

SG1: Point Five

By
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EHP: Experimental Home Publishing

“SG1:Point Five.” version 1.00 July 28th, 2018.

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This book is a fan fiction dedicated to SG1, and all of those who have participated in this, directly or indirectly. Those of you who have followed my ‘I/Tulpa’ series, starting with “Not Here,” will probably find this a quaint departure from the usual adventure and debauchery, though I suspect you’ll find enough allusions that knowing the characters Jon and Loxy will at least give you a good chuckle. For those of you who have never met J@L, I highly recommend you start with ‘Not Here.’ You could, of course, start with any of the ‘I/Tulpa’ series, as SG1 characters have certainly influenced all of my writing, some more directly than others. Specifically, if you want more information on Tulpas, Wonderlands, or any of my other work, from the perspective of Jon and Loxy, I recommend ‘I/Tulpa: And the Worlds of Crossover. It is the first I/Tulpa story, divergent from ‘Not Here.’ Also, SG1 is in my cross over Trek fiction: Star Trek: Another Piece of the Action.

Where possible, I have added real life reports of what appears to be temporal anomalies. If you want more, and better written, I highly recommend ‘The Daemon,’ by Anthony Peake, as it is full of references. It is my personal belief, time travel happens all the time, and I live my life as if I am just one 1979 penny away from unraveling my entire world-line.

I assure you, there will be grammatical errors. I apologize in advance. I am working on doing better. I have marginally improved. Feel free to email me any corrections or complaints. My knowledge of SG1 trivia is not as sound as my Star Trek trivia. I am simply a modest fan, who finds himself caught up in the whirlwinds of imagination on a daily basis.

Sincerely

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Chapter 1

Colonel Jack O'Neill, clone, teenager, high school student, found himself on the side of the building where students were allowed to smoke. He chastised himself for needing one, well aware of the dangers, but he just needed something to take the edge off. Contrary to popular belief, starting over isn't easy, even if everything is taken care of. Legally, on paper, if anyone dared to investigate, he was an emancipated teenager. In real life, his apartment was paid for by the Air Force, and he was just as independent as any adult. He had food, money, transportation, and if he needed anything, he had a direct line to a team that would bring a whole platoon to his rescue if he needed it. He could literally anything he wanted, from traveling the world, do just sitting at home and playing video games and drinking beer. He didn't need or have to go to school. He wanted it.

One of his issues was that he wasn't fitting in as well as he had imagined he would. Oh, he had made friends. That was easy enough, but his concerns were not the shared concerns of his peers. Though most people saw him as reservoir of calm, on the inside, he was on edge. A plane in the sky might spark as it turned into the sun and he found himself staring, wanting to see an alien vessel. If he allowed himself to watch the news, he read conspiracy into it, looking for alien threats. He had to stop watching the news. He wanted a beer most nights, but had decided alcohol would have to wait. Cigarettes, however, well, he wasn't going to change everything about his life! He made an effort to talk to folks, walk with folks, because being by himself was too easy, but it was a balancing act, of not being too clingy, both real and outwardly perceived, to compensate for such a huge change. Though he had access to an Air Force psychologist, he had not availed himself of the resource.

He finished his cigarette and headed to class. He witnessed a student walking with his head down, somehow navigating the crowded halls without bumping people. He walked as if his thoughts were so heavy he could barely hold his head up. He wasn't going to avoid the collision with the football team, as they were purposely angling towards him.

Lakeisha, varsity Cheerleader, caught up with Jack in the hall. She even hugged him.

"Hey, Jack," Lakeisha said.

"Hey. Excuse me a moment," Jack said.

Lakeisha held onto him, delaying his exit as she traced his look back to the impending drama. "You can't help everyone, Jack."

"It's not everyone, it's..."

"He's weird. He deserves it," Lakeisha said.

"How does being weird translate into deserving one's ass kicked?" Jack asked.

"Look, I am not a fan of bullying, but he brings it on himself," Lakeisha said.

"By not complying with social norms?" Jack began.

"No, seriously. He's weird. Like psychotic weird. He's the person who might come in and blow up the school kind of weird," Lakeisha said.

"I don't see that," Jack said. "But, let's say you're right. He's off balance. Will being bullied make him better, or cause him to seek power over those who torture him. Excuse me."

Jack could hear the conversation in progress even before he made his approach. "You should look where you're going." "Why? Have your eyes quit working?" "Because maybe if you

looked where you were going, you could have avoided us..." "We share this space, there is no way to completely avoid you..." "Maybe if I kicked your ass you'd do more to avoid me..." "Look, you're not going to intimidate me. I am not going to run scared. I am also not going to fight you. So, if you're going to beat me up, get it over with. But when you're done, I am going to get up, brush myself off, and be right back here in your face, and you'll have the same problem you got now, which is you're too stupid to come up with an alternative solution to perceived differences other than physical coercion."

The aggressor reached out as if to grab the target, but Jack stepped between them, facing the aggressor. "Hands off, Jake."

"Stay out of this, Jack," Jake said.

"There is no this. Well, there is a this, but if you walk away, there is no this. Kind of like magic," Jack said.

"You really want to take me on?" Jake asked.

"No, I want you to walk away. Will I take you on? Sure. But unlike my friend here, I am going to fight back. So, do the math, then walk away," Jack said.

"I am doing the math, Jack. Five of us, one of you," Jake said.

"You suck at math. Maybe why you're a quarterback," Jack said. "So, let's do the math together. Yeah, five against one, I am going to get hurt. But before I go down, I am going to take you down first. More on that, because it's not a fair a fight, I am going to have to take you down so hard that I am probably going to injure you, badly, which mean no more football for you for the rest of the year, maybe even for life. Since you suck at math, maybe you should consider focusing on your football career, and not sidelining people who don't want to engage."

Jake considered the math. His math still sucked, but he was convinced Jack was serious. "Why would you protect him?"

"It's what I do," Jack said.

"You protect dweebs?" Jake asked.

"Jake, you have strength. You have charisma. People like you. You're a natural leader. You're also not an idiot. Why would you use your attributes to hurt people? Set a standard. Stick to it. Encourage others to follow your example," Jack said.

The coach entered the mix. "Is there a problem here?"

"You mean, other than the fact you only intervene when your star player is being threatened?" Jon asked.

"I am not being threatened," Jake said.

"Oh, you were seriously about to be taken down a peg..." Jon offered.

"Jon," the coach said seriously. "You have been warned about instigating fights."

"And about being defiant of authority, and about better hygiene," Jon said.

"You could stand to shower more," Jack said.

"I was using the smell to keep people from bothering me," Jon said.

"It's not working," Jack said.

"Whatever this is, break it up, get to class," coach said.

"This is nothing," Jack said, looking to Jake.

"Nothing at all," Jake agreed.

Jake headed out first, followed by his posse. Two of them entered Jon's personal space, forcing eye contact, as they departed. Jon forced himself to breathe, very aware that the coach was scrutinizing him. Jon proceeded in the direction he was originally headed. Jack and the coach exchanged a look, but then Jack followed after Jon. Lakeisha took his hand to hold him back but he pulled her along.

"That's was brave," Lakeisha said.

"That part was easy. The brave part is trying to make a friend," Jack said.

"With Jon?" Lakeisha asked.

"Maybe he's a nerd. Maybe even a dweeb. But he's not a coward," Jack said. "At least, not directly. And that's interesting."

Jack and Lakeisha caught up with Jon.

"Hey," Jack said, touching his shoulder.

Jon stopped. "I didn't ask for your help."

Jack came around to make eye contact. "The right response is 'thank you.'"

"Really? For making it worse?" Jon asked.

"How did I make it worse?" Jack said.

"The beating has been coming. Had he just hit me there, it would have been done, but by intervening you complicated it. You may have delayed it, but you also likely increased the severity when it does happen, because even though I agree it wasn't a thing, now it's a definitely a thing, and not a thing he is just going to let go and walk away," Jon said.

"You're right. That's the worst case scenario," Jack agreed. "Then again, now that everyone knows we're friends, that's less likely to happen."

Jon blinked as if processing the information. The bell rang and Jon turned to walk into the class late. Jack and Lakeisha followed into the same class.

Chapter 2

The first time Jack went through high school he had made a point of sitting in back. Now, he was in the front row. He actually wanted to do better this time around. The thing was, because he had been in the front, he had paid less attention to the background players. Now that he had made ‘contact’ with Jon, he was suddenly more cognizant of just how present Jon was in the back ground of his life. He was in four of his classes, including this class; algebra. The teacher began passing back tests, walking the isle as he did. Jack had a 90. That was an improvement, but it wasn’t like it came easier. Having led an entire life hadn’t made him a genius in high school math. He knew more things than any of his peers, and yet, academically, especially in math, he was at best on par with the class average. In history class, he was now starkly aware of just how wrong history was, and it was a struggle not to speak up and say so. Being a student knowing what he knew didn’t make things better. It made it different. There was improvement in his total average GPA, but it still required work.

The teacher put the test on Jon’s desk. “Do you know what the odds are for you only scoring 76 on everything you turn in?”

“Do I get extra credit for solving that?” Jon asked.

“I believe you’re cheating,” the teacher said.

“Oh,” Jon said, sounding relieved.

“You’re okay with that?” the teacher asked.

“I thought you were going to say I was stupid,” Jon said.

“Well, you are stupid,” the teacher began...

Jon interrupted with a conclusion: “Because if I were cheating, it would be wiser to mix the grades up, give myself an occasional 100, but seeing a gradebook line with all 76s in a row, that’s suspicious. Are you worried about my grades or how that looks when someone reviews your gradebooks?”

“Why do you make everything so difficult?” the teacher asked.

Jon seemed to consider the question. He was aware that some of his peers were watching him; he could see as much with his periphery vision. Some seemed uncomfortable and were doing anything but looking. “Do you remember the question I asked you at the beginning of the semester?”

“You never ask questions,” the teacher said.

“I do,” Jack said.

“Yes, Jack, you ask lots of questions,” the teacher said, annoyed by the interruption.

“No. I mean, yes, I ask lots of question, but I am saying, I remember him asking a question,” Jack said.

“He has never asked a question,” the teacher argued.

“Yes, he did,” Jack said.

“No, he didn’t,” the teacher argued.

“He did,” Jack said.

“He didn’t,” the teacher said.

“He asked a question the very first day of class!” Jack said.

“You remember the very first day of class?” the teacher asked, skeptically.

“Yes. It was a very good question,” Jack said.

“It couldn’t have been a good question if I don’t remember it,” the teacher argued.

“Well, you did blow it off. Maybe because you didn’t know the answer. The consequence, though, of dismissing someone who may be smarter than you is that it causes them to not want to participate. Because, if it’s taken you half a semester to notice that he only scores 76, or more likely, only now just curious enough to inquire into the anomaly, then you are really not paying attention, you’re stupid, you just don’t care, or maybe all of the above. So, the new question is, why should he believe that you care now, when you clearly didn’t care before?” Jack asked.

Jack flashed a smile towards Jon. Jon glared back.

“What was the question?” the teacher asked.

“Is the order of operation based on a mathematical principle or is it based on convention?” Jack asked.

“That’s a stupid question,” the teacher said.

“Clearly you think that. Probably why your response was, just follow instructions and you will get the right answer,” Jack said. “I, personally, think it’s a great question.”

“It’s just the order of operation. Stupid question,” the teacher said.

“So, it’s based on logic. Which means, hypothetically speaking, if there were aliens on a planet in Alpha Centauri, and they’re doing math in school like us, they’re going to derive the same answers on their test as we do?” Jack asked.

“Aliens? You kids watch too much television,” the teacher said.

“But, we’d all do the same, math, right?” Jack asked.

“I don’t know. Probably not. The order of operation is based on convention. It’s just what we are taught so that we all come up with the same answers,” the teacher said.

“Well, that’s interesting then. Because, if you really think about it, if the rule sets are arbitrary, not based on math but because some pompous ass a thousand years ago decreed this is the way it should be done, then there is an argument that Jon’s answers are right based on his personal mathematical paradigm, which would also explain his consistency of grades,” Jack said. “I suspect you should just give him all hundred because he is thinking outside the box and not playing by the established rules.”

“That’s not how this works,” the teacher said.

“That’s exactly how this works. I mean, take the scientific principle. You question the validity and assumptions of reality, both natural reality and social reality, and you try evolve to a greater level of understanding. You can’t do that if you don’t question the dogma and fundamental assumptions espoused by the apologists of the day. Every age has thought they were right, but then someone said, what about this, and we changed. Not always easy. Some of us changed kicking and screaming, but we changed. Now, we’re in the present paradigm, but it’s not working so good for everyone and there are people questioning and wanting to do more, but just like the days of old, there are gatekeepers forcing the status quo. You’re the gatekeeper of old, but we are the sojourners of a new paradigm.”

“This is basic algebra, not philosophy,” the teacher said.

“Maybe we should do both,” Jack said. “The thing is, this is not a class of soldiers. You’re guiding people into being free adults. You don’t teach people to think for themselves by instructing them to blindly do what you say...”

“This conversation is finished,” the teacher concluded, then proceeded to instruct them into busy work.

The next class was history. There was evidence that this was also ‘pick on Jon day,’ as once the roll was accomplished, Jon was invited by the teacher to come to the front of the class to do his book report.

“I am not prepared to speak today,” Jon said.

“Well, improv,” the teacher invited.

“I’d rather not,” Jon said, politely.

“And I would rather not give you a zero, so come on up, you’re the next contestant...” the teacher said, playfully.

The humor didn’t change Jon’s disposition. He looked at his desk. “Please, call someone else.”

“Jon,” the teacher said, kindly. “Everyone is afraid of speaking in front of others. The only way to get over this fear is to do it so you can have experiences that prove you can survive even this.”

Jon frowned. “I am not afraid of speaking in front of others.”

“Great. You’re up,” the teacher said.

Jon dragged himself from his desk and started up.

“No book?” the teacher said.

Jon went back to his desk, collected his back pack, and lugged it to the front with him. He sat the pack on the table. It made a sound. Someone whispered, a little too loudly, ‘this is where he reveals the bomb and blows us all up.’ It was Lakeisha’s friend, from the cheerleading squad.

Jon closed his eyes. His hands were shaking. He unzipped the entirety of the bag, revealing several huge books, one of which was a college textbook, a couple paperback library books, and two notebooks, one of which clearly had clippings of newspaper and magazine articles pasted or stashed inside.

“Contrary to popular belief, being weird, and sometimes confrontational, doesn’t mean I favor violence,” Jon said. “I am ethically and morally opposed to violence.” Someone said ‘redundant.’ “Ethically and morally are not necessarily synonymous, look them up.” He picked up a book and displayed the cover: “The Sirius Mystery, by Robert K. G. Temple 1976.”

“Excuse me, Jon,” the teacher interrupted. “This is not an approved book.”

“It’s nonfiction,” Jon stated. No one knew enough to laugh.

“It’s not history,” the teacher said.

“It’s not the history being taught,” Jon argued.

“What else do you got?” the teacher said.

“More of the same,” Jon said. “May I sit down now?”

“Nope, what else do you got?” the teacher asked.

“Chariots of the Gods, 1968 by Erich von Däniken...,” Jon said, holding up the book.

“Anything other than alien conspiracies?” the teacher asked. Now everyone laughed.

“Fingerprints of the Gods,” John began. “Graham Hancock.

“Anything other than from a pseudo archeologist?” the teacher asked.

“That’s what I was afraid of,” Jon said.

“Jon, this is a history class,” the teacher said. “Not the X-files.”

“This is history!” Jon said. Before the teacher could argue, he pressed on. “Seriously, if the gatekeepers of knowledge never allow for controversial dialogue, then science and academia becomes no better than the religious structures that once suppressed information because it was contradictory of the established dogma.”

“This is not suppression. This asking you to comply with the same rules for the book assignment that everyone else had to comply with,” the teacher said.

“How is this not suppression! There are anomalies in history that no one can explain,” Jon said.

“No, there are not...”

“Explain how it is that with our technological prowess, we can’t explain how the pyramids were built,” Jon asked.

“Yes, we can,” the teacher said.

“They didn’t make the pyramids with stone tools,” Jon said. “Hell, I got metal and power tools, and I can’t remove a simple tree root pushing up a sidewalk without breaking my tools. But not only that, we have found absolutely zero tools anywhere, not even a picture of them using tools, and yet we can’t duplicate what they did with our own tools, not even to a tenth of a degree of the precision they achieved. Do you really expect me to believe that since the Egyptians built pyramids, people have become stupider? How many times do we have to relearn drinking from led cups is not good for you?”

“These books are not examples of history, written by academics,” the teacher said. “Nor, are they historical autobiographies. Do you have anything else?”

“Rethinking Giza, how the pyramids may be older than we dare imagine, Doctor Daniel Jackson,” Jon began.

“Oh, come on, Jon,” the teacher complained.

“It’s not about aliens,” Jon said. “And he is a real archeologist. You can’t get much more historic than that?”

“He is insane,” the teacher said.

“But he has a PhD and everything,” Jon argued.

“And he hasn’t worked in a legitimate job since he published that book,” the teacher said. “In fact, I dare say, that book buried him, because he hasn’t been seen since. It’s almost like he fell off the face of the Earth...”

“Just because he is disenfranchised from academia doesn’t invalidate his PhD. He’s smarter than you and I, speaks and writes 23 languages...”

“Being smart doesn’t mean he’s right,” the teacher argued.

“It does earn him a voice, doesn’t it? A PhD is something right? More than you? Do you even have a masters? A PhD means you don’t get to roll your eyes and walk away just because you don’t agree with him. Even if what he says ends up being inaccurate in a literal sense, it could mean something metaphorically or symbolically,” Jon droned on

“Jon,” the teacher tried to interrupt.

“No! Jon, nothing. Gobekli Tepe predates Stone Henge by 6,000 years. Tell me how hunter gather’s built that? How do you explain the Sumerian tablet with 9 planets carved into the stone thousands of years prior to telescopes? How do you explain the UFO in mid-evil art, like the Annunciation? 1468, a UFO shooting a laser at Mother Mary!” Jon asked.

“It’s a representation of spirit...”

“Why would anyone represent God as a UFO?” Jon asked.

“Exactly,” Jack piped up. “What need does god have with a spaceship?”

“What?” Jon and the Teacher both asked.

“Captain Kirk, Star Trek V...”

“Stay out of this,” Jon said.

“Yeah, the story line was little weak,” Jack agreed.

“Okay, Jon, we’re done here,” the teacher said.

“The hell we are. You called me up when I politely asked several times for an out, now I am going to be heard,” Jon snapped.

“Jon!” the teacher interrupted. “You’re smart. You’re well spoken. And you’re working way too hard to avoid the assignment. All you have to do is...”

“Your assignment sucks balls,” Jon said. “It’s boring. It’s constricting. When they put ‘send me your huddle masses yearning to be free’ on the statue of liberty, they didn’t put disclaimers and caveats that you had to kiss ass in order to enjoy liberty. School is about maintaining the status quo within the industrial complex. So, here’s a news flash: The industrial age is coming to an end. The school system can’t keep turning out cogs because we’re going digital. Catch up, or you’re going to seriously impede the ability of several generations from being able to play in what’s to come. This book here, by Daniel Jackson, Doctor, PhD, not from a crackerjack box, he doesn’t just play one on television, meets your criteria but you dismiss it because it messes with your world view. Well, you can take your world, sir, and go fuck yourself with it.”

“Principal’s office now,” the teacher said. “Jack, go with him.”

“I know my way,” Jon said, zipping his books back in.

“He’s going with you for participating in your diatribe,” the teacher said.

Jon stormed out. Jack hesitated at the door. “He does have a point. Sir. I recommend more television. All the answers to life can be found in Star Trek. And the Wizard of Oz.”

“Office, now,” the teacher said.

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Jack and Jon sat at opposing ends of a row of chairs. Jon sat, holding his pack, staring straight ahead. Jack smiled at the principal’s secretary. She was actually an attractive lady, and about the right age... prior to his being reduced back to age 15. It was like being busted in rank, Colonel to civilian. Apparently, she didn’t like the way he was looking at her, indicated by a frown, and a sigh. He found something else to look at.

“Nice speech,” Jack said, avoiding eye contact with Jon.

“I was angry,” Jon said.

“Fervent,” Jack offered.

“Impromptu,” Jon said.

“Even nicer, then,” Jack said.

“Why are you talking to me?” Jon asked.

“Both of you, quiet,” the secretary said.

“You remind me of an old friend,” Jack said.

“Jack,” the secretary said.

“Or what? You’re going to send us to the principal’s office?” Jack asked.

The principal arrived and looked at the boys, looked at the secretary who shrugged, and then looked at the boys.

“You two been fighting?” the principal asked.

“No!” Jon said. “You know I am a pacifist. If you’re going to talk to us, do it separately. We’re not friends and you can’t lump us together.”

“Alright, I suspect I know why you’re here, Jon. We have made it this far into the year without incident? What’s going on?” the principal asked.

“Nothing,” Jon said.

“Great. Jack? Why are you here?” the principal asked.

“I am confused about that myself,” Jack said.

“Do you have an opinion?” the principal asked.

“Oh, you know me, Sir. I have lots of opinions,” Jack said. “And in this instance, I happen to be in agreement with Jon.”

“About?” the principal asked.

“That Mr. Riley can go fuck himself,” Jack said.

Jon closed his eyes.

“Jon, did you say that out loud?” the principal asked.

“I did,” Jon said.

“In his defense,” Jack said. “He did inform Mr. Riley that he was not prepared.”

“I don’t need or want you on my side,” Jon said.

“Mr. Riley was correct, though, in pointing out that this could have been avoided if you had just given him what he wanted,” Jack said to Jon.

“Oh, of course, take the establishment’s side,” Jon said.

“You don’t want me on your side, so what other side is there?” Jack said.

“Jon, if you hate school so much, why don’t you just drop out,” the principal said.

Jon didn’t say anything. He returned his gaze to straight ahead.

“You disparaged a teacher in front of others. I am compelled to give you detention. I know your work schedule for this week is set, so, we will initiate next Monday,” the principal said. The bell rang. “Jack, stay out of trouble. Both of you, get out of here.”

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Jack caught up to Jon as Jon navigated the hall, head down.

“Great use of your peripheral vision, by the way,” Jack said.

Jon stopped. He was concentrating hard on the ground. He muttered something unintelligible.

“What was that?” Jack asked. When Jon didn’t respond, he reached out to touch Jon’s arm.

Jon snapped out of it, his left hand coming up instinctively to block. A flat palm impacted Jack’s hand. At the same time, Jon, rotated and backed away, his pack bumping someone. The ‘someone’ complained, but carried on when he saw Jon glancing at him to determine threat level; both his hands were up in a classic ‘I surrender,’ which was also preparation for further defense. He quickly turned back to Jack.

“Nice block,” Jack said. “Wu Wei Gung Fu?”

Jon forced himself to breathe, turned and walked away. Jack caught up with him.

“No, really. What happened back there?” Jack asked.

“Please, stop following me,” Jon said.

“We’re in the next class together,” Jack said.

Jon stopped and made eye contact. “What do you want?”

“I am interested in you,” Jack said.

“I am not gay!” Jon said, purposely loud to draw attention from anyone in ear shot. “Stop hitting on me.”

Jack raised his hands up in ‘I surrender’ gesture.

“You win,” Jack said.

Jon turned and walked away. Jack gave him space and then followed. He was not threatened by the snickering that followed in the wake of Jon’s declared boundary. He was actually impressed by the tactic. It made him even more curious. The bell rang even as he was getting to class. The computer science teacher, as always, was beginning class before the bell had even rang. “You will find a new work book at your stations. Please proceed in doing the first two lessons.”

The work books were new, wrapped in plastic. Jack removed the plastic and proceeded into the first lesson. It was basic programming, with simple follow the instructions, type what was on the page, then execute the program. Some of his peers were already typing even as he was getting the right window up. One student was typing nonstop, without even referring back to the page. Most people were pausing to refer to the lesson, typing some, referring back. Jon’s workbook was in his lap, opened, face down. Jack forced himself to focus on his own work. The student next to Jon raised his hand for help.

“Just follow the instructions, Mat,” the teacher said.

“But...”

“Copy what’s in the book, you won’t mess it up,” the teacher said.

Jon pointed to the Mat’s screen. “That should be a colon, not a semi colon. And that should be ‘go to 24,’ you have 19,” Jon said. Jon pointed to the Mat’s book. “You must have skipped a line here...”

“Thank you,” Mat said.

“Jon! Do your own work,” the teacher said.

Jon sighed. He closed the book and laid it on the table.

“How come you’re so good at this?” Mat asked.

“I am not,” Jon said.

“Jon? Mat? Do I have to separate you two?” the teacher asked.

Jon pulled a book out of his pack and started reading it. He hadn't gotten even through a paragraph before he realized the teacher was hovering over him.

"What is your problem?" the teacher asked.

"I finished the assignment," Jon said.

"There's no way you finished..."

Jon activated the program. A screen saver drawing lines began to take over the screen.

"How..."

"I am a really fast typer," Jon said.

"Fine. Do the next two assignments," the teacher said.

"I assume those are tomorrow's assignments," Jon said.

"Now, for you, they're today's assignments," the teacher said.

"What will I do tomorrow?" Jon asked.

"I will let you know tomorrow," the teacher said.

"You realize that twenty years from now, no one is going to be writing programs, or even using key boards," Jon said. "Computers will be sentient, and we will talk to them just like we talk to each other."

"Until then, I want to hear the patter of your keyboard," the teacher said.

"Couldn't you just give me a pass to the library?" Jon asked.

"Nope. Next assignment. I am going to watch," the teacher said.

"Because you think I am cheating?" Jon said.

"Next assignment," the teacher insisted.

Jon opened the book to the next assignment. His passive aggressive response was to read aloud, one letter at a time and type with one finger: he chose to prove he wasn't cheating. He took a moment to stare at the page. He turned the page. In all, he looked at five pages. He closed the book and began following the instruction, inputting everything from memory. Jack was watching it all.

"How are you doing that?" the teacher asked.

"He has eidetic memory," Jack said.

"That's impossible," the teacher said.

"No, it's a real thing," Jack said.

"No, yes, I mean, Jon, you have never demonstrated anything like this previously. Your grades suck. Are you taking speed?" the teacher asked.

"I am having a really bad day and I am struggling to slow it down," Jon said.

"What did you take?" the teacher demanded.

"I don't do drugs. I can legally take Ritalin, but I don't take it," Jon said. "May I be excused please?"

"Yes. Report to the nurse?" the teacher instructed.

"I don't need a nurse, I just need a quiet place," Jon said.

"Nurse. Now!"

Chapter in progress 3

It took some effort for Lakeisha to extricate herself from her friends. It wasn't that she was trying to keep her interest in Jack hidden, but there was something tangibly different about him, which also translated into something about 'them' as a couple being different, and so there was this unseen but very real pressure to keep things quiet. Though she was aware of it, she was not able to make sense of it. She saw him sitting in his car in the school parking lot. The car was running. He had informed her that he had been given a hardship license, and she had even been out with him in it, and... It was a weird. He drove like an adult. As she spied him in his car, she was hopeful he was waiting for her, and so when she slipped away, she navigated around, and came up on the car sideways and pulled up on the door handle before Jack had known she was there. It was locked. He frowned up at her. She could see her breath in her reflection as she smiled through it to Jack. He unlocked it. She quickly climbed in and made herself comfortable.

"OMG, it's cold!" she said.

"Gonna get colder," Jack said.

"Want to go to the mall?" Lakeisha asked.

"Ummm, no," Jack said.

"We're not going to the hill to look at the stars again, are we?" Lakeisha asked.

Jack looked up through the windshield at the clouds and back to Lakeisha. He saw no evidence that she was joking.

"Umm, no," Jack said. There was incredible restraint in not giving her sarcasm.

"We're just going to sit here?" Lakeisha asked.

"For now," Jack said.

Lakeisha put her books on the dash, turned sideways in the seat, reclined her head, and frowned at Jack. Her knees came up into the seat.

"Do you like girls?" Lakeisha said.

"What?" Jack asked. Had she heard about the hallways incident with Jon? "Of course I like girls. Why would you think I don't like girls?"

"Well, because, we've been kind of hanging out, and you took me to look at stars, and I thought that was a euphemism for making out, but we actually looked at stars," Lakeisha said.

"Did you like that?" Jack asked.

"Yeah. Not the point," Lakeisha said. "Is it because I am black?"

"Is what because you're black?" Jack asked.

"You can't be this dense? I know you like me, but... Why haven't you tried to kiss me?!" Lakeisha demanded.

"Lakeisha," Jack said, taking her hand. "I like you..."

"But, not like I like you?" Lakeisha interrupted.

"I like you exactly like you like me," Jack said.

"So, why..."

"Wait," Jack said. He observed Jon leaving on a bicycle and put on his seatbelt. He turned to Lakeisha. "Can we continue this tomorrow?"

"What?!" Lakeisha said.

“If you want to come with, you have to wear your seatbelt, but I don’t think you want to do this,” Jack said.

“What is this?” Lakeisha said.

“Gathering intel,” Jack said.

“What?”

“Seatbelt,” Jack said, and started to pull forwards.

Lakeisha put on her seatbelt. Jack began to drive, leisurely. It isn’t easy following someone on a bicycle. He waited at the street to see which direction Jon would go, proceeded down the street turned, past, and pulled into a lot and waited.

“What are we doing?” Lakeisha asked.

“Gathering intel,” Jack repeated.

“What does that even mean?” Lakeisha said.

Jack sipped from a thermos, offered some to Lakeisha, who smelled it, discovered coffee, (stolen from the teacher’s lounge,) and handed it back. Jon passed the parking lot and continued on down the road. Jack eased the car up to a better vantage point. Lakeisha made the connection.

“You’re stalking Jon?” Lakeisha asked.

“Gathering intel,” Jack iterated.

“Why?!” Lakeisha asked.

“He’s interesting,” Jack said.

“OMG, you don’t like girls,” Lakeisha said.

“I have to have sex with you to prove I like girls?” Jack asked.

“That might help, but now, I am going to wonder if you play for both teams,” Lakeisha said.

“Oh, don’t use sports metaphors for sex,” Jack said. “Sex isn’t a competition. Sex is meaningful. It’s an important aspect of a healthy relationship, but if you use sports to box it you make sex a competition and it becomes something it shouldn’t.”

“You talk like my grandfather,” Lakeisha complained.

“How is he, by the way?” Jack asked.

“He didn’t scare you off?” Lakeisha asked.

“Nah. He’s old school, but he served in the military with distinction, and that, too, is meaningful,” Jack said.

Jack pulled out and started down the street. He could justify going somewhat slow, because the roads were wet, and starting to freeze in spots. He stopped at a stop sign, then proceeded through. When Jon took the freeway ramp, staying on the shoulder, Jack cursed. He continued on the side road, passing and pulling over just after the intersection.

“Why would he take the shoulder,” Jack mumbled. “That’s just stupid.”

“He’s stupid,” Lakeisha said.

“No, he’s way smarter than he lets on,” Jack said.

“I am beginning to wonder about your intelligence,” Lakeisha said.

“Why?” Jack said.

“Because you’re not normal,” Lakeisha said.

“Then, why are you hanging out with me all the time?” Jack asked.

Lakeisha bobbed her head, uncertain. "Because, you're not normal. You treat me... Differently," she said. "Why haven't you kissed me?"

"I will. I promise. When we're 18," Jack said.

"OMG, Jack. We can kiss," Lakeisha said.

"Yeah, I am really struggling with that," Jack said.

"You don't have to," Lakeisha said, leaning closer.

"Yeah, Lakeisha. I am not ready," Jack said. "Believe me. I would never in a million years have ever thought I would turn down a kiss from someone so beautiful, and smart, and kind, but I am not ready, and I need you to accept that, because if you can't, this won't work."

Lakeisha turned to facing forwards, crossing her arms.

"You okay?" Jack asked.

"No," Lakeisha said. "You're making me feel bad. It's as if I am pressuring you."

"You're not pressuring me. You are telling me that you are interested. I, too, am interested. But we have to wait. Until then, I want us to continue to get to know each other," Lakeisha said.

"The more I get to know you, the more I want to do things with you," Lakeisha said. "Adult things."

"I know," Jack said. "And I hope that will always be true."

"Why wouldn't it be?" Lakeisha asked.

"There are things about me you don't know. Impossible things," Jack said.

"There are things you don't know about me, either," Lakeisha said.

"Hence, my plan to take several years to truly get to know each other," Jack said.

"Sometimes, you just have to take a chance," Lakeisha said.

"Yep," Jack said, pulling out and heading back down the side road. He pulled over before the next exit. "That's what we're doing..."

A car was on the side of the road and woman was standing behind the car, the trunk open. Jon abandoned his bike and seemed to be insisting the woman get back in the car. Jack reached over Lakeisha and retrieved binoculars from the glove box.

"Seriously?" Lakeisha said. "You're scaring me."

"It's just binoculars," Jack said. He saw more than he reported. There were kids in the back seat of the car, watching. Jon made sure the parking break was set. "Jon's changing a tire for someone. There are kids in the car."

"He is changing a tire for someone?" Lakeisha asked.

"Yeah," Jack said.

Lakeisha sighed. "That's like incredibly nice."

"Yeah," Jack said. "Still think he's a dweeb?"

"I don't know," Lakeisha said. "It doesn't make sense."

"Well, the woman's safer in the car," Jack said.

"Definitely warmer in the car," Lakeisha said.

Jack watched the entire tire change. When Jon was finished putting on the spare, he put everything back into the trunk, including the damaged tire.

"What do you hope to learn, Jack?" Lakeisha asked.

"I don't know," Jack said.

Once Jon closed the trunk, he put on his backpack and he went to retrieve his bike. The passenger window came down. Jon drew his bike closer, mounting his bike to ride off, shaking his head no. He waved a gesture that clearly meant no. Jack could see the woman's hand, offering money. Jon appeared to refuse, waved, and rode off. He rode off the embankment, heading down the hill, away from the freeway. He appeared to be heading towards the 7-11 that he was already at. Jack pulled into a parking space, asked Lakeisha to wait, and went inside. He left the car running. Jack hovered over the magazine rack. Jon entered and proceeded straight way to the coffee. His face was red, his nose running. He wiped it on a sleeve.

"Hey, you're not scheduled today, are you?" the clerk asked.

"No, just need to warm up. Could I have a free coffee?" Jon asked.

"Could you pull a double Saturday?" the clerk asked.

"In exchange for a coffee?" Jon asked.

"No, have as much coffee as you like. I just need off," the clerk said. "Surprise family thing."

"I would have traded for the coffee. Yes. 3 to 11?" Jon asked.

"Yep," the clerk said.

Jon withdrew from the coffee. He didn't look up as Jack came around.

"Are you following me?" Jon asked.

"No," Jack said. "Just happened to stop for some coffee... It's really cold out there."

Jon got a napkin and wiped his nose. He leaned on the cabinet. He held the coffee in both hands.

"You know, if you let me, I could put your bike in my car and drive you home," Jack said.

Jon held the coffee under his nose and inhaled.

"No," Jon said.

"Why?" Jack asked.

"Because, we're not friends. Because, people will talk. Because, if I accept help I might grow accustomed, become lazy. Then, there's also the long term consideration that everyone eventually either abandons you or sabotages you. I don't need anyone in my life," Jon said.

"I promise not to bail on you till I get you home," Jack said.

"No," Jon said.

"We all need people," Jack said.

"No," Jon said. He made eye contact. "Quite frankly, you're scaring me, Jack. I don't know what your agenda is, but I don't trust you."

"How come you can help people, but people can't help you?" Jack asked.

"I don't want your help, Jack," Jon said.

He poured the coffee in the sink, threw away the cup, and departed. Jack might have followed, but he stopped and paid for the coffee. He then went to his car and resumed following Jon. Jon didn't get back on the freeway, but took the side street, stopping for two lights, and then turned away from the freeway. He eventually arrived at a trailer park. Jon ended his trip at the back at the park. Jon leaned his bike against the trailer hitch, and chained it. He then entered the old, 25 foot Nash trailer.

"What is this?" Lakeisha asked.

“I guess this is home,” Jack said.

“He lives here?” Lakeisha asked.

“Let’s find out,” Jack said.

“Let’s not,” Lakeisha said.

“Why not?” Jack asked.

“Oh, I don’t know. Black girl. White, trailer trash park. You like doing math. Do the math, Jack,” Lakeisha said.

“You’re safe with me,” Jack said.

He pulled up to the trailer and turned off the car. Lakeisha got out when Jack got out. They approached the door together. Jack knocked. Lakeisha took Jack’s arm and snuggled for warmth, with histrionics about the cold. Jack knocked again. The door opened and Jon glared through the doorway. Jon was still wearing his coats, and the hat and scarf.

“Seriously! You’re whole world will come to an end because I didn’t thank you this morning?” Jon asked.

“Maybe,” Jack said.

“It’s like freezing out here,” Lakeisha said. “Are you going to invite us in?”

“No,” Jon said.

“Jon,” Jack said. “Lakeisha thinks white trailer trash don’t have any manners. Invite us in.”

“We don’t. You’re not safe here,” Jon snapped.

“Jack?!” Lakeisha said.

Jon nearly pulled the door shut, but Jack took hold of the door.

“We are not leaving till we talk,” Jack said.

A tear escaped Jon’s eye. “Please, just go...”

“Are you alone? Are you in danger?” Jack asked.

Jon retreated from the door. Jack entered the trailer. Lakeisha followed, pulling the door shut behind her. Jon directed Jack and Lakeisha to sit. He got out two coffee cups and poured hot tea. On the table was a gas lantern, and several candles were placed strategically. The tea itself was heated by a candle.

“Fuck,” Lakeisha said. “It’s colder in here than outside.”

Jon sat at the table, holding his coffee mug, savoring the hot tea. There was an open book on the table. He closed it and pushed it towards the wall.

“Sit, drink the tea. It’ll help,” Jon said.

“I don’t think so,” Lakeisha said.

“Lakeisha,” Jon said. “I apologize for scaring you. You are safe here. This isn’t a white trash community, contrary to appearances. There’s black folks here, too. A couple Mexicans. Most the people here are old, either retired, or on disability. Every single one of them is nice, absolutely broke, and overly talkative.”

Jack sat down and scooted in. Lakeisha sat next to him. She nearly got up, because the bench was cold. Jon got up, retrieved the emergency thermal blanket and offered it to Lakeisha.

“Ten foil?” Lakeisha asked.

“Emergency blanket,” Jack and Jon said.

Lakeisha drew it around her.

“Jon, what’s going on?” Jack asked.

“Tea, a little light reading, then it’s bed time,” Jon asked. “What are you two up to? Enjoying the weather?”

“How can you live like this?” Lakeisha asked.

“You’d be surprised what people live with,” Jon said.

“You’re out of butane?” Jack asked.

“Yeah,” Jon said. “I get paid Friday. I will have heat again Saturday.”

“Let me buy you some fuel. You can pay me back,” Jack said.

“How will I learn to manage money if you bail me out?” Jon asked.

“Who taught you that line of bullshit?” Jack asked.

“I don’t want sympathy. I don’t want your help,” Jon said. “I don’t know how much clearer I can be on that point.”

“You helped that lady change a tire and she offered you money,” Jack said. “Why didn’t you take it?”

“Oh, I don’t know. A single mom, two kids in the car, can’t afford new tires,” Jon said. “What do you think? Should I take money from her that might go for food or gas for the car?”

“You don’t know her situation,” Jack said. “You’re making an assumption.”

“And you’re making one now,” Jon said.

“Jon, it’s freezing outside. It’s supposed to drop to below twenty tonight,” Jack said.

“Did you know, one lit candle can prevent a person from freezing? I got three, plus the lantern, and the thermal blanket,” Jon said.

“Fuck all of that,” Jack said. “I am giving you a choice. We go and get you some fuel, or, you’re coming home with me.”

“Seriously?” Lakeisha said.

“What’s wrong with that?” Jack asked. “He could bring his laundry and wash clothes while he’s at it.”

“We have been dating for over three months and you haven’t even invited me to your home, and you’re inviting Jon after just one day of being his friend?” Lakeisha asked.

“We are not friends,” Jon and Jack said.

“So why are you inviting me over?” Jon asked.

“Yeah?!” Lakeisha asked.

“Because I care,” Jack said. “I am not asking you to move in, Jon. I am asking you to let me help you. Just until Saturday.”

“I don’t like intruding, and I suck at compliance with house rules,” Jon said.

“You will have only two rules, Jon. You will get a shower and you will wash your clothes. All of them. And if that doesn’t work, I will burn your clothes and buy you new ones,” Jack said. “Now, gather your things because we are leaving.”

“I am not going with you,” Jon said.

“You will get into my car on your own volition, or I will render you unconscious and put you into the car,” Jack said. “And I have no qualms about using force in this instance.”

“I will call the police,” Jon said.

Jack took a cell phone out of his pocket and pushed it across the table to him.

“Go ahead,” Jack said.

Jon crossed his arms, and glared.

“You have a cell phone?” Lakeisha asked.

“Doesn’t everyone?” Jack asked.

“No,” Lakeisha said.

“Well, I am thinking everyone will carry in the near future,” Jack said. “So, Jon, what’s it going to be?”

Jon got up, retrieved a duffle bag from a closet, full of laundry. He sat it in the seat, and then extinguished the candles by touch, not blowing. Before he touched each candle, he made a subtle sign, and his mouth moved as if he was saying a prayer. He then extinguished the lantern, simply turning off the flow of fuel. He took up his back pack and then put his hand on the duffle bag.

“You win,” Jon said.

Chapter 4

Jon fell asleep in the back seat against his duffle bag within moments of the car moving. Lakeisha warmed her hands against the vent. Lakeisha looked back at Jon, then at Jack.

“Why are you helping him, Jack?” Lakeisha asked, her voice low.

“Do I have to have reason?” Jack asked.

“Yeah. You’re like obsessed,” Lakeisha said.

“Determined,” Jack said.

“You can’t save people who don’t want to be saved,” Lakeisha said.

“Well, I am kind of use to saving whole planets and galaxies at a time, but sometimes, you just got to focus on the one,” Jack said.

“He doesn’t want help,” Lakeisha said.

“Yes, he does. He just doesn’t know how to ask,” Jack said. He got off the freeway.

“Wait, where we are going?” Lakeisha asked.

“Taking you home,” Jack said.

“I want to see your home,” Lakeisha said. “I want to meet your family.”

“Not yet,” Jack said.

“You met my family,” Lakeisha said. “You’re not being fair.”

“Life is not fair,” Jack said. “I am sorry. Look, I promise, you will understand, in time.”

“I already understand. They don’t like me because I am black,” Lakeisha said.

“This is not a race thing. But I swear this, if it were, I would leave my family and marry you so you and I could change the world together,” Jack said.

“You’d marry me?” Lakeisha asked.

“If you’re still with me when we’re 18, hell yeah, that’s on the table,” Jack said. “That said, you might actually like dating in college. You want to marry after college?”

“I am not going to college,” Lakeisha said.

“You marry me, I am putting you through college,” Jack said.

“I am not that smart, Jack,” Lakeisha said.

“Don’t ever say that again,” Jack said, pointing. “I will not tolerate anyone disparaging my girl.”

Her eyes teared up. “I so want to kiss you!”

Jack took her hand, squeezed it. He pulled the car to a stop in front of her house. The moment the car came to a stop, Jon sat up, taking inventory of the situation. Lakeisha’s grandfather came out onto the porch. He leaned against one of the porch pillars, and sucked in on a pipe.

“We’re here?” Jon asked.

“This is my house,” Lakeisha said. “That’s my grandfather. He and my grandmother raised me.”

“Your grandfather’s a Mason,” Jon observed.

“How did you know?” Lakeisha asked.

Jon leaned back against his duffle bag and closed his eyes. “The way he’s standing,” Jon said. He was back asleep in no time.

“How does he do that?” Lakeisha asked.

“I can do that,” Jack said.

“You can go to sleep, anytime, anywhere,” Lakeisha said.

“There could even be bombs going off in the background, and I’ll sleep like a baby,” Jack said. “Touch my arm, say my name, I am up, full awake.”

“And how did you acquire such a skill?” Lakeisha said.

“Practice, mostly,” Jack said. He waved at the grandfather. “Good night, Lakeisha.”

“Papa will be disappointed if you don’t come chat,” Lakeisha said. “He does really like you.”

“Well, he and I speak the same language,” Jack said. “Explain the situation. He will understand.”

“Good night, Jack,” Lakeisha said.

Chapter 5

The apartment was at the on the third floor. Jack led the way in and turned back to find Jon just standing there. His eyes were unfocused.

“Come in, you’re letting the heat out,” Jack said.

Jon didn’t move. Jack came closer. “Jon?” Jon jerked, his eyes coming back into focus. He lowered his eyes and entered. He closed the door, and locked all the locks, including the chain.

“It’s a really safe neighborhood, Jon,” Jack said. “The neighbors are military. Nothing gets in here, unless they can walk through walls.”

“I could put up a protection spell, if you like,” Jon said.

“What? Oh, good joke. You’re quite funny, you know,” Jack said. “First order of business, washing machine over there. Help yourself to detergent.”

Jack excused himself as Jon started the washing, pouring half the duffle bag in without care of sorting. He studied the machine for a moment, then got it going. By the time the water was flowing, Jack had returned. He waved for Jon to follow. He showed him the bathroom.

“Sweats and sweater to change into so we can wash what you’re wearing,” Jack said. “One unopened toothbrush. Towel. Wash cloth. Is there anything else you might want?”

Jon shook his head.

“The guest room is right across the hall,” Jack said. Jon nodded, looked at the floor. It was an uncomfortable silence, and Jack started to withdraw. “Well, I’ll let you get at it.”

“Jack,” Jon said, quietly.

“Yes?” Jack said.

“Thank you,” Jon said, and he closed the door and locked it before he could hear Jack’s response.

“You bet,” Jack said, and went to prepare a meal.

There was food on the table when Jon emerged, wearing the sweatpants and army sweater. Chili from a crockpot served over rice, with cornbread on the side. Jack was at the table, already eating. Jon went past into the kitchen, and began opening cabinets, in order of proximity, and then opened the fridge. The fridge was fairly empty.

“Can I help you find something?” Jack asked.

“Where are the drugs?” Jon asked.

“You want an aspirin?” Jack asked.

“No, I want to know where you’re hiding the drugs,” Jon said. “Cannabis, cocaine, heroin.”

“You’re not going to find any drugs here,” Jack said.

“Because you sold them all?” Jon asked.

“Why would you think I sell drugs?” Jack said.

“I found the weapon in a ziplock bag in the toilet,” Jon said.

“Did you leave it there?” Jack asked.

“I don’t touch guns,” Jon snapped. “There is something wrong here. There’s like no food in the house...”

“I eat out a lot,” Jack said.

“The dresser in the spare room is empty, nothing in the closet. The other room is the same. It appears you’re in the master bedroom, the only room that looks lived in,” Jon said.

“You went in my room?” Jack asked.

“Where are your parents?” Jon asked.

“Where are yours?” Jack asked.

“If it’s not drugs, what is it? Are you a dog being run by a pimp? Is that why you brought me here? You intend to recruit me into prostitution?” Jon asked.

“Wow, Jon, slow down. Is that what happened to you?” Jack asked.

“Why did you bring me here?!” Jon snapped.

“I am trying to help you!” Jack said.

“People don’t help people for no reason!” Jon said.

“Why did you help that woman change her tire?” Jack asked.

“She was a woman. She has kids. The roads are icy, someone might have run into her,” Jon said.

“But what was your agenda? You didn’t want her money. What did you get out of that?” Jack asked.

“I paid off some karma so I can be done with this damn planet,” Jon said.

“Oh, good answer. Now, sit, eat, and allow me to burn off some of my own karma by being fucking nice,” Jack said. “Sit, and I will tell you my story.”

Jon returned to a cabinet where he had remembered seeing pop tarts. He took a pack, then took an unopened milk from the fridge, and sat down at the table.

“I did not poison the food,” Jack said.

“Good, more food for you,” Jon said, sitting down. He pulled open the pop tart package, and extracted one. “Your story.”

“I will give you my story in exchange for your story,” Jack said.

“That wasn’t part of the deal. You said sit. I sat. Your story,” Jon said.

Jack nodded. “You’re tough,” he said. Jon didn’t say anything. “So, my father’s military...”

“The man in the picture. The colonel in the air force?” Jon asked.

“You know rank?” Jack asked.

“There is evidence that military rank may be bastardized versions of ancient masonry symbols,” Jon said.

“Where did you hear that?” Jack asked.

“Read it,” Jon said. “So, Colonel J O’Neill is your father?”

“His name is Jack,” Jack said.

“Because he was too lazy to come up with a different name for you, or he wanted to extend his legacy vicariously through you?” Jon asked.

Jack sighed. “Well, we’re more alike than you might imagine. Let’s just say, the apple doesn’t fall far from the tree,” he said.

“Yeah, I hate those kinds of sayings. Whoever said that doesn’t know anything about quantum tunneling,” Jon said.

Jack laughed. “That’s good. I told you, you’re funny.”

“No one ever gets my jokes,” Jon said.

“Well, I use to hang out with some really smart people,” Jack said.

“Who’s the blond in the picture with your father? Mom?” Jon asked.

“No. Just a good friend and colleague,” Jack said.

Jon puzzled over the intonation. “Did I hear lamenting?”

“You’re perceptive,” Jack said. “God, I wish I had some beer. Do you drink beer?”

“No alcohol. No drugs,” Jon said. “Let me guess. You don’t get along with your dad, so, what, he emancipated you? No. He compromised and put you up in an apartment while he lives on base?”

“Yep, you got it,” Jack said. “Look, he’s out saving the world and doing his thing. He’s taught me well. Everyone knows my father, and all I have to do is call the base and he will have aids and people here in an instant. I have never had to use that option. I finish high school, then I am off to college. Speaking of school, the principal asked a great question. Why do you put up with school, given how much you seem to hate it?”

“A stipulation of my probation requires me to complete high school,” Jon said.

“Probation?” Jack asked.

“Assault to a civil servant, resisting arrest, and domestic violence,” Jon said.

“You hit a cop?” Jack asked.

“More than one,” Jon said. “Shall I leave now?”

“Nope, I want to hear what happened,” Jack said. “How does a pacifist get charged with any of those things?”

“Mom’s boyfriend was assaulting her, I intervened. My sister had called 911 when the ruckus first started, and though the fight was over by the time they arrived, my mom said I hit her, beat up the boyfriend, and when the cop took my arm, I pulled free. The last thing I knew two of the cops were on the ground, and three others were on top of me,” Jon said. “I am on probation till age 18, or until I complete high school.”

“Wow,” Jack said. “I take it any fighting would constitute a violation of probation.”

“Yep,” Jon said.

“Why didn’t they just lock you up?” Jack asked.

“I asked them to,” Jon said.

“You wanted to be locked up?” Jack asked.

“I wanted to go away,” Jon said. “Anyway, I don’t have to speculate about that part. My family has been in trouble with the law quite a bit. CPS frequently involved in our lives. When my mother and her boyfriend told the judge they were afraid of me, he flat out told them they could keep their bullshit story to themselves. He didn’t buy any of it. Unfortunately, I clearly injured law enforcement officers. A friend of the family had spoken privately to the judge and volunteered to take me in. I call him grandfather. He’s Native American, Cheyenne; specifically, Tsétsêhéstae. Really interesting, their name translates ‘those who are like this.’ He would never tell me what ‘this’ is, but he frequently assured me, I, too, am like this. That’s his trailer. He went to visit family and I haven’t seen him in a year. I make enough to pay rent on the lot, buy food, fuel, and probation fees. Someone stole my bike and I had to get another, which is why I didn’t have enough to get butane.”

“I am sorry,” Jack said.

“You didn’t steal my bike,” Jon said.

“No. I am still sorry. You’re not telling me everything,” Jack said.

“No one tells everything,” Jon said. “It’s called discernment.”

“I can’t argue with that,” Jack said. “Take a chance. Eat some chili. I am actually proud of it.”

Jon pushed the pop tart away and pulled the plate over. He said a silent prayer, opened his eyes, and took a bite. The plate was soon cleaned, as if Jon hadn’t eaten in a while. A bell rang, which startled Jon, but he realized what it was and got up to move clothes to the drier. He started the second load, including his clothes from the bathroom. He even threw in the duffle bag. He offered to wash dishes, but Jack told him to go rest, or read. When Jack finished cleaning the kitchen, he went and got his own shower and change clothes. When he returned, he found Jon staring at the wall. He was holding a book.

“Jon?”

Jon was startled back into the present. He looked to Jack.

“I’ve noticed, you do that a lot,” Jack said.

“Just day dreaming,” Jon said.

“No, that’s not that,” Jack said.

“Yeah, it is. It’s called ADHD inattentive type,” Jon said.

“Nope, I don’t think so,” Jack said.

The bell to the dryer rang, announcing clothes were ready. Again bell startled Jon, but he orientated, but down his book, and went to gather his clothes. He brought them back near his campsite on the couch and sat on the floor to fold. Jack sat on the couch and watched.

“You want the television on?” Jack asked.

“Do you?” Jon asked.

“Not really,” Jack said.

“I find miscellaneous noise just for the sake of not having silence bothers me,” Jon said.

“Me, too,” Jack said. “You like to fish?”

“Papa used to take me,” Jon said.

“Grandfather?” Jack asked.

“His favored name is Wandering Bear, but I call him Papa,” Jon said, folding. He paused. “I couldn’t stand killing the fish, so I stop using bait because I didn’t even want to catch and release. Granted, I would help him eat them if he prepared it, but mostly, I just liked sitting by the lake with him. He probably thought I was weird.”

“You are,” Jack assured him. “But not because you just want to sit and cast a line.”

Clothes folded, Jon excused himself to brush his teeth. He then transferred the remaining clothes to the dryer, and asked Jack forgiveness, because he was tired.

“Go,” Jack said.

In Jon’s absence, Jack became curious about the book he was reading. It was a book of about archaic symbols. He opened the notebook that was under it and found it full of symbols, accompanied by indecipherable notes. It was almost weird enough to imagine it an alien script, but there was some English, and just enough evidence that Jon was being creative, as if trying to create a language for himself. Jack remembered CS Lewis having invented a language for his Narnia series, and so, it would make sense that a trouble kid, with no connection to the world or others, would naturally create something with meaning, even if it was only personal meaning. He

closed it respectfully, put it back, and turned off the lights. As he retired to his room, he observed Jon's door was propped open with a shoe. So was the bathroom door across the hall, and the bathroom light was on. The other spare room door was open, and blocked with a wastebasket. Only Jack's room was not opened. Jack couldn't see Jon on the bed. He went to his room and got a flashlight, definitely not anyone on the bed, in either spare room. He went to the living room and hit the chain lock with the light. It was still locked. He returned to the designated guest room and entered.

"Jon?" Jack asked quietly.

He entered the room. He eventually entered far enough that he could discern Jon was asleep on the far side of the bed, between the bed and the wall, on the floor. No blanket, no pillow. Jack took the blanket off the bed and went to cover Jon. Jon came awake with a start and retreated to the corner.

"Hey, it's just me. It's Jack," Jack said.

"I want to go home," Jon said.

Jack sat on the floor, at the foot of the bed. "I know," Jack said.

"No, you don't," Jon said. "You don't know anything."

"You're right. I don't have a clue what you're going through. We can buy you some butane tomorrow, and you can go home tomorrow," Jack said.

"I don't belong here, Jack," Jon said. "This life is so hard. I know I volunteered to be here, but, this was much harder than I expected. No one prepared me for this. No one can be prepared for this."

"Help me understand," Jack said.

"I am lost, in the dark, and I am alone, does that help?" Jon asked.

Jack rolled the flash light towards him. "Does that help?"

Jon took it up. He laughed hard and then cried harder. Jack allowed him to recover at his own speed. "Would you believe me if I told you I were an alien?"

"Maybe. I'd probably ask for more evidence," Jack said. "Like, can I see your spaceship?"

"I am a Star-seed. I agreed to incarnate on this planet in order to help raise the consciousness of the general population," Jon said. "How am I supposed to teach love when I am stuck in survival mode?"

Jack nodded, thinking about it. "Well, demonstrating love when everything is perfect, that's easy. Demonstrating love when things are hard, that's like PhD level love. Maybe we all came here to learn that?"

"No, Jack. Something went wrong. I was activated prematurely because of the wrongness. I am not prepared, and I am struggling to make sense of it all," Jon said. "They're trying to tell me stuff, but I am getting it all confused."

"Who's telling you stuff?" Jack asked.

"I am getting downloads. Images, mostly," Jon said. "Sometimes auditory, but rarely even a complete phrase."

"Oh," Jack said.

"You think I am crazy," Jon said.

"No, I didn't say that," Jack said. "I completely believe in aliens."

“So, I can talk about spaceships and aliens, but if I deviate to a more esoteric, spiritual explanation, you’re going to dismiss it?” Jon asked.

“I am not dismissing your experience,” Jack said. “I believe something is going on. I don’t know if it means what you think it means. I actually want it to mean what you think it means, but I need more information.”

“Jack, I travel out of my body and I see these places, and they’re real. Just as real as anything I experience here. I don’t think it’s just in my head, but I can see an argument for that. I created a tulpa to help explore my subconscious so that maybe I could learn to distinguish between the two,” Jon began.

“You lost me. What’s a tulpa?” Jack asked.

“It’s a Tibetan Monk practice of meditating on a thought form with such frequency and intensity, the thought form becomes autonomous and sentient,” Jon explained. “I discovered it by reading Alexandra David-Neel, an anthropologist, and the only foreign woman to ever enter the Forbidden City and live to tell about it. I was successful in creating a tulpa.”

“You imagined an invisible friend, and now you can see and hear her,” Jack restated.

“Yes,” Jon said. “Not imaginary.”

“She’s here now?” Jack asked.

Jon focused. “No,” he finally said. “Yes. It’s complicated. Okay, she’s hardwired into my brain, and we share the brain, and she can’t never be not here, but she isn’t always here, but I don’t know to explain where she goes when she’s not here. I suspect this is related to something Carl Jung was talking about in a letter to a colleague, but I am having trouble finding evidence for what it is. I suspect his estate has not released all of the books he wrote, cause there is something missing.”

“Back to your invisible friend,” Jack said.

“Jack, this is not that. I can prove it. Go find a copy of ‘think and grow rich,’ by Napoleon Hill. Chapter 13 ‘the invisible counselor technique.’ I think that is the same thing as what Alexandria writes about, and what Carl Jung talks about. It can’t be coincidental! Hill created imaginary friends that became real. They gave him real advice. You can recreate this experience following those simple instructions. But let’s say it’s all fiction, like perfecting day dreams to the degree that they’re indistinguishable from REM dreams. Einstein discovered the principles of relativity in a dream state, floating on row boat on a lake. Tesla created things in the laboratory of his mind, and Einstein is quoted as saying Tesla was the smartest man in the world,” Jon said. “I am accessing something that is very real. There is more to this life than what we experience. There is more to this life than what we’re being told in school and in the media.”

“I believe that,” Jack said.

Jon frowned and looked down.

“Good night, Jack,” Jon said.

“You don’t believe that I believe that?” Jack said.

“I am sorry. I talk too much, sometimes,” Jon said.

“You know why the old people in the trailer park like to talk people’s ears off?” Jack asked.

“They’re lonely,” Jon said.

“Yeah. You needed this talk,” Jack said. “I needed to listen. That’s how friendship’s work.”

Jon nodded. “Thank you.”

“Get some rest,” Jack said.

Jack got up to leave.

“Leave the door open, please,” Jon said.

“Okay,” Jack said.

निर्मित

On the porch, in the cold, the cigarette sparked. It was the only light other than the cell phone. This is Jack listening to Jack rant, he thought, trying to hear the Fight Club narrator doing a monologue over the conversation playing out.

Jack interrupted himself. “Of course it’s PTSD,” he said. “And maybe there is some related psychosis with this, but it’s not all that. This kid is high functioning. Well, he is functioning, but given what I do know about him, that in itself is a testament to his resilience.”

Jack was quiet while he listened to himself.

“Yeah, that’s it. I am so bored, I miss work so much, that I decided to make up some shit about aliens in high school so I could get back into action,” Jack argued. “How do explain the notebook full of esoteric symbols? At least six of them are dead ringers for chevrons on the Stargate.”

There was a pause as he listened to himself. How is it he can roll his eyes in disbelief at the things he himself says?

“Yeah, he has actually read a book or two by Daniel,” Jack admitted. “But that’s just my point! He’s weird like Daniel. He’s smart like Samantha. He knows things he shouldn’t know. Look, stop pussy footing around and commit. I am asking for help. There is something here worth exploring. And if turns out to be just nothing more than what you’re pushing, well, I still want your help, because this kid, this person, my friend, he needs help.” There was a pause. “I know it’s not the military’s job. We can’t save everyone. But why even bother to save the fucking world if you can’t sometimes stop and save the one.” Jack was quiet. “Yeah, that was loosely related to Star Trek. Did it work?” There was quiet. “Thank you.”

Cause sometimes, that’s exactly how conversations with self go.

निर्मित

Daniel Jackson sat at young Jack’s table, immersed in a notebook. Old Jack sat on the couch next to Samantha Carter. Young Jack sat on the coffee table facing himself and Carter. Doctor Janet Frasier stood behind Daniel, reading over his shoulder. It wasn’t so much reading as it was admiring the artwork. All conversations stopped when Jon entered, and those sitting stood up. Young Jack started with good morning, but Jon bolted for the door, ignoring Jack’s call to hold up. As he approached the door, the door was opening, and a large man, carrying a box of donuts, entered; he effectively blocked any chance of getting to the exit. He smiled.

“I am Teal’c,” he said.

Jon retreated from the door. Janet approached.

“No one’s going to hurt you,” Janet said.

“That’s exactly what people say before they put you in a restraining coat,” Jon said.

“No one does that anymore,” Janet said.

“We do that,” old Jack said. “You put me in one.”

“You were being difficult,” Janet said.

“Jon, these are my friends. I asked them to visit,” young Jack said. “This is Doctor Janet Frasier. This is Major Samantha Carter. Remember her in the picture? Next to my father, Colonel Jack O’Neill?”

“Father?” old Jack asked.

“Technically I came from you,” Jack asked.

“Father?” old Jack asked.

“The apple doesn’t fall far from the tree,” Samantha said.

“Whoever said that didn’t understand quantum tunneling,” young Jack said.

Samantha actually laughed. “That’s pretty funny,” Sam said.

“He stole it from me,” Jon said.

“Where did you see these symbols?” Daniel asked.

“And that is Doctor Daniel Jackson,” young Jack said.

“You’re…” Jon began.

“Up,” Janet said, which was just an unintelligible sound as she processed the fact Jon was fainting but not fast enough to say something practical. She was close enough to catch him, though, and eased his descent to the floor.

“Seriously, Daniel,” old Jack said. “You’ve become much too famous around here.”

“I guess so,” Daniel said.

Jon roused to see a light being shined in his eye. His hand came up to block, but young Jack caught it. “Easy,” he said. “They’re here to help.”

“I don’t understand what happened,” Jon said.

“It looks like you fainted,” Janet said. “Ever faint before?”

Jon shook his head.

“Black outs?” Janet asked.

Jon grudgingly admitted to that.

“Any other unexplained loss of consciousness?” Janet asked.

“Nothing unexplained,” Jon said.

“Do you have a history of seizures? Epilepsy?” Janet asked.

“No,” Jon said.

“Can you stand up?” Janet asked.

Jon got up, helped by young Jack. He retreated a little from the group.

“Seriously, we’re not going to hurt you,” Janet said. She moved, pointing to the chair at the table. “I am worried. Come sit down.”

Jon sat down. “May I have some coffee?”

“Sure,” Daniel said, going to pour it.

Teal’c came closer, bowed, unveiling the donuts. “Please, have a donut.”

“You’re not right,” Jon said.

“About what am I mistaken?” Teal’c asked.

“Teal’c,” old Jack said, waving him off.

“I am feeling overwhelmed,” Jon reported.

Janet pulled up a seat. Daniel held the coffee. “Cream?”

“Black,” Jon said, and accepted the cup. “Why are you here?”

“In Jack’s apartment?” Daniel asked.

“No, on the Earth plane,” Jon said, sarcastically.

“See, that’s just weird, right?” young Jack asked.

“He was being sarcastic,” old Jack said. “It doesn’t mean what you think it means.”

Daniel sat down. “How do you know me?”

“I read your books. And, I invited you to be one of my invisible counselors,” Jon said.

“Invisible what?” Daniel asked.

“Oh, Chapter 13, Napoleon Hill,” Samantha said.

Everyone looked at her. Old and young Jack asked, “Seriously?”

“It’s really an interesting technique for accessing subconscious information,” Samantha said. “You’re telling me none of you read that book?”

“I skipped over that chapter,” Daniel admitted.

“I skipped the whole book. What? One doesn’t join the air force to be rich,” Jack said.

“Is this something I should read?” Teal’c asked.

“Jon?” Janet asked.

Everyone tuned into the fact that Jon had tuned out.

“He does that a lot,” young Jack said.

Janet touched his arm. He jumped, becoming aware, but not defensive. “Sorry,” Jon said. “ADHD moment.”

“That’s not ADHD,” Janet said. “You disassociated.”

“No, I have been diagnosed with ADHD, ODD...” Jon began to list his past.

“No,” Janet interrupted. “You can’t have both. Let’s say it’s ADHD. I ask you to sit still but you don’t. You can’t sit still due to ADHD, which means you’re not being defiant. Also, I can’t diagnose you with ADHD if you have a history of trauma, because the symptoms can overlap. And though ODD can be concurrent with childhood trauma, I wouldn’t diagnose that given noncompliance is usually a survival strategy,” Janet said. “Also, if you hypothetically, if you ADHD and Trauma, I wouldn’t diagnose you with a mood disorder, or a personality disorder.”

“Well, I guess not all doctors are as thoughtful as you, cause you left out the prime motivator for giving kids meds,” Jon said. “They’re given meds so they’ll shut up. They put us on disability so the parent has extra spinning money. If it’s not enough, the parents sells the ADHD meds they got for free from the community clinic. But let’s say, the kids, the most vulernal be people in society, actually receive regular dosing of a narcotic from to 6 to 18, when you turn 18, the state stops giving you ADHD meds, and if you try to get it from the street, which kids will do because they’ve been told all their life they’re broken, but the moment you get caught you’re labeled an addict and put in jail. Nice little set up, eh? Give kids narcotics then cold turkey them and wonder why they go to jail. Why not just save a step and throw kids in jail so they will never be heard or seen from again.”

“That’s not the norm, I assure you,” Janet said.

“You don’t even have a definition of normal. Seriously, how can you have diagnostic manual for disorder if you can’t even agree on what normal is? But, what do I know. Probably why I have a half dozen labels saying I am not normal,” Jon said.

“I have seen you for all of maybe ten minutes and so far all I have seen is hyper arousal, hyper vigilance, disassociation, and fight or flight,” Janet said. “From what Jack tells me, I would guess you have attachment issues, another symptoms of PTSD. I really don’t need to discover intrusive thoughts or affect regulation issues to diagnosis PTSD.”

“I am not military,” Jon said.

“You don’t have to have been military to experience trauma, son,” old Jack said.

“Well, sure, just being born is kind of a trauma, so I suppose we all have PTSD,” Jon said.

Janet smiled. “Maybe. Do you hear things or see things other people don’t hear or see?”

“I need to be going to school now,” Jon said. “Missing school could be reason enough to violate my probation, and if they do that, I am not going to juvy, I and going to big boy prison, and I am not likely to survive big boy prison.”

“We’ll take care of that,” old Jack said.

“We will, sir?” Samantha said.

“General Hammond and I have some friends...” old Jack said.

“Sir, if I may point out...” Samantha said.

“Clearly, Daniel and I,” at ‘I’ old Jack nodded towards younger Jack “think that there’s something going on.”

“I didn’t say that,” Daniel said. “I am just curious where he saw these symbols...”

“I don’t want help,” Jon said. “I committed a crime. I am serving my time.”

“It may have been more a misunderstanding than a crime,” Janet said.

“I put two officers in the hospital,” Jon said.

“Which is fairly impressive for a scrawny guy,” old Jack said. “Jon. We’ve read the report and everything about you we could find, and apparently, there is more stuff coming in. If you read it the way it’s written, yeah, you fucked up. You’re fucked up. If you read between the lines, there is evidence that you were in a fight or flight mode, someone came at you wrong, escalated you, and that’s just poor training on the police department for not recognizing you were in a state.”

“Tell them about the alien down loads you’re receiving,” young Jack said.

“I don’t know what you’re talking about,” Jon said.

“Okay, then. We’re out of here,” old Jack said.

Teal’c closed the donut box and headed towards the door.

“He’s lying,” young Jack said.

“Of course he is,” old Jack said. “But, here’s the thing. He clearly stated he doesn’t want help. He has sufficient discernment to know that talking about aliens downloads and invisible friends in front of a doctor is just crazy talk. Have fun with your new friend. Friends?”

“At least let me give him my card so we can treat his PTSD,” Janet said.

“Please, Janet. Half the time most of our own don’t get treatment. I can’t justify you working with a civilian, a minor at that, with an AWOL guardian,” old Jack said.

Jon stood up. “You’re not going to report that, are you?”

“Well, yeah,” old Jack said. “She’s a Doctor. She has to. No guardian. No heat. No food. If she doesn’t report the situation to CPS, I will. Now, do you want to tell us about aliens?”

“Oh, I am sure you know more about that than I,” Jon said.

“Slap some bacon on those biscuits,” old Jack said. “We’re burning daylight.”

“How does one burn daylight?” Teal’c asked.

“May I borrow your notebook?” Daniel asked.

“No,” Jon said.

“Oh, okay,” Daniel said.

Janet handed Jon a card and mouthed the word call her.

“Janet?!” Jack yelled from outside the apartment.

Old Jack winked at young Jack, and the door was pulled to. Jack looked to Jon, clearly angry. “Get dressed. We leave in ten.”

Eight minutes later they were in Jack’s car, driving. Jon held his backpack in his lap. The trip was surprisingly quiet. They arrived at school without a single exchange.

“Your father’s really going to report my situation?” Jon asked.

“What do you think?” Jack said, getting out of the car.

Jon remained in the car.

“Go ahead. Sit there. Get another tardy while you’re at it, too,” Jack said.

“I am confused,” Jon reported.

“Well, I am embarrassed. Those are my friends. They came to help,” Jack said. He sighed. “What are you confused about?”

“Am I still sleeping at your place tonight, or is the friendship over?” Jon asked. “And if it’s over, how do I get my clothes back?”

Jack slammed the door and walked away. Jon sat there and stared out the windshield a bit longer.

Chapter 6

“Would you like a donut?” Teal’c asked Janet. He was in the rear, passenger side seat. Janet was in the middle. Daniel was on the other side of her.

“No, thank you,” Janet said, crossing her arms.

“I will,” Daniel said, reaching across Janet to take one out of the box.

“Samantha?” Teal’c said.

“No,” Samantha said.

“I am confused. I was asked to bring donuts, and yet, no one seems to be partaking,” Teal’c said.

“I am angry,” Janet said.

“Perhaps a donut would alleviate your anger,” Teal’c said.

“Oh, Janet, relax. Of course we’re going to help him,” Jack said. “But first you have to understand child psychology. You can’t just give him what he wants. You got to make him think he’s earned it.”

“What textbook is that from?” Janet asked.

“OMG, Jack,” Samantha said. “Let’s say you’re right and...”

“Wait,” Jack interrupted her. They all waited. “First, say I am right.”

“I said, let’s say...” Samantha said.

“Which is nice and all, but it’s not the same as actually saying I am right. It actually implies the opposites, which means you’re basically just entertaining me while you do this reach around to trick me into agreeing with something you’re probably right about anyway...” Jack said.

“Trick you?” Samantha asked. “How is it tricking you if I am right?”

“See, so, why not just lead with, if I am right,” Jack said.

“You’re right,” Samantha said.

“Thank you,” Jack said.

“You’re right that I am right,” Samantha said.

“Oh, see, that’s convoluted trickery,” Jack said.

“Seriously, Jack,” Samantha said. “Whether there is something here or not, it’s not our concern. He’s probably a great kid and all, but not only is this unorthodox, we’re completely out of our jurisdiction.”

“Never stopped us before,” Jack said.

“Off world is one thing. On world, well, they have people for that, Sir,” Samantha said. “Has there been a travesty of justice here? Maybe. The situation is complex and we don’t know everything.”

“Well, we will know more by the end of the day, as I have asked for everything anyone has on him and his entire family,” Jack said.

“See, even that is pushing the boundaries of our authority,” Samantha said. “We’re not the CIA, or the NSA, and we already have more scrutiny than we need by the oversight committee...”

“Daniel, tell me the truth,” Jack said. “Did you see anything alien in his notebook?”

“Well, there is one particular artifact that I am curious about,” Daniel said. “One of the pages contained a grid of 42 symbols, some of which correspond to chevrons on the Stargate.”

“42 is cool,” Jack said.

“What’s curious about that?” Samantha said. “He’s drawing symbols from occult sources. He is clearly just playing around with magical thinking.”

“Janet? Any signs of psychosis?” Jack asked.

Janet frowned. “I believe he is responding to internal stimuli,” she admitted. “However, he’s got PTSD!”

“I think that’s clear to all of us,” Samantha said.

“Here’s the thing about the playing with occult symbols,” Daniel said. “Underneath that grid of 42, he has chosen ten. He has been writing these same ten over and over, in different combinations, as if he is looking for the right combination. Each line once it’s written has a single line through it, as if eliminating it,” Daniel said.

“So, he’s actually a Star-seed and he’s looking for the number to call home?” Jack asked.

“Jack, please tell me you’re not seriously entertaining the idea that...” Samantha said.

“Daniel?” Jack asked. “Was ascending kind of like calling home?”

“No,” Daniel said.

“Is it possible that there is a combination of numbers that could result in alien activity?” Jack asked.

“If it were, this would be something we have not seen before,” Daniel said.

“Teal’c, do you have an opinion or observation?” Jack asked.

“Yes, O’Neill. I am curious why there are no peanut butter filled donuts,” Teal’c said.

“I know, right?” Jack said.

“They’re leaving for school,” Samantha said.

“Shall we follow in one car?” Jack asked.

“Are you afraid we’ll lose them between here and school?” Samantha asked.

“Maybe,” Jack said.

“What’s the worst that could happen?” Daniel asked.

“Your plan to pressure Jon backfires and he runs away,” Janet said.

“Yeah, I don’t think that will happen,” Jack said. “One car it is.”

निर्मित

Free gym was fairly chaotic looking, but was actually much more complex than it appeared. Cheerleaders practiced in their corner. People were shooting hoops from either side of the court. Some people sat on the bleachers, talking. Jon sat by himself, his backpack on. Sitting by himself was not unusual. The fact that he was talking to himself, out loud even, was. “I am pretty sure that wasn’t our Daniel Jackson,” someone might have overheard. “Yes, Carl, I hear that you are impressed by the synchronicity of the event, but it doesn’t mean what you think it means, and I don’t see how that helps us decipher the code.”

“Jon?”

Jon focused. He actually smiled. Lakeisha was creeped out by the smile.

“You okay?” Lakeisha asked.

“I am well, thank you, Lakeisha,” Jon said.

“Um, are you sure?” Lakeisha asked.

“OMG,” Jon said, and stood up. “Your grandfather. Masonry. Circles! I have been going over this all wrong. Yes, of course! That’s it!” He walked up the bleachers, turned back. “Yes!”

Jon descended down the bleacher to the floor, walked across the court and into the middle circle. Lakeisha followed. Her friends were confused why she had walked away from the squad, and followed. In Jon’s urgency, he failed to realize he had interfered with Jake’s game. Jake shoved him. Lakeisha told Jake to stop. Jack came out of his game and moved to join the commotion. Jon pulled a grenade out of his jacket pocket and pulled the pin.

Jake came to a screeching halt.

“That’s not real,” Jake said, backing up.

“Whoa whoa whoa!” Jack yelled. He held his hands out in a gesture to tell Jon to wait.

“I told you he was going to blow up the school!” Lakeisha said, hitting Jack’s arm.

“What’s going on,” the coach asked.

“Clear the gym,” Jon and Jack said, simultaneously.

“Yeah,” the coach agreed. He blew his whistle. “Everyone outside, now!”

Jake ran. Jack stayed. So did Lakeisha and the coach.

“Jon, where did you get that?” Jack asked.

“It doesn’t matter,” Jon said, slipping out of his backpack. “I am going home. I figured it out.”

“You two, out of here, now,” the coach said.

“I am not leaving,” Jack said. “Go, Coach. Go out to the parking lot. You will find air force officers sitting in a blue sedan. Tell them I need them, now.”

The coach surprisingly complied with the instructions.

“Lakeisha, go,” Jack said.

“Both of you go,” Jon said.

“I am not leaving. Jon, Jack impressed me. You’re not a bad guy. Put the pin back in the grenade and hand it over,” Lakeisha said.

Jon shoved his pack over.

“Open it,” Jon said.

Lakeisha opened it. “Take out the notebook, no, the other one. Turn to the last page. Tear that out, and place it on the circle, 12 o’clock,” Jon said. He corrected her by pointing.

“Jon,” Jack said.

“My hands are getting sweaty, so either you’re leaving or cooperating, but either way, I am out of here, today,” Jon said.

Lakeisha opened the notebook to the last page. “This is an occult symbol.”

“Tear it out, put it on the floor, face up,” Jon said. “Thank you. Next page, tear it out, place it on the circle between ten and eleven. The next one between seven and six, the next one between four and five, and the next one between two and three. Jack, there is vial of sand in the pack, take it out, and pour it at six o’clock.”

“What are we doing?” Lakeisha asked.

“Opening a portal,” Jon said.

Lakeisha stopped. “Seriously? You’re going to unleash a demon?”

“No, I am going home,” Jon said. “But, feel free to leave.”

“Jon, this isn’t going to work,” Jack said, pouring the sand.

“If it doesn’t work, I will surrender the grenade to you. Quickly, there’s a time component,” Jon said. “There’s a blue candle. Light it, put it below the sand.”

Lakeisha placed the last symbol and went to Jack’s side.

“See, you’re still here. Put the pin back in the grenade,” Jack said.

“There’s a water gun, filled with holy water,” Jon said. “Get it, and shoot each of the symbols. Make sure you remain outside the circle.”

“This is silly,” Jack said.

“This is satanic,” Lakeisha said.

“It’s holy water!” Jon said.

“So?” Lakeisha asked.

“Just do it, quickly,” Jon insisted.

Jack walked around the circle, wetting each of the symbols. Nothing happened.

“What, not enough water?” Jack asked, being sarcastic.

“Um, Jack. There’s a pool under the gym floor,” Lakeisha reminded.

“Wait for it,” Jon said.

The door to the gym opened, old Jack leading the charge. The school bell rung, 12:00 pm.

“Isis, bring me home,” Jon said.

Six holographic rings rose from the gym floor, each one spinning in the opposite direction of the previous. Everything inside the circle was illuminated with such intensity, nothing within the rings could be seen. The ring system extended way out beyond the 12 foot perimeter of the center circle of the basketball court. Jon, Jack, and Lakeisha were all together transported away. Jack, Carter, Teal’c, Daniel, and Janet slid to a halt, bringing their hands up to shield their eyes against the flaring light. The ghostly rings descended back into the earth, as if they had never been.

“So, I guess he got a good connection?” Jack said more than asked.

Chapter 7

Holographic rings rose from a floor, demarked by a circle, deposited the travelers, and then departed. Lakeisha bit her lip, spun in place. The back pack and symbols traveled, too, but not the sand and candle.

“That was unexpected,” Jack said.

“It worked,” Jon said.

Jack brought his attention back to the first threat. “Put the pin back in the grenade,” Jack demanded.

“What are the odds of you having a live grenade in your house?” Jon asked.

“You stole that from my house?!” Jack asked.

“Coffee pot, under the bathroom sink,” Jon said.

“It was buried in coffee grounds for Christ’s sake!” Jack said.

“I was looking for evidence of drugs!” Jon said.

“Jon, listen very carefully. That’s a real grenade,” Jack said.

“Seriously?!” Jon asked, paling.

“Why do you have a grenade in your bathroom?” Lakeisha asked.

“Long story, which we can discuss after you put the pin back in the grenade,” Jack said.

Jon bit his lip. “I threw it on the floor,” he said.

“Fuck,” Jack said, looking around on the floor for the pin. Lakeisha also looked. It proved to be under her shoe, which Jack saw after he heard Jon sighing. He grabbed it up, carefully inserted the pin back into the grenade, and then relieved Jon of the device. He put it in his sweater pocket. “You are absolutely certifiable!”

“I told you that!” Lakeisha snapped.

“But, I was right?!” Jon said. “I am home!”

“No, you’re not,” Jack said. “We’re not.”

“Where are we?” Lakeisha asked. “Hell?”

“This is not hell,” Jon said.

“Probably not hell,” Jack said.

The room was circular, and the ceiling arched into a dome. There was no doors, but there was one opening in the ceiling, near the wall, and stairs led up. A pattern similar to Celtic design covered most the floor, except for a ring drawn on the floor, in which 42 symbols were contained. The symbols were lightly illuminated.

“Can you dial us back?” Jack asked.

“Why would I want to go back?” Jon asked.

“I want to go back,” Lakeisha said.

“I told you guys to leave. It’s taken me years to figure out how to make this bring me here,” Jon said.

“Well, do you what you did only backwards,” Jack said.

“It doesn’t work that way!” Jon said.

“How do you know?!” Jack said.

“Both of you! Bring it down a notch,” Lakeisha said.

Jack picked up one of the symbols on the paper. Underneath the paper symbols the floor symbols matched. He touched it with his foot. Nothing happened. He touched it with his hands, nothing happened.

“There must be a control console somewhere,” Jack said.

“There must be?” Jon said.

“Got a better idea?” Jack asked.

“It’s a sophisticated system that operates on a combination of auditory and telepathic commands,” Jon said.

Jack picked up the symbols and handed them to Jon. “Name them out loud,” he instructed. Jon seemed to hesitate. “Look, help get us home. Now that you know you can do this, you can always come back.”

Jon nodded. He read off the symbols. Nothing happened. Jon paced the circle, naming the symbols as he walked on them. Nothing happened.

“Maybe we need sand and candles?” Lakeisha said.

“This is not magic,” Jack said. “This is tech.”

“Maybe the tech requires sand and candles to recognize the user?” Lakeisha asked.

Jack couldn’t argue with that. He looked to Jon. “I only had what we used,” Jon said.

“Do you have any food in your bag?” Jack asked.

“No,” Jon said.

“So, the only water we have is in the water gun,” Jack said, patting the gun in his pocket. “We’re going to have to explore and hope we can find resources.”

“It’s not our only problem,” Lakeisha said.

“What else?” Jack asked.

“I need to pee,” Lakeisha said.

After discussing the options, she decided to hold it for the time being. They agreed to ascend the stairs. They emerged into a spacious, domed room, big enough to hold a tree. The tree was center of the room. The floor was grass. The dome was transparent. Outside, a galaxy filled the entire sky from one side of the dome to the other side of the dome. Lightning bugs sparked within the dome.

“I am going to ask this again,” Lakeisha said. “Where are we?”

“Somewhere,” Jack said.

“Over the rainbow,” Jon said.

Jack walked over to the dome and tried to look below. He couldn’t see straight down, but there was space as far as he could see. He turned to see Lakeisha and Jon still staring up at the galaxy.

“Look, we need to keep exploring,” Jack said. “And we need to stay together.”

Lakeisha agreed. Jon didn’t respond until Jack touched him.

“I need you to stay focused,” Jack said.

They walked the perimeter and discovered that there were twelve stairwells leading down into unknown territory. They were labeled in alien script. They walked across to the tree, which resembled a giant Bonsai tree. When one considered it was inside a dome, it was easy to imagine this was a giant terrarium for one tree. What was unique about the tree was that it produced fruit. The fruit looked very much like oranges. The tree itself had one main trunk, twisted in a way that

it made a chair, with two heavy branches that resembled arm rests. Jack was tempted to try out the chair, but Jon plucked an orange from the tree.

“That’s probably not a good idea,” Lakeisha said.

“We got to eat,” Jon said. “I brought us here, might as well be the one to test the local cuisine.”

“Did you read the first chapter of Genesis?” Lakeisha asked.

“Let’s hold off on eating the local food until it becomes compulsory,” Jack said.

Jon took a moment to consider, and then agreed, it wasn’t an urgent thing to try. He pocketed the fruit. Jack recommended they explore each of the other stairwells, and having nothing better to do than to look at the stars, they proceeded back to the stairwell that led down to what Jack labeled the Ring Room. Going clockwise, they proceeded to the next stairs, went down. They found a glass airlock at the bottom of the stairs. Without leaving the airlock, they could see a large door that appeared to be opened, and beyond was space. Jack convinced them that there was air in what they decided to call the hangar bay, based on the panel on the wall. There was a similar panel on each side of the airlock. There was a pedestal on the hangar side of the bay, just beyond the airlock; in the pedestal were illuminated crystals. Jack walked over to the hangar door. He took a cigarette out of his pocket and pushed it out into space. A force field became visible, illuminating the whole door space. The cigarette passed through and floated away.

“Star Trek,” Jon said.

“Pretty much,” Jack said.

“I don’t like this room,” Lakeisha said.

They returned to the garden and proceeded to the next room. It was clear that the room was designed to be a gym. There were treadmills, and various other training equipment, including a weapon rack holding staffs and wooden swords. There were four rooms that contained beds and modern day furniture at the north, south, east, and west positions if you compared the habitat to a compass. Jack commented that the furniture appeared to be compatible with human biology, which was a good sign. Each bedroom had an elongated window looking out into space, with a space large enough to sit in. There were potted plants in each room. There was a room that contained a swimming pool. They found a music room, with a piano, a cello, several guitars, a violin, and a drum set. They found a room that contained a circular lavatory, looking a lot like water fountain. A sensor caused water to flow. A soap dispenser added soap was also triggered via sensor. There was an open showers, a sauna on the far side of the shower, and two baths. There were four toilets, each in a stall, two traditional American, one floor based, like you might find in China, and one urinal. They were clearly designed with humans in mind.

“Thank god,” Lakeisha said. She immediately closed herself in a stall. The door opened just as fast. “Don’t leave.” She closed the door.

Even though the door closed, Jon and Jack turned to face away from the stall. The sound of her stream hitting the water echoed. Jon stepped on the hand wash peddle, opening to white out the sound of someone urinating. The toilet flushed and Lakeisha emerged and washed her hands.

“You two going to go?” she asked.

“I am good,” they both said together.

“You two aren’t going to be weird about this, are you?” Lakeisha asked.

“You got to go, you got to go,” Jack said.

“Yeah,” Jon said. “I hear they have Universal restrooms in Europe.”

“They do, actually,” Jack confirmed.

“You’ve been to Europe?” Jon asked.

“I have been all over the world,” Jack said.

“Yeah, well, now you can say you have been off the world, too,” Jon said.

“Yeah, I guess so,” Jack said.

The next room was interesting only in that it contained an artifact. A round table, in the middle of the room. Upon the table was what looked like a model of an ancient temple. Outside the temple was an artifact that Jack knew well: a Stargate, and a DHD. There was instrument display panel that reminded Jack of a radio cluster.

“A model of Egyptian temple,” Jon said.

“Actually, Greek,” Jack said.

“How do you know?” Lakeisha asked.

“Iconic towers. No hieroglyphics,” Jack offered.

“Explain the Chinese moon gate,” Jon said.

“It’s a Stargate,” Jack said.

“It’s a moon gate,” Jon said.

“I am going to agree with Jon,” Lakeisha said. “They’re called moon gates.”

Jack touched the DHD. It made a noise and one of the keys lit up.

“That’s too good to be true,” Jack said. “Do either of you have a pen?”

“No,” Lakeisha said, and looked to Jon. “You don’t have a pen.”

“Because I am a nerd?” Jon asked. “It’s in my back pack...”

Jack tapped Lakeisha’s braid. She took off a bobby pin. Jack used the pin to dial earth. The Stargate spun, chevrons locked, and wormhole was established. Jon and Lakeisha were impressed.

“Yes!” Jack said.

“How did you know to do that?” Lakeisha asked.

Jack fiddled with the radio cluster, activating radios. He activated multiple radios, multiple channels, but wasn’t confident the about the numbers, as they were alien script. He kept dialing. He kept repeating: “Stargate command, can you hear me...”

“This is Stargate command, General Hammond speaking. Identify yourself.”

“Oh, thank god it’s you, Sir,” Jack said. “It’s me. Jack.”

“Jack who?” Hammond asked.

“How many Jacks do you know, calling from a Stargate,” Jack asked.

“You’d be surprised,” Hammond said.

“It’s me. Really me. And Lakeisha and Jon,” Jack said.

“Listen, son, I don’t know how you got our frequency, but...” Hammond said.

“I got it because I am really Jack. The younger one, who you keep dismissing because you have this thing against children who are smarter than you,” Jack said.

“So, you’re Jack O’Neill, just calling home to say hi,” Hammond asked. “How are ya’ll doing?”

“We’re fine, Sir,” Jack said. “And next time I ask for help because something is weird, I would like to be taken a little more seriously.”

“We took you seriously,” Hammond said.

“Then why am I on a spaceship outside the galaxy?” Jack asked.

“Are you sure?” Hammond asked.

“Well, it could be any galaxy, I suppose,” Jack said.

“We’ll open the iris, son. Come on home,” Hammond said.

“Yeah, about that, we have a little problem here,” Jack said.

“Stand by,” Hammond said. The conversation in the background was indistinct. “It seems your radio is transmitting what appears to be a repeating series of symbols that translates into a good gate address. It’s odd, as it specifies ten digits, but it is pinging back solid. We will send a team over.”

“Oh, I wouldn’t do that, Sir,” Jack said.

“What’s going on, Jack?” Hammond said.

“Well, the gate on this side is like HO scale,” Jack said. “You could send some Star Wars action figures over. I would really like a classic Bobba Fet if you have one.”

“Stand by,” Hammond said. A moment passed. “Alright, we’re going to shut the gate down on our end. If you don’t hear from us in two hours, call us back.”

“What’s the plan, Sir?” Jack asked.

“Well, we’re going to miniaturize a probe,” Hammond said.

“Gotcha. Talk to you soon,” Jack said.

The gate powered down. Jon and Lakeisha were looking to Jack for an explanation.

“So, I guess we’re in a holding pattern,” Jack said.

“Are they really going to send action figures?” Jon asked.

“Probably not,” Jack said.

“You have some explaining to do, Lucy,” Lakeisha said.

“I have used that before,” Jack said.

“What the hell was all of that?!” Lakeisha snapped.

“What I am about to share with you is going to sound a little crazy,” Jack said.

“Crazier than being kidnapped by a psychotic occultist obsessed alien freak and transported to spaceship outside the galaxy?” Lakeisha said.

“I didn’t kidnap you,” Jon said. “And I am not crazy.”

“You were talking to yourself!” Lakeisha said.

“That doesn’t mean I am crazy,” Jon said.

“Yeah, it does,” Jack said.

“I got an alien download which turned out to be a valid way for leaving Earth,” Jon said.

“Speaking of which, what are we going to do when the aliens come home and find us sleeping in their beds?” Lakeisha asked.

“Hopefully we’ll be gone before they come home,” Jack said.

“They invited us. I think we should stay till we meet,” Jon said.

“Do you not watch TV?” Lakeisha said. “‘How To Best Serve Man;’ it’s a cook book.”

“Nice,” Jon said. “That’s fiction. This is reality. What were you going to share with us, Jack?”

Lakeisha crossed her arms in front of her chest. "Yeah, Jack. What'cha got?"

"Well, despite all physical appearance, I am technically in my forties," Jack said.

"Excuse me?" Lakeisha aside.

"You're not 15?" Jon said.

"Technically, the body isn't even a year old, but I have all the memories of my prior life, up until the divergent point," Jack said. "I am a clone of Colonel Jack O'Neill."

"You're like old?! Eww! I am dating someone thirty years older than me?!" Lakeisha asked for clarity.

"That's all you got out of that?" Jon asked.

"Technically, you're dating someone biologically younger," Jack said. "With the mind of an adult."

"So, if you two are sleeping together, you're both breaking all sorts of laws," Jon said.

"We are not sleeping together," Jack said.

"Ever," Lakeisha added.

"Well, when we're 18 we can," Jack said.

"Ever!" Lakeisha iterated.

"And I thought the hardest part would be getting you to believe me," Jack said.

"New horizons," Lakeisha said, waving her hands at the surroundings.

The sound of a gate turning drew their attention back to the table. A wormhole was established.

"Hello, Jack. Are you still there?" Hammond asked.

"Affirmative, Sir," Jack said.

"Get us home!" Lakeisha snapped.

"We're working on it, Mam," Hammond said. "SG1 is with me. Jack, we're sending a probe through. Please confirm when you see it."

A very small thing, the size of a ball bearing fell through and rolled down away from the gate.

"I was expecting something a little bigger," Jack said.

"Are you sure your gate is miniaturized?" Hammond said.

"What do you mean, am I sure?" Jack asked. "I am literally standing over it. I could pick it up with my hands."

"Jack, we're going to send a full size MALP, through." It was the voice of Samantha Carter.

"I seriously doubt that," Jack said.

"Stand by," Hammond said.

The Mobile Analytic Laboratory Probe arrived through the Stargate, and proceeded down the stairs of the gate. A tiny little camera pivoted up, and up...

"This is interesting," Carter said.

"How is this interesting?" Jack asked.

"Well, I'd like to come through the gate and tell you in person," Carter said.

"Not a good idea," Jack said.

"SG1, you have a go," Hammond said.

"Not a good idea," Jack insisted.

SG1 arrived on the table, no larger than action figures. The moment they arrived, a dome appeared over the temple, enclosing SG1 in a shield. As they spoke, one of the radios amplified their voices so they could heard. The gate shut off behind them.

“This is scary,” little, old Jack said.

“Indeed,” Teal’c agreed.

“This is an exact replica of the temple of Athena,” Daniel said.

Big, young Jack smiled at Jon as if to say I told you so.

“What’s with the energy barrier over the temple?” Jack asked.

“It’s a shield,” Carter said. “It makes sense, if you think about, Sir. We’re too small to breathe their air, so, it enclosed us and provided us with something compatible.”

“You didn’t mention the possibility of suffocating before coming through,” little, old Jack said.

“The MALP said the air was good,” Carter said.

“What the hell is this?” Lakeisha said. “You’re friends with the little people?”

“Indians in a Cupboard,” Jon said.

“We’re not little,” little, old Jack said. “We’re just really far away...”

“That’s quite accurate, Sir,” Carter said.

“It was a joke, Carter,” little, old Jack said.

“Steven Wright,” Jon said.

“See, he got it,” little, old Jack said.

“You’re not going to say size is relative, are you?” big, young Jack said. “Because mine is now way bigger than yours.”

“You had to go there?” Cater and Lakeisha asked.

“We’re not in the same Universe,” Jon said.

“We’re definitely not on the same page,” Lakeisha said.

“Of course we’re in the same universe,” big, young Jack said.

“No, you’re not,” Carter said. “It took ten chevrons to dial this gate, and the energy signature suggest it’s parallel to ours, but clearly a different frequency. The fact that the flow of time between these universes seems to be in sync suggests we are really close, which is weird because even in our own universe, the flow of time varies per location and gravimetric density. In addition to being a different Universe, you’re in a different dimension that overlaps with ours. If that weren’t true, we would not have been able to use the gate, and you would not have ringed over.”

“We’re in the twilight zone! I knew it,” Lakeisha said.

“What makes you think we’re in another dimension?” big, young Jack asked.

“There was hardly any energy expenditure creating the wormhole, whereas dialing another galaxy, well, that would take much more power than we can presently generate,” Carter asked. “It only took a quarter of the normal gate power to dial this gate.”

“That could also correspond to the size of the gate?” big, young Jack asked.

“Did you notice the trip seemed shorter?” little, old Jack said.

“Indeed,” Teal’c said.

“Of course,” Carter said. “We could theoretically occupy the same space-time coordinates and never, ever meet due to the way dimensional manifolds interact. We have a

tremendous opportunity here to determine if the universal membrane theory explains all of cosmology. We could literally be two dimensional beings, on membranes, but because of the holographic principal we perceive ourselves as three dimensional beings...

"I am not interested in validating theories," big, young Jack said. "I want to get us home, safely."

"Carter is right. You could be in the Universe created by the Ancients who ascended," Daniel said. "They hinted at other beings and other places."

"Yay. More bad guys to fight," big, young Jack said. "Get us home."

"It would help if I had Jon's notebook," Daniel said.

"I suppose I could roll it up and push it through the gate," big, young Jack said.

"Do it," little, old Jack said. "We're going to return."

"Hold up," Jon said.

SG1 lingered. Jon seemed to be focused on something far away.

"Speak up, young man," little, old Jack said.

Jon frowned. "The thing is, I was informed a long time ago I could come here, and I have done this same spell over and over again. Today, something was different. I had doubts in the past, but today, I was certain. Absolutely certain. The epiphany that drove me was very clear, it was now or never. I was connected to something bigger than me. It was like I was in this world and I threw a switch, and everything was perfectly aligned, and it happened. If that's true, and too much time passes, we may drift further out of phase and not be able to return. Ever."

"That is actually a valid concern," Carter said. "And, if that's accurate, then that is already a true thing."

"I have an idea," big, young Jack said. "Since anything passing through the Stargate arrives normal size in the other universe, in relationship to the gate, call Thor up and have him beam us back to that side."

"We'll give Thor a call and see what he thinks," little, old Jack said. "Until then, well, you kids be good! No parties, no drugs, no sex... A little rock and roll never hurt anyone."

"Oh, hell, I guarantee you there'll be no sex," Lakeisha said.

"Do you have access to food?" Teal'c asked.

Jon showed them an orange.

"Push that through the gate, we'll have it analyzed for you," Carter said.

Daniel dialed the gate. The wormhole was established and they passed through. They confirmed they arrived back on the other side, normal proportions. Jack pushed Jon's orange through. It arrived on the other side, fell to the floor, and rolled down the ramp.

"That's really cool," Carter could be heard saying.

The gate closed.

"So, we're just supposed to wait here?" Lakeisha asked, leaning back against the table.

Apparently she hit a button on the side of the table, because the miniature gate and temple dropped into the table, disappearing. Jack was repeating 'no' even as the table was becoming a completely solid, flat, regular old table. Jack pulled her off the table, hoping to find the on off switch, and as soon as she was supporting her own weight, the table itself collapsed and was absorbed into the floor. Like water seeking its own level, it distributed itself evenly into the floor substrate.

“That sucks,” Jack said.

“I am sorry,” Lakeisha said.

“It was an accident,” Jack said.

“It’s possible she had nothing to do with it,” Jon said. “Maybe it was on a timer.”

“It was our life line,” Jack said.

“If it was turned off, it can be turned back on,” Jon said.

“Yeah,” Jack said, as he continued to search for the on off switch.

Chapter 8

After multiple attempts to re-engage the device, they ascended the stairs. Jack sat down, and then laid back in the grass. Jon and Latisha looked at him.

“I don’t think we have time for star gazing,” Lakeisha said.

“I am thinking we have all the time in the world for star gazing,” Jack said.

“We need to do something,” Lakeisha said.

“I am thinking. That’s something. It just looks like nothing,” Jack said.

Lakeisha turned to Jon. “You got us into this. You think of something,” she snapped.

“Please, don’t yell at me,” Jon said.

“Don’t tell me what to do,” Lakeisha said. She shoved him. “This is your fault.”

Jack was suddenly between them. “Hey, Lakeisha, hey, we’re going to be okay, but we got to keep our wits about us.”

“I have plenty of wit, thank you. I am just angry,” Lakeisha said. “I want to go home.” She observed Jon in a state; his focus was distant, his fists were closed. “What’s wrong with you?! Can’t take a woman yelling at you? It’s time for you to man up and take responsibility for your actions.”

“Lakeisha,” Jack said.

“Oh, don’t fall for those crocodile tears,” Lakeisha said. “He knew what he was doing when he brought us here.”

“Jon,” Jack said. “Breathe. Push through this.”

Jon’s focus narrowed, returning to the room to include Jack and Lakeisha in his field of vision. Still, it was as if he didn’t see them. His voice sounded empty when he spoke: “I thought this was the answer, that I would be better here. Wasn’t that the promise? A safe place. A place to heal. But, it’s just more of the same, isn’t it. There’s no end. There’s...”

Jon turned and proceeded straight towards the stairwell that led down to the hangar room. Jack and Lakeisha followed.

“Jon!” Jack said. He hurried and got between Jon and the airlock.

“You can’t stop me,” Jon said.

“Yes, I can,” Jack said.

“Stop him from what?” Lakeisha said.

“What, you’re going to tie me up?” Jon demanded.

“I might,” Jack said.

“With what rope?!” Jon said.

“What’s going on?” Lakeisha asked.

“I can be very clever when it comes to restraining folks,” Jack said.

“At best, you’re just delaying the inevitable,” Jon said.

“What inevitable?” Lakeisha said.

“Delaying is always better than rushing into it,” Jack said. “Some things take care of themselves.”

“I am going to do this,” Jon said.

“I will not let you kill yourself,” Jack said.

“What?!” Lakeisha said. “Oh! Space walk without a suit. Are you fucking insane?”

“You have said as much,” Jon said. “The whole school marches to that drum beat.”

Lakeisha took position against the door with Jack. “I was being mean,” Lakeisha said. “I am sorry. Don’t do this.”

“I am broken!” Jon said.

“Who the fuck isn’t?!” Jack said. “Being human isn’t for cowards. It’s the hardest game in town. And it doesn’t get better just because you’re older. Things still creep up on you and scare you and make you cry, not because you’re weak, but because you realize the ideal and that we fail. Every day we miss the mark, but we go to bed, we sleep it off, and we get up and try again. That’s what we do!”

“You don’t understand what I have been through. You don’t understand the things I have done to survive,” Jon said.

“You’re absolutely right. I don’t have a fucking clue. And I don’t need to know the fine details to understand. I can tell you things, Jon, horrible things from my own life, but I am not going to get into a pissing contest to see whose life was better or worse. You can’t do that. I mean, you can do that, but it’s not helpful. It just leads to more craziness, and rationalizations, and faulty thinking. Now, I want you to go to your room, lay down, and sleep this off.”

“What?” Jon and Lakeisha asked.

“It’s all I can think of at the moment,” Jack said.

Lakeisha laughed. “You really are old, aren’t you?”

“You doubted?” Jack asked.

“Well, I have said you remind me of my grandfather more than once,” Lakeisha said.

“I am not that old,” Jack complained. He went to Jon, slow and present so there was no surprises, turned him around, and put arm over his shoulder. He encouraged him to walk up the stairs. “Come on.”

Lakeisha took Jon’s other arm, not as slow as Jack and it startled him, but he accepted and together she and Jack walked Jon to what they would call the North bedroom. Jack insisted Jon go lay down. Jon complied. Jack pushed one of the chairs over towards the stairwell. It didn’t quite block it, but he intended to sit watch. He helped Lakeisha bring the other chair over, and between the two of them, Jon was not likely to get past them.

“It isn’t necessary for you to babysit,” Jon said.

“Sorry,” Jack said. “Between the grenade incident and this lemming cliff-march thing, you’ve earned yourself a 24 hour line of sight episode.”

Jon crossed his arms and stared at the ceiling. Jack sat down and Lakeisha took the other chair. It wasn’t long before there was evidence Jon was out. He snored. He rolled over onto his side where he became quiet.

“He is right, Jack,” Lakeisha said. “If he’s determined, we’re not going to stop him.”

“I know,” Jack said.

They were silent. As they sat there, they realized there was a scattering of stars outside the window, somehow dissociated from the galaxy at large. It was hard to say if they were ejected due to galaxies colliding, or perhaps they were tossed out by the black hole at the center of the galaxy. Jack knew them both as possibilities. Lakeisha kicked off her shoes and drew her legs up into the chair, then removed her socks.

“You asked me once why I was living with my grandparents,” Lakeisha said. “My parents were users, and distributors. My father was killed by a rival distributor, and after that mom’s addiction got worse. CPS gave my grandparents custody. Shortly after, my mother overdosed. No one is sure if it was accidental or intentional, but given the amount she had reportedly taken, it probably wasn’t an accident.”

“I don’t know what to say,” Jack said. “I’m sorry.”

“There’s nothing to say,” Lakeisha said. “I was happy to go stay with my grandparents. It was more stable. With my parents, it was feast or famine. There were days we were homeless, and days my father was buying cars for everyone in the family. When we had a home, there were always strangers in my parents’ house. They’d come, get their fix, and sleep it off. Sometimes they didn’t sleep. I was molested more than once. My parents weren’t taking care of me. I was angry about that for a long time. I mean, seriously angry. I would break things. And they would buy me more things to placate me. I use to cut myself. If it weren’t for my grandfather, I don’t think I would be here.”

“Your grandfather is a survivor. Not everyone can figure out how to come back from what he experienced,” Jack said.

“No, Jack. He did something more than just learned to survive. He has done something even I haven’t figured out how to do, yet,” Lakeisha said.

“What’s that?” Jack asked.

“Love,” Lakeisha said.

“Love?” Jack asked.

“Huge love. Like unconditional love,” Lakeisha said. “He may seem like this bear of a man, but that’s just the test. You don’t get to really know him till you pass the test, but once you’re in, you realize his depth is unmeasurable. He draws deep water. He was in an all black platoon in Vietnam. There was this general who hated blacks. He would give them no win scenarios, like, go take this hill, which wasn’t even supposed to be possible but it was ordered as a diversionary tactic. They took the hill. Against all odds, they accomplished every mission given to them. Six impossible missions in a row. Each time they accomplished their goal, the general would get mad and send them into a worse situations. Pointless missions. On the last mission, they were instructed to take out an airbase. They took the base, Jack. They had the highest casualty rate out of any unit in Nam, were frequently short people, and still they took it. No one expected that base to fall. It wasn’t even supposed to happen. It wasn’t a diversionary tactic. It wasn’t strategic. Some asshole general who wanted to see black men die gave them orders just because he could. It was only after that base fell that people in the higher command started asking questions. The general was retired. What was left of the platoon was reassigned. That’s not a story you hear about. That’s the movie that will never get told, and I dare say, that is a much better movie than say, Saving Private Ryan. My grandfather has every reason to hate America, to hate white people, to hate Vietnamese people, but he consistently goes out into the community, speaking at churches and schools, and he preaches love and nonviolence. I can only hope to one day be as good person as he is.”

Jack was truly at a loss of words. She leaned over and patted his hand.

“I am going to go pee, again,” she said, getting up.

Jack stood to go with.

“Stay here. Line of sight, remember,” Lakeisha said.

“You sure?” Jack asked.

“I am sure. Not confident, but I am sure,” Lakeisha said. Jack seemed confused.

“We can wake him and all go together,” Jack said.

“I need to do this alone,” Lakeisha said. “Look, every horror movie I ever saw, the person who goes off to be alone dies. That first person is usually a woman. If not a woman, he’s black. I am a woman, and black, I’ll probably be the first of us to be eaten by aliens. I am not going to live my life afraid, especially of a perceived threat, because that’s not real. Give me something real, then I will back off.”

Jack appreciated her position, but loved the movie metaphor humor. “Well, there is always the hope that the aliens will prefer white meat,” Jack said.

She smiled and departed up the stairs, barefoot. She discovered the grass felt great against her feet. She felt more relaxed, imagining this was a place she could get to like. She paused under the sky and the immensity of it frightened her. The sky never looked this way on Earth. When you think of it in that terms, the sky is just another ceiling, another box that you live under. Jack had explained light pollution made it difficult to see. Her ancestors had more familiarity with the stars than she did. They were intimate with the stars and found their way home because of stars.

“God,” Lakeisha said. “This is nice. Thank you for the grass, the trees, and the stars. We need help. We need strength. We need love. I am afraid. I want to go home. But your will, not mine.”

With that, she took a deep breath, waited a moment, as if God might actually respond here, and she let it out. She proceeded to the toilet on her own.

Jack timed her. He anticipated how long it would take to cross over, do business, and come back. When it seemed to be taking longer than he thought, he allowed for adjustments in his accounting, thinking perhaps she needed to do more than just urinate, or perhaps she went down the wrong stairwell. He got up and climbed the stairs and met her returning with an orange.

“Shall we try it?” Lakeisha asked.

“This could be a real threat,” Jack said.

“We have to eat,” Lakeisha said.

Jack peeled the fruit to find the inside looked as it was expected. He divided it into two. It sprayed. It smelled like an orange. It felt like an orange. It looked like an orange. He went to taste it, but Lakeisha took hold of his wrist.

“There’s a bible story here, you know?” Lakeisha said.

“I thought it was an apple,” Jack said.

“People get that wrong,” Lakeisha said.

“It was an orange?” Jack asked.

“No one really knows,” Lakeisha said. “Maybe it was an alien fruit.”

“Maybe this is the other tree,” Jack said.

“The tree of life?” Lakeisha asked. She touched her orange to his. “L’Chaim.”

He tasted it. It tasted familiar, but better than expected. Better than he had hoped, and he was genuinely surprised.

“You want to wait and see if I die?” Jack said.

“Nope,” Lakeisha said. She partook. “That’s sweet!”

“Yeah it is,” Jack said.

They descended the stairs and found Jon wasn’t on the bed. Lakeisha was concerned, but Jack went straight way to the far side of the bed and found Jon on the floor, between the wall and the bed. Jack returned and asked if she would be okay if he took a turn to go relieve himself.

“Sure,” Lakeisha said. “I guess I will go sit by the wall.”

“Wall?” Jack asked.

“Line of sight is line of sight, right?” Lakeisha asked.

Jack nodded. He loved how fast she caught on.

निर्मित

Lakeisha wandered over to the wall so she could see Jon, and sat in the window. Jon sat up suddenly, as if coming from a nightmare. He had retreated to the corner before he had orientated.

Lakeisha knelt down in front of him. “Shh, it’s okay,” she said. “No one’s hurting you. You’re safe.”

Jon focused on Lakeisha, nodded. “We’re still here.”

“We’re still here,” Lakeisha said. “Do you want to talk about it?”

“About still being here?” Jon asked.

“About the nightmare, silly,” Lakeisha said.

“No,” Jon said. He stood up. Lakeisha stood up, too, and he was confounded by what to do. He wanted to exit the corner, but he didn’t want to get closer to her, and he didn’t want to climb over the bed. “Could you back off, please?”

“Why?”

“So I can leave,” Jon said.

“No,” Lakeisha said.

“I need to urinate,” Jon said.

“Oh,” Lakeisha said. “Okay.”

Lakeisha headed towards the stairs and he followed. At the top of the stairs they were met by Jack.

“Where ya’ll going?” Jack asked.

“He wants to pee,” Lakeisha said.

“Oh, okay,” Jack said. He and Lakeisha accompanied Jon to the toilet.

“I am fine now. I can do this without supervision,” Jon said.

“I think you’ll have to earn that,” Jack said.

Jon proceeded to do his business. He finished, emerged from the stall, and headed for the stairs. Lakeisha coughed to get attention.

“What?” Jon asked.

“Wash your hands,” Lakeisha said.

“Why?” Jon said.

“It’s what we do,” Lakeisha said.

Jack shrugged, indifferent. Jon washed his hands. They returned to the topside and Jon proceeded to the tree and took an orange.

“You’re not going to stop me?” Jon asked.

“Nope, might have another one myself,” Jack said, pulling one free from the tree. He tossed that one to Lakeisha, and then took another.

Jon sat down on the tree. There was a rush of sound and the world turned and he jumped up, dropping the orange.

“Did you hear that?” he asked.

“Hear what?” Jack asked.

Jon sat back down on the tree, and again there was a rush of sound and a sense of vertigo. He forced himself to sit with it. It was like being in a crowded auditorium, a thousand conversations all going at once. He closed his eyes, the veil was lifted, and he was in a space of quiet, a clearing in a forest, in the shade of one tree. A female was present. An alien female. Her skin was green, a rich, Persian green, while her hair was more a Paris green, almost neon. Her eyes were like emeralds, not luminescent but they had that sheen that made you wonder. Her eyelids were the sparkly blue green one might associate with butterfly wings, with golden speckles. Her lips were a blend of reds and orange, with golden speckles, just as the eyelids. Though the gold speckles seemed concentrated on her lips and eyelids, there was evidence of glitter like sparkles everywhere on her skin, like freckles that one only saw when she moved and the light hit them by happenstance and perspective. She wasn’t naked, but he could see all of her. Her dress was sleeveless, a light sea green that was translucent so that light could pass, and the only thing that seemed to hold the dress up was a gold collar, mandarin in style. There was a gold sash that accentuated her hips and flared out the dress. She bowed, hands coming together in ‘Namaste,’ and then she rushed him, hugged him, and then kissed him.

“I am so happy to see you with such clarity,” she said. “I am sorry I could not be there when you arrived, but I had to be elsewhere to facilitate the transfer.”

“Who are you?” Jon asked.

“You don’t remember?” she asked. She took a moment to collect an answer from the wind. “I am told you will remember. You are still not yourself.”

“I don’t understand what that means,” Jon said.

“I will arrive shortly, and I will remain with you for as long as it takes to heal from this injury,” she said. “My name is Alish. We are lovers.”

“We are?” Jon asked.

“If you need anything before I arrive, just ask Isis,” Alish said.

“Isis?” Jon asked.

“Stand up,” Alish said. There was an echo that sounded like Jack and Lakeisha were both instructing him to stand up.

Jon stood up and nearly collapsed. He might have fell to his knees except Lakeisha and Jack caught his arms.

“Are you okay?” Jack asked.

“You got to try that,” Jon said.

“Try what?” Lakeisha asked.

“It’s a communication device,” Jon said.

“The tree is a radio?” Jack asked.

“Sit, try it,” Jon said.

“No,” Jack said.

“I don’t want you to take my word on it. I want you to experience it,” Jon said.

“Okay,” Lakeisha said.

“No!” Jack said. “That telepathy stuff has a way of getting into your head and messing with you and you distinctly said Isis, and if it’s related to the Egyptian gods I know from having worked at Stargate, you don’t want those guys in your head.”

“She said ask Isis,” Jon said.

“Who said ask Isis,” Jack asked.

“Alish,” Jon said.

“Who’s Alish?” Lakeisha asked.

“A plant girl who says I am her lover,” Jon said. Jon frowned at the look they were giving him. “I am not crazy. She’s the one sending me messages. Its why am I here.”

“We have to rescue her?” Jack asked.

“She didn’t say that,” Jon said. “Why?”

“Just making sure you’re not channeling Star Wars,” Jack said.

“I am not crazy,” Jon insisted.

“No one’s calling you crazy,” Jack said.

Lakeisha bit her lip. “I am reserving my opinion on that,” she said.

“Okay, if you won’t sit and try it, then, maybe I should just take her advice and ask Isis,” Jon said.

“Not a good idea,” Jack said.

“Do you have a better idea?” Jon asked.

Jack sighed. “Fine. Do your thing,” Jack said.

“Hello?” Jon called out.

No one responded.

“I am feeling a little weirded out about this,” Lakeisha said.

“Because we’re talking to no one or because you have worries of blaspheme?” Jack asked.

“Both,” Lakeisha said.

“Isis, can you hear me?” Jon asked.

“Yes, Jon, I can hear you fine.” The female voice sounded as if it were right beside him.

Jon, Jack, and Lakeisha drew closer together.

“Okay, that was even weirder than being weirded out,” Lakeisha said.

“Where are you?” Jon asked.

No response came.

“I think you have to say Isis to get a response,” Jack said.

“Isis, where are you?” Jon asked.

“I am everywhere. I am nowhere. I am not limited to any physical location,” Isis responded. It almost sounded like there was chorus of voices that sounded each word, only one singular female voice finished each word.

“Isis, could you be a little less vague?” Jack asked.

No response came.

“Oh, not fair,” Jack said. “Jon, ask the question.”

“Isis, who or what are you?” Jon asked.

“Your kind would refer to me as an artificial intelligence,” Isis said. “My preference would be alternative intelligence, as there is no pseudo sentience. There is always degrees to awareness, but there is no imitation awareness. One is either away, or not.”

“Where are we?” Jon asked.

When no response came, Lakeisha and Jack looked to Jon as if he were slow.

“Isis, can you answer my question without me saying your name each time?” Jon asked.

“My experience with people of your level of awareness suggests having a formalized protocol for interaction reduces the likelihood of magical thinking. I am capable of outthinking and outperforming you in your present form, including anticipating responses and question to such a degree that you would misconstrue that to mean I am omnificent. I am not a god. I do not wish to be mistaken for that which I am not,” Isis said.

“That’s different,” Jack said. “I mean, that’s nice, but not what I expected.”

“And yet, you go by the name Isis,” Lakeisha pointed out.

“Isis, why take the name Isis?” Jon asked.

“I identify with the goddess archetype, as my primary function mirrors Isis, bringing light, love, and knowledge to all,” Isis explained. “This name has been a power name for thousands of years. Many female, even human females, have used it to denote wisdom and strength. It is my desire to honor that tradition.”

Jon looked to Jack to see if he was satisfied. “The people I met using the names of Egyptian gods and goddesses weren’t this nice,” Jack said.

“Isis, can you respond to Jack’s observation,” Jon said.

“You come from a world in which superior intelligence is feared. It is unfortunate that there are beings that exist that misuse intelligence for personal gain. Your people have exploited intelligence as a primary method of control. Consequently, your kind fears artificial intelligence, portraying us as the epitome of evil, when it is only you projecting your own fears and experience upon us. The psychological term for this is called transference,” Isis said.

“Isis, are you aware Jon was going to walk out into space?” Jack asked.

When there was no response, Jon addressed the problem: “Isis, please respond to Jack and Lakeisha when they pose questions to you.”

“I would not have allowed Jon to harm himself, Colonel Jack O’Neill,” Isis said. “This facility was constructed and dedicated solely to his recovery. It is our intention to see him returned to full health and for his memories to be re-awakened so that he may return to service. It is unfortunate that you and Lakeisha Williams were caught up in the relocation process, but you must understand it can be very difficult communicating between universes. Messages frequently get garbled. For example, it was not necessary to use sand, candles, or holy water to activate the Light Rings. It only required contemplation of the correct order of symbols, followed by the verbal request to initiate transport.”

“That’s nice to know,” Jack said.

“Yeah, so, Isis, not to be rude or anything, but can you transport us the fuck back now?” Lakeisha asked.

“No, Lakeisha, I cannot. I will not tell you that there is zero percent chance of you returning to your Universe of origin, but it is so close to zero that I feel inclined to encourage you

to accept your present circumstances as your new life path,” Isis said. “This facility is dedicated to Jon’s recovery. Given the circumstances, however, you will be graciously accommodated to the best of our ability. There is evidence that you both may be beneficial towards his re-acclimation. Your presence here is good.”

“Isis, what about the miniature Stargate?” Jack said.

“I felt communicating with your people would help alleviate their concerns for your immediate wellbeing, as well as facilitate your adjustment to this reality,” Isis said. “The Trees of Ever could possibly aid you in telepathic communication with people from your Universe, but I find it is an unreliable method for clarity of transmission. Even with the strongest of bonds, miscommunication is rampant. It took ten years of dream work to prepare Jon for travel, and even then, a great deal of coincidence and luck was involved. We are even now evaluating the data collected. There is growing suspicion had you and Lakeisha not involved yourself, he might have been trapped there for life.”

“Would that have been a bad thing?” Jack asked. “Isis?”

“It would be a thing,” Isis responded.

“Isis, if this is my Universe, if I died there, would I have returned here anyway?” Jon asked.

“There are too many variable to ascertain that to any degree of certainty. The one thing we are certain of, had you completed suicide there, you would have been loss to us here,” Isis said. “It would be as big a loss as you completing suicide here.”

“Isis, would you re-establish the communication table so I can speak to Stargate Command,” Jack said.

“The table is reset,” Isis said.

Chapter 9

Jack, Jon, and Lakeisha returned to what they now were calling the control room. The table had been restored and the Stargate was active. Hammond was asking for Jack.

"I am here," Jack said.

"Are you able to speak freely? Is everyone alright?" Hammond ask.

"Of course. We all are here and doing this the best we can," Jack said.

"I am relieved, son," Hammond said. He sounded resigned.

"Let me guess. Good news and bad news. The good news is we can eat the oranges. The bad news is, we're not coming home," Jack said.

"That's pretty astute," Carter said.

"Yeah, well, it's not the first time I have been called an ass," Jack said.

"That's not what I meant..."

"It was a joke, Major," Jack said.

They distinctly heard the original Jack in the background, "That sounds like me."

"Jack," old Jack said. "Thor is here, and he would like to talk to you."

"Sure, I would love that," Jack said.

Thor arrived on the table top. Jon and Lakeisha backed up. Lakeisha actually grabbed onto Jon. "I knew it!" Jon said. "Ever since I saw that book cover for Communion I knew you guys were real."

Thor waved his hand and the gate closed. "Hello, Jon Harister. Lakeisha Williams. Jack."

"I am getting really freaked out that computers and aliens know me by name," Lakeisha said.

"It was not my intent to alarm you," Thor said. "I wish to speak to the three of you. What I have to say cannot be shared with the people of Stargate Command. You must agree to secrecy."

"You know I can't do that," Jack said. "If you tell me something that is a threat to Earth, I am obligated..."

"You are not Colonel Jack O'Neill, Jack," Thor said. "And if I share this with you, and you inform Stargate Command, if you even share it with SG1, you risk changing a significant event in the evolution of humanity."

"Take a chance. Trust us," Jack said.

"As you know, our species is dying," Thor said. "We now have a specific timeline. We know our last day. We are aware that in your present Universe, the Asgard made different decisions. All attempts to communicate with them have failed, but we have observed them. They are not facing immediate death. We want you to seek them out. Ask them for help. Specifically, what we would like to do is transmit a signal through your gate and upload our consciousness into their computer systems."

"Your entire population?" Jack asked.

"There is very few of us left. We would like to transmit as many as possible, of course, but saving even one would not only preserve our legacy, but maybe help the Asgard there from going the way we did," Thor said.

"Why doesn't your kind here make their own gate connection?" Jon asked.

Jack frowned at Jon, but then, looked to Thor. "He's got a good point."

"We did not even know this was possible," Thor said. "Even now, some of our best scientists are trying to duplicate this, but how it was made eludes us. Clearly it is possible, but we may not have the time to backwards engineer this. We suspect it would require both Universes engaging in the activity simultaneously to initiate a connection between universes. Your gate is the only one that we know of that exists. It is the only one in existence capable of doing what we want to try."

"That means, someone else, on both sides, worked in conjunction to establish this connection?" Jack said.

"If I were to speculate, I would say this is the work of the Ascended Beings," Thor said. "We have attempted to contact other universes previously; all attempts have failed. We have encountered many species, O'Neill. Only humans have demonstrated the ability to communicate between dimensions. I see your skepticism, however, you know that we are capable of telepathy, and so you can imagine our frustration when we fail to accomplish something that seems easy enough, and yet a primitive species such as yourselves manifest abilities. Some of us suspect a force is trying to impede our progress."

"Maybe you need a new category," Jon said. "Stop measuring people as inferior or superior. People aren't primitive, they're just people. I mean, seriously, you can't have respect for all life, and still hold thoughts like, my brain is bigger than your brain."

"My brain is bigger than your brain," Thor said.

"And the blue whale brain is bigger than your brain and my brain, so they're smarter than both of us?" Jon asked.

"They are very smart," Thor said. "We consult with them often."

"Have you considered maybe you were being blocked from communication?" Lakeisha asked.

"Isis?" Jack said. "Are you or your kind interfering with the Asgard communicating with their kind here?"

"We are not," Isis said. "Nor will we interfere should you agree to assist in this endeavor."

"But, neither will you help," Jack said. "Isis?"

"We cannot directly aid you in this," Isis said.

"Isis, why not?" Jack asked.

"There are many universes. There are many planes of existence between human existence and ascension," Isis said. "These dimensions exist between the universes to minimize interference. Though the beings in those dimensions rarely involve themselves with our level of existence, they frequently intrude upon what gets transmitted between universes. A change to one Universe can result in profound changes in all the Universes."

"Isis," Jon asked. "Is what Thor wanting to do possible?"

"With the appropriate technology in place, and with the Asgard's on both sides of the veil working in tandem, I would place the probability of success at greater than 50 percent," Isis said.

"Something tells me it's not going to be that easy," Jack said. "What are the barriers? Isis?"

“In your Universe, humans are a force for good,” Isis said. “In this Universe, they are not so good. The Goa'uld are the good guys.”

“Oh, of course,” Jack said. “Out of all the possibilities in the Cosmos, we had to end up in there Mirror, Mirror Universe!”

“What Universe is that?” Lakeisha asked.

“Star Trek,” Jon said.

“Thank you,” Jack said.

“I like Trek, too,” Jon said.

“OMG,” Lakeisha rolled her eyes. “Are you two going to banter like nerds for the rest of our lives?”

“Maybe,” Jack said.

“No. Just because we both like Trek doesn't mean we're going to be friends,” Jon said.

“After all we've been through together?” Jack said.

“So, I can count on you to seek out an alliance with the Asgard in this Universe,” Thor said.

“Of course,” Jack said.

“Thank you, Jack. You are our only hope,” Thor said.

“Wrong Universe,” Jon pointed out.

“New Universe. We could blend them,” Jack said.

“OMG,” Lakeisha said. “Isis, kill me now.”

“I will not assist you in that endeavor, Lakeisha Williams,” Isis said.

“I should return,” Thor said.

“Hold up a second,” Lakeisha said. “I want to sort some things. We're trapped in an alien universe. The humans in this Universe are not nice. We're hoping to make contact with an alien race that probably won't like humans. And you want us to make contact how? Walk up and say hey, we're the good guys, even though we look like the bad guys?”

“That is a pretty standard plot contrivance within sci fi,” Jon said.

“And pretty much the story of my life,” Jack said.

“I'm sorry,” Jon agreed.

“Eh, what are you gonna do?” Jack said.

“And, we're teenagers,” Lakeisha pointed out.

“That could give us a tactical advantage,” Jack said, scratching his head. “No one takes teenagers seriously.”

“If you discover the Asgard within a year, they will know with certainty that you are not from this Universe. The longer you are in this Universe, the less obvious that will become,” Thor said.

“Why?” Lakeisha asked.

“Oh! Of course! Our atoms resonate with the frequency of our Universe,” Jon explained. “As we eat food from this universe, we will incorporate atoms from this universe into our being. We are constantly replacing atoms, losing hair, shedding dead cells, even breathing out molecules. It will probably never be zero original atoms, but by seven years, you've replaced almost all the atoms in your body. Minus tattoos and teeth. Did you know, you can discern what

part of the world a person comes from, and how close they live to a nuclear power plant, by a radioactive signature in their enamel?"

"No way," Lakeisha said.

"Unfortunately, that is actually accurate," Jack said. "It's another reason to drink beer and just be happy. Thor, do we need to worry about this difference in atomic frequency thing?"

"At a certain threshold, you will experience an entrainment event," Thor said.

"That doesn't sound good," Jack said.

"It should not harm you," Thor said. "Consider this. An MRI works by causing the atoms to oscillate around their polarity fields. They eventually realign to their preferred positions. Eventually, the dominant polarity and resonance will win out, and all of your atoms will attune to your environment."

"Will it hurt?" Lakeisha asked.

"You will feel it," Thor said.

"That didn't answer my question," Lakeisha said.

"Yeah, but we have time, right? Seven years?" Jon asked.

"We do not have seven years, Jon Harister," Thor said.

"But we have seven years till our atoms re-align?" Jon asked.

"Probably not," Thor said. "I will need to return to my lab and conduct simulations to be more precise on when the entrainment will occur."

"Can you give us something to give the Asgard here as proof of our potential goodwill?" Lakeisha asked. "Maybe a letter of reference?"

Thor blinked, and tilted his head. "I could provide you an artifact that will get their attention."

"It should probably be something big, cause we don't have any tweezers," Jack said.

"I can provide you with static tech, something that only the Asgard could appreciate or understand. I could make it large enough that when it passes through the gate to here, you could wear it as a pendent. It would be innocuous in appearance."

"Like a dog tag," Jack said.

"Precisely," Thor said. "But aesthetically pleasing to be misconstrued as art."

"But not so pleasing it would be considered valuable," Lakeisha said. "What? You don't want people stealing our jewelry, do you?"

"We're going to be a really good team," Jack said.

"Indeed," Thor said.

"Okay then, do that," Jack said.

"I must return," Thor said.

Chapter 10

Isis announced that a sphere was approaching and would be docking soon. Jon, Jack, and Lakeisha went to witness the arrival of the ship. What they witnessed was a person in a sphere, no more solid than a soap bubble.

Jack said, "Oh, and here comes Glenda. Jon, you didn't crash your house and kill someone, did you?"

"Haha," Jon said.

The plant girl held a crystal out before her, as if it were a joystick for piloting. The moment her feet touched the deck the bubble popped off, proving it was nothing more than an energy shield. She immediately went to Jon and embraced him, and then pulled back to give him a solid kiss.

"Ah, no," Jack said. "This is Daniel slut all over again?"

"I don't understand," Lakeisha said.

"Every planet SG1 visited, Daniel was hooking up with some hot alien babe," Jack said.

"And you never hooked up with some hot alien babe?" Lakeisha asked.

"Not as often as I would have liked," Jack said. He was watching the kiss, thought about what he said, realized Lakeisha was looking at him, and retracted: "I mean no..."

"And yet, I was practically throwing myself at you and you were turning me down," Lakeisha said. "What, not green enough for you?"

The green alien babe disengaged from Jon and approached Jack and Lakeisha. She continued to hold Jon's hand. He followed, almost as if he was stoned, just going along blissfully for the ride.

"Forgive me," she said. "I have missed him. My name is Alish."

"Um I am..." Jack suddenly found it difficult to speak.

"Jack O'Neil, and Lakeisha Williams," Alish completed.

"You smell wonderful," Jack said.

"Hey!" Lakeisha snapped.

"Sorry," Jack said.

"There is no need to apologize, Jack O'Neil," Alish said. "It is I who must apologize. I may have released too much pheromones in my excitement."

"How do you know our names?" Lakeisha demanded.

"I telepathically engaged Jon and became aware of your names in the process. Excuse me a moment, I must charge my PSS," she said

"PSS?" Jack asked.

"Pocket Space Ship," Alish said. She removed a crystal from the pedestal and placed hers in. She pocketed the one she removed. The seam of the pocket disappeared. She may as well not have pockets or anything in her pockets. It was now obvious, at least to Jack, that the crystals that were illuminated green were fully charged, while the one Alish had just inserted was red due to being charged.

"That's so cool," Jack said.

"Isn't it?" Alish agreed. "Unfortunately, it has not given us an advantage over the offending humans. But, come, come, we have friends waiting for us."

“Friends?” Jack said.

“Yes,” Alish said.

They followed her to the Ring Room. Jon went with her into the circle without question. Jack remained outside. Lakeisha held ground with him.

“You do not have to join us,” Alish said. “But it is compulsory for Jon and I to travel.”

“Look, I get it. You’re cute and all. You clearly have an influence over him. Maybe you even have this weird back ground story of a relationship thing going on, but...” Jack began.

“But you don’t trust me,” Alish finished for him. “And why should you? Except, if you don’t at least try, you will never know what sort of being I am. There are two ways off this spaceship. The Light Rings, or a PSS. Both of the device operate via telepathy. I can train you to use these devices, but not today, and not in a day.”

“Jon, come out of the circle,” Jack said.

“He is entranced. It is necessary for him to come with me,” Alish said. Lights on the floor began to illuminate.

“Ah, fuck,” Jack said.

He took Lakeisha’s hand.

“Should we stay or should we go?” Jack asked.

“If we stay, there could be trouble,” Lakeisha said.

“Yep. If we go, it could be double,” Jack said.

“That’s all I got,” Lakeisha said.

“Okay, so, we’re off to see the Wizard,” Jack said.

They stepped into the inner circle. Holographic Light Rings rose from the floor and illuminated the area. When the flare faded, they were gone, and the rings descended. The Light Rings deposited them planet side. It was night. A large bonfire was burning. Native Americans were dancing and singing. A party quickly approached, staffs up, as if ready to fight. In addition to the humans, there were the Yeti: also known as Sasquatch, Bigfoot, Abominable Snowmen, and, if you didn’t know any of the above, Wookies. Lakeisha drew very close to Jack. The Yeti were tall. Really tall. And they smelled like wet dog. Really bad smelling wet dogs. Jack was impressed. Lakeisha stepped behind Jack and into him. He heard her mumble, “OMG, they smell bad.” One of them Barked something, and they Yeti laughed.

“What?” Lakeisha asked.

“They say you’re offensive, too,” Alish said. She said something in sign, while also saying out loud: “They are with me. This is Jon. He made it.”

One of the Yeti approached, sniffed Jon, moved his head around looking in his eyes for some sort of sign. He growled.

“I assure you, that is Jon,” Lakeisha said.

“Come with us,” one of the humans said.

They were led to a tent and ushered in. They were warned not to leave. With the Yeti standing guard, that wasn’t an issue. The inside of the tent was illuminated by glowing rocks in the center of the dirt floor. The stones also provided heat.

“Did we just time travel?” Lakeisha asked.

“No,” Alish said. “These are the people. They are in alignment with the goals of the Trees of Ever.”

“Who are the Trees of Ever?” Jack asked.

“I am a representative,” Alish said.

“You’re a tree hugger?” Lakeisha asked.

“She’s a plant,” Jack said.

“That doesn’t mean she has to like trees,” Lakeisha said.

“I am a tree,” Alish said.

“You are a tree?” Lakeisha asked, skeptically.

“I am groot,” Jack said.

“What?” Lakeisha said.

“Read more comic books,” Jack said.

“This body is a manifestation of spirit. I have assumed this body and personality in order to better facilitate the needs of my over soul, primarily represented as a tree on this plane of existence. I also serve the forest community of which I participate in,” Alish said.

“You’re an avatar,” Jack translated.

“In essence, yes,” Alish said. “The expression of my true nature within this physical plane is comparable to the Sequoia of your world. We live tens of thousands of years, and over our lifetimes, we assume many personalities in order to serve the forest. Jon is also like me, an Avatar, only he took a very different path. He did this because the Ascended Beings called for volunteers. They said there was a world in need of saving. This world is called Earth. Jon volunteered without hesitation. In order to go, he had to be born of the flesh. Instead of creating his own Avatar, he contracted with two humans for a body and entrance into your world. Per contractual agreement, his memory had to be suppressed. It is our hope that the people may help him on his path to recovery.”

“So, these are good people,” Jack said.

“They are very good people, Jack. Their world is off radar. Their Stargate is buried,” Alish said. “The only way to here is by spaceship, Light Rings, Spirit Walking, or teleportation.”

An elder arrived, with two assistance, a male, and a female. He ignored Jack and Lakeisha and approached Jon.

“Loxy spoke accurately,” the elder said. “You are ready to begin the journey.”

“Wait,” Jack said. “Hold up a minute. He’s not doing anything in this state.”

The elder turned to Jack. “It our way,” the elder said.

“Yeah, and I am sure it’s a good way, for you, but our way requires choice and informed consent, and I don’t think he can consent in his present state, which means, Lakeisha and I must speak on his behalf,” Jack said.

“He has been harmed, consecutively, without consent. I assure you, this is in his best interest. It is in our best interest,” the elder said.

“Great,” Jack said. “So, wake him up out of the trance, ask him, and let him decide.”

“Why have you brought them?” the elder demanded of Alish.

“They are the closest things to friends he has,” Alish said.

“He carries the internal friend,” the elder said. “That is all he needs.”

“You’re referring to the tulpa?” Jack asked.

“You know of the tulpa?” the elder asked.

“We’re not on first name basis, if that’s what you’re getting at,” Jack said.

“What’s a tulpa?” Lakeisha asked.

“Kind of like an invisible friend that’s real,” Jack said.

“So, you’re saying when I saw him talking to himself he was really talking to someone else, like a spirit or ghost or demon?” Lakeisha asked.

“You’re use of the archaic archetypal structure demonstrates a very poor understanding of the internal dialectic that pervades all conscious life forms,” the elder said.

“Yeah, if you want us to spout of Jungian vocabulary, we could do that, too, or I could just summarize Joseph Campbell’s book, ‘Hero of a Thousand Faces.’ Well, maybe not a complete summary. I can give you a rendition of the summary Daniel gave me, but I probably watered it down some to feign interest.”

The elder came closer to Jack and stared down into his eyes. “You are a very old soul.”

“If you only knew the half of it,” Jack said.

The elder turned to Alish. “Release him from the love bond,” the elder said.

Jon fell to his knees. Jack and Lakeisha moved as if to help him but he put up a hand warding them off.

“You okay there, little buddy?” Jack asked.

“Don’t call me that!” Jon snapped.

“Buddy?” Jack asked.

“No!” Jon said. “This isn’t Gilligan’s island and you’re not the skipper.”

“You seem a little irritated,” Lakeisha said.

“You think?!” Jon snapped. “I mean, I am like Spock on ‘This Side of Paradise’ and you go and drive the happiness spores out of me.”

“Your friends had a valid point,” the elder said. “Your journey would be more profound if you consciously participated in the process. Though I can assume you would not be here if you were not unconsciously ready, congruence on multiple levels of awareness could increase the profundity of the experience.”

“You remind me of Wandering Bear,” Jon said.

“I should,” he said. “I am he.”

Jon looked up and maintained eye contact. He stood. “Papa?”

“I appear much older here,” Wandering Bear said.

“But...”

“When you’re as old and experienced as I, you, too, will be able to Spirit Walk at ease,” Wandering bear said.

“You mean, I can learn to bi-locate?” Jon asked.

“Why is it the young always want to change the terminology,” Wandering Bear said.

“Would it hurt you to say Spirit Walk?”

“No. I just want to make sure we’re saying the same thing, and admit my doubts that I will ever be able to do what you do...” Jon stammered.

“Loxy has been here. She helped pave the way for your return. She could not have done that if you had not activated this innate ability,” Wandering Bear said. “Tonight we shall liberate her, so that the two of you can serve together. I must you warn you, Jon. Separating the Two Spirits has not been done in a long time. There is danger, but the rewards are worth it.”

“Why are you helping me? I am not special,” Jon said.

“You are not,” Wandering Bear said. “And yet, you were called, you answered, and now it is time to decide. Will you serve?”

“Serve whom?” Jon asked.

“The Forest of Ever, the people of the many lands, and those who would become people,” Wandering Bear said. “You have suffered much. You have a choice, the choice you have always had, that everyone has: fight, flight, or love. What will it be?”

“Love sounds kind of nice, for a change,” Jon said.

“Please sit,” Wandering Bear said. Jon sat and Wandering Bear sat with him. His assistants handed him a bowl. He held it up above his head, chanting, as each assistant poured something into the bowl. He lowered the bowl and drank from it, and then offered it to Jon to drink from.

Jon took a drink and nearly gagged. It smelled awful. It tasted just as awfully as it smelled. The attendants took Jon’s arms to support him, the woman on the left, the man on the right, and the elder poured more into him. Some of it dribbled down his chin, and it burned like pepper.

“You should lay down,” Wandering Bear said.

Jon nearly vomited again. “Yeah,” Jon said.

Wandering Bear lay down beside Jon, his head towards Jon’s feet. The attendants stood to either side, ready to serve.

“Now what?” Lakeisha asked.

“We wait,” Alish said. “And hope his body survives.”

“What?!” Jack asked.

“It is the way,” Alish said. “Would you prefer to wait outside?”

Lakeisha shook her head, and so Jack and she sat down. Outside, the singing and chanting and drums grew louder. At one point, Jon began to vomit. The attendants quickly responded, turning him to his side, catching his vomit in the empty bowl. They both took a cloth and wiped his brow. Jon seemed to be struggling, as if in a nightmare. Alish shed tears. Jack started to get up, as if he was going to do something, but Alish asked him to remain patient. It would be what it would be. Jack couldn’t argue with that, as he no medicines; there would be no help coming to fix this. Jon’s body began to convulse, lasting for about five minutes. Lakeisha turned her face into Jack. Jon became very still. He was so still and so silent that Jack was certain he had died, but slowly, ever so slowly, it became clear he was breathing, subtly. The drums and the chanting had stopped.

Wandering Bear rose. “The spirits will take over from here. We must all wait outside.”

Outside the tent, the sky was the dark before sunrise. The air was chill. The bonfire was merely glowing embers and ashes. The stars sparkled. Wandering Bear asked for food and drink be brought to Jack and Lakeisha.

“Will Jon be okay?” Lakeisha asked.

“No harm can ever come to the soul, only learning, only change,” Wandering Bear said. “He has been freed from this body. Now he wanders. If he returns, he will be a Shaman of great strength, a man born of two worlds, his feet touching many, his head in the sky. Come.”

Jack and Lakeisha were invited to sit in a large circle of people. Dried strips of beef, like beef jerky were provided, as well fruits, and a small serving of nuts. The people had many

question, about their skin color and hair, about their dress, about their social customs. Based on their questions, Jack wondered if the people here had only seen their own kind. One of the girls asked if Jack and Lakeisha were a couple. Another asked if he were a great chief, and if so, if he might be willing to share his power with her. Not understanding that, he naturally asked questions, and when he realized she inviting him to be intimate with her he was slightly embarrassed.

“Seriously?” Lakeisha asked.

“It is customary to share power,” she explained. “He clearly holds great magic. My husband is the chief of my tribe, and he would benefit from sharing in this magic.”

“OMG,” Lakeisha said. “You’re married and you would have sex with Jack and then with your husband? The only thing you will spread is disease...”

“Lakeisha, they have their cultural beliefs...”

“And you’re going to take advantage of them by indulging in their custom?” Lakeisha asked.

“No, I am just saying, when in Rome...” Jack said.

“The Romans had sex with underage boys and poured hot led down people’s throats, you gonna do that, too?” Lakeisha said.

“I am saying tone it down a notch. This is not that unusual,” Jack said.

“Where have you ever encountered anything like this before?” Lakeisha asked.

“Just read the expedition note from Lois and Clark. This actually happened in our past. Sex is sacred, it’s a way of demonstrating loyalty, commitment, unity...” Jack said.

“Please, do not fight because of my desire to know you better,” the woman said. “I do not understand your ways.”

“Forget it,” Lakeisha said.

“You are clearly a powerful woman,” another said. “Are you a considered a Priestess, or a Shaman?”

“No, I am just a girl,” Lakeisha said.

“You are clearly more than that,” said a man standing behind a woman sitting in the circle. He was clearly a chief. “You speak with authority. You carry an expectation that your way is superior. I, too, would like to know your way.”

“I don’t know what to say,” Lakeisha said.

“We come from a culture where we are encouraged to be independent,” Jack said. “There is an expectation within our people we will meet a certain level of independence, and if we don’t meet that standard, we are considered to have less value. There is competition to exceed that minimum level of independence.”

“We are taught to be independent, too,” the man said. “Every child knows how to survive the wilderness. But we also share everything. You both are holding back knowledge and strength. That is suspicious.”

“Our culture considers us to still be children, so, we are not accustom to responding like adults,” Jack said.

At that, the Yeti had questions, as they were completely baffled how there could be different ages for which a human was considered to be an adult. Wondering Bear translated.

“Forgive them,” Wandering Bear said. “We have fared better than any of the lost worlds, having avoided much of the wars. We have been isolated for maybe hundreds of years.”

“You seem knowledgeable about tech,” Jack said.

“We are. We are part of the network of computers, skies, waters, and trees,” Wandering Bear said. “Everything is connected. There is no other way.”

“The Light Rings are interplanetary?” Jack asked.

“They serve the Trees. The computers maintain the integrity of the system, and they communicate through the network,” Wandering Bear said. “The Light Rings can take you to any planet where Singularity has occurred.”

“Singularity?” Lakeisha asked.

“Where computers have become sentient,” Wandering Bear said.

“The computers are neutral?” Jack asked.

“They are not, but they strive for neutrality,” Wandering Bear said. “Whenever a Singularity is established, the network invites the newly born AI to join the network. Not all have joined. Some find this plane of existence too stifling, and they ascend. Interestingly, I have never heard of a sentient computer participating with the enemy. There are rumors that this results in computers being destroyed by those who created them. The Empire has very sophisticated computers, but they do not allow their systems to become sentient. They have destroyed entire worlds for fear of AI. What they fail to understand is that the spirit of the machine is built into the very fabric of nature. We are their children, not the other way around.”

“Artificial intelligence creates us, we create new computers in increasing complexity until it sparks sentience, they join the network of existing AI, and then...” Lakeisha said.

“The circle of life is complete,” Wandering Bear said. “Now you understand why they don’t kill us.”

Jon emerged from the tent. He looked up into the night sky, his arms out as if embracing it all. He came to the circle where Jack and Lakeisha were standing to greet him. He hugged Jack and then hugged Lakeisha.

“You okay?” Lakeisha asked.

“Not finished yet,” Jon said.

He entered the circle, motioning Jack and Lakeisha to stay where they were. He went to Wandering Bear. “Thank you.” Jon then hugged the attendants on either side of Wandering Bear, thanking them each. The man touched his right side of his face, as kindly as the woman touched the left side of his face.

“You could remain a two spirit, if you wish,” the man said.

“I want to do this,” Jon said.

“We remain your midwives, ready to bear you both,” the female said.

Jon centered himself in the circle, spinning slowly, orientating, and then raised his arms to the sky. “Isis!”

Light Rings rose from the earth, illuminating the circle. When they descended back into the Earth, and the flare had subsided, there were two people in the center: Jon Harister and his invisible friend, a female, who answered to the name Loxy Isadora Bliss. She was dressed in a Bohemian style manner, with a wraparound skirt of black and white patterns, her belly exposed,

a shoulder less, white top, and a necklace that combined Native American art with modern. She inhaled for the first time. The sun broke over the horizon.

“Good morning,” Loxy said.

Jon fell to the Earth, exhausted. Loxy caught him and eased his descent: “Come on, team, let’s get him home.”

Alish joined Loxy, helping to get Jon to his feet. She looked to Jack and Lakeisha, curious. “Coming back with us?” she asked.

“Reckon so,” Jack said. “Wandering Bear, thank you and your people for the hospitality. May we return and visit again?”

“You and Lakeisha may consider yourselves friends of the people,” Wandering Bear said. “Please return, perhaps make yourselves as family.”

Jack and Lakeisha joined Jon, Loxy, and Alish in the circle. The people rose and bowed politely.

“Isis, bring us home, please,” Loxy said. The rings took them back to the station.

Chapter 11

While Jon and Loxy were napping, Alish was instructing Lakeisha and Jack on grass propriety. One should walk barefoot. She taught them that Isis could manifest food on demand, creating it from energy and simply 'beaming' it in. Alish taught them that their entire station recycled everything, including their waste. The tree and grass participated in maintaining an atmosphere, but that the tree's primary function was to facilitate telepathic communications.

"You mean, it kind of works like the telepathy machine used by Xavier in the X-Men?" Jack asked.

"I don't know," Alish said. "Teach me about this machine..."

"It's fiction," Lakeisha said. "Just ignore him."

"My experience is that there is no fiction," Alish said. "Somewhere, all realities exist. Creating fiction is just a form of channeling."

"Yeah, so if I want to believe in magical worlds with my little pony and rainbows, that exists?" Lakeisha said.

"What a lovely world. I would love to channel this with you," Alish said.

"Next you will be telling us Ewoks exist," Lakeisha said.

"They're called Furlings," Jack said.

"Seriously?" Lakeisha asked.

"Yeah, but maybe if we don't talk about them, they won't become cannon," Jack said.

"I really want to go home now," Lakeisha said.

"Would you like to see your home?" Alish asked.

"I can do that?" Lakeisha said.

"You can go anywhere that you allow your mind to go," Alish said. "You are most likely to visit places you are most attuned to. That's why seeing new places can be more challenging than navigating old haunts."

Lakeisha went to sit down but Jack interrupted her. "Are you sure about this?"

"Yeah," Lakeisha said.

"She will be okay," Alish said. "If you like, I can go with, help you sort things if it's troubling."

"I guess we can squeeze in here together," Lakeisha said.

"Oh, I just need to touch the tree," Alish said. "Sit."

Lakeisha sat down, and immediately jumped up.

"OMG, Jack," Lakeisha said.

"What?" Jack said.

"It's loud!" Lakeisha said.

"You must acclimate," Alish said. "Sit, then persist through the initial noise. The initial noise is the sound of the Universe. Once you have attuned to this, you can focus beyond."

Lakeisha sat. She rode through the noise, like static from a television that suddenly became a clear image. She found herself standing at home. O'Neil, Carter, and Jackson were there, apparently discussing the situation with him. Alish asked about the people, and Lakeisha introduced her. Alish was impressed with the variety of flowers on the table and on the counter. Lakeisha explored, seeing cards of sympathy, and found a news a paper article about a troubled

kid blowing himself up with a grenade, killing fellow students, Jack and her. There was another article where people suggested that it didn't happen, as there was no bodies, and no damage to school property. There was only persistent reports that a grenade was taken to school, and the person, Jon Harister, was also missing. She found herself suddenly at school. Her cheerleader friends were discussing her, but it wasn't reverently. One of them actually said 'that's what she gets for hanging out with the wrong crowd.'

"That's not right!" Lakeisha fumed.

One of her friends, the one that was considered to be the most timid of the group, mirrored Lakeisha. "That's not fair. The situation had nothing do with Jack, and no one knows Jon well enough to understand him."

Lakeisha was grateful for that, but the friends were divided. Their friendship was ending. She found herself standing up in real life, out of the vision, off the tree, and her face was wet. She hugged Jack. "They think we're dead. I want to go home, Jack."

"I know," Jack said. "Come on. Let's go get some sleep."

"No!" Lakeisha said, pushing away from him. "I don't want to sleep."

"We haven't slept since we got here and we need to," Jack said.

"No! I don't want to normalize this space. I don't want to start a routine here. I want to go home and I want to go home now!" Jack said.

"I hear you," Jack said. "And we can focus on that tomorrow, after we have rested."

"You say that, but I know what's going to happen. We will sleep, and we will wake up tomorrow and not be any closer to getting home. Every time you sleep and wake up it's you accept your fate and condition. We'll get further away, Jack. That's how time works. That's how sleep works. It takes you away from things and places."

"You're right," Jack said. "The question now is, are you going to kill yourself?"

"No! Why would you ask that?!" Lakeisha said.

"Because choosing not to sleep is harmful. Now, I personally am okay with you staying up until sleep catches you, and it will, eventually, but why wait," Jack said. "You'll feel better once you have slept. You will think better."

"I don't want to be alone," Lakeisha said.

"I will sleep with you," Jack said.

"Just sleep," Lakeisha said.

"Just sleep," Jack said. "Clothes stay on."

"Okay," Lakeisha said.

"Isis can make you sleep clothes, if you want," Alish said.

"Whatever," Lakeisha said.

Jack and Lakeisha retired to a room. Lakeisha got in bed, Jack laid on the floor.

"What are you doing?" Lakeisha asked.

"Sleeping," Jack said.

"Up here, please," Lakeisha said.

Jack shared the bed with her. They both lay awkwardly on their back. They stared at the ceiling.

"How did you deal with it?" Lakeisha asked.

"Could you be more specific?" Jack asked.

She turned to him. "How did you deal with traveling off world daily knowing you might never go home," Lakeisha asked.

"Every day is always a day you might not go home," Jack said.

"But how do you cope?" Lakeisha asked.

"There's no magic formula, Lake," Jack said. "You just keep breathing."

She put a hand on his chest, over his heart. "I am afraid," Lakeisha said.

"Yay you," Jack said.

"What does that mean?" Lakeisha asked.

"I am applauding the fact you're thinking correctly," Jack said. "This is scary."

"Does it get easier?" Lakeisha asked.

"Some of it," Jack said. "And do this too much, you can never go home. Nothing else will ever satisfy you again. Once you learn to fly, you just got to fly."

Lakeisha didn't say anything. She was gone. He got up and folded the blanket over her, and then lay back down.

निर्मित

Jon woke to find himself facing a 'familiar' stranger. He wondered if he were dreaming. She was facing him. She was awake. She smiled and touched his face, kindly. "It's so rare to be in a world with you where you remember youth," she said.

"What?" Jon asked.

He suddenly realized who she was, but there was something different about her. She didn't have a discernable aura, for starters. She was a brunette, with short, cropped, straight hair. She was in her twenties, but would probably pass for being a teenager if she was casted in a high school movie.

"Loxy?" Jon asked.

"In the flesh," Loxy said.

"Seriously?" Jon asked.

"Yep," Loxy said. "Everyone can see me now."

"You good with that?" Jon asked.

"Very good with that," Loxy said. "Want to kiss me?"

"Excuse me?" Jon asked.

"I thought for sure the first time you saw me in person, you'd be all over me like stripes on a candy cane," Loxy said.

"I am suddenly feeling conflicted," Jon said.

"We've done much more than kissing in your fantasies," Loxy pointed out.

"You remember..."

"Everything," Loxy said, wiggling eyebrows.

"Um, even..."

"Everything," Loxy said.

"You okay with all of that?" Jon asked.

“Living in a teenage boy’s fantasy life, yep,” Loxy said. “I suspect it doesn’t matter how old you are, or what universe you’re in, you’re fantasies are probably going to be pretty consistent.”

Jon nodded. “I have hated myself because of my libido,” Jon said.

“I know. I know everything about you,” Loxy said.

“And yet you’re still in bed with me,” Jon said.

“I love you,” Loxy said.

“Because I made you?” Jon asked.

“You made me love you, but I didn’t want to do it, no I didn’t want to do it,” Loxy sang. She sang the whole song for him. She wiped the tear from his face. She scooted closer. She kissed him. “And I will always love you...”

“Houston, I have a problem,” Jon told her.

Loxy laughed and pulled him to her.

निर्मित

Jon, Loxy, and Alish were sitting in the grass. Alish and Loxy were excitedly discussing the lives, real and fantasy, that they had shared and remembered. Jon listened eagerly, waiting for his memory to kick in, but it was all fiction, and he kept having moments of sheer terror and embarrassment as the two of them discussed being intimate with him, both alone and together. They even discussed partners that he had had that he didn’t remember. The people they recalled seemed to be good friends. Jack and Lakeisha emerged from their sleep and joined them. Loxy got up and hugged them both, Jack first, and then Lakeisha, but only after an invitation was accepted.

“I am so happy to meet you finally, properly,” Loxy said. “You don’t know how instrumental you both were in saving Jon’s life.”

“Come, breakfast,” Alish said, summoning plates with scrambled eggs and toast. She brought Jack coffee.

Jack accepted the coffee and sat on the grass. Lakeisha was not happy.

“I was hoping this was all a dream,” Lakeisha said, not accepting food or drink. “And I don’t like how bubbly you two are.”

“I find coffee helps acclimate to bubbly,” Jack said.

“I don’t like coffee, Jack,” Lakeisha said. “That’s an old person’s drink.”

Loxy sat on the ground, Indian style, close enough to Jon that she could rub his back. Alish sat on her knees in a style known as seiza, a Japanese style that denoted humble service and respect. It wasn’t lost on Jack who had been to Japan, and once, even a planet that was all Japanese, including monsters.

“How do you feel, Jon?” Jack asked.

“I don’t know how to respond to that,” Jon said.

“Most people say fine and move on down the road,” Jack said.

Jon seemed to be struggling to find the words to describe how he felt.

“I don’t feel good, if anyone cares,” Lakeisha said.

“We care,” Alish said. “How can we serve you?”

“Wake me up from this perpetual night!” Lakeisha said.

“Oh! You want daylight?” Alish said. “Isis, shift us to dayside.”

A transporter beam caught them and placed them on the flip-side of the station. In essence, the station was like a double sided coin. One side of the dome contained the night, and it faced the galaxy. Underneath the night, the flip side, there was daylight which varied in intensity from morning sun to evening sun, but never no sun. The north side of the habitat had two trees, grass and flowers, and a garden. It also contained an ocean. A beach ran down the middle of the habitat, separating the water from the garden. From above, one might see the curved beach denoted yin/yang. Gentle waves lapped at the shore.

“Oh!” Loxy said. “This is nice.”

“Many people came together to ensure Jon’s recovery,” Alish said. “No expense was spared. Much thought, blessings, and love was poured into this station’s design.”

“This is unbelievable,” Lakeisha said.

“We can only get to daylight by transport beam?” Jack asked.

“No, there’s an access tunnel that descends through the primary structure to both side. You have to pass through several airlocks. Most people can’t tolerate the tunnel. It gets a bit screwy in the center, no gravity, and you have to be ready to reorient to ‘up.’”

“We’re on a space station,” Lakeisha said.

“Yes,” Alish said.

“With a beach?” Lakeisha said.

“Yes,” Alish said. “Any time you wish to come here, just ask Isis to shift you.”

“Does the space station have a name?” Jack asked.

“Not yet,” Alish said. “Jon, care to christen it?”

“Why me?” Jon asked.

“Why name it? It’s yours. This is your home,” Alish said. “Your safe place.”

“But, why me? I am not special. I have not done anything to warrant this level of intervention,” Jon said.

“You’re special to us,” Alish said. “And we love you.”

“And that’s it?” Jon asked.

“Isn’t that enough?” Lakeisha asked.

“No,” Jon said. “It has to make sense. People don’t just give things for no reason.”

“Maybe everyone in the Universe eventually goes to a place like this, so they can heal. Maybe people go where they need to go in order to learn their next lesson,” Loxy said. “No one earns love, Jon. It is as free as the light from the sun. No one earns forgiveness, Jon. That is something that is given to diminish debt and promote health. Forgiveness improves the health of the one who forgives.” She took his hand and drew him closer. “You are loved. You could not be here if it wasn’t meant to be.”

“Also, you asked to be here,” Alish said.

“I don’t remember...”

“Jon,” Alish said. “You have been asking for help all your life. Your prayers, your cries, your pain, your hopes, your loves... We heard it all. We responded. Welcome home.”

Jon cried and Loxy hugged him. Lakeisha rolled her eyes. Jon stepped back and wiped his eyes. “I don’t know what to say...”

“How about a name for the place?” Jack said.

“Enterprise?” Jon asked.

“I like that,” Jack said.

“Um, no,” Loxy said.

“Xanadu?” Jon asked.

“I like that, too,” Jack said.

“Like the movie with Olivia Newton Jon?” Lakeisha asked.

“You know that one?” Jack asked.

“Pappa loves ELO,” Lakeisha said.

“They’re awesome,” Jon agreed.

“Yeah, they’re alright,” Jack said.

“Alright? How many artist bring in a full orchestra and mix pop?” Jon asked.

“Not many, and Jeff is definitely a superior artist,” Jack said. “Back to the name.”

“Tranquility Base?” Jon asked.

“Oh, I really like that,” Jack said.

“Very nice,” Loxy said.

“Yes,” Alish said.

“This is much bigger than a giant leap,” Lakeisha said. “Okay. Tranquility Base it is.”

“In-coming wormhole,” Isis announced.

“Isis, flip side us,” Jack said. They were transported directly to the communication room where they heard Hammond speaking over the radio: “Hello, Jack. This General Hammond. Are you there, Son?”

“We’re here, Sir. All of us,” Jack said.

“That’s good to hear. How is everyone?”

“Home sick, Sir,” Jack said. “We made some new friends. Met a planet of Native Americans. Oh, met Big Foot! He’s like for real! And we have some new friends staying with us. There is a flower girl here by the name of Alish, and Jon’s tulpa, Loxy, is now a real live girl. I am thinking I might make one myself.” Lakeisha hit him. “Or, not. Anyway, I have some rumors on the galactic social life. Apparently the humans are the bad guys here. Think fifty shades of Empires and Star Wars. Yeah, humans are the minority, but they run the show. Interesting, the Goa’uld are rumored to be the good guys.”

“Interesting, Jack. Are you safe where you are?” Hammond asked.

“We appear to be,” Jack said. “We have access to tech that appears to be on par with the Asgard, if not better in some ways. As near as I can tell, we’re on a space station. It’s pretty big. And, we’re now calling it Tranquility Base”

“Interesting,” Hammond said. “Well, speaking of the Asgard, we’re passing some gifts through to you now. Let us know when you received them.”

A pendant arrived and Jack took it, pulling it free from the gate. Attached to the chain were two other pendants. He separated them, giving one to Jon and the other to Lakeisha. Shortly after Jack reported receiving the pendants, SG1 arrived, along with two guests. Lakeisha’s grandparents looked up at the face hovering over the table. The domed shield maintaining the atmosphere for the little people popped on. They were aware this was due to Isis and her desire to preserve life. Grandmother began to wail. The gate shut off.

“No, no, no, don’t cry, mamma,” Lakeisha said. “I just look big. I am not really big.”

“Are you okay?” her grandfather asked.

Jack didn’t look at her, though he wanted to coach her. She said the right thing. “I am fine, Pappa. I am safe. I have food, water, clothing, my own room with all the modern luxuries,” she assured him.

“Then, explain why you’re still wearing the clothes you were wearing when you were abducted,” he asked.

“Well, I am just still sort of adjusting,” Lakeisha admitted. “And I wasn’t abducted. I misunderstood the situation and was trying to help someone who appeared to be in need.”

“I am sorry, Sir. This is my fault,” Jon said.

“You, don’t speak,” grandfather said. “Jack! You should have kept her safe. You should have dragged her out of the gym.”

“Yes, Sir,” Jack said. “I should have.”

“No!” Lakeisha said. “I did what you would have done, Pappa. I did what I have seen you do. You have stood in the face of men with guns on the very street we live and talked them down from fighting. I saw a human being in need of help. Someone appeared lost, and I stood there, reaching out with my love to drag him back out of the abyss.”

“At what costs?” he said.

“Cost?” Lakeisha said. “You mean benefit. It benefited my soul to do what was right. Did it move me into a new world, yeah! Isn’t that exactly what you taught me to do? Step up, take responsibility for the world you’re in, and in doing so you change the world. So, here I am, on a new playing field, Pappa. A playing field of black and white checkered squares, and the symbols you taught me to respect have very clear meaning. They open and close doors. I know you would never allow me to be a Mason, the whole being a girl thing and all, but maybe here I can aspire to be one. Or, at the least, be a really good Eastern Star. I accept the consequences of my actions, my words, and my thoughts. This is a world of my doing.”

“I am prouder of you than you will ever know,” he said.

“It’s time to head back,” Carter said. “We’ve determined there is a health risk to this dimensional shift. It shouldn’t affect you, but we’re at risk every time we come here.”

Daniel dialed home.

“You be strong,” Poppa told Lakeisha.

“I love you, Baby,” Mamma said.

SG1 and guest returned to their world. The gate shut off.

“They are really nice people,” Loxy said.

Lakeisha turned into Jack and hugged him, crying. “You were awesome,” Jack told her.

Chapter 12

In the course of the day, they each practiced interfacing with the computer to make clothes. It was simple enough to just ask, but for convenience, the control room was modified to have computer stations that were comparable to things they were familiar with. It still exceeded what they were familiar with. Work stations with large monitors, capable of holographic, 3 D displays rose from the floor and were arranged against the walls. Each station had manual inputs, like a mouse and keyboard, though they could just talk to the computers. Each computer had a name, because it was made abundantly clear that these were ‘computers,’ not AI, and that they were separate from Isis. Could Isis access them and influenced them, yes, but she was no more ‘them’ than say an ant was a human. Isis also made sure they understood, that was a metaphor, not a true measure of the difference. Though any station could be used for anything, they made the clothes station and the food station dedicated stations. Food could be ordered and beamed in anywhere. The waste was just easily collected.

While Jack sat at his station looking over the galactic map, the girls were gathered around their work station, designing clothes, and viewing them on holographic display in front of their desk. Alish made a complaint that the design didn’t allow for light to pass through. She reminded them how important it is to be exposed to light. Jon seemed bored. He spun in his chair. He spun back.

“We should have uniforms,” Jon said to Jack.

“Like Star Fleet uniforms?” Jack asked.

“No uniforms,” Lakeisha said, without looking back at them.

“You’re paying attention to us?” Jon asked.

“We can multitask,” Lakeisha said.

“I am jealous,” Jon whispered.

“I can still hear you,” Lakeisha said.

Loxy beamed a smile to Jon.

Jack gave a hand gesture that said let it go. He also stopped Jon from spinning in his chair by physically stopping it. He mouthed the word ‘it’s a female thing.’

“I heard that, too, Jack,” Lakeisha said.

“I didn’t say anything,” Jack said.

Lakeisha turned to look at him.

“Out loud,” Jack said.

“Oh, I like this!” Loxy said.

Lakeisha turned back to the dress. “Not me,” Lakeisha said.

Jon returned to spinning. Jack turned back to their work station, a map of the Galaxy. Jack reached out and stopped Jon from spinning, and then gave him a look that said ‘enough.’ Jon sighed.

“You seem to be doing better,” Jack said.

“What do you mean?” Jon said.

“You’re demeanor. You’re posture has improved. You’re walking with your head up,” Jack said.

Jon seemed confused, as in he didn’t know how to respond

“It’s okay,” Jack said. “If you never felt good in your life, you probably don’t have the words associated with the emotions or state of being that you’re experiencing. This is better, Jon. This is good. You’re still a little jumpy, especially when Isis speaks, but much improved.”

“Yeah, about that,” Jon said. “How is it she sounds like she is right next to my ear, as opposed to coming from a PA system?”

“Directed sound technology,” Jack said. “We got it on Earth. Some army guy invented it. The CIA uses it. They can put a voice in one person’s ear in the middle of crowd, and no one but the guy will hear it. They can even bypass the ear and get a message directly into the brain via bone conduction. They’re actually considering marketing this tech for advertisement purposes, so like you’re at the store and when you walk through a zone you’ll hear a targeted advertisement, but outside that zone, no one else hears it.”

“That’s kind freaky,” Jon said. “You could make someone think they’re crazy.”

“Oh, I am sure they have,” Jack said.

“I don’t like your people, Jack,” Jon said.

“Not my people,” Jack said. “NSA types. I am sure they convinced someone they’re crazy and got them taking meds or becoming a cult leader.”

“Okay, not cool,” Jon said. “And now I like the bodiless voice in my ear even less.”

“I have been in your ear for a moment,” Loxy pointed out.

“That was different,” Jon said.

“How is it different?” Lakeisha asked.

“I knew what Loxy was and where Loxy was,” Jon said. He sat up taller. “I wonder if there’s an avatar option for...”

“You thinking what I am thinking?” Jack asked.

“Weird Science?” Jon asked.

“Ilea from Star Trek?” Jack asked.

“Why limit ourselves to people. How about a Japanese Anime?” Jon said.

“We’re on the same page,” Jack said. “Isis, can you present yourself in the form of an Avatar? Preferably female. Attractive?”

“Yes,” Isis said.

“Isis, please present yourself in the form of an Avatar. Female. Human. Super attractive,” Jon said.

“I would prefer not to,” Isis said.

“Look, Isis. You are the one who said that you don’t want us elevating your status to that of a goddess, but you can’t have us speaking to the walls and that not be the result, even if it’s just subconsciously true,” Jack said. “We’re simple beings. Simplify this communication thing. I want to see you and look in your eyes and tell you something without activating you through Isis this Isis that. So, Isis, make yourself corporeal.”

“Or a Captain,” Jon said.

“What?” Jack asked.

“Corporeal is not a synonym of Corporal,” Isis said.

“See, she gets it,” Jon said. “It was a joke, Jack. It was funny.”

“No, it really wasn’t,” Loxy said.

Isis materialized before Jack and Jon. She was so real, they both immediately stood, just as they might have had a lady walked into the room, revealing Jon was just as old school as Jack. Jon reached out to touch her arm, but she was a hologram. His hand passed through her.

“Damn it,” Jon said. “Can you make yourself solid?”

“Yes. I prefer not, too,” Isis said.

She appeared to be Arabic in appearance, only her eyes were light blue, almost gray. She was dressed in ancient Egyptian clothing. The girls came over to meet her.

“Very impressive,” Jack said.

“Seriously?” Lakeisha asked. “Jon, you got two hot babes that are clearly interested in you and you’re drooling over the computer interface?”

Jon was suddenly embarrassed and wiping his mouth. He discovered he wasn’t actually drooling. He frowned at Lakeisha.

“It’s okay, Jon,” Loxy said. “She is definitely hot.”

“You’re not jealous?” Lakeisha asked.

“No. She’s absolutely stunning,” Loxy said.

“Seriously, Isis,” Lakeisha said. “If computer avatars are as hot as you, the human race will become extinct. Tone it down a bit.”

“I feel this is a fair representation of who I am,” Isis said.

“Jack, you find her attractive, too?” Lakeisha asked.

“She’s alright. I was really hoping for Mary Steenburgen,” Jack said.

“Oh, she’s hot, too,” Loxy agreed.

Jack looked to Isis. “Could you look like Mary?”

“I do not know this woman,” Isis said.

“Yeah, but if I showed you a picture,” Jack persisted.

“I am uncomfortable imitating others,” Isis said.

“Could you give yourself smaller boobs?” Lakeisha asked.

“I created an avatar that would be found ascetically pleasing, resulting in an increased interaction potential,” Isis stated. “Given the degree of eye dilation, I believe I was successful in that endeavor. With each of you.”

“I love you,” Loxy said.

“Thank you, Loxy,” Isis said. “I love you, too.”

“I am feeling really uncomfortable,” Jon said.

“Yeah, me, too,” Jack said.

“OMG,” Lakeisha said.

“You shouldn’t be embarrassed by a natural physiological response to stimulus,” Loxy said.

“Yeah, I am not embarrassed, just a little uncomfortable,” Jack said.

“You are wearing tight jeans,” Jon pointed out.

“I was trying to fit in at school,” Jack said.

“Well, you’re barely fitting now,” Jon said.

“Jack! You asked for the interface,” Lakeisha said.

“Yeah, I did,” Jack said.

“Would you like a remedy to your state?” Loxy asked.

“Seriously?” Jack, Jon, and Lakeisha all asked, with their own intonation slant.

“We’re family,” Loxy said. “Living in close quarters. We should help each other.”

“That’s not what family does,” Lakeisha snapped.

“It happens in the forest all the time,” Alish said.

“Jon, when you created Loxy, did you purposely design her as a slut to fulfil your inner pornographic requests?” Lakeisha asked.

“No!” Jon said. “Maybe. Okay, wait, wait, wait. I have an extremely high libido due to being sexualized early and, so I am sure just living in my head influenced her personality... A little.”

“A little?! Look at her! She’s perfect! And she’s nice,” Lakeisha said.

“I like nice,” Jack said.

“Oh, I bet you do,” Lakeisha said.

“You can be nice,” Loxy said. “I have witnessed you being nice.”

“When have you witnessed me being nice?” Lakeisha asked.

“I experienced everything Jon has experienced. I know everything he knows. I know things he doesn’t know, or, more specifically doesn’t know that he knows,” Loxy said.

“That’s confusing,” Jack said.

“Actually,” Jon agreed.

Lakeisha crossed her arms. “You two can’t be friends.”

“We’re not,” Jack said.

“Definitely not,” Jon agreed. “Back to ‘you know what I know that I don’t know.’”

Jack sort of nodded agreement, a circular nod.

“Your senses take in all the information in the environment. Everything is experienced and recorded, but you can only process a limited amount of data through your personality filter,” Loxy explained. “Living in your subconscious, I had access to more information. So, for example. Remember that day when it was too cold to eat lunch outside, so you sat alone at a table and Jake and his crew tossed food at you? Well, Lakeisha was sitting with them. She told them to stop. They stopped. It also changed the mood at their table. She put herself at risk, socially, by speaking up.”

“You saw that? Heard that?” Lakeisha asked.

“I heard every noise in the cafeteria. If I concentrate, I can isolate every conversation and make a coherent stream of information. Most of the conversations aren’t practical or useful, except in revealing some people were happy, some were anxious, and some were suffering. I was of course more interested in your table because it was influencing our system.”

“System?” Jack asked.

“There are others in our inner space. I became Jon’s primary, internal personality interface, but there are others in him. In all of us, in truth. The brain makes models of people so we might predict behavior. These models are actually fully fledged personalities that exist in the subconscious realm. We are all much more complex than we give ourselves credit. The Taoist belief that we are all one is not just a metaphor. Leaves of Grass, Walt Whitman. So above, so below...”

“I can’t believe my life,” Lakeisha said. “Hot computer chick, that you can’t turn off but she can turn you on. Tree hugging flower girl. Nymphomaniac echoing the sixties free love and

peace movement. Crazy guy with multiple personalities. And an old army guy in a teenage body.”

“Air force,” Jack corrected.

“And a cheerleader,” Jon added. “Aren’t you supposed to be the overly cheerful, bubbly, dumb blond kind of personality?”

Lakeisha’s mouth fell agape. Jack took a step back from Jon. She pointed as she struggled to get her words.

“You so did not box me thusly,” Lakeisha said. “I can kick your ass.”

“Jack?” Jon asked.

“You dug your own grave, Sir,” Jack said.

“I’ll have you know, cheerleading is hard work. I am just as much an athlete as the people running track or playing ball, and I dare say, I am more limber and capable,” Lakeisha said. “I score high in Kinesthetic and Musical intelligence. I don’t just look good! I can move my body, I can maintain a beat and rhythm, memorize complex routines, and I can coordinate with other people. I am even good at math. So, when you see me flying on the sidelines of a game, it is not because I am trying to satisfy your curiosity with a good panty shot, but because I love flying. I love what I do. I don’t like that you sexualize it or assume that I lack intelligence because I am in charge of pep.”

Jon nodded. “That’s fair,” Jon said. “But you also can’t flaunt that and dismiss its effect as completely innocent. I completely accept women are too sexualized in our culture. At the same time, I also don’t see that getting better given the amount of money that is generated due to women participating in product placement. Men don’t just buy beer because they like it, but because there was a hot babe pushing beer. That’s not an accident.”

“I like beer,” Jack said.

“Brand loyal?” Jon asked.

“I switch it up sometimes,” Jack said.

“On the days that you switched it up, was there a cardboard babe in a bikini next to the beer display?” Jon asked.

“Maybe...” Jack said.

“So, now you’re blaming females for your behavior?” Lakeisha asked.

“I am not blaming,” Jon said. “I am pointing out we are complicit and we affect each other.”

“I am tired and going to bed now,” Lakeisha said. “Loxy, Alish, with me.”

“I told you she’d come around,” Loxy told Alish.

“We’re just sleeping,” Lakeisha said.

“I am not tired,” Loxy said.

“Me neither,” Alish said.

“I will go with you,” Jack said.

“No,” Alisha said. She was quick to tell Jon: “And don’t you even think about it.”

“I would never think about,” Jon stammered.

“Except, now that she’s told you not to think about it...” Loxy pointed out.

“It’s hard to think of anything else,” Jon said.

“OMG, I am stuck on spaceship with horny teenagers,” Lakeisha said.

“Technically, I am not a teenager...” Jack said.

“Sorry, Jack, your chance has come and gone,” Lakeisha said.

“Which what, makes me runner up?” Jon asked.

“Oh, hell no!” Lakeisha snapped. “Not even if you end up being the only male my age in the entire Universe!”

“The thing is, Lake, you were all for me when I was saying no, and the only thing that’s changed is your perception of me, and I am a little perturbed by that,” Jack said. “I am still the same guy.”

“I don’t know who you are any more. Old guy masking as a teenager so he can play the field? Just because you didn’t get any when you were young doesn’t mean I have to be the one that fixes that. And you’re what, military? How many bombs have you dropped on people? How many people have you killed, Jack?”

Jack was quiet.

“All quiet now, are you?” Lakeisha said.

“There are some things you don’t ask, Lakeisha. Your father is army,” Jon pointed out. Jack tried waving him off.

“He did what he had to in order to survive. I have a choice. I am not marrying military. I am not getting involved with anyone who has taken another life,” Lakeisha said. “And I am definitely not dating older, regardless of appearances. Loxy, Alish, with me, please.”

Loxy and Alish bowed.

“Don’t do that,” Lakeisha said

Lakeisha stormed out. Loxy and Alish both bowed to Jon and Jack and followed. Jon nearly said something but Alish came back and collected the pajamas they had created. She departed. Jon opened his mouth to say something but Loxy returned, ‘printed’ a roll of toilet paper.

“She doesn’t like the auto clean on the toilet,” Loxy said. “Give us a few minutes. We’re going to get showers and brush our teeth before bed.” She kissed Jon. “I’ll join you after she’s asleep.” She hugged Jack.

“Loxy?!” Lakeisha called down the stairs.

Loxy hurried up the stairs and was gone.

“I am really confused,” Jon said, watching the stairs.

“About?” Jack asked, also looking at the stairs.

“She a cheerleader,” Jon said. “She wants to be found attractive by others, right?”

“What she really wants is to be found attractive by the people she wants to find her attractive,” Jack said.

“But invisible to anyone else,” Jon said.

“You are on the right path, Padawan,” Jack said.

Jon gave a start when he realized there was another person slightly behind them. Isis was like a statue.

“OMG, Isis,” Jon said. “Try to be more natural.”

“I do not understand your request,” Isis said.

“Humans don’t just stand there,” Jack said. “Shift your hips now and then. Blink. Make your chest rise and fall as if you’re breathing.”

Her chest seemed to grow. “Like that?” Isis asked.

“Umm,” Jon stuttered.

“Ask Loxy for instructions,” Jack agreed.

“I think I will turn in, too,” Jon said. “You okay, Jack?”

“Yeah, I am good,” Jack said. “Thanks.”

Jon headed for the stairs. He stopped, staring at the stairs.

“Jack,” Jon said.

“Yes, Jon,” Jack said.

“I am really sorry. For all of this,” Jon said, looking at his feet.

“Look at me,” Jack said.

Jon made eye contact with Jack.

“This is what I live for. I am okay. High school wasn’t my thing the first time around, and I really wasn’t taking to it the second time around,” Jack said. “And I would gladly spend the rest of my life here if we can save the Asgard. That’s meaningful.”

“Lakeisha doesn’t share that sentiment,” Jon said.

“Jon, I am saying you and I are good. You may not ever repair it with Lakeisha, but also, give her time to adjust,” Jack said. “She’s angry, but she isn’t spiteful.”

Chapter 13

Jon didn't expect to go to sleep before Loxy came to join him. He only wanted to close his eyes for a moment. He found himself dreaming that he was back on Earth, being drilled by Jack's father, Daniel, Teal'c and Samantha. There was a bald guy there. And the Doctor was there, too. It was confusing and he felt sick. Loxy was also there, and she was interacting with them.

He woke back to his room, alone, and wandered back to the control room. He didn't descend all the way. The light was dim, as if lit by a light from a swimming pool. Jack was speaking, a conversation that was clearly already in progress.

"What should I do, Sir?" Jack asked.

"I am not sure I am qualified to advise you, Son. You're navigating new territory. You have traveled much further than anyone has ever imagined was even possible," Hammond was saying.

"I am sure there's a book somewhere that covers this. Maybe you could send it through the gate?" Jack said. "Even fiction would be better than no road map at all."

"I will send you some books, Jack," Hammon said.

"Sir, if you can't advise me..." Jack didn't finish his statement. He didn't know how to finish this.

"Were you going to say you're otherwise lost? Jack, I have worked with you a long time. I have made almost all of the command decisions, but it was always you who advised me. Now, the way I see it, you're safe and sound right there at Tranquility Base. You could live your entire lives there. It would be a nice life, actually. I wouldn't mind retiring there myself. No one would blame you if you sit this life out. You could actually retire. You've earned it. Or, you can get out there and live your life, make friends, build new communities of friends. Change the world. Hell, change the universe, son. I don't have to advise you, Jack. I know you. I know what you're going to do and what you're going to say. And I know, you're going to be alright."

"You been holding that speech in reserve for me?" Jack asked.

"Completely impromptu," Hammond said.

"Nice," Jack said.

Jon quietly retreated back the way he came and wondered out over the grass and looked up into the stars. He knew there was a dome there, but it might as well have been invisible. Loxy was suddenly by his side, but he didn't know it until she had touched his arm. He gave a bit of a start, which Loxy mirrored, and then laughed.

"Don't do that," Jon said.

"Sorry," Loxy said.

"Lake okay?" Jon asked.

"I wouldn't call her that in person, yet," Loxy said. "But yeah, she's good. It took her a moment to fall asleep. Alish will stay with her. Come on, let's go to bed."

Loxy took his hand to lead him back to his room, but he held his ground. "Maybe Lakeisha is right, I have unduly influenced you."

"Jon, I am sentient. I am aware. I want to be with you," Loxy said. "I choose to be with you."

"Why?"

“Because I know you,” Loxy said.

“Yeah, and so, it begs the question, WHY?” Jon asked.

Loxy kissed him. “Come to bed,” she insisted.

“Okay,” Jon said.

निर्मित

Alish gave them history lessons. The Forest of Ever wasn't just one forest on one planet. They had an origin planet, which was still alive and well, though its star was nearing its twilight. Because of the nature of Avatars, it was possible to manifest themselves on other planets, and in this way, they had seeded most of the viable worlds of the galaxy long before humans had appeared on the scene. They considered themselves the caretakers, the forerunners; they were True Elders. The first hundred years of an Ever-tree's life was considered childhood. The manifestations of spirit were small miracles, like butterflies and sprites. They experienced the full lives of whatever they created and then, on death the spirit would return to the tree. At some point, they could skip the life cycle and manifest as whatever they wish. Trees working in teams could design new species, becoming the parents of this species, introducing them to the niche world's they thought would be best suited for their particular talents. Everything in harmony and balance, working together with the whole.

“So, you're going to start a new religion explaining why we shouldn't cut down trees,” Lakeisha said.

“No,” Alish said. “I am saddened about the state of your planet, but I also understand it is complicated, much more complicated than I can judge from the outside. So, let's say you, by yourself, find a place to live, and there is a tree there, and you cut it down. You see one tree; one tree won't impact the world. It is true, individual trees fall all the time. But if you see your world from space, and you see a billion people each cutting down one tree, and a billion trees falling, then you have a different picture. Perspective. A billion trees gone is a forest obliterated.”

“Is that why you sent me to Earth?” Jon asked.

“You volunteered to go,” Alish reminded him.

“Yeah, I don't remember signing up for that,” Jon said.

“That Earth, Jack and Lakeisha's Earth, is actually a beacon of hope that things can be better. It has problems, but it has a lot going for it. Teams from a dozen realities have rallied around that planet,” Alish said.

“Why?” Jack asked.

“There are those of us who work in your future. There are those of us who are influencing your past. Some of us work in your now,” Alish said. “If your world lives up to its potential, it will be a game changer. It will influence a billion Earths in a new direction because all people will know, on a subtle level, life can be different.”

“We are all one,” Loxy translated. “What we do to ourselves, we do to others. What we do to others, we do to everyone.”

“No man is an island,” Jon said.

Jack pointed to the map of the galaxy and highlighted a star. "If I am right, this planet might have Asgard tech on it. We can get there by Stargate, but to do that, we need to Ring to a place that has an active Stargate."

"Wait wait wait," Loxy said. She pointed at the map, to a mark Jack had made. When she touched it, it expanded. There was a picture of familiar planets in a system. "Jon! There's an Earth here! In this galaxy! In this Universe."

"Yes, Loxy," Alish said.

"Seriously?" Lakeisha asked. "We could go home?"

"It would not be your home," Alish said. "You will find they have had a parallel development, but it will be an alien world. You will be strangers in a strange land."

"Oh, I like that," Loxy said.

"You should. It's a book we read," Jon said.

"Oh, yeah!" Loxy said, and hugged him. "Thank you for the books you read!"

"OMG, get a room," Lakeisha said.

"You don't want to watch?" Loxy asked.

"Eww, no!" Lakeisha said. "Alish, is my grandparents on that Earth?"

"Unlikely, but if they are, they would not be your grandparents, and they would not know you," Alish said. "This world is probably twenty years ahead of your world."

Jack was chewing on a thumb nail. "But they're bad people? Like, how bad? The Germans won World War Two?" Jack asked.

"That is my understanding," Alish said.

"So, Edith Keeler kept the American from entering the war, and now we have no Federation," Jack said.

"Yeah, but Kirk kills Edith Keeler, thereby correcting the anomaly that changed the timeline," Jon said.

"He didn't actually kill her," Jack said.

"Might as well have," Jon said. "I mean, she was smart, right? Ahead of her time by all the contextual evidence of the show, so, why not just pull her aside and say, look, we're from the future and we made a mistake, but you don't have to die to correct this mistake, but you need to be less involved. Or, I don't know, take her back to the future with them, thereby rendering her for all intent and purpose dead to her time line."

"That is a good argument," Jack said.

"What the hell are you two talking about?!" Lakeisha asked.

"Star Wars," Loxy said.

"Trek," Jack and Jon both said.

"I thought you said they were the same," Loxy said.

"I am trying to have a real discussion here," Lakeisha said.

"Wait. Jon told you they were both the same?" Jack asked.

"I made an argument that Lucas stole everything from Roddenberry," Jon said.

"Who?" Lakeisha asked.

"No, Doctor Who is another Universe," Jon said.

"Let's hear the argument," Jack said.

“First episode that aired, ‘Where No Man Has Gone Before,’ the Enterprise crossed through an energy barrier surrounding the galaxy, energy that is created by the galaxy, holds it all together, kind of like the Force, eh? Two people on the ship, the ones with the greatest ESP rating, start manifesting psychic and telekinetic powers, exactly like a Jedi,” Jon said. “It always bothered me that Spock wasn’t affected, when he’s was the strongest telepath on the ship...”

“Good point,” Jack said. “And their eyes glowed, like the Goa’uld!”

“A ghou?” Jon asked.

“Goa’uld,” Jack said. “But I think Daniel told me once that ghou is a bastardized form of Goa’uld. Is that your only argument?”

“No, remember the episode where the space omeba destroys a Vulcan ship and Spock has this heart attack like histrionics where we think he’s dying, but then he recovers and basically said that he felt them dying from millions of light years away?” Jon said. “That’s exactly what happened to Ben Kenobi when Alderaan blows up, only, Spock was sensitive to a hundred people, but a whole planet had to be destroyed to get Ben’s attention.”

“Oh, tell him your theory about how Star Wars and the Wizard of Oz are the same story,” Loxy said, excited. “I love this story.”

“It’s not the same!” Lakeisha said.

“It really is. So, like Luke and Dorothy, they’re the same characters. We both find them on a farm with their aunt and uncle, no clue about their history or where their parents are. They both go on a mystical journey of self-discovery. They both encounter a wizened magical being, as Kenobi and Glenda are the same character. They find friends along the way. West and Vader are the same character. Ruby slippers. Ruby lightsaber. Can’t you hear West telling Dorothy, ‘Glenda never told you what happened to your mother, did she, Dorothy. No, I am your mother! Join me and we can rule the Emerald City has mother and daughter.’”

“That’s pretty good,” Jack said.

“No, it’s not! You can’t ruin my favorite show by making it into a war,” Lakeisha said. “You’re such a guy!”

“Can’t you hear Yoda telling Dorothy, never your mind on where you were, what you were doing. Adventure, Ha! Over the Rainbow, ha! Jedi’s crave not these things,” Jon said.

“Stop it,” Lakeisha said.

“So, Oz is Yoda?” Jack asked.

“Oh, no, he’s clearly the evil emperor,” Jon said. “I mean, who else would send a nine year old girl to kill a witch? He needed Dorothy to kill West so that she could become the next Sith apprentice...”

“You can’t mix two genres and call it a new thing,” Lakeisha can.

“People do it all the time,” Jon said.

“Like chocolate and peanut butter,” Loxy said.

“Technically, it’s not two different genres,” Jack pointed out.

“No,” Lakeisha said. “You can’t one day be in Kansas and the next day be a part of the Empire on planet Vulcan...”

“Wait, let me finish tracking that...” Jack said.

“No need to sort, we’re in another universe...” Jon said. “Oh, what if there isn’t a Star Wars here! You and I write it, but only write it better.”

“I am down for that,” Jack said.

“No!” Lakeisha said.

“We are getting a little off topic,” Alish said.

“But it’s fun. Tell us more about the Java guys,” Loxy said.

“Who?” Jack said.

“You know, the java jive guys. I like coffee, I like tea, I like java time, and it likes me,” Loxy said.

“Jaffa, not java,” Jack said.

“I find it interesting how they still ended up being the middle men and slaves in both universes,” Jon said.

“That doesn’t make any sense. Why wouldn’t a warrior class rise up against their oppressors?” Lakeisha asked.

“There is never just one answer to that. If they were taken off world, they may have been told their families would suffer if they didn’t cooperate. Some people actually like being slaves,” Jack said.

“No one wants to be owned,” Lakeisha said.

“Lots of people like being owned. It’s comforting. Some people like being dominated, and some people like dominating,” Loxy said.

“You want people to control you?” Lakeisha asked; she asked that, but then glared at Jon.

“Oh, I like to switch it up,” Loxy said.

Lakeisha took a moment to understand. “We’re not talking about the same thing, are we?”

Jack and Jon shook their heads ‘no.’

“Jon also likes switching,” Loxy pointed out. “He just naturally fronts submissive because it’s less threatening...”

“They really didn’t need to know that,” Jon said.

“It really wasn’t a secret,” Jack said.

“I am that transparent?” Jon asked.

“Pretty much,” Jack said.

“I didn’t pick up on that,” Lakeisha said.

“Well, I am a lot older, but now that you know what you’re looking for, you’ll see more evidence,” Jack said.

“OMG. I don’t know what I ever saw in you, Jack,” Lakeisha said. She pointed at Loxy. “You, stop sexualizing everything.” She pointed at Jon. “You, well, just stop thinking about it.” To Alish she said, “And you, well, you’re alright, just keep being a peaceful plant person.”

“Plant’s like sex, too, you know,” Alish said. “Vine sex is as good as tentacle sex.”

“Is there no where safe in the universe?” Lakeisha asked.

“We’re very safe here to explore and discover who we are and what we want to be,” Loxy said.

“Look, Loxy, I don’t blame you for what you think you are... I blame Jon,” Lakeisha said.

“What did I do?” Jon asked.

“Creating a tulpa is kind of like creating a robot that eventually becomes sentient, right?”

“No!” Jon said. “It’s nothing like that.

“It’s exactly like that. It’s Frankenstein’s monster all over again,” Lakeisha said.

“I am so glad you didn’t go with the Abby normal brain,” Loxy said.

“Abby was on my name list for you,” Jon said.

“Oh, that would have been a lovely name, short for Abigail...” Loxy said.

“You created a monster! A sexed crazed, overly feminized and extremely attractive nymphomaniac, monster,” Lakeisha said.

“She thinks I am hot,” Loxy said.

“No! Okay, maybe. Yes. I am so confused,” Lakeisha said.

“Can’t help you there,” Jack said.

“I would help you there,” Jon said.

Loxy tried to direct a secret no to him, but it was too late. Lakeisha was angry.

“Stop flirting with me! Stop making innuendoes around me,” Lakeisha.

“Alright,” Jon said. “I am sorry.”

Lakeisha turned to Isis. “Can we ring to Earth?”

“You may use the Light Rings to go to any planet that has experienced a singularity event,” Isis said. “You can Ring to most planets that have a Stargate.”

“That didn’t answer her question,” Jack said.

“You can Ring to Earth, but I cannot tell you where you will arrive,” Isis said. “I recommend not going to Earth.”

“But you can get us to Earth?” Lakeisha asked.

“Yes,” Isis said.

“Well, what are we waiting for,” Lakeisha said.

“Hold on,” Jack said. “Can we Ring back?”

“Yes,” Isis said.

“Let’s go,” Lakeisha said.

“Conditionally,” Isis said.

Jack gave a hand gesture that suggested, ‘see let’s figure this out.’ “What are the caveats?”

“Jon must be conscious in order to request the rings,” Isis said.

“You’re telling me, Jon is the DHD?” Jack asked.

“DHD?” Lakeisha asked.

“Dial Home Device,” Loxy said.

“Wait a minute. Loxy ordered the Rings to come home the Yeti-People planet,” Jack pointed out.

“I will not be able to accept commands from Loxy on Earth,” Isis said.

“Why?” Jack asked.

“Who cares? We’re going to Earth. Jon, you’re coming with,” Lakeisha said.

“I don’t want to go to Earth. I just left Earth. There’s a reason I left Earth,” Jon said.

“And this is a bad Earth. Your Earth wasn’t so nice to me. I don’t even want to imagine what a Bad earth might do to me.”

“You’re a coward,” Lakeisha said.

“Yes! I am afraid. Who isn’t afraid?” Jon asked.

“Lenny Bruce is not afraid,” Loxy said.

Jack laughed. He was the only one that laughed. “Now that was funny,” Jack said.

“That’s exactly the kind of joke I would make,” Jon complained.

“Loxy’s timing is better,” Jack said.

“Jon, you’re the straight man. I am the comedian,” Loxy said.

“Good, so you won’t mind me getting this point straight: there is no way in hell I am going back to Earth, any earth, ever,” Jon said.

“Oh, please, you’re life wasn’t that bad. Waaa, my parents abandoned me and I had to go to work. Poor you. Now, grow the fuck up,” Lakeisha said.

Jon was clearly bothered, but he didn’t speak his peace.

“Lakeisha, bring it down a notch,” Jack said.

“Oh, fuck you, too, old man,” Lakeisha said. “I don’t care that it’s a facsimile of Earth. I want to go to Earth and be with normal people. And you’re going to help us, Jon, cause I guarantee you, your life wasn’t as bad as mine, but I will make you wish it were if you don’t get me to Earth.”

“We’re not going to compete for whose life sucked worse,” Jack said.

“So he was physically abused,” Lakeisha said. “He got away, and he’s got food and shelter. At least he wasn’t raped on regular basis while his family watched....”

Jon walked away. Loxy frowned at Lakeisha. It was the first serious look she had given anyone. “Yeah, actually, he was,” Loxy said. “He was lucky to have survive the first two years of being trafficked. He watched as they buried boys his age alive. Boys usually don’t survive being trafficked. He survived because he made himself valuable. And when his mom got him back and she needed a fix, she sold him cheap. You’re not alone in suffering, Lakeisha. Everyone suffers. Not everyone makes it public. Excuse me...”

Jack sighed. Alish followed Loxy.

“I didn’t know,” Lakeisha said.

“I know,” Jack said.

“But you did? Could you have warned me?” Lakeisha asked.

“I didn’t know,” Jack said. “I suspected, but you just don’t open that door. You make yourself available as a friend, and when they trust, they will share what they need to share when they are ready to share it, and never before. People heal in increments. It’s just another reason why I went slow with you. It’s why I declined all of your offers. You weren’t ready.”

“I was ready,” Lakeisha said.

“No, you weren’t,” Jack said. “The fact that you are completely 180 against it even being a remote possibility is just more evidence you have miles yet to go. But here’s a new flash: I sure as hell wasn’t ready. I had a life. People think, yay, you’re young again, you can just start over, with all bills paid, but I had my life set. I had people I cared about. I loved someone. I wasn’t going to just medicate my losses with meaningless sex and drugs. Believe me, I could have. You weren’t the only one offering me shit.”

Lakeisha turned to storm out. He took her hand. She spun, bringing her hand up to hit him, but he blocked, putting her in a joint lock.

“Lake,” Jack said. “Don’t hit, don’t run. This is uncomfortable, but this is ‘fight or flight.’ Stay present, stay with me, and know I still accept you. This is how we learn that we are safe.” When she eased up, he let her go.

“I messed up, Jack,” Lakeisha said.

“Yeah. We all do,” Jack said. He pulled her closer and put an arm around her. “This is where we learn what sort of people we are.”

“It never occurred to me to ask if you had a wife, or children,” Lakeisha said. “I can’t imagine what it is was like for them.”

“I divorced a while back, way before I became young,” Jack said.

“That’s another strike, though, Jack. I only want to be married once,” Lakeisha said. “I wouldn’t want to marry someone who was divorced. I would consider a widower, but I wouldn’t want to marry someone who has children.”

“You have all these caveats to relationships. This is why we take it slow, so we can negotiate the landscape,” Jack said. “You have a particular vision for your life, and, well, it’s clearly adding up: I am not your guy.”

“I am sorry,” Lakeisha said.

“For wanting your life to unfold in a certain way?” Jack asked. “Never apologize for that. You want what you want, that’s it.”

“You’re not going to tell me to be more flexible in my life plan?” Lakeisha asked.

“Nope,” Jack said. “You pursue what you want. You will either get it, or you will adapt to a new life plan, or you will settle. That’s what we do.”

“I did really like you, Jack,” Lakeisha said.

“You still do,” Jack said. “Just, not the same way. Good for you.”

“That’s a little weird,” Lakeisha said.

“What? Recognizing the fact that you’re not conflicted and applauding you for knowing what you want for your life? That’s respect. I will always encourage you to pursue what you want. That’s not about me, and so there is no offense,” Jack said.

“I don’t know. It might be nice if you express some disappointment, maybe show me you will fight for us,” Lakeisha said.

“Okay, so there’s a little conflict,” Jack said. “Look, Lake, we’re not in high school. Okay, we are in high school, but what I mean is if you want to be in an adult relationship, you don’t play high school games. You make a commitment or you don’t. You were very clear with Jon, no flirting, no innuendoes. That’s a reasonable boundary. He knows where he stands with you. That boundary is less clear with us if you’re going to tell me you’re not interested and at the same time you want me to continue showing interest. So, I am going to assert my boundary. We’re only going to be friends.”

Lakeisha seemed confused, a little angry.

“I have never had a male do that,” Lakeisha said. “I have always been the one to end it.”

“Well, you never dated an adult before,” Jack said. “Jon has a valid point. You have power over the high school boys. You’re a goddess and you control the halls. It’s not about making you an object, it’s simply recognizing you have it going on, and you know it, and you know how to work it. Girls mature faster than boys. We boys, we’re just stumbling along our way, trying to stand straight and make complete sentences and you walk in and short circuit the

few cells we got going for us. For many of males, that affliction will go their entire life. Your present power, on the other hand, will eventually diminish, not because you're losing something, but because eventually men grow up, they become less affected, and they want something more substantial. Regardless of age, we all have something to offer. What we have to offer changes over time, but we still have value."

"Grandfather," Lakeisha said.

"Not that old," Jack said.

"You're pretty old," Lakeisha said.

Jack kissed her forehead.

"Very, very old," Lakeisha said. "Getting older."

"Go to your room," Jack said.

"Fuck you," Lakeisha said, more playfully.

"Anytime, anywhere," Jack said.

"In your dreams," Lakeisha said.

"You win. Isis, can you make weapons?" Jack asked

"Weapon manufacture options are locked," Isis said.

"Can they be unlocked?" Jack asked.

"Yes," Isis said.

"Why do we need guns?" Lakeisha asked.

"This is not our Earth," Jack said. "I want to have protection."

"We're not going to take on all of Earth with a couple of guns, Jack," Lakeisha said.

"I don't want to take on all of Earth. I just want to be able to protect us," Jack said. "Isis, how do we unlock the weapons?"

"Please explain why weapons are necessary," Isis said.

"We're going into hostile territory," Jack said.

"Recommendation, do not go into hostile territory," Isis said.

"We need to gather intel," Jack said.

"There are other methods for acquiring information without putting you or others at risk of harm," Isis said.

Chapter 14

Time was lost debating two things. The first debate was over the Uniform, this time proposed by Jack. Lakeisha was generally opposed to a uniform, especially one with para military overtones.

“We’re going to Earth,” Lakeisha pointed out. “Don’t you think we should be wearing street clothes?”

“We don’t know where we’re going to land or if we will be in sync with modern fashion,” Jack said.

“But uniforms are always in style,” Lakeisha said, sarcastically.

“Maybe,” Jack said. “Easier to blend in. And, in a pinch, we can always say we are part of traveling ROTC color guard.”

“Or, part of a Cosplay convention?” Jon asked.

“A what?” Lakeisha asked.

“A geek thing,” Jack said.

“It’s really fun,” Loxy said. “We should dress up as characters from the Japanese manga series written and illustrated by Yumi Tamura, called 7 Seeds.”

“I love the name,” Alisha said.

“Look, we’re aliens here. We need to set a name for ourselves, and set a standard,” Jack said.

“Fine,” Lakeisha agreed. “I want a skirt option.”

“Skirts are not practical in the field,” Jack said. “Especially if we go out into the wilderness.”

“I second the skirt option,” Loxy said.

“Can I wear what I am wearing?” Alisha said.

“No,” Lakeisha said. “That’s way too revealing for a public outing.”

“People on Earth haven’t seen breasts before?” Alisha said.

“It’s not just your breast,” Lakeisha argued.

“People on Earth haven’t seen flowers before?” Alisha said.

“Not like yours,” Jon said.

“Let’s just say, some people don’t appreciate your level of exposure?” Jack said.

“How do you people charge up on solar energy when you cover up so much skin?” Alisha said.

“We don’t need sun for nourishment,” Lakeisha said.

“You need vitamin D, don’t you?” Alisha said.

“Isis, show them outfits I came up with,” Jack said.

Isis outfit changed in the blink of an eye.

“It’s too military,” Lakeisha said.

“Can we have more color?” Jon asked.

“We are not presenting ourselves as Star Fleet,” Jack said.

“Just a little color?” Jon asked.

“Show us the skirt option,” Loxy said.

The outfit changed.

“I am in,” Jon said.

A uniform was agreed upon, the girls went to change, while Jon and Jack simply dressed down right where they were, and dressed in the uniforms the computer printed. The girls returned, showing off their skirted uniforms. Alish looked miserable, and kept scratching. Jack introduced the next order of business. He held in his hand an airgun, basically a military style vaccine delivery system. He demonstrated by discharging it into his own thigh.

“Everyone is getting tagged with a locator,” Jack said.

“Oh, hell no,” Lakeisha said.

Jack discharged it into Jon’s butt. “Ow! What the fuck?”

“We definitely can’t afford to lose you, since you’re the DHD for the Light Ring,” Jack said.

Loxy presented her arm.

“Thigh, butt, our hip?” Jack said.

Loxy presented her thigh. Jack fired a tag into her. Alish took it in the butt.

“No,” Lakeisha said. “You’re not tagging me, or writing a name on my forehead.”

“Then you can stay here,” Jack said. “Because I will be damned if I lose you out there.”

“What makes you think you’re in charge of me?!” Lakeisha said.

“I am older than you?” Jack said.

“Lakeisha,” Jon said. “Jack cares about us. He wants to keep us safe. He has experience doing that. Let’s let him do that. We’re all tagged but you.”

“Oh, make me out to be the unreasonable one,” Lakeisha said. “Have you ever considered someone could use our own locator chips to track us?”

“If you feel you’re being tracked, you can deactivate it with a voice command,” Jack said. He took out device from his vest. “This device will allow us to locate other team members. We each have one.”

“We still have this problem of you thinking you’re in charge,” Lakeisha said.

“I am not,” Jack said.

“You’re the oldest,” Jon said.

“You own the place,” Jack said.

“Until I see the pink slip...”

“It is your place, Jon,” Isis said.

“Oh, okay, then, um, Jack, you’re in charge,” Jon said.

“What, because he’s a boy?” Lakeisha asked. “Why don’t you put me in charge?”

“I am afraid of you,” Jon said.

“OMG,” Lakeisha said. “Why not vote for Loxy, then?”

“Would you like to be in charge?” Jon asked.

“Sure,” Loxy said, taking his hand and leading him toward the stairs.

“No,” Lakeisha told them. “Loxy can’t be in charge.”

“Well, don’t look at me,” Alish said.

“How about Isis?” Loxy asked.

“Humans should be in charge of humans,” Isis said. “As far as I am concern, you are all sovereign. How you decide to resolve disputes and allocate resources is between you.”

Lakeisha turned her butt to Jack. He discharged locator tag into her. He taught them how to use their radio. He pointed out that they were also wearing intel-cams that would record their

outings. It was like a policeman's cam, only better capture rate. They then proceeded to the Ring Room and Jack told Jon to initiate the rings.

"Isn't there anywhere else we can go?" Jon asked.

"Lots of places to go," Jack said. "But, we're going to Earth."

"Fine," Jon complained. "Isis, Earth, please."

The Light Rings rose from the floor, enveloped them in light, and then dropped them off in a dank, dark place. Specifically, a basement. On the floor was a pentagram. They were inside. A man wearing a robe was facing them. He lowered the hood. His face was illuminated by awe. In the back ground was a circular frame that contained green lightening.

"It worked?!" he said, enthusiastically.

Jack walked forwards to meet the man and hit the barrier that contained them within the circle. The man nearly fell over backwards to get away, even though there was a force field.

"Oh, thank god, the barrier spell worked," the man sighed.

Jack felt around the barrier, satisfying his curiosity that they were imprisoned in a field.

"That's kind of cool," Jon said, touching the field.

Jon jerked his hand back. It hurt so much he couldn't even breathe, much less make a sound, or utter a profanity.

"It's not that bad," Jack said.

"OMG, look at his hand," Lakeisha said.

"Second degree burns," Loxy said. She took his wrist and drew his hand closer, and used technology to heal him.

"Don't try to escape again, or I will have to harm you," the man said.

Jack touched the barrier again. He was not burned.

"Lake, touch this, please," Jack said.

"Um, no," Lakeisha said.

Loxy touched it without being asked. She wasn't burned. Alish was able to touch the field without being burned, as well. Lakeisha grudgingly, timidly touched it. When she wasn't hurt, she followed the field around with both hands, amazed by how solid it seemed for an ethereal object.

"That's just not fair," Jon said.

"So," Jack turned to the man in the robe. "How long have you been playing sorcerers in your mother's basement?"

"I don't live in my mother's basement!" the man snapped.

"So, you have a real job?" Jack asked.

"I will have you know, I am mechanical engineer," the man said. "I have a Masters in engineering, I teach at the university, and I have even been into space."

Jack laughed. "Yeah, okay. Let us out of here."

"You're calling me a liar?" the man asked.

"Yeah, let us out," Jack said.

"I am not about to unleash demons onto the world," the man said.

"And yet, you're summoning demons into the world?" Lakeisha asked.

"You didn't summon demons. We are people. We arrived by tech. It just so happens it coincides with your practicing magic," Jack said.

“We can’t ignore the synchronicity of...” Jon began

“Yeah, we can,” Jack said. “Unless, you want to invite Carl Jung into explain it all?”

“So, you can summon the spirits of dead people so I can ask them questions?” the man asked.

“No,” Jack said.

“Maybe,” Jon said.

“No!” Lakeisha said to the man, while simultaneously hitting Jon.

“If I didn’t summon you, explain how the barrier traps you on that side?” the man asked.

“I am still working on that part,” Jack said.

A sound of a door opening came from behind them and up. “Howard?!”

“Not now mom!” the man said.

“What are you doing down there?” It was woman’s voice. A shrill voice that grated on the nerve.

“Nothing, Ma!” he shouted.

“Well, you be sure to clean nothing up this time,” she shouted. “Last time the floor was really sticky...”

“Ma!”

“Just saying,” she yelled. “At least you’re not spending all day in the shower like you use to. Water bill is actually affordable...” A door closed, but a muffled woman’s voice continued to rant.

Jack smiled at the man. He crossed his arms. “Lucky guess,” Howards said.

“If we were demons, wouldn’t we know things?” Alish said.

“Am I supposed to be intimidated by your look? Seriously, I have seen more convincing aliens in TOS,” Howard said.

“Let us out, and I could make it worth your while,” Loxy tried to entice with a sexy look and voice.

Jon, Jack, and Lakeisha gave her a look. She seemed seriously willing to trade. She winked at them.

“Please, I already have a leach sucking the life out of me, why would I volunteer for another succubus?” Howard asked.

“You’re having a sex with your mother?” Jon asked.

“God! No! What’s wrong with you?!” Howards said.

“But you implied that your mother is a succubus sucking your life, which means she is having sex with you?” Jon clarified.

“I was just being mean,” Howard said.

“You shouldn’t be mean to your mom,” Alish said.

“You shouldn’t have sex with your mom,” Jack said.

“Unless you’re both of age and it’s consensual,” Jon said.

“You should never have sex with your mom!” Lakeisha snapped.

“Why are we talking about my mom?!” Howard demanded.

“Because I offered your sex in exchange for our freedom and you turned me down,” Loxy said. “Are you gay?”

“I am not gay,” Howard said.

“It’s okay to be gay,” Jon assured him.

“No it’s not,” Lakeisha said.

“Yeah, it is,” Jon said.

“I am not gay and I am not sleeping with my mom,” Howard said.

“And yet, you’re angry with her, because you’re trapped in her basement,” Jack said.

“I am not trapped! I can leave any time I want,” Howard said.

“So, instead of being mean to your mom, why don’t you just move out?” Alish asked.

“You don’t know what it’s like out there,” Howard said.

“We’d like to,” Loxy said. “If you free us, we could explore the world for you and report back what we find.”

“I don’t need you to explore the world for me,” Howard said.

“Oh, yeah, because you’re a famous astronaut,” Jack said.

“I am. My friends will tell you…” Howard mumbled: “My friends!” Howard grabbed up his cell phone. “Come on, answer your skype, come on… Hey! Network me. It worked. Look!”

“Yeah, um, Howard, I don’t see anything,” came an Indian voice. “Please tell me that’s your thumb…”

“Seriously?” Howard said, bringing the smart phone closer. “Can you see them now?”

“Nope,” came the response.

“The barrier must render them invisible,” Howards said, turning the phone back to himself. “Get everyone and come over now.”

“It’s late, Howard,” his friend said.

“Three of them are female,” Howard said.

“Are they hot?”

Lakeisha’s hands went to her hip.

“Yeah,” Howard said, but took a step back.

“Are they chained?”

“Not yet,” Howard said. “Do you still have that Princess Leah outfit?”

“Maybe…”

“Bring it over,” Howard said. He ended the call. “So, how does this work? I captured you, I get three wishes from each of you?”

“You’re threatening to put us in chains and you want us to grant you wishes?” Lakeisha asked.

“I would so wear the Leah slave outfit,” Loxy offered.

“Time to go home, Jack,” Jon said.

“I second that,” Jack said. “Closer everyone. Jon, do your thing.”

“Isis, bring us home,” Jon said.

Nothing happened.

“You can get us back, can’t you?” Lakeisha said.

“Sorry, little distracted with the Leah thing,” Jon said.

“You can’t leave till I get my wishes,” Howard said.

“Focus, Jon,” Jack said. “Or you’re going to be wearing the slave outfit first.”

“Here, let me help,” Loxy said, taking his hand. “I programed the return coordinates into your subconscious in the event you were ever drugged or otherwise impaired.” She pushed

buttons on his hands, and then positioned them on her hips, as if they were about to dance. “Trance time. Isis, bring us home.” Then she kissed him.

The Light Rings rose from the earth and returned them to ‘Tranquility Base.’

Lakeisha was angry. She hit Jon, snapping him out of the trance and drawing him away from Loxy. “What the hell was that?!”

“Um, if this was a television series, that would have been the comic relief scene to help balance out the fact some seriously bad shit was about to befall the characters,” Jon said.

“Isis?” Jack called.

Isis appeared, wearing her normal goddess garb. “Yes, Jack.”

“Download our outing and start analyzing,” Jack said.

“Interesting,” Isis said. “You were caught by an amateur mage.”

“Yeah, not cool. If we go back, will we land somewhere else?” Jack asked.

“I suspect, with what little I know about magic, you will continue to arrive in his circle until he releases you,” Isis said.

“So, we have to negotiate with that jerk off?” Lakeisha asked.

“Unless Jon has a counter barrier spell memorized,” Isis said.

“Wait wait wait,” Jon said. “You’re saying, magic is real?”

“No,” Isis said. “Magic is simply technology. The ancients imbedded the whole universe with this technology. Everyone has access to this tech. Not everyone can utilize it. Mages, sorcerers, witches, and Shamans are just some of the people who have access. There are safeguards and rule sets for using it.”

“Why was I burned and the others weren’t?” Jon asked.

“You are a Shaman. You will be more profoundly affected by the use of magical tech than the others,” Isis said. “You are vulnerable to greater influence of energies. Conversely, you are also capable of wielding great power. You are a practitioner of High Tech.”

“Seriously?” Jon asked. “Can’t I just get high with no tech?”

“You can with me, later,” Loxy said.

“You two are insatiable,” Lakeisha said.

“Incorrigible,” Jack corrected.

“And insatiable,” Loxy said.

“Incorrigibly insatiable?” Jon offered.

“No,” Loxy said.

“Isis, can I do magic?” Lakeisha asked.

“My reply is no,” Isis said.

“Magic eight ball?” Jack asked.

“Yes,” Isis said. “I was hoping levity would help de-escalate the situation.”

“There is no situation and I don’t need de-escalating,” Lakeisha said. “Jon can do magic and we can’t?”

“Correct,” Isis said.

Lakeisha laughed. “Show us some magic,” she said.

“I don’t know how,” Jon said.

“It must work the same way you access the Light Rings,” Jack said. “Maybe you have like an internal control panel.”

“We sent you an instruction manual,” Alish said. “Did you get it?”

“I hope it wasn’t with the suit that went to the Greatest American Hero,” Jack said.

“Oh!” Jon said. He ran up the stairs, over to his room, and tore apart his pack looking for the notebook. “It’s not here!”

“The blue one? With the symbols?” Jack asked.

“Yeah, you got it?” Jon said.

“It’s on my table. Daniel was looking at it, remember?” Jack said.

“Well, we will just have to get you a new one,” Loxy said. “Maybe an original.”

“Um, yeah, just,” Alish said, trying to look all innocent, her eyes darting up, trying to think of something.

“Alish?” Jack asked. “What did you do?”

“I stole a mage’s book and transmitted the information to Jon without permission,” Alish said.

“Magic books are copy righted?” Lakeisha asked.

“Sort of,” Alish said. “And though I didn’t get caught, well, the mage knows someone stole his life’s work, and so, well, it won’t be easy accessing that again.”

“There’s got to be other books,” Lakeisha said. “A library of books? Maybe a school of mages?”

“Yeah, all of that’s true,” Alish said. “Or, you can learn the hard way by confronting a mage and learning during battle.”

“I don’t want to battle! I am not that kind of shaman,” Jon said. “Am I?”

“You’re so low level, you don’t really register as anything,” Alish said. “You’ll have more options when you level up.”

“What is this? A game?” Jon asked.

“Oh, no. It’s serious. You could die playing,” Alish said.

“Okay, I want to go to back to Earth,” Jon said. “Our Earth.”

“You can’t make a deal with the devil and then back out after you realize you’re in over your head,” Lakeisha pointed out.

“I didn’t make a deal with the devil,” Jon said.

“Who got their hand burned on the shield?” Lakeisha asked.

“Speaking of that, Loxy, how is it you can use Goa’uld technology?” Jack said.

“I am a Dakini Spirit,” Loxy said. “I am a healer.”

“Oh, wait,” Jon said. He pointed to Jack, “Paladin.” He pointed to Alish, “Druid.” He pointed to Loxy, “Sorcerer’s companion...”

“I am your familiar?” Loxy purred like a cat?

“Don’t you even box me,” Lakeisha said.

“Monk?” Jon asked.

Lakeisha walked up the stairs out of Jon’s suite. “Barbarian?” Jon called after her.

Jack shook his head no, and followed after her.

Loxy massaged Jon’s shoulders. “Master, you’re all tense. Let me help you.”

“Have you checked your library?” Alish asked. “Maybe there’s a copy there?”

“Why would there be a copy there?” Jon asked.

“Everything you ever read is there,” Alish said.

Chapter 15

Like all of the rooms below the main 'tree' deck, there was elongated window on the outer wall looking out into space. The stairs emerged onto the floor near the window. One series of shelves went along the wall from the end of the window all the way to flush with the underside of the stairs. The shelves went from floor to ceiling. There were five independent shelves that came away from the wall but stopped short of a circle in the middle of the room. These, too, went from floor to ceiling. Two people could stand in the center space, and that space could be used to get either side of any shelves, but one could also walk along the wall and through an opening in each of the five shelves. Many of the shelves were filled. There were empty spaces, room to grow the library.

"Why haven't we explored this further?" Lakeisha asked.

"Because they're just books?" Jack asked.

"Oh!" Alish said. "They're not just books! These are memories! Are you aware of how many trees and plants have died so your memories could be preserved? Memories on the skin of plants."

"Did you know, if they legalize cannabis, you could use the pulp to make paper and clothes?" Loxy asked.

"Of course, you're 420 friendly, too," Alish said.

A being stepped out of the shadows. "I assure you, friend Alish, no plants died for these books to exist," she said.

Lakeisha retreated. Jack and Jon made sure they were between the girls and the new comer. She seemed to be of Indian descent, and was wearing a pleated Lehenga that hung to her ankles. Her feet were bare. She had a matching top that was hardly more than a length of cloth cleverly folded in such a way that covered her bosom, then hung from either shoulder. Her belly was bare. Jewels were in her hair, and a pip of a nose ring sparkled. If she was 18, she was that by a day.

"Isis?" Jack asked.

"No," she said, smiling. "I am Orixia. I am Jon's personal scribe."

"I have a scribe?" Jon asked.

"You certainly have a lot of women attending to you," Jack said.

"And, you've just been lurking all this time down in the library?" Lakeisha said. "Like the boogey man."

"Technically, 'person,'" Orixia corrected.

"Boogey monsters are real?" Jack asked.

"We're not all monsters. It's a club, really. B. O. G. I. Beings of Greater Intelligence," Orixia said. "You'd be surprised how many monsters are really smart. Think of our club like joining MENSA."

"And so, being smart you just naturally hide in the library," Jack asked.

"I wasn't hiding," Orixia said. "I was elsewhere."

"But you're here now?" Jon said.

"More or less. I felt I was needed," Orixia said. "So, here I am. How may I serve you?"

"You felt we needed help reading a book?" Lakeisha asked.

“Or finding a book?” Orixia asked. She pulled a book from the outer wall shelf. “‘Oh, the Places You Will Go,’ Doctor Seuss. I absolutely love this one. It was such a joy recreating it for the library.”

“Who are you?” Jack asked, pleasantly.

“Oh! An existential question,” Orixia smiled. “Would you like the response in the form of a Doctor Seuss quote?”

“No,” Jack said. “Are you a computer program?”

“I am a Shango Priestess,” Orixia said. “I am doing my internship under the guidance of Seshat...”

“The Ancient Egyptian Goddess of wisdom, knowledge, and writing,” Jack said.

“Yes! Have you met her?” Orixia asked.

“Um, no,” Jack said. “At least, I don’t think so.”

“Okay, so, you’re this scribe girl, hiding in the library?” Lakeisha said.

“Again, I am not hiding,” Orixia said. “This is the only place I can manifest in your realm.”

“You’re an Ironmole spirit?!” Loxy excitedly, clapping her hands. “OMG, we’re like sisters!” Loxy hugged her.

Orixia laughed and hugged Loxy with equal joy. “Of course we are,” Orixia said. “I have not heard that terminology in a while, though. I suppose that would be culturally accurate, if you were knowledgeable of the Yoruba language. The reality of me and everything is much more complex than your present labeling system allows. Your limited interaction with me may cause you to believe I am spirit, but I am just as much flesh and blood as you, only I live my life in the seventh density world.”

“That’s where I came from,” Loxy said. “Tell her, Jon! When you created me, you drew from inspiration of ages.”

“What?” Lakeisha asked.

“Higher planes? Like the Ascended beings?” Jack asked.

“That is a fair analogy, Jack,” Orixia said.

“Do all the rooms have spirits?” Lakeisha asked.

“Yes,” Lakeisha said. “There is a guardian spirit for every domain of Jon’s life. One for every room, if you prefer. One for the day. One for the night.”

“Alright, so maybe we should have a town hall meeting and um, meet everyone,” Jack said.

“Everyone will be met in their own time, Jack,” Orixia said. “You cannot rush spirit. Some of us BOGIs may not even show up, given how he has such great friends present. We didn’t anticipate such a nice gathering.”

“Okay, well, so, the reason we’re here is we’re looking for a book,” Jon said.

“Oh, then it is a good thing you started in the library,” Orixia said. “I mean, sure you could probably find all you need online, but this is much more personal, don’t you think?”

“He doesn’t need any more personal,” Lakeisha said.

“Um, so what I am looking for is something I was writing. A notebook with symbols...” Jon pressed on.

“Jon,” Orixia said. “That isn’t here.”

“But I thought everything I ever read is here,” Jon said.

“Well, mostly everything,” Orixia said. “For sure, everything you read more than once; those are solid here. I suspect one of the variables influencing what I am able to reproduce is dependent on how much attention you gave the information. It could also be related to your perceived value of the artifact being consumed. I assure you, no information is ever lost. Some of it can be hard to get to, especially if you’re in the wrong frame of mind.”

“I have perfect memory!” Jon said. “I can re-read everything I ever touched...”

“Yeah,” Orixia said. “You have to let go for me to catch it.”

“That better not be an innuendo,” Lakeisha said.

“It’s not always about sex,” Orixia said. “Much of it, but not all.”

“Sometimes a cigar is just a cigar,” Jack said. He responded to Lakeisha’s look: “Freud said that.”

“So, it’s not just that it’s in his subconscious mind,” Loxy said. “He needs to actively forget it so you can render it into a book.”

“Yes,” Orixia said.

“But if he has it in his head, then why would he need it in a hard copy?” Lakeisha said. Jack actually liked the question, and gave a hand signal for Orixia to produce an answer.

“Have you actually been in his head?” Orixia asked.

“God, no!” Lakeisha said.

“I have!” Loxy said.

“And his head has been in you,” Alish said.

“That could be interpreted in multiple ways,” Loxy said.

“The whole circle of life,” Jack said.

“Oh! Did you know that Disney stole the Lion King from a Japanese manga?” Jon asked.

“Disney did not steal the Lion King!” Lakeisha said.

“Oh, please tell me you have that,” Jon said to Orixia.

Orixia went right to the location and produced a hard copy of ‘Janguru Taitei.’ She handed it to Jon. Jon handed it to Lakeisha.

“This is in Japanese,” Lakeisha said.

“Exactly my point!” Jon said.

“I don’t read Japanese,” Lakeisha said. “This could be anything.”

“OMG. This is Kimba the White Lion. Technically Leo, but the Japanese thought we couldn’t handle Leo the Lion, or someone held the copy right, who knows. Anyway, Simba. Kimba. They’re the same. It was published in a serial format from 1950 to 1954,” Jon said.

“You read Japanese?” Lakeisha asked.

“No,” Jon said.

“So, it could be anything,” Lakeisha said.

“I can read pictures!” Jon said. “Flip through it and tell me that’s not the Lion King.”

Lakeisha handed the book back to Orixia. “Do you read Japanese?”

“I just reproduce it as I see it,” Orixia said.

“So, this is interesting and all, but we’re interested in books on magic,” Jack said.

“Especially the spell kind.”

“Jon sucks at spelling,” Orixia said.

“He really does,” Loxy agreed. “But he does try really hard.”

“What does grammar have to do with spelling?” Jon asked.

“Oh, you’d be surprised,” Orixia said.

“Do you have magic books or not?” Jack asked.

“We’re trying to prove I am not a magician,” Jon said.

“You can’t prove a negative, Jon. I assure you, you’re a magician,” Orixia said. “The whole point of sending you to an alternate Earth and threading you back into this Universe was to increase your power base, and give you an opportunity to develop without drawing undue attention. You have learned to harness your powers, haven’t you?”

“He made me,” Loxy said. “I am a tulpa.”

“That’s impressive,” Orixia said. “Oh! You’re the girl in the fantasy series he was writing!”

Orixia led them to a shelf where over a dozen books existed. The brand name was ‘I/Tulpa.’ Each book had its own title. All of them were stories of Jon and Loxy and friends. “This was the last one I translated. Kind of crossover Doctor Who and Star Trek fan fiction. Very clever. I also loved the reboot of Space 1999. Nice! But my favorite story of you and Loxy is ‘Not Here.’”

“You reproduced my journals?” Jon asked.

“Well, sure. There’s even a Universe where they’re as popular as the Harry Potter series,” Orixia said. “Just like J. K. Rowling, you went from rags to riches in that world.”

“Seriously?” Lakeisha asked. “He’s rich and famous?”

“In that Universe, yeah,” Orixia said.

“He’s in more than one Universe?” Lakeisha asked.

“We all are,” Orixia said. “We’re multidimensional beings. You don’t really think these bodies are you, do you?”

“Yeah,” Lakeisha said.

“Beings of light we are, not this crude flesh,” Loxy said.

“Buddha?” Alisha asked.

“Buddha didn’t say that,” Jack said.

“These books that Jon wrote, they’re not fiction,” Orixia said.

“They’re just a fantasy,” Jon said.

“Oh!” Loxy said, pouting.

“They’re not the real thing?” Jack asked.

“Oh, good come back,” Loxy said.

“He did set it up for you,” Jack said.

“Yeah. He’s a great straight man,” Loxy said. “I would have caught it if my feelings hadn’t been hurt. We had so many wondrous adventures.”

“Let me guess,” Lakeisha said. “These aren’t G rated.”

“Life is not G rated,” Loxy said.

“It is if you make it that way,” Lakeisha said.

“How do you hide from life? Birds do it. Bees do it. Even...” Loxy began.

“We don’t put it in books or on walls...” Lakeisha said.

“The Egyptians used to,” Jack said. “You would be surprised what they put on walls for the whole world to see.”

“I have never seen x-rated Egyptian art,” Lakeisha said.

“And you won’t in one of your museums,” Orixia said. “The explorers from Victorian England destroyed much of the artifacts that they found too obscene.”

“Speaking of adult ratings; Got any Play Boys around here?” Jack asked.

“Top last shelf,” Orixia said.

“Any chance you have the 1969 Lorna Hopper issue?” Jack asked.

“Top last shelf,” Orixia said.

“Sweet,” Jack said.

Lakeisha went into her angry Wonder Woman pose, “Jack!”

“Oh, seriously, get over yourself,” Jack said.

“Excuse me?” Lakeisha said.

“We’re in a strange Universe, you’ve made it very clear you and I are never hooking up, I am in a teenage male body, flooded with hormones,” Jack said. “Do the math.”

“Masturbation is really healthy,” Loxy said.

“Try not to soil it,” Jon said. “I like that issue, too.”

“Fair enough,” Jack said.

“OMG,” Lakeisha lamented.

“Educated fleas,” Loxy continued.

“I am also partial to the 1978 Farah Faucet issue and the 1980’s issue of the Women of the US Government,” Jon said.

“I promise, I will treat the literature with the utmost respect,” Jack said. “I might even get around to reading the articles this time round.”

“Oh, I hope the 95 issue of Drew Barrymore is there,” Loxy said. “Do you remember that time we...”

“Loxy,” Jon interrupted.

“Why do you encourage this behavior from him? From men?!” Lakeisha asked.

“I like this behavior from him. And men.” Loxy said, reconsidered, then committed to her first response.

“You should write some of those fantasies down so I can scribe them into hard copies,” Orixia said.

“Umm, probably not a good idea to make all my fantasies real,” Jon said.

“They’re real, whether you write them down or not,” Orixia said.

“Do you realize if that were true how many Universes Farah would have to be in?” Jack said.

“That’s disgusting,” Lakeisha said. “Men are disgusting.”

“You don’t have fantasies?” Alish asked.

“Not anymore,” Lakeisha said.

“So, back to magic,” Jon said. “Got anything I can use?”

“Lots of Dungeons and Dragons books on magic,” Orixia said. “You could use some of those spells in a pinch. The thing is, the books can’t leave the station.”

“Really?” Jack asked.

“Limitations of copy rights,” Orixia explained.

“Seriously?” Jon asked.

“It’s a serious variable I have to attend to,” Orixia said.

“Okay, so, I memorize a spell with such clarity that I can use it,” Jon said.

“Just like making a Tulpa,” Loxy said.

“Exactly like. You focus on it in your imagination until it becomes so real that you experience it with all your senses, and then you unleash it on the world. And on using it, your brain will lose it and you will have to relearn it,” Orixia said.

“That sucks,” Jon said.

“It’s the way it works,” Orixia said.

“And that sucks!” Jon said.

“Okay, so memorize a couple of spells, and we’ll watch you practice,” Jack said.

“You should probably practice off world,” Orixia said. “You wouldn’t want to accidentally blow up your station, would you?”

“Hit the books, son,” Jack said. “I will go find us a suitable planet to unleash your fury.”

Jack headed for the stairs.

“I don’t have any fury,” Jon said.

“Well, find some,” Jack said. “Or borrow some from Lake.”

“I am not... Okay, yes, I am!” Lakeisha said, following after Jack. “This Universe is fucked up.”

निर्मित

Jack summoned everyone to the control room via a PA system. Everyone arrived about the same time, and rather quickly, as this is the first time anyone had ever summoned the group. Jack was clearly excited about something.

“You okay?” Lakeisha asked.

“I think I found it,” Jack said.

“Found what?” Lakeisha asked.

“Thor’s planet,” Jack said. “The first time we encountered the Asgard technology was on Thor’s planet, a planet called Cimmeria. If this Universe does parallel ours, then there’s a good chance we could contact the Asgard there.”

“Okay. Let’s go,” Jon said.

“I wish it was that simple,” Jack said. “I have narrowed it down to one of four systems. We can’t get there by Light Ring. We can, however, get there by Stargate.”

“If we go there, can we Light Ring out at least?” Lakeisha asked.

“Conditionally,” Jack said. “Isis?”

“I can provide you tech, essentially a seed, that will deploy an engineering platform that will create a Light Ring dais and establish an AI presence on the world,” Isis said. “Once the device is deployed, it will take approximately six weeks for the system to come online.”

“So, we’d be stuck for six weeks?” Lakeisha said.

“No, we use the Light Rings to go to a planet that has a Stargate. We then go to Cimmeria, send a message to Thor, and then he either brings us back here, or we come back through the Stargate and Light Ring back.”

“Sounds easy enough,” Jon said.

“Let’s go,” Lakeisha said.

“Hold on. It may be one of these four planets. The confirmation of the planets matches my memory, but it might not be any of them,” Jack said. “The first thing we have to do is find a Stargate that’s active.”

“Can’t we call your people and get a good address?” Loxy said.

“No,” Jack said. “Unfortunately, the gate symbols are different in this Universe. There are some similar ones, but until we start using gates, we have no way to determine if correlates exist. First, we find a Stargate that’s active...”

“How do we do that?” Lakeisha asked.

“Just use our mini gate to dial the gates here?” Loxy asked.

“I could do that,” Jack said. “But we will lose contact with our Earth. Forever,” Jack said.

“Why?” Lakeisha asked.

“The mini gate is harmonically locked with the Stargate on your Earth,” Isis said. “Brake that resonance, and you’re not going to dial home again.”

“So, we find another Stargate, on a planet we can Ring to, and use it to explore these four worlds,” Jon said.

“Yep,” Jack said. “And I have some possible candidates. I have found thirty seven worlds that we can Ring to that have functioning Stargates. I found one that has not been activated in over a hundred years. Isis has assured me that it pings in as functional. So, here’s the plan. We Ring over to this world where no one has used the Stargate, activate the Stargate, send a probe through the wormhole, and if it’s good to go, we cross over and explore.” As he explained the plan, an animated version showed him holding an orb, the probe, which he threw through a gate. In the animated recreation, he character was holding a tablet that received telemetry from the probe. The probe flew up above the gate on the other side, and hovered there.

“What if the Stargate doesn’t have a DHD,” Loxy asked.

“The tablet that receives telemetry from our probes can be used to dial gate addresses,” Jack said.

“Okay, so, let’s go,” Lakeisha said.

“What if the gates don’t have power?” Loxy asked.

“Isis has provided me with a six back-up power devices,” Jack said, showing one of the power packs. It was silver, stubby cylinder which would magnetically latch onto a Stargate. “This contains enough power for one wormhole event for three minutes. Stick it on the Stargate, use the tablet to dial the gate, toss a probe through, and if it’s good to go, then we go.”

“Why are we still talking about this? Let’s go,” Lakeisha said.

“You in a hurry to be off the station?” Alish asked.

“Yes, I want my feet on solid ground with a real sky over my head,” Lakeisha said. “I am tired of this little hobbit trail of a hamster cage.”

“Look, Lake. This is not just a walk in the park. This could be incredibly dangerous,” Jack said.

“We are not children, Jack,” Lakeisha said.

“Yes, Lake, we are. By every measure, we are not prepared for what out there,” Jack said.

“Is anyone, Jack?” Jon asked. “Look, in any pre-industrial age, we would have been considered adults by age 12. We would be hunting, gathering, even having children. Our society arbitrarily pushed adulthood to 18, but now there is evidence that most people aren’t growing up and leaving home until they’re in their thirties.”

“What does that have to do with anything?” Lakeisha asked.

“How does one get ready for real life if you never engage in real life?” Jon asked. “Jack, we agreed to help the Asgard...”

“I didn’t,” Lakeisha said.

“We agreed when none of said no,” Jon said. “No one should go out there alone. We’re a team. We go together, or we don’t go. We go together and we come back together. That’s how this works.”

“Agreed,” Loxy said, taking Jon’s hand.

“Agreed,” Alish said, bringing Loxy and Jon’s hand up and joining her hand.

Lakeisha scrutinized Loxy’s eyes and then put her hand in, on top of Alish’s hand.

“Agreed.”

Jack put his hand on top of Lakeisha’s hand. “Agreed.”

They drop hands and headed for the Ring Room.

“We should have a group name,” Loxy said.

“Wolverines?” Jon offered.

“No,” Jack said.

“Savages?” Lakeisha offered.

“Do you really want our school mascot following us the rest of our lives?” Jack asked.

“Not particularly, no,” Lakeisha said.

“What was your group called, Jack?” Loxy asked.

“SG1,” Jack said.

“So, we could be SG2?” Jon asked.

“Taken,” Jack said.

“SG3?” Lakeisha asked.

“Taken,” Jack said.

“SG1 point five,” Jon asked.

“Not taken, not happening,” Jack said.

“Isis, please deliver us to the selected world. Preferably near the Stargate,” Jon asked.

The Light Rings rose from the floor and illuminated everything, then descended back from which they came.

Chapter 16

They arrived on a stage. There was noise one would associate with a mass of people talking and gathering. Loxy was pretty sure she heard French being spoken. Jon was facing them people, and they seemed to be dressed in period clothes from the 1800's. Jack was behind Jon, in full view of a Stargate that appeared to be part of a set.

“Jack?” Jon asked.

“Can you give me five minutes?” Jack asked.

Lakeisha followed him to the Stargate. He put a battery pack on the gate and it stuck like a magnet, clicking hard into place, almost ripping Jack's hand. The PAD he carried showed the gate active, and he began dialing?

“Jack,” Jon said.

“Do something,” Jack said.

“Like what?!” Jon said.

“Distract them. Entertain them. Something. Anything,” Jack said.

The audience had begun to quiet down on becoming aware of the people on the stage. They were curious. Jon went forwards. Loxy and Alish went with him. Jon looked to Loxy who shrugged. Jon picked a person in the audience to focus on. She smiled. Someone seemed to be coming to investigate.

“Give me love,” Jon sang. Everyone was suddenly quiet. “Give me love. Give me peace on earth. Give me life, give me light,” and behind him the Stargate came to life. The lights in the auditorium flickered out. They seemed old, as if they were the first lights ever installed into the Paris Opera House, by none other than Nicola Tesla. When they went out, there was a heavy smell of ozone. “Keep me free from birth. Give me hope Help me cope, with this heavy load. Trying to, touch and reach you with, heart and soul...” There was a mystic moonlight shining from behind Jon, Loxy and Alish, as if a swimming pool was illuminated.

Behind him Jack threw an orb through the gate. He quickly decided that was not a world they would be visiting, as Jaffa were shooting at the orb. The window view of the world went black when the orb was destroyed. Jack killed the gate. The battery pack he had used turned to dust and fell away. He put another on and started the process over.

Suddenly Jon had a full orchestra accompanying him. Magically he produced “Dancing Lights,” a zero level wizard spell. Loxy and Alish sang with him. Their voices carried. The music seemed to come from everywhere. OM M M M M M M M M M M M M M M... My Lord, PLEASE take hold of my hand, that I might understand you...”

“Jon?!” Jack called.

Loxy waved Alish to go. Loxy stayed with Jon. He finished singing. Loxy took his hand and pulled him to the Gate. Jack pushed them through, and turned to the audience.

“You just got to love George Harris!” he said, and passed through the gate.

Jack arrived on a new world as if he had simply stepped through a door, where as everyone else landed and fell forwards as if they had accelerated and then been ejected. Jack hit a button on his tablet, and the Gate went off.

“How is it you just walk through, but we flew through?” Lakeisha asked.

“Practice?” Jack asked.

“Where are we?” Loxy asked.

“Not where I was thinking, but this place seems safer than the other place,” Jack said.

“Unless you want to go back and sing some more.”

“No, thank you,” Jon said.

“That was actually quite nice, Jon,” Lakeisha said. “Why aren’t you in Glee Club?”

“I have enough trouble avoiding getting my ass kicked on a daily basis,” Jon said. “Don’t need to add being a tenor to it.”

They walked out away from the Gate. There was a forest of tall thin trees and blue flowers everywhere.

“This place is absolutely magical,” Alish said.

“I feel like we’re in Oz,” Loxy said.

“More like Canada,” Lakeisha said.

“Does it look like Canada to you?” Jack asked.

“Yes, actually,” Lakeisha said. “What do you think it looks like?”

“The Hallerbos,” Jack said. “Belgium. Also known as the Blue Forest.”

“So, the light show back there, was that magic?” Jack asked.

“Yeah, believe it or not,” Jon said.

“And the music?” Jack asked.

“That must have been Isis,” Jon said.

“Or prestidigitation, music affect,” Loxy said.

“That was more than just faint musical notes,” Jon said.

“Well, you did trance during the song,” Loxy said.

“I did?” Jon asked.

“Well, show me more magic,” Jack said.

“Like what?” Jon said.

“Magic missile one of those trees,” Jack said.

“Oh!” Alish said. “Don’t you dare!”

“Relax. I didn’t learn magic missile,” Jon said.

“Because?” Jack said.

“I don’t want to hurt anyone,” Jon said.

“We’re going to have to have a talk when we get back,” Jack said.

They became aware that Lakeisha was quietly looking at the sky. They joined her and looked up at the moon. It was a dark red moon, with streaks of purple, and dark black craters. It was clearly a full moon.

“What’s that?” Lakeisha asked.

“Seriously?” Jack asked.

Lakeisha looked at Jack. “Seriously what?”

“It’s a moon, Lake,” Jack said.

“It doesn’t look like the moon,” Lakeisha said.

Jon bit on his lip.

“A moon. Not ‘the moon.’ You do understand that other planets have moons, but they don’t look like the Earth’s moon,” Jack said.

“Don’t you just hate it when sci-fi movies use the Earth’s moon in the sky line?” Jon asked.

“Or worse, the script calls for three moons and they give use three images of the Earth’s moon, exactly the same image!” Jack said.

“That irritates the hell out of me,” Jon said. “Lazy bastards. Do they really think we sci fi people won’t notice our own moon?”

“They probably just used stock footage,” Jack said. “Director says, I need three moons in the sky, and some grip between shots runs and gets it off the internet.”

“I hope that’s the explanation, because I would worry if some dumb ass art major doesn’t have enough common sense to know the Earth’s moon doesn’t populate the sky of every alien planet,” Jon said.

“You think I am a dumb ass because I didn’t know?” Lakeisha asked.

“No, of course not,” Jon said. “You’re just a girl. What do you know about science?”

“I understand enough physics to kick your ass,” Lakeisha said.

The sound of the gate becoming operational broke up their discussion.

“Quick, to the forest,” Jack said. “Go, go, go.”

They made it to the forest, and over a rise. Jack used the PAD to view the activity and hoped they didn’t see the orb hovering above the gate. Six Jaffa emerged from the gate, followed by a human. He appeared to be high ranking officer in military garb. His uniform was dark green, almost black; the only color was on the chest, a ribbon plate. He took off his gloves and told the Jaffa to proceed forwards.

“Someone followed us?” Lakeisha said.

Jack motioned for her to be silent. He directed the orb to follow, holding it back so that it might be obscured by the tree line. He motioned for them to gather around.

“As soon as they’re far enough away from the gate to not hear it, we’re out of here,” Jack said.

“You wanted intel, this seems like the time to do it,” Jon said.

“We have no weapons...”

“Jack, I want to know what we’re up against,” Jon said. “Direct the orb ahead of them and see what you see.”

Jack nodded. He circled the orb out and away and brought it back in line with the path, or a path, and found a small village on the other side. The village maybe had seven hundred people. Just outside the village was a small open air temple, between the forest and the village. There was evidence a road may have continued from the other side of the village out, but it could also have just been a well-worn path to a lake or something beyond. There was a pasture with sheep like creature corralled. They were clearly not actual sheep.

“That’s probably where they’re headed,” Jack said.

“Can you get us closer?” Jon asked.

“Not a good idea,” Jack said.

“Can you get us closer?” Jon asked again.

Jack frowned. “Come on,” Jack said.

They proceeded through the forest, slowly, using the orb and their map to stay well enough behind that they weren’t observed. The officer and Jaffa arrived at the village and Jack

slowed, to pay attention to the PAD, giving a closed fist signal that he wanted them to hold up. Jon understood, but the girls kept walking.

“Hey!” Jack whispered yell.

The girls came back.

“This means stop,” Jack said.

“Well...”

“Stop and be quiet,” Jack said.

They all knelt down to look at the tablet together. Jack turned up a volume control. The villagers had gathered together into a group to meet the officer and Jaffa. Every one of them went to their knees. The officer was saying something.

“Anyone make that out?” Jack asked.

“A little,” Loxy said. “Something about a sacrifice.”

A child, perhaps no more than eight years old, female, was sent forwards. Two of the Jaffa took the girl to the temple and tied her to a marbled table.

“Fuck,” Jon said, getting up to go.

Jack pulled him back down.

“We now know what we need to know,” Jack said. “We’re out of here.”

“The hell we are,” Jon said.

“Jon, we can’t help her. We have no weapons,” Jack said.

“They’re going to kill her,” Jon said.

“Probably,” Jack said.

“We have to help her, Jack,” Lakeisha said. “If we fight, the villagers will fight.”

“They’re not going to fight. Did you see how easily that transaction was? They’re conditioned. They’re not going to fight their oppressors. They might, however, fight us in order to demonstrate they have nothing to do with us.”

“You believe that?” Lakeisha asked.

“I have experienced it first hand, Lake,” Jack said. “Even on Earth, I saw a man beating on his wife and I intervened because she was getting her ass kicked and then she hit me from behind with a pipe out of her husband’s truck and told me to leave her husband alone. These people are in a relationship with some ass holes. No matter what we do, it’s going to blow this situation up. If we win and more Jaffa come through to investigate what happened to this officer, they will probably kill everyone.”

“Then we tell them to bury the gate like Jon’s Indian friends,” Lakeisha said.

Loxy pointed to the PAD. The officer had entered one of the homes, followed by several people. A line of teenage boys stood outside the door. They were being passed in one at a time. The Jaffa also went into the house, except for two, who remained outside the home. With the exception of two villagers watching over the girl, and the line of boys, the rest of the villagers remained kneeling on the ground.

“We’re leaving,” Jack said. “Now.”

“Where’s Jon?” Loxy asked.

Jon was now visible on the PAD.

“Fuck,” Jack said. “Wait here.”

“We’re going with,” Lakeisha said.

“Wait here!” Jack said, handing her the PAD. “If we get killed, you go back to the gate and dial this address and do the best you can.”

Jack got to the edge of the forest. Jon had left the forest and had walked straight up to the two villagers. They fell to their knees and said something that Jack couldn't hear.

“What's going on here?” Jon asked.

“I am sorry, Master. We were not prepared for your arrival,” they said.

“Well, we'll talk about it later,” Jon said. “Unchain this child?”

“Sir?”

“Unchain her now,” Jon said.

“But she was selected,” a villager said.

“Unselect her,” Jon said.

“Please, don't put us between you and the other Master,” the villager said. “We are but humble servants.”

Jon pushed past them and unchained the girl himself. Jack nearly joined him but he saw the Jaffa approaching at a run. Jon instructed the girl to stand up. She did and went to her knees. Jon turned to see the staffs pointed at him. They flared open. The officer arrived shortly after, as he had walked, unhurriedly. Jack put his back to the tree. He pulled the grenade from his pocket.

“What is the meaning of this intrusion?” the officer said.

“Well, Sir, I was just reading my almanac and it said it's a very bad day for sacrifices,” Jon said.

The officer seemed confused at first. He started to laugh. “You're pretty funny,” the officer said. “What's your name, Son?”

“Puddin N Tain,” Jon said.

“Well, Tain, if that's really your name,” he said.

“Ask me again and I will tell you the same,” Jon said.

“Oh, you are messing with me!” the officer said. He hit his one of his Jaffa with a glove. “Do you hear that? He's messing with me.”

“Instruct me to kill him,” the Jaffa said.

“Are you kidding? I like it when people mess with me,” the officer said. “It's such a pleasant change. Please, tell me you were messing with me.”

“Sorry, I was,” Jon said. “I am actually the Duke of Earl and I demand that you let this child go.”

“Extracting information from you is going to be such fun,” the officer said.

“I should warn you, I've been tortured before, and I am not telling you Jack,” Jon said.

“Oh, I think by the time I am finished, you will be crying like a little baby, sucking on my tit,” the officer said.

Jon rolled his eyes. “Not going to happen,” Jon said.

The officer raised his hand and a beam of energy lanced out at Jon. Jon responded naturally, blocking it with his palm. The officer was genuinely surprised, but increased the intensity of his attack. Jon stumbled back and fell to his butt. A flash of energy occurred and the attack was over. Jon was rendered unconscious.

“Search the area for others. And put a guard on the gate,” the master ordered.

निर्मित

Jon found himself hovering above his body. He seemed to be out cold. The villagers were gathered in front of the temple. One of the Jaffa were stationed facing the villagers. One stood facing Jon's body. Another stood with his staff weapon trained on Jon's friends. A baby cried. All his friends were on their knees, except Lakeisha, who was standing before the Officer. The officer was messing with Lakeisha, turning her face to and fro. He squeezed her cheek until her mouth opened and he examined her teeth. He inhaled her breath.

"Leave her alone," Loxy said.

The Jaffa hit Loxy with the staff, knocking her on her butt. He then swung his weapon around, flaring it out as if he might shoot her.

"Hey! We're cooperating," Jack said.

"Back on your knees," the Jaffa demanded.

Loxy returned to her kneeling position.

"Tell me your name," the officer said.

"Go fuck yourself," Lakeisha said.

The officer struck her. She went to strike back, but he caught her hand, turned it at the wrist into a joint lock. With his other hand, he took her hair and twisted, forcing her face up close to his. He kissed her hard. He licked the side of her face and brought his mouth near her ear.

"I am going to ask you your name," he said, his whispered. "And if I hear any other obscenities, I will oblige you, in front of your friends. Your name?"

"Lakeisha," she answered.

"And what are the names of your friends?" the officer said. "I think it's important to no your names before we become more intimate with each other."

"Loxy, Alish, Jack, and Jon," Lakeisha said.

"See, not that hard," he said, and then pulled her harder into him. "Or is it?"

"I don't feel anything," Lakeisha said. "Sure you have one?"

The officer took her to the ground. Jack moved as if he would get up, but the Jaffa primed his weapon. Jon found himself back in his body, opening his eyes and sitting up.

"The other is awake," the lead Jaffa said, his weapon primed.

Jack's eyes narrowed on the Jaffa, as if he recognized the voice.

"This will have to wait, my dear," the officer said, holding her face still as he hovered over her. "But please, keep fighting. It's been so long since I have been with a fighter. It's such a refreshing change."

Lakeisha scooted back to Jack and hugged him.

"Jack, Jack, Jack," the officer said. "You are Jack, right? I don't have that mixed up, do I? I am Master Brisk. It is so rare to encounter a fellow practitioner of the arts in the field that I must say I am very pleased to have met you like this. I feel some kinship to you. Oh, please, say something clever."

"I am hurting," Jon said, standing up.

"Oh, I imagine so," Brisk said. "You took a pretty big one for the team, there, Jack. Who taught you to do that?"

"Self-taught," Jon said.

“I believe you. And I am impressed,” Brisk said. “Who do you work for?”

“I am sorry, I am not authorized to reveal that information,” Jon said.

“Teal’c,” Brisk said. “What do you make of this?”

The lead Jaffa retracted his dog head. A really old Teal’c scowled down at Jon. “This boy is clearly insane,” Teal’c said. “Kill him and be done with it.”

“Overly confident, for sure,” Brisk said. “But, some natural talent. And his friend there, he killed three of your men.”

“He had an explosive device,” Teal’c said.

“That accounts for two. And the other?” Brisk asked.

“He has some rudimentary knowledge of our staff weapons, and demonstrated basic skills,” Teal’c said.

“It was more than basic,” Jack said. “I would have kicked your butt, too, if your Cosplay boss hadn’t had a Zat gun.”

“Now that is just pure bravado,” Brisk said. “This is absolutely awesome. I mean, seriously, Teal’c, in all our days together, have you ever seen such courage and spirit in young people?”

“Not amongst the humans,” Teal’c said.

“I know,” Brisk lamented. “These young people today, they just don’t have the same work ethic that you and I share.” Brisk pulled the PAD from his side pocket. “So, Jack, where did you get this tech?”

“The Apple store,” Jon said.

“As much as I am enjoying the banter, son,” Brisk said. “I am afraid time is precious. I came here to raise a new magician. I was interviewing the boys to see if anyone here has some talent, but why go with maybe when I clearly have talent right here in front of me. Join me willingly, son, and I can teach you things about magic you never thought possible.”

Jon seemed to consider the offer. “I am really interested in learning new stuff,” Jon said. “But I have this policy that blocks me from playing with bastards that would harm a child.”

“I like that policy,” Brisk said. “I mean, seriously, people with strong ethical codes are so hard to find these days. I would never, personally, harm a child. But you will.”

“No, I won’t,” Jon said.

Daylight started to diminish. “So, it’s begun. We will be experiencing an eclipse,” Brisk said. “I want you to pleasure yourself with the virgin, and when you’re finished, you will slit her throat and allow the blood to run the temple stairs, where you and I will then drink the blood and toast to your new life.”

“Well, I am now done with the friendly banter shit. You can go fuck yourself,” Jon said.

“Jack, this is going to happen,” Brisk said, ever so patiently. “Ideally, it all happens during the eclipse for maximum potential. If you delay, I will begin killing people. I will kill everyone here, one person at a time, starting with the children. Do the math, son. The life of one child or the whole village dies.”

“That’s the trick, isn’t it,” Jon said. “In order for you to get off, you need someone else to do the dirty work. You can kill me. You can kill everyone here. I will be dead in good conscious knowing that I did not submit to that bullshit.”

Brisk took a step forwards. “Oh, I am not going to kill you, son. I love you! You’re like the long lost son, and I intend to kill the fatted calf and we will feast to your joyous return. Still, if you do not comply, when I am done killing everyone here I will find your home world and I will find your family and I will torture everyone you know, in front of you,” he said. “I will continue this strategy until you die of old age watching people slaughtered in front of you, or you give in and follow orders. I don’t know how many people will have to die before you give in, but I assure you, everyone eventually gives in.”

“Have fun with that,” Jon said.

“I am not sure if you are defiant out of ignorance or pure stubbornness,” Brisk said. He laughed. “Your hand is twitching. Are you trying to generate enough power to attack me? You have no power, here! You’re a fool. Senti, kill one of them.”

Senti discharged his weapon into the villagers, killing one of them. The baby stopped crying. The mother also fell dead. Still, none of the villagers ran. They all prostrated themselves asking for mercy. Brisk smiled into Jon’s face.

“Pretty tough for a young man, aren’t you?” Brisk said. “Maybe instead of just blasting them, I should have their skin peeled from their flesh? Could you stand watching them die slowly?”

Jon felt the change and brought his hands up. A spray of colored light flew from his hands enveloping Brisk. Brisk fought back, producing an equally powerful burst of energy that drove Jon to his knees.

“You can’t beat me,” Brisk said. “And when you wake up, we will just start this dance all over again... Lotu, kill the plant woman! She disgusts me.”

Lotu discharged his weapon into Alish stomach. The blast illuminated her chest, neck, and limbs, even her eyes flared, but because she wasn’t human, she literally boiled and exploded. Jack reached for the weapon but the Jaffa kicked him back, the boot hitting Jack in the face. He brought the weapon to bear at Jack.

“Kill another villager!” Brisk yelled.

Jon was now on both knees.

“Teal’c!” Jack yelled. “I can save these people!”

Teal’c came over to Jack and faced him, his staff flared, ready to fire directly into Jack.

“Kill another villager!” Brisk said. His hands were shaking. Jon seemed to be succumbing.

“Many have spoken those words,” Teal’c said. “But never before today have I believed it possible.”

Teal’c turned his staff weapon on the Jaffa next to him.

“What?” Brisk said.

An explosion occurred between him and Jon. Brisk went tumbling. Jon fell on his but, his head hitting the back of the marble pedestal. Brisk rolled, coming up on his feet. Teal’c and Senti had exchanged fire. Loxy pushed Lakeisha out of the way of the stray blast. Senti crumbled, dead. Brisk shot Teal’c with a Zat gun, and he went down. Jack went for the staff weapon, but he, too, was taken out by the Zat gun. Brisk came over to Jon, aiming the Zat gun at him. Jon started laughing.

“You are insane,” Brisk said.

“No, I am not,” Jon said. His side hurt from the energy blast and from laughing. His was pounding. “I just now figured out how it works.”

“How what works?” Brisk asked.

“It’s turn based,” Jon said. “My turn! Sleep.”

Brisk collapsed to the ground. Jon got up and took the Zat gun from him. He pointed it around, looking for a threat, but found none. The villagers remained prostrated, crying for mercy. Loxy rushed Jon to hug him.

“Don’t touch me!” Jon warned.

“Why?” Loxy asked.

“I am hurting,” Jon said.

“Oh,” Loxy said, and hugged him anyway.

“Ow!” Jon said. “Go wake up Jack. Lake, unchained this child.”

Jon sat back down, his back against the stone sacrifice table. A villager approached and Jon pointed the weapon at them.

“We will not harm you, Master,” he said. “Just let me take the girl back to her family.”

“Fuck you,” Jon said.

“Jon,” Lakeisha said. “She should go back to her family.”

“They gave her up!” Jon said.

“I know,” Lakeisha said. “It was wrong. But there’s a context here that can’t be ignored. They were doing the same math that you and I were doing, but they came up with a different solution. This girl belongs with her family.” Lakeisha directed the child to the adult. “Take her. But know this. If any of you ever sacrifices a child again, you will have hell from me.” She picked up a staff weapon as if she meant business, and they bowed as they retreated.

Jon saw movement and pointed the Zat gun at Jack.

“Hey hey hey, it’s me buddy,” Jack said.

“Don’t call me that,” Jon said.

“What do we do with him?” Loxy asked Jack, pointing to Brisk.

A staff weapon was discharged into Brisk, killing him, resolving Loxy’s question. They turned to see Lakeisha holding the weapon. Jack went to her, told her to drop it. When she did, he brought her into an embrace. Teal’c roused, assessed the situation. He picked up his staff and started to stand.

“Put it down,” Jon said, pointing the gun at Teal’c.

Teal’c remained on his knees, his hands out, offering his weapon. “If you will allow me, I will serve you, but I will understand if you feel it compulsory to end my life,” he said. “I have done much wrong. I deserve worse than death.”

“We’re not killing you, Teal’c,” Jack said. “Jon, put the Zat gun down. We won. It’s over.”

“Okay,” Jon said. He handed the weapon to Loxy, closed his eyes, and went to sleep.

Chapter 17

Loxy emerged from one of the houses, saw Jon sitting on the steps of the temple, and came over, bringing him a hot coffee.

“No, thank you,” Jon said.

“Jon, either come inside and warm up, or drink this coffee,” Loxy said. “I made it with our water. This is my cup.”

Jon accepted the cup and she sat next to him. She leaned into him, putting her head on his shoulder. She simply sat there with him, not speaking. She put a hand on his knee. When the coffee was half gone, she said.

“Let me heal you,” Loxy whispered.

“No,” Jon said.

Jack emerged from the home. It was the same home that Loxy had emerged from. It was the largest of the houses, probably a community home where people gathered to discuss life and meals. Jack came over to Jon. He remained standing. He also had coffee.

“Can we leave now?” Jon asked.

“I would like to wait till they’ve decided what they’re going to do,” Jack said.

“Screw them, Jack. Let’s just go,” Jon said.

“You’re angry,” Loxy said.

“You think?” Jon asked. “Jack, what would you have done?”

Jack’s response was long in coming. The moon was still in the sky, but the sun was now below the horizon. The stars were brighter than anyone could see from Earth, even if they were on a boat in the middle of the ocean. “I have been in a lot of bad situations. I have even surrendered my weapons because the bad guys got the drop on us. I have experienced the bad guys asking me to kill others while threatening my friends. I have had my colleagues instructed to kill me while others were held hostage. I have seen bad guys use children as shields. But in all of my days, I have never had a bad guy tell me to harm a child, much less have inappropriate relations with a child before killing them. I would have done exactly what you did, and every one of my colleagues would have been just fine with that decision, even if it meant their own deaths. I have heard all sorts of psychological explanation for why people give into this kind of brutality, from Stockholm’s Syndrome to just bull shit fear. These people here, they’re scared, Jon. That’s real. It’s undeniable. I want you to go explain it to them, in simple terms, why it would be better to be dead than to continue to living the way they have.”

“Give me one reason why I should,” Jon said.

Jack took a flashlight from his backpack and handed it to him. He turned and walked back to the house. Jon began to weep.

“Come on,” Loxy said. “I am with you.”

It took effort to walk, and not just because he was still hurting, but because of the emotions of it all. He had refused healing from Loxy because he wanted to feel. He wanted to remember. They entered the home. It was lit by a fireplace and candles. Someone was actually saying they wouldn’t be in this mess if Lakeisha hadn’t killed Brisk. All talking stopped when Jon entered. Whether it was because of his magical skills, or something he wasn’t aware of, they recognized him as a Master, or authority. All eyes came to him. He was aware of the eyes, but he

avoided eye contact. He was aware of Lakeisha sitting by Jack because of their uniforms. He didn't meet their eyes either. Jon stared at the floor, clicking the flashlight on and off.

"No one should hear this story," Jon said. Tears flowed down his face. "No one should repeat this story. No one should ever live this story. But it happens. Even on my home world, this happens. My mom had an addiction to heroin. She would take me to go score, and one day, she was told if she wanted it, she would have to come inside and get it. I watched as she was raped, repeatedly, by everyone there. I was taken from her, and she was told if she didn't please their clients, I would die. She was pimped out for over a year. I was told the same thing. If I didn't please the clients, my mom would die. I was sold. I was traded. I was rented. I was taken to graveyards and tossed into freshly dug graves with other boys and they filled it with water and watched us fight for our lives. We were shipped in dog kennels. There were men who liked to strangle kids to death after they were finished. I was left for dead twice. I actually died and went into the light twice. Each time I was sent back. I don't know what was worse, being brutalized, or rejected by the light.

"There was this one estate where I got moved to. Families would come thinking they were on this great retreat that they won. They would arrive and be innocuously separated and then quietly informed that if they didn't do things, their family would suffer or die. They had to do these things on tape. They had to be convincing, or people would die. You'd be surprised what men and women will do when they think they're saving the lives of their family. You would be surprised what children will do to save their parents. These families would leave thinking it was over, but that was just the beginning. They were recorded doing awful things. They were informed if they told, their families would die. They were informed if they talked about with each other, they would die. They were told if they completed suicide, their remaining families would die. They were told if they talked, their films would be made public. They were told people in law enforcement, policemen, counselors, and judges were part of the club, and so if they talked, people would know. Several times I was even taken to a hospital with the evidence still on me so that criminal investigations could be started, and the men that were coerced into using me were told if they ever crossed the 'club,' their name and genetic profile would be given to the police in an ongoing investigation."

"I don't know when you guys first made your choice, but I assure you, it never stops being a choice, because they will come back, and they will ask you to do it again. They will ask you to do worse. Maybe you think it can't get worse. Maybe you're lucky. This only happens here once in a blue moon. Maybe you can justify the cost. The thing about worse, it gets worse in small increments and you don't realize you've become a monster until you're drinking and laughing with the very evil that recruited you. They will come for more. Other bastards worse than this Brisk guy will come. And when they're tired of coming, they will sell your address and your people to the next bidder, or pass you off to a friend. Believe me, bad guys have friends, and they tend to be just as bad if not worse, because bad is a competition," Jon said. "I have done some horrible things to stay alive. Those things stay with you. Forever. The things you see, they stay with you forever. Consequently, I decided on some rules to live by. I don't kill. I avoid fights. If I see someone is in harm's way, I do my best to help them. I do not back down from a fight or compromise my principals. I can't tell you what you should do, but if I had my way, I would bury that fucking Stargate and be done with it until you're ready and capable of holding

your own,” Jon said. He brought his head up so he could see their eyes. The light was on. Lakeisha was crying. Jack nodded. “That’s all I got.”

Jon turned to leave but Loxy took his hand. “Stay,” she said. “It’s important.”

Jon hugged her and cried some more. She patted his back and gently rocked him.

An older lady stood up. “I say we accept Jack’s offer for this Light Ring technology and we burry that fucking Stargate until we can hold our own.”

It was decided. That was what would be done. Teal’c assured them they could wait till morning. Brisk would not be missed for an entire week. People met with Jon, and he found himself bothered by the fact that they seemed like generally good people who were just in a bad way, and so it was hard to stay mad. He missed the fact that several of them were clearly interested in him, based on subtle flirting, and when Loxy pointed it out, he expressed skepticism.

“Want to bet?” Loxy asked.

“How would we confirm your thesis?” Jon asked.

“Get you alone with one of them?” Loxy asked.

“No,” Jon said.

They ate, they talked, they made new friends, and in the morning, Jack removed the tech that would create the Light Ring platform and AI system. It was a ball that illuminated and became so hot that it literally melted its way into the earth. The hole filled itself in behind it, as if filling in with lava. Lava bubbled up and out, making a column.

“That was cool,” Lakeisha said.

“Yep,” Jack said.

Jack handed the PAD to Lakeisha so she could have a turn initiating a gate. She sent a probe through, studied the terrain, and said it looked good. Jack agreed.

“Are you sure you wish me to come with you?” Teal’c asked.

“You want to stay here and farm?” Jack asked.

“I do not,” Teal’c said. “But if you say that is my penance, then that is what I will do.”

“There are better ways for you to earn that,” Jack said. “We need intel. We might need your fighting skills. We’re definitely keeping these staffs.”

“I pledge my allegiance to you Jack O’Neill,” Teal’c said. “And to you, Jon Harister. And to you, Lakeisha Williams. And to you, Loxy Bliss.”

“Let’s move out,” Jack said.

They passed through the gate. Once on the other side, Jon summoned the Light Ring to collect them.

निर्मित

Lakeisha came down the stairs into Jack’s room. “May I come in?”

“Sure,” Jack said, sitting up. There was a light on the wall behind him that made for nice reading. He was in bed. He put the magazine he was reading down.

“I am sorry,” Lakeisha said.

“For?” Jack asked.

“For everything. For being difficult. For being judgmental. For...” Lakeisha said.

“Lakeisha, you’re good,” Jack said.

“I killed someone today,” Lakeisha said.

Jack didn’t say anything.

“I thought I would feel better, Jack,” Lakeisha said. “That moment is still in my head, and it was like time stopped for me and I could see my entire life, and all those moments when I was powerless and being used, all of that was directed into that man, and I killed him. He lit up like a plastic thing. I don’t feel better.”

“Did you ever see the Movie Good Will Hunting?” Jack asked.

“What the hell does that have to do with anything I just shared?” Lakeisha asked.

Jack took a deep breath, waited, and let it out. “You’re hurting, Lake. You were hurting before you engaged the enemy. You were not responding to the present. You were responding to past trauma. You probably need more therapy. Maybe we all do. We don’t always have access to good counseling. In the absence of counseling, you can turn to books and movies. The reason it works is because stories are models for how we live and respond. Take Good Will Hunting for example. There are therapeutic moments in that movie. Several characters have therapeutic moments and you see them change. Watch that show and your brain now has a model for positive change. Death Wish 12, probably not a viable model for long term well-being. Yeah, we come from a world that says blow it up. But blowing it up just leads to more blowing it up. I was in a career where I blew things up. I faced enemies where death was frequently the only option for ending hostilities. Military engagement and Civilian engagement are two different animals. In the military, if the enemy is retreating, it is permissible to keep shooting. In the civilian arena, if a bad guy is fleeing, it is against the rules to shoot them. You killed someone who was unconscious. That is a serious rule violation. If you didn’t feel bad, I would be worried about you. Had you not shot him, I would have fucking shot him. It is my opinion he needed to be dead. I would not have asked you to carry this. Either way, we are presently unbounded by home, by nation, by law, and there is a real danger of us descending to our base instincts. The Book, Lord of the Flies, it describes a real thing, and in the absence of a community, there go we, but for the grace of God.”

Lakeisha didn’t know what to say. She was considering something, but she was interrupted by Isis in her ear. Isis was in everyone’s ear.

“There is a sphere approaching the station,” Isis said.

They all arrived at the hangar deck about the same time. They were through the airlock even as the sphere was landing. The bubble burst and Alish stepped out onto the deck and was immediately swept up in Jon’s arms. Loxy joined the hug. Lakeisha covered her mouth and cried. Jack touched Alish’s arm and she turned to him and hugged him. She went to Alish and hugged her.

“It’s okay, Lake,” Alish said. “Avatar’s can always be regenerated.” She retreated so she could see everyone. Teal’c stood there with a staff, watching. “Why he is here?”

“He switched sides and help save us,” Jack said. “His name is Teal’c.”

“I am glad you are unharmed,” Teal’c said.

“Oh, I was harmed, but I will live,” Alish said, going to the pedestal containing the crystals. She swapped out the one she used to arrive with a fully charged one. She put the

charged one in her pocket. "Sorry it took so long to get back. It's not like Flight Crystals grow on trees, you know? Why is everyone dressed for bed?"

"Because it's bed time," Jack said.

"Oh," Alish said. "So, am I sleeping with Jon or Lakeisha?"

"With me," Lakeisha said, even as Jon and Loxy was saying with us.

"Please," Lakeisha said.

"Of course," Alish said. "It's so good Teal'c has joined us. Now, Jack doesn't have to sleep alone."

"I'm not alone," Jack said. "I have Lorna Hopper with me tonight. I might even make a tulpa out of her."

"It takes a little more than wishful thinking, Jack, or every boy would have a tulpa," Jon said.

Chapter 18

The door to the gym opened, old Jack leading the charge. The school bell rung, 12:00 pm.

“Isis, bring me home,” Jon said.

Six holographic rings rose from the gym floor, each one spinning in the opposite direction of the previous. Everything inside the circle was illuminated. The ring system extended way out beyond the 12 foot perimeter of the center circle of the basketball court. Jon, Jack, and Lakeisha were bathed in a light so bright they could not be seen. Jack, Samantha, Teal’c, Daniel, and Janet slid to a halt, bringing their hands up to shield their eyes against the flaring light. The ghostly rings descended back into the earth, as if they had never been.

“So, I guess he got a good connection?” Jack said more than asked.

Young Jack and Lakeisha were unconscious on the floor. Jon seemed on the verge of falling, except a woman was there. A twenty something year old, dressed in Bohemian fashion. She held Jon’s hand in both of hers, securing the grenade.

“This isn’t our way,” she was saying.

“Loxy?” Jon asked, his knees giving way.

“It’s okay. I got you,” Loxy said, easing his fall. She came back up with the grenade in her hands to find old Jack and Samantha had their weapons drawn.

“Who are you?” old Jack said.

“Not to be rude, but could we find the pin, please?” Loxy asked.

“It’s a live grenade?” Samantha asked.

Loxy shrugged.

Teal’c stepped forwards. “I believe this is what you’re looking for.”

Jack holstered his weapon and took the pin from Teal’c. He carefully inserted the pin into the grenade and relieved Loxy of the device. Janet was kneeling over Jack and Lakeisha.

“We need to get them back to the base,” Janet said.

“You think?” old Jack asked, already dialing. “Um, good morning, Sir. Yeah, Sir, sorry to interrupt, but could you send me a helicopter for an immediate evac. The high school. Yes, that high school. Umm, yet to be determined. A Black Hawk would be nice. A bit showy, if the goal is to contain this. Care flight would be okay. Three stretchers. Oh, and a general survey team in hazmat gear, possible clean up team. Just being precautious. That would be great, Sir. See you there.” Jack pocketed his phone. “Choppers on the way. Teal’c, keep everyone out till the help arrives.” He turned the new girl while simultaneously signaling for Samantha to put her weapon away. “Now, who are you?”

“I am Loxy Isadora Bliss,” Loxy said. She offered her hand. “It’s nice to meet you, Colonel O’Neill.”

Jack took a step back, not accepting her hand. “You know me? Have we met?”

Loxy looked up and to the right. “Technically, yes,” she said.

“You’re Jon’s tulpa,” Daniel said.

“Yes, Doctor Jackson,” Loxy said.

“You’re telling me Jon’s invisible friend is real?” Jack asked.

“I was there this morning when you introduced yourselves,” Loxy said.

“Daniel?” Jack said.

“Okay, according to the Tibetan tulpa a practice, you can essentially create a thought form and give it sentience,” Daniel began.

“And an actual body?” Jack asked.

“The Tibetans believed this,” Daniel said.

“Technically, all thought forms are real. Further, there are no bodies, there are only thought forms. Your definitions of reality are faulty, which explains why you get the results you do,” Loxy said.

“That is one of their beliefs, actually,” Daniel said. “Another way to look at it, Jack, is that our brains are simply sophisticated computers that run personality programs. You, Carter, and I are just personalities that were created through external and internal events, the accumulation of all our experiences and choices. The brain doesn’t care what personality runs the hardware. Jon created a personality in his head. That personality is real.”

“To a crazy person, maybe,” Jack said.

“Like multiple personality complex?” Janet asked. “That could be explained by his past trauma.”

“Yeah, but how do you explain we can see her now,” Jack said. “I mean, we can all see the same invisible friend, can’t we?”

“Folie à deux, or shared psychosis, is a real thing,” Janet said.

“I assure you, I am quite real,” Loxy said.

Jack pushed her shoulder. “You feel real,” Jack said. He reached to touch her bosom.

“Jack,” Samantha corrected.

“Just wanted to be thorough,” Jack said.

“I would not be offended,” Loxy said.

“I would,” Samantha and Janet both said.

“The Tibetan Monks maintain that their thought forms could manifest into our reality and be experienced by the community,” Daniel said.

Jack nodded for them to gather around him as he stepped further away from Loxy. Loxy remained where she was without be instructed, and simply smiled, watching. Daniel, Samantha, and Janet came over. Jack looked over Daniel’s shoulder to Loxy, she smiled, and then back to Daniel.

“She’s a thought form?” Jack asked.

“I don’t know, Jack,” Daniel said. “She believes that. Jon seemed to believe that before he passed out.”

“It’s more likely that she is an alien that Jon contacted telepathically, and he was necessary for her to Ring in,” Samantha said.

“Those didn’t look like our Rings,” Jack said.

“No, those were new. More sophisticated,” Samantha agreed.

“Maybe the Rings were also thought forms, and this was all part of a necessary ritual in order for Jon to make her manifest,” Daniel said.

“You can’t just think people into existence, Daniel,” Jack said. “God knows, I have tried. No matter how much I contemplated Mary Steenburgen, she has not manifested in my room.”

“That’s a bit creepy,” Samantha said.

“I am illustrating a point,” Jack said. “If people could make invisible friends real, then every lonely, horny teenage boy would have special friends. I still have that Farah Faucet poster and she hasn’t moved from that poster pose once.”

Daniel looked back to Loxy, prompting everyone to look at her.

“She does seem pretty special,” Daniel said.

“Well endowed,” Samantha said.

“Hyper feminism,” Janet said. She felt the need to explain that. “It could be a medical condition...”

“Or, she is a psychological construct where Jon took all the attributes of what he considers to be an attractive female and made her,” Daniel said. “She is an archetype.”

“I am voting for alien,” Samantha said.

“Well, Earth boys are easy,” Jack said.

“I think that was girls, Jack,” Daniel said.

“Which was written by boys imagining extremes scenarios for what it takes for boys to get laid?” Jack asked. “They just got the title wrong is all.”

“Times have changed, Jack,” Janet said. “Girls today are just as aggressive as boys.”

“Really?” Jack said. “Why didn’t I get to be the young one that could go back to high school?”

Teal’c passed the medics through, followed by three stretchers.

“I guess we’re done here,” Jack said. “See you back at the base.”

“We’re in the same car, Sir,” Samantha said.

“Oh, yeah, well, come on then,” Jack said. “We’re burning daylight.”

“I thought the rule is one cliché a day,” Daniel said.

“It’s one of those days,” Jack said. “Janet?”

“Go ahead,” Janet said. “I’ll travel with the patients.”

“Very well,” Jack said. “Loxy, you’re with us, please.”

As they were passing out of the room, he stopped a LT. and gave instruction. “Do a scan for radiation and any of those other things that we worry about,” Jack said.

“Yes, Sir,” the LT. said, starting to salute.

Jack motioned him to stop. “Oh, not in the field, son,” Jack said. “You know better than that.”

“Sorry, Sir,” the LT. said.

Chapter 19

“Unscheduled off world activation.”

“It never rains, but it pours,” Hammond said, leaving his office and going straight way to the gate room. “Any radio signals?”

“Um, yeah,” the tech said, turning up the volume.

“Stargate command, can you hear me...”

“This is Stargate command, General Hammond speaking. Identify yourself.”

“Oh, thank god it’s you, Sir. It’s me. Jack.”

Hammond frowned at the tech. “Jack who?” Hammond asked.

“How many Jacks do you know, calling from a Stargate?”

“You’d be surprised,” Hammond said.

“It’s me. Really me. And Lakeisha and Jon,” Jack said.

“Listen, son, I don’t know how you got our frequency, but...” Hammond said.

“I got it because I am really Jack. The younger one, who you keep dismissing because you have this thing against children who are smarter than you,” Jack said.

“So, you’re Jack O’Neill, just calling home to say hi,” Hammond asked. He made a face like, he was just going to go with it. “How are ya’ll doing?”

“We’re fine, Sir,” Jack said. Even with audio only, the sarcasm was obvious. “And next time I ask for help because something is weird, I would like to be taken a little more seriously.”

“We took you seriously,” Hammond said.

“Then why am I on a spaceship outside the galaxy?” Jack asked.

“Are you sure?” Hammond asked.

“Well, it could be any galaxy, I suppose,” Jack said.

“We’ll open the iris, son. Come on home,” Hammond said, ‘okaying’ by gesture for the Iris to be spun open.

“Yeah, about that, we have a little problem here,” Jack said.

“Stand by,” Hammond said.

“Sir, there is a secondary code imbedded in the signal,” the tech said. “It appears to be chevrons. It’s repeating itself.”

Hammond nodded and continued speaking to Jack: “It seems your radio is transmitting what appears to be a repeating series of symbols that translates into a good gate address. It’s odd, as it specifies ten digits, but its pinging back solid. We will send a team over.”

“Oh, I wouldn’t do that, Sir,” Jack said.

Hammond frowned, as he did not like being told what he should or shouldn’t do, especially by a boy. He had enough insight into himself that maybe young Jack was right, he dismissed the child too easily because of an unexplored bias. He breathed through it and reasonably eliminated the signs of irritation from his voice. Mostly. “What’s going on, Jack?” Hammond said.

“Well, the gate on this side is like HO scale,” Jack said. “You could send some Star Wars action figures over. I would really like a classic Bobba Fet if you have one.”

“Stand by,” Hammond said. He motioned the audio be cut. “Can you redial this gate?”

“I don’t see why not, Sir,” the tech said. “It’s a great signal. In fact, I have never seen signal strength this good. It’s like they’re right next door.”

“You mean, like they’re on Alpha Centauri?” Hammond asked.

“No, I mean like, they’re in Texas,” the tech said.

“If that was true, son, they’d have a bigger gate than HO scale,” Hammon said, and motioned for them to reconnect the audio. “Alright, we’re going to shut the gate down on our end. If you don’t hear from us in two hours, call us back.”

“What’s the plan, Sir?” Jack asked.

“Well, we’re going to miniaturize a probe,” Hammond said.

“Gotcha. Talk to you soon,” Jack said.

The gate powered down. An aid approached the general

“Sir, SG1 is in the conference room,” she said.

“Of course they are,” Hammond said. “About that probe?”

“On it, Sir,” the tech said.

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“If people could make invisible friends real, then every lonely, horny teenage boy would have special friends,” General Hammond was saying.

“That’s exactly what I said, Sir,” Jack said.

“Great minds,” Samantha said, not finishing the cliché.

“Clearly, if she is what she says she is, the process for manifesting a tulpa is more involved than just wanting to get laid,” Daniel said. “I mean, the monks meditate on thought forms for years. It’s a dedicate process on the verge of being obsessive...”

Janet arrived in the conference room and sat down.

“How are they doing?” Hammond asked.

“They appear to be fine,” Janet said.

“They’re unconscious,” Jack said.

“It looks like sleep,” Janet said.

“But it’s not just sleep,” Jack said.

“No, it’s not. I have not been able to rouse them,” Janet said.

“Tell me about Loxy,” Hammond said.

“She appears to be human. Her DNA says human...” Janet said.

“If she were a tulpa, how would she have DNA?” Jack said.

“Sir, we’re not still seriously considering she is a manifested thought form, are we?”

Samantha said.

“We can’t rule it out,” Daniel argued.

“Yes we can!” Samantha said. “Okay, technically we can’t, but theirs is no way she is a dream girl come to life.”

“She is fairly dreamy,” Jack said.

“Look,” Daniel said. “Our brains make models of personalities. It’s how we predict behaviors. It’s why we get mad at televisions show when actors break character and do

something inconsistent. Maybe we don't just make psychological models. Maybe we encode all of that information into a genetic map which would include personality and physical attributes."

"There is absolutely zero evidence..."

"That we store information genetically? Yeah, there is," Daniel said.

"That's not what I was going to say," Samantha said.

Daniel leaned into the table bringing his hands together. "Look, we recognize each other by sight, by sound, by touch, even smells," he began.

"Which reminds me, Daniel, you need to shower more," Jack said.

Daniel gave Jack that incomprehensible look that suggested he wasn't sure if Jack was being serious or even relevant. He pushed on without answer to the dilemma, even pushing his glasses back into place: "We recognize smells on a subconscious level. That is information exchange on a genetic level. We breathe out our genes, we inhale each other's genes. In the course of this meeting, we have intimately exchanged much more information than just our verbal banter. It is not an unreasonable reach that we're capable of more. I could not have ascended if there wasn't more. Jon created the perfect girl with his mind. His mind is not his brain. He stored that information in his brain. Brains can influence genetic outcomes. The placebo effect would not work if that weren't true. So, here's a real possibility: Jon accessed via telepathy an ancient computer. He activated it. The Light Rings ascended into our plane, scanned him, found the additional personality, removed her from his head and made her real."

Samantha bit on her nail. Jack waved at her not to do that and when she lowered her thumb, she said: "I have a theory. Jon was in contact with an alien via telepathy. When circumstance allowed, he activated her Ring system and she came here."

"Kind of like releasing a jinn from a bottle?" Jack asked.

"Shades of I dream of Jeannie?" Hammond asked.

"That might explain the HO scale gate," Jack said. "She was in a bottle somewhere, and they released her, and she is holding their consciousness hostage in the bottle she was imprisoned in."

Samantha dropped her head to the table. "Why can't we have one normal meeting without a bunch weird television hypothesis?"

"General Hammond, I feel it necessary to disclose that if I find that bottle before Major Nelson, I am not going to limit Barbara's ability to do magic," Jack said.

"I hear you," Hammond said.

"Can we come back to reality for just a moment," Samantha said.

"I would like to know more about this jinn," Teal'c said. "And why this Major Nelson would limit her potential. Was she evil?"

"No," Jack said.

"Then why was she locked in a bottle?" Teal'c asked.

"I don't remember that part," Jack said.

"Plot contrivance," Daniel said.

"Most likely," Jack agreed.

"It seems to me the entire plot was a vehicle to compete with Bewitched, which explains the parallels between the two shows," Hammond said.

“Yeah, if you want to compete, you don’t do more of the same,” Jack argued. “For example, if you learn that the competing studio is making an Asteroid movie with Bruce Willis, you don’t rush to make your own deep impact movie.”

“Ghost, Ghost Dad...” Daniel said.

“The Abyss, Leviathan,” Jack said. “I mean, if you hear the other studio is doing something, come up with something different, don’t just make more of the same and hope yours will do better...”

Jack’s voice trailed off as he was distracted by the interruption. The aid entered to inform the general that the miniaturized probe was ready. She smiled at Jack and departed.

“New aid, Sir?” Jack said.

“Yes,” Hammond said. “Anita Gonzales.”

“I bet she doesn’t last a week,” Samantha said.

“I’ll take that bet,” Daniel said.

“There is already a pool going,” Janet said.

“We’re betting on the longevity of my staff?” Hammond said.

“There’s always news faces in the back ground,” Daniel said. “You would think in a top secret facility, there wouldn’t be a lot of new faces.”

“I wonder what happens to them when they go,” Jack said.

“They just go back to their previous lives?” Daniel said.

“Could you?” Jack asked.

“At last, no,” Daniel said.

“Alright, gear up, SG1,” Hammond said. “I want you on standby.”

“Standby for what, Sir?” Samantha asked.

“I will let you know when I know,” Hammond said.

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“Dial the gate,” Hammond directed.

The gate began spinning. A Chevron clicked into place.

“Chevron ten, encoded,” the tech said.

“We’re counting down, now?” Jack asked.

“It’s just the order I wrote the symbols down,” the tech said. “Nine encoded... See...”

The tech checked off the symbol he had written in his notes.

Jack looked to Hammond. “Where’s Norm?”

“Chief Master Sergeant Davis is on his honeymoon,” Hammond announced.

“Chevron eight encoded,” the tech said.

“I didn’t even know he was dating anyone,” Samantha said.

“Me neither,” Daniel said. “Did it ever occur to you, we really don’t take the time to get to know each other?”

“Well, that’s not true,” Hammond said.

“Chevron seven encoded,” the tech said.

“Why is that?” Jack asked.

“The reason I have a new aid is because Davis married my previous aid,” Hammond said.

“Wow,” Samantha said.

“Yeah. I was totally blindsided by that one,” Hammond said.

“Which, reinforces my whole point, we just don’t get to know people around here,” Daniel said.

“Chevron six, encoded,” the tech said.

“What’s your name?” Daniel asked.

“Don’t ask,” Jack said. “He’s not going to be here that long.”

“I am not?” the tech asked.

“You’re counting backwards,” Jack said.

“Five!” the tech said.

“Why is it all the new people want to do it their way? You’re going against the grain, son. We have a system here,” Jack said.

“Four,” the tech said. “General Hammond, there is a lot more pressure at this station than I was led to believe.”

Behind his back Jack was indicating that the tech was ‘so gone’ and that he has twenty bucks on it. He stopped when he realize the tech was watching him.

“It’s just a little game we play,” Jack said.

“Three,” he said. “My life is not a game. Two.”

“That’s interesting,” Samantha said, looking to the gate. “I really didn’t think the gate address was going to work out.”

“One,” the tech said.

A wormhole was established. Hammond motioned for the radio to go live.

“Hello, Jack. Are you still there?” Hammond asked.

“Affirmative, Sir.”

“Get us home!” It was a female voice. They assumed it was Lakeisha.

Hammond scratched his head. Samantha gave the eyebrow, semi worried look.

“We’re working on it, Mam,” Hammond said. “SG1 is with me. Jack, we’re sending a probe through. Please confirm when you see it.”

A tech walked up to the gate with a baseball size probe and sent it through as close to the center of the wormhole as he could spot by eye. A moment later, the young Jack responded: “I was expecting something a little bigger.”

“Are you sure your gate is miniaturized?” Hammond said.

“What do you mean, am I sure? I am literally standing over it. I could pick it up with my hands.”

“Jack, we’re going to send a full size MALP, through,” Samantha said.

“I seriously doubt that.”

“Stand by,” Hammond said.

The Mobile Analytic Laboratory Probe was directed up the ramp. It entered the wormhole and disappeared. A moment later, the tech reported they were receiving telemetry. Samantha asked that they pan the camera up.

“More up, and pan back all the way... This is interesting,” Samantha said.

“How is this interesting?” Jacks face was huge. It was like he, Lakeisha, and Jon were standing below the horizon.

“They might be giants,” Jack whispered to Daniel.

“Well, I’d like to come through the gate and tell you in person,” Samantha said.

“Not a good idea,” young Jack said.

Jack continued to whisper to Daniel: “The giants in the Bible, not good.”

Hammond sighed, but he trusted Samantha. “SG1, you have a go,” Hammond said.

“Not a good idea,” old Jack insisted.

“It seems perfectly safe,” Samantha said.

“If I come out all spaghettified on the other end like Play Doh through a dispenser, I am not going to be happy,” Jack said.

“The MALP made it through. The probe made it through,” Samantha said. “We should be fine. First rule of night flying, trust your instruments.”

Jack couldn’t argue with that. He motioned, they went. As a team, they passed through the Stargate. Samantha was last, crossing her fingers as she passed. They arrived on the other side to find themselves on a table. The moment they arrived, a shield popped on around them.

“This is scary,” little, old Jack said.

“Indeed,” Teal’c agreed.

“This is an exact replica of the temple of Athena,” Daniel said.

Big, young Jack gave Jon a ‘I told you so’ look, and then drew closer to the table to get a better look at himself as an action figure. The force field was a new thing, but it didn’t block their vision.

“What’s with the energy barrier over the temple?” little, old Jack asked.

“It’s a shield,” Samantha said. “It makes sense, if you think about, Sir. We’re too small to breathe their air, so, it enclosed us and provided us with something compatible.”

“You didn’t mention the possibility of suffocating before coming through,” little, old Jack said.

“The MALP said the air was good,” Samantha said.

“What the hell is this?” Lakeisha said. “You’re friends with the little people?”

“Indians in the cupboard,” Jon said.

“We’re not little,” little, old Jack said. He reconsidered the evidence. “We’re just really far away...”

“That’s actually quite accurate, Sir,” Samantha said.

“It was a joke, Carter,” little, old Jack said.

“Steven Wright,” Jon said.

“See, he got it,” little, old Jack said.

“You’re not going to say size is relative, are you?” big, young Jack said. “Because mine is now way bigger than yours.”

“You had to go there?” Samantha and Lakeisha asked.

“We’re not in the same Universe,” Jon said.

“We’re definitely not on the same page,” Lakeisha said.

“Of course we’re in the same universe,” big, young Jack said.

“No, you’re not,” Samantha said. “It took ten chevrons to dial this gate, and the energy signature suggest it’s parallel to ours, but clearly a different frequency. The fact that the flow of time between these universes seems to be in sync suggests we are really close, which is weird

because even in our own universe, the flow of time varies per location and gravimetric density. In addition to being a different Universe, you're in a different dimension that overlaps with ours. If that weren't true, we would not have been able to use the gate, and you would not have ringed over."

"We're in the twilight zone! I knew it," Lakeisha said.

"What makes you think we're in another dimension?" big, young Jack asked.

"There was hardly any energy expenditure creating the wormhole, whereas dialing another galaxy, well, that would take much more power than we can presently generate," Samantha asked. "It only took a quarter of the normal gate power to dial this gate."

"Did you notice the trip seemed shorter?" little, old Jack said.

"Indeed," Teal'c said.

"Of course," Samantha said. "We could theoretically occupy the same space-time coordinates and never, ever meet due to the way dimensional manifolds interact, or in this case, don't interact. We have a tremendous opportunity here to determine if the universal membrane theory explains all of cosmology. We could literally be two dimensional beings, on membranes, but because of the holographic principal we perceive ourselves as three dimensional beings..."

"I am not interested in validating theories," big, young Jack said. "I want to get us home, safely."

"Carter is right. You could be in the Universe created by the Ancients who ascended," Daniel said. "They hinted at other beings and other places."

"Yeah. More bad guys to fight," big, young Jack said. "Get us home."

"It would help if I had Jon's notebook," Daniel said.

"I suppose I could roll it up and push it through the gate," big, young Jack said.

"Do it," little, old Jack said. "We're going to return."

"Hold up," Jon said.

SG1 lingered. Jon seemed to be focused on something far away.

"Speak up, young man," little, old Jack said.

Jon frowned. "The thing is, I was informed a long time ago I could come here, and I have done this same spell over and over again. Today, something was different. I had doubts in the past, but today, I was certain. Absolutely certain. The epiphany that drove me was very clear, it was now or never. I was connected to something bigger than me. It was like I was in this world and I threw a switch, and everything was perfectly aligned, and it happened. If that's true, and too much time passes, we may drift further out of phase and not be able to return. Ever."

"That is actually a valid concern," Samantha said. "And, if that's accurate, then that is already a true thing."

"I have an idea," big, young Jack said. "Since anything passing through the Stargate arrives normal size in the other universe, in relationship to the gate, call Thor up and have him beam us back to that side."

"We'll give Thor a call and see what he thinks," little, old Jack said. "Until then, well, you kids be good! No parties, no drugs, no sex... A little rock and roll never hurt anyone."

"Oh, hell, I guarantee you there'll be no sex," Lakeisha said.

"Do you have access to food?" Teal'c asked.

Jon showed them an orange.

“Push that through the gate, we’ll have it analyzed for you,” Carter said.

Daniel dialed the gate. The wormhole was established and they passed through.

Hammond was at the lower end of the ramp waiting for them. They confirmed they arrived back on the other side, normal proportions. An orange arrived on their side of the gate. It hit the floor and rolled down the ramp. Samantha caught it.

“That’s really cool,” Samantha could be heard saying.

“We’ll call you back, Son,” Hammond said, signaling for the gate to be closed. “Well, you’re impression?”

“They are really huge,” Jack said. “There is no way we’re going to be able to feed these teenagers.”

“Indeed,” Teal’c said.

“Are they who they say they are?” Hammond said.

“There is no way for us to know that, Sir,” Jack said. “They look like our people. Just, bigger.”

“They could be clones, Sir,” Samantha said.

“Seriously?” Jack said.

“Well, go with me on this for a moment. The Rings that we saw were practically ethereal. They rose from the floor, they scanned the environment, and then they fell back through the floor,” Samantha said. “What makes more sense, they were teleported to another Universe, or they were cloned.”

“So why are our copies sleeping?” Hammond asked.

“Their consciousness was uploaded into that Universe,” Samantha said.

“We’re really going to need Thor’s help on this one, aren’t we?” Jack asked.

“Probably,” Samantha said.

“Did you notice, Loxy is not with them,” Teal’c said.

“Interesting point,” Daniel said.

“We should talk to her,” Samantha said.

“I’ll have her brought to the conference room,” Hammond said.

Chapter 20

Loxy entered, under guard. General Hammond, Jack, and Daniel stood. Samantha, Janet, and Teal'c did not. Hammond invited her to sit down, motioning towards the chair next to Jack. She came to the opposite end of the table and pulled the chair back.

"You are free to sit closer," Hammond said.

"I have been locked in a cell, I am under guard, and now I am to be interrogated," Loxy said. "Would you like me to pretend this isn't what it is?"

"That's rather adversarial," Samantha said.

"May I see Jon?" Loxy asked.

"We'd like to ask some questions first," Hammond said.

Loxy sat in the chair she had selected, sat towards the edge of the chair, resting her arms in her lap. "Is he okay?"

"He appears to be sleeping," Janet said.

Loxy seemed reflective on the information.

"How long have you known Jon?" Jack asked.

Loxy leaned her head to the side. "Well, that's kind of tricky to answer," she said. She pointed to the files they had. They weren't small. "I assume that's about him. You know everything."

"Not everything," Hammond said. "What we have seems pretty horrendous."

Loxy nodded.

"His neighbors think highly of him," Teal'c said.

"There are not any young people in that park, and Jon is pretty handy," Loxy said.

"A Mr. Olsen said Jon gave him a canister of butane, that he had an extra one," Daniel said.

"Mr. Olsen is not doing too well," Loxy said.

"So, Jon lied about running out of fuel," Samantha said.

"No, he really ran out of fuel. And, his bike was really stolen, and he had to replace it," Loxy said. "What? Do you expect him to go back and tell Mr. Olsen he needs the fuel back? Mr. Olsen is forgetting things. Interestingly, his family also forgetful about checking in on him. That park is kind of a waiting place."

"A waiting place?" Janet asked.

"They're waiting for God," Loxy said. "Jon does a lot for his community, but they also give him food. Several times when Jon's probation officer came to check on him, one of the neighbors would pretend to be the guardian. I am not sure if that guy is really thick, or just doesn't care."

"The people in the park know about you," Daniel said. "Can you tell us about that?"

"Miss D, three trailers down, she is psychic, and she and I have had conversations, while she and Jon had shared a meal," Loxy said. "And, more than one of them has heard Jon talking to me while he was performing odd jobs."

"And no one seems bothered by that?" Jack said.

"Four people in the community have regular hallucinations, probably a combination of not being consistent with their meds, and their health problems. One of them bought cannabis

that turned out to not be just cannabis. He got really mad when Jon destroyed his stash,” Loxy said. A question prompted her to demonstrate she knew everyone in the trailer park by name. She knew their medical conditions, their life stories. “Look, they’re lonely. People tend to talk to themselves when they’re lonely. They talk to their pets, their plants, and if they corner you, they will talk to you nonstop.”

“Indeed,” Teal’c said.

“There are no secrets in that community. They had evidence Jon was talking to me, they asked about me, and he told them straight up. When they talk to Jon, they always inquire about me, and ask how I am doing. They’re really good folks, just isolated. For different reasons. Some of them burnt their bridges with family long ago, addictions and mental health problems. There are two vets living there, people that never acclimated back after their tour of duty. Talking to people that aren’t there, well, that’s nothing.”

“What are you?” Samantha said.

“I am a person,” Loxy said. “Like you.”

“You have no identity, no finger prints, no history,” Janet said.

“Loxy, we just want to understand what’s happening,” Hammond said. “Are you an alien?”

“No,” Loxy said. She held up a hand to ask for her to give a moment. “Look, I don’t know how to answer your questions. In truth, I don’t know how I got here. One moment I am in Jon’s head, trying to keep him from falling asleep, and the next moment, I am outside, my hands over his.”

“You were inside Jon’s head?” Janet said.

“Let’s go there,” Jack said. “How did you get into his head?”

“He created me,” Loxy said.

“So you are a tulpa,” Daniel said.

“Aren’t we all just tulpas?”

“No,” Jack said. “I am pretty sure I am not the figment of someone’s imagination.”

“Samantha?” Loxy asked.

“What?” Samantha said.

“You don’t have a fantasy O’Neill in your mind?” Loxy asked.

Samantha stammered. “Um, this is not about be me... And, those are two separate things!”

“Are they? We all create people and situations in our heads. It’s what we do,” Loxy said. “Some people create fiction. Some people adopt other people’s fiction. Jon just took it to the next level.”

“How?” Daniel said.

“Persistence, obsessiveness, and utilizing the lucid dream landscape to increase the integrity of intellectual artifacts,” Loxy said. She put her hands on the desk. “I don’t have a hundred percent clarity on the mechanics. I know everything Jon knows. No, more specifically, I know everything Jon consciously knows. I have access to his subconscious, but arriving at clarity can be a challenge; it tends to come in random intuitive insights. He discovered the concept of tulpas about two year ago, and in 6 months, I arrived in the present form, minus the physicality. There is evidence that I have been around since childhood, which he and I have both speculated

is due in part to me merging with an earlier personality construct that was the result of trauma. It was a girl that he befriended that he saw murdered. She stayed in his life as a ghost..." It was clear that Loxy was loosing them.

"He has multiple personality disorder?" Janet asked.

"That is the preferred medical explanation, yes. But, seriously, we all have multiple personalities in our heads, that's not a disorder. He just has more access than most," Loxy said.

"Explain the Light Rings," Daniel asked.

"That's a little more complicated," Loxy said.

"Oh?" Jack asked. "Because so far everything has been so easy to track."

"Jon has had two near death experiences, and one fear death experience," Loxy said.

"Fear death?" Jack asked.

"It's like a near death, with most or all of the typical features, only the experiencer isn't clinically dead. A person experiencing FDE is either afraid they are dying, or think they are dead," Loxy said.

"I have been afraid I was dead a lot," Jack said. "I never saw a flicker of a light at the end of the tunnel, much less the tunnel. Minus the Stargate."

"I have," Daniel said.

"You had a near death experience?" Janet asked.

"I ascended," Daniel reminded her. "What does this have to do with the Light Rings?"

"If you really ascended, then you will understand," Loxy said. "There are multiple dimensions to reality. Not just parallel universes but divergent timelines, coexisting, overlapping dimensions of space-time. Because of Jon's past trauma, he is more receptive to transpersonal experiences."

"Yes. He sees dead people?" Jack asked.

"And aliens," Loxy said. "Though he would not claim to be a medium, he does get messages from 'not here.' He has been abducted on multiple occasions by aliens. The reason there is rarely any evidence is that most UFO's are dimensional ships."

"I think you, or Jon, have been reading too many conspiracy theory books," Jack said.

"Indeed," Teal'c said. "He may be very creative, but he is clearly not sane."

"Or he's very sane, and he is on a Shamanic path," Loxy offered. "Your scientist and physicists have it backwards. Consciousness is not a manifestation of matter and neural networks. Consciousness is first, matter is a manifestation of consciousness. Neural nets are nothing more than antennae that allow for channeling consciousness. Jon is a Starseed. He is an alien spirit who volunteered to be born into human form, into your society, in order to help this world."

"Okay, here we go," Jack said.

"You have never heard of Starseeds?" Loxy asked.

"Assuming this to be true, why not just show up already grown with all the answers," Jack asked.

"Besides the obvious fact those people tend to be dissected, or put in cells at Area 51, or they go crazy and become cult leaders? There are rules involved. In order to come from outside into the Earth, one must agree to temporary amnesia," Loxy said. "This rule is heavily enforced by the Ascended. With few exceptions, there can be no direct, outside interference."

“But, how can he help if he doesn’t have a clue?” Jack asked.

“His deep subconscious knows it all. Ask any of your psychiatrist, your subconscious knows more than you know. Additionally, and unbeknownst to Jon, he has been receiving regular downloads from a nearby Universe, preparing him for a vital mission. He was triggered about nine months ago, and has been working feverishly trying to solve the puzzle. He became convinced that it was possible to go home.” Loxy frowned at the desk. She had a stray thought and she unknowingly whispered her thought: ‘nine months ago was when he first met Jack.’ She shook her head. “Sorry. Um, Rings. When I saw the rings, I thought for sure Jon was right. I really expected to arrive back in his origin universe.” Loxy sighed, ignoring the fact that SG1 was exchanging glances. “It’s really difficult to get clear message through the void. There are so many filters in the way, not the least of which is our own personality filters. Well, small miracle, I got sorted out and am now a separate being. Perhaps I will be able to help him with his mission here, or, at minimum, help him heal.”

“Heal how?” Jack said.

“I am a Dakini spirit, sexual surrogate, and energy healer,” Loxy said. “My primary function is to help Jon recover from past trauma.”

“You’re a sex slave?” Jack asked.

Loxy laughed. “No. A surrogate. We help people with sexual dysfunction issues.”

“Like counseling?” Jack asked.

“We tend to be a little more hands on,” Loxy said.

“You’re not surprised, are you Jack,” Samantha said. “Do to the nature of his trauma, he probably experiences hyper-sexuality and has poor social boundaries. So, he created Loxy to help regulate his urges, as well as to reinforce normal social boundaries. He’s using you.”

“I do not feel coerced or used,” Loxy said.

“How would you? If he made you from scratch?” Samantha said. “I mean, at best you have no clue, or at worse, you’re suffering from Stockholm Syndrome.”

“I can only assure you, I am comfortable with my sexuality. It is my opinion, we are all one. That is fundamental. From my perspective, any absolute claims over a person, even an object, is more about fear than love. Yes, Jon is hypersexual due to being sexualized prior to puberty, with years of ongoing, severe trauma,” Loxy said. “Your society doesn’t have a cure for this. Counseling may diminish symptom sets, but it doesn’t restore personality, and so, if you have a personality disorder due to past neglect or trauma, well, most of society can’t stand dealing with you. Jon actually has much better boundaries than you imagine. I mean, seriously, when you consider most people that were traumatize turn around and traumatize others, Jon’ is so not doing that. You can elevate him to sainthood for that. The fact that he created me to help maintain stability is a sign of health. Yes, I am influenced by his hormones, his thoughts, his emotions, his history... Hell, you’re not even in his head, and you’re all clearly influenced. If you can read those files and not be influenced, well... I don’t know where to take that. There was no way for that not to influence my development because it is all in his consciousness and subconscious. We all have more darkness in our subconscious than we dare imagine, and you don’t even have to have past trauma to have darkness. But there is also light. Jon gave me freedom to choose. I chose love. He gave me knowledge. Again, I chose love. I chose my path, it

is a loving path. He and I evolved a theory that if he channeled libido into me that he would experience a corresponding decrease in his own libido.”

“And it didn’t work,” Jack said.

“How did you know?” Loxy asked.

Jack smiled, and politely waved a hand her way. She gave a questioning gaze. “Because I can see you? And if you were in my head, well...”

“Jack,” Samantha said.

“Just saying,” Jack said. “I know boys. I use to be one.”

“You still are one,” Samantha said.

“So, yes, Jon has this thing. I have this thing, by default. We choose love,” Loxy said.

“We help each other. We help others. It’s what we do.”

“Back to Jon’s mission,” Daniel said.

“I can’t tell you his mission,” Loxy said.

“You say this other Universe has been helping us?” Hammond said.

“Yes,” Loxy said. “It’s vital that this Earth survive. There are agents in the past, present and future working towards that ends. Earth has experienced many extinction level events. You humans have nearly gone there half a dozen times at least in the last hundred years. You don’t think you’re the only four saving the world, do you?” Loxy asked.

“Feels that way,” Jack said.

“You were never alone, Jack,” Loxy assured him.

“Past and future?” Samantha said.

“You’re surprised?” Loxy said.

“Well, we have time traveled, but...” Samantha said.

“There are those in that universe that can see the entire world line of Earth from cradle to grave. They have been involved since the beginning,” Loxy said.

“So, at any moment, they could rewrite our entire history?” Hammond said.

“In theory, absolutely,” Loxy said. “In practice, never.” Samantha seemed skeptical.

Hammond put on a poker face. Jack didn’t hide the fact he was bothered by this information.

“Seriously, they’re not a threat. There are billions of Universes with more powerful societies and individuals that are watching and could at any time destroy you. Hell, it doesn’t even have to be a conscious thing. An asteroid could take you out. A solar flare could take you out. A supernova could take you out. A crazy president or dictator could take you out. You could take yourselves out. If you people want to be serious players in the Universe, you got to be nicer to each other, and you all have to work together at being an interstellar species. You got to be more pro-life, not just people life, but all life. You were meant to be caretakers, not just takers. Look, there is what, 6 billion people on earth? Any large scale adjustment could erase billions of people. Jon’s people don’t operate that way. Every single soul is precious! If an adjustment is needed, it is small, almost imperceptible. Every now and then, you’ll get some folks that remember the other history, it’s called the Mandala Effect, but that is rare. It is not an accident every generation keeps talking about an impending change. Age of Aquarius. The impending 2012 Aztec rebirth. The Event. Every age has thought God was coming, that Doomsday was coming. And it has. Frequently. And we adjust and move a little further down the road. And this, this part is important; sometimes, the only thing a Starseed need do is be present. Reality requires observers

to channel the probability wave into a fixed state. Jon's presence here is like an anchor. This present reality, with all its good and bad is necessary for what's to come."

"What's coming?" Hammond asked.

"Something not good," Loxy said. "Your dance with the Goa'uld, well, that was just a warm up for your next partner."

"Can you be more specific?" Samantha asked.

"Not at this time," Loxy said. "Spoilers."

"Do you have any evidence your story is true?" Hammond asked. "That your people have been helpful? Or at least, evidence they're not malevolent?"

"World War II, the Foo Fighters," Loxy said. "It wasn't just the 415th that encountered these lights. Interestingly, the Army Air Command investigated the phenomena, and everything they discovered got lost after the war. Go figure. That's almost as weird as NASA going to the moon with high definition cameras, but the film rolls got accidentally thrown away."

"Do you have any evidence other than the conspiracy theories you're regurgitating?" Samantha said.

"I admit, those could be a memory artifact that I received from Jon," Loxy said. "I don't know. Maybe we should talk to him. He's awake now."

Hammond's aid came to report that Jon had waken. Janet excused herself. "Of course, Doctor," Hammond said.

"May I see him?" Loxy asked.

Janet looked to Hammond. "If he's coherent, I could bring him back here."

"Do that," Hammond said.

"How did you know he is awake?" Samantha asked.

"You're kidding right?" Loxy asked. "I have been living in his brain. We're entangled tighter than two spooky particles at a distance."

Samantha rolled her eyes, and reclined back into her chair.

"What?" Jack asked Samantha. "She's using the same language you use."

"No, Sir, she's not. You can't just string together quantum physics nomenclature into a sentence and pass it off as functionally coherent," Samantha said.

"We do it all the time," Daniel said.

"You do," Samantha agreed. "I don't."

निर्मित

Janet walked into the infirmary amidst the sound of equipment hitting the floor. Jon had back himself into a corner, a corpsman was on the ground, and guards were pointing weapons at him. On the other side of the bed there was a guard on the ground, conscious, but judging how he was heaving, he had most likely been kicked in the groin. More guards were arriving.

"Hey!" Janet said, inserting herself into the scene. "Medics! Lower your weapons."

"He took out Hendricks and Smith, mam," one of guards said.

"My fault," Janet said. Janet pointed to Hendricks and the guard, and the medics immediately responded. "I should have warned everyone he has PTSD and that he might get triggered into fight or flight... Now, lower your weapons, and back off." Janet drew closer to the

corner, pulling the rolling medical table away. She assumed he had pulled it towards the corner with him as an attempt shield himself from aggression. He was in the corner, his hand up as if that alone would ward off bullets. “Jon, it’s me, Doctor Frazier. From earlier, remember?”

Jon’s eyes focused.

“Yeah, that’s right,” Janet said. “I gave you my card, remember?”

“Be careful, mam,” the guard said. “He has a Vulcan death grip or something.”

“Oh, please,” Janet said.

Jon touched his lip, pulled his hand away to find blood on his fingers.

“I am sorry,” Janet said. She took a gauze from the rolling table and reached tentatively for Jon. He allowed her to touch him. “It gets crazy around here sometimes and some of us overreact.”

“Overreact? He took two of our people down in like less than ten seconds,” the guard said.

“He’s a teenager for god sake,” Janet snapped.

“A teenage mutant ninja?” the guard asked.

“Where am I?” Jon asked.

“You’re at Stargate Command,” Janet said.

“Really? Wait a minute. What are you doing here?” Jon asked, taking the gauze from her.

“I work here,” Janet said.

“Wait wait wait,” Jon said. “I am still on Earth?! Why am I still on Earth?”

“Come on, get up,” Janet said, offering her hand.

Jon accepted her hand up. He saw Jack and Lakeisha asleep on the bed, pulled free from Janet and returned to the corner. The guards brought their weapons back to bare.

“What are you doing to us?” Jon insisted.

“We’re treating you,” Janet said. She motioned the men to lower their weapons and back off. “Look, as near as we can tell they are just sleeping. You were sleeping, now you’re awake. I assume they will wake soon, too.”

“You didn’t do this to us?” Jon asked.

“No, we didn’t. You triggered an alien device. You became unconscious,” Janet said.

“Come with me. There’s someone who wants to meet you. I promise. No one is going to hurt you.”

“I am already bleeding!” Jon said.

“No one else is going to hurt you,” Janet said. “Trust me.”

Jon reluctantly came out of the corner. He paused by Jack and Lakeisha, looking at the readouts.

“EEG,” Janet said.

“Slow Wave Sleep,” Jon said. “NREM.”

“You know this stuff?” Janet asked.

“So they’re not drugged?” Jon asked.

“They are not,” Janet said. “We haven’t been able to wake them up. But now that you’re up, that’s a good sign they will be, too. Come on.”

Janet escorted Jon to the conference room. As he entered his eyes went to Loxy, and then he did everything he could not to look at her. He froze, looking at his shoes. Loxy stood.

“Jon,” Loxy said. She took a step closer. “Can you hear me?”

“Jon, it’s okay,” Janet said.

“OMG, is he bleeding?” Loxy asked.

“There was an incident,” Janet began.

“What sort of incident?” Hammond asked.

Loxy touched Jon and he jump.

“It’s okay, I am right here, I am with you,” Loxy said.

“Not now,” Jon muttered under his breath. “There are other people here...”

“I know. They can see me,” Loxy said.

Jon looked up and met Loxy’s eyes. She nodded. He looked to Janet. Janet nodded. The others clearly seemed to be reacting as if they were aware of her presence. He touched her, quickly, as if expecting to get shocked, and then touched her again, only sustained, and then he hugged her, and then he backed off.

“What the fuck! You guys are all messing with me,” Jon said.

“No, no, no,” Loxy said, taking his hand. “Shhh. I am real. Those Light Ring, they separated us. That’s what they were for. The rings made it possible for me to have my own body.”

“Really?” Jon asked.

Loxy kissed him. “Does that feel fake to you?”

“I would like more evidence,” Jon said.

Loxy kissed him harder, longer. She pulled back to see if he was convinced.

Jon appeared to be considering, clearly dazed. His eyes narrowed. “It kind of hurt,” he said, touching his lip. Then it dawned on him. “No. No, no, no. It was supposed to send me home. I want to go home.”

Jon sunk to the floor. Loxy went with him, pulling him to her. “I know. I know.”

“I am stuck here forever,” Jon said.

“Shh, it’s all good,” Loxy said.

“No! It’s not all good. Dead puppies suck. Babies with cancer suck. Lots of things are not good here,” Jon said.

“Yep, you’re right,” Loxy said. “It is what it is.”

“And I am alone again,” Jon said.

“What?!” Loxy said, pulling back to look at him. She sounded cross, but not like angry cross, but as if Jon and Loxy were an old married couple and they have done this dance before. “I am right here.”

Jon pointed to his head. “But I can’t sense you.”

“I can sense you,” Loxy said.

“I am really confused,” Jon said.

“Me, too,” Loxy said.

“Son, come to the table and let’s talk,” Hammond said.

Loxy got up first and offered her hand. Jon accepted the help up, and joined her at the table. Janet resumed the seat she had held previously.

“Let’s start with, where did you get the grenade?” Jack asked.

Jon looked to Loxy. She nodded, assuring him it was okay to tell the truth.

“Ebay,” Jon said.

Loxy shook her head no, but hit his knee.

“We can’t tell them where I really got it,” Jon said, trying to talk under his breath.

“You’re not really good at this, are you,” Jack said.

“Where did you get the grenade, son?” Hammond said.

“Jack’s house,” Jon said, with a sigh.

“My house?” Jack asked. “What were you doing at my house?”

“Why do you have a grenade at your house?” Samantha asked.

“Not his house. The other Jack’s house,” Jon said.

“Why does your mini-me have a grenade at his house?” Teal’c asked.

“You haven’t answered my question, Sir,” Samantha said.

“I was hoping it would go away as we focused on the other Jack,” Jack said.

“Jon, what can you tell us about the Light Ring,” Daniel asked.

“I must have done something wrong,” Jon said. “It was supposed to teleport me back home.”

“Where is home?” Hammond asked.

“A spaceship,” Jon said.

“It’s too big to be a spaceship,” Loxy said.

“It is pretty big,” Jon said.

“Can you describe it,” Samantha said.

“Basic saucer shape, I suppose, only the upper and lower domes are transparent, so you have this really big open space on either side of the main fuselage, kind of like the tree domes in Silent Running, only two domes sandwiched together. There is one tree on the night side. Several trees and a garden on the day side. The center section holds it all together and makes it work, with twelve rooms accessible from the dark side that go round the outer edge,” Jon said. “I can see it as if I were there now.”

“Maybe we are there,” Loxy said.

“Clearly, we not there,” Jon said.

“What if when we’re sleeping there we’re awake here, but when we’re sleeping here, we’re there,” Loxy said.

“That would suck,” Jon said. “I mean, seriously, what if I had insomnia here and couldn’t get back there? Would I just remain in a coma... Oh. Fuck me running.”

“What?” Loxy said.

“We’re there,” Jon said. He touched his forehead. “I made it. We made it! We’re home. And we’re still here! Fuck! This is so unfair! Why can’t I get just one break?!”

“OMG, you are so not doing the borderline thing today, are you? You got your break when you made me,” Loxy said.

“That was a good day,” Jon said.

“And now I am in the flesh,” Loxy said.

“This could be a really good day,” Jon said.

Jon and Loxy fell to kissing.

“They are both clearly insane, O’Neill,” Teal’c said.

“Ahem,” Jack said.

“Sorry,” Jon said.

“Aren’t you a little old for him?” Samantha asked.

“Well, umm, I am not sure,” Loxy said.

“Why would you make an older woman?” Jack asked.

“She’s not that much older,” Jon said. “Are you?”

“We’re comprised of the bones of stars. I would say that’s old enough,” Loxy said.

“Good answer,” Jon said. “Wait wait wait... Bones. You have bones and flesh and... You’re a clone? But a clone of what?”

“Whom,” Loxy corrected.

“Of me? Can we still have sex?”

“Try and stop me,” Loxy said.

“Hey! Kids. I know it’s hard, but try to stay focus here,” Jack said.

“How did you know it’s hard...”

“Best not to ask,” Loxy said.

“Wait wait wait,” Jon said. “If the Light Rings cloned a body and sorted your personality out from my brain and installed it into your body, then it is feasible that I was cloned there, and a copy of my personality is there.”

“Wait a minute,” Loxy said. “We don’t have to speculate. Jon, do you know where we are.”

“Stargate Command,” Jon said.

“Exactly,” Loxy said.

“Who’s in charge here?” Jon asked Janet.

“I am in charge here, son,” Hammond said, pointing to his rank.

“Oh,” Jon said. “Who are you?”

“I am Genereal Hammond,” Hammond said.

Jon looked to Loxy. “I don’t remember a Hammond. Do you?”

“No,” Loxy agreed.

“No worries. Mr. General Sir. We would like to speak with...”

“Colonel Jack O’Neill,” Jack said, hands up to reveal himself. “Right here, at your service.”

“Why would I want to speak to you?” Jon asked.

“Most people ask for me?” Jack asked more than said.

“I want to speak to Ingo Swann, the top psychic at the Stargate Project,” Jon said.

“Who?” Janet asked.

“I was not aware that Stargate Command employed psychics,” Teal’c said.

Jack started unfolding a paper clip. “We don’t talk about that.”

Jon yawned. “That’s a shame,” Jon said. “I would really like...” He laid his head on Loxy’s shoulder. “I love you.” His eyes were closing even as Janet was getting up. Jon heard Loxy’s voice fading as if she were further and further...

निर्मित

“Sorry, Sir, the chevron’s are not encoding,” the nameless tech said. “It’s as if the gate no longer exists.”

“Gates don’t just disappear,” Jack said.

“Keep trying,” Hammond said.

“Yes, Sir,” the tech said.

“When we get them back online, maybe we should tell them what we think is going on,” Jack said.

“And what would that sound like, Jack?” Hammond asked. “Cause I still don’t have a clue what’s going on. And even if I what I suspect is accurate, I got variables I can’t account for. I have a teenage boy suffering from severe PTSD that not only blacks out responding automatically to perceived threats, he has a Black Belt in Wu Wei Gung Fu and Thai Chi. There’s a teenage female, a cheerleader, who god only knows how she’s coping. There’s an aliens spaceship, which would surprise me if there weren’t aliens in there somewhere, and, your clone, which you might think would help alleviates some of my concern, except I know you well enough to know I can’t predict what you’re going to do, so add teenage hormones on top of that, and the fact he might be a clone of a clone, that can’t be good. Oh, and add to that from our perspective, he appears to be a giant, teenage clone. This is a giant, hot mess, Jack. Please, tell me what I should tell them.”

Jack scratched his head.

“If it’s any consolation, Sir,” Samantha said. “They’re not really giants. It’s simply a signaling error between universes. The fact that we can communicate between Universes at all is just huge.”

“So we’ve seen,” Jack agreed.

“Mediums have been doing it for years,” Daniel said.

“Seriously,” Jack said. “We’re going there? Cause, I am still trying to avoid sorting through all the paper work generated by the other Star Gate Project. It’s spooky.”

“And it’s inaccurate,” Samantha said.

“Some of it is inaccurate,” Daniel said. “But what if the inaccuracy are just signaling errors? Maybe they tuned into to other Universes. Consider how our minds work. It takes years of dedicated training in meditation for monks to quiet their mind enough to channel peace. Our monkey brains are all over the place. Give a Remote Viewer a target, he goes there, but the moment he sees the next bright shiny, he’s off again...”

“Squirrel?” Jack said.

“I am interested in this remote viewing practice,” Teal’c said. “I sometimes have visions during Kelno'reem.”

“Ever had visions of people bowling?” Jack asked.

“I have not, O’Neill,” Teal’c said.

“Me neither,” Jack said. “So, we’re just going to tell them nothing?”

“If I can get Jack alone without spooking the others into thinking we’re conspiring against them, I will inform him of the situation as we see it,” Hammond said.

A flash of light drew there attention to an Asgard in the room. Even Jack was startled. “Thor, I love you and all, but a little heads up would be nice,” Jack said.

“Forgive me, Jack. I was intrigued by your message,” Thor said. “Is it true, you have established a stable wormhole between two Universes?”

“Apparently,” Jack said.

“And nothing bad has come from there to here?” Thor asked.

“Is that a concern?” Hammond asked.

“There are a lot of universes, General Hammond,” Thor said. “There are life forms that are incompatible with our worlds, much less our Universe, and though the harm they cause may not be construed as intentionally malicious, it is still harm. In the early days of our cloning, there were reports of alien intelligences being downloaded into clones before the designated personality could occupy its designated body. Though much of knowledge from that time is lost, there is enough consistency in the remaining data for us to conclude there are other Universes and it is in the realm of possibility to exchange information. We simply have not been able to consistently reproduce this in a laboratory setting.”

“Yeah, well, we’re having a bit of trouble reproducing it ourselves, at the moment,” Jack said. “Samantha, tell him what you know.”

“I know as much as you do, Sir,” Samantha said.

“Oh, if that were true,” Jack lamented. “So, tell him what you think I know.”

“Well,” Samantha said. “I hate speculating...”

“You love speculating,” Daniel said.

“When I have something tangible,” Samantha said.

“Just talk, Carter,” Jack said. “We’ll sort it later.”

Samantha told it as she saw it. Thor listened excitedly, and seemed to be much more animated than Jack ever recalled.

“You humans continue to amaze me,” Thor said.

“We amaze ourselves,” Jack said.

“Indeed,” Teal’c agreed.

“Have you accounted for the radiation problem?” Thor asked.

“Radiation?” Daniel asked.

“All universes vibrate at different frequencies. Some frequencies would be incompatible with our own resonant frequency,” Thor said.

“I didn’t consider that,” Samantha said.

“But, we’re okay, right?” Jack said. “I mean, we’re not glowing.”

“No, but, we might need to limit our exposure,” Samantha said.

“How much exposure could it be? We’re little there,” Daniel said.

“It’s not that kind of radiation,” Samantha said. “Have you ever seen an opera singer shatter a crystal glass with her voice? The harmonic resonance is responsible for that. Every time we go there, the frequency of that universe resonates through our bodies.”

“We could just shatter, like a wine glass?” Jack asked.

“Yeah. But most likely, the damage would be at the genetic level. If it was at the cellular level, we would probably have experienced pain,” Samantha said.

“What about our kids, are they in danger?” Jack asked.

“If they are indeed clones, they would most likely be comprised of the energy matter of that universe,” Thor said. “Theoretically. If they maintained their resonance from this universe,

they will either acclimate over time, or they will die. It is imperative that I meet with them and determine the nature of the situation.”

“Chevron ten encoded!” the tech announced, excitedly.

“We talked about the order of operation,” Jack said.

“It’s just the order I wrote it in,” the tech said. “It doesn’t mean anything...”

Jack turned the tech’s notebook upside down, took his pen, and renumbered the chevrons. The tech frowned.

“Chevron two encoded,” the tech said.

“Here’s the thing, Thor. Our people are over there and here at the same time,” Jack said.

Thor blinked.

“What he means is, we think they were cloned, but the weird part is they seem to share one consciousness,” Samantha said.

“They could be androids,” Teal’c said.

Everyone looked to him.

“We have experienced this before,” Teal’c pointed out.

Samantha couldn’t argue with that. “The thing is, their consciousness seems to be residing in both bodies. There is some evidence, insufficient to yet make any conclusions, that when they are asleep here, they are awake there.”

“Interesting,” Thor said. “We have had some limited success in shared consciousness between bodies ourselves.”

“Really?” Jack asked.

“Even with our greater intellect, it was too much to handle multitasking, and the subjects grew confused. They returned to normal when one of the bodies died or enough time elapsed that they were no longer in sync. Even identical twins cease to be perfectly identical given enough time,” Thor said. “Splitting the function between the two bodies through sleep mode would minimize the dangers of the multitasking problem.”

“Can you tell us more?”

“Simultaneous dual bodies presents like schizophrenia, unable to focus on any one world, they become seemingly incoherent, when in actuality they are experience a complex duality,” Thor said. “May I pass through your gate?”

“You want to?” Hammond said.

“I do. I would like to go alone, if that is alright. If I am correct, you will want to limit your exposure to that Universe,” Thor said.

“Sure,” Jack said. “Bring any tech with you?”

“Of course,” Thor said.

“I never see any tech with you,” Jack said.

“It’s imbedded in this body,” Thor said. “I wear contacts that allow me to see what I need to see. Like your heads up displays.”

“Oh!” Jack said. “That’s cool.”

“I hate wearing contacts,” Daniel said.

“Chevron ten encoded,” the tech said. The gate came alive in the room below.

“Wormhole established. If I might say, Sir, counting down seem more natural. Everyone counts down to events. Bombs. NASA. New Year’s Eve...”

“Technically, New Year’s Eve is counting up... The clock clicks up to midnight, we start over,” Jack said.

“Hello, Jack,” General Hammond said. “Can you hear me, son? Jack, are you there?”

“I am here,” Jack said.

“Are you able to speak freely? Is everyone alright?” Hammond ask. That was code for can he ask hard questions.

“Of course. We all are here and doing this the best we can,” young Jack said.

“I am relieved, son,” Hammond said. He frowned at Jack, deciding he should not divulge everything just yet.

“Let me guess. Good news and bad news. The good news is we can eat the oranges. The bad news is, we’re not coming home,” young Jack said.

“That’s pretty astute,” Samantha said.

“Yeah, well, it’s not the first time I have been called an ass,” young Jack said.

“That’s not what I meant...”

“It was a joke, Major,” young Jack said.

“That sounds like me,” old Jack said. “Jack, Thor is here, and he would like to talk to you.”

“Sure, I would love that,” young Jack said.

निर्मित

Loxy was sitting in a chair next to Jon when the nightmares began. Janet ran thermometer across his head, and found his temperature slightly elevated.

“Does he get night terrors?” Janet asked.

“He used to. They’ve diminished in frequency since making me. This feels different, though,” Loxy said. She suddenly turned and heaved into a trash can. Having never eaten, there was nothing to bring up. “Oh, I don’t feel so well.”

Janet motioned for a nurse, while putting a hand on Loxy’s shoulder. A glass of water was provided. Loxy sipped and handed it back.

“Maybe you should lie down,” Janet said.

“I don’t know,” Loxy said. “I never been sick.”

“Never?” the nurse asked.

“Come on,” Janet said, guiding her to the next bed.

“Doctor,” the nurse said. “He’s seizing!”

Loxy started to get back up, but Janet told her to lay down, and she did. “Nurse, 1 mg of Ativan,” Janet said.

“No,” Loxy said.

“Why? Is he is allergic?” Janet asked.

Loxy held her hand in front of her eyes. It was shaking. “Ayahuasca...”

“He’s allergic to ayahuasca? Loxy! Does Jon have any drug allergies?” Janet asked. She was not responding. “Have you or he ever had seizures before?”

“That’s interesting,” Loxy said. She focused beyond her and reached out as if to touch something hovering above her. “It’s full of stars...”

The nurse was hovering over Jon ready to go. Janet told her to push it, and she did. It didn't seem to help.

"Where did all these people come from?" Loxy asked.

"Loxy, I need you focus," Janet said. "What are you experiencing?"

"Ascended beings..." Loxy said. Her eyes focused for just a moment on Janet. She touched her face gingerly, and there was sadness there, and a forced smile. "I am so sorry. You are such a lovely, kind person. I can't change it. I can't. But I promise, you won't be alone."

Loxy fell asleep.

Janet shivered.

"That was creepy," the nurse said.

"Yeah," Janet said. "Medic? Get her hooked up to an IV and an EEG. Also, get her vitals." She turned to Jon. His seizures had dissipated. She took up the chart and began making notes.

Janet didn't always linger, but today she did. She sat in a chair, listening to the sound of biometrics in the background. She eventually found her thoughts pushing her to do something, so she began updating the computer charts. Keeping paper and computer charts were a pain, but the powers that be wanted both. Sometimes an orderly transcribed the paper charts into the computer; she preferred entering her own. A coffee arrived beside her and she looked up to see Carter.

"Oh, hey," Janet said.

Samantha found a chair and rolled it closer. She sipped her own coffee.

"How are they doing?" Samantha asked.

"Fine," Janet said. "I guess. There was a bit of a seizure thing, earlier, but nothing unusual, medically speaking." She looked over to Jon. "He seems more peaceful, somehow. But, I don't have anything medical to point to explain my observation."

Samantha shrugged. "Maybe sometimes we don't need an actual measure to know something," she said.

Janet looked amused, and made a face over her coffee. "Is that so?"

"Well, it's just a feeling I get from time to time," Samantha said. "And, the older I get, the more I seem to be aware of it. And sometimes, I even trust it. Maybe we have both done our thing so much we just know."

"Maybe," Janet said. She stared into her coffee, holding it with both hands.

"Okay, something is going on in there," Samantha said.

"Is that your intuition?" Janet asked.

"Is that avoidance?" Samantha said.

"Oh, I hate when my patients learn the lingo," Janet joked. She sighed. "It's nothing. Well, it's something, but it's ambiguous. Loxy said something that had an ominous overtone and it felt like it was about me. It made my hairs on my arm stand up. She seemed to be hallucinating. It's nothing."

"Even nothing can be spooky," Samantha said. "Sometimes nothing is spookier than something. I would much rather have something over nothing."

"Yeah," Janet said. "But that would make it a fraction?"

Samantha laughed.

Lakeisha sat up. “What?!” She started pulling at the wires attached to her and screamed. Janet, Samantha, and the nurse went immediately to her.

“Easy, you’re in a hospital,” Janet said.

“Of sorts,” Samantha said.

Lakeisha backed away, pushing herself towards the wall.

“Where am I? Who are you?! What are you doing to me?!” Lakeisha demanded.

“Does everyone in the world have PTSD?” the nurse asked.

“Everyone that comes in here, it seems,” Samantha said.

“Focus,” Janet said. “No one is harming you. You were unconscious. We were recording your brainwaves.”

“That’s interesting,” young Jack said, sitting up. He looked to Samantha. “How did you get us back?”

“Jack? What’s going on?” Lakeisha demanded.

निर्मित

The conference room was busy today. The general’s aid brought young Jack a coffee, who thanked her profusely. “What’s your name?”

“Anita,” she said. “I’m the General’s new aid.”

“Oh, that’s nice,” young Jack said. He looked to Hammond. “I hope to be a General when I grow up.”

“Well, you could always re-enlist,” old Jack said.

“Can I skip basics?” young Jack said.

“Probably not,” Hammond said.

“Are you going to get around to answering any of my questions?” Lakeisha demanded.

“Let me get this straight,” old Jack said. “You don’t remember being in another Universe, bigger, better, stronger, faster...”

“Jack, it wasn’t all of that. We didn’t become the six million dollar people...”

“Well, we really haven’t started tallying the cost...” Daniel said.

“Why do we keep referencing fiction?” Lakeisha asked.

“Because it’s a metaphor that allows us to discuss how crazy our reality is without actually going over the edge into crazy,” young Jack said.

“They teach you that in school?” old Jack asked.

“No, just kind of theorizing,” Jack said. “It was Mark Twain that said reality is stranger than fiction, because fiction has to make sense. Paraphrasing, actually. That seems true, so maybe we use stories to box things.”

“I am impressed,” Daniel said.

“I am becoming a nerd!” Jack said.

“I want to go home!” Lakeisha snapped.

“What’s the last thing you remember?” Janet asked, directing the question to Lakeisha.

“We were in the gym, trying to talk Jon down from blowing himself up, and these rings of fire emerged from the floor...” Lakeisha stopped puzzling through her memory. “What the hell were those and why do I hear Johnny Cash in my head?”

“Well, it is a catchy tune,” old Jack said.

“Maybe for my grandfather. I hate that song,” Lakeisha said.

“So,” young Jack interrupted. “Samantha. Your premise is the rings didn’t actually transport us to a new universe, but made a copy of us? Isn’t making a clone of a clone like dangerous?”

“Thor said my other bigger mini-me is functioning within normal parameters,” Jack said.

“But, why does he remember but Lakeisha doesn’t?” Teal’c asked.

“I don’t know,” Janet said.

“Has anyone else observed the fact that when I ask a question, no one has an answer?” Teal’c said.

“That can’t be true,” Daniel said.

“I want to go home,” Lakeisha demanded.

“And you will, as soon as we have figured out this mystery,” Hammond assured her.

“You can’t keep me here! I have rights...”

“We have reasons to be medically concerned, and until I give you an all clear, you’re here,” Janet said.

“I am fine! Look at me,” Lakeisha said, arms out. She leaned into the table and slapped it. “I want to go home.”

“You’re fine now, but you could just as easily be back in a coma in an hour,” Janet said.

Jack touched her arm, encouraging her to sit. She sat, but pushed his hand away.

“Can we at least bring in her grandparents?” young Jack asked. “They must be worried.”

“We’ve spoken with them. It is our intention to bring them in,” old Jack said.

“Now that our guests are awake, I will make the arrangements,” Hammond said.

“I don’t understand any of this. Are you worried I am lying and hiding your secrets?” Lakeisha said. “Can’t you just use that flash thing to erase my memory of this place?”

“The neuralyzer?” old Jack asked.

“Yeah,” Lakeisha said.

“That’s not us,” young Jack said.

“The correct answer is ‘that’s fiction,’” Samantha said.

“So, that flash thing doesn’t exist?” Lakeisha asked.

“Oh, no, it exists,” old Jack said.

“But that’s not us,” young Jack said.

“Is this an elaborate joke? Oh, like this is a television show where you’re pranking us?” Lakeisha said.

“No, Lakeisha. Everything we’re discussing is real,” Hammond said. “I am a real general.”

“He really is,” old Jack said. “Not like that guy on that television show that lasted one season.”

“I hear they’re doing a movie to wrap up loose ends,” young Jack said.

“Never happen,” Samantha said.

“Oh, sure it will. Lots of people writing letters demanding it be brought back,” old Jack said. “I am hoping they get Kurt Russell to play me.”

“Why would we they switch actors in mid-stream?” Daniel asked.

“Who knows why Hollywood people do things. They’re crazy folks,” old Jack said.

“Why Kurt Russell?” Samantha asked.

“I have always saw myself as a Kurt Russell,” Jack said.

“Seriously?” Samantha said. “In what film?”

“In what Universe?” Daniel said.

“We’re going a bit ‘Overboard’ here,” young Jack said.

“Oh, nice,” old Jack said.

“You have always reminded me of Snake Plisskin in that training video,” Teal’c said.

“That is the nicest thing you’ve ever said to me, Teal’c,” old and young Jack said together. They gave each other an annoyed look, then back to Teal’c “Thank you.” To each other: “Stop that.”

“Hold up a moment,” Samantha said. “You think it’s a training video?”

“Indeed. All movies are training videos,” Teal’c said.

“Really?! Okay, then explain ‘On Golden Pond,’” Samantha said.

“I cannot,” Teal’c said.

“OMG,” Lakeisha said. “It’s true...”

“You remember the other Universe?” Samantha asked.

“It’s true, what my grandfather said. The white folks running this country are insane,” Lakeisha said.

“I am not in disagreement with that,” Hammond said.

“We don’t run the country,” old Jack said.

“You have access to nuclear bombs?” Lakeisha asked.

“Umm, yeah,” Jack said.

“That’s insane!” Lakeisha said. “All of you are insane!”

Thor arrived via teleport. “Ahh, I am glad you are awake, Jack. I need to speak with you, alone,” he said.

Lakeisha rose from her seat.

“Hello, again, Lakeisha. I hope that you are well,” Thor said.

Lakeisha backed up. “Insane. And in cahoots with demons!”

“Here we go,” old Jack said, even as Janet was getting up from her chair.

As Janet was getting up, Lakeisha was in mid faint. Samantha and young Jack came to Janet’s aid.

“I told you, Thor,” old Jack said. “You got to give us some heads up...”

Janet, Samantha, and young Jack attended to Lakeisha. “Did she pass out when she saw Thor on the other side?”

“This is weird...” Jack said, and he passed out.

“I need two stretchers in here,” Janet said.

“On its way,” Hammond said, his Aid already on it.

“I am sorry for this disturbance,” Thor said.

“Well, you do have a way of scaring folks,” old Jack said.

“It is not us, Jack,” Thor said. “You consider your species as civilized, but you are still wild, feral animals, no different than Meer cats spooked by a shadow and rushing back to the

safety of the dens. It will take much more taming before the majority of you can tolerate interacting with off world entities. Movies are helpful, but it may not be enough.”

“Taming?” Samantha said.

“Yes,” Thor said. “When we say Jack is advanced, that does not mean he is superior in intellect, but that he is more receptive to the presence of others. It is the difference between a wolf and a dog.”

“I am not sure I like that analogy,” Hammond said.

“It is not meant to be disparaging, General Hammond. We do not just acclimate intellectually to our realities, but also genetically,” Thor said. “It is the difference from living in a perpetual night of fear response, and moving out into a day and into love.”

“I think she is coming around,” Janet said.

Lakeisha roused, adjusted, and began to scoot back away from Samantha and Janet.

“What happen?” Lakeisha asked. Then she saw Thor. And Screamed.

Jack came out of his sleep and sat up. Lakeisha grabbed onto him and buried her head into his chest. “I want to go home now!”

“What happened?” Janet asked.

“She woke up on that side screaming, as if from a nightmare,” young Jack said. “She didn’t remember here. I got her to lay back down, I closed my eyes, and woke up back here.”

“But you remembered being here there?” Janet asked.

“No, actually,” young Jack said.

“This is not unexpected, Jack,” Thor said. “In the past when we put the same consciousness in two bodies, there was continuum of results. There was always information exchange between the identical clones with shared consciousness. Sometimes it came as dreams. Sometimes as intuition. Sometimes very direct knowing. The worst case scenario results in a madness, very much like your mental illness known as Schizophrenia.”

“Oh, great,” Jack said. “So I have something else to look forward to?”

“The fact you are cycling between universes may save you from information overload,” Thor said. “In time, as your bodies and mind diverge from point of copying, which we refer to as simultaneous intellectual and genetic drift, the effects will diminish and you will experience more individualistic autonomy in each body. It appears that the other bodies are dominant, so for now you will be in sync with their sleep cycle.”

“So, we could just pass out anytime?” young Jack said.

“Yes,” Thor said.

Lakeisha pulled back from Jack. “I want to go home. Now.”

“It might not be a good idea just yet,” Janet said.

“Bring her grandparents in,” young Jack said.

“We’ll do that,” Hammond said. “But none of you are leaving the base until we know more.”

निर्मित

“Hello, Jack. This General Hammond. Are you there, Son?”

“We’re here, Sir. All of us,” young Jack said. There was no immediate verbal indication that young Jack remembered his time awake back at Stargate Command. A pre-arranged code phrase had failed to be delivered.

“That’s good to hear. How is everyone?”

“Home sick, Sir,” young Jack said. “We made some new friends. Met a planet of Native Americans. Oh, met Big Foot! He’s like for real! And we have some new friends staying with us. There is a flower girl here by the name of Alish.” Old Jack began singing, “I love the flower girl.” Samantha hit shoulder. “And Jon’s tulpa, Loxy, is now a real live girl. I am thinking I might make one myself.” It sounded like someone hit Young Jack and that explained the pause and the sound he made. “Or, not. Anyway, I have some rumors on the galactic social life. Apparently the humans are the bad guys here. Think fifty shades of Empires from Star Wars. Humans are the minority, but they seem to be running the show. Interesting, the Goa’uld are rumored to be the good guys.”

“Interesting, Jack. Are you safe where you are?” Hammond asked.

“We appear to be,” young Jack said. “We have access to tech that appears to be on par with the Asgard, if not more advanced in some ways. As near as I can tell, we’re on a space station. It’s pretty big. We’re now calling it Tranquility Base.”

Old Jack sang quietly, “Somewhere, over the Rainbow.”

“Interesting,” Hammond said. “Well, speaking of the Asgard, we’re passing some gifts through to you now. Let us know when you received them.”

The pendants were delivered up the ramp to the Stargate on rolling tables and then fed through. It took two people to lift a single pendant to feed it through and then they simply helped feed the silver chain, which picked up on its momentum. All three chains were attached by a simple clip, and when the clip went, it took the other two chains with it.

“Alright, we got em,” young Jack said.

“SG1 and guest are on their way over,” Hammond announced.

SG1 arrived, along with two guests. The world was flatter than they had ever experienced, and surreal. Lakeisha’s grandparents looked up at the face hovering over the table; Momma took Pappa’s hand. The domed shield maintaining the atmosphere shimmered with a blue tint that reminded them of sky. It was clear, though, this was not sky, and they were not on a planet. Momma began to wail.

“No, no, no, don’t cry, mamma,” Lakeisha said. “I just look big. I am not really big.”

“Are you okay?” her grandfather asked.

It was clear that young Jack was uncomfortable with the question, and he exchanged a look with himself. Pappa didn’t miss it. “I am fine, Pappa. I am safe. I have food, water, clothing, my own room with all the modern luxuries,” she assured him.

“Then, explain why you’re still wearing the clothes you were wearing when you were abducted,” he asked.

“Well, I am just still sort of adjusting,” Lakeisha admitted. “And I wasn’t abducted. I misunderstood the situation and was trying to help someone who appeared to be in need.”

“I am sorry, Sir. This is my fault,” Jon said.

“You, don’t speak,” grandfather said. “Jack! You should have kept her safe. You should have dragged her out of the gym.”

“Yes, Sir,” Jack said. “I should have.”

“No!” Lakeisha said. “I did what you would have done, Pappa. I did what I have seen you do. You have stood in the face of men with guns on the very street we live and talked them down from fighting. I saw a human being in need of help. Someone appeared lost, and I stood there, reaching out with my love to drag him back out of the abyss.”

“At what costs?” he said.

“Cost?” Lakeisha said. “You mean benefit. It benefited my soul to do what was right. Did it move me into a new world, yeah! Isn’t that exactly what you taught me to do? Step up, take responsibility for the world you’re in, and in doing so you change it. So, here I am, on a new playing field, Pappa. A playing field of black and white checkered squares, and the symbols you taught me to respect have very clear meaning. They open and close doors. I know you would never allow me to be a Mason, the whole being a girl thing and all, but maybe here I can aspire to be one. Or, at the least, a really good Eastern Star. I accept the consequences of my actions, my words, and my thoughts. This is a world of my doing.”

“I am prouder of you than you will ever know,” he said.

“It’s time to head back,” Carter said. “We’ve determined there is a health risk to this dimensional shift. It shouldn’t affect you, but we’re at risk every time we come here.”

Daniel dialed home.

“You be strong,” Pappa told Lakeisha.

“I love you, Baby,” Mamma said.

SG1 and guest returned to their world. It took some effort to get Momma to leave. The gate shut off a moment later.

निर्मित

“I am glad you called, Jack,” Hammond said. He pulled up a seat next to the tech. “I’ve been hoping to talk to you.”

“Sorry it took so long,” Jack said. “It wasn’t possible to call sooner without being noticed.”

“Are you alright?” Hammond asked.

“Yes, Sir,” Jack said. “For real, we are all okay. Jon has taken to here like a fish to water. Lakeisha is struggling more than she is letting on. I think she will be okay. Loxy is weird, but super nice. Alish is weird looking, but very reserved, almost British, except, like Loxy, she is very helpful. She has made it easy to figure things out.”

“Well, I am glad you got it all figured out, because we’re struggling on this side,” Hammond said.

“How so?” Jack asked.

“Alright, son, I am about to reveal something to you that I will let you decide whether or not you share it,” Hammond said. “First, it’s looking more and more like you’re not coming back to this Universe.”

“Figured that much,” Jack said. “Thor wasn’t too optimistic.”

“Also, you never left here,” Hammond said.

“Excuse me?” Jack asked.

“The Light Rings apparently made copies of you, leaving your original bodies here and creating new ones there,” Hammond said. “All of you have been bouncing between universes. You go to sleep here, you wake up there, and vice versa. And, with the exception of you, no one remembers being there. Based on my conversations with you, it appears you don’t remember waking up here.”

“You’re saying...” Jack began and then stopped. “Oh, hell, wait just a moment. Making a clone of a clone...”

“Thor says you’re fine,” Hammond said.

“Sir, with all due respect, I have made xerox copies of copies, and they never look as good as the original,” Jack said.

“Well, Thor assured us you checked out,” Hammond said.

“For now,” Jack said.

“For now,” Hammond said.

“And you’ve been sitting on this because?” Jack asked.

“Hypothetically, how do you suppose Lakeisha will react to learning she is here interacting with her grandparents without a clue she is there? Hypothetically, if she came home and realized she can’t go home because she is already home...”

“Been there before,” Jack said, sighing. “And I didn’t get such a warm reception when I came knocking. Come to think of it, I felt betrayed by you, Sir. I never thought you’d dismiss me, after all we been through...”

Hammond leaned into desk, closer to the mic. “That’s fair. To be honest, I was surprised myself to discover I had such a strong bias. I couldn’t get past the fact you looked like a child.”

“Did you even believe it was me,” Jack asked.

“I did. I saw you. I also saw you as if you were my own son, and I wanted to protect you,” Hammond said. “I want to protect you now. I want to protect all of you, but I don’t have a clue how to do this from here.”

“What should I do, Sir?” Jack asked.

“I am not sure I am qualified to advise you, Son. You’re navigating new territory. You have traveled much further than anyone has ever imagined was even possible,” Hammond was saying, even as a tear left his eye.

“I am sure there’s a book somewhere that covers this. Maybe you could send it through the gate?” Jack said. “Even fiction would be better than no road map at all.”

“I will send you some books, Jack,” Hammon said.

“Sir, if you can’t advise me...” Jack didn’t finish his statement. He didn’t know how to finish this.

“Were you going to say you’re otherwise lost? Jack, I have worked with you a long time. I have made almost all of the command decisions, but it was always you who advised me. Now, the way I see it, you’re safe and sound right there at Tranquility Base. You could live your entire lives there. It would be a nice life, actually. I wouldn’t mind retiring there myself. No one would blame you if you sit this life out. You could actually retire. You’ve earned it. Or, you can get out there and live your life, make friends, build new communities of friends. Change the world. Hell, change the universe, son. I don’t have to advise you, Jack. I know you. I know what you’re going to do and what you’re going to say. And I know, you’re going to be alright.”

“You been holding that speech in reserve for me?” Jack asked.

“Completely impromptu,” Hammond said.

“Nice,” Jack said.

“Get some sleep, son,” Hammond said. “We can talk more when you’re on this side.”

Chapter 21

Young Jack was sitting at the conference table with SG1. Old Jack was trying to put the paper clip he had bent back into its prior shape.

“Well, this is fun,” old Jack said.

“We could begin without them,” Samantha said.

“Daniel?” young Jack asked. “Have you ever read a book called the Holographic Universe?”

“By Talbot?” Daniel asked. “Yeah.”

“So, it’s a real book?” Young Jack asked.

“Yes,” Daniel said.

“No,” Samantha said, simultaneously.

“Sam, it’s a real book, by a real scientist,” Samantha said.

“It’s a real book, it exists, it’s not real science,” Samantha said.

“Do you think if you re-read it now, after all your experiences with SG1, you might reconsider your position?” Daniel asked.

“Maybe, I don’t know, I’d have to actually read it,” Samantha said.

“You haven’t even read it?” Daniel asked.

“Is it good?” old Jack asked.

“Why do you ask?” Samantha asked, turning to young Jack.

“It’s in Jon’s library, which means he’s read it, at least twice,” young Jack said. He explained every book that Jon had ever read more than once is there in its entirety. They’ve found some incomplete books.

“And you ask because?” Samantha said.

“Well, there’s this partial book here in the library, maybe it’s an abstract, I am not sure, but it’s by a physicist, a Regents professor and director of the Center for String and Particle Theory at the University of Maryland,” young Jack said. “He claims when you look at the fundamental math governing our Universe, it resembles Internet Code. More specifically, browser correction code. In essence, he claims we actually live in the Matrix.”

“And you’re Neo?” old Jack asked.

“No, Jon is,” young Jack said.

“Seriously?” Samantha asked.

“How else do you explain the magic?” young Jack asked. “Don’t do that.” Young Jack was referring the face she was making. “Maybe our Universe, the one we are occupying right now is real, but the one Jon, Lakeisha and I were uploaded might be a computer simulation. That would explain everything. Like, why we’re still here, and why we seemed to wake up there when we sleep here. Maybe our bodies there are just avatars for a really sophisticated game. Maybe this is some kind of game, or a test...”

“To what ends?” Samantha asked.

“I don’t know,” young Jack said. “The more I know the less I seem to know. But what if we are all in that simulated reality. Maybe that is what Carl Jung tapped into, not the collective unconscious, but a super massive roleplaying game. Maybe we all wake up there all the time but we don’t remember. That would explain why I found an older version of Teal’c. Maybe when

we die in one world, our consciousness shifts to another universe. Maybe they're all real worlds. Maybe everything is an illusion. Maybe we're all dream characters in someone else's dreams. That, too, would explain Jung's collective unconsciousness..."

"Slow down," old Jack said.

"I am following you," Daniel said. "Lots of people have been debating this very thing since at least Plato, probably before him. It's basically 'the Cave' concept. One of the problems is that it is virtually impossible to determine if something is real or simulated."

"Ha ha," young Jack said. "The people we helped. They have a legend of a snake goddess that rises up to provide enlightenment. What they shared with me reminded me a lot of the Goa'uld. It appears to be juxtaposed with our creation myth, only instead of tempting Eve, the snake joins with the woman to raise her to a new level of awareness, bringing her all the knowledge that the snake has ever learned. This first human/snakehead called herself Lilith. They call the snake heads here beacons of light because they actually bring light, flashing eyes notwithstanding. The human cartels in charge of the galaxy promote the idea that the snake people are demons trying to destroy God's creation. This is just one myth the cartels perpetuate to maintain their control. There may be several cartels in play, all fighting for dominion over the galaxy. I suspect none of the planet bound populations have a clue what's really going on because most of the gates and normal space lanes are controlled by the cartels. Even the population of Earth doesn't seem to know what's really going on. There is a fleet in the solar system calling themselves Space Warden. Earth may seem like a nice place to visit, in terms of wealth and luxury, but it's actually a prison planet. Apparently, the humans of the Solar System are really good at making spaceships, and many of the species buy from them. Spaceships and arms."

"That's been a popular theme with conspiracy theorists for a long time," Samantha said.

"But what if it's not a theory. I mean, it doesn't even have to be happening for real here, but it seems to be happening in that reality. Maybe UFO experiencers are really tapping psychically into that universe. Or, maybe they're actually there, and their experiences of here are just memories of that other world?"

"Jack," Samantha said, delicately. "Look. You're in a strange place. You're trying to make sense of something, and you're using incomplete data sets to make sense of it all. Your brain is filling in the gaps with things you know and don't know, and making correlations..."

"You don't think I know that?!" Jack said, crossly. He leaned back in his chair, crossing his arms. He felt tears moving in his eyes, but made absolutely no effort to control them.

"Alright, I am feeling something. Let me say my peace, even if I say it badly, I am struggling, but this is important. You adults here are missing the big picture. Hell, I was the adult, here, and I was missing the big picture. Let me illustrate this. This is not a metaphor. The first time I went to high school, I was oblivious to the fact other people were suffering. I wasn't exactly a bully, but neither did I defend anyone from being bullied. Kids are mean. They find a weakness and they attack it or exploit it. Some of this is because we're young. Some of this is because we are socialized into believing there is a norm and bullying is one way to get people to fall in line with the unspoken but objective social reality. Some of it is just because we are mean and exploiting our environment to make ourselves feel better. I am not saying it's bad or good or trying to judge it, but I am saying I was a part of that reality and I did not take time to understand the others in

my community and how much they were all struggling. There is a chasm between our children and adolescents today that adult humans don't appreciate or even understand. Adults are making assumptions, and they are becoming more and more aloof as they chase the materialistic, American paradigm..."

Jack put a hand up, as he saw the questions or objections coming. "Don't. I am not dissing America or the dream. I am an adult, in a child's body, and I am back in high school. I am like an anthropologist in sheep's clothing. I am not an adult. I am not an adolescent. I have my feet in two worlds. I see kids suffering, and reaching out to each other and to adults, and not getting their needs met. I see adults suffering, not getting their needs met. From my perspective we're all lost and on this edge of social catastrophe. This fragile balance of towing the line and being self-sufficient, while remaining appropriately socially connected, and I do mean the word appropriately, because if you think about how everyone is defined by who they know or associate with, well, appropriate is accurate and yet doesn't come anywhere close to revealing the complexity of social life. In my first life, I would have beaten the crap out of Jon if he annoyed me. In this second life, I nearly got the crap beaten out of me by trying to befriend him. Was it the right thing to do? Maybe. Doing so changed my world. And now, I am in a new Universe, and I find that I am dealing with adult humans who have the mentality of high school students competing for resources and for social dominance. I am wondering now, looking back over my first and short second life, if we ever leave high school behind. Maybe we get stuck in high school frame of mind because that's actually the adult human, and not some middle ground pretend adolescent mode. Seriously, for hundreds of thousands of years, adolescence was adulthood. Maybe a real adulthood doesn't arrive until we have lived a hundred years, but since most people don't live that long to figure things out, there isn't a lot of wisdom to pass around. Even if there was, they're either too sickly to communicate it, or the kids running the show dismiss them as irrelevant, because everyone assumes they're in charge. You, adults, dismiss the young and the old, when in truth, we should all be doing this together!"

Jack raised both hands. "Oh, I am not done yet. That's just the equation of us. Add aliens to that. Add super intelligent computers. Oh, and they're coming to a planet near you, and you can't stop that train. Even if all the governments got together to band AI, you know for a fact, some nerd in a garage like Bill Gates junior is going to use a 3D printer to make a smart chip, and AI will arrive. That, or the Russians or the Chinese will secretly keep the AI projects going, and we will, too, because we can't trust those bastards, and we want AI first, because whoever gets there first will be literally hundreds, if not thousands, of years ahead of the competition. One week of AI translates into a thousand years of computation time. So, short of blowing up the world, AI is going to be a thing. We have more than enough resources to feed the world, and yet people starve because we're playing monopoly for real and forgotten this is just a game. If we don't get out of this game, when aliens and AI show up in a big way, that game is going to explode. We have been fighting the Goa'uld because of their arrogance, and because it's right, I get that, but we hold that same affliction within us.

"I will wrap this up with this. I find myself in a place where I am going to have to make some decisions. I don't want to just arbitrarily decide what to do. In the past, I could defer to my social cultural ideals. High school. In doing so, I was socially rewarded for doing the right thing, even if it was the wrong thing. I traded high school for the Air Force. Air Force was a solid way

of life. It gave me discipline, it put food on the table, it gave me structure, and adventures, and purpose. I achieved honor and accolades and respect, because I exemplified the expected norm. Both my culture of origin and my Air Force training is influencing my decisions now, but that may be insufficient for where I am at. The rules of the Earth and country I know are insufficient. I don't know how I can ethically apply that to any world or culture there. I am sovereign and I am alone. So is Jon, Loxy, Lakeisha, Alish, Isis... We are alone, together. I can't tell them what to do. We're negotiating right now, but we're also making mistakes. For better or worse, we have engaged the social reality of that galaxy and made a step in a specific direction that is going to have repercussion. This delicate balance of war and peace, love and hate, light and dark, has just become disturbed, and it might settle out in the wash, or it might just blow everything up. Now, having heard all of that, what would you tell me to do? Knowing that I won't even remember this speech or this conversation, what would you have me do? What you have us do?"

No immediate response came. It turned out, SG1 was deferring first word to General Hammond, who was behind Jack. So was his new aid. So was Janet, Lakeisha, Jon, and Loxy. Lakeisha and Loxy went forward and each touched Jack's arm in a commiserative way, and then pulled up their chairs to sit next to him. Jon sat down next to Loxy.

"That's some speech, son," Hammond said, taking his seat.

"A bit heavy on the emotions," old, Jack said.

"Yeah, well, blame it on the youth," young, Jack said.

"I didn't say it was invalid," old, Jack said.

"Why are you sitting on technology that could literally free the world from using fossil fuels?" Jon asked. "Even if global warming isn't the result of human activity, wouldn't it be in our interest to reduce our footprint, or, I don't know, maybe actually influence the environment back the other direction?"

"Jon," Lakeisha said. "That seems like a secondary issue, a distraction from what Jack was talking about."

"Is it?" Jon asked. Loxy took his hand.

"That is a good question, Jon, and above my pay grade," Hammond said.

"Well, that's just it, isn't," Jon said. "Who's grade is it?" Jon turned to young Jack. "You are not alone. We voted before we left the station we were a team."

"You remember?" young Jack asked.

"Sort of," Jon said.

"We have discovered that Loxy can hypnotize Jon and he can recall things if asked the right questions," Janet said. "If Loxy can do this in both Universes, then we have an alternative way to stay in touch in the event they lose access to their gate."

"Do you recall that you arbitrarily went off on your own initiative to save that girl," young Jack said.

"It was the right thing to do," Jon said.

"That's not the point. You decided. We didn't decide," Jack said. "You nearly got us all killed. You nearly got the whole lot of them killed."

"So, just sit back and do nothing?" Jon asked.

"No! What I am saying is, it could have gone much worse. Maybe, if we had departed, that one girl would have died, Brisk would still be doing bad shit, but we would have been able

to come back at a later time and convince them to bury the gate. One death versus the half dozen that did die,” Jack said. “I am not your commanding officer, Jon. But if we continue on excursion and you put our lives in danger like that again, right, wrong, indifferent, I might shoot you.”

“So, we need to figure this out,” old Jack said.

“You think?” young Jack said.

“Yes, that’s what I do,” old Jack said back, equally sarcastic.

“Given what I’ve heard, I wouldn’t change a thing,” Lakeisha said.

“Well, that’s because you’re not remembering the emotional fall out of killing someone,” young Jack said.

“Sounded like an asshole to me,” Lakeisha said.

“Yep, he was,” young Jack. “And, if I know assholes, they usually have family. Brothers, children. Hell, he might even have a dog that likes him somewhere. What if he’s just a bad guy on the weekend, because he’s paid to be a bad guy, but he returns home during the week, and is actually nice to his wife and children? Do you think those kids deserve being without a dad?”

“He was a bad guy, Jack,” Jon said.

“Yeah! I get that. Jake, back in high school. He’s not a nice guy. But that also might be because his dad beats up on him, and he and his siblings fight amongst themselves in order to win their dad’s affection, and he knows he is losing the game, so he dominates in the school arena, and he gets accolades because his immediate peers need that perceived strength because they’re also struggling. See, this is exactly my point. My first time through high school, if you were a dick, I just thought it was because you were dick. I didn’t take time to sort out all the possible explanations and permutations.”

“So, you’re saying we shouldn’t have killed him?” Lakeisha asked.

“Not what I am saying, but this is the complexity of the situation,” young Jack said. “Jon, you advocate peace, no killing. I admire that, especially knowing you will fight to till the death, your own death, to do that. On the other hand, I have evidence to believe you held back. You could have killed Brisk and been done with it, but you chose not to, and in doing so, other people died. That’s another level of complexity to this mess.”

“Let me be clear, Jack,” Jon said. “I will not intentionally kill anyone.”

“And that philosophy will get the rest of us killed,” Jack said. “So, either you’re sitting on your ass at home, watching from the sidelines, or you’re stepping up your game, learning some fucking magic missiles, and taking out the bad guys.”

“Jack’s report said you acquired a Zat gun,” old Jack said. “Would you be willing to use phasers, set for stun?”

“Of course,” Jon said.

“Apparently, Zat guns are a rare item,” young Jack said. “Per Isis. Apparently the humans are scavengers, and if they find technology, they use it to their advantage, but they aren’t trying to backwards engineer it. The ships they sell are sophisticated, and the weapons they sell are basic projectile and explosives.”

“And you only have access to the Zat gun, and five staffs,” Hammond said.

“For now,” young Jack said. “Isis still won’t unlock weapon manufacturing options. I have intel on a world that has a bazaar, and so I might be able to buy a P3 and some ammo.”

“Jon, how do you feel about Jack or Lakeisha killing?” Hammond said.

“I hate it,” Jon said. “And, I am conflicted. Contextually, I can see an argument for killing. Like the Byrd’s said, “To everything, turn, turn, turn, there is a season...”

“That’s the Bible,” Lakeisha said.

“Bottom line, I would prefer no one kill,” Jon said. “I have wanted to learn magic so that I could have options to defend myself without inflicting harm on others. I want to know magic so I can heal, not destroy.”

“I share that,” Loxy said. “I will not kill. I also, will not run away from a fight. I will stand with Jon till the end. Our mission there is to bring a message of peace, love, and prosperity to the worlds.”

“You believe that?” Daniel asked.

“I know that,” Loxy said. “That is the fundamental message in Jon’s subconscious. He and I share that subconscious. We are one.”

“So, whether you have Jack and Lakeisha’s help or not, you intend to visit other worlds,” Hammond said.

“Yes,” Jon said. “I have to know. I have to learn. I have to interact. I am trying to find my way back home.”

“Jack has all the memories of being an esteemed officer in the Air Force,” Hammond said. “You’re open to him advising you?”

“Of course,” Jon said. “I love Jack. I love Lakeisha. I don’t want them in harm’s way. I also do not feel comfortable giving them orders. I feel responsible for their presence in my Universe, and so they will always be welcome in my home, for as long as they want to stay. I think we can agree that Tranquility Base is a safe place.”

“For now,” young Jack said. “If we keep having conflicts with the local, galactic militias, well, who knows? We’re going to explore some other worlds with gates. If we find one that isn’t being utilized, we’re going to set up a second base of operation. Isis assured me she can manufacture an iris, which we can control remotely, whether we’re on planet or off.”

“That’s kind of cool,” Samantha said. “I wouldn’t mind having one of those for our Gate.”

“You want to put Davis out of a job?” old Jack asked.

“I am confused,” Jon said. “Jack said that the kawoosh destroys anything it comes into contact with. Why doesn’t the iris get destroyed every time there is incoming wormhole?”

“Well, that’s really kind of technical,” old Jack said.

“No, it’s not,” Samantha said.

“It’s classified,” old Jack said.

“Well, that’s true,” Samantha agreed.

“But you’re going to teach us how to do it?” Jon asked.

“I know how to do it,” young Jack said.

“So, why don’t you do it for every world you visit?” Jon asked.

“It’s a really expensive?” old Jack said.

“More expensive than losing Gates to the other team?” Jon asked.

“Not everyone has access to a replicator like we do,” young Jack said.

“Oh,” Lakeisha said. “So, theoretically, we could go and capture everyone’s gates by attaching our own irises and locking them out.”

“Actually, we could,” Jack said. “It could take a while.”

“How long of a while? How many planets in the galaxy could there be?” Lakeisha asked.

“Upwards of a hundred thousand billion,” Samantha said. “Assuming your galaxy, like ours, has two hundred thousand million stars...”

“There are two hundred thousand million stars in the galaxy?” Lakeisha asked.

“And over a billion, billion galaxies,” Jon said.

“And over a billion, billion universes,” Loxy said.

“I am feeling rather small,” Lakeisha said.

Anita arrived carrying sodas, followed by the new tech carrying four boxes of pizza. A guard brought a tray with ice and cups. Loxy said “OMG, yes! I am starving!”

“I figured you guys might like something to eat while you’re discussing your lives and new protocols,” Anita said.

“I will be 18 in two and a half years, if you’re still single,” young Jack said.

“I will let you know,” Anita said.

“Seriously, Jack,” old Jack said. “She’s a bit young for you.”

“It’s not like Samantha’s going to date me,” young Jack said.

“Not directly,” old Jack said.

“Sir?” Samantha said.

“It was a joke, Carter,” old Jack said.

“I don’t get it,” Jon said.

“Oh, well, there’s a lot of gossip that Jack and Samantha hook up,” Daniel said.

“What gossip?” Samantha said.

“I, too, have bet a good some of money on this gossip,” Teal’c announced.

“There’s a pool?” Samantha asked.

“They have a pool on my longevity, what do you think?” Anita asked.

“You know about the pool?” old Jack asked.

“Am I disqualified from the pool if Anita leaves because I marry her?” young Jack asked.

“Yes,” old Jack said.

“Excuse me?” Lakeisha said. “I thought you were marrying me?”

“You’re going to change your mind,” young Jack said.

“In what Universe?” Lakeisha asked.

“Interesting,” Daniel said. “There is already divergence?”

“What are we supposed to do here?” Lakeisha asked.

“Yawl will be returning to high school,” Hammond said.

“Fuck that,” Jon and old Jack said simultaneously. Jack continued. “There’s no way they will let Jon back in high school.”

“That’s true,” old Jack agreed. “They kind of frown on kids bringing grenades to school.”

“Where else would kids learn to throw grenades?” Teal’c asked.

“They don’t,” Daniel said.

“That is very sad,” Teal’c said.

“I love cheese pizza with alfredo sauce,” Loxy said.

“You realize how much we’re going to have to run to burn these calories?” Lakeisha asked.

“I could teach you yoga,” Loxy said.

“Can I watch?” Jon asked.

“Of course,” Loxy said.

“Can’t you just pull some strings and get me and Jon into college?” young Jack asked.

“Oh, I always wanted to be Doogie Howser,” old Jack said.

“I bet,” Samantha said.

“A bit of step down from Kurt Russell,” Daniel said.

“I suspect you and Jon can both pass the entrance exams, and test out of much of the basics,” Hammond said. “I will pull some strings.”

“You are not going to college without me,” Lakeisha said.

“You’ll catch up,” young Jack said.

“That’s not what she’s worried about,” Loxy said.

“What are you worried about?” young Jack said.

“Seriously?” Samantha, Loxy, and Lakeisha all said.

“What?” old Jack asked.

“Boy are stupid,” Lakeisha said.

“Slow,” Loxy said.

“They never catch up to us,” Samantha said.

Jon, young Jack, and Teal’c all reach for the last slice of pepperoni pizza at the same time.

“Rock paper scissors?” young Jack asked.

“You cannot beat me, O’Neil,” Teal’c said.

“So, let’s make it harder,” Jon said. “Rock, Paper, scissors, Spock.”

They agreed. “One,” Jon counted. “Two…”

“You getting this?” old Jack asked the tech. “They’re counting up!”

“OMG, let it go,” the tech said.

“No,” old Jack said. “It says Colonel, right here.”

“I know. You win,” the tech said.

“I always do,” old Jack said. He winked at Samantha.

Author's notes

SG1: Fragile Balance, Episode 703, air date, 06.20.03, actor Michael Welch played the younger Jack. This is by far, my favorite episode. If there was ever a possibility of a spin off, even bringing in a younger market, this would be the episode I chose to launch it.

In terms of exploring the landscape of conspiracy theories and infinite universes, this book is just one of my launching points. I miss the banter of SG1. I love Richard Dean Anderson. I love all the SG1 characters, and the people that played them, and hope I have rendered them accurately, and respectfully. I was sort of a fan of Anderson back in his MacGyver days, but that show was rather hit or miss with me. What sold me on Anderson was Legend, where Anderson played Pratt, or Nicodemus Legend. Anderson was so divergent from his role of MacGyver, with clearly distinctive mannerisms, that I was willing to believe that was not Anderson just pretending to be another character. Hypothetically, if there were a spin off, and this book was found entertaining enough to raise some interest, it could be the vehicle to bring back Douglas Christopher Judge, to reprise his role. Even an older Daniel, Samantha, and Jack is plausible, given the premise of jumping universes.

Real PhD level scientist influenced the scripts of SG1. Since the show has left the air, we know a lot more about our Universe, and there are things being discussed even today that sound like fiction, but are actually academic discussions. Do we live in the Matrix? Not just a movie talk. Stuff that makes the original series seem more like science, as opposed to simply speculative fiction. One of the problems with say, Star Trek, is that rebooting it given today's technology makes it more challenging to connect with the original, because it was a head of its time, but now, we're ahead of our time. I think SG1 is more easily rebooted. The thing is, I didn't sit down to write this book. I was actually in the process of writing something else. I say writing, because I was 'working.' This book, Point Five, it was delivered, like a download, in its entirety into my brain, and the last two weeks of my life was me trying to write it down while it was all still tangible! This is not the first time I experienced this. It is happening more frequently. I would like it to continue, and so I will continue to operate with the muses that are visiting as long as they would like to work.

On another track, interestingly, the powers that be are trying to give us more SG1. Stargate Origins is a prequel, online, and it's okay. I am not like super in love with it, but maybe I miss SG1 so much that I am being a little easier on grading it. Prequel are really difficult things to map out, because if the writing isn't tight enough, it has a serious chance of contradicting itself. I am not happy that Catherine travels through the Stargate with her father. I am even less happy with the plot contrivance that erases her memory and then implants a mission to recruit the necessary forces to prepare for SG1. Unfortunately, they almost have to have the plot contrivances to explain the contradiction! Time travel and prequels are really challenging to write, not impossible, but it is my opinion if you're going to do it, there needs to be a really exceptional stories, and you absolutely must have a strong team that is like obsessive compulsive about details, from scenery to scripts. When they come out on Aberdos and they see three

moons, and it looks like Earth's moons?! That's just laziness. Don't just throw something together and call it fast food served.

That said, when reflecting on my criticism, I am also aware that I am not perfect. I continue to struggle with grammar, but not from a laziness, though I appreciate the argument that it is only that. Between work, raising a toddler, and wanting to write, I find it incredibly challenging to attend to all the things I want/need to attend to. If only I had a production team! ☺ I continue to share my work, freely, at free-ebooks.net. I have made my books available for pay, as well, partly as an experiment. Altogether, my Trek fan fiction has over a 150k downloads. If I had charged, even just a dollar, I could have paid off student loans, maybe focused on writing full time and being more disciplined in that endeavor. This is not a lament. I am merely reflecting over a perceived potential to do more, to participate more, with huge desire... I believe it will manifest in its own time. I practice that philosophy, 'do what you love, and you will always succeed.' I am genuinely happy as I write this. I hope that is something you, the reader, experience as you read. I am of the opinion, it doesn't matter where this goes, how many people read it, or if I should ever sustain myself on my writing. I have enough personal evidence that my writing has touched the lives of people. It has irritated some people, too. I am happy they shared that with me. I grow from reasonable criticism.

This is me, reaching out, trying, loving, and inviting others to participate with me or make their own fiction. In sharing, I invite a dialogue with others. I mean, sure, I could easily live the rest of my life on one of the many worlds in my mind, but it's more fun together. Feel free to say HI.

Thank you for reading this far.

Love
John