Eye of the Serpent

by elaine

Summary

On holiday in Chicago, Jim and Blair run into some old friends - and danger. Jim and Jack discover that two anthropologists together are more than twice as much trouble.

"Honestly, Jim. You'll love this, and it's the last chance you'll have to see it. The exhibition's going into storage in a couple of months while the museum does some construction."

Blair gestured with the floor plan, his face all earnest eagerness. Jim didn't have the heart to tell him he'd rather do almost anything but spend what might be one of the few fine days left in the summer wandering around a museum when they could be enjoying their well-earned holiday.

Even so, he couldn't quite keep the impatience out of his voice. "Look, I said I'd do it, didn't I?"

"Yeah, but..." Blair stared up at him doubtfully. He looked tired, worn somehow, and Jim was afraid it was because of his new job.

Blair was a damn good cop, but it certainly wasn't the career he'd planned for himself. These days, Jim found himself watching Blair, sometimes too closely for the comfort of either of them. He hated to think he was waiting for the first cracks to appear, and yet he couldn't help feeling that was exactly what he was doing.

That was the main reason he'd suggested a holiday away from Cascade, and Blair had wanted to come here, to Chicago, and more specifically to the Field Museum, which had one of the top ethnographic departments in the whole of the US. If things had gone differently, Blair might have
ended up working here, or some place like it. Instead, he was just another visitor, dragging his cranky Sentinel along for the ride.

Suddenly, Blair smiled and wagged his eyebrows. "They have a great cafe, you know. I'll spot you lunch. After we check out the Pacific Northwest display."

"It's a deal." And he followed Blair into the dimly lit room with a much lighter heart.

Lunch was just as good as Blair had said it would be, and Jim felt in an expansive mood. There was another exhibition on the Pacific Island cultures that Blair wanted to check out and then maybe they could wander down the shore of Lake Michigan, since it was a warm, sunny day, and maybe hang out for the evening on Navy Pier. Jim had already taken the precaution of checking out the restaurants and there was a good seafood place there. Or they could go casual at Bubba Gump's. Either way Blair would approve of his choice.

They were on their way to the Pacific exhibit, bypassing, to Jim's relief, the ancient Egyptian mummy room, when he thought he caught sight of a familiar pair of shoulders, heading away from him. With a brief tug on the sleeve of Blair's shirt, Jim headed in that direction.

The greying hair threw him for a moment, but he suddenly knew who it was, and grinned. "Just saw an old friend, Chief. You want to go ahead? I can catch up."

"No way, man." Blair mock-scowled. "I know you. You'll be outta here so fast..."

"Suit yourself." He lengthened his stride to catch up with the pair ahead of them, ignoring Blair's sudden intake of breath. He was probably just a little pissed at the delay. "Jack!"

The silvered head turned and Jack O'Neill's craggy face went slack with surprise for a moment. He waited for Jim to approach, muttering an aside to his younger companion. He held out his hand with a grin, and Jim took it in a firm grip. "Well, whadaya know? Jim Ellison. What are you doing here in Chicago?"

"Daniel?" Blair's croak, coming from behind, distracted Jim's attention for a moment. And then Blair, and Jack's friend both spoke at the same time. "What are you doing here?"

The two men wrapped their arms around each other with an enthusiasm that struck Jim as being more than friendly. A lot more. He met Jack's eyes across Blair's shoulder and the other man seemed just as dumbfounded as he felt himself.

Daniel was at the bar, ordering their beers. He'd insisted on bringing them to Berkhoff's. Only a ten minute cab drive from the museum; he'd sworn it served the best beer in Chicago, brewed at its own microbrewery, and Blair had eagerly supported him. It was dark and a little musty but with an astounding variety of beers. At this time of day there weren't many patrons, and so it was perfect for two pairs of old friends to reacquaint themselves with each other.

Jack scowled. It had been bad enough having to hang out in the museum for most of the day, tagging along behind Daniel and his archaeologist friends, but he'd just been on the verge of getting Daniel outside, in the sunshine, when Jim Ellison had called out his name. Not that it wasn't great to see an old friend again, but he could have done without the sidekick, and what kind of a name was Blair anyway?

The beer when it came, was as good as Daniel had promised it would be. After a long, long swallow Jack lowered the glass to the table and fixed Blair with his best innocently enquiring look. "So you worked here with Daniel, huh?"
Blair's sideways glance of amusement at Daniel did nothing to endear him to Jack. "Yeah. I was here to study the Fijian tribal artefacts and Daniel was working on some translations. I think we were the only people under forty on the whole staff."

"And now you're a cop?" Daniel's voice was frankly incredulous.

To Jack's surprise, Jim flinched a little and Blair looked down at the table top. "Yeah, well I'd been working with Jim as an observer, and I got the chance to... you know... and so here I am." He looked up, smiling with more than a hint of bravado.

It was obvious that the two of them wanted to talk, and Jack had already resigned himself to not getting that afternoon with Daniel after all. Between them, he and Jim kept the talk going for as long it took to finish their drinks and then he sighed and stretched. "Well, I don't know about you two, but us old guys have some catching up to do."

"Hey. Watch who you're calling old." Jim smiled wryly. "Blair? That okay with you?"

Blair nodded his agreement, pushing back his chair and smiling at Daniel. "I'll see you back at the hotel, okay?"

"Sure." Jim watched the two younger men leave, his face carefully neutral. Then he turned back to look at Jack. "Seems like a nice guy."

"He is." Jack smiled blandly. "So does Blair. So, are you two...?"

Jim's pupils widened a little, then he looked away. "No. You and Daniel?"

He supposed he'd asked for that. Or perhaps Jim saw more than Jack realised. The truth was, he'd spent so long ignoring his attraction to Daniel that it had become a habit; one that would be difficult to break. That didn't mean he wasn't going to give it his best shot. Meantime, he shrugged and sipped his beer. "Didn't know he'd be interested, actually. Daniel and me are gonna have to have a little talk, later."

"Yeah." Jim's voice was abstracted. "I know what you mean."

The late afternoon breeze was rising off Lake Michigan, cooling them as they walked. Now that they were alone together, Daniel was beginning to feel just a little awkward. It had been years since he'd last seen Blair. They'd kept in touch at first, but when Daniel's career had begun to unravel, Blair hadn't called or written, and Daniel had just assumed Blair had wanted to protect his own career, like so many others.

Now, looking at Blair, who'd hardly changed at all, he remembered how loyal, and how good a friend he'd always been. Their eyes met and Blair smiled diffidently and cleared his throat. "Uh... when... when, you know, all that stuff was happening? I was on an expedition with Eli, in Irian Jaya. I tried to find you when I got back, but you'd just disappeared, man. Nobody could tell me where you were."

"Oh. Well, yes, I just... kinda dropped off the face of the planet." Which just happened to be literally true. Daniel felt himself flushing and avoided Blair's sympathetic gaze. "And after that, well, I've been kinda busy. I guess I haven't exactly kept in touch lately."

"Yeah, well..." Blair shrugged uncomfortably, then grinned. "I never would have picked you for the military."

"I'm a civilian consultant, actually. But, yeah, it can be a little weird at times, but I don't regret it. And
I certainly never would have picked you to be a cop." To Daniel's surprise Blair seemed to draw in on himself. "Blair? What's wrong?"

"Nothing. I just..." Blair started walking a little faster, his eyes on the ground just ahead of them. After a short silence he looked up again. "I guess you haven't heard, then. About my diss."

Daniel smiled wryly. "I don't socialise in academia all that much any more."

"No. I can understand that." Blair took a deep breath. "I had some trouble with the Dean at Ranier. I had to withdraw from the doctoral program and... and trash my thesis. I'd already been working with Jim, like I said, and he managed to pull a few strings and here I am, Detective Sandburg."

His voice resonated with a mixture of weariness and bitter pride that Daniel didn't know how to respond to. "Blair, I'm sorry... if I'd had any idea..."

"I know." Blair raised a wry smile. "Look at us now, eh? A couple of ex-boy wonders, disgraced academics, and now we're both hanging out with aging covert ops guys, saving the world. Who woulda thought it?"

"Not me, that's for sure." He hugged Blair tightly, ignoring the occasional glance from passers-by. "Do you like being a cop?"

"Sometimes." Blair stepped back, and Daniel could see the shields going up. "The adrenaline rush is pretty damned incredible, and the paperwork doesn't suck as much as marking term papers. We're doing some good, I know. Helping people. It's just..." he gestured vaguely with one hand. "I don't know if this is what I want to do with my life. Apart from Jim."

Ah. "So... you and him...?"

Blair shook his head smiling. "No. He doesn't have any idea about me being Bi. What about you and Jack? He seemed kinda protective."

Daniel shrugged. "He's my best friend, but... well, firstly, there's the whole 'don't ask, don't tell', which by the way, is a total crock. And he doesn't know about me, either. I... well, I got married."

"Wha-aat?" Blair grinned widely and punched him lightly in the chest. "Why didn't you tell me?" But his smile faded rapidly as he took in the expression on Daniel's face. "Daniel, what happened?"

"She... died." Daniel thrust a shaky hand into long hair that was no longer there and ended up rubbing the short strands against his scalp. "It was a while ago, now."

"Oh, man..." Blair was suddenly wrapped around him and Daniel pressed his face into the dark curls. It felt so good to feel that short, sturdy body hard against his own. Tendrils of pleasure unfurled through his belly. It had been a long time since he'd been with a man.

Aware that Blair might no longer consider himself available, Daniel stepped back before he could give himself away. But Blair was looking up at him expectantly, so he smiled. "So...?"

Blair leaned back into Daniel's chest, his body more relaxed than it had been in months. He rested one hand on Daniel's raised left knee and with his other hand played with Daniel's teasing fingers as his companion twirled his nipple ring. The last couple of hours had been fun, but he wasn't in any hurry to start anything serious again just yet.

Daniel's chin came to rest on his shoulder, nuzzling aside his hair to nibble at his earlobe. Suddenly the body behind him tensed. "Oh, for crying out loud, that theory was discredited years ago. The
man's a pompous ass!"

Blair grinned and turned to look at Daniel's outraged expression. "So change channels. You don't have to watch this."

But Daniel muttered under his breath and continued to glare at the screen. His hand, though, persisted with its teasing. Blair stroked up and down Daniel's shin, lazily complacent, while Daniel made occasional disparaging comments about the documentary they were watching.

Funny, that something like that would make him hard, but it did. When Blair had had enough distraction, he drew Daniel's hand down to his cock and left him to play, happily aware of the growing hardness pressing against his spine.

Daniel's touch was light and sure, almost like a woman's in its delicacy, but with the hint of strength beneath that had always been such a turn on for Blair. He'd missed that edge lately. Since moving in with Jim, he hadn't dared risk sex with a man because Jim would certainly have noticed.

It was stupid really; sure, his first instinct had been that Jim would freak if he knew his new partner, and then roommate, was turned on by guys, but it hadn't taken him long to realise that he'd underestimated Jim. Still, something had made him hold back, and now his main concern was that Jim would not at all understand why Blair had kept it a secret all these years. He didn't want to hurt Jim, was what it came down to; and any hint that he didn't fully trust Jim would hurt his partner big time.

So, why was he here now? He knew he wasn't dealing too well with the changes in his life. He couldn't talk to Jim about it, and wasn't ready to tell Daniel all of it; but Daniel had been through a lot of the things he'd experienced. Daniel had dealt. Maybe he could help Blair to deal too.

But right now, all Blair really cared about was the light touch of Daniel's fingers stroking the length of his cock. Blair moaned softly and rocked his hips into the warmth of Daniel's hand. The grip on his cock changed slightly and Daniel's thumb began to rub delicately across the sensitive head of his cock. It was already seeping pre-cum and the feel of that slippery wetness sent shivers through Blair's body.

To add to the effect, Daniel had pushed aside his hair and was slowly licking Blair's exposed throat. "Oh, yeah.... I've never had a lover like you, Danny... so fucking good..."

"Mmm..." Daniel sucked sharply on Blair's throat. It would definitely leave a mark. "Speaking of fucking... I think it's my turn this time?"

Reluctant to lose that sinfully sweet sensation on his cockhead, Blair sighed. "Just keep doing that a bit longer, and I promise I'll fuck you till you scream."

"You asshole!" Daniel's yell nearly deafened Blair and certainly startled the hell out of him. "Jerkwad! Fucking reactionary, head up your ass..."

By then, Blair had realised that the insults weren't being aimed at him. He fumbled for the remote and pressed the mute button. "Think you can focus now, Daniel?"

He was still muttering under his breath, but when Blair wriggled around to lie face to face along his body, the furious mumbling ceased. He rubbed his cock against Daniel's and saw his friend's eyes glaze over. Blair lowered his head and bit gently at a hardened nipple, and Daniel groaned, thrusting up urgently against him.

The first time they'd barely got their clothes off before exploding, noisily and messily, all over each
other. The second time hadn't been much different, except that Blair had been just a little bit demanding and as a result his ass was still aching pleasantly. Now it was Daniel's turn, and Daniel was already sliding down the heaped up pillows and drawing his knees up to his chest. Blair grinned and reached for the lube and condoms.

As he slid into Daniel's eagerly receptive ass, Blair felt something loosen up inside him. It was a kind of homecoming to be inside a man again, to feel Daniel's hard cock twitch against his belly with each thrust and hear the uninhibited yell as his cock brushed against Daniel's prostate. He loved women, and loved making love to them, but this was different, and he'd gone without it for too long. Already his thrusts were becoming erratic as his own pleasure built. Daniel was incoherent, and noisy, and obviously on the brink. With a long heartfelt groan, Blair plunged deeper still, and Daniel screamed, just like Blair had promised he would, as hot drops of cum splattered their bodies.

Fan-fucking-tastic. Blair roused himself long enough to dispose of the condom and then collapsed across Daniel's chest. It was still early. Plenty of time to catch his breath and snuggle a little before he'd need to shower and head back to his own hotel and Jim.

He must be getting old, Jack decided, if he was ready to call it quits before midnight. Time was when meeting up with an old combat buddy meant a night spent investigating the merits of at least a dozen bars and staggering home in the early hours of the morning. Sure, they'd had a few drinks, but neither of them was seriously drunk - they could still walk in an almost straight line - and it was only eleven-thirty. Yet here they both were, stumbling out of a cab at the Ramada Inn Lake Shore.

For some reason that Jack couldn't actually remember, it had been decided that Jim would come back to his hotel for one last nightcap before heading back to wherever it was he and Blair were staying. Making their way through the lobby, Jack managed to keep his eyes locked on the elevator doors, otherwise he could have got lost. He also kept a firm grip on Jim's sleeve, since his friend was showing a tendency to list to the right.

"We made it." Jack beamed triumphantly at Jim as the elevator doors closed. Score one for the Air Force over the Army. Oops. He hadn't meant to say that aloud.

Jim blinked sleepily. "Any time I need a superan... superani... over the hill... flyboy to get me back to my own hotel room, is the day I hang up my badge. Gun. Whatever."

"Are we at your hotel? I thought we were at my hotel." Jack peered at the lights on the panel. "It's stopping at my floor" he offered helpfully.

"Then it must be your hotel." Jim swayed alarmingly. "Mind if I visit?"

"Y're most welcome..." Jack flung an arm around the other man's shoulders and together they made their way to his room.

The first thing he thought when he opened the door was that it was somehow typical of Daniel to be watching the Discovery channel while having sex. The second thing was that, in spite of the PDA this afternoon with Blair, he really hadn't ever expected to find Daniel in bed with another man. In bed, naked, and all too obviously fucked senseless.

Behind him Jim stumbled and swore softly.

Well, it was far too late, he supposed, to worry about Daniel's virtue. If, in fact, he'd ever had any. Jack moved forward, allowing Jim to enter the room and close the door. The two men on the bed slept on obliviously, Blair sprawled face down and half on top of Daniel, who was still wearing his glasses.
It struck Jack that it would probably be a good idea to do something about that. He tiptoed over and eased the rather lopsided glasses off Daniel's nose and folded them up, placing them on the nightstand between the two double beds. Then, after further consideration, he pulled a sheet across the still figures and used the remote to turn off the TV.

When he turned back, Jack realised that Jim hadn't moved from just inside the door and that he was staring at his partner and Daniel with an unnerving intensity. Alarm bells went off. Jack had no idea what Blair meant to Jim, but it was obvious that his old friend was dumbstruck to say the least. He also realised that they were both suddenly stone cold sober.

"Uh, I guess... um..."

Ice cold blue eyes fixed on him from across the room and Jim's lips thinned almost to invisibility. "Yeah?"

Jack shrugged, knowing there was a point at which it became impossible to reason with a man, and Jim Ellison had reached that point the moment he'd entered the room. "I'm going to bed. If you wanna stay, there's extra blankets in that closet. You can sleep on the couch."

Jim didn't reply. His jaw clenched and Jack thought he could hear teeth grinding. With another shrug he turned away and began to undress. When he slipped between the sheets Jim was still standing by the door, but a few minutes later he heard the closet door open and close, and then the sounds of Jim undressing.

Blair was still only half awake when he realised that something was very wrong. For one thing, a brief nap shouldn't have left him with this heavy, relaxed feeling; the kind he got after a good long sleep. He sighed, rubbed his face and snuggled a little closer to Daniel.

Daniel.

Okay. So he was in bed with Daniel. Well, that wouldn't be the first time, nothing wrong there. He rolled onto his back and stared up at the ceiling. A hotel room. Fine. No problem. Turned his head. Oh... not good. Not good at all. It took a moment to remember that the grey-haired man was Daniel's friend, Jack. Jack who was in the military and who Daniel was more than a little fond of, but couldn't do anything about it... because Jack. Was. In. The. Military. Oh shit.

Jack had gone out for a drink or two - more likely ten, in Blair's opinion - with Jim last night. Ah! That was what else was wrong. Blair had overslept and now it was morning. Well, okay. He'd just get up, have a shower and get back to his hotel and pretend... oh fuck! Jim was asleep on the couch.

Panic seemed the only feasible course of action. He shook Daniel awake and jerked his head frantically in the direction of the couch. Daniel's eyes widened, turned to the other bed and closed in horror.

"Okay. I'm going to have a shower," Daniel whispered desperately. "A shower's a good idea, right?"

Before Blair could think of an answer to that, Daniel had slipped out of the bed and into the bathroom. Great. Now all he needed was for Jim, or Jack, or - even worse - both of them, to wake up. And then he noticed that Jim's eyes were open and staring straight at him.

He'd had worse moments in his life. Or had he? Even being held captive by David Lash suddenly didn't seem so bad as he'd always thought. He smiled hopefully at Jim, but Jim just stared coldly back, unblinking.

Unblinking. Jim wasn't blinking.
He was out of the bed, desperately scrambling for something to cover himself with before he'd finished following that thought to its logical conclusion. He pulled on a pair of shorts, Daniel's, not his, and went to kneel by the couch. Jim's eyes were still fixed on the place on the bed where Blair had been lying.

"Jim." He kept his voice low and soothing. "Jim, man, it's time to wake up now. Can you hear me?"

There was no immediate response, but there was nothing unusual in that. He brushed the tips of his fingers lightly over Jim's cheek and continued his usual patter: wake up, Jim. Everything's okay, Jim. Follow my voice, Jim. Eventually, there was a response; a barely detectable tremor in Jim's cheek. "That's it. You're doing great, Jim. Can you feel my hand?"

Suddenly, Jim was back. He blinked vigorously and caught hold of Blair's hand, pulling him closer. Sniffing. Jim was sniffing... oh my god... Before Blair could decide what to do, Jim's hands had grabbed him by the waist, Jim's face was pressed against his stomach, sniffing and... and licking... his eyes closed, a furrow of concentration on his brow. Blair threw himself backwards, landing on his ass as Jim's eyes flew open, his stare accusing.

"Well, that's a pretty neat trick." Jack's sardonic voice cut across the silence. "What do you do for an encore?"

Jim wasn't exactly sure how they'd got back to their own hotel room. He vaguely remembered Blair's lame story of 'seizures, no big deal, man' and Blair's hands on him, helping him to dress and then being led to the elevator and out of the hotel. Jack's hotel. Jack and Daniel. Daniel who... who'd... but his mind refused to go there.

He waited patiently while Blair paid off the taxi driver and steered him through the lobby of the much less luxurious hotel that they were staying in. The ding of the elevator bell made him wince and the muzak made him nauseous although that, at least, wasn't unusual. All the while Blair was talking, quietly and rapidly. Too fast for Jim to be able to understand what he was saying, but the sound of his guide's voice helped a little.

The sight of the door made him shy away, but Blair held on fast and wouldn't let him go. There was something bad behind that door. Something told him that he really didn't want to open that door... he realised he was muttering under his breath and closed his mouth with a snap.

"Look, Jim, I'm telling you there's nothing bad inside." Blair tugged at his sleeve impatiently. "Come on, man."

So he went inside, and Blair was right. It was okay in there. Safe. No Daniel, and Blair was right beside him, not... no! He headed for the bed he'd been sleeping in and sat on the edge. He was so tired.

"Jim, what are you doing?"

"I'm going to sleep." The sound of his own voice startled him. It sounded strange and distant, but he was so tired. He pulled the covers over himself and closed his eyes.

The bedding was dragged off him, but he didn't have the strength to protest. "You've still got your shoes on." Blair let out a long sigh when he didn't stir, and then his shoes and socks were removed. "You're really starting to freak me out, man. I mean, you haven't zoned in ages and now this... this... whatever it is you're doing. I really wish you'd just snap out of it."

A gentle touch on his bare foot sent a jolt through Jim's body, shocking him out of his inertia. He
stared up at Blair, shivering. "Why, Blair? Dammit, why him? Why not me?"

Blair shook his head. "Oh no. We are not having this discussion now, okay?"

He could only look at his partner and swallow all the words, all the pain. After everything that Blair had been through - because of him - it was the least he could do. He nodded shakily and closed his eyes.

Blair's hands moved over him, easing off the light jacket he'd been wearing and starting on unbuttoning his shirt. "Look, Jim, we'll talk later, okay? You're tired, I'm freaking out... if we try to do this now we'll only end up saying things we'll regret later. You got that?"

"Talk later." Jim nodded sketchily. Having Blair undress him like this felt far too intimate. He could feel his body responding; wanted desperately to touch Blair, to hold him.

Blair wouldn't mind if Jim just held him, would he?

"Jim, now what?" Blair's voice was muffled and Jim could feel his breath warm through the cloth of his undershirt. He felt good: heavy and solid and alive. Jim's fingers tangled in the loose curls, but he didn't mind.

Somehow Jim managed to angle his head so that he could kiss the softness of Blair's hair. He wished he could kiss Blair. Touch Blair. Cuddle up to Blair the same way Blair had cuddled up to Daniel. No! Don't think about Daniel...

"Ouch!" Blair pulled free of him and sat up, one hand going to his head where Jim must have pulled his hair. He hadn't meant to do that. Blair frowned down at him, obviously uncertain what to do.

"I love you." Jim smiled up at Blair, but he could feel tears leaking out the corners of his eyes. "Why can't you love me?"

"I do love you, man. Even when you're being a pain in the butt." A fingertip brushed Jim's temple, carrying away one of the teardrops. "I just don't know what to do with you when you're like this. What happened, Jim?"

"I smelled you. And I smelled him on you and it was all mixed together and I couldn't tell which was you and which was him." Jim felt his nostrils flaring with the memory of it. Panic tinged his voice. "Blair, I need to know... I need to."

"I know. Shh... it's all right. I understand." Blair leaned over him, his long hair brushing Jim's cheek. "It's all right."

Without even thinking about it, Jim lifted a hand to Blair's face. His thumb rubbed lightly over the rough stubble, exploring the harsh texture, then he slid his hand round to the back of Blair's neck and drew him down further.

Blair's mouth tasted of mint - gum, not toothpaste - and underlying morning breath, but not, thank god, of Daniel. He could still smell Daniel everywhere on Blair, but it didn't matter as long as he could just go on kissing Blair.

"This is crazy, Jim. We need to talk about this." Blair's voice sounded somewhere between laughter and tears.

Jim smiled complacently. "No talking. You said so."
"Bastard." But Blair kissed him again, and stroked him through his undershirt until his nipples ached. "Are you sure about this, Jim?"

Jim nodded, unable to speak. Blair smiled at him and slowly drew up his undershirt until it cleared his nipples. He could hardly breathe as Blair leaned down and kissed, then sucked his nipples, moving from one to the other without haste.

"Do you have any idea how long I've wanted to do this?" Kisses trailed down his abdomen to the waist of his pants and nimble fingers attacked his zipper. "You're so beautiful, man. I've wanted you since the moment I first met you." His pants were pulled open, and his shorts, and cool air rushed over his cock. "Well, I guess that covers the question of whether you really want this."

"I want it." It was still extraordinarily difficult to speak. Whatever crisis of need had brought him to this point, it wasn't going away just because it looked like he was about to get everything he wanted. He managed to infuse every longing, every need and desire into one word. "Blair."

A tender kiss was placed on his belly and Jim groaned softly. Then Blair's hands got busy working his pants down over his hips. He lifted them helpfully and sighed as the clothing was pulled off completely.

Blair stood by the bed looking down at him admiringly. "You know, I could take the shirt off, but you look so damn hot like that."

"Doesn't matter." Jim reached for Blair, and his partner stretched out on the bed next to him. They kissed slowly, exploring each other's mouths thoroughly while Blair stroked lightly over every inch of Jim's body. It felt so good that Jim could almost feel his body becoming lighter, in danger of floating away. He took a firm hold of Blair and was reminded in no uncertain terms of something they'd both forgotten. "Aren't you a little overdressed here, Sandburg?"

Blair grinned against his mouth. "You haven't called me Sandburg in ages, Jim. Feeling better, are we?"

"Blair..."

"Oh, all right." Blair disentangled himself from Jim and sat up. He bent over to drop a kiss at the base of Jim's cock, making it twitch eagerly, then slid off the bed.

Jim watched intently as Blair's fingers began to unbutton his shirt. By the time he'd got to the bottom, Blair had noticed. His cheeks flushed slightly, but he made a show of sliding the shirt off his shoulders and letting it drop to the floor. Then he peeled the undershirt inch by inch up his chest and over his head before tossing it aside with a little flourish. The zipper on his pants descended with excruciating slowness, but by that time, Blair must have been getting impatient, or nervous, because he yanked both pants and shorts down together and stepped out of them, kicking them aside before raising his eyes to meet Jim's again.

It wasn't the first time Jim had seen him naked; they'd shared an apartment and a bathroom for almost four years now. But those had been brief glimpses and they hadn't been planning on making love at the time. Now Blair was just standing there, his cock darkly flushed and half hard, smiling a little shyly and looking so damned gorgeous that Jim's mouth went dry. He heard the way Blair's breathing changed, and then Blair was on top of him and nothing else mattered.

His senses were overloading on Blair and all he wanted was to sink into them. Only one thing stopped him; whenever Jim let his sense of smell open up even a little, he could smell Daniel on Blair. It kept throwing him off and was probably what stopped him going completely crazy.
Then he heard Blair's voice. "...that's it, Jim. Just listen to my voice. Dial it down, okay?"

Suddenly, his senses were at least approaching normal. Jim could feel the smooth skin of Blair's shoulders under his hands and the hard length of his cock digging into his belly. He took a deep breath and blinked and Blair's face swum into focus, looking more than a little worried.

"Okay. 'm okay." His voice was slurred. "It's just... so intense."

"That's all right." Blair kissed him lightly. "We can take it slowly."

"No." The protest was an instinctive reaction. He let his hands slide down Blair's back till they reached his ass, and pulled him closer. Blair moaned softly, his eyes darkening as his pupils dilated. Jim rested his hands there, feeling how perfectly each cheek fitted into the curve of his palms.

Blair nuzzled his cheek. "What do you want, Jim?"

The answer came to him, clear and certain, and a throb started, like a drumbeat deep inside Jim's body. "I want you in me."

"Have you ever done this before?" Blair's face was a study in conflicting emotions. "Jim, this is important. Have you?"

He shook his head and Blair frowned. "Then we can't. We don't have anything. No condoms, no lube..."

"We don't need..."

"Yes, we do. Lube at the very least. I guess we can safely forget the condoms, but without lube... Jim, I could hurt you. Maybe tear you. I won't risk it." Blair lowered his head to rest against Jim's chest. "God, I want to..."

Disappointment threatened to overwhelm them both. Their bodies were still moving slowly together, but some of the joy was gone. Jim was still searching desperately for a solution when Blair lifted his head again, some of the sparkle back in his eyes. "How about the other way? You in me? Would that work?"

Now he knew exactly how Blair had felt. "Not if I'm going to hurt you."

"You won't." Blair grinned confidently. "I've done it before, and besides, I'm still pretty loose... uh... from, uh..."

It was more information than Jim really wanted, but not even that could blunt the wild anticipation he felt. Blair must have easily read the answer in his face. He slid down Jim's body until he was kneeling between Jim's thighs, then gave Jim a wicked grin and brushed his tongue up Jim's cock in one long swoop before closing his mouth around the tip.

The sensation was so incredible that it all could have easily ended right there. Jim managed to hold back his initial reaction - to thrust up into Blair's mouth - and kept himself still only by using every ounce of determination he possessed. His whole body shook with the effort. Perhaps that was why, after a couple of long, wet sucks, Blair released Jim's cock from his mouth, only to trap it between ruthless fingers.

"Don't start without me, big guy." Blair let loose a smouldering smile and slid two fingers between his lips, moving them in and out with a lazy sensuality that almost set Jim off again, even before he realised why Blair was doing it.
He watched, reduced to helpless whimpering, while Blair prepared himself, rocking his hips back onto his own fingers. Mercifully, Blair kept it brief, and only a few moments later, he was sinking down onto Jim's cock, a tiny frown of concentration drawing his eyebrows together.

God, it felt so unbelievably wonderful. And Blair - straddling Jim's hips, his body arched in pleasure, his cock lifting again, dripping tiny, hot droplets of pre-cum onto Jim's belly - he had never seen a more beautiful sight in his life. He reached, wanting to touch, wanting... everything. His hands moved over Blair's thighs, up his body, revelling in the coarse, soft hair, the sleek skin and muscle; then down again, wrapping around Blair's cock, investigating every raised vein, every tiny variation in texture. It felt awkward to be stroking from this angle; different from the way he touched himself, and he'd never touched another man before.

Blair rocked into his hand, sending his cock sliding through Jim's grip, spreading the slick pre-cum down over his shaft. Jim's thumb went automatically to feel this new sensation and suddenly touch linked to scent and he even thought he could taste it in his mouth. He brought his hand away and, yes, it was the same taste. His body reacted, surging up into Blair's and nearly overpowering both of them.

"Jim... oh god..." Blair's voice was gravelly with arousal, his eyes barely open. He leaned forward so Jim could thrust into him more easily.

They couldn't last much longer. Jim held onto Blair's hips, guiding his counterthrusts and watched as Blair's cock twitched helplessly between their bodies. "Blair... touch yourself... please..."

Blair nodded, biting his lip and frowning with the effort of responding to anything outside his body's immediate needs. His hand moved jerkily over his cock and his breathing became even more erratic. Somehow, Jim could feel the incipient orgasm building in the heat of Blair's belly, could feel it rising from his balls into his cock. Suddenly Blair went rigid, every muscle in his body contracting as thick strands of pearly liquid spilled over his cockhead and ran down his fingers.

The gentle tightening of Blair's ass around his cock was all Jim needed to send him over the edge. He thrust up one last, endless time with a yell of utter incredulity. Nothing could have prepared him for the intensity of what he felt and he teetered on the edge of unconsciousness as his cock pulsed fiercely inside the heat of Blair's body. It seemed to last for an eternity and yet, when it was over, he could see that Blair had barely begun to tumble forward, still panting and shaking.

Jim caught him, acting more on instinct than actual brain function. With Blair lying safely against his chest, Jim turned his attention to the one other thing that mattered. He lifted Blair's limp hand to his mouth and began the task of licking up every trace of the semen that coated his lover's fingers.

"God, I love you." Blair moved his head and Jim felt him smile against his shoulder. "Love you too, Chief."

Breakfast arrived, courtesy of room service, on a large trolley. It was purely a precautionary measure, Jack had decided. Whatever was going to be said between them - and he had no idea what he was going to say, let alone what Daniel might come out with - it would be better said here, in their suite, than in a hotel dining room. Besides, it was almost a duty for him to exercise his colonel's privileges to the max, in accordance with the 'use it or lose it' principle.

Another advantage was that if his mouth was full of food, it would be that much harder to say something stupid. That obviously wasn't an idea that had occurred to Daniel, who had drunk two cups of coffee and was halfway through his third, but had yet to eat a single mouthful of anything on
the plate in front of him. That this was not a good sign, Jack was well aware, and it was making him nervous.

Maybe he should say something to encourage Daniel to talk. Jack hastily swallowed the forkful of scrambled eggs. "Dammit Daniel, just what kind of redneck Neanderthal do you think I am?"

Well, that probably wouldn't help at all... he watched as Daniel's head came up, irritation sparkling in the previously sombre blue eyes. "I don't think that, all right, Jack? I think you're a decent, open-minded guy who works for an incredibly homophobic government."

Okay, so the cards were well and truly on the table. Jack opened his mouth to reply - still with no idea what he was going to say - but Daniel launched a pre-emptive strike. "I'm only following the rules, after all. Don't ask, don't tell? Heard of that Jack? Well, you didn't ask and I didn't tell, all right? I just figured there were some things it would be better that you didn't know. For your sake, not mine."

"Okay." Jack smiled peaceably. "I appreciate your concern. Thank you."

Daniel's eyes dropped back to his plate, and he lifted a few curds of scrambled eggs with his fork, only to drop them again, untasted.

"But now that I do know..."

"What? Do you want a blow by blow account?" Daniel's bottom lip showed dangerous signs of developing a pout. "Oh, I forgot - we never quite got to that."

Jack winced. Daniel in a pissy mood was not what he was aiming for. "No, I think we can safely leave that in the realm of... you know; that rule. This Sandburg character. I take it you and he were..."

"Lovers. Yes. Years ago." Daniel let out an explosive sigh. "I'm sorry, Jack. I never meant for you to find out, and especially not this way."

Jack made a negligent 'everything's okay' gesture with his free hand while lifting his cup for another mouthful of coffee. "I can't believe he did that. I mean, where does he get off taking you to... you know... while Ellison and I are having a few drinks, talking over old times."

"Jack, what are you talking about?" A flush rose suddenly under Daniel's tan. "On second thoughts, I'm not sure I want you to answer that."

But Jack was on a roll now. If he couldn't bring himself to remain angry with Daniel, then Blair was another convenient target. "I suppose he told you that he and Ellison were just good friends, huh? If he's hurt you, Danny, I swear..."

Daniel laughed. "As a matter of fact he did tell me that. And I believe him." He relaxed back into this chair and actually bit off a piece of bacon and chewed it for a moment before swallowing. "It was a long time ago, Jack. Blair's just a good friend who... well, who was there. He was available and I... it's been a long time since I..."

Jack felt himself flushing. "So you haven't, uh... dated..."

"Dated?" Daniel rubbed his eyes wearily. "What did you think I was doing, Jack? Sleeping my way through the entire SGC? If you must know, I haven't been with a man since before Sha're."

Okay, so it wasn't just that Daniel wasn't interested in him specifically. Jack felt himself blushing for
even thinking that. "So we... I mean, the SGC, are off limits?"

"It seemed like a good idea." Typical Daniel-style understated sarcasm.

He gone about as far as he dared, Jack decided. He finished the last mouthful of bagel and poured himself more coffee. "Okay."

"Okay." Daniel nodded absently.

End of discussion. It was time to get back to real business. "So... yesterday. You were telling me something before Jim interrupted us."

"Just that I hadn't found anything so far." Daniel's amusement was obvious behind the polite mask. They both knew damn well that Jack hadn't been listening to his scholastic enthusiasm. He'd just been riding out the wave and waiting until Daniel could tell him in twenty words or less whether the archaeologists at the museum had uncovered a Goa'uld artefact.

Jack sighed. "So I guess that means we head back there today?"

"Well... I promised Blair I'd introduce him to a friend at the Oriental Institute. There's a manuscript he wants to look at." Daniel smiled, slightly maliciously. "We're going to meet for lunch. You can come too, if you want."

"I'd call him first if I were you. Somehow I got the impression that he and Jim wouldn't be going anywhere today." Jack watched Daniel's eyebrows rise. He didn't seem to be upset.

"Blair wouldn't lie to me, Jack. He told me... well... that he cared about Jim, but..." suddenly, Daniel looked intrigued. "You really think so?"

"You shoulda seen what went on while you were in the shower, Danny. Or the way Jim reacted last night. If they weren't doing each other before, they are now." He ignored Daniel's wince as he followed that thought to its logical conclusion and then made a sideways leap to another issue entirely. "So, you aren't interested in... I mean, it never occurred to you that I..."

"No." Daniel answered hurriedly. Far too hurriedly for someone who'd never thought what Jack was implying. "Never."

Hmm... so Daniel was interested in him. Jack filed that thought away for future reference. It was obvious that Daniel wasn't ready to talk about it right now, and Jack was still not entirely certain what he wanted to do about it, but sometime in the future, he'd have to have a little talk with Dr Daniel Jackson.

Behind his dumb-ass flyboy facade Jack had always been, as Daniel well knew, a shrewd observer of human behaviour. Still, it came as quite a surprise to find out he'd been right about Blair and Jim. The changes in their behaviour were unmistakable, so it wasn't, as Jack had initially thought, that Blair had lied to him. Yesterday, they hadn't been lovers. Today, they obviously were.

There was nothing blatant about it. Yesterday, Daniel had noticed how frequently Jim had touched Blair, often without really being aware of what he was doing. Today, there was barely a moment when some part of Jim - hand, shoulder, hip, thigh - wasn't in contact with some part of Blair. Yesterday, Blair had given Jim the occasional affectionately amused glance. Today, he could hardly keep his eyes off his partner, and the word 'adoring' leapt to mind as the most appropriate description of Blair's expression. To top it off, both of them were radiating the smug air of satisfaction common to new lovers.
Daniel was happy for them. Really happy. If only their happiness didn't throw into stark relief the total lack of ease that now existed between him and Jack. He was well aware that Jack was watching his reactions carefully, which didn't help at all, but it wasn't Jim and Blair who dominated his thoughts. He was still trying to come to terms with Jack's astonishing implication about their own relationship.

Of course, he'd thought about Jack; had wondered what it would be like to let himself become involved. But all his internal debating had foundered on the rocky shores of the military mind-set. The idiocy, not to mention hypocrisy, inherent in 'don't ask, don't tell' told him all he needed to know about how impossible a relationship with an Air Force colonel would be in practice. He couldn't do that to Jack, and he certainly didn't want to do it to himself.

Only now, watching the way Blair and Jim unconsciously leaned into each other's personal space, Daniel felt the loss of Sha're's loving presence more painfully than he had in a long time. Even as a friend, Jack had the ability to ease that pain. How much more so, if they were... but Daniel shied away from the thought. It would do neither of them any good to dwell on what he couldn't have.

They cabbed to the University of Chicago, and Jim followed Blair and Daniel across the campus towards the Oriental Institute with an inward sigh of resignation. It was another fine day, and his hopes of having any fun with Blair were rapidly dwindling. Beside him, Jack sighed too.

But when Blair turned back with a guilty little smile, Jim resolved not to let his disappointment show. "You don't mind, do you, Jim? It's really important."

"I don't mind." Without thinking he tucked a stray curl behind Blair's ear. He preferred it when Blair left his hair loose, but since he was due to meet some academic friend of Daniel's, he'd tied it back today. "Tell me again why it's important?"

He didn't really care; it was simply an excuse to stay close to Blair for a little longer. Blair grinned, as if he was reading Jim's mind. "You remember that... uh... research project I've been working on? There's an inscription from the early Achaemenid period that might refer to, um... that thing I'm studying? It could be the earliest known reference, Jim. Can you imagine how important it might be?"

"Oh, well, if it's that important..." but neither of them showed any inclination to part, until Daniel cleared his throat significantly. "I'll catch up with you soon, okay? Don't forget we've got that appointment later."

"Oh! Uh, yeah..." Blair blushed vividly. "I won't forget."

He watched the two men walk away and then turned to Jack. Who was grinning from ear to ear. "You've got it bad, Ellison."

"I don't know what you're talking about." Jim hid behind his most impenetrable mask. "So what was it you wanted to do?"

Jack shrugged. "We've probably got a couple of hours to kill, if Blair's anything like Daniel. How about we hop a cab and take a look at the Planetarium? Astronomy's kind of a hobby of mine."

"Why not?" He managed to catch one last glimpse of Blair before he disappeared into the Institute, and turned away. "You know where to go?"

"I grew up around here." Jack started walking, and Jim fell in beside him. "So, you're okay with Daniel and Blair? I mean..."
"Strangely enough, I'm fine with it." Jim smiled at Jack's expression. "After all if it hadn't been for that, I might never have found out how Blair felt about me. Or how I felt about Blair." He hesitated a moment, then asked, "What about you?"

"Me? Why should..." Jack looked away. "Oh, hey, there's a cab."

Jim waited until they'd arrived at the planetarium before asking any more questions, but by that time Jack had managed to get his story straight. The most that Jim could get out of him was that Daniel was a friend, 'a good friend', and military or no, nothing was going to change that.

He wasn't fooled. He'd seen the way the two of them looked at each other, but it had also been obvious that they weren't lovers, and that they were not as comfortable together today as they had appeared to be yesterday. It seemed as though he and Blair had gone forward, while Daniel and Jack had stepped back. That was a pity, but he wasn't going to let it tarnish his happiness.

The next show would be two-thirty, which was a long time, in Jim's opinion, given that the show lasted an hour and it would take another twenty minutes to get back to the U of C campus. Still, Jack was right. Blair would easily spend three hours, or double that, talking shop. Jim had no intention of allowing him to be away from his side for so long, so once the show was over, he dragged Jack away in search of another cab.

Halfway back to the university, he felt a sudden, sickening wrench and doubled over in pain. "Something's wrong. Blair... Jack, we have to get to Blair. Please!"

He felt Jack's hands on his shoulders and forced himself to straighten and interrupt Jack's demands to the cabbie to be taken to a hospital. "I'm all right, Jack. It's Blair. I have to get to him now!"

"You're sure?" Jack's dubious expression remained. "What's going on?"

Jim shook his head as the pain in his gut swelled, then faded to a dull ache. All the blood drained out of his face. "Oh, my god. Hurry!"

It still took an interminable five minutes for them to reach the Oriental Institute, even with Jack urging the protesting cabbie to greater speed. As soon as they pulled up to the kerb, Jim flung himself out of the cab and ran into the building. Some instinct guided him through a maze of hallways and exhibition rooms until he saw Daniel.

"Where's Blair?" He grabbed the younger man by the shoulders and shook him urgently. "I have to find him."

"Uh... I left him with Professor... wait!"

Jim heard Daniel running after him, and slowed a little, as much as the need driving him would allow. Daniel could get him to Blair faster. Further behind, he could hear Jack's cursing closing the distance, and Jim finally did what he should have done the moment he arrived. He cast out his senses, first hearing, but that returned nothing. Not even Blair's heartbeat. Sight was useless, in this old building with a maze of hallways and dozens of rooms, so that left scent. He caught a faint whiff of Blair's shampoo. So he'd been here recently. He crashed into a doorway and forced himself to remain still while he piggybacked sight onto smell. And then he was running again, his blood like ice in his veins, because there was still no hint of Blair's heartbeat, and he should have been able to hear that from the moment he entered the building, if not before.

He found Blair in a small storage room, lying sprawled on the floor, his hair spilling around him. There was no sign of any wound. No sign of strangulation; yet Jim knew with absolute certainty that
this was not natural. He eased his lover onto his back and began checking his airways before starting CPR.

This couldn't be happening again. He breathed into Blair's mouth, soft and yielding as when they'd kissed this morning, but now with the slackness of complete inertia. Five breaths and then three compressions. He went through the familiar routine with sick dread in his heart, ignoring all the commotion around him. Jack was bellowing orders and he could hear Daniel trying to keep onlookers and security guards at bay. Outside, an ambulance siren heralded the arrival of paramedics. When they got to him, he stumbled back from Blair's body, knowing that they had a better chance of resuscitating Blair than he did.

When, finally, they sat back, Jim flinched at the expression on their faces. The senior paramedic shook his head. "He's breathing and we've got him stabilised, but..."

Jack and Daniel were beside him. He looked into their faces and saw no hope either. Jim shook his head stubbornly. "He's still alive. I know he is."

At the hospital, they practically had to drag Jim off Blair so the nursing staff could prep him. Like the paramedics, there was no real urgency in their movements and Jim turned away, his shoulders slumped. Blair's heart was beating, and he was breathing on his own, and that was all he was likely to be doing for however much longer he lived. A scan confirmed Jack's opinion; there was almost no brain activity.

Blair was moved into a bed in a small, quiet room, connected to a heart monitor and with an oxygen tube in his nose. Jim sat beside him in silence, holding his hand while Jack and Daniel watched helplessly.

Jack hated waiting. He'd waited beside too many deathbeds and it never got any easier. There was nothing he could do for Blair, or for Jim, and it ate at him. Worse, was the guilty sense of relief that it was Blair and not Daniel in that bed.

"Jack?" Daniel finally roused himself from watching the tableau by Blair's bed. "Shouldn't we be... doing something?"

He nodded towards the door and Daniel followed him. Jim didn't seem to notice. Outside in the hallway, Jack leaned close to Daniel. "I've notified General Hammond there's a Snake loose in Chicago. I assume you're thinking what I'm thinking?"

"That it was a ribbon device?" Daniel shivered. "Yes."

Jack slammed his hand against the wall, startling several nearby medical staff. "Dammit, how did this happen? If a Snake was going to turn up anywhere it should have been at the Field Museum, not there."

"I don't know." Daniel's voice broke. "I should have stuck closer to Blair, but I thought..."

"It's not your fault, Daniel. You're the brains, not the brawn in this outfit." Jack leaned back against the wall facing his friend. "Security is my responsibility. I'm so sorry."

"Tell that to Jim." Daniel sighed heavily. "I'd better go back in."

"And I've got a few more calls to make." Jack patted his shoulder. "Be back soon."

But when he got back to the room, Jack could hardly believe his eyes. The heart monitor was silent and Jim was lying on the bed beside Blair, his face buried against Blair's shoulder. "Daniel? What's
going on?"

Wide blue eyes met his. "Jim unhooked the monitor and then just..."

A slight movement from the bed had them both jumping with nerves, but it was just Jim, moving to slide one hand under Blair's neck. The other hand slid over the bare chest, down to Blair's navel and came to a stop just beneath it.

"Uh, Daniel... is he...?"

"No." Daniel shook his head, still watching intently. But Jim didn't move again and after several minutes Daniel sighed and rubbed his eyes. "I'm not sure... my knowledge of Yoga's pretty sketchy, but I think..."

"Yoga? You're telling me Jim's doing Yoga?"

"There's a form of Yoga known as Kundalini." Daniel smiled weakly as Jack mugged surprise. "It's based on meditation techniques using the chakras, the seven energy points of the body. The navel's one and I think the base of the skull is the counterpart to the forehead, or third eye."

"Base of the skull, huh?" Jack felt his stomach churn. "Daniel, you don't think..."

Daniel knew exactly what he meant. "It seems unlikely. No, I was thinking that the chakras, if that's what he's doing... the Third Eye relates to the astral plane, or spirit world. And the navel... that's about sex..."

"No kidding." Jack raised his eyebrows.

"Jack!" Daniel frowned at him. "It's also about relationships, emotions. Control..." he sighed. "Like I said, I'm not exactly an expert on this. But Blair told me he'd experienced a vision once, during a near death experience. He said Jim had had the same vision at the same time."

"So they're... what?"

"Well... Jim might be trying to reach Blair through another shared vision." Daniel shrugged helplessly.

"You think it might work?" Okay, now he was going crazy.

"I don't know. But maybe we could make sure nobody gets in the way." Daniel looked at him expectantly. "It's the least we can do, I think."

Silence hung over the jungle like a pall; even the usual denizens - insects, birds and the small to medium sized animals that were the jaguar's natural prey - were unusually quiet. The jaguar's hackles rose and he growled low in his throat. There was something unnatural in the air; a reeking stain on the fabric of the spirit world. Dealing with it, however, was not the jaguar's purpose here; his mate was in serious trouble.

Still growling, unable to stop himself, the jaguar lowered his head to sniff the ground. He nearly recoiled at the overpowering stink of perversion that marked this place, but anxiety forced his muzzle to brush the surface of the long grass. Blood, and fear, and the distinctive scent of wolf. Despite the sickening stench of corruption, the jaguar had no trouble in distinguishing his mate. Setting off at a steady lope, the jaguar followed the scent, aware that the unnatural creature was also following the trail left by his mate.
The spots of blood grew larger and came more closely together until they formed a continuous trail. The jaguar could sense the wolf's growing weakness and quickened his pace. There was no danger, now, of losing the trail. His stride lengthened until he was running, bounding through the jungle as fast as he dared. He still had no idea how far he would have to go, and his body was built for speed rather than endurance.

He might have to fight at the end of the trail. Though the prospect of facing whatever had caused this sickening aura of corruption in the jungle made the jaguar's blood almost congeal in his veins, he knew he would fight to the last drop to protect his mate. They were bound together on every plane, in every world he knew of. To lose him in this world was to lose him in every world.

Finally, the jaguar realised he was close. He could sense his mate's nearness in his mind, and the blood was fresher, still warm where the larger splotches lay. His mate still lived, but was close to death. And the enemy was nearby. The jaguar paused long enough to shriek a challenge and then went on, holding nothing in reserve. If it was his destiny to meet this creature, then he would fight until one of them was dead. It would not be him. He would win because he must. Because the price of losing would be more terrible than he could imagine.

With a final leap, the jaguar cleared a low spread of lush greenery and stopped in his tracks, his nose only a whisker's length from a solid wall of rock. But his senses had not lied to him. He scented the air and again found his mate's trail. He paced alongside the wall, growling in frustration until he found a tiny crevice in the rock's surface.

He sniffed cautiously around the opening which was surely too small for a grown wolf to enter. Or for a jaguar. Yet the signs were unmistakeable. The wolf had gone into this place and whatever had attacked him had either not dared, or not been able, to follow. If his mate could do it, then the jaguar would also. He lowered himself to his haunches and crept into the darkness.

He could not move quickly, though surrounded now by his mate's scent, he tried. It occurred to him more than once that if the tunnel narrowed even slightly he would be stuck, and it might not be possible for him to back out. He was almost at the point of resigning himself to a slow and inevitable death when the tunnel opened into a small cave and the scent of his mate grew suddenly stronger.

Not even the lack of light could hold him back now. He went swiftly to his mate's side, growling a query, but receiving no response. Anxiously, he nuzzled the wolf, but he lay unmoving, barely breathing and soaked with his own blood. It was worse, far worse than the jaguar had feared; but he would not leave his mate in this place to die. He would stay, and do everything in his power to heal his mate. And if he failed... then death would find him at his mate's side where he belonged. He began to lick the awful wounds, flinching at the scent and taste of the loathsome thing that was everywhere on the wolf's body. When there was nothing more he could do, the jaguar lay down beside his mate, lending his warmth and his presence to strengthen his beloved.

"Any change?" Jack's voice held only weariness, no hope. What little they'd had had died hours ago. He dropped into the chair beside Daniel and rubbed his face. They'd been taking turns to watch over Jim and Blair, once it became obvious that Jim wasn't going to come out of his trance - or whatever it was - in any great hurry. That had been nearly twenty-four hours ago.

Daniel yawned and shook his head. Neither man had moved since Jim had first crawled onto the bed with Blair and not all the prodding and probing of the medical staff had made the slightest difference. It was beginning to look as if they would lose both of them. "God, this is so unfair! They only had a few hours together."

A hand pressed comfortably on his shoulder and Daniel needed it too much to shrug it away. They were both thinking the same thing; a few hours, days, years... it made no difference in the end. The
loss, when it came, was no less agonising. After a few moments, he stood and turned away from the bed, fighting back tears that were as much for himself and Sha're as for the unconscious lovers.

And that was when it happened. He heard the rustle of clothing and thought only that Jack was settling himself more comfortably. Then Jack's shaken gasp told him otherwise. By the time he'd turned back, Jim was on his feet, advancing on Jack with murder in his eyes.

"You know about this. You know!" He had Jack by the throat and slammed up against the wall. "I want to know what's going on here."

For a moment Daniel simply stared as a highly decorated, ex-Covert Ops officer, who he knew had more combat experience than the combined members of most battalions, was swiftly and efficiently immobilised by a man who minutes before had been completely insensible. And it wasn't because Jack was giving anything away. He simply wasn't able to make any impression on Jim's determined attack.

"Jim. Jim, please just calm down willya?" Jack got the words out somehow, past a stranglehold on his throat. Jim had some kind of grip on one of Jack's arms, and the other was trapped between Jack and the wall, while Jim's right knee pinned Jack's hips firmly to the wall. "I'll tell you everything I can. I promise."

Just as Daniel had decided he'd better try something, though what he wasn't entirely sure, Jack was released. He turned, his shoulders still resting against the wall and dragged in a couple of shaken breaths. "You'd better sit down."

With an angry glare divided between the two of them, Jim sank into the chair he'd dragged Jack out of. "Well?"

"Okay. A lot of this is classified." Jack paused at Jim's growl. "Come on, Captain. You know the score. What I can tell you is that we think Blair was attacked using some kind of... of..."

"It's a device... very advanced." Daniel stepped in when Jack faltered. "We don't exactly know how it works, but if there's prolonged exposure, the result is fatal. I'm sorry, Jim. Blair's gone."

"No, he isn't." The calm certainty in Jim's voice was disturbing. "I know he's alive. I just don't know whether I can get him to come back."

Jack hunkered down in front of the chair, looking up into Jim's face. "Jim... I've seen this before. Nobody survives what's been done to Blair."

Jim shook his head determinedly. "He's alive, but he's been badly hurt. I know I can reach him but... I don't understand this stuff. Blair's the one who helps me..." he cocked his head suddenly, as though he was listening for something, and then went back to the bed.

"Chief? Come on, Blair, you have to come back now." Jim bent over the still figure of his lover and put his hands on either side of Blair's face. "I need you, Chief. If you die, then I... just, don't you go. Don't you leave me."

Daniel could almost have believed that the first, faint fluttering of dark lashes against Blair's cheeks was no more than a figment of his imagination, but Jim's sob of relief was confirmation that it was real. A faint line appeared between Blair's eyebrows and then his eyelids lifted reluctantly. Immediately, he was dragged up into Jim's arms and the big cop rocked the two of them back and forth, whispering brokenly, the sound too soft for Daniel to understand what he was saying.

He'd almost forgotten Jack, but suddenly an arm was wrapped around his shoulders. He leaned into
his friend's side and closed his eyes. Neither of them moved, even when the door flew open and half a dozen medics rushed into the room to examine their two patients.

Two hours later, Jim was demanding Blair's release from the hospital against everyone's advice. Even Jack and Daniel, who understood his reasons, were against the idea. Only Blair, who was too weak to do more than open his eyes and nod exhaustedly, backed him up. The hospital staff finally admitted defeat, but made both of them sign the medical waiver form before they allowed Jim to lift Blair carefully into a wheelchair. Jack had already hired a car, and it was waiting for them in the parking lot.

"Okay. You got him out. Now, where are you planning on taking him?" Jack scowled at him. "I don't recommend going back to your hotel, by the way. But why ask me?"

Jim ignored the sarcastic tone. He pulled out his cell phone and hit speed dial #4. "Ellison. I need a safe place. Four people, Chicago." He looked over at the other two. "I've got it under control." He listened to the instructions that came from the phone and then disconnected after a curt acknowledgement. The whole call had taken little more than a minute. "Head out to O'Hare. We'll be meeting someone there and switching cars."

"Is this really necessary?" Daniel, too, was ignoring Jack's signals, much to the older man's obvious annoyance.

Jim glared at the pair of them. "I don't know what you two are involved in, but if it involves hi-tech assassination attempts on my partner, then I'm the one who'll decide what's necessary here."

"But..."

Jack lifted a warning hand. "Shut up, Daniel."

"As the attackee, can I say something?" Blair's voice startled them all into silence, including Jim. "Good. Because whoever, or maybe I should say whatever attacked me, it wasn't human."

"God, Chief, you're right. I knew there was something wrong, but I never would have guessed..." He slid an arm around Blair protectively, knowing it was a pointless gesture but finding it comforting anyway.

Blair smiled drowsily. "Y're welcome." He promptly fell asleep again.

The three men all looked at each other, but nobody spoke. Jim started the car. "Either come with me or get out now."

"We're coming." Jack's voice was grim.

The onset of rush hour traffic meant that the trip to the airport took far longer than Jim would have liked. They met up with his contact only slightly behind schedule, and it was painful to see the effort it took for Blair to take the few steps between the cars and collapse into his seat. Jim threw a furious scowl at Jack and fussed over buckling his lover safely in. Then they were on their way to the safe house, another hour's drive away.

Blair didn't wake when the car stopped, so Jim simply lifted him out and carried him inside. There was one double bedroom and he laid Blair on the bed in there, well wrapped up against the cooler evening air. Then he went out to keep an eye on Jack and Daniel.

Daniel was in the kitchen investigating the coffee maker while Jack prowled from room to room. He stared at Jim defiantly.
Jim returned it, with a touch of cynicism thrown in for good measure. "I thought we were perfectly safe."

"Daniel thinks we're safe." Then Jack sighed. "Jim, I'm sorry. You and Blair should never have got involved in this, and can you tell me how the hell either of you got this... this looney idea that aliens were involved?"

Jim looked at him steadily. Now that he was treating everyone as a suspect, he had no difficulty in telling when Jack was hiding something. And he was hiding something major right now. "We'll talk in the morning. I want Blair to be a part of this. I think he's earned that right, don't you?"

He went back to the bedroom without waiting for a response. He knew that he was being hard on Jack, but dammit, Blair had nearly died. If he wanted to protect his guide and lover, then he was going to need Jack's information, and the only way he'd get that was to push to the limit, and then push harder.

He leaned against the inside of the door with a sigh and looked at Blair. Yesterday morning they'd made love for the first time. Today he was simply grateful that Blair was alive. Jim moved to the edge of the bed and sat there, watching Blair's face and trying to resist the urge to wake him just to be sure he really was still alive and all right.

It wasn't very long before Blair's eyes opened and he smiled. "Hey."

"Hey." Jim leaned down and kissed his parted lips. "Hungry?"

Blair shook his head lazily and grimaced a little. "Give anything for a shower."

"Then you're out of luck. No way am I going to risk you falling and cracking your head open." He ruffled Blair's unruly curls. "How does a sponge bath sound?"

He grinned as Blair's eyes lit up, and went into the bathroom to get what he needed.

It was curiously comforting to tend to Blair's needs like this, and Jim's nose told him that Blair would certainly be better for having been washed. He could smell the sour tang of fear in the sweat that had dried on Blair's body, overlaid by hospital smells. As he carefully washed and then patted dry each bit of skin, Jim felt the tightness inside him loosening a little.

When he finished, Blair lay still, looking up at him with such intense longing that Jim would have given anything to be able to make love to him, even though he knew that Blair needed to rest far more.

Blair smiled weakly. "You're not gonna tell me you can resist this body?"

"I'm afraid so." Jim bent over and kissed the soft cock that had lain unstirring on Blair's belly all through the sponge bath. He sucked it gently into his mouth for a moment and Blair sighed with pleasure, but remained soft. "You need to rest."

There was no more protest when Jim tucked the covers around Blair's shoulders. "Jim?"

"Yeah?" He kissed the pale lips.

"You're gonna sleep with me, right?" There was a hint of anxiety in Blair's voice, and Jim thought again of the vision, and the wolf lying alone in the dark of the cave with that creature outside.

"Of course I am." In fact, he decided, food could wait. He stripped hurriedly and slid naked into the
bed, eager to take his lover into his arms.

The safe house had everything they needed: food, coffee, even an assortment of clothes and underwear, and shampoo and soap in the bathrooms. It only made Jack more pissed off than he already was. He hated having to lie to Jim, hated even more that Blair had been hurt, and really hated that he was no longer calling the shots in this little operation.

He could have done something about that but had, for reasons that escaped him, decided not to try. Jim was a good man, and one of the toughest, smartest covert operatives Jack had ever worked with. He obviously still had connections too, and until Jack knew more about who they were, he preferred to let things ride.

It seemed unlikely that the Goa'uld, whoever it was, would come after them, but Jack simply wasn't prepared to take that chance. And since Jim had disappeared into the bedroom with Blair and was showing no signs of coming out again, that left him and Daniel to share the watch overnight.

Consequently, they were both tired and grouchy when they met in the kitchen in the morning. Jack was well into his second cup of coffee when Jim came in, dressed and looking rested, and began to scramble eggs.

"How's Blair?" Daniel offered the coffee pot to Jim.

"Better. Still weak." Jim nodded to Jack and Jack returned the courtesy with a reluctant smile. "If we're going to talk about this, it'll need to be in our room. He's staying in bed until I'm satisfied he's strong enough."

"That won't be a problem." Daniel smiled up at Jim and simultaneously frowned at Jack. It was a neat trick, Jack made a mental note to ask Daniel sometime how he did that.

So Danny wanted him to play nice? Well, that could be arranged. Jack put on his best hopeful look. "Those eggs for us too?"

Jim nodded towards the bowl on the counter, which contained at least a dozen more. "Those are yours."

"Sweet." Jack rose from the table with a sigh.

But an hour later, in the bedroom Jim and Blair were sharing, Jack was on his best behaviour. "So, Blair. Did you get a good look at your attacker?"

The other two men looked at him. Jim scowled. "You're not going to try to pretend this was an ordinary mugging?"

Jack sighed patiently. "I'm just trying to get all the information available. Didn't they teach you that in the Police Academy?"

"Ah... I think what Jack means is, that we only have a general idea of who attacked Blair. We don't know the specific person..."

"Thank you, Daniel." Jack smiled as if at a particularly bright student. "We don't know who, exactly, attacked Blair. A description would help."

"I'm sorry." Propped up against a bank of pillows and dressed in loose grey sweats, Blair still looked fragile and exhausted. "I only got a glimpse, and then after that everything got... kinda vague." He frowned slightly and leaned against Jim, sitting beside him on the bed. "It was a man, taller than me,
because he was looking down. Not as tall as Jim. He looked Latino, maybe. Didn't talk, so I can't tell if he had an accent." Blair shuddered suddenly. "There's one thing I remember though. His eyes... they glowed..."

Well, that removed any possible doubt. Jack avoided looking at Daniel, but still noticed Jim look at him sharply, as though he'd given something away. It didn't sound like any of the System Lords he'd ever encountered, so it looked like they might have another stray Goa'uld on their hands. And things just kept on getting better...

"We think he used a device on you, Blair." Daniel leaned forward, his tone sympathetic. "Do you remember something like a glowing stone in the palm of his hand?"

Blair shook his head slowly. "Like I said, things got very blurry after that."

"And from this you deduce that an alien attacked you." Jack kept his voice free from sarcasm. Barely. If he wanted to keep the lid on the Stargate project and, oh boy, did he ever, then he had to convince these two men that Blair's attacker was of terrestrial origin.

"No," Jim spoke this time. "That came from something else." He glanced over at Blair, who nodded uncertainly. "Blair and I, we have this special bond..."

Jack smirked. "Ya think?"

"Get your mind out of the gutter, O'Neill." Instead of annoying Jim, his comment seemed to have settled some uncertainty in his friend's mind. "It goes back to when Blair was drowned, and I brought him back."

"Daniel told me about that. Some kinda vision thing?" The scepticism in his voice was unmistakeable. "Gotta say I have a problem with that stuff."

"You think I don't?" Jim rubbed his face and glanced at Blair, who nodded encouragingly. "All I can tell you is those dreams, visions... whatever you want to call them, they're real. Not in the usual sense of real, but... oh hell, I don't know how to explain it."

"What happened in the hospital, Jim?" Daniel leaned forward, his eyes intent on the two men. Jack suppressed a curse. Danny sometimes forgot, in his enthusiasm, the main purpose of their mission. Right now, Jack needed him on-side, not off on some wild goose chase. "Does it matter? We need to..."

"I'd say it does." Daniel stared at him in mild surprise. "Jack, Blair is the only person to survive the..."

"You did." Jack dropped his voice to a low murmur. "Danny, work with me here."

But Daniel's eyes were suddenly unfocused, and Jack knew that look. Hated seeing it, for all that he'd known Daniel would react that way to what he'd just said. "That was different. Sha're..." he bit his lower lip and glanced towards Jim and Blair. "If Blair could tell us how he did that..."

"And you think it's something to do with these dreams?" Jack followed Daniel's line of sight and saw that Blair was now lying with his head pillowed on Jim's lap, his eyes closed. Jim was sitting perfectly still, one hand slowly stroking the dark curls; he was staring absently in their direction.

"I don't know." Daniel almost hissed the words. "But have you got any better ideas? They don't trust us. Maybe we should tell them..."
"Daniel..." He grabbed Daniel's arm, scowling furiously. Their voices were too low for Jim to hear, but he wasn't going to take a chance that the bedroom - hell, the whole house - wasn't bugged.

But Daniel wasn't listening. He was staring from under his lashes at Jim. Jim, who was glaring at the pair of them as though he was pissed about something. Jack heard Daniel's soft gasp. "Oh, my god... he found one..."

"Daniel, what the fuck are you talking about?"

"Blair. He found a Sentinel." Daniel blinked rapidly. "Jim is a Sentinel."

Jack was just about to ask what the fuck a Sentinel was when he saw the shocked anger on Jim's face. Somehow, impossibly, Jim had heard them. And Jim obviously knew exactly what a Sentinel was.

Angry voices dragged Blair out of a shallow sleep and he rubbed his gritty eyes weakly. This falling asleep thing was getting old fast, but god, he was just so tired. Then he realised that what had really woken him was not just voices, but Jim's voice specifically, and the hint of fear beneath the anger. The adrenaline rush that followed this realisation got Blair into an almost upright position, leaning heavily on one arm for support, but more or less sitting up.

"Jim... Daniel, what's going on?"

He wasn't prepared for Jim to turn that famous Ellison glare onto him. "I can't believe you did that, Sandburg. What the fuck were you thinking?"

"Jim, he didn't..." Daniel's voice, equally angry, but quieter, was drowned out by Jack's demand that 'everyone just shut up!'.

They all fell silent, and Blair stared up at Jim in hurt confusion, not knowing what he'd said or done that would make his lover so furious with him. Jim's eyes refused to meet his, and then Jim turned away, running a hand over his head in a familiar gesture of baffled anger.

Jack surveyed them all grimly. "Now will one of you tell me what the fuck a Sentinel is?"

Blair's heart began to hammer in his chest. He could tell by the sudden increase in the tension of Jim's shoulders that Jim had heard it, but the other man remained unmoving. And now it made sense - except that, really it didn't, because in spite of what Jim so obviously thought, he hadn't told either of the two men about Jim being a Sentinel.

"Jim. Jim, I swear..." his voice failed.

How had Jack found out about Jim's abilities? How was he ever going to make Jim believe that he had not been betrayed by his own lover? Jim's whole life had been an endless series of betrayals by the people he loved. He choked back a sob, which was pointless, really, because there was no way Jim wouldn't know about it unless he deliberately chose not to know.

"Goddammit!" The oath was bitten off short, and loaded with frustration, but Jim was turning, was coming toward him, and then Jim was perched on the bed, pulling Blair into his arms, holding him with a rough tenderness that wasn't, even now, entirely free from anger. "I love you, Chief, but what were you thinking?"

"I didn't... Jim you have to believe me..." Blair's voice was muffled against Jim's chest, and he tried to pull away, but Jim just wasn't letting go. He sighed and relaxed against the solid strength of Jim's body. Jim still loved him and right now that was enough. He'd deal with everything else later.
"Jim." Daniel's voice, coming from so close beside the bed startled both of them into looking up. "Blair told me about Sentinels years ago, when we were both studying here in Chicago. I just put two and two together, and..."

"Came up with five?" Jack smiled sarcastically. "Will one of you tell me what the hell we're talking about?"

Blair exchanged an appalled glance with Jim. He'd forgotten telling Daniel about Sentinels all those years ago. Back then it had just been a new and exciting idea; he'd talked about it to anyone who would listen, and Daniel had always been a good listener.

"Daniel, why don't you tell Jack all about it." Jim hadn't taken his eyes off Blair. "Somewhere else."

Blair barely waited until the door closed behind Jack and Daniel. "Jim, I'm..." what? Sorry? He couldn't possibly have known that a situation like this would arise. Yet somehow, Blair felt responsible. This was Jim's life at stake, and once again, Blair had got them both into something that could ruin it. He smiled miserably. "Here we go again."

"It's all right. It's not your fault." Jim drew him back into his arms and kissed him tenderly. "At least I'm learning. I haven't kicked you out, or shut you out like the other times."

"There is that." Blair grinned, relief that everything was still all right between the two of them making him light-headed. "What are we going to do?"

Jim shrugged. "That depends on Jack, I suppose."

"But he's your friend."

"He's also military, and involved in something big. That's my guess. He'll do whatever he needs to do."

That was so not reassuring, but Blair had seen changes in Daniel; the same kind of changes he'd seen in himself since becoming involved with Jim. Daniel might be a consultant with the military, but he'd seen things that had turned him from a hesitant academic into a man of quiet strength and determination. Then there were the physical changes. Daniel, like himself, had always fought with words. Now he was capable of fighting physically too.

Jim was right. Something big was happening. And now, they were all involved.

Blair pulled away from Jim and reached for reserves of strength he hadn't known existed an hour ago. "Then we have to figure out how we're going to handle them. Can you hear what they're saying?"

"Daniel's telling Jack about Sentinel abilities. Jack's... resisting." A smile flickered across Jim's face. "Pretty much like I did when you told me." Then he frowned. "Daniel started to say something, and Jack stopped him. Something about... does the word Goa'uld mean anything to you?"

Blair shook his head. "Never heard it before."

"Daniel wants to tell us about it... no... them. Jack's saying they can't. Daniel says to check with General Hammond." Jim glanced at Blair enquiringly and Blair shook his head again. It wasn't anybody he knew. "Jack's asking if he really believes the Sentinel stuff and Daniel... oops..." Jim grinned ruefully, "he's realised that I might be able to hear them. They're coming back."

"Don't let them know what we know, okay?" Blair whispered hurriedly as the door opened.
Obfuscation was clearly the order of the day, but it would have to be his best effort ever. If Daniel even thought to look into his dissertation fiasco, he'd have everything figured out in no time at all. Their only hope lay in Jack and Daniel completely underestimating Jim's abilities.

After five minutes of Blair's best efforts, Jack was looking confused and irritated, but Daniel had the air of a man who was willing to wait out all the bullshit until he got to what he wanted. Undeterred, Blair was busily summing up his farrago of half-truths and outright lies.

"...so, you see why I had to withdraw my thesis. I mean..." and Blair waved his hands in a complicated pattern, "any halfway decent investigation would have shown that Jim couldn't possibly be a Sentinel. I mean, he's good... good enough for me to think I'd found a real Sentinel, but that was just... serendipity, man... he's ex-covert ops, for god's sake. And that time spent in Peru... he learned stuff that few white men ever get the chance to learn..."

It was obvious to Jim that Blair was becoming desperate and that the other men knew it. Some kind of distraction was clearly called for, "You want to know more about the guy who attacked Blair? I think I know a way we can help."

Blair stopped mid-sentence and frankly stared. Jack and Daniel simply looked relieved that Blair had shut up. Jack raised an eyebrow. "And that would be how?"

"Somehow, Blair used the spirit world to protect himself from the attack. Maybe if we go back there, we can find out something." Jim looked at Blair's suddenly pale face. "You think you can handle it?"

"Yeah." Blair bit his lip and nodded. "We're gonna both go together?"

"We can try." Jim shrugged. "We've done it before."

"Daniel!" Jack appealed to his partner.

"They may be on to something, Jack." Daniel stared thoughtfully at Jim and Blair, then smiled slightly maliciously. "Think of it as a kind of hypnosis to recover lost memories, if it makes you feel better."

"It doesn't." But Jack sighed. "I guess we don't have anything to lose, and it's better than listening to more of Blair's... you know, I always thought you talked too much, Daniel."

Daniel grinned. "And now you know better."

"So whaddaya need to do this, Jim?"

"Nothing." Jim exchanged a nervous smile with Blair and settled himself against the headboard with Blair sitting between his legs, and leaning back against his chest. Jim slid his arms around Blair's waist and took a deep breath...

...and he was there. Not in jaguar form this time, but his human self, and Blair was standing beside him. Their eyes met for a moment and Jim signalled silently for Blair to remain still. He circled the trampled groundcover, seeing the spots of blood and smelling that foul stink he associated with Blair's attacker. He started out of the clearing following the tracks made by the wolf and the creature, aware of Blair close behind him.

When they reached the cave, instead of trying to go in - an impossibility in human form anyway - they continued along the trail left by Blair's attacker. It seemed like they followed the trail for a long time, but finally they arrived at a place that seemed oddly familiar. The stench was stronger there, but there was still no sign of the creature.
Blair touched Jim's shoulder, distracting him for a moment. "Jim, I know where we are."

"Where?"

Instead of answering, Blair moved ahead. After a brief hesitation, Jim followed. Just a hundred paces or so later, they entered another clearing and Jim saw a painfully familiar statue. Blair glanced at him. "What's an alien doing at the Temple of the Sentinels?"

"I don't know." Jim started forward. "Why don't we find out?"

They made it as far as the stairs. At the top was the creature. It was some kind of snake, but not one he'd ever seen before; as it drew itself up to strike, he saw a webbed crest behind its head. It had no eyes that Jim could see, just a slimy, gaping maw. The stink of it made Jim want to gag, but he slipped his crossbow from his shoulder, wishing it was possible for him to use a gun here.

With a hissing shriek the creature threw itself down the stairs towards them and Jim loosed the first arrow, knowing he wouldn't get a chance at a second. It struck the creature, which recoiled, then fled back up the steps and into the temple. Jim and Blair followed.

But as they reached the top, a jaguar and a wolf, standing side by side, barred their way.

"Let us past." Jim almost snarled the words, but Blair's hand on his arm reminded him of who he was facing.

Sure enough, the jaguar transformed into the image of himself that Jim always thought of as The Sentinel. "You cannot go any further. This is not the time. You must hunt your prey in the waking world."

"That thing tried to kill Blair." Again, Blair's hand touched him and Jim fell silent.

"Will we find him at the Temple of the Sentinels?" Blair's quiet voice was respectful. Jim realised that Blair had never met his spirit guide before, but it didn't seem to have fazed him any.

The Sentinel didn't reply, but looked at the wolf instead. It too began to shift, changing into almost a mirror image of Blair. Jim stared at The Guide - there was no doubt about his identity - in a kind of shocked awe.

The Guide was Blair, and yet not Blair. His hair was longer, swirling down over his shoulders and chest, and had a myriad tiny braids, each with a feather or stone or strip of fibre woven into it. And he was naked, his body decorated with narrow strips of leather tied around his biceps, wrists, calves and ankles. A necklace of carved stones hung from his neck and a thin twisted strip of cloth lay slung around his hips, drooping across his belly almost to the top of his pubic hair. His face, as he looked at the two men, was eerily calm.

"Many years ago, his kind ruled the people of the land. They overthrew the Jaguar god, claiming the place of the gods for themselves, and suppressing the knowledge of the Sentinels. They were cruel and not in harmony with the spirits. They ate the souls of their victims and wore their bodies as a garment." The Guide turned from Jim to Blair. "One day he passed through the gate to visit among the stars. When he returned another of his kind imprisoned him. Now he has escaped and seeks to rule again, to profane the Temple of Light. It is your duty to stop him."

"We'll do it." Blair spoke confidently.

The Guide took a step toward Blair, and Jim had to remind himself that Blair was in no danger. He shifted nervously from one foot to the other. The Guide smiled. "Sentinel, your guide will come to
"I know." Jim didn't move again, even when The Guide took another step. It almost took his breath away to see the two of them together. He thought Blair was beautiful, but The Guide transcended all concepts of beauty. Jim wanted to kneel at his feet in worship, to lay his cheek against that slightly rounded belly, to kiss the cock that lay half aroused against his thigh. Jim was aware that on some level The Guide knew exactly what he was feeling, but it didn't seem to matter.

They were standing close now, only a few paces separating Blair from his spirit guide. The Guide looked into Blair's eyes. "What do you fear?"

"I, uh..." Blair looked surprised. "I fear the creature."

"What do you fear?" The Guide's inflection hadn't changed.

"I fear..." Blair swallowed audibly, "I fear being attacked again."

"What do you fear?"

"When it attacked me, I could feel everything being sucked out of me." Blair closed his eyes, his face drawn. Jim ached to go to him, and knew he could not. He couldn't help Blair, couldn't do anything. "I fear losing everything that I am."

The Guide smiled. "You are many things - friend, lover, son, teacher, guide. Yet what you are is not important. It is who you are that matters. If you know who you are, you need never fear being lost."

"I..." Blair's eyes flew open and he sobbed, once. "I don't know who I am any more."

"Don't you?" The Guide placed his hand firmly against Blair's chest and they were both enveloped in a nimbus of light.

Blair screamed.

And he was back again, dazed, and holding a screaming, struggling Blair in his arms. With a quick twist, Jim tumbled them both to the mattress and held on as Blair sobbed and fought him. It was over in a couple of heartbeats, and Jim stared down into the wide, wild eyes of his guide. Blair's pupils were so dilated he could barely see the sliver of blue iris around the edges; Blair must be completely blind, even though the room wasn't brightly lit. He stank of sweat and fear and, god... and arousal. His body jerked uncontrollably beneath Jim, and the only way Jim could restrain him was to wrap both his arms and legs around the thrashing body.

He glanced up at Jack and Daniel, hovering uncertainly at the foot of the bed. "Get out. Get out now!"

Even before the door closed behind them, Jim was tearing at Blair's sweats, dragging them off the writhing body until Blair was naked. He could see a red mark on Blair's chest where The Guide had touched him. His nipples were erect and his cock strained to lift its swollen length off Blair's belly.

Instinct told him what Blair needed from him, yet Jim hesitated. In all his life he'd never made love with another man until Blair and he had only his fevered imaginings to guide him now. He kissed the panting mouth, plunging his tongue deeply inside as Blair moaned and arched up against him. This wasn't going to give Blair any release, but something inside Jim was repulsed by the thought of simply relieving his lover physically with no gesture of tenderness to soften the act.

He kissed and licked the fluttering pulse point in Blair's throat and gently sucked his nipples,
controlling Blair's struggles by the simple expedient of lying across his legs and restraining his arms with a gentle grip. Blair moaned, helpless in the extremity of his need, as Jim kissed his heaving belly and caressed the length of his cock with a delicate flick of his tongue.

It carried the taste of Blair, and Jim shuddered, tempted suddenly to cast aside all caution and lose himself in the arousal that simmered between them. At that moment he was hardly more in control of himself than Blair was. It was, prosaically, his lack of expertise that brought him back to his senses. He simply didn't know how to do what Blair needed from him.

Still, he told himself, he'd been on the receiving end often enough; knew what felt good to him, and he had the advantage of his senses to tell him if he was pleasing Blair. He'd figure it out. With a little groan of pure hunger, Jim wrapped his hand around the base of Blair's cock and began to lick up the side to the slick, smooth tip. He spent some time acquainting himself with the sensation of another man's cock against his lips, his tongue, before finally taking the top half of Blair's cock into his mouth.

A ragged groan and an abortive thrust of Blair's hips warned Jim that his lover was already stretched to breaking point. He only had a moment to prepare himself before a gush of hot liquid flooded the back of his throat, almost choking him until he remembered to swallow. Blair collapsed into limp relief as Jim savoured the last few drops and told himself to breathe. Just breathe. He could do that.

He stretched out beside his lover, ignoring his own arousal for the moment as he registered the fact that he'd just given his first blow job. Blair groaned again, softly, and Jim pushed himself up on one elbow and saw, with more dismay than pleasure, that Blair's erection had not diminished in the slightest. As he watched, Blair's right hand slid down over his belly, his cock, and continued its path between the wantonly spread thighs. The other wrapped itself around his cock and began to pump jerkily.

A ragged groan escaped Jim's lips at the sight. He knew what Blair needed from him, but his inexperience, and the intensity of his own need, made him hesitate. But, really, he had no choice. Blair needed him and nothing would prevent him from satisfying that need. He sat up and stripped hurriedly, his hands shaking, then lay down again beside his lover.

There was no lube, nothing but the most basic of toiletries in the bathroom; he'd established that last night. All they had was the slippery pre-cum from his own and Blair's cocks, and saliva. It would have to be enough. He collected the liquid from Blair's belly and used it to coat his fingers, brushing his fingertips cautiously across Blair's anus, feeling the fluttering twitch of reaction. As Jim's finger slid into Blair's body his lover shuddered and let out a high keening sound, so utterly unlike Blair's normal timbre that Jim could almost believe he'd been possessed by some animal spirit. Certainly, he didn't sound at all human.

"It's all right, buddy. Hang in there." Jim pressed his lips against the base of Blair's cock and stroked up and down Blair's thigh with his free hand. "Soon, okay? I've just gotta be sure..."

He added another finger and watched, shocked and unbearably aroused, as Blair jerked his hips, driving himself onto Jim's fingers. Now, low growls and groans escaped him, growing louder and more insistent by the moment. Some tiny scrap of self-consciousness reminded Jim of the two other occupants of the house, but he shrugged it off. Nothing was more important than Blair. Nothing would prevent him from giving Blair what he so desperately needed.

With conscious deliberation, Jim leaned over to take Blair's cock into his mouth again, sucking hard and with no finesse. It would have been wasted on Blair right now anyway. At the same time his fingertips pressed firmly against Blair's prostate and Blair howled. Another quick rub and Blair was coming into his mouth, his hips thrusting up endlessly before dropping back to the mattress.
Even so, Jim knew he'd bought himself no more than a breathing space. A little time to do what he needed before Blair's hunger surfaced again. If this didn't finish it, Jim had no idea what he'd do next. Hurriedly, he spat into his palm and spread the saliva, mixed with his pre-cum, over his cock. With one hand he pressed his cock against Blair's hole and eased the tip past the loosened ring of muscle while Blair was still relaxed enough to make it easy.

The moment Jim slid full-length inside him, Blair began to shake helplessly. His head tossed from side to side and his legs came up and wrapped around Jim's waist like a vice. He was panting again, his ribcage heaving with the effort of breathing, and Jim's sides ached in sympathy. For a few, precious moments Jim was able just to enjoy the sensation of being inside his lover's body and then they began to move.

It was rough, and awkward, and on some level that Jim couldn't entirely grasp, more profound than anything Jim had ever experienced. He was aware of the slip-slide of sweaty bodies, of the almost unbearable friction against his cock and the stinging slap of Blair's cock against his belly, but part of him was far away from the physical sensations.

There, there was only heat and light and the all encompassing aura of sexual hunger. And there was Blair. A Blair he never could have imagined, who glowed with an intensity that all but blinded him. Blair's voice reverberated through him, drawing answering cries from the depth Jim's being. When they came, together, it felt like the end of the world.

Jack was pacing. Normally his restlessness would have driven Daniel crazy, but right now it was a welcome distraction from the sounds that were coming from the bedroom, and the tension in his groin that was part reaction to the knowledge of what Blair and Jim were doing right now, and part something else that Daniel didn't understand.

"What the hell are they doing?" Jack's irritation didn't visibly diminish as Daniel rolled his eyes, but he snorted derisively. "Okay, so I know what they're doing, but I tell ya, Jim's one of the most private people I know. This isn't like him."

"Believe it or not, Blair's not exactly an exhibitionist, either, Jack." Daniel shrugged impatiently. "It's obviously related to the spirit walk, but..." he stared worriedly at the wall separating them from the other two, "I wish I knew what they saw."

The sounds from the next room reached a crescendo, followed by a silence almost shocking in its intensity. Jack grinned crookedly. "Well, I guess we'll find out pretty soon, now."

"I wouldn't count on it." Daniel smiled reluctantly. Blair's tendency to fall asleep after sex was extremely familiar to him.

"Well, then. Since we've got some time to kill..." Suddenly, Jack was well within his personal space. Daniel backed up a little. "Uh... Jack? What are you doing?"

"Just passing the time." Jack smiled, moving closer. "Got any better ideas?"

It was tempting, very tempting, to just give in to the soft throbbing of the blood in his veins that demanded he do something, anything, to relieve the pressure. But this was Jack, his best friend, and his immediate superior, for all that Daniel had pushed those boundaries time and time again. It would be a terrible mistake to forget that.

"I don't think that's a good idea." Somehow he managed to get his hands up between them and give Jack a sharp little shove. Daniel took advantage of Jack's stagger to put a little more space between
them. "Cut it out, Jack. Something's affecting us, making us feel..."

"Horny?" Jack grinned. "I know. Sure works for me, Danny boy." He reached for Daniel again. "Aw, come on, Daniel. Don't pretend you don't want this. I want this."

"Okay, I won't pretend." Daniel managed to plant his hands firmly in the centre of Jack's chest and hold him at arm's length. "What happens after? Have you thought about that?"

"Huh?" But Jack's eyes sharpened a little. "What about after?"

"Well, there's the little matter of you being in the military." Daniel could hear the pissiness in his voice and didn't care.

"I won't ask and you don't tell." Jack grinned. "Howzat sound, Daniel?"

"You know that's a piece of shit." From pissiness to full blown anger in under thirty seconds. He was on a roll now, and he'd need all the momentum he could find to keep Jack at bay. It was so damned unfair that he had to be the one to play Devil's Advocate. "Christ, Jack, you know damned well there are more gays and lesbians being dishonourably discharged than ever before. That whole policy was just window dressing for the liberal vote. It's never meant a thing."

At last he was getting through. Jack scowled at him, but didn't try to move closer. "Is that why you never..."

"That, and the fact I had no idea you'd be interested." Daniel sighed and let his hands drop. "Have you ever... I mean..."

Jack shrugged. "Just messing around. Guy stuff." His hands sketched something vague in the air. "Before I was married. This is different."

That wasn't, actually, what he'd wanted to hear. He could have handled 'guy stuff', maybe. The thought that Jack could seriously contemplate a meaningful relationship - with him - was curiously unsettling. Frighteningly compelling, even.

A heavy sigh brought his thoughts back to earth. "So you don't wanna... ?"

"It's not that..." Daniel met Jack's eyes morosely. "I mean, I want... but it's, you know, not worth the risk. SG-1 is too important to tear it apart over... you know..."

For a moment he thought Jack might argue the point, and then the older man shrugged and turned away. "So, what do you think we oughta do?"

He wasn't talking about them, Daniel realised, with a little twinge of hurt. "I think we ought to tell them as much as we can." He braced himself for the inevitable explosion.

Jack and Daniel were arguing furiously about something when Blair and Jim entered the room. Jack suddenly shut his mouth and glared at them over Daniel's shoulder. Daniel swung around hurriedly. "Blair, are you okay?"

"Yeah, I'm... fine." Blair felt more exhausted than ever, but he also felt more truly himself than he had in months. He moved, a little hesitantly, towards an armchair, aware that Jim was hovering behind him protectively.

Even Jack waited until they'd settled. Jim perched on the arm of the chair and Blair leaned against him gratefully. Jim's arm immediately went around his shoulders. Blair glanced up at him with a
smile and relaxed into the supportive arm. The smile disappeared as he looked at Jack and Daniel and he took a deep breath to centre himself before he spoke. "We've... uh, we've come to a decision. We're prepared to tell you everything we can, but in return..."

"I can't promise anything." Jack's voice cut across his words. "Jim, you know the score. And, uh... should we be discussing this here?" He canted an eyebrow toward the light fixture on the ceiling.

Blair glanced up at Jim who smiled and shook his head. "If there was surveillance equipment working in here I'd know."

"You'd... know." Jack's voice was heavy with scepticism.

"I'd know." Jim's hand tightened a little on Blair's shoulder. "There's always a small amount of feedback. I'd be able to hear it."

Blair released a barely held breath. They'd done it now; taken the first step in admitting Jim's Sentinel abilities to a representative of a government agency, and even if Jack was Jim's friend, it was one of the scariest things he'd done in his life. "We've discussed this. We both feel this too big for me... us..." he glanced up at his lover, "to worry too much about protecting ourselves."

"So you are a Sentinel?" To Blair's amusement Daniel cut in impulsively, in spite of Jack's obvious irritation. Some things never change. "All five senses are heightened?"

"That's right." Jim's voice was tense, though Blair doubted anyone apart from him could tell.

"And you have these... these visions? God, this is incredible." Daniel's eyes lit up with excitement. "Are they prophetic, or... or..."

"We've both had them, Daniel. Some of Jim's have been prophetic, some about dealing with issues." Blair closed his eyes briefly. He could still feel the shock of the last one in every aching muscle of his body. "The first one I had was the one I shared with Jim when I died. The second was... well, when I died again. Yesterday. And today..." he shivered and leaned closer to Jim. "We saw the alien, Daniel."

"At last. Something useful." Jack threw himself onto the couch, facing them. "So you can give us a description?"

"No, you don't get it." Jim took over as Blair fumbled for the words to explain. "In the spirit world, you don't see... you see beyond the surface. There are people - spirit guides - sometimes, but often what you get is an animal."

Daniel nodded vigorously. "It's well documented, Jack. Animals act as spirit guides in many primitive cultures."

"So you saw...?" Jack gestured in a parody of helpfulness, his face resigned.

"A snake. A weird kind of snake. Not like any I've ever seen before." Blair didn't miss the shock on the two men's faces as Jim spoke. They exchanged a long glance before turning back to Jim and Blair. "It didn't feel like... it didn't belong here. On Earth. It was like this... this taint on the spirit world."

"A Snake. Daniel..." Jack's tone was almost accusatory, and Daniel stopped his restless fidgeting and sat beside him on the couch, staring at Jim.

It was time for their next move. Blair straightened a little, steeling himself for the inevitable response.
"It was a Goa'uld, wasn't it?"

"How the hell do you know about Goa'ulds?" Jack's face turned alarmingly red. "Daniel!"

Blair swallowed a smile of satisfaction. He'd only just begun; it wasn't a good idea to let them see how much of this was guesswork. "They travel through some kind of gate, right?"

Jack visibly pulled himself together. "That's classified."

"Jack..." Daniel leaned towards the older man. "Maybe we should..." he stopped, obedient to Jack's raised hand.

"You need our help, Jack." Jim spoke with calm certainty. "We know where this alien's headed. We can take you there."

"Say what?" Jack's glare was turned full force onto his friend. "Just where did you get this information from?"

"There's a temple we know about. In our vision, we saw the Goa'uld there. The temple is sacred to Sentinels, and there's things there that are very powerful." Blair watched the two faces carefully. "He'll go there. I'm sure of it."

"Blair, have you been to this temple before?" Daniel leaned forward, face intent. "Did you see a sarcophagus, maybe with Egyptian hieroglyphs?"

"Egyptian? No." Blair blinked in surprise. "But we didn't have much chance to explore. There were these drug runners, you see. And... uh... another Sentinel." He glanced up at Jim, but his lover was looking over at their companions, his gaze assessing their reactions. He was probably using his senses to gauge their responses. "We only saw a tiny part of the temple. But we can take you there. Provided you tell us what's going on."

"I thought you said this thing was too big not to help." Jack scowled, his voice sour.

"Yeah, we said that." Blair smiled. "But come on, man, Jim's already admitted to being a Sentinel. Do you have any idea what that means? I gave up my academic future to safeguard that secret." He patted Jim's thigh reassuringly, "and I don't regret it for a moment, but just ask Daniel what that really means. We've given you plenty. And Jim can use his Sentinel abilities to track this Goa'uld."

Jack and Daniel exchanged glances. Daniel shrugged. "You have to admit, Jack, that could be useful."

They'd given up pretending that there was no aliens involved in the situation, Blair noticed. "So, tell us about these Goa'ulds. The more we know, the better we can help."

"Jack?"

The older man scowled again. "Don't you listen in. okay?"

Jim held up his hands in surrender. Jack and Daniel leaned their heads close together and held a brief conversation. "All right. We'll tell you what we can. Daniel? You'd better handle this."

It hadn't taken long for Jim to get the measure of Daniel; in many ways he was very like Blair. Certainly, he had the same enthusiasm for his field of expertise and the same tendency to provide way more information than his listeners - except, of course, for Blair - really needed or wanted.
What he had to tell them was worse than anything Jim could have expected - a race of parasitic aliens who took humans as hosts and believed themselves to be gods. All he needed to know after that was how to fight the damn things, but Daniel had launched into a discussion about something that sounded like cross-pollinisation, which as far as Jim knew only happened to plants, but which Blair and Daniel seemed to think happened to cultures too.

"So these Goa'uld actually played the roles of the ancient gods?" Blair's face was rapt. "Wow! Oh man, that's... that's..."

"I know." Daniel was practically vibrating. "At first we only knew about the Egyptian gods - Ra, Apophis, Hathor - but they were part of other early civilisations too. Hindu, Greek, Chinese. Almost every culture on Earth has developed from civilisations that worshipped the Goa'uld as gods."

"Fuck! The implications... Daniel..." Blair shivered suddenly in Jim's arms. "Oh fuck... I bet I know who the Goa'uld was who attacked me."

"Who?" Just the hint of a threat to his Guide set Jim's nerves on edge, but his rough voice barely seemed to register with the two Anthropologists as they stared into each other's eyes.

"Quetzalcoatl!" They both spoke at once. Daniel bounced to his feet as Blair nodded his agreement. "Of course! Why didn't I think of that? It all fits."

"Ketsa-what?" Jack's irritation brought Daniel up short. "What are we talking about?"

"Yeah. Enlighten us, Chief." Jim tightened his arm around Blair's shoulder. "Who is this guy?"

"The first known civilized people in South America were the Olmec. They worshipped a jaguar god. There are statues, amulets, friezes, all depicting a figure that was part jaguar and part man." Blair turned his head to smile up at Jim. "Quetzalcoatl was often depicted as a feathered serpent. He became one of the most prominent gods of the Mayan pantheon - and get this - worship of Quetzalcoatl replaced the worship of the jaguar god. I don't think it's any accident that your animal spirit is a jaguar, Jim. If you accept that the gods were, in a sense, real, then the mythology tells the story of the aliens' attempt to suppress the whole culture of the Sentinels."

"Like The Guide said." Jim nodded. All the pieces were starting to fall into place. "And then there's the whole snake thing."

"It all adds up." Blair was talking to Daniel now. "In the spirit world we were at the Temple of Light. We've been there before. I'll bet that's where this Goa'uld is going. But Jim hurt him in the spirit world. That's got to have slowed him down on this side, don't you think?"

He hadn't thought of that. It seemed likely, but Jim shrugged, unwilling to commit himself. "You're the expert on this stuff, Chief."

"So you're gonna tell us where this place is? Cool." Jack perked up suddenly.

"Uh... no, actually." Jim gestured helplessly. Just thinking about what he was going to say made his teeth ache. It was just too far out there for his comfort. "I can't. When we found the temple... it was because I followed Al... another sentinel. Somehow she just knew where it was. Sandburg followed me, and he had a GPS transponder; that's how Simon - our captain - found us."

Jack nodded. "So you've got the co-ordinates."

"Yeah." Jim smiled tightly. "And when the government of Sierra Verde sent an expedition to those co-ordinates to explore the temple they couldn't find it. But I know I can find it again. So, like it or
not, we're coming with you."

After ten more minutes of listening to Blair and Daniel discussing ancient cultures and the Goa'uld, Jack made his escape. He knew he could trust Daniel not to mention the Stargate, and there certainly wasn't anything he could add to any discussion between two hyperactive anthropologists. He seriously needed to think about what Jim had told him.

It all seemed completely crazy, but Blair had backed his story up all the way, and Jack was pretty sure he could read Blair. A lot better than he could read Jim anyway. So, it looked like he was stuck with this, and Jim and Blair were getting in deeper all the time.

It was long past time he called this in to General Hammond, but until he could be sure of not being overheard, he simply wasn't prepared to do any such thing, and he wasn't yet willing to accept Jim's assurance that he would be able to hear any surveillance equipment operating. So he leaned his elbows on the kitchen counter and stared glumly out the window. It wasn't very long before Jim joined him.

"How's it goin' in there?" He glanced at Jim's profile, which seemed remarkably relaxed, considering the situation.

Jim grunted. "They're making my head ache."

Which was pretty much what he'd expected. Daniel and Blair together were far more than twice as bad as either of them were alone. It occurred to him, suddenly, that there were other annoyances sure to come. "So, this temple. I'm guessing it's in the jungle?"

"Yep. Maybe six, seven hours walk." Jim turned to face him, leaning sideways into the counter. "It's not too bad."

"There's always trees." Jack sighed mournfully. "Why is that?"

Jim only grinned and didn't answer his question. "When are you gonna tell us the rest?"

"I'm not." He ignored Jim's impatient sigh. "I mean it, Jim. We've already told you far more than we should."

"We're trying to help you here."

"Look. I have to let my CO know what's happening. If he okays it, then I'll tell you." Jack shrugged, knowing how unlikely it was that General Hammond would do such a thing. "You know how it works."

"Yes, I know." A muscle twitched in Jim's cheek. "Blair nearly died, Jack. Without him... I just can't do it. This Sentinel thing. Hell, I'd be lucky to survive without him. I'm not sure I'd want to."

Jack studied his old friend. "You've sure got it bad."

"Yeah, I have." Jim smiled. "But it's more than that. You don't know what it was like at first. My senses were all over the place. I thought I was going crazy. When Blair found me and told me what was going on... well, you know me. It wasn't easy to trust someone who looked and acted like Blair does." He laughed shortly. "I was desperate, so I took him on, and it was the best thing I've ever done. I'm closer to Blair than I've ever been to anyone in my life, and it just seemed to happen without me even realising it. I trust him with my life; hell, I trusted him with my sanity, and he's never let me down."
"Yeah, I know what you mean." Jack's voice softened a little and he jerked his head towards the lounge. "Ya just don't stand a chance against these anthropologists."

A big grin spread across Jim's face. "I don't think I'm the only one who's got it bad. So when are you gonna call General Hammond?"

"How the fuck did you..." Jack broke off and glared at Jim, who just grinned and shrugged. "You heard that?" It was impossible. He and Daniel had been in another room and even then they'd kept their voices low. He sighed. "So you really could hear if there were... you know?"

Jim nodded, smiling complacently. "There aren't."

"Okay. It's time we got moving, then." He pulled out his cell phone. "You think Blair's up to this?"

The corners of Jim's mouth turned down. "Probably not. But don't even try to talk him out of it. You'll be wasting your breath."

Two hours later they were back in Chicago, waiting in his and Jack's hotel room for Sam and Teal'c to arrive. Now that Jim and Blair knew a bit about the Goa'uld and how they operated, it hadn't been difficult to convince them that the chances of their hotel being watched were extremely slim. Even so, Jim had insisted on having the hotel pack up their belongings and send them back to Cascade while the two of them went out to buy new clothing. Daniel got the impression that Jim intended to stick to Blair like glue.

After a lengthy interval they returned, armed with backpacks and bags full of clothing suitable for tramping through tropical rainforest. While Jim set about packing their gear away, Blair relaxed on the couch at his lover's insistence and began instructing Daniel in the niceties of Sentinel sensitivities to synthetic fabrics and how hard it was to find clothing made from natural fibres in any kind of style that Jim was willing to wear.

Daniel barely suppressed a smile. Out of the corner of his eye he could see Jim stoically ignoring the babble of words as he neatly rolled and stuffed gear into the two packs. Jack met his eyes for a moment, raising his own to the heavens with a little grin. He held up his left hand with the middle and forefingers pressed closely together and glanced from Daniel to Blair and back again. Daniel blinked. He wasn't as garrulous as Blair, surely?

"...and you don't even wanna know what happened when there was that chemical spill..." Blair's narrative stopped dead at the quiet knock on the door.

"Sir? It's... ah, it's us." Sam's voice. Jack nodded his okay and Daniel opened the door to let them in. The moment Teal'c appeared in the doorway behind Sam, Jim was moving. With two steps he'd put himself between Blair and the door, his right hand was already coming up to aim his gun unerringly at Teal'c's broad chest. The Jaffa stopped, his face giving nothing away.

"Woah. Hang on there, Jim." Jack stepped directly into Jim's line of fire. "He's with us."

"He's one of them." Jim's voice was hoarse with something very like fear, and Daniel could see that Blair was as pale as a ghost. "He's got one of those things inside him."

"Yes, he has." Daniel moved closer to Jim, but he spoke to Blair. "But he's a friend. Just let him get inside and close the door and we'll explain."

Blair's lips tightened, but he nodded. "Jim. It's okay. He can't do anything with all of us here."
Slowly, Jim lowered the gun and Daniel breathed a sigh of relief. "Jim, Blair, this is Teal'c. He's... he's, ah..."

"He's a friend." Jack stepped in firmly. "And this is Major Samantha Carter, my second-in-command. Sam, Teal'c, this is Detective Blair Sandburg. And the big guy with the gun is Detective Jim Ellison. He's ex-army." This last was offered with a shrug, as if it explained everything about the situation.

Teal'c offered his usual respectful dip of the head, but Sam stepped forward, holding our her hand to Jim. Daniel suspected that she was checking for traces of naquadah in his system. After a moment she stepped back, apparently satisfied. "Pleased to met you, sir. Uh... can you tell me how you knew about Teal'c?"

"He could feel it. So could I." Blair shook hands in turn. "It's... um, it's complicated."

"Isn't it always?" Jack's ironic voice drew their attention to him and away from Teal'c hovering cautiously in the background. "I don't want to nip what promises to be yet another exciting talk fest in the bud, but hadn't we better get moving, campers? We can talk on the way to Sierra Verde."

Sam gave him a small smile. "There's a plane waiting at O'Hare. It's the same one that flew Teal'c and I here, sir."

"Great. Our gear's on board, I assume." Jack didn't even wait for Sam's assent. But then, he didn't really need to. Of course their gear would be on board. "Then let's get moving."

Daniel couldn't help noticing that, as they left the room, Jim made sure to keep his body between Blair and Teal'c at all times. He sighed. It looked like being a long and uncomfortable trip, and he wasn't thinking about the rigors of military-style transport.

At first Blair was almost as wary of Teal'c as Jim, but it was impossible to maintain that attitude for very long. He only had to observe the friendly respect the other three members of the team showed towards the big man to know that he could be trusted. Even though the noise of the engines made it almost impossible to talk, their body language told him that this was a well-liked and trusted colleague.

Apparently, Jim came to the same conclusion; it took him a little while, but eventually the long body relaxed and he wrapped his arm around Blair, drawing him close so he could sleep, his head resting against Jim's shoulder.

When he woke again they were an hour out from Sierra Verde and his bladder was close to bursting. He took care of that, nodding politely to Teal'c as he passed, and returned to Jim's side.

It felt strange to be returning to Sierra Verde. The last visit had been... unpleasant to say the least. Memories of being attacked by a tank, of seeing Jim making out with the woman who had killed him as though none of it had ever happened, of the long trek through the jungle when he'd barely recovered from his drowning - all the things he'd tried so hard to put behind him now came flooding back.

He glanced at Jim and found sombre blue eyes looking down at him. It was impossible to hold any kind of private conversation - even the shortest exchanges were difficult over the noise of the engines - but what he read in Jim's face and eyes was enough to ease his heart. He smiled and tucked his hand into Jim's for a moment, and was rewarded with a lightening of the serious expression, and a tiny nod.
Their actual arrival could not have been more different than the last time. Instead of queuing for Customs and baggage claim, they landed at a small American military base and were immediately led into a small office. The Colonel who met them glanced curiously at the two obviously non-military members of the team, but asked no questions. Jack took him aside for a few minutes and returned smiling casually. Thirty minutes later they were leaving the base in a convoy of five jeeps, headed towards the Zaragordo River.

Some twenty miles up the Zaragordo, the troops disembarked from the convoy and began to set up camp. It was easy for the six of them to slip away and meet up half a mile away from the main site. Then they walked, following Jim along the trail that would eventually lead to the Temple of Light.

Although Jim had insisted on carrying the bulk of their supplies, the backpack weighed heavily on Blair's shoulders and it wasn't long before his feet began to drag a little. Almost immediately, Jim stopped in a small clearing and calmly announced they'd be setting up camp there for the night.

Blair was slowing them down. It was obvious to all of them, but nobody said a word. Seeing the way that Jim watched him like a hawk, hovering protectively just far enough away so Blair couldn't object, it was hardly surprising that none of the SG-1 team dared to comment.

Jack sighed as Jim stepped a little closer to Blair, laying a hand on his shoulder for a moment before calling yet another halt. Carter threw him a questioning glance, but he ignored it. Teal'c would never openly question him, but the big Jaffa was clearly puzzled by Blair's inclusion in the expedition. To be fair, considering the state Blair had been in only three days before, he was doing incredibly well, but he needed frequent rests and it was beginning to seem unlikely they'd reach the temple today.

Maybe that was what Blair was thinking too, because after a quick swig at the water bottle Jim offered him, the smaller man was on his feet and apparently ready to move on. Jim fell into place beside him and the rest of the team followed in silence.

Last night had been... interesting. Neither man had made the slightest attempt to hide their relationship from Sam and Teal'c. They hadn't exactly flaunted it, either. They just sat side by side, thighs touching, exchanging frequent glances and soft-voiced remarks and then, when everybody started to settle for the night, the two of them had lain down on one Army issue sleeping bag, with the other draped over them both. Jim had spooned up behind Blair as though it was the most natural thing in the world.

Was that what Daniel wanted from him? It wasn't going to happen. Sam and Teal'c wouldn't mind, and would never betray them, but as long as they both remained in the SGC, such open displays of togetherness were never going to be possible. Daniel was more than smart enough to know that, but it occurred to Jack for the first time that perhaps it was what he wanted all the same. Jack pondered that thought for an hour or two until a subtle increase in the tension of Jim's shoulders told him they must be near their destination.

Sure enough, another five minutes brought them to a clearing and a large stone statue of a stylised jaguar.

"So, I'm guessing we're nearly there?" Jack slipped his back pack off his shoulders to the ground and double-checked his automatic weapon.

Around him the others were making similar preparations. Their plans were already made, as far as it was possible - Jim had admitted they hadn't got very far into the temple, so most of the territory was unknown. They would head for the grotto first, in two teams, to search for likely Goa'uld hiding places. Daniel was sure there'd be a sarcophagus they could study. Carter was probably hoping for more esoteric information, after Blair had mentioned the writings this other Sentinel - the one that
neither Jim nor Blair seemed to want to talk about - had found.

There was only one way into the temple. They separated into their teams; Carter, Jim and Blair in one, with Daniel and Teal'c staying with Jack. He would have preferred to team Teal'c with the two men, but given their reaction to Junior, Jack wasn't prepared to push it. They needed to have confidence in each other, if it came to a fire fight. With a nod to Daniel and Teal'c Jack led the way to the temple, carefully slipping between the trees along the edge of the path. In a few minutes, the other team would follow.

Of course, they still had to use the flight of stone steps to get inside, but since there was no avoiding it, Jack took a deep breath, signalled to Teal'c to cover them, and sprinted up the steps with Daniel at his back. He kept watch while Daniel figured out the mechanism that opened what seemed to be an impenetrable stone wall.

It only took a moment, then Jack heard the grinding sound of stone moving against stone. He glanced down to see a dark rectangle and the top of another flight of stairs, this time leading down. So far, everything was exactly how Jim and Blair had described it.

By now, Carter's team should have arrived. They would wait until Jack's team had actually entered the temple, watching their backs. Jack signalled to Teal'c, who jogged up the steps.

Inside the temple, the light that came from the entrance didn't reach very far, but Jack was reluctant to use his flashlight just yet. Jim had told them how to reach the grotto and after that they would be in unknown territory.

The grotto was simply a stone-walled room with no markings or carvings, just two shallow rectangular pools half full of water. No chance of their Goa'uld being in there. Jack flicked on the flashlight and raised an interrogative eyebrow at Daniel.

"That way, I think." Daniel kept his voice low and nodded to the right hand branch of the hallway. "If the temple follows the usual layout, that should lead to a large chamber. If there's any sarcophagus, it will probably be there."

"Okay." Jack used a bit of burnt twig from last night's campfire to mark their path on the wall outside the grotto. The flashlight went out again, and after a minute for their eyes to adjust, they went on.

There seemed to be some kind of dim light here, barely enough to see by; where it was coming from, none of them could tell. Nor could Jack hear Carter's team behind them. Whether that was a good thing or a very bad thing, Jack wasn't sure.

Several minutes passed while they made their way slowly along the hallway. The chamber was exactly where Daniel had said it would be. Teal'c moved silently across the entrance to take up position on the other side. They counted down silently, then moved through the arch, weapons at the ready. The chamber was empty - no sarcophagus and no sign of any Goa'uld.

Jack lowered his gun with a sigh. "Not looking good. I hope this wasn't a wild goose chase."

"It would appear that is the case, O'Neill." Teal'c's face was imperturbable as ever, but Jack heard the disappointment in his calm voice. "There is no sign of any..." his eyes turned suddenly to the open doorway.

Too late, Jack was moving, even as he saw the shadowy figure in the hall beyond. Daniel had been staring at a carving on the wall, oblivious to what was happening behind him. The air went out of his body with an audible 'oof', as Jack slammed into him, his impetus aided by the blast of a staff
weapon hitting just below his right shoulder. He never even felt himself hit the ground.

The sound of gunfire nearly blasted Jim's skull open. He'd been extending his hearing, hoping to pick up the sound of movement or another heartbeat, but was having trouble even tracking O'Neill's team. Something about the layout of the temple, or the constitution of the stone was muffling the sounds, making them hard to track.

Instantly, Blair was at his side, rubbing his shoulder and talking softly. Carter was already running towards the other team.

"I'm okay. Come on." He took off at a sprint, leaving Blair behind. It had been a long day for his partner, and in his current state of health, Blair didn't have the stamina to keep up. That was pretty much the way Jim wanted it, right now. Blair was much safer in the rear.

It didn't take long to catch up with Carter. The dim light did little to illuminate the uneven flooring and Jim's eyesight allowed him to move much more quickly than Carter could. He reached the chamber just ahead of her and called out to the others as he burst into the room.

Daniel lowered his gun and bent over Jack again. The older man was unconscious and bleeding from a nasty wound on his shoulder. The smell of burnt flesh was almost enough to make Jim gag, and he hurriedly dialled down his sense of smell. "What happened?"

"A Goa'uld. He waited till we got in here then fired from the doorway. Teal'c's gone after him." Daniel had managed to get a sterile bandage out of his kit. He didn't look up again as Jim and Carter went back into the hallway.

There was only one direction the Goa'uld could have gone. As he followed Carter down the hallway, he thought that perhaps he should have told Daniel to keep Blair with him. He consoled himself with the thought that Blair would probably have kept coming anyway.

More gunfire from ahead made him cringe, but he'd been better prepared this time. Shoving Carter aside, he ran flat out down the hallway. It only took a few seconds to catch Teal'c, limping determinedly in the same direction.

"You okay?" He paused for a moment, but the wound in the big man's thigh, though bleeding freely, wasn't close to any major veins or arteries. He waited for a curt nod before breaking into a fast trot. The enemy couldn't be too far ahead now.

Soon Jim saw a shadowy opening about twenty yards ahead on the right. He slowed; silence was more important than speed right now. He'd almost reached the opening when a strange, watery light flashed in his face, accompanied by a 'whooshing' sound unlike anything he'd ever heard before. Lifting his gun, Jim threw himself into the room beyond, and stumbled, falling to his knees in shock.

At the far end of the room was an upright metal ring, with a shallow set of steps leading up to it. But in the centre of the ring... Jim swallowed and blinked, but his eyes weren't deceiving him. The light that filled the room with rippling reflections had come from the centre of the ring. Its surface shimmered like a pool of water; except that water couldn't do what this pool was doing.

The slim figure that stood before this eerie phenomenon glanced back at him, and Jim raised his gun, taking aim. Before he could shoot, the man stepped into the reflective circle and disappeared. With another whooshing sound, the light disappeared, leaving nothing more than a narrow ring of metal decorated with strange symbols.

Before he could do anything, Carter ran into the chamber, closely followed by a limping Teal'c. Jim
managed to take control of his slackened jaw muscles and stumble to his feet. "He... he got away."

"Damn." Carter didn't seem to think it strange that their quarry could have escaped from a dead-end room. "Did you see the symbols?"

"Huh?" The sound of Blair's approaching footsteps distracted him for a moment, and Carter repeated her question just as Blair came in. "Hey, Chief. You okay?"

"I'm fine, Jim" Blair smiled weakly. "Jack's not looking too good, though. What happened? We lose him?" His eyes widened as he took in the metal ring. "Wow... that's the gate? Jim, that could be the Eye of God that's in the ancient writings."

"Yeah, you could be right." Jim turned to look at the ring again. Set under a sloping arch, it vaguely resembled the iris of an eye. The resemblance had been even stronger when it had been filled with the rippling light.

"The Goa'uld escaped through the Stargate, Detective Sandburg." Teal'c nodded towards the ring. "Major Carter was trying to ascertain whether Detective Ellison had seen the co-ordinates of the planet Quetzalcoatl escaped to."

At Jim's questioning look, Carter smiled hopefully. "Some of the symbols on the DHD - that device over there," she indicated something that looked like a large, off-kilter sundial, "would have been lit up. If we knew which ones, it would give us a chance to track him down."

Jim shook his head. "I didn't see them. Hell, I didn't even notice the thing. I was too blown away by that... did you call it a star gate?"

The two of them exchanged glances before Carter smiled politely. "I'm sure you understand that the less we tell you about this, the better."

"Jim..." Blair was tugging at his sleeve. "Jim, even if you didn't notice the DHD, I'm sure you could have... well, noticed it. You know what I mean?"

Strangely enough, he did. Jim nodded brusquely, wanting to help in any way he could, but still feeling like all kinds of an idiot whenever he had to do this meditating thing that Sandburg was so keen on. "All right! Sam, Teal'c, we may be able to... Jim has this eidetic memory, so I'm gonna talk him through some relaxation techniques to see if he can remember anything."

The two members of Jack's team looked curious. Teal'c leaned closer to Carter and Jim heard him speak softly. "Is that a form of Kel-no-ree?"

"You could say that." Carter smiled faintly. She moved towards Jim and Blair, raising her voice. "It might help jog Detective Ellison's memory if he had a look at the symbols."

"Sure. Sure." Blair bustled over to the DHD and Jim followed obediently. "Now, you probably won't have seen the symbols, exactly, but maybe you can tell from their position which ones were lit up. Just relax, do your breathing, and concentrate, okay?"

"All right." Jim scowled, then forced himself to relax. He took in and released several long breaths and listened to his Guide's voice talk him through his entry into the room. And then he had it, a single, clear image of the DHD and the orange-red glow of the lights. He opened his eyes, his hands already moving to the surface of the device. "Here. Here... and this one." He touched each one lightly, not sure how they were activated, although it looked like each symbol was in the centre of a key, much like a computer keyboard.
"Any others?" Carter looked simultaneously pleased and disappointed. "There are six co-ordinates."

"I dunno..." Jim shook his head, trying to recapture the image in his mind. "The angle's wrong. It could have been this... or maybe this, but these others... I wouldn't have been able to see them all from the doorway."

"Jim, which ones would have been out of sight from the doorway?" Blair stared down at the device. "We should at least be able to eliminate some of the remaining symbols."

Carter was staring at the two of them in amazement and even Teal'c seemed faintly surprised. It had become so natural for Jim to follow Blair's directions that he forgot how extraordinary their combined abilities must seem to strangers. He frowned and closed his eyes, trailing his hand over the device. "They would have had to be between here and... here." He indicated the two symbols with absolute certainty. "If they'd been anywhere else, I'm sure I would have seen them."

"That's... incredible." Carter looked dazed, but she scribbled something in a tiny notebook before putting it away in a pocket on her vest. "We'd better get back to the Colonel and Daniel."

Jack was in a bad way. Daniel didn't need to see the greyed, lined face of his best friend to know how much pain Jack was in. He'd been shot with one of those damned staff weapons once, and his skin stung in sympathy. He'd managed to get the wound covered with sterile dressings, though he had practically used up all his meagre stock.

When Teal'c turned up wounded too, Daniel's heart sank. He'd been counting on the big Jaffa to carry Jack out of the temple. He could do it, he knew, but not as effortlessly as Teal'c would have done. But there was no point in worrying about it. He broke out the medical kit again and set about dressing the wound on Teal'c's thigh. Luckily it had barely caught the outside of his leg and was more painful than dangerous.

The morphine he'd given Jack was kicking in; he could see the pain induced tension draining out of Jack's body. Jim was kneeling beside his old friend checking him out. Daniel finished with Teal'c and went over.

"He'll be out for a while." Jim nodded. "We need to get moving."

"It'll be dark outside." He glanced at Sam. He knew she was thinking the same thing as he was; if they had a GDO they could have gated to another planet and returned to Earth through the Stargate at the SGC. It would only have taken them a few minutes.

"That won't be a problem." Jim's voice was unconcerned. He ignored Sam's startled look. "Once we get outside, I'll rig up a stretcher and we can get moving."

Daniel nodded his agreement. The sooner they got Jack to a hospital, the better his chances were. If Jim was willing to expose his abilities to Sam and Teal'c to save Jack, then there was no way he was going to argue the point.

Sandburg was still sleeping. Jim had checked on him several times in the last four hours, but just the sight of the shadows around his lover's eyes and the drawn look around his mouth was enough to convince him to let Blair sleep. It had been a long and exhausting trip back from the Temple of Light; hours of walking through the jungle with only a few short breaks, then a flight from Sierra Verde to Los Angeles, where they'd refuelled then headed for... for wherever they were now.

All Jim knew was that they were in Jack's house and that there were two military police officials outside, making sure that they didn't leave. They'd arrived in the dark and Jim had been too tired and
too worried about Blair to pay much attention to their surroundings. Jack had been whisked off to a hospital somewhere and Daniel had lingered just long enough to bring them here before heading for the hospital too.

Leaving was the last thing on his mind right now, and phone calls could wait. He knew how things worked in the military, after all, and he trusted Daniel and Jack a whole lot more than he had Colonel Oliver. Meantime, he was happy just to perch on the bed and watch his lover sleep for a while. When Blair at last showed signs of waking, Jim hauled himself off the bed and went to get some juice and to start another pot of coffee.

"Jim?" Blair's voice was rough with exhaustion and dehydration, and his eyes were mere slits. Jim steadied him with one hand as he pushed himself up, and held out the cranberry juice with the other. "Oh, man... thanks."

After a couple of gulps of the juice another pressing need made itself felt and Blair stumbled towards the bathroom. He was in there for a while, but when he returned he was looking a lot more normal, in spite of being badly in need of a shave. He slid between the sheets and smiled winningly at Jim. "Any word on Jack?"

"Yeah. Daniel called an hour ago. He's doing okay." Jim leaned forward to help Blair pile up the pillows. Blair sank back against them with a sigh and Jim kissed him lightly. "We're going to have an 'interview' with General Hammond tomorrow. Until then, we're not allowed to leave or make any phone calls."

Blair's eyes widened. "Jim, they can't do that."

"Relax, okay?" Jim kissed him again. "They just don't want us telling anybody about the Stargate until they've had a chance to debrief us. You've gotta admit, Chief, that's one hell of a big security risk."

"I guess, but..."

"Let's just wait and see what happens, okay?" Jim thought he had a pretty good idea what was going to happen, but they had plenty of time to talk about it. Right now he had more pressing needs on his mind. "You hungry? I've got bagels warming in the oven and a pot of coffee just about ready."

"I'm starving." Grinning, Blair leaned forward, sliding his arms around Jim's neck and lifting his mouth invitingly. "Feed me."

Jim growled softly as their lips met. Blair tasted of cranberry juice and morning breath and the coffee he'd drunk on the plane last night. He stank to high heaven of sweat and body odour and his whiskers were like sandpaper against Jim's face. It was Sandburg to the nth degree and it was absolutely wonderful.

They hadn't really had a chance to make love just for the pleasure of it, so Jim was in no hurry now. He explored the contours of Blair's jaw, dialling up his senses to experience his lover as fully as he dared. Blair would be understandably pissed if he zoned now.

"Jim! Oh, man..." Blair's capable fingers got busy, burrowing under Jim's sweatshirt to stroke his bare back, then peeled the whole thing up over his head and tossed it aside. He groaned as Jim pushed him deeper into the mound of pillows and sucked the tender skin of his throat. "You better not give me a hickey where that Hammond guy can see it."

Jim ignored him, sucking harder. He drew back and looked at the dusky red mark with satisfaction.
"You mean, like that?"

"Yeah, exactly like that." Blair smiled lazily. "I love you, Jim. You know that, huh?"

"Mm-hmm." Jim rubbed his nose gently against the mark, then nibbled his way down the side of Blair's throat to his shoulder. "I love you too, Chief."

He brushed his fingers lightly over Blair's chest, ruffling the dark, coarse hairs. Blair's heartbeat was thundering in his ears, sending vibrations from his fingertips, up his arms, into his body. Jim moaned softly when his teasing fingers encountered the crinkled surface of a nipple. He bent his head to suck gently, flicking his tongue back and forth across the tip until Blair was squirming beneath him.

"Jim... oh, yeah..." Blair's hands cradled his head, guiding him where Blair wanted him to go. "So good, man..."

He rubbed his face against the centre of Blair's chest, covering his skin with Blair's scent, marking his own scent on Blair. "You're mine now. Never letting you go, you get that, Blair?"

"Oh yeah, I get it." A breathless laugh above his head was cut off abruptly as his hands skimmed down Blair's sides, pushing down the covers. "Are we getting just a little bit territorial here?"

"Mmn." He could see the blood-darkened tip of Blair's cock peeking up from under the comforter, and the scent of his arousal was all encompassing now. "God... I've never wanted anyone the way I want you."

He tasted the slick pre-cum almost hesitantly, though he already knew he liked it. Hell, he liked everything about Blair's body. Hooking his fingers under the comforter, he pulled it down to the top of Blair's thighs, staring greedily at the solid length of cock. He heard Blair's gasp and saw the heavy shaft stir restlessly as more pre-cum leaked out.

Unable to resist any longer, Jim went down on his lover, sliding his lips down the thick shaft as far as he could without gagging. He'd need to practice, was looking forward to practicing a lot, but for now he concentrated on the slow glide of cock against tongue as Blair groaned and flexed his hips instinctively.

"Jim... ohhh, Ji-iiiiimm..." Blair sounded like he was ready to explode at any moment, and Jim released him hurriedly. As much as he wanted to experience the taste of Blair's cum in his mouth again, he had other plans. He squeezed the base of Blair's cock until his lover slumped back against the pillows, moaning pitifully.

"Not yet, Old Faithful." He kissed Blair in consolation. "It's my turn now, okay? I want you inside me."

Blair's half-closed eyelids lifted reluctantly. "Hang on there, Jim. We still don't have any lube."

"That's what you think." Jim grinned at the stunned expression on his lover's face as he pulled a small tube out of the bedside drawer and wagged it triumphantly.

"Way to go, Jack!" Blair grinned. "I guess Daniel's got more of a chance than he realised."

"That wouldn't surprise me at all." He tossed the lube onto the bed and moved over to straddle Blair's thighs. He snatched a quick kiss, followed by a long slow one. "So... no more excuses, Chief."

"No more." Blair smiled seductively. "But you gotta promise to do exactly what I tell you, okay?"
"Sure. You're the expert here." Obviously taking his acquiescence for granted, Blair was already sliding his hands down inside Jim's loose sweatpants. The feel of those broad palms holding his ass cheeks made Jim shiver with anticipation. "So far I'm really liking this."

"It gets better." One hand moved around to stoke his cock lightly, the other to cup his balls. "Don't hold back, Jim. I want you to come. I want you to be relaxed."

That wasn't going to be a problem. Jim rocked into the stroking hand, barely retaining the presence of mind to yank down his sweat pants - borrowed from Jack's supply - before burying his face in the curve of Blair's shoulder. "Oh, god... oh god... Blair..." his body shuddered under the force of his climax and he slumped against Blair's chest, panting.

"Oh, man, that was so hot." Blair licked his ear as Jim struggled to breathe. His hand stroked soothingly up and down Jim's sweaty back. "I'm gonna love watching you come again when I'm inside your ass."

"Blair..." He shivered at the seductive, possessive tone in Blair's voice, then shivered again when Blair's stroking hand reached the base of his spine and continued on down. A fingertip circled his hole, sending a wave of heat through his body. "More."

"Gimme the lube then."

One hand, in the centre of his back held Jim in place, resting face down along Blair's body, while that fingertip continued its circling. It was difficult to co-ordinate his movements enough to reach for the tube and pass it to Blair. Jim groaned as the fingertip was removed briefly, but then it was back, slick and cool, teasing its way inside him with little darting thrusts.

"That okay, Jim?" Blair's voice sounded distant and strained. His cock throbbed needily against Jim's belly. "Talk to me. I need you to tell me what's happening."

"Yeah... 's fine..." His tongue felt numb and too large in his mouth, his body heavy as lead. "You gonna be able to hold on?"


Jim realised that he was rubbing his whole body against Blair's as his cock reawakened. His spilt semen made the slippery glide almost frictionless. He forced himself to stop. "Sorry."

"Mnn." Blair's finger wiggled deeper and Jim discovered that once past the tight ring of sphincter muscle, it was all good. "I don't think I can reach your prostate from this angle, but that's okay. Ready for more?"

"Go for it." The second finger was noticeably intrusive. Jim tensed for a moment, but Blair's gentle rubbing if his lower back soothed him into relaxing again. After a few moments he began to rock again, and had to force himself to stop. Still, he could feel the muscle stretching uncomfortably.

"Dial it down a little, Jim. Just enough to take the edge off, okay? Not enough that you wouldn't feel it if I was really hurting you."

Obeying his Guide had become second nature to Jim. Before Blair had finished his instructions, the discomfort had all but disappeared. "I'm okay. Don't know how much longer I can hold out."

"Okay." A kiss was pressed against the side of his neck as Blair withdrew his fingers. "I want you to lie on your back now, Jim."
It was an effort to move at all, but Jim managed it. He lay staring up into Blair's serious face as the sweatpants were stripped off his legs and Blair's hand slid from his ankle up to the inside of his thigh. "You're so beautiful, man. So open..."

A groan escaped him as Blair slid two fingers inside his ass. "Easy, now, Big Guy." Hot little kisses peppered his belly and thighs as Blair worked him even further open. "We're nearly there." A fleeting brush against his prostate sent pleasure ricocheting through his body and a quick squeeze at the base of his cock denied him release.

"Blair, I can't..." his body arched off the bed, desperately seeking relief.

"Yes, you can." Blair's determined voice, and a third finger, brought him back with an almost perceptible thud. "Just a little more, Jim. You can do it."

A moment later he was empty and Jim cracked open his eyes to see Blair spreading lube over his cock, shivering with the effort of holding back his own climax. Neither of them was going to last very long once Blair was inside him.

"Now I want you to pull your knees up to your chest and hold them there." Blair pushed gently at his leg and Jim obeyed, feeling vulnerable and exposed and more than a little ridiculous. "Good. When I start to enter you, just bear down a little, okay?"

"Okay." Jim could hardly breathe as Blair positioned himself between his raised legs. His heart was pounding and his mouth as dry as the Mojave desert. "Go on."

"Patience." A tiny smile played around Blair's lips and he leaned forwards, rubbing his slicked-up cock along the crease of Jim's ass. "Yeaaaahhh... you like that, Jim?"

A wordless groan was the only response Jim was capable of making, but his cock jerked wildly. Blair smirked, and then pressed into him. For a moment he forgot Blair's instructions and panicked a little. Blair's voice, soothing even though it shook perceptibly, brought him back, and he pushed gently against the intrusion.

"Yes! Perfect!" Blair bent over and kissed his nipple as his cock slid home. "How's that?"

He had to take a couple of deep breaths before he could speak. "Good. It's good."

"Okay, you can dial it up a little, if you want. No higher than normal, though." Blair smiled lasciviously. "We'll save the kinky stuff for another time, huh?"

The lightness of his words belied the effort Blair was clearly making to control his responses. His sturdy body was shaking with excitement and arousal, and his face was tense. Jim raised his hand to brush back a tangled skein of hair and cup his lover's cheek. "It's okay, Chief. You don't have to hold back, I'm not that fragile."

"Oh, Jim..." Blair stretched forward to kiss him hungrily and his hips began to move, thrusting slowly, smoothly. He stopped short of Jim's prostate and drew back. "Still okay?"

"Oh, god... incredible... it feels... you feel incredible." It was hard to speak, hard to think when all his being seemed to be concentrated where Blair's cock filled him. "I can feel your heartbeat inside me."

Blair's face twisted, and he kissed Jim again. In the middle of that kiss he began to move again, with the same steady care, though his whole body was trembling with the effort. Jim stretched out his legs, already feeling a little cramped from the tension, and planted his feet firmly on the mattress. He lifted his hips tentatively, and wrapped his arms around Blair's torso. "Come on, Chief. Fuck me."
A choked sob gusted warm breath against Jim's throat and Blair's sturdy body began to move. Jim countered each thrust with one of his own, jerky at first, then with more assurance. He realised that he was moaning Blair's name over and over, but couldn't seem to stop. Not even being inside Blair had made him feel like this; the intimacy of feeling Blair's cock inside his own body was, quite literally, mind-blowing.

It can't have lasted more than a couple of minutes, as he'd expected, before he felt the familiar pressure of impending release. He screamed as he came, and all his senses spiked agonisingly before dropping back to something like normal. He could just feel the last tiny spasms of Blair's orgasm as his lover collapsed across his chest with a weak moan.

It was amazing what twelve hours sleep, a mind-numbing orgasm and a long, hot shower could do for a guy. Blair smiled lazily, semi-reclining against Jim's chest and popped the last bite-sized morsel of bagel into his mouth. Food was good too, but definitely an also-ran compared with the other three.

He sighed contentedly as Jim caught his wrist in a gentle grip and licked away the barely noticeable smear of blueberry cream cheese on his thumb. "That was great, man. Thanks."

"Mm-hmm." Jim tilted Blair's head up and they kissed. "You want to sleep some more, Chief? We're not going anywhere today."

"Not sleepy right now, Jim." Blair stretched cautiously, and rubbed his groin invitingly against his lover's. "You got any other ideas?"

A soft chuckle rumbled against his chest as Jim's arms tightened around him. "I never thought I'd be the one to say this, but we need to talk."

"Yeah?" Blair stifled a yawn. "What about?"

"This interview tomorrow. I have a feeling Hammond's going to want to reactivate my commission, bring me into whatever set up they have here. It's the only way he can keep control of us." Jim's voice was neutral, not giving any clue to how he felt about it.

"Can he do that?" Blair knew his heartbeat had sped up, and Jim would certainly be aware of it. "Besides, Jack's Air Force, so I'm assuming Hammond will be too. You're ex-Army."

"If he wants to do it enough, he'll find a way." Jim's hand began to caress his back. "What I want to know is what you want to do about it. We're a team, Chief. Where you go, I go; and he can't force you into the military."

"Jim, I..." Blair swallowed a lump in his throat. In his quiet, understated way, Jim had just made an enormous commitment to him - to them - and it all but took his breath away. He pushed himself away from Jim's chest and looked him in the eye. "I can't even begin to say what I want to..." he stroked his fingers down Jim's cheek and saw his lover's eyes shift away, embarrassed by the emotion in his voice.

"Yeah, well, I guess I feel like you've already sacrificed enough to be in this partnership, Chief." Jim cleared his throat awkwardly, "and if I'd just listened to you, maybe it wouldn't have turned out that way."

Oh boy, they were really getting in deep with this one. "Look, Jim... it's not that I don't appreciate what you did for me."

"And he had. He really had, at the time... "I guess I just realised that as much as I love police work, it's not enough for me." But right now police work was all he had.

"I know. I'm sorry, Blair." Jim met his eyes again. "I'm not going to make that mistake again. So, I
want to know whether you want to get into this thing, or do something else. We don't have to stay in the US. We can go anywhere you need to go to do what you want to do." He smiled shakily. "Hell, there isn't anywhere that doesn't need a cop, right?"

Now it was Blair's turn to look away. Could he do this? He'd never imagined being a part of the military, but he'd never imagined he'd end up as a cop, either. And if this project that Daniel was involved in could satisfy his brilliant mind, then the chances were, Blair would like it too. "I think... it sounds important. Hell, it's got to be! I mean, we're talking alien invasion, here, Jim. Travel to other planets, if that gate really is what we think it is. And if Daniel's involved, then it's got to be an anthropologist's wet dream. So, yeah, I'm willing."

"Okay." Jim nodded. "I'm down with that. So we just have to figure out a way to get what we need."

"You mean the... um... the 'us' thing. Yeah, well the military's not exactly gay friendly." Blair sighed. He'd been prepared to come out to their friends on the Force back in Cascade, but this was a whole other deal.

"It's more than that, but yeah, it's that too." Jim pulled him back against his chest and Blair went willingly. "If they reinstate my rank I'll be a captain; not senior enough to lead a team, I'm guessing. So that means at best we'll be in a team together with someone giving us orders. And I'm telling you, Blair, I don't like that. I don't want someone who doesn't understand the sentinel thing telling us what to do."

"Daniel's a civilian, so will I be. You could join up as a civilian too, couldn't you?" The tension in Jim's body didn't dissipate at all. "Wouldn't it be better if you weren't back in the military?"

"Not necessarily. Who knows how much they listen to non-military personnel? It could end up being worse." Jim sighed. "The only advantage would be that we wouldn't have to be in the closet. In fact, I'm not sure we could be closeted - there's going to be talk if we buy a place together here. And don't even think about living apart, Chief. I'm not going there."

"Damn right you're not." Blair nibbled Jim's shoulder thoughtfully. "We'll work something out, okay? We've got till tomorrow. Now, are you sure you can't think of anything better to do right now?"

"Well, gentlemen, I'm afraid you've put me in a difficult situation." General Hammond's voice was quiet, almost paternal. It was a tone that belied the sharp intelligence in his eyes and the calm confidence in his stance. Jim found himself thinking that here was a commanding officer he could truly respect.

Which was one of the reasons he'd agreed to let Blair do all the talking. Already, he could feel the old habit of military discipline falling into place. Blair would be able to question the military mindset far more effectively than Jim ever could.

"We appreciate that, Sir." Blair smiled, apparently without a care in the world. "We understand the necessity of keeping what we know to ourselves."

Apparently recognising an opening gambit, the General smiled in return. "As much as I'd like to consider that, as sworn officers of the law, the two of you are completely trustworthy, it would be remiss of me not to ensure the security of this command. Admittedly through no fault of your own, you have stumbled across one of the most highly classified projects in this country."

Everything Jack had said about Hammond told Jim that his friend liked and respected his commanding officer. "Let's cut to the chase, Sir. I'm sure you've had us both investigated." He
ignored Blair's frown. "I'm sure you've considered the possibility of reactivating my commission."

"That I have," Hammond nodded genially, but his eyes were watchful. "You would be a fine addition to my command. If you're willing to come on board."

"Well, there's some, uh... some conditions." Blair broke in, nervously. He rubbed his hands together. "Jim and I, we, uh... we've talked about this, and..."

"Detective Sandburg, I'm not in the habit of negotiating with the members of my command."
Hammond's voice was stern, but something about him prompted Jim to meet Blair's eyes and give an almost imperceptible nod.

"I understand, and believe me, once we've come to an understanding... well, we're cops, we know how these things work. Chain of command, and all that." Blair swallowed audibly, at least to Jim. "But there are some things you have to understand about Jim."

Hammond nodded. "Dr Jackson has informed me of Detective Ellison's... abilities. I must confess, I'm curious about that, but it doesn't entitle him, or you, to special treatment."

"Oh, but you're wrong, Sir." Blair held up his hands placatingly as Hammond seemed about to interrupt. "Just hear me out, please. You can confirm what I'm saying with our boss, Captain Banks."

"All right." Hammond was clearly dubious, but he waved his hand. "Carry on, Detective."

"We're a team. Jim's abilities are very real. You have no idea what he's capable of doing, but he needs me to help him control them." Blair smiled briefly at Jim. "We're also lovers."

"I see." For the first time it seemed that Hammond was less than completely in control of the interview. "I'm sure you're familiar with the policy of 'don't ask, don't tell'. Might I ask why you've volunteered this information?"

"Both Jack and Daniel have spoken of you with the utmost respect, Sir." Jim decided it was time to take part in the conversation again. "We have no intention of flaunting our relationship, but we don't intend to hide it, either. We want you to understand how important this is to us."

"Very well." Hammond leaned back in his chair. "Continue."

"We need an assurance from you that, where it comes to the use of Jim's abilities, nothing is decided without my agreement." Blair's earlier nervousness had fled. This was his 'area of expertise', as he called it, and his confidence in his knowledge showed. "The same when it comes to medical procedures. If I say no, it doesn't happen. General, Jim's sentinel abilities have their down side too. He has drug sensitivities and allergies; I know them, inside and out. I've studied Jim's abilities practically twenty-four hours a day for the last four and a half years. All we're asking is that I be officially designated the "expert opinion" on Jim's Sentinel abilities and that whoever commands the team we're placed in is willing to respect that."

Hammond studied each of them in turn; long, thoughtful stares that seemed to see right inside them. Then he smiled. "I don't have a problem with that, considering that I'd intended to recall Detective Ellison, with an immediate promotion to Major. You'll be commanding your own team, once you've been brought up to speed with the procedures and background of this command."

He glanced from Blair to Jim, both of whom were speechless with shock. "Gentlemen, it seems we have an agreement."

"Yes, Sir." Jim nodded respectfully to his soon-to-be commanding officer. "We'll have to advise our Captain, back in Cascade. With your permission, we'll go back there to settle things up."
"Permission granted." Hammond stood, extending his hand. "Welcome on board. I'll have Major Carter give you a brief tour of the facility before you leave."

Outside Hammond's office, they both stopped, still digesting the sudden change to their lives. Jim could already feel himself falling into a more military stance. He met Blair's wider than usual gaze. "So, how does it feel to be a civilian consultant again, Chief?"

"Does this mean I have to salute you?" Blair's eyes gleamed with elated amusement. "I am not saluting you, okay?"

Jack was showing signs of waking at last. Daniel was prepared to wait. He'd stayed by Jack's bedside in the Infirmary for nearly two days now, leaving only to catch short naps in his office and to shower once in the locker room. Dr Fraiser hadn't even tried to send him away; she claimed Jack's vitals seemed to improve when Daniel was there. Sam and Teal'c had been frequent visitors too.

Even Jim and Blair had dropped in once, on their guided tour of the SGC, and Blair had cornered Janet for a good ten minutes, earnestly explaining to her his role as Jim's resident medical expert. That had been three hours ago, and since then everything had been quiet.

Daniel needed that quiet. He'd had time to do a lot of thinking over the last two days. The journey back through the jungle had been a nightmare. They'd hardly stopped at all and had depended on Jim's ability to see in the dark just to keep going. Jack's survival had depended on their getting him to proper medical care as quickly as possible, but, when they reached the base, the Medical Officer had lacked the equipment or expertise to treat an injury as serious as Jack's. Since sending Jack to the local hospital was out of the question, they'd been flown back to the SGC.

By then, it was almost too late. There'd been times when things had got uncomfortably tight in the heat of battle, but this had been worse. He'd been helpless to do anything but watch as Jack slipped closer and closer to death.

But Jack was not going to die, and that meant that Daniel had to reconsider his decision not to pursue a relationship with his friend. Blair had told him about General Hammond's willingness to look the other way regarding his and Jim's relationship. If he could do it for them, then Daniel doubted he'd be too concerned about what half of his best team got up to in their off duty hours.

A low moan brought his attention back to the bed. Frown lines on Jack's forehead and the fluttering of his eyelashes indicated he was close to waking, and Daniel leaned forward, capturing a faintly twitching hand between his own. "Jack?"

"Mmn." The frown deepened and Jack turned his head towards Daniel. "Wha..."

He touched Jack's cheek lightly and pressed a sipper between dry lips, squeezing a tiny amount of water into Jack's mouth. "I'll give you more in a moment."

Jack's eyelids lifted heavily. "More." His voice was raspy and weak, but the best thing Daniel had heard in a long time.

Another sip seemed to revive him considerably. He stared up at Daniel for a few seconds, then smiled sketchily. "You look like shit."

"Actually, I think that's my line." Daniel grinned suddenly. Everything was going to be okay.

"Whatever." Jack turned his head away, looking around the infirmary. "How did we get here?"

"Long story, which doesn't concern you, right now." Daniel held out the sipper again and Jack
nodded. He eased it between Jack's lips and this time Jack sucked it without any assistance. "You had me... us... worried for a while."

"Worried?" Jack brightened a little. "You worried about me?"

Daniel nodded.

"Cool." Jack's eyes drifted shut. He opened them again with an obvious effort. "So this worrying thing..."

"I was afraid I was going to lose you without ever..." He swallowed a lump in his throat. Twenty-seven languages, and he still couldn't find the words to say what Jack meant to him.

But Jack understood. "Yeah. Me too."

"Oh." Daniel laid his palm against Jack's cheek. "So, you think we could... after you get out of here... we could..." he brushed his thumb across Jack's lower lip. "Y'know."

"Why wait?" Jack's eyes crinkled in amusement. "Kiss me now."

"Okay." He bent over, pressing his lips gently against Jack's. They were warm and dry and parted easily beneath his own. He brushed his tongue over them and sucked the lower lip, holding it carefully between his teeth for a moment.

Jack sighed, his eyes closing. A faint snore escaped his lips. Daniel sat back with a grin. They had plenty of time.

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