

Shaking that thought off, Daanar turned his attention back to the matter before him, continuing to focus energy into the machine in front of him, praying that the process would complete itself only after SG-1 had departed the planet, but definitely before the Ori battlecruiser managed to get lucky and hit this specific building…
The Wormhole Safedock

As soon as they had reached the streets, Mitchell knew for a fact that they were running out of time at an increasingly rapid rate. He may not have much experience with those Ori ships attacking actual [planets](#) what he'd seen of their battlecruisers attacking other ships that were both shielded and capable of fighting [back](#) in the Battle of P3Y-229 wasn't exactly the same as seeing them shooting at undefended (Or at least, not [directly](#) defended) cities- but, given the increasing amounts of smoke, not to mention the more-than-slight glow of fire around them, he was prepared to bet that this world didn't have much longer until the Ori were finished with it.

"Hey everyone!" a voice said from off to the side, prompting a relieved glance between the others. The speaker was none other was Vala, closely followed by Teal'c as the two of them ran down a street, Vala smiling broadly. Mitchell noted that even Teal'c actually looked uncommonly cheerful; evidently, regardless of whether or not they'd managed to accomplish something, they had enjoyed their brief chance to strike back at the Ori.

"Have a good time?" Mitchell asked, grinning slightly as he looked at the two alien members of SG-1. If the situation had been better- and it hadn't been Teal'c who was one of the people involved- he might have joked about them having a good time [together](#), but, given that they were facing a potential time limit- coupled with the fact that he really didn't want to get on Teal'c's nerves when they were facing the significant changes Liam had already brought into their lives- he decided not to and focus on the matter at hand.

"That is definitely accurate," Vala said, grinning at her associates as she jerked her thumb back at a building behind them. "Trust me, you only [think](#) you know how good Goa'uld technology can be; until you've seen those defence satellites of theirs, you can have [no](#) idea what they're really capable of!"

For a moment, Daniel's expression darkened, as though at a bad memory of some kind, but then he shook it off and jerked his head towards the entrance to the city.

"Look, as fascinating as all this is, we [really](#) need to get moving right now," he said, as he looked anxiously at the gates behind him as the buildings shook again.

"I agree, Dad," Liam said, looking anxiously at his father before a small smile crossed his face. "Race you?"

For a moment, Daniel looked at Liam in surprise, but then shook his head and smiled.

"You sure you can run in that thing?" he asked, indicating the robe that Liam was wearing; he and Sam had thought about getting Liam some other clothes, but, given that they still had a lot of questions to ask about how he was even there in the first place, they'd decided to find out more about him first and worry about getting him better clothes later.

Liam just smiled back. "Trust me, Dad; I can move like the wind when I want to," he said, as he looked over at Sam. "What do you say, Mom; care to join me and Dad?"

Despite Sam's momentary uncertainty as Liam initially spoke- like Daniel, she evidently still wasn't sure about thinking of herself as a [parent](#) but she swiftly shook it off and smiled back at her new-found son.

She and Daniel may have a lot to talk about when they got back to Earth, but, for the moment,
she'd welcome the chance to have a little fun with her new family, free from the cares of the galaxy for even a few moments.

"You're on," she said, before she and Daniel broke out into a run for the gate to the city, Liam following on behind them with a wild whoop of joy.

Looking after their teammates, Mitchell glanced over at Vala and Teal'c with a small smile on his face.

"Make a cute family, don't they?" he said, indicating the three figures before them as Daniel reached the gate and ran through it, Liam and Sam close behind him. "Always knew they were close, of course, but, somehow, I never expected it to be quite like this…"

"Indeed," Teal'c said, nodding in agreement at Mitchell as he studied his friends with a small smile on his face. Even knowing that there was still an Ori battlecruiser above them could do little to dull the Jaffa's good mood in this moment, as he watched two of his oldest and most trusted friends and allies enjoying time with the son they'd never expected to have. "It is a welcome sight to see; it has been a long time since I have seen Daniel Jackson and Colonel Carter to be this happy."

The faint smile that had crossed Teal'c's face faded slightly as he glanced up at the sky, energy blasts from the Ori ship above them continuing to strike the city. "I only regret that we have been unable to discover Liam Jackson at a less… uncertain time in our history."

"Yes, yes, we're all very happy to have Samantha and Daniel's long-lost love child drop in on us even as we're annoyed that it was during this invasion; can we just leave this place now?" Vala asked, indicating her surroundings impatiently, a frustrated expression her face as she looked at her teammates. "We do still have an Ori ship above us, you know!"

Sighing slightly at their teammate's attitude- Teal'c supposed, on reflection, it was expecting too much for Vala to totally get over her 'feelings' for the archaeologist any time soon, no matter what he had tried to say to her earlier- Mitchell and Teal'c turned to look at each, dismissing their earlier thoughts of Vala as another thought crossed their minds.

"Race you?" Mitchell asked, voicing the thought on both their minds as he indicated the gates.

"Indeed," Teal'c said, allowing himself a small smile at the thought of the race before he glanced back at Vala. "Do you believe that you can keep up with the two of us, Vala Mal Doran?"

For a moment, Vala just looked at the two men as though wondering if they'd both suddenly been replaced by demented clones of themselves or something. After all, they were suggesting having a short, pointless race to the Stargate when they were stuck on a planet that was being attacked by the Ori…

But, on the other hand, short or not, serving any kind of point or not, it would be kind of fun to have that kind of 'contest' with her new friends.

"See you at the finish line!" she said, grinning at the two men as she began to run. Even as she began to pick up speed, however, she wasn't all that surprised when the other two soon caught up with her; she may have been more agile, but they did have longer legs and more muscle power…

Still, it was fun.

Right now, despite herself, that was enough for her friends, so it would be enough for her.
As Adria approached the planet's surface, she frowned slightly as she felt something… tugging, was the only term she could think of… at her mind, apparently focused on a specific location on the planet. It felt slightly like the feeling she got when she was contacted by her 'fathers' (She generally thought of all Ori as her fathers, as she had never been blessed with the privilege of specifically meeting the Ori who had impregnated her mother- but it was simultaneously mixed with the 'edge' she had sensed when in the presence of Daniel Jackson. She might have been prepared to dismiss it as simply the Alterean technology they had on the planet setting off a 'danger' sense that her fathers had given to alert her to the presence of their evil counterparts, but this feeling was too focused for it to be the technology.

There was definitely something down there that was connected to the Others who would deny them the right to spread the word of Origin through this galaxy, beyond the simple technology.

Despite her own power, Adria couldn't contain a brief stab of fear at the thought of what might await her down there Unconsciously, with no bidding from her mind, she recalled a warning that her fathers had given her along with their knowledge; a warning of the one being in the galaxy who might actually be more powerful than even her.

The Alteraci; the One Who Would Deceive…

Even in her mind, Adria hated to think of the name.

The counterpart to her own existence, a being created by the Others to continue to spread their lies and claims of neutrality throughout the galaxy, rather than take the active hand they should take.

They were fools.

She would take great pleasure, if she ever had the chance, to kill the Alteraci with her bare hands to end his lies.

Shaking off her initial concerns, however, Adria continued down towards the planet, her fists clenched as she stared at the ever-growing landscape spread out before her.

As soon as she reached that planet, she was going to track the source of this annoying 'pressure' on her mind, and, as soon as she had found it, she would take personal steps to eliminate it, rather than take the chance that the abomination might find some way to escape the attack that was currently under way.

Such an event could not be allowed to take place; as the Orici, it was Adria's sworn duty to defeat the Alteraci before it could spread its blasphemy through the universe…

Even as Adria turned her attention to the planet, however, she realised two details that prompted a great deal of concern.

Firstly, that she could no longer detect the presence that had so concerned her earlier- which, given the likely powers such an abomination would seek to gather to itself, would suggest that he had managed to escape from the planet before she could catch up to him.

Secondly, that there was suddenly a worryingly large amount of energy being generated from a particular point on the planet, focusing towards a piece of technology that Adria could have identified in a matter of moments under any circumstances.

The device the humans of this galaxy commonly called the Stargate.

That realisation was all Adria needed to know to encourage her to turn around, positioning her ship
so that she was facing the open sky once more, and start to head back towards her personal battlecruiser.

No matter how many other technological discoveries were made, the Stargates remained one of the most powerful pieces of technology known to even the Ori. If something was feeding this much power into the 'Stargate', Adria knew for a fact that it would not be a good thing for her forces. If she didn't manage to get them out of the way soon enough...

She wouldn't think of that.

It had been bad enough to lose just one battlecruiser and access to the Supergate; she wouldn't even begin to think about what might happen to her fathers' status among their worshippers if another ship was lost.

She had to make it…

When he and Vala finally managed to reach the Stargate- only a few moments behind Teal'c Mitchell noted with pride; he was definitely in better shape than he sometimes thought- Mitchell wasn't surprise to see that the Jackson Three (Even if Sam wasn't an official Jackson yet, he was already starting to think of her, Liam and Daniel as a complete family) had already finished dialling the wormhole that would get them back to Earth. That kind of thing had become so much a part of his life since joining SG-1- one or the other of them dialling the wormhole while the others held off danger- that he sometimes didn't even worry about it happening any more.

No, what really surprised him was that the ring with the chevrons on it was still spinning, as though it was trying to get a connection even with the wormhole dialled and the connection established.

"Uh…" he said, looking uncertainly at Sam and Daniel as he indicated the Stargate. "Is it meant to do that?"

"Oh, the ring still spinning?" Liam put in, smiling slightly at Mitchell. "That's just the device Daanar and the others are using, Uncle Cam; don't worry about it. Trust me, I'm a Jackson."

If the situation had been less serious, Mitchell might have made a joke (Albeit an incredibly bad one, he would have been the first to admit) about Liam, Sam and Daniel being the only Jacksons he'd trust after the Michael Jackson Trial thing a couple of years back, but, given that he was about to dive through a Stargate that still seemed to be dialling, he'd prefer to focus more on the matter at hand rather than make bad puns.

"Yeah, I get that, but I'd still appreciate some information about that," Mitchell said, as he looked over at Sam. "Any ideas about the why of it, Sam?"

Sam shook her head uncertainly. "Trust me; I'm as confused as you are, Cam," she said, before looking over at her son and holding up a hand to stop whatever he'd been about to say. "It's not that I don't trust you when you say you know what's going to happen, Liam; it's just that… well, this goes against practically everything I thought I knew about wormhole physics…"

Liam sighed slightly as he looked pleadingly at his mother.

"Come on, Mom; I know what Daanar and the others are doing, and it's not dangerous!" he said, taking her hand as he gentled tugged her towards the still-active Stargate. "All the 'gate's doing is gathering energy until it's got the power to do what Daanar and the others need it to do; we can go through and get back to Earth."
Turning around to look at her, Liam fixed Sam with a gaze that she was absolutely sure he must have inherited from Daniel; it reminded her all too strongly of the look that Daniel often had that left pretty much every woman in the SGC falling over themselves to do what he'd asked them to do.

In some ways, however, this look was more effective than Daniel's version could ever have been; not only was it evidently done intentionally, resulting in it being even more effective than when Daniel just did it by accident…

But there was also the fact that, when he looked at her like that, Sam could see the resemblance between her, Daniel, and this boy who she was already coming to love as though she'd been there for him for his entire life, rather than just the past few hours.

"Please, Mom," Liam said, clasping both hands before him in a pleading gesture. "Just trust me on this; I know what's going on, and we'll be fine."

Sam sighed in a mockingly self-criticising manner as she looked at her son.

How could she say no to a look like that?

Taking a deep breath, Sam reached out and took Liam's smaller hand in hers, smiling down at her son before she looked over at Daniel.

"Shall we?" she asked.

Daniel didn't answer her with words; he just reached out, took Liam's other hand, and inclined his head slightly towards the Stargate with a small smile before he looked back at the other members of SG-1.

"Come on, then!" he said, indicating the Stargate with his other hand, his smile becoming wider as he looked briefly down at his son once again. "Last one back on Earth has to pay for dinner!"

"Oh no you don't!" Mitchell said, an identical grin spreading across his face as he hurried towards the Stargate, only crossing the event horizon mere moments after Daniel and Sam had dashed through it with Liam.

In the brief moment before they both dived through the Stargate to safety, Teal'c and Vala turned back to look at the city behind them, several of its buildings now blazing merrily from the damage delivered by the Ori battlecruiser's weapons.

They had made an incredible discovery here.

All they could do now was hope that what the people here had told them would prove to be enough in the continuing war against the Ori.

"Goodbye," Teal'c said under his breath as he looked at the city before him, regretting that he could not save them even as he was grateful for all that they had given him and his allies…

Then he and Vala turned around and ran through the Stargate- Teal'c just beating Vala through the event horizon- leaving the planet that had raised Liam Carter Jackson behind, to meet whatever fate would befall it.

In one of the few towers still left standing in the city, Daanar smiled gratefully, as though at some signal only he could sense, and nodded at the other men who were generating energy into the
"They're gone…" he gasped, as he stared at the 'gem' he still held in his hands. He'd been pouring energy into the machine for the last few minutes, trying to keep it in standby until all six members of SG-1 had managed to retreat through the Stargate, but he doubted he could have managed it for much longer.

Now, however, there was no longer any need for him to keep the energy contained.

It was time for him to give the crucial command.

"Activate the Wormhole Safedock!" he yelled at his friends. Instantly, the men in the room poured one last burst of energy into the machine, their eyes clenched shut as they poured all their concentration into the gems they held in their hands…

And, with that action, a brilliant burst of light emitted from the machine in the centre of the room, and everything began to change.

From space, an outside observer would have found it hard to believe the incredible events that were taking place before them, but it would nevertheless have been a sight well worth seeing. As the Ori battlecruiser hovered above the planet, continuing to bombard it with missiles and lasers, numerous wedge-shaped modules- much like the ones the Ori had used to create their own Supergate, except for the fact that they were slightly larger and there were more of them- flew up from the planet, moving into a position around the planet that they had come from.

As the crew of the Ori ship watched in confusion, the various modules began to gather together in a vast, circular formation. As energy bolts activated in one module to connect it to the next, the end result of the modules linking became ever more apparent, as more and more modules appeared and connected up.

It wasn't just another Supergate, like the kind that had been used by the Ori to send their battlecruisers into the Milky Way; the conventional Supergate would have been completed with less than a tenth of the modules that had already come through. This one was far larger, and it hadn't even finished forming itself yet.

At this point, the crew seemed to decide that this was no longer the best location to be, but it was too late. Even as the Ori ship stopped firing and began to turn around to try and escape the wormhole, it was apparent to the crew, as well as to any outside observers, that they wouldn't manage to complete the turn before the 'Uber-Supergate' was completed. What the Ori ships possessed in strength and firepower they lacked in speed and manoeuvrability, and right now it was clear that it was moving far too slowly to get out of danger's way.

Even as the ship tried to get away from the 'Uber-Supergate' before it was completed, the modules that formed the massive gate almost seemed to be increasing in speed, as more and more of them flew up, linking up with the earlier modules as the 'Uber-Supergate' became larger and larger at a faster rate than even the Ori Supergate had 'grown' when it had first been activated in the Milky Way galaxy.

The Ori battlecruiser had just reached a position where it could get out of harm's way when the 'Uber-Supergate' activated, expelling the unstable energy of the wormhole in the familiar 'kawoosh'- the only difference, of course, being that this particular 'kawoosh' released a burst of energy that could have cracked a planet. The Ori battlecruiser didn't even stand a chance; the entire ship was consumed by the energy expelled by the 'kawoosh', leaving only the faintest traces of the
ship that had once been there as the energy vortex faded.

However, that was not the end of the incredible sight. Even as the 'Uber-Supergate' began to stabilise, it turned-literally turned a complete one hundred and eighty degrees-until it was facing the planet that had triggered its existence. At various points along its circumference, small 'rockets' activated, sending the 'Uber-Supergate' moving forward until it made contact with the planet. At a speed that was remarkable even to people used to thinking in faster-than-light terms, the 'Uber-Supergate' moved onward to encircle the planet, spreading rapidly over the landmasses and oceans that comprised the home of one of the last Ancient-related civilizations in the galaxy. Barely a few minutes after the 'Uber-Supergate' had activated, it had made its way along the entire planet, leaving practically no trace that there had ever been a planet or an Ori battlecruiser there.

Then, as rapidly as it had appeared, the 'Uber-Stargate' collapsed back in on itself, the various modules breaking apart and flying in towards the centre, until only a regularly-sized Stargate was left where the planet had once been, drifting aimlessly in space, its DHD drifting beside it.

Apart from that, the only other sign that there had ever been anything there was the small shape of a gold-and-grey 'Puddle Jumper', flying rapidly away from the planet while, inside, its pilot cursed in rage and horror at the events of the last few minutes.

HOW?!! Adria asked herself, her mind constantly replaying the events that had just taken place, trying to understand what had just happened practically in front of her eyes. HOW could those unenlightened blasphemers have done something like that

She had just witnessed something that defied everything she thought she knew about her fathers and the Others! The Others always refused to get involved in the affairs of the world, and yet what other explanation could there be for a single planet managing to activate a Supergate for any length of time without the use of a black hole?

Admittedly, even her fathers may have had trouble generating the energy that would be required for something of that size to actually work, but the fact remained that they could have done it!

It could only have been the Others who'd provided the energy to activate that… monstrosity that had just destroyed her followers.

Adria growled low in her throat as she urged her 'Puddle Jumper' onwards, determined to reach the nearest planet with a viable Stargate on it as soon as possible.

She had to make contact with the remaining two battlecruisers as soon as possible and work out a suitable retaliation; this… blasphemy… against the Ori by the Others would not be tolerated for long.

She would take great pleasure in ensuring that the people responsible for what had just taken place paid dearly for their crimes.

And if she could discover the Alteraci in the process…

Despite what she had just gone through, Adria could still allow herself a small grin.

She may have failed her fathers for the moment, but once she got her hands on the Alteraci, she would more than make up for today's debacle.
As soon as Teal'c and Vala were through the Stargate, Daniel had turned to look at where Sergeant Harriman sat in the control room, looking anxiously at SG-1.

"Close the iris!" he yelled at the man sitting there, indicating the Stargate behind him; he had no sure way of knowing exactly what Daanar and his fellows were planning to do to escape the attacking Ori battlecruiser, but he was pretty sure that it would be wisest to prevent any after-effects from reaching them until the wormhole had shut down.

As soon as the metal shield had closed on the wormhole, a voice sounded from the control room that Daniel had, on some level, been expecting to be there.

"So," General Landry said, looking at his flagship team with a look that somehow combined fondness with exasperation, "judging by the rather rushed way you came back through the 'gate, shall I take it things didn't go smoothly?"

"You could say that, General Landry," Liam said, looking brightly up at the window that separated the Gateroom from the control room. "Don't worry, though; Daanar and the others dealt have with it, and they're safe now."

"Ah," Landry said, nodding in a slightly bemused manner at Liam's words before turning his attention to the others. "Colonel Mitchell, would you care to elaborate on what Liam Jackson means by that?"

Mitchell shrugged in an apologetic manner as he looked up at his commanding officer.

"Sorry, sir; you know as much as I do," he said apologetically, as he looked back at the general. "We'll tell you what we can in the briefing, OK?"

After a moment's pause for contemplation, Landry nodded in acceptance.

"Very well; briefing will take place in an hour's time," he said, before looking inquiringly at Sam and Daniel. "I assume you two will be wanting to have some time alone first?"

Despite the seriousness of what they'd only just managed to escape, Sam and Daniel felt more relieved when Landry told them that they'd have some time to talk than they'd felt when they'd found themselves back on Earth.

The problem of the Ori may still be existent- and the question of what Daanar and the others had actually done to escape that planet remained an issue- but, right now, Sam and Daniel knew only one thing for sure.

They needed to talk about what they'd just discovered- or rather, remembered- about their feelings for each other.

As Landry turned around and walked out of the control room, Daniel turned to look at Liam.

"Uh, Liam, could you just… stay with Cam and the others for a bit?" he asked, trying not to feel quite so out of his depth as he looked at the son he'd never thought he'd have. "Your mother and I… uh…"

Even as he tried to come up with a way of saying what he wanted to say without having to deal
with his son's teasing, Daniel couldn't help but reflect to himself that, if he hadn't felt so awkward about Liam's presence, he might have found the current somewhat amusing. He'd spent so much time wondering what he'd be like as a father, trying to make sure that he wouldn't make the mistakes some of his foster parents had done, and now that he was actually in that position, he wasn't entirely sure how to behave.

Of course, he wasn't exactly in the usual position of a first-time father- if nothing else, his child was physically ten and chronologically four without Daniel having had the chance to be involved in any of the intervening stages of his son's development, and he hadn't even remembered the conception until barely even an hour ago- but he still felt like he should have been a bit better at this kind of thing…

Thankfully, Liam seemed to understand why his father was asking him.

"Sure thing, Dad," he said, giving Daniel a brief thumbs-up as he grinned at him and Sam. "After all, you two probably have a bit of catching-up to do… in every sense of the word…"

"Liam…" Sam said, glaring mockingly at her son even as she smiled slightly; in some ways, his behaviour reminded her of the times she'd teased her brother Mark about having a girlfriend over when she was younger.

"Just joking, Mom; I know you're not going to do anything too inappropriate," Liam added, grinning over at his mother before looking back at Mitchell. "C'mon, Uncle Cam; can we just get out of here already? There's got to be something interesting to play on the computers in this place, right?"

"Uh… sure thing, Liam," Mitchell said, looking bemusedly over at Teal'c and Vala as Liam grabbed his hand and began to practically drag him out of the gateroom. The other two exchanged glances, smiled slightly, and then followed Mitchell and Liam out of the gateroom. As the doors closed behind their teammates, Sam and Daniel were left standing in the gateroom, staring uncertainly at each other.

"Uh… your office or mine?" Daniel asked after a moment's pause, looking at Sam with an awkward expression on his face.

Of course, Sam couldn't exactly blame him for feeling awkward about how to deal with this drastic change in their relationships; she wasn't exactly sure how to handle this kind of situation herself. After all the times she'd entertained thoughts about asking Daniel out, suddenly they both had a ten-year-old son with access to most of the knowledge and powers of the Ancients themselves… and they'd not only totally missed out on the early parts of his life, they now (apparently) had to depend on him to fight the current war against the Ori.

There wasn't even an 'instruction manual' for normal parents; this was definitely going to be far harder to deal with.

"Yours, I think," she said after a few moments in silent thought. "If Liam wants to play a few games, I don't think he'd drag Cam and the others off to the room full of ancient artefacts- no offence meant, of course."

"None taken," Daniel replied, a brief smile flickering across his lips before he indicated the door. "Come on; let's go."

A few minutes later, the two of them stood in Daniel's office, amid a mass of artefacts and
language books, staring awkwardly at each other as they tried to come up with something to say.

Nothing was occurring to them so far.

In all fairness, though, what was there for them to say in a position like this?

Finally, in the end, Sam broke the silence that had settled over the room as she looked at the man she had come to love, voicing the one topic she could think of that wouldn't be likely to make either of them yell at the other.

"So… Oma named our son Liam?" she said, looking awkwardly at Daniel; it probably wasn't the best way to begin the conversation, but it was all Sam could think of right now. "Nice name, isn't it?"

"Uh… it kind of fits, really," Daniel said, looking back at her with an equally awkward expression on his face. "'Liam' does mean 'determined guardian'; given how Oma appears to have kept him secret to help us against the Ori… well, it fits."

"Yeah…" Sam said, nodding slightly in agreement, a small smile on her face before it faded as she looked at Daniel once again. "Did… did you mean what you 'showed' me?"

Daniel swallowed.

Even after all they'd gone through since joining the Stargate program, Daniel didn't think he'd ever been more afraid of the consequences of his actions than he was at this moment.

"Yeah… I meant it," he said, looking at her anxiously, hoping that she'd allow him to say everything he needed to say about the matter in question before speaking herself; if he had to stop, he wasn't sure he'd manage to summon the nerve to start again. "I… well, actually, I'd had… feelings… for you… for a while before I Ascended."

Sam blinked in surprise.

"What?" she said, looking at Daniel with a stunned expression. "You've had… feelings… for me for that long and never mentioned them?"

"Well, I wasn't actually consciously aware of them for a while before that," Daniel explained, looking awkwardly at Sam as he spoke, clearly wishing that he didn't have to be in this position. "It was… well, just little things here and there that made me realise I didn't just think of you as a friend at first. My thoughts when I saw you in that dress on Simarka, how I felt when Jolinar got into you, that time you were taken over by that entity and sent into the computer…"

He sighed briefly as he took off his glasses and pressed his fingers against the bridge of his nose, taking a couple of deep breaths as though he was trying to steady himself before he looked back up at Sam. "I can't pinpoint specifically when I started to feel something for you; all I know for sure is that, when I first saw you back on Vis Uban, when I'd lost all my memories… I felt something for you that I've never been able to really forget."

"Oh," Sam said, after a moment's pause.

What else was there to say when you learned that a man you'd thought only saw you as a friend had been hiding feelings for you for the last few years?

"Well…" she said, sighing once again as she looked at him. "I suppose I should admit that… well, I'd been thinking about asking you out before you Ascended."
Daniel's head shot up sharply at that.

"What?" he asked, staring incredulously at his friend. "But… but Jack…"

"Yeah, I know I had a crush on him at that point, but I was getting tired of having feelings for him and not actually being able to do something about them," Sam explained. "I had pretty much given up on a relationship with him at that point, and… well… God," she said, chuckling slightly as she looked up at the ceiling, "this is kind of embarrassing…"

"What is?"

The lieutenant colonel sighed as she looked at him. "Well, during the first months we were a team, I actually had feelings for you."

Daniel's eyes widened.

"E-excuse me?" he asked, staring incredulously at her. "You had a crush… on me?"

"Well, why wouldn't I?" Sam asked, smiling slightly at him. "I mean, you were this brilliant, gorgeous guy who actually understood my work and who I genuinely enjoyed spending time with. The only reason I never did anything about it was… well…"

Sam trailed off slightly at that, but she didn't need to finish; Daniel knew what she would have said.

Even if she'd actually asked him out back when she'd first had feelings for him, he probably would have turned her down out of loyalty to Sha're, so she hadn't done anything about it. Even after Sha're's death, Sam couldn't have been sure when would be the 'appropriate' time to ask him on a date, and anyway, by that point, there was the detail of her 'feelings' for Jack (Not that Daniel would ever have mentioned them to her face, of course; the situation was awkward enough without bringing whatever 'relationship' Sam may or may not have had with their old friend and commanding officer into the equation).

"And then, when I came back from Ascension, there was never a convenient time, was there?" Daniel continued after a moment's pause, looking inquiringly back at Sam as he spoke in an attempt to gauge her reaction. "I mean, what with the search for the Lost City, your brother setting you up with Pete, the war with the Replicators, and the current situation with the Ori…"

Sam nodded. "Tell me about it; there was just never a good time to have a discussion like that, was there?" she said, shaking her head as she smiled slightly, before the smile faded as reality set in. "And now… well, here we are."

"Yeah…" Daniel said, his own grin trailing off as he acknowledged Sam's point.

'Here they were' was indeed all that could be said about their current situation.

Two friends and teammates on a military team created to travel to other worlds, facing life-or-death situations every day of the week, who'd just discovered that they'd had a child for the last four years that neither of them knew about… and neither had any real idea where they could go from this point.

Finally, after a brief silence, Sam finally decided to speak.

"Well," she said, smiling slightly at Daniel as she inwardly prepared herself for what she was about to do, "it seems like we have two choices right now. Either we can do the 'sensible' thing, and leave
things as they are for the sake of the team…"

"Or," Daniel continued, slowly walking over to Sam, a slightly apprehensive look on his face as he reached out with one hand to gently touch her cheek, "we could not do the 'sensible' thing, and take a chance on something that I, for one, have wanted for the last few years?"

Sam didn't answer- at least, not with words. Instead she leaned in, a soft smile on her face, and kissed Daniel. It wasn't an overly passionate kiss- just a soft, gentle meeting of lips- but the warm feeling that spread through the two of them as their lips finally met was, as far as they were both concerned, the most incredible feeling either had experienced, second only to Liam's actual conception.

After a few moments, the two parted once more, prompting a small smile from Daniel as he looked at Sam.

"So, Colonel-Doctor Carter," he said, in a casual manner that did little to conceal the gleam of joy in his eyes, "shall I take this as meaning that you're interested in giving a long-term relationship a shot?"

Sam smiled back at him trying to conceal her instinctive pleasure at hearing his updated version of his old nickname for her; it had been a long time since he'd first called her 'Captain-Doctor' back in the early days of the SGC, but she'd always remembered it with great affection. It was the closest thing she'd ever had to a 'pet name' in her life- her father and brother occasionally calling her 'Sammy' didn't really count, and her boyfriends had mostly just called her 'Sam' or 'Samantha'- and, on some level, she'd always loved the fact that Daniel was the only person who called her that.

It may have been a somewhat antiquated attitude- and she'd have beaten up anybody else who suggested it- but, in some way, it made her feel like she'd… belonged to him, almost.

"You may indeed, Doctor Jackson," she said, a broad grin on her face as she looked back at him.

"Perfect," Daniel said, grinning back at her with an equally broad smile as he pulled something out of his pocket- Sam vaguely recognised it as the tablet Daanar had given Daniel just before they left the planet- and placed it on his desk.

Noting Sam's slightly surprised expression- she'd never seen him reject the chance to look at a tablet that could contain useful information at the earlier opportunity- Daniel smiled softly at her.

"Hey, I've got an entire department of people to study that if it's needed; I can look over that the next time we're in here if I want to," he said casually. "Right now… well, I'd like to spend some time with my son, my friends, and the woman I love."

Once again, Sam couldn't come up with the words for a proper response to that; instead she just leaned over to kiss Daniel once more, another smile spreading across her face as she stepped back.

"Come on," she said, indicating the door of his office. "Let's check with General Landry if we can have some time off, and then we'll see if we can find our son."

Clasping hands, the two of them headed out of their office and into the corridors of the base, broad grins on their faces as they reflected on what had just taken place.

The Ori may still be a threat, that tablet may still need to be translated, and the exact part that Liam was meant to play in the continuing Ori war may still remain a problem…

But, for the moment, as far as Sam and Daniel were concerned, all they wanted to do was spend
some time away from work with their son and friends.

After all the time they'd been forced to put their own desires for families above the needs of the majority, they were going to take the day off before starting to worry about the universe once again.
Studying the mission reports before him, Landry had to admit that this was definitely one of the strangest mission reports that had ever been filed by any of the Stargate teams.

Admittedly, the reports on the original encounter with that 'Oma Desala' woman had been just as strange in their own way, and those confrontations with the Replicators had definitely been more desperate encounters, but this?

Learning that two of his senior staff had conceived a child that neither of them had even remembered until now?

He knew for a fact that General Hammond had never had anything to deal with like that…

His thoughts were interrupted by a knock on the door.

"Come in," he said, glancing up from the report. The door opened, and Doctor Jackson and Colonel Carter walked into the office, standing close to each other in a manner that Landry found rather significant.

"The briefing isn't for another forty minutes, Doctor Jackson, Colonel Carter," he said, sitting back and looking casually at them. Of course, he'd already asked Mitchell for some of the more concise details of what had just taken place- he'd gathered something about a tablet and something to 'enhance' the Stargate before Liam had dragged the SG-1 commander off to play something on a computer- to save on the time the briefing might take up later, but he still liked to hold the briefing anyway in order to get it out of the way.

"Uh… we know that, sir," Colonel Carter asked, looking at him in a slightly apprehensive manner. "It's just that… well, Daniel and I were wondering, after we've given you our full briefing on what we… well, discovered about Liam while on Daanar's homeworld…"

"If you'd be able to spend some time off with your son?" Landry asked, smiling slightly at them. He couldn't exactly blame them for it; back when Carolyn had first been born, before his marriage had become strained, he'd requested as much time off as he could allow himself without putting his career in unnecessary jeopardy.

"Well… him and the rest of SG-1, yeah," Daniel said, looking uncertainly at the man he still, on some level, considered his 'new' commander despite having known him for over a year.

He supposed, in the end, it was the time factor that made him still consider Landry 'new' to the job. After all, Landry had only commanded the SGC for a year by this point, whereas General Hammond had commanded it for seven, and even Jack had been Daniel's direct commander in SG-1 for years before becoming the base's overall superior for a year.

It wasn't that Daniel didn't like Landry, he just wasn't as comfortable asking him for time off as he would have been if he'd been asking Hammond for it (Asking Jack for time off, naturally, would have been an uncomfortable experience under any circumstances; Daniel was still trying not to think too much about what would happen when Jack found out about Liam's existence).

"Well, I'd like to, Doctor Jackson, Colonel Carter, but there are other issues to consider," Landry continued, looking at them with a slightly apologetic expression. "From what Mitchell told me before he was dragged off to a computer by that son of yours, this 'Daanar' character gave you a tablet that sounds like it could be important; shouldn't you take a look at that?"
Daniel shrugged slightly at that comment, although Landry noted that he looked somewhat embarrassed about the inquiry; evidently, Doctor Jackson acknowledged his other commitments, but still genuinely wanted this chance to get to know his new son.

"Well… yeah, I know that, but I was thinking that I could have my staff make a start on that while we're away," Daniel replied, looking at Landry in a somewhat more confident manner as he continued to speak. "I mean, most of them are getting pretty fluent in Ancient these days, particularly after our discovery of Atlantis, and it couldn't hurt to give them a chance to exercise that skill."

"We're not asking for a particularly long amount of time off, sir; maybe just a day or two to get to know Liam and show him some of the sights in Colorado, something like that," Sam added, looking just as anxiously at Landry as Daniel was. "Some of our staff can continue any of the work that might need done at the moment, and we'll be back in a day or so at most."

Landry paused for a moment, a reflective expression on his face, until, finally, he smiled and nodded in approval.

"OK then; you're free to go," he said, smiling casually at the two original members of SG-1.

Allowing himself a small smile upon seeing the wider ones that split their faces after his agreement to allow them time off, Landry paused for a moment before continuing. "I presume you've already contacted your respective staff about anything that might need to be done while you're away?"

"Oh yeah; I've already got some of my best people on the tablet to see what they can find, and Sam's told Doctor Lee to continue working on that device of Merlin's," Daniel said, nodding reassuringly at his boss. "We'll look over them both ourselves tomorrow, of course, but for the moment…"

He trailed off, looking slightly awkward, but Landry smiled reassuringly at him.

"No need to explain any further, Doctor Jackson; I was in the same position myself once," he said, briefly allowing himself a moment to recall those happier moments, back when Carolyn had still been a little girl and he'd still had a relatively happy marriage, before bringing himself back to the matter at hand. "Anyway, as far as I'm concerned, you and SG-1 are on stand-down for today, but I'll expect you back tomorrow; as much as I wish I could, I can't have my premier team off-duty for too long in this current situation."

"Thank you, sir," Sam said, nodding gratefully at Landry before she turned to look at Daniel, a small smile on her face. "Well, let's go; time's a-wasting."

"Yeah…" Daniel replied, chuckling slightly as the two of them walked out of the office, Daniel's arm almost instinctively wrapping itself around Sam's waist as they walked through the door.

Despite himself, Landry smiled.

Even amid the current Ori crisis, it was good to see that the team that remained humanity's best hope of success against this new danger still retained their humanity.

Of course, he knew that he'd have to contact somebody back at Homeworld Security about this new turn of events, but given that the organisation was currently run by an old friend of the couple standing before him- coupled with the fact that the team had been closer than regulations should allow for years up to this point and nothing serious had happened yet- Landry was reasonably sure that everything would work out in their favour.
"Looks like George and I won that little bet with Hayes," he thought to himself casually, as he reached over and picked up a phone, before dialling one of the two numbers he'd grown used to calling when it came to matters concerning SG-1.

"Hello, George?" he said, smiling slightly as he heard the voice of the SGC's original commander on the other end of the line. "Just thought you might want to hear about the aftermath of SG-1's recent mission…"

A few minutes later, as the two scientists rounded the corner of the corridor that led to Sam's lab, neither Sam or Daniel were surprised to hear the faint sounds of a joking argument that seemed to be taking place between their son and one of their friends; somehow, they'd gathered that Liam would have an affectionately teasing attitude towards his friends.

"…I'm telling ya, there is no way you could have done that well that fast!" Mitchell's voice said, his tone sounding initially angry but with an evidently amused edge to it. "It took me ages to get through that game with that kind of score, and you just go and top it a few minutes after even learning this thing existed?"

"I've just got good reflexes, Uncle Cam; is that a crime?" Liam's voice replied; his words were pleading, but his tone of voice made it clear that he was enjoying the chance to tease his newfound 'uncle'. "You know, I did spend the last couple of years of my life being kept in good shape by Daanar; I think I'm entitled to be pretty good at something that just involves tapping buttons."

"Having fun?" Sam asked, as she and Daniel stepped into the office, grinning slightly at the sight before them; Mitchell and Liam were crouched before her computer, a racing game displayed on the screen before them, Teal'c standing off to the side as Vala slouched in a chair, staring casually around herself.

"Mom! Dad!" Liam said, a wide grin spreading across his face as he leapt up from the computer and ran over to hug his parents, Sam and Daniel crouching down to wrap their arms around him.

"Hey there," Mitchell said, smiling casually at his friends as he stood up, stretching slightly before his face took on an inquiring expression. "So… how's things?"

"Oh, about what you'd expect," Daniel said, as he and Sam parted from Liam and stood up, Daniel's arm around Sam's shoulders while Liam took hold of Sam's hand. "Sam and I spent a little time talking in my office, we discussed a couple of details about what we learned while linked up to that machine of Daanar's…"

"And?" Vala interjected, looking critically at Sam and Daniel. "What's the end result?"

For a moment, Sam and Daniel just looked slightly uncertain as they looked at their teammates, until, finally, Daniel smiled.

"Well," he said casually as he looked at Mitchell, "so long as you don't mind about us remaining on the team, among other things, we were going to request that the sleeping arrangements on missions be changed to accommodate new circumstances."

Mitchell blinked in surprise.

"Changing the sleeping arrangements?" he said, looking in confusion at his friends. "What do you- OH," he said, his face going from puzzlement to a broad grin as he looked at his two friends. "You mean you're…"
Sam and Daniel exchanged glances for a brief moment, then, broad smiles on their faces, turned back to look at their friends, Daniel's arm moving Sam's body closer to his as they turned to look at each other and exchanged a brief kiss.

When they parted, the two scientists were somewhat gratified to see that they'd generated a significant amount of surprise from their teammates; Vala couldn't have looked more shocked if Adria had just turned up and asked if she could just go out and spend some time with her mother rather than try to convert the galaxy, Teal'c's eyebrows were both raised for the first time since either Sam or Daniel had known him, and Mitchell seemed to be both grinning broadly and staring incredulously at them.

Finally, Liam broke the silence.

"Finally!" he said, grinning up at his parents once more. "After everything Aunt Oma told me about you guys, I was worried this would take ages!"

Sighing slightly, Sam and Daniel exchanged rueful glances, each of them easily able to conclude that the same thought was passing through their minds; if Oma had still been around, they would definitely have wanted to find out exactly what she told their son about their relationship.

"Now that's what I'm talkin' about!" Mitchell put in, walking over to clasp Sam and Daniel's shoulders affectionately as he looked at them both, before his expression became serious once more. "You realise, of course, that this is most likely going to result in one of you having to leave the team due to professionalism risks…"

"No we won't," Sam said, her arm still wrapped around Daniel as she grinned at her old friend. "After all you went through to 'get the band back together', as you put it, I don't think you're going to let a little thing like regulations stand in the way of you keeping it together."

"Indeed," Teal'c said, nodding from off to the side. "In any case, it has long been the case that SG-1 has been less of a team of individuals and more of a group of close friends who have come together through hardship; I fail to see how such conditions could change."

For a moment, as Sam and Daniel looked at Mitchell, they wondered if he actually was going to request that one of them leave SG-1, but, in the end, he just stepped back and grinned nonchalantly at them.

"Well, if this isn't a good time to call in the favours owed to you guys by the rest of the planet- and the rest of the galaxy, come to that- I don't know what is," he said, shrugging in an equally relaxed manner as he looked at them. "Besides, as Teal'c said, SG-1 hasn't just been a team for ages; why should the team performance change just because a couple of us are a bit closer than we have been?"

Exchanging another brief glance with each other, Sam and Daniel smiled gratefully at their new commanding officer.

"Thanks, Mitchell," Daniel said, nodding at his friend. "We… well, we appreciate it, believe me."

"In any case," Sam said, smiling casually around at her friends and her newfound son, "since we've got the day off, and SG-1 doesn't have any missions scheduled, Daniel and I were thinking of showing Liam around Colorado Springs once the briefing was over, and we were wondering if you three would be interested in coming with us?"

Vala, who had remained silent up until this point, blinked in surprise.
"You three?" she said, looking in surprise at Sam. "You mean… all of us?"

"Well, why wouldn't we want you along?" Sam asked, looking casually at the other woman. "You're part of the team, aren't you? Just because you're a bit… difficult… at times, doesn't mean we wouldn't want you to come along and spend some time doing something apart from fight the Ori."

"Exactly!" Mitchell put in, grinning over at Vala as he gave her a friendly pat on the shoulder and jerked his thumb towards the door. "Come on, let's get out of here."

The subsequent briefly went relatively easily; as Mitchell had already given General Landry an explanation of the essential details about what had taken place, the briefly was mainly needed only to provide the General with the essential information he needed to provide for his superiors. With the essential information out of the way, the five members of SG-1 headed for the changing rooms, leaving Liam to wait for them to be read in Sam's lab.

"You know," Mitchell commented, glancing over at Daniel as the two of them shrugged on their shirts, "before we go anywhere, we need to get Liam some new clothes; that robe could work to get us to the shops, but that's about it."

"Yeah, I know," Daniel replied, nodding slightly as he looked over at his friend. "I guess that's the only part of the day we can actually guarantee will happen; Sam and I were thinking that we'd just get Liam a guidebook while getting him some clothes and take it from there."

"A sensible plan," Teal'c commented, nodding in approval as he pulled his customary hat on and looked over at his friends. "It is well that we allow Liam Jackson the opportunity to become acquainted with the world that must be his home now."

"Course, shouldn't be too difficult to guess what he'll want to go to see," Mitchell put, smiling casually as he picked his trousers out of his locket. "I mean, he's the child of two of the smartest guys who've probably ever lived; if he doesn't want to check out a museum or two at least during the trip I'll be very surprised."

Despite himself, Daniel smiled slightly at the 'joke'.

He had to admit, it did seem like the kind of thing he and Sam might have done when they were younger, so it wouldn't be totally outside the realm of possibility for their child to be as scientifically inclined as they were.

"Still, no pressuring him on that front, OK?" he added, looking critically at Mitchell as he spoke. "Whatever he may be as a result of his conception, he has a right to make his own decisions about his life without us forcing him into anything because it would help us; if he does anything, it has to be because he wants to do it."

"Agreed," Teal'c stated, nodding in confirmation at his friend as he put on a Hawaiian shirt. "We are not the Goa'uld, and we shall not make Liam Jackson do anything that he is not willing to do."

"Fair enough," Mitchell agreed, nodding approvingly at his male teammates as he pulled his jeans on and took his shoes out of the locker. "Well, we'll worry about stuff like that when we get back; in the meantime, we've got a day off, so I say we use it."

In the other changing room, as Sam was shrugging off her combat BDUs, she only needed to glance briefly over in Vala's direction to realise that the former thief wasn't in the best of moods
"Vala?" she said, looking curiously over at the other woman, who was making a deliberate point of not looking in Sam's direction. "Is something wrong that I should know about?"

"Oh, the usual," Vala grunted dismissively, briefly glaring back at Sam before turning back to get her clothing out the locker. "I spend all this time trying to fit into your little Stargating club, and then, just as I'm finding my niche, you show up and take away everything I've been working on."

"I'd hardly say that," Sam began.

"Oh, please; look at it!" Vala yelled, turning to look directly at the other woman for the first time since they'd discovered about Liam's existence. "Just when I was really starting to fit in last year, you showed up and I'm suddenly the 'odd girl out' once more- not that I don't get why, of course; you'd been around a lot longer than I was and I didn't really have anything I significantly gave to them at the time- but now, here I am, having spent months among the bad guys and given birth to the child of a bunch of Ascended beings, and then I go and find out that you did all of that before me?"

"It's not like I did it all deliberately, Vala," Sam retorted, as she pulled on a long-sleeved shirt and a brown leather jacket. "Daniel and I weren't even planning to have a child; it just... happened. The fact is that Liam's here, and Daniel and I are finally doing something that- as it turns out- we've both wanted for a while now, and we aren't going to change that just because it isn't 'convenient'."

Noting the slightly hurt expression on Vala's face as the other woman shrugged on her own jacket, Sam sighed and walked over to stand beside Vala, placing a reassuring hand on her shoulder as she looked at the former thief.

"Look," she said, smiling slightly at the woman she'd briefly regarded- if only on a subconscious level that she was only now acknowledging- as a rival for Daniel's affections, "just because Daniel doesn't care about you as a lover doesn't preclude him caring about you as a friend. He's changed a lot over the years, but his capacity for compassion is something that has always remained the same, and he never treats anybody as a friend unless he feels they're worth the effort to get to know. You'll never be in a relationship with him, true, but Daniel will always regard you as a friend, and that's what you need to remember."

For a moment, there was silence in the locker room, and then Vala smiled as she looked back at Sam.

"You know, Teal'c said something similar to me when we were on our way to that weapons warehouse," she said, her gaze softening slightly as she stared her fellow SG-1 member. "I guess it's time I started listening to it."

Sam smiled in return.

"Exactly," she said simply, as she headed back to the locker. "Come on; let's get changed, get out of here, and show my son the sights of Earth."
An hour or so later, the tablet Daanar had given them was in the hands of the linguistics department, who had promised to make it their top priority, and Landry already making arrangements to draw up the fake paperwork that would account for Liam's existence. Admittedly, the chosen cover story- that Liam had been the result of a brief relationship between Sam and Daniel who'd been stolen from the maternity ward some years ago- hadn't been a favourite choice of either party, but,

Regardless of their opinions over the chosen cover, the entire team was grateful that the most immediate long-term issue about Liam's existence had been sorted, and were now resolved to take advantage of their day off. Having said their goodbyes to the rest of the senior staff at the mountain, SG-1 had departed the Cheyenne Mountain complex, Sam and Daniel taking Liam in Daniel's car while Mitchell, Vala and Teal'c followed on in Mitchell's own car, heading for a shopping centre to get Liam less conspicuous clothing than his current robe.

"So, this is Earth, huh?" Liam said, smiling slightly as he sat in the back seat of the car, staring out at the landscape before him, his light brown robe looking surprisingly bright in the sunlight shining through the window on either side of him. "Nice place, really; bit less high-tech, but I always found the persistent white back there a bit… intense at times, I guess."

"Yeah, there's a lot to be said for simplicity on some occasions, isn't there?" Sam said, smiling briefly over at Daniel as she spoke. "Trust me, your father knows that better than anyone."

"Oh, you meant that year you spent on… Abydos, wasn't it?" Liam said, looking over at Daniel with a slight smile on his face before he assumed a more serious expression. "Sorry you couldn't save it, by the way; if it's any help, even though she had some serious explaining to do to the Others once that situation was all over, Aunt Oma always told me that she was proud of your resolve to stick to what you believed in."

"Really?" Sam asked, looking teasingly between Daniel and their son with a slight smile on her face. "Well, I guess some things never change, Daniel; whatever plane of existence you're on, your superiors like you even if you annoy them until they're grey."

"Oh, I don't know about that; Mitchell's still got his original hair colour after almost a year of being in charge of me," Daniel said, smiling slightly back at Sam. "I turned Jack grey within a year from the stress; if Mitchell's still actually got hair, I'd say I'm losing my touch."

Sam shrugged dismissively. "No offence to Mitchell, but after all the effort he went to trying to get on SG-1 in the first place, I doubt he'd manage to bring himself to lodge a formal complaint even if you told him he was a complete incompetent and you wouldn't obey him if he told you to breath," she said casually. "After all you've done for Earth, Cam would probably be prepared to excuse almost anything you do under his command; so long as you get the job done, he lets you just do what you want whenever you need to do it. He couldn't even get annoyed with you if he tried to, in my opinion."

"You know, I think he'd complain a bit if I did what you'd suggested there…" Daniel said, trailing off as he and Sam exchanged a slight smile once again. "But you have a point; after going to all that effort to work with you, me and Teal'c, he would probably let me get away with anything I wanted… within reason, of course."

"Too bad you'd never actually try to use that little 'edge', huh, Dad?" Liam put in from behind, as
Daniel turned a corner as they began to approach the centre of Colorado. "Just like Aunt Oma always told, me you couldn't do anything deliberately malicious if your life depended on it."

"Deliberately malicious?" Sam said, looking back at Liam with another grin before she looked back at Daniel. "If we needed any more proof he's your son, there you have it; he's using words like 'malicious' and he's technically not even four yet."

"Moooooommm..." Liam groaned, as he looked almost pleadingly at her, "can we please avoid poking fun at my age?"

"Only because we'd attract too much attention if we talked about it too much," Daniel retorted, continuing to grin at his son as they turned another corner into one of the busier shopping streets. "I, for one, do not want to explain why we're referring to you as four when you're looking like that."

"You know, that reminds me of something I've been meaning to ask you for a while," Sam asked, turning to look curiously at her son. "I assume that Oma was responsible for your accelerated aging, but... well, why did she stop? I mean, no offence, but when your father encountered Adria... well, she was nearing adulthood in a matter of hours."

"Oh, simple enough," Liam replied, looking reassuringly at his mother to convince that he didn't mind her asking the question; only a slight curl of his lip when Sam mentioned Adria showed how distasteful he found it to talk about his Ori 'counterpart'. "Aunt Oma wanted me to be old enough to fight the Ori when the time came, but she didn't want me to end up an adult without being able to be a kid first. Seeing as how she figured you weren't likely to do anything might bring the Ori down on your heads with Anubis still out there, she felt it safe to just help me along to a point where I was about... six or seven physically after about a year, I think... and then she just left me to grow normally."

He smiled slightly as he looked briefly at his hand, holding it up in front of his face as he generated a brief glow of energy, smiling slightly as he did so. "I mean, it's still a bit weird being this old this fast, but generally I tend to just ignore it, kick back, and do what I can in the time I've got."

"Ah," Daniel said, exchanging another brief glance with Sam, grateful to see the same relieved smile on her face that he knew was developing on his.

Even knowing everything that they knew about Oma, it was a relief to know that she had wanted to give Liam the chance to grow up normally, unlike the Ori who'd accelerated Adria's growth at a rate that meant she'd probably hit adulthood a week after her birth.

If nothing else, it at least reaffirmed that their current approach to any powers Liam may or may not possess- that they should give him the choice to use them in any struggle against the Ori, rather than making him do it against his will- was the correct one.

Oma hadn't treated him as a simple weapon, and Daniel and Sam would make sure that Liam wouldn't be treated that way either.

"Anyway," Daniel said after a moment's reflective silence, Liam instantly cancelling the glow around his hand as he looked expectantly up at his father. "we'd best pull in here; before we do anything else, we need to see about getting you some less distinctive clothes if we're taking you around anywhere."

"Aw, do I have to, Dad?" Liam asked, as Daniel turned the car into a nearby car park, knowing without looking back that Mitchell would follow him shortly afterwards. "This thing may look odd,
but it's *comfy*…"

"And you stick out like a sore thumb; robes aren't exactly normal clothing here," Daniel replied as he pushed the button for a ticket. "Look, you'll have final call in what we pick out, but you have to take something at least; it's going to be awkward enough explaining why you're in that."

"Any ideas on that front, by the way?" Sam asked, looking curiously over at Daniel as he began to search for a space. "I was thinking he might have lost his luggage while he was moving here and ended up in hospital for a few days with that being all they had available, but I'm not sure if there's something better we could use…"

"No, that seems fine," Daniel said, nodding in confirmation as he pulled the car into a nearby space. "Attends to the obvious details without prompting too many questions; without a better explanation for the robe, it's as good as we're like to get, really."

Liam shrugged slightly as his father stopped the car. "Well, that works, I suppose," he said, looking at his mother as Mitchell's car passed them on its search for a space. "Anyway, can we hurry up, OK? I'd like to see what this planet's actually like, you know…"

Their hands had just reached the door handles for the car when Sam and Daniel heard that comment, and, once again, they found their eyes meeting as they looked back at each other, knowing that the same thought had crossed both their minds.

Liam's eagerness to learn more about Earth reminded them so much of their own interest in other planets after going through the Stargate, it was almost uncanny proof of the idea of nature surpassing nurture on occasion.

"Well then," Sam smiled, as she looked back at Liam and indicated the door beside him, "let's get this over with; the sooner we have your clothes, the sooner we can start looking around."

About an hour later, having spent a good part of the search trying to avoid some of the more outrageous suggestions from Vala- her constant attempts to convince Liam to get a leather jacket, despite the fact that it was far too large for him, just raised a few too many questions for Sam and Daniel's liking- the team at last departed the shop, Liam now wearing jeans and a simple grey T-shirt, his other new clothes having been left in the car along with his robe. Fortunately, the staff had generally accepted Sam and Daniel's cover story to explain Liam's lack of conventional clothing, although the robe had initially attracted a few odd looks; evidently, people were puzzled as to what kind of hospital provided gowns like that.

"OK then," Mitchell said, smiling slightly at his friends as the stepped out on the street, having decided to leave the cars in the car park and stick with public transport to both give Liam a better taste of Earth and save them having to worry about finding a space, "where to now?"

"Well, I wouldn't learning a bit more about Earth history, if that helps," Liam put in, looking inquiringly up at his parents. "I mean, Aunt Oma did tell me *some* stuff about this place, but it was all pretty basic, and… well, if I'm going to keep living here…"

"Good idea," Daniel said, nodding at his son before turning to look back at Sam and the others. "So, if Liam wants to learn more about history, that's the Pioneers' museum on the list; it's a bit focused on Any other ideas?"

"Maybe a movie at the end of the day?" Mitchell added, grinning slightly as he looked back at the young man standing between his parents. "You know, some honest, straightforward, giving Liam a
bit of a taste of the culture and entertainment tastes of the world he's now on…"

"You want something with some cool fight scenes, right?" Daniel said, rolling his eyes as he looked at Mitchell. "You know, there are times when I really wonder why I put up with you…"

"Because I brought you all back together when you guys would have been prepared to let the band drift apart?" Mitchell said, smiling casually over at the archaeologist.

"Drift apart?" Liam asked, looking up at his father with a suddenly anxious expression. "You guys were splitting up?"

"No, Liam, of course we weren't," Sam said, instantly crouching briefly to talk more directly at her son. "Your father, Teal'c and I just… took an opportunity to try some things for ourselves; we would never have split up."

"Your mother's right, Liam," Daniel said, as he crouched down to look at his son as well. "She and I were still friends- that would never change- but we all thought that the main need for us to work as a team was over, and just wanted to try our hands at some individual projects, rather than always working in a team."

"Getting back to the movie idea," Sam said, looking over at Mitchell as she stood back up, "so long as you don't select anything over a PG-13, that should be fine." As something seemed to occur to her, the astrophysicist glanced over at Daniel, a small smile on her face. "Actually, I think I even know what movie we could check out… you've still got that box set you received for your birthday, right?"

"Oh, you mean the complete extended edition of the Lord of the Rings trilogy?" Daniel asked, smiling slightly at the memory. "Yeah, it's there; I've actually been working a bit on getting some kind of idea of how to speak Elvish in my free time, but it's taking a while given how hectic things have been these last few weeks."

"Uh… sorry to interrupt, but what's Lord of the Rings?" Liam asked, looking curiously up at his parents.

"Simply put, the best fantasy movie trilogy ever created," Mitchell said, smiling down at Liam before looking back at Daniel. "Perfect choice there, Jackson; not much on in the cinema at the moment, but a team movie night in would be just the thing right now."

"Ah," Liam said, before he looked back at his father. "Sorry, but Aunt Oma must have missed a few details when she was teaching me about Earth; what's a movie?"

As SG-1 began to walk towards the bus stop that would take them to the museum, Daniel chuckled slightly as he looked down at his young son.

"Liam, my boy," he said, as he reached over to place an affectionate hand on his son's shoulder, "you definitely have a lot to learn about Earth culture at the moment, but we shall be happy to answer any queries you may have about our way of life."

"Indeed," Teal'c said, nodding in agreement as he looked down at the young man. "Having been in a similar position to you when I first came to Earth, Liam Jackson, I have this one piece of advice for you; it shall not be as hard as you may believe to learn about-"

"Sorry to interrupt, but the bus is coming," Daniel said, looking apologetically over at the Jaffa and Liam. "It's probably best we save that particular conversation for when we're not on public transport; no point attracting attention by explaining stuff to Liam that should be obvious."
Liam only had time to nod before the bus stopped in front of them, the doors opening to admit the team onto the transport before it departed once more.

After a brief trip, the six of them had arrived at the Pioneer Museum, where Liam found a great deal to interest him about the immediate area, ranging from its origins as a mining and agricultural centre to its present status. Even the adult members of SG-1 found something to keep themselves interested, Sam in particular being somewhat embarrassed at the idea that she'd lived in Colorado Springs for almost a decade and never given much thought to the history of the area that she worked in on a long-term basis. Daniel, however, assured her that it was nothing to be embarrassed about- he'd never come here himself in all the years he'd been a member of SG-1- and joined her in exploring the museum with Liam.

Vala, naturally, found the various artwork there to be of particular interest- Daniel made a half-serious mental note to keep an eye on her if she ever came back here in the future; some habits might just be a bit harder to break than others- while Mitchell and Teal'c found themselves studying the information about Colorado's history as a military training facility. Apart from the occasional attempt by Vala to get a closer look at the artwork around her, the museum visit went by fairly peacefully, with Sam suggesting at the end of it that they pay a visit to some of Colorado's other major tourist spots.

It didn't take long for the selection of which tourist spots to visit to be made; Liam was mainly interested in viewing examples of Earth history, whether ancient or recent, and getting a better idea of what else was to be found on the planet. With those objectives in mind, they would visit the Manitou Cliff Dwellings- they may not be historically real, but they were still surprising accurate-, Cheyenne Mountain Zoo- thus giving Liam examples of the various animal life to be found on the planet-, and finish with a brief visit to Old Colorado City- providing Liam with a look at recent architectural history- before heading back to Daniel's house for a team movie night.

In general, the reactions to the selected destinations were varied among the other members of SG-1; Mitchell found the zoo somewhat less appealing than it had been when he was younger, Teal'c, although intrigued by the cave dwellings, found the knowledge of their status as fakes to detract from the overall scale of the structures, and Vala claimed to find Old Colorado somewhat depressing (Although Sam privately attributed it to the knowledge that the Colorado Gold Rush described in its history was long since over.

But, throughout the day, wherever they went, whatever they did, one thing remained constant; Liam took it all in with wide eyes and an eager smile that that brought warmth to Sam and Daniel's hearts whenever they saw it.

Liam may have access to the knowledge of the Ancients on a subconscious level- he certainly had no reason to lie to either of them about something like that- but, as the day demonstrated on many occasions, he was still, at heart, just a normal young boy who wanted to learn about a new place.

And, as they watched him eagerly drag Mitchell over to look at some of the Manitou cave paintings, his expression simultaneously reminding Sam and Daniel of the look on the other's face as they made a new discovery, the so-called 'Science Twins' of SG-1 wouldn't have him any other way.

An hour after their departure from the zoo, after stopping off on the way home to pick up a Chinese carry-out for a meal- nobody particularly felt like cooking at the moment, but they wanted something more filling than pizza-, the team had entered the main hall of Daniel's house, and were already gathering together plates and cutlery while Daniel and Sam set up the main living room for
the team to watch the earlier-selected DVD.

"So," Liam asked, as the team walked into the living room, each of them soon taking up positions in the various seats around the room as Daniel headed for his shelves, "what is this Lord of the Rings thing you mentioned- apart from being a 'movie', I mean?"

"As Colonel Mitchell has already informed you, it is widely regarded as the greatest piece of entertainment to have been created by humanity since this form of entertainment began," Teal'c explained, smiling slightly at Liam as he sat in the middle of the couch in front of the television, Sam on his left as Teal'c pulled up a nearby chair and Vala slumped into a bean bag chair; she preferred to just be able to totally sit back and relax as she studied the screen. "It is set in the fictional land of Middle-Earth, and features the quest of various people to defeat the Dark Lord Sauron, a disembodied power to seeks to rule the world, and the quest of a small group to destroy the One Ring, an object he requires to achieve full power."

"Really?" Liam said, looking over at Teal'c with the same eager smile he'd worn for most of the day. "So… we're talking good versus evil on a large scale with good- eventually- winning, right?"

"Pretty much, yeah," Vala put in, smiling slightly over at the young man sitting beside his mother. "It's not going to be a quick victory, of course, but they pull it off in the end."

Even as she spoke to Liam, Vala noted, with some slight degree of surprise, that she was actually coming to like Liam. Oh, a part of her was still jealous of Sam for having 'snagged' Daniel first, thus resulting in her somewhat resenting Liam as the physical reminder of that 'liaison' between them, but, in general, Vala generally found herself having grown somewhat attached to the young boy.

Maybe it was just that he reminded her so much of his father- he had this easy-going nature and eager inquisitiveness that made it almost impossible not to like him- or maybe it was just that she already had a bad 'relationship'- if it could be called that- with her own child and didn't want to mess things up with another kid, but, either way, Vala was quickly getting over her initial 'resentment' of Liam's presence and finding it easy to like him.

"Great," Liam said, smiling slightly over at Vala as thanks before looking up at Sam, sensing her slight confusion at why he'd chosen the word 'great' to describe the movie. "Well, if you guys are dealing with something like that in reality, what better way to keep your spirits up than to check out something that shows victory is always possible?"

Once again, Sam was reminded of Liam's innocence in spite of everything else that he'd gone through in his life, and it left her with a warm, comforting feeling inside.

For all his powers, it was good to see that Oma hadn't taken the chance to just be child from Liam. He may have the ability to vaporise a house if he ever really let loose with his powers- she and Daniel had talked about it over the day and estimated that Liam probably couldn't achieve the full power of the Ascended due to his still-corporeal nature- but, that aside, if today had proved anything, it was that he was still human where it counted.

"Hey there, guys," Mitchell said, smiling casually as he walked into the room with the steaming plates of Chinese food in his hands, quickly passing them out to his friends. "Jackson's sorting out the drinks- you don't mind lemonade, do ya?" he asked, looking curiously over at Liam.

"Nah, that's fine, Uncle Cam," Liam said, nodding gratefully over at his parents' commanding officer as he took his own plate from the lieutenant colonel, along with the chopsticks; the majority of the team were just using conventional cutlery, but Daniel had volunteered to give Liam a couple
of lessons in using something different, and Liam, ever eager, had practically jumped at the chance.

"OK then," Daniel said, smiling over at his friends as he walked into the room, carrying the last of the plates and a few assorted bottles on a couple of trays, "let's get this movie started, shall we?"

"Agreed!" Sam said, leaning over to give Daniel a brief kiss as he put the tray down before handing out the drinks and heading over to his shelves, pulling out the thick forest-green box that contained the extended *Fellowship of the Ring* DVD.

"Well then," he said, smiling back at his friends as he opened the box and crouched down to turn on the DVD, "time to kick back and see what Liam thinks of our entertainment."

"Well, I've enjoyed everything that's happened so far," Liam said, smiling casually up at his father as Daniel inserted the disc for the first part of the movie.

"Trust me," Mitchell smiled as he glanced over at Liam. "You thought that was cool? You haven't seen anything yet."

As it turned out, Mitchell's prediction of Liam's opinion of the movie was accurate; Liam was clearly impressed by the special effects- even knowing the stuff wasn't real didn't detract from how cool it looked- and found the movie's general similarity to the Ori War to be surprisingly effective.

"I still don't really see where you get that from," Mitchell commented to Liam as Saruman used the *palantir* to communicate with Sauron. "I mean, I'm not saying that the idea of Sauron doesn't slightly resemble the Ori, but-"

"Oh, come on, Uncle Cam; when you look at it the right way, it all fits!" Liam said, grinning slightly over at his new friend. "Saruman as the Doci, the Ringwraiths as the Priors, the orcs and goblins as the army… ignore the fact that Sauron doesn't want anybody to worship him as a god and only wants to rule one world, and we've got the Ori War in miniature!"

"Let me guess, all that information about the Ori came from the Ancient knowledge in your head?" Vala interjected, looking inquiringly over at Liam. "Not that I'm doubting you or anything, but I thought you couldn't access that stuff on a regular basis; how did you just come up with it now?"

"Oh, I tapped into the stuff about the Ori almost as soon as Aunt Oma finished accelerating my aging," Liam said, shrugging nonchalantly as the film changed to show Gandalf at the top of Saruman's tower. "She figured that I deserved to know about that, since it was the only way she'd ever be able to convince any of the Others to leave me alone if they found out about me."

Noting Daniel's somewhat confused expression, Liam shrugged casually at his father. "Hey; the Others may take such an extreme 'Hands-Off' approach that they might as well not have hands, but that doesn't mean they wouldn't be at least slightly concerned about the Ori," he said as he shifted slightly back in the sofa to better look at the rest of SG-1. "Aunt Oma figured that she could use the Merlin precedent to ensure that they left me alone; she told me that, so long as I didn't do anything too big against the Ori by myself, they'll just leave me alone."

"Ah," Vala said, a slightly uncertain tone in her voice as she looked at Liam. "Uh,… does that mean you can't actually do anything to help us now?"

"Nah," Liam said, shrugging dismissively. "So long as I limit myself to giving you guys a few pointers in the right direction- rather than just waving my hands and giving you everything you need in a matter of seconds- I'm pretty much sticking to the rules the same way that Dad did during
his Ascension; telling you where to look, but not how it helps."

"Ah," Vala said once again, sighing slightly as she looked back at Teal'c and Mitchell with a slightly dejected shrug. "Well, any help's better than none, I suppose."

After that brief conversation, silence once again settled over the room, apart from the sound from the television as the DVD continued to play before them.

Finally, as the movie ended with Frodo and Sam walking alone into Mordor, Mitchell stood up and stretched slightly as he glanced at his watch, before glancing over at Teal'c and Vala.

"Well, we'd better get going," he said, as he tapped his watch with one finger. "We may have this day off, but I kinda doubt that Landry'll be able to allow us that much, what with the Ori situation and all." He glanced over at Sam. "Care for a lift, by the way?"

"No, I'd prefer to have a few more minutes," Sam said, as she looked back at Mitchell. "We... well, we have a few things to discuss."

"Really?" Vala said, looking over at Sam with a slightly teasing smile on her face. "No offence, but if I were in your position, I wouldn't be doing that much--"

"Vala Mal Doran, please remember that we are in the presence of Liam Jackson and you should refrain from completing that sentence in the interests of taste," Teal'c stated, looking critically at SG-1's other 'alien' member. "If Daniel Jackson and Colonel Carter say that they merely wish to talk, that is all they wish to do, and you should believe them when they say that such is the case."

"Geez, can't a girl even joke any more?" Vala said, rolling her eyes as she stood up and head for the door. "See you in the morning!" she called back before she and Teal'c departed the house, leaving Mitchell to smile and shake his head slightly.

"She's frustrating sometimes, but she's still good to have in a tight spot," he said, a small smile on his face as he looked at his friends. "Anyway, I'll call you if anything comes up, OK?"

As the lieutenant-colonel departed, Daniel stood up, sighed briefly as he studied the many plates around the room, and then glanced down at Liam.

"Well, I guess we'd better see about sorting out a bed for you, Liam," he said, as Sam and Liam got up themselves. "I've got an extra bed, so you could probably use that for the moment--"

"And where'll Mom sleep?" Liam put in, jerking a thumb over at Sam. "The couch? She should take the bed; I'd fit the couch better."

Daniel nearly opened his mouth to say something, but stopped as he realised that Liam had a point; he would fight the couch better, and as for Sam taking the other bed...

"Actually, Liam, I should probably be heading home myself; I don't really have anything I could sleep in over here," Sam said, looking apologetically at her son. "I mean, I'd love to spend more time with you two, but... well... it's just..."

"Too soon to be thinking about stuff like that?" Liam said, looking suddenly dejected as he looked awkwardly at the floor. "Uh... sorry about that... guess I just got a bit excited... good day today and all..."

Even with the sudden awkwardness that had settled over the two of them at Liam's casual assumption that Sam would be staying, neither Sam or Daniel could stop a slight smile at Liam's
awkwardness over his little mistake.

"Hey, it's OK, Liam," Daniel said, walking over to crouch slightly in front of Liam, the better to talk to his son. "It's only natural that you'd expect both your parents to sleep in the same house. We'll sort something out, I promise; just... give your mother and I a bit more time to get to that stage, OK?"

Looking back at his father, Liam smiled gratefully, before wrapping his arms around Daniel's neck and giving him a brief hug.

"Thanks, Dad," he said, as he pulled back to look at Sam. "Sorry, Mom."

"No problem," Sam said, smiling reassuringly back at her son before assuming a less jovial expression. "Now, could you just... get changed for bed and give your father and me a few minutes?"

"Check," Liam said, nodding briefly before he turned around and walked into the hall, grabbing one of the clothing bags as he headed up the stairs towards the bedroom.

Waiting a moment for the sound of Liam's footsteps to vanish, Sam and Daniel both turned to look at each other, a brief silence in the room before Daniel spoke.

"You know... he did make a point," he said, looking at Sam in a slightly embarrassed manner. "I mean, with Liam here... and we did decide we wanted to give things a shot... it does raise a few... accommodation questions..."

"Yeah, I know what you mean," Sam sighed, as she looked back at the door that Liam had just exited by. "Going too fast right now would just be the worst thing for us to do... but, at the same time, where would Liam stay if we weren't... well... together? It's not like we're a divorced couple who got joint custody; we haven't even- technically- slept together yet."

"I know," Daniel sighed, nodding as he followed her gaze to look at the door. "Liam's only just come to Earth after spending four years on a different planet; he needs consistency in his life right now, no matter how powerful he is."

After a moment of silently staring at the door before them, Sam turned to look at Daniel.

"Well, I guess the first step would be going on a date- an actual date, rather than with the rest of the team coming along- and seeing what happens from there," she said.

"Yeah... just a date, and see how it goes from there," Daniel replied, nodding in agreement. "So... shall we make it the weekend? Liam could probably stay with Cam for the night if he needs someone there..."

"OK," Sam said, nodding in agreement. "In the meantime, Liam should probably stay with you; I don't really have a 'guest room' that he could use at the moment."

Daniel nodded in agreement.

"Yeah... that's probably for the best," he said, even as his eyes made it clear that he, like Sam, wished there was a better arrangement at the moment.

"Well..." Sam sighed, as she glanced back at the door leading to the hall, "I guess I'd better say goodnight to Liam and... go."
"Yeah…” Daniel said, an equally dejected tone in his voice. "I'll bring him in tomorrow, OK?"

Sam nodded, turned back to look at Daniel, leaned in to give him a brief kiss…

And, mere seconds later, the two of them were in each others, Sam pinning Daniel onto the sofa, the two of them kissing passionately even as they moved their hands to the buttons of the other's clothing…

"ARGH!" a voice screamed from the door, prompting Sam and Daniel to break apart and look around just in time to see Liam spinning around, dressed in his pyjamas and with both eyes pressed over his head.

"Liam!" Sam said, blushing fiercely as she leapt off Daniel and began to rapidly button up her blouse. "We just-"

"Mom, do not go there!" Liam yelled, turning around and apparently pressing his hands even deeper into his eyes. "I need a few seconds to not look at you right now or I think I'll have major mental issues from seeing something I should not have to see, OK?"

"Right…” Daniel said, looking slightly sheepishly at Sam as the two of them stood up and buttoned up their clothes once again. "Uh… we're done now."

"Thank God…” Liam muttered, as he turned around to look at his parents. "Just… please don't do that again, OK? There's some things I should not have to see…"

"Oh, we definitely agree with you on that," Sam retorted, staring at Liam with her hands on her hips, a slight smile on her face the only thing that confirmed that she wasn't completely cross about the whole thing. "Next time you go into any room, Liam, you knock, OK?"

"Check," Liam said, nodding briefly before his expression became more inquisitive as he looked directly at Sam. "So… with that incident behind us and never to be mentioned again… you're leaving, Mom?"

"Just for the night, Liam; I'll see you and your father tomorrow," Sam promised him as she crouched down to give Liam a brief hug, before standing up and nodding at Daniel.

"Uh… see you at work," she said, after a moment's hesitation, clearly unwilling to get too close in case they were tempted to lose control once again, before she walked out of the door.

Sighing slightly wistfully, Daniel turned to look back at his son, who was now looking at Daniel with a slight smile on his face.

"Y'know," Liam said, smiling casually at his father, "as disturbing as it was to see that, at least it looks like I won't have to wait too long to have a younger brother or sister…"

"OK, that's more than enough out of you," Daniel retorted, smiling slightly at Liam's mischievous grin as he looked back at the archaeologist. "Get to bed, OK, Liam?"

"Sure thing, Dad," Liam said, grinning once again as his father before he turned and walked back up the stairs towards his room.

As Daniel picked the various plates to put them in the sink for the next morning, he couldn't stop himself from smiling slightly at the memory of the previous day.

If you ignored the fact that Sam wasn't staying in his house for the night, he, Sam and Liam already
felt like a family.
When Daniel woke up the next morning, it was not to his alarm clock, but to the ringing of his bedside phone. Groaning slightly as he sat up in bed, the archaeologist reached over, placed his glasses on, and picked up the phone.

"Yes?" he said, hoping he didn't sound as sharp to whoever was on the other end as he sounded in his head; the last thing he needed was to annoy someone from the IOA who might have been calling about Liam or something like that.

"Hey, Jackson," Mitchell's voice said on the other end of the line, a slight smile on his face. "Sorry to wake you, but Landry just called me; there's a situation or two back at the SGC that he thinks Liam should hear about."

Whatever sleep disorientation remained in Daniel's mind vanished at that comment, his brain instantly springing into alertness at the idea that something had happened that would affect his newfound son.

"What is it?" he asked, throwing the covers off and turning around so that his feet were now on the floor.

"He didn't say," Mitchell said apologetically. "He just told me to call the rest of the team and get them down here soon; he mentioned something about the Odyssey having noted a couple of things that the kid might be interested in, but that's as much as I could get."

"Ah," Daniel said, rolling his eyes briefly in annoyance as he stood up and began to pull some clothes out of the wardrobe. "OK, we'll be there after breakfast."

"Great," Mitchell said, a slightly amused tone suddenly appearing in his voice as he spoke. "By the way, I was wondering; do I need to bother calling Sam about this, or...?"

"Yes, you do," Daniel stated, making sure that Mitchell understood that the subject was off-limits from then on in. He knew that the SG-1 commander was only intending to make a light-hearted joke rather than anything else- if anything, his tone had been somewhat quizzical, as though he was almost expecting Sam to have stayed with him and Liam last night- but Daniel supposed, in some way, he was still somewhat sensitive about his relationships being insulted after some of the comments he'd received during his college days; a part of him just found it 'easier' to instinctively assume the worst in a situation.

"Uh... OK, gotcha," Mitchell said, sounding apologetic about the whole thing. "Sorry 'bout that; guess I'm used to joking about relationships while they're still in the early stages, stuff like that..."

Momentarily forgetting that Mitchell couldn't see him over the phoneline, Daniel began to shake his head in an apologetic manner, but stopped himself mid-shake.

"Don't worry about it, Cam; I'm just a bit too used to people just making fun of a relationship because they're making fun of me," he explained, sighing slightly as he sat down. "I mean, it wasn't like that back when I was married to Sha're- except for when I tried to do 'woman's work', of course- but I guess some habits are just harder to break than others."

"Fair enough," Mitchell replied in a relieved tone of voice. "I'll see you and the kid when you get here, OK?"
"Yeah... we'll see you," Daniel replied simply, before he terminated the call and finished shaving on the last of his clothing, heading for the door as he buttoned up his shirt. Exiting his own bedroom, he turned left and headed towards the door to Liam's room, knocking briefly as he reached it.

"Uh... yeah, Dad?" a voice said from inside the room.

"Liam, I just got a call from the SGC; we need to get there soon," Daniel explained, as he reached to the door handle to make sure his son was getting up. "Apparently the Odyssey- one of our ships- has detected something that General Landry thinks- oh."

The 'Oh' probably wasn't the best word Daniel could have chosen for the situation- as a linguist, he could almost certainly have thought of better if he'd really tried- but when he opened the door and saw Liam sitting cross-legged in the middle of the bed, a faint glow surrounding him as he hovered an inch or so above the covers, it was hard to imagine what else he could have said.

"Mmm?" Liam said, looking curiously at his father for a moment before looking down and smiling slightly sheepishly as he realised what he was doing. "Oh; sorry 'bout that," he explained, as the glow faded and he landed back on the bed, before getting up and walking over to his father. "Just something Daanar always insisted I do when I wake up to practice my telekinesis; it's a bit tough to get the concentration right, and I need a lot of focus just to do that- I couldn't do it well enough to fly or something, and trust me, I've tried- but it helps me get my brain going in the morning."

"Ah," Daniel said, nodding briefly as he looked back for a moment at the bed that his son had just been 'hovering' over.

This definitely wasn't the way he'd imagined fatherhood, but, all in all, he supposed the situation could be worse. Liam may be capable of levitating himself and generating energy, along with who knew what other powers, but he was far from being an antisocial child who didn't want to speak to people, or simply did what he wanted without telling anybody. On the contrary, so far Liam had taken the recent upheavals in his life rather well, and seemed highly eager to spend more time learning about Earth or his parents rather than complaining about having to leave the world he'd grown up on.

Daniel wasn't sure how much of that came from his part-Ancient nature and Oma Desala's involvement in his upbringing and how much came from his purely human genetics- he and Sam certainly always seemed to cope relatively well when they'd needed to change where they lived back when they were children, either because of Jacob's transfers or Daniel being sent to a new foster home- but he was nevertheless grateful for it. Coping with the sudden responsibility of being a parent, coupled with the added complication of this new dynamic in his and Sam's relationship, was more than enough for him without including a son who wasn't even interested in talking to either of them.

"Uh... Dad?" Liam asked, looking curiously up at his father, breaking the archaeologist's train of thought. "What were you saying earlier about that General... Landry, right?"

"Oh... uh, apparently, something's come up that General Landry- and you did get the name right, by the way- thinks you might be interested in learning more about," Daniel explained, looking apologetically down at Liam as he spoke. "I wasn't told much about that, but apparently the Odyssey- one of the ships we've built in the last few years- has discovered something that General Landry apparently wants us to take a look at-

"Hold on; you guys have spaceships?" Liam said, his eyes wide as he eagerly looked at his father. "Cool!"
"Uh… excuse me?" Daniel said, looking at Liam in surprise. "You're excited about a spaceship? Wouldn't you have seen some of those when you were growing up; Daanar's planet looked pretty advanced to me…"

"Well, they had a lot of Ancient-based technology, but they didn't really do much in the way of spaceships," Liam explained, sighing slightly as he looked up at his father. "I think it was the whole 'secrecy' thing they were trying to pull off, really; they didn't want to take the chance that they'd run into any Goa'uld or something like that while they were out and about. At least if they travelled through the Stargate they could limit the amount of technology they had access to on the other end; spaceships aren't really the kind of thing you'd make if you didn't have some significant technology available to you-

"And the moment they started attracting more attention from the Goa'uld would have been the moment when Oma's actions resulted in a large-scale impact on the universe and attracted the interest of the Others, huh?" Daniel asked, rolling his eyes slightly as he listened to his son. There were times when the Ancients' restrictions on interference could be more than slightly frustrating, as far as he was concerned; they allowed the Ori access to this galaxy because the Ori themselves weren't doing anything, to say nothing of giving Anubis free reign despite him being an immortal basket case with a god complex and the ability to use any Ancient technology he discovered, and yet, if Daniel tried to save one planet, or if Morgan tried to tell them something important about Merlin's weapon (Daniel still wished he could have figured out what she meant by that "Merlin's weapon is not-" comment), the Others came down on them like a falling Stargate.

"Dad?" Liam asked, breaking into Daniel's train of thought as he looked uncertainly at his father. "You OK?"

"Mmm? Oh, I'm fine… just… well, a bit frustrated, I guess," Daniel said, sighing as he moved into the room to sit down on the bed as he talked to his son. "It's all the Ancients' talk about non-interference, I guess, Liam; it's just so frustrating sometimes. I mean, I get why they do it- their fears of becoming just as bad as the Ori are valid, don't get me wrong- but you'd think that they'd get involved when it's something that will affect them just as much as it will us."

"Yeah…" Liam said, sighing a little himself as he looked back over at his father, reaching over to place a comforting hand on his shoulder. "Trust me, Dad… I wish there was some way of getting them to do something about it too."

Daniel didn't bother replying to that comment; there was nothing he could have said to Liam's statement that wouldn't have ended up sounding woefully inadequate to both their ears.

After all, Daniel may have been somewhat frustrated by what had happened to him after he'd tried to break the Ancient's rules- being stripped of his memories and his clothes was still far from being one of his best memories- but Liam?

Because of the Ancient's rules, he'd had to grow up without his parents for the past four years, and his parents hadn't been allowed to remember that he'd even existed until a few days ago.

Liam may have had access to some of the powers possessed by the Ascended, but, as he looked at his son right now, staring dejectedly down at his hand, Daniel somehow doubted that his son considered a fair trade for never getting to meet his parents until a few days ago. After growing up without parents for about half of his childhood, Daniel knew that he would have traded anything if it meant he could have had them back; he couldn't even imagine how it must have been for Liam, lacking any actual parents for his childhood. Oh, he knew that Liam was far more mature than most children his age, but that didn't mean he wouldn't have missed his parents while growing up; his evident enthusiasm when he'd met them for the first time made that clear enough.
Still, there was no point dwelling on what they couldn't change in their lives; if the Gamekeeper experience had taught Daniel anything, it was that, sometimes, you have accept that there were some things in life that people just couldn't change. All they could do was deal with the present and hope that things would improve from here on in.

"Come on," Daniel said, as he stood up and looked down at his son, a small smile on his face as he did so; if they were going to start building anything like a normal father/son relationship, Daniel was going to start it as soon as possible. "Let's have breakfast and get to the SGC, OK?"

Looking over at his father, Liam smiled and nodded as he stood up himself.

"Sounds good," he said, before an uncertain expression crossed his face. "Uh… what is there to eat here anyway? Aunt Oma never really told me much about the food here…"

Even after all the recent thinking he'd done about his frustration with the rules of the Ascended, Daniel couldn't stop himself from smiling slightly as he looked at his son's suddenly anxious expression. He supposed that it was only to be expected that Liam would be at least slightly nervous about good- it had taken a bit of encouragement from the entire team to get him to give the pizza last night a try- but there was still something kind of amusing about a kid who didn't even know what a banana was, to say nothing of the other food Daniel had in his cupboards.

"You just get changed; I'll see what I can whip up for breakfast," he said reassuringly as he headed towards the door. "Just trust me on this, OK; if you liked the pizza, I'm sure I can figure out something for you to have now."

About an hour later, after a quick breakfast consisting of a couple of pancakes and a banana or two, Daniel and Liam found themselves back in the SGC car park, taking the lift down towards the main briefing room. Daniel had initially contemplated leaving Liam in his office while he found out what Landry wanted to talk to him about, but had decided against it; after all, if this was an Ori-related matter, Liam's Ancient knowledge probably made him one of the more qualified people to hear it directly from the source.

As soon as they'd exited the lift, both father and son smiled as they saw who was standing in front of the door to wait for them.

"Hi," Sam said, smiling affectionately at the two of them as she leaned over to give Daniel a brief kiss on the cheek- after their close call the previous night, she'd prefer to take things a little slow for the moment, no matter how much she might want to go a bit faster- and slightly ruffle Liam's hair.

"Mooooommmmm..." Liam groaned, as he reached up to try and smooth his hair back down. "Do you have to do that?"

"I think you look good with your hair like that," Sam retorted, smiling slightly at Liam. The young boy opened his mouth as though he was about to protest, but Daniel put a hand on his shoulder to stop him.

"Liam, a word of advice; don't argue with your mother on matters concerning your appearance," he said, smiling at Liam himself as the three of them began to head towards the briefing room. "Trust me, if I learned anything from my years in foster care, it's that the mothers always know best when it comes to how you look."

He paused for a moment, his head titled to one side in a thoughtful manner, and then he shrugged.
slightly. "OK, make that they know best most of the time in matters concerning your appearance."

"Only most of the time?" Sam asked, looking over at her old friend with another small grin. "Are you saying you don't think the ruffled look works for Liam?"

"Do you really expect to answer that in the negative?" Daniel retorted, treating Sam to another teasing grin as he spoke. "You could kick my ass six ways to Sunday if you wanted; do you honestly think I'd ever tell you if I didn't agree with something you'd done?"

Sam rolled her eyes slightly as she looked back at the father of her child.

"Are you still basing this fear of yours on that time I decked Colonel O'Neill during training?" she asked, looking almost critically at him. "I would have thought you'd have stopped being quite so concerned about that; it took place back when you'd barely even started training with us! After all these years, I'm sure that you're more than capable of holding your own against me now!"

"Some beliefs are just hard to break, I guess," Daniel replied, smiling casually back at her, before looking down at Liam who was clutching his throat as though trying to stop himself from gagging. "And don't make me have to ground you, young man!" he stated grimly.

"Oh, come on!" Liam groaned, as he looked up at his parents with a small smile. "I could just undo the lock in a matter of seconds, aren't you forgetting?"

"Oh, I'm sure Daniel remembered that," Sam replied, as she looked critically at her son. "Just as I'm sure he remembers that I could do pretty much the same thing when I was younger, but didn't because I wanted to be sure my parents could trust me."

She didn't add, of course, that after her mother's death she'd stopped bothering quite so much about whether or not her father trusted her; like many things she'd done during the low period she'd been in at that point in both her life and her relationship with her father, she preferred to just try and forget about it.

Before any of them could continue that particular line of discussion, they finally reached the door of the main briefing room, thus cutting off any further conversation between the three on that topic (For the moment; ) as Daniel opened the door, revealing the other three members of SG-1 sitting on the right side of the table, with General Landry facing the door the three new arrivals had just entered by.

"Ah, you're here," Landry said, smiling slightly as he stood up to look at the remaining members of his flagship team, before smiling down at Liam. "Good to see you, Liam; I hear you enjoyed your tour of Colorado yesterday?"

"Yeah, I did, thanks," Liam said, nodding with a small smile at the general before looking uncertainly at the empty chair immediately next to where his parents had just sat down. "Uh… could I… would it be OK if I…?"

"Sat there?" Landry finished, nodding reassuringly at the young boy. "Quite frankly, I'd have requested you come here if Doctor Jackson hadn't done so already; one of the topics I need to discuss at the moment actually concerns you in particular, and the other almost certainly has relevance for you as well."

"Yeah, what is this all about?" Mitchell asked, looking curiously at his commanding officer. "I mean, you didn't give me much detail over the phone; just that a couple of things had come up and you wanted Liam to have the opportunity to hear about them as well."
"Well," Landry explained, as he turned to address the entire team while keeping his gaze fixed on Liam, "the first thing I thought that Liam should know is that, late last night, we received a transmission through the Stargate that we've identified as having come from Daanar."

Noting Liam's suddenly excited expression, Landry raised his hand apologetically. "Unfortunately, the majority of it seems to have been compressed and encoded, much like the initial transmission we received from Atlantis; it's taking a while to discover what it's actually about."

"Oh," Liam said, sighing slightly.

"So… you don't know whether it's some automatic warning or an actual message?" Sam asked, looking hopefully at the general even as she reached over to place a comforting hand on Liam's shoulder.

"No, I'm afraid we don't," Landry said, shaking his head apologetically. "The name and Stargate address of the sender was the only unencoded part of the whole message; if it was Daanar who sent it, it looks like he had to use some kind of general broadcast system aimed at only the general location of Earth in the Stargate network."

"Eh?" Mitchell asked, looking in confusion at Liam. "Why would he need to do something like that? Wouldn't he know where Earth was?"

"Well… no, he wouldn't," Liam explained, as he looked back at Mitchell. "Aunt Oma never actually told us where Earth was; I think she was worried I'd try and get back home before I was ready or something like that…"

"Ah," Daniel said, sighing as he looked over curiously at Landry. "Any ideas how long it will take to figure out what the message was?"

"Hopefully not more than a few hours; it's using a different operating system from our own computers, but it seems to be compatible with our own systems at least," Landry replied, before his expression became more serious- evidently this matter was more directly connected to the Ori war- as he turned to address the entire team.

"The second matter I have to talk to you about concerns a larger scale issue," he explained, as he looked at the team to make sure all of them were listening to him. "We have received word from the Odyssey of an Ori battlecruiser approaching a world not far from the location of Daanar's homeworld, which recently made a slight detour towards the location of Daanar's home. The Odyssey wasn't able to give us any specific information about why it made such a minor change in its course- it didn't even go to the planet itself, it just moved close to the planet - but given its close proximity to the planet…"

"You think the ship might have picked up… survivors from the planet?" Sam asked, looking briefly at Liam- she hoped he didn't get too excited if the supposition turned out to be incorrect, and was only somewhat relieved to see that he didn't seem to have become too enthusiastic about the possibility- before she turned back to her commanding officer.

"Unfortunately, we don't know enough about what happened there to determine either way," Landry continued, as he looked apologetically at the young boy, evidently thinking the same thing Sam had been thinking, before turning back to look at the entire team. "As I said, we're working on decoding that signal in the hopes it provides some clues- and translation of the tablet he gave you is apparently going fairly well- but until we get anything definite from either angle of research, we have no way of knowing what the message is all about or whether the tablet can tell us anything useful."
"Oh," Liam said simply, looking slightly sadly at the general before his face brightened as something seemed to occur to him. "Still, you'll probably have both of them cracked by the time we get back, right?"

"'Back'?" Vala asked, looking in surprise down at Liam before turning her attention to Sam and Daniel. "Excuse me, but were you three planning to go somewhere without telling us?"

"Actually, I think Liam was thinking that we'd all be going to the Odyssey to investigate what that Ori battlecruiser picked up during its detour," Daniel said, as he looked back over at Landry. "Is that correct?"

"Precisely," Landry said, nodding at the archaeologist. "The Odyssey's currently orbiting a planet no more than an hour or so away from the planet that the battlecruiser was heading towards; since we don't know what the situation is on that planet, we're unwilling to risk dialling the Stargate until we have a better idea what we'd be dealing with. You'll be going to the planet and teleporting down to investigate the Ori presence, and see if you can discover anything about what happened to the Ori battlecruiser that attacked Daanar's planet- or, indeed, what happened to the planet itself."

"That simple, huh?" Mitchell said, smiling slightly as he stood up and stretched briefly. "No sweat; we'll be there and back before you know it."

"All six of us," Sam added as she stood up, looking in a determined manner at the general as she indicated Liam. Landry blinked in surprise.

"You want to take Liam along as well?" he said, looking in no slight degree of shock at the head of the SGC science division. "Colonel Carter, are you sure that's a wise decision? He's only a child-"

"Who has access to the powers and knowledge of the Ancients themselves," Sam retorted as she looked at General Landry. "Even without that, he has a right to know what happened to the planet where he grew up, General; if this Ori ship can give us any clues to that, I'd rather he knew sooner rather than later."

"We'd make sure he stayed on board the Odyssey until we knew whether or not it was safe for him to go down onto the planet," Daniel added, noting the still-sceptical expression of his commanding officer as he looked at the young boy before him. "General Landry, I promise you that Liam would remain on the Odyssey and out of our way until we've established whether or not it's safe for him down there. We wouldn't do anything to put him in jeopardy unless we're sure we have no other option; he's coming along in case we learn anything we feel he needs to know, but he'll stay out of harm's way."

Liam nearly looked like he was about to protest, but a brief glance from Teal'c seemed to be enough to convince him to keep his mouth shut for the moment; evidently, this wasn't the time for him to talk about how he could take care of himself. If nothing else, all of SG-1 were well aware that, if he was anything like what they'd heard of Adria, Liam was more than capable of using his powers to deal with any potential opponents; it was more their 'parental instincts' taking over.

Even if only two of them were actually his biological parents, the other three members of SG-1 were already beginning to regard Liam, even if only subconsciously, as a 'nephew', and found it hard not to instinctively be concerned about his safety.

After a moment's silent contemplation, Landry sighed and nodded at Sam and Daniel.
"Very well; you can take Liam with you," he said, before a small smile crossed his face as a thought occurred to him. "After all, he is still technically listed as an offworld citizen; I hardly need to consult the IOA on whether or not he should be allowed through the Stargate, seeing as how he's already known about it for some while…”

With a slight twinkle in his eye, he sighed, stood up, and glanced at his watch. "Well, I'd best be off; have to straighten out the paperwork for when you get back…”

With that, he left, closely followed by the rest of SG-1 as they made their way to the locker rooms to change into their mission uniforms; most of them had all come straight from their homes to the meeting, and so hadn't had time to change yet.

For some reason, even though the circumstances between the mission and yesterday's activities couldn't be more different, for the moment, Daniel could almost feel like this was just another group outing for the team to give them the chance to spend more time with Liam.
A few minutes later, now armed and ready for action, SG-1 were standing in front of the Stargate, Liam standing between his parents as he eagerly examined the artefact before him; apparently, he was rather impressed at the SGC managing to get the Stargate working even when they hadn't actually known what it was.

Unlike the rest of the team, Liam didn't have a uniform of his own, and was too small for even a cadet uniform- for all the Ancient knowledge he might possess, he was still physically only about eight- but, as a compromise, he was wearing a dark blue T-shirt and trousers; if he needed to go down on the planet in the end, he was at least dressed to move fast if the situation turned unpleasant for some reason.

"OK then," Daniel said, as he looked down at Liam, "we'll be taking the Stargate to one of the less inhabited planets that we've encountered in our travels, and from there we'll be beaming onto the **Odyssey**; once there, you're to do **everything** we tell you to do and *not* come down to the planet with us until we've determined whether we need you, clear?"

"Dad, for the last time, I get you..." Liam groaned as he looked back at his father, a small smile on his face the only sign that his frustration was all a joke. "Y'know, just because I'm a kid *doesn't* mean I'm stupid..."

"After the intellects your mother and I displayed growing up?" Daniel chuckled slightly, as he reached up to ruffle Liam's hair. "If we thought for a moment you *were* stupid, we wouldn't be who we are now..."

"Indeed," Teal'c said, a small smile on his face as he looked at Liam. "The only reason we could ever believe you to be stupid would be if you were not the child of DanielJackson and ColonelCarter; even if you were a normal human being, you would be far from... normal."

After a moment's pause, the Jaffa spoke again. "I freely acknowledge that my previous statement made little sense."

"Nah, we got what you meant, T.," Mitchell said, smiling in understanding over at his friend as the Stargate finished dialling and the wormhole activated; Liam jumped slightly- he may have possessed some of the powers of an Ascended, but he still didn't have much experience with actually *using* the Stargate himself- but otherwise the activation passed without incident.

"OK, team," Mitchell said, nodding at the Stargate before him, "let's go."

With that, the team walked up the ramp, through the Stargate, and instantly found themselves standing in a rocky clearing surrounded by nothing in particular; this planet was one of the ones that never seemed to have been used much by even the Ancients.

Glancing around at his new surroundings, Liam voiced the opinion of the entire team.

"Dull, isn't it?" he said casually.

Sam shrugged.

"Well, that's just the way the universe goes, Liam; sometimes, things just... aren't that interesting," she said, almost sounding apologetic as she looked at her son, before she turned to look at Daniel and Mitchell. "OK; let's just call the **Odyssey** and get out of here."
"Gotcha," Mitchell said, smiling slightly at his old friend as he raised his hand to activate the radio clipped to his uniform. "Hey, Odyssey? Six to beam up."

"Sure th- six?" the voice of the Odyssey's commander, Colonel Emmerson, said over the connection. "I thought SG-1 was just a five-man team?"

"Oh yeah; I'll tell you more about that when we get up there," Mitchell replied, chuckling slightly as he glanced over at Liam; he'd almost forgotten that information about Liam's arrival in their lives hadn't yet spread much further than the immediate 'core' group of SG-1 and their various close friends back at the mountain. "Just trust me; number six is totally trustworthy."

"Well… if you vouch for him, that's good enough for me," Emmerson said. For a moment, the team were silent as they stood on the planet's surface…

Then, after a brief flash of blue light that was the only sign- to them- that they had teleported, they found themselves standing in the Odyssey, Liam instantly looking eagerly around himself as the technician manning the teleporter blinked in surprise at the sight of a (Seemingly) eight year old boy accompanying SG-1.

"Before you ask," Sam said, turning to look apologetically at the technician, "we know that having children along for a mission is not something we're 'meant' to do, but trust us; we did not just drag this kid along on a whim; if anything, he practically forced us to take him with us."

"Mooooooooo…" Liam groaned as he turned to look at her. "Could you not exaggerate like that? I'm not that bad…"

"M-Mom?" the technician stuttered, looking in shock at Sam. "Colonel Carter, what… what…?"

"It's a long story, Lieutenant; we'll fill everyone in when there's a convenient moment," Daniel said by way of explanation. "In the meantime, we need to get moving; I doubt that the Ori ship we're here to look at will remain where it is for much longer."

"Uh… right," the lieutenant said, as he walked over to a nearby wall and activated the radio. "Sir, SG-1 and their… guest… are aboard."

"Thank you, Lieutenant; we're on our way," Emerson's voice replied. A moment alter, the team felt the slight 'jump' that indicated that they'd entered hyperspace, and soon the ship was humming with that faint sound that was all that indicated that they were no longer within normal space.

"Right then," Mitchell said, nodding over at the lieutenant with a slightly apologetic smile, "sorry about springing Liam on you guys like this; if you could you just call the senior crew and get them all together, we'll do our best to fill you guys in on that little detail…"

"Uh… sure thing, sir," the lieutenant said, nodding at the lieutenant colonel as he activated a nearby communication panel. "Sorry to bother you sir, but SG-1 would like to have a word with the chiefs of staff as soon as possible; they've got… things… they'd like to tell us."

"I… see," Emerson's voice said over the speaker; he sounded more than slightly puzzled, but nevertheless appeared willing to agree to the meeting anyway. "SG-1, be in the main briefing room in half an hour; I'll get the rest of the staff together and get right onto it, OK?"

"Sounds fine," Mitchell said casually as he glanced back at his teammates and received a
confirming nod from all of them. "See you in a tick."

A few minutes later, SG-1 were standing at the Odyssey's briefing table, Liam standing between Sam and Daniel with a slightly sheepish expression of his face and his hands clasped behind his back, clearly uncertain whether he should be doing anything in particular to make a good impression on the people they were currently talking to.

"So, let me get this straight," Emerson said, looking sceptically between Sam and Daniel as he stood at the head of the table, his arms folded. "You and Doctor Jackson conceived a child during that whole 'Acension' thing a few years ago, he's spent the last few years growing up on another planet, and now he's here with you guys, with access to at least some of the powers and knowledge of these 'Ascended' suckers?"

"Pretty much, yeah," Sam said, nodding in confirmation at the ship's commander. "I know it's a bit of a stretch to accept, sir, but Daniel and I know that his guardians were telling us the truth; Liam's been through every test possible, and Daniel and I."

"A bit of a stretch?" Emerson interrupted, looking at Sam with a small smile on his face. "Colonel Carter, the only thing that surprises me is that something this weird didn't happen to anyone a long time ago; after everything we've encountered in this line of work, an unusual conception isn't that much of a stretch."

"Yeah... fair point, I suppose," Mitchell said, chuckling slightly as he indicated the young boy sitting in front of his parents, before his expression became serious once again. "So, does that mean that you guys are OK with letting Liam stick around for the mission?"

"Ah," Emerson said, looking at the young boy with a suddenly uncertain expression. "I mean, odd conception or not, he is only a kid..."

"A kid with access to at least some of the powers and knowledge of the Ancients; can you honestly say that wouldn't be even slightly handy to have on our side?" Mitchell added, jerking a thumb at Liam with a small smile.

"Cam..." Sam sighed, glancing critically at her old friend before she turned back to look at Emerson. "Look, putting aside Colonel Mitchell's somewhat nonchalant attitude towards this situation, he's right; Liam does have the potential to be a useful asset if we're dealing with an Ancient-related manner."

"If you're concerned about the potential risks of having a child on something of this scale," Daniel added, looking reassuringly at Colonel Emerson, "I assure you, we have no intention of letting Liam come down to the planet or anything like that with us until we know he's needed; until we know whether or not there's anything down there that might actually merit his assistance, such as the presence of... well, anything Ancient-related, to put it simply."

For a moment, there was silence as Emerson stared thoughtfully at Liam, clearly weighing up the pros and cons of keeping the child on board versus the potential benefits his apparent access to Ancient knowledge and powers could bring, until he came to a decision and nodded.

"Very well then," the colonel finally said, as he looked over at Daniel, Sam and Liam. "Doctor Jackson, Colonel Carter, your son can stay on the ship, but he needs to stay out of the way of my staff while we're on our way to the planet. When we reach our destination, he can remain on the
bridge while you go down to the planet, but he will not be sent down to the planet unless we are
certain his presence there is required."

"Thanks," Daniel said, nodding gratefully at the ship's commander before he glanced back down at
his son. "Well, now that that's out of the way, shall we see about showing you around?"

"Really?" Liam asked, the same eager expression on his face now as had been there when he had
initially been told that the SGC had spaceships originally. "You mean it?"

"Would we be saying it if we didn't mean it?" Mitchell asked, smiling casually at the young boy.
"If Emerson doesn't have a problem with it, why should anyone else mind you looking around?"

"Just so long as you stick with your parents and stay out of the way of anybody who's actually
doing something, young man," Emerson added, a slight smile on his face as he looked at the young
boy in front of the table. "I'm willing to let you stay on my ship, but you're not to interfere with
anybody who's doing their job, understand?"

"We'll keep an eye on him, Colonel," Sam said, patting Liam's shoulder as she smiled reassuringly
at the Odyssey's commanding officer before looking back at her son. "Come on then, Liam; we've
got a day or two until we get to our destination, so we'd best get started if you want to see what
we've got around here."

Once the initial uncertainty of having a child on board the Odyssey was out of the way, Liam
quickly became well adjusted to ship life during the day or so it took them to reach their destination
via hyperspace. His eager-to-learn attitude about everything to do with the ship, coupled with his
natural talent for knowing just how far to take a conversation or line of inquiry without making it
frustrating for the person he was talking to, quickly made him well-liked among the staff, who
enjoyed the opportunity to talk to somebody new about what they did for a living. In general, he
managed to stay out of the way of anybody who was currently doing their job when he originally
found them, but whenever they had a spare moment they were always willing to answer any
questions he had about the ship and how it worked. He sometimes had a little trouble
understanding it immediately- the Ancient knowledge was only on a subconscious level after all,
and some of the principles were slightly more primitive than he was used to- but once he'd grasped
it Liam was quick to understand how it all came together.

When he wasn't examining every little detail about the Odyssey that he could, Liam also enjoyed
spending time with SG-1, asking them various questions about some of their past missions. He
particularly enjoyed anything they had to tell him about Ancient-related missions- he found Teal'c's
recollections of the incident when he and Jack were stuck in a time loop by an Ancient attempt at a
time machine particularly interesting, as well as their battles with the Replicators- but in general he
enjoyed all the team's missions, loving the opportunity to hear about the events that had made his
parents legends in the war against the Goa'uld. The only thing he didn't ask too many questions
about were Daniel's encounters with Apophis and Amaunet, or Sam's encounters with the Tollan
and her early meetings with the Tok'ra; whether that was because Liam didn't want to talk to them
too much about a clearly awkward subject, or whether it was simply a child's natural dislike of
thinking too much about their parents being with somebody else, neither Sam or Daniel were
certain and neither felt the need to ask.

As well as teaching Liam about their own history and some interesting bits of information about
their technology, Teal'c had also volunteered to give him a few brief lessons in hand-to-hand
combat, and Liam had eagerly accepted the offer. He may not have been that interested in actually
starting fights, but, as he told his parents, he wasn't going to get into one and rely solely on his Ancient-based powers to help him win. Liam's smaller size put him at a slight disadvantage against most of the opponents that were available for him to train against, of course, but in general he managed to cope fairly well against his training partners. By the time his first couple of lessons had ended, he was able to hold his own against most of the Odyssey's better fighters, ranging from Mitchell to Teal'c himself. He couldn't defeat them on his own- he always restricted himself to physical combat without using his Ancient abilities-, but he could hold his own for a significantly impressive length of time, given his opponents' greater experience in hand-to-hand combat and their own superior strength and height.

However, despite all the fun Liam had learning about the world his parents had lived in for the past decade or so, as well as finding out about the technology they used in their daily lives, his favourite part of the trip so far had been when he and SG-1, taking advantage of an afternoon off, settled down together in one of the ship's leisure facilities and watched a couple of Harry Potter DVDs that Mitchell had purchased for Liam during their initial day off, reasoning that the kid might enjoy seeing another example of popular Earth fiction. In general, Liam had actually enjoyed the two movies, although he freely admitted that he'd preferred the Lord of the Rings trilogy; he'd found the parallels between the War of the Ring and the Ori War highly appealing.

Finally, after a couple of days of hyperspace travel, the Odyssey arrived at the planet they'd been heading for, prompting SG-1 to get dressed in the brown robes that sometimes seemed to be the default camouflage uniform for SG-teams investigating less-developed planets. They were just heading towards the teleporter that would send them down to the planet when Liam walked towards them, an anxious expression on his face.

"Uh… you're going down now?" he said, looking uncertainly at his parents and his two adopted 'uncles'; he still seemed somewhat uncomfortable around Vala, but he seemed to have easily accepted Teal'c and Mitchell as extra members of his family.

"Liam, I thought we already told you we were," Daniel began, looking with a slightly exasperated smile at his son. "Why do you keep… no," he said, changing tack as he saw the quizzical expression on his son's face, "you are not coming down with us, understand?"

"Please, Dad?" Liam asked, looking pleadingly up at his father. "I won't get in the way, I promise-
"
"Look, Liam," Sam said, crouching down to look her son in the eyes, "you getting in the way isn't the issue; this simply isn't the kind of mission where your father and I want to have to keep an eye on you right now, OK? You just wait up on the bridge with Colonel Emerson for us to get back, and we'll let you now if we need you; at the moment, however, your father and I just want to see what we're dealing with down there before getting you involved, understand?"

"Aw, c'mon, Mom, can't I just come down for a little peak at the place?" Liam asked, looking pleadingly up at his mother. "I mean, I came all this way-"

"In case we needed you; we're not taking you onto an unknown planet until we know what we're dealing with," Daniel stated, looking resolutely at his son. "We've enjoyed the time we've spent with you, Liam, don't get me wrong, but we're not going to bring you along with us; there's no way of knowing if Adria would be able to… detect you or something if she's down there; after all, if Sam can detect the presence of Goa'uld because she was once a host, who's to say that Adria can't sense you because you have access to the powers of the Ancients?"
For a moment, Liam just looked at his father as though he was about to protest, but finally sighed and nodded his acceptance.

"Yeah… good point, Dad," he said, resignedly. "There's no way I can know whether Adria's going to sense me or not if she is down there; be kind of stupid if I tried to help out in a stealth mission and she just manages to work out that you guys are there because I'm there."

"Thanks," Daniel said, reaching over to place a grateful hand on his son's shoulder. "I promise you, when we get back to Earth and this mission's over, we'll take you somewhere fun the first chance we get."

"Cool," Liam said, smiling back at his father, before a slightly quizzical expression appeared on his face. "Uh… does 'somewhere fun' include Atlantis?"

Exchanging glances with each other, Sam and Daniel smiled slightly.

He may have only met them a couple of days ago, but Liam was already like both of them in so many ways it was almost scary; after all, for both of them, if the Ori crisis didn't demand their full attention (And if the Wraith weren't still a prominent threat back in the Pegasus Galaxy), Atlantis would have been the ideal holiday location, and Liam clearly felt the same way.

"We'll see," Sam said simply, before she and Daniel stood up and joined the rest of the team on the Asgard teleporter, nodding to the lieutenant at the control panel to send them down to the planet as she stepped onto the machine. As the lieutenant tapped the buttons that would send the SGC's premier team down to the planet, Sam and Daniel gave Liam one last brief wave before departing in a brief glow of light.

As the brilliant white light of the teleportation faded from their eyes, SG-1 quickly glanced around at their surroundings, making sure that nobody had seen them. Fortunately, the Odyssey's scanners had been accurate; they were on the outskirts of a small town, resembling something that would have been discovered on Earth at any point between the middle ages and the fifteenth century, but in an area that was presently experiencing little to no real activity. In general, it seemed no different from any of the other pre-industrial planets the SGC had encountered on their travels through the Stargate; no technology more advanced than a horse and cart, basic construction materials used in the development of both roads and houses, and other similar details about the way of life these people appeared to possess.

Overall, the only thing that spoiled the illusion of this just being another reconnaissance mission of a simple planet was the large form of an Ori battlecruiser sitting on the outskirts of the village, dominating most of the landscape and forcing the entire team to focus on the key issue of exactly what they were here to accomplish.

"Hoo boy…" Mitchell whistled softly as he studied the vast ship outside the village, before he glanced over at his friends. "Y'know, they really do seem a lot… bigger when you look at them like this."

"Rather than from other ships, you mean?" Sam asked, looking somewhat critically over at Mitchell. "Trust me, I saw those things up close when I was trying to sabotage the Supergate; they're even wore when you're only a few hundred metres away from them."
"Uh, can we just get on with what we were sent here to do and see what the *Hell* is going on here?" Vala asked, jerking her thumb towards the town centre, with several people already heading in that direction. "Call me impulsive, but we've got at least one likely-looking location to look for answers right over there; we should probably see about heading that way to check it out."

"Agreed," Sam said, nodding in confirmation at Adria. "The sooner we get done here, the sooner we can get Liam back home."

With that said, the five of them pulled up the hoods of their brown robes, closed them over their BDUs to avoid any possibility of attracting attention, and then headed towards the town centre, trying not to move too rapidly and risk attracting attention.

As they approached the middle of the town, they soon noticed the reason for the gathering that they had gathered was taking place; a Prior was standing on a balcony sticking out from a large building in the middle of the city, presumably the local equivalent of a town hall. For the moment, he appeared silent as he studied the people around him, but Daniel didn't need a moment to guess that this was only because he was waiting for everybody to arrive rather than out of a lack of anything to say.

"OK then," Mitchell said, nodding grimly as he studied the gathering before them, making sure to keep his eyes fixed on the Prior; if the guy showed even the slightest sign of doing anything, none of them wanted to be caught off-guard. "You all know the drill; just blend in with the crowd, wait for the Prior to give his speech, and then make sure nobody pays any real attention to you while we get back to somewhere out of the way where we can beam out."

Daniel nodded in agreement; the plan wasn't exactly perfect, but given that they hadn't quite been expecting the Ori presence here to be quite as established as it seemed to be, they'd just have to improvise somewhat if they were going to find out any more about how far the Ori's influence extended on this world. As the team joined the large throng of people gathered before the town hall, the last of the villagers seemed to arrive, as the Prior raised his head and began to address his audience.

"Mark this day," the Prior said, his white face as unnerving for the members of SG-1 as ever as he spoke to the gathered masses before him, "for the darkness of your world has been lifted so the light of Origin may shine upon it!"

For a moment, he paused to allow the crowd to cheer- evidently he'd already made a significant impression on the people if they were this eager to hear what he had to say- before he continued speaking. "You have cast aside the shackles of the past to welcome a brighter future. Now, hear the words of the Orici!"

As he stepped aside, a young woman dressed in a long gold sleeveless, shoulderless gown stepped forward, her dark hair pulled back in a tight bun. A thick gold strip of material surrounded her neck, and a small necklace was just visible underneath the material in question.

"That's Adria?" Vala whispered over to Daniel in shock.

Daniel didn't reply to Vala's statement- indeed, since Adria seemed to be about to start talking, he concluded that it wouldn't be a particularly smart thing to do, given how devoted these people seemed to be to the Ori- but he had to admit, the evidence seemed to make it clear that this woman definitely was Adria.
"The unbelievers amongst you sought to hinder our message," the rapidly-aged young woman standing before the crowd said; looking at what the Ancients and Ori could do if they put their mind to it, Daniel had never been more grateful to Oma for letting Liam age at a relatively normal rate and giving him a chance at a regular childhood. "They took up arms in an attempt to suppress the truth, but they failed and were vanquished; a reminder to all that Origin cannot be extinguished. It will flourish throughout this world and countless others."

As the crowd cheered once again, Sam and Daniel exchanged a brief, frustrated glance with each other; it was sometimes hard to believe that people could accept something like this after being deceived for so long by the Goa'uld.

"The believers amongst you have been richly rewarded, with truth, and with Origin…" Adria continued, pausing for a moment, a curious expression on her face as though she was sensing something, but then shook it off and continued talking. "It is now up to you to help others see as you have seen, to spread the message by joining the armies of the Ori!"

As the crowd cheered, Adria turned to whisper briefly to the Prior before she departed leaving SG-1 exchanging anxious glances with each other.

"OK… that is not exactly the best situation," Mitchell muttered grimly, as he glanced over at Sam and Daniel "Any recommendations regarding our next move against these suckers?"

Up on the Odyssey, Liam had just managed to finally find a comfortable spot on the floor to study the sight of the planet before him- all the chairs on the bridge were taken by the officers, but he'd found a part of the deck that was comfy enough to sit on without being in anybody's way- when Lieutenant Marks, manning the ship's scanners, looked anxiously over at Emerson.

"Sir," he said, anxiety evident in his voice as he looked at the colonel, "I'm picking up an energy reading coming from the surface of the planet."

"What is it?" Emerson asked, looking inquiringly at the lieutenant.

"It's a wave-" Marks began.

"A wave of radiation, emanating from the Stargate, spreading rapidly across the surface of the planet," Liam said, as he glanced over at Marks. "Am I right?"

Marks' stunned nod of confirmation was clearly all Emerson needed; he may have had his doubts about Liam's presence on the ship

"Get them out of there," he said, turning to the lieutenant who was currently manning the bridge's teleporter controls. "Now."

Liam had only just crossed his fingers, staring anxiously at the large space in the centre of the bridge, when the brief glow of the teleporter appeared in the middle, to be rapidly replaced by his parents and the other members of SG-1.

"What the… Liam?" Daniel said, looking in surprise at the anxious expression on his son's face. "Are you OK? Did something happen?"

"That's what we're trying to figure out," Emerson said, as he looked over at the team. "We detected
a wave of energy coming from the Stargate, Liam confirmed it, and…" 

He shrugged. "Well, that's all we know so far."

"Sir?" Marks said, glancing over at his commanding officer with a slightly stunned expression. "I'm… not picking up any life signs on the planet."

"What?" Sam said, turning to look at Marks in shock. "But… that's impossible."

"Is it a sensor malfunction?" Emerson asked, clearly not wanting to believe the implications any more than anybody else did.

As Sam walked over to check out another panel, Marks glanced back over the control panels in front of him before looking up regretfully at his commanding officer.

"All systems are operating normally," he said, an almost apologetic tone in his voice as he spoke.

"This can't be happening…" Daniel protested, as he looked desperately over at Sam. "There are thousands of people on that planet…"

Shaking her head as she studied the screens before her, Sam sighed as she looked forlornly up at Daniel.

"He's right," she said simply. "We're not picking up anything."

"Oh my God…" Liam whispered in shock as he stared at the planet before them.

So many innocent- albeit misguided- people had lived on that planet…

And now, in a matter of seconds, they'd vanished.

But why…?

And, more importantly, how?
A few minutes later, as the Odyssey scanned the planet below them in a desperate attempt to try to determine what had caused the events they'd just witnessed and if there were any remaining 'side-effects' from it, Daniel found himself hurrying along a corridor after Vala, Liam close behind him. Sam was helping the Odyssey technicians run the scans that they hoped would allow them to determine whether there was any sign of whatever had caused the recent 'annihilation'- there was no other word for it than that-, and Mitchell and Teal'c were preparing for the subsequent reconnaissance mission, but after Vala had walked out of the bridge, Daniel had hurried after her, saying he needed to talk to her, and Liam had followed because, in his words, he 'wanted to stop her making eyes at Dad'.

"Vala!" Daniel yelled after her; the former thief was walking rather briskly down the corridor, clearly uninterested in talking to anyone- not that Daniel was going to allow that to stop him, of course. "Look, we still don't know what happened down there-"

"There'll all dead, Daniel; that's what happened," Vala retorted, stopping briefly to glare at him. "Now then, why don't you just go back to the bridge and be with your son and his mother and leave me to-"

"Hey, Dad's trying to be nice here, lady!" Liam yelled, looking indignantly up at Vala. "Just because your daughter bought it down there-"

"And I'm relieved," Vala stated.

Daniel blinked in surprise.

"What?" Vala asked, noting his surprised expression. "Not all of us can have children we can be proud of, you know. Did you think I wanted to be responsible for the enslavement of an entire galaxy?"

"It was hardly your fault-" Daniel began.

"I knew she was the will of the Ori even before she was born," Vala stated, clearly having little interest in Daniel's attempts to talk to her. "I could have done something about it, but I didn't."

"She was your child-" Daniel tried to say once again.

"Maternal instinct can only excuse so much," Vala said bluntly, before her expression became slightly uncertain, as though even she didn't entirely believe what she was now saying. "Of course... I did tell myself that my relationship with her might prove to be an advantage, that at some point... at some critical moment, I might be able to reach her in a way that no one else could."

Liam thought about voicing his own opinion of that theory- something along the lines of 'Not a hope in Hell', assuming his father would let him get away with that-, but Vala spoke once again before he could say it.

"I'm just relieved that I'll never have to find out for sure," she said, looking at Liam with a slightly saddened smile as she did so. "After all, not all of our kids can have such a good heritage as yours does."

Liam blinked in surprise at the idea of Vala actually paying him a compliment, but before he could even say thank you, she'd turned and walked away, leaving the two Jacksons staring after her in a
somewhat bemused manner.

"Well..." Liam said after a moment's pause as he looked up at his father. "That was unexpected."

"Tell me about it," Daniel nodded briefly, before he sighed and turned his attention back to his son. "Anyway, we should probably get back to the bridge; your mother may have found something we can use."

As the two of them arrived on the bridge, they were just in time to overhear what sounded like a radio transmission from the survey team down on the planet's surface; Teal'c and Mitchell had also returned, having presumably attended to all the necessary preparations for the mission down to the planet.

"No chemical or biological agents in the atmosphere," the voice said, Sam nodding thoughtfully as she took in what was being said to her from her position by the radio. "The place is clean. The weird thing is whatever it was, it only seems to have targeted living tissue, because everything else was left standing."

At that comment, inspiration struck Daniel. Clearly, the same thought had occurred to Sam, since her next sentence coincided exactly with the theory that had just occurred to Daniel.

"You said the wave emanated from the Stargate?" she said, looking over at the lieutenant who'd been at the scanners when the incident took place.

"That's right," the lieutenant said, nodding in confirmation. "From there, it spread over the entire surface of the planet before dissipating."

That, more than anything, settled it for Daniel; it only took a brief look at Teal'c and Sam to confirm that the same explanation had occurred to them, and, judging by the shocked look on Liam's face, an at least basic history of Ancient technology had been included in his genetic memories.

"What?" Emerson asked, looking over at them in confusion.

"We know of only one device that would operate in such a manner," Teal'c explained, his face grim as he looked at Emerson. "The superweapon at Dakara."

"What, you mean that thing you used to destroy the Replicators?" Emerson said, looking over at Sam in surprise. "But I thought that had been destroyed by the Jaffa High Council... oh."

"Exactly," Sam said, nodding grimly as she looked at Emerson before she turned to look at the rest of SG-1. "We'd better send a message to Earth; the sooner the SGC know what we're dealing with, the better."

A few minutes later, the message to Earth having been transmitted, Sam, Daniel, Liam and Mitchell joined Teal'c as he stared out of the window, the Jaffa clearly deep in thought about their recent discovery. For a moment, the various members of SG-1 stood in silence- Vala had retreated to her quarters to reflect on recent events-, until Teal'c finally broke the silence that had settled upon them.

"I am ashamed that my brothers have utilized these methods," he said, his expression grim as he stared at the stars before him.

"Hey, they're only trying to stop something that's got everybody terrified-" Liam put in, trying to
look reassuringly at his unofficial 'uncle'.

"There is no honour in this action," Teal'c interjected, glaring down at Liam as he spoke. "Freedom without honour is meaningless, Liam Jackson; we cannot resort to the methods of our enemies to achieve victory."

"Well, what's done is done," Mitchell said, shrugging slight before he smiled slightly at the former First Prime. "Plus, when you get down to it, there is still an opportunity here."

"Cam's right," Sam added, nodding at Teal'c as she spoke. "We've got an Ori ship sitting on the ground, unmanned and unguarded."

For a moment, Teal'c continued to look grimly out of the window at the scene before him, and then, after a moment's pause, he turned to look resolutely at his friends.

"We must act quickly," he said simply, as the team turned to head for the teleporters, Daniel and Sam pausing as Liam continued after them.

"What are you doing?" Daniel stated, folding his arms and looking critically at his son.

"Coming with you; what else?" Liam replied, copying his father's pose as he looked up at Daniel. "Look, Dad, we all know that the Dakara superweapon doesn't leave anything alive when it hits, so you're basically going down to a deserted planet to investigate Ancient-like technology; can you honestly say that my insight isn't going to be useful in a situation like that?"

Exchanging a glance with Sam, Daniel sighed as they both acknowledged Liam's point; they really didn't have a legitimate reason to keep him on board the Odyssey this time around.

"OK, you can come along," he said, sighing slightly as he looked at his son. "Just… be careful and stay behind your mother and me, understood?"

"Of course," Liam replied, smiling up at his father.

As he walked off, Sam and Daniel only needed to exchange a brief glance with each other to confirm what Daniel had suspected; the look on Liam's face was the same one Daniel always used when Jack gave him an order he had no real intention of obeying.

It was official; one of them would have to keep an eye on Liam at all times.

A few moments later, all six members of the temporarily-expanded SG-1 were standing inside the Ori spaceship, the five adults with their weapons raised while Liam stood in the centre of the group, his hands glowing, although the glow faded once they confirmed there was nobody else there.

"You know your way around this tub?" Mitchell asked, glancing over curiously at Vala, only for the space thief to shake her head.

"All the corridors look the same," she said apologetically. "I haven't got my bearings yet; I'm sorry."

"There has to be some sort of control room here," Sam put in, glancing over at Liam as though
seeking confirmation; it may not have been quite the same as Ancient technology, but the Ori and
the Ancients shared so many similarities it would be almost impossible for Liam not to have at
least some idea of what the layout of this place was like. "I'm guessing it'll be in one of the forward
sections.

"Sounds about right," Liam replied, nodding in confirmation.

"Right then," Mitchell said, lowering his weapon as he looked at his friends, "we've got a lot of
ground to cover; time to split up."

Nodding in confirmation, the team subsequently divided and headed for their pre-designated
locations; Teal'c and Mitchell took off to try and track down the weapons systems, Daniel and Vala
set out to do a general reconnaissance of the surrounding area, and Sam and Liam had decided to
track down the control room of the ship (Liam, naturally, would have preferred to stay with both
his parents, but Daniel and Sam had both acknowledged that their best bet for getting information
lay in splitting up, and given Daniel's better knowledge of Ancient culture, it made more sense for
him to look at the general living quarters of the ship rather than join Sam and Liam looking at the
machinery.

Vala and Daniel had only been walking for a few moments when Vala, as though having come to a
decision, turned to look inquiringly at the archaeologist.

"Can I ask you a question?" she asked.

"Just the fact that you have to ask me makes me think I should say no," Daniel said, but he nodded
his acceptance nevertheless.

"Back on the Odyssey, you said you knew how I felt," Vala continued, looking curiously at him.
"What did you mean?"

"What?" Daniel said, blinking in confusion.

"Well… with Adria," Vala explained. "You said, 'Believe it or not, I know how you feel'. What did
you mean?"

For a moment, the two continued walking in silence, but, finally, Daniel sighed and spoke.

"Um… about ten years ago, my wife was taken as a host by a Goa'uld," he replied simply.

"Oh," Vala said, looking uncertainly after him as he walked along the corridor a short distance,
before she hurried after him. "That framed picture on the wall in your office; is that her?"

"Yeah…" Daniel replied, sighing slightly at the memory as he continued walking. "Her name was
Sha're; we were married for just over a year when she was… taken. I swore that I'd get her back,
but… in the end, I couldn't save her."

"Oh," Vala said simply.

"For a long time, I felt like I'd failed her," Daniel continued, allowing himself a slight smile as he
remembered the latest arrival to his life. "But at least I can be assured that she's no longer in any
pain… plus, of course, I have Liam and Sam in my life now."
Vala wasn't sure what to say to that, so, in the end, she decided to just say nothing.

If nothing else, what do you say to a man when discussing a child that you wished had been yours, not only because it would have been his, but because at least his child wasn't trying to conquer the galaxy despite having the potential to do so…

There was no two ways about it; life with SG-1 was remarkably complicated.

A few dozen metres down the corridor from the archaeologist and the ex-thief, as Mitchell walked through the now-open door in front of him, Teal'c just behind him, his eyes widened as he took in the full scale of the room before them. Judging by the large glowing egg-shaped device in the centre of the large round room— which vaguely reminded Mitchell of Cerebro in the X-Men movies—, he was prepared to guess that they were currently standing in the main power room of the entire ship.

"Wow…" he breath, as he glanced back at Teal'c. "Check this out. I may not have the Ancient know-how of some people, but I'd say this looks important."

"It appears to be a power generation chamber," Teal'c said.

"Exactly," Mitchell replied, nodding in approval. "Which has me thinking… it could be a good place to drop a little C-4."

"It would be our best opportunity to disable the vessel should it be necessary," Teal'c agreed, nodding in approval of his colleague's plan.

"Just in case we can't get this thing flying before the Ori come back, of course," Mitchell said, looking hastily at Teal'c to make sure the Jaffa understood where he was coming from. "I mean, if this all goes wrong, we can still win one for the home team while we're hauling ass for the gate."

"Mmm…" Teal'c said, nodding thoughtfully as he studied the surroundings. "A great Jaffa once said, "Exalted is the warrior who achieves victory without battle."

"Exactly," Mitchell said, nodding in approval. "Just winning only shows strength, but winning without fighting shows real skill."

"You are a student of ancient strategies?" Teal'c inquired, looking over at Mitchell in surprise.

"No, Landry said it to me," Mitchell said, shrugging apologetically at the Jaffa. "I think he was quoting Sun Tzu… or it could have been Doctor Phil."

Before Teal'c could respond to that, their radios activated, Liam's eager voice coming over the device as he spoke.

"Guys, Mom and I found something!" he yelled, sounding almost as enthusiastic as he had when he'd first met Sam and Daniel.

"What have you got?" Daniel's voice said over the radio before the other two could respond.

"It's the bridge- well, according to Liam it's a bridge," Sam put in, followed by a faint exchange that sounded like she was criticizing Liam for grabbing her radio before she continued talking. "It
looks like the main command interface is a chair, similar to the weapons platform in Antarctica. Liam was right; there really doesn't seem to be much difference between this and Ancient technology. Vala, you mentioned that most of the people on these ships were simple villagers, right?"

"Yes, why?" Vala's voice added.

"Well, I think that means that it's likely that the Priors were the ones who were flying the ships," Sam explained, frustration in her voice. "With that in mind, it probably means that the chairs are keyed in to their unique brain physiology; Liam's already tried it, but it would appear that, whatever the differences between the Ancients and the Ori, they're enough so that the chair doesn't recognise Liam as an acceptable pilot."

Exchanging glances, Teal'c and Mitchell noted that both of them clearly felt the same way about that particular revelation; even if Liam had been able to pilot the ship, it was doubtful that his parents would have allowed him to go into battle in it no matter how safe he would have been.

"Don't sweat it," Mitchell added, smiling slightly as he raised his radio, finally taking part in the conversation. "Me and T. are in the power room; just give us a few moments and Plan B is ready."

"OK, let's not jump the gun just yet," Sam said, as Teal'c pulled out some of his samples of C-4 and began to plant it around the power core. "At the very least, Liam and I would like to try to get some information out of this database before we start blowing things up; maybe we'll discover a weakness in their defences we can exploit."

"Right-o," Mitchell said, as Teal'c planted the last of the C-4 around the power core and the two men walked out of the room and back along the corridor they'd entered by. "Just make it quick; it won't be long before the Ori come back for this ship, and we're not going to let them-"

Teal'c suddenly raised his arm, cutting Mitchell off mid-sentence. For a moment, Mitchell was about to ask what that was about, but then he heard the faint sound of footsteps and an explanation was no longer necessary. As he and Teal'c raised their P-90s, they prepared to confront whatever Ori forces had been dispatched to reclaim their ship…

Then the sound of charging staff weapons reached his ears, and Mitchell realised just who they were dealing with; he wasn't sure if he preferred this option or the Ori. As soon as they rounded the corner, the two SG-1 members found themselves face-to-face with a group of Jaffa.

"Cam?" Sam's voice said over the radio; he'd been so caught up in recent events he'd forgotten to terminate the call. "Cam, what's happening?"

"Not much," Mitchell said into the radio, his eyes fixed on the new arrivals at all times. "We've just got ourselves some company."

For a moment, the two sides simply stared at each other, and then one of the Jaffa stepped forward, his cold gaze resolutely fixed on the two in front of him.

"I am Bo'rel of the free Jaffa," he said, his tone and stance clearly permitting no interruption, "and we have come to lay claim to this vessel."

"Hey, slow down brother; we were here first," Mitchell retorted.
"Cam, report!" Sam insisted over the radio.

"It's all right, Sam," Mitchell replied, speaking into the radio even as he continued to stare at the new arrivals; he wouldn't give anyone the satisfaction of breaking eye contact first. "Just a little misunderstanding with some of our Jaffa friends; you and Liam get back to work."

"There is no misunderstanding," Bo'rel retorted, looking at Mitchell as though he was an idiot for thinking such a thing. "We achieved this victory, therefore we claim the spoils."

"What you have done is sacrificed the lives of thousands of innocents," Teal'c retaliated, clearly showing little compassion for Bo'rel's explanation.

"Nobody is innocent who joins the enemy," Bo'rel retorted back at the first free Jaffa.

"They were invaded by an army with massively superior firepower." Mitchell protested.

"They should have resisted," Bo'rel said scathingly.

"So... what?" Mitchell glared. "It's die at the hands of the Ori or die at the hands of the Jaffa now? Some choice."

"Enough of this," Bo'rel said; either he didn't feel Mitchell's point was worth contradicting, or (As Mitchell hoped) he didn't have a decent comeback and was falling back onto his original plan. "This ship is ours, and you shall lower your weapons."

"Not gonna happen," Mitchell retorted, clutching his gun. The Jaffa may be officially their allies, but when faced with this many guys packing weapons of any kind, Mitchell wasn't going to disarm for anybody but the rest of SG-1.

"Colonel Mitchell..." Teal'c said warningly, glancing over to one side as he spoke. Spinning around, Mitchell took just enough time to process that he wasn't going to shoot an innocent- the Jaffa standing there was holding a zat aimed directly at him- but, before he could fire, the zat blast hit him. As he fell to the ground, he barely registered Teal'c raising his gun and beginning to fire before he lost consciousness, leaving his Jaffa friend to face his people alone.

"Great," Sam groaned, as the sound of gunfire came over Mitchell's radio. Whether he or Teal'c were doing the firing wasn't clear and, right now, it didn't matter; the only thing that mattered was that they were all facing some serious trouble unless they could deal with this problem soon.

"Liam," she said, looking over at her son where he was studying the control chair in the middle of the room, "get ready; we're leaving."

"Leaving?" Liam protested, looking dejectedly up at her. "Aw, Mom, I've barely even started to look at this thing yet..."

"It's going to have to wait," Sam said simply, before she activated her radio and contacted the ship above them. "Odyssey, this is Carter, requesting immediate evacuation."

After a moment's pause, Liam looked inquiringly at his mother.

"Uh... is this some new definition of 'immediate' that Aunt Oma didn't tell me about?" he asked.
"No… something's not right here," Sam replied, shaking her head anxiously as she activated her radio once again. "Odyssey, what's happening?"

"We're getting too much signal degradation for successful beam-out," Emerson replied from the other end of the communication. "As far as I can tell, the malfunction's aren't coming from this end."

"Great…” Sam groaned, as she looked over at Liam. "I don't suppose you could have touched anything to turn the shields on?"

"What?" Liam said, looking almost offended. "Mom, the only thing I've done is sit in the chair; I haven't touched any consoles!"

Sam knew he was telling the truth; she'd been watching him pretty much ever since they entered the control room, and he quite clearly hadn't gone anywhere near the control consoles.

"Guys," she said, tuning her radio to talk to the rest of SG-1 instead, "we have a problem; the Odyssey can't beam us out."

"Why not?" Daniel asked anxiously.

"Well," Sam said, studying the consoles before her as she tried to figure out what she'd done originally, "I'm not a hundred percent sure, but I think I may have activated the shields."

"Why would you do that?" Vala practically yelled over the radio.

"Little thing called an accident, Miss Doran; know what that means?" Liam retorted over the radio. "You really think Mom would get us trapped here on purpose? I mean--"

"Liam, enough of that," Daniel retorted, his tone allowing for no argument before he spoke again. "Sam, can you fix it?"

"I'll try..." Sam mused, as she reached over to connect her laptop up to the console, just before her radio activated again.

"SG-1, this is Odyssey," Emerson's voice said. "Three ha'tak vessels are moving into positions around the planet."

"Don't chance it, Odyssey," Sam said into the radio; as much as she hated the idea of having to deal with an attack on the ship with Liam in danger, she knew they had to consider the safety of the Odyssey's crew as well. "We can't risk losing another ship."

"All right," Emerson said after a moment's pause. "Be advised that we're leaving range to avoid detection."

With that, the radio cut out, leaving Liam looking anxiously at his mother.

"So… we're alone, huh?" he asked.

Sam nodded grimly.
"We are," she told her son. "All we can do now is stay hidden and do what we can."

As Mitchell blearily opened his eyes, the first thing he registered was that at least he wasn't dead; that would really have been a sucky end to what was already proving to be a rather sucky day.

The next thing he registered was that he was being prodded in the side by a staff weapon.

"All right… all right," Mitchell groaned, as he hauled himself back up into a sitting position. "Geez, give me a break, willya?"

"Where is the rest of your team, Colonel Mitchell?" Bo'rel asked, staring resolutely at him.

"I don't know what you're talking about," Mitchell replied, trying to sound truthful.

"You were speaking with a female," Bo'rel said, holding up his radio and tapping it. "Where is she?"

"Um… she's back at the village," Mitchell replied, hoping the guy bought it. He did not want to be responsible for Liam getting shot at by a bunch of ticked-off Jaffa; even assuming the kid had Ancient-based powers that could probably deflect any weapon used against him, Sam would not be happy with him for endangering the kid. "Probably gone back through the gate by now…"

"You are lying," Bo'rel said simply, before he activated the radio and held it to his mouth. "This is a message to all Tau'ri on board this vessel. My name is Bo'rel, and my brothers and I have taken this ship in the name of all free Jaffa. We have Teal'c and Colonel Mitchell in custody. Surrender now and no harm will come to them. If you do not identify yourselves immediately, we will have no choice but to assume your intentions are hostile, in which case we will deal with the prisoners harshly."

For a moment, there was silence, and Mitchell allowed himself a slight smile; clearly, the team were staying hidden.

"So be it," Bo'rel said grimly, as one of the other Jaffa activated the staff weapon and aimed it at Mitchell. Staring resolutely at the weapon now aimed at him, Mitchell tensed himself for the impact…

"Bo'rel," a voice suddenly said over the radio- Mitchell wasn't sure whether he should be grateful to still be alive or frustrated that his team had given away their presence-, "this is Daniel Jackson of Stargate command. Listen, there's no reason we should be fighting each other; we should be working together."

"I am afraid that would not be possible," Bo'rel replied coldly.

"Look," Daniel's voice insisted, "we're dealing with some very advanced technology here, and we have some experience that might be useful."

"You doubt our ability to fly this ship?" Bo'rel practically growled, his hand tightening over the radio to such an extent that Mitchell briefly thought he was going to crush it.

"All I'm saying," Daniel protested, "is that there's not a lot of time, and it would be in everyone's best interests if we pool our resources."
"My orders are to take this ship and all on board," Bo'rel retorted, his voice as grim as ever. "You will reveal your location to me now."

Just as he finished speaking, Mitchell heard the sound of charging staff weapons over the radio, and had to bite his lip to stop himself from swearing; he couldn't be sure that Liam was listening to this, but if he was, he wasn't going to be responsible for the kid picking up bad words.

"That... won't be necessary," Daniel said, a resigned tone in his voice before someone else- clearly a Jaffa- spoke into the radio.

"Bo'rel, we have them," the voice said.

"Well done," Bo'rel replied. "Hold them until our patrols find the control room."

Great… Mitchell groaned mentally as he slumped back against the wall. We are in serious trouble now…

As Daniel and Vala got back to their feet, their hands on their heads, Daniel allowed himself a brief moment to hope that Sam and Liam were all right- they hadn't been asked anything about what a child was doing on the ship, which was at least something encouraging- before he turned his attention back to the matter of getting out of here alive.

"Look, you're making a big mistake," he insisted, looking desperately at the Jaffa around him. "More Ori ships will be here soon-"

"Then they will suffer the same fate," a Jaffa soldier said grimly.

"I think not," a voice interjected.

Before anyone could even begin to look for the new arrival, the Jaffa's weapons suddenly flew away from them and the Jaffa in question began to choke, clutching their throats as though trying to stop somebody from strangling them. As Daniel and Vala stared in shock at the sight before them, the Jaffa's bodies collapsed to the ground as a regal-looking, beautiful woman walked out of a side corridor to stand before them.

Daniel's eyes widened in shock, but Vala beat him to it before he could say anything.

"Adria?" she said, looking in shock at her genetically-altered daughter.

"Hello, mother," Adria replied, as though nothing out of the ordinary had just taken place.
Within the Battlecruiser

Daniel didn't even stop to consider the consequences of his actions; as long as this woman lived, she was a danger to the galaxy and everyone in it, including his son and the woman he loved. Diving for a nearby zat gun, he raised it to fire at Adria, his fingers tightening on the control switch…

Then, much to his shock, he felt… something… grab him around the throat, forcing him to drop the zat as he instinctively raised his hands to his throat, only partly surprised when he found nothing there that could account for this latest turn of events.

"OK!" Vala yelled, as a staff weapon began to rise up from the ground to point at Daniel. "We all know that you have telekinetic powers, darling; you can stop showing off now!"

With that, the staff fell to the ground and the pressure on Daniel's neck finally vanished, leaving him gasping for air as Adria walked over to Vala, smiling affectionately at her mother.

"I've missed you, mother," she said, sounding far younger than her physical age suggested; if it wasn't for the fact that she didn't show her enthusiasm as clearly as Liam had, the parallels between this reunion and Liam's introduction to Sam and Daniel would have made the whole thing even more disturbing. "They said I should forget about you, that you'd abandoned me because you didn't care."

"No!" Vala insisted, smiling in an overly cheery manner, clearly trying to convince Adria that abandoning her daughter had been the last thing on her mind; Daniel wasn't sure who 'they' were—possibly some of the Ori followers charged with guarding Adria while she was 'growing up'—, but he doubted they could have SG-1's best interests at heart.

"I knew you'd come for me," Adria continued, smiling warmly at her mother as she spoke. "It's… good to see you again."

"How is it that you're even alive?" Vala asked, looking in confusion at her daughter, while clearly trying to be as polite as possible. "Everyone else on the planet was killed."

"I was saved by this," Adria replied, indicating the necklace she was wearing. "It holds a piece of the holy city of Celestis. It protects me, keeps me safe."

"Oh," Vala said simply, once again clearly trying not to show the full truth of how she felt about that. Daniel had to admit, the idea of that necklace protecting Adria from the Dakara Superweapon was fascinating—would it only work for her, or could others use it?—, but, for the moment, he was willing to let Vala handle this.

If nothing else, he wasn't too keen on encouraging Adria to start using her powers on him again; he wasn't clear on if she knew about Liam or not— to say nothing of him not being sure whether she was telepathic or not— but he wasn't particularly eager for her to learn that his son was hanging around here as well.

"Soon," Adria said, smiling affectionately at her mother as she walked towards her, "the other ship will come for us, and once we're back with the fleet, I promise you, mother, we'll never be separated again."

As she hugged her mother, Vala glanced briefly at Daniel, and he knew that the same thought had crossed both their minds.
This situation had just become extremely complicated, and it hadn't exactly been simple to start with…

As Bo'rel continued to study the equipment before him, fiddling with his zat in a manner that suggested he had an overly itchy trigger finger, Mitchell could only stand and wait for an opportunity to get back at this asshole for what he'd done to them. He wasn't denying that the Jaffa's alliance with Earth was one of the main reasons they'd managed to do as well as they had so far - it wasn't like they had entire armies available to deploy through the Stargate on Earth at a moment's notice - but gratitude for past victories would only get this guy so much leeway with him before he finally lost it. The fact that Teal'c looked just as annoyed as he did at least limited the guilt he felt about thinking that, but it still didn't

"There are some," Bo'rel suddenly said, breaking into Mitchell's train of thought as he walked over to the bound lieutenant-colonel, "who hold the Tau'ri in great esteem for the assistance they provided us against the Goa'uld."

"I'm guessing you're not one of them?" Mitchell replied, trying not to sound as annoyed as he felt; right now, he was only still alive because of this guy, so antagonising him probably wouldn't be the best idea he'd ever had.

"While I recognize the contributions made, I question the motive," Bo'rel replied, leaving Mitchell forced to stop himself from rolling his eyes in frustration; did these guys really think that the Tau'ri had gone to all that effort of freeing the Jaffa just to set themselves up as the new Goa'uld?

"I suspect it had more to do with self-preservation than generosity," Bo'rel continued, looking critically at Mitchell. "We had a common enemy, and…"

He shrugged. "As much as the Tau'ri would have us believe that we could not have defeated the Goa'uld without them, I know better."

Trying once again to bite back the automatic retort that sprang to mind - if the Jaffa hadn't needed the SGC's help to deal with the Goa'uld and the Replicators, how was it that it had been Samantha Carter and Daniel Jackson who'd played the crucial role in the final fight with the Replicators rather than any of the Jaffa soldiers available, to say nothing of Daniel convincing Oma to get off her Ancient ass and help get rid of Anubis at the last minute? - Mitchell could only watch as Bo'rel picked up the C4 trigger and looked critically at him.

"What is this device?" he asked bluntly.

"Haven't a clue," Mitchell replied casually; if they had to blow the ship up to stop either side getting their hands on it, he was prepared to accept that as a necessary sacrifice to maintain the balance of power.

Staring grimly at Mitchell, Bo'rel pressed the button on the C4 detonator, activating the explosives to activate.

"I will not ask you again," he said, staring grimly at the lieutenant colonel.

"Mmm…” Mitchell said, pausing for a moment in pretend thought before shaking his head. "Nope; still nothing."
Even if it meant them having to be blow up, he could *not* allow these guys to gain this kind of advantage over Earth; it was hard enough having to deal with the Ori without given a bunch of renegade jaffa who seemed to see the Tau'ri as just as much of a problem as the Ori were.

Just then, the lights went down around them, prompting Bo'rel to put the device down and glance over at one of his Jaffa.

"Find out what's happening," he said grimly.

Meanwhile, up in the control room, Sam smiled over at Liam as she closed her laptop and stuck it back in her bag.

"Come on, let's get going," she said, indicating the door before them. "You'd better take the Prior's staff; if nothing else, the opportunity to get a better look at that couldn't hurt-"

"Plus I might be able to use *it*, huh?" Liam replied, smiling slightly back at his mother as he took the staff from her and raised it up in one hand, smiling slightly as he spun the 'weapon'- for lack of a better term- in his hands before he held it up in one hand, apparently unconcerned about the fact that it was at least a couple of feet taller than he was. "Well, it's worth a shot; maybe the only reason the chair rejected me was that I was… a bit short or something like that."

"Exactly; it can't hurt to try it, at any rate," Sam said, nodding in agreement at her son before she turned back towards the door, raising her zat in one hand as she indicated the corridor before them. "I'll lead the way; you stay behind me and don't attract attention to yourself, understood? I don't think the Jaffa here would kill us, but I'd rather not risk your life on an uncertainty."

"Mom, will you just *relax* already?" Liam sighed, as he tightened his grip on the staff. "I'll be fine, I promise."

"Just be sure you stay that way, young man," Sam said, smiling slightly at him before her expression became more serious. "Your father and I only just got you in our lives; we are *not* losing you so soon, OK?"

Looking back at the stern figure of his mother, Liam nodded reassuringly at his mother.

"Got you, Mom," he said simply.

With that, the two of them walked out of the door and headed back into the corridors of the Ori ship, each of them ready for anything that might be subsequently thrown at them.

As Daniel lay on the floor, trying not to attract too much attention to himself as he watched the scene before him, Vala stepped forward to take Adria's hands in her own, trying to stare authoritatively at her daughter.

"Listen, we're *not* rejoining the fleet," she insisted. "You're coming with me."

"No," Adria replied, stepping back and shaking her head. "I can't abandon my army; we have already lost two ships, and I cannot allow them to lose faith by abandoning them when they need me most."

"It's *not* your army!" Vala insisted.
"Of course it is," Adria replied casually. Looking at her, Daniel didn't think he'd ever stop being grateful that Oma had been willing to grant Liam the chance to grow up in a mostly normal fashion; he wasn't how he'd have coped with a son who acted anything like the way Adria acted if his growth had been accelerated as much as Adria's had, even if Liam would have been on Daniel's side rather than against him.

"Well," Vala insisted, staring resolutely at Adria, "as your mother, I'm putting my foot down on this matter; you're too young to have your own army."

"They look to me for guidance," Adria insisted; if Daniel hadn't been perfectly aware of what she was capable of, he would have found it almost amusing to see a fully-grown woman acting like a little girl trying to understand why mommy was mad at her. "For protection…"

Then she turned to look harshly at Daniel. "And for answers."

As he felt a vague tingling sensation gathering around his eyes, Daniel desperately tried to force any thoughts of Liam or the Dakara Superweapon to the back of his mind as rapidly as he could. His knowledge and experience of telepathy may have been limited, but his confrontation with Sam's Replicator duplicate had given him a decent idea of what he needed to do to prevent somebody from getting what they after by probing his mind. Just so long as he didn't think too much about what she was looking for, and focused on thinking about other things from his past that he could still clearly recall- the feel of Sam's lips on his own when they had their first kiss, the happiness he'd felt when he'd managed to save Skaara from being used by Klorel as a host, the pain at the knowledge that he'd been unable to remove Amaunet from Sha're, the pain of his death prior to Oma helping him to ascend- he might be able to prevent her from finding what she was looking for…

"Don't!" Vala protested, looking desperately at Adria. "He doesn't know anything!"

Whether it was because she'd given up on her attempts to get information, or just because Vala had distracted her, Daniel didn't know; all he cared about was that he no longer felt like somebody was trying to pry his brain out of his skull.

"You have a strong mind," Adria said casually, before she turned to look at one of the Jaffa corpses lying off to one side. "Wake up, Jaffa."

As Daniel and Vala watched in shock, the Jaffa's eyes suddenly opened- despite the fact that he'd definitely been dead only a few seconds ago- before he was lifted into the air, floating in front of Adria as she stared grimly at him.

"Welcome back," Adria said casually, before her eyes narrowed as she glared at him, giving Daniel an opportunity to scramble back onto his feet as she stared at the apparently-resurrected Jaffa. "Now, tell me, what happened to the believers who came to spread Origin to this world? Yours is a backward people, too primitive to have created such an effective weapon. So tell me, how did it come into your hands? Where is it?"

"Stop!" Vala yelled desperately at her daughter.

"Don't interfere, mother," Adria said dismissively, throwing Vala back into Daniel with a wave of her hand as she glared at the Jaffa before her. "Where… Jaffa?"
After a prolonged period of silence, during which the Jaffa seemed to strain against her invasion of his mind, Adria spoke once again.


After a tortured moment, during which Daniel and Vala could only pray that the Jaffa would be able to resist, the temporarily-resurrected warrior weakly opened his mouth to speak.

"Da…ka…ra…" he gasped briefly.

With that, Adria casually snapped his neck, sending the Jaffa collapsing to the ground.

"Dakara," she repeated, a grim expression on her face as she looked back at the two members of SG-1. "It would appear that my next destination has been chosen."

As Mitchell waited impatiently in the corridor where he and Teal'c had encountered the Jaffa, a couple of soldiers already having been dispatched to find out what had happened to the lights, he desperately tried to think of something that he and Teal'c could do that would get them out of this situation without running the risk of being shot or killed by their guards. Charging them was a possibility, but it was a dumb one as far as he could see; they just couldn't move fast enough to get to those guys without getting attacked.

Just as Mitchell was about to turn to Teal'c and see if the big guy had any plans when he suddenly heard a faint noise from around the corner. With a brief nod from Bo'rel, a Jaffa was sent to investigate the sound, only for the top end of what looked surprisingly like a Prior's staff to hit the man on the top of his head and send him crumpling to the ground. No sooner had the Jaffa hit the ground than Liam- looking more than slightly ridiculous holding a staff that was at least a couple of feet taller than he was- stepped out around the corner and thrust it out before him, sending Bo'rel and the remaining guard hurtling back to the end of the corridor and knocking them out.

Mitchell blinked.

"Did you just… use that thing?" he said, indicating the staff in Liam's hand as Sam walked around the corner to stand beside her son. "I thought it was a Priors-only deal?"

Liam shrugged.

"Hey, it's used to enhance the Prior's mental powers; Mum and I figured it would probably do the same thing for my own abilities," he said casually, before he turned his attention back to the staff and sighed in frustration. "It's a bit draining, of course, but I think I'll get used to it."

"Hold on a minute; it's 'draining' for you to use your powers?" Sam repeated, looking down anxiously at her son. "You never mentioned that-"

"Look, I just feel a bit tired if I use my powers for something too big, and I'm still getting used to using this staff as a booster; it's nothing important, Mom!" Liam protested, looking up at her with the same resolved expression that Mitchell recognised from Daniel when he was trying to make a point. "We've got bigger issues to worry about right now, anyway; there's still the fact of us being stuck on this stupid ship, you know!"

"Stuck?" Teal'c repeated, looking inquiringly at Sam.
"Someone seems to have activated the battlecruiser's shields; the Odyssey can't beam us out," Sam clarified, as she looked anxiously at her fellow SG-1 members. "Since the Jaffa couldn't have been in a position to do that or we would have heard about it, and neither us or them have the powers to control it in the first place, the conclusion is obvious."

"There's someone else on this thing?" Mitchell groaned, as he looked in frustration at his fellow lieutenant-colonel and team scientist. "Great…"

"Plus, of course, there's the little fact that Odyssey had to leave in order to escape the motherships that showed up recently," Liam pointed out, a frustrated look on his face as he studied the Jaffa lying at the opposite end of the corridor. "I have to admit, I am really getting annoyed with these guys…"

"Liam…" Sam said, a warning tone in her voice as she looked at her son. "Getting angry at the Jaffa won't solve anything; they had their reasons for doing what they did, and you need to acknowledge that."

"Look, can we save discussions on the morality of getting annoyed at what people'll do to survive later?" Mitchell put in, taking out his radio as he spoke. "Right now, the Stargate's our only way home, so I say we get the hell out of dodge right now; I'll call our wayward sheep."

With that, he activated his radio and raised it to his mouth. "Jackson, Vala, come in; you guys read me?"

No sooner had the words crossed his mouth than the lights around them suddenly lit up, followed almost instantly by Liam collapsing to his knees, clutching his head with one hand as he tightened his grip on the staff with the other.

"Liam!" Sam cried out in alarm, crouching anxiously down beside her son, Teal'c and Mitchell hurrying over to check on the young boy. "What's wrong?"

"Mental waves… of some sort…" Liam gasped weakly, looking up at his mother with concern and pain evident on his face as he raised a hand to hold his head. "Something… something's happening…"

Before Sam, Teal'c or Mitchell could ask the young boy to elaborate, there was a sudden shudder that seemed to spread throughout the room, and then end.

Mitchell looked anxiously over at Sam.

"Uh… any chance that wasn't what I think it is?" he asked.

"If you think it was the ship taking off?" Sam asked, looking apologetically over at her friend. "I can't tell you that, Cam."

"Well, no harm in hoping," Mitchell said, groaning slightly before he looked back at Liam. "Don't suppose you can tell us where these… 'waves' you're picking up are coming from?"

Liam shook his head, already looking slightly better as he stood up; presumably the 'waves' that had thrown him to the floor earlier had died down now that they'd managed to get the ship off the ground.
"Sorry, Uncle Cam; I've got nothing on that," he said apologetically. "I think it's because these waves seem to be just as strong no matter where I am; it's hard to work out where they're coming from."

"Right," Sam said, nodding briefly at her son and her teammates as she indicated back the way she and Liam had come. "We'd better start by checking the main control room; even if whoever's doing this has psychic powers, it's possible they've stationed themselves there to make it easier for them. If they aren't there, I might still be able to override primary systems from the control room."

"And if the people who have taken control of this ship are there?" Teal'c inquired.

Clutching the Prior's staff and holding it out in front of him, Liam smiled slightly up at the Jaffa.

"Then I show them what I can do," the part-Ascended child said simply.

For a moment, Sam looked like she was going to protest, but then she sighed, evidently recognising Liam's resolve to do what needed to be done- he was so much like his father in that regard she was once again reminded of the old 'nature VS nurture' argument; if she'd ever needed proof that nature could win out it was standing right in front of her- and simply turned around to head back the way they'd come.

"All right," she said, looking briefly back at Liam as the four of them began to head back towards the control room. "Just remember, if it looks like we're heading into a dangerous situation-"

"Keep my head down and try not to draw attention to myself, right?" Liam asked, smiling reassuringly at his mother. "Don't worry, Mom; I'm not going to do anything stupid."

"You won't do anything stupid in a fight?" Mitchell repeated, looking somewhat teasingly at Liam before he glanced over at Teal'c. "You sure this guy's a Jackson?"

As the group advanced into the ship, however, Liam was already making plans to cut and run at the first opportunity to track down the source of those psychic waves.

He hated the idea of lying to his mother, of course, but when push came to shove, he wasn't going to risk her life by taking her to the source of those waves he'd detected earlier; she and the others wouldn't be able to take on something that powerful and get away.

Liam knew precisely what was out there, and he was going to take her on as soon as he could.

The battle he'd practically been born for would soon begin…

Liam just wished he felt a bit more confident about his chances of holding his own against the Orici when the time came.
Alteraci VS Orici: Round One

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Just to mention in advance, the scenes with Mitchell and Teal'c after they left the rest of the group-with them running into the Jaffa and Mitchell attempting to set off the C4, only for Adria to stop the attempt- happen pretty much in exactly the same way as it did in the show; given that nothing significant would have been altered in those scenes, I didn't see much point in rewriting it, given how long I've had to make everyone wait for this chapter already.

Child of the Ancients

As she finally entered the main control room, Sam was only slightly disappointed to realise that there was nobody inside it. On the one hand, it meant that she, Mitchell, Teal'c and Liam wouldn't have to potentially risk their lives before she could get on with trying to take control of the ship away from whoever was currently piloting it, but on the other hand, it meant that they had no way of gaining control of the ship back from whoever was piloting it in the first place.

"OK," Mitchell said, raising an eyebrow as he studied the room before him. "Here's a question; who's flying this boat?"

"I don't know..." Sam replied, shaking her head slightly in frustration as she pulled out her laptop and plugged it back into the control console. "Maybe if I can tap into the main computer, I can work out where this thing's receiving its commands from and cut them off from the ship's computer before we reach our destination..."

"And if that doesn't work?" Mitchell asked critically.

Sam shrugged.

"Then... we come up with a new plan," she said simply.

She just hoped that her current method of dealing with the situation would be enough; if they didn't work out where they were going soon, there was a good chance that none of them would be going anywhere...

As Daniel stood off to the side in the small room that seemed to serve as Adria's personal shrine, trying not to attract Adria's attention once again- the less time she spent with a reason to probe his mind, the less chance she'd find out about Liam before they were ready-, the young woman smiled slightly at Adria.

"I know that Tomin will be happy to see you again," she said, smiling warmly at her mother.

Vala looked up at that comment, clearly startled at what she'd just heard.

"Tomin's alive?" she said, her excitement at that information plain in her voice. "He wasn't on the planet with you?"

"No," Adria responded, shaking her head. "I've been travelling with various ships. As the leader of
this great enlightenment, it's important that I make my presence known, especially now, when the first inroads are being made. Once the rest of the fleet arrives, I'll have a much harder time of it."

"How many other ships are coming?" Daniel asked, knowing that attracting attention probably wasn't the best idea he'd had but knowing that the SGC would need to know this if they were going to have any chance of preparing themselves for a future assault in the event that their attempt to block the Supergate was ever dealt with.

"Many, many more," Adria replied, sounding as frustratingly smug about that fact as she always did when discussing Origin; Daniel was once again grateful to Oma for allowing Liam to grow up naturally and not get a big head about his parentage in the process. "By my estimation, the galaxy will be converted within the year."

If Daniel had been the type to make glib comments, he would have said something about how it didn't entirely look that way from where he was currently standing- how were the ships meant to get here with the Supergate still active and connected to that 'gate in the Pegasus Galaxy?- but he stopped himself in time; drawing further attention to himself would accomplish nothing, and he knew from bitter experience the first time they'd met that convincing Adria of anything outside her fathers’ programming would be practically impossible.

All he could do right now was wait for an opportunity to strike back and hope that it didn't come too late to do anything to her plans for the galaxy.

Or- almost worse, in his opinion- that it didn't come too late to stop her from finding out about Liam…

As Liam stood in the corner of the room, watching his mother as she anxiously worked away at her computer in a desperate attempt to locate whoever was controlling the ship, Mitchell pulled out his radio and raised it to his mouth.

"Jackson, come in," he said briefly. After a moment's static, he pressed the relevant button and tried again. "Jackson, Vala, can you hear me?"

After another moment of nothing but blank static, he put the radio back in his pocket and looked over at Teal'c.

"We'll have to go out there and look for 'em," he said, his frustration at the fact evident in his voice as he turned his gaze to be directed at Sam. "Sam…"

"I'll keep working on it," Sam said, nodding in confirmation at her old friend.

"Right then," Mitchell said, raising his weapon as he glanced back over at Teal'c, "let's go."

As the two men walked out of the door, Liam seized his chance and hurried out after them, quickly turning in the opposite direction from the other two as soon as he had left the door.

He hated having to leave his mother like that, of course, but he was fairly confident that she would be so focused on her work that she wouldn't notice that he was missing until it was too late for her to do anything about it. If he was lucky, he'd manage to find the Orici and take her out before his mother had any chance to realise what had happened, allowing her to regain control of the ship before they could reach whatever destination Adria had in mind.
Liam wasn’t entirely sure what would happen if he was wrong, of course—his Ancient knowledge was fairly detailed, but he would be the first person to admit that his abilities with people were sometimes sketchy at best, but given the possible stakes if he did nothing, he didn’t see that he had much of a choice available to him.

He was the only person who might have a chance of stopping Adria in a fight; he had to find her.

"I don't know why you're complaining," Adria said, sighing slightly sadly as she looked at Vala. "You should be delighted; as the mother of the Orici, you will be revered by all the followers of Origin."

"I really don't know..." Vala replied, leaning against the altar in the middle of the room, trying to sound nonchalant about the fact that her adult month-old daughter was trying to convert her to a religious belief that she knew was false. "While I appreciate the celebrity status, I have to admit it would get very tiresome very quickly, especially if I had to perform for the..."

She waved a hand uncertainly for a moment before she finally spoke. "...for the masses. I'm not very good with crowds."

"There will be no demands made on you," Adria said bluntly. "All you have to do is accept Origin into your heart."

"That could be a problem," Vala said, raising a finger to emphasise her point as she spoke.

"Perhaps at first," Adria admitted. "But eventually, you will embrace the truth."

"I don't think so," Vala retorted, glaring slightly at her daughter, only for Adria to spin around and stare at her in frustration.

"You're my mother!" Adria practically yelled at Vala (Daniel could only assume that the 'training' she'd received from the Ori prevented her from losing her temper too much in case she ended up accidentally injuring herself or others with her powers). "If I'm unable to convince you, how can I be expected to sway the countless worlds in this galaxy? Until I have brought you into the fold, my mission here is a failure."

Daniel doubted it would be that extreme—Adria was probably exaggerating in the hope of encouraging some kind of maternal sympathy by appealing to every parent's natural desire for their child to succeed— but to Vala's credit, she just stared back at Adria defiantly without any sign of being concerned about that statement.

"I can be very stubborn," she said simply.

"Then I'll be patient," Adria retorted grimly, her eyes narrowing as she looked at her mother and Daniel, "and very determined."

"What about all the other people that refuse to bow down to the will of the Ori?" Daniel interjected, glaring at her. "Are you going to show them the same courtesy?"

"There is a limit to my patience," Adria stated simply.
"And there's a difference between devotion and blind submission," Daniel countered; even after almost a decade of seeing the worst the galaxy had to offer, he couldn't believe how blatantly hypocritical some people could be when it suited them. "You can't expect to win the faith of your followers through fear and intimidation."

"What would you have me do?" Adria retorted as she glared at Daniel.

"Give people a choice," Daniel stated simply.

"I'm trying to bring an entire galaxy from darkness into light," Adria stated, shaking her head in what Daniel could almost swear was a regretful manner. "In order to do that, all doubt must be removed or it will spread like a cancer. It's that simple."

Daniel wasn't sure what was worse, really; that Adria could actually come up with an even remotely rational explanation for killing people who disagreed with her, or that she didn't even register how absolutely insane she sounded to any outside parties. Why was it that, no matter what galaxy they were from, humanity could always find some kind of excuse to rationalise war in the name of religion?

"Adria, listen to me-" Vala began desperately.

"I'm sorry, mother," Adria said, shaking her head slightly. "The time for talking is over. We've arrived."

If Daniel had been the type to swear, he would have done so at that point.

"We've arrived?" he repeated, looking at Adria in disbelief; he'd known she was powerful, but he hadn't imagined she could do something like that. "But you've been here with us; how could you have sent the ship to Dakara this fast?"

"The will of the Ori is capable of many things, Daniel Jackson," Adria said, looking at Daniel with a smile that Spike found particularly worrying. "Do not doubt what they are capable of; their spirit is here in me, even as it steers this vessel to its destination."

Daniel really didn't like the sound of that; the implications of that statement weren't encouraging no matter what way he looked at it.

He may prefer it if his son never had to be in a position where he would be forced to fight against Adria in a one-on-one confrontation, but he'd always hoped that, if it came down to a fight between them, they'd be relatively evenly matched.

If what Adria had just said was meant to be interpreted literally, and she could actually channel the collective will of the Ori even from this far away…

Daniel had little doubt that Liam was powerful- what Mitchell had told them about him channelling power into that 'Stargate enhancer' back on Danaar's homeworld proved that, even if they still didn't know what that had accomplished-, but if Adria could access the powers of all the Ori, Liam would be hopelessly outmatched; even in a best-case scenario, only a certain percentage of the Ancients would probably be willing to acknowledge his existence, never mind help him in a fight.

"Look-" he began as he took a step towards Adria, hoping that another tactic might work.
"Silence," Adria interrupted, closing her eyes and turning away from the two of them as she lowered her head, clearly concentrating on something. "I have… something to attend to."

After a moment's pause, during which Daniel and Vala exchanged confused glances with each other, Adria opened her eyes and turned to look back at them, a satisfied expression on her face.

"You should thank me," she said simply. "I just saved your lives."

"What are you talking about?" Vala asked.

Before Adria could reply, the sound of footsteps was suddenly heard from outside the corridor, a Jaffa appearing at the door even as the room's three inhabitants turned to look in the direction of the sound. Before either Daniel or Vala could react, the new arrival had been literally thrown out of the room, the doors automatically closing behind him as Adria turned back to look at the only other two people in the room.

"It will all be over soon," she said, smiling slightly as she looked at the two people before her. "In a matter of moments, the weapon at Dakara will be destroyed, and the word of the Ori can at last spread unchallenged across this galaxy."

"It won't be that easy," Daniel stated, staring resolutely as he spoke, wishing that he felt as confident as he was trying to appear; his recent thoughts about Liam's ability to hold his own against Adria if she was as powerful as she claimed to be hadn't exactly helped him on that front.

"Why wouldn't it be?" Adria retorted, sounding as frustratingly smug as she always did. "I'm about to destroy the only real threat against us."

"You're forgetting about someone," Daniel retorted, knowing that it wouldn't do any good but equally aware that he had to at least try. "What about the Ancients?"

Adria only looked scornfully at him at that last comment. "You know as well as I do they'll never get involved. We have free rein in this galaxy."

"Adria, listen to me," Vala hissed, stepping forward as she looked desperately at her daughter. "I promise to stay with you, I'll hear you out on the whole Origin thing; I'll… even try and keep an open mind. Just… let everyone else go."

"It's too late for them," Adria said, sounding almost apologetic as she shook her head, before a slight smile crossed her face.

"But don't worry," she added, as she turned to look at Daniel. "I'm keeping you alive; we have… plans for you."

Daniel didn't know what she meant by that comment, but he was willing to bet every book he possessed on ancient Egypt that it wouldn't be good for him.

If something didn't happen to change the situation soon, Daniel had little doubt that he and Vala were going to be serious trouble…

As Liam charged through the corridors of the Ori battlecruiser, heading resolutely for the location
where he could still sense the 'ripples'- out of a lack of a better term- that indicated the presence of the person controlling the ship, he only allowed himself to devote the absolute necessary amount of his attention towards what was immediately around him. It was hard enough tracking the source of the emanations as it was; tracking her- and it could only be Adria; no Prior could have been this power- while simultaneously preventing her from sensing his presence until he was ready; he could barely spare the attention necessary to stop himself from crashing into a wall or something like that in his mad rush to reach her location.

If there was one thing he knew about the Ori, it's that they hated waiting for anything for longer than they had to; whatever Adria was intending to do with this ship, he doubted it was going to be good.

He had to reach her before it was too late...

Then he rounded a corner and barely managed to skid to a halt as he heard the sound of multiple staff weapons firing at an unknown target; if he'd walked around that corner, the first thing the Jaffa would see would be the staff, and more than likely they'd shoot first and worry about questions later.

There are times, Liam reflected to himself as he spun around to press his back against the wall, when being smart for my age is a mixed blessing.

He groaned; even in his head, he sounded stupidly mature for either of his ages.

He knew that it wasn't Oma's fault, of course- she'd tried everything she could to give him at least some semblance of a normal childhood- but the necessity for him to be ready when the Ori came to this galaxy had meant that she'd been forced to enable him to grow up faster than he would have grown if he'd simply been left alone. He recalled some of his more relaxed moments before his training in his powers had really begun in intensity, of course, but this current situation reinforced the fact that he'd never had a normal childhood...

Then he sensed something vast and powerful coming towards him, and he forced his mind back on track; he had a definite feeling he was going to need all his strength for this. For a brief moment he sensed something trying to find him, but his pre-existing 'block'- the only thing that had allowed him to come this close to Adria without her detecting him earlier- continued to serve him well, and the... whatever it was... stopped almost as soon as he'd sensed it, leaving him where he was as the energy (Whatever it was) continued to advance towards him.

As he stood in the corridor, his hands clenched tightly around the Prior Staff that he'd taken from its original owner, Liam could only pray that his idea about how these things worked was accurate. Focusing his power through the staff, Liam sensed the subtle mental power within the staff itself, the power that allowed the Priors even greater control over their powers, and willed it to accept his power, boosting and enhancing it as it had enhanced the power of the Priors in the past...

Then the vast energy wave struck him, and, for a moment, Liam felt as though the world had suddenly decided to punch him in the gut for the hell of it. He felt as though he'd just run a marathon and every breath he'd had left in him had been forced out by somebody kicking him in the stomach. He nearly fell to the ground as he gasped for air, fighting to remain conscious as the energy wave swept through him before vanishing into the walls of the ship.

Glancing up ahead once again, he only vaguely registered that the staff weapons that had been firing earlier had now stopped; he'd have enough time to think about what had happened to them
later.

Right now, the only thing he was certain of was that Adria was still standing, and, if he didn't move quickly, she'd do whatever she'd come here to do. Forcing himself to his feet, using the staff as a crutch of sorts to help him regain his balance, Liam took a few deep breathes to try and regain his composure before he charged down the corridor before him, spinning around the corner and diving through the door to a small room that looked like it was intended as a shrine to the Ori or something like that.

When he saw the tall woman with long dark hair standing in the middle of the room, her eyes closed as she generated powerful psychic 'waves', Liam didn't hesitate. Raising the staff, he swung it like a club and struck the woman in the side of the head, sending her staggering and breaking her concentration.

"Sorry, Orici," Liam spat, glaring at Adria as she turned to look at him, her cold hatred of him clear as she realised who he was, "but I'm afraid that I can't let you do what you're doing."

"Alteraci!" Adria roared, glaring at Liam as he stared coldly back at her.

"My name is Liam," he retorted; he definitely wasn't going to give this lunatic any more reasons to go after his parents than she had already. Raising the staff before him in a defensive gesture, Liam extended one hand and beckoned his opponent towards him with his fingers, in a manner that he recalled Uncle Cam doing during a training fight with his mother on the Odyssey. "If you want to finish what you were doing, you're going to have to go through me first."

Adria didn't even hesitate. Raising her hands, she thrust a burst of red energy at Liam, who barely managed to counter the attack by raising the staff to launch a beam of brilliant blue light back at her. For a moment the two remained locked in a temporary stalemate, Adria focusing her will against Liam even as Liam channelled his power back at her, but then the 'ball' of energy where their two attacks met began to slowly move back towards Adria, Liam's eyes narrowing in concentration as he focused more and more of his power through the staff.

For a moment it seemed as though they were in a draw, locked in a stalemate as Adria focused ever more of her power at Liam while her physically younger foe tightened his grip on an ever-hotter staff, focusing more and more of his power through the staff at the woman standing opposite him.

The strain rapidly reached a point where something had to give or else both sides would be destroyed, and the 'something' that gave was Adria. Before Liam's eyes, Adria's resolute expression faltered, sweat streaming from her brow as she tried to focus, and the power she was generating briefly faltered, giving Liam all the opportunity he needed to strike. Before Adria could regain her focus, he generated one last, desperate burst of power through the staff, tearing through what energy was left from Adria's early attack and striking her head-on, sending her collapsing to the ground as Liam finally halted his attack, clasping the staff as he panted for breath.

"How... d'you... like... that?" he said, grinning slightly at Adria as she slowly raised her head to glare back at him. In the back of his mind, Liam knew that goading her wasn't the smartest move-stopping that energy wave from doing... whatever it would have done to him... had really taken it out of him, and he still wasn't back to full health yet-, but from what he could see, she didn't look much healthier than he felt at the moment, so it probably all balanced out in the end. "Ready... to... surrender?"

"NEVER!" Adria briefly yelled, sounding like it had taken all her breath just to get that much out,
before she touched a control on her wrist and instantly vanished into thin air.

Despite his own fatigue at their brief struggle, Liam sent out a brief mental probe to try and discover what had happened, and swiftly detected the now-familiar telepathic ripple of Adria's presence, apparently moving away from the battlecruiser at a rapid rate; Liam was prepared to bet that she'd sent herself to a shuttle of some kind to get away from that last attack.

Either way, it didn't matter how she was getting away; even if he'd been at full strength, he doubted his dad's 'side of the family' (Liam acknowledged that his dad wasn't actually an Ascended on a full-time basis any more, but he'd still acquired his 'extras' from him, so he tended to consider the rest of the Ascended as distant relatives the rest of the family didn't agree with) would allow him to exert the amount of power necessary to hold the shuttle immobile until somebody could capture Adria.

So long as she hadn't succeeded in doing whatever she'd set out to do, Liam could cope with her getting away.

Now, all he had to do was get back to the control room, find a radio, and see about calling for help...

Chapter End Notes

OK, before anyone starts accusing anybody on the Odyssey of leaving Liam behind on purpose, I'd like to clarify the reason for that; when the Odyssey locked on to SG-1 to beam them out, Liam was currently trying to 'shield' himself from being detected by Adria as he tried to track her down, so the ship's transporters were unable to lock on to him and he ended up being missed.
The Alteraci and the Jaffa

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

As he stood in the temple of Dakara, the group of Jaffa in the room having waited a few moments to allow the weapon to take effect, General Landry was barely able to stop himself from hitting Se'tak as the man looked casually at the Dakara Superweapon's controls before turning back to look at him.

God, if he didn't need to remain diplomatic if he was going to have any chance of making his point, he would have just punched the Jaffa leader and damn the consequences.

The man may just have killed three of the few people who the galaxy literally owed their very freedom to at this point- one of them the person who started his people on the path to freedom in the first place-, and the only thing he seemed to care about was the fact that Earth had apparently been suppressing the Jaffas' right to control their own destinies when they'd only wanted to work together to coordinate an assault on the Ori.

"The ship has been halted," Se'tak said, a slightly smug tone in his voice as he glared at the general. "Your attack on Dakara has been thwarted; the Ori warship is once more ours."

"And I keep telling you," Landry retorted, "my people have nothing to do with this. We only object to your use of the weapon against innocent people; we do not object to you taking power-"

"Hello?" a voice suddenly yelled over the radio in Landry's pocket- the only communication device in the room, which he'd brought along in case he needed to be informed of new developments at the SGC-, breaking the chain of conversation between the two men. "Sorry I didn't call earlier; I was a bit tired and got a little lost…"

Landry's eyes widened in shock as he pulled his radio out of his pocket, ignoring the critical looks from Se'tak- evidently he felt that Landry's not having mentioned the radio earlier was further proof that Earth didn't see the Jaffa as true allies- as he forced himself to focus on the more immediate concerns right now.

"Liam?" he yelled into the radio, unable to fully believe that Doctor Jackson and Colonel Carter's part-Ascended son was actually talking to him now, of all times. He vaguely registered that Se'tak was looking at him in a critical manner, as though angered at the lack of respect Landry was showing him, but Landry had questions that needed answered right now; Se'tak would have to wait a few moments. "What the- heck- are you doing here?" (He acknowledged that Liam probably had access to at least some Ancient swear words already, but he didn't Sam and Daniel to be able to accuse him of encouraging bad habits in their new-found son.)

"Trying to save the day, General Landry; what else do you do when you're on SG-1?" Liam asked, sounding like he was restraining a slight smile as he spoke. "I was… well, I was trying to avoid being detected by the Ori when the weapon at Dakara hit; given that the Odyssey would have followed us and rescued everyone else, it ended up with only me being in a position to stop the Ori before she could do anything."

"The Ori?" Se'tak repeated, looking critically at the radio in Landry's hand, before he walked over to yank the radio out of the general's hand and raise it to his own lips. "I am Se'tak, one of the council of the Free Jaffa Nation; who are you, and what do you mean when you say you have
'taken out' the Orici?" 

"Oh, so you're the guy who was firing that weapon at us?" Liam's voice replied, apparently unconcerned about the potential consequences of talking to the ruler of an entire people in that manner. "You know, you really need to think more about friendly fire; you nearly killed my family, and it took everything I had just to make sure I'd still be alive after that... thing hit me..."

Se'tak's eyes widened at that, and Landry could only hope that the Jaffa weren't so far gone that they'd countenance the use of a child as a weapon; Liam may be only a boy, but the potential damage he could do in a fight, if the powers he'd inherited from

"You... you claim to have survived the Dakara superweapon?" Se'tak said, staring incredulously at the radio before he looked critically up at Landry. "If the Tau'ri have discovered such a powerful defensive measure-"

"It's not a Tau'ri thing, sir; it's an Ancient thing- or, rather, an Ascended thing, if you want to be specific," Liam interjected (Evidently Liam had inherited his father's diplomatic skills; the 'sir' was a nice touch as far as gaining Se'tak's respect went, Landry had to admit). "It's a long story, and quite frankly it would be easier to explain up here rather than over the radio; what I can assure you of right now is that the Orici was also able to escape the Dakara weapon using what I can only presume was a similar method to what I used, and the Tau'ri as a whole are innocent of attempting any action against the Jaffa."

For a moment, Se'tak simply stood in silence as he contemplated what he had heard, before he looked up at Landry.

"This... boy... claims that he wields the powers of the Ascended Ones?" he asked, looking critically at the SGC commander. "How is this possible?"

"Well..." Landry said, pausing for a moment to come up with a convincing cover story that wasn't a total lie- he'd tell them all the truth about Liam later, but for the moment he doubted that Sam and Daniel would appreciate it becoming public knowledge that they were the parents of a boy who had access to the powers of the Ancients- before continuing, "as far as we've been able to learn, Liam was created when an Ascended Ancient linked himself to a human woman on a distant planet, resulting in him being conceived under circumstances nobody's entirely sure how to explain. After being raised on that planet for the last four years, Liam's people made contact with the SGC and Liam thus came to live with us, offering his assistance in fighting the Ori."

"He is the offspring of one of the Ascended and a human female?" Se'tak inquired, looking critically at Landry. "If he possesses such power, why does he ally himself with you in particular?"

Landry knew the implication in Se'tak's statement all too well; the Jaffa leader was wondering if the Tau'ri had somehow abducted Liam and forced him to work for them to give them an edge over the Jaffa in the current struggle.

"The answer to that is relatively simple, I assure you," Landry replied, already making sure that none of his answers were lies while still avoiding any implication of the true connection between Liam and his parents. "You have to understand that Liam's existence was concealed from the majority of the Ascended from the moment of his conception, as it was feared that the Ascended would object to his status as partly one of them and partly one of us, so he was primarily educated by only a very select few Ascended. As a result, the Ascended most responsible for his teaching in the knowledge and powers he possessed was Oma Desala, an Ascended who has served as a guide for the SGC's Doctor Jackson on occasion. As a result, Oma preferred to send Liam to someone she knew personally rather than strangers when the time came for him to travel into the wider
universe; it was not a mark of disrespect, but simply a lack of familiarity, that encouraged Liam to travel to us rather than to the Jaffa."

For a moment Se'tak simply stared at General Landry in silence, until he finally smiled slightly at the other man in acknowledgement of his statement.

"The child was sent to one whom his guardian knew could be trusted," the elder Jaffa said as he studied Landry thoughtfully. "And you say that she was one of the Ascended?"

"Correct," Landry replied, staring back at Se'tak as he spoke, taking care not to give anything away at the Jaffa's queries.

After a moment where the two men simply silently stared at each other, Se'tak smiled slightly.

"Our lost brothers in the Sodan believed in the words of the Ascended of this galaxy," he said, a thoughtful expression on his face as he looked at Landry. "I have heard much of the wisdom they accumulated about the Ancients in the months following their demise at the hands of those who would serve the Ori, and am aware that they are not like the Ori who now plague us. If this member of the Ascended believed you to be worthy guardians for such an important child…"

He paused for a moment, as though making sure that what he was about to say was clear to Landry, before he finally finished. "Then there may indeed be something to be found in the concept of further co-operation between our people."

Landry smiled gratefully back at the man.

"Thank you," he said simply.

"You are welcome," Se'tak replied, before his eyes narrowed as he glared at Landry. "But know this; if you have lied about this child, you shall be the first to die for your impudence."

General Landry simply nodded in acceptance of that point. In all honesty, he would have been almost disappointed if Se'tak hadn't been at least slightly sceptical of his motives; after spending so long believing the Goa'uld to be gods, it was encouraging to see that not all of them were willing to start worshipping every new arrival who showed up with a fancy bag of tricks practicing miracles.

"Right then, Liam," he said, turning his attention back to the radio in his hand, grateful that the boy had been willing to wait to speak to him- it wouldn't exactly improve Liam's possible reputation among the Jaffa if he kept interrupting important conversations-, "now that you've taken the ship, what do you want us to do?"

"What else?" Liam asked, sounding a bit healthier now; evidently he'd taken advantage of the silence to regain some of his strength. "Get somebody from down there up here; I'm having a bit of trouble doing anything up here on my own, you know."

"Right," Landry said, still smiling as he looked up at Se'tak. "I'll have some people up there as soon as I can, I assure you; in the meantime, just… don't do anything impulsive. Clear?"

"Crystal," Liam replied, before he terminated the call. Putting the radio back in his pocket, Landry turned to look at Se'tak.

"Well," he said, nodding politely at the Jaffa before him, "now that we've straightened out the immediate issue of what happened up on the Ori battlecruiser, I would be most grateful if your people would accompany me to properly secure it; Liam is a remarkable young man, but there is still only so much that he can accomplish by himself."
For a moment, Se'tak stared grimly at Landry, as though coming to a decision, and then he finally nodded and turned to look at one of his fellow Jaffa.

"Assemble a contingent of Jaffa and have them assemble here," he said. "We shall dispatch a ha'tak to secure the ship."

"Actually, that won't be necessary; Ori battlecruisers are equipped with ring transporters," Landry interrupted, looking at Se'tak as he spoke. "We can travel directly to the battlecruiser without the need for a ship; it should allow us to more rapidly secure the more vital parts of the ship in case other Ori forces show up."

For a moment, Se'tak looked as though he was going to protest, and Landry wondered if he'd been a bit too direct in his 'orders'- he didn't want to risk jeopardising their relationship with the Jaffa any more than it already seemed to be, but concealing something as important as the Ori possessing ring transporters from them definitely wouldn't help matters- but the Jaffa leader simply nodded.

"A good plan," he said simply. "We shall meet you at the ring transporters shortly; be prepared to leave as soon as we arrive."

"Of course," Landry said, nodding briefly at the man as he and his associates departed, leaving only Landry and Bra'tac in the room.

As soon as the last Jaffa had departed, Bra'tac turned to look at Landry with a relieved smile on his face.

"It is good to know that your teammates have managed to triumph over the Ori," he said, before he looked more curiously at the general. "However, I am surprised about that you have not mentioned this 'Liam' before now; is he a relatively recent arrival?"

"Actually, his story's a bit more complicated than what I just told Se'tak," Landry said, looking around himself briefly to confirm that he and Bra'tac were alone before he leaned closer to the master Jaffa. "You know that Doctor Jackson spent a year among the Ascended, right?"

"Of course," Bra'tac replied, nodding the SGC commander. "After Ry'ac and I were rescued from Erebus, Teal'c told us everything about how he was aware of our plight."

"Good," Landry said, allowing himself a momentary relief before he continued. "I didn't want to mention it to Se'tak in case it colours his view of Liam- the kid really does want to help everyone stop the Ori, I assure you-, but…"

After taking another glance around to make certain they weren't being observed, Landry finished what he was saying. "Liam's parents are Colonel Carter and Doctor Jackson; he was conceived while Doctor Jackson was Ascended but he was taken away and all memory of him was erased so that he could remain safe until he was 'needed'."

Bra'tac blinked in surprise.

"Doctor Jackson and Colonel Carter have a son who possesses the powers of the Ascended?" he said, looking at Landry with the closest thing to incredulity that the general had ever seen on the old Jaffa warrior's face. "That is indeed… unexpected."

"Trust me, nobody was more shocked than they were when we found out about him," Landry replied, a small smile on his face as he recalled the expression on the faces of his science and archaeology department heads when SG-1 had first told him about Liam's existence. "Given that even their memories of him had to be erased to ensure his existence wasn't even known to them
until they met him a few days ago; he's settled into their lives well enough, but I think it's safe to say-

A sudden alert from Landry's radio prompted him to break off mid-sentence as he raised the object in question to his face. "General Landry."

"Sir," Sergeant Harriman's voice said from the radio, a dejected tone in his voice as he spoke, "we just received word from the Odyssey that the Dakara superweapon was used against an Ori battlecruiser that SG-1 had found themselves on when it started to fly after its crew had apparently been killed. SG-1 managed to get away on the Odyssey in time, but..."

"But," Landry continued, deciding to take advantage of his colleague's apparent reluctance to deliver the news that he believed he was about to give- that the SGC had just unintentionally killed a young boy before he'd even really had a chance to live-, "Liam remained behind on that ship, survived the weapon's attack due to circumstances he hasn't revealed to me yet, and has not only defeated Adria, but apparently drove her away and left us in control of the ship."

For a moment there was a stunned silence at the other end, but then Sergeant Harriman's voice was heard once again on the other end.

"Liam… Liam's alive?" he asked, clearly relieved at the unexpected good news.

"Well, I was talking to him only a couple of minutes before you called; I'd call that pretty alive, all things considered," Landry replied, unable to stop a grin spreading across his face as he imagined how Doctor Jackson and Colonel Carter would feel once they received the news. "Bra'tac and I are preparing to head up to the battlecruiser with a team of Jaffa to meet with Liam; contact SG-1 and let them know the situation as soon as you can."

"Understood," Harriman said, clearly smiling as he ended the conversation, leaving Landry to turn and smile at Bra'tac.

"Well then," he said, as he slipped the radio back into his pocket, "now that Colonel Carter and Doctor Jackson know that their son's all right, let's get up to that battlecruiser and get him down."

A few minutes later, Landry and a small group of Jaffa- Bra'tac in the lead to avoid any command dispute; he at least was somebody that everyone could agree deserved to lead this kind of 'expedition'- were walking through the corridors of the Ori battlecruiser, weapons drawn in case of any unexpected attacks. As they turned into the control room, Landry smiled slightly as he saw Liam in the middle of the room, the young boy slumped in the control chair, staring up at the ceiling, clearly trying to regain his strength after what he'd had to do.

Landry didn't blame him; given what the Dakara superweapon was capable of, he doubted that any being in existence could come through it using natural means without feeling at least a little tired afterwards.

"Oh… there you all are," Liam said, smiling slightly as he looked up to take in the sight of the new arrivals. "What took you all so long; I've been waiting here for ages…"

"The traffic was bad; you know how it is," Landry replied, trying to sound equally casual; not only would going over to Liam and hugging him be unprofessional behaviour, but he hardly wanted to give the Jaffa any further clues regarding Liam's origins by acting like he thought of him as anything more than a visitor.
Fortunately, Liam evidently picked up on that particular 'vibe' in the room; having sat up and stepped off the chair, he simply walked over to stand in front of Se'tak, looking up at the Jaffa with a resolute look on his face, clearly unafraid of the man before him despite his greater height.

"Hello," he said simply, glaring slightly up at Se'tak as he spoke. "So, you're the person in charge of this… situation, right?"

"Indeed," Se'tak replied, staring sceptically down at Liam. "And you are this… 'Liam' I have heard about, who claims to possess the powers of the Ascended?"

"I possess some of their powers and knowledge, sir; I can't do everything they can do," Liam countered, clearly wanting to avoid anybody establishing any misconceptions about what he could do. "However, I do not 'claim' to be anything more or less than what I am; I am the Alteraci, the 'counter' to the Orici who now leads the Ori's armies against this galaxy."

"Does that imply that you seek to lead us all against the Ori?" Se'tak inquired, his eyes narrowed as he glared at Liam; Landry was starting to wonder if this man had been born cynical or if he'd simply been a particularly loyal follower of Ba'al before the Goa'uld had finally proven his non-godhood status by running after the final defeat of the Replicators.

Liam shook his head. "Nope; I'm just here to provide some suggestions, offer some ideas, and fight the Orici one-on-one if the time comes when you need somebody to do that; I'm not interested in being the boss," he said, looking resolutely up at Se'tak. "If I learned anything from my parents- both my biological parents and the parents who raised me until I was ready for… well, all this…, it's that exerting your own influence on other people against their will isn't right; if they do something, they need to want to do it themselves, not have somebody just tell them to do it. The tau'ri understand that, Se'tak; they only want to work with you so that you can do more damage to the Ori working with each other rather than working independent of each other."

For a moment, Se'tak simply continued to stare at Liam, a reflective expression on his face at the young boy's words, before he smiled slightly at the short figure before him, dressed in simple clothes and clutching a staff that was at least a couple of feet taller than he was.

"Your words are… compelling, Liam of the Ascended," he said, allowing himself a slight smile as he studied the boy before him in a reflective manner. "I shall… remember that."

Liam had just opened his mouth to reply when Landry's radio suddenly activated, prompting the general to look briefly around at the rest of the people in the room apologetically before he left the control room to respond to the call, returning a few seconds later with an apologetic expression on his face.

"Sorry about that," Landry explained, looking apologetically at the Jaffa, "but I just got a message from Earth; Liam's… his presence is required."

"I… see," Se'tak said, looking at Landry for a moment before he looked back at Liam once again. "You would willingly take orders from others if you were entering into battle alongside us and the Tau'ri?"

"Of course," Liam replied, nodding slightly at the warrior. "I'm not the Orici, sir; I'm fine with letting other people take charge of the situation. As I said, I'm not here to boss anybody around;
I'm just here to help out when I can."

After a moment's silence as he stared at the young boy before him, Se'tak smiled slightly.

"I believe you," he said simply.

Then his eyes narrowed as he glared at Liam. "But know this; if you are lying, than the tau'ri will be the next target of the weapon."

"Understood," Liam said, nodding back at him. "Since I'm not lying to you, all's fine."

With that said, he turned and walked over to join General Landry, leaving the assorted Jaffa to look around the ship that they now found themselves in.

"So..." Liam asked, looking curiously up at Landry as soon as they were out of earshot of the Jaffa, "who wants me back home?"

"Your parents," Landry replied, smiling slightly at both the way the boy was already considering Earth his home and the suddenly anxious expression that crossed his face.

Evidently, even having access to some of the powers of the Ascended wasn't enough to prepare a technically four-year-old boy to face parental wrath.

Chapter End Notes

1. If anyone finds the opening scenes familiar, it's because I took them from my Angel/SG-1 crossover 'The Ghost in the Team', editing them to accommodate Liam rather than Spike; the way I saw it, the essential details would be the same at first, so why not remain consistent?
2. To mention in advance, if Liam seems a bit more mature than he should at times, it's mostly the way he's been brought up; he may act like a normal child when he can, but when the situation calls for it, he's got the knowledge and at least some of the experience of the Ancients stuck in his head to help him make a convincing argument for whatever he's trying to convince people to do while simultaneously avoiding him becoming a psychotic religious ruler like Adria or the Goa'uld
Well, for anyone wondering exactly what happened to Daanar's planet after they activated a Stargate so big it was able to go around the entire planet, here's your explanation (Those who didn't particularly care either way… eh, I'm doing it anyway); I would have done it earlier, but I just couldn't find the right moment to include it before now.

Liam wasn't entirely sure what to expect when he stepped through the Stargate at Dakara and subsequently came out of the Earth Stargate within the SGC; General Landry had remained behind on Dakara to help talk over recent events with the Jaffa High Council and hopefully repair what remained of their original alliance. On the one hand, he was grateful that his parents had survived the Dakara superweapon's assault- he'd been fairly sure that the Odyssey would have followed them after the ship vanished, but he'd had no way of working out if the ship would have arrived in time or simply not been able to get away afterwards-, but on the other hand, he was definitely going to be in serious trouble for forcing them into a position where they'd had to leave him behind…

Liam was fairly confident he was about to experience what it meant to be 'grounded' for the first time in his life when he got back to Earth from this experience.

With that expectation in mind, it was a significant relief for him to walk though the Stargate and have his first experience be his mother's arms wrapped around him, hauling him up into the air like he was the size he would have been without Oma's 'tampering' with his body's ability to age.

"You're alive!" his mother said as she hugged him tightly to her, sounding like she was close to sobbing despite the fact that they were currently standing in front of what seemed to be at least half of the currently-available SG teams. "We were so worried… we thought you were dead… you're alive!"

"Mom…" Liam gasped, as she squeezed him so tightly he felt sure that he felt a rib or two crack, "good… to see… you… but… air…?"

Hearing his gasps for oxygen, Sam stepped back slightly from Liam, giving him a moment to catch his breath before she grabbed his shoulders as she crouched down in front of him.

"What were you thinking, staying behind like that?!" she yelled at him, shaking his shoulders angrily as his father stood slightly behind her, clearly torn between wanting to help Liam and wanting to make sure that he understood why they'd been so worried. "We thought you'd been killed before General Landry told everyone that you were alive! If you ever- ever- do something that stupid again, I'll-!"

"Uh… Sam?" Daniel said, leaning forward slightly to place a hand on her shoulder. "Maybe we should save this for somewhere less… public?"

Glancing behind her, Sam blushed slightly, clearly having only just remembered that she was still in public rather than in a room.
"Uh... right," she said, looking at the rest of the people in the room with an expression that made it clear that they were never to speak of this matter again (Fortunately, none of the other people in the room, with the exception of Mitchell, were over the rank of Major, so could almost certainly be guaranteed to remain quiet in order to avoid being court-martialed for showing a lack of respect to a senior officer). "Let's just... go."

With that immediate issue settled, Sam took Liam's hand and led him out of the gateroom, Daniel and the rest of SG-1 close behind, leaving the rest of the SG teams to split up and go to wherever it was they were currently required to be.

"Uh... what was that all about?" Liam asked, indicating the collection of people behind him as he was led out of the gateroom by his mother. "Why were there so many people there?"

"Oh, a couple of guys on the staff wanted to congratulate you for taking out Adria, but when your parents showed up they figured it should wait until they were finished talking to you," Mitchell said by way of explanation, smiling slightly at the young boy currently walking along behind his team's science expert (He didn't mention that the only reason they hadn't done anything when he'd arrived was that Sam had gotten to him first; there was no point rubbing it in the kid's face that he.

"What?" Liam said, looking over at Mitchell in surprise. "People wanted to congratulate me? But... well, I didn't really do very much; I was just in the right place to take a chance and try something..."

"Hey, you 'taking a chance' helped us gain access to a pretty impressive piece of technology back there," Mitchell pointed out, smiling slightly at the younger Jackson's embarrassment. "Did you really think people wouldn't want to congratulate you after scoring a win like that for our side?"

Liam shrugged in a manner that was clearly intended to be casual, but nevertheless managed to look somewhat embarrassed (Mitchell couldn't help but smile slightly at this further proof that the kid was Daniel's; he even possessed his father's overall lack of ego even when he'd done something that he really should be proud of).

"I just did what I could; it's not like anybody else wouldn't have done the same thing in my position," Liam protested weakly, before he turned to look at his mother with an anxious expression. "Uh... how much trouble am I in, Mom?"

"On a scale of one to ten?" Sam replied, as she turned around to look at her son with a harsh glare in her eyes. "Let's just say that, from what General Landry told us about your situation, you're lucky you weren't deliberately trying to worry us when you got left behind; if you'd done that on purpose, you would be in serious trouble."

"As it is," Daniel added, smiling slightly as he looked back at Liam, "we can hardly blame you for going after Adria yourself without being somewhat hypocritical, particularly given all the times that we've disobeyed orders and ended up winning a major victory for Earth against the Goa'uld or the Replicators."

For a brief moment, Liam smiled in relief, but the smile quickly faded as a more serious expression appeared on his father's face.

"However," the archaeologist continued, his eyes fixed on his son, "if you try something that dangerous again without even thinking about telling us about it, you will be serious trouble, young man; your... mother and I only just found you, and we are not going to lose you so soon."
"Check," Liam replied, swallowing slightly nervously- even amid Daniel's evident concern for him, there was a definite touch of anger in there as well- as SG-1 walked around another corner as they approached the lift, an apprehensive expression on Liam's face as he looked around at his parents. "So… what now?"

"Well," Sam said, after exchanging brief glances with Daniel, "your father and I are still working on that; until we come up with anything else, consider yourself grounded for the next week, with all TV and book access restricted and lights to go off by ten."

"Aw…” Liam moaned as he slumped down in his chair, a sullen expression on his face. "C'mon, Mom, I just saved a planet; couldn't you just-?"

A polite cough from behind them caused Liam to stop talking mid-sentence, prompting the team to look up as Colonel Feretti walked down the corridor towards them, looking over at SG-1 with a slightly apologetic expression on his face.

"Sorry to bother you all after… recent events," he said, smiling briefly at Liam before he turned his attention back to Sam and Daniel, "but we managed to finish decrypting that transmission we apparently received from Daanar and his planet shortly after General Landry left for Dakara- it turned out to be a bit more complicated than the tech staff initially thought, from what I understand-, and I thought that you'd all like to hear it as soon as possible."

"Really?" Vala asked, looking curiously at Feretti. "What is it?"

"Just follow me and I'll show you," Feretti said, indicating a corridor that led down to the 'gate control room. Swiftly turning around to head back the way they had come, SG-1 and Liam followed Feretti down to the control room, where Sergeant Harriman glanced back at their arrival as he sat in front of a computer screen.

"Good, you're here," he said, nodding briefly at them before he turned back and began to tap at some of the controls in front of him. "Now, bear in mind that this is only a pre-recorded message- we haven't worked out a way to send a signal back in reply yet- but it seems to answer most of the questions we had left about that situation."

"What situation?" Mitchell asked, looking at Harriman in confusion.

"Watch," Harriman said briefly before he reached over and activated the monitor. Instantly, much to SG-1’s surprise, the familiar face of Daanar appeared on the screen, looking out at them with a slight smile.

"Hello, Daniel Jackson, Samantha Carter… and Liam, of course," Daanar said over the screen, the grin on his face making it evident that he had remembered the boy from the beginning and simply delayed in saying it for a joke. "I apologise for not making contact with you sooner, but it's taken a while to make sure that everything here is settled and working as we predicted. In case you're wondering what happened to our planet, we… well, essentially, we hid it inside the Stargate network itself."

Sam's eyes widened at that statement, and the rest of SG-1 weren't exactly unimpressed at it either. The physics of travelling through the Stargate may escape most of them, but they knew enough to know that creating a stable wormhole that was just capable of transporting people briefly from one location to another would take a tremendous amount of energy.
To actually create a stable area inside a wormhole that could hold an entire planet… even if they had no idea how long such a structure could last, it was unquestionably a very impressive accomplishment.

"You don't need to worry about us; the psychic energy we channelled into the Stargate-enhancer-the device that Colonel Mitchell witnessed us using-will be more than sufficient for us to keep our planet safe inside the network for a year or so," Daanar continued, a slight smile on his face as he spoke, clearly proud of his peoples' achievement. "Our Ancient power sources will permit us to artificially duplicate tides and solar energy for the duration of that time, at which point we shall reactivate the 'Mega-gate' and depart back into the real universe; our Stargate will remain in orbit around our sun until it is time for us to return. You need not worry about our planet having a negative impact on wormhole travel; our section of the Stargate network is currently cut off from the rest of the system, leaving anyone attempting to access this location unable to find us until we are ready to return."

After a moment's silence, as the SGC staff studied the image on the monitor before them and Daanar looked out of the monitor with a reassuring smile, Daanar sighed slightly and shook his head.

"Well," he said slightly wistfully, "I'd better get back to work; check that tablet, and you shall learn all you need to learn."

With that, the monitor terminated, and Sergeant Harriman glanced back apologetically at the group around him.

"Sorry there's not more to it than that; it looks like Daanar just wanted to let you all know that he was fine," the technician said by way of explanation. "I've tried to transmit a message back along the wavelengths used to send this one, but it's practically impossible to get a lock on anything at the other end of the signal inside a wormhole; the coordinates just keep shifting too much for me to establish a clear two-way link."

"Essentially, until they return to real space, Daanar and his people are on their own, correct?" Teal'c asked, looking briefly at Harriman.

"As far as we can determine, yes," Harriman replied, nodding slightly at the Jaffa before he glanced back at Liam. "Sorry we can't give you better news about your home, Liam; I've done everything I can think of, but-"

"That's OK, Sergeant Harriman; I… I get that you tried," Liam replied, smiling slightly at the sergeant reassuringly before something seemed to occur to him. "What tablet was he talking about?"

"Oh, that must be the one he gave us before we left the planet," Daniel said, turning to look at Feretti as he spoke. "That reminds me, how's the translation coming along?"

"In a word? Slowly," Feretti replied, smiling slightly at his old friend as he did so. "Your staff's managed to get a few phrases translated, but so far nothing's particularly making sense; as far as they can tell it's written in a rather significant variation on the original Ancient dialect, rather than actually being written in genuine Ancient. They're hoping that, now that you're back…"
"I'll be willing to look over the tablet myself?" Daniel concluded, smiling slightly at the only other member of the original Abydos expedition still working at the SGC. "Don't worry, I'll get right on it; care to come with me, Liam?"

"Can I?" Liam asked, looking eagerly over at his father.

"Well… consider it work to make up for scaring us like that, OK?" Sam said after she and Daniel had exchanged brief glances with each other. "Given all the time you spent on Daanar's planet, I assume you picked up at least some Ancient, correct?"

"Well, Daanar and some of the others showed me some examples of it and a few other languages to help my education," Liam said, somehow looking slightly sheepish as he studied the floor. "It wasn't my best subject, but I can do pretty well so long as you don't want me to-"

"Write an opera in Ancient?" Mitchell interjected, chuckling slightly as he looked over at the young boy. "Liam, given who your parents were, I get the impression that something that wasn't your 'best subject' by your standards would make you a virtual prodigy by anyone else's!"

"Uncle Cam…" Liam groaned, the slight smile on his face as he looked back at SG-1's leader belying the apparent frustration in his voice.

"Smart, cute, and modest?" Vala put in, grinning as she leaned over to tousle Liam's hair with one hand. "It's official; you are going to leave as many hearts broken as your old man has."

"'Old man'?" Daniel repeated, turning to look at Vala with a raised eyebrow. "Now you're saying I'm old?"

"Just a figure of speech," Vala said, raising her hands reassuringly. "Trust me, Daniel, I would never think-"

"Please don't go any further; I'm not sure I could take it," Liam interjected, looking at Vala in a slightly pleading manner before he turned to look at his father. "So, Dad, shall we get started?"

"Might as well," Daniel replied, smiling back at his son before he turned to look at Sam, Mitchell, Teal'c and Vala. "How about the rest of you?"

"Well, personally speaking, I should probably see about checking my e-mail to see if anything interesting happened here while we were gone; just because we have a serious problem in the galaxy doesn't mean we should lost track of what's happening on Earth, after all," Sam said, looking slightly apologetically down at her sun. "Sorry, Liam; it's not that I don't want to spend time with you and your father, but-"

"Don't worry, Mom; I understand," Liam said, leaning over to take her hand and give it a brief, comforting squeeze. "You're all busy at times; it's not like you don't want to spend time with me, after all."

"Exactly!" Vala said, smiling broadly over at the young boy before she glanced over at Mitchell and Teal'c. "Just out of curiosity, I don't suppose that either of you would be available to take a girl out for a bit?"

"Uh, Vala, you are aware we need to wait until General Landry gets back to hear our reports before we go anywhere else?" Mitchell asked, looking pointedly over at the former thief. "Just because he
isn't here right now doesn't mean we don't still have to keep up with the usual procedure; until Landry gets back, we don't leave the base, OK?"

Vala sighed in an overly dramatic manner. "Well, if that's the way it is, that's it; I'll just have to go off and find some other way to occupy my time…"

"Hey, if you need something to do, how about a bit of basketball with me, T. and whoever else can spare a half-hour or so?" Mitchell asked, smiling casually over at Vala as he indicated himself and Teal'c.

For a moment Vala looked like she was about to object, but, after a moment's pause, she sighed and nodded, the slight smile on her face belying her otherwise apparently dejected appearance.

"Well… if I must," she said, shaking her head slightly as she smiled at her two remaining teammates before glancing over at Sam, Daniel and Liam once again. "See you later; we're off!"

As the other three members of SG-1 headed off towards the base's indoor basketball court, Sam leaned over to give Daniel a brief kiss on the lips before crouching down to give Liam a brief hug.

"I'll see you two later," she said, smiling slightly at her son before she stood up to look critically at Daniel. "Make sure he doesn't have too much fun."

"I'll keep that in mind," Daniel replied, a small smile also present on his face before he and Liam headed off towards the archaeology lab where he'd left the tablet before they'd left for the Odyssey, Sam subsequently turning around and heading for her lab, a brief, wistful smile on her face as she thought of her son and…

Even as she walked, she couldn't help but wonder a bit about that; what was Daniel to her now? Obviously he was still her friend, but when you added in the factor of him now being the father of her child, despite the fact that they hadn't yet had the chance to have even one date- she couldn't exactly count their day out around Colorado with Liam, given that the rest of SG-1 had been with them at the time-, it all just became…

Confusing, was the best term that she could come up with.

Oh, their feelings for each other were genuine enough- what she'd felt when Daniel had 'shared' himself with her when Liam had been conceived was proof enough of that, as were their subsequent kisses in Daniel's office and at his house after they'd left Daanar's planet-, but they'd had so little opportunities to really explore them- they'd spent so little time on the Odyssey that there hadn't even been an opportunity to watch a movie or something like that, what with Liam constantly asking them questions about their time at the SGC and their attempts to prepare for the upcoming mission- that a part of her was still waiting for some kind of problem to turn up that would pretty much end any chance of anything more definite than what they had already developing between them.

For Liam's sake, if for nothing else, they would find an opportunity to explore their current relationship in more detail than they had so far. Maybe once General Landry came back and the briefing was over she and Daniel could see about going out to a restaurant while Liam stayed with Teal'c or Mitchell…

Shaking such thoughts off to the side- she and Daniel would just have to take the situation as it came and hope things worked out in their favour-, Sam walked into her office, sat down at her
desk, turned on her computer, pulled up her e-mail account, and her eyes automatically widened as she opened the most recent e-mail in her inbox.

"Oh my God…" she whispered to herself as she studied the information before her, all thoughts of arranging a date with Daniel temporarily driven from her mind in surprise at what she was reading.

If the information about the formula this e-mail was telling her about had been accurately recorded…

The implications were incredible.
"So," General Landry said as he looked around the room at his premiere team, a smile on his face as he finished filling them in on the final results of the negotiations with the Jaffa, "in conclusion, given Liam's actions in preserving the temple at Dakara and in acknowledgement of the fact that the Ancients judged us worthy to guard a child who possesses at least some of their power and knowledge, Se'tak has agreed to cease using the Dakara superweapon and let us help the Jaffa in studying the Ori battlecruiser in an attempt to learn more about their technology and mount an effective defence."

"In other words, we're allies again now, huh?" Mitchell asked, smiling slightly at the SGC commander. "Great to hear; at least things are finally going our way for once."

"Quite," Landry said, nodding in agreement at Mitchell before he turned to look over at Sam and Daniel; Liam, for the moment, had been sent to one of the empty laboratories as part of his punishment for disobeying his parents. "Be certain to pass on our congratulations, you two; thanks to that boy of yours, things are finally working out in our favour for a change."

"I'll be sure to let him know that, sir," Sam replied, she and Daniel sharing a slight smile at the praise of their child. He might have only been a new addition to their lives, but both of them were almost surprised at how easy it was for the two of them to accept compliments about their son.

"On the topic of things going our way," Daniel said after the brief moment between him and the mother of his child had passed, raising a hand as he looked over at Landry, "I've been studying that tablet Daanar gave us, and I think it might be of more use to us than I'd initially thought."

"In what way?" Landry asked, looking curiously at the archaeologist.

"Well, based on what my staff had already discovered before I started to look over it, they'd already determined that the tablet was definitely written at some point in the last thousand years, and seemed to be related to Merlin's research into creating the Sangraal; actually, there's even evidence that it was written by Merlin himself, although I wouldn't like to swear to it," Daniel explained, looking briefly at the tablet that he now held in his hands before he looked back up at his teammates. "Apparently, Merlin had hidden some information relating to his plans for the Sangraal in a certain location, but the context of the words seems to suggest that these plans couldn't be accessed by just anybody; they had to meet certain conditions before they would be granted access to the information."

"What sort of conditions would these be, Daniel Jackson?" Teal'c asked.

"That's where it got a bit confusing at first," Daniel replied as he looked up at the Jaffa. "The original team I assigned to translate it thought that it simply referred to one who 'walks among man' while still being 'one of us', but actually, the second phrase translates as 'return to us'."

"Return to us?" Sam repeated, looking in confusion at Daniel "Return to who?"

"Well, based on what I've managed to translate so far," Daniel continued, the excitement in his voice about his discovery becoming ever more apparent as he continued speaking, "given that the evidence would seem to suggest that this was written by Merlin himself, the context would seem to suggest that it's referring to someone who was once one of the Ascended- at the time, the Ancients were the only ones to have mastered the secret of Ascension, so, assuming Merlin was the one who wrote the tablet, the 'us' was most referring to his status as an Ancient rather than an Ascended-,
but returned to human form for some reason or another while still retaining the spiritual qualities necessary to ascend again. In other words, this security system wouldn't have granted access to the plants to someone like Anubis, who definitely didn't possess the spiritual qualities necessary to ascend all the way even if he attempted to Ascend for real, it would have applied to Orlin after he descended to help us find a cure to the Prior's plague last year."

"Sorry; can we back up a bit here?" Vala asked, looking in confusion at Daniel. "Not meaning to be rude, but why does this tablet thing talk so much about someone like that?"

"As I said at the beginning, the tablet talks in some detail about Merlin's research when he was constructing the Sangraal," Daniel explained, as he looked between his friends to ensure that they understood what he was saying. "The precise details are unclear, but it would appear that, before he created the Sangraal itself, Merlin developed other potential methods of neutralising the powers of an Ascended being. Apparently none of them were ever actually constructed- he mainly drew up the plans to help himself figure out what would work best in taking out the maximum amount of Ori possible-, but he left copies of his original plans in a secure location where they could be eventually rediscovered if his original work was lost and-:"

"Hold on, back up a minute here; you're saying this thing tells us where we can find a prototype Sangraal?" Mitchell said, looking incredulously at Daniel. "As in, he didn't just work on the one we've been looking for, he also made other versions? How did the guy find the time to makeall this stuff and do everything he's meant to have done in Camelot?"

"We have no way of really knowing how much time Merlin spent among King Arthur's court before he was supposedly sealed away by Morgan; it's possible, if nothing else," Daniel replied, before he turned his attention back to the matter before him. "What's important here is that, according to the tablet, Merlin's plans for the prototypes are located in an Ancient database, which he ensured would be transferred and secured in a very specific location, protected from discovery not only by the security features I mentioned earlier, but also by a password that is apparently only recorded here."

"And does this tablet mention the location of the database where these plans for the... prototype... can be discovered?" Landry asked, leaning forward to look inquiringly at the archaeologist.

"Atlantis," Daniel replied.

For a moment there was silence across the table, and then Sam spoke.

"I don't believe it," she said simply.

"Look, I know it's a stretch," Daniel began, as looked over at the woman he had only recently allowed himself to acknowledge he loved, "but given what we've gathered about Merlin's power at that time, it's not impossible to assume he could have remotely transmitted the information to Atlantis; we still don't know how Arthur and the other knights managed to travel to other planets with the Giza Stargate buried and the one in Antarctica."

"No, I didn't mean I didn't believe you when you say that Merlin left the plans in Atlantis; I meant that I didn't believe the coincidence factor involved in you discovering that information just after some I recently found out myself," Sam explained, looking over at Daniel with a slightly stunned smile on her face before she turned back to look at the rest of the team. "When I checked my e-mail earlier I received a message informing me that a woman in Vancouver had recently had a paper published at the California Institute of Technology on the possibility of bridging the barriers between parallel universes; we wouldn't be able to actually travel to them, but we could access them at least."
"And that would accomplish... what, exactly?" Mitchell asked, looking in confusion at the astrophysicist.

"Well," Sam began to explain, as she turned to look at SG-1's current official leader, "about a year ago, Colonel Sheppard and Doctor McKay discovered the remnants of an Ancient research station where they were conducting an experiment called Project Arcturus, which essentially featured them attempting to gather a new power source by absorbing the zero point energy from the universe itself, rather than from the subspace dimension accessed by zero point modules."

"Oh yeah, now I remember that report..." Mitchell said, snapping his fingers in inspiration before he looked at Sam with a slight smile. "Didn't McKay blow up a solar system trying to make it work?"

"Exactly," Sam replied, nodding at Mitchell before she continued her talk. "At the time, Arcturus was a failure because absorbing the zero point energy from a specific region of space drastically altered the laws of physics within that region, continuously creating various exotic particles within the containment field. As they were created in a region with radically different physical laws, the researchers' predictions for what would happen when they carried out the experiment no longer applied and the containment field couldn't hold them, meaning that they began to generate hard radiation that would almost certainly kill everyone present. When Doctor McKay tried to alter the field to compensate he triggered a catastrophic overload that, as Colonel Mitchell said, resulted in the destruction of almost the entire solar system."

"I'm still a bit confused as to what something that blew up a solar system last year has to do with something that lets us access other universes," Vala put in, leaning forward to look at Sam curiously.

"Simple," Sam replied, looking over at Vala as she spoke. "I'm hoping that, with the use of this mathematical proof, the Atlantis Expedition will be able to restart Project Arcturus, this time drawing on the zero point energy from another universe rather than our own. As a result, not only would we be accessing a source of power potentially as great as the scope of the universe, but we would also be avoiding the creation of the exotic particles-"

"And transferring them to some other universe," Daniel pointed out, leaning over to look at Sam in a manner that was partly critical and partly anxious. "You did remember that, right?"

"Well, it is a possibility, but when you consider that the number of possible parallel universes that we could access borders on the infinite, the odds of us choosing at random one that's inhabited are astronomically slim," Sam pointed out, leaning over to reassuringly clasp Daniel's hand. "Don't worry; I thought over everything before I came to this meeting, and I'm confident that the experiment can be carried out without any risk."

"I... see," General Landry said, nodding slightly as he processed what Sam had told him before he turned to look at Daniel. "Just to clarify, Doctor Jackson, you are certain that the information described in the tablet is in the Atlantis databanks?"

"I am," Daniel confirmed, nodding at the SGC commander. "Last time I was carrying out a fairly random search with the only thing I really had to go on being the knowledge that I was looking for something about the Sangraal; this time I have a password and a better idea of what I'm expecting to find. It's not much, but knowing what Merlin was capable of, I'm hopeful that it'll be enough; at the very least, the information there could help us work out some kind of counter-measure against the Ori, even if I still think we shouldn't abandon our attempt to find the final Sangraal."

"Right," Landry said, nodding once again in understanding at the archaeologist before apparently
coming to a decision. "All right then, Colonel Carter; you have my permission to-"

A knocking at the door caused Landry to stop talking mid-sentence, prompting him to look up as Feretti walked into the room with an apologetic expression on his face.

"Sorry to bother you, sir," he said, holding up a phone as he looked apologetically at the team, "but we've just received a call from Homeworld Security up in Washington."

"Homeworld Security?" General Landry repeated, looking in surprise at the colonel. "What do they want?"

"Well… it's about Liam," Feretti said, looking over at Sam and Daniel with an unidentifiable expression on his face. "After they received the reports about his existence, the IOA wanted to talk to the two of you about the possible implications of his existence straight away, but at the time you were all off on the Odyssey and we couldn't do anything but tell them you weren't here- after pointing out that, until the necessary paperwork's sorted out back at Washington, Liam's still officially an offworld citizen so we were perfectly within our right to take him through the Stargate-, and agree to arrange a meeting to discuss the possible long-term consequences of allowing Liam to remain here when you got back."

"A meeting with who?" Daniel asked, exchanging an uncertain glance with Sam.

"That's where we managed to get a bit of luck," Feretti said, a slight smile on his face as he looked at Daniel, only for the smile to fade slightly as he looked at Sam and Liam. "It's… well, given the personal aspect of this particular situation, the head of Homeworld Security recommended that he come down to discuss the implications of this latest turn of events in person; he's on his way at the moment and wanted to let us know so that we could arrange an appropriate meeting place."

Daniel and Sam both turned to look uncomfortably at each other.

Jack…

The one topic that neither of them had really discussed since Liam had come into their lives, and the one topic that would be most affected by Liam's presence on Earth.

After all, neither of them had any really definite idea how he felt about Sam by this point; just because he hadn't done anything about it yet didn't mean that there weren't still some old feelings hanging around that he either didn't want to admit to or hadn't gotten around to admitting to yet. The odds might be good that Jack's old feelings for Sam were just that- old feelings that no he longer felt as keenly as he had before, assuming that they'd ever been that serious in the first place-, but at the same time there was no guarantee that he'd actually managed to get over them as totally as he appeared to have done so; maybe he'd simply been waiting for the right moment to talk about them again.

But now that he'd actually heard about Liam's existence, before Sam and Daniel had had the chance to tell him themselves- they'd meant to call him, but between their attempts to bond with Liam, followed by the crisis with the Dakara superweapon, they hadn't had the chance to make a call-…

Well, they really had no way to really know how he was going to react to the news; no matter how much they might want to hope for the best, the fact remained that there was never any way of knowing how Jack would react when placed in a situation where he had to talk about his emotions on a topic like this.
After a moment's pause as the team contemplated what they had just learned, Mitchell broke the silence.

"So," he said, clasping his hands together as he looked over at his friends with a slightly awkward smile on his face, "any chance that he only needs to see one of these two?"

"Why?" Landry asked, looking critically at Mitchell.

"Uh… just assumed Sam'd be wanting to see about contacting the woman who wrote that math thing she just mentioned as soon as possible, sir," Mitchell replied, looking over at Landry as he shrugged slightly. "Y'know, she's got a choice of a meeting that might give us access to a potential source of unlimited power against a meeting that might not even really need her to be there for the whole thing; wouldn't it make more sense to see about getting the first one done as soon as possible?"

For a moment Landry simply sat and looked at Mitchell, before he nodded and glanced over at Sam.

"Would that decision be fine with you, Colonel Carter?" he asked, leaning forward slightly to look at the two people before him.

After exchanging brief glances, Sam and Daniel both nodded.

"That should be fine," Daniel said, looking at Landry as he spoke for the both them. "It'll… it'll give me and him some time to straighten things out in private."

Nobody needed to ask Daniel to elaborate on what he meant by that; the evident implication was clear to all of them.

Given General O'Neill's known 'complex' feelings for Colonel Carter, after hearing that she was currently involved with someone else- hell, that she'd actually had a son with someone else four years ago, even if she hadn't remembered the son's existence until recently- it would probably be for the best if the two of them didn't talk directly with each other until Jack had had a chance to cool down in case he said something he'd regret later.

"Very well," Landry said, nodding briefly at Daniel before he turned to Sam. "Colonel Carter, you'll be departing to meet with the writer of that formula as soon as possible; make whatever arrangements you see fit. Doctor Jackson, I'll contact General O'Neill and let him know that you'll meet him in your office when he arrives; will that be fine?"

"Oh… yeah," Daniel said, nodding in response to his commanding officer's query. "That's… that's fine."

"Good," Landry said briefly, before he stood up. "Well, I'll just let General O'Neill know what to expect when he gets down here. In the meantime, Doctor Jackson, keep up with that tablet in case there's something else about it you need to know; Colonel Carter, I'll have transportation arranged for you to talk to Mrs Miller within the hour."

"What about the rest of us?" Vala asked curiously.

"Attend to whatever you need to attend to," Landry said simply. "Dismissed."

With that, the general walked out of the room, closely followed by Mitchell, Vala and Teal'c, leaving Sam and Daniel sitting in the room as they looked at each other for a few moments before Daniel spoke.
"So… does that work?" he asked, looking at the mother of his child in a slightly uncomfortable manner. "I mean, I just assumed-"

"You were right," Sam confirmed, nodding at him with an equally awkward expression on her face. "It's just… it's too soon for me to talk to him. Maybe if you two can have some time to yourselves to straighten things out first…"

"It'd be at least a bit less awkward for when you try to do it yourself, right?" Daniel said, looking in understanding at her. Sam might be a genius when it came to science-related matters, but he knew that she had always found it difficult to really talk about how she was feeling about things; it was one of the main reasons why she and Jack had never managed to really managed to have a relationship beyond friendship.

Admittedly, Daniel wasn't much better, but he was at least slightly removed from this particular problem; while he still had an emotional investment in any attempts Jack and Sam might make to sort out their feelings, he had never been a direct participant in their complicated tangle of emotions, so the upcoming conversation wouldn't be as awkward for him as it would have been for Sam. "Don't worry; I'll do what I can."

"Thanks," Sam replied, leaning over to kiss him briefly before the two of them stood up. "Well, we'd better get going; I'd like to say goodbye to Liam before I have to go."
The next day, with Sam having left the SGC to talk with Mrs Miller regarding her formula-one advantage of being officially connected to the Air Force; given the importance of the formula to Atlantis's long-term power requirements, she'd been granted access to a private plane to get there as quickly as possible-, Teal'c having gone to Dakara to discuss the Jaffa Nation's now-improving relationship with the Tau'ri, and Mitchell and Vala having agreed to take Liam out for a meal to celebrate his victory over Adria due to his parents being currently occupied- Daniel felt that the time wasn't quite right for Jack to actually meet Liam until he'd had more time to process the young boy's existence-, Daniel found himself sitting in his office studying the tablet for further clues before he heard a knock at his door.

"Yes?" he asked, looking up from the tablet in the direction of the door.

When Major General Jack O'Neill entered the room in response to his query, however, Daniel almost wished that he hadn't answered; somehow, now that he was actually in this position, it was far more uncomfortable than he could have imagined it being earlier.

"Oh… Jack," he said simply, standing up and pushing the tablet off to one side. "Uh… hi?"

"Hi," Jack replied simply, his arms folded and a worryingly neutral expression on his face as he looked at his old friend. "So, I heard about the newly-arrived genetically-accelerated bundle of joy; should congratulations be in order, or is it a bit late for that given that you've already had some time to get used to having him around?"

For a moment Daniel just sat in silence as he looked at his old friend, trying to determine what Jack actually felt about this latest turn of events, before finally just deciding to speak at the lack of response.

"Yeah, it's… well, it was quite a surprise," he said as he stood up, looking slightly awkwardly at his old friend.

"Surprise? Try the metaphorical equivalent of a gatebuster going off in my face," Jack replied, a slightly insincere smirk crossing his face before he reassumed his more neutral expression. "You know, when I first heard the news, I just couldn't believe it. I mean, you and Carter have a four-year-old kid you've both forgotten about?"

"Technically, Liam's older than that- he's biologically almost ten and the Ancient knowledge he has access to doesn't exactly make him younger-, and we didn't forget him; Oma erased our memories of his conception," Daniel pointed out, trying to remain calm and stick to the facts. He acknowledged that the last comment was probably only intended as Jack's usual attempt at humour, but he wasn't entirely certain about it; it could have just been Jack's attempt to cope with the news that the woman he loved was now involved with his best friend.

"Eh, you know me and science-type stuff; so long as I get the essential basics explained to me nice and clearly, I'm prepared to overlook the fine details," Jack said nonchalantly, before he turned to look directly at his old teammate. "So… you and Carter, huh?"

"Yes," Daniel replied simply; until he had a better idea of how Jack himself felt about this latest change in their relationship, his best bet right now would be to simply remain calm and stick to the essentials when replying.
"And this started while you were Ascended?" Jack said, his tone still refusing to give away anything helpful regarding how he felt about the situation.

"Liam was conceived while I was Ascended; I'm pretty certain that it had actually started... well, some while before that," Daniel replied; as much as he might want to avoid hurting Jack, he wasn't going to conceal the truth from him, even if he could at least soften the blow by omission (He'd known how he felt about Sam before he'd Ascended, but hardly wanted to admit that part of the reason he'd accepted Ascension was to try and escape the pain of supposedly unrequited love; it seemed so... pathetic when he said it out loud).

"Ah," Jack said simply, continuing not to give away anything- Jack had become far too good at that whole 'emotional repression' thing since he'd been transferred to Washington; Daniel used to be able to read him much better than this- as he continued to look at the archaeologist. "Any idea how long you've felt... that way... about her?"

For a moment silence dominated the office, Jack looking at Daniel as Daniel tried to look everywhere but at Jack without making it obvious, before he finally spoke.

"I think..." he began, swallowing slightly as he looked up at his old friend, "I think it really began when we went to the Land of Light and you hit me for being concerned about Sam."

Jack blinked.

"Excuse me?" he said, looking in confusion at his friend. "How the hell could that get you to start thinking about her?"

"Well, the fact that you- on some level, anyway- actually seemed to consider me any kind of threat to you being with Sam just... well, it started me wondering if there ever could be anything there," Daniel explained, feeling extremely embarrassed as he said this but feeling as though he had to try and explain the situation from his point of view regardless. "It wasn't much at first- maybe just briefly finding myself thinking about what it would be like to... y'know, go on a date with her, something like that-, but there were just all these moments when I felt more concern about her than I would have if someone else was in that position... when I thought she was going to die when Cassie first came to Earth, her... her 'moments' with Narim and Martouf... how I felt when Jolinar took control of her and we thought she'd become just another Goa'uld host..."

Shaking his head at the memories of his feelings back then, Daniel sighed slightly as he looked back at Jack. "I never actually registered why I felt the way I felt about those situations at the time, but when I looked back on them after you found me on Vis Uban, before my memories of the... well, the fine details from that time... came back to me... it was really almost obvious to me that I felt more for her than just friendship."

"But... but you were married!" Jack all but yelled at him, staring incredulously at his friend. "I mean, you and Sha're... seriously, in three years, I didn't think you even knew other women were alive when you were thinking clearly!"

"That was part of the reason I tried to deny it at first," Daniel admitted, looking down to try and conceal the shame he felt as he reflected back on that part of his life. "Every time I found myself enjoying spending time with Sam, whether it was on a project or during our leisure time, I couldn't help but think that I was, on some level, cheating on Sha're, but at the same time I just... I couldn't help it. I always told myself that things would be different when Sha're came back, but..."

He sighed again, almost looking like he was about to cry for a moment at the memories of those conflicted three years he'd spent looking for the woman who had been his wife before he
continued. "Anyway, it didn't matter then; even when Sha're was gone for good, there was still… well…"

"Me, huh?" Jack said, his tone still refusing to give Daniel any extra information even as they moved on to the central reason for this meeting. "Yeah, I kinda figured that was gonna come up…"

After a moment's awkward silence between the two men, Jack finally spoke. "So, what was it that stopped you; pity for the guy who lost his son or loyalty to your buddy?"

"Uh… a bit of both, really," Daniel admitted, trying to avoid looking Jack in the eye as he spoke. "I mean, I wanted you to be happy as a friend, of course, but… well, I knew what it was like to feel like you'd lost your… your family… and, well…"

He didn't continue the sentence, of course, but Jack understood what he meant; after losing so many people at such a young age himself, Daniel knew better than most what Jack must have gone through when he'd lost Charlie, and at least a part of him had felt like he didn't have the right to stop Jack from finding whatever happiness he could find with Sam.

Jack wasn't sure whether he should feel touched at Daniel's efforts or frustrated at his selflessness; just for once, couldn't the guy think of what he wanted, rather than other people?

"So… you knew about… that… all the time?" he said at last, looking awkwardly at his friend; there really was no good way to talk about how Daniel had felt at seeing the woman he loved showing interest in his friend.

"You weren't exactly being secret about it to those of us who knew you," Daniel replied, an almost unreadable expression on his face as he looked back at Jack. "I just never said anything because I knew that neither of you would do anything so long as the regulations remained an issue, and I didn't want to make anything worse or more awkward by bringing it up."

"Probably a good call," Jack replied, nodding in agreement before a thought occurred to him. "Hold on a minute… did this… well, y'know…?"

"Have anything to do with my choice to Ascend?" Daniel finished, sighing slightly as he sat down while looking at Jack, the expression on Jack's face all he needed to confirm that his guess had been correct. "Well… it wasn't the only reason, but it did contribute a bit; ever since Sha're's death- although it was really when I thought that she was dead after that entity hijacked her body and sent her into the SGC mainframe- I'd started to… well, I'd started to allow myself to acknowledge that I was thinking of Sam a bit more in… well, in that sense, rather than just thinking of her as a… a sister or something like that… then I had before, and… well…"

"You noticed that she was more… looking my way at the time, huh?" Jack said, for once not taking the opportunity to make a joke at the idea of Daniel Jackson being lost for words; the two men were making a conscious effort to look anywhere but at each other as the conversation became even more awkward.

"Yeah…" Daniel replied, nodding back at his friend. "When the chance came to Ascend, I thought that… if I couldn't ever seem to get what I wanted in life- a family, the woman I loved-, maybe… maybe Ascension would help me find some way past it and allow me to start again…"

After a moment's silence after that comment, Daniel uncomfortable at having confessed something so personal and Jack uncertain how to respond, Jack chose to break the silence.

"Didn't work out that way, huh?" the head of Homeworld Security asked, the slight smile on his
face belying the sorrow he felt at the thought of how low Daniel must have felt at that point in his life.

"No," Daniel replied after a moment's pause, evidently uncertain if Jack had even wanted a reply to that last statement. "Even when I was Ascended, I couldn't stop wishing that Sam was there with me, that she was able to share what I was witnessing and learning with my new abilities, that I could show her what I could discover and accomplish like this…"

He sighed. "It's why I… I came back when we conceived Liam, really; I think that, when I… shared myself with her- like Orlin and Chaya shared themselves with Sam and Colonel Sheppard, you know-, I was so… so eager to share all of that with her that I actually gave her more of me than I was planning…"

"And bingo; there's a half-Ascended bun in Sam's oven until Oma has to take him away for his own protection, eh?" Jack said, the slight smile once again making a poor job of concealing his emotions on the topic. "God… that must have sucked."

"Why do you think I never went back to see Sam after Liam's conception?" Daniel said, looking back at Jack with a saddened expression; even if he couldn't remember his reasons at the time, he knew enough about himself to know why he hadn't gone back to see Sam after that. "It… it would have been too hard to see her and know she didn't remember what we had shared… what we had created…"

Jack could only nod at that; he couldn't even begin to imagine how it must have felt for Daniel to be in that kind of position. Having to give up his child was bad enough; seeing the mother of that child and knowing that she didn't even remember that the kid in question had been conceived in the first place…

To say that the situation there would have monumentally sucked was a serious understatement.

After the two men had stood in silence for a few moments, once again lacking any clear idea of what they could say from this point on, Jack spoke again.

"Daniel…" he began, looking at his friend with a renewed sense of determination, "as far as my feelings on this whole thing go…"

He took a deep breath, making sure he had clearly thought out what he was about to say, before he nodded reassuringly at his old friend. "I… well, I put all that aside a long time ago, really; the feelings were there, don't get me wrong, but I just…"

He sighed, an almost embarrassed expression on his face as he spoke, before he continued. "I kind of realised that, even if the regulations weren't in the way, it wouldn't have worked out; if nothing else, we didn't really have anything to talk about outside the Air Force and the program. Then I got promoted to base commander, and… well, after I got bumped all the way up to head of Homeworld Security, it just reached a point where continuing to try for anything more serious- even if I'd still been interested in trying something- would have probably resulted in me being accused of abusing my position, to say nothing of what the rumours might have done to Carter's promotion prospects."

After staring slightly wistfully at nothing in particular for a moment, Jack smiled and shrugged in a nonchalant manner. "It was all probably for the best anyway; one of the main reasons I got over it all was, if we'd ever actually tried anything more than the staring-with-occasional-flirting thing, we'd have probably ended up killing each other before six months were up. You two, on the other hand…"
Jack smiled slightly as he looked at his old friend, who was now looking almost embarrassed at the now-teasing expression on the general's face. "Hell, I think it's safe to say that you're not just spending time together lately because of the Liam thing, huh?"

"No... it's not," Daniel replied, a slight smile on his face as he recalled the few free moments he'd managed to spend with Sam since Liam had come into their lives, grateful that Jack was past his old feelings for Sam; at least he knew things weren't going to be too uncomfortable between them. "It's not been easy finding time, of course, but..."

He shrugged slightly, for the first time in his life lost for words regarding how he felt about his current situation. "Well, we've tried to have some time alone together to talk about things like where we want this to go, and we've... we're exploring things while we can. We don't want to rush into anything too fast- it's been four years since Liam's conception and things have changed since then, to say nothing of there now being Liam to consider- but it's..."

"Going well, huh?" Jack replied, giving his old friend a quick smile and thumbs-up. "Good on you, Danny-boy; about time you got something going right for you on that front."

Glancing around himself briefly, Jack then leaned closer to the archaeologist with a slight smile. "Particularly after all the rumours I've been hearing lately about you and a certain ex-space-thief; didn't buy them myself- she never really struck me as being quite your 'type'-, but I was really worried you'd do something crazy there."

"Uh... right," Daniel said, nodding slightly uncertainly at Jack at that last comment. "Well... thanks."

"Don't worry about it," Jack said, waving a hand reassuringly before he assumed a more serious expression. "Just one simple question that the IOA insisted I ask you; can you continue to operate on a team with Lieutenant Colonel Samantha Carter without allowing your personal feelings for her to affect your judgement at a crucial moment while on a mission through the Stargate?"

"Yes," Daniel replied promptly. "We've been... well, we've always been close even before this happened, and it never affected our judgement back then; I think I can safely say that things won't change just because we're closer now than we were."

"Good enough for me; pretty much how I felt about it all anyway," Jack replied, stepping back with a smile on his face as he nodded briefly at the archaeologist. "So long as you're serious about giving this thing a shot, and you're sure it won't have an impact on missions... well, after you've been on a bit of a probationary period to determine if this is going to affect your performance in the long run, I'm prepared to take everything else as it comes, to tell ya the truth."

Daniel blinked.

"That's it?" he said, looking at Jack in surprise.

"Well, I already had a bit of a talk with the president about this whole thing; he said that he'd pretty much accept my final judgement on the situation, so long as I could get confirmation from the horse's mouth that this wouldn't be a problem," Jack replied, smiling reassuringly at his friend.

"On that topic," Daniel put in, looking pointedly at Jack as he stood up, "not that I'm saying we'll do it all the time, but, if a mission comes up where access to Liam's Ascended-related knowledge and power would be useful..."

"Could you take him through the 'gate?" Jack finished, smiling once again at his old friend. "Hey;
so long as you give a good reason why he's needed, I see no reason why anyone can object to allowing an offworld citizen who's relocated to Earth regular access to the Stargate; the fact that he's your kid doesn't change the fact that he was raised on another planet, and nobody's ever objected to allowing Teal'c, Nyan, Jonas and Vala through the 'gate even if they didn't have any official qualifications or anything like that.

"And… the fact that Liam's a child?" Daniel pointed out, looking uncertainly at his friend; a part of him almost couldn't believe that it was going to be this easy to give Liam permission to go through the Stargate.

"As you've pointed out more than once in your reports, he's a kid with access to Ancient knowledge; gives him a bit of an edge, you have to admit," Jack pointed out, his smile becoming slightly broader as they moved further away from the more complicated (And the more personal, of course) issue of Daniel's relationship with Sam. "Look, just don't worry about it, will you? I've already recommended to the IOA that you two should stay on the team, Liam's pretty much got official status as an offworld citizen when it comes to Stargate-related matters, and I've got the same team who prepared my clone's history covering the necessary paperwork to explain Liam's existence; I'll expect you and Carter to let me know what kinda personal history you want regarding how he was conceived, given the age thing."

With that said, Jack shrugged and indicated the door. "Anyway, I'd best be off; with this out of the way, I think Landry wants to hear my final decision on the team front in person before I have to head back to Washington."

"Keeping you busy up there, huh?" Daniel asked, smiling slightly at his old friend.

"Oh, you have no idea how busy," Jack replied, sighing dejectedly at the thought of the paperwork that still sat on his desk- no matter how far he rose up the ranks, he would never get used to the paperwork he had to do these days- before he shrugged. "Well, duty calls; see you when I see you."

A few hours later, his work completed and the day ended, Daniel sat on his couch, reading a book as he waited for Sam to get back from her trip to Vancouver; he'd received a call from Landry an hour or so ago that she was on her way back from meeting with Mrs Miller and would visit Daniel's house to let him know how it had gone. Once again, Liam was spending the night in Daniel's spare room in the absence of any ideas for a more permanent living arrangement, but he'd already been sent to bed upon arrival as part of his punishment; the two of them had eaten dinner together, of course, but after that Daniel had sent Liam to his room and made sure that his light was out before coming back downstairs. A part of him felt a bit foolish making sue Liam went to bed early- his son had access to the knowledge of the Ancients and here he was grounding him?- but at the same time he knew that he wanted Liam to have the normal life that Adria had never even had the chance to have; if that meant punishing him when he made a mistake, than he'd just have to get used to it.

Of course, that didn't mean he couldn't be proud of Liam's accomplishments; his earlier action while he was out with Mitchell and Vala had given him another reason to be proud of his son's abilities. As it turned out, the meal hadn't gone quite as they'd expected; at one point when Vala had gone to the bathroom, a member of the Trust had attempted to abduct her for reasons that they still hadn't managed to learn from him. If it hadn't been for the man's attempts to abduct Liam as well- evidently news about the SGC's new arrival had travelled fast and inspired some interest among the remaining Goa'uld- , the abduction might have succeeded.

As it was, of course, as soon as the man had started trying to prompt Liam to leave his seat- the
man had evidently assumed that Liam was little more than a normal child with a few extras, as well as being unconcerned about Mitchell's presence-. Liam had known that something was wrong, subsequently using his powers to make the man choke for a few moments until he and Mitchell could get him to the gents'.

Now out of public view, they had swiftly questioned him about his presence- Liam once again using a slight 'nudge' of his powers to make sure the man was telling the truth; Daniel didn't like his son having to resort to such methods, but acknowledged that, when dealing with the Trust, every possible measure had to be taken- and learned about his final goal in capturing Vala. Apparently the Goa'uld he was employed by- Athena- had been an old 'ally' of Qetesh's back when Vala had been her host, and had wanted to interrogate Vala about the location of an Ancient treasure that Qetesh had apparently discovered and kept from Athena before she was taken out of Vala. Whether the treasure actually existed or Qetesh had been lying, nobody was certain, but what was certain was that nobody was going to allow Athena the chance to 'question' Vala about it. For the moment, all that could be done was to put Vala and Liam under closer security observation to make sure that no Trust agents tried to abduct them again, although Landry assured Daniel that all efforts were being made to find Athena's current location before she could accomplish her goal.

"Hello?" a voice said from the door, breaking into Daniel's train of thought and stand up, a smile crossing his face as he stood up and walked into the hallway to greet Sam, who was already shrugging off her coat and hanging it on a nearby hook.

"Hey," he said, smiling at her as he leaned forwards to kiss her lightly on the lips. "Good to have you back."

"Good to be back," Sam replied, a similar smile on her face as she looked back at Daniel. "Liam's in bed?"

"Made sure of it myself," Daniel confirmed with a brief nod.

"Glad to hear it," Sam replied, a slightly teasing smile on her face as she looked at him. "I have to admit, I was a bit worried that you wouldn't be able to go through with it…"

"Excuse me; are you implying that I'm a poor authority figure?" Daniel countered, the equally teasing grin on his face taking any potential sting out of his words.

"No; just that you might have difficulty saying 'no' to our son when he tries to get out of something," Sam replied, raising a critical eyebrow. "Or am I the only one who remembers who was the one to get Cassie the trip to Disneyland after she saw an advert for it?"

"As I recall, you helped cover the tickets for that just as much as I did," Daniel retorted, his smile growing broader as the two of them recalled Cassie's enthusiastic recollection of that particular holiday- the first one she and Janet had ever taken as a family-, before the two of them briefly fell silent, memories of their long-lost friend driving cheerier thoughts away for the moment.

"Anyway," Sam said, shaking her head slightly to bring the two of them back to the present, "how's it been here?"

"Oh, fairly quiet," Daniel replied, a slight smile on his face at the memories of the last day's activities. "Jack's assured me that he's fine with… us… and he's also assured me that we're allowed to both remain on SG-1 so long as we can guarantee that we'll keep our personal feelings separate from our missions. Oh, and Liam and Vala were nearly abducted by an agent of the Trust before
Cam and Liam realised he wasn't everything he seemed-

"Hold on; a Trust agent?" Sam repeated, looking in momentary shock at Daniel.

"Don't worry; thanks to Cam and Liam he was stopped before he could get away with either of them," Daniel reassured her, placing a reassuring hand on Sam's shoulder as he indicated his couch.

"Actually," he continued, as the two of them sat down, "neither of them seemed to mind that much about the 'interruption'; Liam described the experience as 'cool', and Vala even told me that she actually rather enjoyed her 'date' with Cam, even if they did have a 'sixth wheel' for the whole meal."

"Back up a minute there; Vala called her dinner with Cam a date?" Sam repeated, looking at Daniel with an amused smile. "How did he react to that?"

"About what you'd expect, really; embarrassed, but I got the impression he actually rather liked it," Daniel replied, allowing himself a slight chuckle of his own as he recalled Mitchell's expression after Vala had told him they'd need to arrange another time to finish their 'date' properly before he turned back to Sam. "So, how did things go with Mrs Miller?"

With that question, the smile faded from Sam's face as she reflected on that meeting.

"Not too well, unfortunately," she said, shaking her head as she looked over at Daniel. "She refuses to sign away her rights to her discovery on the grounds that it'll just result in all subsequent patents to the idea belonging to the US military and thus be unable to be used by anyone in the general population, and we can't tell her that it's already inspired an idea until she signs the confidentiality papers…"

"A real Catch Twenty-Two situation, huh?" Daniel said, sighing sympathetically as he reached over to rub a comforting hand along Sam's arm. "So much for using her work as a reason to go to Atlantis…"

"Actually, it turns out that we have an unexpected bonus that might help us win her over," Sam said, smiling slightly as she looked at Daniel. "It turns out that her brother is a member of the Atlantis expedition; if we can get him to explain the situation to her, we might have a chance to get her help in getting the formula working."

"Really?" Daniel said, looking at her with a smile; even if their fields of expertise were drastically different, he always loved seeing Sam enthusiastic about a project. "Who is it?"

"Unfortunately, that's the part that makes this slightly difficult," Sam said, the smile on her face fading slightly. "You see… her brother's Rodney McKay."

Daniel blinked.

"Wait a minute; McKay has a sister?" he said, staring at Sam in surprise.

"Apparently," Sam replied, nodding at her old teammate. "I saw him in a picture with Mrs Miller from their college days; I asked her about it and she said they'd had a falling out some years back over her chosen career path. From what Mrs Miller said, their relationship doesn't sound like it's particularly close these days, of course, but it still seems like the personal connection's our best chance at getting her to help."
"I see," Daniel replied, nodding in understanding. "So, now we just need to send a message to Atlantis and wait for McKay to come to us?"

"That and hope he'll actually come in the first place; as I said, according to Mrs Miller their relationship's apparently been a bit strained ever since college, but it still seems like bringing in McKay to talk to her instead is our best chance to get her to help us," Sam replied, shaking her head slightly as she reflected on the results of her latest trip.

Sometimes, it seemed like every solution she discovered to a problem always had its own pitfalls to go with it; just once, she'd like to encounter a situation where the first solution suggested was both simple to employ and the only one they had to use.

The reflection only lasted for a few moments, however; after a while, Sam found herself simply taking advantage of the first real moment of silence she'd had the chance to experience in a while to simply enjoy the presence of the father of her child as she rested her head against Daniel, the two of them staring silently at the screen before them as they enjoyed the presence of the other. No words were exchanged, but they both knew that no words were needed; right now all that they wanted was a chance to be with the other, rather than anything else.

With the unknown results of their attempts to contact McKay the next day waiting for them in the future, and after the chaos and tension of the last few days on the *Odyssey* and around Dakara, both of them right now needed nothing more than a chance to be with the person they'd only recently confessed their feelings for.

Somehow, they both knew that this night was merely going to be the calm before the storm…
How to Shock the McKay Family

Chapter Notes

Usual kind of rules for this kind of story; what you don't see happened the same way it did in the original episode, barring some minor changes in dialogue that don't really matter enough to be written about as they don't make a difference to the overall plot.

As Doctor Rodney McKay stood in front of the Stargate, his bag packed and clutched in his right hand, frowning slightly in frustration as he waited for the Stargate to dial Earth.

He still couldn't believe it; after all this time away from Earth, with the Wraith, the Ori, and maybe even the Asurans- there was no guarantee that those guys wouldn't come back to get them at some point- posing threats to humanity in at least three different galaxies, what did Colonel Carter want his help with that was so important he had to be called away from Atlantis?

Looking over something his sister had 'allegedly' done (Although he really had his doubts about that; she hadn't published a thing since his niece… what was her name again…? had been born; why would she suddenly start now?)

Here he was, the man who'd rediscover- who'd helped to save Atlantis from destruction time and again over the last two years (That was the problem with having become so excited over the possibility of completing Project Arcturus where the Ancients hadn't managed to pull it off; a part of him still acted like it had worked before he remembered how it had screwed up), and he was getting dragged away from his team and his city, all the way over to another galaxy just because his sister had written some proof that nobody would even tell him the purpose of on the grounds that he 'wouldn't believe it unless he saw it'?

He'd just be glad to get this over with so he could get back to Atlantis; even if this 'proof' Jeannie had written was as interesting as Colonel Carter said it was, he doubted it could be as significant as any of the work he was in the middle of at the moment.

"Ready for the trip?" Lieutenant Colonel John Sheppard's voice interjected, prompting McKay to look over to where his friend and team leader was currently standing off to one side, arms folded with a slight smile on his face as he looked at McKay's bag.

"It's a brief jaunt to Earth and then I'm on the Daedalus coming back here; what's to look forward to?" McKay countered, his frustration clear as he spoke; he still wished that he'd had the time to pack a couple of experiments for the trip back to Atlantis, but the SGC had been insistent that he wouldn't have the time to do that.

"Just asking," John replied, shrugging casually as he continued to smile teasingly at McKay. "Give my regards to everyone back on Earth, OK?"

As the wormhole finally activated, McKay simply nodded at his friend before he turned and walked though the Stargate, leaving John's teasing comments behind him- John knew as well as anyone that even he had more people to give regard to Earth than McKay, even if most of them were only people he'd met during his brief times in the SGC when he'd had to return to Earth for some reason or another; he never seemed to stay in touch with anyone he'd known prior to his
Subsequently emerging on the other side of the galaxy, his bag still in his hand and marching impatiently down the ramp leading from the Earth Stargate, McKay was only partly surprised to see Doctor Daniel Jackson standing alongside Sam at the bottom of the ramp, his left arm around her shoulders as Sam's left arm reached up to hold the hand over her shoulder.

"Welcome back to Earth," Daniel said, smiling casually at the man standing before him, his arm casually around Sam's shoulders.

"Yes, yes…” McKay said, initially unconcerned about Daniel's presence in the gateroom. "What has my sis… wait a minute…” he muttered, evidently registering how close to each other the two SG-1 members were standing- far closer than even friends would normally be, in his opinion; the hand thing rang a few more 'non-friend' alarms as well-, along with the slight smiles on their faces as they held hands. "Are you two…”?

Exchanging glances, Daniel and Sam smiled casually at each other, Daniel leaning in to give Sam a brief kiss, before they both looked back at McKay.

"We are," Sam said simply, her grin broadening as McKay's expression became briefly comparable to a fish out of water as he stared at them. For a moment, Sam was tempted to just let him continue to stare incredulously, but eventually both she and Daniel acknowledged that it had gone on long enough; as fun as it was to see McKay lost for words, they did have other matters to attend to right now.

"Come on," she said, indicating the door behind them. "Copies of your sister's work are in my lab if you want to take a look at it."

"Uh… right…” McKay said, trying to control his still-apparent shock as Colonel Carter and Doctor Jackson turned around to walk out of the gateroom. He knew that he wasn't doing a very good job of keeping his shock contained, but he still couldn't believe it; one of- if not the- most fascinating, mentally stimulating women he'd ever met had ended up involved with an archaeologist?

Seriously, how was it that he always ended up being overlooked by the really interesting ones; was he just not hot enough or something stupid like that? OK, so Jackson looked better than he did- from a purely masculine perspective with absolutely no interest in it, of course-; was Carter really that shallow to go with a guy just because of how he looked? The man was an archaeologist; he wasn't even anywhere near her league of brilliance, never mind being anything like as good as him when it came to understanding her work!

OK, so McKay was willing to admit that he'd noticed that she looked good in the past; that didn't mean he didn't also admire her mind, even if she wasn't quite up to his standards.

For a moment, as the two SG-1 members walked out of the gateroom, McKay's eyes flicked downwards, his previous thoughts almost instinctively drawing his eyes down to look at Sam's-

Before his eyes could reach their goal, however, they were diverted by the unexpected sight of a young boy, no more than ten years old- maybe even only eight; McKay had never been very good at estimating peoples' ages-, standing by the door to the gateroom, with blue eyes and brown hair that came down to around his shoulders, dressed in a dark blue BDU that looked like it belonged to a cadet, glaring at the Canadian scientist as he held one hand up in front of him, the hand in
question glowing in a disturbing manner.

"Stop looking at my mom, Doc," the boy said simply, indicating the direction of the corridor that Sam and Jackson had just walked down while McKay was distracted by the boy's presence. "You don't have a hope of comparing to Dad, so don't try; you'll just end up embarrassing yourself."

If it was possible, McKay's eyes got even wider as the boy turned around to walk out of the room, hurrying after Sam and Jackson as the glow around his hand faded to leave only a normal hand in its place.

"M-mom?" he said, looking around himself for some kind of sign that he was the victim of some practical joke, becoming increasingly disturbed as he realised that nobody was actually laughing at him and there was no sign of a video camera to record his reaction.

Samantha Carter was a mother to an eight-year-old son?

How come nobody told him that before; he'd been making an idiot of himself for the last five years every time he even tried to hit on her!

Couldn't someone have mentioned that she had a son-

Hold on a minute; McKay had read her file before he'd come down here the first time- he really didn't like thinking about that visit, of course; not only had his theories about the Stargate been proven totally wrong, but he'd ended up being transferred to Russia of all places for several months-, and she'd definitely never had a kid then…

But the kid looked way too like her to be adopted…

What the hell was going on here?

Even as Sam and Daniel walked out of the room, they couldn't stop a slight grin spreading across their faces as they heard McKay's stunned stutter at Liam's proclamation.

"Who'd have thought it?" Daniel said, smiling casually at the woman he loved as the two of them headed for the lab. "He can face off against the Wraith and the prototype Replicators and still find something sarcastic to say about the situation, but bring him up against the idea that you've got a son and he can't get a word out."

"Maybe it's Liam's apparent age rather than anything else; it's not like we mentioned Liam in the transmission to Atlantis," Sam pointed out, unable to restrain the slight smile at the thought. "He's probably…

Before the two SG-1 members could continue that conversation, Liam hurried along to join them, shaking his head slightly as he looked between his parents with an inquiringly smile.

"Did that guy really call Mom a dumb blonde once?" he asked, looking inquiringly up at his father as he indicated back in the direction of the gateroom.

"Don't go there, Liam," Sam interjected before Daniel could say anything, scowling slightly at her son. "If you don't like him, fine, but just bear in mind that I have to work with him for the moment; I'd rather you didn't start showing him what you can do until we're at least on Daedalus, and even
then you're not to do anything to McKay himself."

"Mom..." Liam pleaded as he turned to look at her.

"No," Sam countered, glaring resolutely at her son. "You're part-Ancient, Liam; act like it and don't complain about not being able to tease somebody with your abilities."

Daniel chose to remain silent at that, but he had to admit that Sam had a point; they might want Liam to have a normal childhood now that he was here, but that definitely didn't include using his powers to tease people like McKay... no matter how much she might be tempted to let him get away with it.

"It's part-Ascended, not part-Ancient; you don't have to make me sound old..." Liam grumbled, sticking his hands in his pockets as he walked sulkily after his parents.

"Hold on; part-Ascended?" McKay's voice suddenly yelled incredulously from behind them; Sam, Daniel and Liam had been so caught up in talking with each other that they hadn't noticed that the Canadian scientist had caught up with them. "B-b-but t-t-that's... that's imposs-

"To answer your obvious questions, yes, Liam's part-Ascended, yes, Sam's his mother, and to answer the most likely question after that one, I'm his father; Liam's... well, he's younger than he looks," Daniel said, cutting off McKay's incredulous stammering as he stared in shock between the three people standing before him, his gaze apparently settling on Daniel after the archaeologist's last seemingly bizarre statement. "He was conceived during the year I was Ascended and taken to another planet to be trained in the use of his powers until he was ready... and I'm not going to tell you what he's ready for," the archaeologist said, glaring pointedly at the scientist as the Canadian opened his mouth that's not what you came here to talk about and it's not relevant to anything you're doing here."

"Now that we've got the immediate questions about Liam out of the way- and don't think you're getting back to that matter later; as Daniel said, we didn't bring you here to interrogate my son about where he came from-," Sam added, looking critically at the scientist as she picked up from where Daniel had finished, "I assume that we can get on to the reason why you really came back here?"

"Huh?" McKay said, looking back at Sam before he shook his head, evidently trying to force his mind back on track before he nodded. "Oh... yeah, let's... let's get on with that... proof thing..."

"Good," Sam said, nodding briefly at McKay before he turned to look at Daniel and Liam. "I'll see you two later; right now I have to show our visitor a math proof."

"Have fun," Daniel said, smiling slightly at her as he leaned over to give her another brief kiss; neither of them could ever get tired of doing that (Particularly not when it resulted in another incredulous stare from McKay; he might have done good work on Atlantis, but it would take some time until SG-1 were prepared to forgive him for nearly letting Teal'c die).

"As much as I can," Sam replied, crouching down briefly to look at Liam. "Be good for your father, young man."

"When am I not?" Liam replied with a broad smile.

"Let's start with the reasons why you're grounded right now and work our way up from there," Sam
said, the smile on her face taking away any potential sting that Liam might have felt from her words before she stood back up and turned to look at McKay. "Come on, let's get this over with."

As the clearly still-flustered Canadian scientist followed Sam towards her lab, Daniel and Liam exchanged small smiles with each other.

"That was fun," Liam smiled up at his father, indicating McKay's retreating form, the scientist still looking in confusion between Sam and the two of them.

"Oh yeah," Daniel replied, unable to stop a slight chuckle of his own as he looked back at his son before he looked more seriously at his son. "Just to make it clear, I agree with your mother; as fun as it might be for you to tease Doctor McKay, you can't make fun of a man just because you don't like him; what you've done so far is more than enough to be going along with."

"Come on, Dad, can't I just make him float a little; he really shouldn't have looked at Mom like that…" Liam pleaded, looking at the archaeologist with wide eyes that reminded Daniel of the expression that Jack in particular had always told him he used to get out of the infirmary when he was injured (Personally Daniel thought that Jack was joking about that, but looking at Liam at the moment he thought he could see some elements of his expression that definitely did not come from his mother…).

"No," he replied, resolutely folding his arms as he stared at Liam. "You've already been grounded once, Liam; don't make us have more time to add to that so soon."

"Aww…” Liam groaned, lowering his head and dejectedly swinging one leg as he looked at the floor.

"Come on," Daniel smiled, reaching down to place a hand on his son's shoulder and indicating a nearby corridor. "Let's just grab a bite to eat and then see how your mother's doing."

"What, you mean we aren't going to help her deal with the git?" Liam asked, sounding almost offended.

"Don't call him that; it's rude," Daniel told him, wishing he could stop the slightly amused smile-he did not want to encourage his son to insult people- that crossed his face as he looked down at the young boy. "Your mother can handle Doctor McKay by herself; I was only there to be polite-"

"And make sure he knew not to try anything?" Liam asked, smiling slightly at his father.

Daniel smiled slightly as the two of them turned towards the commissary.

"OK, that might have had something to do with it…” he admitted, shaking his head slightly as the two of them walked.

He trusted Sam, of course, but after spending so long thinking that he'd never… be with her… like he was now, wasn't he allowed to enjoy the novelty of being with her when he'd once thought that he never would be?

Plus, of course, seeing the look on McKay's face when he'd realised what Daniel was doing in the gateroom with her had definitely been very amusing…
A few hours later, Sam, Daniel and Liam were standing on the observation deck of the *Daedalus*, Sam standing beside a teleporter as the three of them waited for the necessary signal from McKay as he visited his sister's house in an attempt to talk to her directly. Having looked over the proof with Sam, McKay had been forced to confess that they genuinely would require his sister's help, but had also confirmed Sam's earlier information that the two of them hadn't spoken in years; apparently McKay had disagreed with his sister's decision to quit scientific research and focus on raising her daughter after she learned she was pregnant. Although he had eventually been persuaded to at least attempt to talk to her, McKay had made his doubts about convincing her to listen to him clear, resulting in Sam having to convince the SGC to grant her access to the *Daedalus's* teleporter while McKay took a remote transmitter with him.

"So," Liam said from where he was currently leaning against a nearby wall, a casual smile on his face as he talked with his father- Daniel and Liam had accompanied Sam up to the *Daedalus*, but since she was the only one needed to work the transporter the two of them had decided to talk while they waited-, "you really worked out that the Ancients built the Stargates based on the idea that they were the 'Ancient Ones' who taught the Romans how to make roads?"

"It only made sense," Daniel said, shrugging slightly uncomfortably as he looked over at Sam in an attempt to ask for help, only to be met by a chuckle at his embarrassed expression. "I mean, how many 'Ancient Ones' could there be? Coupled in with Jack's new knowledge of Stargates that even the Goa'uld hadn't discovered yet, it only made sense that they'd been the ones to create the Stargate network in the first place…"

"Only to you, Daniel," Sam pointed out, smiling over at him before she turned her gaze to Liam. "Take it from me, Liam; you'd have more luck convincing a Replicator not to replicate than you would trying to convince your father to realise just how smart he is."

"Sam…" Daniel sighed, an embarrassed expression on his face as he turned to look at her, only for any further conversation to be cut off as the transport console suddenly beeped, indicating that McKay was ready to be transported. Turning away from the current conversation, Sam activated the transporter console, and instantly a brilliant white glow filled one part of the room, rapidly fading away to reveal Doctor McKay- now dressed in a black-and-grey shirt and dark trousers-standing alongside a blond-haired woman dressed in a dark top and a long pale green dress, who swiftly pulled away from the scientist to stare incredulously at her surroundings.

"Uh… uh, O-OK," she said, raising her hands as she looked at the other people in the room, "what the he- uh, heck-" she corrected herself, noting Liam's presence-, "was that?"

"It's OK," Sam said, briefly holding up one hand in a calming gesture as she, Daniel and Liam walked over to stand beside the two siblings. "You're perfectly safe."

"I don't *feel* perfectly safe," the woman- who Liam and Daniel felt safe in assuming was McKay's sister Jeanie Miller- said, looking pointedly at her brother.

"You've just been teleported to an interstellar vessel in orbit around the planet-" McKay began.

"Please," Mrs Miller said, sarcasm evident in her voice as she shook her head in disbelief. "Teleportation is about as likely as time travel."

"How about superpowers?" Liam put in, raising his hand to generate the now-familiar golden glow that signified when he tapping into his powers. "That more likely?"
"Liam, don't push it; we're asking Mrs Miller to accept enough as it is," Daniel said, looking pointedly down at his son before he looked back at the new arrival with an apologetic smile. "Sorry about that; my son's still getting used to being here…"

"Your… your son?" Mrs Miller repeated, looking in confusion between Daniel and Liam as the young boy lowered his hand, the glow fading as he looked slightly sulkily up at his father. "Who…?"

"Sorry; Doctor Daniel Jackson," Daniel said, stepping forward to shake her hand. "That's my son Liam Carter Jackson."

"Carter?" Mrs Miller repeated, turning to look at Sam as she dazedly shook the archaeologist's offered hand. "So…"

"Yes, I'm his mother, but it's… complicated," Sam admitted, indicating behind Mrs Miller as Daniel released her hand. "As for where you are… look behind you."

As Mrs Miller turned around, her eyes widened as she took in the view before her; a floor-to-ceiling window, displaying the vast landscape of space above the brilliant blue sphere that was Earth.

"Ohhhh my…" Mrs Miller said, almost sounding like she was talking to herself as she stepped forward to stare incredulously out of the window before her.

"I know; cool, huh?" Liam put in, stepping forward to stand beside her, a broad smile on his face as he studied the view before him.

"I-is that…?" Mrs Miller began, raising a hand to her face for a moment before she seemed to regain some degree of control and turned to look critically at Sam, Daniel and her brother. "Why aren't we weightless?"

"Artificial gravity," Sam explained, before she indicated the window with a slight nod. "And yes, that is North America, and you are in geosynchronous orbit."

"We work for something called the Stargate Program," McKay began

"Stargate?" Mrs Miller repeated, turning to look at him in confusion.

"It's a device that creates stable, artificial wormholes that allows us to travel between other planets," Daniel explained. "We can even go to other galaxies, but that requires more power and isn't as easy to accomplish; it's a long story."

"I'm… I'm sure it is…" Mrs Miller said, staring out the window as she shook her head incredulously. "What have you gotten yourself involved in here, Meredith?"

"Meredith?" Sam repeated, turning to look at McKay in surprise as the Canadian suddenly seemed to develop a strong desire to study the floor below him.

"It's a long story-" McKay began, clearly refusing to look at any of the Jackson/Carter 'family' around him

"It's his name," Mrs Miller interjected, still staring out of the window as she spoke.
"Your name is Meredith McKay?" Sam said, staring at the Canadian with an increasingly broad smile, Daniel's own amused smile almost matching hers while Liam looked like he was about to fall over as he clasped his hands over his mouth to stop himself from bursting out laughing.

"Meredith Rodney McKay, yes, but I prefer to go by 'Rodney'," McKay said, evidently uncomfortable about the current topic. "Look, can-can we just stick to the point here? Look out the window; much more interesting than my name-"

"You're a guy called Meredith?!" Liam said, staring wide-eyed at McKay with a broad grin on his face. "Just when I think you can't get any more ridiculous…"

"Look, according to your parents you're meant to have access to the knowledge of the Ancients; can't you just let that go?" McKay hissed at the young boy.

"He's right, Liam; you really don't have much reason to laugh at it," Daniel pointed out, looking pointedly at Liam even if he couldn't stop himself from smiling slightly as he looked over at McKay. "It was a fairly common male name before the last century…"

"Maybe, but come on; these days it's a girl's name!" Liam insisted, a broad grin on his face as he looked at the Canadian, whose attempts to counter Liam's 'innocent' grin with a glare of his own met with little success.

Apparently oblivious to the quieter conversation taking place between her brother and the father-son duo, Mrs Miller continued to stare silently out of the window for a moment before she turned around to look at the room she was currently in.

"So this…" she said uncertainly, waving her hands above her head as she walked towards the control console, "this is, like, a... like a space ship?"

"This is a US Air Force vessel called the Daedalus," Sam confirmed, shooting a pointed look at Liam as her son continued to chuckle at McKay's name; as much as she and Daniel enjoyed the chance to see Liam acting like a normal boy, there was a time and a place for that kind of behaviour and this wasn't it.

"Your equation has real-world applications I'm certain you've never even considered," McKay added, looking earnestly at his sister as he spoke, even as she continued to stare at her surroundings.

"You see," Daniel said, picking up the story himself, "there are... well, to put it simply, there are creatures out there that would like nothing more than to destroy this planet and everything you know."

"Uh, did you say 'creatures'?!" Mrs Miller asked, turning to look uncertainly at the archaeologist. "Like... like alien creatures?"

"Yep," Liam put in, grinning over at his parents before he turned back to smile reassuringly at Mrs Miller. "Don't worry though; between Mom Dad, and their team, I'd say we're all in good hands."

"Oh, and I'm chopped liver?" McKay interjected, glaring at the young boy.

"You're a galaxy removed from us; your guys aren't as big a problem for the people she knows,"
Liam pointed out.

"And that makes me irrelevant because?" McKay countered, glaring back at the young boy before him.

"I'm sorry; why are you people allowing your eight-year-old son on a spaceship when you're dealing with... with aliens?" Mrs Miller cut in, looking in frustration and confusion between the archaeologist and the astrophysicist.

"Liam's... well, he's complicated," Sam replied, smiling slightly down at her son before she looked back at Mrs Miller. "Let's just say that he's... well, he's not exactly your normal kid."

"In what way?" Mrs Miller asked, looking curiously at the mother of the child in question.

"Trust me," Sam said, smiling slightly at her son before she looked back at Mrs Miller, "you wouldn't believe me if I told you."

Evidently, that comment was enough for the other woman to leave the matter alone for the moment; Daniel was prepared to assume that she had concluded that anything she couldn't believe after being told that aliens were real and Earth had the ability to travel through space wasn't something she even wanted to know at the moment. Without saying a word, she turned back to stare out of the window, evidently trying to help herself cope with thoughts of aliens and inexplicably unusual children by focusing on something closer to home.

"Look," McKay said, trying to take control of the conversation once again, "the kid's parental obsession aside, he's right; the work we could do is important, Jeanie."

As his sister turned to look back out of the window, McKay could only continue talking, evidently making- for once in his encounters with SG-1- a genuine effort to choose his words carefully. "Not just to you or me, but to every living being down there, and that includes Madison and... um..."

"Kaleb," Mrs Miller replied, not even bothering to hide the exasperation in her voice as she continued to look out of the window in front of her.

"Kaleb, yes," McKay said, evidently relieved at being let off the hook like that.

"We can't do this without you," Sam put in.

"Let's not go overboard," McKay said, his indigation at the implication that he couldn't handle it clear as he turned to look at the astrophysicist. "I mean, she'd be an asset, but-"

"McKay," Sam, Daniel and Liam interjected simultaneously, Liam raising his hand to generate the same threatening glow that he'd used when he initially confronted McKay in the gateroom (Fortunately, Mrs Miller didn't notice it; she might have been prepared to let Liam's origins remain a mystery for the moment, but if she saw his hand glowing any thoughts she might have had of just waiting for answers would almost certainly be at an end), prompting the Canadian to swallow and remain silent.

"So what do you say, Mrs Miller?" Sam asked, turning back to the other woman.

"Jeanie-" McKay began, when his sister showed no signs of replying immediately.
"Look, it's just... a lot to take in right now, OK?" Mrs Miller said, turning to look in frustration back at her brother, waving an impatient hand in his direction. "Just give me a second, Mer."

As McKay tried to ignore Liam's renewed chuckle at the reference to his real name, Sam and Daniel simply stood in silence as they watched Mrs Miller turn back around to stare thoughtfully down at the planet before them, her mind evidently lost in contemplating the sheer multitude of people that were now spread out below her, so many miles from where she herself currently stood.

"So," Mrs Miller said, clearly trying to focus on something tangible, "somewhere down there... my husband is giving my daughter a bath."

"Yeah," Sam replied, nodding at the other woman. "Trust me, I know how you feel; when I first saw Earth from space, even after spending the last year going to other planets, it was... well, incredible."

After another short silence, Mrs Miller turned back to look at the small group before her.

"Can... can I have a bit of time to think about this?" she asked, indicating the room around her with a sweep of her hand. "I mean, no offence, but it's..."

"A lot to take in, right?" Daniel said, smiling reassuringly at her as he nodded. "Don't worry about it; just call us when you're ready."

"I've got the number you need; all you've got to do is ring it," McKay added, pulling a card out of his pocket and handing it to her.

Glancing at the address on the card, Mrs Miller's eyes widened.

"You're stationed at NORAD?" she said, looking at them in surprise.

"Under NORAD, actually," Sam clarified with a smile. "It's obvious, I know, but that's actually what makes it so good; nobody expects there to really be something under there."

"Point," Mrs Miller smiled, nodding slightly as she turned her attention back to the view before her, nodding thoughtfully as she did so.

They might not have convinced her totally yet, but both Sam and Daniel had faith that they'd made good progress with her right now.

All they had to do now was make the necessary arrangements with General Landry for what they were planning to do next...
"So," General Landry said, as he sat opposite Sam and Daniel- Teal'c had agreed to keep an eye on Liam while his parents talked with General Landry about their next mission- in his office the following morning, a grim expression on his face, "you want me to grant you permission to leave the SGC- and the rest of SG-1, I might add- and travel all the way over to Atlantis- accompanied by your son, no less- on the chance that you'll be able to discover the plans for a prototype Sangraal that may not even be capable of doing what the final version is capable of?"

"General, with all due respect, this is the first definitive clue we've found about the Sangraal since we discovered that it even existed; it has to be worth a look," Daniel insisted, as he looked urgently at his superior. "From what I've read of the tablet, Liam and I are the only people who might be capable of accessing whatever information Merlin's left in Atlantis's databanks; I have to take him along to at least find out if he can access the plans if I can't."

"And if it turns out to be nothing?" Landry pointed out.

"I'll be continuing my research into the possible location of the Sangraal while I'm travelling on the Daedalus, and I'll be taking most of my current research on Merlin with me; even if we don't find anything on the Sangraal, I'll still be continuing my current line of research while we travel," Daniel replied, his expression becoming more resolute as he looked at the general. "If I haven't managed to find any new information about the Sangraal's location by this point, even after checking Merlin's library and most of the available, I think it's fairly safe to say that I won't find anything else by staying here; it's possible that when I'm on the Daedalus, with a more limited number of possible distractions from missions or request from the rest of my department, I'll stumble across the connection that I've been missing so far."

After looking thoughtfully at the archaeologist for a few moments, evidently trying to determine his sincerity regarding his last statement, Landry nodded.

"All right," he said. "So long as you continue your research into the Sangraal while travelling, you and Colonel Carter have my permission to take Liam with you to Atlantis; just be sure to make sure Colonel Mitchell has a couple of half-decent replacements for you while you're away."

"Understood," Daniel replied, he and Sam exchanging a slight smile at the thought of Mitchell's possible reaction to 'replacing' them; he'd made it clear on many occasions that, as far as he was concerned, an SG-1 without at least half of the original members wasn't SG-1 at all, and once Sam and Daniel left Mitchell would only have Teal'c left on the current group from the original team. For a brief moment Daniel thought about trying to contact Langara and seeing if Jonas was available to fill his old slot for a month or so- would Mitchell have any objections to the team's longest-lasting 'substitute' returning to the fold?- but swiftly decided against it; Langara might have apparently escaped the Ori's attention so far, but he didn't want to risk putting the planet in danger by asking Jonas to put himself back in the line of fire. Even if the other man would probably have welcomed an excuse to get away from the delegates from his planet's other two nations if the situation was still as tense between them as it had been in the past, Daniel just wouldn't feel… right asking Jonas to leave his people like that just so that he could spend time with his new-found family, even if he was also on a mission at the same time.

"There's another thing, sir," Sam added, drawing Daniel's thoughts away from the issue of who might replace them on SG-1 as he turned to look at her. "As long as Daniel's planning to do some work on the journey to Atlantis, I'd like to take Merlin's device along as well."
Landry blinked.

"When you say, 'Merlin's device', that would be that thing he used to hide himself when he was working on the Sangraal by hiding in another dimension, correct?" he asked, looking pointedly at Sam.

"Correct," Sam replied, nodding at him. "I've been studying it extensively ever since Colonel Mitchell and I first activated it, and I think that I'm making progress with working out a way to activate the device in a controlled manner using naquadah generators. If I can make it work for us on a larger scale than just sending a few individual people out of phase, we might be able to use it as a means of protecting ourselves and others from future Ori assaults by shifting us out of phase with the rest of the universe; if I have access to a couple of spare naquadah generators to provide power, I'm confident that I can get it working during the journey to Atlantis."

Nodding thoughtfully as he took in what Sam had just said, General Landry didn't take long to come to a decision.

"All right," he said, nodding in acceptance at the colonel. "I think we can be sure that Daedalus is as secure a working environment as you'll find anywhere in the SGC, particularly since you'll be in hyperspace for the entirety of the trip; you can let Colonel Caldwell know that you have my permission to bring the device and Liam on board with you." He smiled slightly, as though an amusing thought had just occurred to him. "Of course, there's still the issue of power to remember; I take it that I can trust you not to start tapping into Daedalus's systems without letting Caldwell know what you're up to first?"

"Of course," Sam replied, a slight smile on her face as she stood back up and nodded gratefully at the SGC commander. "Thank you again, sir."

"Just be sure to bring back something good," Landry replied, his own slight smile still on his face as he nodded back at the two of them. "Somehow, I get the impression Colonel Mitchell's not going to be extremely happy about this…"

"Hold on; you're leaving?" Cam yelled, staring incredulously at his two teammates as the three of them sat in his office; Sam and Daniel had both decided that the best way to let the team's newest commander know about their current plan was to tell him as soon as possible, subsequently letting Teal'c and Vala know once everything had been confirmed. "And you didn't think the rest of us might want to come? What happened to the SG-1 unity, I ask you?"

"Cam," Sam said, looking sympathetically at her old friend, "we had enough trouble convincing General Landry to let four of us go to Atlantis the last time we thought we'd discovered something, and even then… well, I'm not trying to offend anybody, but did we actually need you and Vala there in the end?"

For a moment Mitchell looked like he was going to protest that last comment, but finally he sighed and nodded.

"OK, point, there's not really much that we could do if we came along…" he admitted, shaking his head slightly before he looked back pointedly at them. "Just to check, did you even consider how we're meant to cope with things here? I mean, I get that this stuff Merlin talks about in the tablet's important, but what if the rest of us run into something that we can't handle without you two-"

"There's always the possibility that what we know won't be enough to get us out of a mission,
Cam; do we ever let that stop us from going through?" Sam pointed out, looking reassuringly at her friend.

"Well… OK, good point," Mitchell said, nodding thoughtfully at Sam before he turned to look at Daniel. "You've left a couple of suggestions for your replacements, right?"

"Lieutenant Grant's agreed to serve as your linguist for the next few missions; he's shown a good grasp of the Ancient language lately, as well as a good grasp of some of the most common Earth-based languages we've encountered in the past to at least provide you with the basics of a translation if the need arises," Daniel replied, a reassuring expression on his face as he spoke to his friend. "As far as scientific problems go, Doctor Lee's volunteered to help out if you encounter anything technologically interesting off-world that you can't identify- so long as you don't actually touch anything beforehand, of course-, but otherwise you should be able to manage well enough without Sam and I until we can get back from Atlantis."

For a moment, Mitchell just stood staring silently at the scientist, his thoughts inwardly conflicted over the desire to give his friends and teammates the opportunity they were asking for to try and find another possible clue to the device that could save the galaxy versus his own desire to either insist on the entire team accompanying them or refuse to let them go until a more convenient moment…

But, in the end, he knew what he had to do.

If nothing else, after discovering that they had a son they'd never known about, he was pretty sure that Sam and Daniel had earned the chance to spend some time in Atlantis; Sam had told him more than once that she regretted not being able to spend more time there during their mission to try and 'block' the Supergate, and as for Daniel…

That place was practically Daniel's own Holy Grail even before Liam came into the picture; now that he had a son who was technically part-Ancient, how could Mitchell deny him the chance to learn more about where his son had come from?

"All right," he said at last, nodding in resignation at his two friends, before a slight smile crossed his face. "You probably need it anyway…"

"Need what?" Daniel asked, looking curiously at Mitchell.

"Hey, c'mon; three whole weeks on the Daedalus with nothing to do but work, eat, or spend time kicking back with the family?" Mitchell pointed out, his smile growing broader as he looked at them. "If you need any help working out which I think you guys should be doing, then we've definitely got a few IQ tests whose results should be called into question…"

With that, the current leader of SG-1 turned and walked out of the room, a slight smile on his face at the expressions that had suddenly appeared on his friend's faces.

In some ways, it was actually rather comforting to know that, no matter what else changed in their lives, Sam and Daniel could still get a bit… embarrassed… when reference was made to their romantic lives…

Shaking such thoughts off for the moment- he, Teal'c and Vala would have plenty of time to tease their friends about this latest turn of events in their relationship when they got back from Atlantis-, Mitchell turned to head for the commissary to let Teal'c and Vala know about the upcoming change
in SG-1's status for the next few missions.

Actually, now that he thought about, this latest turn of events really wasn't so bad; without the distraction of needing to go on missions on a regular basis, Sam and Daniel would definitely have the chance to work on improving their 'new' relationship with each other…

As he felt the slight 'shift' as the Daedelus made the transition from normal space back into subspace, beginning the long three-week journey back to Atlantis- he really should think about working on cutting that down somehow; a ZPM couldn't be the only thing that produced enough power to boot the engine like that-, McKay couldn't help but feel a certain relief.

Visiting Earth was OK if he ever wanted a vacation, of course- even the best minds needed a little break from the thrill of near-constant discovery, after all-, but Atlantis was still the only place where he really felt like he was actually needed; back on Earth, the SGC always defaulted to Colonel Carter when they wanted a technical 'miracle' of some sort, even if he was just as good at solving Ancient technology-based riddles as she was. It wasn't that he minded sharing the credit- even if he didn't do it very often-, but he'd at least like the chance to share it; it seemed

"What did you tell Kaleb?" he asked, shaking off his train of thought to look inquiringly at his sister as the two of them walked through the ship towards the nearest briefing room. Apparently they were meant to talk to someone to brief Jeanie on exactly why they needed her help with that proof, despite McKay's attempts to convince the SGC that he could do the job himself.

"The truth," Jeanie replied simply.

Brilliant scientists were never surprised at anything; McKay was certain that the floor in that part of the corridor had always been a bit unsteady when he stumbled slightly in shock at that last statement (Of course, this whole trip had been one shock after another; not only was Samantha Carter now involved with Doctor Jackson, but she actually had a part-Ascended son with the guy?)

"What?!!" he yelled, staring incredulously at her. "Do you have any idea what "non-disclosure" means?"

"Just because we don't keep secrets from each other doesn't mean we're incapable of it," Jeanie countered, shrugging slightly at him.

"What did he say?" McKay asked, quickly deciding that he didn't want to get too stuck on that; it was going to be hard enough working with his sister on her proof as it was, he didn't want to have her being mad at him on top of all that.

"Um…" Jeanie said, pausing for a moment before she continued, a slight smile on her face and an amused tone to her voice, "he's concerned that me telling him will get him assassinated."

Her initial laugh at that idea faded as she looked anxiously at her brother. "Uh… that won't happen, right?"

"Oh, probably not-" McKay began, only to blink in shock as he rounded a corner to see Colonel Carter and Doctor Jackson casually chatting in front of a door, their son leaning against a wall with a somewhat bored expression on his face.

"What the He…ck are you doing here?" McKay yelled, drawing Carter and Jackson's attention
away from each other and towards him (He only just managed to remember to edit his words for the sake of their son; the kid might be smart, but he still didn't want to risk being accused of corrupting a young boy by teaching him swearwords; Jackson might just be an archaeologist, but Colonel Carter alone was said to have picked up some very painful ways to kill people while working with that Teal'c guy…)

"What else?" Carter replied, smiling casually at McKay in a manner that made him feel like he'd just asked for directions to find his own head. "We're coming with you."

McKay blinked in surprise.

Why was it that just when he thought he knew where he stood in the universe, it turned out something like this?

"What?" he said, looking incredulously at the Jackson/Carter 'family'. "You mean… you two are coming with us?"

"We three, actually; didn't you notice that Liam's here as well?" Jackson pointed out, looking affectionately down at his son before looking back at McKay in a very pointed manner that made it clear the Canadian overlooked the archaeologist's son at his own peril; evidently the fact that McKay didn't think the kid should be there meant nothing to the others. "We think there's something in the Atlantis databanks that might be able to help us with… well, our current problem back here, if you catch my meaning… and as far as we can determine Liam's the only person who'll be able to access the information in question. Since Sam and I are not willing to let our son out of our sight, and the rest of the team should be able to handle anything that comes up while we're away, we've been given permission to take him along when we go back to Atlantis with you, along with a couple of experiments that we've been working on back on Earth."

"Plus," Carter put in, as she indicated a nearby open door, a computer monitor on the desk inside the room in question, "on a short-term note, I thought that I could at least help you get Jeanie up to speed on what we'll be dealing with on the way to Atlantis; you two can tackle the proof on the way there while Daniel, Liam and I see what we can figure out about our own problems during the trip."

"Sounds fine to me," Jeanie said, nodding in agreement at the astrophysicist as she looked over at her brother. "Well, shall we?"

Sighing, McKay could only nod in acceptance as the five of them- he couldn't believe the SGC were being this relaxed about letting a child no older than his niece have this kind of access to information about the Stargate program; the fact that his origin wasn't exactly normal only made the Canadian scientist feel slightly better about the whole thing- walked into the room, Jeanie sitting down beside him in front of the monitor while Carter took up a position off to one side of it, Jackson and the kid simply sitting down off to one side to watch the 'real' scientists work (McKay had never really understood why people regarded archaeology as a science back on Earth; all it really was back there was looking at old ruins, and even with more advanced discoveries 'waiting' to be found on other planets, it was still the real scientists who did the final work).

"About a year ago," Carter began to say, as McKay tapped a few buttons on the monitor to display some of the read-outs taken from the original Project Arcturus prior to the facility's destruction, "your brother came across an abandoned alien experiment called Project Arcturus; it was an attempt to generate zero point energy."
"That would be virtually limitless power…" Jeanie whispered, awe at the implications of the discovery evident in her voice before her expression became more curious once again. "What happened?

"A slight problem," McKay replied, holding out one hand with his thumb and forefinger just barely apart in an attempt to reinforce his point. "It was the creation of exotic particles in the containment field-"

"He destroyed a solar system," Jackson put in, his voice with a frustratingly blunt tone to it.

"Meredith!" Jeanie yelled, turning to glare at her brother as she smacked him on the arm (Liam had to clap both hands over his mouth to stop himself from laughing; evidently, Ancient knowledge or not, the kid just found something so utterly hilarious about a genius like McKay being treated like a little boy who'd just made an inappropriate comment)

"It was uninhabited!" he protested, trying to ignore the kid's chuckles over his name as he looked back at his sister.

"Yeah, like that excuses that kind of screw-up…" Liam pointed out, a slight smirk still visible on his face as he looked at McKay.

"Your brother," Carter continued- only the slightly scolding smile she directed at her son demonstrated that she was even aware of him laughing like that-, "along with many others, has been trying to figure out a way to draw zero point energy from a parallel space time."

"Which," McKay continued, glad for any opportunity to draw attention away from the kid who insisted on making fun of his name, waving his hands slightly to better illustrate his point, "would get us around the whole problem of the creation of dangerous exotic particles in our own space time-"

"And my theory is about bridging universes," Jeanie finished, nodding in understanding with a slight smile.

"Exactly," Carter confirmed, nodding in approval at Jeanie's reasoning. "We're hoping to use your proof as the theoretical basis for building a bridge from a parallel space-time to ours."

"Uh…" Jeanie said, suddenly sounding sceptical once again as something else seemed to occur to her. "The energy you'd need would be enormous to the point of absurd-"

"Absurd we can do," McKay added, raising one finger to better illustrate his point. "We have something called a Zero Point Module which essentially does what we're attempting on a smaller scale; extract energy from subspace time."

"So… subspace is real?" Jeanie asked.

"What do you think you're flying in?" Liam pointed out, smiling slightly at her.

"Oh," Jeanie said, looking briefly at Liam in an uncertain manner; evidently she was just as uncertain about his presence as her brother was, but was tactful enough to avoid drawing attention to it (Privately Sam and Daniel both wondered how she'd feel if she knew the truth about Liam's origins).
Then something else seemed to occur to her, prompting thoughts about subspace and the unusual presence of children on a spaceship out of her mind. "Aren't you worried about the exotic particles crossing back over my bridge?"

"Well, that's the beauty of your theory," Sam continued, a slight smile as she spoke. "It should not only allow us to build a bridge, it should also allow us to manage the flow rate of energy."

"Like a tap?" Liam asked curiously.

"Well," McKay said, laughing in a slightly condescending manner at the young boy's comment, "something like that…"

"It's exactly like that," Sam added, smiling proudly at her son as McKay's face fell.

"What about the parallel universe?" Jeanie added. "Aren't you just shifting the exotic particle problem to their side?"

"Potentially," Sam admitted, nodding back at the other woman. "But when you consider that the number of possible parallel universes that we could access borders on the infinite, the odds of us choosing at random one that's inhabited are astronomically slim."

After a moment's silence as she sat in a contemplative manner, Jeanie spoke again. "Wow…"

"I know, it's an awful lot to take in at once," Sam said, only to realise that Jeanie's train of thought hadn't been quite what she'd suspected as the other woman turned to look at McKay with a satisfied smile.

"I solved your problem in my spare time," she said, waving her fingers in his face as she smirked at him. "With finger paints."

"Here we go…" McKay groaned, looking up at the ceiling in frustration.

"I just can't imagine how you're surviving the humiliation," Jeanie began, continuing to smile in satisfaction at him.

"Hold on; your sister came up with this idea with finger paints when you've been working on it for a year without getting anything?" Liam said, smiling back at McKay. "So much for you being so smart, huh?"

"Look, what I do or don't accomplish is not your business," McKay countered, looking pointedly back at Liam before he turned back to face his sister. "Anyway, you seem to be forgetting that, if it wasn't for my work, your little theory would be useless."

"Whoa, whoa!" Carter put in, raising her hands as she looked between the two. "Siblings, please!"

"Sorry," McKay and Jeanie said automatically, prompting a slight smile from Sam and Daniel; Liam's own grin, of course, just grew even broader.

"What?" McKay asked, looking pointedly at the other three people in the room.

"W-well," Sam began, trying to stop herself from chuckling slightly at what had just happened, "it's
just that you both said "sorry" in that cute little Canadian way, and I..."

As the two Canadians looked pointedly at her, she trailed off uncertainly before finally shrugging helplessly. "Sorry."

After a moment's awkward pause, she shrugged. "Well, that's really pretty much everything."

"Right…" Jeanie said, nodding slightly before she glanced over at McKay and Daniel "These aliens must be pretty dangerous for you to go to this much effort for you to even try what you're doing."

"Yeah," McKay confirmed, nodding slightly back at her. "I don't want to scare you, but you need to know the stakes; we're at war."

"Did you start it?" Jeanie asked, looking pointedly at him.

"What?" McKay yelled, staring indignantly at his sister. "No! Come on!"

"Yeah, he's telling the truth; he didn't start it," Liam put in, shaking his head slightly before he hopped off his seat and looking curiously up at his parents. "So, shall we go now?"

"I'm sorry, 'go'?" McKay repeated, looking incredulously at the young boy, his anger at his sister's implication redirected at the young boy before him. "We're on a spaceship, kid; there's not really many places for you to go-"

"Well, we've got a few DVDs that Colonel Mitchell thought Liam might like to watch, so Colonel Caldwell gave us permission to take today off and spend a little time with Liam before we get back to work tomorrow; Sam and I brought a couple of projects along to give us the chance to catch up on anything we were falling behind with," Daniel said by way of explanation, smiling casually back at the Canadian before he glanced over at Sam. "So, shall we get going?"

"Sounds fine to me," Sam said, standing up herself as she glanced over at McKay and Jeanie. "Just call us if you need anything, Mrs Miller; if there's anything that McKay can't tell you about this situation that you'd like to know, don't hesitate to ask."

"Hey!" McKay yelled indignantly.

"I'll keep that in mind," Jeanie replied, a slight smile on her face as she nodded back at the astrophysicist. "In the meantime, just have some fun with your son."
All in all, the Jackson 'family'- it was almost amazing how easily Sam and Daniel had fallen into their new routine- spent an enjoyable first night on the *Daedalus*, watching a DVD in their room-given Liam's presence, Colonel Caldwell had given them one of the ship's larger rooms, although Sam and Daniel had deliberately chosen one with separate beds to avoid the temptation of diving into anything before they really felt they were ready- before bed. Liam and Sam had particularly enjoyed teasing Daniel slightly about the movie in question, given that it had been the Disney film *Atlantis: The Lost Empire*. Both of the adults were fairly confident that Mitchell had slipped it into their luggage, given that he'd often jokingly comparing to the original Stargate mission, given the main character's similarities to Daniel and the plot similarities between the two (Omitting the obvious detail of one journey being to another planet and the other being to the bottom of the sea).

With the first night over, however, Sam and Daniel were resolved to get to work as soon as possible, prompting Daniel to take Liam with him while he continued his Merlin-related research in order to give the young boy something to keep himself occupied; the boy had expressed an interest in helping his father look over his research on Merlin so far in case a new perspective provided him with any useful clues about where the final Sangraal had been hidden

As much as they and the rest of SG-1 might want Liam to have the opportunity to be a normal child, both had agreed that it was probably the best use of Liam's time right now. They could treat Liam as normally as they wanted to, but the fact remained that he was never exactly going to be ordinary; he had access, on a subconscious level, to the knowledge of the oldest civilisation ever to have evolved in the universe itself, and if they were going to be allowed to take him through the Stargate they needed to provide the IOA with evidence that Liam was actually contributing something to those occasions where they took him off-world.

Having made sure Daniel remembered to take Liam for breakfast later on- he'd eaten well enough the previous night that both of them felt comfortable with him going for a short while without breakfast-, Sam had come down to the commissary herself.

Having collected her food, Sam turned to take a look around the room before her eyes settled on Jeanie Miller, sitting alone at a nearby table; evidently, given her still-tense relationship with her brother, the other woman had preferred to eat alone rather than with McKay at the moment.

"This seat taken?" Sam asked, walking over to look curiously at Jeanie; given that she was part of the reason Jeanie was even here in the first place, she felt that it was only right that she at least try and make sure that Jeanie felt comfortable on the *Daedalus*.

"Mmm? Oh, feel free…" Jeanie replied, nodding slightly at her as she indicated the seat in question with a slight wave of her hand.

"Thanks," Sam replied as she sat down, looking reassuringly at the other woman as she began to eat. "So, what do you think of the *Daedalus* so far?"

"Honestly?" Jeanie replied, smiling slightly as she looked back at Sam. "It's a bit… well, strange to know that I'm currently in space decades before I ever expected us to achieve space travel, but at the same time… it's really kind of…"

"Cool?" Sam asked, a slight smile on her face as she looked at the other woman. "I don't blame you; I still recall how I felt when I first saw Earth from space."
"When was that?" Jeanie asked.

"Just over eight years ago now," Sam replied. "Daniel and I - along with our teammates - had just managed to save Earth from an attack by a couple of alien ships, and we took the opportunity to look at Earth from the fighters we'd used to escape before we were picked up by the space shuttle and taken back to Earth."

"Hold on; Earth was attacked by two spaceships, and nobody ever mentioned it?"

Jeanie asked, looking sceptically at Sam. "How is that even possible; you'd think that somebody would have noticed-"

"The ships were far enough out of range that civilian systems couldn't detect them, and people just attributed the explosion when they were destroyed to an… 'unusual stellar phenomenon', I believe was the official cover story used," Sam replied, smiling slightly at the other woman. "You'd really be amazed at how little work we sometimes have to do to keep things secret; we've had the occasional close call, of course, but most of the time the general lack of belief in aliens helps us a lot."

"Yeah, I can see how that would happen…" Jeanie said, a slight smile on her face at the thought before something else seemed to occur to her as she looked uncertainly at Sam. "Uh… on the topic of space battles, can I ask you something?"

"Of course," Sam replied, nodding back at her. "What is it?"

"Well… what's your son doing on this ship?" Jeanie asked, looking in confusion at the other woman as she spoke. "I'm not trying to criticise your abilities as a parent, and I get that it's not really any of my business, but isn't this… well, a spaceship heading to another galaxy- even without this war you've told me about- doesn't exactly strike me as the safest place to have a child come with you, even if he can do that… glowing hand thing… and I still don't know what that's all about…"

As the other woman trailed off, looking anxiously at Sam as though worried she might have offended her, Sam smiled reassuringly at her, already making up her mind on the response she'd give. She and Daniel had talked about it last night after Liam had gone to bed, and both of them had agreed that, if Jeanie asked about Liam's presence, they'd tell her the truth; given that she was leaving her own child for three months for something that she'd never even known about until a couple of days ago, concealing anything from her just… didn't feel right to either of them.

"No offence intended, I assure you," Sam replied, smiling reassuringly back at the other woman. "Normally you'd be right about the reasons for not having a child on a ship like this, but Liam… well, he's not exactly a normal boy."

"In what way?" Jeanie asked, a slightly critical expression on her face as she looked at Sam; evidently, as a mother herself, she was particularly interested in hearing how Sam justified putting Liam in a position where he would run the risk of being attacked by aliens.

"Well… has your brother told you anything about the final fate of the Ancients?" Sam asked; she might as well start by providing Jeanie with some background information about Liam's conception if she was going to tell her about Liam himself.

"Uh… if you mean the 'Ancients' who actually created that 'Project Arcturus' thing, then… not really, no," Jeanie replied, shaking her head in response. "Actually, apart from the fact that they were also the ones who built those… Stargates… you told me about, as well as… Atlantis… he
hasn't mentioned much about them as a people; why do you ask?"

"Well," Sam explained, noting Jeanie's uncertainty at the reference to Atlantis- evidently she still couldn't quite believe that the mythical city was real in any form- but deciding to address it later, "for reasons that we're still not entirely clear on, the Ancients reached a point where they were forced to learn how to Ascend in order to survive some great catastrophe or another that had struck the galaxy; most of the evidence we've discovered suggests that the catastrophe was some kind of plague, but we're still not certain what caused the plague originally. Basically, by achieving inner purity and enlightenment- although there's also evidence that actual evolution played a part in it in at least some cases-, they mastered the ability to shed their physical bodies and exist in a state of pure energy; on that level they possess virtually limitless power and knowledge, and some of them have even been known to help people still on this plane master the secret of Ascension if they have proven themselves spiritually worthy of it."

Jeanie could only sit in silence as she stared incredulously at the other woman.

"Hold on; you're saying that Ancients- a group who were… well, from what Meredith's told me they were originally pretty much human, right?" she asked, looking uncertainly at Sam as though she was suddenly wondering if she'd taken a trip to another galaxy on the word of a crazy woman, receing only a confirming nod in return. "Well… you're saying that they… learned how to exist as pure energy? Is that even possible?"

"Trust me, it is; I've seen people Ascend myself on more than one occasion," Sam confirmed. "Actually, that's where this ties in to Liam; about five years ago, we visited a planet called Kelowna, where the natives were experimenting with a particularly radioactive mineral from their planet to create a bomb. Daniel managed to disarm the weapon after an accident took place in the lab where it was being created, but in the process…."

For a moment, Sam paused as she tried to collect herself- even after five years, Daniel's continued presence could never erase the memory of seeing him in that horrific condition as his internal organs began to liquefy underneath the mass of bandages Janet had wrapped him in- before she continued. "…he was exposed to a lethal dose of radiation."

"A lethal dose?" Jeanie repeated, looking sceptically at Sam. "Uh… I hate to contradict you, but Daniel looks pretty healthy for someone who was in that situation…"

"That's actually where the Ancients come into this story," Sam continued. "A couple of years before our visit to Kelowna, we'd met an Ancient called Oma Desala- Daniel theorised that she might have been the inspiration for the myth of Mother Nature- who had made it something like her life's work to help those who sought Ascension learn the secret if they were pure of heart. When we first met her she formed a certain bond with Daniel, volunteering to care for the child of…"

For a moment, Sam paused, uncertain how to phrase what she was going to say next- she somehow doubted Daniel was ready for everyone who knew him to know about Sha're-, before she settled on the more diplomatic description of "… a woman Daniel had become close to during the first mission through the Stargate, and she later came to him in a… well, 'vision' is the only accurate term for it… when he was dying. With Oma's help, Daniel was able to Ascend at the moment of his death, joining the other Ascended beings for the better part of a year, but the rules of the Ascended prevented him from making contact with us on the grounds that it would be 'interfering with the lower planes', or something like that."

"Interfering with the lower planes?" Jeanie repeated, looking curiously at Sam. "You mean… they just don't get involved with anything that… we do on this… 'plane'? I mean, they wouldn't even…
I don't know… help us if Earth was under attack and we needed them if we were going to live?"

"You're not the only one who found it frustrating," Sam confirmed, nodding at Jeanie before she continued. "That's actually the reason Daniel returned to human form; he initially only Daniel dropped in once or twice when one of us was alone and needed help- a couple of us were captured or badly injured during that year and he visited them to give them something to focus on until the rest of us could find them to help out-, but he was eventually forced to retake human form when he tried to save a planet."

"They punished him for trying to save a planet?" Jeanie

"Trust me; he wasn't exactly… happy… about it when he returned either," Sam replied, shaking her head grimly as she recalled how shaken Daniel had been about the whole situation after he'd regained his memories. "Anyway, before he descended- it was about a few months after he'd originally Ascended, if I remember the dates correctly-, he visited me when I was in my lab, and…"

Despite herself, Sam couldn't help but smile slightly at the memory of that night; even if she'd only recently been able to remember it, the knowledge that Daniel had defied the Ancients for no other reason than that he wanted to see her was very… touching, really.

"He what?" Jeanie asked, looking uncertainly at Sam, an uncertain expression on her face that suggested she had an idea what the other woman was about to say but wasn't quite sure if she'd understood it correctly.

"Well… he came to me when I was alone, and… one thing led to another…" Sam admitted, smiling in a slightly embarrassed manner at the other woman; somehow, even when it was a highly unusual conception, she still felt somewhat uncomfortable talking about it even in that little detail.

For a moment, the Canadian woman simply stared silently at Sam, mounting incredulity on her face, before she finally voiced the shock that she'd felt since hearing that pronouncement.

"Hold on; you're telling me that you and Daniel… did it… when he didn't even have a real body?" Jeanie asked, staring in ever-increasing incredulity at Sam. "OK, that just raises way too many questions…"

"Trust me, I know how you feel; I remember it happening to me and I still can't quite believe it," Sam replied, a wistful smile on her face as she recalled that near-indescribable moment of becoming one with Daniel before she turned back to look at Jeanie. "Anyway, I told Daniel about the pregnancy when he next came back to visit me- he'd had to spend a week away helping a friend of ours who'd been captured-, but then Oma showed up and told us that it wasn't yet 'time' for our child to be known; she knew that there would be a time- most likely referring to the current situation- when we'd need him, but until then the other Ascended wouldn't accept his presence in our lives."

"Why- hold on…" Jeanie said, raising one finger as though to ask a question but halting herself mid-sentence as she looked uncertainly at Sam. "Liam's… glowing hand thing…. that he did when I was teleported up here the first time… does that…?"

"Come from his father?" Sam finished, nodding at Jeanie with a congratulatory smile. "You've got it; due to Liam having… well, gestated on the higher plane- as well as Daniel having been one of the Ascended at the time of… conception, of course-, he's capable of wielding at least some degree of the traditional powers possessed by the Ascended, although they're nothing like as powerful as what he'd be capable of if he was one of them. We haven't actually determined the limits of his
abilities yet, but…"

She shrugged slightly. "To be honest, we're not that bothered about the full scale of his abilities, really; as far as I'm concerned, powers or no powers, he's still my son, and that should be all that matters."

At that comment, Jeanie smiled slightly in gratitude at the other woman, evidently grateful to have moved on to more traditional conversational territory; discussing parental 'techniques' with another mother.

"I know what you mean; I've always promised myself that, when Maddie- my daughter- decides what she wants to do, she can do whatever it is so long as it makes her happy," the Canadian woman said, nodding slightly in confirmation at Sam. "Meredith and I never really had that; our father… well, he wasn't overly strict about it or anything- he didn't punish us if we didn't work harder or something like that-, but he tended to keep pushing Meredith and I to really work at our studies when we probably could have done just as well even if we'd spent only around half the time he insisted we spend on the work doing the work. I think that's part of Meredith's problem these days, really; he never really tried to kick back much after he quit his piano lessons, and just ended burying himself in his work almost more than even Dad sometimes felt was necessary…"

"Yeah, he mentioned the piano lessons to me once; it was his attempt to bond with me after a plan of his resulted in me being electrocuted," Sam replied, shaking her head slightly as she recalled that grim occasion, made all the darker by the memory that Daniel had been absent; she'd always felt that, if Daniel had been there, the two of them would have come up with the idea of simply taking the Stargate off Earth far sooner than she, McKay and Jonas had. "It didn't exactly work, of course, but it was still an… interesting effort."

"That's Meredith for you; when he wants to, he can make an… interesting… impression," Jeanie said, another wistful smile on her face as she reflected back on old memories before she looked at Sam with a now-teasing grin. "So, just out of curiosity, has he been in any… particularly embarrassing situations since he took this job?"

"Embarrassing moments?" Sam repeated, looking thoughtfully up at the roof of the commissary before she turned back to Jeanie. "Well, most of them were only really funny in hindsight, but there was the time when he ended up sharing a body with Lieutenant Laura Cadman…"
As the journey progressed, Sam, Daniel and Liam both found themselves found themselves spending almost as much free time with the McKay siblings as they spent by themselves. Sam swiftly established that Jeanie was a far easier person to get along with than her brother, with the other McKay sibling particularly enjoying hearing some of the tales about her brother's time in the Stargate program, ranging from the ones where he risked his life to save the day- she cited it as being encouraging to know that even her brother could change, such as when he'd nearly overdosed on Wraith enzyme to save his teammates- to the ones where he was humiliated in some way or another- the incident with Laura Cadman being trapped in his mind still managed to make her laugh- depending on her mood.

Their time with Rodney McKay wasn't always as comfortable, of course; even if McKay had clearly given up any thoughts of being with Sam- in that sense of the word- a long time ago, he still had some unresolved issues as far his old feelings for her were concerned. More than once Liam and Daniel caught McKay looking at Sam in a manner that looked like he wasn't certain if he wanted to go over and kiss her- or at least attempt to ask her for coffee- or run from the room, only 'making his mind up' when he realised that one or both of them had noticed the attention he was paying her.

Daniel generally managed to convince Liam not to resort to using his powers to try and make a point to McKay about the inappropriateness of his actions, but he'd have been lying if there weren't a few occasions where he allowed Liam to get away with the occasional small prank. McKay had already been shocked to find himself hovering several inches above the floor on more than one occasion, and Liam had even done a few more mundane tricks such as secretly tripping the scientist up or tweaking a few of his notes. It was never anything serious, of course- just a few misplaced numbers and a couple of casual comments that McKay could easily correct or ignore-, but the way the scientist complained anyone would think he'd been denied the opportunity to discover the secret of the meaning of life whenever he discovered another of Liam's little 'doodles'. Sam tried to make a show of lecturing Liam about it, of course, but the fact that she was always smiling when she was giving the lectures in question did a great deal to assure Liam that she wasn't as angry as she might pretend to be.

When they weren't continuing their work on their respective projects- Sam doing a mixture of working on Merlin's device and helping the McKay siblings refine Jeanie's theory while Daniel and Liam continued to study the information they had available regarding Merlin-, the Jacksons made every effort possible to set time aside to spend with each other. Sam and Daniel's date opportunities were limited- Jeanie was the only person available on an even semi-regular basis to look after Liam, with the rest of the Daedalus crew being too occupied with either work or their own leisure time to give Liam enough attention-, but they enjoyed the few moments they managed to spend together, with one or the other of them often arranging a private meal for themselves with some help from the Daedalus culinary staff. The possible meal options were naturally limited, of course, but they still managed to have the occasional decent meal now and again when the moment presented itself.

When they weren't spending time getting adjusted to their new relationship with each other, Sam and Daniel naturally focused most of their attention on spending time with Liam in a more leisurely atmosphere. As it turned out, Mitchell's additions to their luggage hadn't been limited to the occasional DVD; he'd also included an entire Xbox 360 computer game system, accompanied by some other games, evidently believing that it would be unfair to restrict Liam's opportunity to learn more about Earth culture simply because he wasn't going to be on-planet.
The DVD collection didn't include anything rated higher than PG-13, of course- Liam might have access to a great deal of knowledge but he was still only a child as far as his age and actual life experience went-, but he'd still included a fairly diverse range of entertainment possibilities. Sam and Daniel had been expecting that Mitchell would provide them with the entirety of the *Lord of the Rings* series- they hadn't managed to find the time to watch *The Two Towers* or *The Return of the King* while they were on Earth, so it only made sense that they do so now-, but a few of the other options presented to them, such as *King Kong* or *The Man in the Iron Mask*, came as a more significant surprise; they were almost ashamed to admit that they'd failed to consider the possibility that Liam might enjoy a few more historically-themed films as well as the more futuristic-themed ones.

On the other hand, Sam was just grateful Mitchell hadn't included the likes of *The Core* or *Signs* amid his film choices; those films *always* managed to annoy her whenever she watched it, no matter how hard she tried to ignore the glaring scientific inconsistencies, and he'd probably have only included it in the collection as a 'joke' knowing that Liam would have wanted to check it out. Right now, she'd just appreciate the chance to sit back and relax with her son and… his father (To say nothing of appreciating some time to feel more comfortable thinking of her and Daniel as parents so suddenly)... rather than constantly subconsciously picking holes in the plots of the films she was watching with them (Even *Independence Day* was stretching her ability to accept the plot; she was only just able to accept the idea of being able to infect the alien ship with a computer virus due to the implication that Earth technology had been reverse-engineered from the ship that the characters had studied in Area 51, and even then the issue of how the ship got that close to Earth without affecting Earth's tides remained a problem).

As it was, regardless of Sam's habit of noting some of the scientific inaccuracies in some films, the three of them always enjoyed their occasional 'film nights' with each other, often alternating between watching the films with just the three of them or inviting some of the other members of the crew in for a larger event. They'd had pretty much every member of the crew currently off-duty for their showing of *King Kong*- evidently it truly was one of those timeless classics, regardless of the strange subject matter-, although the later showing of *Shrek* had just consisted of the three of them; both of them felt that the more kid-centric films would be their best chances for bonding opportunities with Liam, and so preferred to 'screen' those ones in private.

On one particular occasion the Jacksons had once ended up watching the *Atlantis* film again when Jeannie had come along to their quarters seeking a break from McKay's continued focus on her theory- personally Sam thought she might have wanted a bit more time to adjust to her first meeting with Hermiod; the Asgard could be a rather significant surprise when a person met them for the first time even if they'd known about alien life for a while-, naturally prompting Jeanie to ask if the real Atlantis was anything like the one shown in the film.

Daniel and Sam had both subsequently spent a significant part of the night answering the questions that McKay apparently hadn't been able to spare the time to answer himself; even with their own limited experience with Atlantis, they were still able to provide a decent amount of information about the city thanks to their previous visits. In many ways, when they'd looked back at the film the resemblance between it and the actual Atlantis was rather surprising; Atlantis might not have the giant robots that the Disney version had possessed, nor was it underground, but both were capable of erecting a city-wide force field to protect the city against outside attack, both relied on crystals- ZPMs looked enough like crystals for them to count in this analogy- as a power source, and both even possessed small flying machines left behind by the original owners. The fine details were obviously different, of course, but at the same time it was surprising how similar the film was to the reality, despite the fact that it had been released almost three years before they even knew Atlantis was anything more than a myth.
Even outside the film nights, Daniel and Sam found themselves spending a surprising amount of time with the *Daedalus* crew despite the lack of time they'd spent with them in the past; their previous visit to Atlantis had mostly featured the four available members of SG-1 spending time together without allowing for much time to bond with others. Neither of Liam's parents were entirely surprised at the amount of offers they received from some of the younger members of the crew to compete against Liam on the Xbox 360 when his parents were occupied, but at the same time even some of the older members of the crew welcomed the opportunity to spend some time with him. Daniel still recalled the occasion when he'd gone to fetch Liam to send him to bed and discovered him engaged in a race on the XBox with some of the older crew members, easily outstripping most of them in the current course of *Need for Speed*.

The crew's interactions with the Jacksons on Liam-related matters weren't just limited to playing games or watching films, however; on the contrary, Sam and Daniel swiftly found themselves having to deal with all kinds of varied advice about their status as new parents. Some cases just featured people offering suggestions regarding what they'd enjoyed doing in their own childhoods, but a few of the older staff members- mostly those who Daniel had encountered playing on the XBox with Liam that one time; he speculated that they were taking advantage of Liam's presence to, at least in some way, 'make up' for the time they missed with their own children while on the ship- offered their own bits of parental advice to the two SG-1 members, ranging from simple suggestions such as what time they should make Liam go to bed at to the schools they should see about sending him to when they got around to that part of his new life (Personally neither of them were certain about how they'd handle Liam's education; with the Ancient knowledge in his subconscious he already knew more than most adults, but at the same time he deserved the chance to have a life outside of the SGC).

One of the most unexpected people to give Daniel advice regarding Liam was Colonel Caldwell, who spoke briefly with Daniel shortly before they departed from their galaxy, just after the latest film screening- *The Man in the Iron Mask* had finished. Once the news about what film they were planning on showing had gone public, it had become another 'full-crew' film, with most of the off-duty personnel coming to watch it, Daniel having subsequently volunteered to pack everything away; the full-crew films were commonly watched in the mess hall to accommodate them, necessitating the television screen and DVD player being moved to that part of the ship. He'd just finished packing the television back into the box they'd used to transport it- Mitchell had needed to provide them with a television of their own as most of the monitors in the *Daedalus* were needed to keep an eye on the computer systems- when a slight knock at the door prompted him to turn around to see Colonel Caldwell standing at the entrance.

"Colonel Caldwell?" Daniel said, looking in surprise at the *Daedalus* commander. "What are you doing here?"

"Just thought I'd make sure everything was going well down here; it's rather quiet on the bridge at the moment, and I like to feel like I'm earning my pay here," Sumner said by way of explanation, smiling slightly at Daniel as he nodded at the archaeologist; the colonel rarely spent enough time at the SGC to consider anyone there a friend, but SG-1 had all spent some time with him after the Trust's attempt to blow up Atlantis and his infestation with a Goa'uld had come to light, doing what they could to help him get over the experience, and had formed a certain bond with him.

"Fair enough," Daniel replied, smiling slightly back at the commander as he turned back to study the boxes that he'd been using to store the equipment. "Well, I'm pretty much finished here, you'll be glad to know; I just need to get these down to our room and everything's sorted."

"Until your son wants to watch something tomorrow, of course," Caldwell added, smiling slightly at Daniel as he spoke. "Any ideas what tomorrow's film will be?"
"I think he expressed an interest in *The Mask of Zorro*, but beyond that I really can't be sure," Daniel replied (He was already planning on making sure Liam was aware of the film's historical inconsistencies; unlike Sam with science-fiction films, Daniel never actively criticised historically inaccurate films while watching them, but he did what he could to correct peoples' views of the events depicted afterwards).

"Well, be sure to let us know when he decides; that kid's always a pleasure to spend time with," Caldwell said, smiling slightly at the archaeologist before a more solemn expression crossed his face. "On the topic of kids… from one father to another, there's one thing I find you always need to remember."

"Which is?" Daniel asked, trying to conceal his surprise at this confirmation that Caldwell had a family himself. He vaguely recalled some reference in Caldwell's file to him being divorced with children, but in general he tried to avoid studying the files of those who weren't in his department in too great detail; if he was studying the files of the archaeologists he at least had the reason that he needed to get a better picture of their histories if they were for some reason required to go off-world at any point, but when he looked at any other files he felt like he was probing too much into people's private lives for no reason.

"Make sure you watch how much you let the kids get away with," Caldwell said, looking solemnly at the archaeologist as he spoke. "Give them too much freedom and you lose any authority you might have with them, but give them too little and they just…"

He paused for a moment, evidently searching for the best way to phrase what he was about to say before he continued. "They end up resenting you for doing what you thought was best, forcing you to realise that you went on the wrong side of the line between protecting them and imprisoning them, to the extent where they'd rather go all the way to the other side of the country rather than see you again."

As Caldwell lowered his head, a grim, dejected expression on his face, Daniel could only reach out and place an uncertain, intended-to-be-comforting hand on the other man's shoulder. He'd known that Colonel Sumner's personal life hadn't been without its problems- it was one of the reasons he'd been selected as the permanent commander of the *Daedalus*; while he still had people back on Earth, there was nobody immediately close enough to him for them to wonder why he was so often out of contact for long periods-, but knowing that and hearing him talk about it were two different things.

"I'm… I'm sorry," he said at last, looking uncomfortably at Caldwell; he might not have known the man well, but he could tell that the man had some particularly painful emotions associated with this topic.

As much as Daniel wished he could say more to try and help Caldwell, he honestly couldn't; having grown up in the foster system himself, he doubted that he was in any kind of position to be giving advice about how Caldwell might go about improving his relationship with his family. Even if they'd been actual friends rather than only business associates, Daniel didn't know enough about the specifics of the situation to offer any more advice, and he hardly felt.

Despite Daniel's own feelings of inadequacy, it was clear that Caldwell didn't feel he had anything to apologise for, the other man simply smiling slightly back at the archaeologist's statement as he placed a grateful hand on the other man's shoulder.

"Thanks," the colonel said shortly, taking a deep breath before he removed his hand and stood back, his expression one of cool professionalism again. "Well, I'd better get back to the control room; we have to pass through what Tok'ra intelligence tells us is a rather Ori-focused region of
space before we exit this galaxy, and I somehow doubt we want to risk running into another one of those weapons satellites."

Daniel could only nod grimly in agreement as the Colonel turned around and headed back towards the bridge; even after so many months, the memory of the tragedy that had befallen the Caledonia/Rand protectorate continued to haunt his dreams.

He knew that it was unlikely he could have done anything different to save the Prometheus and the planet without possessing foreknowledge of the crisis or some means of contacting the planet's leaders directly, but when he remembered the destruction that had been caused by that weapon…

He didn't blame Caldwell for wanting to take precautions to prevent something like that from happening again; he'd lived through that once, and, with the added need to care for his son taken into account, he did not want it to happen again.

Still… even with the knowledge of the greater responsibility Liam's presence in his life presented him with…

At least he had a son who knew what he did for a living and could play a part in his life; Caldwell didn't even have that much available to him.

Shaking his head slightly in sympathy for the military commander, Daniel turned around and headed back towards his office, resolving to get through at least another hour or so of research before Liam returned from his current 'babysitter' (Although he and Sam took care to never use the term in Liam's presence; they had a feeling he wouldn't care for it no matter how young he was chronologically).

Once they were out of the Milky Way galaxy and beginning the long trip back to Pegasus, the situation generally became much calmer, the initial 'novelty' of having a child on board the ship having 'worn off' after the first week. The trip through the galactic void between the two galaxies wasn't exactly the most interesting time Sam and Daniel had ever spent together, of course, but with Mitchell's various assorted entertainment supplies to keep them occupied they managed to find some ways to 'amuse' themselves even when they weren't on duty. Sam divided her work time between helping McKay and Jeanie refine their theory and working on making Merlin's device work without the need for further naquadah generators while Liam and Daniel focused on researching Merlin, with Daniel also taking the time to answer some of Liam's further questions about Earth history. Liam had been particularly interested in hearing about the cultures where the Goa'uld, the Asgard and the Ancients had made their own significant impacts on the societies as they developed, although for some reason the Norse myths remained his favourite tales from that part of his 'lessons'. The work was never exactly easy, of course, but all of them- the McKays in particular; Sam and Daniel's need to spend time with Liam somewhat limited the time they could spend on their duties- made significant progress in tackling their assigned duties, each of them finding at least a clue towards the next stage in their research each day as time went on.

Eventually, as the Daedalus finally arrived back in the Pegasus Galaxy and moved on to the last stage of the journey, the workload began to die down, the assorted scientists having reached the limit of what they could accomplish with the resources available to them on the ship. With some help from Hermiod and Sam, the McKay siblings having managed to develop and expand Jeanie's theory in a manner that would allow the staff at Atlantis to develop a containment unit for the zero point energy that would be gathered from the experiment; all that was required now was for the McKay siblings to get there themselves to oversee the final stages of the project before they actually began their attempts to open the 'bridge' that would allow them to access the zero point space before we exit this galaxy, and I somehow doubt we want to risk running into another one of those weapons satellites."

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Sam's own research with Merlin's device had made some progress, but she had been unable to definitively test her theories about whether or not she had succeeded in making it work with only the naquadah generators either way. She had no real idea what would happen if she shifted herself out of phase while in a moving vessel, and wasn't inclined to find out what would happen in case the worst-case scenario occurred and she remained in one place while the ship continued; there was a difference between being held in place by a planet's gravity and being held in place by the artificial gravity field generated by a spaceship.

With her own work as complete as she could make it, and Atlantis still at least two days' journey away, Sam had taken the opportunity to pack the generators and Merlin's device away- until she was back on solid ground there was nothing further she dared to do with that particular technology- and went off to the office where Daniel had been doing his research. The two of them hadn't really discussed much about their own independent projects during their time together, preferring to focus on non-Stargate related topics of conversation to improve their ability to develop a normal family dynamic, but with them about to leave the ship for Atlantis Sam felt that this was as good a time as any to find out how things were going at his end.

As she opened the door, she couldn't stop herself from smiling slightly at the sight of the two most important men in her life sitting around a desk, Liam's arms folded and his head resting on top of a book that seemed to be about Arthurian-related history topics while Daniel stared silently at a computer screen, the illumination from the monitor the only light in the office (Sam was willing to bet he'd turned the lights off in order to give Liam the chance to rest).

"Mmm?" Daniel said as she walked into the room, looking up at the door only to give her a slight smile as he saw her walk in. "Oh, hey, Sam."

"Hi," Sam replied, smiling back as she walked over to give him a slight smile as he indicated his son with a slight smile as Liam lay asleep at the table. "I just finished packing Merlin's device, so I thought I'd see how things were going at his end.

"Not really," Daniel replied, shaking his head as he indicated his son with a slight smile as Liam lay asleep at the table. "I just finished packing Merlin's device, so I thought I'd see how things were going here; have you two had any luck finding anything new about the Sangreal yet?"

"Well, that's what I thought," he said, raising a finger to emphasise his point before he turned back to the screen. "Until I noticed this."
As Daniel tapped a few buttons on the keyboard, the display changed to focus on the relative positions of the three planets in relation to each other, another tap of a button creating equal-length lines between the planets, as they were displayed in a two-dimensional format on the screen before the two new parents.

"Their coordinates form an equilateral triangle," Daniel continued, his smile growing slightly broader as he saw the dawning interest on Sam's face. "Now, add their departure point, the Camelot planet, and you get…"

Daniel tapped another key and a fourth point appeared on the screen, causing the display before them to move into a more three-dimensional shape that displayed a wire diagram of a pyramid connecting the four planets.

"A tetrahedron," Daniel said, indicating the screen before him as he looked back at Sam. "A perfect pyramid."

"And that means… what?" Sam asked, looking curiously at the father of her child. "I mean, I know that it can't be a coincidence, but what's the point of it all?"

Daniel sighed.

"Unfortunately, that's the problem; I'm not sure yet," he admitted, shaking his head regretfully. "I know there's got to be something, but I just can't figure out what; there's just too many possibilities and nothing that accounts for all four planets being involved…"

"Have you told this to anyone else yet?" Sam asked.

"When I don't even know what it means?" Daniel replied, looking over at Sam with a slight shrug. "I'm trying to see if I can come up with an explanation for it myself before I go any further; I've got a few ideas, but I'd like to try them out and see what I get as a result."

"Well, let me know if you think of anything I can do to help," Sam said, smiling slightly at him as she leaned in for a brief kiss before she stood up. "Anyway, we should probably start packing everything up; we're arriving at Atlantis in the next day or so, and I'd like to make sure I have everything packed before we get there."

"Right," Daniel said, nodding in agreement as he glanced over at where Liam lay on the desk. "I'll take Liam to bed; we can see about clearing the books out tomorrow morning."
As Doctor Elizabeth Weir walked out of her office and down towards the central platform of the gateroom after receiving the communication from the Daedalus, she couldn't help but smile slightly at the thought of the visitors they'd soon be receiving. Not only would it be a relief to have the head of her science department back- McKay could be annoying at times, but he did have a habit of growing on you-, but with the addition of Doctor Jackson and Colonel Carter, she had a feeling that Atlantis was going to be a very interesting place to be over the next few days.

Admittedly, the fact that they were apparently bringing along a fifth guest who General Landry had declined to identify- on the grounds that they 'wouldn't believe it until they've met him'- was a bit frustrating, but Elizabeth was prepared to wait until they arrived before she started asking further questions.

Plus, the fact that whoever it was had apparently convinced even McKay to keep silent about their identities in his communications with Atlantis while instructing Zelenka and the rest of the science department on how to reconfigure Atlantis's energy containment chamber for the experiment said a great deal about his potential importance; somebody who could make McKay stay quiet was clearly not somebody to be underestimated.

"So," she asked, turning to look curiously at her military commander as he started to walk alongside her, having been waiting in the control room for news ever since his team's strength had been reduced by one man, "has he ever talked about his sister with you?"

"Oh, once or twice in passing," Lieutenant Colonel John Sheppard replied casually as the two of them left the control room. "Usually like, "Come on, even my sister can do it!"- here he waved his hand slightly to further emphasise his point. "You know, that type of thing."

Elizabeth chuckled slightly at that comment- John could do a surprisingly convincing impression of McKay's attitude, despite his own being so drastically different-, but assumed a more serious expression as she saw Radek, still dressed in the containment suit that had practically become his uniform since McKay started to send transmissions to them from the Daedalus, come hurrying up the stairs from one of the side corridors.

"How's it coming, Radek?" she asked, turning her attention back to the Czech scientist as she pushed John's smile out of her mind; she had the more immediate matter of Atlantis potentially receiving a significant increase in its available power supply to attend to.

"The simulations are all in the green," Zelenka replied, his tone rapid as he spoke to her. "We're ready to try power-up."

"Just in time," Elizabeth said with a smile; she may have become used to Rodney McKay's attitude over the years, but that didn't mean she didn't welcome any opportunity not to deal with it that came up.

"That's actually what I just said," Zelenka replied, laughing in a slightly nervous manner before the three of them stopped in the middle of the gateroom, turning to face the middle of the room just as the distinctive sound of an Asgard transporter being used reached their ears. For a moment the brilliant glow of a transporter 'beam' filled Elizabeth's vision, quickly fading to reveal Doctor Rodney McKay, a blonde-haired woman dressed in civilian clothing who could only be Jeanie Miller- Elizabeth quickly noted that she seemed to be slightly tensed up; evidently she still wasn't entirely used to the transporters-, and the familiar forms of Doctor Daniel Jackson and Lieutenant
Colonel Samantha Carter, each one dressed in the same black BDUs that they had worn during their previous visit to Atlantis.

It was the fifth figure, however - the figure that she could only assume was the mysterious 'guest' that Landry had mentioned to her earlier-, that was the greatest surprise for Elizabeth; whoever she'd been expecting, it hadn't been a young boy who looked like he could only be ten years old at most. Unlike the two SG-1 members, he was dressed in casual clothing, simply wearing a black jacket over a grey T-shirt and dark blue jeans, with light brown hair and blue eyes that reminded her uncannily of Doctor Jackson's, looking around at his surroundings with a wide-eyed grin. A quick glance to her right was all she needed to confirm that John hadn't been expecting the fifth visitor to be a child either, but that still left her with the immediate mystery of what a ten-year-old boy was doing in Atlantis.

"Holy cow..." Jeanie said, looking up at the ceiling as though looking at the path she'd just travelled along in order to reach her destination. For a moment she looked like she was about to say something else, but then her eyes fell on the boy and she seemed to relax, evidently concluding that she wasn't going to panic if someone that young was going to be calm about the whole process.

"Yeah, it's always a wild ride, isn't it?" John said, smiling slightly at her- Elizabeth squashed the momentary spike of jealousy before it could even get started; it was beyond ridiculous to feel jealous of her military commander simply being polite to a visitor, particularly when the visitor was married- before he turned to look curiously at the young boy standing between Doctor Jackson and Colonel Carter. "Uh... sorry for being rude, but who's the kid?"

"Oh, right," the boy in question said, smiling apologetically back at John as he held out a hand. "Liam Carter Jackson; nice to meet you."

Elizabeth blinked.

She had long trained herself to expect anything in the Pegasus Galaxy- after meeting her own alternate future self during their first year in the city, it was hard not to acknowledge that there were going to be some surprises in life- but what she'd just heard definitely ranked in at least the top five surprises she'd had since arriving in Atlantis.

"Carter Jackson?" she repeated, looking in surprise at her two visitors. "As in..."

"Yeah, Liam's our son; we'll fill you in on the full details as soon as possible," Colonel Carter said, nodding briefly at Elizabeth in apology before she turned back to the other woman. "Anyway, Mrs Miller, allow me to introduce Lieutenant Colonel John Sheppard, head of Atlantis's military division, Doctor Elizabeth Weir, overall leader of Atlantis, and Doctor Radek Zelenka, the second-in-command of the city's science division."

"Uh... pleasure to meet you," Jeanie said, nodding at them all with a slight smile. "I've heard all about you from Mer and the Jacksons."

"All good, I..." John began, before his voice trailed off as he looked at Jeanie in confusion, raising a finger to indicate McKay. "Did you just call him 'Mer'?"

"It's a... pet name," McKay cut in, clearly unwilling to discuss that topic any further- Elizabeth made a mental note to ask Doctor Jackson and Colonel Carter what they knew about that topic when she had the opportunity to do so; she had a feeling that the answer would really be rather amusing- before he turned to Zelenka. "Where are we?"

"Simulations are all in the green," Zelenka replied as he began to walk towards the corridor that led
to the containment room, McKay and Jeanie close behind him. "We're ready to try power-up."


"Thank you!" Radek replied, looking back at Jeanie with a broad smile at her praise.

"Yes, we try not to encourage him..." McKay began, his voice trailing off as he, Zelenka and Jeanie walked through a door and out of audible range on their way to the lab. Elizabeth had been planning on going with Jeanie in order to make sure that the other woman settled in well enough, but with this latest unexpected turn of events she had a feeling that it would be best to get answers to the questions that the rest of the expedition would be asking as soon as possible.

"So..." she began, looking uncertainly at Doctor Jackson and Colonel Carter, "is there any chance you could explain why you brought a ten-year-old son that I've never heard about all the way to another galaxy?"

"Gotta admit, I'd appreciate knowing the answer to that myself," John admitted, looking back down at Liam as he spoke. "Not that there's a problem with having kids here, but..."

"It seems like a bit of a strange thing to do, correct?" Doctor Jackson concluded, smiling in understanding at John. "Don't worry; we'll be perfectly happy to explain what Liam's doing here, but I think I'd prefer to fill in some of the others as well."

"Gotcha," John said, nodding briefly at Doctor Jackson before he turned to look at Elizabeth. "I'll just go and get Teyla and Ronon, shall I?"

"You do that; I'll let Carson know about our new arrivals myself," Elizabeth replied, as she turned back to look at Doctor Jackson and Colonel Carter. "Will that be acceptable for you two?"

"That'll be fine, thanks," Colonel Carter replied with a brief nod.

As Sam sat alongside Daniel and Doctor Weir at the conference table in Atlantis, she wished that she felt more comfortable in front of SG-1's Pegasus Galaxy counterparts than she did.

She knew that it was only natural she'd feel somewhat anxious when confronting them- after all, she was entrusting the truth about her son to a group of people she'd never even really met; her previous contact with Doctor Weir during her brief time as head of the SGC and McKay had changed so much since she'd first met him that he was practically a different person, and she'd spent little to no time with Colonel Sheppard, Doctor Beckett, Teyla Emmaggen or Ronon Dex-, but it was more than that.

In many ways, she felt like Mitchell must have felt when he'd originally managed to officially recreate SG-1: After all, Colonel Sheppard, Teyla and Ronon were members of SG-1's Pegasus Galaxy counterpart, each of them fighting for this galaxy much like SG-1 had fought for their galaxy back on Earth; the sheer scale of their accomplishments wasn't exactly something that could be easily ignored, particularly after their recent confrontation with Pegasus's answer to the Replicators...

She shook thoughts of the aforementioned machines out of her mind; right now she had more immediate matters to worry about than the potential threat posed by the Asurans, no matter how dangerous they might be.
"Well," she said at last, as she looked around at the group of people before her, going over what she was about to say one last time to make sure, "I suppose you're all wondering why Daniel and I brought our son along here?"

"The thought did occur to me," Colonel Sheppard replied, as he looked over at Liam. "I mean, no offence, kid, but just because your parents are the big heroes back home doesn't mean you can get them to take you all the way over here when you want to have a holiday…"

"What can I say?" Liam replied, shrugging at John with a casual smile on his face, showing no sign of offence at the man's question. "I had a good reason for wanting to come here."

"And I can assure, it's not just because he wanted to see Atlantis," Daniel added, looking around the table as he took up the explanation. "Liam is… well, he's part-Ascended."

The silence that settled over the table at that statement was almost deafening as the Atlantis expedition's leaders stared incredulously at the archaeologist.

"Hold on; he's part-Ascended?" Doctor Beckett repeated, looking incredulously at the young boy in question. "But…"

"I'm simply a kid physically, Doctor Beckett; I just have some… extras," Liam said; clearly he'd guessed, like his parents had, that the immediate question anyone might have on learning about his heritage here was whether or not he was actually solid. "Y'know, I can generate energy bursts, move things with my mind, things like that…"

"How… how is this possible?" Teyla whispered, looking between Liam and his father in a mix of awe and confusion. "Unless one of you…"

"It's really a long story," Sam said, looking reassuringly over at the Athosian before she turned to face Daniel. "Daniel?"

"Around six years ago, we encountered a woman called Oma Desala, who we later learned was an Ascended Ancient herself," Daniel explained, continuing the story as he looked around the table at the small group gathered around him. "At the time, I learned some details about ascension from one of her students, but I only really learned the necessary basics at that point. A couple of years later, she helped me when I was fatally injured after exposure to radiation by helping me ascend--"

"You ascended?" Ronon said, looking in surprise at the archaeologist. "No offence, but you look pretty human to me; I thought ascension was a one-way thing …"

"Normally, yes, but I broke the Ancients' rules of non-intervention and attempted to help my friends when one of our enemies sought a long-lost superweapon," Daniel explained, looking over at the Satedean before he turned back to address the room as a whole. "As a result, I was returned to human form by the other Ascended as punishment for attempting to interfere, but I was eventually discovered by the SGC and returned home."

"And this ties into Liam… how?" Colonel Sheppard asked, waving his hand promptly as he looked at Daniel. "Don't get me wrong, it's interesting listening, but still…"

"Well, the exact details are still a bit hazy- I lost my memory after I returned to human form and I still haven't managed to remember everything about the year I spent as one of the Ascended-, but I remember the crucial points well enough," Daniel continued. "The point of this is that, while I was
ascended, I came to visit Sam when the team was temporarily off-duty while our commander was recovering from an alien virus, and we ended up talking to each other, but… well, one thing led to another, and we…"

He trailed off, looking slightly embarrassed as he glanced over at Sam and Liam, but the glances that were briefly exchanged between Doctor Weir and Colonel Sheppard made it clear that they had understood what Daniel had said.

"Hold on; you're saying that… Liam was conceived while you were Ascended?" Doctor Beckett asked, looking in surprise at the archaeologist. "But… well, I don't mean any offence, but he seems to be at least six years too old to have been conceived around that time…"

"His aging was accelerated by Oma Desala after he was born," Sam explained, taking up the story after exchanging a brief glance with Daniel before she turned back to address the Atlantis members. "Daniel came back to me a couple of weeks after the conception- he'd been away for a short time to help General O'Neill when he was captured by one of our enemies-, but shortly after I'd told him about the pregnancy, Oma Desala came to us and told us that the Ancients wouldn't accept the existence of our child, and she had to take the child away for its own safety from the other Ascended. After assuring us that we would eventually get our child back when the time was right, she erased my memory and… well, as far as we can determine, she subsequently took the child up to the higher planes of existence where the Ascended exist until he was ready to be born, at which point she left him with a race of people who had salvaged some abandoned Ancient technology, simultaneously accelerating his aging to a point where he would be mature enough to cope with his 'destiny' when the time came."

"His… destiny?" Teyla repeated, looking at the child in question with renewed curiosity, even as her evident uncertainty made it clear that she was still uncertain how to feel about what she had just heard.

"Well, we think that part of Liam's role is connected to the reason we came here," Daniel explained, as he reached into a bag and pulled out the tablet that he'd received from Danaar. "When we discovered the planet where Liam had been raised, the people who'd trained him in the use of some of his Ancient powers left us with this tablet, which reveals that Merlin left potentially vital information to help us defeat the Ori in Atlantis's databanks, protecting them so that they would only be accessible by specific people; as far as we can tell, Liam and I are the only two people who might be able to access that information, so we came here to see what we can do about finding it."

"Ah," Doctor Beckett said, nodding thoughtfully as he looked at the archaeologist. "This would be because you were Ascended yourself once, correct?"

"Precisely," Daniel confirmed. "From what we can tell, Merlin devised a security program to prevent the information he stored here from being accessed by anyone who hadn't previously been one of the Ascended, while still possessing the necessary spiritual qualities to Ascend again; in other words, theoretically I should be able to access the information once we find it, but Anubis wouldn't have been able to do anything with it even if he'd come here because he wasn't spiritually worthy of Ascension."

"And the reason you didn't find out about this when you came here last time is because…?" John asked, looking curiously at the archaeologist.

"From what we can tell, you require a specific password to access the information in question; I couldn't have found it the last time I was here because I didn't even know what I was looking for,
never mind lacking the password," Daniel replied. "I'm hoping that, now that I know what I'm looking for and how to access it, I'll have better luck using the holographic interface this time around."

"The one that was hi-jacked by an Ancient last time you were here?" John asked, looking at Daniel with a slightly uncertain expression. "You sure that'll work?"

"Given that I have a more precisely defined search pattern to work with than what I was using last time I was here, I think it's possible," Daniel replied, before he turned to look at Doctor Weir. "With that in mind, I think I should probably start in the holographic interface room; it seems like the most likely place for Merlin to leave the information."

Doctor Weir sighed.

"Unfortunately, I can't do that right now," she said, looking regretfully at the archaeologist. "While I was contacting Carson, Teyla and Ronon, Doctor McKay called me and requested that all non-essential systems be shut down while he and Mrs Miller attempt to activate the matter bridge; given the potential risks in this kind of experiment, they both agree that it would be best to divert all available power from the ZPM to maintaining the bridge until they're certain that it's going to work."

"Oh," Sam said simply, looking apologetically over at Daniel. "Sorry, I should have mentioned that earlier; McKay did say that might happen, but I wasn't sure how much power would actually be needed…"

"That's… that's OK, Sam," Daniel said, nodding in understanding even as a slightly wistful expression crossed his face, before he glanced over at Doctor Weir again. "Well, as long as I'm going to have to wait, is there anything we can do here?"
An hour after the meeting had concluded, Daniel sat in front of the workstation that Doctor Weir had managed to locate for him, eagerly going over the information in the Ancient databanks as he studied the information appearing on the screens in front of him. He'd initially tried to use the password provided in order to find out any information that the system might be able to offer him about the plans for Merlin's prototype, but the database had failed to provide him with any kind of useful information. It looked like it was going to have to wait until the holographic interface room was active if he was going to try anything else; given that the two interfaces operated on a slightly different system, it was the only other possible place for Merlin to have stored the plans that they were looking for.

With that avenue of investigation having met with nothing but failure, Daniel had turned his attention towards studying the Ancients' earlier research on ascension. From what he was able to discover, their initial research seemed to be focused more on the evolutionary view of ascension-focusing on improving their bodies so that ascension was the only remaining 'path' left to take after all other evolution had taken place- rather than the spiritual one that he was acquainted with (Which, when he thought about it, certainly tied in to what they'd learned from the mission reports of Atlantis's first year with that energy-draining entity, to say nothing of what they'd learned about the Ori over the last year or so; while the Ori had immediately taken a more spiritual route, it seemed that the Ancients had started their own research from an evolutionary angle before becoming more inclined to the spiritual angle Oma had used).

Some of the information seemed to be based on little more than conjuncture and theory, as far as he could tell; the theory about people needing to use around eighty percent of their brains in order to Ascend at all was clearly false, given that he and the Abydonians hadn't needed their brains to operate at anywhere near that level before they'd Ascended (Admittedly, they'd had some outside help when ascending, but the fact remained that their brains had been operating on a normal level and yet they'd reached a higher plane of existence, making it clear that higher brain activity was far from a requirement).

On a related topic, the Ancient theory that automatic ascension once the subject was using a certain amount of their brains- around ninety to ninety-five percent, according to the research Daniel had discovered- could be disproved just as easily. After all, according to the tests run by the doctors at the SGC whenever Jack had fallen victim to the Ancient repository, Jack had been using at least ninety percent of his brain to process all the information that had been downloaded into his head, and he certainly hadn't Ascended then.

Of course, the fact that Jack's brain was being essentially scrambled at the time might have been the reason nothing had happened, but Daniel somehow doubted that that was the case. Jack might have been coming out with very little actual coherent information while the Ancient knowledge was hanging around in his head, but he'd still been thinking clearly enough to repair a DHD the first time he'd been exposed to the repository, to say nothing of him managing to rewire a ship's hyperdrive to increase its speed and his subsequent use of the Ancient chair to destroy Anubis's fleet the second time around. His old friend might not have been able to directly speak with anyone, but he'd definitely been aware of what was going on around him and been able to react to it accordingly.

Then, of course, the theories about what they do after they'd Ascended made for particularly disturbing reading. Even without his knowledge of the Ori and what they had become, the theories Daniel had read about what the Ancients 'should' do after they achieved Ascension, ranging from...
passive observation to having the right

Other details of the research were mainly interesting on their own merit, of course— the reference to various planes of existence was particularly interesting; it could certainly explain how Anubis was able to possess some of the powers of the Ascended without actually being one of them—, but in general the most interesting thing about the research was seeing how the theory of Ascension compared to the reality of it…

"How's it going?" a voice said from off to the side.

Glancing around, Daniel was more than slightly surprised to see Ronon Dex standing off to one side, his arms folded as he looked curiously at the archaeologist.

"Uh… interesting, really," he said at last, deciding that he might as well answer the Satedan's question. "I mean, I've already actually ascended myself, but there's still a difference between reading about it and doing it; the Ancients really seemed to get some things wrong when they were researching it…"

Ronon shrugged.

"They seem to do that a lot," he said dismissively, apparently relatively unconcerned about Daniel answering his question in perhaps more detail than he might have wanted. "If it isn't that thing McKay turned on that blew up a solar system, it was when we ran into the Asurans and they ended up trying to kill us."

"Yeah, I heard about that; did your weapon really managed to effect the Asurans when you confronted them?" Daniel asked, standing up to look curiously at the former Runner.

"Yeah," Ronon replied, nodding briefly in response. "What about it?"

"It's just… well, after all the trouble we had dealing with the human-form Replicators back in our galaxy, it's interesting to encounter a weapon that can actually hurt them when it wasn't actually designed to fight them," Daniel explained, as he stood up and walked over to stand in front of Ronon. "If you don't mind me asking, where did you get it?"

"Picked it up while I was a runner," Ronon said briefly, removing the gun in question from his holster to give the archaeologist a better look at it. "Can't recall the planet's address; all I remember clearly is that it was in some crashed ship that I found near the 'gate after I left the last planet I'd been on. Managed to grab this thing and some of the power cells for it; didn't really see anything else I could use at the time."

"Ah," Daniel said, nodding slightly as he studied the weapon. "And… you never needed to go back to… well, pick up more power cells for it?"

"What ones I got see to recharge themselves if you switch 'em round enough," Ronon said dismissively. "Why go back for more when what I had worked out pretty good?"

"Point…" Daniel admitted, nodding slightly as he took a last look at Ronon's gun before turning back to look at Ronon. "Your civilisation… Sateda, wasn't it?"

"Yeah," Ronon said, nodding curiously at the other man. "What about it?"

"Well… is there any chance you could… tell me about it?" Daniel asked, looking curiously at the other man. "I studied the history and culture other civilisations for a living before I joined the Stargate Program, and, well…"
He shrugged. "Given what I've heard about you, your people sound like they managed to develop surprisingly well, given the presence of the Wraith and what I've heard about their attempts to suppress technological development in this galaxy; I just… well, I'm curious to know more about how they achieved that."

After a moment's silent pause as he looked reflectively at the archaeologist, Ronon spoke.

"It's been a while since anyone wanted to talk about my people," he said finally.

"If you'd rather not-" Daniel began, anxious to avoid offending someone who'd survived being hunted by Wraith for the past seven years.

"Don't worry about it," Ronon said, shaking his head slightly as he looked at the archaeologist. "It's…"

He shrugged. "It's just been a while since I thought about them, really; living as a Runner didn't really give me many opportunities to chat, and I've mostly been learning about your civilisation since I came here."

"If it helps, you don't have to tell me anything personal; I'm just interested in getting… well, a general picture of what your way of life was like before you joined the Atlantis expedition," Daniel clarified, as he shifted the terminal into the Ancient equivalent of 'stand-by'- enough to allow him to go back to his research if Ronon said no while leaving him open to leave if the Satedean agreed to talk with him- and stood up to better look at Ronon. "You know, how your people developed, how you used the Stargate, what worlds you traded with in particular, things like that…"

Ronon looked silently at Daniel for a moment, before he finally spoke.

"No questions about my family or my own life unless I bring the topic up first," he said simply. "Clear?"


"Good," Ronon said, before he jerked his head towards the corridor behind him. "Come on; sooner we get started the better."

As Ronon walked out of the room where Daniel had been conducting his research, Daniel only had enough time to turn the monitor off before he began to walk after Ronon, his mind already going over some of the questions he had for the Satedean.

His research on Ascension might have been interesting on a more personal note, but he would actually rather enjoy the chance to get back to his roots and learn something about a culture that he currently knew absolutely nothing about.

Even as she moved to deflect the Athosian woman's attack, Sam already knew that she was moving too slowly to accomplish her goal. Before she could adjust her stick weapons to compensate for the attack, Teyla's sticks had struck her in the chest, sending her staggering back as she briefly gasped for air.

"Are you all right?" Teyla asked, lowering her stick to look uncertainly at the other woman. "I have grown so used to sparring with the Atlantis personnel, I briefly forgot that you are unused to this method of combat-"

"Don't… don't worry about it," Sam panted, smiling reassuringly at the other woman as she
regained her balance, flexing the sticks experimentally as she looked back at Teyla. "Just… a little
tired; it's really tricky… to keep track of everything… going on there."

"Yes, that is one reason my people developed this means of engagement; its rapid pace makes it
harder for the Wraith to know what we are about to do next," Teyla confirmed, nodding slightly at
the other woman before her face reassumed its uncertain expression. "Are you certain that you wish
to continue-?"

"As I said, don't worry about it," Sam said, raising her hand as she nodded reassuringly at the
Athsian woman as she twirled her sticks experimentally, trying not to focus on how relaxed Teyla
looked at the moment. The main point of this exercise was to learn from Teyla; she could hardly be
expected to *defeat* someone who'd been fighting like this for years when she'd barely started to
learn it a couple of hours ago.

Sam had started out checking in with the McKay siblings and Atlantis's science team to see if she
could do anything to help there, but when she'd confirmed that her presence there was simply
causing a case of 'too many cooks', she had left the research lab and travelled to the Atlantis gym,
where she had encountered Teyla as the other woman was practising stick-fighting with one of the
marines. After the marine had left the room, Sam had expressed an interest in learning something
about the combat style herself, Teyla subsequently agreeing to give her a basic demonstration.
Some of the lessons Teal'c had given the SGC on Jaffa staff combat had been useful in helping Sam
get the hang of the basics, but the differences between the weapons used in both forms of combat
were still significant; the smaller weapons might be easier to move than the staffs, but at the same
time they lacked the range that the staff weapons offered in close-quarter combat…

In some ways, she supposed part of her problem lay in the fact that her mind wasn't entirely on the
task at hand. She'd enjoyed learning about how the combat style worked, of course- she might be a
scientist at heart, but she was also a soldier-, but she just couldn't bring her attention completely on
the topic at hand; her recent conversation about Liam's origins had left her reminded once again of
just how… complicated… her current relationship with Daniel was.

They might have a son together now, but there just hadn't been sufficient time available for them to
really explore that. Privacy on the *Daedalus* might have been possible, but it was still hard to feel
completely comfortable in an enclosed environment where you didn't have anywhere else to go but
another part of the ship. Coupled with the fact that it hadn't been designed with the possibility of
passengers dating in mind, it wasn't hard to see why she and Daniel had failed to properly find
many opportunities to explore this newest turn of events; add in the additional complication of
Liam only being in the adjoining room, and it wasn't hard to see why the two beds in their room
had both remained occupied during their duration; neither of them wanted to start anything physical
too quickly.

Still… even knowing that there were perfectly good reasons *why* they were taking it slowly-
Daniel finding her unattractive definitely *wasn't* an issue if what she'd felt during some of their
kisses was any indication- didn't stop Sam from wishing that the timing could be better. It seemed
like ever since they'd found Liam they'd just been going from one crisis or discovery to another; if
it wasn't having to investigate the reports of Adria's presence, then it was their current attempt to
find whatever secret Merlin had left within Atlantis…

"Colonel Carter?" Teyla asked, breaking into Sam's train of thought as she looked curiously at the
other woman. "Is something wrong?"

"What?" Sam replied, looking back at Teyla before she shook her head apologetically. "No,
nothing's wrong; I'm just…"

She sighed. "Well, it's this whole… thing with Daniel, really; it's all just so… complicated."

"You are… uncertain about your feelings for Doctor Jackson?" Teyla asked, lowering the sticks as she looked inquiringly at Sam.

"No, nothing like that," Sam replied, shaking her head as she looked back at the Athosian. "It's… well, my feelings for him are the one part of this situation I'm actually sure about; it's more like I'm uncertain about our relationship now; we've never even dated, and yet we've now got a ten-year-old son to consider on top of everything else."

It might have seemed strange, talking about her feelings to someone she'd only met a few hours ago, but in many ways Sam felt like that actually made it easier for her to talk to the other woman about her feelings; there was no chance of Teyla judging her based on anything she might have heard about her in the past, so she could the Athosian to give an unbiased outside view of her and Daniel's… 'situation'.

"We both know that we love each other, don't get me wrong- what we felt when Liam was… conceived hasn't changed since then," Sam continued, looking uncertainly at the other woman in an attempt to gauge her reaction. She wasn't entirely certain how Teyla's culture viewed single parents, but given that Teyla hadn't made any comments about their status so far she would assume that either the Athosians had no objections or Teyla herself didn't have a problem either way. "We just got better at hiding it because we didn't think there was any point in telling the other after we lost our memories and he returned to his human form, but, it's…"

She sighed, slightly embarrassed to admit what she was about to say even as she knew that she wanted to say it to somebody. "Well… it's hard to find the time to really explore it, given how busy our lives are at the moment; as it is we're just sharing joint custody of Liam- he stays with one or the other of us when we're back on Earth- until we're more comfortable with where this is going."

"I… see," Teyla said, nodding thoughtfully as she looked at the other woman. "It is not that you doubt your feelings for Doctor Jackson, it is that you have not had the time to properly explore them?"

"Exactly," Sam said, nodding at Teyla in confirmation. "We managed to spend some time with each other on Daedalus during our trip here, and we've been on a few… well, 'dates' is the best term, really… back on Earth, but… well it's not really the same as having free time on Earth; it's not exactly practical to look for privacy on a spaceship, particularly when you've got all kinds of projects to work on …"

She sighed slightly as she shook her head in frustration. "I just… well, as great as it is to be here again, I just wish Daniel and I had more time to be… us, you know?"

"I understand," Teyla replied, nodding sympathetically. "It can be… hard… to find time for things like that in this position."

For a moment the two of them simply sat in silence, before Sam looked over at Teyla.

"Who is he?" she asked, a slight smile on her face.

"Excuse me?" Teyla replied, looking back at the other woman with a curious expression.
"It's just... well, the way you said that comment about finding time; it sounded like you were thinking of somebody you were in that situation with yourself," Sam explained, smiling slightly at Teyla to reassure her that she wouldn't mention it to anyone else if Teyla didn't want her to. "I know that I might be wrong, but..."

"You are not wrong, Colonel Carter; it is simply... well, as you said, it is... complicated... to be certain of my relationship given the limited opportunity I have had to explore it," Teyla replied, a slight blush briefly passing across her face as she looked at Sam. "His name is Kanaan; when we were young, he, like me, learned that he possessed the ability to sense the Wraith. We have long been close friends as we grew older, but recently..."

She smiled slightly as she looked out of the window at the ocean spread out around Atlantis, a wistful expression on her face as she did so.

"Things went a bit further than that, huh?" Sam said after a few moments, breaking the silence that had settled over the room as she smiled slightly at the other woman.

"Well... it is like you described your relationship with Doctor Jackson; we are both aware that the feelings are there, but we have difficulty finding time to... explore them," Teyla said, looking back at Sam with a grateful smile of her own. "Still, in the end it is at least... easier for you to find time than it is for Kanaan and myself; the time required to travel to the mainland puts a significant limit on the time we can spend together, no matter how much we try to find convenient moments to do so."

Sam smiled sympathetically over at her new- albeit very new- friend as she walked over to place a reassuring hand on her shoulder.

"Look on the bright side," she said, as she looked at the younger woman. "You might have more difficulties then Daniel and I when it comes to finding time to be with each other, but at least you don't have to worry about a kid suddenly dropping into your lives like this."

"A... valid point, I suppose," Teyla said, smiling in a slightly awkward manner as she looked back at Sam. For a moment, Sam briefly wondered if she'd said something wrong- had Teyla taken the comment about what she and Kanaan would do if they had children in a more serious manner than Sam had intended?-, but then Teyla simply shrugged and turned to look more directly at Sam. "Shall we continue?"

Unable to stop a slight smile of relief crossing her face, Sam walked over to where she'd left her sticks and picked them up, twirling them briefly before turning back to look at Teyla.

"One more time before a snack?" she asked, raising an inquiring eyebrow.

"If you insist," Teyla replied, a slight smile on her own face as she looked back at the astrophysicist.

"Wow..." Liam whispered, his eyes wide as he stared at the sight of the ocean life currently swimming around beneath Atlantis spread out before him, only the thinness of the puddle jumper's forward viewing window protecting them from the water as John took the puddle jumper through the ocean like a submarine.
With Liam's parents occupied and offworld activity suspended until the matter bridge experiment was complete—another case of not wanting to use more power than was necessary, John had volunteered to take the boy out for a quick spin in the puddle jumper, showing him Atlantis from underneath rather than the above-ground view he'd witnessed while coming in on Daedalus. He was planning on taking Liam up to the planet's outer atmosphere at some point on their current 'trip' if they had the time, but given the kid's Ancient heritage John had assumed that he'd find it more interesting to take a look at an example of their achievements first.

"Yeah, I know; pretty cool, isn't it?" John said, smiling over at the young boy sitting beside him as he manoeuvred the small ship around one of Atlantis's 'engines'- there was probably some complicated Ancient term for them that he couldn't remember right now- to give his passenger a better view of the city's lower area.

John had initially started out by taking the jumper around Atlantis's higher towers to give him a better impression of the scale of the city, culminating in taking him to a position where they were actually looking down at the city from above- the inertial dampers had made that particular feat fairly simple even when still within the planet's atmosphere, although John freely admitted that it had been a little disorientating looking straight down without feeling gravity doing anything to them- before he took the jumper underwater to look at the city from a different perspective.

The opportunity to see Atlantis's various forms of marine life- ranging from the smaller fish that showed up now and again to one sighting of that large whale-like thing that he and Zelenka had seen when rescuing McKay after he sunk- had apparently gone down well with Liam, although he was currently more interested in examining the systems that powered Atlantis's star drive than anything else.

Then again, John supposed that his interest was only natural. After all, Doctor Jackson might be human enough, but Liam was still at least technically part-Ancient; what kid wouldn't be interested in seeing what their 'parents' had built in the past (Particularly when it was something as cool as Atlantis)?

Actually, that reminded John of something he'd been wanting to ask Liam ever since he learned about his conception…

"So…" he said, turning to look curiously at Liam as he put the jumper onto autopilot essentially directly underneath the middle of the city, "just out of curiosity- and if this comes out badly I apologise in advance-, can you… do anything… cool?"

Liam blinked.

"Uh… what?" he asked, looking uncertainly at John.

"Well, your parents mentioned that you'd been trained in the use of some of your 'Ancient powers' while you were raised on… whatever planet you were raised on; I just wondered what that actually meant," John clarified, as he turned around slightly to better face Liam. "I spent some time in this weird area where the Ancients had set up a time dilation device to allow people to hide from the Wraith, and the people inside it had managed to pick up a few nifty little tricks while they were working on learning how to Ascend- one of the kids could heal people, there was this one woman who could see the future, things like that-, and, well…"

"You wondered if I could do anything like that, huh?" Liam asked, smiling casually back at the colonel. "Oh yeah, a few things; how about… this?"
As soon as the last word began to cross his lips, Liam had raised both hands and they almost instantly started to glow with a brilliant golden light. Even as John watched, Liam concentrated the light in his hands into two brilliant balls that he held in his hands, giving the impression that he was holding a pair of golden footballs in both hands.

"Whoa…" John said, staring at the balls for a moment before he smiled at Liam. "OK, I'll admit, that's cool; lemme guess, you throw them at the other guy?"

"Well, it's not like Mom and Dad want me to have to do it, but it's nice to know that I can defend myself," Liam replied, shrugging slightly as he closed his hands and the balls vanished. "I can also move stuff without touching it, but that's about it that I can think of; other stuff is… well…"

"'Higher being'-type stuff that you need to have been through to have any idea of what you're talking about?" John asked, smiling slightly at the young boy. "No sweat; after what your parents said about you being 'needed' for this whole thing with the Ori, I'm just glad to know that you've got a few extras if you need to use them."

"Yeah…" Liam said, nodding slightly as he stared thoughtfully at his hands.

John instantly found himself wondering if he'd done something wrong; the kid suddenly looked like someone had kicked his puppy.

"You OK?" he asked, looking uncertainly at the boy.

"It's just…" Liam began, pausing for a moment as he stared uncomfortably at his hands before he looked back up at John. "Well, I get that I'm 'meant' to help stop the Ori, but even if I do it, what do I actually do after that?"

Even as he opened his mouth to reply, John paused for a moment as he thought over what Liam had just said.

He had to admit, that was actually a good point; when you've been raised- hell, when possibly the main reason someone made sure you were even conceived- to achieve one specific purpose, it was kind of hard to know what you were going to do with yourself once you'd done that…

"Hey," he said at last, reaching over to place a comforting hand on Liam's shoulder; he wasn't exactly experienced when it came to kids, but his time with the Athosians had certainly helped make him a bit more comfortable in dealing with them than he'd been before, and he thought he at least had a basic idea of what to say right now. "Just because you were born to do one thing doesn't mean you have to define yourself by it. Hell, look at me; I may have been born with an Ancient gene that packs a bigger punch than anyone else's, but I try not to let that be the be-all and end-all of what I bring to this whole party."

As Liam sat silently in the jumper, his gaze alternating between John and the window, John smiled reassuringly at him. "Besides, I might not know your parents well, but what I do know leaves me pretty sure they're not going to try and define what you should do with your life after you do… whatever you're meant to do to help us out at the moment. You've got those powers, but judging by who your parents are I think it's safe to say you're not exactly the dullest tool in the shed; I have a feeling you'll cope fine in the real world."

After a moment's silence, Liam smiled.
"Thanks, Colonel Sheppard," he said at last, smiling slightly at the older man. "I… I think I needed that; I mean, Mom and Dad have been great with me just… dropping in like this… and Danaar and everyone else were always nice to me back when I was younger, but…"

He paused for a moment, evidently trying to think of the best way to say what he was about to say, before he shrugged and smiled over at John. "Well… you're the first person who actually told me that I'd have something after I did… whatever I'm here to do."

"No sweat about it; always happy to help," John replied, shrugging dismissively as he turned back to the controls.

"Oh, and call me John," he added, unable to stop a slight smile crossing his face as he contemplated both where to take the jumper next and what topic of conversation to start chatting with Liam about at the same time; he had to admit, he was really kind of enjoying the chance to show the kid around the city.

"Doctor Weir to Colonel Sheppard?" Elizabeth's voice suddenly said over the radio, breaking into John's train of thought.

"Yeah?" John replied, reaching up to activate his earpiece, pushing all thoughts of further conversation topics with Liam to the side for the immediate moment.

"Liam's parents are going to the mess hall for dinner right now," Elizabeth continued. "They wanted to let you know in case Liam was feeling hungry; they'd like to eat with… well, the last I saw Colonel Carter was talking with Teyla while Doctor Jackson was asking Ronon about Satedean culture, so I think it's safe to say that your available teammates are already there, but I'm sure they won't mind you joining them."

"A chance to spend time with the people who basically opened the Stargate in the first place?" John asked, smiling slightly as he looked back at Liam, the young boy looking just as eager for the opportunity to spend time with the group Elizabeth had just told them about as John himself. "Give me a few minutes to park the jumper and I'll be right there."

"Glad to hear it," Elizabeth replied; John could almost have sworn he could hear her smiling. "I'll see you there."

"See you," John replied, terminating the call as he glanced back at Liam. "Well then, shall we?"

"Yep," Liam replied, nodding with a broad grin at Atlantis's military commander. "Let's go."

Even as the jumper changed direction to head towards the surface, John couldn't help but allow himself a slightly satisfied smile even as he mentally calculated his route.

In some ways, it was good to know that he was able to give that kind of advice after the crap he'd received from his own father when he'd left to join the air force.

He hadn't just told Liam that he could be whatever he wanted because he wanted the kid to feel better; he genuinely did feel like that.

At least he knew he wouldn't make the same mista-
NOT *gonna go there*! he thought to himself, cutting that thought off mid-sentence.

He had enough trouble coping with… how he felt… as it was; he did *not* want to have to deal with thoughts of *kids* being introduced into the picture as well…

Noting a slightly amused grin on Liam's face as the jumper left the water, John only now found himself briefly wondering if telepathy was one of his current passenger's 'tricks'. 
As McKay walked into the mess hall later that night, his mind relatively refreshed and rested after a slight rest and his appetite now active, he was only slightly surprised to see his sister sitting at a table and laughing at something while talking with John, Teyla, Ronon, Sam, Doctor Jackson, and the kid (He still couldn't quite get used to the idea that they were allowing a child on Atlantis; the Athsian kids might have stayed there for a while but that was when they were cut off from Earth and had no other choice), all of which also appeared very amused at something; the way his luck went, that kind of meeting in this situation was only to be expected.

It didn't take a genius to see how bad this was; letting your sister- who could provide all sorts of embarrassing details about your childhood- talk with your colleagues at work when you were an adult would never result in them learning anything about you that you wanted them to know…

(Plus, of course, having the kid hanging around just made it worse; his teammates, Colonel Carter and Doctor Jackson might at least display some awareness of his personal boundaries, but he really had little faith about that kid being able to resist the opportunity to learn embarrassing secrets, and who was to say what he could do with those freaky Ancient powers of his anyway…?)

"What is this?" he asked, walking over to stand in front of the table as he looked at the people there, trying to conceal his own discomfort at this latest turn of events; if he'd learned anything from his time in the city, it was that you could never let them see you sweat.

"Hey, Meredith!" John said, smiling broadly as he looked in McKay's direction.

"Oh, wonderful…" McKay muttered, not even making an effort to hide the sarcasm in his voice; so much for any hopes that he could get out of this mess with at least some of his dignity intact.

"I got a call from Colonel Carter to ask if I'd be interested in taking a look at the rest of the city," Jeannie said, shrugging dismissively even as she smiled teasingly at him (On reflection, he probably shouldn't have let her go off alone after they'd started the universal bridge; he'd just really wanted to get some rest after having to spend so much time with her all over again). "We decided to have a meal first, Daniel, Ronon, John and Liam showed up, we got to talking, and…"

She shrugged, a slightly amused smile on her face. "Here we are."

"What have you told them?" McKay said, trying not to sound as panicked as he felt as he looked at his sister; why was it that he could go all the way to the other side of the universe and still not escape embarrassing childhood stories?

"We weren't talking about you," Carter said, looking at him with a face that was so innocent it had to be hiding something.

"You weren't?" McKay said, looking hopefully at her.

"Uh… no," Teyla said, shaking her head as she looked at him with a slight smile. "We were discussing… many things."

"Yeah, you know, the history of the Pegasus Galaxy, the war with the Ancients, some of the Ancient technology Liam's identified from his subconscious knowledge since he came here, that kind of thing…" Doctor Jackson said, waving his hand dismissively as he reflected back on the conversation.
"Of course, you may have come up when we started talking about bedwetting..." John added, that same annoying smirk on his face that McKay recognised from when the colonel was making fun of Kolya or some of their other human adversaries.

"That is not true!" McKay protested (He knew he sounded like a child insisting that he hadn't broken the vase or something like that, but he couldn't help it; he hated it when this kind of stuff came up.

"Relax," Ronon said casually. "We all have embarrassing childhood stories."

"Of course we do," John said, his tone once again serious.

"There was one time the school bullies made me eat lunch with my underwear on my head," Ronon added.

"Oh!" McKay said, turning to look at Ronon with a slight smile.

"Oh wait; that was you," Ronon said, pointing briefly at McKay before the table dissolved into laughter once again; McKay was only slightly mollified by the fact that at least Doctor Jackson wasn't laughing quite as much as the rest of the table- whether because he'd been through something similar or just out of some shared 'geek'-related sympathy McKay couldn't be sure-, and even that wasn't that reassuring.

"Oh, hardy har-har..." McKay said, shaking his head in frustration as he looked around the table before his eyes settled on Jeannie. "And this is revenge for what, exactly?"

"You don't even know, do you?" Jeannie said, looking back at him with a slight smile (McKay honestly wasn't sure if that made it better or worse; it wasn't like he hadn't tried to be a good brother, it was just that he was never much of a people person at the best of times...).

"Colonels Sheppard and Carter and Doctors McKay and Jackson to the Isolation Room immediately," Elizabeth Weir's voice suddenly said over the city's broadcast system.

"Isolation room?" Doctor Jackson said, looking over at the rest of the requested people inquiringly, only to be met with no response; evidently they didn't know what this latest turn of events might be about either.

"Come on," McKay said, indicating the main door before he turned and headed out of the room, John, Doctor Jackson, Colonel Carter, Jeannie and the kid just behind them (He knew he probably should protest about the other two coming along, but right now he just didn't think he was in any kind of position to demand anything after the way Jeannie had humiliated him; he'd just have to ignore it).

As Daniel walked into the Atlantis observation room- except for the size and architectural structure it really was rather similar to the one they used at the SGC; architectural consistencies like this were one of the main reasons he'd developed his original theory of cross-cultural pollination, and it was always somehow comforting to see further evidence of it even after so long-, he barely had time to open his mouth before his eyes fell on what must have been the reason for Doctor Weir calling them there in the first place.

Initially it simply seemed to be a large television screen displaying a picture of Rodney McKay, but a brief glance was all Daniel needed to confirm that it wasn't the McKay currently standing beside him. The McKay on the screen not only looked far more relaxed than the one Daniel knew-
he might not have worked with McKay a great deal since he was originally sent into the SGC by Colonel Simmons, but he knew the man well enough, but he was also dressed in a leather jacket and his hair seemed to be slightly ruffled in a manner that looked more like John Sheppard's hair than Doctor McKay's.

"What in the world…?" McKay said, staring at the screen in confusion himself.

"It's… you?" Jeannie said, her own tone making it clear that she was just as uncertain as everyone else in the room.

"No," Doctor Weir said, pointing briefly at the screen before her before she began to walk over to the balcony, "that is a live closed-circuit feed of a man we have in the Isolation Room."

Glancing down at the room in question, Daniel couldn't help a sudden feeling of deja-vu at the sight of McKay being simultaneously in the room before them and standing just a couple of feet down from him; it was Doctor Samantha O'Neill- looking back on that now, the name actually made a part of him hurt- and Major Kowalsky trying to escape their reality all over again…

"How did it happen?" he asked, looking curiously over at Doctor Weir.

"According to Doctor Zelenka, he appeared in the containment room in some kind of forcefield," Weir replied.

"What do you mean, he appeared?" Colonel Sheppard asked, looking over at Doctor Weir inquiringly.

"Out of thin air," Doctor Weir clarified, nodding briefly at the stunned expression on McKay's face. "I have Zelenka working on it; obviously, we shut down the experiment.

"Well, how'd he get in there?" Sheppard asked, clearly wanting answers as much as the rest of them.

"He claims to be from a parallel universe," Weir replied.

"Oh," Sam said, as she and Daniel exchanged glances; the news wasn't encouraging, but at least they had an obvious explanation for an alternate version of McKay being present, rather than having to deal with the potential issues that would have been raised if he'd been a clone or some other kind of duplicate.

"Hold on a minute; you said the odds against this were astronomical!" Jeannie said, turning to look critically at Sam.

"Well, in our defence, the odds of this happening were very low," Sam pointed out, even as the expression on her face made it clear to Daniel that she still felt guilty about the implications of the other McKay's presence as a result of their experiment; he'd have to be sure to talk with her about that when they had the time. "It's just that, unfortunately, we beat the odds once again… and not in a good way this time."

"Look, we can argue about how the bridge idea fell apart later; the important thing is, what does this guy actually want now that he's here?" McKay asked, waving a hand in frustration at his other self as the man in question continued to pace around the isolation room.
"To talk to you," Doctor Weir said simply as she looked over at McKay. The Canadian scientist briefly grimaced at that last statement - evidently he didn't like the idea of having to talk to someone who was essentially himself any more than Sam had enjoyed talking to her other self; meeting someone who was so like you while simultaneously not actually being you was never easy-, but quickly pulled himself together to look over at Jeannie.

"Alright, you want shared credit?" he said, apparently unconcerned about Jeannie's subsequent shake of her head as he continued to speak. "You're coming in with me."

"Wait-" Jeannie began, only for McKay to walk down the stairs that would lead to the entrance of the isolation room, leaving her with no other option than to follow her brother.

As the door to the isolation room below them opened, the five people remaining in the observation room turned their attention back to the people below them, silently watching as the two McKays came face-to-face for the first time.

It barely took two minutes of conversation to establish that the other Rodney McKay - or 'Rod' as he preferred to be called - was far more relaxed than his counterpart in their universe, cracking jokes and raising smiles with an ease that 'their' McKay clearly envied no matter how much he might try to hide it. According to his story, Rod's version of Atlantis had detected the rift that the experiment had created on his side of the universal bridge, creating dangerous exotic particles that didn't belong in either world and were proceeding to create a rift in reality. Having failed to simply broadcast a signal through the rift by taking a jumper up to the anomaly and transmitting a message through it, Rod and his version of Colonel Sheppard had decided to beam someone through the anomaly protected by an Ancient shield device - much like the one McKay had burnt out stopping a shadow creature their first month in Atlantis - in order to bring the problem to the attention of everyone on the other side. The obvious disadvantage was that Rod had no immediate plans for getting back to his own universe from this side, but he didn't seem to be all that concerned about it.

After Rod had finished explaining his presence, it only took a brief moment for Doctor Weir to come to a decision.

"All right," she said, reaching over to activate a radio that would broadcast her words into the room before them, "you can come out now."

"Does that include?" McKay began, looking up at the observation room anxiously.

"Including Rod... Rodney," Doctor Weir said, looking pointedly at her head scientist; even with the knowledge that he couldn't actually see her, she still felt better for making the point directly to him. "You can all come up here; we can talk this situation over in more detail."

"Sounds fair enough, Elizabeth," Rod said, waving up at her with a slight smile. "We'll be with you in a minute; looking forward to it."

"Uh... sure thing," Sheppard said, nodding slightly as the three McKays left the isolation room. Turning around, the group in the isolation room waited for a few moments for the three to arrive. Rod was the first one to reach them, his face widening into a broad grin as he took in the sight of the others present in the room.

"Oh my God... Colonel Jackson?" he said, grinning broadly at Sam as he held out a hand for her to shake. "You work here too?"
Sam's eyes widened in shock.

Colonel Jackson?

She was Colonel Jackson in Rod's reality?

But that meant…

"Oh…" Rod said, his grin slightly fading as he glanced between the two SG-1 members, taking in their stunned expressions at his statement. "So… I take it you're not married to Professor Jackson?"

"Professor?" Daniel repeated in surprise. "Uh… I'm actually just a doctor here."

"Oh, sorry about that," Rod said, shrugging apologetically. "My universe's Daniel Jackson taught for a bit at his old university in Chicago before joining the Stargate Program; made it to the head for the department before he was transferred to the SGC to translate the coverstone…"

His voice trailed off as his eyes fell on Liam, who was looking slightly curiously up at him. "Melbourne? What are you doing in Atlantis; is the IOA that relaxed here?"

Melbourne? Daniel thought, looking at Rod in surprise. But… but that was Dad's name…

Combining that bit of information with what he'd said about the IOA being apparently more 'relaxed' here than they were in Rod's world, the implications were… disconcerting, to say the least…

"Uh… my name's Liam, Doctor… Alt-McKay?" Liam said, looking slightly uncertainly at the man from the alternate universe; clearly he was uncertain what he was meant to call the new arrival to distinguish him from his counterpart. "Who's… Melbourne?"

"Oh, you didn't name him after your father?" Rod asked, looking over at Daniel with a curious smile.

"Well, Liam's… his birth was… complicated, really; Sam and I didn't exactly get the chance to choose his name," Daniel said, shrugging slightly uncertainly as he looked at Rod, wishing he could think of a better way to discuss this (On the other hand, when was there ever a good time to talk about why you hadn't had kids when talking to a man who knew an alternate version of yourself that had actually gone through the whole process?).

"I take it… we…" he continued, uncertainly indicating himself and Sam (Briefly noting Colonel Sheppard's slightly amused smile at this latest turn of events; he supposed that it would seem amusing viewed from outside) "had… Melbourne back in your reality?"

"Oh yeah; Melbourne, Claire and Martin- you named him slightly after Martouf but tweaked it to avoid attracting awkward questions," Rod said, smiling briefly at Sam before he turned back to Daniel. "Seriously, you wouldn't believe how excited everyone was when you two got together back home; from what I hear, your first kiss actually nearly caused Daniel to have a heart attack!"

"Heart attack?" Colonel Sheppard said, looking at Rod sceptically. "Does your Doctor Jackson have some kind of heart condition or something…?"

"No, he was in the body of some old Goa'uld killer called Ma'chello at the time or something like
that; it was all before my time and nobody ever felt like going into too much detail about it," Rod said, shrugging slightly. "All I know is, things were said when Doctor Jackson nearly died of old age before he got his body back, he and Captain Carter started dating, and then, about a year later…”

He shrugged. "Well, Melbourne came along."

"Hold on; we started dating after Ma'chello?" Daniel said, looking at Rod in surprise. "But… but what about Sha're?"

"Sha're…? Oh, your Abydonian wife?" Rod said, looking at Daniel in surprise. "She died when Apophis's forces came to Abydos while you were showing Colonel O'Neill the room with all the Stargate addresses in it; didn't that happen here?"

"No," Daniel said simply, his expression and tone making it clear that the topic wasn't up for further discussion.

"Getting back to the matter at hand," Sam said- evidently she didn't feel that this was an appropriate time to talk about Sha're any more than Daniel did-, as she looked pointedly at Rod, "you are aware that you can't actually stay here, right?"

Rod blinked.

"What?" he said, looking inquiringly at Sam. "If this is about having two of me-"

"Yes, but not in the way you think; hasn't your universe ever encountered entropic cascade failure?" Sam asked, nodding slightly as Rod's blank look in response answered her question for her. "It's a side-effect of travel between alternate universes; due to the increased rate of entropy caused by multiple versions of the same person in one reality, the non-native versions of the reality begin to experience significant molecular disruption. You can probably remain here for a couple of days at best, given the apparent distance between our realities, but after that your cells will start to break down unless we can get you back to your world."

"Ah," Rod said, looking between the rest of the people in the room before his eyes settled back on Sam. "You're sure?"

"We saw it happen to an alternate version of Sam," Daniel said, nodding apologetically at Rod "Trust me, we're sure about it; she was as different to Sam as you two are to each other, and she barely managed to spend a couple of days here before she had to be sent back to her reality."

"Great…" Rod said, rolling his eyes as he looked up at the ceiling. "So much for that…"

"Hey, look on the bright side; we've still got the bridge that Rod used to get here set up, right?" Colonel Sheppard said, looking inquiringly around at the various scientists. "I mean, I get that the bridge is only one-way now, but how hard can it be to turn it around and make it work the other way around?"

"Oh, come on, you really think it's that easy?" McKay said, turning to look critically at Sheppard, clearly grateful to have something to talk about besides his other self even if it was still indirectly linked to the man in question. "We're not talking about redirecting traffic here, Colonel; this 'bridge' is a complex system linking us to a completely different universe while otherwise remaining in all other planes of existence-"
"Uh… question?" Liam asked, raising a hand to look uncertainly between the adults, clearly anxious to make a point even as McKay glared in frustration at the young boy for interrupting him. "Talking of that bridge… well, I might be wrong, but… now that we've created that thing to draw power from… the other DoctorMcKay's universe… won't stuff just keep coming through it even if we're not collecting any of it at this end?"

Nothing the stunned expressions of the adults as they all stared at him, Liam shrugged slightly. "Well, Mum did compare it to a tap; haven't we just… blocked the tap without turning it off?"
For a moment, Liam looked as close to embarrassed as he had ever been since arriving in the SGC as the various leaders of the Atlantis expedition, accompanied by his parents, stared at him for a few silent moments until McKay finally broke the silence.

"Oh my God…" he said in a low voice, giving the distinct impression that he wanted to hit himself for not realising it earlier. "He's right… just because we've shut down the chamber doesn't mean the bridge still isn't drawing power…"

"And that's bad?" John asked, looking inquiringly at his team scientist.

"Essentially, we've created a dam and we've cut off the only means the water had of draining out," Sam said, recognising McKay's expression as meaning that he was about to launch into a long-winded explanation that she would probably be the only person present capable of understanding. "We're no longer actually using the power ourselves, but because we've left the bridge intact, the energy we're drawing along it is simply building up like a dam without actually doing anything for either side until it reaches a point when…"

She shook her head. "Well, there's no way I can be sure without further investigation, but I think it's safe to say that it wouldn't be good for anyone on our side of the bridge."

"Well, I guess that's it; we're going to have to start it up again," McKay said, shaking his head in frustration.

"Excuse me?" Rod said, turning to look incredulously at his other self. "Did you miss what Colonel - Colonel Carter- was just saying? If you start that thing up-"

"Yes, we'll start causing damage at your end of the bridge; I get that," McKay said, looking back at his other self in frustration. "However, in case you missed what the kid just pointed out- and God, I can't believe I'm saying that-., if we don't do anything, our universe will be the one to suffer the tear, which happens to be your one right now as well; I'm not saying it's fair, but-"

"Before we start debating whose universe has the greater right to live, wouldn't it make more sense to figure out a means of shutting the bridge down?" Daniel cut in, stepping between the two McKays as he looked critically at them both. "If we can create it, surely we can destroy it to stop this from being an issue, right?"

After a moment's silence as the two McKays looked at him, Rod, McKay and Jeannie all turned to look at each other almost simultaneously.

"Overload?" Rod asked.

"Well, it's possible, but the energy requirements-" Jeannie began.

"Again, it's possible; we just need to work out what they are…” McKay concluded, nodding slightly at his sister and his other self before he turned back to look at Sam. "Uh… as long as you're here, could you-?"

"Give you a hand with your calculations?" Sam finished, smiling slightly at the uncomfortable expression on McKay's face (Not that Daniel blamed her; he'd changed a lot since their first meeting, but it was always pleasant to see the man whose 'theory' had nearly led to Teal'c being killed acknowledge that Sam was still better at things than him even before Daniel had allowed
himself to acknowledge his feelings for her). "No problem; the sooner we can sort out a solution to this the better."

"Gotta agree with you there, Mom," Liam said, smiling slightly up at his mother. "Still, shouldn't take too long with you on the case; Orlin always said you had a great mind-

"Hold on; Orlin?" Sam repeated, looking at her son with a sudden renewed interest. "Orlin visited you?"

"Well… just once or twice; Aunt Oma… kind of mentioned me to him and asked him to keep an eye on me when she had other stuff to do…" Liam admitted, looking slightly sheepishly down at the floor before he looked back at his mother. "He didn't visit that often; he just… well, Aunt Oma asked him to teach me a bit of Ascended history so I'd know when not to help, that kind of thing…"

"Sorry, can we get a cast list for those of us who walked in on the middle of this particular story?" Colonel Sheppard asked, looking in confusion- as well as a slight trace of apology; evidently he didn't want to interrupt but was simultaneously curious about what anyone was talking about-between the various members of the Carter/Jackson family. "Who's Orlin?"

"He's… he was an Ancient who we encountered a few years back who'd been exiled to a planet after the people there used a weapon he gave them as a defensive measure to try and conquer other worlds," Sam explained, looking uncomfortably over at Daniel, clearly seeking a reaffirmation of his emotional support when faced with an uncomfortable topic. Even though Sam was listed as Orlin's 'aunt' after they'd been forced to send him to that psychiatric facility when the brain damage caused by his Descension had become 'fatal', she hadn't visited him in almost six months; as much as she recognized Orlin's sacrifice, she always found it awkward to talk to a child version of someone who she'd once shared a… well, if she considered what she and Daniel had shared 'sex' she essentially had to call what she and Orlin had shared a 'relationship'…, even when he didn't remember what they'd once been. "He was allowed to return to the Others after he helped us stop the weapon from falling into the hands of the NID, but before he did, he and I… well…"

"Gotcha," Colonel Sheppard said, nodding briefly in understanding at her before he assumed a more serious expression. "Sorry I sent us down that personal bit of memory lane; any chance we could get back to the 'stop the end of the universe' bit of this evening?"

"Mmm? Oh, sure thing…" McKay said, shaking his head slightly- Daniel noted a briefly frustrated glare McKay shot at Sam for some reason but decided not to question it; right now the situation needed every available scientist if they were going to prevent either their Atlantis or Rod's from being destroyed, and probing McKay for the reason for that glare would accomplish neither goal right now- before he turned to look at his sister and other self. "C'mon, let's go…"

With that, the four scientists walked out of the observation room, already tossing ideas for possible solutions back and forth as they faded out of sight, leaving Daniel and Liam alone in the room with Doctor Weir and Colonel Sheppard.

After a moment's silence, Liam shrugged and looked up at the three adults.

"Shall we get back to breakfast?" he asked, a slightly hopeful smile on his face.

Looking down at the young boy, Doctor Weir smiled back at him.

"Why not?" she said, looking back at Colonel Sheppard and Daniel. "I could use a meal myself; I didn't have time to eat something before Zelenka told me about this latest turn of events."
"Sounds good to me," Colonel Sheppard said, shrugging slightly himself as he glanced back at Daniel. "C'mon, let's go; I'm pretty sure we've still got a few interesting stories to share about life through the 'gate before our resident geniuses save the day once more."

"You're that certain they can pull it off?" Daniel asked as they began to walk back towards the main dining area. "I mean, I trust that Sam can find something, but as for Doctor McKay…"

"Well, as I told Colonel Mitchell during your last trip here, McKay's pretty good when faced with the threat of impending death; he pretty much thrives in a situation like this," Colonel Sheppard said, a slight smirk on his face as they began to walk back down the stairs towards the dining area. "Trust me; he might not like being stuck in situations like this, but it's the only way you can really guarantee to get results from him…"

A few hours later, Daniel and Liam having spent most of it walking, eating and talking with Colonel Sheppard and Doctor Weir- with all available resources having been diverted to assist the McKays in their research, there really weren't that much left for Elizabeth to do right now, thus allowing her at least a couple of hours to spare for leisure-, the three McKays and Sam finally contacted them with news of what they'd discovered about the current problem.

"Overload the bridge?" Colonel Sheppard said, looking somewhat sceptically at McKay as he sat around the conference room with Daniel, Liam and Doctor Weir, all four of them looking questioningly at the four scientists. "I thought this thing was designed to draw power?"

"Well, it's a bit more complicated than that, but we've really been a bit pushed for time," McKay said, looking somewhat uncomfortably at the group of people around them, clearly trying to give the impression that whatever solution they'd come up with wasn't something they'd have chosen if they'd had more time. "Unfortunately, we received a transmission from Rod's universe- we still can't communicate with them, unfortunately- which mentioned that they have a solution to the problem at their end which would essentially stick us with the problem by flooding the exotic particles that had already been created on their side into our space-time all at once…"

"The consequence of that are something we can't be certain of, of course," Sam added, looking around the room as she spoke up herself, "but from everything we can determine using the available data, the resulting tear would eventually swallow up the entire galaxy, possibly expanding to consume the universe itself."

"So… very bad thing to let happen, huh?" Colonel Sheppard asked, the solemn expression on his face the only thing that made it clear he understood the severity of the crisis they now faced.

"To say the least," Sam added, before she continued her explanation. "Fortunately, their plan will take six hours to implement, but we've already got an idea at this point to beat them to it; actually, Daniel's the one who inspired it."

"Really?" Daniel asked, looking over at Sam in surprise. "What did I do?"

"Your comment about destroying the bridge managed to get us thinking," Sam explained, smiling slightly affectionately at him before she turned back to address the other two adults sitting around the table. "Anyway, Jeanie came up with our final plan."

"Basically," Jeanie said, taking up the explanation herself, "we think we can collapse the bridge by essentially 'overloading' it with a massive burst of energy from this side."
"Thus stopping the creation of exotic particles on the other side into the bargain," Rod added, smiling around the table.

"How massive a burst are we talking about here?" Colonel Sheppard asked, looking sceptically around at the four scientists (Jeanie might not have been officially qualified but she still counted as a scientist after all the work she'd put into this project).

"Everything we've got," McKay said, looking around the room with a solemn expression on his face. "I mean, enough to severely deplete our ZedPM."

Elizabeth sighed.

"So instead of creating a powerful new energy source, we'll be sacrificing the one we already have," she said, her voice equally solemn as she looked at the group.

"Well, on the bright side, we caught it early enough that we should be able to retain at least some power if we trigger the burst now- since the bridge hasn't been active for relatively long it won't be as 'used' to transferring this kind of power as it might be-,. but… yeah, it will be a lot lower after this," McKay admitted, clearly trying to find any kind of bright spot in this latest turn of events. "I wouldn't want to be here if the Wraith showed up for any length of time, of course, but if we time it fast enough we might still manage to shut down the bridge before it becomes too difficult…"

After a moment's silence, Elizabeth nodded.

"All right," she said simply. "Do it."

With that, the scientists turned around and headed back towards the lab containing the containment chamber, leaving the other four people in the room to look anxiously at each other and cross their fingers.

*Here goes nothing*… Daniel reflected as he looked after Sam's retreating form, hoping that she would succeed in this latest experiment.

"Doctor Weir gave the OK for this?" Zelenka asked, looking incredulously at McKay after taking a brief look over Jeanie's notes; the four scientists hadn't had much time to explain the current situation beyond that they had a plan for shutting down the bridge for good after arriving, but the Czech scientist had already taken a look at their current calculations.

"You'd rather the universe was destroyed?" McKay asked, looking up slightly from his work as he tapped away at his laptop, the three McKays going over the required calculations while Colonel Carter checked out their work to act as an at-least-somewhat-impartial observer to make sure nobody missed anything. McKay was so focused on his work he barely registered Zelenka's muttered response to his last comment, only for his attention to be drawn back to full awareness when Rod walked past him while tapping away at a small handheld computer.

"Look," Rod said, after McKay had joined him in one corner of the lab, Colonel Carter moving into position to take over checking over McKay's equations (Clearly Rod had finished his if he felt comfortable doing something like this), "the Daedalus is still in orbit; I thought-"

"I know what you're going to say," McKay cut in, prompting a brief silence between the two men before Rod continued.
"If I can beam into the energy stream protected by my personal forcefield..." he said, his voice trailing off slightly to allow McKay to finish his line of reasoning.

"You'd be transported back to your universe, I know," McKay confirmed with a brief nod. "I didn't bring it up before because, if it doesn't work..."

"I'm willing to take that risk," Rod replied, nodding slightly at his other self. "After all, you heard Colonel Carter; I've only got a few days at best before I can't stay here, so it's best I just try and leave now. I've already requested the Daedalus to execute the transport to the coordinates inside the chamber on your mark."

After a moment's silence, McKay sighed.

"You're sure about this?" he asked. "I mean, everyone loves you here..."

"Maybe, but it's not home," Rod replied, a slight smile on his face. "I mean, my Sheppard may be a know-it-all, my Teyla's hard to talk to, my Ronon is... well, actually those two are pretty similar," he admitted, shrugging slightly and sharing a brief smile with his counterpart before continuing, "but, in the end, for all their faults... they're my team. My place is with them, in that world where Colonel Jackson has kids, Professor Jackson taught at university, where... well, y'know, all that stuff..."

He smiled back at his other self once again, a casual smile still on his face. "Besides, this world doesn't need another McKay; it's already got one."

"It's just the lesser model, hmm?" McKay countered, allowing that slight hostility he'd been nurturing towards his other self since the beginning to slip through at last; he knew it was petty, but in the end this guy did seem to have everything he didn't...

Rod just smiled back at him.

"I envy you," he said, his expression betraying no hint of the irony or condescending attitude that McKay would have expected to accompany that statement. "ou say exactly what's on your mind no matter how it makes you look. I can only imagine the freedom you must have, not caring if people like you or not."

"Oh," McKay said, uncertain how to feel about that last statement before it fully registered in his mind. "People don't like me?"

"Trust me," Rod said, ignoring that last query as he patted his other self on the shoulder, "you've got it great here."

With that, he turned his attention to the small hand-held computer he had in his hand. "Now, I've made some calculations; when the readings reach the levels I've indicated, you'll know whether or not I made it home."

"Oh," McKay said again as he took the computer, looking back at his other self with an uncertain smile of his own. "I guess you just need to... click your heels together, huh?"

"Good luck, Rodney," Rod said, holding out his hand.
"You too," McKay said, taking the offered hand only to be slightly phased when Rod used a street shake before he walked away, briefly saying something to Zelenka in Czech that McKay couldn't quite make out before walking out from behind the console to face Jeanie, a concerned look on her face as she stood in front of Rod before the two shared a brief hug, followed by Rod turning to smile slightly at Colonel Carter.

"You are going to give him a chance, right?" Rod asked, a slightly inquiring smile on his face as he looked at her.

"I already am," Colonel Carter replied simply; whether she just naturally knew what Rod was talking about or this was the result of some previous discussion McKay had missed he didn't know and wasn't sure how to find out without sounding stupid.

"Good," Rod replied, his smile becoming broader. "Because I've got to say, from what I've seen back home, you two make each other very happy."

With that, Rod walked over to another console, tapping a few switches before he activated a radio link.

"Hermiod, ready when you are," he said, before terminating the link and smiling around at the others in the room. "I guess there's nothing left to say but, 'There's no place like home'."

With that, the transporter whisked him away in its traditional burst of white light, leaving the rest of the people in the room to turn their attention back to the relevant consoles in preparation for their next attempt.

"All right, everything's in the green," Colonel Carter said, looking up as McKay and Jeanie gathered around the control console. "We're ready to begin forced power output."

"Right," McKay said, nodding briefly at her before he turned to Jeanie. "Uh… you want to… press the button?"

After a moment's brief stunned silence, Jeanie smiled back at her brother.

"Sure," she said, grinning as she turned to press the button, the two McKay siblings hurrying over to different consoles as the containment generator began to charge up, the yellow light of the energy gathered so far growing ever brighter in its centre as it gathered energy.

"Power is at full," Zelenka said.

"It's working!" Jeanie called back to the others from where she was monitoring the rate of the energy's transference into the bridge; she could almost see the bridge beginning to come apart as more energy than it could be expected to cope with at this stage 'flowed' over it, barely even registering McKay issuing the order to begin transport as the energy continued to flow over it.

"The bridge is destabilising!" Colonel Carter put in, looking up at the room with a smile.

"It's getting there; we just need more power…" Zelenka said, looking anxiously up at McKay.

"ZedPM is at fifty percent," McKay said, his eyes fixed on the readouts; with the energy on the bridge dissipating so rapidly, Rod's chances of getting through were better than if they'd done this later- the energy would have interfered with the signal at a normal transference rate, so the more
energy on the 'bridge' the slower the signal would have been to make sure Rod reached the other end intact-, but that didn't mean McKay wanted to risk it cutting off too soon.

"It's still not enough, Rodney!" Zelenka called over to him.

"We have to max it out!" Jeanie yelled over at him.

"Thirty percent!" McKay added, his eyes fixed on the readings before him, further calculations running through his brain…

"The bridge is collapsing!" Jeanie yelled over at him.

"He's through!" McKay said at almost the same time. Instantly, Zelenka terminated the energy burst, leaving a reading of 20% power on the monitors as the various scientists looked around at each other.

Finally, Colonel Carter broke the silence.

"Nice work, McKay," she said, nodding at him with a slight smile on her face. "From what I've seen of the readings, it looks like he got through; you did a good job."

McKay shrugged. "Eh, I felt I owed him a shot," he said simply. "Besides, in the end I would've done the same thing for… me."

A few hours later, as Sam sat silently in her quarters- having decided to go to bed earlier after the sudden stress involved in today's work-, she looked up at the sound of a polite knocking to find Daniel standing at the door, looking curiously at her.

"Hi," he said as he walked into the room, correctly interpreting her brief nod as approval. "How are you?"

"Oh… just a bit tired; nothing major, really," Sam said, nodding reassuringly at him as she sat up. "Jeanie Miller's just packing to get ready for her return to Earth, and the last I heard McKay's trying to make sure everyone understands that he had to drain the ZPM as much as he did or we wouldn't even be here to complain about the power loss…"

Daniel smiled.

"Good to know some things never change at least, isn't it?" he said, each of them clearly remembering the McKay they'd met or heard about during his original trip to the SGC; he might have significantly improved as a person since those days, but in some ways it was comforting to know that some people would always remain the same no matter what they experienced when they went through the Stargate.

"Yeah… in a way," Sam replied, smiling slightly at him before she assumed a more curious expression. "Where's Liam?"

"Oh, he's just settling into his room a little bit down the corridor; I just thought I'd… see… how you were after… well, after all that," Daniel said, smiling slightly awkwardly at Sam (She supposed it was only to be expected; this was the first time that they'd been alone since arriving in Atlantis, and neither of them were still entirely certain how far they wanted to take… things).
"Oh… I'm fine," Sam replied, nodding reassuring at him. "It was a bit… strange having two Rodney McKays, of course, but at least Rod was pleasant enough, and we did manage to save the universe."

"Just another day at the office, huh?" Daniel said, allowing himself another smile as he looked at her.

"Yeah, pretty much," Sam said, smiling herself as she looked at Daniel. "Almost hard to believe at times, isn't it?"

"Yeah…" Daniel said, his voice trailing off at that as the two of them looked at each other.

The truth was, while they might have normally been able to get away with the comment that their job at the SGC was essentially just like any other job- they just travelled a lot more than they might have done in other avenues of employment- there were always those missions that made it clear that what they did wasn't just a 'job'; the fact that they now had a son who was physically at least twice his chronological age and possessed at least a degree of the power and knowledge available to Ascended beings made that perfectly clear.

After a moment's silence, Daniel stood up.

"Well, I'd better get some sleep," he said, looking slightly apologetically at Sam. "We've got a lot to do tomorrow; Liam and I were going to see about trying out that password on the tablet Daanar gave us in the holographic information room…"

"Just checking the computers didn't reveal anything, then?" Sam asked.

"Not a thing," Daniel replied, shaking his head in response. "Whatever Merlin created, if he did leave the plans here he probably encoded them to make them as difficult to access as possible; the computer consoles can at least be used by anybody, but the information in the hologram room needs someone with the Ancient gene to at least turn it on…"

"Which makes it more secure from anyone attempting to use that system to find whatever Merlin left there, right?" Sam finished, nodding in understanding. "Well, I guess all we can do now is wait and see, right?"

"Yeah," Daniel said, nodding back at her before he indicated the door. "Well, I'll see you tomorrow…"

Before Daniel could turn around to leave, Sam, acting on impulse, stood up from her bed, leaned in, and kissed Daniel directly on the mouth.

The second their lips made contact, both of them knew that this wasn't going to be a chase kiss; like their kiss in Daniel's house the day before they were sent to rendezvous with the Odyssey, one minute their lips had met and then, in a blur of limbs and clothes and skin, they found themselves lying on top of Sam's bed, kissing hungrily, Daniel already moving to undo Sam's jacket as Sam's fingers moved to do the same to him, his lips already moving down her neck towards her chest…

The realisation of what they were about to do- particularly when compared to what both of them had intended when they originally started to part company for the night- prompted both of them to quickly stop what they were doing, Daniel part-'rolling' off the bed and rapidly getting to his feet,
leaving Sam lying on the bed with her shirt and jacket half-undone, staring up at him as she panted slightly to regain her lost breath.

"Wow," she said, staring back at him with a slightly dazed, yet shocked, expression. "That… that was…"

"Yeah," Daniel said, stepping back and trying not to look directly at Sam without appearing rude as he closed his jacket once more. "I think I should go, Sam, because… because I really don't want to."

Sam simply nodded in understanding.

No matter how much she and Daniel might want to take that last step in their relationship, the timing just wasn't right at the moment, not with their need to find Merlin's plans having to take precedence over everything else.

Mentally, she and Daniel were definitely ready to take the final step.

Emotionally, however…

After the way things had been between them over the last year, they'd prefer a little more time to get used to this new turn in their relationship before they got on to that part of the equation.

As Daniel walked out of the room and the door closed behind him, however, Sam was already wondering how cold the showers here could get…
The next morning, Daniel, Sam and Liam walked into the holographic information room, ready to begin their latest search, only to be at least partly surprised to find Colonel Sheppard, Doctor Weir and Doctor McKay already there.

"Hi," Colonel Sheppard said, nodding briefly at the three new arrivals. "Hope you don't mind, but… well, it's been a bit quiet lately, McKay's sister already left for Earth…"

"And you wanted to see what we discovered, right?" Daniel said, smiling slightly at the colonel's eager-yet-concealed enthusiasm at the possibility of learning another Ancient secret; in some ways, Colonel Sheppard reminded him of himself when it came to finding Ancient secrets, even if his intellectual passion was mainly for military (and the occasional mathematical, now that he recalled Sheppard's file) puzzles.

"Well, hey, any chance to discover new Ancient technology…" McKay said, shrugging in a manner that did little to conceal his own evidently keen interest in the current project.

"Can we just try this password already?" Liam asked, looking up at his father with a slightly impatient glance (Not that Daniel could blame him for it; Liam hadn't really had much to do since Rod had shown up, and even after he'd left they'd been too busy sorting out the consequences of his time here to really give Liam much to do beyond reading a couple of the books he'd been given to look up further information on Earth).

"Sure," Daniel said, smiling slightly at his son before he walked over to stand behind the control console for the room, Liam standing beside him; given that the tablet they had acquired indicated that they were the only people who might be capable of accessing whatever information Merlin had left in the databanks, it only made sense for them to be the first ones to try and access the information they sought.

"Here goes…" Daniel said, as he laid his hands on the console before him, looking ahead of himself at the middle of the room before he spoke the password that the tablet had stated would grant access to Merlin's plans. "Myrrdin Pendragon!"

As soon as the words had left his mouth, a thin beam of white light instantly activated in the middle of the room, the brilliance of its glow initially so intense that it almost hurt to look at it. Before anyone could even think of asking what was happening, a sudden pulse of energy burst from the beam, swiftly spreading out to the walls of the room before fading away, the beam itself shutting down as soon as the pulse had faded away.

"Huh," Liam said, looking slightly dejectedly at the still-empty room before him. "That was…"

His voice trailed off as he and his father realised what had just happened; with the exception of...
Doctor Weir, Daniel and Liam were the only people left in the hologram room, Sam, Colonel Sheppard and Doctor McKay having all vanished as soon as the light faded, followed by the doors having seemingly automatically sealed themselves rather than remaining open as they usually did when someone was in the room.

"What just happened?" Doctor Weir asked, looking over inquiringly at Daniel even as she anxiously scanned her surroundings; evidently she had never experienced something like this when the hologram room had been used in the past. "Where did they go?"

"I don't know…" Daniel said, looking anxiously at the control panel before him, hoping that he'd missed some sign or screen on there earlier that might explain what was currently happening. "I don't think they were harmed; putting aside the fact that what information we have about Merlin doesn't support the idea that he would do something like that just because someone had access to the password who shouldn't, if that pulse had been capable of killing them it would probably have done the same to us…"

"You are correct, Doctor Jackson," a voice suddenly said from the middle of the room. "They are not dead; the ones whose worthiness I cannot trust have merely been transported outside of this room to another part of the city while we converse."

Spinning around to look in the direction of the voice, the three figures were shocked to see a man standing before them, dressed in long light grey robes with a thick white beard, holding a sturdy-looking white staff in his left hand as he looked out at the three people before him.

"Merlin?" Daniel said, looking uncertainly at the figure before them.

"Up to a point, Doctor Jackson," the figure replied, nodding slightly at the archaeologist. "I am an interactive holographic representation of Moros, the one you now know as Merlin. He created me during his last visit to Atlantis, programming his brain patterns into the computer to create an exact holographic representation of himself. I possess most of his knowledge and experiences, and am programmed to interact with you and respond to your queries the way my creator would have done if he had been present; you may ask me any questions you wish relating to my history and my work on the device known as the Sangraal, and I shall answer them to the best of my ability."

"Right…" Daniel said, nodding slightly as he looked at the holographic image before him before he came to a decision. "Uh… why were we not teleported out of here?"

"That is the result of a security feature that Merlin included in the programming when this hologram was created," the hologram replied, his expression calm as he looked at the archaeologist. "As you are doubtless aware of already, the information I was created to provide for you was encoded so that only one who has walked among the Ascended, while retaining the spiritual capacity to ascend again in the future, can discover this information; my creator knew that only such a one would ever seek to claim the Sangraal for the purpose for which it was created, and thus took steps to ensure that only they would be present when I revealed his weapon to them."

"OK, that explains why Doctor Jackson and Liam Jackson weren't teleported out; why am I still here?" Elizabeth asked, looking in confusion at the hologram. "I've never been Ascended myself, I've never had any training to help me so much as try to Ascend, I don't even have the Ancient gene."

"But those things are not required for me to know your worthiness to access this information; I have already met you, Doctor Elizabeth Weir, and can thus confirm your worthiness to wield my weapon," Merlin said, turning to look at her with a slight smile.
Elizabeth blinked in confusion.

"Excuse me?" she asked, looking sceptically at the hologram, clearly wondering if it had confused her for someone else.

"You are aware of what happened in the first timeline where you came to Atlantis, are you not?" Merlin continued, the smile remaining on his face as he looked at her.

"You mean how the city flooded and I only survived by taking an experimental time-travelling jumper back in time... oh," Elizabeth said, the explanation hitting her just as Daniel recalled the files about the even in question. "You- well, the original Merlin- met... her... when she went back, didn't you?"

"I was the leader of Atlantis at the time when your other self came to us; it would have been strange if I had not met her," Merlin replied, nodding in confirmation at Elizabeth. "While you and I strongly disagreed on the action we should take to save the expedition at the time, your dedication to what you believed in and your resolve to do all you could to save their lives- a fact that I became further aware of after I ascended and learned what she and Janus had done to try and protect her people- left me to realise that, even without having so much as attempting to achieve ascension, you also possessed the necessary strength and resolve of spirit to wield my weapon appropriately. Having acquired a DNA sample from your other self while she remained in stasis during my return to enter this information into Atlantis's databanks, all that was required was to program this system to take a basic scan of your brain waves to confirm that you and your other self retained the same essential moral outlook- prior to arriving in Atlantis you have each experienced the exact same events and circumstances; that provides more than enough evidence for this system to confirm what I most wanted to know-, and I was able to establish that you, like her, are worthy to wield this weapon."

"Weapon?" Daniel repeated, looking in increased confusion at the hologram before him. "What are you talking about?"

"This," Merlin said, the hologram stepping back slightly and extending both hands before him, before closing his eyes in what would have been concentration if those watching him hadn't known he was merely a hologram. As they watched, the very air around the hologram's hands seemed to glow, light once again expanding outwards from the middle of the room to fill it completely, before retreating back towards the hologram's hands, leaving two long white objects that looked like a combination of Ori and Jaffa staff weapons, being a silverish grey colour with a brighter silver oval on the top.

"These were created by Merlin years ago, in the early stages of his research, and were subsequently kept in storage in Atlantis's transporter patterns in preparation for when the time would come that those who would wield them against the Ori would come to claim them," Merlin explained, the hologram smiling slightly as he stepped back, the rods remaining hovering before him. "Doctor Jackson, Doctor Weir, you may each take these for yourselves; I have encoded each of them to respond to your touch."

"Hey, what about me?" Liam asked, looking up at the hologram while briefly waving his hand at the figure. "Don't I get one?"

Looking down at Liam, Merlin smiled slightly indulgently.

"Unfortunately, I regret that my template did not take into account the possibility that the Alteraci would be so... young... when he created the Staffs; none of them are the appropriate size for you to effectively wield against the Ori," he said, shaking his head slightly.
Liam barely registered the rest of Merlin's speech; his eyes had automatically widened when the hologram had mentioned the 'name' that Adria had given him during their initial confrontation.

"Y-y-you know… what I am?" he said, looking in shock at Merlin.

"Naturally," Merlin replied, nodding slightly at Liam. "Just as my creator was aware of the possibility that the Ori would seek to grant their armies a ruler in the form of a hybrid of Ori and human, he was aware that there would be those among my kind who would know, when the circumstances that would permit the Ori to learn of the humanity that existed in your galaxy came to be, that the time was right to ensure the creation of one such as yourself."

"Hold on; 'ensure the creation'?" Daniel repeated, looking urgently up at Merlin. "But… but he's my son-"

"And you worry that your decision to… conceive… him with his mother was based around outside influences?" Merlin concluded, smiling reassuringly at Daniel. "I can assure you, Doctor Jackson, that any action you might have taken to ensure Liam's conception was fully your own choice; the only way for him to be the true Alteraci would be for him to be conceived out of nothing more than the love between his parents, rather than the Ori's method of forcing the pregnancy on their subject with the sole intention of creating the Ori."

"Ah," Daniel said, clearly uncomfortable about exploring the implications of that last statement right now- when was it ever comfortable for a parent to discuss how they'd conceived their child in front of the kid in question-, only for Elizabeth to draw their attention back to the present as she walked over to take the rods that Merlin had 'summoned' into the room, keeping one clasped in her right hand as she turned to throw the other one over to Daniel before turning back to face the hologram.

"OK," she said, her expression resolute as she looked at the man standing before her, "now that we know how you know about Liam, what are these… rods?"

"It is simplest to refer to them as the Staffs of Merlin, should you wish to name them, Doctor Weir; my true self never gave them a more official name," Merlin explained, as he looked between the three people before him. "Only you three- or others who, like Doctor Jackson and myself, retook human form while retaining the spiritual qualities required to ascend once more- can use them; they are my first prototypes of the weapon which shall be capable of destroying the threat of the Ori once and for all."

"I see," Elizabeth said, nodding slightly as she studied the Staff she now held in her hands before returning her attention to the hologram. "What does it do?"

"As inspired by the staff weapons the Ori provide for their followers, when fired at an Ori- or any form of Ascended being; so long as they are within range of the Staff in some form it shall work-, it temporarily… 'compresses' is the best term there is… the energy that is their body back into physical form, thus rendering them mortal and vulnerable once again, permitting them to be killed," Merlin explained, his tone somewhat apologetic as he looked around the room at the three people before him. "I apologise that it is such a… specific weapon; as you were already aware, this was merely a prototype I created in preparation for the construction of the true Sangraal, and it was dangerous enough to perfect this version of it."

Daniel could only nod in understanding at that. He could barely even remember a fraction of the physics involved in his awareness of his state of being when he had been ascended, and that alone was complicated to remember; he didn't even want to try and think about how much knowledge Merlin must have needed to retain in order to create the Sangraal. When trying to work on any
technology relating to something that complex, it would only make sense for Merlin to start with the idea of compressing the energy rather than automatically trying to develop a means of erasing it; once he'd worked out the correct means of compressing the energy, negating it was simply the next logical step.

Testing something like that would be a problem, of course, but Daniel could think of a couple of ways it would be possible. Assuming that Liam's powers were an example of what Merlin would have been capable of after retaking human form, he could probably have created an energy 'ball' and then used the weapon to compress the ball back into a 'lump' of flesh; he and Sam were both fairly certain that the energy Liam generated was similar in structure to the Ascended themselves.

"So… in other words, this weapon can only be used against the Ori directly?" he asked, looking uncertainly at Merlin as he studied the staff in his hands; based on what he'd seen of Teal'c's staff weapons, it looked like it could be used in about the same way, but that still left the central question of how they were meant to use this against the Ori when they needed to be facing them-

"Of course…" he said, looking up in awe as inspiration struck him. "That's it…"

"What?" Elizabeth asked, looking curiously over at the archaeologist as the hologram simply looked serenely at them, evidently willing to allow Daniel to voice his plan before it continued to speak itself.

"Merlin," Daniel said, turning his attention back to the hologram, "can you provide us with the gate address to the Ori homeworld?"

"Of course, Doctor Jackson," Merlin replied, nodding briefly as eight symbols appeared in the air before him, the last one being Atlantis's point of origin; Elizabeth made a mental note to run them through the database and determine what the address would be if dialled from Earth.

"Thanks," Daniel said, nodding briefly at the hologram before he looked over at Elizabeth and Liam. "OK, I think I have an idea, but I'll need you two to help me sort out the fine details before we try and put it into action…"
"Are you insane?" Doctor McKay said a couple of hours later, looking incredulously at Daniel and Elizabeth as the Atlantis senior staff sat around the conference table, the two doctors' new Staffs- somehow their new 'owners' had already begun to capitalise them in their minds- leaning against their chairs as they looked around at the people before them, having just explained what had happened to the people who had been teleported to outside the holographic chamber. "Do you even realise how crazy that plan is? You don't even know if it's going to have any effect on them-"

"Merlin said that it would," Daniel interjected, looking pointedly at McKay.

"Oh yeah, like he'd really know how it would actually work on them; did he ever have the opportunity to test that kind of thing-?" McKay began to say again.

"McKay," Sam said, looking pointedly over at the Canadian scientist with a harsh glare in her eyes. "I think we can assume that Daniel knows what would or wouldn't affect an Ascended being; if he says it's going to work on them, it's going to work on them."

"But…” McKay sputtered, looking incredulously at the archaeologist for a moment before he finally seemed to find his voice again. "But we don't have what you're asking for! We've barely even scratched the surface when it comes to the Ancients' research, and the Asgard aren't just going to hand that kind of thing over-"

"Actually, given that they still owe us a couple of favours for helping sort out the Replicators a couple of years ago, I think we could probably convince Thor to lend us something if we can make contact," Sam put in, smiling slightly at Daniel before she looked over at Doctor Weir. "I'm just sorry you ended up getting dragged into this, Doctor Weir; if we'd known-"

"Trust me, Colonel Carter, I'm not blaming anyone for this latest… turn of events," Elizabeth said, nodding briefly at Sam before she smiled slightly, her eyes briefly flicking to the staff she held in her hand before she turned back to look at the group before her. "Besides, this just means that I have an additional reason to let John come with you."

Sam blinked.

"Excuse me?" she said, feeling as though she'd just missed the last few minutes of the conversation. "What do you mean, 'let John come with you'?"

"Well, from what I understand, Doctor Jackson's plan is going to need you to use a puddle jumper if it's going to have any real chance of working properly," Doctor Weir pointed out, a slight smile on her face as she looked at the two members of SG-1 sitting before her. "Since I'm already going to have to come along with you on the grounds that I'm the only other person who can use the Staff, it only makes sense that I provide our best Jumper pilot in order to increase your chances of success- I assume that's all right with you, John?"

"The chance to take a spin through another galaxy?" John asked, a slight smile on his face as he looked at his boss. "Count me in; I'm not sending anyone out in a Jumper going that far without me there."

Even without continuing his sentence, Elizabeth knew what he was saying; that he especially wasn't going to send her out in a Jumper that far without him.

It might not be entirely professional behaviour, but the way Elizabeth saw it, neither of them had
ever actually said anything; it was just that…

In the end, if either one of them was in danger, they would do anything to bring the other one back safely, except when it compromised their principles—such as when Kolya had tried to blackmail Elizabeth by having a Wraith feed on John—or endangered Atlantis, always with the unspoken knowledge and agreement that things would never go beyond what they were now…

"Good," Elizabeth said, standing up from her desk as she looked over at the Jackson 'family', pushing her thoughts to the back of her mind; reflecting on what she might want didn't change the facts of their current situation, and it would be better for all concerned if she ended this before she went too far in her thoughts. "Doctor Jackson, Colonel Carter, Colonel Sheppard, you'd better come with me; we should probably let the IOA know what we're planning before we try and make contact with the Asgard."

"Of course," Daniel said, standing up with a casual smile as he glanced over at Sam. "Let's go."

As the four of them stood up to head for the control room, McKay, Ronon and Teyla could only exchange brief glances with each other at this latest turn of events.

"So," Ronon said at last, looking over at McKay, "in other words, we've got a weapon that can destroy these 'Ascended' suckers so long as they're face-to-face with the person holding it, and Doctor Jackson's plan is the only thing we've got that might work to stop them?"

"Well… yeah," McKay confirmed.

Ronon shrugged.

"Sounds like it should be fun," he said simply. "Just wish that we could do a bit more for that particular round."

As Ronon stood up and walked out of the conference room himself, McKay decided not to bother answering that particular statement; he wasn't entirely sure how he felt about Ronon's only response to the idea of two-thirds of Atlantis's 'main' senior staff—Teyla's role in the command structure was more unofficial than anything else—going up against beings who were the closest thing to gods they'd probably actually encounter being 'interesting'…

And how was it he'd reached a point where the idea of going up against god-like beings didn't immediately make him want to panic?

Despite the news that his best friend and a woman… he regarded as a very close friend (Her being his overall boss did encourage a certain distance no matter how much he liked her as a person)… had just signed up to fight an enemy who operated on a scale that even he could barely imagine, McKay actually found that he was going to regret the chance not to help them out.

He shook his head in amazement at that fact.

I have changed…

The next few days in Atlantis as they waited for a response to their message left Sam, Daniel and Liam with little to really do in their spare time. Although they volunteered their services in helping out the scientists in their respective fields when they could, with the sheer scale of staff already available in Atlantis combined with their own need to spend time with Liam, there wasn't really that much for them to do, although each of them managed to make some at least minor contributions to Atlantis's current long-term projects.
In the end, at the present they were mainly just grateful that the IOA had signed off on their plan on how best to use the Staffs (Privately more than one person was convinced the IOA had agreed to it because of the possibilities they saw in Elizabeth being out of the way- it sometimes seemed to her that the only people who supported her presence any more were the people who'd originally objected to it in the first place-, but right now they had more important matters to worry about). The request for equipment had been sent to the Asgard- along with a detailed explanation of why they needed what they were asking for in the first place-, but that aside there wasn't much left for them to do.

Even missions at the time progressed almost smoothly; the closest they came to a serious crisis was when an off-world team had an unfortunate run-in with what appeared to be a Wraith experiment to enhance their own natural psychic abilities that had been left running even after the Wraith had abandoned it. While there was a brief period of uncertainty after Sheppard's team were stuck off-world with Beckett and a group of marines when the DHD was rendered inoperable by a hallucinating soldier who believed he was on a hostile planet, after the device itself was shut down all the team had needed to do was wait for Daedalus to reach the planet and return them home, which had only taken a couple of days to accomplish; the only true long-term consequences were a few gunshot wounds Teyla and McKay had suffered when they were shot while someone else was hallucinating, and none of the injuries were even close to being dangerous.

In the intervening time, when not occupied with volunteering their services for their respective departments- Daniel in particular found himself giving some of Atlantis's linguists a few refresher courses in Ancient during his time there-, Sam and Daniel continued to explore their new friendships with the Atlantis staff while also giving their new relationship time as well. Sam continued to work with Teyla on developing her sparring abilities- she even shared the occasional practise session with John just to provide each other with an opponent more in keeping with their current skill level; Teyla's experience meant that she easily dominated any fights against her no matter how skilled her opponents were-, as well as going over various examples of Ancient technology in some of the newly-discovered laboratories (Sam's presence had already proved vital in shutting down a machine that generated explosive tumours; if she hadn't taken a closer look at it when she was discovered the lab there could have been some very unpleasant consequences) and continuing her work on attempting to improve the power source of Merlin's device, confident that she was just a short time away from making a breakthrough in her research.

Daniel's work time was generally more relaxing, consisting primarily of him taking the occasional trip to the mainland to learn more about Athsian culture; he found their Ring Ceremony funeral service particularly fascinating, although he appreciated their stick fighting on its own interesting merits as well.

In their leisure time, Sam and Daniel had also managed to find a few hours to share two or three dinners with each other, Liam eating in the mess with Sheppard's team on those occasions, although each of them had made the decision to wait to take things further; even with Liam as a reminder that they'd technically gone there once, preparing for a mission on this scale was not the best time to do... that. They'd made it a point to have lunch with Liam and the Atlantis senior staff whenever they could as well, of course- breakfasts were erratic depending on what time they woke up; they generally allowed Liam to sleep in given the scale of what he'd have to do when the time came to carry out their plan-, but after the events of their first proper night in Atlantis each of them had moved to separate rooms to avoid temptation, with Liam's room located between theirs.

As Sam and Daniel walked into the conference room for another day's briefing- given their high
ranks back at the SGC they tended to attend briefings with the Atlantis senior staff-, they were surprised to find the rest of the room's inhabitants all looking in their direction with a slight smile, Liam sitting between Colonel Sheppard and Teyla with an eager grin.

"Good news?" Sam asked, looking curiously at the assorted members of the Atlantis expedition before them as she and Daniel took their own seats.

"We have an Asgard ship above Atlantis, and they're preparing to send down their representative," Doctor Weir explained, looking over at the three SGC members- Liam was technically a member in everything but legality as far as everyone else was concerned- with a slight smile. "I thought you'd appreciate being here when he showed up; John even went and picked up Liam from his room just to make sure."

Before any of them could ask for further clarification, the familiar bright light of an Asgard transporter filled the conference room, before fading away to reveal the now-familiar thing, pale form of an Asgard standing before them.

"Thor?" Daniel said, looking at the new arrival with a wide grin on his face, a similar smile on Sam's at the sight of their old friend and ally.

"Indeed, Doctor Jackson," Thor said, inclining his head slightly at the archaeologist with an expression that looked as close to a smile as any Asgard had achieved. "When I learned of your presence here and the importance of this task, I requested the opportunity to provide you with what you sought myself; I have long been interested in witnessing the city of the Ancients for myself, and now seemed as appropriate a time as any."

"Well, good to see you here, Commander," Colonel Sheppard said, nodding at the small alien with a slight smile on his face. "We've heard a lot about you."

"As I have heard of you, Colonel Sheppard," Thor replied, nodding slightly at the man in question. "Your control of Ancient technology is indeed impressive; I only regret that there is little time to analyse it in greater detail."

"Yeah, the Ori war and all that, huh?" Colonel Sheppard replied, evidently not offended by the casual manner in which Thor talked about analysing his DNA; evidently he had read the original reports about the Asgard's degenerating genetic condition and was aware of Thor's reasons for expressing an interest. "But hey; feel free to drop by when I get back if you want a look."

"I shall keep that in mind, Colonel Sheppard," Thor confirmed, nodding briefly at Sheppard before he turned his attention to look at the young boy. "You are Liam Carter Jackson, I assume?"

"Yep," Liam replied, nodding with a smile at Thor. "Oh, and before you ask, I'm with Colonel Sheppard; feel free to take a peek at my DNA when we get back."

"Thank you also, Liam Jackson," Thor said, nodding at the young boy before he turned to look at Daniel and Sam. "From all that we have heard of his recent actions, your son is a fine individual, Doctor Jackson, Colonel Carter; I have faith that he shall prove worthy of the powers I hear his heritage grants him."

"Thanks," Sam said, nodding slightly in response to the compliment before she assumed a more serious expression. "So, the devices we requested…?"
"Both of them are currently in my ship waiting for transport," Thor confirmed with a nod. "I have studied what information you provided us about the ships you call 'puddle jumpers', and believe I have determined the best means to connect the various systems together in a manner that will allow them to operate as you wish them to do so; it required some effort to allow for the size of the ship in question, but our scientists are confident that everything shall work."

"Thanks," Daniel said, nodding gratefully at Thor. "We appreciate it."

"You are welcome," Thor said, his expression turning as grim as it was possible for the relatively inexpressive Asgard to look as he stared pointedly at Daniel. "Are you certain that this course of action is wise, Doctor Jackson? The risks are great-"

"No more than they would be if we don't even try this; at least this way we have the element of surprise," Daniel replied, nodding resolutely at his old ally. "Believe me, I get why you're worried, Thor, but if we don't at least try this we're just going to be stuck waiting for some other clue about where the completed Sangraal is; this might be riskier, but it's worth a try."

Thor could only nod at that.

"Your point is valid, even if it is… regrettable that alternatives are not available," he said at last. "We should proceed as soon as possible; time is almost certainly a factor."

Even as his friends- and, in some cases, his family- hurried off to begin work, Daniel couldn't help but smile slightly at Thor's comment.

Time was a factor in his plan…

It just wasn't quite a factor in the traditional sense…
One Giant Leap

To answer any questions in advance, the power device plugged into the jumper's DHD is intended to be based on the device Jack built when he was originally possessed by the Ancient knowledge in "The Fifth Race"; for convenience's sake, they were able to combine some of Liam's Ancient knowledge with information from the Asgard and the Atlantis databanks to create a version of it that would be compatible with the jumpers. It's a bit of a stretch, I know, but I was always planning on that detail- I just couldn't work out a decent opportunity to include it in previous chapters- and it was the only way I could think of to get around the obvious point that the Ori Stargates probably don't have ZPMs installed and rely on power from the Ori to dial inter-galactic wormholes (After all, if it was possible for people to dial the gates for this galaxy from the Ori galaxy with technological assistance, why would Vala have gone to so much effort to blend in during her time there when she could have stolen a ZPM to escape?)

"Right then," John Sheppard said as he sat down in the pilot's chair of the modified puddle jumper, "everyone set in here?"

As he received replies of confirmation from the rest of the jumper's small 'crew'- he still felt slightly uncomfortable about doing something like this without the rest of his team there, but he was confident in the skills of the new bunch anyway-, he took one last glance around the jumper. Doctor Jackson was now sitting in the co-pilot's chair- on the grounds that he was the only other person in the jumper who possessed even a variation of the Ancient gene and was big enough to effectively use everything-, while Elizabeth and Liam sat behind them, Colonel Carter in the main part of the jumper going over all the equipment that the Asgard had connected up to it over the last couple of days.

In general, John had to admit that he was impressed; the Asgard had really spruced the jumper up. As well as the power source that was now plugged in to the DHD up at his end- based on a few plans they'd salvaged from the Atlantis databanks and information provided by the Asgard, it would apparently allowing the ship to dial eight-chevron addresses on its own, although it would apparently only be able to do that a few times before it burnt out-, they'd installed not only the device that Doctor Jackson had requested in the back, but even managed to include that cloaking thing that Colonel Carter had been working on since she'd first arrived in Atlantis, powered by a naquadah generator to spare the jumper's power source.

Admittedly, the stuff they were now carrying around in the back of the jumper did make John a little uncomfortable- he wasn't used to having this much equipment in there; he kept on feeling like he needed to glance back to make sure something hadn't fallen over-, but he was sure he'd get over it; right now, all that mattered was getting the job done.

"We're all set here, Sheppard," Carter said, smiling over at him (The two had, by unspoken agreement, taken to addressing each other by their surnames, since using their titles had seemed pointless due to them being the same rank) as she nodded in confirmation. They were all dressed in their usual offworld uniforms- he'd really been kind of surprised that they had BDUs available in Liam's size-, but also had long robes worn over them in order to better blend in when they arrived
at their destination; they didn't want to attract attention until they were ready for it.

"Strapped in and ready to fly!" Liam added, grinning over at his parents where he sat in the back of the jumper, his mother opposite him with Elizabeth while his father sat beside him.

"What he said," Doctor Jackson said, smiling slightly at his son's enthusiasm even as he kept a tight grip on his staff, waiting for the slightest hint that the time was right to use it.

"Jumper One, this is Atlantis control; you copy?" McKay's voice suddenly said over the radio, breaking their brief moment of relaxation and bringing their attention back to the matter at hand.

"Atlantis control," John said, turning his attention back to the radio before them- he was just grateful that Rodney had agreed to share command with Lorne and Teyla while they were away; he was a great scientist, but the last thing they needed was Rodney McKay in charge of Atlantis on a full-time basis- as he ran one last pre-flight systems check on the jumper, "this is Jumper One; all systems are plugged in and we are ready to go."

"You've got the DHD Remote wired up-?" McKay began

"Yes, Rodney; would you just relax already?" John groaned, shaking his head in slight frustration as he glanced at the device strapped to the side of his chair and connected to the power supply; a small grey-coloured 'rod' with a red button and a green button on it. A recent discovery of Rodney's from an Ancient lab, the 'DHD Remote' basically served to transmit a pre-programmed 'gate address directly into the Stargate, without needing to waste time dialling in specific coordinates or working out what the appropriate symbols were when attempting to establish a cross-galaxy wormhole.

It was still in the experimental stages- it had to be connected up to a jumper if it was going to have the power to do anything in the first place, and the conventional DHD systems were generally more reliable-, but McKay had assured them that the one he'd given John would be suitable for the job they wanted it to do; with their current plan of action, anything they could do to make things go faster at the other end would be welcome.

Their plan of attack might be insanely risky and based on more than one presumption about what the Ori were capable of doing or how their technology- if it could realistically be called that if their theory was correct-, but it was all they had; anything they could do to take even the slightest element of risk out of their attempts to pull this off and come back safely would be a welcome advantage.

"Good luck, Colonel, Elizabeth," a familiar Scottish voice said over the radio, prompting a slight smile from the two members of the Atlantis senior staff.

"Don't worry about it, Carson," John replied, before he terminated the connection and glanced back at Sam. "OK, so Rodney said it's the red button to take us to the Ori, right?"

"Yes, it's red for the danger location and green for the safe one, and no, you didn't leave the radio on; I just guessed where your line of thought was probably going," McKay said, his voice breaking the silence once again as everyone in the jumper turned to look at the radio in surprise. "Now can we just get this over with; why delay a potential suicide mission?"

"Uh… right," Carter said, exchanging an uncertain look with Doctor Jackson- not that John could blame her; McKay was definitely an example of an acquired personal taste- before she turned to look at John. "Ready to go, Sheppard?"
"Check," John said, raising the auto-dialler to point at the Stargate as the jumper lowered through the floor to hover in the middle of the gate room. As the eighth chevron locked and the wormhole before them activated- the power device sparking slightly as it did so, but otherwise appearing to be coping well with the task it had been designed for-, John took a deep breath in preparation for what they were about to do.

"Everyone strap in," he said, looking back at the small group behind him. "We're about to take one giant leap."

With that he turned back to face the wormhole before him, triggered the systems that would activate the jumper's engines, flew through the wormhole…

As soon as they were on the other side of the wormhole, John swiftly engaged the cloaking device, remembering to restrict himself to the usual one rather than the one using that thing Carter had plugged in; according to her, the other one might be more secure, but it would also make it 'difficult' (To say the least, if her description was accurate) for them to actually do anything if they left the jumper after it had been activated.

"OK, folks," he said, turning around to look at his passengers with a casual smile, "we have arrived at Celestis, home of the Ori, the Doci and associated other religious Ascended fanatics; everyone wishing to depart at this stop should do so immediately."

"Right," Doctor Jackson said, nodding at John as he and the others in the rear of the jumper stood up, the door already opening as John brought the jumper to a brief rest.

"Remember, keep Merlin's device active and keep an eye on us at all times," Carter said, turning back to look briefly at John as her son, his father and Elizabeth stepped out of the ship. "The moment we draw attention to ourselves, you'll be our only way of getting out of here alive; you have to stay close without being seen, or you could end up being destroyed and giving us all away."

"Understood," John said, nodding briefly at her before she stepped out of the jumper. As soon as she'd ceased to be in contact with the ship, John triggered the systems that activated Merlin's device, prompting a brief glow of light around him before the jumper returned to normal, with only the obvious slight surprise on Elisabeth's face as she walked in front of him- evidently studying the area where he'd been- an indication that anything had happened.

"Good luck," he said, looking silently out at the woman before him as she turned to walk away, the Jackson 'family'- even if one wasn't a Jackson in name yet- close behind her.

Then, after a few moments of silent waiting, he reactivated the jumper's engines, lifted himself up into the air, and followed his former passengers as they walked on towards the village closest to the Stargate, waiting for the moment when he would be needed.

As Daniel walked into the village, with its buildings and surroundings seemingly better suited to medieval Earth than a society capable of creating the Ori's battlecruisers, he couldn't restrain the slight shudder he felt at the sight of the surroundings he had only experienced before in the body of another; even if he'd survived that particular experience in the end, it still hadn't been the most pleasant visit to a planet he'd ever had…

"Daniel?" Sam asked, leaning over to place a comforting hand on his shoulder, prompting Liam
and Elizabeth to glance back from where they were walking in front of the other two. "Are you OK?"

"What?" Daniel asked, turning to look back at her before he smiled reassuringly "Yeah, I'm fine; just... well, memories, you know."

"Oh," Sam said, shooting a brief glance at Elizabeth and Liam that made it clear that they were to leave it at that; evidently she realised what he was referring to.

"So..." Elizabeth asked, looking uncertainly at the village before them. "What do we do now? Just walk up to someone and tell them that we're from the Milky Way?"

"Actually... I was thinking that we'd start by introducing Liam as the Alteraci and take it from there," Daniel said, looking over at Liam with an apologetic glance.

As Sam turned to look at him with a pointed glare, Daniel raised his hands defensively. "Look, I don't like it any more than you do, but if Liam's reputation in this galaxy is anything like the one Adria's developing in ours, he might just be the only person the Ori would be willing to have a direct audience with; if we can talk to the right person about his presence, we can claim that Liam's here to discuss terms with the Ori regarding our willingness to accept Origin back in our galaxy, and then..."

He trailed off as he spoke, clearly uncomfortable with the plan even as he voiced it, but Elizabeth was already nodding in agreement.

"It's probably our best chance, when you get down to it," she said, even as her expression made it clear she didn't like the idea of using Liam like that any more than Daniel did. "It's unlikely that the Priors- or whoever's in charge here- will allow just anyone automatic access to the Ori; telling them who Liam is seems like our best chance."

After a moment's contemplative silence, Sam sighed.

"All right..." she said, nodding in resignation as she turned to look at Daniel. "Any ideas where we find the Priors?"

"The village centre seems like the best location; if we can't find a Prior, we can at least make contact with the Administrator and have him pass our presence along," Daniel said, before he turned back to look ahead of himself, strengthening his resolve in preparation for what was to come as they continued to walk towards the town centre.

As they arrived there, however, Daniel couldn't stop a slightly relieved smile at the sight before them; not only was the square currently occupied by a small group of people gathered around something that Daniel couldn't quite make out, but there was even a Prior overseeing their activities.

As they walked up to the Prior, Daniel briefly noted that they were overseeing the construction of an ara- almost identical to the one that Vala had been burned to death on during his first visit-, but pushed that thought aside; reflecting on the horrors of the past wouldn't accomplish anything right now, any more than worry about who this ara was 'scheduled' to be used by.

Right now, the best chance anyone had of escaping death by Ori was if their current plan worked, and even then it might merely buy them more time rather than actually saving anyone...
As the Prior turned to look at them, clearly curious as to why his followers would interrupt at this time, Daniel took a deep breath to prepare for what he was about to say, only for Liam to step forward before he could say a word, his son raising his hands to generate two small glowing balls of energy as he stared at the Prior.

"I am the Alteraci," he said, his tone reflecting a maturity that more suited the Ancient knowledge and wisdom that dwelt within his subconscious rather than the boy he had been earlier, ignoring the people who withdrew from the town centre as they stared at him in shock. "I come to address the Ori on behalf of my father's kin and the people of the galaxy known to the natives as the Milky Way."

For a moment, the Prior simply stared in silence at the young boy before him, an expression on his face that was the closest thing to incredulity Daniel had ever seen on the face of a fully-powered Prior- the confrontation with that Prior where they'd tested their 'anti-Prior weapon' was the only other occasion, and given that the Prior had been powerless discomfort was to be expected-, before he nodded in understanding.

"Very well," he said simply, a brief flicker of loathing crossing his face as he looked at Liam before he turned around. "Walk with me, and I shall take you to the Ori."
Assault on the Ori

As the teleportation rings deposited them on the outskirts of the plains of Celestis, Daniel glanced over briefly at Elizabeth just in time to see her double-check something inside her pocket; evidently she was making sure that the tracer they'd brought to allow John to keep track of their location was still functioning.

Allowing the Prior to take them through the rings was risky, of course, but Daniel and Sheppard had talked over it and both agreed that the risk was worth it. Given how long it took for Daniel to be taken to meet the Doci even after he made his request during his first visit, coupled with how long it had taken to reach Celestis after the initial arrival there, Sheppard was confident that the jumpers would be able to reach Celestis in time to carry out his role in their plan no matter how far away the city was from the gate.

No matter how significant their presence might be, Daniel doubted that they would be taken directly to the Doci- the Doci’s role as an apparent combination of religious figurehead and the closest thing the Ori had to a political leader probably meant he was rather busy, particularly if how long Daniel had been forced to wait during his first ‘visit’ was any indication of usual proceedings-, which should increase John's opportunity to reach them…

In the end, however, as the Prior began to lead them towards the distant shining form of Celestis, the rest of their group slowly walking through the shallow water that filled the plains around the so-called 'city of the gods', all Daniel and his group could do was keep their fingers crossed and hope for the best.

As their small group were shown into a room that matched Daniel's description of the conference room that he and Vala had been taken to on their first visit- complete with the paintings on the stone walls and the finely-carved wooden furniture in the middle-, Sam was already wishing that they had come up with a better plan; this current one relied on far too much waiting for her comfort.

Even with the knowledge that the power of the Ori wasn't as unlimited as they'd like to believe it was- if the Ori were capable of reading minds they would have probably known about Daniel and Vala's presence in this galaxy as soon as they arrived-, their plan essentially depended on the Ori behaving as they had guessed they'd behave.

If the Ori acted too quickly, or if they decided to attack them before Sheppard could get into position-

No.

Sam couldn't consider that; they'd already gone over every possible response the Ori might have to their presence, and this was the best option available to them.

They were here, and they had a plan; it had to work.

"W… wait here," the Prior said, looking slightly uncomfortably at Liam (Sam wondered how she should feel about the implications of being the mother to the Ori Antichrist, but decided to push that aside; if Vala could handle being Adria's mother after what that woman had done in the Milky Way galaxy, Sam could certainly cope with taking Vala's role from the perspective of the Ori). "I
"Fine," Liam said, nodding simply at the Prior. "We'll see you then."

With that, the Prior turned around and left the room, leaving the small team alone as they studied their surroundings while exchanging anxious glances with each other.

"So," Elizabeth said at last, turning to look at Daniel with a raised eyebrow, "how does the service compare to last time?"

"Well..." Daniel said, pausing slightly to take one last check-over of the room around him- the same elaborate tapestries and fine furniture, but the bowl that had contained fruit on his previous visit was now empty, although the Book of Origin remained- before he turned back to look at Elizabeth. "To be honest, it was better last time; they provided us with something to eat while we waited."

"Well, we'll just have to get by, I suppose," Sam said, as she sat down in a chair before glancing over at Elizabeth. "The locator beacon's still transmitting, right?"

Elizabeth glanced briefly at a pocket inside her robe before looking back at the others, nodding in confirmation. "Everything's fine at that end; all we can do now is wait and buy time for John to get here."

"Given what you know about the achievable speed of the jumpers, how long do we have?" Sam asked.

"Assuming that John goes into orbit to get here, the jumper could probably reach us in around an hour in a worst-case scenario, but I wouldn't like to swear to it; I never actually figured out the specific speeds they're capable of reaching when they're pushed to it," Elizabeth said, looking slightly apologetically at the others.

"Don't worry about it," Sam said, nodding reassuringly at Elizabeth. "If we assume that it takes John the better part of an hour to traverse a planet while in orbit- coupled with the fact that we're definitely still in the same hemisphere as where we arrived given that it's still sunny outside-, we shouldn't have too long to wait until he gets here so long as he remembers to wait until we send him the signal."

"He'll do it," Elizabeth confirmed, nodding at the other colonel in the group. "If I've learned anything about John Sheppard these last few years, it's that the one thing he can't do is fail."

For a short while the group merely sat in the room and waited, conversation quickly shifting to safer topics than had originally been discussed- recent events back on Earth, some of the latest surprises faced in the Pegasus Galaxy (All the while avoiding reference to where the events took place; if the Ori or any of their servants happened to overhear that there was another galaxy out there inhabited by humans things would just get more difficult), before the door opened and the Prior returned, once again looking at Liam with a more than slight discomfort visible in his stance.

"The Doci will address you now," he said, his tone direct and abrupt as though he would rather be anywhere but here. "The others must-"

"No," Liam said, folding his arms as he glared up at the Prior. "Where I go, they go."
For a moment the Prior looked like he was about to object, but then he looked Liam directly in the eyes and clearly decided that his planned strategy would be inadvisable.

"Very well," he said at last, nodding slightly at Liam as he looked at the rest of the small group around them. "You shall... all... come with me to witness the Doci."

"Good," Daniel said, tightening his grip on his staff as he stood up, preparing for the moment when they would have to use the staffs for the purpose that they had been created for all those millennia ago.

The idea of becoming essentially an assassin almost sickened him, but he knew that none of them had any choice; if he didn't do this, their entire plan would fall apart before it could get beyond the beginning stages, and they had not gone to all the effort of travelling to the Ori galaxy to quit now...

After a long walk through the corridors of the city- Daniel constantly tightening his grip on the staff every time he saw another Prior coming toward them; he noted that Elizabeth Weir was keeping an equally tight grip on her own staff, similar thoughts to his own evidently dominating her mind-, their small group finally came to the doors of the chamber where Daniel had first met the Doci on his first visit to this galaxy. As the Prior bowed briefly at them before stepping back- evidently this was one occasion where the Doci wished to address them alone-, Liam, continuing his current role as the group's 'speaker', walked up to the door before him and opened it.

As soon as they entered the room, Daniel's eyes immediately fell on the Doci, standing in the middle of the still-near-empty room with the ankh symbol against one wall and the 'fence' 'concealing' the Flames of Enlightenment on another side, the Doci looking at Liam with a gaze that contained a strange mixture of reverence and fear.

"You are the Alteraci?" he asked, looking at Liam in a manner that could have expressed reverence or fear, given his relatively blank expression.

"I am," Liam confirmed, nodding at the Doci as he folded his arms, the better to give a more authoritative impression as he stared at the man before him. "And I am here to address the Ori on the behalf of the people of my home galaxy."

"That is... good," the Doci said, apparently regaining some of his old confidence as he continued. "Our quest to bring enlightenment to your galaxy is progressing well, but if you should-

"I feel you misunderstood my intentions," Liam interjected, glaring at the Doci as he spoke. "I came here to address the Ori; you, for all your loyalty and faith, are not the Ori."

"I speak with their wisdom-" the Doci began, looking slightly indignantly at Liam.

"Look," Liam said, rolling his eyes as he looked at the Doci (Daniel was seriously starting to question the wisdom of their idea to have Liam take the 'lead' in the negotiations; so far he was definitely making a dramatic impression but he also seemed to have chosen a poor time to allow his 'child' side to take control), "I get that you're the main 'spokesperson' for the Ori these days, but my fathers didn't send me here to talk to the middleman; I'm here to address the Ori themselves on behalf of the people of my galaxy, and you can either get them in here or get lost, OK?"

Daniel made a mental note to give Liam a few pointers on being diplomatic when they got back-
he appreciated that Liam was probably being more forceful than he would have been under normal circumstances in order to make his point more effectively, but he had to make sure Liam understood that he couldn't do this kind of thing every time he wanted to get his way-, but it evidently paid off as the Doci nodded slightly at the young boy.

"Very well," the leader of the Ori faith said, turning to walk towards the iron fence behind him, opening the gate and stepping forward, standing almost directly in front of the flames as he spread his arms in the manner Daniel remembered all too vividly from his first visit. As they watched, the flames before the Doci suddenly intensified, the light going from the deep orange to an almost blinding whiteness, strings of flame bursting from the 'wall' before converging on the Doci.

As the Doci turned, his eyes blazing with the flaming glow that signified the presence of the Ori in his body, Sam and Elizabeth couldn't help but start slightly at the sight before them; even after hearing Daniel's description, actually seeing the Doci possessed by the Ori was still somewhat intimidating.

"We are here, Alteraci," the Doci/Ori said, his tone now sounding almost smug as he/they looked at the young boy before him/them (Sam wasn't sure if she should consider the Doci currently one being or several, given that he was currently essentially the 'vessel' for the Ori). "It is good to see that you have chosen to forsake the evil of your fathers-"

"No," Liam said simply.

Despite the severity of the situation they now found themselves facing, Daniel couldn't help but allow himself a slight smile at the sight of the Ori-possessed-Doci actually looking flustered by Liam's words; after he'd been practically ignored by the Ascended of his galaxy during his time in that 'celestial diner' when he'd nearly Ascended for the second time, it really felt good to know that a 'lower' being- even if Liam was probably more in between the Ascended and humans than anyone else in existence- could give an Ascended that kind of shock.

"We shall not give in to the word of the Ori," Liam stated, staring in increased resolution at the Doci/Ori. "I have come here not to offer our surrender, but to offer you a choice; depart from our galaxy now, and we shall spare you. Persist in your attempt at conquest… and we shall take action."

"And these people with you stand with you in this claim?" the Doci/Ori asked, indicating the others with a brief wave of his hand. "Who are they, that they would defy our majesty alongside you?"

"I am Daniel Jackson," Daniel said as he stepped forward, glaring at the Doci as he spoke, refusing to show the fear he felt at the knowledge of what the beings before him could be capable of doing to him if they chose to do so (Their current actions were more of a performance than anything else, but Daniel felt that it was the best way to provoke the Ori into doing what they wanted them to do). "I am the father of the Alteraci, the one who walked among those you call the Deceiving Ones… and I shall not submit to Origin."

"I am Samantha Carter," Sam said, stepping forward to stand beside him, mimicking Daniel's gaze as she stared at the Doci. "I am the mother of the Alteraci, the mortal who so loved one of the 'Deceiving Ones' that I was willing to bear his child… and I shall not submit to Origin."

"I am Elizabeth Weir," Elizabeth said, moving forward herself to glare at the possessed Doci, taking a brief moment to decide on her appropriate title before continuing. "I am… the guardian of
"You have a choice," Daniel said, tightening his grip on the staff in preparation for what he might have to do. "Withdraw your forces from our galaxy and end your demands for worship from our people now, or prepare to be destroyed."

The Doci/Ori simply stared silently at Daniel for a moment after that statement, before it opened its mouth to speak again.

"Your defiance comes from your ignorance," he/they said, their expression continuing to be neutral even as a hint of malice crept into their tone. "You must be enlightened."

"If we're going to achieve 'enlightenment', we'd prefer to find it on our own," Elizabeth said, her own grip on the staff tightening as she looked at the Doci/Ori. "I will repeat the Alteraci's demands; either you recall your forces from our galaxy, or we will destroy you."

As the Doci/Ori glared at the small group before him/them, his/their expression still giving no indication of their feelings about the group's demands, Daniel and Elizabeth tightened their grips on their staffs in preparation for whatever was about to take place...

Then, as the Doci/Ori glared at them with increasingly glowing eyes, flames suddenly emerged- it was too gradual to be described as an eruption- from his body and began to advance towards the group standing before him.

"Now!" Daniel yelled, he and Elizabeth automatically lowering their staffs to fire at the flaming form of what could only be an Ori. As soon as the energy from the staffs had made contact with the Ori, there was a sudden... intensity in the air- as though something without vocal chords had just screamed at them- and then a naked human figure was lying on the ground, his skin pale and his body shaking as he looked up at them, rage and anger on his face even as Sam drew her P-90 from under her robes and shot the man once in the head.

Even as the former Ori fell to the ground, the bullet having struck him practically right between the eyes, Daniel knew that their strategy repulsed Sam as much as any of them- she was a soldier; killing the enemy in a fight was one thing, but killing them when they were disorientated and incapable of effectively fighting back was another-, but it was the only way they could provoke the Ori to do what they wanted.

Based on Daniel's own recollection of his forced decension after Abydos, when it was done against the individual's will- unlike when he'd descended after Oma had departed to clash with Anubis, when he'd consciously chosen to do so- it left them temporarily confused and disorientated; Daniel had surmised- apparently correctly- that using the Staff against the Ori would leave them confused long enough for Sam to eliminate them before they could collect their wits enough to Ascend or properly access their abilities.

Staring incredulously at the sight before him, the Doci raised one hand as though about to take action, only for Liam to thrust one hand rapidly forward, sending the Doci stumbling backwards into the metal fence before the Flames that 'contained' the Ori, subsequently falling to the ground unconscious (Daniel couldn't help but be grateful Liam hadn't thrown the Doci into the Flames themselves; it was one thing having to kill people in front of his son, but having Liam be responsible for a death himself was something Daniel did not want his son to have to deal with).

Apparently further incensed by the assault on their chosen agent, the Ori renewed their assault on...
the group, two more flaming Ascended emerging from the Flames only to be struck down with the Staffs' blasts. As more Ori began to emerge, Liam raised his hands to generate a large 'shield' between them and the Ori, his face furrowed and teeth clenched in concentration as bursts of flame from the Ori struck the shield. It wouldn't stand up to a direct assault for long- Daniel wasn't kidding himself that Liam was anything like a match for a fully-Ascended being-, but it was enough to buy them some time.

"Elizabeth-" Daniel began, his thoughts reminding him on the necessary steps for the next stage of their plan.

"The signal's already been sent; John should be here any moment!" Elizabeth replied, raising her Staff to fire at another nearby Ori that had begun its own assault on Liam's hastily-erected shield, sending the being falling to the ground in human form before Sam fired once again. "Just hold on…!"

As a burst of flame came close to his face, Daniel only just managed to duck to the side and fire another blast from his Staff at the Ori that had just managed to punch a hole in the shield. Liam instantly strengthened the barrier to prevent any further attempts at assault from that area.

Come on… Daniel thought, turning the Staff to fire at another Ori- there still weren't that many, but the Ori's numbers were definitely increasing in strength and he had no way of knowing how much longer the staff's power source would last- as he tried to calculate how much longer they'd have to hold out.

Just as the Ori were starting to press against the shield in far greater numbers- the Flames seemed to have extended out of the chamber where they were usually contained, although Liam's wall was halting their advance-, there was a sudden explosion in one wall, throwing up dust and rocks that were only halted from making contact with them by Liam's shield. As the dust faded, the familiar sight of a puddle jumper decloaking appeared in the air before them, the ship already rotating around so that it could enter the chamber rear-first, the door opening as John Sheppard looked over his shoulder at his allies.

"Come on!" he yelled, waving a hand impatiently. "Move it!"

As soon as Daniel joined Sam and Elizabeth in hurrying into the jumper- Liam waiting at the back to keep his shield erected until the last minute before he turned around to hurry after his parents-, Daniel could only pray as he turned back around to face their enemies; if the Ori didn't react like they'd expected…

As a powerful burst of flame entered the puddle-jumper's still-open door to practically engulf the rear end- briefly jolting the ship forward from the force of their entry and nearly knocking the inhabitants off-balance-, the four members of the 'strike team' gathered around the door leading to the control area, Daniel allowed himself a brief smile.

Jackpot.

As soon as the Ori 'entered' the puddle jumper, John didn't hesitate; the jumper now fixed in 'hover mode', he reached over- his chest currently still pressed against the console after the jolt caused by the Ori's 'entrance'- and practically slammed his hands on to the controls for Merlin's device and the time dilation device the Asgard had installed in the jumper, shifting the ship out of phase with everything around it even as the Ori already inside the jumper- along with all of John's current
teammates froze in position in the rear of the ship.

Glancing back at the sight behind him- Elizabeth and Daniel clutching their staffs as they aimed them at the 'approaching' Ori, Liam's hands raised in preparation to generate another shield as Sam defiantly clutched at her P-90, John allowed himself a relieved smile.

Just like Doctor Jackson had predicted would happen, the Ori had been so enraged at the earlier attacks against them that they hadn't bothered to attack the jumper, but had instead charged inside it to assault those who had killed some of their number personally. Thanks to the time dilation device provided by the Asgard, the Ori currently inside the jumper were temporarily frozen in a single moment in time, while the phase-shifting device they'd salvaged from Merlin's work was concealing the jumper from the other Oris' attempts to attack them.

*Well, that's the tricky bit done*, John reflected, as he activated the controls to send the jumper hurtling towards the upper atmosphere and the quickest route back to the Stargate. *Now comes the difficult part…*

If he ended up going to two different galaxies in less than a day for no reason, he was *really* going to have words with somebody when he got back…

And that was assuming that the time dilation device would hold for as long as they hoped it would; the Ori's energy might have been frozen in time at the moment, but that didn't mean it was going to stay that way for long…

As he drew up to the Stargate- which actually looked rather like the Stargates back in Pegasus, save for the fact that it seemed to have a slight orange 'tint' as opposed to the blue of the Pegasus 'gates'-, John reached over for the automatic dialling device, only to swear when his fingers came in contact with cracked plastic; when he'd hit the control console after that last blast, he must have cracked the dialler, and what he could see of the circuitry didn't look like it would be easy to put back together in the time frame available (He wasn't exactly comfortable trusting a time dilation device to hold back a bunch of Ascended beings for any longer than was *absolutely* necessary).

In other words, the only way they were going to get out of here was for him to dial the 'gate manually.

John didn't hesitate; quickly going over the necessary chevrons to dial Earth in his mind- just because he'd thought he wouldn't need them didn't mean he hadn't covered them- he quickly deactivated the phase shifting device while leaving the cloak intact and began to rapidly enter the chevrons into the jumper's DHD.

Just as he was about to hit the second chevron, however, he paused, sensing something… not *quite* right about the one he was about to hit… before reaching over to touch another one, subsequently moving his hand to engage another set of chevrons that definitely did *not* dial to Earth, even if he was fairly sure- based on what he knew of eight-chevron addresses- that it would still take him to the Milky Way galaxy. For a moment he wondered if this was some Ori stunt- had they managed to infiltrate his mind even if they couldn't find the jumper directly?- but shook that thought off; not only was it *far* from healthy to start getting that paranoid, but he was still fully capable of deciding what switches he did or didn't want to do right now.

He just… *felt* that it was better to do things this way rather than what he'd been planning originally; if it was the Ori, wouldn't they be trying to *force* him to go where they wanted?
As the last chevron engaged and the wormhole activated in front of him, John pushed those thoughts aside, deactivated the cloak, and sent the jumper hurtling through the Stargate, just before the sudden 'wall' of fire that suddenly appeared behind him could engulf the now-visible jumper (Evidently the Ori couldn't 'see' the cloaked jumper any more than normal beings could, although that could have just been because the thing hadn't been cloaked that long rather than any intrinsic ability on its part)…
Banishing the Ori

As soon as he emerged on the new planet the Stargate had taken him to- it actually seemed like a pleasant enough place; a simple wooded area with trees and grass all around them-, John only took a moment to make sure that nobody else was round them- if this plan didn't work at least they'd be the only ones who suffered rather than any random innocents in the wrong place at the wrong time- before he deactivated the time dilation device.

Even as he turned around, the Ori were already moving once again, advancing with ever-increasing speed towards the small group in the jumper behind them, only to suddenly halt mid-motion as though something had grabbed them, flames that had so recently been blazing towards his current allies suddenly turning away from them.

No… a voice that was somehow many voices 'spoke' without being actually heard by any of the people present. *This cannot happen… we are Ori… we are the rightful rulers of those beneath us… we are-*

"You are in our world now," another voice said, this one sounding far closer- although precisely how it could sound closer when nobody else was even visible was something John wasn't sure he'd ever quite understand- and speaking on its own. "At this time… in this place… should you seek a test of strength… we are your masters here."

As John stared at the brilliant sight before him in awe- the light somehow intense enough to be incredible while dim enough to allow him to stare without squinting-, a young man with tanned skin dressed in loose brown robes suddenly appeared before them in a blaze of white light, a resolute expression on his young face as he stared at the flaming forms of the Ori before him.

"What the…?" Doctor Jackson said, turning to look at the new arrival only for his eyes to widen in shock as he took him in properly for the first time. "Skaara?"

Looking over at Doctor Jackson, the new arrival smiled briefly at him.

"Hello, Dan'iel," he said, before he returned his attention to the Ori before him with an apologetic grimace. "We will… talk later; this… is very difficult… right now…"

John briefly thought about asking what was difficult, but recognised that he had a fairly good idea of the answer anyway and kept his mouth shut; if this 'Skaara' guy was what he seemed to be, the last thing he wanted was to give him a reason to lose focus.

As the rest of the humans in the jumper could only watch what was taking place before them, Skaara clenched his teeth and thrust both hands forward- for a moment John got the distinct impression of several people standing around Skaara despite the lack of space for them to be present-, seemingly extinguishing the Ori's flames while sending the Ori themselves- John vaguely caught a brief glimpse of some kind of small ball of 'stuff' in the middle of the air where the flames had been previously, but couldn't be sure what it was- hurtling backwards, seemingly passing through the rear wall of the puddle jumper and vanishing from view.

As soon as the Ori had left the jumper, Skaara lowered his arms, resting them against his legs as he gasped for oxygen, evidently fatigued by what he had done (John briefly wondered how an Ascended- since that was evidently what this guy was- could actually *get* tired without a body, but decided that was an issue to worry about later).
"Skaara?" Carter asked, hurrying over to crouch down beside the young man as he stood in the middle of the jumper's 'passenger' area, bent double and gasping for air. "Are... are you all right?"

"I am... well, Sam'antha," Skaara replied, smiling briefly at her before looking over at Doctor Jackson. "It is... good... to see you... my brother."

"Same here, Skaara," Daniel replied, nodding back at the other man with a slight smile. "I have to admit, I... well, I wasn't expecting you."

"It was felt that it would be... better... for you to be met... by one who knows you," Skaara replied, already starting to stand up slightly straighter as he spoke. "The others recognise... that you have helped them... but they are angry... that you forced them... to this; it was felt that I... was best qualified... to see things your way."

"So... it worked?" Elizabeth asked, looking uncertainly at Skaara. "I mean, did you just force those Ori out of this galaxy, or...?"

"All traces of the Ori's power have been stopped for the moment," Skaara replied, nodding briefly at the leader of the Atlantis expedition. "Even the energy they provided to initially start their ships no longer functions; it will return in time, with the aid of the Priors- their natural powers will allow them to restore the ships eventually-, but, for the moment, the Ori's forces have lost their power within this galaxy."

John sighed in relief.

"Thank you..." he breathed, slumping down in his chair with a relieved grin as he looked back over at Skaara. "After the way things have been lately, we really needed that kind of help..."

"We are... aware of that, Jo'hn," Skaara replied, nodding briefly at Atlantis's military commander. "Those among us who still follow Oma's teachings are aware of what you have endured at the hands of the Ori's followers, but the rules of the Others have prevented us from taking action until now; your plan to... provoke us into action was just the cue we have been awaiting for some while."

"On that topic..." Daniel added, looking uncertainly at the new arrival. "Should we be worried about any future visits from the Ancients...?"

"Do not worry, Dan'iel," Skaara said, nodding reassuringly at the archaeologist. "Your strategy was... unusual... but even the most stubborn of us recognise that what has taken place here will, in the end, be of at least some benefit to us; they have all... if not given their consent... assured us that your actions will meet with no reprisal. In the end, the Ori chose to assault you directly; the nature of their arrival here does not change the fact that they used their powers in this galaxy against lower beings; even the most adherent followers of the Others' rules cannot ignore such an action."

"Really?" Elizabeth asked, looking slightly uncertainly at Skaara. "That seems like a bit of a... well, a weak excuse for breaking the rules..."

"Sometimes all that is required to start an avalanche is one pebble creating enough dissent in the structure," Skaara replied.

"You're quoting Aunt Oma now?" Liam asked, rolling his eyes as he looked at Skaara, although the teasing grin on his face detracted from the content of his words. "I had enough trouble understanding her when she did that; please don't start it yourself, Uncle Kar..."
"Hold on; 'Uncle Kar'?" John repeated, looking at Skaara in surprise, only registering that Doctor Jackson had done the same thing.

"When I first met him, he pronounced my name incorrectly, and it became his… 'nick-name', I believe is the term?… for me ever since," Skaara explained, smiling briefly at Liam before he looked back to Doctor Jackson. "He is your son, Dan'iel; did you believe I would not visit him?"

"Uh… sorry to be rude, but what's everyone here talking about?" John cut in, raising a hand as he looked slightly uncomfortably at the others in the jumper. "I mean, I get that this guy's an Ancient, but how do you guys know him?"

"Well…" Daniel began, before Skaara held up a hand to cut him off.

"I am not an… Ancient… in the way you believe, Jo'hn Shep'pard," the new arrival explained, looking at John with an understanding yet apologetic smile at the man's evident confusion. "I was born on the planet Abydos, and met Dan'iel and O'Neill when they first came through the Chaapa'ai from Earth, around ten years ago. After they killed Ra, who had once ruled our planet, Dan'iel remained with us for a year as the husband to my sister, Sha're, until she and I were taken by the evil ones to serve as hosts."

"The… you mean the Goa'uld, right?" John asked, hoping that didn't sound as rude as it did to him; it wasn't that he didn't recognise how dangerous the Goa'uld had been, but given that his only encounter with them had been during that whole mess with the Trust trying to blow the city up- and he'd only known one of them was actually present at the last minute-, he tended not to think about them that much.

"Yes," Skaara replied, nodding in confirmation at the other man. "Although my sister was eventually slain when the evil one within her threatened Dan'iel's life and there was no other way to save him, I was saved from the one who infested me by the Tollan, and then returned to Abydos until I and my people were Ascended by Oma Desala to save us from death at the hands of Anubis."

"Oh yeah, I remember…" John said, nodding briefly as he remembered the file in question. After his original return to Earth after the Siege he'd started going over everything the SGC had on ascension following his meeting with Chaya, and the bits with Anubis had been some of his 'favourites'; the guy might have been a psycho, but what he'd learned about ascension from Doctor Jackson's reports had been rather interesting. "So… you're one of Oma Desala's… 'group' of Ascended?"

"Precisely," Skaara replied, nodding at John with a brief smile before he turned back to Daniel. "I must go now; there is only so much time I will be permitted to remain here before the Others take objection."

"But-" Daniel began, only for Skaara to smile briefly at Daniel before vanishing in bright light, leaving the five of them looking at each other uncertainly for a moment before Daniel's eyes turned to the front of the jumper.

"Hold on a minute…" the archaeologist said, confusion practically written all over his face as he turned his eyes away from the jumper's cockpit to look at John. "Why didn't you go back to Earth?"

"What?" Sam asked, turning to look at the window herself before turning to stare at John in confusion. "Actually, that's a good question; what are we doing here?"

"Uh…" John said, looking uncertainly at the group of people in front of him before he finally
shrugged uncertainly. "Actually, I don't really know; I just… felt like I should enter some different chevrons to what we were going to use- the automatic dialler was damaged and I had to do it pretty much on automatic-, and…"

He shrugged. "Well, here we are."

"Hold on; you just… entered a gate address at random?" Sam said, looking incredulously at him. "Do you even realise that the odds of that working-?"

"It wasn't at random," John interjected, pausing for a moment as Sam looked back at him- they might be officially the same rank, but John evidently recognised Sam's superiority over him for more reasons than just her having been promoted first-, before he sighed and continued. "I… look, I know it sounds crazy, but it's like… something told me what to enter."

Noting their increasingly uncertain looks, John felt compelled to elaborate. "It wasn't like anything made me enter these chevrons; it just… felt right to use them, that's all."

"Wait a minute…" Sam muttered, reaching into the bag containing their equipment- even with the knowledge that they were just going to confront the Ori and then head back mission regulations required them to go in fully prepared for any eventuality-, pulling out her laptop and booting it up. "Maybe the address will tell us something… John, can you remember which chevrons you dialled to get here?"

"Uh… sure," John said, nodding uncertainly at her as he turned back to indicate the jumper's DHD. "Well… I was more operating on… instinct… than anything- as I said, I'm not entirely sure where these things came from-, but I keyed in this… this… this…"

As he indicated the chevrons he'd so recently made contact with, Sam merely nodded as she entered them into her laptop before activating the program that would translate the symbols on the Pegasus-style DHD into symbols used in the Milky Way galaxy (That was the interesting thing about the jumper DHDs, really; they were cross-compatible with each other so long as you knew what symbols represented what constellations).

After a few moments of waiting, the computer displayed a short file about the address that had just been entered into it, prompting Sam to shake her head as she looked up at John.

"Nothing," Sam said, shaking her head as she looked at the screen. "The address matches one of the Stargate addresses General O'Neill entered after our first encounter with an Ancient repository, but there's nothing else about it; we haven't even visited this planet yet, never mind having any kind of information about what kind of people live on it."

"Hold on…" Daniel put in, leaning over Sam's shoulder to look uncertainly at the chevrons displayed at the top of the file. "It might just be a coincidence, but… you remember those four addresses I told you about on the way to Atlantis?"

"You mean the ones that Morgan gave us?" Sam asked, looking curiously back at the archaeologist.

"Yeah…" Daniel said, nodding uncertainly as he studied the address on the screen before him. "As I said, it's probably nothing, but… each of those addresses had at least one chevron that also features in this address."

"Really?" Sam said, looking at Daniel in surprise as she pulled up the addresses of the planets in question from the copy of the Ancient database she kept stored on the laptop, quickly seeing that
Daniel was right; at least one chevron from the four addresses that Morgan had given them was part of the address that John had just dialled.

"I'm not claiming to be an expert on the 'gate system itself, but that doesn't strike me as something that could happen by accident," Elizabeth put in, walking around to stand behind Sam and Daniel as she studied the information on the screen before them, John and Liam joining them. "There has to be something we're missing here… apart from the source, do these addresses have anything in common?"

"Well, when I entered them into a star map, I noticed that the four planets together formed a perfect pyramid in relation to each other," Daniel added, looking over at Sam as he reached past her to bring up the star map he'd shown her a couple of weeks ago (It sometimes amazed him how much could change in such a short amount of time; how had his life reached a point where he could discover he had a son who was technically as close to being partly a god as anyone could be, travel to three different galaxies and encounter an alternate universe in just over a month?). "At the time I guessed that they might be part of a puzzle, but I just couldn't figure out where to go from there…"

"Well…" John said, his tone uncertain- he wasn't exactly used to providing the science info in a situation- even as he nodded slightly, the ever-increasing gleam in his eyes suggesting that he was fine-tuning the current theory even as he spoke, "it's a bit of a long shot, I know, but… is it possible that we're looking at some kind of three-in-one puzzle? You know, the three addresses on their own don't make anything, but when you stick them together you get the location that you're looking for…?"

As Daniel, Sam, Liam and Elizabeth looked at him, John shrugged slightly. "Well, it's possible, right?"

"Maybe…” Sam said, nodding reflectively as she began to tap away at the laptop once again. "Just give me a moment…if I can whip up a program that cross-references the addresses in the database with those of Castiana, Sahal and Vagonbrei to look for planetary designations with all those symbols…"

For a moment the small jumper crew simply sat and stared at the laptop- currently displaying a counter that rapidly 'spun' through possible chevrons in a visual display that reminded those looking at it of a slot machine-, none of them certain what kind of results they were hoping would result from this latest theory, until the computer finally ended its search, displaying the six 'Milky Way' chevrons that corresponded to the 'Pegasus' chevrons John had entered into the jumper's DHD, accompanied by a flashing message that confirmed that it was the only gate address that fit the specified parameters.

"Huh," John said, his eyes widening slightly in surprise as he glanced over at Sam. "That was unexpected."

"To say the least…” Sam said, nodding in agreement before she looked over at Daniel. "Do you realise what this means? If this planet is where Morgan was trying to guide us…?"

"Than this could be where Merlin hid the Sangraal," Daniel finished, looking grimly at the people around him as the implications sank in.

With the Ori having literally just been forced out of this galaxy, there was probably never going to be a better time for them to acquire what could be the only weapon in existence that could defeat them than there was right now.

"But… look, I freely acknowledge that I don't know as much about the Ori as I could, but didn't we..."
just force them out of this galaxy?" Elizabeth asked, looking uncertainly at Daniel. "Do we really need to find the Sangraal now?"

"We drove them out for the moment, but we can't be certain how long that will actually stop the Ori," Daniel replied. "We may have provoked the Ascended into taking action this time, but the Ori will eventually recuperate from what we did to them, and if they can re-establish a Supergate there's no guarantee we'll get lucky enough to succeed in attempting a repeat performance of our last attempt with that Wraith ship and the black hole."

For a moment Daniel paused, evidently reluctant to say what he was about to say, but clearly knowing that it had to be said. "The only way the Ori are ever going to definitely not try and come back to attack us again… is if we can find the Sangraal."

For a moment, as Sam looked at Daniel, the pained expression on his face reminded her of how he'd looked when he was sent to that Goa'uld summit to release the symbiote poison against the System Lords; the look of a man who didn't like what he had suggested, but at the same time knew was the only way to save anyone.

If they could find the Sangraal and end the threat of the Ori for good…

They had a chance to recover a weapon that they might not have found until it was too late to be of any use under other circumstances; if they had a chance to recover the Sangraal now, they had to take it.

"We'd better contact Stargate Command," Elizabeth said at last, looking around at the rest of the small crew. "If this is the location of the Sangraal, we need to let them know about it in case… anything goes wrong."

Nodding in confirmation, John returned to the jumper's controls and turned the ship around so that it was facing the Stargate, subsequently entering the chevrons for Earth into the DHD; if this was the planet they thought it was, than the sooner the SGC knew about it the better.
"You're telling us that, through total coincidence, you've discovered the planet containing Merlin's weapon?" General Landry's voice said sceptically through the radio link that had been established between Earth and the puddle jumper.

"Well, it's a bit more complicated than that, General," Daniel said, looking momentarily uncomfortable with what he was about to say before he continued. "You see, I don't think these coordinates just 'came' to Colonel Sheppard; I think that something gave them to him-"

"Hold on; someone 'gave' me the coordinates?" John interjected, looking over at Daniel inquiringly. "How does that work?"

"Well, Daniel was able to appear to Teal'c in a dream while he was Ascended," Sam replied, looking over at Daniel for confirmation that they had developed the same theory before continuing. "Given what you told us about how you entered this address, it's… well, it's possible that maybe another Ascended Ancient might have… influenced you to go to this location. After all, you've said yourself that you had to deactivate Merlin's device to dial this address; it's possible that one of our allies among the Ascended- maybe even Skaara, or possibly Shifu or Kasuf-, had been keeping an eye on us and managed to influence you in that moment before you completed entering the address to dial this particular planet…"

"A possible explanation for this latest turn of events, I have to agree," Landry said, sounding slightly grim as he spoke over the radio. "However, that still doesn't answer the question of who did it."

"Unfortunately, there's no way to know the answer to that one either," Daniel said, shaking his head slightly uncertainly. "Given that we're on the planet that everything we've got suggests is the one she wanted to tell us about, Morgan would be the obvious candidate, but after what happened to her the last time we saw her…"

Daniel sighed. "I'm not even sure if she's still Ascended, never mind if she has the power necessary to pull something like this off even if the other Ascended would let her; it's possible we'll never know precisely who sent us here."

"But you're certain that the planet is the location of the Sangraal?" Landry asked, his tone betraying his uncertainty at this latest turn of events (Not that anyone could blame him; after all the trouble they'd had with the sheer scale of the Ori forces arrayed against them and the Ancients' unwillingness to help them so far, it almost seemed too good to be true for them to have received this kind of assistance virtually out of nowhere).

"All the evidence Daniel's gathered would seem to suggest that's the case, sir," Sam said. "I know that it's a bit sudden, but with the Ori forces in this galaxy currently powerless, and given that we're all already equipped and on-site, it just seems like we might as well at least try and see what we can find out about the Sangraal."

"All of you?" Landry said, his tone betraying scepticism.

"With the obvious exception of Doctor Jackson, Colonel Sheppard has more personal experience with the Ancients than anyone else currently living, and without meaning to sound arrogant, my own knowledge of Ancient language isn't exactly something to dismiss either," Elizabeth said, picking up the conversation herself. "I acknowledge that active participation on a mission like this
isn't the kind of thing I would usually do, but I have to agree with Colonel Carter; now that we're here, it seems pointless to return to Earth when we're already fully equipped for finding out some more about the area and taking it from there."

For a moment, there was silence from the other end of the radio, and then General Landry spoke again.

"All right," he said, nodding in confirmation. "Leave the jumper somewhere in the area under cloak, and then see what you can find out about the Sangraal from the local area; just... report back here before you actually go anywhere, OK?"

"Of course," Sam replied, nodding in understanding at the radio; Elizabeth might technically outrank her given her status as head of Atlantis, but given that Sam was a member of an active offworld team in this galaxy, coupled with the fact that she had a year's experience in rank over John, it only made sense for her to be in charge of this mission.

"And I take it I can assume that Liam will be remaining with you?" Landry asked.

"There's no way of knowing if Merlin included any other safeguards around the Sangraal like what he used to protect the plans for the Staffs in Atlantis," Daniel said, his tone of voice making it apparent that he agreed with what Landry was being too polite to say; that a mission like this was no place for Liam. "If there is anything like that out here, Liam's our best chance of accessing the Sangraal if things become difficult; Daniel and Elizabeth might get past Merlin's security systems too, but we already know that Liam pretty much exactly meets the criteria for penetrating whatever security systems Merlin's installed to protect his discoveries."

"Fine," Landry said, his tone grim as he processed what he'd just heard. "Good luck."

With that, he terminated the radio connection, leaving the makeshift SG-1/Atlantis team amalgamation to exchange resolute glances with each other as they reaffirmed their new vow.

They might have never worked with each other on anything like this before, but now that they were here, all they could do was try to find whatever Morgan might have hidden here and hope for the best.

About an hour later, the assorted team walked into the village that was the nearest habitation to the Stargate that they could find, Sam and John holding their weapons while Daniel and Elizabeth carried their Staffs, Liam standing in the middle of the group as they looked at the villagers staring curiously at them.

"Just take the direct approach, huh?" John said, looking uncertainly over at Elizabeth; given her status as the officially highest-ranking member of the team, it had been decided that Elizabeth would serve as team leader for the moment unless something came up that required someone else to take control.

"It's as good a plan as any," Elizabeth said with a brief shrug before she turned to address the people gathered before her.

"Uh... hello," she said, trying not to sound as nervous as she felt; she might be a diplomat, but it had been a long time since she'd been called upon to make first contact with a civilisation herself rather than simply taking on diplomatic responsibilities after another team made contact. "We have come here in search of the Sangraal; can you assist us?"
For a moment, the villagers simply exchanged glances with each other, until one of them, dressed in a simple green sleeveless shirt over a yellow long-sleeved shirt and identically coloured trousers, broke the silence.

"It has been many generations since anyone has come in search of the Sangraal," the villager said, looking pointedly at the five people in front of him as he indicated a building on the opposite side of the square they were currently standing in. "If you truly seek the Sangraal, you must consult with the Parchment of Virtues in the village library; it will prepare you for the journey to come."

"Thank you," Elizabeth said, nodding briefly at him before they turned around to walk in the direction of the building that had just been pointed out to them.

"But I should warn you," the villager added, prompting the group to turn around and face him once again, "no one has ever returned from the Quest alive; if you value your lives, you would do well to reconsider."

"Thanks for the warning," John said, nodding briefly at the man before him. "However, that's quitter talk; we didn't come this far to quit."

With that, the team resumed their walk towards the library, the old wooden door easily opening to reveal a poorly-lit interior, roles of parchment scattered all over the shelves, as well as some piles of books on a table and some benches.

"Hello?" Elizabeth asked, looking uncertainly around the building as the assorted team took up positions to study the parchments before them.

"So... how do we do this?" John asked at last, looking uncertainly at Daniel. "I'm not exactly sure these things use an organisational system we'd be familiar with..."

"Well," Daniel said uncertainly as he looked over the parchments before him, "I suppose we could start by looking for any and all materials related to the Sangraal..."

"Or you could simply ask me," another voice said, the small team glancing up a low stairway to see an old man with a neat, short white beard standing on a small stone staircase behind the door, dressed in a long black robe with a brown coat over it and a rolled-up parchment in his right hand. "I am Osric, keeper of the village archives."

"Hello," Elizabeth replied, nodding uncertainly at the old man before them. "We're looking for something called the Parchment of Virtues."

"Ah," Osric said, smiling slightly as he walked slowly down the stairs, tossing the parchment in his hands off to the side, "another band of stalwart heroes come to tempt fate in the hopes of claiming the legendary prize."

"Uh... sure," John said, nodding uncertainly at the man before them; the fact that Osric had said all that without even looking at them wasn't entirely comforting to him. "What do you actually know about the thing?"

"Only what I have heard from legend," Osric replied, as he leaned against a small ladder and pointed at the door behind them. "That it is located in a cave beyond the outlying forest... but that the journey there is fraught with peril."
"Ages ago," he continued, as he climbed slowly up the ladder to remove a long wooden box from a shelf before passing it to Elizabeth, "Morgan Le Fay enchanted the area with a terrible curse, and since then it has claimed countless lives."

"Curses aren't really something we worry ourselves about much..." John began.

"Neither did Phaedra, the cobbler's wife," Osric interjected, as he took the box back and opened it, placing the parchment it contained- a small piece of paper rolled around two long, thin pieces of wood- on the table before them, displaying the clearly Ancient writing on it. "Several weeks ago, she set off in search of her son who had strayed too far from the village. Neither have been seen nor heard from since. This parchment was purportedly left behind by Morgan herself, as a guide for knights of noble spirit, since it is said that only the most virtuous will succeed in claiming the Sangraal."

"Only those of virtue true may win the prize concealed beyond the reach of the flawed and tainted," Daniel said, having begun to study the parchment before them. "The Sangraal shall instead belong to he who speaks the guardian's name'... guardian's name?"

"They say that the Sangraal is protected by the most powerful of mythical beasts," Osric responded. "A dragon."

"Dragon?" Liam repeated, looking at Osric with a brief enthusiastic grin before he noticed the sceptical expressions on the faces of his current teammates.

"You doubt the legend?" Osric asked, as he looked slightly sceptically at the group around him.

"Well," Sam put in, trying to sound diplomatic, "I'm sure the Sangraal is protected by something very powerful, but I don't think it's an actual dragon."

"Believe what you will," Osric said, chuckling slightly as he spoke, clearly amused at their scepticism. "With luck you may have the opportunity to prove the truth for yourselves."

"Prudence, wisdom, charity, kindness, and faith," Daniel said, still reading from the parchment before them with undisguised curiosity. "Let these be your guide on this perilous quest..."

His confused expression as he looked up after he had finished speaking made it clear that he had nothing else to contribute; evidently he'd read everything relevant that the parchment had to offer.

"Is there... anything else?" Liam asked uncertainly.

"No," Osric replied, as he rolled the parchment back up and returned it to the box. "All Morgan left behind was this parchment... and the map."

"A map?" John repeated in surprise. "There's a map?"

"Yes," Osric replied, smiling slightly at them.

"Uh... could we... take a look at that?" Elizabeth asked uncertainly.

As Osric looked silently back at Elizabeth, a contemplative expression on his face, Elizabeth briefly wondered if he was going to deny their request, only for him to smile and nod at her as though he had come to a decision.
"You may... study it, if you so wish," he said, with a reassuring nod, before his expression became noticeably grimmer. "However, I would ask that you not depart this village with the map in your possession; you may memorise and copy it, but the map itself must remain with me."

"Of course," Elizabeth said, smiling at him in gratitude. "Trust me, we wouldn't dream of stealing anything from you."

It almost certainly wouldn't be easy to copy out a map that had been left by an Ancient to protect something as powerful as the Sangraal- none of the group gathered there had any doubts that the actual route covered on the map would only be a small part of what they'd actually have to face-, but they'd have a clearer idea of where to go and what to expect, and that could make all the difference in their current mission.
The following morning, having checked in with the SGC to report on their current rate of progress, a newly-drawn copy of the map in Daniel's hands- he and Osric had spent some time going over the original map to create a near-exact duplicate of the original, although they'd naturally avoiding going into as much detail in areas of the map looking at forests or other such landscape-related details- and packs containing supplies for the next few days on their backs- grateful that Atlantis always kept the puddle jumpers well-stocked in the event of a longer mission than usual-, the team began to follow the route that would apparently lead them to the Sangraal.

The majority of the walk was fairly straightforward for a time, with the group simply exchanging short stories about some of their past adventures and experiences on other worlds that they'd previously only briefly heard about in missions- Daniel was naturally particularly interested in John's time inside the valley that had been protected by a time dilation field-, as well as a few private reflections about the implications of some of the information Osric had been able to provide them with- the reference to the 'guardian's name' was one issue that none of them could guess at, although the primary consensus was that it referred to a password that could be used to shut down the guardian when it attacked-, but so far they had encountered no serious opposition to their search.

"What the Hell...?" John muttered at last after a long walk through a field filled with high grass brought them to the outskirts of a forest, staring uncertainly at the sight before them, drawing Daniel and Elizabeth out of their current conversation about some of the finer details of the Ancient language- Elizabeth had picked up a few skills in that area in her time in Atlantis, but Daniel was still the best at it- to study the scene before them.

Spread out in front of them, all facing the direction that the team were currently travelling in, were a scattered group of people dressed in clothing similar to the villagers- one woman with her hand over her mouth was almost certainly the missing mother Osric had mentioned-, all of them facing the direction that the map indicated would lead the group to the Sangraal. At first glance all of the people before them simply appeared to be standing completely still, but the sight of a bird frozen in position in the air above the field made it clear that they weren't dealing with a group who'd decided to play a game for some reason.

"What's the matter with them?" Liam asked, moving over to stand slightly closer to Daniel, his arm going around his father's leg as though seeking comfort even as his gaze shifted to look questioningly at his mother.

"I don't know..." Sam muttered, studying her hand-held scanner as she walked parallel to the group of frozen people. "I'm picking up varying anomalous readings; stronger here... weaker here... than rising again..."

She paused in her walk as she looked back at the rest of the group. "This is weird; they're temporal fluctuations." "Which means... what?" John asked. "Morgan Le Fay set up a time distortion field around this place?"

"From what I'm seeing, I'd say that's almost a certainty," Sam confirmed. "Judging by the moving leaves in the trees, it's probably capable of generating an illusion to supplant the standing weather pattern, but otherwise time within the field is drastically slower than what's taking place outside it."
"So... everyone in the field isn't standing still, they're just moving so slowly that we can't see it?" Elizabeth asked, her and John exchanging brief glances at the uncomfortable reminder of the six months/six hours he'd spent trapped in the temporal displacement field in Pegasus before he'd managed to escape.

"Pretty much," Sam confirmed, studying the scanner before her with an uncertain gaze. "Several years may pass for us in the few seconds it takes them to take a single step; many of them may not even be aware anything's happened to them yet."

"Uh... can we just go around it?" Liam asked uncertainly.

"If this is anything like the field I encountered back in Pegasus, it's probably big enough to cover the air above this area as well; odds that we can just walk around it are pretty much slim to none," John said, shaking his head grimly. "Only question now is, do we go back, or-"

"Wait a minute..." Sam interjected, her gaze still thoughtfully fixed on the scanner in her hands. "John may be right about it extending outwards- the readings I'm getting of the field seem to indicate that it stretches in both directions as far as I can detect, and it even has a slight curve to it-, but these varied readings... it's almost as if..."

She paused for a moment, taking the time to run through the possible implications of her theory, before she turned to look at her new family and friends with a brief smile. "I think I've found a way in; there's a circuitous path of real-time winding through the temporal fold."

"Like a... maze?" Liam asked uncertainly.

"Exactly," Sam confirmed, smiling in approval at her son's deduction. "With the readings on my scanner, I can use them to guide us through, but you'll all need to follow my lead; if you stray off the path, you could end up trapped in the distortion field."

"From Statues to 'Follow the Leader', huh?" John said, allowing himself a brief smile as the group of five formed a line of single file behind Sam as she began to walk through the field of frozen bodies, her gaze constantly fixed on the scanner in her hands. For the first few steps it was relatively straightforward- a few metres in prompting a turn to the left as the only even minor 'course correction' needed at first-, but after another turn to the right, Sam's eyes widened as she studied the scanner.

"Uh oh," she said simply.

"'Uh oh'?" Liam repeated, looking anxiously at his mother. "What's 'Uh oh'? I don't like 'uh oh'; what's with the 'uh oh'?"

"The temporal distortions are affecting these readings," Sam explained, looking uncomfortably back at the rest of the group as far as she dared without risking contact with the field around her; she had no real idea how wide the safe path was and wasn't inclined to test it. "We're effectively blind."

"OK, maybe we should try something else..." John said, turning his own head to look at where Liam stood between him and Daniel. "Hey, Liam; sorry if this is a bit presumptuous, but would your Ancient abilities have included some kind of 'time sense'?"

"I don't really... feel any different, if that's what you're asking," Liam replied, shaking his head uncomfortably as he looked back at the people frozen in time around him. "I mean, I'm aware that there's something... strange... about this place, but I'm just not getting any clear idea about where to
"go to keep us safe..."

"And going back isn't exactly an option either," Elizabeth added, looking grimly back at the parts of the temporal displacement field they'd already crossed. "There's no way to be certain we'd measure out our steps exactly right; if we go too far we'll just end up trapped like everyone else..."

"Look, we need to be practical about this," Daniel put in, holding up the map for brief emphasis before he continued talking. "Morgan Le Fay left clues about how to get to the Sangraal, which means that there is a way to get there; this kind of thing is just a trap to stop anyone who isn't worthy from getting there first. All we have to do is be resourceful and carefully think this through."

"Well..." John said after a moment's silent contemplation, "if this was originally set up in the Middle Ages, there wouldn't have been many planets with this kind of technology; she'd probably have set up some way to get through this whole thing that's so simple people would never think of it..."

For a few moments, the group of five simply silently contemplated their options, until Sam bent down to pick up a rock from the ground, tossing the rock ahead of her and watching as it came to a halt. "Follow me," she said, walking towards the now-frozen rock and picking up another, tossing it to the left and watching as it repeated the other rock's mid-air halt, before a toss to the right resulted in it falling to the ground normally several yards away from them. "That is simple..." Liam commented, smiling warmly up at his mother.

"First rule of Stargate exploration, Liam," Daniel put in, smiling at his son as they continued walking. "Sometimes the simplest explanation is the correct one."

"Like the time you realised that the constellations changed position without knowing a thing about stellar drift?" Sam asked, smiling back at Daniel as she tossed the same rock to the left, revealing a still-clear path. Following the rock to the point where it fell, Sam threw it once again, the rock briefly impacting against a force field before it continued to fall to the ground, clearly indicating that it had left the temporal displacement field. "Phew..." Elizabeth said, exchanging relieved glances with her teammates as they walked out of the field at last. "Now that is one experience I am not interested in repeating any time soon..."

"Join the club," John said, nodding briefly at her before he glanced back at Sam, Daniel and Liam. "So, we keep on going?"

"Well, we've already passed one test; there's not much point in stopping now," Liam replied with a casual grin as he indicated the wood before them. "Besides, this looks like fun."

"Fun, huh?" John said, smiling slightly at Liam as he glanced at the wood before them. "In that case... race?"

No sooner was the word out of his mouth than John was running into the wood, Liam laughing as he hurried after him, the half-Ascended's eight-year-old legs managing to keep a surprisingly good pace with the lieutenant-colonel. For a moment, Sam, Daniel and Elizabeth exchanged glances, and then the three of them hurried after the other two, their search momentarily forgotten in the simple fun of the race as they followed the path, all thoughts of a second time displacement field swiftly pushed aside by the comforting certainty that nobody would use the same trap twice, fear of what
might be coming ignored for the sake of this brief period of joy...

After the desire to run had petered out and the group returned to a more traditional walking speed—although Liam was still prone to occasionally dashing on ahead for the sake of it—, Elizabeth finally stopped walking as she looked at something off to the side.

"What in the world...?" she said, staring in surprise at the sight that was now visible off to the side of their current path. Sitting in the middle of a small clearing in the woods was a simple wooden chest made of a deep brownish-red wood, positioned on a small pile of rocks in the middle.

"What's that?" Liam asked, looking curiously between his parents.

"No idea..." Daniel said, shaking his head briefly as they walked towards the chest, the same thought clearly on all their minds; the chest very likely contained something that would be relevant in their quest. They had just passed through the last of the trees immediately around the chest when a sudden burst of yellow light prompted them to spin around and watch as the dome-like structure of a force field burst from the ground to move upwards around them.

"Oh," John said, tapping against the force field with his P-90 and watching as the field flashed at the point of impact. "Well, that's not good..."

"So much for finding something useful in this thing," Elizabeth added, indicating the now-opened chest, which contained nothing and revealed only a simple wooden interior. "Why would Morgan have included something like this on the quest?"

"Maybe..." Daniel said, staring reflectively at the chest.

"What?" Sam asked, looking curiously at him.

"Well," Daniel said, as he looked thoughtfully around at his friends, "the Parchment of Virtues told us that we've have to rely on five things in order to reach the Sangraal; prudence, wisdom, charity, kindness, and faith."

"You're saying we should interpret that literally?" Elizabeth asked.

"Why not?" Daniel replied with a brief shrug. "We were able to make our way through the time dilation field by patiently and carefully negotiating the maze. In other words, we demonstrated prudence as opposed to recklessness, which would have stranded us. So ask yourselves, what does this trap exploit?"

"Curiosity?" Liam offered uncertainly.

"Greed," Daniel corrected. "A person approaches the chest expecting to find treasure inside, but instead finds nothing and gets trapped for their trouble."

"Great..." John muttered, shaking his head in frustration before turning back to study the object before them. "So... what do we do now; say we're sorry?"

"Essentially, yes," Daniel confirmed. "The opposite of greed is charity, one of the virtues mentioned in the parchment."
"You mean... we put something in the box and it lets us go?" Liam asked.

Nodding in confirmation, Daniel pulled a pen out of his pocket, dropped it into the box, and closed it, only for John's second experimental tap against the force field to be met with the same results as before.

"Well," Elizabeth said at last, sighing slightly as she reached into her pocket and pulled out what looked like a personal organiser, "we're all trapped, so we should probably all contribute something."

As she passed the organiser to Daniel, Sam handed her scanner to the archaeologist while Liam removed his new watch, looking at it with a briefly dejected expression before adding it to the chest's contents, followed by John- out of a lack of anything else that could be considered remotely expendable- depositing a spare clip of ammunition for his sidearm.

"OK," he said as the force field lowered around them, turning to look inquiringly at Daniel, "with that out of the way, does that map say anything about what the Sangraal is located so we don't have to deal with a repeat of this?"

"Well..." Daniel said, briefly studying the map before he looked up at the others, "according to this, the Sangraal itself is located in a cave beneath a lone mountain; if we focus on the mountain as our destination, we should be able to avoid any further traps..."

"Here's hoping, anyway," John said, indicating the path before them with a brief shrug. "Lead on; time's a-wastin'."
After another couple of hours of walking towards the cone-shaped, volcano-like mountain—this part of the journey omitting further traps, much to the relief of all concerned; the straightforward grassy field they had to traverse at this point even allowing for Liam to lead the adults in another couple of races so long as everyone watched their feet in case of something hidden in the grass—, they finally arrived at the area that looked like the most likely entrance; a small rocky corridor surrounded by foliage and moss, culminating in a small door leading to a dark cavern underneath the mountain.

"So... the Sangraal's in there?" John asked, looking uncertainly over at Daniel as he indicated the cave. "We're sure this isn't another time dilation field, right; I've been stuck in one of those already and I'd rather not repeat it..."

"Well, according to my scans, there's no sign of any kind of temporal distortion in there; a few odd anomalies, but nothing like that," Sam said, looking briefly over at John before she shrugged and returned her attention to the issue at hand. "Either way, there's nowhere else to go but in."

"Everyone get the lights on and watch your step," Danie said, pulling out his torch as Liam and Elizabeth did the same, leaving John and Sam to keep a hold of their P-90s as they advanced further in.

As they walked through the cave, the group couldn't help but notice the unusual combination of natural and artificial formations; the stalactites on the top were relatively straightforward, but many of the accompanying stalagmites had been removed, the floor having subsequently been carved into basic man-made steps.

The group simply settled into silence as they walked further along the cave, keeping a careful eye on their surroundings for any sign of further clues about the next potential trap; John briefly noted that the stalactites and stalagmites at this point looked more like they were made of wax rather than traditional rock, but given his relatively limited knowledge of geology he was going to ignore that anomaly until he had more time to look into whether a rock that looked like that was possible...

Then the group entered a more open area of the path in the form of a decently-sized chamber with Ancient writing on the wall in front of them and two paths leading in two directions on either side of the writing, and John's priorities shifted back to the task at hand (Particularly when a casual glance backwards as Daniel moved forward to study the writing revealed to John that the path they'd just entered by appeared to have 'vanished'; whether it was a sliding 'door' or a solid hologram John couldn't say, but either way they definitely wouldn't be getting out that way any time soon).

"Choose the way that is just and true," Daniel read from the sign before them.

"I don't suppose that literally means the right way, huh?" John asked as he looked back at the archaeologist.

"Unfortunately not," Elizabeth confirmed. "The word meaning 'just and true' in Ancient is very different from the one meaning 'right' in the sense of 'the opposite of left'; it's not going to be that simple..."

Her voice trailed off as she and Sam turned to look at the tunnel to the left, an uncertain expression on both their faces.
"What?" John asked, only to pause as he heard what they had doubtless picked up themselves; the sound of a crying child from somewhere further down the tunnel.

"What the heck is a kid doing all the way out here?" John asked, briefly checking his language at the memory of Liam's presence as he glanced over at the others.

"Well, the obvious possibility is that it's a trap or a test," Daniel said as he looked around at the others before he shrugged. "Either way, we don't exactly have another indicator of what way to go right now."

Nodding in agreement, the group turned and headed down the path, Sam now leading the way. After only a few feet, the light on the end of her P-90 fell on the form of a small boy, about five years old, dressed in a green hat and shirt with a brown sleeveless 'jacket' over it, only for the boy to cry out in fright at the sight of them and running along another tunnel.

"Wait!" Sam yelled, the group slightly picking up the pace to follow the child. "We're here to help!"

Even as they ran after the child along increasingly-unstable steps- it was as though whoever had designed this place had stopped paying much attention to the fine details at this point- all of them were wondering what the end result of this particular chase would be; the Parchment of Virtues might have stated that kindness was one of the virtues that those who sought the Sangraal would need to possess, but it wasn't out of the question that this was also intended to test their wisdom by giving them an obvious trap to avoid...

Then a loud clanking noise up ahead pushed all thought of which virtues this was intended to test from their minds, particularly when they rounded the corner and saw an iron portcullis in front of them, the small boy sitting on the floor behind the door crying and shaking at his predicament.

"Hang on there, kid," John said, walking over to grab the gate bars in one hand. "We'll get you out of there; just hold on..."

With that, he tightened his grip around the gate bars and pushed, swiftly being joined by Daniel, Sam, Elizabeth and Liam. As soon as Liam's hand reached the gate, it began to lift immediately, the boy on the other side smiling slightly at them before he vanished in a brief blue glow that faded as soon as it had appeared.

"Huh," Liam said, looking at the tunnel that had appeared at the other end of the cave where the child had been. "That was... different."

"Look on the bright side; at least we know we're going the right way," John said, indicating the path before him. "Let's go."

Although the next stage of their journey was at least more level than the previous one, the tunnel finally came to a dead end, another panel with Ancient writing on it the only kind of clue to show that they had come the right way.

"It's another riddle," Daniel said as he studied the writing in front of them. "I'm struck and cut, shaped and cooled, then bound by rings to release what's stored."

Whether speaking those words had triggered a signal of some sort, or they'd simply been standing in the new cave for too long, was never established, but the cave around them began to shake and rumble around them, bits of dust dropping from the roof as it continued.

"Any chance we could pick this up any time soon?" John asked, glancing uncertainly at the
archaeologist.

"OK, we need to think about this," Elizabeth said, taking a brief breath as though trying to calm herself. "What fits all those categories; something that can be cut or shaped-?"

"Key!" John yelled suddenly, clicking his fingers as inspiration struck him.

"Clavia!" Daniel yelled at the panel, the wall almost automatically vanishing as Daniel spoke, allowing the group to run through the new door, only for the rumbling to continue as they approached another panel with Ancient writing on it.

"I shake the earth with booming thunder, fell forests whole and homes complete!" Daniel yelled, urgently scanning the text. "I influence ships, topple kings, sweep down swift yet remain unseen!"

"Wind!" Elizabeth called out.

"Vantio!" Daniel said, nodding in understanding at Elizabeth's deduction before they ran into another tunnel, hurrying up a flight of stairs only to discover another panel as the rumbling continued.

"Seriously, this is getting ridiculous..." John groaned as Daniel leaned forward to study it.

"Battle-scarred in times of strife," he read uncertainly. "Resistant to... resistant to..."

"To what?" Elizabeth asked.

"I don't know; I can't-" Daniel began.

"Contagia!" Liam called out suddenly, the panel vanishing as the rumbling around them ceased at last.

"Huh," John said, looking at Liam with a grateful smile. "Nice job, kid."

"Eh," Liam replied, shrugging nonchalantly back at the colonel. "I've got a good knowledge of Ancient; what I could see of the panel sounded like that answer would work."

"Hey; after some of the leaps of logic your father's made, that's almost straightforward," Sam said, smiling in approval at her son as they continued walking along the tunnel, only to slow down as they continued walking further.

"Uh..." Elizabeth said at last, looking uncertainly over at the rest of the team, "is it my imagination, or is it getting hotter in here?"

Before anyone could respond to Elizabeth's query, they had entered another decently-sized underground chamber, with a wall of fire burning at the end of the only other passageway out of the chamber, blocking their way out.

"Oh boy..." John muttered, studying the blaze before them with a grim expression. "This doesn't look good..."

"Damnit..." Sam said- her voice low so that her son couldn't hear her-, before turning to look uncertainly at Liam.

"Liam..." she began awkwardly, hating the idea of 'using' her son like this- bringing him along because of his Ancient heritage was one thing, but 'depending' on his powers to get them out of dangerous situations set a precedent that she wasn't comfortable with- but knowing it was their best
chance right now, "could you... uh...?"

"Stop that fire?" Liam asked, smiling briefly at her as he raised his hand to aim it at the fire. "No sweat; just give me a minute..."

He paused for a moment as he stared at the fire, a confused expression spreading across his face as he looked between the fire and his hand, before swallowing uncomfortably as he looked back at his mother.

"I... I can't," he said, sounding almost scared at the realisation.

"What?" Daniel said, looking in confusion at his son. "But I thought that Daanar-"

"I can't access them, Dad!" Liam said, looking increasingly panicked as he looked at his father. "My powers aren't... they aren't there; I can't use them..."

"Wait a minute; all of them?" Sam said, looking with renewed fear between Liam and Daniel; Liam's powers might not be something they considered much when interacting with their son, but it was one of the only reasons they'd been comfortable bringing him along here in the first place.

The idea that he didn't have them right now...

"It... it must be a security measure set up by Morgan," Daniel speculated, looking anxiously at his son. "She probably set up safeguards to negate telekinetic powers like Liam's in case any Priors managed to find their way here..."

"Well, at least we know it's nothing personal; that doesn't help us get through this mess," John said, indicating the wall of flames in front of them. "What are we going to do now; spit on it?"

"I don't know..." Elizabeth said, staring anxiously at the passage before them before briefly glancing back the way they'd come. "There's no sign of any triggers or passages that we could use to shut the fire off, and there's no way out; the passage has resealed behind us..."

"This doesn't make sense," Daniel muttered, looking at the passage before them with a sigh. "We made all the right choices to lead us to this point. I know the Sangraal lies beyond that wall of fire; we just have to find a way through..."

He paused for a moment before he began to walk slowly towards the flames, a reflective expression in his eyes.

"It's the only one left," he muttered.

"Pardon?" Elizabeth asked, looking in confusion at the archaeologist as she and the rest of their small group began to gather around the passage entrance.

"The parchment told us that five virtues would guide us in our quest for the Sangraal," Daniel elaborated. "Prudence, kindness, charity, wisdom, and faith. We displayed prudence in finding a way out of the temporal maze, charity in escaping the forcefield trap, kindness by helping the child and finding the hidden passageway, and wisdom in solving the riddles; the only virtue left is faith."

Pausing for a moment, Daniel took a deep breath, and then walked into the fire before him, the flames dissipating around him almost as soon as he reached them, leaving him totally unharmed as he turned around to look at the others, the tunnel up ahead now open to them after the fire that had so briefly cut them off from it.
"Huh," John said, looking over at Liam with a slight smile. "Definite Indiana Jones-esque vibe to that one, wasn't there?"

"What?" Liam asked in confusion.

"We need to keep that in mind for when we get back," John muttered, shaking his head slightly at the kid; the son of an archaeologist and the kid hadn't seen Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade yet?

He definitely needed to correct that shortcoming in the kid's knowledge of popular culture when they got back to Earth...
They had only walked for a few more metres before they finally arrived at what could only be their final destination; a large cavern, consisting primarily of a deep abyss with a narrow walkway stretching from the cavern entrance to a wider platform in the middle of the abyss.

The platform itself appeared relatively straightforward, but the two objects on it were definitely worth attention; the taller of the objects before them was a dolmen-like structure with a blue diamond-shaped stone pattern on it slightly above the height of the average man, Ancient writing running from the top to the bottom of the dolmen, while the glowing red form of what looked like the Sangraal rested on a lower dias.

"Well... there it is," John said, waving a hand slightly as he indicated the dias in front of them, the small group of five gathered around the entrance of the passage that had lead them to their goal. "So... who's going for it?"

"I am," Daniel, Elizabeth and Liam said practically all at once, only for the subsequent glares between them to culminate when Daniel stepped forward and walked along the narrow bridge, Sam and John automatically placing their hands on Liam and Elizabeth's shoulders respectively to stop them following him; given the bridge's relative size, the last thing they wanted was to have too many people on it unless they had to.

As he walked onto the dias, Daniel reached out to take the glowing red form of the Sangraal, determined to claim the object they'd sought for so long and make the next step towards stopping the Ori once and for all...

Only for his hand to pass through the red orb as though it wasn't even there, the object subsequently 'flickering' in a manner that confirmed Daniel's initial suspicion; if the thing before him wasn't a hologram, he'd be very surprised.

"Well?" Sam called over to him where she and the others still stood at the passage exit.

"It's... it's a hologram," Daniel replied, looking uncertainly back at the rest of the group. "I don't-"

Whatever else he'd been about to say, Daniel stopped talking as the cave was suddenly filled with the sound of mechanisms moving, followed by dust beginning to fall from the cave wall around the entrance. Daniel only just managed to run back across the bridge to join the rest of the team when the sound of what appeared to be large wings replaced the sound of the machinery.

"What the...?" John muttered, looking over at the others apprehensively. "Why is it I'm suddenly getting the feeling that we're not done yet?"

"Possibly because our thoughts on the subject of dragons were wrong?" Liam asked, pointing at a massive form now hovering above them, resembling a massive lizard with two long wings in place of its forearms, hissing at them as it opened its mouth.

"Run!" Elizabeth yelled, voicing the thoughts of all of the group as they turned around to hurry back along the still-open passage behind them, narrowly avoiding the subsequent blast of flame that followed them as they hurried around the first available corner.

"OK," John said, glancing back as the dragon's flames beat against the wall behind them, "looks like Draco's too big to fit through this, but we should probably keep moving..."
"Looks like an exit this way," Sam added, indicating another passage that seemed slightly lighter at the end than the others. "Come on, let's go!"

After a few minutes' more hurried movement, the group finally found themselves back outside the mountain, shaken by this latest turn of events but all still clearly alive.

"OK, what the he-ck just happened there?" John asked, indicating the cave they'd just left by.

"It was a hologram," Daniel explained. "The Sangraal wasn't real."

"What?" Sam said, looking incredulously at the father of her child. "Are you saying we came all this way for nothing?"

"We have to defeat the dragon," Liam said, clicking his fingers as he looked up at the adults with a slight smile.

"I'm sorry, what?" John said, looking back at the young boy with an incredulous stare. "In case you didn't notice, I'm a bit short on vorple swords right now..."

"That's the Jabberwock-" Daniel began, before the sound of rocks breaking prompted the group to glance up just in time to see the dragon emerge from the top of the mountain, its wings spread as it began to dive towards them with a loud screech.

"Whatever you use to slay dragons, we don't have it, so let's run now and sort that out later, huh?" John said.

With that, the group of five turned and ran towards the nearby tree line, Daniel and Elizabeth attempting a couple of quick blasts at the dragon with their Staffs while John and Sam fired their P-90s just long enough to confirm that the dragon was vulnerable to neither.

"So..." Elizabeth asked as the group took up position behind some of the nearest available trees, "what's the plan now?"

"We can't go back to the village now; if the dragon's the final test, we'll just have to figure out how to get past it," Daniel said, looking urgently up at the monstrous creature above them. "The Parchment of Virtues said that 'The Sangraal shall instead belong to he who speaks the guardian's name'; maybe we can stop it with that?"

"Just by saying its name?" Liam asked, looking incredulously over at his father. "Dad, we're dealing with a dragon; I don't think it's going to stop if we tell it to sit!"

"Don't be so sarcastic, Liam; your father might be on to something," Elizabeth said, looking briefly over at the young half-Ascended before she turned back to Daniel. "I admit that the mythological aspects of this kind of thing aren't my strong point, but I know for a fact that there's at least one story where the protagonist gained power over an imp by learning his name..."

"Great," John groaned. "We're taking a stab in the dark based on Rumpelstiltskin..."

"It's not like we have any better ideas, John!" Elizabeth yelled as the dragon roared overhead clearly waiting for them to emerge.

"Wait a minute..." Daniel said, looking upwards with a faint smile as inspiration came to him. "The Parchment said that the Sangraal would belong to 'he who speaks the guardian's name'..."

"Which means...?" Sam asked.
"Wait a minute..." Liam put in, raising a hand uncertainly as he looked over at his father. "I might be wrong, but I think Aunt Oma mentioned something about Morgan Le Fay being the one who hid the Sangraal..."

"So we're thinking that 'the Guardian' is referring to Morgan Le Fay rather than the dragon?" John asked, looking between the two Jacksons as he indicated the air where the dragon was still hovering with what looked like a glare on its face as it looked for them. "In other words, we call this thing Morgan Le Fay and... what?"

"No, that's not it..." Daniel said, shaking his head briefly before he clicked his fingers in inspiration, stood up, and ran to stand in front of the dragon.

"Daniel!" Sam yelled in shock as she stood up and ran after her old friend.

"DAD!" Liam yelled as he followed his mother.

"Ganos Lal!" Daniel yelled upwards at the dragon still hovering above them, just as the dragon was opening its mouth to launch another fireblast at them.

As soon as Daniel had spoken, the dragon's entire body suddenly seemed to glow with a brilliant light before it folded in on itself like it was made of paper before it vanished into nothingness, with only the singed trees around them serving as any indication that it had been there in the first place.

"Huh," John said, nodding slightly in a stunned manner as he and Elizabeth walked over to join the Jackson 'family', before he looked curiously over at Daniel. " 'Ganos Lal'?"

"It was Morgan's name before she Ascended," Daniel replied. "It seemed like our best chance, anyway."

Elizabeth smiled briefly at him.

"Good call," she said simply, before she turned around to indicate the mountains that they'd just fled from with her Staff. "Well, let's try this again, shall we?"

With that brief exchange, the group turned around walked back into the mountain cavern system they'd just left a few moments ago, the cavern still open and unsealed as the group advanced into the underground network that would lead them back to the Sangraal. Finally arriving back in the cavern where the dragon had originally appeared, the five of them advanced carefully along the narrow bridge to gather around the glowing red orb of the Sangraal; with the last trap having been dealt with, nobody saw any point in staying back at a moment like this.

"OK," Daniel said, as he reached out to take the object before them. "Let's get this..."

His voice trailed off as his hand passed through the red orb once again.

"Oh, come on!" Sam said in frustration, looking almost like she was prepared to shoot something for their continued inability to find what they were looking for.

John was just about to voice his own exasperation with this continued lack of progress when he saw the diamond-shaped stone formation on the obelisk behind them glow a brilliant blue...

As soon as the light faded, the cavern they had been standing in earlier had vanished, leaving the five of them standing in a new room with a similar rock structure to the caverns they'd been in earlier.
However, unlike the caverns they'd been exploring for the last several minutes, this cavern appeared to be more like a private study than a simple cave, with wooden torches around them - the torches lighting up almost as soon as they arrived in the room -, along with various books stacked on shelves and a chest of drawers up against the wall, as well as a desk and a couple of chairs that seemed to have been chosen to relax and work in respectively. A few jars and what looked like a crystal ball were positioned on top on the chest of drawers beside the books, but the most obvious anomaly in the room was a strange circular metal table near the centre of the room with metal bars sticking out of it and a relatively smooth upper surface, with no chairs near it or objects on it to give any sign that it was used for anything.

"Uh... what just happened?" Elizabeth asked, looking anxiously at her surroundings as she tightened her grip on her staff; it might be useless against anything other than the Ori or other Ascended, but it at least helped her feel better to know it was there.

"It looks like we were... transported to another chamber," Sam said, she, Daniel and John pulling out their torches to better examine their surroundings. "It's probably a last security measure Morgan installed; maybe it was designed to prevent anyone loyal to the Ori gaining access at the last stage."

"Y'know, that might sound good in theory," John said, as he shone his torch over the books on the nearest shelf, "but I'm still not seeing anything here that looks like a Sangraal; why did she go to all this effort to send us somewhere that doesn't have what we're looking for?"

"I think I know," Sam said from the corner of the room, prompting the rest to turn and look at what she was now staring at; an alcove in the wall filled with what looked like thick green ice, glowing with a faint gleam even as they stared at it, containing an old man with long grey hair and an equally-long beard in grey robes, a slab of rock to the figure's right decorated with Ancient writing.

"'Here lies Myrrdin, Archmage of the Round'," Daniel said, leaning over to read the writing as he, Sam, Liam and Elizabeth gathered around the figure, John slightly at the back as he continued examining the rest of the room.

"Just to clarify..." the male lieutenant colonel said, indicating the figure before them with his torch, "that's the real guy, right?"

"I think so..." Daniel muttered, staring at the figure before him in barely-concealed amazement.

"He must have been here for over a thousand years..." Elizabeth said reflectively. "I mean, I've seen Ancient stasis chambers before, but that was... I mean, this is Merlin..."

"Uh... sorry to interrupt, Dad, but how do we get him out?" Liam asked, raising one hand as he reached out to place another on the 'ice' before them. "I mean, making contact with him won't work-

"Whoa!" John's voice yelled, the group spinning around in time to see John stepping back as a cylindrical object protruded outwards from the black octagonal shape of an Ancient repository of knowledge positioned on the wall near the strange table they'd witnessed earlier, clearly having been activated by the other man's close proximity to it.

Before anyone could say anything else, a sound behind them prompted the group to turn back to look at the stasis chamber as the 'ice' receded away from the occupant, the old man inside weakly
opening his eyes as he began to fall forward, Sam and Elizabeth only just managing to grab his arms before he hit the ground.

"The desk; clear the desk!" Elizabeth yelled over at John, the lieutenant-colonel quickly hurrying over to sweep the books off the nearby table, clearing a space for them to lay Merlin- given all the names that the man before them had gone by, it was easiest to think of him as 'Merlin' as it was the most well-known alias he'd assumed- down on the table. As he was stretched out before them, Merlin weakly opened his mouth as though he was about to say something, his eyes flicking from one figure to the other, before he leant back and closed his eyes, his body slumping slightly as he did so.

"Oh no..." Elizabeth whispered, as she looked up at the others. "Please say he didn't-"

"No, he's alive," Daniel said, leaning over to place his fingers on Merlin's neck to check his pulse. "He probably just needs some time to revive completely."

"All right..." Sam said, nodding briefly at Daniel before she indicated the cave behind her, which appeared to lead to another part of the cavern system they were in. "You, Liam and Elizabeth wait here; John and I will see if we can find another way out of here."

As the two lieutenant colonels walked off, Daniel, Liam and Elizabeth could only stare in silence at the elderly man now lying unconscious before them and hope that he would wake up soon; they hadn't come all this way just for Merlin himself to get tired at the last minute.
"It's amazing how similar this is to the myth..." Daniel mused reflectively as he, Liam and Elizabeth browsed over the books in Merlin's cavern, Sam and John still absent as they searched for an exit from the cavern.

"Pardon?" Elizabeth asked, looking curiously over at Daniel. "What do you mean?"

"Well, supposedly, Morgana trapped Merlin in a cave and left him frozen there for all eternity," Daniel explained, as he turned to look thoughtfully at the still-unconscious form of the powerful Ancient. "Only in reality, I think she was trying to protect him."

"You mean... she destroyed the Sangraal to follow the orders of the Ascended, but preserved Merlin so that he could make it again later?" Liam asked uncertainly. Noting the impressed-but-surprised expressions on Daniel and Elizabeth's faces as they looked at him, he shrugged slightly. "I spent a lot of time when I was growing up reading what I could find about the Ancients' rules after they Ascended; it gave me a fairly good idea of what they would or wouldn't allow..."

Daniel could only stare slightly sadly at the young boy before him, wondering if things could have been different if Oma had actually allowed him and Sam to raise Liam on their own- even if they'd been aware of the role their son would have had to play, maybe they could have made him act a bit more childish and a bit less... professional compared to his current attitude; it just wasn't right for a kid to be so casual about his knowledge of the rules that governed a race of highly-evolved beings-, but the sound of approaching footsteps pushed such reflections from his mind as he looked up to see Sam and John return from their exploration of the cave's entrance.

"Well, the good news is, we're safe," John said, looking around at the group with a grim smile. "The bad news is that we're in the middle of a desert."

"A desert?" Elizabeth repeated, looking at her military commander in surprise. "How did that happen?"

"Given that there's a Stargate just outside the cave, my best guess is that we weren't just sent to another chamber, we were sent to another planet," Sam explained. "The obelisk near the Sangraal must have teleported us through the Stargate after activating it by remote control."

"Oh," Elizabeth said, nodding slightly in understanding. "So... I take it that means that dialling out will be difficult?"

"Try 'impossible'," Sam corrected with a frustrated sigh. "I tried that already, but somebody tampered with the DHD; it's going to take time-"

Further discussion was cut off as Merlin suddenly sat up, Elizabeth automatically moving to place her hands around his shoulders, helping him to sit up, his legs now over the side of the table as he stared uncertainly around him.

"Where... where am I?" the elderly Ancient muttered, his voice low from lack of use.

"Good question..." Sam admitted slightly awkwardly, prompting Merlin to turn and look in her direction, leaning forward slightly as he stared at her.

"You look... familiar..." he muttered, standing up and walking towards her, a smile spreading across his face as he spread his arms wide.
"Guinevere!" he said, his hands pressing against her shoulders as he hugged her to him, smiling broadly as he pulled back. "Oh, my dear, it's been too long..."

"Uh... it's... good to see you too," Sam said, nodding uncertainly back at him, clearly uncertain if she should bother correcting his misapprehension about her identity or not.

"Gawain!" Merlin continued, looking over at John with a further smile before he turned to face Daniel, placing a friendly hand on his shoulder as he looked at the archaeologist. "And Galahad! Fortune does indeed smile upon me to see your faces again!"

"Uh... Merlin?" Elizabeth said, walking forward slightly to look at the elderly Ancient. "As flattered as we are by the comparison, we're not-

"Doc..." Merlin began, looking at her in slight surprise as he blinked his eyes as though trying to clear them, a reflective expression on his face before realisation finally seemed to dawn. "Doctor Elizabeth Weir..."

"You know me?" Elizabeth asked, before she recalled the meeting with her other self that Merlin's hologram had mentioned back in Atlantis; if she'd made enough of an impression for him to remember her for over nine thousand years after he'd Ascended, than remembering her after he'd essentially just slept for a thousand years shouldn't be that hard.

"Yes..." Merlin said, nodding slightly as he studied her reflectively. "You came from the future... we talked about the dangers of time travel... you... you remained in Atlantis..."

"The version of me that you knew remained in Atlantis, yes," Elizabeth said, walking over to stand closer to the elderly Ancient as he leaned against the small round table that they'd noticed earlier, evidently using it as support. "I'm the Elizabeth Weir that exists in the timeline that was created by the presence of the Elizabeth you knew when she remained in the city; we came here looking for the Sangraal, and we need you to remember Morgan le Fay and how you got here."

"Morgan?" Merlin muttered uncertainly.

"You also knew her as Ganos Lal," Daniel added, walking over to stand beside Elizabeth as she spoke to the Ancient.

"Ganos Lal..." Merlin repeated, looking at Daniel in slight surprise. "That is a name I haven't heard for a very long time..."

"Look, sorry to rush you, but the important thing to note here is that, as flattered by the comparison as we are, we aren't the Knights of the Round Table," John added, as he and Sam walked over to join Daniel and Elizabeth in addressing Merlin.

"A thousand years have passed since Morgan placed you in stasis," Daniel explained. "We know who you really are, we know about Atlantis, and we've encountered the Ori."

"The Ori..." Merlin sighed, shaking his head as he stared down at the table before him, lost in his memories. "It has been so long..."

"I know," Elizabeth said, walking over to place a reassuring hand on the Ancient's shoulder. "I know it's hard- I've seen how using those stasis things affected my other self-, but right now we need you to focus; we've managed to delay the Ori by using the Staffs you left plans for in the Atlantis databanks, but they'll be back eventually. We need you to help us; we need the Sangraal."

"The Sangraal..." Merlin repeated, swallowing slightly as he took in the group before him, shaking
his head slightly as he stared at the group around him. "It's been so long... so hard to think... so
tired..."

"I can help with that," Liam said, walking up to the side of the table and holding his arms out so
that his hands were positioned a short distance away from Merlin's torso, a white glow beginning
to emit from his hands to spread across Merlin's body before his parents could say anything.

"Liam-" Daniel began, unable to stop himself remembering the report he'd read about the Ancient
Ayiana dying of exhaustion from her efforts to help the SGC stop what had almost certainly been a
variation of the Prior's plague after she had been unthawed during his Ascension; Liam might do
things on impulse, but that didn't mean they couldn't tell him to stop once he'd started...

"I'm just going to give him a bit of help, Dad; I'm not going to do anything dangerous," Liam said,
looking reassuringly over at his father even as his hands continued to glow. "He's basically
physically exhausted; all I'm doing is giving him a... boost."

"A 'boost'?” Elizabeth repeated, looking sceptically at the young boy before them; she might not be
an expert when it came to children, but when dealing with anyone in a situation like this, child or
not, clarification could definitely help.

"Just using my power to help build him up a bit; it's not going to do anything to me apart from...
whoa..." Liam said, the glow fading from his hands as he staggered back, holding one hand up to
his head as he blinked rapidly, as though adjusting to a bright light.

"Liam?” Sam said, hurrying over to crouch down beside her son. "Are you all right?"

"I... I'm fine, Mum..." Liam said, smiling reassuringly at his mother as he leaned against the table.
"I'm just tired... took a lot out of me..."

"Wait..." Merlin said, shaking his head slightly as he looked at Liam, his gaze already more alert
than it had been before Liam did whatever he'd just done. "You are... the Alteraci?"

Daniel couldn't help but tense slightly at the implications of that word, and he noticed that he
wasn't the only one; even Liam had drawn back slightly as Merlin looked at him with a slight
smile.

"You need not fear me... what is your name?” he asked.

"Liam," the boy replied, looking more uncertain than Sam and Daniel had ever seen their son look
before, even as he seemed to straighten up slightly while leaning on the table to regain his energy.
"Liam Carter Jackson... sir?"

"'Merlin' will be fine, Liam," Merlin replied, nodding reassuringly at the boy as he indicated the
Staffs that Daniel and Elizabeth still held in their hands. "As I am sure my holographic message
told your... guardians-"

"Actually, I'm his father," Daniel cut in.

"Really?” Merlin said, raising his eyebrows slightly before he looked at Sam. "And... you are his
mother, correct?"

"Uh... yeah," Sam replied, nodding at the Ancient.

"Fascinating..." Merlin said, looking at the two with a slight smile. "I never imagined that the
human race would progress so far as to achieve Ascension in a mere thousand years..."
"Well, I did have a little help," Daniel said, shrugging in a self-effacing manner. "Her name was Oma Desala."

"Of course..." Merlin said, smiling slightly in understanding before he shook his head and turned his attention back to Liam. "Regardless, as I am certain my hologram already informed your... parents..., the Alteraci is a crucial part of the fight against the Ori; I will cause him no harm, and his... assistance... in providing me with extra energy is... appreciated."

"Wait..." Elizabeth said, looking uncertainly at Merlin. "We know from experience that spending time in stasis isn't the automatic suspension of the aging process that we'd initially assumed it was; does that mean...?"

"Normally, my time now would be limited, yes," Merlin replied, nodding at Elizabeth as stood back from the circular table, his back straightening as he looked at the group around him with renewed strength. "However, with the aid of your son here, I believe that he has managed to heal the worst of the cellular damage I had sustained in my time in stasis. My projected lifespan is not likely to be long, but it will be more than sufficient for our current purposes so long as I am permitted time to rest while I work."

"Well, we should be able to provide that easily enough; we managed to use your Staffs to deliver a pretty effective blow to the Ori before we came here," Sheppard said, shrugging slightly as he looked at Merlin. "Long story short, we managed to trick a couple of the Ori into using their powers here so that the Ascended would take action and kick them out of this galaxy. It's not exactly a foolproof strategy, but according to a couple of people we know among the Ascended, it got the job done; they'll be out of action for a bit while they try to regroup, and they've only got one active and fully-crewed ship left in this galaxy."

"Really?" Merlin said, smiling slightly at John. "You have certainly done well; to have scored such victories against the Ori is no easy task..."

For a moment the cave was dominated by silence, the makeshift SG team all uncertain what to say in response to Merlin's praise, before he looked curiously at John.

"And... how did you come to be here?" he asked, indicating the cave around him. "From what I am beginning to recall, Morgan concealed my location well..."

"Well..." John said, looking slightly uncertain as he spoke, clearly aware of how much of what he was saying was mere guesswork, "Doctor Jackson had been studying some stuff that was going to lead us to this address, but we think that Morgan may have helped to lead us here at the last minute; I had to dial an address in a hurry and I entered the address for this world instead of the one I was meant to be entering..."

"Ah," Merlin said, nodding in understanding. "That does indeed sound like the work of the Ascended."

"Their usual cryptic selves, really," Daniel said with a slight shrug. "Oma was the same way when I knew her."

"Which reminds me," Merlin said, turning back to look at Daniel, "what happened to result in you returning to human form?"

"Well... I wasn't too good at the whole 'non-interference' thing, and there... were a few arguments," Daniel replied, before he shrugged uncertainly. "At least, that's the impression I got."
"You don't remember?" Merlin asked.

"Only a few bits and pieces, and most of them involve... things I did here," Daniel said, his eyes briefly flicking over to Sam almost automatically before he continued, John, Elizabeth and Merlin either not noticing his glance or deciding not to ask him about it. "In order to protect me, Oma erased it all from my mind and sent me back."

"Oh," Merlin said, stretching slightly as he stood up on his own once more, his strength having sufficiently returned to him. "I'm surprised she still hasn't learned her lesson."

"Not meaning to be picky, but she's not the only one who broke some of the rules," John pointed out as he raised a slightly teasing eyebrow at Merlin.

"The Ori gain their power from the lower plains," Merlin replied, looking solemnly over at the lieutenant colonel. "So much so, that one day they shall be strong enough to wipe the Others out. In the face of such a threat, the strict policy of non interference is absurd!"

"I'm sure Aunt Oma would agree with you," Liam said with a slight smile. "She did help raise me, after all..."

"'Aunt' Oma?" Merlin repeated, looking at Liam with a slight smile. "Did she assume the title herself, or was it given to her?"

"Uh... a bit of both?" Liam said, shrugging uncertainly.

"An intriguing answer," Merlin replied with a slight smile, before he turned his attention to Daniel. "I confess, Oma's concern for the individual over everything did... trouble me at times, but... she must have seen something in you to believe you to be worthy."

For a moment, he closed his eyes in silent contemplation, before he opened them again to look around at the group around him. "Before I agree to join with you, I need to know that you are willing to do whatever must be done to see it through."

"Surely you have some idea of what we've been through to get here..." Elizabeth said uncertainly, clearly uncomfortable questioning the man before her after everything he'd already done.

"What you have experienced so far... is as nothing compared to what is to come," Merlin said, looking grimly at the group around him. "Completing the Sangraal is merely part of what is to come; delivering it alone will be difficult, to say nothing of the possibility of the Others intervening again."

For a moment, the two lieutenant colonels and the two doctors exchanged questioning glances with each other, only to be met with nothing but the same resolution that they themselves felt on the current topic.

Regardless of the risks, so long as Merlin understood what else would need to be done for them to succeed in their current efforts, they were ready for it.

"Well... we're on board, whatever happens, but I think an immediate priority should be... making contact with Earth," Elizabeth said at last, looking slightly uncomfortably at Merlin as she spoke; Daniel might be the superior expert when it came to Ancient, but at this point in their quest Elizabeth was the one with more official authority. "I mean, we appreciate that you've been kept secret so far for a reason, but we didn't exactly come here prepared for a long stay- we were expecting to find the Sangraal rather than you, and we only even came to this planet because of outside circumstances rather than planning to come here ourselves..."
"Understandable," Merlin said, holding up a hand to smile reassuring at the archaeologist. "The process that I am about to undertake is a long one; while I must remain here to carry out my work, if your assessment of the current status of the Ori fleet is accurate, we may be able to spare the time necessary to contact your world and inform them of our current situation."

"Thanks," Sam said, smiling briefly in gratitude at the Ancient as she indicated the passage behind her. "I think I've got a basic understanding of what's happened- we were sent through the Stargate by the obelisk that was next to what we assumed at the time was the Sangraal-, but if there's anything you know about what Morgan did to set it up-"

"Yes..." Merlin said, nodding in reflection as a smile spread across his face, Sam's words having evidently triggered another memory. "I remember now... she created a 'sub-section' of the Stargate network... a series of gates that would not connect to the rest of the network unless receiving the transmission that someone worthy had passed her tests..."

"Network?" Sam repeated in confusion.

"In the event of those who discovered the Sangraal being followed by hostiles, Morgan informed me that the Stargate and the obelisk should work together to transfer me and those with me into the next Stargate in the system to ensure my protection..." Merlin reflected, his voice trailing off as he thought about what he had just said before he continued. "I assume you are... aware of how the Stargates operate?"

"Well, we've managed to create our own one back on Earth- the original was lost before we gained access to our Stargate-, and we've used others when we've had to..." Sam replied, before her eyes widened at the implications. "You mean-"

"I mean," Merlin said, holding up a hand to stop her before she could continue further, "that we have business that must be attended to, and it will progress faster once the Stargate has been restored to full working order; I shall do what I can to assist you before I begin my work."
A couple of hours later, they had finally completed the last of the necessary modifications to restore the Stargate's access to the rest of the 'gate network. The work on the DHD hadn't been as straightforward as those involved had hoped, given that Merlin himself hadn't known that much about the fine details of what Morgan had done to the system originally, but with Sam's acquired experience of the systems involved and Liam's instinctive access to Ancient knowledge combined with Merlin's own memory of the fine details of the technology they were working with, they had eventually managed to shut down the obelisk that contained the automatic dialling program that would have transferred them to another planet if someone had been following them. With the obelisk disabled, they had been able to restore the DHD's connection to the main Stargate network, and were preparing to dial Earth.

"Here goes nothing," Sam said at last, looking around at her small makeshift team as she stood in front of the DHD, her gaze settling on Merlin. "You're sure you're OK with this?"

"It has been... a long time since I lived in this galaxy," Merlin admitted with a slight smile. "The technology and materials required for me to recreate the Sangraal are here, but I recognise that more will be needed if this endeavour is going to succeed, and am certain that we all require rest before we proceed any further. If you feel that this is the best course of action to take at this time, I shall concede to your superior wisdom in this area."

"Thanks for trusting us," Daniel said, smiling gratefully at the Ancient before his stance became less comfortable. "Ah... you do understand that you might have to deal with some people who are more interested in what... else you could give us apart from the Sangraal, right...?"

"I am not so out of touch as to not assume that there are those out there who would wish to use my knowledge for purposes aside from the reason why I have been preserved for all these years, Doctor Jackson," Merlin said, nodding in understanding at the archaeologist. "I recognise that the path I am taking by accompanying you will not be easy, but if it is necessary to ensure that I may complete my work with as much possible assistance from the rest of the galaxy, I shall do it."

"Uh... thanks," John said, nodding slightly at Merlin as he and Elizabeth exchanged brief glances, a slightly reflective expression on both their faces as though they were recalling some shared experience. Daniel briefly thought about asking what they were thinking about, but any thought of asking questions was pushed aside as Sam began to dial the coordinates into the DHD, the group turning to face the Stargate in preparation for contact with Earth.

A few moments later, the Stargate had completed dialling and the wormhole had connected, leaving Sam to activate her radio and address the planet at the other end.

"General Landry?" she said. "This is Colonel Carter, and... well, our team."

She knew that the phrase 'our team' wasn't exactly the best term, but it was all she could come up with; given that they currently consisted of two-fifths of SG-1, two-fifths of Atlantis's command structure- given that Teyla was normally referred to by the SGC back on Earth as a 'co-leader' of Atlantis due to her former role among her people-, a partly Ascended child and a former Ascended, there really wasn't any specific name that could be used to describe their strange 'team-up'.

"Colonel Carter?" Landry's voice replied at the other end of the communication. "Does this mean you've found the Sangraal?"
"Not... exactly, sir," Sam replied, exchanging a brief glance with her teammates, uncertain how Landry was going to react to this kind of news, before she continued speaking. "We didn't find the Sangraal- Daniel thinks that Morgan really did destroy it when the other Ancients ordered her to do so-, but we did find... well, we found Merlin."

"Merlin?" Landry repeated, clearly sounding sceptical at what he'd just heard. "As in, you encountered a holographic recreation of Merlin, or-?"

"As in they encountered me myself, General Landry," Merlin said, stepping forward to address the radio with a slight smile. "I am the one your people know as Merlin; after Morgan was forced to destroy the Sangraal on the order of the Others, she arranged for me to be concealed from the rest of the universe in a specially concealed area of the overall Stargate network, accessible only when specific codes were transmitted from a specific address, until the time came when my creation would be needed."

"I... see," Landry said, clearly uncertain how to cope with this latest revelation. "And... why are you contacting us?"

"Long story short, we need something to eat and Merlin needs to get some rest before he just dives in and starts making something this tricky," Liam cut in, stepping forward and looking impatiently at the radio. "Can you just let us through already; it's really hot over here..."

"Liam!" Sam said, her voice low as she stared in embarrassment at her son before she turned back to the radio in her hand. "I'm... sorry about that, sir; Liam's..."

"Demonstrating the less appealing issues involved in being a parent for the first time since you've met him, right?" Landry said, sounding slightly amused at the other end of the connection. "Don't worry about it, Colonel Carter; kids say the darndest things, after all."

"Thank you, sir," Sam said, nodding slightly with a relieved smile. "So... shall we come through?"

"Permission granted," Landry said.

With that, Sam turned the radio off, and the group walked into the activated wormhole, Merlin just behind them...

As they entered the gateroom at the other end of the wormhole, the team were unable to stop slight smile crossing their lips as the rest of the SGC personnel in the base stared incredulously at the sight of Merlin standing among them, his long beard and robes making him the almost perfect personification of the stereotypical concept of Merlin in fiction.

"My God..." Landry whispered, the general now standing at the end of ramp leading up to the gate, his eyes wide as he took in Merlin, standing nonchalantly among the two lieutenant colonels, the two doctors, and the young boy. "You were being serious..."

"Indeed, General Hank Landry," Merlin said, smiling slightly at the other man as he walked forward, holding his hand out for the general to shake as he studied his surroundings. "An... interesting... location for your... Stargate, I believe you call it? Shall I assume this serves to conceal its activities from the rest of your world?"

"Well... yes, exactly." Landry said, nodding slightly hesitantly at Merlin. "We're just not certain how the general public would react to the news that life exists outside this planet; we've generally tried to keep it quiet to avoid revealing the scale of what we're dealing with..."
"A wise precaution," Merlin said with an approving smile. "As I myself have determined, even among my people, people can foolish when it comes to making decisions on a large scale, no matter what the long-term consequences of their decisions could be."

"Right," Landry said, nodding briefly at Merlin before he turned to address the rest of the group. "So, what were the results of your search?"

"Firstly, you might want to send someone to pick up the jumper from the first planet we visited; we never managed to get back for it," John said, before he shrugged as he indicated Merlin. "After that, I guess we just let Merlin go back to that planet where we found him and get to work on the new Sangraal; does that work for you?"

"That will be... sufficient, Colonel Sheppard," Merlin said, smiling over at the lieutenant colonel briefly before the doors to the gateroom opened once again, revealing the other three members of SG-1 as they hurried into the room, their eyes instantly falling on their teammates.

"So, you guys made it back, huh?" Mitchell said, smiling slightly at Sam and Daniel. "Well, you definitely picked an interesting time to take a break; we just-"

His eyes widened as he realised the identity of the sixth member of the originally five-man team. "Holy crap..."

"Indeed," Teal'c said, looking at the bearded man standing behind his teammates with a slight smile. "This is a most unexpected turn of events."

"I am certain that it was that way for all of us," Merlin replied, smiling briefly at Teal'c before he turned to look at Landry. "To begin with the most obvious details, is there someplace here where I might have something to eat? As much as the boy has been able to... assist in my recovery, it has still been a long time since I had sustenance of any sort..."

"Uh... we'll see what we can do, anyway," Mitchell said, smiling slightly at Merlin. "It probably won't be great food, but-"

"I am sure that it shall suffice," Merlin replied as he walked off the ramp leading up to the Stargate, smiling reassuringly at the people around him as he joined the group now heading for the commissary.

"Uh... General Landry?" Elizabeth said, the rest of the SGC staff filing out of the gateroom now that the immediate problem had been dealt with, leaving only her and John as the two people who didn't have anything to do at this time. "Firstly, I feel that I should go on record and apologise for just leaving Atlantis like I did; at the time it seemed as though we would only be gone for a few hours, and we had no plan for travelling to the Sangraal planet..."

"Doctor Weir," General Landry said, holding up a reassuring hand as he looked at Atlantis's civilian commander. "As much as I am certain my superiors would appreciate a chance to... talk... with you about breaking orders, given that your efforts have resulted in us being given an unprecedented chance to speak with one of the most respected Ancients to ever live, I believe that it would be safe to assume that they wouldn't have a leg to stand on by any stretch of the imagination."

"Good point," John said, smiling reassuringly at Elizabeth. "Look at it this way; with that kind of
PR boost, the IOA would have to be idiots to ignore the advantages we've just picked up because of what we just did."

"Precisely," Landry said with a confirming nod. "In the meantime, as long as we're here, I think the obvious thing to do right now is for the two of you to join your temporary teammates for a meal; Atlantis is meant to be getting back in touch with us soon to help set up the timing of the first test of the Inter-Galactic Gate Bridge in the next few days- once Colonel Carter's had a chance to go over McKay's data about the bridge to make sure-, so you can get back in touch with the city then."

"Well... that should be fine," John said after exchanging a confirming nod with Elizabeth.

"Good," Landry said, indicating the door with a brief smile. "In the meantime, you'd better get going; after everything that's happened, you could probably use a meal of something."

Despite the unexpected nature of their latest guest's arrival, Daniel had to admit that Merlin's brief time in the commissary could have gone worse than it had. Picking what Merlin might actually want from the commissary's relatively limited range of foods had been a challenging prospect, of course- the Ancients' dietary requirements were one area they'd never found out much about no matter how much they'd learned about the society-, but he'd been fairly understanding about the limited food available, and had generally expressed an appreciation for the beef that had been provided for him once they'd clarified that there was nothing he would have any trouble consuming.

"So," Merlin said as he studied the building around him, a slight smile on his face as he studied the people looking at him, "shall I assume that my people have acquired a... reputation... among your own?"

"Well, among those of us who know about the Stargate, anyway," Daniel replied, as he, Liam and Sam sat alongside Merlin, picking at their own food as they spoke with the former 'wizard'. "We've only managed to find out a limited amount about your people- and there's some doubt about whether we're ready as a species to know the full scale of what you all discovered out there in the rest of the universe-, but in general... well, some of the advances you made were just... incredible."

"And yet?" Merlin asked, looking at Daniel with a slight smile.

"'And yet?'" Daniel repeated uncertainly, Liam looking slightly uncomfortable as he looked between his father and Merlin.

"There is something that you are not telling me regarding your thoughts on this matter, Doctor Jackson," Merlin said, looking at Daniel with a brief smile. "If you have problems with actions that have been committed by my people, feel free to share your opinions with me; I will not be angry at whatever conclusions you have reached, I assure you."

"Well..." Daniel said, looking awkwardly at Merlin for a moment before he spoke. "Your people seem a bit... aloof."

"Aloof?" Merlin repeated. "In what way?"

"Well... as an example, in their first year in Pegasus the Atlantis expedition discovered a world covered by a sentient mist that consisted of billions of life-forms," Daniel explained. "Whenever the Stargate on that world was dialled, thousands of those life-forms were killed when the Stargate
drew power from them to generate the wormhole; the people who installed the Stargate there had to have known about the creatures, but they still left it there..."

"And you object to the morality involved in such an action," Merlin said, nodding simply at Daniel. "I recognise the point that you are making, Doctor Jackson; all I can say in the defence of my people is that some of us were... less considerate... of the implications of our actions than others were."

"We appreciate that you had your more... renegade... elements in society just like we do, Merlin..." Sam began, trailing off as a thought occurred to her. "Actually, would you prefer to be called 'Moros'? I mean, we've just been calling you Merlin, but Moros was-"

"A name I have long outgrown, Samantha Carter," Merlin said, shaking his head at her. "Moros was too bound by his rules to see the larger picture; my time among the Ascended and my realisation of the threat we face from the Ori has shown me that I cannot be constrained by rules to the point of immobilisation. If action is necessary to save lives, we must take it, and avoid action that would harm innocents unless we are left with literally no alternative."

"That's... good to know," Daniel said, nodding slightly at Merlin.

"Thank you," Merlin said, nodding at the archaeologist. "In any case, you know me as Merlin, so I shall accept that name as the one you use to refer to me; I... appreciate the connotations it brings."

"Cool," Liam said, smiling at the Ancient with a casual grin.

"Thank you," Merlin said with a brief nod, before he looked curiously at Daniel. "On the topic of my peoples' discoveries, given that you began your exploration with only the Stargates, how has your own exploration of this galaxy progressed?"

"Well... like anything, it's had its ups and downs," Sam replied. "We've developed a couple of battlecruisers for space exploration using technology we reverse-engineered from ships we recovered from our enemies, as well as managing to provide some assistance for some of the worlds we've encountered out there- the Goa'uld didn't allow much opportunity for technological development, so we normally ended up helping out other planets rather than getting help ourselves- and we've managed to check out quite a few worlds based on a list of addresses we recovered from an Ancient repository-"

"You have discovered the repositories?" Merlin said, looking at them curiously.

"Well, up to a point; we've found two, but what we were able to get out of them was... limited," Daniel said. "We couldn't exactly control how much was downloaded into the receiving mind; we had to get help from the Asgard both times before Jack- General Jack O'Neill; he was the person who received the information in the repositories both times we encountered one- had his brain burnt out because of the sheer scale of information that the repositories downloaded into it..."

"Ah," Merlin said, nodding briefly as he looked reflectively between the three before him. "Yes, I suppose that would occur should the repositories be left alone for too long; with their power supply having been allowed to run down, it would naturally attempt to transfer all available information into the first receptive mind with its last dregs of energy..."

"Oh, so they aren't meant to work like that," Sam said, smiling in relief as she looked at Merlin. "I always wondered about that; it never made sense that your people would design something that
downloaded that amount of information into the subject on purpose, but we couldn't work out what the problem was..."

"That is not surprising; the repositories are highly complex systems," Merlin said, nodding briefly in understanding at Sam before something seemed to occur to him. "You say that the Asgard still exist?"

"They're... around, anyway," Daniel said, looking more solemn as he spoke. "We've both helped each other out when we can, but they're also suffering from a genetic degeneration due to their continued use of cloning technology; Thor's told us that there's doubt they'll last much longer."

"Genetic degeneration?" Merlin said, looking thoughtfully at the two of them. "I was aware that they had turned to cloning as a means of continuing their existence, but... is there no cure?"

"They thought that analysis of our DNA might help at one point in the past- particularly after we discovered some of our genetic ties to the Ancients- but they weren't able to find anything," Daniel said. "They're still doing what they can to help us, but they've had to withdraw over the last couple of years; we... haven't had as much contact with them as we used to."

"That is regrettable," Merlin said with a solemn nod. "They were noble allies back when the Alliance was first formed; that they should meet such a fate is tragic."

"Uh..." Sam said, looking uncertainly at Merlin. "I don't suppose... you could do anything?"

"Do anything?" Merlin repeated inquiringly.

"Well, they've often speculated that your people's DNA might be able to offer a cure for their condition; it was one reason that they were so interested in us at first, but Thor told us a couple of years ago that Colonel O'Neill- the most advanced genetic specimen they knew of at the time- wasn't advanced enough to give them what they wanted," Sam explained. "Thor took a scan of Liam when he came to help us earlier which he thought might be able to help him, but maybe..."

"If you can make contact with them, I would naturally be pleased to volunteer what I can to assist them," Merlin said, a slight smile on his face. "You are acquainted with Thor?"

"You know him?" Sam asked.

"Only from what I have seen during my time Ascended," Merlin said. "However, what I saw then assured me that he was a worthy leader for his people; I would be proud to help him if I can do so."

Finishing the last of his food, Merlin sighed as he stood up and looked between the three people around him. "However, for the moment, we have more immediate tasks to be dealing with; will I travel alone, or do you wish for me to bring others while I work?"

"Well... if you don't have any objections, I think we'd prefer it if other people were there in case you need any... help," Daniel said, looking slightly uncertain even as he spoke. "I mean, we understand that there's probably not going to be much we can do to help you complete the Sangraal itself, but-."

"There is no need to be concerned about any possible desire I might have for privacy, Doctor Jackson," Merlin said, smiling briefly at Daniel. "I have been alone for far too long; any company that you can provide while I complete my work will be most welcome."
"Cool," Liam said, smiling enthusiastically at Merlin. "When do we start?"

"As soon as possible," Merlin said, standing up with a brief smile at Liam. "We must proceed; there is much to be done, both in the Sangraal's construction and in the training that I can offer you."

"Training?" Sam repeated in surprise.

"In his abilities, of course," Merlin said. "The Alteraci is capable of many things beyond what you have seen him display so far; the construction of the Sangraal must be a priority, but I will nevertheless be able and willing to do what I can to provide Liam Jackson with a clearer idea of what he is capable of, if he- and you, of course- are willing to accompany me."

The eager smile on Liam's face at the prospect was all that his parents needed to confirm his willingness to go along with this suggestion.

"If General Landry agrees with us, we're in," Sam said, nodding at Merlin with a smile.

"And I'm sure the rest of our team would be interested in coming along as well... if you don't mind, that is," Daniel added.

"Feel free to count us in, too," a voice said, prompting the four diners to turn around and see John Sheppard and Elizabeth Weir walking over to join them, trays in their hands.

"You want to come along as well?" Daniel asked, looking at his new friends- he hadn't really managed to spend enough time with Elizabeth as a person when she'd run the SGC to count her as a friend, and John had been at the SGC for too little time to really bond with anyone at first- in slight surprise. "What about Atlantis?"

"Next chance to go back won't be for another few days, anyway; if you need us at the moment, we're all yours," John explained.

"I know it's a bit presumptuous, but... well, we were with you at the start, and we'd like to be there at the end," Elizabeth said, shrugging slightly as she looked at Sam. "If it's all right with you, Colonel Carter?"

"Of course," Sam replied with a smile.

"I have no objections to such an arrangement either, Doctor Weir," Merlin put in, smiling at her as he turned to face her. "It will be a pleasure to get to know you again."

"Same here," Elizabeth replied, smiling back at Merlin before the six of them returned to their respective meals, thoughts of the next few days' activity first in all their minds as they anticipated to varying degrees what was about to take place.
"Stargate Command?" a voice said from the other end of an active wormhole a couple of hours later, SG-1 standing in the Stargate control room along with a few of their newer associates. "This is Doctor Rodney McKay; have you heard anything from Doctor Weir and Colonel Sheppard yet?"

"Having that much trouble coping in our absence already, Rodney?" John asked, shooting a brief smile at Elizabeth at the sound of their old friend's voice; even after only a couple of days at most away from Atlantis, it was hard not to worry about the city that had brought them all together.

"Wha- you're on Earth?" McKay said, clearly surprised to see them over the video communication. "B-but you said you'd be right back after the mission; we thought you were-!"

"Sorry to make everyone back home worry, Rodney, but we're fine; we were just... diverted... on our way back from the Ori galaxy," Elizabeth explained with a slight shrug of apology.

"On the bright side," John put in, a slightly satisfied smile on his face as he looked at his friend, "we managed to help Doctor Jackson and Colonel Carter find where Morgan Le Fay had left the Sangraal while we were away, and we even stumbled across a very interesting little bonus."

"Which was?" McKay asked, clearly sceptical that anything they had found could be that interesting.

"Oh, we found Merlin," John replied, exchanging an amused grin with Elizabeth and General Landry at the suddenly fish-like expression on McKay's face at that news.

"M... Mer... Merlin?" he repeated incredulously. "You're joking?"

"I assure you, Doctor McKay, this is no joke," Landry said, looking at McKay with a nonchalant smile that was only slightly less amused than the one John had given his friend earlier. "He's currently getting some rest before he returns to his world to begin the reconstruction of the Sangraal- Doctor Jackson's theory is that the original Sangraal was destroyed but Morgan kept Merlin somewhere safe so that he could rebuild it when the time came-, and, since all gate travel between Atlantis and Earth is temporarily on hold until we can get the gate bridge up and running, Colonel Sheppard and Doctor Weir have volunteered to accompany SG-1 to Merlin's planet while he begins construction of a new one."

"Oh," McKay said, looking between the people standing in front of the screen before he finally shrugged. "Well, in that case, I'll let Major Lorne know that he'll be piloting the first jumper flight along the bridge... unless you've got anyone else you'd like to recommend for the job?"

"Nah, if I can't be there myself, Lorne'll be fine," John said, nodding in approval at his friend. "Sucks that I won't be able to do it myself, but I'll manage."

"Tell me about it; I was really looking forward to monitoring everything from Daedalus, but I had to delegate to Zelenka what with you two being missing..." McKay said, his voice a low murmur that suggested he was partly talking to himself.

"In the meantime," Elizabeth added, smiling slightly at McKay to bring his focus back to them, "you and Teyla just make sure to keep everything together until we get back; we'll be home soon."

"Sure thing," McKay said, nodding at his friends with a slight smile. "Well... see you in a couple of days."
As the Canadian scientist terminated the connection, John turned to look at Landry with a slight shrug.

"Well," he said, clapping his hands together as he looked at the general in front of him, "with that issue out of the way, OK if we head off to join SG-1?"

"Feel free," Landry replied with a confirming nod. "The sooner we get Merlin to work on the Sangraal, the happier our superiors would be, I'm sure."

Landry's prediction about the IOA response to recent developments proved almost prophetic. SG-1- the team temporarily expanding its ranks to include Doctor Weir and Colonel Sheppard, although Doctor Weir had made it clear that Colonel Mitchell would remain in command of the team given his superior 'on-site experience' of events in this galaxy- had barely travelled through the Stargate to return to the planet where they had found Merlin- although the Ancient in question had needed to help them modify their dialling program to access the mini-network Morgan had apparently set up to protect him- when Richard Woolsey was at the door of Landry's office, looking at the general with a pointed stare.

"Yes, Mr Woolsey?" Landry said, putting his current round of paperwork off to the side as he looked at the other man. "What is it?"

"Having just received your latest report on the events of the last couple of days, the IOA is... concerned about your decisions regarding your... recent discovery," Woolsey said; evidently he was trying to stick to more generic terms to limit the need to think too much about the orders he was giving.

"I assume you're referring to our recent discovery that Merlin is still alive and is even now completing the Sangraal for us?" Landry asked, looking pointedly back at Woolsey.

"Well... yes, really," Woolsey replied, swallowing uncomfortably before he continued. "While the IOA acknowledge that the threat of the Ori should be resolved as quickly as possible, the potential information that Merlin could offer us--"

"Is practically worthless if we're conquered by the Ori before we can use it," Landry countered bluntly. "Believe me, everyone at this base thought about asking Merlin what else he could tell us about his people- particularly regarding the possibility of giving us some way of searching the Ancient database in Atlantis that would streamline the whole process more than what we're doing at the moment; I can assure you I didn't need Doctor Weir to point out the benefits of that kind of information-, but given Merlin's current physical condition, it was considered to be best for all concerned parties if he focused on finishing the Sangraal before he did anything else."

"And you're sure that he can do this?" Woolsey asked, looking slightly more comfortable now that a line of debate had begun. "According to Doctor Lam's reports, Merlin's physical condition after so long in stasis is extremely weak; even allowing for our natural ignorance of his unique biology, she apparently calculated that he cannot have more than a few weeks left to him-"

"Maybe he's not got long, but if that's the case, given his age and the powers and knowledge he possesses, I think it's safe to say that it's up to Merlin himself what he does with the time that's left to him- there's relatively little that we could do to him if he really wanted to do something, if Liam's any example of what he's capable of-, and what he wants to do is finish the Sangraal," Landry said, looking resolutely back at Woolsey (It was a slight bluff given Merlin's poor health, but the former Ascended still had enough power to potentially demonstrate what he could do to the
"Given the still-immediate threat of the Ori," Landry continued—there was no point worrying about his bluff being called when there was no reason to suppose that it would be—, "I concluded that it would be better for all concerned parties if Merlin got to work on reconstructing the Sangraal before he did anything else, and Merlin definitely wasn't arguing. If he decides that he's got time to share more information about his people with us once he's finished his work, we'll ask him about it; right now, he's got something that he needs to do, and he's going to do it. Is that understood?"

Woolsey could only nod at that.

"Good," Landry said, standing up with a slight smile as he glanced at his watch before he turned to address Woolsey again. "If you've got time, Mr Woolsey, you might want to stick around the base; we're planning the first test of the McKay-Carter Inter-Galactic Gate Bridge in a few hours."

Even if the IOA wouldn't be entirely happy that they were unable to use potentially the greatest source of Ancient knowledge they'd ever find to its greatest extent, they couldn't exactly complain if he provided them with this kind of proof that they were making progress in making Atlantis more accessible...

As he sat in the cave where they had discovered Merlin only a couple of days ago, John wondered if he should be concerned about the fact that he had actually reached a point where he was bored while being in the same room as Merlin himself.

Granted, it wasn't like Merlin was actually in a position to talk with them much—his attention was fairly focused on what he had to do at the moment—but that didn't exactly change the fact that the only thing there really was to do in this situation was alternate between chatting with the rest of the team or just generally hang around.

God, he was even reading a copy of War and Peace that Doctor Jackson had let him borrow in the absence of his own copy back in Atlantis; he wasn't exactly anti-social, but there was only so many times you could talk with people while waiting in a small space for several hours...

"Whoa!" Liam's voice said, drawing John's attention back to one part of this current assignment that was not boring; seeing Liam Carter Jackson experiment with his abilities.

While Merlin had confirmed early on that Liam had a fairly impressive amount of training in the abilities he had gained from the Ascended side of his heritage, his skills were nevertheless limited to only the most obvious powers he had acquired from Doctor Jackson's Ascended days, mainly focusing on healing and the occasional energy 'attack'.

With Merlin's conscious mind focusing on the Sangraal, he had apparently established a basic but evidently effective telepathic link between himself and Liam before he began his work. As a result, Liam was able to receive lessons and instructions from the part of Merlin's mind that wasn't occupied with completing construction of the Sangraal, based on Merlin's own experience in learning about his powers after he himself had retaken human form following his Ascension.

As the adults watched, Liam held his hands out before him and began to generate a ball of golden energy between his palms, his hands moving around the ball as though he was caressing it, despite the fact that it was always a couple of inches away from his skin, before he raised his arms above his head and spread his arms, the ball he had been generating dispersing into a burst of golden light...
that showered down on the adults watching like a small golden storm.

"Nice..." John said, giving Liam a quick thumbs-up.

"Interesting tri-" Vala began, only for her to suddenly stop mid-sentence when Liam raised his fingers and flicked them in Vala's direction, causing her voice to suddenly vanish.

"Huh," Mitchell said, looking at the suddenly-shocked Vala with a slight smile. "That's different."

"Liam..." Sam said, glaring at her son.

"What?" Liam asked, his mind shifting from his lesson as he opened his eyes to look at his mother with an innocent shrug. "I was just testing something Merlin taught me; Vala just... happened to be the one talking when I realised that I could do that."

Before Sam could say anything else, Liam had waved his hand at Vala again and her voice was restored, the boy shrugging apologetically at her.

"It's nothing personal," the boy said with a brief shrug.

"No offence taken," Vala replied, her eyes slightly narrowed as she looked at Liam.

"Yeah..." Liam said, swallowing slightly before a slight smile crossed his face as something seemed to occur to him. "Just a moment..."

"What?" Vala asked, even as Liam reached over towards the nearby wall, his hand waving as small fragments of rock became detached from the cave wall and floated over to hover in front of him.

His eyes narrowing, Liam held his hands out in front of him as the small rock fragments came together between his palms, subsequently rapidly manoeuvring his hands through thin air as though he was rubbing a ball that only he could see, the rock fragments moving seemingly at random inside the small area before he suddenly clapped his hands together.

After a moment's stillness as the golden glow that had briefly burst from his hands as they came in contact faded, Liam parted his palms to reveal a thick golden ring with nine small diamonds studded around it, the ring hovering over his palm for a moment before it suddenly flew over to Vala.

"What the...?" Vala said, looking in confusion at the object in her hand.

"Check the pattern," Liam explained, looking slightly expectantly over at Vala.

Frowning, Vala studied the ring in more detail, wondering what Liam could have meant by it; it was a bit thicker than normal rings, and there was a slightly unusual-yet-naggingly-familiar detail about the triangular 'pattern' around the diamonds...

"The Stargate?" she said, looking at Liam with a slight smile. "It... well, it might just be me, but this..."

"Looks like the Stargate?" Liam finished for her with a nod. "Just thought you'd like it... plus, of course, it comes equipped with a small energy field that means that any Ancient technology you encounter will register you as possessing the Ancient gene and allow you to use it-"
Liam's further explanation was cut off when Vala stood up and walked over to give the young boy an enthusiastic hug, pulling back only to smile broadly at him as she slid the ring onto her finger.

"Thank you," she said, leaning over to give him a brief but warm kiss on the forehead. "At last I can use something more interesting than Goa'uld technology..."

"Just don't overuse it; there's only so much it can do when you don't actually have the gene," Liam pointed out, a slight smile on his face at her enthusiasm before the smile faded, his head lowering as he looked at the ground in a slightly sheepish manner. "I know it's not that much, but... well, consider it me saying 'sorry'."

"'Sorry'?" Vala repeated.

"For... well, what I said when we met," Liam explained, looking up at Vala with an expression of what could best be described as hopeful anxiety on his face. "I know I didn't bring it up earlier, but... well, stuff was happening, and... look, the whole 'whipping up an energy ball and glaring at you' thing wasn't anything against you, I just..."

He sighed for a moment, looking over at his parents in a briefly pleading manner before he shook his head resolutely and turned back to look at Vala. "I got so used to the idea of Mom and Dad coming for me that when you showed up, criticising Dad for something he'd never known about, I just... got a bit defensive, and-"

"Don't worry about it," Vala said, smiling slightly at Liam before he had to say anything else, clearly aware of how uncomfortable the current topic made him. "I get that I'm not always one for making a positive first impression- I think my first meeting with your father is proof enough of that, after all-, and I admit that I could have been a bit less... blunt... when I first met you; add in the way I treated you at first, and it was only natural that we'd hit it off badly."

"Thanks," Liam said, smiling back at her.

"When you gave me the ability to do something only a certain amount of us can do even with Atlantis's gene therapy?" Vala replied with her own smile. "I think it's safe to say we're even."

"Oh, and on the topic of rings..." Liam added, closing both his palms before opening them to reveal a couple of simple gold bands that he subsequently floated over to his parents.

"Uh..." Daniel said, looking uncomfortably between the ring he now held in his fingers and the woman sitting beside him. "Liam, it's not that we don't appreciate the thought..."

"Just thought that you might like something that you can use later," Liam replied, shrugging nonchalantly, a teasing gleam in his eyes the only indication that he understood the full implications of his latest 'gift', before he closed the aforementioned eyes and assumed the meditative pose he'd been using earlier.

After a few moments of silence as the group waited to see if Liam was going to say or do anything else, John broke it.

"OK, I'll be the one to say it if nobody else is," he said, looking over at Sam and Daniel. "Any ideas how your kid did that... and does it have anything to do with what's happening over there?"
As he indicated the small round table that the group had seen when they originally arrived in the room, it wasn't hard to realise what Atlantis's military commander was referring to; holograms of what looked like molecules were assembling themselves above the device, the 'molecules' coming together over time to form larger components as the group watched.

"Well," Daniel said, shrugging slightly uncertainly, "I can't be certain, but from the looks of it, I'd say that Merlin's using that device to completely put something together from base molecules."

"Really?" Mitchell said, looking at the table in surprise as a round ring of some sort appeared around the edge of the table. "Well, that's... somehow, 'neat' doesn't cut it, does it?"

"And... what Liam did with the rings was essentially the same thing?" Elizabeth asked, indicating the items in question.

"Should we be congratulating you for Liam managing to create these without that device?" Vala asked, holding up the hand with her new ring on it with the same broad smile she'd had when she'd learned what it was capable of.

"Well, given the Sangraal's obvious complexity, it only makes sense that Merlin would need to use more advanced methods to put everything together," Sam said, trying to stop herself blushing slightly as she looked at the simple gold ring her son had created for her, wishing that she could stop herself thinking of another ring that might be on her hand in the not-too-distant future. "Liam did need to use and convert fragments from the walls around us to make the rings; his control over the finer details of his abilities is definitely improving, but it's not like-

"Stargate Command to SG-1," a radio suddenly said, breaking the current conversation as the non-part-Ascended beings in the room looked at the source of this new voice (They must have been too deep inside the cavern to hear the Stargate activate), "are you receiving me?"

"Stargate Command, this is Colonel Mitchell," Mitchell replied as he activated his radio, curious glances being exchanged among the rest of his team; the relatively calm tone of the voice on the other end of the connection suggested that the current topic wasn't anything potentially dangerous, but that still raised the question of what anyone from Earth would want with them at a time like this. "Merlin's still busy working on the new Sangraal; what's happening back there?"

"Sorry to interrupt your progress, Colonel Mitchell," Walter Harriman's voice said from the radio, "but you might want to get Merlin on the line; the test of the Inter-Galactic Gate Bridge has... well, according to Colonel Caldwell and Doctor McKay's latest transmission, we've discovered something that he might want to know about."
When Ancients Meet

Chapter Notes

1. This is set just a few hours after the last chapter; relevant information about the intervening time will be provided, but given what I've got planned for this chapter and its impact on subsequent events in the series I thought it best to get this out as soon as possible.

2. A bit of my own personal speculation regarding the Ancients' knowledge of Ascension and the Ori at the time when Helia's crew were 'cut off' from the rest of their people, but I'm reasonably sure that nothing I have here contradicts anything we knew from the series; after all, Chaya/Athar proves that some Ancients Ascended before the others, so after that it doesn't seem like much of a stretch to assume that even those who hadn't Ascended yet were aware of the possibility that they would do so in future.

3. For advance reference, the crew of the *Tria* will refer to Merlin as Moros because that's the name they knew him by, but he will continue to be known as Merlin to the SGC staff because he recognises that it's easier for them to refer to him by that name given the impact he made on them as a mythological figure during his time on Earth in the past; he has no personal preference either way.

As Daniel stood in the Atlantis gateroom alongside his team, his son, and his new friends, he almost couldn't believe that he was going to be present at a moment like this.

An actual Ancient ship...

Merlin might be a more impressive discovery (Not that Daniel thought of Merlin as just a 'discovery'; he was already starting to enjoy his conversations with the Ancient even without the knowledge of what Merlin was doing for them by helping them vanquish the Ori by completing construction of the Sangraal) in terms of his own historical and mythological importance to Earth, but the concept of an entire ship crewed by living, breathing Ancients, kept alive for all this time thanks to the time dilation effect of their attempts to travel at just under lightspeed, undetected until *Daedalus* had happened to be in just the right place to detect them...

From what reports they'd received from Caldwell over the transmissions from *Daedalus*, the ship itself was almost certainly a write-off after the damage it had sustained and the effort that had been required for the crew to make it as far as they had, but the fact that there was an entire crew of Ancients available for them to learn from was something that he knew he couldn't miss.

Fortunately, with John and Elizabeth currently in the Milky Way galaxy and the Inter-Galactic gate bridge tested and confirmed to be ready for action, Landry had given permission for a puddle jumper to be sent to Earth so that Atlantis's leaders could be present at this historic event, Merlin, Daniel, Sam and Liam accompanying them back to the city so that they could be present for the crucial moment.

The 'on-loan' members of SG-1 had already settled into their chosen 'positions' in the gate room to wait for the Ancients to arrive in Atlantis; Merlin and John had chosen to wait there with them while Elizabeth gathered the rest of the city's senior staff and given them what additional
information she could about the ship that hadn't been included in the transmission.

"So," John asked, looking at Merlin with an uncertain smile, "how's it feel to know you're not the last of your kind?"

"In many ways, I am the first and last of my kind, John Sheppard; no other has walked the many varied paths I have walked in my life," Merlin replied, smiling slightly at the colonel before his expression became more solemn. "But... to know that I am not the only physical member of my species left in this universe is... comforting, in a sense."

"Uh, I don't want to sound selfish," Liam said, raising a slightly uncomfortable hand as he looked at Merlin, "but, if you've got all these other Ancients coming..."

"I assure you, Liam Jackson," Merlin said, a reassuring smile on his face as he looked at the young boy, "I have no intention of abandoning my efforts to train you just because my kin have returned to this world; as my... I suppose 'apprentice' is the best term... you are my immediate priority after the completion of the Sangraal itself."

"Apprentice?" Liam repeated, a smile on his face at the thought. "I'm your apprentice?"

"You are a student with whom I am sharing everything I know, Liam Jackson; what else am I to consider you but my apprentice?" Merlin confirmed, smiling back at Liam.

"Father of Merlin's apprentice, huh?" John said, smiling over at Sam and Daniel. "Well, at least nobody can say that your kid's going to have a boring life, huh?"

"Just so long as that's not going to be everything in his life," Sam said, the look she exchanged with Liam's father before they looked at Liam and Merlin making their intentions clear; no matter how much they appreciated Merlin teaching Liam whatever he could about his own experiences, they didn't want to deprive Liam of the chance to have some kind of normal life.

"Of course, Samantha Carter," Merlin responded, inclining his head slightly at her with a slight smile. "I promise you, I have no intention of allowing what I have to teach Liam to consume his time and attention; once I have completed my work, he shall have every opportunity to make his own choices about what to do with his life outside of the use of his powers."

"Thanks," Daniel said, nodding at Merlin in gratitude. "I mean, I know we probably do things differently from your people."

"Just because your ways are different from mine does not make them wrong, Doctor Jackson; it merely makes them different," Merlin said, smiling at the archaeologist. "You have accomplished much with your method of doing things, and that is what is important; that you have used our legacy to progress as far as you have simply shows that you have the wisdom to acknowledge the experience of your predecessors rather than any 'handicap' on your part."

Further conversation was briefly halted at the sound of Elizabeth's voice approaching them down a nearby corridor, the subsequent sound of Teyla's distinctive tones confirming that Atlantis's leader had found the other two members of John Sheppard's team during her search.

"...believe this return was foretold," Teyla's voice said from the corner of the room, prompting the group already assembled to glance over as the Athosian leader entered the room along with Elizabeth and Ronon. "They say that it marks a turning in the tide on the war against the Wraith."

"Well, I don't know about that," Elizabeth replied, smiling slightly awkwardly at her friend.
"Doctor Weir?" Chuck said from the balcony, prompting Elizabeth to glance up. "The Daedalus is ready to beam down our people and the Ancient delegation."

"Thank you," Elizabeth replied, turning towards the gate and walking into position, standing in front of SG-1 and Merlin; she had offered the former Ascended the chance to make the first introductions, but he had insisted that this was her responsibility as his successor as Atlantis's leader, and he would introduce himself later. As soon as she was ready, the transporter activated and Major Lorne and Doctor McKay had materialised in front of them, along with a small group clad in the distinctive white clothing that John had seen the Ancients wear in the virtual reality he'd discovered on the Aurora.

"Doctor Weir, Colonel Sheppard, Ronon, Teyla," Lorne said- evidently recognising that, as the group in front, it had been agreed that Atlantis's leaders would make the first introductions-, nodding at the four in question before he indicated a woman with blonde, curly hair in her apparent mid-thirties, "this is Helia, captain of the Ancient ship Tria."

"It's an honour to meet you," Elizabeth said, inclining her head slightly at the other woman.

"Thank you," Helia replied with a smile of her own. "And from what I'm told, you've done a remarkable job preserving our city."

"We did what we could with what we had," Elizabeth replied, a slight smile the only sign of her gratitude at that acknowledgement.

"I need to speak to the leader of your people," Helia continued, her face shifting as the smile faded to leave a more serious expression.

"I'm in charge of the Atlantis expedition-" Elizabeth began.

"You misunderstand me, Doctor Weir," Helia interjected, a slight smile on her face that put Daniel uncomfortably in mind of an adult who felt the need to correct a child's erroneous assumption about the reason why the sky was blue. "I need to talk to the one who can speak for all the people of Earth."

A glance at Merlin was all that Sam, Daniel and Liam needed to confirm what they were thinking; Merlin knew where this woman was going with this line of questioning, and his grim expression made it clear that he didn't approve of it.

"That can certainly be arranged," Elizabeth replied, looking slightly questioningly at Ronon and Teyla before she returned her attention to the woman in front of her, "but may I ask why?"

Helia didn't answer verbally, but a thin white console with blue lights on it suddenly rose up from the floor between her and Elizabeth, pausing at approximately waist-height as Ronon automatically drew his blaster to aim at the new object (Daniel could only hope that none of the Ancients took that personally; Ronon was a good person, but he definitely had a bit of an itchy trigger-finger...).

"What is that?" McKay asked, staring at the object in confusion. "How come I've never seen that?"

Helia didn't even bother to answer the Canadian scientist. Ignoring the surprised looks her actions had attracted from those around her, she walked up to the console and placed her hand on it, the screens in Atlantis's control room going dark practically as soon as she had made contact with the console.

"Excuse me," Elizabeth asked, her polite tone concealing an obvious edge of hostility at this sudden apparent usurpation of her authority in the city. "What's going on?"
"Thank you for all that you have done, Doctor Weir," Helia said, her tone suggesting that the reason for her actions should have been obvious, "but your guardianship of this city is no longer necessary. The city is now under my control."

Daniel quickly amended his previous slight concern to definite anger; even when they hadn't apparently even considered Ascension as a solution to their dilemma, and wouldn't even be in this city if it hadn't been for the actions of the people they were even now ordering around, Helia and her crew had already decided that they knew best even when placed in a situation where they were over ten thousand years out of date...

"No," Merlin said, stepping forward before Elizabeth or Daniel could say anything in response to that statement, his expression resolute as he glared at Helia.

"Who...?" Helia began, turning to face the speaker, only for her voice to trail off as she took in the identity of the man before her. "Moros?"

"Indeed," Merlin replied, nodding at Helia in acknowledgement of her use of his former name. "My presence here is a... long and complicated story, Helia, which this is not the time for; we shall have time to discuss it once more immediate matters have been resolved."

"Of... of course," Helia said, stepping back slightly as she indicated the newly-activated console, a slightly uncertain smile on her face at this unexpected turn of events. "This... this city is yours, after all; I only assumed authority because I believed that I was the highest-ranking person left among our people-"

"Precisely; you assumed that you knew what action you should take, and you chose the wrong one," Merlin said, staring grimly back at the other woman. Before anyone could ask him what he meant by that, the former wizard of Camelot had waved his own hand over the console and it had receded back into the ground, the screens that Helia had shut down when she triggered the console reactivating once again.

"I apologise for Commander Helia's actions, Doctor Weir," Merlin said, turning back to face Elizabeth as though what he'd done had been no more significant than opening a door. "I can assure you that-"

"What?" Helia said, looking incredulously at Merlin, the near-reverent expression she'd had on her face earlier replaced by shock. "You are allowing them control of Atlantis-"

"As you said yourself, Helia, they have done a remarkable job preserving our city," Merlin said, looking back at her with a smile whose purpose couldn't be determined; it was equally likely that Merlin was trying to console or provoke Helia into an argument. "I see no reason for that to change simply because we have returned; they do know more about the current situation than we do, after all."

"You would give this city... to them?" Helia almost yelled, apparently held in check only by her own apparent respect for Merlin's past in the city. "But... but we are your people-"

"Who have been virtually extinct for several centuries, Helia; even if we attempted to establish our authority over the city, we lack the numbers to exert any real power anywhere else if we were faced with someone who genuinely wished us ill," Merlin said, looking solemnly back at Helia (Daniel wondered if he or Elizabeth should try and say something, but swiftly decided against it; Merlin seemed to be carrying out their 'defence' well enough on his own, and he didn't want to risk saying the wrong thing and giving the Ancients a bad impression on top of everything else that might go wrong with the current situation). "Your actions disappoint me, Helia; after these people
saved you and your ship from being lost in the void of space for possibly millennia, your first course of action is to take command of this city away from them?"

"Moros, I merely sought to claim what is ours-" Helia began, even as the rest of the Ancients who had beamed down with her began to look uncomfortably at each other, evidently aware that Merlin's intense stare meant that things weren't about to go well for them.

"You sought to claim what was ours, Helia; that is not the same," Moros interjected, staring grimly at her as he spoke. "We are no longer the inhabitants of this galaxy, and that is not merely because the Wraith have achieved so much power since our departure; that is because our time has gone. The city of Atlantis is now the city of these men and women around us; it is our legacy to them, and the fact that a small fraction of our people survived in no way changes that fact. We are not the dominant race in this galaxy any more; we must find our own place among the humans, not apart from them."

"But this is not their place; we made this city-!" Helia protested in almost pathetic frustration; she had clearly realised that she wasn't going to win this argument already, but that wasn't going to stop her from trying.

"And they have made Atlantis their place since our departure, Helia; we cannot expect the rest of the universe to stand still simply because we have done so, or we are no better than our... cousins," Merlin said, his arms folded as he stared grimly at her. "We had a responsibility to the people of this and other galaxies, and where we failed to uphold it, they have done their best to do so, despite lacking the scale of resources, knowledge and experience that we possessed when we set out to do the same. They do not need to earn a place here; I have spent time with them over these last few days, and from what I have seen and learned of them, they are already worthy to guard and learn from our heritage."

He smiled slightly as he looked over at Daniel as he spoke, although his expression turned more serious as he turned back to look at Helia. " Granted, that is partly because of a few... particularly advanced members of the species- I respect that the species as a whole has yet to fully progress to a point where they can be trusted en masse with all of our technology-, but that does not change the essential details of my point; our only right to this city comes from the fact that we built it, and that is hardly sufficient justification for taking this city from them when they have done so much with what they have learned about it over the last ten years."

"You cannot do this!" another member of Helia's crew said, pushing past his captain to glare at Merlin. "We created this city; they are mere scavengers-!"

"Learning from those who came before them does not make them scavengers, Tenvid; it merely makes them wise enough to recognise that the experience of their ancestors should not be overlooked," Merlin said, glaring firmly at the other Ancient. "I acknowledge that this is a difficult adjustment for everyone here, but in the end, any action that we take here must be carried out with the agreement of the people of Earth who already dwell in Atlantis. They are not our 'servants', they are our allies; we have greater knowledge, but their experience and knowledge of the situation that exists in this galaxy at present is greater than our own, and that is something that should be respected."

After a moment's pause, Merlin smiled slightly as he studied the others. "Besides... how can we call them primitive when one of them is the father of the Alteraci?"

The Ancients' eyes widened incredulously at that news.

"The... the Alteraci?" Helia said, clearly voicing the thoughts of all of her crew. "You mean... our
"Yes, we all achieved Ascension in our latter days," Merlin said, smiling slightly at the small group that was all that remained of his people on this level of existence. "However, as you are doubtless aware, for the Alteraci to exist, the Ori have accomplished the final goal as well; even as we speak, they have found the galaxy where we settled and are preparing for their assault upon the worlds we seeded with life so that they may destroy our Ascended brethren-"

"Our... brethren?" Helia interjected, looking at him in confusion. "You mean... you aren't one of them?"

"Not entirely," Merlin replied, shaking his head with a slight smile as he raised one hand, generating a glowing ball of energy in his palm as he looked at his fellow Altereans before he dispersed the ball once again. "I forsook my place among the Ascended so that I could prepare a defence against the Ori when I realised the threat they posed to the rest of our people, and am presently assisting the Alteraci in mastering the full range of his powers while I complete construction of a weapon that can eliminate the Ori-"

"You would eliminate them for these people?" Tenvid said, glaring incredulously at Merlin. "The Ori are our kin-!"

"They are a danger to the Ascended and corporeal people of this universe, Tenvid; in the face of such a threat, inaction is a foolish decision," Merlin said, looking solemnly at the other man as he indicated Daniel. "Like me, this man recognised that doing nothing in the face of evil is a foolish course of action no matter what power or knowledge he acquired through Ascension; he may have reached that stage with the help of others of our kin, but she would not have done so if she did not believe him worthy of that gift, and I have seen nothing to suggest that her trust was misplaced."

"Look... Tenvid, right?" Daniel said as he stepped forward, a slight nod from Merlin confirming that now was as good a time for him to speak as any. "I understand that this isn't... what you were expecting when you got back to Atlantis, and I can only imagine how difficult this must be for you, but the fact remains that the galaxies have changed a lot since the last time you saw them; we're willing to help you settle in and find your place, but all we ask is that we be allowed to continue exploring the knowledge and information that your city and people have to teach us-"

"While under your authority," Tenvid spat.

"Y'know, considering that we're the only reason you people aren't still stuck out there between two galaxies, I'd think you could be a bit more appreciative of the effort we had to use to get you here," John interjected, walking over to stand beside his new friend. "Plus, if you're so interested in the 'Alteraci', I don't think you want to slag off his dad, do you?"

"You?" Tenvid said, looking sceptically at Daniel. "You are the father of the Alteraci?"

"I returned to human form when I found that I couldn't live with the rules of non-interference placed on me by Ascension- no matter how well-intentioned the rules might have been, total immobility in the face of evil isn't something I can live with-, but I am his father, yes," Daniel replied, staring solemnly back at Tenvid.

"Consider that, Tenvid," Merlin said, staring back resolutely at the newly-returned Ancient. "Even if he forsook it, one of our people judged this man worthy of wielding our power, and he forsook it because he valued the ability to help another more than the knowledge and power he gained as one of us."
"A few unique examples does not make this species qualified to be our masters-!" Tenvid began.

"We don't seek to be your 'masters', Tenvid," Elizabeth interjected, stepping forward to glare at the other man; she had been trying to show respect, but given that even his shipmates were looking sceptically at him right now Elizabeth felt comfortable voicing her thoughts on his current attitude. "We would be grateful for your help, but we would naturally respect your authority among each other; all we ask is the same respect in return."

For a moment, Tenvid simply stared silently back at the group before him, his face shifting slightly between a variety of expressions at such a rate that it made it hard to determine what he was feeling about this situation, until he finally sighed.

"Moros has... chosen... to support you," he said at last, a slight sneer in his tone the only remaining sign of his disapproval. "I shall... accept his decision."

"Thank you," Elizabeth replied, nodding back at Tenvid before she turned to Helia, making a mental note to choose her words carefully; she was grateful to have control of Atlantis back, but there was no sense in aggravating someone who was clearly already uncomfortable with this situation. "Now that we've... sorted that out..., shall we discuss plans for future interaction between ourselves?"

As Elizabeth and Helia turned to walk up the stairs to the conference room, followed by the rest of the Ancient 'delegation' and Sheppard's teal, Daniel, Sam and Liam exchanged a slightly relieved smile with each other.

They weren't going to fool themselves that Merlin's presence here had completely solved every problem that would probably arise from the Ancients finding themselves no longer in charge of their city, but it wasn't like they hadn't been able to provide good, clear, logical arguments for why the chain of command should remain as it was; as Merlin himself had pointed out, the fact that they had built Atlantis didn't mean that they knew everything about the current state of affairs in the Pegasus Galaxy, to say nothing of the various alliances and advances that humanity had made on their own merits (They may have reverse-engineered much of their technology but that didn't mean they hadn't put their own 'spin' on things as well).

All that they needed to do now was sort out the fine details of their new 'alliance', and things would hopefully go as well as they could be expected to from here on in; Daniel hated to feel selfish, but the sooner Merlin was back to work on the Sangraal the happier he'd be...
"So," Elizabeth said, looking back at Helia with a slight smile, Merlin and Daniel sitting on either side of her while John's team sat around them, presenting a relatively equal front to Helia's assembled senior officers, "we're all in agreement about this... alliance?"

A part of her couldn't help but feel slightly uncomfortable about the exact terms of the deal she'd just drawn up with the Tria's crew- Tenvid in particular looked like he was rather dissatisfied with the final result, although given his attitude so far the former diplomat was fairly sure that he'd never be happy with something that took Atlantis away from the Ancients-, but Merlin and Daniel had helped them sort out the specifics well enough in the end.

As much as she acknowledged that Helia had made a valid point with her attempt to retake control of the city to return it to its ancestors, the fact remained that they had been out of contact with the rest of the galaxy for centuries and had no way of knowing what was out there. Even without Elizabeth's own personal attachment to the city prompting her to stay, the fact remained that just allowing the Ancients to establish themselves like this could be dangerous for them; at least working together they had a better chance of coming through this latest turn of events with something that would benefit each race involved.

One of the most obvious details of their new treaty was that, with Helia's consent, the Tria- which was too badly damaged to be returned to full working condition- was being dismantled, with anything that could contribute to Atlantis or Earth being sent to the relevant locations for further study. The most significant resource that the Tria had to offer was its small stockpile of ZPMs, one of which was being sent back to Earth to power the Antarctic weapons platform while another was being kept in Atlantis to provide it with additional power to compensate for the recent drain on the city's original ZPM following Rod's trip into their universe.

More significantly, the Ancients had been able to direct the Atlantis expedition to the section of the Ancient database concerning ZPM manufacture and maintenance, which had included directions to a particular room in the city which contained a device that allowed the ZPMs to be recharged by using a combination of solar and water energy to recreate the ZPM's link to the subspace dimension from which it drew its power, although this feature could apparently only be used a certain amount of times before the ZPM lost its ability to 'hold charge'.

However, the most relevant issue that had been decided in the treaty was the legal status of the Ancients themselves. Under the terms of the finalised agreement- although Elizabeth needed Hayes to sign off on it, she had confidence that he and the IOA wouldn't be able to legitimately object to it-, the Ancients were granted legal citizenship on Earth- much like Teal'c and any other Jaffa who spent a prolonged period of time on the planet-, although precise details about their pasts such as families had been left blank for the Ancients to fill in themselves in case they felt the need to do so.

A few Ancients, including Helia, had accepted the offer to return to Earth to get a better feel for human culture and society, but the majority of the general crew had agreed to remain in the city under Elizabeth's command, feeling more comfortable working in the city that their ancestors had built rather than relocating. Most of them were the junior members of the ship's crew, and had no problem 'transferring' their allegiance from their original superiors to the Atlantis senior staff in general, but they would still be officially under the authority of the highest-ranking crewman left in Atlantis after Helia's departure. Fortunately, the highest-ranking person remaining was the ship's chief medical officer, who had no problem allowing Beckett to remain in charge in the infirmary given his personal experience with most of the patients that she would be treating, as long as he
deferred to her authority in dealing with her people for the same reason; she had agreed to act as a 'liaison' between her people and the expedition if the situation called for it.

"The terms are... acceptable," Helia said, nodding at Elizabeth after taking a last glance over the paperwork in front of her, before she allowed herself a slight smile. "And... I admit that I am... grateful... I will not have to take command of Atlantis myself. It is a very... heavy burden, even with so few people to govern compared to those who filled this city at its peak."

"Yes, I can't argue with that," Elizabeth said, smiling slightly at the Ancient captain, even as each of them knew that this was the last time they would be bringing up that particular issue in the foreseeable future.

"That is good," Merlin said, nodding in approval at the two women before he stood up from the table with a solemn manner. "And now, I must depart; I have work to do."

"What?" Helia asked, looking at Merlin in shock. "But... Moros, aren't you going to stay with us?"

"There is no need," Merlin replied, shaking his head at her. "You have a clear command structure established already, and I am comfortable that Doctor Weir will lead your crew with the same wisdom and courage that she has displayed in her leadership of Atlantis to date, just as I am certain that you will represent our people well back on Earth; there is nothing that I can contribute to this arrangement."

"There is a great deal you can contribute to this arrangement, Moros; we are-!" Helia began.

"Helia," Merlin said, smiling slightly at her. "I am dying."

Helia blinked.

"Wh... what?" she said, as though she couldn't believe it. "But... you are Ascended-"

"A state of being that I have forsaken for a purpose, Helia," Merlin said, shaking his head grimly as he looked at her. "The Alteraci has worked to give me what strength he can spare, and the treatment I have received on Earth has also provided me with some extra time that I might not have gained otherwise, but the fact remains that I have only a limited time left; I am simply too old to continue in this form, and my work is too important for me to Ascend before it is completed."

For a moment, Helia simply sat in contemplative silence as she looked at Atlantis's former High Councillor, before she finally sighed.

"It is the Ori, I assume?" she asked.

"As I informed Tenvid, they have grown to a point where the danger they pose to both our people and our descendants cannot be ignored," Merlin replied with a solemn nod. "I am aided by the Alteraci in my efforts, of course, but there is still only so much that he can do to sustain me after the sheer amount of time that I have spent in stasis, and none of your crew have progressed far enough in your personal studies of Ascension to reach a state where you could assist me further in the time available to me."

Despite the grim nature of the High Councillor's last statement, Helia gave him a slight smile as she looked at him.

"Your decision is... commendable, Moros," she said at last. "I confess that I have... trouble... understanding it myself, but I recognise that I know little of the current situation regarding the fate and current activities of our distant kindred. If you believe, after all that you have learned since we
lost contact with our people, that it is necessary to vanquish the Ori..."

She paused for a moment, clearly trying to find the right words for what she was about to say, before she finished. "I will... accept your wisdom in this matter."

"Thank you," Merlin replied, nodding back at her with a smile before his expression became more solemn. "And now... I must prepare to return to our galaxy; the sooner I can proceed with my work, the better."

With that, he turned around and walked out of the conference room, leaving the Ancients and humans left to look slightly awkwardly at each other for a few moments before Daniel broke the silence.

"Well," he said, standing up and looking at Helia with a slightly uncomfortable smile. "Now that that's settled, I'd... best be off; Liam'll be wanting to head back with Merlin..."

"Before you go, Doctor Jackson, I have something that I wish to ask of you," Helia said, looking curiously at him.

"Yes?" the archaeologist replied, looking back at the Ancient captain inquiringly.

"If you had a chance to regain the power that you possessed while you were Ascended... would you do so?" she asked.

"No," Daniel replied, not even needing to think about his answer. "What good is gaining access to all the knowledge of the universe if you can't share it with anybody else?"

"You would share those secrets to empower your people?" Helia asked.

"Personally speaking, if I'd been able to, I would have used that knowledge to give my friends some information," Daniel replied. "I wouldn't give them access to weapons or something like that, but there's still some defensive technology or power sources I could have told them about that wouldn't cause too much risk if they fell into the wrong hands..."

He shrugged. "The point is, there might be some of us who make mistakes, but generally those of us who know about your people and what they accomplished recognise that we're not quite ready to reach that kind of level of knowledge and power on a large scale; in general, we've learned that it's best to be sure we know how to walk before we can run."

"Ah," Helia said after a moment's uncertain contemplation as she turned over Daniel's last statement in her mind. "I... see what you mean."

She nodded politely at the archaeologist. "Thank you."

"For what?" Daniel asked.

"For answering my question," Helia said, before she looked over at Elizabeth. "And thank you as well, Doctor Weir; considering my... initial actions in this city, you have shown my crew more kindness than I had a right to expect."

"We all make poor decisions sometimes, Helia; considering what the status quo was like back when you started your journey to Atlantis, your demand was only natural," Elizabeth replied reassuringly. "Besides, you listened to Moros when he explained his own reasons to you, and you accepted that he had a valid point even if you didn't entirely agree with it; just because someone makes a mistake doesn't mean they deserve to be condemned for it."
"Anyway," Daniel said, looking around at the Ancients sitting before them as he clapped his hands together to draw their attention back to himself, "with that sorted out, we should... probably let the rest of your crew know what's going to happen to them, huh?"

Despite his awkward comment, Daniel couldn't help but feel slightly proud at how the day's events had gone.

Not only had they managed to rescue a ship full of living, breathing Ancients- although he should probably think of them as 'Lanteans' if he wanted to avoid any awkward disagreements; they might not appreciate being referred to as 'Ancients'-, but they'd even managed to work out a new alliance with them that should hopefully result in them learning a lot more about Ancient technology compared to what they'd had before.

Now all they had to do was hope that Merlin managed to complete the Sangraal before he died...
Completing the Work

Chapter Notes

This takes place a few weeks after the previous events surrounding the discovery of the *Tria* and the alliance with the Ancients; I'll be covering some of the key events that took place in that time, but we're approaching the home stretch now as the final confrontation is about to begin...

As Daniel sat opposite Sam in the restaurant, unable to take his eyes off her for long as she sat there in a dark green dress that somehow managed to appear tasteful while still leaving an apparently small amount to the imagination, he couldn't believe how... well things had been going over the last couple of weeks.

Not only was Liam's training with Merlin progressing nicely, but Merlin was making significant progress on the Sangraal even with their insistence that he take semi-regular breaks for meals and rest- the mental effort required for him to construct the Sangraal took a lot out of him, and all available doctors had told him that he needed to get a good rest between his completion of each component to ensure that he had the strength to finish it-, and the Ancients who had come back to Earth had generally settled in well with their new home.

The IOA had attempted to recruit the Ancients to the Stargate program automatically, but Daniel and Elizabeth had been able to arrange for those Ancients who wanted it to make lives outside the program on Earth. With the relevant credentials having been established to give them less distinctive names, some of the Ancients had gone into a few other fields of employment outside the program, a couple taking jobs at nearby universities- even if they were under orders not to reveal anything too advanced to their students too quickly, they could still encourage humanity's development in more subtle ways- while others were currently focusing on more straightforward travel, learning more about the world they now lived in before they made any decisions about their place in it.

Of the Ancients who remained directly attached to the Stargate program, a couple had offered to help provide Merlin with whatever treatment he might need, but it had soon become clear that anything they did was simply prolonging the inevitable due to his extreme age, and treatments had been postponed expect if Merlin showed definite signs that his condition was worsening.

Some of the Ancient scientists had also transferred over to Area 51 to help the research teams there work on reverse-engineering some of the technology the SGC had recovered over the years, which so far was meeting with a surprising mix of results; while the Ancients were able to provide a clearer insight into the purpose of some of the equipment, others had been designed before the *Tria* was lost, with the result that they were sometimes just as much in the dark as the humans were.

For Daniel, the most interesting new avenue of research that had been opened up to him as a result of the *Tria's* discovery was the chance to form a clearer understanding of the Ancients' history, rather than just piecing together bits of their past based on what they could discover when it was convenient. He'd even spent a bit of time talking with the rescued Ancients about Ascension, but at the moment very few of them were that interested in learning how to do it even if they found the idea that their race had successfully achieved such a transformation fascination. Daniel had been
surprised at that at first, but when reflecting that the Ancients had originally Ascended at least partly out of necessity to cope with whatever plague had stricken this galaxy, he supposed that it made sense for them to be less interested in mastering that particular skill when they didn't have a reason to do so.

Liam, of course, was practically in his element. While Sam and Daniel were still looking into getting him started at school when the summer holidays were over- it was too late to look into getting him into a school at present, and he was currently too engaged in his studies with Merlin to spare the time for a more conventional academic career anyway-, his control of his Ancient powers had greatly improved. Where his abilities had been initially limited to the straightforward telekinesis and energy blasts, Merlin's training had allowed Liam to further develop the molecular manipulation he'd used to make his parents' rings, as well as generating fire. Liam also claimed that he was getting a hang of the ability to cloud others' perceptions, thus allowing him to appear invisible when in the presence of others, but so far that ability was apparently limited as people could still see Liam when they were actually looking for him.

On a more technology-related note, the assistance of the Ancients had also made it far easier for Sam and her team to further their analysis of the Ori battlecruiser that Liam had managed to capture on Dakara. While they still had to work out a way to power the ship without a Prior or the equivalent in the control chair- everyone involved in the research was fairly sure that Merlin or Liam would be able to activate it, but both of them were naturally too busy to spare the time to test that theory-, they had managed to discover the energy frequencies that the ship's main weapons operated on, leaving Sam hopeful that she could modify their ship's shields to better deflect the Ori weapons in any future engagements.

Things were even going surprisingly well for the Asgard now that the Ancients had returned. While the Ancients had not been able to provide any immediate solution to the Asgard's cellular degeneration, the DNA samples that they had provided for Thor after he had come to Earth to investigate their latest transmission had apparently proven to be very promising, Thor himself noting that the Ancients, while not as far as long as their people became later, were still further along than humanity, creating the potential for a few new avenues of investigation that the Asgard could explore. Merlin had also donated some of his own DNA when Doctor Lam had informed him of the Asgard's visit to Earth during one of his daily check-ups, the resulting analysis making Thor as close to excited as Daniel had ever seen an Asgard demonstrate.

As far as Daniel was concerned, however, the best aspect of the last few weeks had been the chances he'd had to go on a few official dates with Sam. With Liam training with Merlin, and the rest of SG-1 taking the time to attend to some of their own private projects- Teal'c had taken the opportunity to help the Free Jaffa Nation re-organise its efforts to track the activity of the remaining Ori battlecruiser while Mitchell and Vala were following p some leads provided by Vala's old contacts-, he and Sam had been left alone to pursue their own relationship in their spare time. Aside from the obvious dinner dates, they had also gone out to a night club to dance one night, and on another occasion they had gone out to a night club to dance one night, and on another occasion people had gone to a film, although he and Sam both freely admitted that their choice of a science-fiction film had mainly been another excuse to laugh among themselves at how their lives compared to what people imagined they would be.

"So," Sam said, looking at Daniel with a curious expression, as their main courses were taken away as they waited for their deserts, "have you had any ideas about Liam's schooling?"

"Well, assuming that he and Merlin finish the Sangraal soon, I think that we should probably see about getting him into school for third or fourth grade next summer; he looks about the right age for either," Daniel replied, looking thoughtfully back at Sam. "We can maybe arrange for a couple of people to give Liam some kind of crash course in what children his age should have covered at
school so far, but beyond that…"

"No, that could work," Sam said, nodding reassuringly at him. "I can think of a few people at the SGC who have children around the age Liam seems to be; if we can get a chance to talk with them, we should be able to get a better idea of what Liam would be expected to know now and help him avoid any obvious social gaffes."

"Yeah, that could work; we can just say that he was home-schooled for the last few years for some reason- maybe we were moving around a bit or something like that- so that we can account for his... well..." Daniel began, trailing off as he looked awkwardly at Sam.

"Any mistakes he might make when talking with other kids?" Sam finished for her friend and fellow parent, smiling reassuringly at him. "I know what you mean; I'm... well, I'm a bit worried about how he's going to relate to other children myself. Daanar did what he could to raise him to be responsible and control his abilities, and Merlin's helping in that regard, but he doesn't really... well he doesn't spend time with other people much, does he?"

Daniel didn't bother to point out that there had been a relatively minimal amount of opportunities for Liam to spend time with people in his 'age bracket'; even at Liam's physical age (Judging him by the standards of his chronological age would be foolish and pointless), Sam and Daniel had still been willing to at least try and talk with other adults if their parents confirmed that they were friendly enough, but Liam had generally stayed with either his parents or the other members of SG-1 since he'd come to Earth with the obvious exception of the time he'd spent with the staff of Atlantis, and there'd been no real opportunity for him to meet people of his own age.

In some ways, the situation with Liam was what made Daniel the most apprehensive about the future; his relationship with Sam was slightly awkward even if it was still pleasant, but how was Liam going to cope when the time came for him to go to school?

Daniel's bleak train of thought was cut off when his phone went off, followed closely by Sam's own, on the ringtone that indicated that they were being contacted by the SGC.

"What the-?" Sam said, looking at Daniel in surprise before each of them quickly pulled out their phones to answer the call, Daniel putting his phone down almost at virtually the same time that Sam did, a stunned smile on both their faces.

"He's-" Daniel began.

"Finished," Sam confirmed, a broad smile on her face as she nodded at Daniel.

Before either of them could stop themselves, they were out of their chairs and wrapped in each other's arms, enthusiastically kissing the other in a manner they almost hadn't allowed themselves to do so earlier.

It was a significantly more public display of affection than either of them might have done under normal circumstances, but since these were hardly normal circumstances their normal shyness wasn't an issue at this time.

"So... you've finished the Sangrael?" Daniel said, looking at the object before him in surprise as he and Sam sat around the briefing table in the SGC a couple of hours later.

"Almost completely, Daniel Jackson," Merlin confirmed, smiling slightly at the assembled group around him as he indicated a small box sitting near his left hand. "The remaining components
should be inserted shortly before you wish the weapon to activate, to minimise the possibility of
the Others attempting to interfere, but otherwise all is ready; once the last few pieces are inserted,
you merely need to insert the timing crystal, and the Sangraal will activate five minutes
afterwards."

"So, it's just a matter of timing and transit now, huh?" General O'Neill- who had returned to the
SGC to discuss the current plan in greater detail following the news of the latest developments-
asked, shrugging slightly as he looked at the Ancient genius. "I mean, from what you've said, all
we need to do now is send this thing to the Ori home galaxy to waste them..."

"And fortunately," Mitchell put in, looking over at his friends with a slight smile, "we have a
puddle jumper with a... a 'gate dialling power booster still attached, and the 'gate address for that
aforementioned galaxy."

"A "gate dialling power booster"?" Vala said, looking slightly sceptically at SG-1's current leader.

"Hey, it's not like we ever got around to actually giving it a name; what do you want me to call it?"
Mitchell countered, before he looked back at Merlin. "Anyway, that should work, right?"

"I would not recommend sending anyone through the resulting Stargate unless you wish for them
to be trapped there- from what I have seen of the device you speak of, dialling the Ori galaxy for a
third time would be pushing it to its limits even if it was not also required to power the Sangraal-,
but your essential plan is sound," Merlin confirmed with a solemn nod. "If you send the gateship to
the address that you used previously just before the Sangraal activates, the Ori will be destroyed,
and the 'detonation' in a planetary environment will also shut down their Doci and all those
connected to him."

"Leaving us with only the one Ori battlecruiser at this end to deal with, huh?" Mitchell finished,
looking over at his teammates before he shrugged. "Eh, with everything we've picked up since the
last time we fought those things, we should be able to pull that off, right?"

"With everything we've managed to gather from the ship that we captured-" Sam began.

"That I captured, Mom; credit where credit's due, please," Liam put in with a smug smile.

"You're not too old to get grounded for cheek, Liam," Sam said, turning to glare at her son.

"Oh... sorry, Mom," Liam said, the smile faltering as he looked awkwardly down at the table to
avoid his mother's firm stare.

"Getting back on topic," Sam said, looking back up at the rest of the team, "with everything we've
learned from analysing our captured battlecruiser, we should be able to figure out a few likely
weaknesses that we can use to defeat the remaining Ori battleship when the time comes for us to
find it, but it would probably be better to focus on taking the Ori out of the picture before we worry
about that."

"Good thing we've got that address, anyway; I don't even what to think about the amount of red
tape we'd need to cut through to convince the IOA to sign off on this if we had to use the Supergate
for this thing..." Jack muttered, shaking his head grimly before he looked back at the others with a
slight smile. "Anyway, shall we get on with this?"

"It will not be difficult, I assure you, General O'Neill," Merlin said, smiling briefly at Jack, his
voice trembled slightly as he spoke, but otherwise the Ancient appeared to be in relatively good health. "The Sangraal operates on a self-sustaining power system once it has been activated, and I am confident that you can modify the address required to dial it from Earth rather than Atlantis; all that is needed for the moment is for you to prepare the gateship for its mission."

"All right then," Jack said, clapping his hands together as he stood up and looked around the table, "I'll just get on the phone to the IOA and let them know what we've got planned; everyone else... just make sure it's all ready."

After everything that they'd been through since he and Vala accidentally revealed the existence of human life in the Milky Way to the Ori, Daniel almost couldn't believe that this was it.

They were probably hours away from ending the greatest threat to free will that they had ever faced...
A couple of hours later, Sam wasn't surprised to find Daniel sitting in his office, staring contemplatively at the wall as he assumed an expression of deep thought. With the aid of the *Tria*'s dismantled components they'd managed to enhance Earth's Stargate to allow for occasional contact with Atlantis, and the expedition had quickly sent them the chevrons necessary to dial the Ori galaxy from the Milky Way rather than from Pegasus, and the puddle jumper that had been left at the SGC since the quest for the Sangraal had completed was ready to be lowered into the gateroom.

Merlin and Liam were currently working with Mitchell and Teal'c to move the completed Sangraal from Merlin's laboratory back to Earth- Sam would naturally take over once the device was in a position to be connected up to anything, although Merlin assured them that it had its own power source-, leaving Vala to do whatever she did in her free time while Daniel had retreated after the meeting. Sam had been forced to spend some time monitoring the recent gate activity to ensure that the *Tria* components worked as advertised- they were still getting used to the technology, after all-, but now that she'd completed that work she had concluded that now was as good a time as any to talk with Daniel about whatever was clearly bothering him.

"Daniel?" she said, after standing at his door for a few moments failed to raise any kind of response from him. "Are... are you all right?"

"Mmm? Oh, I'm fine, fine..." Daniel replied, still staring silently at the wall for a moment even as Sam shut the door to his office behind her before he finally turned to face her. "It's just... Are we doing the right thing?"

"What?" Sam asked, looking over at Daniel in surprise at the seemingly out-of-nowhere comment (She'd never kidded herself that Daniel would have been comfortable with the idea of destroying the Ori no matter what they'd done in the past, but she'd assumed that the fact that he'd never mentioned his issues with the plan meant that he'd moved past them)."I mean, we had the chance to take out the System Lords once and didn't do it, and that was just a few lives," Daniel clarified, looking increasingly uncomfortable as he spoke (Sam didn't bother pointing out the fact that he'd been the one who'd made that decision; given the subsequent discovery that Anubis had returned and Osiris's presence at the summit, he'd still made the right decision). "We're... well, we're about to commit genocide..."

Sam didn't need Daniel to say any more to realise what he meant; if anything, she was only disappointed that she hadn't realised what was troubling him earlier.

Daniel had been uncomfortable going on that mission to assassinate the System Lords even before Osiris had arrived there and Anubis’s return to the galaxy at large had been revealed, and that would only have killed a relatively small number of Goa'uld; the idea of actually designing a weapon *specifically* to commit genocide against a race as old as the Ancients...
"It's not like we have a choice," she said at last, unsure whether she wanted to sound more assertive at this point before throwing that thought aside; the man she loved was having a personal crisis, and she would sympathise with his uncertainty over the action that they were about to take. "The Ori have made it clear more than once that they aren't interested in negotiation, and we can't exactly convince the Ancients to act in our defence even if we knew anyone among them with the authority to make that kind of decision; even if Merlin Ascended again, he probably wouldn't be able to make the kind of impact we'd need to try and force the Ori to any kind of conference table. The Supergate being blocked doesn't stop them from trying to create a new one, and they could still try and send Priors through to convert on a smaller scale; if we don't take action against them soon, it may be too late to do anything to stop them."

After Daniel had sat in silence for a moment, Sam walked over to sit on the arm of his chair, reaching over to give him a brief, comforting embrace before she continued. "If there was another way to stop the Ori, we both know that we'd try it, but everything we've learned about them and everything they've told us since we discovered they existed has made it clear that they'll only accept our death or allegiance; if we don't... stop them now..."

She trailed off before she finished that sentence, not wanting to actually say what she had been about to say; Daniel might know the stakes already, but if she actually voiced them then it might feel or sound too much like she was emotionally blackmailing him to accept this choice by making him think about the alternatives.

"I know all that," Daniel said at last, nodding slightly sadly as he turned to face her. "It's just... I know it's strange, and even I get that it doesn't make any sense, but... even after everything they've done to us..."

"You wish there was another way," Sam said, smiling at him as she leaned over to give him a brief, affectionate kiss before she pulled back. "And that's just one of the many, many reasons why I'm glad that you're the father of my son; Liam couldn't have a better role model than you."

"Oh, I don't know about that," Daniel replied, smiling back at the blonde astrophysicist, a warmth in his eyes that helped to counterbalance the grief that was still slightly present in them. "You're a pretty good example for him yourself..."

Even as they exchanged smiles, Sam knew that Daniel would never be entirely comfortable with the thought of what they were going to have to do to end this war, but they both knew that every possible alternative resolution had already been attempted and dismissed; if they were going to save this galaxy from falling under the Ori's control, then the Sangraal was their only option...

The sudden sound of alarms blaring drew them away from their current train of thought, prompting them to exchange glances before the turned to hurry towards the main control room, only to run into Mitchell as he was running in the other direction.

"Thank God; sooner we get everyone together for this, the better," he said, looking grimly at them.

"What's wrong?" Sam asked.

"No idea," Mitchell said, looking grimly between his two friends. "All I know is that we're to get ready for every available SG team to go into action, and General O'Neill's postponed his trip back to Washington because he wants to brief us on whatever's going down right now; don't know what the situation is, but what I do know is that he got a phone call from Homeworld Security and now wants SG-1, Liam and Merlin in the briefing room as soon as possible."

Exchanging ominous glances with each other, Sam and Daniel followed Mitchell back to the
briefing room, where the rest of their team was already sitting, along with Merlin and Liam. General Landry was also waiting near the top of the table, but the seat that he normally occupied was still empty, clearly waiting for Jack O'Neill to take his place.

Almost as soon as Sam and Daniel had sat down next to their son, the main door had opened once again and the general in question walked into the room, smiling grimly at the group of people around him.

"Hey there, everyone," he said, smiling in a slightly dejected manner at the people sitting around the large table as he made his way to the empty chair that had been left aside for him. "Everything's progressing well, I hear?"

"So," Vala asked, looking inquiringly at Jack as he sat at the head of the table, "on the topic of that news, what is the emergency?"

"Simply put?" Jack said, looking grimly over at her. "According to Homeworld Security's long-range tracking satellites, we have an Ori battlecruiser at the outskirts of our solar system on direct course for Earth."

It didn't take those in the room who were initially ignorant of the cause of the current state of alarm long to realise the only possible explanation for this sudden turn of events.

"Adria..." Vala groaned, slumping back in her seat as she stared up at the ceiling in frustration. "Just when I thought we'd seen the last of her..."

"The Ori...?" Merlin said, looking around at the rest of SG-1 in surprise. "She is coming here?"

"Apart from the one we've got on Dakara, there's one Ori battlecruiser left in this galaxy, and if Adria's not on board that one as it's heading towards us right now, I'll be very surprised," Mitchell confirmed grimly.

"OK, I know we've still got Odyssey in the area, but apart from that, is there anything else I might have missed because I was skimming over the paperwork?" Jack asked, glancing around at his old team as though hoping that they would be able to tell him about something that he'd missed.

"Nothing," Sam said grimly.

"Nothing,'" Jack repeated, looking sceptically back at her. "Correct me if I'm wrong, but don't we have another-"

"Daedalus is in the middle of a trip back from Atlantis, and our newest ship, the Apollo, is still in development; after what happened to the Korolev when it was rushed into the last stages of production, I think it's safe to say that none of us want a repeat of that particular mistake," Sam said, shaking her head grimly as she looked around at her friends and family. "Even if we could get it up there in time, the only thing it could probably do for certain in a fight would be destroy itself to give the other ship a better chance, and that couldn't accomplish anything in this situation."

"So... we've got Odyssey, and that's it?" Mitchell asked, looking over at her in obvious apprehension. "Damn, we're screwed..."

"Well, we've also got the Ancient weapons platform in Antarctica, but I wouldn't like to put my hopes on that thing if the battlecruiser gets too close to Earth; the drones might be powerful, but they can only travel so far from the control chair before the signal stops reaching them, and given the demonstrated power of the Ori ships, along with their sheer size, there's a good chance that they'll be able to do some kind of damage before we can launch enough drones to destroy them,"
Sam explained grimly. "Add in the fact that we don't know what kind of impact Adria's presence will make to that ship's combat capabilities, and we could have a serious problem."

"What about that Ori ship at Dakara?" Vala asked. "I mean, I get that we probably can't get it here in time to make a difference, but surely all the time you've spent looking over it-"

"We've got a few ideas about where to aim to target its weak spots, but again Adria's powers are a potential X-factor that we can't overlook; all our studies of the ship were based on the idea that they'd be piloted by Priors, but we don't know how Adria's greater power level would affect the ship itself," Sam replied grimly. "We can probably use what we've gathered from our ship to beam some things past the ship's shield, but the first battle around the Supergate made it clear that any nuclear bombs we tried to beam over to the ship would be shut down by the Priors or Adria pretty much immediately, and... and..."

Her voice trailed off as she and Daniel looked at each other before their gaze shifted back to Liam, who was already grinning broadly at them.

"Oh, I am there-!" he said.

"You are not!" Sam interjected, standing up and leaning over the table to glare at her son. "You are not going to beam into a hostile environment-!"

"He does not have to go alone; I shall accompany him," Merlin said, smiling briefly at the mother of his apprentice.

"You?" Daniel said, looking over at him uncertainly, Liam's not-yet-voiced-request forgotten in the face of this new offer. "But... well, no offence, but aren't you-?"

"I am old, Daniel Jackson, but I have enough strength for this," Merlin said, looking solemnly back at the archaeologist. "I have Ascended once, and I have learned and seen everything that I wish to; if this is how it shall end for me, I shall accept that."

"Wait; end?" Liam repeated, looking at his teacher with a slight fear that Daniel and Sam each recognised from when they'd seen their faces in the mirror for the first time after one of their most difficult memories (Both pushed aside the momentary jealousy hey felt at Liam's concern for Merlin; he was their son and Merlin was a valued teacher who'd taught him a great deal, so it was only natural for him to feel close to the Ancient). "You... you're dying?"

"You have known that I was going to die since the moment you healed me, Liam; even your powers and mine cannot halt natural death forever," Merlin said, smiling slightly at the young boy who had been his apprentice for the last few weeks. "I have accepted this-"

"But you can't!" Liam said, looking urgently at him, his earlier confidence lost in the face of this new information. "We need you-

"You do not," Merlin said, nodding reassuringly at Liam. "I have taught you much in the time that we have spent together, Liam Carter Jackson, and you have been of great assistance to me in completing my work; there is nothing more that you need learn from me that you will not learn yourself."

As Merlin spoke, he turned to address the rest of the people at the table, smiling warmly at them. "More than that, I am grateful to all of you for helping me guide the last of my people to find a place for themselves in this time. You are not as old as you could be, but you are equally not as young as you once were; if your world can produce more people like yourselves, I am certain that it
shall do well in future."

After a moment's silence had settled over the conference room, SG-1 and their respective commanding officers looking in silence at the man they had heard so many legends and stories about over the years, taking in the compliment that he had just given them, Merlin smiled and stood up, his expression solemn. "If this is how my life shall end, I am willing to do so; Liam Jackson and I are the only people capable of definitively opposing the Orici in direct combat, and if this means that I must sacrifice myself to do so, than I am willing."

"Look, Merlin, I get that you're good at your 'job' and all, but I can't send an old guy and a kid on a potentially suicide mission-!" Jack began.

"I assure you, General O'Neill, you will be required to do no such thing; I have already conceived a plan that allows Liam Jackson and myself to safely infiltrate the ship and vanquish Adria before she can begin her attack on Earth," Merlin said, smiling reassuringly at the general before he looked back at Daniel and Sam. "Doctor Jackson, Colonel Carter, I give you my word that your son shall be returned to you, safe and unharmed, if it is the last thing that I do."

For a moment, the two parents could only look silently back at Merlin, before Sam turned to look at Liam.

"You're... you're sure you want to do this?" she asked him.

"I have to, Mom," Liam replied, nodding solemnly at her, with a slightly awkward expression that Sam didn't understand until he continued speaking. "I get that I wasn't... made... just for this... but this is why Aunt Oma kept me safe all these years; if I don't do this now..."

He swallowed slightly, before looking at her with renewed intensity. "I can't let her have taken all those risks just to protect me and run away at the last bit."

If it had been any other child in this situation, Sam would have said no. If it had been any other child of hers and Daniel's, she would have said no (And she did want other children with Daniel; she wanted the experience of actually carrying his child, even if a part of her was still grateful for having been able to 'skip' the painful parts of giving birth to bring Liam into the world...).

But this was Liam Carter Jackson, conceived when his father existed on a higher plane of existence, trained in his powers by Oma Desala and Merlin themselves- two of the only Ancients that Sam had ever met that she would trust to do more than sit around and watch the universe all day--; if there was ever any child who defied the rules, it was him.

Even if she and Daniel would always worry about him, Merlin was right; apart from Merlin himself, Liam was the only person who could stand against Adria in a direct fight, and given Merlin's age any aid that he could be given in this situation should almost automatically be provided for him.

As he stood on the *Odyssey* bridge, looking grimly at the old man and the young boy standing before him, Mitchell hated that he had to be the one doing this, even if he also accepted that he was the only one who could; Sam and Daniel were too emotionally invested in this mission for the brass to be sure that they could think clearly when the time came to give the orders, Vala was being kept back for a similar reason given Adria's possible role in the other ship's attack, and Teal'c had gone to Dakara to try and rally some back-up from the Jaffa in case they needed it later.
With *Odyssey* still officially between commanders since it had been recently temporarily hi-jacked by the Lucian Alliance while Sam, Daniel and Liam were off in Atlantis, Mitchell had been given temporary command of the ship to take it into action against the Ori battlecruiser if Merlin and Liam's planned assault failed, and so far all he had come up with in the event of a worst-case scenario was a rapid-fire assault with everything *Odyssey* had while hoping for the best.

Admittedly, he knew that General O'Neill and Daniel were already on their way to the Antarctic base and the Ancient control chair to release the drone weapons if they were needed, but he agreed with Sam's theory that they shouldn't pin all their hopes on that particular weapon; the sheer size of the ship they'd need to be used on made that kind of plan risky at best.

"You're sure about this?" he asked as he looked at the boy he couldn't help but consider a nephew of sorts, trying not to smile at the image of Liam in a small BDU, Merlin standing alongside him dressed in his usual white robes.

"No," Liam replied, swallowing slightly as he looked back at Mitchell, looking ironically more like the small boy he was than he ever had before. "But... but I have to."

The Jackson-esque look of determination on his face only reinforced by the intensity of the stare in the eyes the boy had inherited from his mother, Mitchell knew that they didn't have a choice.

The Ori battlecruiser was already a short distance away from Earth, and right now Liam was the closest thing they had to a 'secret weapon' that could be guaranteed to take out that thing's pilot; as much as nobody on SG-1 liked it, they had one shot at this, and they *had* to take it.

"Send 'em," he said, nodding at the technician presently in charge of the transporter. Accepting the colonel's order, the younger man activated the necessary controls, and Liam and Merlin vanished in a brief burst of white light, leaving Mitchell to turn around and look apprehensively at the Ori battlecruiser that was still approaching Earth.

God, he hoped and prayed to whatever Ascended were willing to bend the rules to help him that he hadn't just sent Liam off to get himself killed...
As he reappeared in the control room of the Ori battlecruiser, Liam didn't take long to take in the immediate details of his surroundings; a few Ori soldiers, one Prior, and Adria herself, the last already turning to face him in obvious outrage at either his presence or his continued existence.

Lacking the time to come up with anything more sophisticated, Liam and Merlin used a sweeping telekinetic gesture to force the various Ori soldiers around them out of the room and into the corridor outside the door, Merlin subsequently closing and locking the door to the corridor behind them while Liam turned his attention to the Prior. Even as the Prior raised its staff, Liam had stretched out one hand and yanked the long object from its original owner's grip into his own hand, following up by swinging the staff to strike the Prior in the head before he turned to aim it at Adria, ignoring the unconscious Prior as he sensed Merlin taking up position behind him.

"You show great courage in coming here, Alteraci," Adria said, apparently unfazed at the rapid manner in which the rest of the forces that had been in the room with her earlier had just been taken out.

"Courage is only required when facing that which you fear," Merlin said, his tone casual despite the evident hostility in Adria's eyes as she turned to look at him, even if she tried to counter her glare with a smile.

"Merlin..." she said, a satisfied tone to her voice as she looked at him. "You have come-"

"To aid my apprentice in his fight against you, Orici," Merlin said, staring solemnly back at Adria despite her own hostile glare. "Your fathers have doubtless informed you that my work approaches completion; you are here because you fear us, and nothing more."

"The flames of ignorance burn without pain," Adria said, smiling at Merlin like he was a child who had just suggested that his parents walk on water or something equally foolish. "Beware the power, or it will consume you-"

"I didn't come here to listen to you going on about your fathers' rhetoric," Liam interjected, glaring at the woman who was probably the closest thing he had to a peer in the entire universe, his arms folded as he glared at her with an intensity that belied his apparent physical age. "I came here to ask you to stop your attempt to attack Earth before I have to do something I won't like."

"You cannot defeat us, Alteraci," Adria said, glaring back at Liam with a cold intensity that any ignorant observers would have been shocked to see exchanged between a grown woman and a child. "Allow me to deliver the message to this world that Origin is the way to salvation, and you and the people you seek to protect will all be spared."

"It is unlikely that the people of Earth would be willing to listen to your message even if you were
permitted to deliver it, Adria," Merlin said, smiling slightly at the young woman in front of him.

"Then you are all doomed," Adria said, a simple certainty in her tone.

"I don't think so," Liam said, smiling slightly back at Adria, his own tone just as confident as hers. "If you were that confident about your ability to beat us, why are you only coming after Earth now?"

"My fathers have told me that the time is right-" Adria began.

"Your fathers have sent you here because they're afraid," Liam countered, smiling grimly as he looked back at her; his father might be a diplomat, but he hadn't heard stories about his mother's victories without wanting to learn something about tactics, and even then it didn't take a genius to see how vulnerable Adria was after recent events. "You've lost two battlecruisers, we've captured a third, and there's no way we'd give you the chance to establish a new Supergate to send in any more, so you're here on a last desperate attempt to intimidate us into surrendering."

"Your defences shall be no match for the Ori-" Adria began, still managing to sound confident despite Liam's last comments.

"I don't need to beat the Ori," Liam said, raising his hands as he generated two brilliant balls of energy in each; he didn't know if he should feel amused or frustrated at her inability to listen to reason, but he had more immediate matters to focus on right now. "I just have to beat you."

"Just like your fathers, Alteraci," Adria said, her eyes narrowing as she looked back at him. "They have given those who should worship my fathers the means to annihilate them, and I will not countenance-"

"You know, if your 'fathers' weren't so eager to expand into this galaxy, we might have been willing to leave them alone," Liam interjected, the balls still blazing intensely in his hands as he returned Adria's stare with his own. "But right now, you brought this onto yourself; for the freedom of my galaxy, there is nothing I wouldn't do."

"ENOUGH!" Adria yelled, thrusting both her hands forward with a powerful burst of energy, only for Liam to counter her blast with one of the balls he'd generated earlier, following the attack up by throwing the second ball at Adria herself, although the ball merely sent her staggering slightly as it impacted against her forcefield. Screaming in rage, Adria raised her hands again, clearly about to try and throw another attack at them, only to be interrupted when Merlin waved his hand at her in a complicated gesture. Before she could retaliate, Adria was sent flying into the wall behind her, Merlin holding her in place with an outstretched arm as Liam advanced towards her, his hands glowing as he stared at the woman who had practically been bred to be his opposite.

"You think I'm going to kill you, don't you?" he said at last.

"You are the child of the Deceiving Ones; I would expect nothing-" Adria began, straining against the hold that was now on her even as Merlin continued to hold her casually in position; only a slight twitch of his face gave away how much effort he needed to use to hold her in position.

"Do you realise," Liam continued, now with a grim smile on his face as he spoke, "that you've been trying to kill me ever since you learned that I existed, and you don't even know who I am?"

"You are the Alteraci-!" Adria began.

"I'm not just the Alteraci," Liam said, shaking his head as he stared at her; if he was going to do what he'd come here to do, she should understand what he really was. "My name is Liam Carter
Jackson; my father is Doctor Daniel Jackson, and my mother is Lieutenant Colonel Samantha Carter."

Adria's eyes widened in rage as she processed what she'd just heard.

"What?" she said, seemingly trying to lunge towards him, only to move a few centimetres before Merlin re-gathered his strength and force her back once again, Adria hitting the wall behind her with a louder thump.

"Yep," Liam said, smiling grimly at her. "I'm the child of SG-1 and the Ancients; how's that for an interesting twist, eh?"

Then his eyes narrowed as he walked up to her, new energy balls in his hands as he stood in front of her and began to raise himself up, his powers holding him a few feet in the air so that the two of them were eye-to-eye despite his shorter height.

"It would be so easy to stop you for good," Liam said, holding out his arms so that his energy balls were virtually in front of Adria's face, his expression grim as he stared at her. "All I need to do is bring these things together, and... well, I don't know what that would do to you, but we all know it won't be good; your force field's tough, but everything has its limits."

After a moment's silence, he shook his head and lowered his hands, the energy balls vanishing as he flexed his fingers.

"But I won't," he said, as he looked at her, enjoying Adria's obvious confusion at his seemingly random decision. "I am the Alteraci, but I'm also Liam Carter Jackson... and I won't do this."

"What?" Adria said, blinking in confusion as she looked at him, her confidence shaken by this sudden unexpected statement.

"Whatever the reason Aunt Oma wanted me to live in secret after I was conceived, she also wanted me to have a normal life," Liam said, still staring solemnly at Adria. "That life also meant giving me the ability to make my own choices when the time came for me to face my destiny, and that includes whether or not I kill you."

"I will kill you-!" Adria began, the confusion quickly vanishing as she glared intently at him.

"But I'm not like that," Liam said, shaking his head as he looked at her, an almost sympathetic smile on his face as he studied her. "You want to kill me, but I don't want to kill you... so I'm going to do something else."

With that, he raised his arms once again, a gentle golden glow surrounding his hands as he looked between them before he faced Adria again, a reassuring smile on his face. "I'm going to help you."

Adria had barely opened her mouth to scream her next defiance before Liam had grabbed her head in both hands, the resulting glow enveloping her head as she opened her mouth in a scream of protest that halted as soon as it had began, her mouth simply hanging open in shock and her eyes wide as Liam stared at her. For a few moments, Adria and Liam merely stared at each other, joined by the glow that seemed to be spreading across the rest of their bodies as the boy who happened to be the Alteraci focused his attention on the woman who had been born to be the Orici, Merlin staring at the two figures with a slight smile...

Then the glow faded, leaving Liam to remove his hands from Adria's head as he returned to the ground, turning to give Merlin a brief nod after his feet came in contact with the ground. Returning Liam's nod, Merlin lowered his hand, allowing Adria to fall to the floor, the formerly regal woman
falling to her knees as she stared in shock at the boy in front of her.

"I..." she said, raising a hand to her forehead, feeling around her head for a few moments before she took it away to hold it up in front of her. "I cannot... I do not feel..."

She swallowed anxiously. "My fathers are gone."

"They're not gone, Adria," Liam said, shaking his head as he looked at her, a slightly sympathetic smile on his face despite the fight that they'd waged earlier. "All I did was shut off the part of them that was in you."

"What?" Adria said, looking shakily at Liam, clearly struggling to comprehend what he'd just said. "What do you mean...?"

"I mean that I have severed the part of your mind that was placed there by your... 'fathers' when you were originally... created," Liam clarified, looking solemnly at Adria, his slight boyish hesitation when discussing Adria's creation prompting a slight smile from Merlin at his apprentice's typically youthful embarrassment before he continued. "Nothing else has been affected- your powers will probably come back eventually; you just need to practise using them without their 'support'..., but you're not dependent on them for anything any more. You don't need them for your powers, and," he added, a slight smile on his face as he looked at her, "you don't need them to tell you how to think."

"What?" Adria said, her confusion suddenly replaced by anger as she stood up, staring down at Liam as he stood in front of her. "I have never-"

"Do you believe in Origin?" Liam interjected.

"Of cou-" Adria began, only to stop herself as her eyes widened in a sudden moment of personal realisation.

"Did you feel that?" Merlin said, smiling at her as he took in the expression on her face, recognising the implications of what Liam had just done. "That is what we call 'doubt', and it is something that we all have to deal with when we have to make up our own minds about something."

"I do not-" Adria began.

"You have never been given the chance to doubt; that is not the same thing as never having doubt," Merlin said, his tone solemn as he looked at her. "There must come a moment in all of our lives when we must accept that we have moved beyond the point when we can accept our parents' attempts to make decisions and influence our development, and Liam has granted you the opportunity to reach that point; without your fathers' doctrine to influence you, you no longer possess the same blind faith that you had previously."

"My fathers created me to spread the word of Origin-" Adria began, even as the desperation on her face made it clear that she was just repeating what she'd always said out of a lack of anything else to do in this situation.

"Parents cannot create their children to be anything, Adria; they must simply be parents to their children," Merlin said, shaking his head as he looked grimly back at her. "You were intended to be nothing more than a vessel for the Ori to achieve their purpose in this galaxy when they could not come here themselves; Liam, created out of nothing more than the love that Doctor Jackson and Colonel Carter sought to share with each other, has simply removed that link, while leaving you
"I am the *Orici-*!" Adria said, now sounding on the verge of tears as the desolation on her face became increasingly evident, her own lack of belief in her words shining through no matter how much she tried to do what she had always done in the past.

"You are a person," Merlin said, shaking his head firmly as he looked at her. "You are not the Orici any more; your destiny is your own, and you are as free to make a choice about your life as the rest of us. The universe awaits you, Adria, but you must choose what you wish to do with that freedom on your own; what will you do with that freedom?"

As Adria looked between Merlin and Liam for a few moments, her expression seemed to constantly shift between anger, confusion, outrage, or some combination of the three, before she finally sat back against the wall behind her, holding up her hands as she stared at her fingers as though she'd never seen them before.

Finally, after a long period of silence, she looked up at Liam, her intimidating composure replaced by a simple, scared girl who was looking urgently at the only person in the room who might be able to understand her.

"Help me..." she said, a tremble in her voice that almost sounded like she was about to cry.

"Always," Liam replied, walking over to place a hand on her shoulder as he crouched down opposite her, their earlier conflict forgotten in the face of Adria's current confusion and fear.

Whatever fate awaited her after this confrontation wouldn't be an easy one, but Liam would do what he could to help her-

The sound of a sudden gasp prompted Liam to spin around, his eyes widening in horror at the sight of Merlin suddenly collapsing to the ground, a hand on his chest over his heart as he stared upwards at apparently nothing.

"NO!" the young boy cried, hurrying over to his mentor, crouching down beside him as he raised a glowing hand over Merlin's chest, over for Merlin to take a hold of his wrist and firmly shake his head as he looked at the younger man.

"No," he said, his expression solemn as he looked at the young boy. "It is my time, Liam; the work you have done to sustain my body was impressive, but even the finest system runs down in the end."

"I can help-!" Liam began urgently, shaking his head in almost furious denial at Merlin's words.

"We must all... pay the piper, I believe is the popular expression on Earth, Liam Jackson," Merlin said, smiling at the young boy before him despite the wince of pain he gave at the same time. "I have taught you what I can, and I have given your family what aid I could; from here on in, your fate is your own, just as Adria's is her own, and you must both make of it what you will."

"But... but you could Ascend again-" Liam tried to protest.

"I do not have the time or energy to focus my thoughts to the degree required for Ascension, Liam Jackson; even if I wished to return to that state... to once again watch as those who were once my peers ignore everything happening here, regardless of the cost in innocent lives... I cannot," Merlin said, his voice weak even as he looked reassuringly at the boy who had been his apprentice. "I have lived a good life, Liam, and I am grateful that my last experience in it will be the experience of having trained you; I am certain that you will be a worthy heir to the knowledge that I have..."
shared with you, and, if you and your family are examples of what humanity has to offer, than I am certain that my peoples' legacy is in good hands."

For a moment, the two simply sat in silence as they stared at each other, tears gleaming in Liam's eyes as Merlin looked sympathetically back at him, before the former wizard of Camelot laid his head down and closed his eyes, his hand falling limp in Liam's as his chest ceased to move.

"No..." Liam whispered, shaking his head in childish denial as he stared at the body in front of him, his shoulders shaking with barely-suppressed sobs, almost unaware of the sound of movement behind him until the person moving stopped walking.

"I... I would not cry," Adria said, her voice trembling as she crouched down beside Liam.

"Huh?" Liam asked, looking away from his mentor's body to study Adria, her expression somehow more open than it had been before even if she was clearly still shaken at what Liam had done to her earlier, looking uncertainly at Merlin for a moment before she spoke again.

"If my fathers died... if they were able to die in their current state... I would not mourn them," Adria said, a slight edge of terror to her voice as she looked at Liam. "I would feel nothing... it would mean nothing... and yet, you not only care for and admire both your parents enough to deny the purpose you were trained for to be someone they can be proud of, but you also grieve for this man, whom you have known for... how long?"

"Just a few weeks," Liam replied, sniffing slightly as he looked at Merlin's body. "I feel like I was just getting to know him..."

He sat in silence for a moment, staring at Merlin in contemplation, before he looked up at Adria with a slightly uncertain smile as she continued to look between him and Merlin with an expression that Liam could only describe as confused jealousy; she envied the bond that he'd obviously shared with Merlin, but at the same time she failed to understand why she envied it when it had left him in so much pain.

Neither of them knew what was going to happen now, but Liam also knew that, as the older of the two of them- even if he looked younger-, as well as the person responsible for Adria's current condition, he had to take responsibility for his actions; it was one of the first things Aunt Oma had taught him about his father, and he'd always promised himself that he'd live up to that if the time came when he had to make a decision big enough to merit doing so.

"Look," he said, wiping his cheeks with his sleeve as he stood back up and held out a hand to Adria to help the seemingly-older woman to her own feet, shrugging awkwardly as he looked at her, "I don't even know why I'm feeling this way right now, and if you're going to understand anything about family, I'm not really the right person to ask, but..."

He smiled, fighting down the urge to continue crying as he looked at her with an encouraging smile. "Well, your fathers may be prats, but you do have a mother down on Earth who wouldn't say no to a chance to get to know you."

As Adria smiled awkwardly back at him, the fear in her eyes lessened by the hopeful smile on her face at the thought of meeting the mother that Liam had just mentioned, Liam couldn't help but chuckle slightly at the bizarre nature of the situation he was in; talking and joking with a woman who'd been resolute in her desire to lead a crusade against his home planet only a few moments ago.

What he'd done earlier might have been done on impulse, but if Adria was already starting to relax,
he was starting to feel more comfortable with the thought that he'd done the right thing for more reasons than just the fact that he hadn't wanted to kill anybody (God, he couldn't believe that *Merlin* was *dead*...).

"Come on," he said, smiling to lighten the mood as he indicated the ship around them. "Let's call this whole mess off and get back to our parents."

The fact that Adria didn't object to his comment was all the proof that Liam needed that he had done the right thing.

Adria might not know what she was yet, but the fact that she wasn't blindly supporting the Ori crusade against Earth to the point of being apparently willing to give an order to stop it was a *definite* step in the right direction...
Looking at the sight in front of him, Daniel almost couldn't believe it; Liam and Adria had originally met when Adria was trying to destroy a planet, and now, just moments after Liam had been sent onto Adria's ship for what everyone knew would be their final battle, Liam was once again standing in the SGC, having teleported down to a position just in front of the Stargate, Merlin's body at his feet and Adria standing alongside him, looking more like a frightened child than the devoted conquering leader she'd been earlier.

Daniel had joined Jack, General Landry and the rest of SG-1 in the dialling room after the alarms had activated- with Mitchell in command of *Odyssey*, the rest of the team were left with nothing to do but wait until they received confirmation one way or the other about his mission-, and were watching the scene in front of them with baited breath as the security teams that had assembled in response to the incursion alert. Sam and Daniel were naturally concerned about their son, but everyone present was noting that Liam seemed to be in good shape, while Adria was the one of the two who showed any real sign that something was wrong given her obviously shaken stance; whatever had happened up there, it had clearly had a significant impact on Adria.

"Easy!" Liam said, holding up his hands in a calming gesture as he looked anxiously at the group of marines around him, even as Adria simply stood behind him with her head bowed and showing no signs of concern or fear at her current circumstances. "We don't have a problem here; Adria's called everything off and she's willing to go to a cell until we can... I dunno, straighten something else out."

"Uh... hold on a minute here, just let me straighten something out before I start to question your parentage," Jack said, holding up a hand as he activated the radio from the dialling room to address the gateroom inhabitants, looking uncertainly at the boy who he partly considered a nephew despite the limited time they'd spent together so far. "You're saying that the person who was created to lead the Ori armies... has *quit* from her job?"

"Yes," Adria said, her voice trembling slightly as she looked up at the source of the voice that had just addressed her. "I... I do not know what I want... but I *do* know that I..."

She swallowed slightly, her eyes briefly wandering over the people standing behind the glass window that separated the dialling room from the gateroom, before her gaze settled on Vala.

"I... I want to know my mother," she said at last, smiling awkwardly at the dark-haired ex-thief. "And I... I want to do it on *her* terms, not my fathers'."

"Oh," Vala said, looking slightly awkwardly back at Adria, before she looked over at her teammates. "Could she...?"

"Be lying?" Sam finished for Vala, shrugging slightly uncertainly even as she kept her voice low and her head slightly turned to one side; Adria didn't look like she had the necessary focus to read minds, but since Liam had never demonstrated that power himself- Oma probably hadn't wanted to give him any excuses to grow apart from other people- they had no way to know what Adria's actual limits were. "It's not impossible, but I don't think that Liam would have just let her beam down here if he thought she wasn't telling the truth, and she just looks... well, she's too obviously shaken for it to be faked."
"Indeed," Teal'c said, nodding thoughtfully as he looked at Adria for a moment before he looked back at his teammates. "If Adria wished to deceive us, she would appear more certain about what she sought to accomplish by coming here; the fact that even she is uncertain about what she wishes for us to do with her at this time lends weight to the idea that she is telling the truth."

"Plus, there's the simple fact that any kind with you two and Oma as examples probably wouldn't fall for any kind of crap Adria might try to pull on him," Jack said, shrugging slightly as Daniel looked at him in surprise. "Hey, she got a bit on my nerves with the whole 'non-interference' thing, but she wasn't exactly stupid apart from the Anubis thing, and I'm fairly sure she learned enough from that to ensure that Liam wouldn't make her original mistakes."

"Uh... right," Daniel said, before he turned to look at General Landry, who was looking between the various members of SG-1 in a slightly pointed manner.

"It's safe," the archaeologist said at last, his teammates nodding in agreement alongside him.

Nodding back at them in response, Landry activated the radio once again.

"Stand down," he told the security team gathered around the Stargate, his tone solemn as he looked at the obviously shaken Adria. "It's... well, it's over."

As the men around the two part-Ascended beings lowered their weapons, Daniel and Sam were in each other's arms almost before they realised it, smiling in relief at their son's continued existence.

Even if they'd had faith that he could make it out of the Ori ship alive- Merlin's training aside, Liam had shown himself to be a fairly resourceful young man in their time together-, no amount of faith could surpass the simply joy of having him back and alive.

"I'll just... go," Vala said, indicating the door to the control room before she hurried out of the room and down the corridor to the entrance to the gateroom, ignoring the slight stares she was receiving from her teammates.

Even she wasn't entirely sure what she was about to do when she'd left the control room, but as soon as she walked through the now-open doors of the gateroom and saw Adria standing there, looking lost and alone and child-like in a manner that she'd never looked even when she was a child physically, she knew that it didn't matter.

Whatever had happened between mother and daughter before now, right now, her daughter needed her, and Vala was going to at least try and be the kind of mother that could help her daughter.

"Hey," she said, smiling awkwardly at her daughter, before she looked slightly uncertainly at Liam. "So... what did you...?"

"I just shut down the part of her mind that was linked to the Ori," Liam replied, shrugging slightly as though discussing that kind of thing was normal. "She remembers everything she did, but without them telling her that they're right in the back of her mind like they were before, she's-"

"I... I can speak for myself, Liam," Adria said, looking at him with a slightly scolding smile before she turned to look at Vala. "As Liam said, without my fathers present in the back of my mind to... support me... I have realised that I do not know the things I believed I did."

"Including everything you tried to tell me about Origin?" Vala asked with a hopeful smile.
"Among... other things," Adria said, nodding at her mother. "I recall the message that the text was created to spread... but I am no longer sure that this... invasion... was the way to spread it; religion should be a choice, and not something forced upon them..."

She paused for a moment, looking down as she held her hands out in front of herself, before she spoke again. "But I... I don't know what I should do now."

Even though her daughter looked like she was only a few years younger than her, Vala couldn't suppress the maternal urge she felt at those simple words.

She hadn't forgotten what Adria had tried to do in the past, but equally, it was clear that whatever Liam had done to her had changed her for the better; for all intents and purposes, the Adria that had been wasn't here any more.

"Come on..." she said, smiling uncertainly at her adult daughter, as she place an awkward arm around her shoulders; Adria's apparent age wouldn't make bonding easy, but Vala was going to try and be some kind of parent to her. "Let's go and... talk."

As Vala led Adria out of the gateroom, Mitchell almost didn't need the confirming nod from Generals O'Neill and Landry to know what he had to do next as he headed out of the dialling room and down to the gateroom as the puddle jumper with the Sangraal attached to it.

Adria might have called the immediate attack on Earth off, but as long as the Ori themselves existed, the possibility of another attack would always remain unless they ended all possibility of future conflict for good, and the only way to accomplish that was to use the Sangraal.

None of them were exactly comfortable with that situation, but since it had been Mitchell who had lead them on the mission that resulted in Daniel activating the long-range communication device that lead to them making contact with the Ori in the first place, he had thus volunteered to be the one who activated the Sangraal.

As he walked into the gateship, Mitchell smiled grimly at the sight of the object that Merlin and Liam had constructed together over the last few weeks; he might not like the idea of the boy he partly considered a nephew helping to develop a weapon of genocide, but the prospect of the freedom they'd provide for the people of the Ori's home galaxy after it was activated helped him to feel a bit better about what they had planned.

"We're ready here, sir," Mitchell said, his tone solemn as he looked back at the observation booth, picking up the last crystal from where it lay near the Sangraal.

"Insert the crystal and proceed to dial the 'gate," Jack said, his arms folded and his expression grim as his gaze shifted from Mitchell to look at the Stargate in front of him, giving no indication how he felt about the order that he'd just given.

As Mitchell placed the crystal in the Sangraal and turned to dial the jumper's DHD, he wondered how things had come to this.

The fact that the Ori were near-omnipotent arrogant psychos who'd happily curtail human development across the galaxy to support themselves made what he was about to do easier, but that didn't mean he wanted to do it; genocide was genocide, no matter how long the other race had lived or how much they might deserve whatever was coming to them...
But, in the end, Merlin had been right; there was no other way to ensure that the Ori were stopped for good apart from killing them all right now, no matter how much Jackson and the others might wish that there was another way available to them.

With that thought, he entered the eight-chevron address that Sam had calculated was the address of the Ori galaxy from this network, tapped the necessary controls to set the jumper in motion-apparently that kind of simple command just required someone to be inside; it was the more complicated piloting feats that relied on the Ancient gene-, and then hurried out of the back as the jumper advanced towards the Stargate, a solemn tone to the advance that nobody felt inclined to break by speaking as the jumper passed through the event horizon, the wormhole shutting down as it passed through to the other side.

It was done.

The Sangraal was on its way to the Ori home galaxy, and it would soon destroy the Ascended who had suppressed and manipulated the lower beings of their galaxy for so many years.

Damn, Mitchell thought grimly as he looked at the deactivated Stargate. I'm going to need a few drinks after this...

After doing something like that, it would take some kind of monster for someone not to need to take a break from reality for a while...

"Will it work?" Jack asked after a few moments of silence, looking over at the Jackson family-even without any official documentation completely sorted out yet, Sam already looked the part as she stood alongside Daniel and Liam, one hand on her son's shoulder and an arm around Daniel's waist- inquiringly, the rest of SG-1 gathered around them as they stared at the now-deactivated Stargate.

He might have faith in Merlin's expertise in principle- the man certainly hadn't let them down while he'd been with them, and he'd won more than a few points with Jack for his decision to side with the SGC when the Ancients tried to take over Atlantis-, but that didn't mean he wasn't entitled to feel somewhat anxious when relying on new technology that he didn't fully understand.

"Well, Merlin did tell us that the Sangraal was programmed to generate an 'anti-Ascended' energy shield when it was in the last stages of the countdown to activation- he didn't say what it did exactly, although I'm guessing it's something like the energy generated by the Staffs-, so, unless he made some kind of mistake in the last stages..." Daniel said, shrugging slightly as he looked at Jack.

He didn't finish his sentence, but Jack didn't even bother making a joke about the silence that had fallen over the usually articulate archaeologist; they might have just saved the world, but they had paid a heavy price for doing so no matter what spin they tried to put on it.

God... they'd just committed genocide...

It was one of those things nobody really wanted to do- even when fighting the Goa'uld, the idea of killing them off completely had always seemed horrifying; it was one reason they'd occasionally just tried to manipulate some Goa'uld against each other-, but, at the same time, Jack couldn't bring himself to really feel sorry for the Ori.
They'd tried to establish total authority over a galaxy that might have been willing to leave them alone if they'd been left alone in return- it wasn't *that* likely that they'd have just sat back and allowed the Ori to enslave a galaxy of people once they'd found out about it, but at the same time it was so far away that it wasn't likely that the IOA or Homeworld Security would have been able to put that much effort into working out what to do next-, and had ignored any of their prior attempts to establish some kind of diplomatic resolution to the problem; they'd made their bed, so the SGC had been left with no choice but to make it a coffin.

It sucked, but that was the way things went; the Ori had pushed against them, and they'd left everyone at the SGC with no other choice but to push back.

Jack just wished that he could be totally sure about where they were all going to go from here; you couldn't just kill a society's gods and leave them to pick up the pieces...

A few hours later, Sam stood alongside Liam in the facility's morgue; Daniel was currently helping Vala, Adria and Jack draw up the first draft of a possible new treaty between the Ori's former forces and the rest of the Milky Way galaxy, but Liam had wanted to take a last look at Merlin's body before they contacted any Ancients to ask for their advice regarding whatever funeral preparations the Ancients might practise.

"Are... are you OK?" Sam asked after a few moments of silence, looking uncertainly at her son as he stood silently beside her, gazing at the body of the man who had taught him so much in the short time they'd had together.

"I... I miss him," Liam said, sniffing slightly as he looked at the body lying before him before he turned to look at Sam. "I always knew that what I did couldn't keep him around forever..."

"But you wanted to believe he'd be there," Sam said, smiling sadly at her son as she crouched down to give him a brief hug, wishing that she could have waited longer before she found herself forced to teach her son this kind of lesson. "Liam, the hardest thing in this world is recognising that we can't keep the people we care about with us for the rest of our lives; eventually, whether through old age or something else, we'll always be separated from those we love. All we can do is treasure the time that we *do* have with them, and hope that we used that time well."

It wasn't the best thing she'd ever said, she was willing to admit- Daniel was the diplomat of SG-1; the rest of them just improvised when they were in a position where they had to talk to other people-, but judging by the smile on Liam's face, he seemed to appreciate it nevertheless.

"Thanks, Mom," he said, returning her hug with his own tight squeeze. "I love you."

*I love you*...

Liam might have said it before, but somehow, it meant so much more to Sam now.

Before, they'd also had to worry about the implications of Liam's 'destiny' to confront Adria, or they'd had to go to Atlantis to find whatever Merlin had hidden there, or he'd been busy with his training with Merlin, but now...

Right now, when Sam looked to the future, all that she could see was the possibility of a long, happy life with Daniel, with Liam as their son- and maybe a few more conventional children...
'thrown in' for good measure--; considering that she'd privately believed that her chances at a conventional relationship had ended when she broke up with Pete, that was far more than she could have ever expected.

She wouldn't be so self-centred as to think that the family she now had with Liam and Daniel made up for the fact that they'd just committed genocide, but it helped her feel slightly better; no matter what guilt they might face for what they'd done in the future, she'd have her family to help her through it.

"I love you too," she said, smiling down at her son as he looked up at her, his eyes gleaming with that same joy that his father always had whenever he'd made some kind of discovery that answered so many of his current questions. "And... whatever you decide to do with yourself now that you're living a normal life... I will always love you."

"Thanks, Mom," Liam said again, still grinning gratefully up at her. "I'll... keep that in mind."

"Just don't use it as an excuse to slack off when the time comes for you to go to school," Sam said as the two of them turned to leave the morgue, Sam pausing to move the sheet back over Merlin's body as it lay on the gurney before leaving the room with Liam.

"Aw, Mom, you know how smart I am-" Liam began.

"Personal opinion isn't the same as documentary academic reference, Liam," Sam replied, still smiling as they walked through the corridors of the SGC. "Your father and I are proud of the progress you made in your lessons with Merlin, but you're not going to have an entire life defined by what you've received because of how you were born..."

After the nightmarish few moments where she'd thought that Liam might be dead, the simplicity of being able to talk about his future scholastic career was definitely a refreshing change of pace.

Later that night, as Daniel returned to his apartment after a busy day at the SGC- drawing up the necessary details for a treaty with a group who had practically no experience with even the idea that there might be people outside of their own galaxy a few months before now-, he was only partly surprised to find Sam sitting on his couch, a pensive expression on her face as she looked up at him.

"Hey," she said, walking over to give him a welcoming hug. "Liam's already asleep in the guest room- I thought he needed something more normal than guest quarters back at the mountain-, so I thought I'd just... wait."

"Thanks," Daniel said, smiling briefly at her before he sat down beside her, staring up at the ceiling. "It's... been a busy few hours."

"What does the treaty consist of?" Sam asked.

"Well, we didn't want to create too great an upheaval in their society, and our ability to stay in contact with other galaxies is fairly limited, so we're basically agreeing to stay out of each other's affairs," Daniel said, smiling slightly at her. "With Adria having expressed her own doubts about Origin, not even the Priors were sure where to go, and with Tomin- Vala's husband, you know- having already begun questioning the Ori's approach and interpretation of the Book of Origin even before we did anything here, we thought that it would be best to leave him and a few others to try
and reinterpret the Books to approach a more benevolent attitude towards interacting with others than what they've done so far."

"You think that he can do it?" Sam asked.

"Well, Origin itself wasn't flawed- most of it depended on the interpretation of the Priors preaching it and the manipulations of the Ori themselves-, so Tomin's got a good basis to work with," Daniel said, smiling slightly hopefully at her before his expression became more dejected as he sat forward, his head bowed in obvious regret. "I just... I wish there was another way..."

"I know," Sam said, leaning over to place a hand around his shoulder as she smiled reassuringly at him. "But... we gave them every chance we could to back down, and they didn't take it; we didn't have any choice."

"Yeah..." Daniel said, nodding grimly before he smiled slightly over at Sam as another thought occurred to him. "And, on an encouraging note, at least our son made the right choice when he realised that he could make one."

"Saving Adria like that?" Sam replied, smiling back at Daniel in understanding. "Yeah, I know what you mean..."

Liam's decision to cut Adria off from the Ori was definitely making things somewhat complicated for the IOA back at the SGC- even the most hardened of them had trouble condemning Adria for something that even she seemed to be genuinely apologetic for in her current condition-, but Sam and Daniel both couldn't help but feel proud at the idea that their son had chosen the more complicated method of victory, attempting to help Adria rather than simply trying to kill her.

"So... what now?" Sam asked, as she looked uncertainly at Daniel.

They might have overcome the Ori, but they still had so many personal details to deal with; Vala had her relationship with Adria to try and straighten out, developing a plan for the Ori society to survive wasn't the same as successfully putting that plan into action, and then there were such minor issues as what was to be done with their captured Ori battlecruiser, to say nothing of waiting for Daanar's planet to return to the real universe...

"Tonight..." Daniel said, pausing contemplatively for a moment before he looked at her with a warm smile. "Tonight, I just want to hold you, and think about the life that we've got waiting for us and Liam now that the war's over, and the life that Tomin and the others can make for themselves now that we've defeated their gods... and not think about what we had to do to give them that life."

"OK," Sam said, nodding at Daniel with a smile of her own, understanding his need to focus more on what could be controlled right now. "Then that's what we'll do."

As she held Daniel in her arms, in that moment and for the rest of the night, Sam felt a certainty in what the future held for them that she had never felt before.

What they had done to get to this stage might have been questionable at best, but they had saved so many people with their last action, both in terms of lives saved and in terms of the freedom that they would now possess to grow and develop beyond the previous limitations forced on them by the beings who had set themselves up as gods over their home galaxy and had sought to do the same here...
There would be challenges up ahead for all concerned parties—Adria and Vala's tentative attempts to develop a new relationship, Liam's incorporation into regular life on Earth, the possibilities presented to them by the continued presence of the Tria's crew on Earth and in Atlantis...

But, if Sam and Daniel had learned anything from recent events, it was that they could accomplish anything if they worked together as members of SG-1.

They had always been a surrogate family for each other ever since they had first come together as a team, and just because that family had expanded since its formation didn't make it any less valid.

Whatever challenges the SGC might face in the upcoming weeks and months as they tried to help Adria and the former Ori forces accept the 'death' of their gods, or whatever issues might emerge as a result of the Ancients' attempts to find a place for themselves in a universe that had moved on since they had first established the Stargate network, the newly-formed Jackson family and their respective friends and allies could at least be sure that they were going to face it all together.

Their relationship might not have been conventional, but neither of them would change what they'd been through and the renewed connection they now shared with each other for anything. Liam might have been a surprise discovery when they went to Daanar's planet, unaware of the existence of the 'Child of the Ancients'- to use a nickname Liam had acquired at the SGC-, but now that he was here, Sam and Daniel could hardly remember what life had been like without Liam Carter Jackson in their lives.

Chapter End Notes

And there we have it; the story concludes—any changes from this point onwards can be left to your discretion, although I was thinking that the Atlantis expedition manage to save the Ancients during the Replicator assault by luring the Replicators in after converting the shield into an anti-Replicator weapon like they did in the show-, and I hope all of you enjoyed it.

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