

SGC-X



The Refugee

by Merik Katuryan

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# **SGC-X: The Refugee**

**by Merik Katuryan**

This first of 2 volumes of Stargate SG-1 fan-fiction introduces two new characters to the cast. One of them, the British mathematician Dr. Harold Trajan, is an established SGC Specialist, who has a history of joining SG teams on expeditions through the stargate. The other is another version of Samantha Carter, who arrived from an alternate Earth, which was conquered by the Goa'uld.

The new arrival is the subject of both suspicion (is she a Goa'uld spy?) and fascination, as she knows slightly different versions of the staff of the SGC. She also possesses information from her work at her SGC, which is new to those serving at her refuge.

Dr. Samantha Carter, who never joined the US Air Force, is a specialist in spacecraft systems and she appears to have much to offer. Confined to the SGC by Pentagon bureaucracy, she has to convince the doubters of her bona fides and come to terms with life among people whom she has almost, but not quite, known for around four years.

The story continues in *SGC-X: A New Alliance*

# Prologue

The first stargate to be discovered on Earth was found in Egypt in 1926 by the Canadian archaeologist Daniel Langford and his daughter, Catherine. The structure, the product of an unknown technology, had been buried for an extremely long time under cover-stones engraved in an unknown language. It eventually ended up in storage, with the cover stones, in a museum in the United States.

Many years later, Catherine Langford offered a fellow Egyptologist and linguist called Daniel Jackson the opportunity to examine Egyptian hieroglyphs on the cover stones. He travelled to the US Air Force installation to which everything had been moved, and concluded that the metal ring was a device which could be used to travel to distant worlds.

Daniel Jackson, often dismissed as a young man with grand ideas but very little in the way of proof to support them, worked out that the non-hieroglyphic symbols on the stargate represent star constellations described in terms of a three-dimensional coordinate system. When an address is *dialled* on a stargate, which is known as an *astria porta* in the tongue of the Ancients, the constructors of the system, and a *chappa'ai* in Goa'uld, the system opens up a stable wormhole to another location.

A stargate, which usually has a diameter of 6.7 metres, can be dialled manually but the first investigation team found that other stargates off-world have an associated DHD, or Dial Home Device. Major Samantha J. Carter of the US Air Force was instrumental in creating a substitute for the DHD, using computer systems, in order to return the stargate on Earth to use.

The system at Stargate Command (usually known as the SGC), a facility deep under Cheyenne Mountain in Colorado, uses several motors to move the inner ring of the stargate in order to dial the desired address. In essence, it is an automated version of manual dialling.

This system has some advantages over using a normal DHD and some disadvantages. Whilst it allows access to the stargate

to be controlled using a palm scanner in the control room, and gate addresses to be stored in a permanent database for speedy recovery, it lacks several of the safety protocols provided by a DHD. The dialling computer can interpret some of the signals sent back by the stargate, but it also ignores many of them. The computer dialling process is also slower than that offered by a DHD.

Air Force SG teams, based at Stargate Command, began to explore the new frontier and search for alien technology. They soon found that they needed allies to defend Earth against the Goa'uld, a snake-like parasitic alien race, which requires host animals.

Humans, the Goa'uld had found millennia before, make excellent hosts. They modified captured humans to serve as troops; the Jaffa; and also as hosts for immature Goa'uld symbiotes, which provide the Jaffa with a superior substitute for an immune system.

The Goa'uld transported human slaves from Earth to other planets and posed as the gods recorded in ancient Earth mythologies, particularly Egyptian mythology, to create personal empires. Although ruthlessly competitive, the Goa'uld do form alliances of convenience to maintain order in their sphere of influence.

A rebellion brought an end to Goa'uld rule on Earth. The rebels buried the stargate used by their deposed god, who found that the supply chain needed for re-conquest would be too long and too exposed to the depredations of rivals if he had to rely on spacecraft to bring in an assault force. Earth was allowed to go its own way and Ra, its former god, turned his attentions elsewhere.

SG-1, the team of human explorers commanded by Colonel Jack O'Neill of the US Air Force, who led the first expedition through the stargate, learnt that highly evolved humanoids known as the Ancients constructed the stargate network millions of years in the past. The Goa'uld tend to be scavengers rather than inventors, and most of their technology is adapted from abandoned Ancient devices.

But they remain formidable foes.

The galaxy beyond the stargate, the explorers from Earth discovered very soon after they began to venture off-world, is full of both wonders and great dangers.

## **CONTENTS: The Refugee**

<b>Two of us</b> (Tuesday, 15th July)	001
<b>Seeking A Direction</b> (Tuesday, 22nd July)	025
<b>Political Intrusion</b> (Wednesday, 23rd July)	046
<b>Revelations</b> (Thursday, 24th July)	065
<b>In Plain Sight</b> (Tuesday, 29th July)	089
<b>Weapons Expert</b> (Thursday, 31st July)	113
<b>Just Similar</b> (Tuesday, 05th August)	146
<b>Nuisance Tactic</b> (Saturday, 09th August)	180
<b>Positive Action</b> (Friday, 15th August)	214

# Two of us

[July 15, Tuesday]

The series of messages from Nevada had disrupted Major-General George C. Hammond's day thoroughly. Mystery had been piled upon mystery, and the man in charge at Stargate Command, a top-secret facility of the United States' Air Force, had been forced to sit at his desk, working through the routines of the day, whilst his experts attempted to obtain an explanation for what had happened.

Each knock on the door of his office deep below Colorado's Cheyenne Mountain had raised the general's hopes. On each previous occasion, they had been dashed quickly. But this time . . .

"Okay, Jack, just what the hell is going on?" General Hammond said without preliminary to Colonel Jack O'Neill. His face was locked in an expression of pained bafflement as the new arrivals entered his office. "Or has Major Carter really found some way to be in two places at the same time?"

"It's more two places at the same place, sir," Major Samantha Carter returned as she settled onto the chair indicated by an impatient wave of the general's hand.

Colonel O'Neill was also wearing a look of bafflement as he sat on another visitor's chair.

"Very well, let's start from what we know," said the general. "Someone, who could be Major Carter's twin sister, and a dying Special Forces corporal, were found in a storage area at Area Fifty-One this morning. She was spotted on CCTV, waving to attract attention. She asked for medical help for the injured man, who had received a Jaffa staff blast. She said she had to speak to General George C. Hammond of the SGC or Colonel Jack O'Neill without delay. So I sent you two to Nevada by fast jet to investigate. And . . .?"

"The woman hid her identity documents as a security

precaution but they were found, sir,” said O’Neill. “They identified her as Dr. Samantha Jane Carter and gave her top-level security clearance, equivalent to mine or Carter’s, for a civilian employee of the Air Force. And she had an SGC pass which looked completely genuine. And she does look like Carter’s twin sister. Only the one who became what Trajan calls a boffin, with eyeglasses and about an extra ten pounds of weight. And she knows both of us; me and Carter.”

“How is that even possible?” said the general. “Is she a clone? Or some sort of android?”

“Sir, Jack was going to introduce us,” said Carter, “but she said, ‘You’re Colonel Jack O’Neill of SG-One.’ Then she looked at me and said, ‘And you’re another me; Dr. Samantha Carter. I came here through the dimensional speculum.’”

“The what?” said the general.

“Sir, you remember that dimensional interface that Daniel found?” said Carter.

The general’s frown deepened.

“You might know it better as the Quantum Mirror, sir. Which gives access to parallel versions of our reality.”

“That device Dr. Jackson found just before Senator Kinsey tried to close down the SGC?”

“Yes, sir.”

“I certainly remember that,” said the general. “Kinsey refused to accept Dr. Jackson’s account of a successful Goa’uld invasion of the Earth in a parallel reality. But SG-One side-stepped the Senate’s attempt to close down operations here at the SGC just before a Goa’uld invasion fleet arrived . . .”

“And Apophis got his ass kicked,” murmured O’Neill.

“Well, sir,” said Carter, “the other Earth; the one the other me came from; has just been invaded by Apophis and the force that took the SGC came through the stargate. Someone opened the iris for them. Dr. Carter and others from her SGC were sent to other parallel Earths to warn them about what happened there and what could happen here.”

“A possible traitor in our midst?” said the general.

“Yes, sir.”

“And you think she really is another Dr. Samantha Carter?”

“Yes, sir. There’s no way she’s an actual long-lost twin sister of mine, as they thought at Area Fifty-One. I know that without having to ask my father.”

“And it’s unlikely her hypothetical foster parents would have called the other twin Samantha Jane, like yourself,” said the general.

“Yes, sir. Assuming she isn’t some sort of Goa’uld spy, a clone of me they’ve created somehow, the only thing that makes any sense is that she really is from an alternate reality.”

“One where the SGC was overrun by a Gould invasion force and most of us; our counterparts, the nerds say we have to call them; were wiped out,” said O’Neill. “Including you and me, sir.”

“Which explains why the other me is so traumatized, sir,” Carter continued. “She was particularly close to the Dr. Trajan in her parallel; they were both civilian employees working in the same laboratory space and he was her section head. I understand Apophis himself executed Dr. Trajan publicly as soon as he arrived at the SGC in the other parallel.”

“But she got away, even though she must have been on the death list too?” said the general.

“Yes, sir. She was extracted from the facility with a small group of survivors. In a state of shock and she has no memories of how they did it. There was a Project Zero as a contingency plan for people of her status at her SGC. Does that mean we have one here?”

“I’d have to get back to you on that one,” said the general.

“It explains how she and Corporal Sheringham ended up in Area Fifty-One, sir,” Carter resumed. “That’s where our interface is being stored and it’s the logical place for them to store theirs. The fact that only two of a group of eleven arrived here suggests they chose to scatter the survivors from their SGC in small numbers across a range of alternates.”

“And in our parallel universe, there’s a Corporal Sheringham, who’s a member of a special forces detail, which would have been able to perform that sort of extraction?” said the general.

“Yes, sir,” said O’Neill. “I was able to extract that infor-

mation from the nerds at Fifty-One.” His tone suggested a high degree of difficulty.

“Where is Dr. Carter now?” said the general.

“The infirmary here, sir,” said O’Neill. “That’s where we’ve been for the last hour since we got here. Waiting on Dr. Fraiser’s preliminary evaluations.”

“And Dr. Fraiser is certain neither of them; the other Major Carter and the other Sheringham; is a product of advanced plastic surgery to make them into lookalikes?”

“Yes, sir,” said Carter. “Well, she is about Dr. Carter. They held Corporal Sheringham’s body at the military hospital in Nevada. Although, it’s probably back at Area Fifty-One now . . .” Major Carter returned to the point in response of the look of impatience on the general’s round face. “The other me is a natural product of genetic make-up and life choices, as far as Janet can make out. She’ll know more after they’ve done the autopsy on Corporal Sheringham, who died about two hours after he arrived at Area Fifty-One. And I find it very difficult to see what an enemy would hope to achieve by planting a double of me at the SGC with her story.”

“Apart from driving us nuts,” remarked O’Neill.

“Yes, sir, that part of the plan is definitely working,” laughed Carter. “But kidnapping me and exchanging me for the double without anyone knowing would make much more sense.”

“Okay, the only thing we can do is keep this woman in the infirmary under guard while Dr. Fraiser runs more tests to be absolutely sure she is who she says she is,” said the general. “Or as sure as we can be.”

“Did anyone think to look inside her head to see if she’s a Gould?” O’Neill asked.

“Yes, sir, it’s been done,” said Carter. “And she isn’t.”

“The next step is to question her to find out if she knows things that she could only know if she works here, as she claims,” said the general.

“I think it will be some time before Dr. Fraiser allows that, sir,” said Carter. “Dr. Carter is obviously badly shaken up. The other me is a civilian who has seen a close friend murdered right in front of her eyes as an act of crude terrorism.

She's entitled to be traumatized."

"I take your point, Major," said the general.

"You don't seriously think she's some sort of spy, sir?"

"Stranger things have happened over the last few years, Major. But I am inclined to accept her story, based on what we know so far. For the moment."

*U-hoo-gar! U-hoo-gar!* The gate room siren shrieked its unignorable message.

The general reached for his red telephone. His hand arrived as it began to ring. He listened briefly then made an acknowledgement and replaced the receiver. "SG-Fifteen are back, nothing to report."

"Oh, for a nice, quiet day like theirs," remarked O'Neill.

General Hammond collected up the sheets of prints strewn on his desk. They had been made from an original data file, which had been secure-mailed from Area 51. They showed full-length and full-face views of a Samantha Jane Carter in a torn and bloodied camouflage uniform.

Her hair was the same shade of honey-blonde as Major Carter's but it was a long, tangled mass rather than a neat crop, which could never fall into the owner's eyes during a fight. The eyes were the same bright blue but haunted and peering through spectacles with thin, gold frames. Unlike the Carter sitting on the other side of the general's desk, this one looked as if she might have chosen marriage and children, and then a slide into comfortable suburban life with a return to work, over a military career. That much was evident from the poor fit of the tattered uniform.

She was clearly traumatized and not someone who considered having to run for her life a routine part of her working day.

**[July 18, Friday]**

His red telephone began to ring. General Hammond abandoned a routine report to take the call. He had been at his desk for less than half an hour at the start of a new day and

he had barely dented the stack of paperwork in his in-tray.

“SG-Two reporting back with Dr. Trajan, sir,” said the gate technician.

“I’ll be right down,” said the general.

He arrived in the stargate control room as members of SG-2 were manoeuvring a trolley laden with packing cases along the ramp. The stargate closed with its usual dramatic flourish.

“They said they were thinking they’d have to kidnap Dr. Trajan at gunpoint, sir,” remarked the gate technician. “The Almed scientists kept coming up with more and more questions, the more he told them.”

“Always leave them wanting more,” remarked one of the technicians.

“They’ve got that gadget Major Carter wanted too, sir,” the gate technician added.

“The impossible achieved again,” the general remarked as he headed for the stairs down to the gate room level.

The Almed were humans, who had been transported to another planet by a Goa’uld overlord, whose life had been cut short by an attack in another star system in his domain by a rival Goa’uld. The Almed had been able to stage an uprising to free themselves from the occupying forces on their planet, and they had buried their stargate for the best part of a century.

Their planet had been named Almed by the Goa’uld and the inhabitants were known as ‘the people of Almed’ or just ‘The Almed’. There had been talk of a change of name to something non-Goa’uld on several occasions in the past but the Almed had never been able to agree on an alternative name. Fortunately for them, they had been deposited on a backwater planet and they had not been rediscovered by the Goa’uld before they had been able to build up their civilization to the stage of space travel and the ability to defend themselves from outsiders.

Their Goa’uld overlord had created a highly compartmentalized society of specialists on Almed. The enslaved population had added human imagination to Goa’uld scavenging skills, and they had been their god’s weapon-makers and builders of specialized equipment.

They had brought their stargate back into operation six years earlier for a programme of cautious exploration. SG-1 had made contact with an Almed expedition on a neutral planet during a visit to one Earth's known gate addresses.

Major Carter had mentioned to the Almed, during an early contact, that they needed to get Harold Trajan's help with a problem which had been baffling one of the physicists. Colonel O'Neill had added, in a phrase which Dr. Trajan had threatened to have embroidered and distributed as a sampler: "There are nerds, and there are Carter and Trajan. If a problem can be solved, they can do it."

There had been cautious exchanges of information and expertise over the last several months. The opinion on Earth was that the Almed were up to a century ahead of their planet of origin in some areas of technology, thanks to their Goa'uld god's needs, and severely limited in other areas.

The Almed society was small and science-oriented; the population had never been used as infantry and hosts for Goa'uld young; but artists, writers and musicians had begun to express themselves after their liberation. The Almed had also made significant advances in the field of medicine. They were lacking in the field of agriculture, however, and Earth had foodstuffs to offer, which the Goa'uld had not bothered to convey to their slaves' new home.

Earth also had thousands of years of culture and history to offer to a people who were intensely curious about their roots, and some Earth scientists could make a contribution in their personal area of expertise. The example of Dr. Harold T. Trajan, a British mathematician working on contract for the United States' Air Force, was a case in point.

Dr. Trajan was as intelligent as the average Almed mathematician, but he lacked the advantages of their greater knowledge base. Even so, his brain was 'wired' to see and make connections which eluded most others in his field, and the Almed government had been willing to enter a limited technology-sharing programme in exchange for access to his services.

There had been a certain amount of embarrassment on the part of the Almed about needing the services of someone from

a civilization at an inferior state of development in the field of science, but both parties were coping with it quite well; on the surface. The latest evidence was the gift of some out-of-date shielding technology as payment for Dr. Trajan's services. Scientists on Earth were hoping to adapt it for use on spacecraft deployed for the defence of their planet.

"Colonel Kowalski," General Hammond said at the foot of the ramp leading up to the stargate. "Success?"

"Mission objectives all accomplished, General," returned Lt.-Colonel Kowalski, leader of SG-2. "Including retrieving our asset, which looked rather doubtful for a while." Kowalski had survived a severe fire-fight and he was still receiving rehabilitation treatment. Thus he was cleared only for escort duty on friendly planets, like the Almed homeworld.

"So I've been told. If you don't mind me saying so, you look like hell, Dr. Trajan," the general added to 'the asset'.

"Short-shifting on sleep, General," Trajan returned with a bleary smile. "But we made some real progress with their projects. They're almost happy with our alliance now. And I got a full set of data crystals for the gadget, which should please Major Carter."

Dressed in combat fatigues, the Briton looked just like a member of an American SG team, but there was something distinctly unmilitary in the way he carried his tall, spare frame and the unit identification patch on the right shoulder of his jacket identified him as an SGC-X, a Stargate Command Specialist, rather than a member of a numbered SG team..

"I'm surprised they were so co-operative, Doctor." The general took charge of a small, easily concealed packet, which Trajan handed to him in a suitably furtive manner.

"Actually, I'm not entirely sure I'm meant to have as much as I got; specifications, materials, operating instructions and so on. But the Almed are really keen to get their hands on books of all sorts about life on Earth, so it's relatively easy to make them grateful if I keep visiting my local secondhand bookshop. And as they're now planning to build a whole new version based on the work we've just been doing, this gadget is obsolete technology. Or it soon will be. Not quite Wright flyer to a Goa'uld mothership, but getting there. So they can't

be too unhappy that we get old stuff along with enough information to make it work if we try real hard.”

“Let us hope you managed to keep a record of all the work you did over the last five days,” said the general. “To give Major Carter a shot at working out where the Almed plan to go next.”

“If anyone can, she will. There’s another gadget, but Colonel Kowalski knows all about it. Permission to go and crash before I fall over from lack of sleep, General?”

“I think we can postpone your debriefing until tomorrow,” the general returned with a smile.

Yawning, Dr. Trajan headed for the nearest exit.

“I imagine your mission report will be brief, Colonel,” the general said to Kowalski.

“Hung out, not knowing what was happening for ninety-nine per cent of the time, sir,” said Kowalski. “But Jack O’Neill would have really enjoyed our mission. There were all these hotshots from an advanced planet but they had no idea what our math guy was talking about until he’d explained it about ten times. There’s one guy who smacks his forehead with his hand when he finally gets something Trajan has told him. And he puts on this amazing bug-eyed expression. It’s a real effort not to laugh out loud when he does that.”

“That must have hurt, to quote Colonel O’Neill,” the general said with a laugh.

“Even worse, when Major Carter dropped by, it was obvious that she knew what Trajan was talking about; maybe not as much as she seemed to; and they still didn’t get it until she’d explained it ten times more from a physicist’s point of view. So much for the advanced civilization.”

“What’s the other gadget that Dr. Trajan mentioned.”

“Something to deal with the problem of limiting the Almed to ten-minute conferences on our stargate, sir. Trajan says it’s a ‘caller waiting’ system to let the SGC know if someone else tries to dial our gate when they’re on the line. Like one of our teams in trouble.”

“That sounds very useful. Make sure Major Carter knows about it.”

“Phone, General, sir,” called one of the technicians.

General Hammond headed for the control room. Kowalski dismissed his team but waited in the gate room to hand over the contents of the trolley. Major Carter arrived in the gate room ten minutes later. She looked into each of the boxes, her expression of delight growing with each delve. Lt.-Colonel Kowalski told her about the other gadget twice to make sure that she had taken in the information. Then he let Major Carter rush to General Hammond's office.

"They told me Dr. Trajan got full documentation in the device, sir?" Carter said with a beam of delight.

"Yes, indeed, Major. I have it right here." The general surrendered the travelling pack of data crystals. "Dr. Trajan is catching up on lost sleep right now. But when he reappears, I'd like you to brief him on the Dr. Carter situation, then put them together to see what pops loose."

"Yes, sir."

"We can be reasonably certain now that she's not a threat?"

"She's not carrying any technology that we can detect, sir. Or any bio-weapons that Dr. Fraiser can detect."

"*That we can detect* being the operative words?"

"Yes, sir," Carter said with a smile. "But she's surrounded by as much security as you can muster anywhere on the planet."

"And you have difficulty in believing that the equivalent of yourself from another parallel universe could be a threat to the SGC?"

"I think it could happen if she was in a position to get something from here to protect her world, sir. A priority of loyalties."

"But, according to her story, her world has already gone to hell."

"Yes, sir."

"What's your opinion of her now?" the general invited.

"Setting the obvious differences aside, sir; the hair, the eyeglasses, her being a civilian; she's me in terms of character and loyalties, if not life experiences. And people say they can't tell us apart when we're talking, she's so like me. If she is any sort of threat, she would have to be under the influence of something like the Goa'uld mind control device that Apophis

used on Teal'c."

"Yes, that's one thing that's worrying Washington especially."

"Teal'c got back to himself with that Jaffa ritual, sir; which involved removing his symbiote and going through a near-death experience. Only Sammy doesn't have a symbiote. The Tok'ra are our only hope of detecting if Sammy really is under Goa'uld control and salvaging her."

"Our problem there, Major, is that the Tok'ra are having some severe self-preservation problems of their own at the moment. And getting them here to scan Dr. Carter is off the schedule for the foreseeable future."

"So if we don't maintain tight security here, we're bound to end up in deep trouble . . ."

". . . because that's the way the Universe works, to quote Dr. Trajan," the general finished.

"Did you get anything on Project Zero, sir? If I can know that."

"A Project Zero along the same lines as the one at Dr. Carter's SGC has been discussed, but nothing more. There's certainly no firm plan for evacuating essential personnel in place right now."

"Possibly because no one thought of sending them off Earth using the dimensional mirror, sir?"

"Very probably," the general said with a nod. "One more thing, Major. The Almed are not too happy about the prospect of contacts with Dr. Trajan via the stargate being limited to a few minutes in case we have an SG team wanting to dial home. So they've provided a 'caller waiting' system, which can be incorporated into our dialling computer."

"Yes, sir. Colonel Kowalski told me about it. Twice. It's so their conferences with Dr. Trajan can go on as long as necessary if one of our teams doesn't need to dial home, sir."

"That's right. And I'd be grateful if you'd give that job priority. The necessary details are with the package you received from Colonel Kowalski."

"Yes, sir." Carter knew that no other answer was available.

"Okay, Major, you're dismissed. Best of luck with explaining your dimensional sister to Dr. Trajan."

“Thank you, sir, I expect I’ll need it.” Major Carter made sure that the travelling pack was securely stowed in a pocket before she left the general’s office.



General Hammond returned to his daily paperwork, marking time until a scheduled appointment with Dr. Fraiser came around. The doctor arrived promptly to make a routine medical report, telling the general that her special patient’s condition remained largely unchanged.

“She’s still unable to sleep, Doctor?” said the general.

“Not without very deep sedation, sir,” said the doctor. “Which is not a long-term solution. It’s as if going to sleep naturally opens the door to her personal chamber of horrors. We’re doing the best we can to let her have a decent amount of rest but it remains a severe problem.”

“Any further information from her?”

“We’ve been able to get our visitor to talk about the people she knew at her SGC, sir,” the doctor reported. “She met you rarely, for instance; when she arrived here on her first day, when she went through the stargate on missions, four times in all, and returned, and twice when you were commending the team’s good work and she was singled out for special praise.”

“The team?” said the general. “SG-One?”

“She was part of what she calls the Trajan Group with Dr. Lee, sir. They worked in the lab area. She met the other Colonel O’Neill very occasionally, and Dr. Jackson more often when he came to consult Dr. Trajan. She doesn’t remember ever meeting the other Teal’c but she does know who he is. She thought that meeting someone from another planet would be pretty much like meeting someone from another country if they’re human stock transplanted and modified by the Goa’uld, but she never got that chance. She also knows who I am; we met socially from time to time in her parallel; but she never had any reason to have a consultation with me.”

“She’s been off-world, you say?”

“Yes, sir. Four times, always on scientific missions and always with Dr. Trajan. She’s nervous about the gate but he’s

obviously not and she takes her cue from him; if he thinks it's safe, she's prepared to risk it."

"Did she give you any details of the missions? Just as a matter of interest."

"No, sir. We were talking about people rather than what she did. But Major Grend of SG-Five was in charge of security on all of them. SG-One was trying to head off the Goa'uld attack."

"But her SGC was betrayed from within," the general said grimly. "Okay, Doctor. No doubt what she did on her missions off-world will come out in due course. Who else does she know?"

"Dr. Carter knows some of the permanent military staff by sight, sir. Mainly the ones who checked her in and out at the main gate. She knows some members of the stores and maintenance staff by name, and some of the Housekeeping people because she worked with them. I'd say she's either been exceptionally well briefed and she's a superb actress, or she really has worked at a version of the SGC."

"I shall add that evidence to the collection, Doctor," said the general.

### **[July 19, Saturday]**

General Hammond responded to a knock on his door with a command to enter. He had chosen to work on a Saturday morning on the understanding that he would be home for lunch.

The visitor was wearing civilian clothing; dark-blue corduroy trousers, a matching long-sleeved, high-neck top and black twin-zip ankle-boots; rather than Air Force-issue garments. He was above average height with cropped blond hair and an athletic build. He moved with the easy grace of someone in good physical condition.

"Ah, Dr. Trajan," said the general. "Come in and take a seat. You're looking a little, well, shell-shocked."

"Being confronted with two Samantha Carters will do that

to you, General,” returned the mathematician. His accent was ‘educated English’.

Dr. Harold Trajan settled on a visitor’s chair and assumed a receptive expression. He still noticed General Hammond’s superficial resemblance to Captain Mainwaring, the bank manager turned warrior in the immortal British television series *Dad’s Army*; only in the case of the general, the bank manager’s bluster was replaced by genuine authority based upon abundant military experience and genuine concern for every member of his command.

“I’ve had a little more time than yourself to adjust to the situation,” the general added, “but my reaction was much the same.”

“Yes, it was really weird. They were obviously two different women when I first saw them. One in uniform fatigues with short hair, the other in hospital scrubs with shoulder-length hair. But then I noticed that the hair was exactly the same colour, and they were the same height when the other one stood up. But there was a little more of the lady wearing glasses than there is of Major Carter, and she looked like she belonged in hospital. Positively haggard. I was still thinking about the description I’d heard; she could be Sam’s sister; the one who got married and had kids and didn’t shed all the weight and became a housewife. Then she put me in a bear hug and spent the next ten minutes crying all over me.”

“I gather she worked very closely with your counterpart in her parallel dimension and he was executed publicly by Apophis himself.”

“Yes, that’s what Sam told me. Which was rather disconcerting to hear about, if not entirely unexpected. I gather you and Colonel O’Neill; or your equivalents; were already dead at that point in the battle. And Teal’c, of course. He would have made sure he wasn’t taken prisoner.”

“I gather Dr. Jackson was on a research trip to Chicago at the time of the attack.”

“I expect he was on Apophis’ hit list too, though.”

“More than likely,” the general said with a nod. “But Dr. Carter stopped crying eventually?”

“Well, yes. When Sammy calmed down a bit, and she got

over her embarrassment, things got even weirder. When the two Carters were talking, I was hearing exactly the same voice from both of them, and they have exactly the same mannerisms. Allowing for Sammy being a lot more deferential, not having had the assertiveness training an Air Force officer like Sam gets. And where she comes from, I was her boss. She also does a lot more nervous smiling. But they look like identical twins when she takes her specs off to polish the lenses.”

“So you’re inclined to believe the dimensional interface story?”

“Well, it does sound incredible enough to be true, General. And Dr. Jackson did come across one of the interface devices in our own parallel. Didn’t it end up in storage at Area Fifty-One?”

“Which is where Dr. Carter and Corporal Sheringham appeared, yes.”

“Which does lend credence to her story. It seems a bit labyrinthine to smuggle her in there with the dying counterpart of a Special Forces NCO if she really is some sort of Goa’uld infiltrator. Just doing a straight swap of her for Sam Carter, and not making a song and dance about it, makes a lot more sense. Although, the weirder the story, the more likely it is to be believed around here. In the light of our weirder experiences over the last few years.”

“Exactly,” said the general with a nod. “So your first impression of her is favourable? No obvious alarm signals?”

“I suppose so. Subject to the fact that I’m still trying to take it all in. The very different circumstances in Sammy’s parallel. She’s a civilian, not in the Air Force, she’s a specialist in spacecraft systems design, rather than an astrophysicist, like Sam, and she’s part of a science team working with myself and Dr. Lee for the main part. And she’s obviously used to being here in the SGC. I remember, I couldn’t get over how metallic it all is for ages; the doors, the big lifts and all the fittings. She just ignores all that.”

“Yes, that’s a common reaction of civilian visitors, focussing on our internal armour plating all the time.”

“But she’s obviously used to it. And she knows her way around specific parts of the science complex, like someone

who works there. She's not one of the SGC-X personnel, of course. In fact, none of us go off-world in her parallel, except in very exceptional circumstances. Although we do have a lot of contact with SG-One. Mainly via their technical expert, Captain Mironova."

"Just as well you speak fluent Russian," said the general.

"So does Sammy, apparently, but our Sam doesn't. Apart from the odd physics-related scraps. I tell you what, General, I was really surprised to hear that the other Colonel O'Neill gets on with Captain Mironova. Russian and a boffin? That's two strikes against her for a start. But I suppose parallel universes will converge and diverge in their own ways."

"I gather you're married in the other parallel," the general said with a smile.

"I am? We didn't get that far. What, to Sammy?"

"No, to a lady who's a movie star and who shares your mathematical talents, which run in her family."

"What have I been doing here, wasting my time in this parallel?"

"Not getting yourself executed by Apophis?"

"Well, yes, there is that," Dr. Trajan admitted.

"Okay, do you have any questions about your assignment?"

"Not at the moment. Major Carter explained it as far as it goes. Mainly, talk to her counterpart over the weekend and see what comes of it. But it's likely to be a slow job. She's still a bit of an emotional wreck at the moment."

"Yes, Dr. Fraiser has read me the riot act about rushing things with her."

"One thing did occur to me. She's definitely not a Goa'uld? I know that sounds a bit obvious . . ."

". . . but it was something worth checking and it was, right away."

"I suppose a Goa'uld infiltrator would have a very limited window of opportunity to do something while everyone here was in a state of shock."

"Opening the iris on the stargate for long enough to let Apophis deliver a nuclear weapon to the gate room wouldn't take very long," the general said.

"Good point," Dr. Trajan said with a nod. "So anyway, I'm

to talk to her and make reports to you?”

“Yes, with particular reference to her work. It occurs to me that your counterparts might have made discoveries which we haven’t made yet.”

“Like a formula for winning the lottery every week? Or a way to harvest zero point energy without have to rely on finding ZPMs? That was a very insightful thought, General. Especially if Sammy is into spacecraft design. She might have had more luck than us in that field.”

“The brass do sometimes do something more than sit at a desk, reading reports,” the general said with mock modesty.

“That’s what I enjoy most about working here,” Trajan returned. “You can get a good idea from anyone because everyone is constantly having to digest the incredible and you just can’t stop thinking, ‘what if?’. Yes, our counterparts are bound to have different priorities, which have made them concentrated on fields we haven’t explored at the expense of ground we’ve covered. Pity we can’t compare notes with more of them.”

“If she’s genuine, Dr. Carter is our only shot at that, Doctor.”

“I imagine she’ll be a bit more forthcoming than the Almed.”

“You’re able to stay here at the SGC to continue to debrief Dr. Carter?” the general asked in a tone which invited no answer but ‘yes’.

“Well, it would be an idea to nip over to my apartment in Silver Spring to pack some things for an extended stay. But there’s nothing other than work at the SGC on the immediate horizon.”

“Good.”

“Actually, it’s quite fascinating, finding out who she knows here.”

“Bear in mind that our main interest is in what she knows that we don’t, rather than who she knows,” the general said with a smile. “I look forward to hearing more from you in due course, Dr. Trajan.”

“Right, General, I’ll get on with it and report back when I have something good to tell you.” Trajan could take a hint.

**[July 20, Sunday]**

It was night in the world outside but deep underground, in the SGC, the concept of day and night had become irrelevant. The brightness of the lights in its many corridors remained a function of the level of use. If there was no traffic through certain section away from main arteries, the lights dimmed automatically to a minimum level and resumed their full brightness only when the system detected the presence of someone who needed to navigate the corridors. Such was the case in the area of the visitors' zone reserved for members of the SGC's civilian staff, like Dr. H.T. Trajan, when their services were required at short notice.

Trajan had been able to mount a mock window on the wall facing the door into his quarters. It measured four feet wide by three feet tall, and it showed a holographic vista of distant hills as seen from his penthouse in Silver Spring, a large town some 30 minutes' drive from the SGC. He was expecting to be one of the first to receive the benefits of 'daylight' panels; technology acquired from the Almed.

The panels would convert electricity into the visible sub-spectrum of sunlight with 99.99% efficiency with no generation of inconvenient infrared, which would add unwanted heat to the environment, and a level of ultra-violet calculated to promote production of vitamin D by the skin without causing tanning and skin cancer.

The new lighting system was expected to make the SGC significantly more user friendly when it was rolled out, and reduce the electricity bill by a huge chunk. One of the main complaints by those Senators who did not appreciate the work of the SGC was that it cost a billion dollars per year just to keep the lights on. Very soon, they would be required to moan about something else.

Dr. Sammy Carter was familiar with the visitor quarters, which had the look of high-quality hotel rooms with artificial windows to reduce the sensation of enclosure. She had worked with the Housekeeping Section at her own SGC to ensure that space management and use of resources were

carried out efficiently, and she had attended many meetings there with visitors from Washington and elsewhere.

She had been told that Dr. Daniel Jackson's den, untypically, was full of stuff: bookcases occupied almost all of the wall space with cabinets of artefacts in between. Dr. Jackson also had three work-tables, all with heaps of stuff on them. She knew that Dr. Trajan's personal space was much less cluttered.

Having spent most of the day there, she knew that Trajan's living area was arranged like a home-office. He had a work area around the desk with its computer terminal, and a hospitality area at the 'window' for conferences. The wall decoration consisted of a poster-size Canaletto of a canal in Venice, a Jackson Pollock drip painting print of similar size and two complex escape-fractal designs in shades of red and yellow with black and silver.

His bookcases featured a collection of science fiction novels and short stories from the 1930s to the 1960s, and he had a fair number of Ace 'doubles'.

The bedroom was 12 feet square, which meant that there was room to move in a space containing what had once been a single bed, a wardrobe, a small chest of drawers and a highly polished wooden chair, which looked antique and very unmilitary.

The walls were decorated with a 1970s Jimi Hendrix poster and two more prints of Trajan's eye-twitching fractal designs. The mathematician had decided that another window here was surplus to requirements.

His apartment's lights were on only in this room at 23:05 hours.

"I feel like Karolin's going to come bursting in here any minute," Sammy Carter said as she and the mathematician made themselves comfortable in the bed, "demanding to know what you're thinking, being in bed with me, but prepared to give you the benefit of the doubt."

"Nice lady."

"You're sure you're okay with this, H.T.?"

"You said the magic words."

"I did?"

“You said, ‘I need your help.’ And we both know that ‘no’ would have been the wrong answer because Rule Number One is you don’t leave anyone behind and Rule One-A is you rally round when someone needs help. Especially if she’s as gorgeous as you are.”

“I don’t feel very gorgeous. And I bet I don’t look very gorgeous. I bet I look like a zombie,” Sammy added with a note of self-analysis.

“You look like you’ve been in the front line and you know exactly what we’re up against, and it’s not going to stop you coming back for more. We’ve all looked like zombies at times, Sammy. But when you’ve had a decent amount of sleep, you’ll be back to gorgeous again.”

“Can I have that in writing?” laughed Sammy. “I just wish I didn’t feel so guilty about being in bed with you and I could enjoy it more.”

“Well, you could always start off with the small step of getting a good night’s sleep and see if you can do enjoyment tomorrow night.”

“That’s going to be a bit of a novelty here,” Sammy Carter said with a note of uncertainty. “A good night’s sleep.”

“You know what, I feel sure Colonel O’Neill will come through that door at any minute,” said Trajan, “see you without your glasses on and shoot me for being in bed with a member of SG-One.”

“Do you like Jack O’Neill?”

“Yes, he’s very okay.”

“What do you like most about him?”

“It’s got to be his sense of humour. It’s very dry and it gets better, the stickier things get. And he’s a real hoot when there’s a Goa’uld about. He really enjoys winding those guys up.”

There was no response from his companion. Trajan was surprised to find that she had slipped off to sleep; and she had probably missed his last pearl of wisdom. Which, he decided, was probably just as well, given her recent experience of the Goa’uld.

[July 21, Monday]

There was the usual mixture of reactions when General Hammond visited the infirmary early on Monday morning. Those who doing jobs which could not be interrupted carried on and ignored the visitor, following protocol. The rest gave their attention to the senior officer until told to carry on.

The diminutive Dr. Fraiser, carrying the inevitable clipboard, ushered the general to her office. She knew what was on his mind, and proved it by getting right down to business as soon as they were sitting at her desk.

“Doing a conventional psych eval on Dr. Carter is a tricky problem, sir,” said the doctor. “We’d have to find someone with the necessary security clearance to be told the background to her recent experiences. And there’s the nightmare of what if she asks for a second opinion?”

“How do you see her mental state, Doctor?” The general tried to keep his tone neutral. Mental problems were a perennial headache for the military.

“She seems to be stable enough at the moment, sir. She suffered the trauma of seeing the man she loved murdered in a parallel dimension, in which he was married to someone else and not available to her. She’s now in the fortunate, if confusing, position of being able to form a relationship with another version of the same man, who’s available and clearly attracted to her.”

“It does sounds like she’s walking through an emotional minefield, Doctor.”

“Yes, sir. But she is with people who are friendly and supportive, and in an environment best suited to helping her to find her feet again. And I was amazed at the improvement in her after just one day and one night in Dr. Trajan’s quarters. Being able to rest properly has transformed her.”

“They do say sleep cures all ills,” said the general. “Nice to know there’s some truth in it.”

“I’ve heard she has information which could be vital to our defences against the Goa’uld, sir. I think, if she can be trusted to do some useful work, that will also speed her recovery.”

“If we can find something with no security implications, we shall, Doctor. How confident do you feel about doing a preliminary psychological evaluation yourself?”

“Well, sir, I have a lot of practical experience in the field but I don’t have recognized qualifications.”

“But you could pick up indications of severe problems right now?”

“Oh, yes, sir. And I could give her trauma counselling. Basically, it’s all down to how resilient she is, whether serious problems develop in the future.”

“I’d like to keep this in-house for the moment, Doctor.”

“Yes, sir. But I’d like to find out if there’s someone we could bring in who’s better qualified.”

“Understood,” said the general. “We always plan for the worst and hope for the best. The Pentagon has come up with the idea of bringing in a social historian to talk to Dr. Carter. Would you have any medical objections to that?”

“To do what exactly, sir?” the doctor asked with a frown.

“To find out if her parallel dodged problems we encountered in ours, or came up with better solutions, or she can point to problems which are likely to crop up unexpectedly here.”

“That sounds very interesting, sir. And it could be therapeutic if done sensitively.”

“I shall insist on proper supervision,” the general promised.

“She’s still a bit jumpy, sir. Loud noises, sudden ones, have more effect on her than on you and me. But reassurance and some gentle teasing by Dr. Trajan are proving effective.”

“I shall arrange for Dr. Trajan to be present at the session, Doctor.”



In the visitor quarters, Dr. Trajan accepted delivery of his guest and nodded thanks to a member of the medical staff, who had brought Dr. Samantha Carter back to his lair. They had enjoyed breakfast together in the mess hall and then Trajan had escorted Dr. Carter to the infirmary for more of the inevitable tests.

Dr. Carter settled on the settee and put on a receptive expression.

“I was half-expecting to have to sign for you,” Trajan said with an apologetic smile. “Can I get you anything? Coffee? Apple juice?”

“No, thanks, I’m good,” Sammy Carter returned.

“Okay, you know what we’re doing now?”

“You’re going to be the good cop who tries to find out if I’m a spy?”

“Or, I’m the SGC Specialist, who asks you what you’ve been doing in the hope of being told about things we haven’t done here, which will help us to keep the Goa’uld at bay.”

“So it’s up to me to come up with something good to justify being here?”

“Actually, as a refugee from a war zone, you just need to convince some burrocrat that you’re entitled to claim asylum.”

“What if I turn out to be a spy and try to get rid of you? Will they court martial you for killing a spy, even if it’s in self-defence?”

“I have no idea about that. But I’m prepared to give you the benefit of the doubt for the moment, Mata Hari.”

“You don’t look too bothered,” Sammy decided.

Trajan shrugged his shoulders. “You had me pretty much at your mercy last night. And yet, I’m still here.”

“Maybe I’m not much good at being a Goa’uld spy and assassin.”

“I’m not complaining,” Trajan said with a laugh. “Okay, what I’m planning to do is ask you about what you’ve been doing at your SGC and take notes on a computer. That way, no one will have to struggle with my handwriting.”

“But you have great handwriting, H.T. Everyone used to say, ‘If that’s Dr. Trajan’s writing, there’s no way he can be a medical doctor.’”

“That’s the kind of detail that reduces the probability that you’re a Goa’uld spy. Good. We’re making progress.” Trajan wheeled a low trolley bearing a desktop computer and a monitor over to the settee. “I’ve chosen this in preference to a laptop because there’s a keyboard with a long lead. Which

means I can pass it to you if there's something that would be better typed by you."

"Good idea," Sammy approved. "Where do you want me to start?"

"Let's recap what you told me last night about how we met and what we did at your SGC, and take it from there," Trajan suggested.

"Sounds like a plan," Sammy agreed.



# Seeking A Direction

[July 22, Tuesday, morning]

Running through her mind a list of the things which she was hoping to achieve during the day, Major Samantha Carter headed for the mess hall at Stargate Command and breakfast. She spotted Dr. Harold Trajan, who appeared to be more interested in the fine structure of his slices of toast than in eating them.

“Mind if I join you?” she said as she placed her tray on his table. “You’re looking puzzled.”

“Some idiot believes you can find Fibonacci series in the structure of toasted bread,” Trajan returned. “But I’m not seeing it.”

“Maybe you need glasses.”

“I think the idiot must have been emptying them. You’re looking like someone with something on her mind,” Trajan added, turning his attention to his breakfast companion.

“All on your own?”

“Some of us have fasting blood samples to donate to Doc Fraiser and will be catching up later.”

“I hear you’re sleeping with my dimsis.” Major Carter was careful to keep her tone light rather than accusatory.

“Oh?” Trajan said with a smile. “No, I’m sitting here, talking to you, actually,” he added, being literal.

The major offered the Carter Look of patience and disapproval.

“Have I ever told you how well you do that?” Trajan said with a laugh. “Have you got my quarters bugged?”

The Look continued relentlessly.

“Actually, it’s the other way round.”

“What is?” Carter said with a frown.

“She’s sleeping with me. You know about your dimensional sister’s nightmares? As soon as she closes her eyes, she’s back

at her SGC with Goa'uld and Jaffa coming out of the woodwork and shooting everyone? And sleeping pills don't agree with her? As a result, she's not been getting anywhere near enough sleep to function properly."

"Yes, I know Janet has been struggling to find a satisfactory solution to the problem. Although, Sammy was looking a hell of a lot better when I caught a glimpse of her a few minutes ago, as she was on her way to the infirmary. I didn't recognize her until she said hello. She was wearing clothes; well, not hospital scrubs; and a labcoat."

"Yes, I went into Silver Spring yesterday and did some shopping for her. And I got her the labcoat from stores so she looks like she works here, not like a tourist. She wears it until seventeen-hundred, and when she takes it off, it's just the two of us hanging out and getting to know each other. She realized she was missing the pockets."

"Yes, I know the feeling well. And she was wearing a really elegant sapphire chip necklace."

"Again, that's something the civilian staff wear; personal jewellery, like her necklace."

"That necklace looks like it belongs in a safe when Sammy's not wearing it. If the sapphires are real."

"If they're not, the lady who made it will get her ass sued out of business. I was also trying to do morale-building; letting her know she's the sort of person who deserves to be wearing a posh necklace."

"You mean, you put it on expenses?"

"Come on, Samantha," Trajan said with a laugh. "Can you imagine the general signing a chit for something like that?"

"So you bought it for her?"

"In the interests of harmonious relations with my roommate."

"Can I move in with you?" laughed Carter.

"Yeah, I'm sure the general would stand for that," laughed Trajan.

"You said she's sleeping with you? Not the other way round?" Major Carter returned to the original query. "She mentioned she'd moved in with you to be able to get some sleep; presumably, to explain why she was on her way to the

infirmary just now.”

“It must have been on the day after I met her. Sunday. She turned up at my quarters in the morning looking like . . . not death warmed up. Like that but without the warmed-up bit. She was embarrassed about inflicting herself on me when she looked like hell. So I told her she’d been through hell and she was entitled to look it. Because our relationship lets us that honest with each other, apparently.”

“It must be a bit confusing for you, having a completely different relationship with another me that only she knows about.”

“Tell me about it,” Trajan said with a wry smile. “She sounds so like you when she speaks, I keep having to check she’s wearing specs to be sure it isn’t you.”

“She had no trouble finding you?”

“She knows her way around the SGC; she’s been working here for as long as I have; and she’s been to the visitors’ quarters lots of times to see visiting dignitaries. But I think she was a bit surprised to find that some civilian staff are assigned digs there for when they can’t get back to Silver Spring.”

“To your luxury penthouse apartment?” laughed Carter.

“A little luxury never hurt anyone, Sam. And you have to spend your vast government salary on something.”

“Some vaster than others.”

“Appreciation is rarely in proportion to contribution,” Trajan said with a smile.

“You were saying about Sammy?” prompted Carter. “Looking like hell?”

“Oh, yes. She told me she looked like hell because she’d only had about an hour’s natural sleep since she got here because of the nightmares. I think she’d mentioned them the day before, when I first met her, but I was still a bit jet-lagged myself after some exceedingly long work sessions with the Almed boffins, and I didn’t take it in properly.”

“General Hammond mentioned you looked like hell when you got back from there.”

“There’s a lot of it about. Anyhow, Sammy went on to tell me she’d come to the only place in the SGC where she could count on getting sensitivity and sympathy. Which turned out

to be the old Carter sarcasm delivered at full blast through a charming smile.”

“I’ve never seen myself as a sarcastic person,” Carter protested.

“You’re not,” Trajan hastened to assure her. “But Sammy and my dimensional brother seem to have developed friendly sarcasm to a fine art. Apparently, my dimbro’s wife, and a friend of hers called Marge, are also experts at it. We’d just about got that straightened out when my phone rang, so I took the call in the bedroom in case it was about something a spy shouldn’t hear.”

“You don’t really think she’s a spy, do you?”

“I hope not. But I’m not really qualified to find that out. Anyway, when I got back to Sammy, she was fast asleep.”

“She was sleeping with you in your work room? I get that now.”

“And it left me with a problem.”

“Whether to wake her up to prevent another nightmare or let her get some much-needed sleep?”

“Exactly. So I came up with a good old British compromise. She was on the settee, so I got her a pillow and a blanket, removed her shoes, manoeuvred her onto her side and let her sleep, planning to wake her up if she started screaming. Which she didn’t.”

“She always does that in the medical centre, Janet says. Wake up screaming. And quite quickly.”

“She arrived at my quarters at about ten o’clock in the morning and she was still asleep at one-thirty, when Doc Bronski dropped by to round her up for some tests. But he decided it would be best to let her carry on sleeping, so he did the nightmare-watch while I nipped round to the PMR for a carry-out lunch. Sammy didn’t wake up until about four o’clock. No longer looking quite as like hell and feeling almost human again. So she had a quick wash and brush-up and we headed for the PMR to get her a late lunch before she checked in at the infirmary. It seems they also call the mess hall the Posh Military Restaurant where Sammy comes from. Well, the civilian staff do.”

“Sounds like it’s a Universal Trajanism.”

“I must remember that,” laughed Trajan.

“So you’ve solved the sleep problem? Letting her use your couch during the day?”

“For Count Dracula, maybe.”

“Good point,” laughed Carter.

“This next bit is confidential medical information, okay? Not to be divulged to anyone else? Stuff Sammy doesn’t mind you knowing but which would be too embarrassing for her to tell you herself.”

“So you are sleeping with my dimsis.”

“She went back to the infirmary while I had a video conference with some Almed boffins, who don’t seem to know that Specialists are supposed to have Sunday evenings off. But as they don’t have weekends like ours on their planet, I suppose it’s fair enough. She turned up again at about ten-thirty, about ten minutes after I’d got back.”

“Having to wear your uniform for contacts with them probably confuses the Almed about your status,” Carter pointed out.

“Yes, I suppose it is basically a good idea to let them know I’m subject to military discipline, not a free-lancer, and any negotiations have to be done with my boss, the general. Anyway, I’d just changed back into civvies when Sammy turned up. With a carrier bag. She reckoned that if I’m there when she’s sleeping, she won’t have nightmares about that sod Apophis blowing me away with a staff weapon and enjoying every microsecond of it.”

“How does she know you’re there if she’s asleep?” Carter asked with a frown.

“A question I asked her myself. She just gave me the Carter Look and said it worked earlier on.”

“She had a point there.”

“Then I found out that her carrier bag was full of night attire and toothbrushes and a spare set of surgical scrubs for the next day. Being gentlemanly, I offered her the bedroom. But she told me we’re consenting adults and there’s no reason why we couldn’t both use the bed. Then she quoted some study she’d found on Doc Fraiser’s medical computer about how couples in the same bed share parallel posture and

synchronized sleeping mode, or some such.”

“Oh!”

“I didn’t like to mention that these studies are just like the Bible; if you look hard enough, you can find one to make any case you want.”

“Probably not something she wanted to hear. So when we’re talking about sleeping with, it is actually with her?” the major added with a smile.

“I did mention it might be a bit of a tight squeeze for two of us in a standard bunk, and I start wondering if we could sneak out of the SGC to my apartment in Silver Spring. But she had an answer to that. Did you know some of the single beds in the visitors’ quarters can be expanded?”

“News to me,” said Carter.

“And to me. But she went into the bedroom with me trailing in her wake, and after a bit of pushing and pulling, we suddenly had a bed that was over fifty per cent wider than it had been before. So I told her she’s a genius; but she probably knew that.”

“How did Sammy know about the expanding bed?”

“One of her friends got lucky with a visiting engineer who knew the mysterious process, she said. But she seemed as surprised as I was that it worked on my bed. That problem solved, she started unpacking her carrier bag.”

“You didn’t have a fit of modesty at that point?” Carter said with a laugh.

“My mind was still boggling at such a fine example of the Carter spirit in action. She was feeling ragged at every edge available but she’d thought about the problem and came up with a fix to try. As she told me the next day, it was either that or try to take an overdose of something because she didn’t want to go on living feeling so terrible. That’s in strictest confidence, Sam. Okay?”

“Agreed. Things must have been really bad for her.”

“She felt she was going out of her mind but she was still together enough to work out an alternative. And when I realized this wasn’t someone making it up as she went along, it was Sam Carter working through one of her projects, I also realized I’d have to be a real asshole to rain on her parade.”

“So you went along with the plan.”

“That was no hardship when the lady has the Carter looks, brains and personality. But I did ask her if she was sure I don’t snore. Or had she ever slept with my counterpart? She reminded me I’m married in her parallel and that was never likely to happen, so I’m was unknown quantity, snore-wise, but she was prepared to risk it. I didn’t mention our history, yours and mine, of sleeping together.”

“Not much of one, is it?” laughed Carter.

“Not if we’ve always done it fully clothed and on the run on some alien planet. And with the rest of SG-One.”

“But we don’t snore.”

“Either that, or everyone else has been too polite to mention it if we do. I also warned Sammy of the obvious hazard of getting into bed with someone who thinks she’s the other most beautiful woman in the galaxy. So she got very embarrassed and told me it’s something she’s wanted to do since she first met my counterpart, about five years ago.”

“I suppose sharing a confidence like that could be a reaction to seeing you again, alive and okay, after watching Apophis blow you away. Did she have a nightmare?”

“If she did, it wasn’t loud enough to wake me up. And as she didn’t look like hell the next morning, I assumed she didn’t. That was when it occurred to me that sleeping with her was as likely to give me nightmares as stopping hers. But I didn’t like to mention it.”

“That’s heading toward the dangerous question of who’s the dominant partner in your relationship.”

“Actually, you’d have to say it’s her right now. At the moment, I’m just standing on the sidelines, watching in amazement as all sorts of weird things going on around me.”

“Poor you,” laughed Carter.

“And Sammy had something other than nightmares on her mind the next morning. No sooner had she started to feel a bit comfortable than reality started to bite.”

“Oh?”

“She realized that she was in bed with a bloke she didn’t really know on a strange world, and she didn’t even have the clothes she was standing up in when she arrived. Mainly

because they were all torn and bloody and they ended up in the incinerator at the hospital in Nevada. And all her stuff is on a planet occupied by the Goa'uld in a parallel dimension. When you come right down to it, she's as alone as anyone can be."

"Apart from being in a safe environment with people who consider her a friend. Some a lot more friendly than others, apparently."

"Apart from that."

"But I agree, she has every right to feel a bit freaked."

"Right. When you think about it, she has absolutely nothing but the goodwill of the people here to rely on. No job, no money, no passport, no right to be in this reality even. She has to start from scratch. With no recognized qualifications or job history. It's a pretty frightening place to be."

"She wasn't wearing scrubs when I saw her just now. She was wearing some really smart clothes."

"Yesterday was *Operation Normal*. Sammy negotiated with Housekeeping for more furniture and she got one of my walls pushed back to make the living room cum office bigger. She knows all about that stuff," Trajan added in response to Major Carter's look of surprise. "Then I went into Silver Spring and bought her some clothes so she looks like someone who works here. I used one of the portable camera systems to buy a load of stuff with the help of some shop assistants, who found the concept of remote shopping really fascinating. And I got her a watch, and a wallet so she can go and buy stuff at the PX, and some other stuff."

"If you're coming up with ideas like that, no wonder Sammy wanted to move in with you," laughed Carter.

"Which is a bit of a responsibility, though," Trajan admitted. "I tend to feel a bit like I'm walking a tightrope. I don't want to lead her on and take her someplace where she'll end up stranded. But at the same time, I do feel a real connection to her."

"Yes, I've noticed. You're a natural couple. Janet says you have complementary talents and harmonious personalities."

"Have you two been discussing us?"

"Wouldn't you find it strange if we hadn't?"

“Yes, I suppose I would. And this could be a good time for me to ask what’s it like for you to have another version of yourself swanning around?”

“It’s definitely weird,” Carter admitted. “But probably not as weird as it could have been if she’d really been another me. An exact copy.”

“She’s another version of you, not a duplicate? So she doesn’t know all your embarrassing secrets and your private hopes and dreams?”

“That sort of thing, yes. She’s more like a twin sister than a recent clone with all the same memories. But the important thing is that Sammy now has a natural solution to her nightmares problem, which doesn’t involve taking drugs.”

“I’m sure Doc Fraiser will think so.”

“And you’re both happy with the solution?”

“She is. And I can’t complain if all I have to do is cohabit with someone who’s female, highly intelligent, beautiful, if in a haggard sort of way right now, and she thinks she knows what makes me tick and she isn’t bothered by any of it. And as a bonus, she has this incredible tale to tell about how our lives could have gone but didn’t. Except where she comes from.”

“There, and a collection of close parallels to hers.”

“Well, yes. It’s all very weird. And as another bonus, she isn’t constrained by military considerations, like being on the same SG team from time to time.”

“So you two can have pillow talk about structure and loopholes in the laws of physics?”

“We haven’t really had much pillow talk. She’s like you; she can just drop off very quickly. Like, asleep about two minutes after her head hits the pillow. I don’t know how you two do it.”

“Catching up, in Sammy’s case.”

“Maybe. But when she was awake, I was able to find out that, strange as it may seem, fifty per cent of the Carters I know don’t believe the Universe and I have cooked up a vast conspiracy to make Samantha Carter’s life miserable. She doesn’t take someone finding structure in the laws of physics as a personal affront.”

“Actually, I don’t any more. I just like to watch you struggle not to laugh when I get indignant about your loopholes.”

“Aha! A manifestation of the Carter wind-up gene.”

Trajan received another helping of the Carter Look.

“I admit that would be Carterocentric to the point of insane vanity,” the major added with a laugh. “But I’m still not completely convinced about your idea of structure.”

“And you reckon Sammy could be predisposed to go along with it because her relationship with my other self could cloud her judgement?”

“Well, there is that.”

“But you’ll also admit that Sammy is as intelligent and level-headed as yourself, and not easily bamboozled? And that she and my other self had a relationship which could survive one of them being utterly wrong about a matter of fact?”

“I get that she’s probably in love with the other Dr. Trajan. And heading in that direction with you.”

“Actually, our talk other than pillow has a broader scope than the laws of physics and our respective previous lives. General Hammond has tasked me with picking Sammy’s brains for stuff she knows about spacecraft design that we don’t know. And mathematical stuff my counterpart has explored but I haven’t.”

“Yes, I know. Have you got anything good yet?”

“A couple of good ideas in the maths department. Which brings up an ethical problem. Whether it’s right for me to take the credit for discoveries made by an alternative me in a parallel universe.”

“They’re still your discoveries. Not the you you we all know and love, but a you, none the less. And you would have come up with them if you’d been aimed in that direction.”

“So would any of a couple of dozen other mathematicians. And there’s also the credibility issue. I might end up trying to publish an amount of work that no one person could do and stay sane. So putting the stuff in the SGC databank could lead to complications.”

“What’s your solution?”

“There isn’t one at the moment. I’ve just dumped it on the management to see what they can come up with. I’ve also

spent a fair bit of time telling her what I know about your life and career, given that most of it is too top secret for me to know, and she's been telling me about this mythical billionaire, who's married to a film star where she comes from."

"I bet that was really weird," Carter said with a laugh. "Having a whole married life only Sammy knows about." She glanced at the wall clock. "Time I was getting back to work."

"Back to playing with your Almed gadget? How's that going?"

"It's up and running very nicely. That was the easy bit. But my real job is to quote address the fabrication issues unquote to find out if we can make another one ourselves."

"Which we probably can't without more help from the Almed? Our technology being fifty to a hundred years behind theirs in places."

"I very much doubt it. And, of course, I'm still having to pretend I don't have the full set of manuals you acquired and I'm having to try to make it look like I'm figuring a lot of it out for myself. Which is really making my head hurt. When I have to ask the Almed a question, I'm sure they have a mental check-list operating. We were expecting her to ask that, but why hasn't she asked this?"

"You don't have to be paranoid to work here, but it helps?" Trajan said with a laugh.

"True," Carter said with a smile.

"I'm afraid figuring out where the Almed are going next with the technology will make your head hurt even more. I got the impression that if the gadget you got will provide a defence shield around a rowing boat, the Almed's next generation will be able to protect a sizeable spaceship."

"Except that it will be fun, working it out," Carter said with a bright smile. "And I'll have your math as a starting point."

"Good luck with that," Trajan said with an answering smile "See you later, alligator."

"In a while, crocodile," laughed Carter. "Oh, yes. I've just thought of this: what about the mattress? It would have been too small for an expanded bed."

"I was just about to point that out when Sammy started

taking the settee to bits for extra parts until we could get a bigger mattress from Housekeeping. Don't forget, this is Sam Carter, acknowledged genius and national treasure, working through a plan that we're talking about, not someone with a spur-of-the-moment vague idea."

**[July 23, Wednesday, morning]**

Dr. Samantha Carter was feeling fully rested and restless as she began her second week at the SGC in a parallel reality. Colonel O'Neill joined her and her host at breakfast in the mess hall, and confirmed that he, like his counterpart, enjoyed the activity of fishing and he did not see the lack of fish in his lake as a disadvantage.

Back in the visitor quarters, Sammy flicked through news channels on the internet whilst her host put in an hour's work on a report. Then they changed into tracksuits and reported to the gymnasium complex.

"Dr. Trajan, we'll start off with five miles, sir," said his usual D.I., who looked as tough and intimidating as any Jaffa. "And Dr. Carter? Sergeant Cheroke, ma'am, your drill instructor."

"Pleased to meet you, Sergeant. I hope," Sammy added with mock nervousness.

"Just a brisk stroll for you, ma'am. While Dr. Trajan is suffering. No slacking, sir."

"Ja, boss," Trajan murmured, settling his backpack into place as his treadmill began to move.

"You also need to requalify at the LFR, sir."

"Okay, next month do you?"

"This week would be good."

"You actually have a slot lined up for me, don't you?"

"If you leave here at eleven-hundred on Thursday, Almed permitting, you'll be back long before their alarm clocks go off, sir."

"Right, thank you, Sergeant," Trajan said after consulting his pocket diary.

“I’ll send you an email of confirmation, sir,” said the sergeant.

“You don’t have to call me sir, you know.”

“No, sir. And you don’t have to call Colonel O’Neill and General Hammond sir. But . . .”

“It seems appropriate quite a lot of the time.”

“Perhaps you’d remind Dr. Trajan about slacking, ma’am?” the drill sergeant added.

“Okay,” laughed Sammy. “What’s an LFR?” she added as the sergeant left to tackle his next customer.

“Live Firing Range,” said Trajan. “It’s like going down the gym to suffer a bit only with bullets flying around. Something it’s advisable to know how to do when you’re liable to be sent off-planet with an SG team on a dodgy mission.”

“Will I have to do that?”

“Only if you’re expecting the team leader to put you on point in hostile territory.”

“Like that would happen,” laughed Sammy. “Whatever that is.”

“So you’re not likely to have Sergeant Colb chasing you at the LFR.”

“Is that heavy? The pack?”

“It’s loaded with fifty pounds of the finest alluvial gravel, which moulds to your body instead of forming spiky clumps, like quarry gravel.”

Sammy pulled a face. “It’s still fifty pounds.”

“If I were one of the military mob, it would be eighty.”

“Remind me not to sign up,” laughed Sammy.

The exercise period completed, Trajan and his guest moved on the mess hall for lunch. Sammy called a greeting to Major Grend of SG-5 before she realized that they had never met before. Intrigued, he joined them at their table, eager to get to know the mysterious visitor.

“Where I came from, we went out with you on four stargate missions to recover crashed Goa’uld death gliders,” Sammy explained. “With SG-Six and Eleven.”

“We?”

“The other Dr. Trajan and me. And four technical staff.

Your brother was playing for the Minnesota Vikings at the time and you talked a lot of football with the husband of the world's number one Packers fan."

"He's still there," said Grend. "Outside linebacker. Was the other Dr. Trajan a big fan of the CFL, like this one?"

"He and his wife used to go and watch the Argos if they were in Toronto on a match day, but he wasn't really a fanatic."

"You know, it's kind of weird, meeting someone who knows me but I've never met her."

"You think it's weird?" Trajan said with a laugh. "She knows my entire life history because we had a completely different relationship where she comes from. Much more social life. It's like being talking to a psychic. I know embarrassingly little about her because Major Carter and I are much more work-oriented and we don't do much hanging out together."

"Spooky," said Major Grend. "Did you work out the stargate dialling protocols where you were?"

"No, that was Wanda," said Sammy. "Dr. Wanda Harthorn? The female Einstein?"

"She died of a heart attack ten years ago here," said Trajan. "I was at the funeral. A great loss."

"She had heart problems but they were fixed," said Sammy. "She had a reputation as one of the most difficult people to work with that you can imagine. You're one of the few people who can talk to her for any length of time without wanting to punch her in the face."

"Sounds like a certain Dr. McKay," murmured Trajan "Only he's more annoying than brilliant most of the time."

"Oh, she's brilliant, all right," said Sammy. "The Air Force was prepared to go to any lengths to keep her on the job of getting our stargate working without a DHD. Karolin once told me she used to ring you at all hours of the day. And night. You'd tell her, 'It's the middle of the bloody night, Wanda.' And she'd say, 'I know that, Harold, but I'm close to a breakthrough and you need to focus.'"

"I bet that made her real popular with my wife."

"Actually, Karolin was one of the few people Wanda really

liked. She always apologized to Karolin for the late-night calls.”

“I heard the other Dr. Trajan’s wife is a movie star,” said Major Grend.

“A very successful one,” said Sammy.

“And the two of you are worth billions, Dr. Trajan?” the major added. “How does a guy do that?”

“You do work that makes getting a patent possible on, say, a new catalyst for an industrial process, and take a royalty of a few cents a pound on chemicals which are made by the billion tons over the years. Or you do contract work in developing products which generate millions and billions of dollars in sales.”

“So how come you’re not doing that here?” said Major Grend.

“Because I’m saving the planet here, like the rest of the people at the SGC,” said Trajan. “And not doing that much contract work. And I don’t need billions of dollars any more than the other Dr. Trajan.”

“He and his wife give most of it away,” Sammy explained. “A lot of it to the V.A. They usually keep a million dollars of what they earn and give the rest away. Usually about three hundred million dollars.”

“A year?” said Major Grend incredulously.

“Every year,” Sammy said with a nod.

“How the other half live, eh?” said Trajan.

“What is it you English guys say?” laughed Major Grend. “My mind’s boggling. How many missions did you do with SG-One?”

“None,” said Sammy. “They were all with you in charge. Things were getting very desperate and SGs One to Four were trying to head off the Goa’uld attack on Earth. Well, you all were when you weren’t on technical missions like mine. We were trying to make a difference. But we didn’t manage it.”

“That’s a thought to keep us motivated,” said Major Grend.

“It certainly has that effect on me,” said Sammy.

After the meal, Trajan pointed to the right after they left the mess hall to indicate that the next stop was the visitor quarters again, which meant the inevitable lift journey.

“What now?” said Sammy.

“I want to do another hour or so on that report I’m writing, if that’s okay with you?”

“I just need to be in the same room with you. I don’t want to interrupt your work, but I do need you nearby.”

“You’re using me as an anchor? If you know where I am, you know where you are?”

“That’s very poetical and philosophical.”

“That’s what mathematicians are, the natural philosophers and poets of the universe.”

“Well, you’re right. I hope it doesn’t sound too silly?”

“It’s psychological. Anything goes there. After the report, I have a meeting with Bill Lee. Which I’d like to take you along to because you could well have a useful contribution to make.”

“I might have been working on something that’s useful to him?”

“That’s the theory of it.”

“Sounds good to me.”

“After that, I have some work to do on something for one of the Almed physicists. And after that . . .”

“You have some CFL catching up to do, so that’s snacks at your digs?”

“Unless you’re allergic to the Canadian brand of American football.”

“You know, I’ve not really seen that much of it. It might even be quite interesting.”

“You will let me know if you get too bored?”

“Let’s find out if I do get bored.”

“Okay. So what’s your typical day like?” Trajan asked.

“Work to lunchtime. I sometimes work through lunch but I usually go to the PMR with our Dr. Trajan. The main meetings are in the afternoons to let people from the Pentagon travel in the company’s time rather than their own. And then, at the end of the working day, everyone goes back to Silver Spring.”

“Instead of spending the night under a mountain?”

“Actually,” said Sammy, “that’s not too bad with the right company. I’ve never been here this long before.”

“Lucky you.”

“In fact, the only time I ever went home on a different day from the one I signed in on was our second glider mission, when we went out in the evening, Earth time, and got back the next morning.”

“Are you going stir-crazy, Sammy?”

“No, not yet. I never knew there was so much interesting stuff going on behind the scenes, where I never went before.”

“That’s good.”

“Actually, I think I need to apologize to the Universe. I can’t believe how ungrateful I’m being. The Universe has got me shackled with the man of my dreams and I keep going stir crazy and wanting out of here.”

“Maybe you should get your head examined?” Trajan suggested.

“Yeah, right,” laughed Sammy.

“Actually, I think the shrink would tell you that the human spirit reacts badly to confinement. Even if you’re somewhere you want to be, if you’re told you have to stay there, the human spirit immediately starts looking for a way out.”

“Some people are never satisfied, you mean?”

“More they don’t like being bossed about and told you will stay here, even if you’re enjoying it.”

“I’m just worried in case you get stir-crazy and I’m left on my own here. Well, without you.”

“Actually, I’ve never been here for more than a week at a stretch before you arrived. And I’ve never had a roomie before. Especially such an irresistible female roomie.”

“So you don’t mind me inflicting myself on you?”

“Hardly, You’re the most interesting person on the planet.”

“Flattery will get you everywhere.”

“Good, that’s what I was hoping,” laughed Trajan. “My only problem is working out how much of what you’re telling me is made up.”

“Surprisingly little,” Sammy returned with a laugh.

“If you’d been on the ball, you’d have said we were married

where you come from and you lost your wedding ring along the way.”

“But I wasn’t on the ball.”

“Which gave you added credibility.”

“Which would have been blown to bits when you found out I didn’t know all that much about someone I was supposed to be married to. Apart from work stuff.”

“You could say it was very sudden and very recent, the marriage. And you’d not had time for an in-depth study of the other me.”

“Except, I’d never have thought of that. I’d be crap as a spy.”

“Which is exactly what a master-spy would want us to believe.”

“Do you think I’m a spy?”

“It’s certainly a great conspiracy theory. You attach yourself to someone on the inside at the SGC, such as a bloke who’s likely to find you irresistible. That’s a very sound strategy for a spy. But if the alleged spy gets close to me, I’m also close to her and able to see what she’s really like. And everything I’ve seen tells me that my roomie is another Sam Carter, not a Goa’uld spy.”

“That’s a relief.”

“But the problem is, my opinion plus a two-dollar bill are worth about two bucks.”

“I’d give you an argument about that.”

“Oh, yes,” Trajan added, “and you don’t know about my tattoos because you were married to a different version of me?”

“I can’t imagine any version of you that works at the SGC having tattoos. And I thought this was supposed to be a serious discussion?”

“Oh? Whatever gave you that idea?” Grinning, Trajan pushed open the door of his quarters and let the guest go first.

“Wow! Who bought the florist’s?” Sammy stopped abruptly three steps into the room. She changed course to the cupboard beneath the synthetic window to admire the trio of pot plants. “Here, these flowers aren’t very real,” she noticed.

“The lights keep going off in empty rooms,” said Trajan,

“and real plants don’t thrive if they’re left in the dark most of the time.”

“They look real enough from a distance, though.”

“There’s a colony of craft-workers in Silver Spring, which includes the mother of one of the corporals in Housekeeping. I asked Major Sam what her taste in house plants is and placed a special order.”

“So you’re useful as well as decorative?”

Sammy burst into laughter when Trajan tried to give her The Look.



Half an hour went by. Then General Hammond arrived with an important visitor. Professor Judith Yu was one of the nation’s leading social historians. Her family had a long history in the Intelligence business and she had acquired sufficient security clearance, through her consultancy work, to be told about the stargate project. She was a respected academic in her mid-fifties, and she had the lean and somewhat hungry look of someone who led an active life and did a lot of snacking on the move.

The professor had been given access to edited versions of some of Dr. Trajan’s debriefings, and she wanted to clarify various points. Not much was happening at the SGC and the general was interested to hear how his own version of the universe differed from Dr. Carter’s.

The interview lasted three-quarters of an hour. General Hammond fielded five telephone calls during this period, but nothing which needed his personal attention on the spot.

When Professor Yu had completed her notes, Dr. Trajan took her along the corridor to a data centre, where she could make print-outs in a format which left room for copious notes.

“Do you find you’re starting to feel integrated into this SGC?” the general asked whilst waiting for the visitor to return.

“Sort of,” said Sammy. “Apart from living here with Dr. Trajan and not doing any work. That’s really strange.”

“But apart from that?” laughed the general.

“I still can’t get my head around H.T. going out on missions with SG teams. Dangerous ones, I mean, where he gets shot at. I can’t imagine our Jack O’Neill having two civilian nerds in his team, H.T. and Daniel.”

“I remember, I once did a value assessment with Colonel O’Neill about Dr. Trajan,” said the general. “Jack’s main objection to having him on the team was that he encouraged Dr. Jackson.”

“In what way?” Sammy asked with a frown.

“By taking an interest in the artefacts Dr. Jackson was studying and asking what the colonel calls ‘Trajan questions’.”

“The colonel doesn’t like them?”

“Well, instead of asking Dr. Jackson what an artefact made of gold is worth, Dr. Trajan will ask rather searching questions about how it was made and so on. He and Dr. Jackson tend to get involved in discussions of that sort, which take their minds off the mission.”

“Mad Scientist Syndrome?” Sammy suggested with a smile. “Yes, I can see how that would annoy the colonel.”

“But Dr. Trajan does have a significant redeeming feature; a firm grasp of the concept of a chain of command and a willingness to accept military discipline in the field. If he is told to wait at a stargate and dial Earth and go home if no one else shows up within thirty minutes, that’s what he will do. Maybe he’ll wait a minute or two longer, but he always follows the order.”

“And that’s something the military values?”

“It means that after the half-hour is up, Colonel O’Neill knows exactly where Dr. Trajan will be.”

“One less variable in the equation of survival?”

“Exactly.”

“I gather that doesn’t apply to Daniel, though?”

“Dr. Jackson is more inclined to use his own judgement and ignore orders he thinks are wrong. Whereas Dr. Trajan understands that the whole system collapses if people don’t follow orders, even when he thinks the person in charge is wrong. He does air his misgivings, but he does respect the chain of command.”

“I suppose that’s a hazard of taking non-military people

along on missions,” Sammy decided. “They don’t have military discipline drilled into them and not all of them will get it. Although, having said that, Colonel O’Neill isn’t exactly a paragon when it comes to following orders, from what I’ve heard.”

“As always, we have to balance strengths and well, not weaknesses, more irregularities,” the general replied. “And if we can strike the right balance, we tend to succeed.”

“And that’s your job, General? From the length of time you’ve been in command here, I suspect you’re good at it.”

“Modesty forbids,” the general said with a smile.

The arrival of Professor Yu with a sheaf of notes brought the session to a close. Trajan fielded a phone call as the visitors were leaving, then he put on an apologetic expression. “I have to disappear for half an hour,” he explained. “I’ll meet you in the PMR when I’ve finished.”

“Check,” said Sammy.

“You remember what the PMR is?”

“The Posh Military Restaurant. What my Dr. Trajan calls the mess hall.”

“Check,” Trajan said with a smile. “See you later.”

Dr. Carter returned the smile then she began to flick through a summary of their latest debriefing session, looking for places where she could add more detail.



# Political Intrusion

[July 23, Wednesday, evening]

SG-1 received a lengthy briefing during the afternoon. The team was due to go out on the mission early the next day, and they were over-nighting at the SGC. Dr. Trajan decided to hold a coffee and cake evening for them as a means of helping his guest to get to know better four extremely important people in his life.

Colonel O'Neill was grateful for the chance to do nothing much for a while as he and team, minus Teal'c, headed for the visitor quarters. He was feeling 'informationed out' to an unusual degree. He was sure that Dr. Jackson was feeling the same. Major Carter had just absorbed her technical briefing in the usual Carter fashion. It was impossible to tell what Teal'c was feeling but his need to take some time for one of the Jaffa personal meditation rituals suggested that he too was feeling a need to decompress.

"I'm sure Sammy would have enjoyed our briefing session with Dr. Klute," Carter remarked, reading the team-leader's body language.

"I don't doubt that," said O'Neill. "She speaks the language. But when I listen to Trajan and your other self talking, the only words I understand are 'the', 'and' and the 'no ways' she keeps saying. It's just like that when I listen to Trajan telling you something nerdy. Except, she sits a lot closer to him than you do. And to Daniel."

"No questions of military protocol involved, sir."

"That's true. It's so strange, seeing an unmilitary version of you, Carter. You look at her and you think 'Who's that?' But if you listen to her, you know it's Sam Carter. The voice is exactly the same. That's how spookily alike you are. Can you imagine what his wife would think about how close she sits to him? And that's another thing; can you imagine Dr. nerd

Trajan married to a movie star?”

“You don’t have to imagine our Trajan married to a movie star, Jack,” said Daniel Jackson. “That’s another version of him. Just like our Trajan isn’t cohabiting with Sam; Sammy is another version of her.”

“Which is even more complicated,” O’Neill complained.

“Don’t blame us, blame the Universe,” laughed Carter. “And the other Trajan’s wife is a mathematician too. It runs in her family. So there must be enough of a nerd behind the pretty face to keep him interested.”

Colonel O’Neill staged a mock shiver. “All this parallel dimension stuff is weird.”

“But fascinating,” Carter added.

“You do talk to him in much the same way, Sam,” Daniel mentioned.

“Really?” Carter said sceptically.

“Okay, dial down the adoration quite a few notches,” Daniel added with a smile, “but you laugh and joke with H.T. just like Sammy, and you both wind each other up by being outrageous. She does it more because she knows him a lot better, but you’re pretty comfortable with him now.”

“I guess watching the two of them makes me feel a bit awkward and self-conscious,” Carter admitted. “It’s like watching *Sam Carter, The Movie*, with really good casting.”

“Like watching someone dating your twin sister?” Daniel suggested.

“Who’s also called Samantha?” said O’Neill.

“I think Jack was exactly right with weird,” Daniel said with a laugh.

The group reached Dr. Trajan’s semi-permanent apartment in the visitor quarters and found that he had acquired more chairs and tables, and another window, which offered a view over a sunny beach of pure white sand with sparkling surf breaking in the middle distance.

“Is this for Sammy?” Major Carter asked as she studied the holographic properties of the display. “It’s not exactly your taste, H.T.”

“Yes, she picked the program because she likes watching the surf,” said Trajan. “How did you know?”

“I know more about your tastes after two or three days of chats with Sammy than after four years of working with you,” said Carter.

“Well, we do tend to operate in separate universes, which have limited interactions.”

“You mean, we don’t hang out enough?”

“Probably because we’re not that sort of person. When we do find ourselves not being required to save the planet before it goes to hell, we usually have something more interesting to talk about than boring you and boring me.”

“Which makes us what? A pair of sad boffins, didn’t you call us once?” Carter said with a laugh.

“Even so, I don’t think our relationship would be enriched by knowing the colour of each other’s favourite T-shirt, or what’s number one on your play list on your hi-fi, assuming you ever go home.”

“I agree. I think our relationship works well as it is. So we’re not going to change it?”

“I hope not.”

“Are you really the world’s number one Sibelius fan?”

“Depends whether it’s a Wagner or a Vaughan Williams day. Or it’s time for some Marillion. I must admit, I do have problems at meal times with Sammy,” Trajan realized. “She knows all the other Trajan’s likes and dislikes but about all I’ve ever seen you eat is field rations and that blue jelly stuff you always have at the PMR.”

“I like blue Jello,” Carter said defensively.

“That was an observation, not a condemnation of your eating habits, Sam.”

“And I eat other stuff.”

“I’m sure you do. In fact, I’ve seen you do it. But our interactions are such that we don’t really see each other enjoying a full and varied diet. But when it comes to getting something we know the other person will eat, it would be blue jelly for you, cake for Jack, donuts for Teal’c and, well, toast for me?”

“I guess,” Carter said with a nod. “And anything handy for Daniel when he’s concentrating. It is kind of relaxing, the surf.”

“She likes watching it when she’s thinking.”

“As opposed to sitting in a corner with a notepad and pen, muttering and occasionally laughing insanely?”

“If you were wearing specs and you had long hair,” said Trajan, “I’d be calling you Samantha rather than Sammy about now. And she does that exact same ‘gotcha’ smile.”

“I keep expecting to see someone walk past us on the beach.”

“Or come up to the window and peer in?”

“Yes, that too,” laughed Major Carter.

A couple of yards away, Sammy was telling the other visitors: “The thing that impresses me is the way he’s handled all this. Me just parking myself in his quarters.”

“Well, you have a lot going for you,” said Daniel. “He’s a guy and you’re an attractive woman, you’re both nerds, on the Jack O’Neill people scale, and you both know each other really well; sort of.”

“Even so, wouldn’t you have been freaked out if the other H.T. had just parked himself in your quarters, Sam?” Sammy said to Major Carter to bring her other self into the conversation.

“Yes, I guess I would,” the major admitted. “But he’s English, and they’re . . . what does he call it?”

“Unflappable.”

“Yeah, that,” laughed Carter. “And you have to admit, it’s working out really well for you two.”

“That’s what makes me nervous,” said Sammy. “You know what H.T. always says.”

“The Universe hates us and it’s always out to get us?”

“Right.”

“On the other hand, one of his favourite questions is: ‘What would you rather be doing than sitting here, struggling to outsmart the Universe?’”

“I’m still trying to come up with a good reply to that,” Carter said with a laugh.

“I imagine you’d say fishing, Jack?”

“Pretty much,” O’Neill said with a smile.

“Does yours watch footy?” said Sammy.

“Oh, yes,” laughed Carter. “He even asked General Hammond if he could be excused trips off-world during the last World Cup of football.”

“I remember that,” laughed Daniel. “So what’s the main difference between the two Trajans from your perspective, Sammy?”

“This one’s not there a lot more than the other one,” said Sammy.

“Not there?” Daniel repeated with a frown.

“You know, when he’s working on something and his part of the universe collapses to just him and the piece of paper he’s writing on. And you could drop a bomb next to him and he wouldn’t notice.”

“Oh, that not there,” Carter said with a laugh. “Yes, it really bugs Jack when H.T. is busy working on a task he’s been given and he takes absolutely no notice when Jack asks him when he’ll be finished.”

“It’s not just Trajan who does that,” O’Neill observed.

“The other one isn’t like that?” said Carter.

“He doesn’t go into the same depth of trance, the other one. Didn’t go,” Sammy added, remembering that the Trajan she had known was dead. “He’d come out of it if his wife or someone else spoke to him. Or his phone started ringing.”

“Maybe he just needs someone who makes coming out of a trance worthwhile,” Carter.

“Does it worry you? Being left out, sort of, when he’s in one of his trances?” said Daniel.

“I don’t let myself go there,” said Sammy. “At first, I was amazed that anyone could just shut out all distractions like that. Then he started apologizing for doing it and we told each other that’s just the way things are. He’s not ignoring me, he’s working. I’ll probably be the same if the burrocrats in D.C. ever give me a security clearance and let me do some work again.”

The intercom at the door buzzed. Trajan went over to it. “Someone else for you to meet, Sammy,” he said, bringing a new arrival across the room.

“I am pleased to meet you, Doctor Carter,” Teal’c said with his usual formality.

"I hope you won't be offended if I'm a bit nervous," Sammy replied, "but I don't think I ever met the other you, Teal'c. And the last time I saw Jaffa, they were killing people I knew."

"Your nervousness is understandable, Samantha Carter," said Teal'c. "But I assure you, I am no threat to you."

"Part of me knows that, but the rest of me is still shaking a bit," Sammy said with a smile. "Does he ever wind you up, Teal'c?"

"I do not understand, Samantha Carter."

"Does H.T. ever try to involve you in his silly jokes? Like when our Trajan heard about the Jaffa ritual of Kel'nori, he asked our Teal'c if it's anything like Kev'lar, the ritual the Tau'ri use to make themselves bulletproof."

"I believe our Doctor Trajan has a greater understanding of what it is to be Jaffa and he restrains himself."

"Kel'nok, kel'nok, who's there? It's a Jaffa joke," said Trajan.

"It is not," Teal'c countered. "Perhaps I should say that our Doctor Trajan restrains himself most of the time."

"Have you realized Teal'c and I have a lot in common?" said Trajan.

"You do?" Sammy said with a frown.

"Yes, we're both visitors to Planet America. I feel as much of an alien here as any visitor from off-world."

"This looks . . . bigger," O'Neill realized, taking in the apartment.

"S.J., it seems, is an expert in space management," said Trajan, "and she can get Housekeeping to move the space-dividing interior walls around, having played a leading part in designing the visitor quarters."

"Really?" said Major Carter.

"Where she comes from," Trajan added, "she also does space management on spacecraft, of which her parallel has more than ours. The Housekeeping manager was overjoyed when she shared her knowledge with him. Her program on his computer is going to make his life a lot simpler. That's how we got all the extra stuff, like the furniture."

"That would be nice," remarked Daniel, "being able to move your walls as your collection grows."

“Except, we’re only doing it temporarily,” said Sammy. “On the understanding we could be shrunk again if there’s a big influx of visitors. It would be nice to have something the size of H.T.’s penthouse in Silver Spring. Well, that’s what Karolin calls it, even though it’s just at the top of a two-story building.”

“That’s the other Dr. Trajan’s wife, Karolin?” said Daniel. “The movie star?”

“Right. His wife loved the roof garden and she just had to buy it.”

“I helped the guy who was redeveloping Briganza Drive to prove that the county architect had got the building regulations totally wrong,” said Dr. Trajan, “and he was talking through his bum about the specifications. So I got a deal on my apartment.”

“Have you ever thought of getting into interior design, Carter?” said Colonel O’Neill.

“Only of spacecraft,” said Major Carter.

“It’s also brighter in here,” said O’Neill. “More like daylight than indoor lights. It’s like your windows are for real and it’s daytime outside.”

“That’s the new high-efficiency lighting we got from the Almed,” said Carter. “Daylight minus dangerous UV; everyone will produce vitamin D but won’t get skin cancer; and minus unwanted infrared.”

“But the lights can assist with temperature regulation by adding infra-red when things cool down,” Sammy added. “Well, in somewhere other than the SGC, where the temperature can change a lot.”

“Nice outfit,” O’Neill said, admiring Sammy’s elegant white leather jacket as he felt information overload beginning. “New?”

Major Carter gave him The Look.

“Well, of course it’s new,” O’Neill told himself. “Proxy shopping?”

“It works quite well when you know someone with a video camera and a credit card,” said Sammy.

“Here’s something that will interest you, Sam,” said Trajan. “S.J. was working on Glider-Plus; a plan to create a small,

space-capable vehicle, which can perform rescue missions in near-Earth orbit for up to seven people or be used for cargo transport to orbital platforms. Something a lot cheaper than rockets and space shuttles because nothing is discarded, like boosters and external fuel tanks. It would normally have a crew of three or four, with the rest of the space rigged for either cargo or four or three passengers.”

“That’s more my line of country,” said Carter.

“The project involves retrieving damaged gliders for study and removing the recall devices. And also training SG personnel to fly them in case they get an opportunity to use them in the field.”

“That makes sense,” said O’Neill.

“I’ve been trying to reconstruct my work on spacecraft development toward the Glider Plus,” Sammy said with an apologetic note, “but I’m not sure how much use it will be. It’s just individual patches in a patchwork quilt. I was working on designing the Glider-Plus between looking at materials the SG teams brought back from missions. Which is why I was still here and not at the glider development base in Nevada.”

“I’ve just seen our friend Kinsey on the news,” Trajan said to O’Neill as the two Carters began to discuss spacecraft. “He was on while the lady of the house was doing last-minute panics.”

“Oh, joy,” said O’Neill.

“Giving out some BS about wasteful government spending and not being red-carded for tautology.”

“This is the Senator Kinsey who thinks he should be in charge of the stargate program?” said Sammy, catching a familiar name.

“Same guy everywhere,” said O’Neill.

“He’s a hot tip for the Vice-President’s job at the next presidential election, apparently,” said Trajan.

“He really hated our Dr. Trajan,” said Sammy. “Especially after he gave a hundred million dollars to the Democrats and they blew him out of his seat in Congress.”

“A hundred million dollars?” Daniel Jackson said incredulously.

“That’s what the TV news worked out,” said Sammy.

“A hundred million?” Major Carter put on an expression of bug-eyed disbelief.

“When I asked him about it, he just smiled and didn’t deny it,” said Sammy.

“You’re smart, why haven’t you got a hundred million to get Kinsey off our backs?” O’Neill said to Trajan.

“He’s probably been too busy helping you to save the planet,” said Sammy.

“That’s fair,” O’Neill admitted.

“Maybe I should take lots more private consultancy work,” Trajan said.

“Why, is the Kinsey here after you as well?” said Sammy.

“Actually, it’s worse than that,” said Trajan. “Kinsey doesn’t know whether or not I put one over on him and the uncertainty is a much more toxic poison than knowing for sure that he lost.”

“Maybe he’ll forgive you if you vote for him.”

“Senator Kinsey isn’t worried about my vote. Being British, I don’t have one. And I don’t think he’s likely to forgive me for pulling the wool over his eyes on P-three-C-eight-seven-one.”

“How come you haven’t told me that story?” said Sammy.

“He’s probably being modest,” said Carter. “Seeing he was the hero of the hour.”

“That’s a bit strong,” laughed Trajan.

“You ensured my safety in action, Harold Trajan,” said Teal’c.

“Well, maybe,” said the mathematician.

“How?” said Sammy.

“Did you have an X-Five-Oh-One where you come from?” said Trajan.

“That’s the designation of a cargo ship we captured from the Gould,” said O’Neill.

“Point of information,” said Carter, “ours isn’t an actual Goa’uld ship. I could tell by the design. It was one they scavenged and repaired. But did a lousy job of it.”

“Same as ours,” said Sammy. “We had endless trouble with the hyperdrive until we did a complete redesign job on the control systems.”

“That’s how all the trouble started here,” said Trajan. “All the stuff I ended up doing should have been done on the ground before they went into space again. But some bozo at the Pentagon demanded short cuts.”

“As they do,” remarked O’Neill.

“Which is why Five-Oh-One got into difficulties on a shake-down cruise,” said Trajan. “And landed on P-three-C-eight-seven-one, where the natives are quite friendly. Friendly enough to let them use their stargate to get some parts sent through from Earth.”

“Then Kinsey stuck his nose in,” O’Neill said with a sigh.

“Obviously trying to raise his profile,” said Trajan. “He must have cashed in a ton of favours to square it with the Pentagon. Kinsey was warned that we knew little or nothing about the planet but he dismissed the warnings as obstruction. Which is why the embarrassing outcome made him even more determined to close down the SGC.”

“How embarrassing?” said Sammy.

“Very,” said Trajan. “SG-One, plus yours truly and a Russian SG team, were detailed to escort Kinsey on an official diplomatic visit to the planet, with a return journey on the Five-Oh-One for the celebrity.”

“I heard the President let him do it to try and get him on-side with the stargate program,” Daniel offered.

“Which so didn’t work,” O’Neill remarked.

“And the Russians were there to make it an international expedition,” Daniel added.

“We got there and Kinsey did some glad-handing,” said Trajan. “Then the wheels came off. A small local war flared up, rebels started doing some artillery practice and we were advised to head for the stargate pronto.”

“Do not pass *Go*, run for your lives,” said O’Neill.

“And that’s where the trouble started,” said Trajan.

“Things got even more tense when we started back to the ship and Colonel O’Neill set up the order of march,” said Carter.

“When the Colonel said, ‘Trajan, point.’ Kinsey wanted *The Jaffa* on that job,” said Trajan.

“Point at who?” said Sammy. “Or should that be whom?”

“No, it’s the order of march,” said Trajan. “The point man goes out ahead of the main body and the rear-guard drops back. And if the party is large enough, there might be flankers on either side.”

“Military crap?” Sammy said with a smile.

“Some of us make a living out of it,” O’Neill protested.

“Kinsey obviously thought the point man is some sort of human sacrifice,” the mathematician resumed. “When he gets blown away, everyone else dives for cover; and he wanted it to happen to *The Jaffa* rather than a valuable Specialist, who’s held in high regard by the President. Sorry, Teal’c.”

“You need not apologize for the truth, Harold Trajan,” said Teal’c.

“Jack could have told Kinsey that H.T. has a strange sixth sense,” said Carter, “which lets him sense an ambush or pickets on our line of march . . .”

“Really?” interrupted Sammy.

“Yes, really,” said Carter. “Jack had a furious row with H.T. the first time he stopped us when we were heading for a small group of Jaffa, who were out of sight, on sentry duty, right in our path. This was ages ago, of course.”

“A lot of people have the same talent as me; an ability to feel when other people are near, and to know where and how close,” said Trajan. “Have you ever seen a player run right through a crowd in an American football match at his top speed? Probably not if you’re not an NFL fan. But that’s the talent operating at short range. Professor Gillard of the University of Miami, the one in Florida, not the one in Ohio, has been doing lots of work on it. He measured my range as two hundred to two hundred and twenty yards. And I’m not the record holder.”

“Does anyone know how it works?” said Sammy.

“Not yet. Everything from being able to detect electrical fields to telepathy has been suggested. One avenue of research is looking for ways to block it. If you can do that, you have an idea how it could work.”

“Like lead shields or a Faraday cage?”

“That idea, yes. Both of those work on some people but not others.”

“How do you block telepathy?”

“How does anyone know it even exists? And it seems to be more a form of empathy than the sci-fi notion of mind reading.”

“Unless it takes place at such a low level that it amounts to just detection rather than communication.”

“That’s one of the frustrations of the field, grappling with that kind of question,” said Trajan.

“Anyway,” Major Carter resumed, “the first time it happened, Jack sent Teal’c on ahead and when he spotted the sentries, we all accepted that H.T. really does have this strange talent. And Jack always puts him on point to make use of it, knowing it’s not going to get him killed. But, of course, he wasn’t about to explain that to Kinsey.”

“The man in charge doesn’t have to explain himself?” said Sammy.

“Exactly. Jack just told him, ‘Senator, we’re in hostile territory and if the bad guys start shooting, they’ll aim at where the noise is coming from. So can we move out quietly?’ And when Kinsey wouldn’t let it go, Jack threatened to zat him and leave him to rot if he didn’t keep quiet and do as he was told. As it happened, Kinsey’s party got straight to the Five-Oh-One with no problems and Kinsey never found out about H.T.’s talent.”

“And no one mentioned it?” said Sammy.

“When people have such an objectionable personality, you don’t feel encouraged to mention things to them,” said Trajan.

“And because he was under Jack’s command, H.T. went on Kinsey’s blacklist,” said Carter. “And things didn’t improve any when we got orders to go back to the city, that’s SG-One and two of the Russians, to help make sure the rebels didn’t compromise the stargate.”

“When SG-One had pushed off, that just left me, Kinsey and the other two Russians,” said Trajan. “Lieutenant Alexeev and a sergeant called Gronin. When Alexeev looked at me and raised an eyebrow, I told him, in Russian, that he was the ranking officer and he was in charge of everyone, confirming what Jack had indicated, almost non-verbally, as

he does at times. That was after he told me to shoot Kinsey if he caused any more trouble.”

“There’s about as much love lost between Jack and the Russians as there is between him and Kinsey,” said Daniel with a smile. “Maybe even less, on reflection.”

“So it was PWOR, as far as Alexeev was concerned,” said Trajan.

“That sounds like something to do with pressurized-water nuclear reactors to me,” said Sammy.

“Proceed With Orders Received,” said Carter.

“More military stuff,” said Trajan. “So Alexeev said, ‘Trajan, point, davai.’ I told Kinsey that means ‘move out’, and off we went. With most of the subsequent conversation in Russian and Kinsey doing a lot of fuming because he can’t speak it; which was my fault, of course; and he thought we were talking about him when we had to speak. I had to tell him three times that we were in hostile territory, and he needed to stop talking, before he got the message.”

“And what happened on the ship after Kinsey was delivered to it turned him against H.T. even more,” said Carter.

“What was that?” said Sammy.

“We ran into the local difficulties on the way back to the city,” said O’Neill. “So I ordered Teal’c and one of the Russians to keep them busy for ten minutes while the rest of us got round them, then head for the Five-Oh-One. After I’d radioed a sit rep to Colonel Devonport, the captain.”

“I thought Kinsey was going to blow a fuse when he found out that we had to wait for Teal’c and the Russian,” said Trajan. “He ordered Devonport to take off the instant his engineers had sorted out their problem.”

“Which was what?” said Sammy.

“The on-going major problem with the drive control systems,” said Carter. “And the captain agreed with H.T. that it would make more sense to fix the problem if they were in no danger at that point. All the shooting was miles away.”

“Is he on the blacklist, too? The captain?” laughed Sammy.

“Probably,” Carter said with a smile. “But the thing that got Kinsey really mad was that he suspected that H.T. had sabotaged something. In fact, he even managed to get an

inquiry held into the captain's conduct, hoping to get at H.T. that way."

"But he failed?"

"The Technical Board ruled that, in the circumstances, Colonel Devonport's decision to find a work-around for the problem was exactly right. Especially as it was this very problem that made the ship do something very close to a forced landing in the first place. That was how we got hold of the Five-Oh-One in the first place; we found it with everyone aboard dead or dying after a pretty hard landing.

"The crash caused a leak of something toxic, which killed all of the Goa'uld symbiotes; the Goa'uld in charge and the Jaffa crew as well. The host of the Goa'uld lingered on for a few hours but he was still in a coma when he died. We thought we'd fixed the problem but there was always something H.T. didn't like in the control programming."

"I know, we had a lot of problems with it ourselves," said Sammy.

"Basically, it was a Goa'uld self-correctional system, which was having the opposite effect. The longer it was left running, the bigger mess it made of things. I should get H.T. to lend you his copy of the report for the gory details."

"We had that same problem," said Sammy. "So you're a spacecraft engineer, too, H.T.?"

"More a mechanic than an engineer," said Trajan. "A fixer rather than a designer. Anyhow, as luck would have it, Kinsey was sidelined. One of the geniuses on the flight deck decided he knew just what was wrong with the Five-On-One's controls and he knew exactly how to fix it. Only he just made things worse."

"Maybe he was a Goa'uld," laughed Sammy.

"Which gave Harold Trajan an excuse to challenge the expert," said Teal'c. "And keep the control-systems off-line until I was able to locate the ship and board it with the Russian soldier."

"Trajan knew I'd have had his ass if he let them take off without Teal'c and the Russian," O'Neill offered with a hint of a smile.

"I suppose that thought was lurking at the back of my mind

somewhere,” Trajan acknowledged.

“I do not believe that Doctor Trajan was motivated by anything other than his sense of honour,” said Teal’c.

“Me, neither,” said Sammy with a glare in O’Neill’s direction.

“Yes, I’d go along with that,” O’Neill said with a trouble-maker’s smile of satisfaction.

“In the event,” said Trajan, “I didn’t have to do any actual sabotage. I just knobbed the genius a bit.”

“How?” said Sammy.

“I asked him some questions he couldn’t answer, and when he resorted to bluster, I cut him short and told him, ‘Don’t you think we should know these things before anyone does anything drastic?’ And he did actually see my point then. Not that he wanted to admit it.”

“Who was this genius?” said Sammy. “Anyone I’m likely to know?”

“Dr. Meredith McKay. He’s Canadian, so you’d think he’d be an okay bloke, but he’s so full of himself, it’s not true.”

“Oh, him,” Sammy said with a heavy lack of enthusiasm.

“That sounds just like Sam’s reaction to him,” Daniel said with a laugh.

“Does he try to grope you, too?” said Sammy.

“I gave him an elbow in the solar plexus the first time he tried it,” said Major Carter. “And he got the message.”

“There you are, the benefit of a military training,” said Trajan.

“Actually, my Dr. Trajan caught him doing it to me,” said Sammy, “and he told him he won’t stand for people harassing members of his team. And when McKay tried to bluster, he came back with, ‘Dr. McKay, this is not negotiable. You’ll either restrain yourself or I’ll have you up before a disciplinary hearing.’”

“A career-killer for a nerd,” remarked O’Neill.

“Then he told me to slap McKay’s face and shout, ‘No!’ in his face if he ever tried it again,” Sammy added.

“And did he?” said Major Carter.

“He played the misunderstood martyr, but he kept his hands to himself after that,” said Sammy. “Sorry, where were

you up to with your story, H.T.?”

“At the point where I arrived at X-Five-Oh-One with the Russian soldier,” Teal’c offered.

“And when he did, I was certainly glad to see him,” said Trajan. “Basically, it was like there was a suicide system built in to the flight controls. As you know, Sammy, there’s a Central Control Unit on the flight deck and a Peripheral Control Unit at the front end. I was looking at it when Teal’c and the Russian guy came aboard.”

“It took us ages to find that on our equivalent of your Five-Oh-One,” Sammy offered. “To even think there might be something like that.”

“Yes, there were so many layers of control circuits,” said Carter. “The original ones, the Goa’uld ones from immediate repairs when they first salvaged the ship, some later ‘improvements’, and so on.”

“A real mess,” said Sammy. “Sorry. You managed to lose the bad guys, Teal’c?”

“Indeed,” said Teal’c. “They proved most reluctant to stray too far from the city.”

“Your actual urban guerillas,” said Trajan.

“And I was exceedingly surprised to find the spacecraft still where it had landed,” Teal’c added.

“It’s that old thing about not leaving anyone behind,” said O’Neill.

“Not even with a senator moaning his head off,” said Trajan.

“You were looking at the PCU control circuits,” Sammy prompted.

“Actually, pulling the cabinets out to try to get a better idea of what there was and what was going on inside,” said Trajan. “My guess was that the CCU controlled the main push at the back and the PCU worked independently to make fine manoeuvring quicker and more accurate. So I took the opportunity to ask our resident expert on Goa’uld stuff if he’d seen anything similar.

“I was looking at some flight control systems but I couldn’t see any links going out of the unit. Apart from to and from the drive. Nothing to the CCU. I couldn’t get my head around

that. What is the point of an extra control unit that doesn't talk to the CCU, which is the primary system?"

"We took a long time to figure that out," Sammy offered.

"I was just moaning to Teal'c about how weird it all was when Kinsey butted in," said Trajan, "so I started asking myself what the point of him is. But it must have been really confusing for him when you think about it. He'd been bitching about not waiting for *The Jaffa* to come aboard, and then he turned a corner and there was his person of no important with me, and we were holding control panels bits. And he had no way of telling if Teal'c had been aboard for just a few minutes or half an hour or more. Which meant that Kinsey could have been making a fool of himself and no one had mentioned it, which was grounds for hating Teal'c even more. And everyone who knows him, including yours truly. Even though Teal'c made a significant contribution to getting the Five-Oh-One back into space."

"He's very good with the hate thing, Kinsey," said O'Neill.

"Almost as soon as Kinsey reached us; I think he was doing a Grand Tour of the ship; I had this idea of a deliberately unbalanced system," said Trajan. "Which is quite common for advanced atmosphere-only fighter aircraft, I gather. There's a big push at the back and the PCU acts as the equivalent of a canard on a jet fighter, one of the engineers told me later."

"To give enhanced agility," said Sammy.

"Right," said Trajan. "The CCU applies raw push and the PCU adds fine control. When it works."

"Yes, that's one way of doing it," said Sammy.

"I get the feeling you could tell me three better ways of doing it off the top of your head."

"Well, two," Sammy said with a modest smile. "But you'd deduced the CCU doesn't monitor what the PCU is doing?"

"We found out later that there's a separate unit for monitoring what the combined effect of the main drive and the canard effect is," said Trajan, "and that reports to the CCU."

"Same with us," said Sammy.

"But it was working intermittently . . ."

“Same with ours. A Goa’uld work-around was getting in the way.”

“So the only thing to do at the time seemed to be to switch off all the automated flight control systems and fly the thing manually.”

“Which you did quite successfully? That’s what we did to confirm the problem.”

“Which Major Wyndham and Teal’c did in shifts, the flying. Which gave Kinsey another reason to hate him as Teal’c was playing an essential part in saving the senatorial ass. Kinsey must have got the hump quite seriously because I pretty much ignored him after I got my idea. I was more interested in questioning Teal’c about the PC station and doing some power consumption measurements than in what Kinsey had to say, which was just pointless bitching because we hadn’t taken off and he felt threatened.”

“A man with a talent for saying very little in a great many words,” said Teal’c.

“But I managed to get rid of him by telling him the crew wouldn’t want passengers wandering about when they were about to take off, which could be any minute,” said Trajan. “And he should go back to the passenger cabin and get strapped in. But he didn’t push off right away. He just stood there, looking for something else to argue about. All he could come up with was what about us? Teal’c and myself? So I told him we counted as crew and being strapped down didn’t apply to us. Which, fortunately, left him without inspiration for another moan.

“So he pushed off and Teal’c was able to give me the information we needed to get the ship back under control. Namely, to shut down the PC station and fly on the main controls. And do so very cautiously. And that meant actually hands-on flying by a human being, not leaving it to the autopilot, which wouldn’t have been able to cope.

“I didn’t really see much of Kinsey after that. I spent most of the return flight working on mapping the flight systems, trying to work out how much of the screw-ups the Goa’uld modifications were causing, doing odd bits of translation and discussing things with Teal’c, when he wasn’t on pilot duty,

because McKay wasn't talking to me."

"The way we saw it," said Sammy, "the Ancients experimented with deliberate instability built in to their main drive systems to increase manoeuvrability. But they abandoned it for some reason. The Goa'uld tried to come up with a better solution but just made things worse."

"The way I heard it, H.T. didn't even know the ship had landed when she got home until Dr. Lee came aboard, and he realized Bill hadn't been on the mission," Major Carter said with a laugh.

"Yes, well, if a spaceship is being flown properly," Trajan said with a defensive note, "you shouldn't be able to tell if it's dashing through space or parked on a planet somewhere. That's my story and I'm sticking to it."

"I've heard you mention something called the USS Mudlark," said Sammy. "Is that the same as the Five-Oh-One?"

"The Air Force tradition of applying comical names," said Trajan.

"I'd really like to see what you've done with it here," said Sammy. "I've been reading up on it. Well, the bits I could access."

"A lot of it is still in bits, last I heard," said Dr. Trajan.

"Yes, they're still trying to figure out what's original and what's stuff the Goa'uld installed around bits they couldn't figure out," said Major Carter. "And how to bridge the gaps."

"Anyone want to bet on when the one person who knows how to tackle that will be let out of the SGC?" said O'Neill.

"Even if the planet were at stake, not without a security clearance," said Daniel Jackson. "Military crap always wins over good sense."



# Revelations

**[July 24, Thursday]**

Sharing his rooms in the SGC's visitor quarters was starting to become normality for Dr. Trajan just over a week after Dr. Carter's arrival from her alternate reality, but he still had to make a slight mental adjustment when he opened the door of what was supposed to be his private den and found someone else already there.

"It's definitely a bit weird, doing the 'Hi, Honey, I'm home' routine at my own digs here in the SGC," he said in response to Sammy's smile of greeting.

"You don't have any where I come from," she said. "Digs, that is. You always go home to your apartment in Silver Spring."

"To my wife, yes." Trajan deposited a stack of documents on a handy bookcase with the air of someone who had no intention of thinking about them again until he retrieved them the next morning. "What's her name again?"

"Karolin."

"Sounds a bit foreign."

"Karolin Johnson. She has Russian grandparents on her mother's side, an American father and a Canadian mother."

"A real internationalist. I keep wondering whether I should try to look her up somehow to find out how she's getting on here. I've never heard of her, but that applies to a lot of famous Americans, as far as I'm concerned."

"It might be quite interesting." Sammy did not sound enthusiastic about the project.

"On the other hand, what if she's living in Skid Row somewhere? Can you imagine going up to her and saying, 'Hi! I just wanted to tell you that in another parallel universe, you're rich and famous beyond your wildest dreams, and you're married to me.' And she'll say, 'Thanks very much for

telling me. It makes my rotten life here so much easier to bear. Excuse me while I find a tall building to jump off of.”

“She’s probably making a success of whatever life she has here. It’s clearly not in entertainment or mathematics.”

“Talking about entertainment, are you finding enough to keep yourself amused in my absences?”

“I can visit the library to compare what I remember of our history with what’s on record for here. And I’ve also been looking around Daniel’s museum. He has some really cool stuff there.”

“Yes, it’s one of my favourite places at the SGC.”

“You hang out with him a fair bit here?” said Sammy.

“I do lots of frequency charts of symbols to help him with his translations. And I get to browse the museum as my reward.”

“Talking about rewards, did you get a certificate of merit at the LFR this morning?”

“I didn’t get shot, so I suppose that has to count for something.”

“They do actually use live bullets there?” Sammy asked through an expression of concern.

“Only paintballs and zats for us amateurs. I’m not sure which is worse. Those paintballs can give you a nasty bruise. But I managed to miss all of them today.”

“Good. I’m glad to hear it. I’d really like to start doing something again myself. You know, work?”

“Some actual engineering work as opposed to telling me what you’ve been doing where you come from? In the hope of educating us lot here?”

“Yes, but something a bit more ambitious than fixing the general’s car.”

“I’ll annoy the general a bit more about getting you cleared for work,” Trajan promised. “Someone starting to feel a bit crabby?”

“No more than a lot,” Sammy admitted. “I just want to do something, not just talk about what I’ve done.”

“It’s the security thing, Sammy. It’s a permanent pain. Your problem is you’re too like me. You don’t switch off easily. You don’t treat this as a holiday before you start another job.

But I suppose being crabby is also a good sign.”

“It is? How?” demanded Sammy.

“It’s a sign you’re finding your feet here. You were living on the edge of a scream when you got here. Now, you’re starting to feel comfortable and getting restless and wanting to do things. You’re no longer content to drift and thank your lucky stars you’re safe here. You want to get your life moving again.”

“And everyone is trying to make that happen as fast as possible?” Sammy said with a smile.

“Anyone who tries to get away with slacking knows they’ll get a boot up the backside from me,” Trajan assured her.

“What do you think about make-up?”

“I don’t remember ever thinking about make-up. I don’t think it would suit me. People would point at me and laugh. Why?”

“For me, you clown,” Sammy said with exaggerated patience.

“Can we start again with more explanation of where you’re going?”

“How do you feel about seeing me here without make-up?”

“I’m not about to turn tail and run away screaming if you’re not wearing bright red lippie.”

“Seriously. Do you prefer a woman to be wearing make-up?”

“I see your other self without it when we’re out in the field, being Tau’ri galaxy-savers, and she always looks fine. Except when she’s covered in mud. I don’t think it improves either of you. Women of your age don’t have lines and wrinkles to cover up. You look great just as you are. And have you ever considered how much time I spend every day, looking into your eyes, observing your face and waiting to find out which of us will crack first and start laughing?”

“I try to have better things to do.” Sammy tried to lock her features to prevent a laugh. “You mean, like you’re doing right now?”

“Have I ever given you the slightest hint that I don’t like what I see? Namely, a washed and unpainted Samantha plus some moisturising cream?”

“What if everyone else thinks I’m a dowdy ratbag?”

“I don’t think many Americans are familiar with the term ratbag, and if anyone calls you that, I shall chastise the ratbag. Severely. What’s behind all this, Sammy?”

“Your wife never wears much make-up. Your other self’s wife.”

“This is the film star, who could have terribly expensive make-up that makes her look like she isn’t wearing any?”

“No, I asked her about it once and she said she thinks spending ages plastering it on and ages cleaning it off is a total waste of time. And it used to make me feel more like one of the team; not being a girlie with a painted face at work.”

“I’ll go along with whatever makes you feel most confident. But don’t try to be Karolin. Don’t forget, I’ve never met the lady.”

“Yes, but she’s obviously your taste in women.”

“She’s the other Dr. Trajan’s taste in women, Sammy. And didn’t he meet her years before he met you? This particular Dr. Trajan would prefer it if you just be yourself, not a Chinese copy of a Karolin he’s never met, okay?”

“If you’re sure.”

“Look, Samantha, I met you as a combat veteran, who spent our first ten minutes together crying all over me. Later, you became my room-mate and you blossomed into your normal gorgeous self. I’ve never seen you with make-up on, and I hope you’ve never ever felt any reluctance on my part to be with you unpainted. If you were to put some war-paint on, you’d look different, not necessarily better. But I’d always know that underneath the mask is my gorgeous Samantha.”

“Have you ever thought of becoming a diplomat?”

“You have to do too much lying. I prefer honesty. If you really are comfortable with not wearing face-paint, I prefer you as you are now. So we can agree on that?”

“Yes.”

“Fine. Next problem?”

“I’m still working on that,” Sammy said with a laugh. “Well, maybe.”

“What?”

“It’s none of my business but I have to say I’m a bit

uncomfortable about the way Colonel O'Neill orders you about and you just do what he says.”

“He doesn't do it for fun, sweetheart.”

“I know, at an intellectual level, that there's a good reason. But I still don't like it much.”

“Life is full of compromises. And also situations where the pragmatic approach is necessary. We both have a job to do and there are circumstances where it's my job to do what he tells me to do. I don't let him order me about because I'm some sort of pathetic wimp. I do it because I know he's trying to keep me alive.”

“Well, yes, there is that.”

“And colonels don't say please.”

There was a knock on the door to the corridor. Dr. Daniel Jackson had arrived with a book, which Sammy had wanted to borrow, and a job for her host.

“The guy over there with the far-away look handles all the problems mathematical,” said Sammy. “And you've got one?”

“Yes,” said Daniel, “I've tried one of your analysis methods on some language data, H.T., and the results don't make sense.”

“Which could indicate either that there's a mistake in the calculation process or . . .,” said Trajan.

“Corrupt data, an eternal problem,” said Sammy. “Sorry. That's one of your favourite sayings.”

“Is it?” said Trajan. “Maybe I'll pinch it. Anyway, a spot of detective work is called for.”

“It's a frequency analysis I'm having trouble with,” said Daniel. “And I think I've made a mistake in the calculations.”

Trajan worked through what Dr. Jackson had done and eventually decided: “You know what, this doesn't work.”

“Your math doesn't work?” Daniel said with a comical expression of incredulity.

“The maths itself is fine. What I mean is that it doesn't work with this data.”

“There's something wrong with the data?”

“It's corrupted somehow.”

“How?” said Daniel with a frown.

“Don't know,” said Trajan. “All I can think of is: are you

sure this stuff was written by someone who's literate?"

"Genius guy but he can't spell?"

"That sort of idea. Someone who has a serious problem with the written language. Or, have you ever heard of Franglais? Which became the province of a chap called Miles Kington?"

"Isn't that a mixture of French and English words? It sounds like French but someone English can understand it?"

"Right. I was just wondering if this is something similar. It's not quite the language that you think it is, but some sort of mixture. Not for comic effect, though."

"Someone who's trying to write in another language but distorting it with the values of his own language, you mean?"

"Something like that. Do you know who wrote the text? Anything about him?"

"Not really. But I think I know where to find out."

"If you can, we can run cross sweeps for the two languages until we get something that makes sense."

"Someone isn't as clever as he thinks he is?" said Sammy. "Or someone who's making it work the best way he can?"

"Probably the latter," said Daniel. "He could be inserting words from his own language to fill in gaps or trying to recreate the sound of the other language the best way he can."

"And not getting the sound values quite right?" said Sammy.

"That could be it," Daniel said with a nod. "So all I need to do is identify the author, or where he's from?" he added to Trajan.

"Assuming I'm right about the alien Franglais," Trajan cautioned.

Daniel shrugged his shoulders. "It's the only lead I have to follow up. I'll let you know how I get on."

"Do you know how old Daniel is?" Sammy asked when the visitor had gone.

"Old Daniel looked okay to me. Why?" said her host.

Trajan received a helping of the Carter Look.

"He's twenty-nine. Yes, his birthday is on the eighth of July, so he had it about a week before you arrived here."

"I thought he was younger than us. I didn't realize it was

five years younger.”

“That has always been a handicap for him, I gather. He always looked far too young to have views anyone would take seriously in his younger days.”

“It never seemed to get in your way.”

Trajan shrugged his shoulders. “There’s a history of child prodigies in mathematics. In fact, a lot of people reckon we’re burnt out at twenty-six. The same doesn’t apply to archaeologists.”

“You weren’t a child prodigy, though. As far as I remember, you didn’t get any sort of recognition until your hit nineteen or twenty. Unless it was different here.”

“No, but I went to university at seventeen, a year earlier than most, and got my first degree at nineteen.”

“You went to study chemistry but you had to do minors in physics and mathematics. And you go so interested in math, and you blew so many minds in the math department, that they got you to switch.”

“If I ever need a biography written, I know where to go,” laughed Trajan. “I suppose you’re another early university entrant? Instead of going into the Air Force, like Sam, and being educated on a military grant?”

“I think my dad would have liked me to try that route.”

“Your dad, who’s Air Force General Jacob Carter?”

“Right. But he was happy to see me working for the Air Force as a civilian consultant, and being a valued member of your team. Even if I wasn’t doing it in a uniform.”

“He never knew exactly what you did though? The stargate programme and all that?”

“No, he wasn’t on the need-to-know list. But if my work was too highly classified for him to know about, that let him join the dots.”

“I hope you’re feeling valued here, Sammy. You are making a significant contribution. And I hope you feel you’re getting something worthwhile out of all this.”

“The best thing I’m getting out of this is a chance to find out if it can work, you and me. If it doesn’t, I’ll probably be an emotional wreck for a while. Then I’ll get over it. But right now, I’m with someone I love and I feel valued because I’m

doing something that will make a difference to the safety of my adopted home planet. And who knows, maybe the Goa'uld will kill us all before our relationship self-destructs and I'll die happy. Well, happyish."

"Do you ever feel that there's too dam' much honesty in our relationship, Sammy? And not enough mystery?"

"I think I prefer the mystery to be about the small things, like what you're getting me for my next birthday. I think I'd prefer to know if you want to dump me but you don't feel able to do it because you feel sorry for me."

"Okay, well, I don't want to dump you, and I haven't even thought about your birthday. Because if it's exactly the same as Sam's, it's six months away."

"Not being dumped will do for the moment."

"Do you know for a fact your birthday is the same as Sam's?"

"I don't know. I assume so."

"It would create a bit of separation of one of you was a few days older than the other. On paper."

"I'll check with Sam," Sammy returned.

### **[July 25, Friday]**

Another working week for SG-1 closed with a briefing on a short mission, which was based on intelligence received. In fact, three SG teams had gathered in the conference room to receive details from General Hammond. The teams were two hours from departure and they had all read through their briefing notes and studied the accompanying photographs and diagrams.

"We have intelligence of possible data repository on P-two-X-three-nine-eight," said the general. "Your mission, Jack, will be to scout some structures about four kilometres from the stargate. A scan from orbit detected a sizeable structure, possibly extending underground."

"How big a structure, sir?" said Colonel O'Neill.

"Approximately the same footprint as a large apartment;

something the size of Dr. Trajan's apartment in Silver Spring. Possibly on two or three levels. With two out-buildings. Which is why SG-Five and SG-Eight have also been assigned to the mission." The general let his eyes travel around the dozen faces at the table.

"No Dr. Trajan on this one, sir?" said Major Peter Grend, team-leader of SG-5.

"It's purely recon at this stage, Major," said the general. "But if Major Carter thinks his talents will be of use, he's here in reserve."

"How old is this archive, General?" asked Dr. Jackson.

"Up to several hundred years," said the general.

"Post-Ancient, then?" said Major Pirelli, team-leader of SG-8.

"Our information suggests that if there is an archive, it was created by a relatively young space-travelling race," said the general.

"But not the Gould, sir?" said O'Neill.

"For what it's worth, we don't think so," said the general. "I'll leave you to study your briefing notes further. They contain everything we know. Final briefing in one hour, you gate out at eleven hundred, which will put you on the planet one hour before dawn. The weather report, prepared from MALP data, says it's likely to be cloudy but dry."

"I do so hate a wet recon," murmured Colonel O'Neill.

The general pushed his chair back. Most of the rest rose to their feet. The general nodded to them and left the room, heading for his office. The others sat down again; all except Dr. Daniel Jackson, who had remained seated. He had spread his briefing notes around his area of the table and he was studying page 4 closely, lost to the world.



"Brace yourself, General, it's that bloke who keeps annoying you," Dr. Trajan remarked as he placed an official SGC binder on General Hammond's desk.

The general glanced at his desk clock. "I have a briefing at a working lunch in eleven minutes," he warned. "Which is

non-negotiable.”

“Five or six minutes tops, sir. Usual subject.”

“The answer is still the same, Dr. Trajan,” the general returned. “I don’t have permission to let Dr. Carter have access to the laboratories.”

“What about our new allies, the Almed? Any chance of getting them to check out Dr. Carter to make sure she’s okay?”

“It’s worth consideration,” said General Hammond.

“Well, I have another good reason why you should consider it, sir. My interrogation over dinner in the Posh Military Restaurant last night revealed that Sammy was involved in making modifications to the zat gun a couple of years ago.”

“Oh?”

“You’re no doubt familiar with my argument that the zat looks like something out of a sci-fi film set in ancient Egypt three and a half thousand years ago? A really clunky weapon. Long overdue for redesign but as the Goa’uld are just scavengers, that would have to be down to us.”

“I am aware that you, and others, have suggested that a redesign is long overdue,” the general returned with a smile as he glanced inside the binder. “Only, I understand there have been several attempts but they have all run into problems, rather basic ones, with the technology.”

“Which were solved in Sammy’s parallel, sir. I gather the problems are all to do with translating the materials and mechanism from what the Goa’uld have to what we can produce. That’s the area Sammy was involved in. And they came up with a version that straps onto the back of the wrist and fires by hand posture. Literally, point and shoot.”

“That sounds very impressive.”

“And something occurred to me on my way to your office, General. That corporal who was with Sammy. He would have had one because the modified zat was standard issue where Sammy came from. Do you have a briefing note about it?”

“No, this is news to me.”

“Which means that, in all probability, it was grabbed at or near Area Fifty-One by an outfit whose name starts with ‘N’ and ends with ‘ID’.”

“That, I would believe,” the general said with a grim nod.

“And I don’t need to point out to you how valuable something like this would be to SG teams, sir. A zat gun with the Cecil B. DeMille removed in the direction of a concealed weapon. Up your sleeve, out of sight.”

“I have to admit, Dr. Trajan, this is by far the most persuasive argument so far for letting Dr. Carter loose in a laboratory,” the general said with a smile.

“Especially, because if NID has the modified zat from Sammy’s parallel, we’ll never see hide nor hair of it. But if you let Sammy loose in an engineering lab; under as much supervision as you like; you could be doing the SG teams an enormous favour.”

“What sort of time scale are we talking about, Doctor?”

“Sammy used to leave the project planning to my counterpart but she thinks a couple of weeks to a working prototype if she can have some ordinary zats to take to bits. And access to the services of the machine shop. And assistance from someone who has been involved in weapon design here, particularly in attempts to modify the zat, would help, too.”

“We can work with that.”

“As soon as possible would be a good idea.”

“In effect, you’re saying that if NID has them, we need them as soon as, if only for our own protection?”

“Pretty much, sir. With the slight reassurance that the one in their possession has anti-tampering defences built in, according to Sammy, so they only work for someone who’s authorized to use them. So NID will have to do a fair amount of reverse engineering.”

“That’s some small consolation. Unless having one of those ID implants like the one Dr. Carter had in her arm is all you need?”

“I think there’s probably more to it than that, General, but I’ll have to check back with Sammy.” Trajan placed a reminder on his notepad. “Bearing in mind that NID probably strolled off with the implant removed from the corporal.”

“Sheringham.”

“Yes. Corporal Sheringham. I really must make an effort to remember that. I read a couple of lines of verse a long time ago; something about honouring the dead by remembering the names of the dead. It’s something we civilians should do as well as you military types, General.”

“I wouldn’t argue with that,” said the general.

“What happened about him? His funeral?”

“I understand there was a cremation and his ashes were scattered with due respect at Arlington. When and where are classified information.”

“Sammy was wondering about being able to go to the funeral. Or visiting the grave.”

“The corporal has acquired the status of the unknown soldier.”

“But known to a select few as well as God?”

“Something like that. I’ll do some discreet checking and get back to you on the zat project,” the general added.

“Here’s hoping the news is good, General.” Trajan glanced at his watch. “Now, I have a coffee date at the Posh Military Restaurant.”

“Dr. Carter’s security clearance is also high on the list of priorities.”

“Something else I’m pleased to hear,” Trajan said with a smile. “I hope everyone who sees it finds the zat project of interest.”

“I’m sure they will,” the general replied, offering a smile with a somewhat cynical edge.

“Oh, yes. Something arising from this discovery of a remodelled zat is positional equivalence.”

“Which is what?” said the General.

“Pension, savings, property ownership, stuff like that. I think Dr. Carter needs to be in line for some generous knowledge bonuses for what she’s telling us. To make her at least the equivalent of a civilian scientist in her position in terms of career and bank balance. Because, let us not forget, she speaks fluent Russian.”

“Threats, Dr. Trajan?” There was a touch of incredulity in the general’s expression.

“Grim commercial reality, sir. And also recognition that the

artisan is worthy of her hire. But I'm betting, from your demeanour, that you've already thought of all this."

"A bet you would not lose, Dr. Trajan."

"I'm very pleased to hear that, sir, as I'm not really qualified to be her agent. It's gratifying to know that you're looking after the best interests of the staff. Okay, I'll let you get back to work."

"I shall read this with interest," the general tapped the binder. "And I'll find out what happened to Corporal Sheringham's equipment."

"Has anyone taken a close look at the chip they took from Sammy's left arm, by the way? To see if it's more than an ID system that's harder to lose than a card?"

"I shall make it my business to find out," said the general.

Both men stopped and listened to a familiar sound. The general's telephone rang as Trajan was remarking, "Unscheduled off-world activation. I hope it's not the Almed with a big problem."

"Sergeant Harriman, sir," the general heard from his telephone. "SG-One coming back with a medical emergency."

"Do you have any details?" General Hammond asked.

"It's Major Carter, sir. We have a medical team on the way to the gate room right now."

"I'll be down directly," said the general.

The gate room was full of people, most of them trying to reach a clear area at the side of the ramp to the stargate in order to leave access to where Major Carter was lying, surrounded by her team.

"What happened, Jack?" said the general

"We don't know, sir," said Colonel O'Neill. "She started having trouble with her breathing about two clicks out from the gate. Then her temperature shot up and she just collapsed."

"Make a hole," shouted a female voice. Dr. Fraiser had arrived.

O'Neill repeated what he had just told the general as Major Carter was being loaded on to a gurney and fitted with an oxygen mask. She was lying on her back limply with a flushed face as the medical team headed for the infirmary.

“Your briefing, sir,” Sergeant Harriman said to the general in an apologetic tone.

“Damn! Not something I can cancel. Keep me informed about Major Carter’s condition, Walter.”

“Yes, sir.”

“And Jack . . .”

“The rest of us will wait here until we know it’s just Carter or something from the planet,” said O’Neill.



An examination of the patient, after she had been stabilized in the medical centre, revealed the presence of an insect bite on the back of Major Carter’s neck. At a corresponding position on the inside of her jacket collar was a squashed orange bug the size of a raisin. The other members of the expedition were ordered to shower thoroughly and surrender all clothing and equipment for fumigation. No one else had been bitten and no more insects were found.

Major Carter was treated with antidotes for the toxins found at the wound site and in the body of the dead insect. She went through twelve less than comfortable hours. She emerged from her ordeal weak but on the road to recovery.

### **[July 26, Saturday]**

A pair of biologists travelled to P-2-X-398 the next day, accompanied by SG-5. Their mission was to perform a quick assessment of the orange bug population in the immediate area of the stargate. Nobody complained about having to wear bulky bug-proof clothing.

All six members of the expedition were checked over in an improvised decontamination chamber placed behind the stargate after they returned to base. Just two stray orange bugs were spotted on the all-white outfits. They were added to the collection of native insects assembled by the biologists over a period of an hour or so.

After Major Grend had made his report, SG-5 stood down for the rest of the weekend. The biologists left the site with a collection of sealed containers. They had much to do and both were eager to take advantage of a chance to study truly alien life-forms.

**[July 27, Sunday]**

Major Carter looked up from the book which she wasn't reading as a visitor arrived at her hospital bed in the middle of her Sunday afternoon. She offered a brief smile to her counterpart, then put on a frown. "You look like you should be in the next bed," she remarked.

Sammy pulled a face, aware that she had flopped onto the bedside chair. "Some of us didn't get much sleep last night. All my fault."

"You had one of your nightmares?"

"As H.T. would say; not even close. Three of them."

"Crumbs!"

"The first one wasn't too bad. I woke up in a panic, soaked in sweat, and he put the lights on, dimmed, and hugged me and told me I was safe. Then I had a quick splash and towel down and put on a new nightdress and I thought I was okay. Wrong. An hour later, it happened again. So I offered to go and sleep in the other room because H.T. was losing a lot of sleep. As you know, the two of us just drop off quite easily, but he always starts thinking about something and it takes him ages to get back to sleep."

"But he wouldn't have it?"

"He told me there was nobody in the room who wasn't a volunteer and we're in it together, no matter what. So another quick splash, another nightie, and back to sleep for me. Two hours later."

"Another one?"

"It wasn't any worse than the other two but I've never felt more miserable in all my life. About not letting him get any sleep. Of course, H.T. went from telling me I'm safe to telling

me we're okay, and I think I must have cried myself to sleep. And then there was the mystery the next morning."

"Oh?" invited Major Carter.

"He had to get up at about half-seven to be ready for a briefing and I woke up when he got out of bed. But he ordered me to stay there and get some more sleep. It wasn't quite the crack of noon when I got up, but getting close."

"How were you feeling?"

"Surprisingly okay. But when I saw myself in the bathroom mirror, I got a bit of a shock. I'd bought a couple of packs of nightdresses and there were all pale green. The one I was wearing was pale pink and quite silky compared to the others, which are just cotton."

"At least you're not red-green colour blind."

"That's a very H.T. remark," laughed Sammy. "When I asked him, he told me he'd stocked up on some extras in case of emergencies."

"So he did a swap when you went to sleep after nightmare three?"

"One soggy one for one silky one, which was very nice of him."

"I'm sure he enjoyed it," laughed Major Carter.

"Yes, I did mention that. And he asked me if it would halve my embarrassment if he said he kept one eye shut during the transplant operation."

"What did you say to that?" laughed Carter.

"Nothing at the time," returned Sammy. "I was too busy laughing to think. Which was what he'd planned. But I did tell him a bit later on that if he's seen me naked, he's going to have to marry me."

"And how did he take that?"

"He just put on a cynical smile and said if that was an attempt to scare him, it didn't even come close."

"That can't have been the first time, though?" Carter said with a mild frown.

"No, but it was a good time to drop a heavy hint," Sammy returned with a laugh.

"Yes, I don't think you'll need to go as far as a shotgun to get him to the altar," laughed Carter.

“Thinking about it, I’ve been in a sort of limbo till now. But after last night, I really think I can get through this as long as I have H.T. looking after me. Just knowing he’s on my side makes all the difference.”

“We’re all on your side, Sammy.”

“Yes, the rational part of me knows that. Apart from the creatures at the Pentagon, of course. But the terrified little girl, who’s having all the horrible nightmares; she can’t function unless H.T. is holding her hand. I know that’s pathetic, but it’s just the way it is.”

“You’re being way too hard on yourself, Sammy. But I suppose it’s just as well he’s not married here and he finds you irresistible.”

“That’s something I keep give thanks for,” Sammy said with a laugh.

“And you’re able to help him with his work. He really appreciates having a physicist available all the time.”

“Yes, it’s really good to be able to explain things to him. And I love hearing him say the four magic words.”

“Which are what? ‘I love you’ is only three.”

“‘I don’t get that.’ He never feels embarrassed about admitting he doesn’t know something outside his speciality.”

“But you try to make him feel embarrassed just the same?”

“Sometimes. I do sometimes tell him he’s an idiot if he doesn’t know something. But he just comes back with: ‘That’s just your opinion, which is worth nought point one per cent of bugger all.’ But he does smile when he says it.”

“I suppose it makes him human,” said Major Carter. “The rest of us are so used to floundering when he explains something from his speciality, so it’s nice to know that we have the advantage in ours and he’s not some all-knowing god.”

“Like the Goa’uld?”

“Like they claim to be but aren’t.”

“Something I’ve been wondering: are you ever been in charge of him? You know, able to order him about like the Colonel?”

“A few times, yes.”

“You tell him, ‘Trajan, report?’ and stuff like that?”

“If necessary, yes.”

“And he takes it?”

“You mean, does he take orders from a girl?” Major Carter said with a laugh.

“Well, yes,” Samantha realized.

“When the chips are down, H.T. trusts my military judgement as much as I trust his mathematical judgement. It’s the only way we can operate.”

“I just hope nothing happens to him tomorrow. You know H.T. and Bill Lee are going to that planet with the bugs? The two of them to do the job you were going to do?”

“If you want to, you can come and visit me tomorrow and we’ll worry together,” Major Carter offered.

“It’s just me being silly,” Sammy admitted. “But it’s a bit nerve-racking, knowing he’ll be billions of miles away instead of in the next city. I’m still not sure I could survive if anything happened to him.”

“He’ll be okay, Sammy. And so will you. They’ll have plenty of cover and the medical staff are sure the bug-proof stuff will work.”

“I wish they’d let me go with him.”

“Then he’d be distracted by worrying about you.”

“Yes, there’s always something,” Sammy said with a wry smile. “I told you H.T. made me go to the infirmary when he went off-base on his first shopping trip? I made a bit of a pest of myself but he insisted. And it turned out not to be such a silly idea when I had a panic attack when he was on the way back here. But the nurse reminded me how to beat it and I was okay by the time he got back.”

“They know their stuff here,” said Carter. “You’re in good hands. But you know that.”

“First-hand experience, like you,” Sammy said with a smile. “And I’ve got this.” Sammy dipped into her pocket. “H.T.’s SGC pass for extra reassurance. As long as I’ve got it, he can’t get out of here. Yes, it’s not logical, but it does help.”

“H.T. pragmatism and thinking outside the box?”

“He said everyone here would get it, being used to confronting weird on a daily basis.”

“It works and that’s good enough?” said Carter. “Yes, that

tends to be behind a lot of what we do.” The major shifted slightly to a more comfortable position and made a grab for her book when it tried to slide off the bed.

“Is that one of the second-hand books H.T. ends up giving to the Almed?” said Sammy.

“It’s one of those mock-factual books about how everyone you’ve ever heard of got it hopelessly wrong,” said Carter.

“That’s another thing about being his room-mate. He’s the Silver Spring second-hand bookshop’s best customer for his Almed pals. He lets me have first pick of each new batch. It’s a bit like being on a university course on the human race.”

“It’s a pity all the books he brings back are in a language we don’t understand,” said Carter. “And the Pentagonians grab them.”

“It’s what they do,” Sammy said with a weary smile.

### **[July 28, Monday]**

Three SG teams, Dr. Lee and Dr. Trajan, all in protective clothing, left the SGC at 11:00 hours on a bright Monday morning. Sammy Carter watched them leave, with mixed feelings, from the control room. Dr. Fraiser had escorted her there to take a break from writing report.

“Yes, it’s just like I remember it,” Sammy said when the shimmering, vertical puddle vanished. “Did anyone really think your stargate would look any different from mine?”

“Why take anything for granted when we don’t have to?” the doctor quoted.

“You do know that’s something that can be taken to ridiculous limits, Janet?” said Sammy.

“Just like lots of things? Yes. But I fancied a walk, anyway. And now we know for sure that our version of stargate travel looks exactly like yours.”

“And knowledge is always power, no matter how trivial it seems,” Sammy quoted. “You’re sure the bugs won’t get them?”

“If they’re careful, they’ll be okay,” said the doctor.

The eleven travellers arrived at their destination in gloomy, overcast conditions. The stargate was located in an artificial clearing in a wooded area, which had a distinctive smell that said it was not on the Earth. The video data stored on the MALP, which was parked clear of the event horizon's explosive formation, had already been checked to confirm that no one had visited the area since the MALP's arrival.

The group's journey along a roughly cleared, overgrown track was uneventful. They travelled in three groups. Inevitably, Dr. Trajan was on point, leading SG-5. Dr. Lee, like Dr. Jackson, was not armed with a submachine gun. Lee allowed himself to be swallowed up by the main body, which consisted of SG-1, minus Major Carter, and SG-8.

Lee experienced a range of emotions during the four-kilometre walk. At first, there was nervousness and worry about the orange bugs. Then came irritation because the group was making a silent approach to the site instead of travelling there quickly and easily on vehicles. Finally, he lapsed into resignation until the trudge ended.

The SG teams exchanged hand signals and brief words of command as they explored the site, looking for signs of occupation and ambush. Once Colonel O'Neill was satisfied that they were in no immediate danger, the Specialists were allowed to get down to work at a site which consisted of three buildings. SG-5 took charge of perimeter security.

There was a main building some thirty feet long by twenty feet wide, and two out-buildings, both about twelve feet square and set twenty feet away from the same long side of the main building, which was receiving intermittent splashes of brightness as the local star burnt away clouds.

"Looks like some sort of concrete," Dr. Lee remarked as he and Dr. Trajan approached Dr. Jackson, who was studying the entrance to the largest building. "With a scab of something like lichen on it."

"If it's as good as Roman concrete, it could be a couple of thousand years old," said Trajan. "Or more. Not many windows."

"There are no windows at all. In any of the buildings," Teal'c added.

“Could be storage rather than habitation,” said Dr. Jackson. “I can’t figure this out.”

“Let me have a look.” Dr. Lee gave his attention to the keypad beside the door, which had the look of aged bronze.

“Twelve symbols?” Trajan said to Daniel Jackson.

“Six-fingered aliens and a duodecimal system?” Daniel said with a laugh.

“Got it,” Lee said with abundant satisfaction as he heard a loud click.

Nothing visible happened.

“Got what?” said Colonel O’Neill.

“Repair procedure Number One,” Trajan recommended.

O’Neill turned his back and delivered a resounding thud to the door with the sole of his right boot.

“That’s done it,” Lee shouted.

“Done what?” said O’Neill, finding that the door looked as solid as ever.

“Look,” said Lee. “See that line down the middle of it? Have we got a crowbar?”

Teal’c stabbed at the gap with a crowbar, hitting it dead on, then heaved. The door parted in the centre and the two halves disappeared into the walls.

“Possibly a magnetic lock with just enough power left for one more activation,” said Lee.

“Well spotted, Bill,” said Trajan.

“Okay, let’s see if we can find something to put in the gap to stop it closing unexpectedly,” said O’Neill, ever the pragmatist. “Then do the bug check.”

A branch from a nearby tree became a door-stop and a roll of close-mesh netting provided a barrier to flying insects. The group investigated the other buildings whilst four men with bio-detectors scanned the interior of the main building.

“Looks like the inside is a bug-free zone, sir,” the corporal in charge reported after a short time.

“Let’s keep it that way,” said O’Neill. “Put plenty of bug spray around the door and on that mesh.”

The routines of an investigation began. The main building had another floor below ground level. It contained what looked like housings for power storage and distribution

equipment, most of which had been removed, and a lot of dusty, empty storage space. Being able to explore without gloves and a helmet and an all-over outfit of bug-proof netting was mainly a psychological relief for the men.

On the ground floor were sagging furniture, beds and stores of long expired food and drink containers. Traces on the walls showed where there had been computer work stations at one end of the building. There was just one of them left; clearly, someone had dropped something heavy onto it.

"It's not an archive, it's just a secure habitat of some sort," Dr. Jackson concluded.

"So not really worth the effort?" said Colonel O'Neill.

"H.T. reckons there might be something on that computer over there," said Daniel. "He and Bill have opened it up and they can't see anything nasty in it."

"No booby-trap bombs for inquisitive visitors?"

"Nothing like that," laughed Daniel. "The best think to do would be to take it back with us and try to power it up and see if we can get to any records off it."

"Okay," said O'Neill. "Have we got enough pictures?"

"More than enough in here," said Major Pirelli of SG-8, who was in charge of documentation. "One of the out-buildings is a garage. The other has a broken roof and a bit of plant life and some bugs in it."

"A garage?" said O'Neill.

"With two abandoned bugmobiles," Pirelli said with a grin. "But before you get your hopes up, one has a broken front axle and there has to be something just as wrong with the other."

"I'm desperate for something to look at," O'Neill decided. "Even if it means putting a bug-suit on again."

The vehicles had the footprint of a Jeep. They had relatively large wheels with solid-foam tyres and a high ground clearance. There was a box-like structure with rounded edges enclosing the entire upper surface. It contained two bench seats for human-size beings and a basic instrument panel before a left-side driver's seat.

There was a tiller for steering and what looked like a hand throttle. The areas in front of the control panel and behind

the rear seats were available for storage. Dr. Lee concluded that the vehicles were solar-powered. The roof was covered with light-converting panels, as were the sides with gaps to provide windows.

At Dr. Lee's suggestion, the vehicles were pushed out into daylight. To no one's surprise, the vehicle with the broken axle began to show signs of life. The other remained just a lump of metal and plastic.

"Our options are swap the front wheels or see if we can spot a bad control board in the other one that we can swap out," said Dr. Lee. "I recommend we try option two first."

"Sounds good to me," said O'Neill, "but check out how much work option one would be."

"You know what," Trajan said as he inspected what had to be an access panel to the vehicle's works, "I don't think anyone has ever tried to take this off. Not since it came out of the factory."

"If it doesn't work, dump it?" said Lee. "So it comes from a culture with lots of resources? Or one with a very idle workforce?"

"And a very educated one," said Daniel Jackson. "I can't see anything in the way of labels or instructions anywhere on these."

"How can they not have some sort of individual ID label to tell them apart?" said Trajan.

"Because they're built and operated by aliens?" said Lee.

"That's what you call merciless logic," laughed Daniel.

To Colonel O'Neill's surprise, his Specialists had one of the vehicles running in less than ten minutes. SG-8 had come up with a system of strapping, which would let the working vehicle serve as a tow-truck to take the other one back to the stargate.

Dr. Lee was awarded the honour of driving, on the understanding that he maintained a steady walking pace. He was quite happy not to be on foot for the return journey.

The teams made a final sweep of the site, then prepared to move out.

"Okay, everyone, we're outa here," Colonel O'Neill said

with the air of someone who was glad to be on his way again. “Suit up tight so the bugs can’t bite and let’s get off this damn planet.”



# In Plain Sight

[July 29, Tuesday, 14:14 hours]

Dr. Fraiser reported to General Hammond's office in the early afternoon with an update on Major Carter's condition. The major was still in the infirmary but the poisons had been cleared from her system and there were no signs of lasting consequences. She could expect to be released the following day, if her blood tests were normal, and return to full duty on Thursday.

"I'm very please to hear that, Doctor," said the general. "And what about the other Miss Carter?"

"I would say her levels of self-esteem and self-confidence have both definitely improved," Dr. Fraiser returned. "When she arrived here, she was a classic little girl lost. Quite literally. Being accepted here, and being able to form a close relationship with a version of someone she worked with in the other SGC, have helped enormously."

"A rather more intimate relationship, Doctor," the general observed with a smile.

"Which speeded up the emotional healing process a great deal, sir. Dr. Trajan's shopping expeditions to provide clothing, and a labcoat from stores, helped greatly with establishing a normal environment for her. But I would say she's not out of the woods yet. She now looks like a member of our civilian staff, sir, but it's still a shell. She's still in a very fragile mental state."

"How fragile?"

"She can function normally, sir, but she's still coming to terms with a horrifying experience, and doing so will take a long time. Maybe years. But she is strong enough to do it, and the healing process is accelerated by Dr. Trajan's presence in her life. And he's helping her with work-arounds. Such as Dr. Carter is carrying his SGC pass around with her."

“Why?” the general asked with a frown.

“Because he can’t get off the mountain without it, sir. We’re issued with our passes when we arrive and we surrender them when we leave as part of the system for keeping track of who is on the base and where we are. As long as Dr. Carter has Dr. Trajan’s pass in her pocket, she knows he has to be somewhere here, which is reassuring.

“At a purely intellectual level, Samantha knows it’s silly. But at the level of someone who was forced to flee for her life while the Goa’uld were killing everyone she knew here, it works and she’s pragmatic enough to go along with it. She’s still having panic attacks, but they’re becoming less frequent and she knows how to deal with them. Which is important if she happens to be on her own.”

“A complex situation,” the general said. “I take it she will need the same sort of monitoring as anyone else suffering from PTSD?”

“Exactly, sir. Did anything come of Dr. Trajan’s idea to ask the Almed about scanning her for signs of mind control, if the Tok’ra are still in trouble?”

“That decision has been taken, Doctor. Telling the Almed about the dimensional interface is not on the table at this stage.”

“That’s not very good from Dr. Carter’s point of view, sir. Her morale plays an important part in her mental health status.”

“The Almed are a huge political problem, Doctor, and Washington is still debating our level of contact with them. Problems arise when they share some wisdom with us and our people have to tell our ‘experts’ here that they’re on the wrong track.”

“This is experts who don’t know about the stargate program, sir?”

“That’s right. So when they say, ‘You know that because?’ we have a huge problem. Do we say, ‘In fact, some Earth governments are fighting a war with enemy aliens and we’ve contacted some people they enslaved thousands of years ago while doing it. The ones we’re thinking about are fifty to one-hundred years ahead of us in some areas of science and they

solved this problem decades ago. Which is how we know you're on the wrong track.”

“But the bad news is that this is all so top secret that now we've told you about it, we're going to have to kill you?” the doctor quoted with a smile. “But the good news about that is I'm a good shot and you won't suffer. Much.”

“Do I detect Dr. Trajan's influence there, Doctor?” the general said with a laugh.

“The way he cuts through the politics can be refreshing, sir. Coming back to the matter in hand, this leaves Dr. Carter where?”

“Vetted to the best of our ability and waiting to be cleared for work here by the people in Washington. There has been some talk of possibly transferring her to Washington in the meantime . . .”

“No.”

“No, doctor?” General Hammond said mildly.

“That should have been ‘No, sir’,” Dr. Fraiser said with a smile. “Not unless you're planning to send Dr. Trajan with her. If she doesn't have him close by, or she knows they will be separated for a lot more than a few hours, she will just come apart at the seams. And putting her back together again will not be an easy task. Neither will securing her future cooperation. She is bound to view it as a betrayal. Not by Dr. Trajan but by the Air Force.”

“Dr. Trajan is needed here, doctor.”

“Which gives us the choice of having Dr. Carter functional and providing useful information here or in a rubber room in Washington, sir. She might look okay in public but Dr. Trajan is still having to glue her back together in private. And she's still having nightmares. Having Dr. Trajan's SGC pass in her pocket will definitely not work if they're the width of the country apart for an extended period of time.”

“Very well, Doctor.” The general made notes on his pad. “Your message received and understood.”



Colonel O'Neill and Teal'c were the first visitors to call on

Major Carter as she was wondering whether to try to read some more of her book. It was interesting, but her mind kept wandering to all the things which she could have been doing had she not been stuck in the infirmary.

“Still not come out in orange spots?” O’Neill remarked as he pulled a chair closer to the bed.

“Disappointingly normal, sir,” Carter said with a smile. “Same with you two?”

“No bugs would dare bite Teal’c,” said O’Neill. “The experts came up with a sort of netting oversuit, which worked. It’s like an all-over bee-keeping veil impregnated with bug-killer. And they gave us a spray to use at the archive site. Much better than a rubber CBW spacesuit.”

“You didn’t find anything exciting at the site?”

“It looks like they bugged out and abandoned it a long time ago. You didn’t miss anything.”

“That’s some consolation,” Carter said with a smile.

“We’re due back on Eight-Two-Five tomorrow,” O’Neill added. “With Dr. Lee as our physics nerd again. Daniel and Trajan have been translating some rather miserable bits of records, and they found a reference to another site about a couple of clicks from the one we visited today.”

“The job is urgent?”

O’Neill shrugged his shoulders. “I think some guy at the Pentagon has got a bug up his ass is all. I don’t expect site two to give us anything more than site one.”

“Patience is a virtue rarely practised by distant leaders of any force,” Teal’c observed.

“You’re not taking Daniel and H.T.?”

“The general has a job for Daniel and he thinks Trajan would be better employed picking your other self’s brains.”

“She has a lot to tell us, sir.”

“I’ll take your word for it,” said Colonel O’Neill. “I still think all this parallel dimension stuff is weird.”

“But still fascinating,” said Carter.

“When will you be released from here, Samantha Carter?” Teal’c asked.

“Tomorrow morning. Cleared to return to duty the next day.”

“With any luck, they’ll have lost interest in the bug planet by then,” Colonel O’Neill said confidently.



Dr. Sammy Carter still had mixed feelings about being in the infirmary at the SGC. In her parallel, she had never been there as either a patient or a visitor. Her occasional contacts with Dr. Fraiser had always been purely social. The medical centre in her present home had a great number of unfortunate associations.

“I met the Colonel and Teal’c on their way out as I arrived,” she said as she reached Major Carter’s bedside. “I hope you’re not feeling overloaded with visitors?”

“Not yet,” laughed the major. “How are you with him now? Teal’c?”

“How would you feel if someone told you to sit next to the biggest, meanest lion you ever saw? And they said, ‘It’s okay, he’s a pussy cat, he won’t harm you.’ I know, at an intellectual level, that Teal’c is a good guy. But he still scares the hell out of me.”

“Yes, he does manage to look intimidating without any effort. Apart from that, do you feel you’re starting to find your feet here?”

“I suppose it’s not bad here. I can read, talk to a few people I sort of know and visit Daniel’s museum, which is great, and the library. And watch TV. Guess what we were watching on TV last night?”

“Football?” said Major Carter.

“Monster trucks. And it was fun trying to work out if they’d make a jump or a wheel would come off or they’d end up on their side or upside down.”

“Weird,” laughed Carter.

“Then we watched the last quarter of an Australian football match. Now, that was weird.”

“You and H.T. seem to be getting on very well.”

“Most of the time. But we enjoy bugging each other. I know I’m in trouble when he starts calling me Samantha. And if he gets to Samantha Jane, watch out! But he cuts me a lot of

slack because he's the only person on the planet I know really well. Apart from Bill Lee, and he goes home to his wife every evening."

"The other H.T. doesn't have a permanent apartment here as well as the one in Silver Spring?"

"No, the only times we had to stay overnight, we were given rooms in the guest quarters; but separate ones, I hasten to add. There was no way I'd ever get to sleep with the other Dr. Trajan. And I've never slept with this one with my boots on, as he mentioned you'd done on missions."

"The laundry will be very pleased about that," laughed Carter.

"But it's surprising how alike they are. Apart from the other Dr. Trajan not having a bullet hole in his leg."

"Oh, yes, ours was hit by a ricochet. It made him limp a bit but the old adrenaline kept him going until we were safe. It didn't do much damage and he didn't get a Purple Heart, of course, because he's not in the Air Force. He was quite indignant that he didn't get a pension for what he was calling his industrial injury. How do you know the other Dr. Trajan was never shot?"

"I think I'd have noticed him limping. And his wife would have had something to say about it."

"But there was never any chance of checking him out for bullet scars?"

"Gosh, no! I think they were both about twenty-one when he and Karolin got married. She was The One; and so was he."

"He didn't invite you to his place in Florida for a beach party?"

"No, we worked together but we didn't go on group holidays. I went to their place in Silver Spring quite a few times. Always when Karolin was there, of course."

"It must have been a bit difficult, you and him sharing this huge secret that you had to keep from her."

"The other H.T. used to tell Karolin that if he ever told her what he did for the Air Force, they'd both end up at Fort Incarceration, allowed to wave to each other through the barbed wire on alternate Wednesdays. You know that

sceptical smile he does when you're convinced you're right and he thinks you're probably wrong but he's too polite to say so? It's sort of his wife's trade mark and I always assumed the other Trajan got it from her."

"But you think now it was the other way around?"

"I think they both do it, and they created a monster bigger than the two of them put together. H.T.'s tastes are pretty exactly like the other Dr. Trajan's, as far as I know them. I guess he's working from your personal tastes, Sam, which he seems to know quite well, when he makes assumptions about me. And they both have one big plus in common: H.T. isn't a guy who does the least he can do. He starts at most and takes it from there. Well, that's what he did with me."

"Yes, he's what the English call a 'good egg'."

"He's the living embodiment of above and beyond. When he did the first shopping trip for clothes for me, he also came back with my watch, a wallet stuffed full of twenty-dollar bills to let me buy things at the PX, and a labcoat because I was really was missing the pockets, and my simple but elegant necklace with the sapphire chips."

"Appropriate for a member of the civilian staff."

"Right. And when he'd presented me with everything, he gave me a medicinal kiss."

"What's that?" laughed Major Carter.

"He thought I was going to start crying again; happiness, this time; when he gave me the labcoat so he decided to head me off at the pass. Which worked very well. When I stopped laughing, we had a daft argument over who'd enjoyed it most. It's really good to have someone you can be silly with," Sammy added with a smile.

"You're used to handling Trajanisms?"

"I know now that I never got to hear the really good ones. Like the one he came out with after he did his second shopping expedition with two kitbags. I'd unloaded the stuff onto the bed and I was gloating over it when he said, 'It's a shame, isn't it? You've got all these lovely new clothes. And a cellmate who's only interested in getting you out of them.' That one takes some beating."

"I guess there must be totally evil H.T.s in some parallel

worlds. But not in this one.” Major Carter found herself reflecting that someone to be silly with was lacking from her own busy life. “Did you just call him your cellmate?” Carter realized.

“That’s another Trajanism; he was asking me if we should get some bars fitted to our window so we can bang a tin cup along them and shout, ‘Yaaa, ya dirty screw,’ like cellmates do in prison movies.”

“Now, that is weird,” laughed Carter.

“It put me on course for a major shift in how I see my situation. I’d pay a lot of money to be locked up with H.T., and he’s obviously prepared to give up his liberty for me. We were wondering if we’re victims of Stockholm Syndrome and it’s impossible not to fall for your cellmate. If you’re one of each, of course.”

“Cellmates with a lot of history with people very similar to you and H.T.,” Carter pointed out. “You had a head start because you’re not exactly strangers.”

“That’s true. The only strange thing about this H.T. is all the voice commands for his apartment here used to be in Goa’uld. Until he changed them to English to avoid upsetting me. You know: ‘twilight’, ‘bright’ and so on for the lighting.”

“That was very considerate of him.”

“I did think of making him change them back to prove I’m not going to let what happened to me in my parallel universe take over our lives here. But I didn’t want him to think I was being picky. And I really need to stay on his good side.”

“I don’t think you’re in much danger of seeing his bad side, Sammy. He really rates you.”

“Maybe. But seriously, Sam, you can’t imagine the relief of having him there when I wake up screaming in the night. If he’d not let me move in with him, I’d be a drugged-up zombie in a rubber room right now.”

“But you’re working through it, Sammy. I’m sure of that. We Carters are pretty resilient, you know.”

“That’s not something I ever wanted to find out at first hand,” Sammy returned with a wry smile. “H.T. is keeping me able to function right now. At times, it feels like I died back home too and I’m in some sort of after-life. My personal

Valhalla. With the man of my dreams. And nightmares.”

“I can’t imagine what that’s like.”

“But it gives me a whole new respect for what you and the rest of SG-One do. Going into danger every day.”

“Not quite every day. And it’s what I’ve been trained for. That makes a big difference. But you must be strong inside to be able to come to terms with what happened to you.”

“Being one of the team is what counts,” Sammy decided. “No one could do it alone. As I found out yesterday. After I left you, I got myself into a bit of state, worrying about what could have happened to H.T., being a total idiot.”

“There’s nothing idiotic about caring about someone, Sammy.”

“There is when H.T. has to sit me down with my feet up and spend half an hour helping me to unscream, as he called it. And remind me that going out through the stargate on missions has to be done.”

“That’s right,” said Major Carter. “We do it because we know what will happen if we don’t do it.”

“Yes, that’s pretty much what H.T. told me. He could be out in the real world, earning hundreds of millions of dollars every year. But instead, he’s prepared to work all the hours there are here, like the rest of you. It’s a good job he’s not a serial killer because I’d help him to get away with it just to keep him around.”

“It’s a bit less one-sided than you think, Sammy. H.T. has told me it’s like having a birthday every day of the week, having you living with him.”

“I’m just so glad he’s not married here as well.” Sammy put her hands together in mock prayer. Then she changed tack. “Apropos of nothing; I’ve noticed is that Colonel O’Neill calls you Carter, Daniel is usually Daniel and H.T. is always Trajan.”

“And?” Carter invited.

“He sees Daniel as a civilian with a first name so does that make H.T. honorary military, so he’s a surname, like yourself? Or am I being too analytical?”

“No, you’re probably right,” Carter realized. “H.T. does get the chain of command much more than Daniel. So he’s

much more likely to get on with it when he's given an order rather than stop and argue about it."

"Have you ever met any of these Almed guys? Apparently, they're not going to be scanning me to find out if I'm a Goa'uld spy."

"A few times, yes."

"I've been trying to imagine what it would be like for someone from, say, the nineteen thirties to meet one of us."

"They don't look any different from us, really. Apart from the clothes. They have great easy-care fabrics that don't go into creases."

"That would be useful to have."

"Except, the Pentagonians, as H.T. calls them, want big technology."

"Which brings obvious problems," said Sammy.

"Right. Imagine showing a Concorde to the Wright brothers. They'd realize what it is but as far as having the technology to build another one; forget it. That's where we are in relation to the Almed as far as the stuff I'm working on is concerned. But the Pentagonians are betting on the chance that they might let us have the plans for a Sopwith Camel or even a Spitfire out of one of their museums. Something which is just within our grasp with a bit of effort."

"They sound the right guys to ask about that dimensional mirror. Have you heard Bill Lee's theory about whether I'm going to be okay here?"

"In theory, individual particles, especially neutrinos and photons, can move from one parallel to another with no detectable consequences," Major Carter quoted.

"They just move around and everything balances out at the macro scale," Sammy continued. "What the dimensional mirror does is shift a bigger amount of material from one parallel to another in one lump, then encourage the natural processes of the Universe make up the difference via a greater rate of exchange of individual solo particles."

"And we have to remember that one person is a fairly insignificant quantity of matter when averaged across the entire multiverse, so you should be okay here."

"In theory, of course."

“Well, yes, in theory.”

“Which could be wrong.”

“Well, yes,” said Carter. “But I tend to go along with Bill Lee. Given the sheer size of the multiverse, even a whole army of people moved to another parallel shouldn’t make a material difference. As H.T. has probably told you, people take the Butterfly Effect way too seriously. A butterfly flapping its wings can cause a tornado on the other side of the world only in a computer, where all collisions are perfectly elastic and there’s no friction. In the real world, though, small local effects are eaten up by the system effortlessly.”

“Yes, I think H.T. is running a campaign to have the term Butterfly Effect wiped from existence. Talking about H.T.; you know a day on the Almed planet is 24 hours and 2 minutes long? H.T. was wondering if it’s possible that the Ancients were able to adjust the rotation period of gateworthy and terraformable planets to a common value.”

“Interesting theory,” said Carter. “Especially when you consider the huge difference between a day on Earth and a day on Venus, which is 243 of our days and about twenty days longer than a year there. But could the Ancients have generated the enormous forces needed to adjust the period of a slower or faster planet?”

“And would it have been worth it just to avoid having to adjust their alarm clocks if they got a transfer to a different planet?”

Major Carter began to laugh. “Put like that . . .”

“Hello, Dr. Fraiser is looking at me,” Sammy realized. “I think she wants some more blood.”

“I know the feeling,” laughed Major Carter. “See you later.”



Dr. Trajan arrived as Major Carter was making up her mind to try her book again. “I come bearing gifts,” he announced. “Some blue Jello and a spoon, and this.” Trajan held up a report binder. “The report you would most want to get your hands on, plus a notebook and a red pen and a black pen.”

“It’s okay, I’m not going to cry all over you,” the major said in response to his cautious expression.

“Actually,” he realized, “I’m probably uniquely qualified to handle that now.”

“I guess you are,” laughed Carter.

“Do you cry much?”

“It happens. Not very often, thankfully.”

“I suppose your other self suffered a lifetime of distress in a few days.”

“She cries a lot?”

“Progressively less, I’m pleased to report. Just as well I’m waterproof. I don’t think things will be anything like totally okay for a long while. She still wake up in the night feeling terrified and she gets terribly embarrassed when she disturbs my sleep. But we deal with it because we can deal with it. There’s a fair bit of the old Carter resilience in there.”

“Behind the nervous geekiness, as Jack puts it?”

“Just shows you what Air Force officer training can do,” Trajan said with a smile at his companion. “And the nervousness will disappear when she finds her feet. She tells me she used to be okay until she got here. Five years at the other SGC, being treated by my other self as someone whose opinion counts for something, had made her confident if not downright assertive. And I’m a bit nervous myself. It’s a bit unnerving, living with someone who knows so much about me while I know so little about her.”

“Who knows things like you’re a composer?”

“You really do have my apartment and my quarters here bugged, don’t you?” said Trajan.

“Sammy told me,” Carter said with exaggerated patience. “She found a CD you’d composed in the collection in your quarters and played me her favourite tracks. It sounds . . .”

“Almost like it was done by a proper composer with a real orchestra and choir?”

“You really wrote a computer program to perform a whole choral symphony?”

“It’s actually easier than it sounds when you break it down into the individual tasks. The only hard part is making the voicing convincing.”

“I’ll take your word for it. I hear you two went for a drive together.”

“Just round and round the car park so she doesn’t forget how to drive. It was very weird; she went straight to my car. Same make, model, colour, number plate and parking spot.”

“The other Dr. Trajan doesn’t drive a Lamborghini?”

“Apparently not. He seems to have his feet firmly on the ground. Just like all the Doctors Carter of my acquaintance.”

“Seeing you and Sammy together has given me a fascinating insight into your relationship with me,” Major Carter said.

“What, this conspiracy I’ve cooked up with the Universe to bug the hell out of you with structure in the laws of physics?”

The Carter Look was followed by: “When you ask her ‘How does that work?’ when you want some bit of physics explained, you listen to her explanation with both ears. And it’s the same when she says something serious during a conversation.”

“And that’s noteworthy because . . . ?” said Trajan.

“You treat her, and me, like real colleagues. People with opinions that count and are worth hearing.”

“Well, you are two of the most intelligent people on the planet.”

“News flash, Dr. Trajan. A lot of your colleagues can’t see past the fact that we’re women and so our opinions are somehow less valuable.”

“One thing I’ve learnt in government service is that women definitely don’t have a monopoly on daft ideas. So, after your close study of my interpersonal relations with Sammy, are you now convinced I’m not here just to annoy you?”

“I do feel motivated to cut you a bit more slack,” Carter admitted. “And I think Sammy being here has improved our relationship. We both know each other better, and we know better where the limits are. We don’t have to tiptoe round each other. We can say silly things to each other and laugh if the other one starts taking us seriously.”

“In that case, is there any chance of using that inter-dimensional gadget to bring another Trajan here so I can evaluate my relationship with all the Carters?”

“Not anytime soon. I’ve heard some talk of putting a fancy

locking system on it to prevent it from being abused.”

“By people whose name rhymes with Binsey?”

“Among others.”

“The thing I don’t get is how Sammy and the corporal managed to use our gadget. Shouldn’t it have been locked up in a box somewhere? I asked the general about that but he told me he has no idea.”

“I heard a whisper that it was out of storage for study.”

“You mean, NID was messing about with it?”

“I guess so. But I’m sure it must be back in its box and under guard now. By the way, I’ve noticed you kid around with Sammy a lot more than you do with me.”

“Probably because we have a slightly different relationship. We two are much more work oriented, so extended kidding isn’t encouraged. And you’ve usually got a gun. All she can do is give me an arm-tag if I annoy her.”

“Good for her. I must say, I’ve never seen anyone looks happier than when she’s with you.”

“Except, her happiness is built around knowing a completely different version of me.”

“Not all that different. Everything she knows about him seems to apply to you as well.”

“Apart from him being married to the second most desirable woman in the galaxy and having more billion dollars to his name than you can shake a stick at?”

“Well, apart from that. But I get the feeling you’re already convinced she’s not a Goa’uld spy.”

“It was expanding the bed in my quarters that clinched it. When you think about it, there’s no way a Goa’uld-controlled duplicate of you would know something like that. You didn’t even know it yourself.”

“Well, yes,” Carter admitted.

“And there is a certain advantage to having a physicist I can trust as a lodger. I can ask her to explain all sorts of things instead of having to come crawling to you with my tail between my legs and my ignorance on show.”

“That’s a bit rotten,” laughed Carter. “Doing me out of opportunities to gloat.”

Trajan looked at her thoughtfully. “Nah, you’re not the evil

step-mother type. You're not a natural gloater."

"That's good to know."

"One thing Sammy has mentioned is that she often unloads her problems on my other self because he's very good at coming up with practical solutions."

"Sounds a useful guy to know," laughed Carter.

"So if you ever need an agony uncle, you know where to come."

"I might take you up on that," laughed Carter. "Is your relationship as ideal as it looks? Do you ever argue?"

"We do have differences of opinion but we don't scream and throw things at each other. Our arguments usually degenerate into really silly stuff. We tend to wind each other up by asking how sure we are about something, and then playing Devil's Advocate to a totally ridiculous degree. Usually, until we both collapse laughing."

"Have you told you parents or your sister that you have a roomie?"

"I sort of hinted that I'm away from home so much at the moment because I'm working with an Air Force rocket scientist, but I don't have a high enough security clearance to know exactly what she does. Which the other you finds highly finds amusing."

"I can believe that. What's your report about?" Major Carter flicked to the back of the binder to find out that it contain 23 pages.

"It's a bit of history trawled from the Almed's files. I think it will give you some context."

"Nourishment for my inner nerd?"

"Something which only another nerd would realize you need," said Trajan. "Hello, here's that doctor lady," he added as Dr. Fraiser joined them. "She's probably after your blood again."

"No, I just have some information for you," Dr. Fraiser said with a smile. "I've been doing a lot of reading and it's likely that Dr. Carter's period of sleep deprivation during her escape and after she arrived here might contain some positives."

"How big a magnifying glass would I need to find them?" Trajan asked with a sceptical frown.

“It’s counter-intuitive, but I’ve found studies which suggest that sleep deprivation can prevent intrusive memories from being stored as effectively as they would have been, had the patient been able to sleep normally or accept medication.”

“So her nightmares could have been ten times worse if we’d found out right away that she can get to sleep in my quarters with me there?”

“I’m not saying that,” laughed the doctor, “but it’s possible that they are less severe than they could have been, and it’s possible that the after-effects of her experience will be less severe. She’s just reported nightmares but she’s not had flash-backs?”

“You mean, like Vietnam veterans? No, there have been no flash-backs. The nightmares are bad enough.”

“I can’t put a time scale on this but they should downgrade to just bad dreams soon,” said the doctor.

“A bit of good news to pass on,” said Trajan.



Dr. Daniel Jackson also had something to stimulate the patient when he made his visit. Major Carter puzzled over an obviously ancient object for a minute or so, then shook her head. “Okay, I give up, what is it?” she said.

“Would you say it looks just like a carved votive statuette of no great value? Something which fits neatly into the hand? Nice workmanship but nothing special?”

“Knowing you’re going to tell me I’m totally wrong?” said Carter as she turned an object slightly smaller than a computer mouse around to view it from all angles.

“I’ve had that for four years. I must have picked it up and put it down scores of times. You could have knocked me over with the proverbial feather when Sammy picked it up yesterday, turned it over and popped the casing open. It was a real Nine-Oh-Seven moment.”

“How?”

“Like this.” Daniel showed his colleague where to press and slide a panel. “There you are. Not some sort of representation of a minor insect god, a gadget with crystals inside.”

“Which does what?”

“I’m still digging in my archives, looking for references,” said Daniel.

“So that’s yet another point scored for our visitor from another dimension?”

“She clearly knows things we don’t, Sam. Her knowledge overlaps ours rather than runs parallel to it.”

“Are you expecting her to find other hidden treasures in your stuff?”

“She hasn’t looked at everything yet,” Daniel said with a laugh.

“What are these marking? Are they just pictures and symbols, or are they actual writing?”

“I’m still working on that,” admitted Daniel.

“And when you come back from Three-Nine-Eight tomorrow, will it be with more hidden treasures to distract you from this one?”

“Nobody’s putting any money on that,” laughed Daniel.

### **[July 30, Wednesday]**

Dr. Samantha Carter emerged from her visitor-quarters bedroom in a new outfit and looked at her host in expectation and invitation.

“You looked just as smart and elegant in what you were wearing a few minutes ago,” said Dr. Trajan.

“Yes, but you’re not used to seeing me wearing clothes,” said Sammy. “So can I trust your opinion?”

“Does my wife know that?” laughed Trajan. “About the clothes?”

“I mean, you normally see me in a labcoat, so all you usually see are lower legs and shoes.”

“You mean, you might be wearing nothing at all under the labcoat?”

Trajan received a helping of The Look.

“Sammy, you look very smartly turned out and I would be delighted to be seen with you in any public place you care to

name. And Sam will be here to talk engineering this afternoon, not to give you marks out of ten for dress sense. And she'll be wearing a black jumper and a pair of work trousers, and not competing with you."

"Now say that like you mean it."

"If you're trying to pick a fight with me, lady, I should warn you that I have passed US Air Force unarmed combat courses, I know how to fight with a knife and I can produce very respectable scores with pistol and assault rifle. I might add that I've been arrested fourteen times for punching women who annoyed me but never once convicted as I'm too important to national security to go to gaol."

"And I suppose you can leap tall buildings at a single bound?"

"Not something I've ever tried. But maybe I could if I put my mind to it. Look, Sammy, you're in a weird situation and you're unsettled and you've lost focus a bit. All I want to do is help you get it back."

"And me being silly isn't helping any? I guess you're right."

"I suppose I could try treating you like one of the team to emphasize how things have changed. I call you Carter and you call me Trajan."

"We don't need to go that far," Sammy said with a laugh. "I'm sorry if I'm being ratty, but I want to do something, H.T. Something to take my mind off feeling like I'm in an afterlife full of the ghosts of the people I used to work with and feeling like I'm clinging to you like you're a human lifeboat. You know what Bill Lee was saying about the dimensional mirror? Do you believe any of that?"

"I accept it as a working hypothesis," said Trajan. "But I want some proof, or a lot more data, before I believe anything."

"I'm not going back. To my parallel."

"I don't blame you."

"I mean it, H.T. Even if I'm not viable here in your parallel, I'm not going back to somewhere you're dead and so is everyone I know."

"Whatever you choose, I'll back you up. We're in this together."

“Am I being a nuisance?”

“No, you’re okay. I’ll tell you if you become a nuisance.”

“No, you won’t. You’re too English and polite to. You’ll just bottle it all up inside and end up hating me.”

“Me hate you?” scoffed Trajan. “Don’t you think that’s slightly never ever going to happen, Samantha darling?”

“You know what I mean.”

“Yes, I do. And we’ll work out any problems that arise because we’re natural problem-solvers. I get that you’re picking a fight with me out of frustration and a good argument will make you feel better.”

“You’ve got me all worked out, you mean?”

“Not even close after knowing you just a couple of weeks,” laughed Trajan. “But I’m sure the SGC’s morale officer has noticed the upward swing in mine due to having you here. So we assume you’re here for the duration and we just keep working on the positives. And in the spirit of doing things, how would you like a change to the normal routine? Like a picnic lunch on top of the mountain instead of lunch in the PMR?”

“Do we need ropes and a team of Sherpas?”

“No, we get a lift to the top hatch and park ourselves on the observation gallery. You’ll need something more substantial than a labcoat, though. It might be a bit windy up there.”

“We could always chase each other round the top of the mountain to keep warm.”

“What would my wife say about that?”

“The one who doesn’t know about the SGC and to whom the other Dr. Trajan is one-hundred per cent faithful?”

“This dual life is very confusing at times.”

“You can tell me about it at the top of the mountain,” Sammy said with a smile. “When I’m trying out that anorak you bought for me.”

“So you’re feeling a bit more cheerful now?”

“And relieved you’re so like the Trajan I know. Did you check the weather forecast, by the way?”

“Just how big an idiot do you think I am?”

“About five feet eleven and a half without your boots on?”

“G.O.S.H. Good Sense Of Humour but slightly twisted.”

“That’s the definition of yours. And your wife’s.”

“And my cellmate’s, evidently.”

**[July 30, Wednesday, afternoon]**

In Dr. Trajan’s apartment in the visitor quarters, Dr. Samantha Carter was explaining to Major Carter, some work which she had done on spacecraft design, seeking to learn how relevant it would be to what was happening in her current parallel universe.

Even though she was not officially cleared for duty, Major Carter was back at work on her own account.

“Is there any coffee?” said Sammy whilst her counterpart was writing notes on a reporter’s pad.

“I hear there’s quite a lot in Colombia.” Trajan headed for the coffee machine and the biscuit tin. “Also Brazil and Kenya.”

“Is there any closer to home than that?” Sammy said with a note of patience.

“I shall move mountains to find out.” Trajan filled mugs and shook a selection of biscuits onto a plate.

“Mine makes the same big production out of a simple job,” Sammy told the major. “I sometimes have trouble remembering which one is supposed to be the actor, him or his wife.”

“You mean, there’s another career waiting for me if the bottom falls out of the maths racket?” Trajan said as he delivered coffee and biscuits to the ladies.

“Or you could be a movie star’s husband,” suggested Major Carter. “There’s a third way for you.”

“America, land of opportunity,” laughed Trajan. “I’m so glad I let the Air Force drag me over here.”

“Where I come from, you came over here for a two-month holiday after you graduated, not long after your twentieth birthday and never went home. You met Karolin, and when her mother found out you were over the hills and far away in the field of statistical theory, she persuaded the insurance

company she worked for to get you a green card. You married Karolin a year later, you branched out, doing work for lots of companies, including defence contractors, and that's how the Air Force got you on their radar."

"You know what," Trajan said to Carter, "the more I hear stuff like that, the more surprised I am that you two are so alike, given the distance our respective universes must be from their divergence point."

"We're working on a Personality Inertia Hypothesis," said Carter.

"Events change but people remain broadly who they are?" said Trajan.

"Something like that, yes."

There was a double-rap on the door. Colonel O'Neill had arrived to remind Major Carter of a briefing

"Having fun?" he added to Sammy.

"Oh, yes," she returned. "And also some really weird experiences. Like when Daniel and H.T. were talking about that Goa'uld gadget I found in Daniel's collection. One minute, they were talking in English, the next, they were chatting in Goa'uld. It was so weird, sitting there, listening to people speaking Goa'uld."

"Without the funny voices?" said Trajan.

"Well, yes. But the only Goa'uld I've ever heard doing the voice is Apophis. And I wish I hadn't."

"Yes, not a pleasant guy," said O'Neill. "The other Dr. Trajan didn't speak Gould?"

"English, French, German, Spanish and Russian. And he could read the languages close to them, like Italian and Czech and Polish and Dutch. But he didn't work as closely with Daniel as H.T. does here. And being married, he had a good reason for getting out of the SGC every evening."

"A reason as good as the one he has for staying on here?"

"I hope so."

"Those whom the Universe hath hurled together, let no man put asunder?" Major Carter quoted a much-deployed Trajanism.

"Do you think he means that, Sam? You're the one who really knows what makes this H.T. Trajan tick," said Sammy.

“If he’s going to marry anyone, it ought to be the person the Universe picked out for him. And he sees you as his ideal companion. Hasn’t he told you that?”

“Yes, but it make it more . . . sort of official if he’s told someone else.”

“Does it count if it’s another version of you?” laughed Carter.

“The big problem is he would be worried that I would feeling pushed into marrying him because I feel I don’t have another option for getting some stability and order into my life.”

“Maybe you ought to tell him that.”

“I have,” said Sammy. “Maybe I need to ask you to tell him as well.”

“Maybe I should start a brand new career as a pre-marriage guidance counsellor.”

“Anyone would think the bloke they’re talking about wasn’t sitting right next to them,” Trajan said loudly.

“Women are like that,” Colonel O’Neill said wisely.

“I take it you didn’t find anything interesting on Planet Bug?” Trajan added, realizing that the morning’s mission had not been mentioned.

“Totally tedious,” said O’Neill. “Carter? Briefing?”

“Okay, what do we do now?” Sammy said to Trajan as the visitors were about to leave.

“How about you show me your tattoos?” said Trajan. “I hear they’re rather spectacular.”

Colonel O’Neill started to laugh.

“What?” Sammy said indignantly.

“Somehow, I don’t think Jack finds the idea of either of us with tattoos at all convincing,” laughed Major Carter.

“You can say that again,” laughed O’Neill. “See you two tomorrow. If we don’t die of boredom at this briefing.”

**[July 30, Wednesday, late afternoon]**

Toward the end of the afternoon, Dr. Trajan was surprised to

find Colonel O'Neill there when he answered a summons to his door to the corridor.

"There's a shoe polishing service?" O'Neill remarked as he entered the main room, his eyes attracted by the thin orange hoops at the toe-ends of Trajan's dark blue socks.

"Samantha was feeling wonky so she went for a lie down," said Trajan. "Then she decided she needed someone to talk to. So I joined her."

"And you don't lie on the bed with your shoes on because you're much too well brought up?"

"Right," said Trajan with a laugh. "Then she just dropped off to sleep. And I was lying there, thinking about Halgan Sets, when I got a visitor. Something is afoot?"

"Apart from orange-striped socks? Yes, SG-Seven is due back in an hour. Hammond wants you and Daniel to attend the debriefing. They've found some wreckage with writing in what they think is Gould on it, so they took pictures for you to look at."

Trajan glanced at his watch. "An hour. Check."

"I see you've got your name on the door. That's new."

"It's as much for our benefit as anyone else. Samantha has been organizing Housekeeping. Every couple of weeks; on the first and sixteenth of the month, they open walls and wheel our stuff into the next apartment so they can do an 'unencumbered clean' to regulation standards at their convenience."

"So you could go out to save the galaxy in the morning and find yourself doing 'Honey, I'm home' somewhere else?" laughed O'Neill.

"Keeps you on your toes, this place," Trajan returned.

"Are you there?" a voice called from the bedroom just after Colonel O'Neill had gone.

"At your service, milady," Trajan said as he entered the bedroom. "How are you doing?"

"No longer wonky after my nap. Sorry about that."

"Oh, it was quite restful, lying there next to you."

"Did you have some thoughts?"

"Yes, but as you were asleep, I had to ditch them and do

some mathematical thinking instead.”

“You mean, I owe you one?” laughed Sammy.

Trajan nodded wearing his best Gomez Addams lustful grin.

“Who was that just then?”

“O’Neill. There’s got a job for me in an hour.”

“Off-world?” Samantha tried, and failed, to avoid looking alarmed.

“No, right here at the SGC,” Trajan said quickly.

“Can I go with you?”

“Aaah . . . yes. It’s a translation job and it would be a good idea to have a physicist handy in case we get stuck with technical stuff.”

“That’s an excuse that sounds almost convincing.”

“Well, there’s no point in having an excuse that no one will believe. Wear your labcoat. Make it look official. And bring a notepad and a pen.”

“And I guess having a physicist there sounds better than pandering to a pathetic, wimpy woman who’s scared of being left on her own.”

“If we meet anyone like that, we can always bring her along, too.” Trajan fixed his gaze relentlessly on his companion and waited to find out which of them would smile first.



# Weapons Expert

[July 31, Thursday, afternoon]

Dr. Trajan was the last to reach the briefing room for an early afternoon meeting. General Hammond, both Drs. Carter and Colonel O'Neill were there ahead of him. The general was busily flicking through a bulky report.

"Apologies for being late," Trajan said, passing a folder of documents to Major Carter. "I couldn't get off the phone."

"Not the President again, H.T.?" said Samantha Carter. "The man voted least likely to get to the point anytime soon?"

"That would probably be treason if you were talking about our President," laughed Trajan.

"But oh, so true," murmured Colonel O'Neill.

"Actually, it was your wife who said that, not me," said Samantha.

"Oh! Well, he was tickled pink to hear he's in his second term where you come from, not his first, like here. Has the Doc given you an official get-out-of-gaol?" Trajan added to Major Carter.

"Ten minutes before she finished her escape tunnel," said O'Neill.

"Yes, I'm completely fine now," said Carter. "Thanks for asking. What did The Chief want?"

"He wanted to know who's who in the Airgoes for his visit to Tronno next week," Trajan said. "So he can pretend to be a bit of a CFL fan. I take it this isn't a mission briefing?" he added as he moved to the vacant chair.

"Will you marry me?" Samantha Carter asked as Trajan as he sat down next to her.

"Don't you have to be a minister of religion or a judge to do that?" he said to buy time.

Samantha responded to frivolity with The Look.

"Have I ever told you how well you and your sister do

that?" said Trajan.

Dr. Trajan found himself confronted by The Look in stereo. "Yes, I'd love to marry you," he said quickly. "When and where? And dare I ask why? Sudden attack of pregnancy? The management getting the hump over our living arrangements, seeing as how we're doing it in sin?" Trajan shot an inquiring glance in the general's direction.

General Hammond closed the report. "Colonel O'Neill suggested it might be an answer to Dr. Carter's immigration status," he explained. "In fact, her whole status in this world, if she's Major Carter's counterpart from another dimension."

Trajan looked across the table at the colonel; O'Neill shrugged his shoulders. "Idle thoughts fill idle minds," he quoted. "And it's not exactly an original suggestion. I seem to remember quite a discussion about it recently. And we know at least one other Trajan, where Sammy comes from, was into his fifteenth year of it, so you should be able to handle marriage."

"The Pentagon is having a real problem with trying to explain away two Samantha Carters," said the general. "Trivial as it may seem, if we could reduce the problems by acquiring a Samantha Trajan, that would make matters easier and also demonstrate that we, here, are doing everything in our power to find solutions to their problems. You, of course, have the most to lose in the way of reputation if this whole thing goes horribly wrong."

"If Samantha is, after all, some sort of undetectable Goa'uld spy?" said Trajan.

"We don't believe that, of course," the general said quickly, "but there are more than a few influential people at the Pentagon who still have doubts, real and political."

"Most of them called Kinsey?" said Trajan

"I couldn't comment on that, Dr. Trajan," said General Hammond.

"Can we assume a show of willingness to solve problems here will be reciprocated, as far as getting Samantha's documentation rammed through the burrocacy?" said Trajan.

"If handled in the right way," the general returned with a

nod. "As for your living arrangements, military regulations don't apply, given Dr. Carter's status as a refugee and your status as an SGC Specialist. Who you pick as a room-mate is not my concern."

"And then again, there's 'when in doubt, don't'," said O'Neill. "Because someone's bound to find some sort of regulation against it."

"Short-circuited by Dr. Fraiser's medical opinion," said Major Carter.

"So how does being married help us exactly?" said Trajan.

"I get ID documents for Dr. S.J. Trajan rather than Dr. S.J. Carter," said Samantha, "which is what Sam is as well as Major Carter."

"And it would be helpful to the paperwork if our Dr. S. J. Trajan is the wife of an existing staff member," said the general. "The obvious conclusion would be that she came here to join her husband, rather than she just appeared out of thin air."

"Which she did," murmured O'Neill.

"And Dr. Trajan's being British would also help," added the general. "The assumption would be that Dr. Carter's records are in England if they can't be found here."

"Do we have to apply to the CIA for a legend for her?" said Trajan. "Like the ones spies have? But as Dr. Carter can be classed as a national treasure from the things she knows that we don't, I'd suggest that any problems with her documents are due to some burrocrat dragging his feet because that's what they do instead of the job they're paid to do."

Dr. Trajan looked across the table quickly, surprised by a sudden burst of applause from Colonel O'Neill in response to his speech.

"Documentation is less of a problem than the back-story," said the general. "We've already told the Russians that Dr. and Major Carter are cousins. That they share a maternal grandmother and they both look exactly like the grandmother in photographs taken when she was their age."

"Actually, sir, the Russians don't buy that," said Major Carter. "They have a pretty shrewd idea of Sammy's status."

"Well, that's a surprise," said O'Neill.

“We are aware that a certain amount of information has leaked out of Area Fifty-One to the Russians,” said the general, “and they know a certain amount about the dimensional interface. But that’s the story we’re giving them and it’s up to them if they go along with it.”

“If we can pretend to believe that Stalin wasn’t even worse than Hitler, they can pretend to believe what we tell them about Dr. Carter,” said Trajan.

“I see you and Colonel O’Neill went to the same school of diplomacy, Dr. Trajan,” the general said with a laugh.

“A leader does tend to influence his troops, sir,” Trajan returned. “And, as you said, Samantha isn’t an illegal immigrant and a potential embarrassment to the government, she’s a refugee legitimately seeking asylum in her first port of call out of the danger zone.”

“In theory only,” the general cautioned.

“And the only minor problem is that the government can’t acknowledge her status on national security grounds,” Trajan added.

“If that’s a minor problem, I’d hate to have a major one,” laughed Samantha.

“But why do we care what the Russians think, sir?” said O’Neill.

“Because you’ll be working with some of them,” said the general.

“Oh, joy,” O’Neill muttered.

“Initially, with a Dr. Mironova,” said the general.

“That name sounds quite familiar, S.J.,” said Trajan. “I’m sure you’ve mentioned her.”

“She’s on SG-One where I come from,” said Samantha. “Only there, she’s Captain Mironova. We used to hang out quite a lot. She’s really a lot of fun when she’s off duty. The other Dr. Trajan liked her but some of the other Russians were a real pain in the neck, to quote the other Dr. Trajan, and he was forever saying, ‘Bloody Russians!’ when they were around. And the other Colonel O’Neill always used to tag on, ‘Shto on gavoreel.’”

“Which means?” said the general.

“*What he said*,” Trajan offered. “What’s the deal on our

Mironova, sir?"

"We think the Russians know that Mironova is involved somehow with our other Dr. Carter and they plan to put them together to see what shakes loose," said the general.

"Are they hoping to get her attached to SG-One, or something like that?" Trajan asked with a frown.

"What their objective is remains unclear," said the general. "Like the Russians, we're just going to have to suck it and see."

"I suppose telling them the bits of truth that haven't already leaked is out of the question?" said Trajan.

"Whether we should tell them any truth at all, officially, is still being discussed at the Pentagon," said the general.

"Let us hope that the Russians have got their bugs, or their mole, in that room," said Trajan

"I share your frustration, Dr. Trajan," the general said with a wry smile.

"I imagine the frustration quota of someone who has to deal with the Pentagon as much as you do is a whole lot bigger than mine ever gets, General," Trajan returned. "But where do the Russians come in to it?"

"Major?" said the general.

"Yes, sir," said Carter. "As you know, Sammy has been taking an interest in Daniel's collection of artefacts. At the beginning of the week, she found that one of them is functional rather than ritual." She placed an object roughly the size of a computer mouse on the briefing table. It was dull black with a metallic sheen, inscribed with symbols and it bore a vague resemblance to a stylized beetle, and had a raised area with depressions from nose to tail, which could have been a handle.

"Used for what?" said Trajan. "A very small iron for ladies' hankies?"

"That's the sixty-four thousand dollar question," Carter said with a laugh. "Daniel has been able to find references to several other examples of the device, which are in a collection made by a German archaeologist. He's gone to check some more references, which is why he isn't here now. We think the other devices were looted from the wreckage of the Third

Reich by Russians in nineteen forty-five. We think being able to work with several of the devices; they're not all exactly the same; will help with finding out what they're for."

"And this Mironova will be bringing a bagful?"

"If the Russians can find them. If they weren't collected as souvenirs by troops, the best outcome we can hope for is that they ended up in a museum basement somewhere. But there's always the possibility they could be in boxes and they might not have been catalogued."

"Sorry, I don't get this," said Trajan. "Have all the Carters here tried their best and got nowhere? Is that why we're letting the Russians in on this? The ladies have hardly had time to do much work with the one we've got."

"It's politics," said the general. "We're under orders to do more joint projects with the Russians and this looked suitable."

"Suitably harmless?" Trajan suggested.

"Plus, if they can't dig their gadgets out from where they were stashed after being liberated," O'Neill waved fingers to make quote marks around *liberated*, "then it's not our fault if the project can't go ahead."

"And regardless of whether a joint project does go ahead," said the general, "Doctor and Major Carter will be working on the item from Dr. Jackson's collection. Which, I gather, will require input from you, Dr. Trajan. And you'll be getting a full briefing on Dr. Mironova well before she arrives. If she does. What you can tell her, what you can't."

"Right," said Trajan. "Obvious question, but did anyone ask Teal'c about these gadgets before he went on his home visit?"

"He remember seeing similar gadgets, but only in Apophis's quarters and he has no idea what they were supposed to do," said Major Carter.

"You mean, they're high-end consumer goods, which aren't available to the staff?" said Trajan.

"That's one way of putting it," Carter said with a smile.

"Did Daniel say if this writing on them is in Ancient?" said Trajan as he turned the device over in his hands. "It looks somewhat modified from the standard script."

“Daniel thinks its later,” said Carter.

“Moving on,” General Hammond said to cut short the discussion. “A quick word of thanks to Dr. Carter is in order. For your help with translating the technical aspects of the documents SG-Seven brought back yesterday and helping with the debriefing. Some of the questions you asked proved so helpful that we plan to include them in future sessions involving a debriefing of a technical nature. Especially your way of telling if a device containing crystals has been used recently.”

“It was nice to feel like a useful member of the Trajan Group again,” Samantha said with a smile.

Trajan looked down at his notes, recalling the delight in Samantha’s smile the previous evening when Daniel Jackson had agreed that bringing his resident physicist along to a technical discussion had been an excellent idea.

Samantha had enjoyed questioning SG-7 about the exact condition of the mechanisms which they had photographed, and swapping stories of weather conditions on other planets with the SG team whilst Trajan and Dr. Jackson had been discussing shades of meaning in Goa’uld texts.

Some of her questions had surprised Trajan with their insight; such as asking SG-7 if they recalled whether crystals in the equipment had felt gritty when handled because use creates a static charge which attracts gritty dust, and a lack of grittiness suggests that the equipment has not been used recently.

Back in their living quarters, Samantha had been so cheered up by the session that she had told Trajan that there was a lucrative career as a psychotherapist waiting for him if the Air Force ever gave him the sack. She had also told him: ‘You know I owe you one? Now would be a good time to collect.’

“As far as your zat project goes, Samantha,” the general continued, “my contacts at the Pentagon were very disturbed to hear that Corporal Sheringham had a modified zat as part of his equipment. There is no official record of it, and also no trace of the implant which was removed from his arm.”

“NID,” said Colonel O’Neill.

“The official story,” the general said, “is that Sheringham

must have lost the zat before he came through the interface to this parallel, but no one is buying it. I have also tasked Dr. Lee with taking another look at the implant removed from Dr. Carter's arm to see if there's anything about it that has been missed. Anyhow, Dr. Carter now has an official go-ahead on building a zat prototype based on the work she did previously. She can also expect to receive full SGC clearance and a local security rating shortly. She will also work with Major Carter and Dr. Trajan, as required, on the device found in Dr. Jackson's collection."

"We were wondering about that," said Trajan. "Whether it would take six months and lots of bureaucracy before S.J. gets a security rating that will give her access to the labs."

"We do have the authority to work outside the system in exceptional circumstances," said the general. "And they certainly don't come more exceptional than Dr. Carter's. We expect to have things tied down by the middle of next week."

"And we'll be free to do a commute from Silver Spring then? Both of us?" said Trajan.

"No, I'm afraid that will have to wait until Dr. Carter has a full set of civilian identity documents," said the General. "In the meantime, I have a temporary SGC ID for Dr. Carter to wear instead of a visitor tag, and we're expecting an expert on zats from the Pentagon to arrive shortly."

"That was quick," said O'Neill.

"It shows how worried they are about the weapon that went missing, Jack," said the general. "Questions about your assignments, anyone? No? In that case, you are dismissed."

The group filed out of the office.

"Is it a leap year?" said O'Neill. "So the woman can propose?"

"I think you'll find you're breaching their human rights if you don't let them do it whether or not it's a leap year," said Trajan.

"That's the sort of remark that would earn the other Dr. Trajan a tag on the arm from his wife," said Samantha.

"Just make sure you're always wearing your velvet glove when you do it to me," said Trajan. "By the way," he added to Major Carter, "if you military types go to a wedding at your

place of work, are you expected to iron your fatigues or are you allowed to stick to the usual 'dragged through a hedge backwards' look?"

"Don't dignify that with an answer, Sam," laughed Samantha.

"If you're wearing your fighting kit, who's going to take you seriously if you have a crease in your trousers and your sleeves?" said Trajan. "You have to look big and tough; like you've been dragged through a hedge but you're too tough to care. But you should be able to let your tough image slip if you're at a wedding."

"I'm sure there's a regulation to cover it," O'Neill said gloomily. "There's one for everything else. But if there is a wedding, I look forward to the cake. Especially if Trajan makes it."

"With twenty-eight tiers?" said Trajan. "One for every level in the SGC?"

"That would be excellent," laughed O'Neill.

"You mentioned NID, Colonel," said Samantha. "Do you know what it stands for?"

"Well, no," Major Carter realized after exchanging frowns with Colonel O'Neill. "We've never been told officially. I've always assumed it stands for National Intelligence Department."

"Neoteric Impact Defense."

"That's where you come from? How do you know that?"

"The other Dr. Trajan found out from a contact in Washington. They'll deny it, of course. They'll claim the main business is oversight of top secret programs like the Stargate Program, but it's really all about politicians and their friends making money out of new technologies. Which means NID snoopers keeping their eyes open for anything good that comes out of the programs it watches."

"Why does that sound so much more likely than what we've been told?" said O'Neill. "Okay, Carter, you're with me."

"Sir?" Major Carter said with a frown.

"No, not you Carter, her Carter," said O'Neill. "Doctor Carter. I'm supposed to escort Sammy to the armoury to draw some zats. And make sure she don't shoot anyone once she's

got them. A nice change from being interrogated by Trajan.”

“It doesn’t feel like being interrogated,” laughed Samantha.

“How does he do it?” O’Neill added. “With a phone book, like in the movies?”

“No!” laughed Sammy. “We sit on the couch with the big computer monitor in front of us and we talk and he makes notes. And we have a keyboard with a long cable, which he can pass to me so I can type in descriptions and he can ask questions about them.”

“I guess that would work better than the phone book,” O’Neill conceded. “Okay, on to the armoury.”

“Okay, it’s this way,” said Samantha, confirming that she knew her way around the SGC.

“I did actually know that,” O’Neill mentioned as he caught her up.

“You’re with me, H.T.,” said Major Carter, brandishing a document folder. “I’m sure there’s plenty in here that you need to explain.”

“I’ll bring you some dinner later,” Trajan called after Samantha as she led O’Neill into the turn down a branching corridor. “And a sleeping bag, knowing what you Carters are like when you’re let loose in a lab.”

“Some of us are quite happy to be in a lab,” said Major Carter. “By the way, how long have you been calling my other self ‘S.J.’?”

“Since the weekend. I think Sammy is a bit too girly for someone of her status. It lacks gravitas. And she agrees.”

“Yes, you have a point.”

“She was stuck with the name in her parallel but it’s easily changed now she has a fresh start. She’s now S.J. or the full Samantha.”

“I’ll have to try to remember that,” said Major Carter.

“I did suggest we call her Samizdat but it would involve too much explaining.”

“Isn’t that Russian? Something to do with underground publishing using Xerox machines?”

“Right. People like yourself and Daniel would get the reference to her being a copy; which she isn’t, we decided quite quickly, because who can say who’s the master Sam

Carter and who's a copy?"

"I think you two have probably over-intellectualized that," Major Carter said with a laugh. "I should think very few nicknames can stand up to that level of scrutiny."

"You're probably right," Trajan admitted. "Anyway, S.J. it is."



Dr. Fraiser visited General Hammond's office to deliver some routine medical statistics for inclusion in one of his reports later in the afternoon.

They had a brief discussion to clarify several points, then the doctor raised O'Neill's suggestion about a marriage between Drs. Carter and Trajan, which had become a talking point at the SGC quite remarkably rapidly.

"Marriage would be a good psychological anchor for Sammy," said Dr. Fraiser. "It would give her something substantial to belong to in this parallel universe. Something which is conspicuously lacking at the moment."

"You don't think she feels a sense of belonging here in the SGC, Doctor?" said General Hammond.

"It's complicated, sir. Moving in with Dr. Trajan gave Sammy a home, a retreat, if you like, somewhere more private than a bay in the medical centre. But while the SGC is familiar territory for her, there are elements of confinement about it.

"Her movements are restricted, and she can't go back to the work she used to do because her parallel is more advanced than ours in her particular field, I understand."

"We are playing catch-up, yes, in spacecraft technology. But we can offer work for her to do."

"I'm pleased to hear that, sir. Because she has been rather frustrated by just talking about her work with Dr. Trajan rather than doing anything in one of the labs."

"They seem to get along remarkably well for two complete strangers."

"She and Trajan have a rather complex relationship, sir. It's no secret that both Colonel O'Neill and Dr. Trajan find

Major Carter attractive, but military discipline means that they can do nothing about it. By the same token, Sam finds both men attractive, for different reasons and with a bias to O'Neill, but military discipline gets in the way again."

"It's a perennial problem, military discipline getting in the way of human relations. How would you assess their relationship, Doctor? Dr. Carter and Dr. Trajan?"

"Sammy Carter has a combination of good looks and intelligence on offer, which Dr. Trajan finds irresistible, sir. Plus availability; a magic ingredient which Sam Carter doesn't have. But I think the main thing is that we're dealing with very clued up people, sir.

"They know all about psychological dependence. There's a mixture of attraction and caution because each has a well established relationship with another version of the other person.

"Sammy's Dr. Trajan was her immediate superior, so she naturally turns to H.T. for advice and defers to him. Our Dr. Trajan sees Sammy as an equal with the same status as an SG team member or an SGC Specialist, and with all the obligations that brings. If she needs help, she gets it immediately and without question, as anyone else at the SGC would expect."

"A complex blend of attractions, loyalties and assumptions."

"Yes, sir. Their different takes on equality could lead to tensions as she will expect him to decide what they do and he will keep presenting her with annoying opportunities to put in her two cents' worth. But minor disagreements, and how two people cope with them, are part of building a relationship."

"Which could be extremely complicated for them, given their circumstances."

"Yes, sir. An attraction between Dr. Carter and our Dr. Trajan comes as no surprise. But it's complicated by neither wanting to force the other into a relationship because it seems preordained by the Universe, to quote Dr. Trajan, and based on their expectations of the other version of the person concerned.

"All that said, I think they have a much better basis for a

lasting relationship than a lot of couples who get married shortly after meeting. It will be interesting to see what develops.”

“Indeed it will,” the general said with a smile.



Dr. Trajan and Major Carter looked up from the computer terminal in Trajan’s quarters in response to a tattoo knock on the door, which announced an intention to enter rather than sought permission to do so. Dr. Carter, looking very pleased with herself, led Colonel O’Neill into the sitting room.

“Have fun at the office, dear?” said Trajan. “And how come you’re not still there?” The display in the bottom-right corner of his monitor was showing 17:43.

“Major McFarlane has to catch up with some Nascars,” said Dr. Carter.

“I was just wondering if you might be too tired to walk home and I’d have to ring for a golf buggy to bring you back here.”

“You can do that? And will one come?” Samantha went quickly from surprise to scepticism.

“You never know. All sorts of incredible things happen at the SGC,” Trajan returned. “I hope you didn’t have too boring a time, Jack. Were you there all afternoon?”

“More of it than planned,” said O’Neill. “I was only supposed to be there until an annoying nerd from the Pentagon showed up. And go back at the end of the day to make sure everything was locked up properly. But I’d just poured out some coffee when the nerd arrived, so I got to watch the lady say, ‘No, that will never work. How do I know? Because we tried it two years ago,’ to him for a while. Which was cool. He was so sure he was really close to a fix on his version of the zat when he was on completely the wrong track.”

“I assume he’s heading down the right one now?”

“Reluctantly. What he’d really like is for Carter to suddenly realize she’s been wrong all along and admit he almost got it right.”

“I know the scenario. Someone has a problem all staked out

as his personal territory then some wiseguy comes along with the solution and grabs all the credit.”

“I don’t have a problem with letting the major share the credit,” said Samantha.

“Yes, you do,” said Trajan. “All your assets here are tied up in what you know, and it wouldn’t be reasonable for you to give up what’s yours to massage the ego of some annoying nerd from the Pentagon, who’s been banging his head against a brick wall up a blind alley. Especially if you got it right two years ago.”

“Shto on gavoreal,” laughed O’Neill, showing off his recently acquired snippet of Russian.

“Maybe it’s as well General Hammond will be submitting the report on this project,” Trajan added, “and he’ll be making it clear that Major Whatsit was just helping you to recreate something you’ve already done rather than you helping him work a couple of bugs out of his bright idea.”

“You can always rely on Hammond to be fair,” said O’Neill. “You two got on okay, Carter?”

“We’ve certainly explained a few things, sir,” said Major Carter. “But I’ll push off now and give Samantha and H.T. some privacy.”

“That’s something H.T. doesn’t get much of any more,” said Samantha.

“Neither do you,” said Trajan.

“But it doesn’t bother you?” Samantha continued.

“All I’m worried about is my roomie getting cabin fever and running amuck with a fire axe,” said Trajan

“I don’t think there’s much danger of that,” laughed Major Carter. “S.J. isn’t stuck in one small room and she can interact with other people.”

“Can I have that in writing?” Trajan wondered.

“So we’re okay?” said Samantha.

“Try to imagine that you’re a bloke living in a military environment part of the time,” said Trajan, “and this gorgeous woman is parked in your quarters. Would you mind something as trivial as the loss of a bit of privacy?”

“That works both ways, you know,” said Samantha.

“Bet you’re not enjoying it half as much as I am.”

“You’re right,” laughed Samantha. “I’m enjoying it twice as much.”

“But thinking about it,” Trajan said slowly, “I do rather miss not being able to do my nude yoga in case I upset my lodger. And I have to make sure I’m properly dressed at all times. No swanning about in just my socks any more.”

“Yeah, it’s exactly the same for me,” laughed Samantha. “Oh, my gosh!”

“What?” said Trajan.

“I never realized,” laughed Samantha. “When you get up in the middle of the night, it’s not to scribble a page of exotic calculations in your notebook, it’s to do your nude yoga.”

“Not a mental image I’d care to keep,” said Colonel O’Neill. “But I’m not so sure about Carter.”

“It’s true,” laughed Major Carter, “you can’t come out with a killer come-back when you’re laughing. I’ll see you tomorrow, H.T.”

“And I have some memos to catch up with,” said O’Neill. “Same time tomorrow, Doctor Carter? Unless the planet needs saving?”

“Looking forward to it,” Samantha said with a bright smile. “Major McFarlane was very intrigued to learn that I’m sharing your quarters here,” she added to Trajan when the visitors has gone. “But I told him it’s classified and I can’t talk about it.”

“A woman of mystery?”

“I think he thinks I’m something to do with Security, and I’m there to keep an eye on a foreign national at the heart of the world’s biggest secret.”

“What, he reckons you’re really Secret Service? NSA? NID?”

“I think that’s what he thinks, yes.”

“So is he keeping his distance and not getting too pally with you because of that?”

“Yes, I think he is,” Samantha realized.

“Have you ever been zatted, by the way?” Trajan asked.

“Nooo,” Samantha said at forbidding length.

“Don’t you think you should know the effect of your creation?”

“You play with guns. Have you ever been shot?”

“Yes, and I didn’t enjoy it.”

“So why do you think I’d enjoy being zatted?”

“I didn’t say you’d enjoy it.”

“Have you ever been zatted?”

“A couple of times. And Jack O’Neill must have been zatted more times than you can count.”

“So why would you want me to go though that experience?” Samantha demanded.

“I just thought that as it’s a very survivable experience, you might be a bit less nervous about shooting yourself accidentally if you knew from personal experience how survivable it is.”

“You’re winding me up, aren’t you?”

“Would I do that to you?”

“Yes, you would,” said Samantha with a knowing smile.

“Nothing gets past you, does it, S.J.?”

“Apart from you doing your nude yoga, apparently.”

### **[August 01, Friday, morning]**

Major Carter brought her breakfast tray over to Dr. Trajan’s table in the mess hall. “All on your own?”

“S.J. and Major McNerd decided to make an early start on the zats.” The mathematician was enjoying coffee with plain buttered toast.

“Doing anything interesting today?” Carter added.

“After we’ve had a chat about all the things you’ve thought up since last night, I’ll be working with Bill Lee on another project S.J. inspired. It seems my counterpart had an interesting thought about ZPMs. We’ve always thought of them as a storage device, like a battery.”

“Which is how they behave. Like one of the non-rechargeable types. Or a rechargeable but we don’t have a charger.”

“But the other Dr. Trajan shifted the goalposts. You use batteries in portable devices which can’t be plugged in to the

mains, like torches or laptops, in the middle of nowhere. But what if that doesn't apply to a ZPM? What if they're always plugged in?"

"What? They have some sort of invisible connection to their mains system?"

"Sort of. The whole point of zero point energy is that it's everywhere. In the buildings of cities as well as the middle of nowhere. So what if a ZPM is some sort of transformer that's always plugged in rather than a device containing stored energy, like a battery?"

"In interesting thought, but how do you prove it?"

"My counterpart came up with the idea that the crystals wear out as energy passes through them. The doping compounds in them break down, and this can be detected as a composition gradient from the inside to the outside. So if you could replace the dead crystals with new ones, that would make the ZPM active again."

"Hey, that could work," Carter realized. "There would be almost none of the dopants at the heart of the crystals and a greater concentration at the outside."

"According to S.J., that's what the other Dr. Lee was able to confirm using crystals out of a dead ZPM."

"Of course, the crystals in a battery could wear out from use," Major Carter realized. "Which would prevent it being recharged again."

"But the other Dr. Lee was able to make a dead ZPM work again, after a fashion, by some crude but effective re-doping of the crystals."

"It started working just with new crystals in it?"

"Right. Lee couldn't recharge it because he had no idea how to go about it. But he didn't need to. In fact, the stage he'd got to when the Goa'uld attacked Earth was having to decide whether it would be possible to regenerate the crystals in a dead ZPM or easier to make new ones. Replacements."

"Not knowing how he did it sounds as frustrating knowing nothing about the cancer cure that was used on my father's counterpart."

"Bill Lee seems to be happy with his new project. He's already been able to confirm a composition gradient in a

depleted crystal and he has some very interesting ideas about making new ones. They won't be as good as the originals, but even if he can deliver ten per cent of the full power, that's something more than we have now. And the zat project will keep S.J. entertained while I do some extra work with Lee. I don't know if she's still finding time to visit Daniel's museum."

"She seems to have taken quite a shine to Daniel."

"She finds his collection of artefacts as intriguing as I do. And she can't remember ever having met him in her parallel. She's heard of him, of course, but our interactions with SG-One; hers and my counterpart's; were usually with Mironova, the Russian lady. My counterpart consulted Teal'c rather a lot, of course, to get the benefit of his knowledge of Goa'uld technology, but never when S.J. was around. The other Dr. Trajan also worked with Daniel a lot, doing statistical analysis of language data, but they usually had meetings at Daniel's museum. S.J. spent most of her time at the SGC in her lab."

"She seems to have loosened up a bit here."

"Back there, she was hopelessly in love with her team leader, who happened to be welded in matrimony to someone as intelligent and desirable as she is. Whereas here, she's shackled with a Chinese copy of her guy, who's not married and who finds her irresistible."

"Things seem to be going so well for her here that I keep expecting to hear loud cries of, 'That's not the way the Universe works!' from the cynical Dr. Trajan."

"What if the cynical Dr. Trajan can't believe his luck? And he's decided to enjoy it while it lasts before the Universe makes everything go horribly wrong in its usual crass fashion?"

"Oh, yes, you're a pragmatist as well as a cynic," laughed Major Carter.

"The two aren't mutually exclusive, Sam. Anyway, what insoluble problems are you planning to dump on me today?"

"I don't get where you're going with some calculations you did for the Almeds." Major Carter offered a page of equations on her tablet.

"You and them both," said Trajan. "I've had eight video

conferences with them in this area. So I should be well rehearsed.”

Dr. Trajan arrived in Dr. Lee’s laboratory to find his fellow Specialist frowning at a mass of data.

“Things going well?” Trajan remarked.

“I’m getting data,” said Lee. “But as to what it means, that’s another matter entirely.”

“Story of our lives,” laughed Trajan. “Morning, sir,” he added as General Hammond arrived at the laboratory unexpectedly.

“Good morning, gentlemen,” said the general. “Dr. Lee, where are we up to on the runabouts you helped to recover from what everyone is calling the Bug Planet?”

“The report is nearly done, General,” said Lee, trying not to look too guilty.

“Highlights?” the general invited.

“The solar converter technology is nothing startling. But the storage technology is. It’s at least an order of magnitude better than anything we have right now.”

“Good news for paying our way,” said Trajan.

“As long as some Senator doesn’t leak it to a firm in his state and they patent it before the Air Force,” said Lee.

“Trajan’s First Law of Politics,” the general quoted with a smile for the mathematician, “all politicians are Kinseys in the absence of a ton of evidence to the contrary.”

“Supported by a ton of empirical evidence,” Trajan pointed out.

“We know what the storage units are made of, their structure and how they work,” said Lee. “Reproducing them is in the remit of the fabrication people at the Pentagon. I assume they don’t want us to do that for them and make it difficult to leak the information. Oh, did I say that out loud?”

“I gather there were two of the runabouts?” said the general.

“Both broken but we swapped some parts round to make one work,” said Lee. “Well, they both work now. We fixed the circuit board that failed and the motor pool replaced the broken front axle.”

“Which means we can send a working runabout to Washington with the report and list the other as disassembled during investigation?” said the general.

“Do I take it the SG teams saying, ‘We should have these,’ hasn’t fallen on deaf ears?” said Trajan.

“If the project can be completed without too much impact on the work we should be doing,” the general said with a nod. “I take it that puts a semi-official seal on something that was going to happen anyway?”

“There are a lot of ideas floating around on how it could be done,” Lee admitted.

“And you’ll have the report ready to go east tomorrow morning?”

“In your office this afternoon, General,” Lee promised.

### **[August 01, Friday, evening]**

Dr. Daniel Jackson had returned from his research trip with some leads but nothing concrete. He took a trip to the visitor quarters to catch up with the others, knowing that Major Carter was visiting Dr. Carter and Dr. Trajan. He found the three of them examining a collection of parts from the interior of the artefact from his collection.

“You could have knocked me over with the proverbial feather,” Daniel remarked, “when Sammy squeezed what I thought was a solid object and slid a panel off to show me crystals inside.”

“The engineer versus the archaeologist,” said Trajan. “Each sees something completely different.”

“The Monty Python approach to the world,” remarked Samantha. “‘And now for something completely different.’ And I have something else to tell you, Daniel: I did some isotope-ratio tests on residues from the interior of your gadget and some of the components. The dating is 12,000 years old, plus or minus 1,000.”

“That’s wonderful!” said Daniel. “The technology to build them certainly wasn’t available on Earth in ten-thousand B.C.

So these had to be made off-planet. And not by the Goa'uld."

"Right. But you realize we can't tell anyone that?" said Trajan.

"No earth-shattering paper in a learned journal," Daniel said sadly.

"But we know, and that's what counts," said Samantha.

"One more secret," laughed Daniel. "They did scan it for explosives when I brought it back here; because it's about the size of a grenade; but it looks so much like an Earth-made votive artefact."

"The old misdirection thing," said Trajan. "This thing was preserved because it has to have been blessed by the local gods. It doesn't look like technology."

"It certainly gave me a real Nine-Oh-Seven moment," said Daniel.

"What's that?" said Samantha, failing to notice a pained look on Major Carter's face.

"We once went to a planet with the stargate mounted in a cavern," said Daniel. "Just once, because it's been taken out of the dialling computer now. There were two tunnels to the gate from the outside originally but one had been blocked off to restrict access. We found that the remaining tunnel opened in the side of a cliff with a steep path down to a lot of ruins. When we tried to dial the stargate to find out if we could get permission extend the mission to go down and search the ruins, we found that the fifth chevron wouldn't engage. No matter where we tried to dial; Earth or somewhere else."

"Crumbs!" said Samantha with a grin. "Did you ever get home?"

"No, we're still stuck there," laughed Daniel.

"What was wrong?"

"Sam thought that stargate had missed out on one of the global resets."

"That's where updates go out automatically to a local set of gates to keep the system running smoothly?" said Samantha.

"That's the gist of it," Daniel said with a nod. "Sam and H.T. tried to work out what was going wrong with the dialling process and pretty soon, Sam was standing in front of H.T., practically shouting, 'No, no, no. No way,' and he was telling

her his math said something would work.”

“Been here, done that,” laughed Samantha.

“After a few minutes, Jack made them both sit down and tell him what was going on. Well, he got H.T. to do it.”

“Too much detail from Sam?”

“As Teal’c says, indeed. That’s when we found it was one of Sam’s ideas they’d been discussing. H.T. had done some calculations and he thought he had a way to make it work. But Sam thought he was asking her to cheat on the laws of physics.”

“Which is a great way to push Sam’s buttons?” laughed Samantha.

“And he knows it,” said Major Carter, trying to glare at Trajan.

“In the end,” Daniel continued, “Jack ordered Sam to try out what H.T. was suggesting, and H.T. promised to give her the most grovelling apology in the whole history of the Universe and polish her boots for a month if he was wasting her time.”

“Yes, he does that. Defuses conflict with a good laugh.”

“Once Sam had cooled off, she started working out things for the rest of us to do. After about half an hour, H.T. produced a cake from his pack and called a tea break.”

“I bet that cheered Colonel O’Neill up.”

“It sure did,” Daniel said with a smile. “We all sat down with our coffee and cake. Sam kept looking at the gate. Suddenly, she tagged H.T. on the arm, looking like her brain had just exploded, and said, ‘Fuck!’ with real feeling, which surprised the hell out of the rest of us.”

“Well, it would,” said Samantha. “Sam said that?”

“It’s something I heard one of the men say,” Major Carter insisted.

“It’s the only time I’ve ever heard her say the f-word,” laughed Daniel. “Out loud. When he got over the shock, H.T. turned towards Jack, put his hand up like a kid in school and said, ‘Please, sir, Samantha just said fuck.’ Which made everyone laugh. Except Teal’c. We had to explain the joke to him. Then Jack looked at Sam and she started blushing and explaining she’d just realized that H.T. wasn’t asking her to

defy the laws of physics.”

“I’d realized that what H.T. wanted me to do was let the laws of physics take their course,” said Carter, “and if we got the just timing right, we could get two of them to cancel out and sneak through the gap, to quote H.T.”

“Yes, that’s him, sneaky,” laughed Samantha. “It looks like heresy but it’s really something doable.”

“But before Sam could explain too much to H.T.,” said Daniel, “Jack jumped in and said, ‘Carter, just fix the damn gate and tell him how you did it when we’re back home, okay?’”

“The ever practical Colonel O’Neill,” said Samantha. “But Sam, you probably suspected that what H.T. was saying would work because the math made sense, but the important thing at that moment was you’d suddenly realized why it would work.”

“Exactly,” said Carter. “Knowing why makes all the difference.”

“It was probably just as well Sam didn’t try explaining that to Jack,” said Daniel. “In fact, I think it took her a couple of days to get everything straight in her own mind before she could explain things to H.T. And they could write a paper which knocked a lot of socks off. So that’s what a Nine-Oh-Seven Moment is. A moment of insight which lights up the whole world. Like you finding that Ancient artefact in my collection. Talking about things blessed by the local gods, H.T.,” Daniel added, “it’s looking very cheerful in here now.”

“I was quite surprised to find how easy it was to get Housekeeping to change the flowers in here regularly to brighten the place up for my cellmate,” said Trajan. “But it seems they have a budget for it.”

“And Sammy is looking extremely elegant,” Daniel added.

“That’s because I can go shopping for her in Silver Spring at a couple of her usual stores. Me waving a video-camera around and S.J. directing traffic by radio for Angela or Penny.”

“That must cheer Security up, when you arrive here with the carrier bags,” laughed Carter.

“Actually, I take a kitbag with me,” said Trajan, “and tell

Security it's stuff for a female colleague. They put it through the guns and bombs detector, then one of the lady soldiers does the rummage check."

"Lady soldiers," laughed Carter.

"Just because they have guns, that doesn't mean they're not ladies," Trajan pointed out. "And they always agree that Dr. Carter has truly impeccable taste."

"Carter, Daniel, Teal's is back so we're having a pre-briefing briefing in twenty minutes," Colonel O'Neill said as he joined the group.

"Yes, sir," said Carter through a big grin.

"Did I say something amusing?" O'Neill asked in a dangerously level tone.

"She's laughing at me, not you, Jack," Trajan said quickly.

"That seems to happen a lot more now there are two Carters," said O'Neill.

"Yes, they take me four times less seriously," said Trajan.

"Just be glad it's not two cubed," laughed Carter.

"I'm just glad there's not three of you," said Trajan. "Or I'd never dare show my face in public. Before you vanish, how did you get on, Daniel?"

"I found two more references to the votive offerings with mysterious script on them," said Daniel. "There might be more here in the United States, but they'll take a lot of tracking down."

"How many more?" said Carter.

"Maybe as many as five more than the one we have here and the six the Russians are supposed to have. Bought from the Germans or given to American collectors as gifts or trades back in the nineteen thirties."

"So we might get hold of enough of them to find out how they work before the Russians can find theirs?" said Samantha.

"The Pentagon would love that," laughed O'Neill.

**August 02, Saturday**

Dr. Carter looked at her room-mate suspiciously when he handed her an anorak right after she had received a telephone call in the middle of the morning.

“You do know that I’m getting out of here for a while?” she said.

“I know Sam’s going to take you to her place so you can see how it compares with your version of ten-twenty-five Canyon Road. With Teal’s as extra security. I was around during the discussion.”

“But you didn’t tell me?”

“I didn’t want to spoil Major Sam’s surprise. But I can reveal that the general was wondering if just half of his top SG team as security would be enough. He started laughing when I offered to pay for SG-Three to go along so you wouldn’t be done out of your trip out.”

“Well, I suppose secrets are the norm here,” Samantha remarked. “Are you going as extra-extra security?”

“No, I have a video conference with some Pentagonians in twenty minutes. And I wouldn’t want to get in the way of the secret stuff.”

“What secret stuff?”

“I know you tell Sam lots of stuff you’d never dream of telling me.”

“Do you have a problem with that?”

“What if I said I did?”

“I’d tell you that’s tough.”

“That’s what I figured. And that’s why I’m going with the flow and bowing to the inevitable. Especially if it gives me a licence to keep secrets from you.”

“Like what?”

“I’m not sure; but I’ll think of something. Enjoy your trip out.”



Samantha returned to the visitor quarters at the SGC in the

early afternoon and announced that she was missing her basement.

“Says the lady who works in the ultimate basement?” said Trajan. “So how does your place compare with Sam’s?”

“I had more stuff. Books, CDs and things. Probably because Sam doesn’t spend as much time at home as me. We use the same garden service, Maricol’s, to keep the outside looking smart.”

“You are going to get out of here soon, S.J. Permanently, I mean.”

“Yes, so they tell me,” Samantha said with a deliberately sceptical expression. “We drove past your penthouse on the way back.”

“It’s not easy to have a basement if you live in a penthouse. Will we have to move? Or should we evict the people who live below us, board up the windows and make a pretend basement?”

“We could get a couple of stargates, small ones, so I can visit the real basement at thirty-five Briganza Drive through a wormhole.”

“I think it would be a bit more practical to install a lift,” Trajan said with a laugh. “Are you going to annex part of the basement and cut down the car-parking space? Or dig a sub-basement?”

“I haven’t thought that far ahead,” Samantha admitted.

### **[August 04, Monday, late afternoon]**

On a trip to the PX, Dr. Trajan met Major McFarlane, who seemed to have a permanent air of resignation. He had flown home for the weekend and he had made an early start in order to arrive at the SGC in the middle of the morning. The afternoon was now drawing to a close.

“How’s it going?” said Trajan.

“Apparently okay,” said the major.

“But?” Trajan detected an undercurrent.

“But it’s very frustrating, finding out that almost everything

I've been doing is a waste of time."

"Well, that's one way of looking at it."

"You mean, there's another?"

"Dr. Carter and the Dr. Lee where's S.J.'s from did all this work of eliminating possibilities over two years ago. Which means you're being saved a lot of frustration and fast-forwarded to a point where the project will yield results."

"Except that it's now Dr. Carter's project, not mine."

"Oh, I'm sure the Pentagon will be willing to spend some of the cash you didn't waste down blind alleys on further refinements of the new zats. I'm sure you're still their zat guy and they see S.J. as just a consultant, who's a rocket scientist, not a weapons person. And someone who will be staying here at the SGC when you return in triumph to wherever you came from."

"She's doing a remarkably good impression of being a weapons specialist."

"Dr. Carter is an engineer, and this is all engineering stuff. But she's just marking time until she gets to go on . . . well, something more in her line. She doesn't plan to tread on your turf for longer than it takes to unload what she knows about the modified zat."

"She has another project she wants to get on with?"

"There are several. Only the bloody Russians are dragging their feet on the one that would be easiest to start. If they don't hurry up, S.J. will have moved on again. The zat project is ancient history as far as she's concerned. She wants to explore pastures new now."

"That's certainly encouraging," McFarlane said with half a smile. "I guess it must be frustrating for her, being stuck in here because she doesn't have a security clearance from Washington."

"She's bearing up remarkably well. And we go up to the observation gallery at the top of the mountain from time to time. To watch the sunset and look out for meteors, and stuff like that. So she does get a bit of fresh air occasionally."

"Tell me, is it true you once threatened to spray Colonel O'Neill with nerd gas and make him 'one of us'?"

"It never pays to let these military guys get above them-

selves,” Trajan said wisely. “And it certainly put a very nice expression of horror on his face.”

“You must know him pretty well.”

“I think he sees me as someone who’s almost human rather than a total nerd,” said Trajan.

“Did you know he thinks the most useful thing you can do is shout, ‘**Kree!**’ and sound just like a Goa’uld? It can freeze a whole gang of Jaffa in their tracks, apparently.”

“He told you that?”

“Oh, no, Samantha mentioned it. She’s still trying to get her head around the whole military thing with you.”

“Yes, she mentioned the other Trajan didn’t go out with SG-teams on a regular basis.”

“I gathered O’Neill only issues appropriate orders to Specialist Trajan. Always of the type ‘Trajan, check that out’ rather than ‘Trajan, get me a coffee’. But he knows if there was any going, you’ll offer him some.”

“Common courtesy rather than officer and batman?” said Trajan.

“Right. You may look the part in uniform but you’re a civilian. And they do things differently.”

“I suppose that’s a constant challenge for you, having to deal with all these weirdos with weirder ideas?” Trajan said with a smile.

“It does have its challenges, yes,” McFarlane said with an answering smile.

“Well, back to the grind,” said Trajan. “I look forward to seeing what you and S.J. can come up with, zatwise.”

“I don’t think you’ll have too long to wait,” McFarlane promised.



There was a knock on the door about ten minutes after Dr. Carter had returned to the visitor quarters at the end of another day on the zat project. She decided to see who was at the door because her host was grappling with an intractable mathematical problem.

“It’s Bill Lee,” Samantha called over her shoulder. “Come

to pick some mathematical brains. What's that you've got there?"

"A USB microscope," Dr. William Lee replied. "You'll be interested in this. I've been taking another look at the implant they took from your arm while my crystals are growing."

"That's going okay?" said Samantha.

"Getting the doping ratio right is fiendishly difficult, but I'm optimistic," said Dr. Lee as he plugged the microscope in at Trajan's computer terminal and used his own log-in code to gain access to the SGC network.

"What we know so far," Lee continued, "is that it looks a lot more sophisticated than something you'd use to tag a pet, or someone who works here. And it doesn't contain nanites or other nasties, or an uploadable computer virus; well, anything we can recognize as a virus."

After some fiddling, Dr. Lee turned the monitor toward Samantha. "What do you make of that?"

"Ah, it looks like one of those new data modules you invented," she said. "That's not standard for a ID chip."

"I invented?" said Dr. Lee.

"I'm sorry, Bill. Your other self. They have about four orders of magnitude more data capacity than anything available previously."

"Are you up to speed on my house guest, Bill?" Trajan abandoned his struggle with the intractable problem until inspiration arrived.

"I know I'm part of your team where she comes from," said Dr. Lee. "You're the leader because you don't mind doing the admin paperwork that we hate. We have labs next door to each other. Well, there's a long office from the corridor to the back wall between them. All three of us have desks there. I'm the crystals expert, Samantha works on spacecraft control systems and materials recovered by SG teams, and the other H.T. is the team leader. I'm amazed how similar my two lives are," Dr. Lee added. "Even my daughters' birthdays are the same."

"So you didn't tell him the other Bill is shackled with three Las Vegas showgirls?" said Trajan.

"He's married to Candice, who's French-Canadian, just like

here,” said Samantha, “and they have two children, Poppy and Robert.”

“Our daughter is called Jeanette,” said Lee. “But Poppy was on the list for a long time.”

“Fascinating,” said Trajan. “Okay, what’s this gadget on my computer?”

“I was hoping Sammy could tell me what the module is. Now, I’m hoping she can tell me how to access the data.”

“You should be able to do it with the equipment in your lab. Am I cleared to go to Bill’s lab?” Samantha added to Trajan.

“I’ll check.”

Trajan found that General Hammond was still in his office. The required permission included the condition of supervision, which Trajan could provide.

The group headed for Dr. Lee’s laboratory. Making the necessary connections to the data module took less than ten minutes. Dr. Lee was disconcerted by the amount of data which he managed to extract from the implant. Then came the frustration of discovering that it was all encrypted solidly.

“Prime numbers are probably the key to unlocking this,” he decided, looking at Trajan. “Who do we know who has the latest ones?”

Trajan pretended to be horrified. “You want my prime numbers!? Are you sure you don’t want my wife as well?”

“Why, are you two going to follow Colonel O’Neill’s suggestion?” laughed Dr. Lee.

“That depends,” said Trajan. “Are we talking about ‘of convenience’? As far as this marriage thing goes?”

“No way is it going to be of convenience,” said Samantha. “So you’re interested?”

“Well, they do reckon married men live longer. Which means I might get a bit of value from my pension fund. And everyone else seems to think of us now rather than a separate you and me.”

“You say I invented this memory module?” Dr. Lee turned to peer into the USB microscope again.

“It came out of your work on gallium-doped Vetch nanotubes, as far as I remember,” said Samantha. “I take it

you're still working on that among other things?"

"More running out of things to try because nothing works any better than the initial improvement," said Dr. Lee.

"Sounds like you're close to where you made the breakthrough, then," said Samantha. "You were using far too much gallium at first. But when you tried using ridiculously small amounts, as more or less an experiment of despair . . ."

"A what?" laughed Dr. Lee.

"You called it an experiment of despair. You'd tried everything else and it hadn't worked, so you tried using practically invisible amounts of gallium, and that's when things started to happen. Then it was just a matter of fine-tuning the co-dopants."

"Really?"

"As far as I remember, yes. You were in the middle of telling us all about it after you'd made the breakthrough when three experts from the Pentagon arrived to kidnap you for a couple of weeks. We never heard anything more about it after that."

"Almost invisible amounts of gallium," Dr. Lee muttered as he made a note in his lab book. "Excuse me," he added when his telephone rang. "General Hammond would like to see you two when you're finished here," he said after receiving a brief message.

"Can I have a quick look at the recipes you've been using?" said Samantha. "I might be able to give you some clues on the co-dopants if something strikes a chord."

"All suggestions gratefully received." Dr. Lee offered the lab book.



Ten minutes later, Drs. Carter and Trajan arrived at General Hammond's office. Daniel Jackson was occupying a visitor's chair, looking moderately pleased with himself behind his smile of greeting.

"Dr. Jackson has found something very interesting," the general said as he waved the new arrivals to chairs.

"Well, let's not get ahead of ourselves," Daniel cautioned.

"I've found what appears to be a reference to another of the artefacts like the one Samantha found in my collection."

"What, in Germany?" said Trajan.

"A well-known collector acquired it. He lives in Boston."

"The one on your east coast rather than the one in Lincolnshire?"

"Right. The plan is to approach him with the object of either buying or borrowing the artefact."

"As opposed to requisitioning it and tossing him in gaol if he won't play ball?"

"I think the advocates of that plan have been reminded we live in a democracy," General Hammond said with a smile.

"And we do have a significant bargaining chip."

"We do?"

"Yes, Dr. H.T. Trajan."

"I don't have to marry his daughter? Or his ex-wife?"

"Nothing as drastic as that," laughed the general. "Nicholas Vartain has gathered a mountain of data and he would like access to one of your classified data sorting techniques."

"Mr. Vartain wouldn't be rich and connected, by any chance?"

"Connected enough to have gathered enough clues about your work to know how valuable it would be to him."

"And the Pentagon is willing to give him access to something I've done?" Trajan said sceptically.

"It's the analytical system you devised for Project Tontine."

"I'm afraid I'm going to have to look that one up, sir. Because the name means nothing to me."

"It's something you worked on over four years ago. Outside the SGC. After you've refreshed your memory, you'll got to Boston, where Dr. Jackson will bump into Mr. Vartain by accident and introduce him to his good friend and collaborator Dr. Harold Trajan."

"One big problem there, sir," Trajan was saying as the general added: "And his wife, of course. If Dr. Carter feels able to do some acting for us. It's important for her to examine the artefact to make sure it's one of the Gould devices."

"I'm sure the pretend Mrs. Dr. Trajan is relieved to hear

that, sir.” said Trajan. “S.J. has progressed as far as being able to sleep here without nightmares when I need to be in Silver Spring, but half a continent is a bit much.”

“Staff welfare is always a primary consideration, Dr. Trajan. Dr. Jackson will conduct the negotiations whilst you and your wife take in the cultural life in the city.”

“So the only problem is whether we can be convincing as a married couple?” Trajan mused. “Why is Daniel laughing?”

“Could it be because you and Samantha would have a hell of a job convincing someone you’re not married?” Daniel suggested.

“Yes, I doubt that will be a problem,” the general said with a smile.

“What about my lack of security clearance, sir?” said Samantha.

“You have a special dispensation to visit Boston under supervision, Dr. Carter,” the general replied. “I’ve assigned SG-Six under Major Simpson to keep an eye on all of you. Purely a precaution. We have no specific intel on any threat to any of you, and we have no reason to expect Dr. Carter will try to disappear.”

“No way would I do that!” said Samantha.

“Please to hear that, sir,” said Trajan as Dr. Jackson nodded agreement.

“Dr. Jackson will express interest in acquiring Mr. Vartain’s artefact if it is, indeed, another of the same type of device. To assist in the study of his own specimen. His good friend Dr. Trajan will be prepared to adapt a piece of semi-obsolete analytical software as a favour to his good friend Dr. Jackson to make the deal work.”

“Do the Russians know about this op, sir?” said Trajan.

“I’m sure they’ll find out,” the general said with a wry smile. “And it might encourage them to look a little bit harder for their spoils of war.”

“Let us hope their archaeologists are getting something out of all the digging through records,” remarked Dr. Jackson.



# Just Similar

[August 05, Tuesday, a.m.]

General Hammond claimed everyone's attention when he arrived at the SGC briefing room on the first Tuesday of a new month. He invited the group to sit, then turned his attention to Dr. Fraiser. "I understand you have the information the Pentagon wants on the Carter twins, Doctor?" the general said. "And they're not identical?"

"Yes, sir," said Dr. Fraiser. "Setting aside the markers Sam now has as a result of her encounter with the Tok'ra Jolinar, there are distinct DNA differences between Sam and Sammy. And their fingerprints show slight but recognizable differences."

"How is that possible if they're exactly the same person from parallel universes?" said Colonel O'Neill.

"My best explanation is that there has been some drift in the sameness, but not enough to make them too different," said the doctor. "But I have nothing more to offer than the observed facts. The good thing about this is that the Pentagon isn't going to have two employees of the Air Force with the same fingerprints and DNA on file."

"It would be a big payday for the lawyers if that had happened," said Trajan. "M'Lud, my client didn't murder these eighty-two people, as the corrupt and lazy police would have us believe. It was someone with the same DNA and fingerprints, and I quote as precedent, the case of Samantha Jane Carter of the United States Air Force."

"Really, when you think about it, this comes as no great surprise," Major Carter. "One of the quote twins unquote wears glasses and the other doesn't, so there must be genetic differences."

"And they've taken quite different career paths," said Trajan.

“And the Gould attack in Sammy’s reality came way after the one we beat off,” Colonel O’Neill realized.

“Yes, you’re all right,” said Dr. Fraiser. “We accept that Dr. Carter isn’t a clone but we do have a geneticist interested in the differences between her and Major Carter as they might shed light on how certain genes control their different characteristics. The main mystery for me lies in the fact that there are all these differences in what we assumed was a close parallel.”

“Maybe that assumption was wrong,” said the general. “That it’s a close parallel.”

“The further we are from being taken over by the Gould, the better,” said O’Neill.

“Like a lot of assumptions,” said Major Carter, “we made them without knowing too many facts. I think it’s time to apply the scientific method and reinterpret things in the light of all the new information that’s come out.”

“And why are we doing this anyway?” said Trajan. “They must have done this at Area Fifty-One; compared S.J.’s DNA and prints with what’s on file for Sam.”

“Why am I not surprised to hear they kept it secret?” said O’Neill.

“Secrecy for its own sake is a problem we’ll always have,” said the general, cutting the discussion short. “And talking of Dr. Carter, I believe you’re making progress with your zat project?”

“Yes, sir,” said Samantha. “Major . . . , I’m sorry.” She flicked open a report

“That’s my fault, sir,” said O’Neill. “She keeps thinking of him as Major McNerd.”

“Major McFarlane,” Samantha resumed, “is getting the preliminary technical drawings completed and checking on the specifications of the materials for fabricating prototypes. In the meantime, I shall be doing some more work on the modified interior circuitry. I think the version we’ll be creating will be significantly better than the one I was working on two years ago.”

“That’s good to hear,” said the general.

“The preliminary date for the first tests is the end of next

week,” Samantha added.

“Subject to how much time is needed to watch Nascars zooming round a track,” O’Neill murmured.

“Sounds like you’re making good progress, Dr. Carter,” said the general. “Major Carter?”

“Daniel has been in touch with Mr. Vartain in Boston, sir. We have a good collection of pictures of his artefact, and it looks too similar to the one that S.J. found to be more than a slight variation of that design. Daniel and Dr. Trajan and his wife are going to Boston at the weekend, and we’re confident of doing a deal. The last I heard, the Russians are still looking for their versions of Daniel’s Device.”

“And Dr. Jackson is still checking the archaeological records to see if he can track down any more of them in this country?” said the general.

“Yes, sir. He’s also hopeful that he can find Goa’uld records which have something to say about them.”

“But involving the Russians in the project is still some way off?”

“As far away as ever, sir, it looks like.”

“Probably further,” said O’Neill. “You’d think they’d have come up with their ante for the poker game by now if they knew where it was.”

“Maybe they just need to try a little harder,” said the general.

“How are you getting on with checking Daniel’s collection for hidden wonders, S.J.?” said Major Carter.

“Slowly,” Samantha returned. “I keep finding interesting things and asking Daniel about them. And he rediscovers them and the work comes to a dead stop.”

“What Jack might call Double Nerd Paralysis?” said Carter.

“I guess so,” laughed Samantha. “But we’re fairly sure it’s a long shot. We don’t expect to get as lucky again.”

“Dr. Trajan? Any progress from your work with the Almed?” said the general.

“Do we know anyone in the field of directed energy weapons, sir?” said Trajan.

“I’m not sure. We must. What are they, exactly?”

“The beams of light coming from spaceships in sciffy TV

series, which take out other spaceships, people, buildings, whatever.”

“Phasers!” O’Neill murmured through a smile with a significant look in Major Carter’s direction.

“Do you have information on a weapon like that?” said the general.

“Nothing concrete,” Trajan said with a note of apology. “But I may have a few crumbs, which might be of interest to our people in the field. I think the Almed are building a powerful weapon of that sort.”

“I’ll talk to some people at the Pentagon and see what comes of it,” said the general. “Are we talking hand-weapons, like the zats?”

“It’s more something that could be mounted on a fighter spacecraft the size of a Goa’uld death glider, sir. But it might even be something bigger and ground-based. As I said, I just have some crumbs.”

“You have a report, Doctor?”

“Yes, sir.” Trajan passed it across the table.

“Colonel O’Neill?”

“Assuming Teal’c and Daniel get back on time tonight, SG-One is go for the training mission at the rebel Jaffa camp tomorrow, sir. Request about twice as much C-four as our present allocation for demonstration purposes.”

“Just as long as you don’t blow up anything vital, Colonel,” the general said with a smile. “Any other business?”

“This is another of those obvious things, sir,” Dr. Trajan said apologetically, “but has anyone checked to see if S.J.’s hand-print will open the iris on the stargate? We know the gate computer is set up to accept authorizations from the likes of Major Carter and the duty sergeant, who’s operating the gate. Will it accept S.J. as near as dammit to Sam?”

“I’d like to know that,” said O’Neill.

“If she really is a Goa’uld spy,” Trajan added, “designed to be another Major Carter, it should. But if it doesn’t, that sticks it pretty terminally to the spy theory.”

“No, sir, I don’t think anyone has,” Major Carter said in response to an inquiring look from the general. “Mainly because S.J. never has a chance to go there. She’s never in this

part of the SGC unsupervised. But we can go down to the control room right now to check, though.”

“I don’t think I’ve ever been in the stargate control room,” Samantha realized.

“But you know where it is?” said Carter.

“Oh, yes. Out that door and down the spiral staircase. I’ve seen it from the gate room, of course. Well, once.”

“I thought you said you’d been through the stargate four times?” said Trajan.

“The first three times out, all I could look at was the stargate. I only had a look around just before the last trip out. And when we came back from glider missions, I was only interested in the stuff we’d brought with us.”

“You know, it was probably the same for me, those first few times,” said Trajan.

“I’d also be interested to know what happens when Dr. Carter tries to open the iris,” said the general to cut the discussion short.

Major Carter took the hint and headed for the control room to make sure that there was nothing happening there.

“Dr. Carter, if you report to my office at sixteen hundred this afternoon, I should have your local documentation ready for issue,” the general said to Samantha.

“That’s a proper SGC pass instead of the temporary one?” said Samantha.

“And access to the computer system within your area of speciality,” the general said with a nod.

“Nice to be one of the family again,” said Samantha. “Almost.”

“Until this afternoon, Dr. Carter,” the general added to bring the formal business of the meeting to a complete conclusion. “Doctor, a word. And you too, Jack.”

Colonel O’Neill dropped back onto his chair. Drs. Carter and Trajan left the office and headed down the spiral staircase to the gate room to join Major Carter and find out if Samantha could open the iris on the stargate by putting her hand on the detector plate in the control room.

“I’d like a quick report on Dr. Carter’s progress toward recovery, Doctor,” said the general.

“I’d say it accelerated after Dr. Trajan took her to a debriefing as a Specialist to help with translation work, sir,” said Dr. Fraiser. “She needs to feel useful and H.T. consults her frequently on matters of fact in her speciality. She’s now feeling more like a valued colleague than a shell-shocked refugee.”

“But . . . ,” General Hammond invited.

“But she still needs our care and we still need to monitor her,” the doctor said with a smile. “But she’s well along the road to surviving a life-changing ordeal.”

General Hammond turned to Colonel O’Neill. “What impression did you get of her knowledge of the new zat weapon, Jack?”

“She field-stripped an old one as fast as anyone, sir,” said O’Neill. “Faster. The sketches she made of the new zats and the parts seemed to make sense to the weapons nerd and the computer design guy.”

“So the zat redesign is for real? As far as you can tell?”

“What I see is pure Carter in a lab with a bug up her ass for a new project, sir. Even if it is just repeating something she did two years ago. I’m impressed by her knowledge of the SGC, especially the nerdier parts. She goes wrong occasionally but she gets it right most of the time. She knows her way round the ordering system for stores and her signature on a requisition looks uncannily like Sam’s.”

“Yes, that was pointed out to me,” said the general.

“This other Carter is the real deal, sir. She knows stuff and she wants to share it. She was so delighted to be in a lab, where she belongs, she didn’t even notice when Trajan stopped in at the lab next door to talk to Bill Lee. I keep thinking he’s going to have to hit her over the head and carry her to get her back to their quarters every night.”

“I can believe that,” laughed the general.

“And she gets quite assertive when she’s on her own turf. She left Major McNerd in no doubt who’s running things here. But not quite as assertive as when she’s telling Trajan he’s wrong.”

“She doesn’t tell the Major he couldn’t be more wrong if he trained for a week?” laughed the general.

“I think she saves that one for Trajan, sir. Do you still have any serious doubts about her?”

“For myself, no. But as head of the SGC, I have to be one hundred per cent sure she is exactly what she says she is.”

“For what it’s worth, sir, she’s one hundred per cent another Carter. Only nerdier. No question.”

“I would agree with that,” Dr. Fraiser added.

“Duly noted,” the general said with a smile.



Dr. Samantha Carter put her hand on the panel at the control desk and tried to open the iris on the stargate. The system did not recognise her personal data and flashed up the ACCESS DENIED message.

“That’s a relief,” said Major Carter as Colonel O’Neill joined the group.

“Does this prove I’m not a Goa’uld spy?” said Samantha.

“Only that if you are, the Goa’uld aren’t as clever as they thought they were,” said Trajan.

“Or maybe twice as clever as we think they are, if I’m part of a long-term plan,” said Samantha.

“Is that what the Goa’uld do, though?” said Trajan. “I thought they were strictly *steam in right away* people.”

“Maybe they thought it would confuse us,” O’Neill suggested.

“If they did, it’s certainly working,” laughed Trajan.

“Right, can I get back to work?” said Samantha.

“Your escort is standing by,” said Colonel O’Neill.

Major Carter returned to the control room to report the result of the security check to General Hammond.

“That’s good to know,” said the general. “Are you making progress on the Almed shield?”

“Well, sir, I think I understand how it works,” said Carter. “More or less. There are some gaps in our knowledge that need to be bridged. And gaps in technology, as far as building the parts to duplicate it. But we might be able to substitute some materials. These are things I’ve been asking the Almed about.”

“And devices of the size of the one you have will protect an aircraft the size of a Gould death glider?”

“Actually, sir, something smaller would do that job. About three of the ones we have will protect an aircraft the size of Air Force One. And be at least as good as anything the Goa’uld have.”

“You mean, there will be a lot of competition for them once that news reaches the Pentagon?”

“That’s the way it looks, sir.”

### **[August 06, Wednesday, morning]**

The stargate closed behind SG-1 and SG-7, who had been sent on an early morning expedition to investigate an intriguing sight. Pictures from a MALP sent to P2R813 showed what looked like at least three Goa’uld death gliders just parked in a staggered line some two-hundred metres from the planet’s stargate. Observations over two days had detected no signs of activity and no communications traffic. Someone at the Pentagon had been intrigued enough to authorize an investigation.

Colonel O’Neill’s orders were to leave SG-7 to secure the stargate and take his team to examine the gliders. SG-1 was about half-way to the parking area when the ground shook. All four took cover rapidly. Every head turned towards the source of a series of explosions; in woods about two miles away. Small craft of about death-glider size could be seen diving and soaring in the area.

“Someone’s popular,” Major Beaton, the leader of SG-7 remarked to Colonel O’Neill on his radio.

“Everyone keep out of sight for the moment,” O’Neill ordered over his radio.

The attack ended abruptly after nine minutes. The fighter-bombers just turned their noses to the sky and headed up into space when their job was done. Major Carter had been taking photographs and Teal’c had been studying the aircraft through binoculars.

“Unknown configuration, sir,” Carter reported to O’Neill. “Not Gould?”

“No, sir. Well, not a design we’ve seen before.”

“Not a Goa’uld design,” said Teal’c. “I have never seen the like.”

“Okay, Daniel, dial the gate,” said O’Neill. “We need to report back. And be ready to bug out if whoever was on the receiving end of that bombing tries to use the gate to make their report. Everyone else, watch out for visitors coming from where the action was.”

Daniel Jackson made his way to the DHD. He turned back toward Colonel O’Neill almost right away, having managed to light up only two symbols.

“Jack?” he called, “there’s a problem with the gate.”

“Carter?” said O’Neill.

“Looks like a glitch in the DHD’s internal processing . . .,” Major Carter began.

“Trajan?” said O’Neill. “Oh, no; he’s back home interrogating the other you.”

“It’s broken, sir,” said Carter, trying not to smile.

“Now, that didn’t hurt, did it?” said O’Neill. “And I guess you’re going to tell me you need to take a good look under the hood to work out how to fix it?”

“Yes, sir.”

“Fine,” said O’Neill. “Teal’c and Daniel, take a look at those gliders as per the original plan to find out how many there are and what’s wrong with them. Take lots of pictures. The rest of us will secure the perimeter while Carter is finding out if we can go home again.”

“We’re not taking a side trip to where all the bombing was going on?” said Major Beaton.

“Too far,” said O’Neill, looking toward the solid column of smoke.

“Agreed,” said Beaton.

“We just need to make sure we get a lot of warning if any survivors from that area try to bug out using the gate,” O’Neill added.

“Still no comms traffic from there, sir,” reported Sergeant Wade.

“Even so, let’s be ready for visitors,” said O’Neill.

The group moved to sentry positions around the stargate with pickets out toward the attacked site.

“That other Carter is real hot,” Sergeant Wade remarked to his team leader as watched Major Carter at work.

“She is now she’s got some new clothes instead of hospital duds,” said Major Beaton. “That Trajan is one lucky guy. It would be nice to have both of them here right now.”

“Two Carters are definitely better than one,” Sergeant Wade said with a broad grin.



Teal’c and Daniel Jackson returned whilst Major Carter was examining circuits and muttering under her breath.

“The death gliders are all damaged, O’Neill,” Teal’c reported. “Five are wrecked but four are not badly damaged. The weapon systems are off-line but at least two could be made to fly with an hour’s work.”

“You took lots of pictures?” O’Neill asked.

Daniel Jackson waved a camera at him.

“Okay, T, you see if you can help Carter,” said O’Neill. “Daniel, check the supplies on the MALP.”

The distant smoke was dispersing slowly, indicating that the fires were out. It was a time for everyone to sit tight and wait whilst the technical experts did their things.



Twenty-five minutes later, Major Carter wiped her hands clean and moved over to Colonel O’Neill, who was standing beside the MALP, looking as if he wanted to kick something.

“I think I can manage to activate the gate one more time, sir,” she reported. “But only once more.”

“Beaton, anything?” O’Neill said into his radio.

“No sign of anyone coming our way from the bombing site, sir,” said the SG-7 team-leader. “Are we out of here?”

“That’s a definite maybe,” said O’Neill. “Hang tight.”

Ten minutes later, Teal’c began to press symbols on the

DHD, waiting for approval from Major Carter before he pressed each key. The group released a collective sigh of relief when the seventh symbol lit up and the wormhole whooshed into life then settled into the expected rippling, vertical puddle.

“Okay, everyone make sure you’ve got everything because we’re not coming back here,” O’Neill told the group as he began transmitting SG-1’s identification code.

The MALP was already approaching the gate. The humans followed it, all of them expecting P2R813 to be removed from the list of planets to be investigated. Despite the misgivings of the more pessimistic among the group, the gate stayed open long enough for everyone to return home. Colonel O’Neill reported the problem to General Hammond on the ramp back at the SGC.

When everyone was clear of the stargate, the general ordered the duty sergeant in the stargate control room to try to re-dial P2R813.

“Chevron one will not engage, sir,” he reported after two attempts to begin the dialling process.

“Okay, Jack, write up your report,” said the general. “Well done, everyone,” he called to the rest of the group.

“It’s a wrap,” O’Neill added, half to himself. “Now and forever.”

### **[August 06, Wednesday, afternoon]**

General Hammond looked well supplied with paperwork when he gave his attention to a visitor. One of the Almed scientists had been working though the night, and he had taken the opportunity to consult Dr. Trajan in the late afternoon, Earth time.

Trajan had a report to deliver.

“Success?” said the general as the mathematician sat down, having spent half an hour in the contact suite.

“I think a sufficient level of understanding was achieved,” said Trajan. “And quite quickly, too. I was able to ask him

about the energy weapon they're working on. I almost wish I hadn't now."

"Oh?"

"Don't tell Jack O'Neill about this, but I think the Almed weapon isn't a phaser, it's something that fires pulses of energy, which hit the target a fraction of an instant before they're fired."

"Before they're fired? How is that even possible?" the general asked with a deep frown.

"I have no idea, General," Trajan admitted. "But that's what comes out of the mathematics. My best guess is that it's some sort of relativistic effect. The sort of thing that would leave Major Carter not speaking to me for a month if I ever dared to suggest it's possible. Real fancy physics."

"Talking of Major Carter, I understand from the people monitoring the contact that you have some crumbs for her?"

"Yes, the Almed were so pleased with our last-but-one contact that they've given me the manufacturing details for the obsolete force field's parts. Someone's obviously been sent into the grimy old archives in the basement. And it means that even a society as primitive as ours should be able to build as many as we want. And remarkably cheaply."

"I'm sure our oversight agency will be delighted to hear that, Dr. Trajan."

"And I'm sure they'll be delighted to give the SGC a fair royalty rate to offset against the cost of our operation. And give us something to wave under the noses of Senator Kinsey and his cronies."

"I don't know about delighted but we shall certainly have our due recognition," the general said with feeling.

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Trajan made the visitor quarters his next stop. He found both Carters in conference in his suite.

"Wow! Who's this handsome stranger?" Samantha breathed as Trajan was heading for the bedroom to change out of his uniform.

He stopped to ask: "Go on, who is it?"

“Don’t you think he looks gorgeous?” Samantha said to Major Carter.

“When we’re in our soldier suits, we’re not allowed to think things like that,” said Trajan. “It’s bad for military discipline.”

“What are you dressed up as again?” said Samantha.

“An SGC Specialist.” Trajan turned to show the SGC-X patch on his right arm. “Why are you always so surprised to see me in a uniform? Didn’t you dress up for your trips through the stargate?”

“They gave us air force overalls to wear over ordinary clothes, not uniforms like that. So you even have to dress up like Sam and the Colonel when you entertain visitors from off-world here in the SGC?”

“Different universe, different routine.”

“Suits you, the uniform,” Samantha said with a smile. “If they put you on a recruitment poster, I’d join up.”

“That’s what I’m supposed to look like when I talk to the Almed, S.J.; a real Air Force-type who’s subject to military discipline.”

“That uniform fits you so perfectly, I’d never suspect you’re really a civilian. You look like you were born to wear it. Maybe you should wear it more often.”

“You do know that Specialists who swan around in a uniform when they’re not about to go out on a mission get everyone laughing at them?”

“Typical,” scoffed Samantha. “And they call the NFL the No-Fun League.”

“Fun is normally against regulations,” Major Carter said with a smile.

“Even so, doesn’t he look irresistible in that uniform?” Samantha said to Carter.

“Has anyone noticed he’s right here in the room and able to hear every word you’re saying?” Trajan said as he went into the bedroom.

“Mmmm,” said Samantha.

When Trajan emerged from the bedroom wearing civilian clothing, Samantha put on an expression of comic disappointment. “How are you getting on with your Almed gadget?” Trajan asked Major Carter to change the subject. “I

haven't heard too much about that recently."

"That's more to do with embarrassment than anything else," Carter admitted.

"I don't get it," said Trajan.

"The Almed are even worse than you for finding loopholes in the laws of physics. Or structure, as you prefer to call them."

"Actually, according to S.J., lots of physicists and other mathematicians where she comes from have bought the concept of structure and made very significant advances by doing so."

"I know, I've read her debriefing notes. And I believe you."

"You do?"

"Are you about to fall over in amazement?" laughed Carter.

"Well, yes."

"Brace yourself, then," said Carter. "Combining the Almed obsolete technology with some scraps from the follow-up work you were doing for them, I think we're on the verge of creating responsive shields."

"And that's good?"

"These are shields capable of drawing power from the force applied to them."

"So the harder they're hit, the stronger they get? That sounds like something a couple of Almed boffins were talking about when I was there. But they changed the subject quickly when they realized I was in earshot."

"Pity. Because we have some big problems with trapping and storing the incident energy. If we can't use it or dump it pretty fast, the shields will overload."

"Sounds like you need a reversible way of converting huge amounts of energy into a relatively modest amount of matter."

"Which may be what the Almed are doing, sort of. But in the meantime, we're working on some pragmatic solutions. Energy wasteful, but something we can use."

"Sounds like you've got a job for life there, Major."

"Except that politics is coming in to it."

"And you're getting crowded out by some of the Pentagonian in-crowd?"

"Pretty much, yes."

“So it’s back to the day job with SG-One?”

“That’s one way of looking at it,” laughed Carter.

“Well, no doubt they’ll drag you back when they get stuck. Only to give you the boot again when you’ve dug them out of the mire again.”

“I’d call you an appalling cynic if I didn’t agree with you one-hundred per cent,” laughed Carter.

“You do know Sam went off-world on a mission this morning?” said Samantha.

“No one told me,” said Trajan. “Or if they did, I had a headful of Almed problems. How did it go?”

“It didn’t,” Carter said with a shrug. “We couldn’t dial the gate to report back when someone started bombing something a couple of miles from the gate. And Teal’c and I had a real struggle to make the DHD work one more time. When they tried to dial the gate after we got back, nothing.”

“Sounds like it was more serious than a DHD malfunction.”

“Yes, that’s what I said in my report.”

“So you’ll be at a bit of a loose end until your next mission comes up if the Pentagonians stroll off with your gadget?”

“Apart from all the other projects I have on the go,” said Major Carter.

“Apart from them,” Trajan said with a nod. “Still, it gives you a chance to catch up with your laundry and do some shopping.”

“Right,” laughed Major Carter.

### **[August 07, Thursday, lunchtime**

Two experts from the Pentagon arrived the next morning to hear what Trajan could tell them about directed energy weapons. The matter had been judged too sensitive for the information to be transmitted across the country electronically. The trio met at a suite in the visitor quarters rather than in an office in the normal working areas at the SGC.

Trajan handed documents to Drs. Jay and Kean, a pair of fortyish government consultants in what looked like comfortable travelling suits, and outlined what he had gleaned from the Almed. Dr. Jay promptly accused him of stealing his research.

“Jay, Jay, he’s a mathematician,” said Dr. Kean in a patient tone. “He isn’t in our field. He’s not the enemy. There’s very intense competition for funding in our field,” he added to Trajan.

“Enough to drive someone crazy?” Trajan said, still recovering from the shock of the unexpected attack on his integrity.

“Well, yes,” Kean admitted. “We know of two guys in our field who just vanished.”

“I am not going down Felger’s road,” Jay insisted.

“So stop acting like you’re crazy, then,” retorted his colleague. “Dr. Trajan is just sharing some bits and pieces he picked up while he was working with the Almed. Remember them? Advanced civilization? At least a century ahead of us in this area?”

“It occurs to me that if Dr. Jay thinks I’m nicking his work,” Trajan realized, “then he must be going down the same road the Almed went down decades ago, or whatever. If the stuff I’ve picked up looks familiar to you,” he said directly to Jay, “you must be on the right track.”

“Really?” said Jay, lost among reflex outrage, embarrassment and reassurance.

“Just how well does this stuff fit in with your work?” Trajan added.

Dr. Jay flicked through his binder. “I can’t see any joins. That’s with whatever falls within my personal remit. Some of your bits and pieces go way beyond where I am.”

“So you now have confirmation that you’re on the right track? Plus bits and pieces of road map, which will tell you if you’re staying on the right track?” said Trajan.

“Do you want me to get down on my knees and grovel?” said Dr. Jay. “For the apology?”

“Would it be entertaining?” Trajan asked Dr. Kean.

“Not unless you’re into weird,” said Kean.

“Can we get back to the point here?” Dr. Jay switched from submissive to assertive disconcertingly.

“Is he always like this?” said Trajan.

“Just count the miles between here and the Pentagon and think how lucky you are to be here instead of D.C.,” said Kean.

“Would you bastards stop talking about me like I’m not here?” said Jay.

“Only if you promise to stop behaving like a total jerk,” said Kean.

“Why don’t we start again?” said Trajan. “Hello, I’m Dr. Trajan, a specialist here at the SGC, and I think I collected some information off-world which might be of interest to you.”

“Okay, I had that coming,” said Jay. “Are you likely to get any more of this?”

“You never know your luck,” said Trajan. “That was a serious statement, by the way. It depends if I meet the more chatty members of the Almed team. Some of them are totally focussed on their own projects and don’t talk about anything else. But some of them are quite interested in where we are in relation to where they are. Just curiosity rather than to assess our threat level. I think.”

“Mostly harmless?” Dr. Kean quoted from *The Hitchhiker’s Guide To The Galaxy*.

“Slightly more positive than that,” laughed Trajan. “And our interactions are not mainly a one-way transaction. Both sides start from different knowledge bases, so we’re both learning from each other when we integrate new knowledge into our respective knowledge bases.”

“So they should be less grateful for what they learn from you because you’re also learning from them?” said Kean.

“I keep quiet about that,” said Trajan. “So as not to upset my bosses, who want theirs to be as grateful as possible to us.”

“Well, yes,” Kean said with a grin.

“And it’s a mutually beneficial process,” Trajan added. “The more I learn from them, the easier it is for both parties to understand each other. And that’s what’s important in this whole business. As with me and the Almed, it’s also you and

me getting the better of the Universe by knowing more of its sneaky tricks. So this stuff is useful?”

“I think the main use of this material will be to keep us out of blind alleys,” said Jay.

“So how close are you to giving our spacecraft the equivalent of phasers?”

“It’s all ultra-top-secret, of course,” said Kean, “but we’re talking months rather than years to significant testing. The main hold-up is the power source.”

“You’re working with naquadah-power and hoping someone comes up with something even better?” said Trajan.

“Living in hope,” said Jay. “You’d really see something if we had a reliable naquadah power source with a really huge output.”



Dr. Trajan returned to his own quarters with a couple of ideas simmering on the edge of becoming something useful. He found Samantha Carter looking through his delivery of internal mail in search of diversion. Trajan picked up pen and paper, a sign that he was going off into his own little world, and began to make calculations.

“I’ve been there,” Samantha said suddenly. “I’ve bloody been there.”

“Great,” said Trajan., giving her just a tiny fraction of his attention.

“I’m not joking,” Samantha protested. “I really have been there.”

“Sweetheart, could you hold that thought for a couple of minutes while I get this written down?” her host asked with an apologetic smile.

Three minutes later, Trajan clicked his ballpoint to retract the refill and put pen and paper down. “Where have you been?”

“P-Two-R-Eight-One-Three,” Samantha said with a note of triumph.

“Okay, this is probably me being dim but that means nothing to me,” Trajan admitted.

“It’s where SG-One and Seven went yesterday. When they had gate trouble. It’s in this report.” Samantha waved the binder at her host.

“Well, Samantha, if you recall, I wasn’t here when that arrived, and it would have been positively impolite to grab it off you.”

“Well, yes. But the point is, I’ve been there. We’ve been on that planet. Well, me and the other you.”

“Doing what?”

“It was the second Glider-Plus mission. The first mission, what the SGC thought would be the easiest one, that didn’t work out. The glider there was too badly damaged to be worth recovering so we just brought back some interesting control circuitry.”

“But you found the recall device in the bits you brought back? Is that right?”

“It was the whole Trajan Team, working together, who found it. Not just me.”

“Okay. So you’re saying you got your first intact gliders from this planet that SG-One has just been to? And what? You want everyone to rush back and grab those gliders?”

“That won’t work.” Samantha waved the report. “We can’t dial that gate, remember? Sam told us she just managed to get it working one more time so everyone could get home. Attempts to dial that gate afterwards failed.”

“Let’s have a look at that.” Trajan held out a hand for the report. He skimmed through it quickly with Samantha pointing out essential details. “No one was bombing the place while you were there?” Trajan said eventually.

“No, but they did a reconnaissance from the SGC; with one of those little planes that go through the gate?”

“With a drone?”

“Right. It showed four gliders in a line, like in a parking lot. About a quarter of a mile from the gate. And I think it was seven others all smashed up and in a heap further away.”

“What about whatever was being bombed when SG-One was there?”

“There was a big clearing a couple of miles away. Nothing in it apart from what looked like two really big bomb craters.

Really big in width but not very deep.”

“No comms traffic? No signs of other occupation?”

“No, it looked like the Goa’uld had just abandoned the site. Or whoever was there.”

“When was this?”

“About four months ago.”

“And you’re certain it’s the same planet?”

“That’s easy to check. The one I went to had three small moons in trojan positions; roughly our Moon’s mass in total at about three-quarters of its current distance from Earth.”

“Well, that’s distinctive enough. Okay, I tell you what, you write up everything you remember about the recons and what you found on the planet, and we’ll pass it on to General Hammond as further proof of what a useful person you are and how things overlap between here and where you’re from.”

“Pity that gate isn’t working. We could have got the Glider-Plus project going right away. Everything we need to make it work is there on that planet.”

“The Universe isn’t organized for our convenient, S.J.”

“You can say that again.”

### **[August 07, Thursday, afternoon]**

A meeting in General Hammond’s office at sixteen-hundred hours had the flavour of a graduation ceremony. Dr. Samantha Carter received a temporary SGC pass and a temporary identity card, which showed that she was a civilian employee of the Air Force of the United States.

Samantha had a purely local clearance, which would let her take up residence at Trajan’s apartment in Silver Spring. Receiving a State of Colorado driving licence and a US passport, however, lay sometime in the future.

“Congratulations, Dr. Carter, you are now almost a person again,” General Hammond said when the refugee had signed all of the necessary pieces of paper.

“This looks just like the SGC pass I used to wear,” Samantha decided after a close inspection of her new ID tag.

“They could have just given me the old one back.”

“We have a lot of bureaucrats who need things to do,” the general said with a rare touch of cynicism.

“Okay, what’s next on the agenda?” said Major Carter.

“You’re driving S.J. to Silver Spring because the Almed want to have another go at me,” said Trajan. “So you get to check if there’s anything interesting growing on the stuff in my fridge.”

“Wonderful,” laughed Carter.

“The Almed promised to be brief,” General Hammond added.

“So just two or three hours instead of a couple of days?” said Samantha. “I’m really looking forward to seeing more of your Silver Spring to find out how different it is here.”

“I’ll let the Almed know they’re on quadruple time after five o’clock,” said Trajan. “See you later. Oh, S.J.,” he added as Samantha turned away, “Are you going to get Sam to shoot the lock off the front door or do you want a key?”

When the ladies had gone, General Hammond headed down to what had become the Almed conference suite, with its mixture of Air Force furnishings and Almed big-screen technology, which had been provided by the more advanced race for their convenience.

The *caller-waiting* system to notify the control staff at the gate room on Earth of someone who wished to interrupt a contact had been tested and found to work without problems. Thus Almed scientists at research stations remote from their stargate could consult experts on Earth via a video conference call and spare themselves the inconvenience of a journey to their local stargate.

Dr. Trajan had to make a quick journey to the visitor quarters to change into his SGC-X uniform to reinforce the message that he was subject to military discipline and acting under orders, he had no wriggle room and any requests would have to be submitted to higher authority for approval.

On time to the second, the Almed activated their stargate. After routine checks, one of their physicists appeared on the main screen in the conference room. The screen filled with a view of Vorn Emmain on the balcony of his apartment. It was

bright early morning on the Almed home-world. High efficiency lights created an illusion of daylight in the room inside a mountain on Earth.

As was customary, the Almed physicist was sitting at the side of his balcony to allow General Hammond, and any other visitors to the room, to enjoy a pin-sharp panoramic view of his home city whilst the two scientists talked.

The balcony was some fifty feet above ground level and it offered a vista of part of the city, a waterfront and a section of a lake which had a great deal of traffic, most of it pleasure craft.

General Hammond had no idea what the conversation was about, but he could hear the almost frustrated understanding in the physicist's voice as Vorn Emmain said, "Ah!" as he grasped each point made by Dr. Trajan.

"I hope that helps," Trajan said after thirty-five minutes of concentrated explanation.

"It's so clear now, I feel rather embarrassed that I had to consult you in the first place," the physicist admitted.

"Yes, it was the same for me," said Trajan. "Once you get your head around it, it all seems so painfully obvious that you wonder why you ever struggled with it. Until you see someone else doing the same."

"Yes, agreed," laughed the physicist.

"Anyway, is that everything for the moment? Because I have somewhere else I need to be."

"Oh, yes, it's coming up to evening where you are. Yes, I think I have everything and I won't have to redial your gate with the contact limit approaching. If not, I'll just stay up late tonight and contact you tomorrow morning, your time."

"Okay, Vorn, see you again."

The stargate closed and the viewing screen went dark when the signal was cut off.

"It really is like he's in the same room with you," said General Hammond. "And it's very relaxing, watching life on his planet happening behind him."

"Baird twenty-three-line TV to ultra-duper-D TV," said Trajan. "If we had the plans for this system, we could make millions."

“After someone invents the technology to take advantage of the plans.”

“Yes, that’s life all over,” said Trajan. “There’s always a bloody snag.”

“The recording of the session checked and verified, sir,” a technician reported to the general.

“I don’t think we need detain you any further, Dr. Trajan,” General Hammond said. “We’ll leave you at the mercy of whatever is growing in your refrigerator.”

“With any luck, Major Carter had a gun in her handbag and she’ll have shot it,” Trajan returned. “See you tomorrow, sir.”



Dr. Trajan opened the front door of his second-storey penthouse apartment and called, “Quick, someone phone nine-one-one, the place is full of squatters.”

“Oh, it’s you,” said Samantha. “Everything’s in the wrong place.”

“Cheer up, you’re an intelligent woman, you’ll adapt and learn,” laughed Trajan. “What’s up with it?” he added, his tone conveying ‘why would you be surprised by that?’

“No, I mean the layout of the rooms is different.”

“Not just furnishings and decoration?”

“Right. The walls are all in the wrong place. The door in and the door up to the roof garden are where they should be, but the rooms are all different. And it all looks kinda bare compared to how I remember it. And the paintings aren’t here. Some views of Montana or somewhere with mesas,” Samantha added in response to a frown. “I like the weird fractal graphics, though. These one are like the ones in pictures of your place in Miami.”

“Oh, yes, we have a place in Miami, my wife and I, don’t we.”

“And New York, and a few other places.”

“Sounds like I need to get out more.”

“At least I won’t keep expecting to meet Karolin every time I turn round if the layout is so different.”

“Oh, yes, I live here with my wife, don’t I?”

“Who’s hidden the wine glasses?” Samantha added.

“I normally dish it up in mugs.”

“No, you don’t.”

“Try the cupboard on the right of the sink. I take it you found the wine?”

“That’s still where it should be.”

“Did you get straight here?” Trajan asked Major Carter. “Because S.J. was threatening to navigate.”

“I think she knows Silver Spring a lot better than me,” laughed the major. “Especially the stores.”

“Most of them look the same,” said Samantha. “And the people working in the ones we visited. It was a bit weird, talking to familiar faces who had no idea who I am.”

“Maxed your credit card out, did you?” Trajan asked.

“I had a good try.”

“Are you joining us for some grub, Sam?” said Trajan.

“I wasn’t sure until Sammy explored your freezer,” said Major Carter. “If the food in it is okay, lemon chicken with leek and red pepper risotto sounds too good to miss.”

“I put the freezer on ultra-cold when I realized I’d be at the SGC for a long time,” said Trajan. “Stuff is supposed to keep for six months.”

“He’s been bringing stuff to the SGC since then,” Samantha added. “And it had always been excellent and exactly as it was when he froze it.”

“I’m surprised you hadn’t found the wine glasses,” Trajan said to Samantha as they were checking labels.

“She was distracted by the huge pile of parcels of things she ordered from catalogues,” said Major Carter. “The one with the notice saying ‘Sammy’s Stuff’ on it behind the door marked ‘S.J. Carter, Private’.”

“Everyone needs personal space, apparently,” said Trajan.

“Is she going to be okay, being here when you have to be at the SGC?”

“We’ve done some trials and she can now sleep on her own without nightmares if I’m not too far away.”

“I hope your microwave works because we don’t have time to wait for the oven to heat everything up,” said Samantha. “I still can’t believe you’re letting me live here.”

“It gives us a bit more room than guest quarters in the heart of a mountain.”

“True. And like I said, the big advantage of a different layout is I don’t expect to meet Karolin every time I open a door.”

“So we won’t have to move when we get married?”

“Are you sure about this? Getting married? You’re not just doing it because you feel sorry for me?”

“There are other considerations, you know. Such as your attractiveness, both physical and intellectual. And we get on. We’ve both co-existed with our counterparts with no serious bust-ups for a number of years. And there’s that intriguing blend of familiarity and total mystery in all the time we spend together.”

“Yes, I get that too.”

“And I do feel appalled at what you’ve had to put up with. And because of that, I’m prepared to cut you as much slack as you need; and a lot more. And not just because of all the seminars on reassurance therapy with Dr. Fraiser. But I genuinely do believe we can live together and enjoy it. And if the added touch of respectability will help you out as well, that’s a bonus for us. Why, are you getting cold feet?”

“Was that a serious question?”

“No, I’m just trying to get off the spot. So we’re both okay about this?”

“Looks like it.”

“It’s not really that much of a big deal, S.J. Millions of people get married. Like our parents.”

“Oh, well, let’s join in,” laughed Samantha. “And let’s have the minimum number of witnesses so that afterwards, we can say, ‘Oh, we’ve been married for ages. Didn’t you know?’”

“The old secrecy and confusion thing,” said Trajan.

“Are you going to draw up a pre-nup?” said Major Carter.

“I hadn’t really thought of it,” said Samantha, “not having anything much to my name.”

“But you do know he’s worth millions?” Carter nodded in Trajan’s direction.

“According to the news media, he and his wife had an annual income of over three hundred and forty million dollars

where I come from," Samantha said reflectively.

"Holy frijoles, Batman! What did they spend it on?" said Trajan.

"They gave most of it away to charities. Mainly to the VA, but also to several universities. They used to keep a million dollars for running expenses and give away whatever was left over."

"How the other half lives, eh?" said Major Carter. "Our Dr. Trajan is only worth ten to twenty million, depending which report you believe."

"So I'll have to keep on working?" laughed Samantha.

"Who's going to be the prisoner's friend at the wedding?" Trajan said to change the subject.

"I think you mean the maid of honor," laughed Carter. "Or are you talking about the best man?"

"Maid of honor?" said Trajan. "Aren't they cakes? And another thing; If S.J. really is a Goa'uld spy and she marries me, will that make her a Trajan Horse?"

His reward was a double helping of the Carter Look.

The microwave chimed its readiness signal.

"Doesn't it bother you, rushing into marriage with a bloke you hardly know?" Trajan said to Samantha as she began to transfer dishes to the table.

"That's the point, I do know him," she returned. "And it doesn't bother me."

"Not even a little bit?"

"Are you trying to tell me it bothers you, H.T.?"

"I'm not trying to tell you anything. I'm gathering data, not distributing it," said Trajan. "But if my counterpart was married where you come from, maybe I should ask if you've been married before?"

"Nope. How about you?"

"There's never been a Samantha Carter on offer before."

"Are you trying to make me blush?" laughed Major Carter.

"No, we're just being a bit rude and excluding you from the conversation," said Trajan. "And by the way, S.J.; as I recall, you proposed to me in front of half a dozen witnesses a while ago and I accepted. So if you back out now, I can sue you for breach of promise."

“Good luck with getting your process server past security at the SGC if Sammy goes into hiding there,” said Major Carter. “So you definitely are serious?”

“About taking a really big one for the team?” said Trajan.

“Are you going to let him get away with that?” laughed Carter.

“The time to get upset is if he says it when I’m not there and means it,” said Samantha. “But I can always do this . . .”

“Ow! She tagged me,” Trajan complained.

“Want to try for the other arm, Dr. Smartass?” laughed Samantha.

“This other Dr. Trajan; is he covered in bruises from all the assaults by his wife and his staff?”

“No, he was much too tough to bruise.”

“Are you planning to go on battering me after we’re married? Knowing I’m much too wimpish to hit you back?”

“I should think the novelty will have worn off by then. If you’re really serious about this whole marriage thing.” Samantha assumed a dangerous expression.

“I wouldn’t dare not be serious,” Trajan returned with a laugh. “And if we look on our acquaintance with the other versions of ourselves as practice, I think we can be pretty damn sure we’re highly compatible. The rest will be up to how willing we are to make the adjustments needed to make it work.”

“I think we know enough about each other to know there won’t be anything major.”

“Of course, the more we try to rationalize this getting married thing, the more danger there is that we’ll talk ourselves into a corner and end up not doing something we both fancy doing.”

“I’m sure a certain Dr. H.T. Trajan would tell us that’s the way the Universe works,” remarked Carter.

“Right in one,” laughed Samantha. “So you’re saying it might be better to leap into the experiment of being married?” she added to Trajan. “Rather than try to nail down the theory first, before we have some real data?”

“I guess so.”

“And if it doesn’t work?”

“At least we tried. And no harm, no foul.”

“Try telling that to a divorce lawyer,” Carter said with a cynical smile.

“Talking about the SGC, as we were a while ago,” said Trajan, “did S.J. tell you she and the other Dr. Trajan beat you to that planet you were on yesterday? And they bagged all four of the repairable gliders.”

“What?” said Carter, suspecting a joke.

“But the place wasn’t being bombed when she was there,” Trajan added. “Did the planet you went to have three small trojan moons?”

“We only actually saw two but we felt sure there had to be three,” said the major. “That was the most interesting thing about the place. Did you see all three, S.J.?”

“Do you want to wait for her report to reach the internal mail or do you want a first-hand account of S.J.’s second trip through the stargate?” said Trajan.

“I’m looking forward to that as much as I am to the meal,” said Major Carter.

### **[August 08, Friday]**

Dr. Samantha Carter’s first official day at the SGC as a civilian consultant began with tests of the modified design of the zat weapon. She had found that she liked ‘Major McNerd’ once she had got to know him, and they had reached Josh and S.J. terms.

Major McFarlane was good at what he did and he had come to terms with his earlier problem; realizing that he had been going through approaches which S.J. had tried and rejected. He now accepted that he had been still at the elimination/exploration stage, and he could do very well, careerwise, when he was directed to productive ground.

The tests were performed in a hardened laboratory next door to Dr. Lee’s. Colonel O’Neill was there to supervise the use of live weapons. Major McFarlane was nominally in charge of the testing but he accepted that it was a joint project

with his colleague, Dr. Carter. Dr. Lee watched some of the tests but he had been reminded about the data on the implant, which had been removed from Samantha's arm.

Dr. Lee had been too distracted by the ZPM project, and new ideas on how to reproduce the implant's base data module, to have much time for the data stored in it. But he had reached a point in the ZPM project where he was waiting for crystals to grow, and he had time to start looking at ways to process the implant's data.

The morning's work in the testing lab ran on into the early afternoon. Major McFarlane completed his notes whilst Colonel O'Neill and Dr. Carter were putting the components of the prototype into secure storage.

The testing had been performed on a collection of parts; storage, burst-generator and projector; which would eventually be fitted into a streamlined shell once the development work was completed.

Samantha phoned Dr. Trajan to issue instructions before escorting Major McFarlane to the car park. She found Trajan and some lunch waiting for her in the mess hall.

"How did it go?" Trajan asked as his companion nodded her approval over his choices.

"Pretty much as I remember it going when I did this the first time," said Samantha. "We're ready to go on to the fully fabricated version."

"What, in a couple of years? After some committee in Congress has chewed it over with appropriate free lunches?"

"You are such a rotten cynic," laughed Samantha. "A lot faster than that. We reckon the first production versions should be ready in five weeks. What are you watching," she added, noticing that she did not have her husband's full attention.

"They're getting ready for a shuttle launch next week." Trajan pointed to a wall television. "And they're showing some greatest hits in case you've not seen one go up before. Here we go."

There was a close-up of huge engine nozzles, showers of sparks and flames blossoming. Another view showed the flames roaring along twin channels. A space shuttle with its

huge, orange external fuel tank began to lift into the air, rising on a column of apparently solid white smoke and vapours.

“I’d have loved to have been there for an Apollo launch,” said Trajan. “They reckoned the ground and the air were both shaking five miles away.”

“All that sound and fury equals a lack of efficiency, power-wise,” Samantha said dismissively.

“Some of us like watching primitive spaceships, Samantha.”

“Our Glider-Plus project should make all that palaver out of date.”

“I’m sure all the people making a living out of making shuttle bits would love to hear that,” Trajan said with a laugh.

“Like all the people who used to make a good living out of building stagecoaches?”

“People were a lot more adaptable back them.”

“Carter one, Trajan nil. We should be going on glider recovery missions and we should be going into space on glider tests because we deserve to go into space.”

“I dare anyone to argue with that,” Trajan said with a laugh.

Samantha realized that her indignation had been loud enough to attract the attention of their neighbours and lowered her volume. “It’s all right for you. You’ve done it. You’ve been on a spaceship.”

“And it wasn’t much fun, as I recall. Work, work, work.”

“But you do think Glider-Plus is a good idea, don’t you?” Samantha ignored the negativity.

“Would you like to hear the tapes of my conversations with General Hammond on the subject?”

“And get myself arrested as a spy? No, thanks,” laughed Samantha. “But we should be going into space. It’s not fair.”

“There is always Plan C, if the worst comes to the worst.”

“What about Plan B?”

“Plan B never works.”

“So what’s Plan C?”

“I do a deal with the Almed. I tell them I’ll work for them for nothing for ten years if they give you a cruise in one of their spaceships.”

“You’d do that for me?”

“Well, maybe five years’ servitude.”



Dr. Samantha Carter spent most of the afternoon working on her report, letting Trajan commune with his ideas notebook. After a break for afternoon tea and a spot of gentle interrogation to give both of them a change from the tasks in hand, he sneaked off for a word with Major Carter, who had been making noises about an early start to her weekend. Trajan found her drinking coffee at a computer terminal and not looking at the screen with any enthusiasm.

“How welcome would an interruption be?” Trajan asked, hovering at a chair.

“A short one would be good,” said Carter.

Trajan sat down. “This naquadah stuff, it’s a big deal, right?”

“Mmm,” Major Carter said with a nod.

“The stargate is made of naquadah, right?”

“Mmm.”

“How big a deal is it, naquadah?”

“How big a deal is the next new prime number?”

“Nothing else could be a deal on that scale,” scoffed Trajan.

Carter responded with a relentlessly knowing smile, which moved into a frown. “You know something.”

“I know lots of stuff,” Trajan said with quiet pride.

He received a dose of the Carter Look.

“If someone knew where we might find some refined, ready to use naquadah, would it make the Pentagon that person’s bestest friend forever?”

“As Teal’s says, indeed.”

“I was afraid you were going to say that.”

“Have you got some sort of problem, H.T.?”

“As Teal’c says, indeed.”

“You know you can’t just leave it there,” Carter said.

“I knew that,” said Trajan. “We were just having a tea break, and we got talking about the stargate, and S.J. remembered there was a big fuss about naquadah at her SGC

about a year ago.”

“Why?”

“It was about a naquadah mine. One of the SG-teams went on a recon trip and found themselves on a backwater planet with a worked-out naquadah mine. The locals were just scraping an existence after being abandoned by their god. Their Goa’uld had just abandoned the mine’s workforce as not worth the effort of relocation.”

“That was nice.”

“Wasn’t it just? The irony of the situation was that they’d found a new deposit a month or two after being ditched, and worked it, hoping their god would come back and bless them.”

“But that didn’t happen?”

“Right. Of course, that deposit gave out quite quickly. So they ended up with a small stockpile of naquadah, which represented a whole lot of worthless labour. So Sammy’s SGC offered to take it off their hands in return for some stuff: workshop tools, medical and agricultural help and training to let them build internal combustion engines fuelled by alcohol, which they could make easily, for pumping water, powering workshop tools, anything they wanted.”

“And they went for it?”

“Apparently. They were also advised to bury their stargate to make sure their god didn’t come back to start exploiting them again.”

“And did they?”

“Sammy wasn’t that far into the picture.”

“And the Pentagon used the stockpile of naquadah in developing power packs?”

“I take it, from the gleam in your eyes, Major, that you know something about work in that direction here? Stuff that you’re not supposed to know?” Trajan said with a smile.

“No comment,” said Carter, trying to keep a straight face.

The familiar klaxon sounded to announce an activation of the stargate from off-world.

“SG-Five’s back,” said Carter.

“Anything interesting,” said Trajan.

“Routine recon of a new gate address, I heard.”

“Someone has to do them. So anyway, the Pentagonians would be very interested to hear about a possible stash of naquadah? Which will require a bit of work to locate?”

“Why? Why the bit of work?”

“All S.J. can remember is the end of the location: Four-Four-Five, which kind of trips off the tongue.”

“That’s a reasonable starting point. What’s the problem?”

“That’s something I want to talk to the general about.”

“I heard Hammond is planning a quick debrief with SG-Five then going home early.”

“There’s a lot of it about,” Trajan said with a grin. “I think the report can wait until Monday. The general has already had one helping of me today. I doubt he needs another this close to going-home time. I think I’ll put something in the internal mail. See you on Monday, Sam.”



Major Grend and his team rose to their feet when General Hammond swept into the briefing room with the air of a man who was not looking for idle chatter. “Anything startling?” the general asked as he took his usual seat at the conference table.

“Interesting rather than startling, sir,” said Grend. “We spotted a structure set into a low hill, which was part of an extended ridge of humps to the east of the stargate site. When we got up there, it turned out to be a building with some inscriptions outside and inside.”

“Something for Dr. Jackson?”

“Yes, sir. The building is set into the side of the hill, below the crest and visible only on the stargate side. There’s a settlement of some sort on the other side; we could see smoke the MALP saw rising from fires and we took some pictures.”

“A village?”

“Yes, sir. Nothing fancy. I’d say it wasn’t built by whoever built the structure on the other side of the hill. That’s a much more solid job. We took pictures, of course, and I’d say it could extend into the hill. What we saw had the look and feel of a porch rather than being the whole structure.”

“Nothing obvious as a door mechanism?”

“Not that we saw, sir. But maybe something will come from the pictures.”

“Nobody took any interest in you?”

“No, sir. As with the MALP, no one seemed bothered about the stargate being activated.”

“Okay, good job,” said the general. “Write up your reports and make sure Dr. Jackson gets copies of your pictures. Enjoy your weekends, gentlemen. Dismissed.”



# Nuisance Tactic

[August 09, Saturday]

Dr. Trajan was in Silver Spring, shopping before the trip to Boston, when he was approached by two men, both of whom had a Londonish accent.

They were dressed in smart, summer-weight suits and wearing wrap-around sunglasses. They looked like routine Secret Service agents.

“What do you know about a star gate?” said the taller.

“Is that like a Watergate?” Trajan said casually. “Or one of the other ‘gates’ inflicted on an unwilling world since the 1970s by tedious and uninspired members of the news meeja?”

“It’s a system for interstellar travel,” said the shorter man.

“I tend to read a lot of detective fiction and non-fiction these days,” said Trajan. “I find that SF has gone off rather a lot. Or is this another of the brilliant, blockbuster films I’m waiting to see on TV?”

“No, this is an actual device, Dr. Trajan.”

“You’re telling me you have an actual working device for interstellar travel?” Trajan said with the air of someone humouring a lunatic.

“Not quite actually working,” the spokesman admitted.

“But once you’ve sorted out the theory, and worked out how to build it, and slain all the bugs and done some safety testing, you’ll be in business? In about a hundred and fifty years?”

“A lot sooner than that, Dr. Trajan. We have the device. We just need to make the control circuitry work.”

“And then you’ll be able to ‘Beam me up, Scotty’ to another star system? Cool!”

“We’re not talking about beaming technology, Dr. Trajan.”

“Okay, it sounds a very fascinating project, but why are you

telling me about it?”

“Because we think you have information that will be helpful to us.”

“And you’ve asked the US Air Force if you can borrow my services? Because I’m pretty tied up at the moment.”

“We though you could ask for a leave of absence.”

“We’re in ‘not going to happen’ territory there, pal. As I said, I’m pretty busy with current projects.”

“Which could be relevant to ours.”

“You do realize that I’m a civilian employee of the US Air Force and what you’re asking me to do sounds like committing espionage against a friendly power at worst, or industrial espionage at best?”

“What we’re asking you to remember is that you are a British citizen, Dr. Trajan, and you have duty to keep you government informed about matters which affect your country.”

“And what if I don’t trust the bunch of spivs running the country right now not to misuse the information?”

“It’s not your place to question the credentials of a democratically elected government.”

“I suppose that’s under New Labour rules? Might I remind you that it’s the democratic right of every British citizen, if not their duty, to question what the government of the day is doing.”

“I think we’ll leave it there for now, Dr. Trajan. Just reflect on what we’ve said.”

“I shall include it in my memoirs,” Trajan promised as the men turned their backs and disappeared around a handy corner.

Refusing to be fazed, Trajan made a phone call to the SGC then got on with shopping until it was time to meet General Hammond at a motel on the edge of town. He spotted a member of SG-3; she was in civilian clothing and carrying a rucksack which looked as if it contained a submachine gun; but he resisted the temptation to nod a greeting.

“Interesting conversation, Dr. Trajan,” General Hammond said after hearing the exchange, bar some missing opening remarks, as captured by Trajan’s pocket recorder.

“I did some deep thinking before I phoned you, sir,” Trajan admitted.

“And what conclusions did you reach?”

“The first one was that I couldn’t be sure they really were MI-Six agents, which is obviously what they wanted me to think. But in the end, it all comes down to where your loyalties lie. And given what I know now, mine have to be to the planet as a whole and the people at the SGC in particular. Which is why I decided to bring this to your attention, General.”

“I have people looking at footage from traffic cameras right now. I must say, the approach was rather blatant.”

“Yes, that struck me too. So where do we go from here, sir?”

“Carry on as planned,” said the General. “Which means you, Dr. Carter and Dr. Jackson go to Boston, as arranged.”



When the Air Force jet took off for Boston at lunchtime, Samantha was wearing a wedding ring which contained a detector specific to one of the crystals used in Daniel’s Devices. It would tingle when she handled such a device and provide a means of testing it in case she was unable to try to open it because the owner would not let it out of his sight. She was also sporting an engagement ring with an elegant single diamond.

The technician who had delivered the wedding ring had commented on the lack of an engagement ring, prompting Trajan to remind everyone that he had not proposed to Samantha; she had proposed to him and he could offer witnesses to that fact, and she should be buying him a ring. He had then produced a ring box whilst Samantha and Major Carter had been exchanging looks of indignant disapproval.



The journeys to Boston and the hotel, and later to the home of Nicholas and Sonia Vartain, proceeded with the smooth-

ness available only to the super-rich and the superbly well-connected. Their hosts offered suitably generous hospitality but the artefact which interested the visitors soon took priority.

All three examined it closely, confirming that it was the same sort of device which Dr. Jackson had collected during his travels. Nicholas Vartain was soon wearing the half-smile of someone who knew that he was on the verge of completing a profitable deal.

“I wonder what this writing says?” Mrs. Vartain remarked, pointing to an inscription which circled the top face of the artefact.

“Kar-en tirash sa-vil meh-haar Haar’ak,” Trajan began.

“Why is Daniel laughing?” said Samantha.

“Probably amused by my accent,” said Trajan.

“Actually, it’s sheer incredulity,” said Daniel. “We’ve been working on assigning sound values to these symbols for quite a while but H.T. is obviously way ahead of where I thought he’d be.”

“You can read this script?” said Nicholas Vartain.

“I can make noises which I think belong to the symbols,” Trajan said. “I don’t claim to know what the noises mean, though. Or how accurate they are. I leave that to the expert,” he added, looking at Daniel.

“Our big problem is we’re only dealing with a few old museum pictures and even fewer of the actual objects,” said Daniel. “So making any sense of what’s written on them isn’t going to be done in a hurry. About all we can say with any measure of confidence is that the thing probably belonged to someone called Haar’ak.”

“So you definitely want to acquire this one?” said Vartain.

“Oh, yes,” said Daniel. “The more I can study, the better the chance of working out where they fit in to history.”

“And what does Dr. Trajan get out of the deal?”

“A bit of a diversion from things mathematical,” said Trajan. “I find Egyptology fascinating. Well, we both do,” he added with a glance at Samantha.

“You can deliver on your side of the bargain?” said Vartain.

“I checked with the Pentagonians and the stuff you want

has been declassified,” said Trajan. “But it would probably take a hell of a lot of digging and prodding to confirm that.”

“So I would get a long lead on the competition if we make the deal?” said Vartain.

“Depends how good their industrial spies are,” Samantha remarked, drawing a laugh from Sonia Vartain.

Vartain held out a hand to Daniel. “Deal?”

Daniel clasped the hand. “Deal.”

“I’ll need about three hours with your people to explain my end of the deal,” said Trajan.

“Okay, shall we say the conference suite at your hotel at nine-thirty tomorrow morning?” said Vartain.

“With any luck, we should be finished by lunchtime,” Trajan said with a nod.

### [August 10, Sunday]

Dr. Trajan’s conference session over-ran into an early lunch. He was able to join Drs. Carter and Jackson for a quick look at the Boston Museum before the Air Force whisked them back to Colorado at the end of the afternoon. All three would be spending the night at the SGC. Trajan had an evening session with an Almed scientist booked. Monday would be a big day for everyone.

“You’d better remember to take that back to the stores tomorrow morning,” Trajan said with a nod at the wedding ring when he and Samantha were in their usual quarters.

Samantha pretended to tug at it. “It won’t come off. I think they should have made a bigger size.”

“You mean, we’re going to have to get Doc Fraiser to cut your finger off to retrieve a valuable piece of Air Force property?”

Samantha responded with the Carter Look.

There was a knock on the door. Dr. Jackson had arrived.

“Awkward moment?” he asked, sensing disagreement.

“We were just winding each other up,” said Trajan.

“I see S.J. is still wearing her wedding ring.”

“Someone keeps telling me they made it too small and it’s stuck on. I wonder whose pay they’ll stop it out of? Hers or mine?”

“Interesting idea,” laughed Daniel. “The bride arrives at the altar with a pre-installed wedding ring to make sure the best man can’t lose it.”

“I wonder who actually signed it out of the stores?”

“I think it was General Hammond.”

“Well, that’s going to make us popular,” laughed Trajan. “Sticking him with a bill for about five thousand bucks if someone doesn’t hand it over to Sergeant La Banda tomorrow. Anyway, what can we do you for, Daniel?”

“You know when you were reading the inscription on the Vartain Device? I was wondering if you could do the same with these.” Daniel produced three photographs from a binder. They showed variations of the unknown device.

“Well, I was making the noises for the symbols,” said Trajan. “The way I can read out something in Greek without having much idea what it means.”

“That’s what I want,” said Daniel. “You know how if you hear someone speaking Dutch, you can do a mental translation into German and get the drift of what they’re saying? It’s the same sort of idea for the inscriptions on the gadgets. I got the idea when you read the inscription for Mrs. Vartain. Thinking about it afterwards, I realized I could make sense of your sounds. Sort of.”

“You’re saying you know what it says on the device? Really?” said Samantha, impressed.

“Sort of,” Daniel admitted.

“And?”

“The bit H.T. read out was that it’s the property of someone called Haar’ak.”

“Here’s another Haar’ak.” Trajan he moved one of the pictures away from the other two. “These belong go Suhl’tan and Dennesh.”

“Where does that get us,” Samantha said, feeling let down.

“It would be interesting to know if Haar’ak’s devices are different from the others inside,” said Trajan, “or if everyone is using a common design. Where did you get the photos,

Daniel?"

"The Dennesh one is the one S.J. found in my collection. The other two are museum pictures."

"So we have two devices from different sources? Your Dennesh one and the Haar'ak we've just got? That's good."

"So are we having a look inside the new one?" said Samantha.

"I think we can do that tomorrow," laughed Daniel. "Maybe during the morning, if we'll be busy in the afternoon."

"Oh, I don't know; how long does a wedding take?" said Trajan. "Knowing the Carter work ethic, I'm sure the bride will be back in her lab as soon as she's had a swig of champagne and a bite of cake."

"We are definitely having the afternoon off," Samantha insisted.

"In that case, can I get H.T. to read all the inscriptions into my recorder so I can try to work on what they say tomorrow afternoon?" said Daniel. "If you've got time?"

"My interview with the Almed's not for another couple of hours," said Trajan.

Trajan studied images and did his best to apply sound values to the characters on them. Dr. Jackson left the visitor quarters wearing an expression of satisfaction. He was making progress in the direction of understanding; even if that progress was not necessarily in the direction of saving the planet from the Goa'uld threat.

"I can't believe we're actually getting married here tomorrow," Samantha remarked when Daniel had gone.

Trajan put on an expression of mock surprise when he noticed that she was no longer wearing the wedding ring with the built-in detector.

"The one we bought is much better," Samantha told him.

"And you're sure you're not just drifting into this on autopilot?" Trajan asked. "Are you sure you don't want to take more time to think about other options?"

"Are you getting cold feet, or something?" Samantha asked suspiciously.

"No way," laughed Trajan. "But most of your expectations

about me are based on another version of me.”

“Not that different, though. Deep down. You’re right, you’re pretty different on the surface, but the person at the heart of it is still the same person I fell in love with.”

“Okay, as long as you’re happy about where this is going.”

“I am. Are you?”

“I’m in a position of not being able to believe my luck. And you know my track record for mistrusting the Universe.”

“Oh, yes, we all know that,” laughed Samantha.

### **[August 11, Monday, afternoon]**

At 13:00 hours, the Air Force chaplain at the SGC performed a secular service for Drs. Carter and Trajan. The chaplain was struck by how much everyone was laughing before and after the ceremony. Dr. Jackson told him that everyone was thinking about Trajan’s speculation about the wedding, and they were still wondering exactly who among them was the prisoner’s friend.

At Samantha’s request, Trajan wore his SGC Specialist’s uniform for the ceremony and the first set of wedding photographs. He did a quick change into a suit for the ones which would be available to his family, which made Samantha, Daniel Jackson and himself a trio of civilians surrounded by dress Air Force uniforms. Teal’c wore an SGC uniform, and he kept his cap on during the session to hide the golden emblem on his forehead.

“Two Carters was confusing enough,” Colonel O’Neill remarked as the wedding party made its way to the visitor quarters for the reception. “Now, all I have to do is convince myself that two Trajans isn’t.”

“They are pretty easy to tell apart, sir,” Major Carter pointed out.

“Positive thinking. I like it,” O’Neill said with a laugh.

Food and drink were waiting in the Trajans’ quarters. In response to calls for a speech, Trajan nominated his wife, having noticed her set of scribbled notes.

“This is not going to be a usual bride’s speech,” Samantha said after retrieving her scraps of paper. “If there is such a thing. But I’ve been encouraged to say what I really feel today.”

“Okay, I’m ready to duck,” her husband remarked.

“There’s no need for anyone to duck,” Samantha continued with a smile. “Because I want to thank all of you. Our common enemy, the Goa’uld, drove me off my world. But you made me welcome on yours. I need to thank the medical staff and H.T. for keeping me sane after I arrived, and especially H.T. for putting me back together whenever I have a panic attack. Daniel for giving me something to do, helping to catalogue his collection.

“Everyone who helped me to get back to work on the zat project. And Teal’c for showing me that the Jaffa are a people with aspirations to achieve a place of their own in the galaxy, not mindless servants of the Goa’uld. This is a day I never thought could happen where I come from. Which only goes to show that you can never know what the Universe has up its sleeve.”

“Now, that didn’t hurt,” Colonel O’Neill remarked to Trajan as the applause died down.

“Extremely painless,” he agreed. “Friends,” he added at a greater volume, “pray silence for the boss.”

“The next order of business,” announced General Hammond, “is to issue Samantha with a new SGC ID as Specialist S.J. Trajan, as well as a driver’s license and a passport in her married name.”

Samantha surrendered her temporary pass and replaced it with the new one. Then she began to wonder where to put the other pieces of ID. “Thank you, General,” she said. “I hope to get a lot of use out of these.”

“Looks like you’ve really arrived,” remarked O’Neill. “Almost.”

“I’m sure the Pentagon will issue a full general security clearance to the new Dr. Trajan very shortly,” said the general.

“Meanwhile, welcome back to the ranks of daily commuters now you can have your own car,” said Major Carter.

“Oh, yes,” Samantha said to Trajan. “When we go home, I’m driving.”

“Married five minutes and already she’s in charge,” laughed O’Neill.

“Someone has to be,” Samantha returned. “You know what he’s like when he starts thinking about something. Not someone you’d want to be behind the steering wheel.”

“Is that the best excuse you could come up with?” scoffed Trajan.

“Everyone else thought it was quite good,” said Samantha.

“Okay, I’m outnumbered by people who don’t know how sneaky you are,” Trajan said with an air of mock resignation.

“Me? Sneaky?” Samantha said indignantly. “You could be on the Olympic team for that.”

“Playing your American team in the final?” laughed Trajan. “Okay, I get it, you want to drive. All you had to do was say so.”

“Yeah, right,” scoffed Samantha.

“I was just about to recommend the SGC’s dating service if you ever find yourself too busy to do anything in person,” Trajan remarked to the others. “I’m not so sure now.”

“Well, I am,” said Samantha. “Just before the ceremony, the chaplain told me he’s known H.T. for a number of years and assured me I was getting one of the best of the best. I asked him about that afterwards. He told me about the welfare fund for SGC staff and their families.”

“Right. H.T. must have put thousands and thousands of dollars into that over the years,” Major Carter.

“Because people putting their lives on the line deserve the best support we can give them when they run into trouble,” said Samantha. “Which is so like the H.T. I used to know.”

“Does that mean I’m somewhat okay despite my obvious defects?” Trajan asked.

“Hey, the lady married you,” O’Neill pointed out.

“Another thing I’d like to do is visit Sam’s place again to have another look at what she’s done with ‘our’ home,” said Samantha. “There was a bit too much to take in the first time.”

“I wonder if the Almed have a gadget which extends time

so we can cram all this into the time available?" said Trajan.

"This weekend," said Major Carter. "It's a date."

**[August 12, Tuesday]**

The following morning, Dr. Daniel Jackson delivered his report on the new device to General Hammond. "Dr. Lee has had a look at the device we got from the deal with Nicholas Vartain," he announced. "It's not working because of a different fault from the one in the device Samantha found in my collection. So we know a bit more about them."

The general put on a wry smile. "If the Russians could deliver a bagful of them, all with unique faults, we might actually be able to repair one of them, Dr. Jackson?"

"That's what Sam reckons," Dr. Jackson returned with a nod. "It's an incentive for me to keep looking for more of them. And now H.T. and I have cracked the meaning of the symbols on them, we'll make even faster progress if we locate anything else from the same source."

"So you think we got a good bargain, swapping access to Dr. Trajan's work for the device?"

"Oh, yes. What we need now is permission to study the ones I have pictures of. They're in museums in D.C. and Pittsburgh. Samantha and Dr. Lee think they can come up with a testing system, non-destructive, which will let us find out why they're not working."

"I sense you're not looking for a piece of paper with a Department of Defense heading, Dr. Jackson?"

"I think an offer to share some scholarship with them will be sufficient, if delivered in the right way."

"How long will the testing system take to develop?"

"I'm going to get together with Samantha tomorrow, sir, to discuss that. After her zat tests. About a week, as Dr. Lee is also working on something urgent."

"Ah, yes." The general remembered that Dr. Lee was working on decoding the data on the implant removed from Samantha Trajan.

“In anticipation of that,” Dr. Jackson added, “I can make some preliminary approaches to the museums. On a relatively informal basis.”

“Very well,” said the general. “Keep me informed. I’d also appreciate a summary of your projects here by the end of business tomorrow. The Pentagon is setting up a briefing on science at the SGC a week from today at Peterson Air Base. Which will need contributions from the Trajans, Dr. Lee, Major Carter and the other Specialists.”

“Something we have to perform at, sir? The Specialists?”

“No, Dr. Jackson. You’ll be relieved to hear it’s for senior officers only. In the meantime, I’ll let you get ready for this afternoon’s trip off-world.”

“Yes, that’s something I’m looking forward to,” said Jackson. “Sam and I are pretty sure we’ve spotted the door in Major Grend’s porch.”



Having lost a round of rock/scissors/paper, Dr. Trajan was volunteered to do a modest amount of shopping on the day off. He detected an unseen presence very quickly and he was not surprised when he was approached by two men, who looked like cops or security staff attached to a government department.

One of them flashed a badge and rushed through a name too quickly for Trajan to catch it. “Where were you on the evening of Wednesday July sixteenth?” he asked.

“I’d have to think about that,” Trajan returned.

“Would you do so, sir?”

“Working,” Trajan realized.

“Doing what?”

“Working for the Air Force. I’m a civilian employee.”

“At ten p.m. in the evening?”

“I work the hours they need.”

“Okay, what time did you leave home?”

“On the Sunday before then.”

“And when did you get back here?”

“About a week later.”

“Where were you during the week?”

“Station Zebra, Cheyenne Mountain base.”

“All day and all night?”

“They have accommodation for visitors and staff who are needed at short notice.”

“And what were you doing there?”

“My work is classified. But you could try asking the Air Force if you really want to know. The commanding officer is Major-General George Hammond.”

“What about asking the Air Force to confirm you were there for the whole of the week?”

“Give them a ring and ask for the duty officer. After he or she has checked up on you, they should be able tell you when I arrived at the base and when I left again. But I should warn you to expect them to clam up if you ask what I was doing. I’ve signed all sorts of pieces of paper threatening truly dire consequences if I tell you.”

“What about leaving the base during the week you were there?”

“I didn’t. And the duty officer will be able to confirm that. The comings and goings of all staff are logged by the Air Force security people. Am I allowed to know what I’m being roused about?”

“You may be a witness to an incident on the night in question.”

“I think you’ll find the Air Force will tell you otherwise. Is there anything else?”

“You’re Dr. H.T. Trajan, the mathematician?” said the other man.

“I’m a mathematician,” said Trajan

“But you’re the Trajan who came up with the concept of Structure?”

“I’m surprised you’ve even heard of it.”

“My sister gets bent out of shape about it.”

“She’s a physicist, then?”

“Works for Korbel Aerospace.”

“Oh, yes. I annoy them with outrageous mathematical concepts from time to time. Is that all?”

“For the moment, sir,” said the first interrogator.

SG-5's mission report from the previous Friday had borne fruit immediately. Dr. Jackson had identified the inscriptions as what he called 'cod Ancient': blocks of words in Ancient script offering no meaning but serving as a warning to lesser beings that they were about to trespass on the domain of their god.

Having applied logic to the layout of the interior of the 'porch', Dr. Jackson and Major Carter were confident that they had identified the position of a door in the wall facing the entrance, and that apparent wall decorations concealed the control mechanism. SG-1 was detailed to investigate further as the team could offer the necessary expertise.

The stargate's wormhole swished out of existence as SG-1 headed for the structure on the hill at a rapid walk. Dr. Jackson and Major Carter set up an array of lights and commenced their study of what they thought was a Goa'uld equivalent of a keypad.

Colonel O'Neill continued up the hill for a cautious look over the crest, taking precautions to avoid being sky-lined. Teal'c maintained a watch on the team's retreat to the stargate.

"Nothing much happening over the hill," O'Neill remarked when he returned to the building. "Anything?"

"Yes, sir, these three buttons," said Major Carter. "They have to be the door controls."

"And?" said O'Neill.

"They could be pressed in a specific order, or all at once, sir."

"And get it wrong twice, like an ATM, and it eats your credit card?" said O'Neill.

"Something like that, sir," Carter said with a smile.

"O'Neill," Teal'c said from the doorway. "A death glider has just flown overhead. It is flying away from the stargate now."

"Let's get out there for a look," said O'Neill. "Make your minds up," he added to Daniel and Carter.

The grass-like stems covering the hill were long and elastic and ready to throw seeds. O'Neill spotted half a dozen Jaffa and three men in work clothes coming their way along the

level ground at the foot of the hills. They were making for a rough track, which led up to the crest of the hill. The workmen kept pointing up toward the structure.

"We've got company," said O'Neill, retreating into the building with Teal'c.

"Locals objecting to trespassers in some holy relic?" said Daniel.

"With some Jaffa to back them up," said O'Neill. "Do we have a door we can open or not?"

"Yes, sir," said Major Carter. "But we now think there are five buttons to press."

A staff blast threw some grass and dirt into the building.

"I don't think those guys are here for a chat," said O'Neill. "T, with me."

"All at once is the least obvious option," said Daniel as O'Neill gave the Jaffa a burst of fire to make them keep their heads down. "Sam?"

"I don't think my hand is big enough." Major Carter was trying to position her hand over the five buttons to press them simultaneously.

"Let me try. Like this?"

"No, the next one along with your thumb. Yes, there."

There was a grating noise when Daniel leaned against the control panel. He released the pressure, then pushed again. He had to jump out of the way as the door swung toward him.

"Obviously built for someone left-handed," said Carter. "We've got it open, sir," she shouted. "I'm just going in for a look."

"O'Neill." Teal'c pointed into the distance.

"Look quickly," O'Neill shouted. "That glider is coming back."

"There's a tunnel leading away from here, going right, heading along the line of the ridge. Looks in good repair, sir," Carter called.

"Okay, we'll risk it," O'Neill decided.

O'Neill and Teal'c delivered some suppression fire in an interval in the staff blasts, which were slamming into the exterior of the porch with decreasing frequency as the glider drew closer. Then they raced into the tunnel. Dr. Jackson

closed the door. O'Neill fired his zat twice at the controls on the wall.

"Well, that's that bridge gone," Major Carter murmured. The hill shuddered.

"Okay, move out, that glider is getting the range," said O'Neill.

There were four more impacts. The tunnel quivered underfoot but it remained apparently solid. Then the door began to sag and release a stream of black earth.

"Move out," O'Neill ordered.

After a short interval, the impacts on the hill resumed. The glider had come round for another pass. Dust gushed along the floor of the tunnel, enveloping the feet of the fleeing members of SG-1. The fabric of the tunnel made ominous cracking noises but seemed to be holding.

"Okay, that's a piece of archaeology permanently lost to science," Daniel observed as he followed the four blobs of light from torches, which had acquired a misty quality. The beams found a solid wall ahead of the group almost immediately. It proved to be a junction of two tunnels. One descended by about one-half of its height to a linked pair of rooms.

"A dead end, O'Neill," Teal'c reported. "It looks like a laboratory."

"This other tunnel goes down to at least the bottom of the far side of the hill, sir," Carter reported. "It could come out in the village back there."

"What are our options?" said O'Neill. "Stay here and hope our radios aren't too buried to talk to the SGC when they dial the gate because we're overdue. And hope they can mount a rescue. Look for a back door at the end of the other tunnel. Or hope we've got enough C-Four to blow a hole out of here, at this end, if there isn't a back door."

"Or maybe combine options B and C at the far end of the other tunnel," said Daniel. "Where it might be easier to get out."

"We need to check that out," said O'Neill. "Let's go."

The descending tunnel started as a series of giant's steps, each three yards long. Then it levelled out. The torches

showed another dead end. Off to the left was a short corridor and a spiral staircase going up. Teal'c moved up it silently. There was another door at the top.

There was no sound coming from the other side of a very solid door. O'Neill and Teal'c stood ready, then O'Neill nodded to Daniel, who spread his left hand and pressed at the points indicated by Carter. The door swung toward them. O'Neill and Teal'c sped through it.

"Clear," O'Neill murmured. "We're coming back in."

"It's a way out?" Daniel said when the door had closed again.

"It's quite a big building," said O'Neill. "A sort of warehouse. Full of stuff in crates and on shelves. We'll wait until it's dark outside before we try to get back to the gate."

"What do we do until then?" said Daniel.

"We can check out that laboratory Teal'c saw," said Carter.

"If we had Trajan along, we could have coffee and cake while we do that," O'Neill remarked as the group reversed course.

"Right," laughed Carter.

"What is it you call that? An unreasonable expectation?" O'Neill returned.

"Maybe not all the time, sir," said Carter. "H.T. has a fair capacity for surprising us."

Major Carter found a power pack in the rearmost room and gave them lights to spare the batteries of their torches. The group settled for water and energy bars as a snack. O'Neill and Teal'c kept out of the way while the team's Specialists did their job.

"All this writing is in Goa'uld," Dr. Jackson reported, waving half a dozen loose sheets.

"Sir!" Carter called from the back room. She had moved some opaque plastic sheeting and found two long-dead Jaffa strapped to benches. The bodies were desiccated, almost mummified.

"Teal'c, don't get too close to those bodies," Daniel called.

"Why?" said O'Neill as Teal'c recoiled to the other side of the room.

“Something in these notes,” said Daniel. “I think they’re saying there’s a plant growing on this planet that has an adverse effect on Goa’uld. I assume that includes immature symbiotes.”

“This place certainly looks like a small research laboratory, sir,” said Carter.

“Adverse as in dead?” said O’Neill.

“I don’t think so,” said Daniel. “Incapacitated.”

“Like flu?” said O’Neill. “The Gould end up with a Jaffa workforce that’s too sick to work?”

“They could have been working on a cure here,” said Carter. “Only it’s a bit small and out of the way.”

“Right,” said Daniel. “It’s more a one-man-band operation. And if I’ve got the sense of these notes right, they’re about amplifying the effect of the bioagent. But I need to look up some references to be sure.”

“Why?” said O’Neill. “Amplify?”

“Killing rivals, sir?” Carter suggested. “Or killing a rival’s workforce? These two being strapped down suggests amplifying rather than curing.”

“Anything likely to be worth taking home with us?” said O’Neill.

“Actually, sir,” said Carter, “all I can see here is standard laboratory equipment. I don’t see anywhere to store samples of the toxin or whatever it is.”

“The Gould bugged out with what he could carry?” said O’Neill.

“That’s likely,” said Daniel. “I found these notes on the floor under that table over there.”

“Bugged out in a hurry?” said O’Neill.

“This planet could have been taken over by a rival,” said Teal’c, pointing to a heap of debris in a dark corner. “Or the people in the village spoke about seeing someone come here by stealth.”

“Yes, no one seems to have done any dusting in here for a while.” Daniel ran his finger along a shelf and displayed its grubby state.

“Okay.” O’Neill looked at his watch. “It will start getting dark out there in a couple of hours. Let’s be sure we’ve got

everything worth taking home, then see what we can do to get back to the gate.”

The door at the far end of the tunnel at the village opened silently into darkness. There were lights on in the warehouse but crates stacked in front of the secret door hid its presence. O'Neill exchanged signals with Teal'c. They moved away through the natural aisles into the body of the warehouse. The distinctive sound of a zat sang out twice. O'Neill stood up to his full height and waved a summons to Dr. Jackson and Major Carter.

“That was very Trajan of you and Teal'c, Jack,” Daniel murmured.

“Sometimes, the pragmatic approach is the best solution,” O'Neill said with a trace of a grin. “And I don't think those guys would have been open to a reasoned argument about not reporting us. Back door's over there.”

The ground began to shake.

The building began to quiver.

Solid objects crashed off shelves and stacked objects fell over.

SG-1 found themselves being bombarded from all sides.

“Anyone hurt?” O'Neill said when the ground steadied.

“Me,” said Carter. “My arm.”

“Bad?” said O'Neill.

“I can't move it. One of the boxes hit it.”

“Daniel, Teal'c, see if you can get to the back door.” O'Neill cleared a path to Major Carter. He used a handy piece of strapping to improvise a sling and immobilize Carter's left arm.

“It's okay, I can't feel anything, sir,” Carter said.

“That's not a good sign,” said O'Neill. “Can you walk?”

“Yes, sir. Hell of a time for an earthquake.”

“Tell me about it.”

The ground shook again but just for ten seconds of relatively gentle movement.

“O'Neill, the exit is cleared,” Teal'c called in a loud whisper.

“Let's get the hell out of here before the roof comes down,”

said O'Neill.

The quartet moved out into the night. The village was in uproar; many voices were shouting and competing with several sources of loud music. Sneaking about in the night was nerve-racking but safe. The people in the village had too much on their minds to be bothered about the possibility of intruders. Unfortunately, they also felt that they had to use the stargate. SG-1 had to resign themselves to finding somewhere secure to wait until they could seize an opportunity to use the stargate themselves.

**[August 13, Wednesday]**

General Hammond had made an appointment with the Trajans his first order of business for a new day. He tapped the binder, which H.T. Trajan had sent through the internal mail system, as the visitors were making themselves comfortable in front of his desk.

"This makes very interesting reading, Samantha," the general said.

"But there's a bit more, sir," said Samantha.

"It's a bit of a poisoned chalice, and we've been talking about it since I wrote that debriefing report," said Trajan.

"I don't see the lack of a full designation for the planet as a problem," said the general. "There are only three Four-Four-Fives to consider, I've discovered."

"That's not the problem, General," said Samantha. "Another thing I remember about the naquadah is that the Pentagon put a professor called Riorden in charge of a power pack project. He was a professor of physics with a string of degrees."

"That's 'was' in the sense of the past tense," said Trajan.

"Yes," said Samantha. "The explosion he caused killed fifty-seven other people. I remember that because someone pointed out it's the same as the number of Heinz varieties."

"This is going to be awkward," said General Hammond.

"Yes, sir," said Sammy. "This was my Professor Riorden

we're talking about. Yours, if there is one with Pentagon clearance, might not be such a stoopid idiot, which was about the kindest thing anyone ever said about him afterwards."

"You're saying we might be blighting his professional life by passing this additional intel on, or saving the lives of about sixty other people," said the general.

"As I see it, we don't have a choice about telling the Pentagon what Samantha knows, even if it is about another parallel universe," said Trajan. "But we don't feel confident the Pentagonians will do something sensible with it. Heads or tails, we're screwed. Or this Professor Riorden is."

"Which is why we've taken so long talking about this before bringing it to your attention," Samantha added. "Even if we get the naquadah, and even if Professor Riorden is never considered for the power-pack project, putting this sort of information on file could do him a lot of damage."

"In that case, I think we have to take a pragmatic view of this," said the general. "First, we need to find out if the naquadah stockpile is accessible. And only if it is accessible need we consider what we're going to do about your additional information, Samantha."

"Even so, I'm sorry to dump this on you, General," said Samantha.

"It's all part of the job," General Hammond said with a wry smile.



SG-1 were able to return to the SGC in the middle of the following morning. The SGC had managed to dial the gate and make radio contact with them during the night and Dr. Fraiser was standing by in the gate room to attend to Major Carter's arm. Carter was confident that it was not broken, and she had been forced to take pain-killers when feeling returned to it.

"That's a new way to get into trouble, Jack," General Hammond remarked when he had sent Major Carter to the infirmary.

"Yes, sir," said Colonel O'Neill. "Being attacked by the

Gould is what we expect. Earthquakes? Well, I guess it just proves what Trajan is always saying: the Universe really does hate us. I'm surprised the stargate is still standing."

"Actually, I don't think the earthquakes are all that frequent," said Dr. Jackson. "In fact, I'd be surprised if they'd had one in living memory. Could we postpone the debriefing, General? I'd like to have a full translation of these notes I found before we do it."

"We'll say sixteen hundred for the debriefing, then," said the general. "Do you think you'll find anything on this plant the Gould was using to experiment on the Jaffa?"

"I'm not hopeful, sir. But it would be an idea to warn our Jaffa allies and the Tok'ra that it isn't a healthy place to visit."

"I think we can also strike it from our own list of planets of interest," said the general.

"Oh, yes," O'Neill said with feeling.



Major Carter emerged from the medical centre with her arm in a dark blue sling. She met Dr. Trajan in the corridor.

"I was just on my way to see you," he announced. "I hear a building fell on you."

"Nothing broken," said Carter. "Just bruises."

"Sometimes, bruises don't feel very just," said the voice of experience. "Why is it always you who comes back broken? The bug planet. Now this. Do you see a conspiracy theory building?"

"Not without some fancy statistical analysis," Carter scoffed.

"My wife was anxious to find out if you'll be fit enough to come to the tests of the zat prototype this afternoon."

"Looking forward to it," Major Carter said with a smile.



Major McFarlane arrived at the SGC in good time to have lunch with the Trajans. He was resigned to playing third fiddle at the session. Dr. Samantha Trajan, as the

acknowledged expert, would deliver the technical briefing. Colonel Jack O'Neill was in overall charge of the proceedings. The demonstration was held in the pistol range close to the armoury.

"Okay, listen up," said O'Neill when General Hammond nodded to him. "We're here for a sneak preview of the new zats, which now look like proper weapons rather than something out of a bad sci-fi movie.

"Sergeant Garand is your range officer and those who try them out will do exactly what he says or be in big trouble. But first, an explanation from the lady who brought this idea to us. Carter? Doctor Carter, that is. As you were. The new Doctor Trajan."

"This version is point and shoot," said Samantha. "Quite literally. Where you point your fingers is where you shoot at. And in case anyone thinks they need to do a 'scratching your ass' joke, I heard all of them two years ago."

"Tough cookie, class," O'Neill murmured.

Samantha demonstrated the new zat, slotting it quickly onto her right wrist and then firing at a store window dummy; always under the close supervision of Sergeant Garand, the range officer.

"Hey, the new ones don't make that cool noise when they're fired," O'Neill complained.

"That's because of a different architecture," said Samantha. "Making them silent deliberately involved some pretty fancy engineering."

"Sometimes, you need people to know you've fired a warning shot," said O'Neill.

Samantha produced a notebook. "Okay, that's the sort of feedback we want. Query: possible over-engineering," she muttered as she made notes. "Query: silent mode as an option, not the default. Meanwhile, how would you like to be the first to test the latest addition to the armoury?" she added to O'Neill.

"Cool!" said O'Neill.

"Just as a general guideline," Samantha said, "a lot of people prefer to have the new zat on their left arm, if they're right-handed. It makes using it a bigger surprise. But they'll

go on either arm. And you need to put your watch on your right wrist if you go lefty.”

□ □ □

When the demonstration and testing period was over, Dr. Jackson claimed Samantha and Major Carter for a discussion on the testing system for museum-bound Goa'uld devices. Dr. Trajan responded to a summons to General Hammond's office.

“This is about Project Topspin,” the general began. “Which was mentioned in one of your wife's debriefing reports last week?”

“S.J. and my counterpart worked on it, yes,” Trajan recalled. “But all she had was just a name and a few fragments.”

“I've just had a message from the Pentagon to say that someone has linked Samantha's project to one in this parallel. The project is too top secret for either of you; or, indeed, myself; to know its name here.”

“Secrecy for its own sake,” murmured Trajan.

“Indeed. And I have been advised that there is to be no further discussion of what your wife knows about Project Topspin without direct authorization from the Pentagon.”

“No problem there, sir. Everything she knows was in that report. What little there was of it.”

“Even so, please ask her to keep quiet about it.”

“Will do,” said Trajan.

□ □ □

In the evening, Trajan found a television programme about America in space. Very soon, he and his wife were watching a space shuttle being launched for a satellite deployment mission.

“We should be doing that. We should be going out into space,” said Samantha, knowing that she was repeating herself.

“And we will,” said Trajan.

“But when? And if you say in the fullness of time, I’ll kill you.”

“What, completely dead?”

“Well, maybe only a bit dead.”

“An appropriate amount for a wiseass?”

“Stop making me laugh.”

“We’ll get you into space. Just be patient.”

“This is you doing your reassurance thing?”

“It used to be my job, you know; getting you reassured and into shape to be interrogated.”

“But you weren’t doing a job. You were doing everything you could think of to make me feel safe and wanted and a valued member of the team. Above and beyond doesn’t even get close to where you went for me.”

“Nice to be appreciated.”

“Yes, I know that from my experience of it.”

### **[August 14, Thursday, morning]**

The following morning involved an early start for Dr. Trajan: he had an 8 a.m. conference with a pair of Almed physicists. He found Major Carter in his apartment when he returned to change out of his uniform. His wife was shuffling notes in preparation for a video-conference with Major McFarlane on the Pentagon’s reaction to the tests of the zat prototype. The major was wearing civilian clothing which matched her dark blue sling.

“You’re going into Silver Spring now,” Samantha announced.

“I know,” said Trajan. “Do I get to change out of the soldier suit first?”

His reward was a helping of the Carter Look.

“Sam needs to do some shopping and you can give her a lift and carry stuff for her,” Samantha added.

“You can do that?” said Trajan. “Lend your husband to your sister? Just like that?”

“Sure,” said Samantha airily. “It’s on page ninety-seven of

the manual. But I guess you didn't get that far."

"I'm still stuck on page two, where it says what's mine is yours and what's yours stays yours."

"I never knew marriage could be that good a deal," laughed Major Carter. "You're sure you've got time for a side trip for me, H.T.?"

"I've got enough time-owed for a trip to Denver, if you fancy it," said Trajan.

"Local shopping will be enough," said Carter.

"And while you're at it, you can get these." Samantha offered a list.

"Someone's going to be busy," Trajan remarked with a thin smile.

"This is you and Sam off-duty, by the way," said Samantha.

"You're telling me that because . . . ?" said Trajan, intrigued.

"Sam was just telling me you have a habit of asking 'Is this you being all military and in charge?' when she wants you to do something. And you can go straight into the military zone with no larking about. I was just wondering if you get off on being ordered around by a woman," Samantha added with a grin.

"Funny how it doesn't work with you," said Trajan.

"I know," laughed Samantha. "It's just you being polite and English and not making life more difficult for Sam than it needs to be?"

"It's him being a member of the team," said Carter.

"Because your lives could depend on it?" said Samantha.

"Occasionally, yes," said Carter.

"You women don't half talk about some weird things," Trajan said as he headed into the bedroom to change.

"You know what he's saying about you?" Samantha said to the major.

"Go on, surprise me," Carter invited.

"That Sam Carter is one tough cookie. A building fell on her and she walked away with just a few bruises."

"Can I borrow him next time I need to update my CV?" Major Carter said with a laugh.

The plan became for Trajan to drop off perishables at his apartment in town before he drove back in the direction of the SGC to Major Carter's home on Canyon Road. Trajan left his vehicle in a short-stay surface parking area instead of the apartment building's underground parking space. He and Major Carter found themselves facing a human road-block in the building's lobby. The woman had the pushy air which Trajan always associated with members of the news media.

"I hear you're in an abusive relationship," the woman said in a tone intended to convey compassion and a willingness to share. She had an unhealthy thinness coupled with a certain air of smugness, and she was looking at Major Carter.

Trajan looked at Carter with raised eyebrows. She said, "I am?" with a frown.

"Who told you that, eh?" Trajan added in a convincing Toronto-Canadian accent.

"That's confidential," the reporter replied with a bright smile.

"Right." Trajan smiled at Carter and curled his top lip slightly. "The old mythical informant ploy."

"A wife doesn't have to put up with that sort of treatment any more," the reporter said to Major Carter.

"In fact, no one has to put up with it, spouse or non-spouse," Trajan remarked.

"You're right," said Carter.

"A married woman doesn't have to agree with her husband," said the reporter.

"I'll remember that for when I get married," said Carter.

"You're not? Married?" The reporter looked surprised.

"He is, I'm not," said Carter.

"You're having an affair with a married man?" said the reporter, looking puzzled.

"No, she's standing here, listening to you make stuff up," said Trajan. "But not for much longer. Are you recording this, by the way? Because I am, and I also have your photograph and DNA in case anyone needs to start legal proceedings against you for defamation. You'd have to be out of your tiny mind to think this charming young lady is abusing me."

"No, you're abusing her," said the reporter.

“That sounds actionable to me,” said Carter.

“And me,” said Trajan. “Would you care to dig your hole deeper. Or are you off to phone your lawyer,” he added to the reporter.

“I didn’t mean . . . ,” said the reporter.

“Tell it to the judge, lady,” said Trajan.

“Dr. Trajan, I’d really like to talk to you about your wife.”

“A fascinating subject, but not one I’d pursue with any old Joe, or Jane, who buttonholes me in the street.”

“What do you really know about her, Dr. Trajan.”

“I refer you back to my previous answer.”

“Suppose I tell you she’s not who you think she is?”

“And suppose I tell you that I’m not really interested in the weird views of complete strangers?”

“It’s in her best interests to give me her side of the story before it’s published.”

“Oh? Which newspaper do you work for, and can you prove it?”

“I’m doing this free-lance,” the button-holer admitted.

“That’s what they all say. Which supermarket tabloid do you usually sell to?”

“I really think you should take this a lot more seriously, Dr. Trajan.”

“And I really think you should move on before I call a cop and have you busted for committing a public nuisance,” said Trajan.

He and Major Carter walked away from the reporter.

“More of Kinsey’s harassment?” said Carter.

“If so, it’s getting nastier,” said Trajan. “I think the bug needs squashing urgently.”

### **[August 14, Thursday, lunchtime]**

Back at the SGC, Trajan found that General Hammond was off the base at a meeting. He made a report of his encounter with the reporter to the adjutant, Major Renny, then took his wife up to the observation gallery for a picnic lunch.

The next visitor to the adjutant's office was less welcome.

His name was Steinway (like the piano, he told the major) and he had the air of one of the rulers of the universe. He left his companions; a man and a woman, both in their thirties with the physique of Special Forces soldiers; in the corridor outside Major Renny's office.

The discussion was likely to involve matters beyond their concern.

Steinway had the rank of Special Agent. Major Renny decided that he was not going to be intimidated into believing that the visitor was his superior. He decided to be remote but outwardly co-operative.

"You have a Dr. Samantha Carter here?" Steinway said after parking himself in the chair in front of Major Renny's desk.

"And your business with her is?" said the major.

"None of your business," Steinway returned with a hint of a smile.

"Do you have any written authorization to show me? That's standard operating procedure," Renny countered.

"My presence here is sufficient authorization," said Steinway.

"I shall have to locate her," Renny stalled. He had already used his left knee to press the button in the well of his desk which announced that he had urgent need of a more senior officer. He picked up the green telephone on his desk and dialled a number. "Major Renny," he said when a member of the security team answered. "I need a location on Doctor Trajan. Call me back."

"Will this take long?" said Steinway, hinting that his time was much more valuable than his host's.

"Probably not," said Major Renny.

"Better hadn't."

Major Renny began to sort documents on his desk, looking busy but not achieving anything useful. A knock on his door coincided with his green telephone coming to life.

"Colonel O'Neill," said the leader of SG-1 when the visitor directed an indignant stare at the doorway, wondering who had dared to interrupt him. "And you are?"

“Special Agent Steinway. Like the piano.”

“And you’re here for . . . ?”

“I’m here to collect Dr. Carter.”

“Because . . . ?”

“That’s none of your business, Colonel.”

“Wrong answer. Major Carter is a member of my team.”

“I’m not here for Major Carter, I’m here for Dr. Carter. The civilian Dr. Carter.”

“Written orders?”

“He says he doesn’t have any, Colonel,” Major Renny offered as he hung up his green telephone. “And the security team has reported that Dr. Trajan is not on any of the security cameras covering public areas of the SGC.”

“He’s not in the visitor quarters?”

“There’s no one in Dr. Trajan’s quarters, sir.”

“I do not appreciate getting the runaround, Colonel,” Steinway said in a warning tone.

“In the absence of our commanding officer,” O’Neill countered, “we have to do things so very by the numbers. Which means you have to show us a piece of paper and leave us with at least two copies of it.”

Looking irritated, Special Agent Steinway produced an envelope from his briefcase. He had clearly been instructed to try to leave as meagre a trail as possible. Colonel O’Neill used the adjutant’s paperknife to open the envelope. He scanned the contents thoroughly, then put on an expression of profound regret.

“We have a problem here,” he announced. “These orders call for us to surrender one Dr. Samantha Jane Carter to your custody. But we don’t have one. What we have instead,” O’Neill continued, talking deliberately over Steinway’s attempt to interrupt, “is a Dr. S.J. Trajan. She got married on Monday. Which means that your documentation is insufficient. Yes, insufficient. A very fine word,” O’Neill added, half to himself.

“So?” demanded Steinway.

“So you and your two escorts are going to be parked somewhere while we check you out and find out why this document has wrong information on it,” said O’Neill. “Call Security and

arrange that,” he added to Major Renny. “Meanwhile, I need to make some phone calls. And I need the number of your immediate superior.”

Special Agent Steinway tried to argue but he was outnumbered and outgunned. Eventually, he shrugged his shoulders and put on a studied expression of mock sympathy for his hosts who, it implied, would be in so much trouble for delaying him.

A team from Security escorted the visitors to a holding area, where they could cool their heels.

“This stinks,” O’Neill decided when Major Renny had brought him up to date with the events from before his arrival in the adjutant’s office.

“Agreed, but what can we do?” said the major.

“Get a message to General Hammond and go through the motions of checking that gang out. Where in hell are Trajan and Samantha?”

“I’ve checked with Security, sir. They still have their SGC IDs; they didn’t turn them in at the main gate; which means they’re still here somewhere. But not anywhere the CCTV system can see.”

“They’ve not gone off-world?”

“No, sir.”

There was a knock on the door. Sergeant Harriman entered the office. “There’s something you need to know, sir,” he said to O’Neill.

“I’ll hear it outside, Walter,” said O’Neill.

“I think I know where Dr. Trajan and his wife are, sir,” the sergeant said in the corridor.

“Surprise me,” O’Neill invited.

“I think they went up to the observation gallery on the top of the mountain for lunch, sir.”

“Why aren’t they on the CCTV?”

“The observation gallery is on the defence perimeter coverage for the whole site, sir, which is a separate system from our security system.”

“You didn’t just tell me that, Sergeant,” O’Neill said after a brief pause for thought.

“Yes, sir,” said Sergeant Harriman.

“But if you happen to go up to the observation gallery, you could tell anyone you happen to see up there to stay where they are, even if they have to spend the night on the mountain top.”

“Yes, sir.”

Colonel O’Neill returned to Major Renny’s office feeling much better informed. NID was clearly behind the move to spirit away Dr. Samantha Trajan, which had been planned deliberately to take place when General Hammond was away from the SGC.

Colonel O’Neill knew that his course of action was clear; to stall the visitors with bureaucracy until General Hammond could quash the scheme, even if that involved contacting the President.

### **[August 14, Thursday, late afternoon]**

General Hammond was looking annoyed but quietly triumphant when the Trajans arrived in his office for an explanation. As ever, his duel with NID had ended inconclusively. Senator Kinsey had more than enough influence to protect those working to his covert orders. They had suffered embarrassment but nothing more.

“I was just about to phone the camping equipment store in Silver Spring to get a tent delivered by a bloke on a hang-glider,” Trajan said as he and his wife sat down. “And get someone to send up an invisibility kit for when we had to sneak to the WC a couple of floors down from the gallery. But at least we got plenty of fresh air.”

“I’ve had enough to last me a month,” Samantha decided. “But I must admit, spending quality time up a mountain with H.T. instead of working does have its attractions.”

“It was all a misunderstanding,” Colonel O’Neill remarked with a thin smile. He had been providing the general with an account of his part in the afternoon’s events.

“I’m fortunate enough to have a team who don’t bluff easily,” said the general. “I got the impression that this

attempt to sequester Samantha was a desperation move on NID's part. All in the name of national security, of course."

"I trust there's an appropriate amount of running for cover going on," said Trajan.

"Nowhere near enough," the general said with a smile. "Just as well the weather was dry today."

"We were moving round and round the gallery to stay in the sun," said Samantha. "And starting to worrying about running out of sun."

"Sir, we need to ask for Almed help on this, as Trajan suggested," said O'Neill. "We need to prove that Sam Two isn't a Gould spy."

"I've dropped some hints about that, sir. Just out of curiosity," Trajan added. "I told them about Teal's brainwashing by Apophis and how he had to nearly kill himself to get rid of the conditioning. I'm pretty sure they have the means to tell if someone is under the influence of deep Goa'uld conditioning like that. But I'd need to ask some direct questions to find out if they'd be willing to use it on Samantha. Which would involve telling them why we need it done and where she's from."

"Which is a decision above our pay grade, H.T.," said the general. "How do you feel about that, Samantha? Some sort of mind-probe?"

"If H.T. is there with me," said Samantha, "I'd be happy to do it. Well, not ecstatic, maybe. More relieved if they can prove I'm for real. And it would be nice to know for sure myself that I've not been brainwashed by the Goa'uld."

"This is confidential information," said the general, "but there has been a suggestion that the Almed might offer Samantha asylum if she finds conditions here intolerable and her husband approaches them."

"What?" said Trajan incredulously. "Are our quarters here bugged? I know we've joked about that from time to time."

"No, you haven't been bugged," said the general.

"Where's it from then? The Almed?"

"No, not them either," the general said with a broad smile at the mathematician's expression of indignation and dismay. "I believe it's what one of the President's strategists called a

credible bargaining position. It came out of one of their discussions on issuing your wife with a full security clearance and telling the Almed about Samantha's origins as part of a strategy for getting information from them."

"NID believed the asylum thing and it's got them worried?" said O'Neill.

"Which makes it something we can work with ourselves," said the general. "NID are not entitled to a monopoly on dirty tricks."

"The Almed have to be in a better position than us to study someone from a parallel universe, so the idea of calling them in on the deal must be eminently believable." said Trajan.

"I had time to plant a few seeds before I rushed back here," said the general. "You can be sure that I plan to cultivate them."



# Positive Action

[August 15, Friday]

General Hammond's Friday morning began with a video conference with security staff at the Pentagon. The outcome of a lengthy discussion of Samantha Trajan's status was a decision to invite Almed experts to screen her for signs of mind control. Further access to her husband's mathematical talents would be on offer as an incentive and bonus.

The general and Colonel O'Neill arrived at Dr. Trajan's apartment in the visitor quarters to find the mathematician in conference with Dr. Jackson. His wife, supervised by Major Carter, was elsewhere, holding a video conference with experts at the Pentagon about the new zat weapon design.

"The decision has been taken," the general began, "to ask the Almed if they have access to Gould technology, or their developments of it, to find out once and for all if your wife could be under their influence."

"Not would be good," remarked Colonel O'Neill. "And they would be the people to do it, in view of their history with the Gould."

"Indeed," said the general. "On offer in return is a seminar by Dr. Trajan on Feynord Theory which, I gather, they're having particular difficulty with, according to your reports on your contacts with them."

"I think even Professor Feynord is struggling with the latest developments," Trajan said with a laugh. "And it was his idea in the first place."

"Colonel O'Neill will be your liaison for what needs to be organized here," said the general. "SG-One will be in charge of security. We want the Almed dealing with familiar faces when they get here. What I need you to do is prepare the material for the seminar."

"Do I get a list of the participants and an indication of the

level to pitch it at?" said Trajan.

"I'll add that to the list of points to discuss with the Almed." The general made a note. "The plan is to send a proposal to them in the next hour and then await developments."

"Bearing in mind that it's about ten o'clock at night where they are," said Trajan.

"Exactly," said the general.

"Pity they don't have weekends," said O'Neill. "I'll lay money they want to do it tomorrow."

"You could well be right, Jack," said the general. "Okay, I'll let you get organized."

General Hammond took his leave of the group. Dr. Jackson began to gather up the documents on Trajan's desk. "I'd better leave you peace, H.T. I think I have more than enough to be getting on with."

"Someone else who shares Jack's pessimism," laughed Trajan.

"Yes, we can be sure the Almed will think it's a really good deal and want instant access to our expert," said O'Neill. "Even though they're way smarter than us."

"Actually, the Almed are no more intelligent than us, Jack," said Trajan. "They're no more intelligent than Newton or Faraday or Einstein or Feynman. They just have the advantage of a greater knowledge base."

"I can believe that you or Carter; your wife; either of them; is as smart as any Almed," said O'Neill. "But as for the rest of us . . ."

"It's broader than that, Jack," said Daniel. "If you could take a group of babies from the first century, when the Romans conquered England and Wales, and raised and educated them as per our current system, they'd fit right in. Because we're no smarter than the Romans. We just know more than them. Except in obvious areas, like concrete technology."

"So how do you explain the way they keep consulting someone from a civilization a hundred years behind theirs?" said O'Neill.

"My brain is wired to make connections in the field of

mathematics,” said Trajan. “The way yours is wired to make appreciations of the situation on the ground under battlefield conditions and take command decisions. The Almed could make the same connections as me, but getting to the point of being able to make them would involve a lot of time and effort. It’s just easier to use the consultant on Earth and pay out a few peanuts to us in technology. Which aren’t peanuts to us.”

“So you’re saying I’m as smart as an Almed?” There was a strong note of scepticism in Colonel O’Neill’s voice.

“In terms of assessing a military situation and taking action, yes, you are,” said Trajan. “In fact, probably quite a bit smarter.”

“Cool! These pulse-arc cannons,” Colonel O’Neill added after a quiet moment. “Hitting the target before you pull the trigger. Smart as I am, I don’t get that.”

“We’re talking about a very small interval of time, Jack. A window which comes before the moment the trigger is actually pulled but after it’s no longer possible not to pull the trigger. It’s just a curiosity of the maths and physics, not anything you could notice. Or even measure.”

“What about the time it takes for the pulse to travel from the cannon to the target?” said Daniel. “How does that fit with your window?”

“This is where the physics gets even more weird,” Trajan returned. “And I get right out of my depth. But for the purposes of the weapon, there is no difference in both space and time between the cannon and the target. It’s like the target is at point-blank range no matter how far away it is.”

“Cool! So you can’t miss?” said O’Neill.

“If you’ve got your aim right,” said Trajan.

“So this would be something to ask your wife about?” said Daniel.

“Probably not,” said Trajan. “It’s something the Almed haven’t got their heads around, despite being a century ahead of us. And I only have a few scraps of what they know. I think they’re just pushing ahead with their experiments and hoping the theory will catch up eventually. Which is pretty much what we do here most of the time.”

“So they could end up blowing themselves up?” said O’Neill. “And have just a tiny fraction of time not to realize they’ve gone past the point of no return?”

“Pretty much,” laughed Trajan, acknowledging O’Neill’s shrewdness, which was always hidden behind a façade of bafflement when he was confronted with technical matters.

### [August 16, Saturday]

A series of messages passed back and forward between the SGC and the control point for the Almed stargate. Colonel O’Neill’s pessimism proved to be a little excessive. The Almed offered to exchange screening Samantha Trajan for Goa’uld influence for a lecture by her husband on Sunday morning rather than on Saturday, which gave General Hammond a full day at home with his family.

Saturday was a working day for SG-1. There were security arrangements to make, and Major Carter and Dr. Jackson had work of interest to pursue.

Lt.-Colonel Kowalski and SG-2 were providing additional support to the security team.

As lunchtime approached, Kowalski joined a group in Dr. Trajan’s apartment in the visitor quarters to confer with Colonel O’Neill.

“I’ve just had something weird happen to me,” Kowalski announced as he claimed a chair after pouring out a cup of coffee and selecting a piece of cake from a modest buffet.

“It’s only something weird not happening that’s weird around here,” O’Neill pointed out.

“Go on,” said Trajan, “I’ll buy it.”

“It’s enormously weird when your wife and Major Sam pass on either side of you, travelling at speed,” said Kowalski. “It’s like Sam suddenly split in half to avoid a collision.”

“I know the feeling,” laughed Daniel.

“The ladies were here, explaining something to Trajan in that sadistic female way they have,” said O’Neill. “You know, where they make him work for every scrap of information.”

“Testing his intellectual credentials, they call it,” Daniel remarked.

“Then Trajan said something and both of them started going ‘What?’ in stereo,” O’Neill added. “And suddenly, it was Trajan doing the explaining to a chorus of ‘Whats?’ Then, after a particularly loud one about a minute ago, they both fled in the direction of Carter’s lab like they had an army of Jaffa after them.”

“Sounds like they’re on to something good,” said Kowalski.

“Don’t look at me,” said Trajan. “They never finished explaining what they were working on so I don’t have a clue what it is.”

“What you got, Ski?” said Colonel O’Neill.

“The technical guys reckon they have all the stuff the Almed asked for installed in the room where they’ll be doing the scan on Sam Two. We’re now spinning our prayer wheels and hoping the snake-heads don’t start something tomorrow.”

“Maybe someone should explain weekends to the Goa’uld,” Trajan remarked.

“You volunteering?” laughed O’Neill.

“Daniel speaks better Goa’uld than me,” said Trajan.

“Gee, thanks,” laughed Dr. Jackson.

“And I still have some work to do on my lecture for the Almed,” said Trajan. “And I got a rather good idea while the ladies were tormenting me.”

“Anyone feeling brave enough to sneak into Carter’s lab and ask her what’s she’s up to?” said O’Neill.

“There’s above and beyond,” said Kowalski, “then there’s that.”

### **[August 17, Sunday]**

The Almed visitors were due to arrive at 8 a.m. on Sunday morning, Earth time, which was around seven-thirty in their evening. There would be an early start at the SGC and a late finish for the Almed. General Hammond arrived at the SGC in good time to double-check the arrangements.

“I’ve put the visitor quarters and the two levels either side on lockdown, sir,” Colonel O’Neill reported at a meeting in the general’s office. “No one in, no one out while our VIPs are here.”

“Samantha is ready for the testing procedure?” said the General.

“Nervous but up for it, sir,” the colonel said with a nod. “The duty doctor is on standby but Sam Two is sure she’ll be able to get through it without needing a pill. Trajan is doing some hand-holding.”

“His lecture is ready to roll afterwards?”

“He has a script, sir,” O’Neill said with a smile. “Carter had a look at it and ended up cross-eyed. It’s brain-scrambling stuff.”

“Let us hope the same doesn’t happen to the Almed,” the general said with a laugh. “Okay, let’s keep our eyes open and see what develops.”



The procedure took half an hour. Samantha Trajan had been expecting to have to wear a set of monitor patches on her temples and be connected to a computer-size gadget by a tangle of wires.

In fact, the Almed device was little bigger than a scientific calculator and a handy pocket size and the requested auxiliary equipment just provided additional electromagnetic shielding.

Samantha answered a series of apparently harmless questions whilst trying to maintain an air of confidence. The environment for the test was reassuringly non-threatening.

The test was administered by Corlan Gilder, a middle-aged woman who described herself as a cross between a physicist and a physician.

She gave a solo performance. The two men who accompanied her had the air of security personnel. They had very little to say for themselves and they paid most of their attention to the others in the room and more or less ignored Samantha Trajan.

To the delight of Dr. Lee, he was presented with the device

when Dr. Gilder had finished her measurements. The Almed government had decided that it would be beneficial to share the technology with their allies on Earth. Dr. Lee also received an instruction manual and some helpful notes on fabricating further devices.

The delegation of physicists, who had come to benefit from Dr. Trajan's wisdom, was led by Professor Mek Klosate, who was in the same age group as General Hammond. He was accompanied by Vorn Emmain, Lorhn Skovars and Lanan Tapan, all of whom were around forty and held senior positions in the research hierarchy.

Whilst Dr. Gilder was processing her results, watched with interested incomprehension by the SGC's duty doctor, Samantha Trajan and Major Carter, the conversation in the other half of the large room moved to dimensional mirrors. The Almed had found one but they had it locked away securely until someone could come up with a convincing reason why they needed to interfere with other dimensions and time-lines, and risk damage to their own.

"We had the benefit of Goa'uld descriptions of the device and what it can do," Mek Klosate offered.

"We found out the hard way," said Trajan.

"Now we know what the device does," said General Hammond. "We have our mirror locked away. But there were complications. From which Samantha Trajan benefitted, of course."

"There are always complications, General," Mek Klosate said with a smile. "We have people who think that some cautious experimentation would be useful."

"Cautious is a word our complications don't know," Colonel O'Neill remarked.

"Sir?" said Major Carter. "Dr. Gilder has finished."

"And?" said the general, expecting good news from the expression of relief on Samantha Trajan's face.

"No trace of Goa'uld deep mind-control methodology," said Corlan Gilder. "If Dr. Trajan is a secret agent for someone, she is not acting for the Goa'uld."

"I think I'll leave that second part out of my report," said the general.

“Needless complications,” Professor Klosate said with a smile.

“I trust that Dr. Trajan will now be able to concentrate fully on his lecture,” said the general. “Now his wife has been cleared of suspicion.”

“Ladies and gentlemen, please grab seats and stand by to absorb some knowledge,” said Trajan.

Trajan delivered a ten-minute talk, which was designed convey an overview of Feynord Theory, an exotic branch of statistical analysis.

“I don’t know about anyone else, but I lost the will to live after about two minutes,” Samantha Trajan said to general laughter when her husband reached the end of his prepared preliminaries.

“But you do know where I started and where I got to?” said Trajan. “It’s just the stuff in between that’s a bit fuzzy?”

“Or a total blank,” said Samantha.

“Being fair to Dr. Trajan,” said Vorn Emmain, “I understand what the theory delivers. It’s just all the how in the middle that also has me baffled.”

“Anticipating this eventuality, I’ve broken the details down into four ten-minute modules,” said Trajan. “So brace yourselves for an hour of me doing a lot of talking and necessary breaks for regaining sanity and questions.”

“Is it okay if we sneak back to Sam’s lab and catch up later?” said Samantha.

“Is there any way to stop you short of resorting to manacles?” Trajan said with a smile. “The ladies are in the middle of inventing something that’s top secret,” he added to the visitors as his wife and Major Carter left the room to negotiate their way past the security cordon. “Much too top secret for the rest of us to know.”

Dr. Lee also left to gloat over his new acquisition.



When Trajan had brought his lecture to a satisfactory conclusion, Dr. Gilder and her escorts rejoined the group. They had been browsing in an improvised library, finding out

what had happened on their settlement's home planet, in the thousands of years since their ancestors had been abducted by the Goa'uld.

"That went extremely well," Lornh Skovars remarked to Trajan. He had been sampling the range of fruit juices on offer and decided that he liked pineapple juice best. "Have you and your wife known each other long?"

"You could say that," Trajan returned with a nod.

"I was rather surprised when your wife admitted the bafflement the rest of us were feeling after the introduction. It's probably something cultural, but I've noticed that some of you Earthers have no hesitation in saying you don't understand something. It's not something we tend to do so easily."

"It's more a personal choice in the case of me and my wife," said Trajan. "There are lots of us Earthers who'd put up with torture before they'd admit they don't know something within their own field, never mind out of it."

"That's the majority of Almed," Skovars said with a laugh.

"We find it saves a lot of time to admit honest ignorance instead of bluffing," said Trajan. "But I suppose telling a Goa'uld that you don't know something gives your god an excuse to blow your head off."

"You know, it probably does go back to that."

"Pleasant bunch, the Goa'uld."

"Maybe you can come to our planet and give us a lecture on how to be honest without feeling like an idiot." Skovar stifled a yawn. "Sorry about that. I deliberately got up late this morning, knowing I'd be having a late session."

"It's a wonder we're not all yawning," Trajan returned. "Having to get up at stupid o'clock this morning."

"What we need to do is find a way of speeding up your planet for a while and slowing ours down so we can work the same hours."

"Some people on our planet think the Universe is the product of intelligent design by some super-being. You'd think someone with a bit of intelligence would have thought of synchronizing all the planets with life on them."

"Except that ours didn't have any advanced life until the Goa'uld transplanted us."

“A super-being would have anticipated that.”

“Can’t argue with that,” laughed Skovars.

“One thing that has occurred to us is that our SG teams seem to visit a lot of inhabited planets with a twenty-four-hour rotation period. Ours is four minutes short of that, yours is two minutes over. But the next planet in from us, Venus, which is about the same size as Earth, has a rotation period that’s about the same as a trip round the Sun.

“Which leaves us wondering if maybe the Ancients had some way of making useful planets have a common rotation period.”

“For the convenience of their biological clocks?”

“This isn’t a new idea?” said Trajan.

“I’ve been guilty of speculating in this area too,” Skovars said with a smile. “It does seem rather too convenient, the way a twenty-four-hour rotation period is so widespread.”

“Maybe I should try to book a holiday on your planet so we can pursue things like that further.”

“You have a fascinating planet here, Dr. Trajan. Maybe I could have a holiday here after you’ve had yours. I wish they’d let us spend some time in that library Professor Gilder got to visit.”

“There’s a pretty good second-hand bookshop near where I live,” said Trajan. “I’ve been supplying books and CDs to other Almed I’ve met. I must remember to put your name on some of the next lot.”

“I’ll look forward to that,” Skovars said with a smile.



When he returned to his apartment in the visitor quarters, Trajan was surprised to find his wife there.

“Getting into training for an early lunch?” he asked.

“Sam had to go to a mission briefing,” said Samantha.

“Doesn’t anyone know this is Sunday? Or has the SGC adopted the Almed weekend-free calendar? And how did they get it past all the trade unions?”

“With Teal’c back this morning, the whole of SG-One was here and they decided to get it out of the way. Probably

because Colonel O'Neill doesn't think this mission will come off. Anyway, Sam and I will be back to work this afternoon."

"Are you going to tell me what you two are up to?"

"In the fullness of time," Samantha said with a smile.

"But not right now?"

Samantha shook her head slowly, keeping the smile at a relentless level.

"What if I promise to take you on a bicycle tour of the Isle of Wight?"

"I have no idea where that is and I can't ride a bike anyway."

"I suppose I could just tickle you until you talk."

"You could try," laughed Samantha.

"So it's something really good?"

"Sam and I will knock your socks off. But tomorrow."

**[August 18, Monday]**

Dr. Trajan was still in the dark the following morning, when his wife received a telephone call from General Hammond as she was preparing to join Major Carter for final preparations for unveiling whatever they had been working on.

Samantha's contributions to the conversation were all short and unrevealing.

"I suppose that was all too top secret for me to know anything about it," said Trajan as his wife replaced the receiver.

"It's not fair," Samantha complained. "I've been cleared as a double agent but they're still sitting on their hands in Washington and not giving me a full security clearance."

"Sounds like I need to do a bit of digging to find out just who it is who's dragging his feet," Trajan said thoughtfully. "And arrange a spot of embarrassment for the sucker."

"Don't do anything rash, okay? And I'll see you in Sam's lab in seventeen minutes."

"Seventeen rather than fifteen because it's a prime number?" Trajan said after a moment's thought.

“Well, we all know how much you love them,” laughed Samantha. “See you soon.”



The other members of SG-1 and Dr. Trajan assembled in Major Carter’s laboratory at the appointed hour. There was nothing special to see. Major Carter drew everyone’s attention to a blue plastic in-tray dotted with irregular lumps of rough, reddish material.

“Looks like bits of brick,” Colonel O’Neill said warily.

“Can you do this?” Major Carter picked up a chunk of brick the size of a bar of soap. She closed her hand into a fist and squeezed. Reddish lumps and dust fell into the tray. She opened her hand and let the rest of the débris fall away.

“And for my next trick,” remarked O’Neill.

“No trick, sir,” Carter assured him. “Pick one.”

O’Neill selected a lump of brick the size of a golf ball and hit it with a larger fragment. Neither suffered much damage. Teal’c picked up another fragment. He did no damage when he squeezed it.

Major Carter took O’Neill’s selection and crushed it to powder with little apparent effort. Then she did the same with Teal’c’s piece of brick.

“You’re wearing some sort of glove,” said Trajan, making a statement rather than asking a question.

“We call it Iron Hand,” said Samantha. “It’s derived from Almed shield technology.”

“And this is what you came up with in the mess hall on Saturday?” said O’Neill.

“It’s based, in part, on something I heard about back at my SGC,” said Samantha. “But I never got to ask the H.T. there about it. Not that it would have done us any good because it took some stuff that Sam knows, but we didn’t back at my SGC, to make it work. Along with the stuff H.T. explained to us on Saturday, of course.”

“My brain hurts,” said Trajan.

“Mine switched off after about two seconds,” said O’Neill. “Can you also use this to leap tall buildings?”

"We're still working on that, sir," laughed Carter.

The telephone on the larger desk began to ring. Trajan, who was nearest to it, fielded the call.

"S.J.? General Hammond again."

As before, Samantha's responses were brief and uninformative.

"I bet that's not what we hoped it would be," said Trajan.

"One of the Tok'ra is coming here tomorrow," said Samantha. "She's called Val'sahr?"

"No one we've met," said Carter.

"She wants to talk to me about zat technology. And the general wants to talk to us in twenty minutes," Samantha added to her husband.

"Trust the Tok'ra to turn up two days after you need them," O'Neill remarked with a thin smile.

"Are you okay about this?" said Trajan. "Meeting a Tok'ra?"

"I guess," said Samantha. "It should be interesting to meet one of them. My parallel had a lot less contact with the Tok'ra than yours. Because my father didn't become one of them like Sam's. Yes, I'm nervous, naturally, about meeting someone hosting a Goa'uldish symbiote, but to overcome an unreasonable fear of the unknown, you need to face it, Teal'c told me."

"You're sure about that?" said Trajan.

"The Tok'ra have also offered to confirm what the Almed test showed about me; this time, using technology that's known to work."

"What they used on T.?" said O'Neill.

"Right."

"Better late than never." O'Neill repeated his thin smile. "Okay, when do the rest of us get Iron Hands?" he added to Major Carter.

"Probably in about ten years, after the idiots at the Pentagon have claimed it as their project and wasted a few millions on free lunches," said Samantha. "Do you have to change into your soldier suit? To see the general?" she added to Trajan.

"It's come as you are," said Trajan.

General Hammond waved the visitors to chairs. He needed to finish a telephone call, which involved a lot of silence on his part and a pained expression. He promised to take the matter under advisement, then he rang off.

“Pentagonians?” said Trajan.

“According to Arthur C. Clarke, the writer, for every expert, there is an equal and opposite expert,” said the general. “And most of them live in Washington. But what I wanted to ask you about is the naquadah deposit Samantha told us about. Have you remembered anything more about that?”

“Nothing that isn’t in H.T.’s briefing reports,” said Samantha. “Have they found it?”

The general nodded. “SG-Four has reported that the naquadah is stored in the old mine, as Samantha reported, and the locals are minded to go for a deal based on what she has told us her SGC offered.”

“What about the poisoned pill?” said Trajan.

“On paper, our Professor Riorden is the ideal candidate to head up a project aimed at creating a portable naquadah-powered generator. He has all the necessary security clearances.”

“Can’t we get the CIA to plant some evidence to prove he’s secretly a communist for the FBI to find?”

“I think we both know that’s a non-starter, Dr. Trajan,” the general said with a smile. “But I’m sure it has been considered.”

“And I suppose you’re going to tell me that even if Professor Riorden is disqualified from the project, there’s no guarantee his successor won’t make the same mistake and blow up a lot of people?”

“Actually, no,” said General Hammond. “I don’t think anyone else has thought of that. All the talk I’ve heard has been about what we can do with the naquadah.”

“No one has thought of it yet,” said Samantha.

“Colonel O’Neill says all this parallel universe stuff is weird,” said Trajan. “I think I’d go further. It’s impossible at times.”

“You can say that again,” nodded the general.

“Something else we wondered,” said Samantha, “is if anyone has considered telling all this to the professor? That another version of him screwed up badly in a parallel universe and he needs to be really careful if he gets control of the project.”

“That has been mentioned,” said the general. “But no decision has been taken.”

### **[August 19, Tuesday]**

General George Hammond arrived at the local Air Force base in a reasonably good mood. He knew of no pressing problems at the SGC, and he had been advised that all of the participants from more distant parts had arrived and the meeting would begin on time.

He was accompanied by Captain Renate Wales of the science division of the SGC’s administrative staff, in view of the nature of the meeting.

His mood began to shred when the general discovered that the agenda for the meeting had been changed. On the table was a proposal to create a new Air Force science centre and concentrate work which was being conducted on five separate sites. As part of the plan, all scientific work at the SGC would be halted and transferred, along with the personnel involved, to the new science centre.

The general felt obliged to excuse himself from the meeting until he had determined the security and knowledge clearance levels of all of the participants. He needed that knowledge, he explained in a tense telephone call to his superiors at the Pentagon, to be able to pitch his arguments at the right level, and to avoid saying too much to those who had no knowledge of the stargate programme.

After just listening during the initial session, the general used a coffee break to discuss strategy with Captain Wales. He was ready for the chairman of the meeting to turn to him when it resumed.

“General Hammond, comments?” invited Christopher

Dargon, a former Pentagon whizz-kid, who had aged to elder statesman.

“I’ve been wondering what will happen to the science facilities at the SGC,” the general returned.

“Re-allocated or mothballed, subject to a review,” said Dargon’s assistant in response to raised eyebrows.

“I was also wondering about the tax dollars, which will be spent on this new facility,” said the general. “Are we getting something which is value for money or just a Federal project aimed at putting money into a local economy?”

“That’s a political concern, not a military one, George,” he was warned.

“I am also a taxpayer,” the general reminded Dargon. “And what about all the travelling time wasted by my Specialists going to and from this new facility and the SGC? We often need them to be on stand-by and I doubt anyone can deny the quality of the work they do at the SGC, in the laboratory space there, during periods of waiting.”

“Perhaps some limited laboratory space could be retained at the SGC,” Dargon conceded. “That’s something which will come out of the review.”

“Another question is whether my Specialists would want to relocate. Where exactly will this new facility be? Within commuting distance of Silver Spring?”

“Where it will be has not yet been confirmed,” said Dargon.

“Are we just watching kites being flown?” wondered General Fairfax of CIS(E), who faced closure of enough of his science facility to put him out of a job. “Or is there an actual plan with a timetable for us to chew over?”

“We have a lot of positives on the side of concentrating this work,” said Dargon. “We are now seeking reactions to them.”

One of the hovering aides whispered to Captain Wales. She made her excuses and moved away from the table for a quick conference. Then she left the room to take a telephone call from the SGC. General Hammond was cultivating his poker face when she returned. He saw no reason why he could not take the time away to receive a call from his adjutant.

“We have an NSA agent plus his driver here, sir,” Major Renny reported. “He arrived at ten hundred hours. He wants

to escort Dr. Samantha Trajan to a local meeting. It's a high-security briefing connected with her work."

"His credentials check out?" said the general.

"Yes, sir. Checked and then double-checked after that affair with NID. All arranged by the Pentagon. When we told him Dr. Trajan is working on something, he said she doesn't have to be at the meeting until fourteen-thirty, so she has plenty of time to bring what she's doing to a temporary halt."

"That sounds almost reasonable," the general remarked.

"Yes, sir. And she'll be needed for only about two hours, so she can continue with what she's doing afterwards."

"You're planning to send an SG-team with her?"

"Agent Clovian was expecting that, sir. Not a problem."

"Okay, you did right to put me in the loop, Warrick."

"Thank you, sir. How's your meeting going?"

"I'm in an ambush and being very careful not to say anything that can be held against me. They're talking closing the labs at the SGC instead of reviewing the work we do here. But I'll tell you all about it when I get the hell out of here," the general said to bring the conversation to a close.



Ten minutes after the adjutant's telephone call to the air base, Dr. Trajan entered his office, looking like a man on a mission. Major Renny braced himself for a confrontation.

"Before you say anything, I've just spoken to the general and he agrees that an SG-team should go with your wife," he told Trajan.

"Did he agree that these NSA agents are being too nice? And when an agency whose name begins with 'N' is this cooperative, we should get suspicious? Especially in the light of recent experience."

"He's been ambushed at Peterson. The meeting is talking about closing the labs here, not reviewing the work we do."

"Where are these alleged NSA guys right now?"

"In a reception facility at ground level. Look, H.T., I've checked them out and double checked them out. This is all on the level."

“Even so, I’d appreciate it if you don’t let them come down to the SGC labs, whatever they say.”

“They seem quite happy where they are.”

“That’s something else that’s suspicious. I shall return.”

Trajan left the office at speed. Major Renny shrugged his shoulders and returned to his paperwork, trying not to take too much notice of the feeling of unease, which the British Specialist had planted inside him.

Dr. Trajan called in two high-value markers to get access to a database and a surveillance satellite, which was over the United States. He was back in the adjutant’s office after another gap of ten minutes.

“This is going to be good,” said Major Renny, closing the folder in front of him and adopting a receptive expression.

“Would you be interested to know that NSA Agent Henry Clovian and his team aren’t where they’re supposed to be?” said Trajan. “They should be on a team-training exercise three-hundred miles from here. In fact, they’ve dropped off the map physically. Are you feeling like you’ve been ambushed yet?”

“How do you know that?” the adjutant countered.

“By means which you don’t want to know. But my info is solid gold. Look at what we’re faced with, Major. The general goes to a meeting which turns out to be an ambush that’s occupying his full attention. Then a co-operative NSA agent turns up here.”

“It is all starting to look a tad convenient,” the adjutant agreed. “And yet, I have confirmation from Washington that his mission is legitimate.”

“We need back-up. We need to call in Colonel O’Neill.”

“What do we do until he gets here?”

“Hang lose and keep everything contained. I’m going to do some further off-trail sneaking, which you won’t want to know about. If this guy is as well organized as he seems to be, it would be nice to have an officer with some grunt on the base if we need to make things happen. Someone with a level of authority that counts for something. No offence to you, by the way.”

“None taken,” the major returned with a cynical smile.

“And that’s another thing. Colonel Kowalski is also conveniently off duty. I doubt there’s anyone above the rank of major here right now.”

“Okay, I’ll give Colonel O’Neill a call,” said the adjutant.

“Tell him this is a red alert and it’s not a drill,” Trajan recommended. “I know how you military guys love to say that,” he added with a smile.



Colonel O’Neill found Dr. Trajan lurking nearby when he parked in his usual spot at the SGC. Trajan got into the passenger seat and gave the colonel a quick summary of his concerns. “This guy is in New Mexico, leading his team on a top-secret exercise,” he concluded. “I’ve had that confirmed and there’s no mistake.”

“And yet, he’s not very far away, in a reception area,” O’Neill pointed out. “Checked out and double checked out.”

“There must be some sort of intercept and relay system, which cuts in automatically when his name goes into the system.”

“So this guy, or a look-alike, has an automatic get-out-of-gaol card? Okay, what’s our next move?”

“I’ve picked up some chatter about the NSA being a likely target for the Goa’uld to infiltrate.”

“How? Did you get your chatter?”

“By doing some hacking and calling in markers.”

“Okay, I didn’t hear that.”

“Of course,” Trajan said with a smile. “I know NID is the obvious target because of their off-world activities. Ambushing one of them would be easier. But the NSA has such a wide-ranging remit here that penetrating it would be of greater potential advantage to the Goa’uld. It’s even possible this Clovian isn’t an imposter; he used to be Agent Clovian but he’s actually a Goa’uld now.”

“You could just be being paranoid because your wife is involved.”

“Doesn’t this look just like a smarter version of that NID attempt to stroll off with Samantha? And doesn’t it make you

suspicious, everything being so first-minute?”

“I assume that’s the opposite of last-minute?” laughed O’Neill.

“And wouldn’t it be just like a minor Goa’uld hoping to establish himself? To stroll into the very heart of the Tau’ri setup here, pull off a monumental bluff and stroll out again with one of their most valuable assets?”

O’Neill pulled an agonized face. “Okay, you have a point,” he admitted. “It’s possible. But what if you’re wrong?”

“Then I’ll bake you two cakes of your choice. Big as you like.”

“Deal!” laughed O’Neill. “Okay, what do we do about all this?”

“That’s what I want to talk to you about.”



General Hammond arrived back at the SGC in an impatient frame of mind. He had been recalled from his conference at the local Air Force base as a matter of urgency. He knew only that a “situation” had arisen; one involving Dr. H.T. Trajan but not involving off-world travel; and that his presence was urgently required; more urgently than fighting a rear-guard action against closure of the SGC’s science facilities.

The general went straight to the provost marshal’s office on arrival. General Hammond invited the occupant to start talking as soon as he had crossed the threshold. Major Gillan had the air of a man whose world had just been through a huge earthquake.

“Sir, as you know, an NSA agent arrive from Washington an hour after you left for Peterson,” the major began. “He had orders to take Dr. Samantha Trajan to an afternoon meeting in the local area, which would last a couple of hours. We did a check back with Washington, of course, and we got confirmation that his orders were real.”

“Checked and double-checked?”

“Yes, sir. And Agent Clovian was expecting that. And that we would want to send an SG team with Dr. Trajan. And that her husband would insist on going, too. Dr. Trajan, that’s

Samantha Trajan, was alerted and she was given plenty of notice bring whatever she was doing to a temporary halt.”

“And where does the other Dr. Trajan come into all this?”

“He got suspicious, sir. You were off the base. So was every officer above the rank of major. Just like when NID tried to extract his wife. And this NSA agent was being too reasonable to be true, in his opinion. So Dr. Trajan did some checking and found that Agent Clovian was supposed to be on a team training exercise with his squad three hundred miles away and not here.”

“Which could have been a cover story,” the general pointed out.

“But why, sir?” countered Major Gillan.

“Secrecy for the sake of it?”

“Possibly, sir. Anyway, Dr. Trajan called in Colonel O’Neill, who distracted the NSA agent while Corporal Wygan charmed his driver a bit. She had that Almed gadget in her pocket at the time.”

“The one that detects people under the influence of the Gould?”

“Yes, sir. Dr. Trajan and Dr. Lee could see a positive result.”

“But you couldn’t?”

“They are the only ones qualified to know one way or the other, sir. So Dr. Trajan and Colonel O’Neill set up a test.”

“And we now have a dead NSA agent and Dr. Trajan in custody?”

“Yes, sir. What happened is all on CCTV. Dr. Trajan said we should show the tape to Dr. Jackson and he’ll tell us exactly what happened. Because the tape contains information we can’t interpret. That way, we wouldn’t have to take his word for anything.”

“You’ve done that?” said the general.

“We’re still waiting for Dr. Jackson to get here, sir. He was off the base.”

As if on cue, the blue telephone on the provost marshal’s desk began to ring. He listened, then replaced the receiver. “Dr. Jackson is on his way to the surveillance room to view the tape, sir.”

"I suggest we join him," said the general.

"Dr. Trajan used one of the new zat guns, sir," the major said when he deduced that the general was inspecting the vinyl flooring around the visitor chair. "No blood."

"Hmm," said the general.

In the security complex, Dr. Daniel Jackson was sitting in front of a monitor screen. The general arrived in time to see Dr. Trajan remove one of the new zat weapons from his left wrist, place it on the provost marshal's desk and step back with his hands raised.

"Dr. Jackson?" said the general.

Daniel Jackson revolved his chair to face the new arrivals. "Good news, General. It's not what it seems."

"You mean, Dr. Trajan didn't shoot and kill an NSA agent?" the general said in an ominously neutral tone.

"Can we replay this?" Daniel asked the room at large. "From where Dr. Trajan enters the office? Watch this, General."

Daniel wheeled his chair out of the way to let General Hammond move his chair closer to the monitor.

The screen showed a door opening in the wall opposite the one on which the camera was mounted. On the left of the picture, a member of the security staff was standing with his back to the wall of the provost marshal's office. The desk was located in the right half of the picture.

The visitor was sitting in front of the desk such that the door was on his left and slightly behind him. Another member of the security staff was standing between the desk and the camera, partially obscuring the provost marshal, who was sitting behind his desk, facing the visitor.

Dr. Trajan entered the office. He said something in a loud, clear voice. General Hammond found himself struggling to make out what had been said.

"Pause there," Daniel called.

The picture froze with the NSA agent rising out of his chair and turning toward the guard on his right.

"That's what H.T. wanted us to see, sir," said Daniel.

"See what?" said the general.

"When H.T. came into the office, he said, 'It's a trap. Get

his weapon.' In Goa'uld."

"Ah," said the general.

"Play the tape on," Daniel called.

The NSA agent rose to his feet, spun the security man round and deftly extracted his pistol from the belt holster as Trajan fired one of the new zat weapons, which was mounted on his left arm, at the ceiling. The provost marshal began to push his chair back and reach for one of the desk drawers.

Trajan fired again. The next shot hit the NSA agent fair and square. He staggered slightly but continued to turn and attempt to bring his weapon to bear on the immediate threat. Trajan fired again. The man collapsed. Trajan fired a third shot.

The provost marshal produced a service pistol from his desk. The guard on the left side of the room unholstered his pistol. Trajan pulled his left cuff back, released the zat weapon onto the desk and stepped back, hands raised to show his palms to the provost marshal.

"He was a Gould?" said the general. "The NSA agent?"

"An X-ray will confirm it," said Daniel. "But a zat wouldn't have had so little effect on a regular NSA agent."

"Ring the infirmary and have Dr. Fraiser bring up a portable X-ray machine," the general said to the hovering provost marshal. "Where's Dr. Trajan?"

"Under soft security and, I guess, waiting for us to figure out exactly what happened for ourselves, sir," said Major Gillan.

"And his wife?"

"She has no idea what's been going on, sir. She's probably still writing up notes in her lab."

"Okay, we'll explain things to her later."

"Yes, sir."

"And make me half-a-dozen copies of that section of tape. There's a lot of explaining to be done."

"Yes, sir. About a statement from Dr. Trajan?"

"Make sure he knows that Dr. Jackson has seen this tape or you might not get much co-operation out of him. In fact, Dr. Jackson, I need you to sit in on the interview."

"That should be interesting," said Daniel.

“I want this wrapped up soonest,” the general added to Major Gillan.

“Yes, sir.”

“It’ll be interesting to know how long the NSA has been recruiting Goa’uld,” said Daniel.

“When you see Dr. Trajan,” the general said in a warning tone, “you might mention that speculation of that nature will not be viewed as helpful.”

“But it’s a fair question, sir,” said Daniel. “If inconvenient.”

“Let us gather all the facts first,” said the general. “Send Dr. Trajan down to the SGC when you have his statement,” he told the provost marshal. “We need to know how our Gould infiltrator got his confirmation from Washington.”

“That’s something we’ve been working on, sir,” said the major. “With due discretion. Like Dr. Trajan, we were never happy about an NSA agent just turning up to claim one of our people. Especially when you were off-base and so were Colonel O’Neill and Colonel Kowalski. Just like when NID tried to do the same.”

“Let me know when you have anything,” said the general. “We also need to know how long he’s been a Gould, if that’s what used to be the real Agent Clovian.”



When he made his formal videotaped statement, Dr. Trajan felt like a contestant in a TV show and self-consciously aware of the audience just out of the camera’s field of view. Colonel O’Neill had joined Dr. Daniel Jackson in the ranks of spectators.

“I look forward to seeing the movie,” O’Neill remarked when Trajan was told that he was free to go down to the SGC.

“Dr. Trajan?” said one of the security staff called, waving a telephone receiver. “Your wife’s on the horn. She wants to know what time you’re leaving for this meeting. She sounds a tad impatient.”

“Would you please tell her I’m on my way down there at this very moment?” said Trajan. “Thanks.”

As the soldier passed on the message, Colonel O'Neill grinned at Trajan and said, "What is it you guys say? The best of British? Sounds like you'll need it."

"If you don't hear from me in two hours, send a burial detail," Trajan returned.

"I think we'd better go with you," said Daniel. "S.J. will think this is another of your wind-ups otherwise."

"Yes, that is very likely," said O'Neill. "You're going to need some backing up."

"Better make that a burial detail for three then," said Trajan.

Trajan travelled down to the laboratory area with the colonel and Dr. Jackson. Samantha Trajan just stared at them in wordless horror as her husband unfolded the tale of a Goa'uld penetrating the SGC with verifiable NSA credentials.

"You know what?" Samantha said when the visitors paused for a reaction. "In the normal course of events, I'd be horrified to hear H.T. had shot someone. But if it was a Goa'uld, I'm fully okay with it."

"The only thing I still don't get is why you shot a hole in the ceiling after you warned the Goa'uld about an ambush," said Daniel.

"That's all you don't get?" O'Neill said incredulously.

"Badly put," Daniel returned between laughs.

"I plugged the ceiling when he responded to the warning to make him think I'd taken out the other guard," said Trajan.

"What would you have done if the NSA guy hadn't reacted to what you said in Goa'uld?" said Samantha.

"That's something I'd like to hear," said General Hammond, who had arrived in the laboratory unobserved.

"I'd have insisted on going with Samantha to what was supposed to be just a local meeting," said Trajan, "and insisted on confirmation we were getting an SG team along as a routine security precaution. Seeing we're talking about a national treasure. I was going to a nuisance of myself until I was absolutely sure that you knew what was happening here, sir."

"In particular, someone had to tell me why the SGC couldn't provide security to get S.J. to a meeting just on our

doorstep. Why did they have to send this NSA stooge? Why create the illusion that he and his squad were three hundred miles away on a training exercise? Why on a day when you were off the base, sir, and so was every officer above the rank of major? Why all this elaborate charade? If not to keep us off-balance.”

“One of our Specialists would call that being too bloody diabolical. I forget what his name is,” Daniel added.

“Captain Paranoid?” said O’Neill.

“Major Disquiet?” said Daniel.

“General Panic?” said Samantha.

“Field Marshal Frantic?” Trajan offered.

“Do you have any idea how many regulations you broke, taking that zat out of storage and up to the surface?” the general said, bringing the discussion back to the essentials.

“No, sir. But needs must, and all that,” said Trajan.

“Actually, sir, I signed it out,” O’Neill volunteered.

“I suppose it can be argued that your experience in the field cuts you a certain amount of slack, Jack,” the general decided.

“Contingent on being proved right, of course, sir.”

“Quite,” the general said with a smile. “While I appreciate that Dr. Trajan doesn’t arm himself and go round shooting people for fun, that’s rather specialized knowledge on my part.”

“Message received and understood,” said Trajan. “There are always consequences for irregular actions. And I have no objections to the buck stopping with me. Seeing my wife was the kidnapper’s target.”

“I think the buck is going to be rather thinly spread by the time all this has been chewed over,” said the general.

“Especially after we know how an NSA agent who’d been taken over by a Goa’uld was cleared twice by Washington?” said Daniel.

“That’s very high on the ‘to know’ list,” the general said with a smile. “You might be interested to know that two very well-armed NSA agents, both members of Clovian’s squad, were arrested in an ambush position about half a mile down the road from here.”

“More Goa’uld?” said Daniel.

“Still human, but we think they’re under mind control,” said the general. “Major Gillan has been quite busy.”

“Do we know how big that guy’s squad is, sir?” said O’Neill.

“Major Gillan was looking for a team of six,” said the general. “He found the other three with a light aircraft at a local civilian airfield. So we have six live prisoners.”

“Actually, I was hoping to stun a fake NSA agent with just one zat blast,” said Trajan. “And give you a full set of live prisoners. But when the first shot just sort of bounced off, I decided it was no time to mess about.”

“I’m expecting to hear he was wearing some new sort of shield,” said the general, “which would have protected him completely from a standard zat. But Samantha’s improved model proved effective.”

“Good job we have the Tok’ra visiting later on,” said Daniel. “Some more customers for them if that Almed gadget gives positive results for the whole squad.”

“That’s about the only good thing to come out of this,” said the general.

“And we get a chance to study that Goa’uld’s personal shield,” said Samantha.

“Well, the bloody Goa’uld owe us something for all the bother they’ve caused,” said Trajan.

“One thing pops out of this,” said Daniel. “None of this would have been possible if not for the science facilities here at the SGC. There’s a unique combination of technology and people involved which wouldn’t exist if the Pentagon succeeds in closing down the labs here.”

“Perhaps you’d care to put your thoughts down in writing, Dr. Jackson,” the general said with a thin smile. “To assist with our opposition to the scheme.”

“Of course, there is an element of self-interest here,” Daniel admitted. “If the labs go, all research facilities will be on a future hit-list. Including mine.”

“Culminating in a closure of the SGC and a transfer of the stargate to somewhere in Russia,” said Trajan. “Where corruption is much more of an institution and the politicians and their friends will find it easier to get their hands on alien

technology for their own fun and profit.”

“Who is this cynic again?” said Samantha. “Do we know him?”

“The voice of sweet reason is rarely heeded in its own back yard,” said Trajan.



As the time of the appointment with the visiting Tok’ra approached, Samantha Trajan spent a long time agonizing over what to wear. Her husband had to order her to wear a dark green skirt, a white blouse and a lab coat to remind everyone that she was a working member of the science staff, not someone who had wandered in off the street. Trajan himself also went for a civilian-smart look.

“I want you there or I want a gun,” Samantha announced as her ‘appointment with fear’ drew near.

“Something you can slip into a pocket or something big and mean?” said her husband.

Trajan received a strong dose of the Carter Look. “I mean it, H.T. And you’d better not get distracted and wander off somewhere.”

“Should I handcuff myself to you accidentally to make sure that can’t happen?”

“You know, that’s such a daft idea that it crosses over to pure genius,” laughed Samantha. “Why, have you got any handcuffs?”

“I’m sure the Provost Marshal has some in his office. And I know the way there rather well now. Samantha, I promise you’re going to be okay. Nothing’s going to happen to you.”

“I know that. I just can’t make myself believe it.”

“Okay, I’ll get some handcuffs.”

“You’d really do that for me? Humiliate yourself in front of everyone else by being stupid enough to get yourself handcuff yourself to me by accident?”

“If that’s the price of getting you through the Tok’ra check-up, then I guess I’ll just have to take one for the team and like it.”

“Everyone will think you’re a total idiot.”

“Half of them think that already,” Trajan returned with a smile.

There was a knock on the door. Dr. Daniel Jackson and Major Carter entered to find Trajan giving his wife a reassuring hug. “Is this a bad time?” said the major.

“We were just discussing whether the Tok’ra really are harmless,” said Trajan.

“And someone was being a wimp,” Samantha admitted.

“No, it’s perfectly reasonable. It’s like a fear of snakes or big, hairy spiders,” said Daniel. “Someone might tell you the animal is completely harmless but your eyes tell you something completely different.”

“That’s my position exactly,” said Samantha. “It’s nice to know someone around here gets it.”

“Look out, Daniel,” laughed Trajan. “I think you’re about to get yourself a lodger. And I do get what you’re talking about on the question of Goa’uld versus Tok’ra, S.J. It’s like seeing an American and a Russian sitting at a swimming pool on holiday. They look fairly interchangeable and it’s not until you question them that you find out that one’s a stooge for an oppressive regime bent on world domination, and the other’s a Russian.”

Trajan won a weak smile from Major Carter.

“What can we do you for?” Trajan added to the new arrivals.

“The visitors have arrived a little early,” said Carter. “We’re collecting you on the way to where they’re setting up their equipment.”

“Via the Provost Marshal’s office?” Trajan asked Samantha.

“What?” Daniel said with a laugh and a comical frown. “He’s already down here with the prisoners. But that’s not what you mean, I guess.”

“No, straight there,” said Samantha. “Don’t even ask,” she added to Daniel.



The meeting took place in an assembly area adjacent to the gate room. The testing would be performed by a female

Tok'ra called Val'sahr, whose host was called Aliesh. General Jacob Carter, Major Carter's father, was also there. His attire provided an immediate distraction.

"Oh, my gosh, Dad! What are you wearing?" gasped Samantha. "Oh! I'm so sorry, General."

"You have to excuse my lodger, sir," Trajan said quickly. "She's not from around here."

"So I gather," laughed General Carter, who knew that his outfit had been described as looking like something from a film version of *The Last of the Mohicans*.

"General Carter, may I present my wife," Trajan added formally. "Dr. Samantha Trajan. Who might just bear a passing resemblance to someone you know rather well."

"I feel like I've suddenly become the father of twins," the general said, his eyes shifting between his daughter and Samantha.

"That makes you the nearest I have to a father-in-law then," Trajan realized.

"I suppose I could do worse," said General Carter. "I hear they found a cure for what was wrong with your father, Samantha?"

"Yes, someone got lucky with a research program. A four-billion-to-one shot, they calculated. You look younger than my dad, sir."

"The benefits of my Tok'ra symbiote," said the general. "And I think you'd better call me Jacob, if you're not Air Force. Allow me to introduce you to Val'sahr of the Tok'ra and her host, Aliesh."

The Tok'ra testing equipment was compact and quickly deployed around a standard office chair. Dr. Trajan received a telephone summons as the preparations for the testing procedure reached completion.

By agreement, the prisoners were to receive first priority for security reasons. All six were chained hand and foot, and under close guard.

"It's not too convenient for me to leave at the moment," Trajan said into the telephone. "I'm needed here."

"H.T., I'll be okay," said Samantha.

"You're sure?"

“Sam’s dad and Sel’mac will look after me. Really. I’ll be okay.”

“I’ll be down in General Hammond’s office if you need me.”

Trajan resumed his conversation with the General’s aide briefly. He left as one of the prisoners was being hooked up in the interrogation chair.

The Tok’ra screening procedure went off smoothly. To no one’s surprise, all of the prisoners tested positive for Goa’uld mind control. When it was Samantha’s turn, Dr. Fraiser hovered in the background, just out of Samantha’s line of sight, just in case she was needed. As agreed, Val’sahr went on to investigate Samantha’s memories of her father’s cancer treatment as a favour to General Carter.

Tok’ra, of course, are protected from cancers by their symbiote, as far as the host is concerned. The procedure and treatment regime had been explained to her father with Samantha present, but she had not taken too much of it in. The hope was that the information extracted from her memory would give Earth’s oncologists good clues as to what had been done for the other Jacob Carter.

Trajan was wearing his SGC Specialist’s uniform when he reached General Hammond’s office. “Reporting for duty, General,” he said, offering formality with a note of question.

“Ah, Dr. Trajan,” said the general. “Have a seat. You may or may not know that the Almed and the Tok’ra have been in cautious communication.”

“I suspected as much but without confirmation,” said Trajan. “To the Almed, we’re sort of a semi-developed, Third Galaxy race which happens to have a useful idiot savant in the maths department on offer. Plus a couple of ditto in the physics department. And the Tok’ra view is much the same. So I’m assuming they both feel safe here.”

“After some behind-the-scenes negotiation, they have decided to make an unofficial first contact on neutral ground; here at the SGC. There will be a party of nine consisting of two people with diplomatic status, four security staff and three scientists; a mathematician, who wishes to consult you, and two physicists.”

“There as referees, no doubt,” said Trajan, “The two physicists.”

“The plan is for you to give your visitors about two hours of your time. With a possible extension into our lunchtime, if necessary. Which should take them into the early hours of the morning, their time, given the twelve-hour difference.”

“So they should be slowing down by then, yes.”

“Everything going smoothly with the Tok’ra?”

“Having General Carter there was a big help to Samantha, sir. With any luck, they’ll make short work of confirming what that Almed gadget told us about her. And that the prisoners are Goa’uld stooges.”

“If they are, the Almed have volunteered to deprogram them. SG-Five is standing by to take them to Almed after our visitors have arrived here.”

“So everyone’s getting something? That’s good. I gather the Tok’ra want to ask Samantha about her work on zats. They were quite amused to hear that we test our prototypes by putting them in a cement mixer with a load of rocks and gravel and water, and test them to destruction.”

“I guess they would do something much cleverer,” the general said with a smile.

“Probably something more technology-intensive,” Trajan said with a nod. “But I doubt the results are much better in the long run.”

The Almed delegation had arrived when Dr. Trajan returned to the assembly area. He found his wife and the Almed scientists at a side table some distance from the diplomatic meeting between Tok’ra and Almed.

He was introduced to Nathan Chorn, the mathematician, who was there with his sister, Margan, and her colleague Lorhn Skovars, whom Trajan had already met. Nathan Chorn was around thirty.

His big sister, who had the air of being the senior partner of the pair, was a couple of years older, over half a decade younger than Lorhn Skovars.

“Welcome to the living museum,” said Trajan. “Is this your first trip through the gate?” he added to the Chorns.

“Not quite,” said Nathan. “But we’re all feeling specially privileged.”

“He’s a cynic,” his sister added. “I like your orange juice. It’s very similar to a fruit drink we have. Some people think our fruit is a mutation of oranges taken to our world by the Goa’uld. Not being a biologist, I wouldn’t know, but the taste is very similar.”

“These biscuits are good.” Nathan Chorn helped himself to another stick of shortbread.

“It’s the selection for Very Important Visitors,” said Trajan. “Okay, should we get started?”

“Good thought,” said Margan Chorn. “Basically, it’s a problem of interpretation. My brother has been working on a piece of theory but he’s stuck in a couple of areas. We physicists are also having trouble with understanding just what he’s discovered. We’re hoping that talking to another mathematician will help Nathan, and having an Earth physicist here will help us.”

“My wife can be quite relentless in her pursuit of understanding,” said Trajan.

“And you should know that my husband has a really weird sense of humour,” Samantha added. “So be warned.”

“I think I’m going to enjoy this,” Lorhn Skovars decided as the young mathematician produced some documents and Trajan deployed a pad and a couple of pens.



The diplomatic meeting became a discussion of strategy and an exchange of information on Goa’uld strengths and weaknesses. Its scientific counterpart progressed to establishing a to-do list. The Almed team had created a list of experiments which the physicists needed to perform to help Nathan Chorn take his theory forward. With Trajan’s help, Chorn had plugged most of his holes and he had ideas for tackling the remaining problem areas.

“I’ve been watching Trajan and Sam Two take turns to be chair-nerd of their meeting,” Colonel O’Neill remarked to Major Carter at a point mid-way between the two groups.

“She has them hanging on her every word, just like him.”

“Yes, I’ve noticed the Almed men have no problems with taking women seriously. Just like you, sir,” Carter returned with a hint of a smile.

“I see the diplomacy course paid off,” laughed O’Neill. “We’re going to need a riot squad to see that gang on their way.”

“Yes, the nerds do seem to have built at least as many bridges as the diplomats,” said Dr. Jackson.

By then, the scientific meeting had turned to satisfying curiosity about two radically different societies.

“Excuse me, do you mind if I ask you something personal?” Margan Chorn said to Trajan.

“Ask him anything,” said Samantha, “but if the answer is embarrassing, he might not part with it. That’s what he always tells me.”

“Oh, well; I was wondering if you’re armed.”

“Only with my lethal sense of humour,” said Trajan. “Why, is there someone you want assassinated?”

“No,” laughed Margan, “it’s just that you’re in uniform and you look like you should be.”

“This is a military base, so there are lots of people on security duty with guns, but most of us don’t lug guns around for the sake of it. In fact, I should think the only armed men in the room right now are your four diplomatic bodyguards. And probably the Tok’ra as well.”

“Aren’t you worried about that?”

“Not really. I assume your people have all been screened and they’re not likely to pull out a gun and just start shooting.”

“I’m glad to hear that,” laughed Nathan Chorn.

“And you don’t think I’d be sitting here without some means to defend my wife if I thought she was in any danger?” Trajan added.

“I didn’t think of that,” Margan admitted. “Another thing I noticed is that it says SGC-X on your shoulder badge but it says SG-One on the other soldiers who’ve got one.”

“That’s because I’m an SGC Specialist, who gets attached to SG teams for special tasks, rather than being a permanent

member of one of the teams.”

“The one with the eyeglasses doesn’t look much like a soldier,” Lorhn Skovars said.

“Dr. Jackson is a non-military member of SG-One,” said Samantha. “He’s an archaeologist with a really cool collection of artefacts and a linguist, so he’s very useful to an exploration team.”

“About the only time you see members of SG teams armed here is if they’re about to go out on a mission or they’re coming back from one,” Trajan added.

“Do they ever give you Specialists a gun?” said Margan.

“If the Air Force thinks a specialist can handle a weapon, and he’s not likely to shoot someone on our side who matters, he does get weapons. Or she.”

“But they have to do lots of training,” said Samantha. “And have a psychological evaluation to make sure they’re in their right mind. Which can be touch and go in some cases,” she added with a grin at Trajan.

“So they put you Specialists in dangerous situations?” said Margan.

“Not deliberately,” said Trajan. “But the SGC recognizes that the wheels can come off when you’re dealing with the unknown, and they make sure SGC Specialists have plenty of military people around as bodyguards. And the ones who can use a gun get one just in case they can make a difference.”

“You don’t have the equivalent of SG teams?” said Samantha.

“We send expeditions out,” said Nathan. “Fifty or so people with tons of equipment.”

“Which is making the other forty people with your group invisible?” said Trajan.

“I don’t think we count as an expedition,” laughed Lorhn Skovars.

“It must be really worrying for you,” Margan said to Samantha. “When H.T. goes out.”

“Actually, the only place he’s been recently is your planet,” Samantha realized. “And I hear you’re quite civilized compared to us.”

“Hah!” scoffed Skovars. “The Borgias from your world

would have been right at home on ours.”

“He’s a part-time student of your history,” Margan said with a nod at her colleague. “They’ve just granted him a library pass for the collection from Earth.”

“There’s twelve thousand years of it here,” said Skovars. “All we’ve got for most of ours is being slaves of the Goa’uld.”

“Slaves of a Goa’uld who let you educate yourselves,” said Trajan. “Which is quite unusual.”

“Only to keep us proficient at manufacturing high-value weapons for our god,” Nathan Chorn said stiffly.

“Hey, I never suggested a hint of altruism about it,” Trajan said quickly. “We know all about the Goa’uld here. None of it good.”

“Why does it say ‘X’ instead of ‘S’ for Specialist?” said Margan Chorn. “On your badge?”

“X, the unknown in mathematical and algebra,” said Trajan. “So it covers anyone who’s not a member of an SG team. Specialists, medical staff, extra troops, even the President’s grandma.”

“I heard whispers that actually happened,” said Samantha. “A congressman’s girlfriend went on a junket to another planet as a Specialist. When General Hammond was in hospital for a while.”

“What happened to the general?” said Nathan.

“One of the SG teams came back under fire, they told me. And he caught the backwash of a Jaffa staff blast, which just missed him but hit something metal behind him.”

“Some people thought it should be ‘E’ for Expert,” Trajan said to Margan. “Or Egghead, as Colonel O’Neill would have it.”

“Or ‘N’ for Nerd,” Samantha offered. “But the patch designer decided that ‘X’ is the most distinctive and efficient letter for that space. Nothing else works as well.”

“You don’t mind me being nosy like this?” said Margan.

“It all helps to increase understanding,” said Trajan. “And the more you understand a bunch of strangers, the more comfortable you feel with them.”

“Can I ask you if you’ve ever been on a spaceship?”

“We’re not encouraged to talk about missions without

authorization,” said Trajan.

“Unless you’ve never been on one, like me,” said Samantha. “I’ve been on other planets but I’ve never been on a spaceship, which is what I really want. But I have been promised a trip into space if this project I’ve suggested is taken up.”

“I take it we’re not talking about your space shuttle or the capsules the Russians use?” said Nathan Chorn.

“Gosh, no. Something much better,” said Samantha. “Have any of you ever been on a spaceship?”

“We don’t have anything like the leverage you need to get near one,” said Lorhn Skovars. “If we defect after your project gets going, could we get a ride on one of your spaceships?”

“After me,” Samantha said firmly.

“I’d be willing to bet a lot that your husband has been on a spaceship,” said Margan.

“Given that almost half the people in this room, to my certain knowledge, have been on one, that’s not much of a risk,” said Trajan.

“I am definitely going to defect,” said Lorhn. “What does a mathematician do on a spaceship?”

“Analyze data from power consumption and power flow measurements,” said Trajan. “To help work out what’s connected to what.”

“If it’s one captured from the Goa’uld, and Dr. Jackson isn’t around, he can translate the logs and help the engineers to get it working,” Samantha added.

“You can read Goa’uld?” Margan Chorn said to Trajan, expecting to be told that her leg was being pulled.

“Doesn’t everyone?” said Trajan.

“We’re part of a generation that doesn’t, in the main,” said Margan. “It tends to be left to specialists now.”

“Have you ever met one of them? The Goa’uld?” said Lorhn Skovars.

“Could we change the subject?” Trajan said quickly.

“No, it’s okay,” said Samantha.

“You’re sure?”

“Yes.”

“I spent a fair bit of time with H’rokal, a minor Goa’uld,”

Trajan said before the visitors could start thinking about overtones to the conversation. "He suffered the minor inconvenience of having both of his host's legs broken in an explosion, and he had to wait far too long for his own satisfaction for the damage to be repaired. I got to help one of his staff straighten out the host's legs and set the bones. And I had to guard him for a while. Whilst the real soldiers did soldier stuff. It was a good opportunity to practice my conversational Goa'uld."

"He talked to you?" said Margan.

"He was quite chatty. In fact, once he knew he was with someone who could speak his language fairly fluently, he wouldn't shut up. So I took the opportunity to find out quite a bit about Goa'uld customs and practices.

"Some of it actually proved to be quite useful to the military types. He probably saw it as routine education of an inferior being about his post-conquest role and routine intimidation of the masses."

"We got rid of ours long before any of us was born, as you know," said Margan, "so we didn't have to learn Goa'uld when we went to college. Most of our grandparents' generation are trying to forget they ever knew it."

"Even so, if you're sending out expeditions fifty-strong, there must be several Goa'uld speakers and other linguists in the group," said Trajan.

"We've been on five expeditions between us," said Margan. "And Lorhn was on three of them. They're all very compartmentalized. You do your job, everyone else does theirs, and there isn't much crossover."

"So you could have had the President's grandma with you?" said Trajan.

"And his grandfather," laughed Lorhn Skovars.

"So you don't hang out with linguists at home? When you're off duty," said Samantha.

"We're still a pretty compartmentalized society," said Margan. "Which was the way the Goa'uld set things up. They moved people around according to their needs and people tended to be kept in groups according to their speciality. But that's changing slowly. And I suppose we can learn a lot from

you about social mobility.”

“Just make sure you don’t pick up all our bad habits,” said Trajan. “They’re the easiest ones to collect. Talking about collecting, I’ll just nip to our quarters to get some books I bought for you, Lorhn. I got you a big boxful.”

“He’ll have to read them quickly,” laughed Margan. “He’ll have every historian on the planet fighting him for access when they find out about them.”

“They can wait as long as they made me wait for my library card,” Skovars said defiantly.



All of the visitors left together, the Tok’ra taking the opportunity to make a quick visit to the Almed planet. Two SG teams escorted the prisoners to their deprogramming session on Almed. Dr. Trajan was about to return to his quarters to change out of his uniform when Major Carter arrived, looking puzzled.

“That shield the Goa’uld had,” she said. “It wasn’t a normal one?”

“It wasn’t one of those swirly fields with wisps of yellow fog that extend two or three feet out from the wearer,” Trajan confirmed. “This was more akin to form-fitting, full-body armour. And not a dead give-away when deployed, like the ones System Lords use.”

“That suggests it’s something new they’ve found,” said Samantha.

“Given the mainly scavenger nature of Goa’uld technology, I agree with you,” said Trajan. “I hope you managed to bag it for study, even if someone shot it to bits with a zat,” he added to the major.

Carter offered a toothy and obviously insincere grin. “I can do sneaky, just like you.”

“Pleased to hear it,” laughed Trajan. “Is there anything left to work with? After someone shot the infiltrator a bit more than he expected?”

“It’s pretty well fried, but I’m hoping to be able to draw some conclusions when I’ve mapped it.”

“Quick, before the Pentagonians turn up, demanding it?” Samantha said.

“As Teal’c would say, indeed,” Carter returned.

“Dr. Trajan?” Major Renny, the adjutant, arrived to claim the mathematician’s attention. “General Hammond would like a quick word. No, just you,” the major added when Trajan glanced at his wife.

“I’ll see you later,” said Samantha as she began to move with the rest toward the exit from the gate room.

Colonel O’Neill was already in the general’s office when Trajan got there. Trajan put on a receptive expression and took the offered chair.

“This is fairly unofficial, H.T.” the general began. “But I’d like your impressions of our Almed visitors.”

“You mean, did I notice the alleged diplomats clearly belong to their equivalent of the CIA or the NSA rather than the State Department?” Trajan returned with a smile. “At decision-maker level. They had that look.”

“I wish I’d had a bet on that, sir,” Colonel O’Neill remarked.

“I’m glad you didn’t, Jack,” said the General. “What about the others?”

“They were very chatty, come to think of it,” said Trajan. “Unusually so, compared to past contacts. It was almost like they were all going to be fired tomorrow, and they knew it, so they thought they’d make the most of the chance to satisfy their curiosity about us. Is that any use?”

“The condemned man ate a hearty breakfast sort of curiosity,” said O’Neill.

“And the Almed doing that check on Samantha to make sure she’s not a Goa’uld spy. And all those NSA agents. That was very generous of them. It’s the sort of favour you do when you’re really keen to be someone’s friend.”

“Well, that could be seen as just repaying you for some of the extra work you’ve done for them,” said the General. “Let’s face it, you’ve gone above and beyond on each of their contacts.”

“Mainly because I find them fascinating,” said Trajan. “And these military types keep encouraging me to keep my

eyes and ears open around the Almed to see what hints I can pick up.”

“Guilty,” laughed the general. “But there are undercurrents. I’ve seen a tension in all the Almed leaders I’ve spoken to recently. It reminded me very much of how things felt here right before that last attack by Apophis. They’re taking decisions they don’t want to make.”

“The Goa’uld are getting uppity again?”

“It looks like the Almed are seeing increasing Gould activity in their area and they’re eager to gather as many allies and resources as they can in case they have to fight off a possible attack. I’ve been checking the lists of books we’ve passed across to them recently in response to specific requests. Works on military history and tactics have become very popular at the expense of general history and softer topics.”

“And I suppose the more paranoid Pentagonians are now telling the President that the Almed are getting ready to attack us?”

The amused expression on Colonel O’Neill’s face answered Trajan before the general could open his mouth.

“We have been getting more Looney Tunes being played than usual,” General Hammond admitted. “But more sensible minds are prevailing. For the moment.”

“Sensible isn’t a word I usually associate with the Pentagonians,” said Trajan. “Mainly because most of the ones I get to meet are real head-bangers.”

“I imagine they’re keeping their heads down after we exposed a Gould inside the NSA,” said O’Neill.

“And one of the cleverer ones, too,” said Trajan. “That was all very plausible; taking Samantha on a short trip out to a local meeting for a couple of hours. None of the usual hassle.”

“But there was no reason why they didn’t run it by the General as a courtesy,” said O’Neill.

“Exactly,” said Trajan. “Whether or not the General was going to be here at the time, he should have been notified at least the day before.”

“I gather the Provost Marshal was thinking much the same,” said General Hammond.

“So I should just have let the people who are qualified do

their jobs?” said Trajan. “Instead of jumping in with both feet.”

“Except, it was your wife they were trying to kidnap,” O’Neill offered.

“Which gives anyone a licence to be Double-Oh Seven,” said Trajan. “Talking about imposters, have you got anywhere with finding out who’s setting all these bogus cops and journalists on me, sir?”

“You probably won’t believe this,” said the general, “but I don’t think that Senator Kinsey is behind it.”

“Puts on a sceptical expression but doesn’t dare call a general a liar to his face,” said Trajan.

“Who else have you upset?” said O’Neill. “Or would it be quicker to ask for a list of high-ups you haven’t upset with an unfortunately honest opinion on ways of waste our tax dollars?”

“Probably option two,” Trajan said with a laugh. “I hope no one’s expecting me to send Kinsey a letter of apology?”

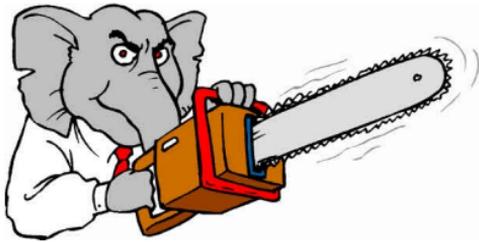
“I don’t see any signs of Hell freezing over,” said O’Neill.

“All joking aside, H.T.,” said General Hammond, “there is definitely something in the wind. Both here and where the Almed come from. So informed observations from people like yourself and Jack are always welcome. My lack of success in finding out who is having you harassed, H.T., tells me that someone powerful is on manoeuvres. And it looks very likely that the Almed are being extremely co-operative because they know they’re about to have problems with the Gould again. Our times are about to become more dangerous.”

“Again,” said Colonel O’Neill.



The story continues in *SGC-X: A New Alliance*



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