

SGC-X



A New Alliance

by Merik Katuryan

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This Edition published in 2017 as part of a collection created by Farrago & Farrago and featuring the work of members of Romiley Literary Circle

Cover by HTSP Graphics Division
Design & typesetting by HTSP Editorial Division,
10 SK6 4EG, Romiley, G.B. for Farrago & Farrago
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This is the second of 2 volumes of Stargate SG-1 fan-fiction. Two new additions to the cast have already been established. One of them, the British mathematician Dr. Harold Trajan, is an SGC Specialist, who has a history of joining SG teams on expeditions through the stargate. The other is another version of Samantha Carter, who arrived from an alternate Earth, which was conquered by the Goa'uld.

The new arrival has found her feet at the SGC and she has proved her worth. Operations described in her debriefing reports capture imaginations at the Pentagon and the other Samantha seems to be on the verge of fulfilling one of her life-long dreams. And yet there are clouds on the horizon.

The Almed, new allies of Earth, are under immediate threat from the Goa'uld, and Dr. Trajan is being harassed, apparently by someone with the clout of a Senator. There are also attempted abductions. As ever, the staff at the SGC are beset by enemies, and not entirely sure where the next attack will come from.

Both on Earth and on Almed, there are new challenges to face.

This is a sequel to *SGC-X: The Refugee*

Previously on SCG-X:

In the previous volume, *The Refugee*, another Samantha Carter arrived on Earth via the quantum mirror discovered by Dr. Daniel Jackson. She knew the secrets of Stargate Command and she knew many of the people who work there; but different versions of them. This Samantha Carter had never joined the US Air Force, even though her father, Jacob Carter, was a general, and she *said* that she had arrived from an alternate Earth, which had been betrayed from within and conquered by the forces of the Goa'uld Apophis.

Stressed close to breaking point by her ordeal, Dr. Samantha Carter had to live with the suspicion that she could be a spy. But she had valuable information about work carried out at her SGC, which had not been explored at her new home.

The refugee proved her worth, became a friend of her counterpart, Major Samantha Carter, and developed a close relationship with another SGC Specialist; the British mathematician Harold Trajan, whom she married; fulfilling an ambition from her previous life and also giving the SCG fewer problems with her documentation.

A few days after the marriage, the Almed, new allies of Earth, cleared Samantha of suspicion of being a Goa'uld spy. Their conclusion was confirmed by the Tok'ra, who were interested in making contact with the Almed. The Goa'uld were on the march again and everyone wanted to gather friends and technology for a time of danger.

At the same time, Dr. Harold Trajan was being harassed by a variety of individuals. Despite General Hammond's best efforts, the source of the harassment, and the reason for it, remained annoying mysteries. And then there was the attempt by an NSA agent, who had become a Goa'uld, to kidnap Samantha after an attempt by NID to place her in that agency's clutches.

The SGC was enduring very troubled times.



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Decoded

[August 20, Wednesday, late afternoon]

Very few of those who reported for work at Station Zebra, Cheyenne Mountain base, a US Air Force facility in Colorado, did so in order to go through the motions of doing a job. None of those who descended to Stargate Command, which was buried deep below the mountain, could ever expect an uneventful day. For the SGC, the existence of which was classified under Section 11C9 of the National Security Act, housed one of a network of stargates; devices constructed in Ancient times to enable travel and communication between star system.

The stargates were called Astria Porta in the Ancient tongue of their creators, and Chappa'ai in Goa'uld, the language of parasitic creatures which had conquered much of Earth's galaxy thousands of years before with the aid of human hosts and an army of modified humans, the Jaffa, who carried immature Goa'uld symbiotes in their bellies.

Some five years after humans had made their first expedition through their stargate, Earth had reached a state of armed stand-off with the Goa'uld. The planet had fought off an invasion attempt by the Goa'uld System Lord Apophis, but at the cost of exhausting the Ancient weapon which had made the difference between subjugation and survival.

The Goa'uld remained a serious and ever-present threat, and Earth continued to seek technology and allies on other planets. But for some of the staff of the SGC, there were enemies closer to home. For two of the Specialists employed by the Air Force, the enemy was the US government. Those two were the mathematician Dr. Harold Trajan and his wife Samantha, a counterpart of Major Samantha Carter of SG-1. Samantha Trajan had fled an Earth in a parallel dimension following a successful invasion by Apophis.

Agents of various government bureaux, police officers and civilians, such as journalists, were being sent to harass the Trajans for reasons which remained unexplained. Worse, there had been two attempts to remove Samantha Trajan from the SGC, one by the oversight agency NID, and the second an abduction attempt by a Goa'uld, who had taken over the body of an NSA agent and placed his squad of six agents under a highly invasive form of mind-control.

A typical example of the harassment occurred on the afternoon of an August Wednesday; on the day after the Goa'uld's abduction attempt; when the Trajans ventured out of the SGC to their apartment in nearby Silver Spring; under escort, of course. At the time in question, Samantha was shopping with Major Carter and a female corporal from the SGC's security force as armed escorts.

Samantha's husband was at home, playing host to General Hammond, the commanding officer of the SGC, who had decided to escape from his office at the end of an unusually quiet day. The general had spent it seeking answers to questions about the abduction attempt. His superiors in Washington had been downright obstructive, in his opinion, and he had decided to share his frustration with the Trajans.

Dr. H.T. Trajan responded to a ring on his doorbell to find two men in dark suits showing identity cards to the CCTV security camera in the ground-floor lobby and requiring permission to use the elevator to reach his apartment on the top floor.

"Does Samantha Jane Trajan live here?" the taller of the visitors asked when they were inside the apartment and Trajan had inspected the identity cards at close range to confirm that the men were immigration officials called Charles Courtney Crown and Lee Michael Wong.

"Of course, she does," said Trajan.

"The apartment is in your name alone, Dr. Trajan," Crown added. He was clearly the senior agent.

"So?" Trajan shrugged his shoulders. "If I pop off first, my wife gets all my stuff, including the apartment, so that doesn't matter."

"Is she here now?"

"She's not here twenty-four/seven. Sometimes, she goes shopping and sometimes, she's out working for your country's Air Force."

"Doing what?"

"That's classified information," said General Hammond, who had been sitting quietly, observing the proceedings. "Unless you have an extraordinarily high security clearance for an INS officer."

"And you are?" Crown said with typical dumb insolence appropriate for someone assumed to be a civilian of no great status.

"Allow me to introduce Major-General Hammond of the U.S. Air Force," said Trajan. "My boss. And my wife's boss, too."

"What business do you have with Dr. Trajan?" said the general.

"We have evidence that theirs was a sham marriage, General," said Crown. "Arranged just for the purpose of providing documents for the woman who is now Samantha Trajan."

"What sort of evidence?" said Trajan.

"That's confidential," said Crown.

"I could probably find out what he thinks he's got on us quite quickly, General," said Trajan.

"I don't think you need take the trouble, thank you, Dr. Trajan," said General Hammond.

"Just thought it might some time and annoyance," said Trajan.

"I can only see one computer, Dr. Trajan," said Wong, who had been taking an interest in the furnishings of a spacious living room.

Trajan shrugged his shoulders again. "Yes?"

"For two people? You never need to use it when your wife is using it? Or vice versa?"

"For your information," said Trajan, "that's actually her computer. And there are four more in the apartment, so getting your hands on one when you need one is never a problem."

"Appearances can be deceptive, Mr. Crown," General

Hammond prodded. "Especially when you're trying to make the facts fit a theory."

"I always thought they had due process in these United States," Trajan remarked, stressing his British origins.

"You should know, Mr Crown, that Dr. Trajan; both of them; are working for the Air Force doing work vital to national security," the general said stiffly. "Both have an extremely high security clearance. Do you have any conception of the vetting procedures involved? And do you seriously think that two people in their position would be involved in a sham marriage? And that they would invite their boss to such a wedding? And hold it at the Air Force chapel at their place of work?"

"It's unlikely, General," Crown admitted. "But . . ."

"But you have a conflict of evidence," said Dr. Trajan. "On the one hand, there's your soon not to be anonymous informant saying my wife is a bad guy, and on the other hand, you have a major-general in your own country's Air Force telling you that my wife works for your government, as you do, and she's been positively vetted and she's a good guy."

Charles Crown began to argue his case with General Hammond, assuming that he was just a desk general and unlikely to put up much resistance.

"Excuse me for a few moments." Trajan disappeared into the kitchen to make a phone call. "Give me a read-out on these guys, will you?" he asked when he got a response from his contact at the USAF Weather Bureau, who had access to more or less anything. He emailed some images captured from the surveillance system.

"And you'll owe me one?" said Major Andrew Calton.

"I might even owe you two if your info is good enough," Trajan returned.

"I like your attitude, Dr. Trajan," laughed Major Calton.

"You do? Well I like speedy service when someone's doing me a double favour."

"Working on it, boss."

The argument had reached a stalemate when Trajan rejoined the combatants and Charles Crown was looking ruffled.

"Charles Courtney Crown of apartment six, Conrad Tower," Trajan said into a silence, "I must inform you that your conduct is being monitored by my security system and may be used in evidence in any legal proceedings arising from your actions."

"Are you threatening me, Dr. Trajan?" Crown returned indignantly. "And how do you know where I live?"

"You assume that my reminder that you can be held responsible for your choices constitutes a threat?" Trajan said thoughtfully. "I'm sure that your superiors, not to mention the Great American Public, will be interested to hear that. As for where you live, it's amazing how much information is freely available on the Internet if you know where to look. And the same applies to your associate; Wong, Lee Michael. His home addresses, like mine, is also a matter of public record. Which this conversation will be, quite soon."

"You can't do that," Wong protested.

"Did I just hear the word culture?" said Trajan.

"Stand down, Dr. Trajan." General Hammond struggled to suppress a smile when he caught the reference to reaching for guns. "I'll handle this."

"Yes, sir," Trajan said in a tone which conveyed reserved options.

"What I suggest you do, Mr. Crown," the general added, "is go back to your office and start a thorough check of the bona fides of your informant. I shall be making a report of this incident to my superiors and, to put it plainly, you might want to make sure your ass is covered."

"We don't respond well to threats, General," said Crown.

"Neither, Mr. Crown, does the United States Air Force."

"Something you could ponder on the way back to your office," Trajan added, "is that we live in an age of information. Which makes it easy to work out who's involved in making a dirty deal work and who's just doing his job. Which is fair enough if the job is being done with due diligence.

"But if someone gets his rocks off from pushing people around when he thinks they're powerless, well, that's when the information war can get real dirty. Because the thing of it is, it's just as easy to put dirty information about you into the

system as it is to do it to my wife.

"It all depends how motivated the person standing next to the person who's being pushed around feels. And please, don't take that as a threat, just take it as a statement of fact."

The immigration agents delivered a little more bluster before they left, feeling out-manoeuvred.

"I think this is all down to someone whose name starts with K and ends with insey," Trajan decided when the visitors had gone.

"A few months ago, I would have agreed with you," said the general. "But rather a lot of gaps have appeared in that theory recently."

"You mean, someone else is out to get me? Or Samantha and me?"

"It's possible there could be more than one interested party, yes."

"That's worrying. I thought the worst that could happen to us would be Apophis dropping in on our wedding day. Clearly, my imagination needs some work."

"Something else that's worrying is how those two knew that you and Samantha would be coming home today instead of spending time in what amounts to protective custody at the SGC."

"Someone with pockets deep enough to stake out the SGC? I think that gets to alarming. I think I can hear the lift."

"It's just as well your wife wasn't here," the general said with a smile. "Otherwise, she'd have been asking to borrow Major Carter's sidearm."

The front door opened and Samantha Trajan and her escorts entered the apartment.

"General Hammond, welcome to our not-so-humble penthouse," said Samantha. "Hasn't he even offered you a cup of coffee?" she added with a glare at her husband.

"Actually, we've been rather too busy for the conventionalities," said the general.

"Nice of you to make excuses for him." Samantha gave her husband a 'doing what?' glare.

"Coffee, General? Ladies?" said Trajan brightly. "And a spot of the deluxe cherry cake?"

“Definitely the cherry cake,” said the general. “Sit down, ladies. There are things going on that Samantha needs to know about.”



When the general and the escorts had taken their leave, Samantha Trajan turned a thoughtful expression on her husband. “What about the Almed planet?” she said. “They seem to enjoy being educating by you. Could we go and hide there for a while?”

“There’s no football, ours or yours, and the TV’s rubbish.”

Trajan received a dose of the Carter Look.

“Plus, how would you like to be one of the only two primitives on a really advanced planet, where you don’t know how anything works and you’re barely intelligent enough to earn the minimum wage?”

“I don’t agree with that last bit. I think we could do okay there. But anyway, what are we going to do?”

“We are going to stand and fight and let our friends help us.”

“We are?”

“But very sneakily so that no one knows we’re fighting rather than just hunkering in a bunker, hoping it will all go away. We are going to find out who’s behind this and call in as many favours as it takes to fight dirtier than them.”

“Someone whose name ends with ‘insey’?”

“Senator Kinsey was my prime suspect. But the general thinks he might have a rival. Someone who has to have a lot of little helpers. Who might not like the going to get tough.”

“Who might not enjoy being squished like bugs?”

“That as well,” Trajan said thoughtfully.

[August 21, Thursday]

Colonel O’Neill and Major Carter reported to General Hammond’s office with the air of people on a mission. Major Carter had been thinking about several items in her

counterpart's debriefing reports on her version of the SGC, and she had a suggestion to make.

"Remember the X-Three-Oh-One, sir?" she said when the visitors were sitting in front of the general's desk. "We might be able to revamp that project but make a success of it."

"I remember what happened to Colonel O'Neill and Teal'c on their test flight," the general returned. "And having to call on the Tok'ra for help."

"Because of the recall device Apophis had in his gliders in case someone tried to defect, yes, sir. But Samantha Trajan knows how to find and remove it. And it would be a real benefit to us if we could have our own gliders, and fly captured ones in the field, while we're studying the technology in more detail to help us build hybrids we can rely on."

"What about finding suitable gliders?" said General Hammond.

"We know where to find a number of crashed gliders that we could retrieve very easily, sir," said Carter. "The Goa'uld must have dumped them where they are in the hope we'll try, and fail, to retro-fit them. Knowing what we do now, thanks to Samantha, this would be an ideal opportunity to get hold of some more gliders for study and flight training. And she would be a great help if we could take her along."

"How safe would it be to send the other Dr. Trajan on this mission, though?" the general asked with a frown.

"As safe as any mission can be, sir. We'd just be spending a few hours at the glider site. If that. The chances of anyone hostile being in the area at that moment are vanishingly small."

"Accepting that, how do you propose retrieving the gliders, Major?" said the general. "I know Samantha Trajan and her team disassembled their gliders partially and brought them back here though the stargate. And then they were removed using the hoist that was used to install the stargate. The Pentagon in Dr. Trajan's reality thought that it would be worth all the disruption at the SGC to get her Glider-Plus scheme up and running. No such decision has been taken here, though."

"Sir, you remember our trip to P-Two-X-Three-Nine-

Eight? And the report Samantha filed about also going there?"

"I remember the stargate there malfunctioned and you barely got home," said the General.

"Yes, sir. Which makes it likely that the Goa'uld have abandoned the planet. Especially if they were being attacked there. We could use the X-Five-Oh-One to land a retrieval team and load the gliders we saw. I've done the math and its cargo hold is plenty big enough."

The general thought for a few moments. "Very well, Major. The big failing of previous suggestions for glider retrieval missions has been a lack of specifics, and there have always been missions with a higher priority because of clearly defined objectives. Removing the need to extract four gliders from the gate room should make a big difference. Submit a mission plan for what we've just discussed and I'll put it on a fast-track to the Pentagon for priority consideration."

"Yes, sir," said Carter, looking very pleased with herself.

"You've been very quiet, Jack," the general invited, looking at Colonel O'Neill.

"I want to fly one of those suckers again, sir," said O'Neill, "and I buy Samantha Trajan's idea that it would be good to train people on our side to fly them in case we get a chance to use them against the Goa'uld. So I didn't want to get in Carter's way when she tried to sell you her plan."

"I admire your discretion," laughed the general. "Dismissed."

"Before we go, sir," said Major Carter, "does anyone have a convincing reason why that Goa'uld wanted to kidnap Samantha?"

"The most sensible one I've heard is that they thought it would be easier to question her directly than get hold of a copy of the data from her chip."

"But there has to be more on the chip than Samantha knows, sir," said Carter.

General Hammond shrugged his shoulders. "Knowing some of it is better than knowing none of it."

"But we don't really know," said O'Neill. "And probably won't."

"These are the realities," the general quoted.

When he was alone again, General Hammond realized that sending Samantha Trajan on a mission might have the adverse effect of making some of the talking heads at the Pentagon sit up and start thinking about the wisdom of putting a valuable resource at risk. But there was a valuable prize on offer, and Samantha Trajan was one of the particular group of people who could make a success of the operation, and even one successful glider retrieval operation would be a big positive for the SGC.



Dr. William Lee responded with reflex nervousness when summoned to General Hammond's office as he was about to resume work after his lunch break. He was somewhat relieved to find Dr. Harold Trajan already present in the general's office when he arrived, but the general was looking annoyed, which Dr. Lee took as a bad omen.

"Dr. Lee, take a seat." The general waved a hand toward a vacant chair then scanned the open binders on his desk again. "As you know," he continued, "Samantha Trajan arrived here with an identification module embedded in her left arm. Something similar to the ones used to tag pets. Do you know where the tag is, Dr. Lee?"

"Well, no, not right now," said Lee, knowing that an accurate answer was the wrong one, as far as the general was concerned.

"Why not?" demanded the general.

"It was requisitioned by two visitors from the Pentagon, sir." Lee offered a perfect defence with little confidence.

"When?"

"Last week. Last Wednesday. They had the proper paperwork; I checked with the Adjutant."

General Hammond made a brief telephone call. "From the look on Dr. Trajan's face," he said as he replaced the receiver, "he knows broadly what I've been told."

"The visitors were properly authorized but no one here was high enough up the food chain to know what their mission was," Trajan obliged. "Everyone who came into contact with

them, including Bill, was told to say nothing about the visit, or else."

"That's what they told me," said Dr. Lee.

"And what did they take?" said the general.

"The implant itself, the disks with my copies of the data extracted from it and all my notes on decoding the data," said Lee.

"Is this going where I think it's going, sir?" said Trajan.

"If you're wondering if the chip and all the data have mysteriously disappeared from a lab at the Pentagon . . .," the general returned.

"Just like Corporal Sheringham's implant?" said Trajan. "And they laughed and called me a conspiracy theorist when I said Kinsey's people are trying to disappear all the devices that came through from the other parallel."

"No one is laughing now, Dr. Trajan," said the general.

"I still have my separate set of notes on the identification module's memory chips, sir," Lee offered. "I didn't think about them at the time. And copies of the notes my counterpart in Samantha's parallel made. They don't add much to what I knew already but they do confirm that the work here has always been heading in a productive direction. It just needed a small nudge." Lee shut up abruptly, aware that he could be offering too much information.

"So reproducing the implant itself isn't going to be a problem?" said Trajan.

"Talking about reproducing," said the general, "how much do you remember of what was on the implant, Dr. Lee?"

"There were lots of legitimate distractions," Dr. Lee began, getting his excuses into place, "but I did succeed in decoding of the first data set. I found logs for the other SGC listing date, destination and duration of off-world expeditions, and also lists of projects. It was the same format that Dr. Trajan and I decided we would have used to organize the data on the implant. The first part is an augmented index; an index with additional notes; some comprising just a title with objectives, other containing a little detailed information on objectives and progress. The second data set must contain the real meat."

"At a much higher level of encryption?"

"Yes, sir."

"If I admit a breach of the letter of regulations, can I do a deal to avoid going to gaol?" said Trajan.

"Tell me you have a copy of the data, Dr. Trajan," said the general.

"As you know, sir," said Trajan, "there were two data sets on the implant. One relatively easy to decrypt, and another which Bill and I haven't been able to crack yet. It made sense to have my own copy of both sets of data, partly in the hope of finding a clue to the key to the second data set in the first, and partly to use the first set to help with Samantha's continuing debriefing.

"I admit being a mad scientist, so shoot me. No, on second thoughts, I withdraw that last bit because Kinsey's stooges could make it happen."

"I'm not surprised to hear that H.T. has a copy of the data, general." Dr. Lee offered support to a colleague. "And as it was never going to leave the SGC, there are no security implications."

"For both of you?" the general said with a smile.

Dr. Lee suddenly realized that he was digging a hole and shut up.

"I'd also mention that Samantha is entitled to access to the data," said Trajan, "as it was entrusted to her."

"And no one has officially denied her access?" said the general.

"Another good alibi," said Trajan. "I admit that not being able to work out how the second set of data was encrypted was bugging me so much, I needed to work on it with my feet up and some music playing. Which isn't encouraged in the labs. I have some ideas about how to crack the data, but I'm not good enough at cracking codes."

"Ideas?" prompted the general.

"Bearing in mind who sent it, the code has to be something which we can be expected to be able to crack at another SGC. Dr. Lee suggested the second data set might start with a repeat of some of the information from the index."

"Why?" said the general with a frown.

"That's where security comes in to it," Trajan returned with a smile. "Would the person doing the decryption necessarily be someone the Pentagonians, or whoever, would want to see the full data? Having seen the last entries of the index, I can guess why certain people are making stuff disappear."

"Oh?" invited the general.

"The final section added to the index is files about the other Senator Kinsey. There must be stuff that is making our Senator Kinsey worry about ending up in front of a firing squad," said Trajan. "Which is why Bill thinks there would be enough repeated data at the start of set two to let the decoder know he's on the right track. So that the full job could be done by a computer under the supervision of people with living-god security clearance."

"Ah!" said the general. "Unsurprisingly, Dr. Trajan, I'd like a copy of the data you have."

"Suitably back-dated to before the men from the Pentagon were here," Dr. Lee suggested.

"Good idea," said the general. "Make several copies, Dr. Trajan. That's the only way to frustrate Senator Kinsey's attempts to make everything disappear. Now, please. We'll wait here until you get back."

Dr. Trajan returned several minutes later with the required copy of the data and a number of binders containing print-outs of part of it.

"These mission logs, Dr. Lee," the general said after glancing through the first few pages of the bulkiest binder, "I notice some entries are in bold?"

"Those are all planets where SG teams ran into trouble, General," said Dr. Lee. "I just did a superficial scan but I think a detailed comparison of missions from our SGC and ones from Samantha's may give us information on planets to avoid."

"I'll get that done as a matter of priority." General Hammond made a marginal note. "As for the project reports, they also vary greatly in size in the index, from what I recall?"

"Possibly because some were initiated at the SGC and taken over elsewhere rather than completed here," said Dr.

Lee. "So there would just be a report on the initial work done here."

"Kidnapped by Pentagonians," Trajan remarked.

"Probably," said Dr. Lee.

"Yes, that makes sense," the general said with a grim smile. "We have our own experience of that."

"I remember the index includes sections on the organ regrowth procedure used in the cancer treatment for Samantha's father," Lee continued. "And the modified zat project; the amount suggests it was kidnapped by Pentagonians at an early stage, as H.T. said. There doesn't appear to be anything about Goa'uld gliders. Possibly because the Goa'uld attacked them before it could be included in an update."

"Sobering thought," remarked Trajan.

"Expecting to be told that most of this is too top secret for me to know about," Dr. Lee added, "I didn't study the index of work going on here too closely, because I had lots of other things to do, but I did notice that the other Trajan was working with the Cold Fusion Team."

"Something to ask your wife about, Dr. Trajan," said the general.

"I thought cold fusion was just a mirage," said Trajan.

"So did I," said Dr. Lee.

"No doubt some bozo of a Pentagonian will use this as an excuse to waste a few more zillions of our dollars," said Trajan.

"Not if we can head them off at the pass," said the general. "I think we should keep your reports in house for the moment, Dr. Lee. At least until we've had a chance to review them thoroughly and we've done our best to defuse any unexploded bombs."

"Agreed," said Trajan.

"What about the rest of the data, Dr. Lee?" said the general.

"That's a problem," said Lee. "The level of encryption is much higher. We may need to call in an outside consultant to assist H.T."

"I think we'll digest what we have now before we do that," said the general.

“Do you need me to do any of that?” said Dr. Lee. “Or can I get back to trying to recreate the memory chips my counterpart invented?”

“No doubt there will be further distractions when we’ve been through the project data,” the general said with a smile, “but you can get back to your real work. And Dr. Trajan, could you pursue cold fusion?”

“The only good thing about that is NID will probably have decoded the index on Sheringham implant and they’re probably now going nuts over the cold fusion references.”

“In reference to that, what are NID’s chances of decoding the second set of data?” said the general.

“I suspect that the other Dr. Trajan had a hand in encrypting it,” said Dr. Lee. “So bad to none without our Dr. Trajan’s co-operation.”

“That’s good to know,” laughed the general.

“Unless they try to enlist me in NID,” Trajan murmured, half to himself. “So where are we up to on all this?” He waved a hand to encompass the reports and the copies of the data.

“Dr. Lee has told me about surrendering the chip and his reports on it,” said the general. “Which the Pentagon didn’t see fit to do. In due course, he’ll mention that to you, Dr. Trajan, and you will remind me we both have copies of the original data. I shall then inform the Pentagon and there will be an enormous sense of relief everywhere.”

“Followed by another attempt to kidnap the data here,” said Trajan.

“Which I shall resist on national security grounds,” said the general. “But I’m sure having a set of copies of my copies of the data will satisfy our masters at the Pentagon for the moment.”

“They might even give you another star, sir,” Trajan remarked.

“Oh, I doubt they’ll feel that grateful,” laughed General Hammond. “Thank you, gentlemen.”

“Permission to flog a dead horse a bit?” said Trajan.

“Briefly,” the general warned.

“We’ve been asking ourselves would the NSA even know about the NID attempt to kidnap Samantha?”

"That's not a given, I guess."

"Not knowing would certainly explain why our Goa'uld friend just steamed in here and expected to get away with it."

"Which gets us where?" the general said with a mild frown.

"Even further up the creek," Trajan admitted.

The Specialists left their boss's office enjoying mixed feelings. Dr. Lee's sense of relief was matched by Dr. Trajan's lack of enthusiasm for having anything to do with cold fusion.

Attempting to reduce the amount of time wasted, Dr. Trajan tracked down his wife, who was in Dr. Daniel Jackson's working area, deciding that an interesting looking artefact was just a votive offering rather than a device created by the Ancients. Samantha plucked a lens cloth from the breast pocket of her labcoat to polish her glasses whilst thinking. She shook her head in a comprehensive negative.

"That means you didn't have anything to do with cold fusion and no one you knew at your SGC did?" said Trajan.

"No one I ever met anywhere did," Samantha returned. "Maybe you should ask the Almed what they think."

"Being told by them that cold fusion is a mirage will be good," Trajan said with a nod.

"So is Bill Lee's translation of the index," said Daniel. "Five years' worth of data has to remove all suspicions about S.J.'s bona fides."

"You didn't hear this from me," said Trajan, "but it's still possible the data has been corrupted deliberately to lead us down a lot of blind alleys and reduce our effectiveness against the Goa'uld."

"Well, yes, I suppose it all hinges on how diabolical the Goa'uld are," Daniel realized.

"I, for one, doubt they're that diabolical," said Trajan. "Or that they plan years ahead."

"Me, neither," said Daniel. "But then, we're biased."

"It's okay," Samantha said with a sweet smile for both men. "But if either of you mentions that idea to anyone else, you're dead."

"Are you sure she's not a Goa'uld?" laughed Daniel.

"I wouldn't dare ask someone that fierce," said Trajan. "Hello!"

The distinctive siren announcing an off-world activation of the stargate seeped into the workroom. The telephone on Dr. Jackson's desk began to ring.

"We have a couple of Tok'ra visitors here to see you two," Daniel announced after replacing the receiver. "They have two of the devices S.J. found in my collection and they want to be in on the research program."

"Another advanced civilization to ask about cold fusion," Samantha realized.

"Good thinking, Batman," said her husband.

[August 21, Thursday, late evening]

Dinner was a memory. Conversation had run out for the moment. Dr. Trajan and his wife were sitting with their feet up, watching surf breaking on a beach via their own artificial window rather than the one at the SGC, and thinking their own thoughts. The threat from the INS had been neutralized and they had decided to return to their home.

"I can hear the wheels going round," Trajan remarked when a frown on his wife's face became raised eyebrows.

"I've had an idea for making Daniel's gadget work," said Samantha.

"He'll be pleased to hear that."

"Is anyone thinking of going in to the SGC.?"

Trajan looked at his watch. "It's getting a bit late, you know. And we've only just escaped from there."

"Oh!" said Samantha, clearly unimpressed.

"Samantha! We'll make an early start tomorrow. Don't forget we'd have to drive there, drive back when we've finished and then drive there again in the morning."

"And you're saying sleeping would be more effective use of the time?"

"Are you going to be awkward or are you going to agree with me?"

The landline telephone began to ring. Trajan was nearer to it. "Trajan residence?" he said.

“Dr. Trajan? Duty officer at Station Zebra, sir. Could you come in? As soon as possible?”

“Okay, I’ll be there in half an hour or so.”

“Thank you, sir.”

“Where are you going to be?” Samantha said with a frown.

“They want me at Station Zebra, soonest.”

“Who says the Universe doesn’t work in mysterious ways?” laughed Samantha. “I’ll get my coat.”

“Grab your toothbrush and some things for tomorrow. We’ll stay the night there.”

“Good thinking, Batman.”



A group of Almed physicists had developed an urgent need to talk to Trajan. Leaving her husband changing into his SGC Specialist uniform, Samantha grabbed a labcoat and headed for her laboratory.

Four Almed visitors came through the stargate. After half an hour, they start a stargate conference with three others, which lasted 20 minutes. When the conference had reached a satisfactory conclusion, Trajan presented the visitors with a box of mainly second-hand history books for Lornn Skovars. The leader of the Almed delegation offered him a smaller box.

“As a token of our appreciation, we have a small reward for you. Dr. Jackson has one of these and he was asking if we know anything about them,” Chain Torral said.

Trajan opened the box and found two of the Ancient artefacts, which his wife had shown to be devices rather than votive objects, and a recently printed booklet. “Ah! Daniel was interested in the inscriptions on his. There isn’t anything like this script in Earth’s archaeological record and he thinks it pre-dates the Goa’uld.”

“He’s right,” said Torral. “Our experts think these devices were built by an older civilization, which died out or the Goa’uld wiped it out.”

“That’s pretty well what our expert thinks.”

“I understand you were visited by the Tok’ra, who are also interested in these devices?”

“And who also don’t know what they are.”

“Actually, we think we do. We think they’re stasis-field generators.”

“How do you know that?” said Trajan.

“None of the ones we have work; and we have several score of them; but we’ve found descriptions of them in really old Goa’uld records. It’s all in the booklet.”

“Any idea how they were used?” Trajan asked, flicking through the pages of the booklet.

“They produce a stasis field about 25 centimetres of your measure in diameter. They should have a globular container with them. You put what you want to preserve in that, fit the device to the lid and switch on. Whatever you put in the container will be preserved in its original condition for as long as it stays in the field.”

“More effective than a deep freeze but less space efficient? Daniel will be delighted to get two more of these. Especially if your experts agree with his dating for them.”

“Glad to be of help,” said Torral. “And thank you for all your suggestions tonight.”

“Yes, sorry about that,” said Trajan. “Things looked quite straightforward before I started complicating them.”

“On the other hand, we’ll be quite a lot further on when we’ve found answers to your points, Dr. Trajan.”

After escorting the visitors to the gate room for their trip home, Trajan phoned his wife: “You haven’t powered that thing up yet, have you?”

“I’m just about to, I think.”

“Well, stop right now. Don’t do anything until I get there.”

“Why?”

“I have some info from the Almed about them. You really need to see it before you do anything more.”

“This is you putting on your serious voice?”

“Samantha Jane!”

“That serious, huh?” laughed Samantha.

“Just don’t. Okay?”

“Okay. I’ll just sit here in the dark until you arrive. Okay?”

Trajan ignored the heavy sarcasm. “And sit on your hands, too.”

“Not fair! Making me laugh,” spluttered from the phone.

A look of strong disapproval followed Trajan from the door to the area of workbench where his wife had set up her equipment. “I come bearing gifts from afar,” he announced.

“Before you do anything else, put these on.” Samantha handed her husband a pair of safety glasses. “You’re supposed to take them from the box beside the door.”

“Someone had his hands full.” Trajan brandished his box.

“My lab, my rules.”

“Actually, I think you’ll find they’re SGC rules. But I wouldn’t be tedious enough as to point that out.”

“Decent of you,” laughed Samantha. “What’s in the box.”

“Have a look.”

“Two more of Daniel’s gadgets?”

“And . . .”

“Oh, my gosh! Is this an instruction manual?” Samantha said when she found the booklet.

“Not quite. It’s a summary of what the Almed know about these gadgets. Which generate a stasis field.”

“Really? I’d have thought something like that would be the size of a refrigerated truck.”

“The Almed think these are for preserving small objects. Eat something, decide it’s very good and save the rest of the batch for later; in exactly the same condition.”

“That would be really useful.”

“Read what’s on page seven.”

Samantha turned pages and began to read. “Oh, my gosh!” She put on a comical expression of horror. “The Goa’uld used these things for executions with no obvious weapon?”

“Do you see now why I stopped you? I wanted you to know just what these things do and how big the stasis field is so you wouldn’t have anything vital in it if you happened to switch the thing on. Especially not a part of you.”

“I don’t think there would have been, but it’s much better, knowing what I’m dealing with.” Samantha read on through the booklet. “You know, there’s nothing in here that affects what I was planning to do.”

“So I was being wimpy and over-protective?”

Samantha nodded with a bright smile.

"Is that anything to apologize for?"

"No, there's stuff I didn't know in here. Which makes me a bit more confident about what I'm about to do."

"Don't take this the wrong way, but if you do get some power into it, maybe it would be an idea to tell the Almed and suggest a joint project? Do we even know how to measure the extent of a stasis field if you can find out how to switch it on?"

"It's something we'd have to invent," Samantha admitted.

"And it would be useful to have a detector which could make the field visible."

"I suppose it wouldn't hurt to see what the Almed can do. But I need to see if my power-up system works."

"Fine. Let's just make sure we are quite a long way from the gadget when you do it, and you can cut the power remotely."

"Just how big an idiot do you think I am?" laughed Samantha.

"I know this one," Trajan returned. "Five foot nine in your socks? I'd better phone Security to let them know we'll be staying the night here while you're setting things up."

"You've not done that yet?"

"I was rushed to the gate room to receive the visitors, still pulling my trousers up."

"I wish I'd seen that," laughed Samantha.

Trajan made his call.

"Do we know anyone who smokes?" Samantha asked when he had finished. She was studying the booklet again.

"What? Are you going to start assassinating smokers?" Trajan replied. He was rewarded with a helping of the Carter Look.

"If someone blew some smoke at it, and we switched it on, the smoke inside the stasis field would just freeze in mid-air, proving it works," said Samantha.

"Ah-ha. What about smoke blown at it with the field on? Would that go around the field and show us the limits of it?"

"Probably."

"I suppose I could take up smoking in the interests of science. Will the PX be open this late?"

"We could always breathe across some liquid nitrogen and

create a cloud of cold steam. Or just bubble compressed air through water to saturate it with water vapour and blow that across the nitrogen.”

“You’ve got some liquid nitrogen handy, then? Well, of course you have.” Trajan answered his own question. “This is the SGC. They’ve got everything here.”

“What we need to do is clamp it vertically a couple of feet above the bench while I try to put some power into it. If that works, the booklet says that end symbol on the handle part is the on-switch. Press to switch on then it stays on until you press it again.”

“Just as well some Goa’uld had a bad memory and needed to write that down. You’re going to blow Daniel’s mind tomorrow.”

“If I can get some power into this thing,” Samantha cautioned. “What did the Almed want, by the way?”

“A referee.”

“What?”

“That’s what it amounted to. They had two explanations for something and they wanted an independent opinion on which was right.”

“And you picked a winner?”

“Actually, no. I picked so many holes in both explanations that we ended up in a conference call back to their planet. It turned out there’s a third faction who think they need to do a lot more experiments before they start drawing conclusions. They won.”

“Let’s hope you don’t jinx my experiment.”

“Nice to be appreciated,” Trajan said with a hurt expression.

Grinning, Samantha completed her preparations. “Okay, here goes,” she announced eventually. She pressed a switch.

Trajan let the second hand of the wall clock circulate twice. “I can’t see anything happening.”

“Like what?” scoffed Samantha.

“An electric-blue glow? I don’t know.”

“It’s drinking up power. In fact, it’s had half a kilowatt-hour. So I’m switching off. Okay, here goes with the stream of water-saturated air.”

A thin fog began to flow across the area beside the base of the device. Samantha pressed the switch.

“Wow!” said Trajan as a foggy globe formed.

“Right size, right place,” said Samantha.

“I am in the presence of genius,” said Trajan.

His wife switched the device off. The fog swirled, then resumed its previous linear stream. The globe formed again when Samantha switched the device on again. She positioned a video camera with a view of the globe and displayed the picture on a TV monitor, to which she had taped a strip of white paper with a scale to let her keep track of the diameter of the globe.

“I wonder how long it will last?” said Trajan as he watched a filmy sphere of ice build out of the fog to define the limits of the stasis field.

“We could be up all night finding out,” said Samantha. “I’m betting these things use power very efficiently.”

“In that case, you’ve proved your point and we can do this again in daytime. Or you can.”

“Another half hour while I write up my notes.”

“Deal.” Trajan began to study the booklet again as his wife set about recording details of her experiment on the computer system.



“Is it my imagination or is that frosty fur-ball bigger?” Trajan said after about twenty minutes.

“Someone’s imagination getting the better of him?” Samantha mocked. Her smile became a frown as she took a closer look at the stasis field. “You’re right. It’s thirty-five centimetres across and growing.”

“I think someone should shut it off.”

“I think you’re right.”

“Be careful. In fact, I’ll do it. My reach is a bit longer than yours.” Trajan made sure that he was exactly behind the device.

“It’s getting a lot bigger,” Samantha warned from her improvised sighting arrangement. “Forty, forty-five . . .”

Trajan was just about to press the switch when the ice-ball exploded.

Trajan closed his eyes reflexively behind the safety glasses after the periphery of his face had been bombarded by small, sharp fragments. He opened his eyes just enough to be able to see the button and press it.

“Well, that wasn’t in the booklet,” said Samantha. “Are you okay?”

“I’ll live. I guess it only goes to show, just because someone knows more than you in some areas, it doesn’t mean they know everything about everything.”

“The field just started growing like crazy all of a sudden.”

“I tell you what, it’s a bloody good job we didn’t just go to bed and leave it with a video camera trained on it. Otherwise, someone would have had to explain how she got the whole of the SGC trapped in a stasis field we can’t switch off.”

“Which would be a good trick,” scoffed Samantha. “Seeing we’d both be inside the bubble. Are you still bleeding?”

Trajan dabbed at his face with a tissue. “Not any more.”

“Sorry. I bet you’re glad you wore the safety glasses.”

“And a bit sorry I didn’t get some sort of helmet with a visor.”

“Some people are never satisfied.”

“Well, I suppose we got away with it,” laughed Trajan.

[August 22, Friday, 08:12 hours]

Dr. Trajan had left an urgent message for Dr. Jackson on the SGC message system just before retiring for the night. Daniel Jackson arrived at the visitor quarters the next morning with an air of expectation. A viewing of a video recording of events in the laboratory the night before explained the state of Trajan’s face.

His hosts served coffee whilst Daniel was reading the booklet. He was still studying it when Major Carter arrived in response to a message left for her by Samantha Trajan. More explaining followed.

"So we have two more of the devices?" Major Carter said in summary, "we can power them up but we can't use them because they become dangerously unstable after about twenty minutes?"

"Who says the Universe doesn't have a sort of sense of humour?" said Trajan.

"We really need to talk to the Almed about this," said Samantha. "Share what we know and work together to move on."

"We'll probably get someone at the Pentagon saying the gadgets have too much weapon potential," said Daniel.

"Don't forget the Russians have some," said Trajan. "Even if they can't quite find them at the moment."

"Frighten them into giving us a green light?" said Samantha.

"It's a sound tactic," said Major Carter.

There was a knock on the door to the corridor. Colonel O'Neill and Teal'c had arrived in search of the rest of SG-1.

"Briefing in fourteen minutes," O'Neill announced. "Anyone interested?"

"Actually," said Daniel, "all the interesting stuff is happening here."

"Yes, I kind of figured that when you and Sam went missing," said O'Neill. "What happened to the face?" O'Neill circled a finger in front of his own face whilst looking at Trajan.

"A mad scientist blew me up a bit," said Trajan.

"I hear that happens a lot in the movies," said O'Neill.

"And real life, too, it seems," said Trajan.

"Just as well I didn't blow up anyone important," Samantha said loudly to Major Carter, "or I'd never hear the end of it. Has anyone mentioned that you wouldn't have been blown up if you hadn't insisted on doing the dangerous bit?" she added to Trajan.

"It would only be mentioned if he hadn't done that," said O'Neill.

"Okay, that's true," Samantha admitted.

"And isn't it a really great story?" said Trajan. "'Did you hear about Trajan? His wife blew him up!' 'Crikey! She must be one really tough cookie.'"

"I'm not sure I want that sort of reputation," said Samantha.

"It would make Dr. McKay think twice about stealing your ideas."

"Yes, there is that," laughed Samantha.

"So, what did that?" said O'Neill. "It looks painful."

"Fragments of supercooled ice hitting bare flesh around a pair of safety glasses at high speed. Small cuts plus freezer burns. The duty doc at the medical centre found it quite interesting. He'd never seen that combination before. We were blowing cold fog onto a stasis field to make it visible when the trouble started."

"This is Daniel's gadget?" O'Neill deduced.

"Right. S.J. found a way to put some power in it."

"It's very interesting," said Daniel. "The Almed found out that the devices are stasis-field generators. They originally came with a container for whatever needed to be put in stasis but the Goa'uld found that the working parts could be detached and used for executions."

"Inventive suckers, aren't they," O'Neill remarked. "How?"

Daniel brandished the booklet. "It's all on page seven. You just hold it behind the neck of a restrained victim to put the neck area into stasis. So no blood-flow to the head, no oxygen going into the lungs and the victim dies horribly and mysteriously."

"Very Gould," said O'Neill. "Did you ever hear any of this, T?"

"It would appear the devices ran out of power centuries ago," said Teal'c. "I have never heard stories of such executions. The devices are just indicators of high status now."

"Yes, when the devices ran out of power and stopped working, the Goa'uld retained them as symbols of power," said Daniel. "None of the containers used with them has been found or identified as such, according to the Almed booklet. And the Almed don't seem to have found any record of what Samantha and H.T. found out last night."

"Possibly because the Goa'uld never left them switched on long enough," said Major Carter.

"Or there were no survivors when they did," said Trajan.

“It has to be hard to miss a lot of people trapped in a stasis bubble,” said Samantha.

“Maybe anyone who wasn’t just ran for it and kept running,” O’Neill suggested.

“That would be the sensible thing to do,” said Trajan.

“Meanwhile, some of us have a briefing to go to,” said O’Neill.

“And some of us have a report to finish off,” Samantha said to her husband.



Moral Imperative

[August 22, Friday, 10:00 hours]

When the knock came at his office door, General George Hammond was struggling to express his thoughts clearly, but with due deference, to higher authority, which had come up with a hare-brained scheme, which was doomed to certain failure before it even began. The general issued a command to enter and returned to his marginal note. He suddenly became aware that his office was filling with visitors.

At the end of their mission briefing, SG-1 had told him that the Trajans had a request to make in connection with what was known as Daniel's Device. SG-1 had joined the Trajans to add weight to their suggestions. The general completed his note and put the document aside for future polishing of his comments.

"I gather you have a story for me, and I shouldn't stare at Dr. Trajan's face?" the general invited.

Samantha presented him with a set of photocopies made from the Almed booklet, ran through the events of the previous night and showed him the interesting parts of her laboratory video.

"As you can see," she concluded, "an unconstrained stasis field starts to grow after fifteen to twenty minutes. I think the containers used with them originally must have acted as some sort of system for focussing and containment. Without that, the stasis field becomes unstable."

"How big does it get?" said the general.

"That's something we need to find out, sir," said Samantha. "Does it keep growing until the power gives out while maintaining the same strength? Or does it get weaker as it grows?"

"The point is," said Trajan, "we need to warn the Almed about this."

"That's a decision I'll have to bump up to the Pentagon, Dr. Trajan."

"Sir, we have a moral duty to warn them about this. What if someone dies because we didn't share what we know?"

"I think that's highly unlikely, Dr. Trajan. I'm sure the Almed are as careful as your wife in the laboratory. And they don't know how to power up the devices."

"With respect, general, if we've rekindled interest in the devices, then someone there could find out what S.J. discovered quite independently. And accidents do happen. If we'd been distracted for a little bit longer, things might have turned out very different. If we hadn't been watching the field and seen it grow; if we'd just putting a video camera next to it; things could have gone very wrong. Let's not forget that all of us, the Almed and ourselves, are dealing with some unknown technology."

"What Trajan isn't saying," added Colonel O'Neill, "is we're like kids playing with guns. And we all know where that can go."

"That's a powerful point, Jack," the general acknowledged, recalling that O'Neill's life had been plunged into crisis by the death of his young son, who had been playing with O'Neill's service weapon.

"Both the Tau'ri and the Jaffa share the concepts of honour and doing the right thing, General Hammond," Teal'c contributed.

"We shouldn't even have to talk about this," said Samantha. "We all know what the right thing to do is."

"Unfortunately, Dr. Trajan," said the general, "politics, especially inter-planetary politics, have their own rules."

"Even if they're nowhere near being able to power up the devices, we would score a ton of diplomatic goodwill points by warning them," Samantha insisted.

"What about plausible deniability?" Daniel Jackson suggested. "H.T. contacts the Almed with some further thoughts about whatever it was they were discussing with him, and he casually asks them if they have any technology to measure the size of a stasis field. Because his wife worked out how to power up one of the gadgets and the field started growing

faster than her improvised system could handle.”

“How do we know Dr. Trajan has had some further thoughts about last night’s discussions?” Trajan said to Daniel.

“When has that ever not happened?” Daniel said with a smile.

“Touché,” said Trajan.

“If we get any static from D.C.,” said O’Neill, “we can just say we assumed the Almed are smarter than us. Even if they aren’t in this case.”

“And we didn’t have this conversation,” Trajan added to the general. “As far as senior managers know, your physicists are still experimenting with the device and we asked the Almed, quite innocently, for a bit more information.”

“Let me think about this and I’ll get back to you within the hour,” said the general.



General Hammond called Dr. Trajan to his office an hour later and agreed to permit a minor indiscretion.

“That’s good,” said Trajan, “because Daniel came up with the idea of asking the Almed if there’s anything in their extensive Goa’uld archives about something which could be explained as the result of an out-of-control stasis field, given what we know now.”

“Let’s not get too far from what we didn’t discussed earlier, Dr. Trajan.”

“Got that, sir. But the more we intrigue them with new ideas, the more likely they’ll come up with even more useful information.”

“Let us not try to go too fast too soon.”

“Yes, sir.”

“I also want to talk to you about another matter,” the general added. “There’s a lot of interest in an idea that came out of your wife’s debriefings. Specifically, neutralizing the recall mechanism which Apophis installed in his death gliders. The news that they solved the problem of locating it very quickly in her parallel has set a number of science depart-

ments here buzzing with interest. They're also interested in her potential contribution to retro-fitting gliders and adapting the technology to make larger vehicles with greater space-capability."

"Air Force, flying things, it was an obvious avenue to develop, sir," said Trajan.

"The Glider Plus concept certainly seems to have struck a chord. The Pentagon thinks it has the potential to provide a big gain for a relatively small effort; provided the system for locating and neutralizing the recall systems is effective and reliable so we can test-fly unmodified Gould gliders until we can build on the technology."

"Samantha definitely thinks it is."

"Major Carter has been doing some research and there are a number of known locations, some very readily accessible, where there are crashed gliders which seem to have sustained very little damage."

"All the better to trap you with."

"Precisely. The crash sites are all within easy range of a stargate, so one way to tackle the mission quickly would be to bring the gliders here and take them out of the mountain in pieces, as happened in Samantha's reality."

"What if the Goa'uld have a hidden spy camera monitoring the gate, sir? Or some way of monitoring activity of that gate? They see us retrieve the gliders but they don't get prisoners when we do test flights. That's going to tell them that we can handle the recall devices and they're going have to try something sneakier next. Like giving us a recall device to find and hiding another one. What's it called? Giving the enemy unnecessary intelligence."

"We would also have to take a lot of equipment through the gate which would extend the mission time considerably. And the disruption of having to removed a large amount of equipment from the gate room. Which is why using the X-Five-Oh-One to retrieve the first group of gliders is under active consideration right now."

"Is that some new piece of kit, sir?"

"You might know her better as the USS Mudlark."

"Oh, yes, that transport ship we acquired. Senator Kinsey's

private space-yacht.”

“Talking about senators, you know about the Cornwell proposal, I assume?”

“Is that the one which brings Colonel O’Neill’s favourite phrase to mind? ‘Over my rotting corpse. Oh, did I say that out loud?’ The science is defective, it will cost at least triple its budget to find out it doesn’t work, and it will be a waste of five to seven months’ time for a lot of people who could be doing useful work on other projects. Apart from that, it’s a brilliant plan.”

“I don’t think I’ll use that last part,” the general said with a smile as he completed a note on a pad of scribble paper.

There was a knock on the door. The general invited the callers to enter. Dr. Trajan directed a look of surprise to his right when he found his wife sitting down there. Colonel O’Neill and Major Carter moved chairs to complete a compact group.

“Dr. Trajan, well, Samantha,” General Hammond said, “we’ve been researching a mission to recover crashed Goa’uld gliders. And you appear to be an expert on locating the recall devices. Do you remember where on the glider you found them?”

“In fact, it was Dr. Trajan who found them,” said Samantha. “Well, he spotted something strange in power consumption and distribution figures and it turned out to be the recall devices. Every glider had it in a different place.” Samantha paused, realizing that she was offering too much information. “They moved them around to make life tough for anyone who was suspicious but they were all hidden in plain sight, more or less, as a sort of double bluff. We built a detector for them.”

“So you know how to build a detector?”

“Well, no. Bill Lee actually built it. But I do know how to find them using standard testing equipment and a mathematician to analyse the data. That’s how we started off. It just takes a bit longer than using the detector.”

“How did you solve that problem?”

“I measured power distribution and consumption on a crashed glider and H.T. did an analysis of the data that let us

pin-point the recall device as an unexplained power drain. More than one, in some cases.”

“Aren’t I a clever so-and-so?” said Trajan. “I don’t suppose I told you how I did the analysis?”

“You used a Bragga series.”

“Really? I always thought they were an amusing novelty. Nice to look at but totally useless.”

“That’s what the other you said.”

“What about a computer?” said O’Neill. “For the data thing?”

“A computer can’t do the thinking needed to do the right sort of analysis for the data,” said Samantha. “Well, not without a lot of programming. It’s quicker to use the Mark One human brain. As long as it belongs to one of the best mathematicians on the planet.”

“And you’re confident you can find the recall devices quickly?” said the general.

“Am I going on the mission again?” Samantha’s tone hovered between nervousness and excitement.

“I think it would be advisable to send you on the mission to be sure that the recall devices are neutralized by someone who has done the job before. We think this is a safe mission, Samantha,” the general added. “The Gould want us to retrieve these gliders. Apophis will still be hoping we will use them and fall right into the same trap. And as has been suggested, it is likely there will be more than one recall device; one that’s hard to find and another that’s almost impossible to find to catch us out. And maybe even a third.”

“H.T. will be going, too?”

“With his Mark One human brain, yes.”

“It might take an hour to clear the first one,” Samantha decided. “Any more will be done a lot faster.”

“We can work with that, sir,” said Carter.

“I’ll report that to Washington,” said General Hammond. “I have a feeling this mission will get a go as soon as possible.”

“Talking about Washington, what’s happening about their mad idea to close the labs at the SGC?” said Trajan. “Do we know?”

“That rearguard action is still on-going,” said the general.

"I've pointed out that technology from friends like the Almed will be worth much more it comes with instructions and feasibility studies for our available level of technology. Which we're getting as a result of the good relations we have between the Specialists at the SGC and our allies."

"Closing our labs is just plain crazy," said Samantha.

"If there's something damn fool that politicians can do, they will do it," said Trajan.

"That's a thought I've had many times," the general said with a grin. "Dismissed."

"Trajan on the mission too?" Colonel O'Neill remarked as he and Major Carter were heading for a junction in their corridor and separate destinations. "That's not a bad idea. Having him along will help to keep your dimensional sister's mind on the job. And who knows, we might find more nasty new Gould technology, and two Carters and a Trajan will definitely be better than two Carters in that situation."

"Or two Trajans and a Carter?" suggested Carter.

"Whatever."

In another corridor, Samantha Trajan was struggling to work out what she was feeling about the up-coming mission. "I'm a bit freaked out by this," she admitted to her husband. "Going off-world again."

"You'll be fine," said Trajan. "It's just like riding a bike. Once done, you don't forget how to do it. You just walk through the wormhole. Nothing to it."

"Until you're actually standing in front of it and you know what's going to happen to you."

"The other you has been through stargates millions of times with no ill effects," Trajan said. "Samantha?" he added into a growing silence.

"I've just had a brilliant idea," his wife returned.

"Does it involve anyone getting blown up?"

"I could do some power distribution and consumption measurements on one of Daniel's devices. Before the stasis field starts destabilizing. And you could practice Bragga analysis on the results to create a power consumption map."

"Which will tell us what?"

"It will be something to show the Almed to prove that we're

clever, too. And it will help you to get your head round how you're supposed to use Professor Bragga's ideas in this context."

"Of course it will, oh, wise one," Trajan acknowledged.



A trio of Almed scientists arrived at the SGC just before noon, responding to a message sent by Dr. Trajan some forty minutes earlier. They were escorted to Samantha Trajan's laboratory. Her husband was wearing his SGC uniform and working on a report, and Samantha was making final checks on equipment when they arrived.

"That was quick," Trajan remarked to the visitors.

"What's the expression? You pushed our button," said Lorhn Skovars. His expression became mild horror at the state of Trajan's face as the mathematician went through the ritual of handing new safety glasses in wrappers to the visitors. "What happened to you?"

"I blew him up last night," Samantha said casually. "But it's okay. He might look like a wimp but he's really quite tough. And he was wearing his safety glasses, which is why he only got blown up around the edges."

"Why is he laughing?" said the oldest of the trio of visitors. "Because you didn't really blow him up?"

"It's a much better story than what actually happened," said Trajan.

"I believe I warned you that quite a few Terrans have a strange sense of humour," said Lorhn Skovars. "Can I introduce Professor Mek Klosate, our head of department, and Lana Tapan, another of our physics team. Samantha and Harold Trajan."

Professor Klosate looked like someone in his mid-fifties and he had an air of easy authority. Lana Tapan was about Skovars' age and she seemed to be of roughly the same status. She had charge of an ornate box with a carrying handle. She placed the box on a handy stretch of bench and looked at the professor. Trajan, meanwhile, had been gathering chairs.

"I have to say that Dr. Trajan's message provoked

considerable excitement on our side of the stargate,” Professor Klosate began.

“Apologies for the late hour,” said Trajan. “It must be about what? Twenty-three fifteen where you are. We weren’t expecting to hear anything from you until your morning.”

“We couldn’t wait for two reasons,” said the professor. “Number one: your wife’s discovery of a way to power up a stasis device. But mainly because we have what we think is a stasis-field detector. And we were working late anyway.”

“This is something of the same age as the devices?” said Samantha. “Your detector.”

“It’s definitely from the same period. And it seems to fit records from that period. We had no problem with connecting it to a power source and it appears to be working.”

“But . . . ,” said Lorhn Skovars.

“Yes, the but,” the professor said with a smile. “We’ve never been able to generate a stasis field to find out if the device can detect one. Hence our extreme eagerness to come here and satisfy our curiosity.”

“Over to the expert,” said Trajan.

“I think we’ll start by showing you the video of what we did last night,” said Samantha. “Then I have the device set up in the fume cupboard so I can blow chemical smoke at it to make the stasis field visible. And you can see what your detector shows.”

“Excellent,” said Professor Klosate.

Samantha began to play the recording. “This is the bit where I blew him up,” she warned.

“All those of a nervous disposition look away now,” said Trajan. “It was about seventy centimetres across when it blew. S.J. was measuring the size on her monitor screen and I was staring at the back of the device, wondering why there was no ice forming there.”

“That’s puzzling,” said the professor.

“Very,” said Trajan. “When it blew, most of the bits went away from us. I just caught some of the stuff nearest to me.”

“It’s very interesting,” Samantha continued. “The growth rate of the stasis field was quite slow, so the ice sphere could break apart and new material could form in the gaps. But just

as H.T. was reaching for the off button, there was a sudden surge, which sent bits everywhere.”

“Cold, sharp but very small bits,” said Trajan.

“Ouch!” said Skovars.

“I’m wondering if the field starts expanding exponentially, or does it jump out to a new radius with less instability, and start growing again slowly?” said Samantha.

“A question we should be able to answer with some investigation,” said the professor. “If our detector is working. This is very exciting.”

“Let’s try it out,” said Samantha.



Colonel O’Neill and Major Carter joined the Trajans in the mess hall during the early afternoon. The Specialists were enjoying a late lunch. Their guests had been too eager to get home and start work to sample Earth hospitality. H.T. was still in uniform.

“Have a good trip?” Trajan asked as the new arrivals unloaded trays at their table.

“No one got damaged,” Carter returned with a poker face.

“That bad, huh?” laughed Samantha.

“We found some answers, we eliminated a few possibilities and we didn’t achieve a whole lot,” said O’Neill. “How did you get on with the Almed? They didn’t blow up anything visible?”

“I kept well out of their range,” said Trajan.

“It was great,” Samantha firmly.

“Their professor had one of the best days of his working life, thanks to S.J.,” Trajan added quickly.

“I had a pretty good time myself,” said Samantha.

“I thought he was going to faint from sheer joy when you hooked all three of his gadgets up to your crude but effective charger and powered all of them up,” said Trajan.

“I gather his gadget worked?” said Carter.

“His gadget was able to show small instabilities circulating at the surface of the stasis field,” said Samantha. “Coming out of it and tucking back inside. A bit like small solar promin-

ences only so many that they overlap and interfere with one another.”

“Which causes the instability?” said the major.

“Right. In the absence of some external force to contain them, like the missing storage jar, they just inflate the stasis field. The video doesn’t show it so well but we could see a short of shimmering effect at the surface of the ice-ball we created around the field. On reflection, I think we were too busy watching that to notice what the field was doing; until H.T. spotted that it had grown quite a lot.”

“What did that do to the field strength?”

“It didn’t seem to diminish at all as the globe grew, as far as we could tell, but we didn’t let it grow more than three times the original size of the field before we switched it off.”

“I suggested they need to set things up on a bomb range before they grow the field bigger,” said Trajan.

“Then he had to explain what a bomb range is,” said Samantha. “Because the Almed physicists have never had anything to do with explosives. Their science is very compartmentalized.”

“Lucky them,” laughed O’Neill. “What time is it where they are?”

“About half-two in the morning,” said Trajan. “I don’t think the prof and his team are going to get much sleep tonight. They were all fired up to start experimenting as soon as they got back to their lab.”

“I can’t wait to see if he can build another stasis field detector for me,” said Samantha.

“You think that’s possible?” said Carter.

“The prof seemed to think it would be easy-peasy,” said Trajan. “The only reason they haven’t tried it before is they’ve never had any stasis fields to test the original one, so they would never know if they’d built something that works. But S.J. has given them as many as they have gadgets to charge up. Ain’t she clever?”

“Runs in the family,” laughed Samantha.

“What’s the next step for you?” Major Carter said to Samantha.

“We’ve sent a report to the general,” she returned. “We’re

waiting to get clearance to carry on with some testing with our gadgets.”

“And a booking at a bomb range,” Trajan added.

“How did you get on with Male Superiority Syndrome?” said the major.

“He was very good,” said Samantha. “The prof. gave him at least half a dozen chances and he ducked them all. I was really proud of him.”

“This time,” said Trajan, “it doesn’t matter if you’re talking about him like he’s not here because he doesn’t have a clue what you’re on about. And from the evil grins being worn by all the ladies at this table, that’s probably for the best.”

“MSS,” Major Carter explained, “is the natural tendency of the only man in a group to try to take over because he thinks all females are subordinate to him.”

“Trajan?” Dr. Trajan looked at his wife and tried to copy Colonel O’Neill’s delivery.

“Professor Klosate kept assuming that the guy in uniform was in charge,” said Samantha. “But you kept referring him back to me.”

“Because it was your show, not mine. I was just there as a bouncer to make sure the mad scientists didn’t blow up the SGC.”

“Plus?” said Samantha, fighting against an urge to smile.

“Plus, being married to the star of the show, I had to be mindful of the loss of privileges that would have followed trumping her ace.”

“Even so, eight point five out of ten males would have taken the opportunity to be in charge in the same circumstances,” said Carter. “This is strictly non-military situations we’re talking about, of course, sir,” she added to O’Neill.

“Oh, of course,” said the colonel.

“Now I’m suspicious,” said Trajan. “I can’t imagine Sam Carter wasting her time reading about MSS or remembering that sort of stat.”

“We haven’t written the article yet,” Samantha admitted, “but we do have strong observational evidence for the existence of MSS.”

“So this is what you two talk about when you have a coffee

morning? Not frocks or shoes or the latest developments in physics. Oh, no. It's how the male half of the species oppresses you."

"So?" said Samantha.

Trajan shrugged his shoulders. "So nothing. Your topics of conversation are none of my business. But I know now that everything I say is being recorded to be held against me at some future opportunity."

"Amen to that," Colonel O'Neill said with a grim smile.



General Hammond was wearing a grim expression when the Trajans reported to his office in response to a telephone summons.

"I don't think I'm going to enjoy this," said Samantha.

"Unfortunately, I do have bad news," said the general as the visitors sat down.

"Fifty bucks says we have to send all our Daniel's Devices to Area Fifty-One," said Samantha.

"A bet you wouldn't lose, I'm afraid," said the general.

"And they call the NFL the No Fun League," Trajan quoted. "Has anyone pointed out what havoc NID could cause if they get their mitts on those gadgets?"

"Which is why I'm still advocating that they remain here in our safe storage," said the general.

"What about the ones in museums?" said Samantha.

"A decision is pending on them," said the general. "Dr. Jackson has suggested borrowing them for study and offering something enticing in exchange to display during the study period. And fabricating copies for return to the museum."

"That sounds eminently sensible," said Samantha.

"What a shame most of us don't associate good sense with politicians and Pentagonians," said Trajan. "Oh, did I say that out loud?"

"I still have ground to cover on the devices," said the general, "but I need your notes on them written up fully as soon as possible."

"We'll get right on it," said Trajan.

"Did you mention your request for information on cold fusion?" said the general.

"Their professor confirmed they've found it a dead end. But they are having some success with what he called tepid fusion. He said he'd give me some notes once they've got their project directed at powering up and investigating their Daniel's Devices going."

"Could you give me your impressions of their reactions to what they learnt tonight?" said General Hammond.

"If I read the runes correctly," said Trajan, "they were far too excited by being told how to power up their stasis devices. A lot more than you'd expect, even for people who had a mystery solved. Especially if they can't be controlled without the storage jars they're assumed to work with."

"You think there may be some sort of weapon potential involved?"

"Put it this way, sir. They couldn't have got themselves here much faster after they got our indiscreet message."

"Samantha?" the general invited.

"Sorry but I was so busy being a mad scientist, I never got round to studying the visitors," said Samantha. "Why, what did you two see?"

"They show all the signs of people who expect to be attacked soon, probably by the Goa'uld," said the general. "And they're scratching around for any means of defence they can find."

"Has anyone here offered to help them?"

"There are diplomatic moves going on," said the general. "But speed isn't a word associated with diplomacy."

"So they could all be wiped out by a Goa'uld attack before their leaders decide we could be any help?" said Trajan.

"Stranger things have happened at sea, they tell me," the general returned with a grim nod.

"Talking about the Almed," said Trajan, "we had a thought about all these attempts to get Samantha out of the SGC. What if we say the Almed tried some fancy memory extraction stuff on her but it didn't quite work? We got some of her memories recorded but as for the rest, they were . . . not wiped. I'm still looking for the right word."

“Degraded?” said Samantha. “Crosslinked and made unreliable?”

“Something like that, yes,” said Trajan.

“It’s certainly worthy of consideration,” said the general.

“We’d need to produce a report containing more information than there is the debriefing reports to make it convincing,” said Samantha. “The new extracted memories.”

“Sneak in some stuff from your chip when we get that decoded?” said Trajan.

“Assuming we can manage that,” said the general.

“The doability isn’t in question,” said Trajan. “Just the when.”

“Or better still, work with what we have,” said the general. “We have already established that the Tok’ra recovered some memories on the cancer treatment Samantha’s father’s received when they tested her for Gould influence.”

“Oh, yes,” said Trajan. “And they have the advantage of being harder to contact than the Almed.”

“So you could issue a report, General, saying my memories have contained inconsistencies since then,” said Samantha.

“No one’s going to want to kidnap a lady with a wonky memory,” said Trajan.

“So no more debriefing reports until further notice,” said the general. “That sounds like something that would work.”

“If you’re okay about being a bit economical with the truth with your bosses,” said Trajan.

“It’s in a good cause,” said the general. “And, as you’ve pointed out, they should get the rest off the data on Samantha’s chip eventually.”



More Pressure

[August 23, Saturday]

Out shopping on Saturday morning, Dr. H.T. Trajan was accosted by a suit; a man who looked like someone who would insist on being called a Special Agent, if he felt that his full rank was not being acknowledged.

“What can you tell me about your wife, Dr. Trajan?” he asked in a brisk tone.

“Can, or are prepared to?” Trajan returned with an ‘awkward squad’ smile.

“Non-co-operation would be unwise, Dr. Trajan.” The suit’s tone remained level and unamused.

“I have a really snappy rejoinder to that. Unfortunately, unleashing it would involve revealing classified information and I’d have to shoot you as a security precaution.”

“Are you armed, Dr. Trajan?” There was forced unconcern in the other man’s voice.

“No, but my protection team is.”

“What protection team? Where are they?”

“If you could see them, they wouldn’t be much good, now would they?”

“Dr. Trajan, is it true that you’re married to a human clone?”

“What is this? Rag week?” Trajan decided to treat his inquisitor as a village idiot; someone to be humoured until he became tedious.

“How does it feel, being married to a clone?”

“How does it feel to have a microphone cord wrapped round your neck and tied? And would you like to find out?”

“When did you find out your wife is a clone? Before or after you married her?”

“When did you have your brain removed, before or after you got your present job?”

“Is it even legal to be married to a human clone?”

“Is it even legal to harass members of the public whilst out of your mind on illegal drugs? Let’s ask that cop over there.”

Trajan started to cross the road, heading toward a member of the Silver Spring Police Department, who was talking to three young women in skimpy, summer dresses. By the time he reached the other side of the road, there was no sign of the suit.

[August 24, Sunday]

The following morning, when Dr. Trajan went out to buy a newspaper, he was accosted by a different suit. The conversation was brief. “I hear you’re having a trial separation, Dr. Trajan,” the suit said in a voice devoid of sympathy. “That must be very distressing for you.”

“Who are you and why should I care what you’re pretending you’ve heard?” Trajan raised a small digital camera and pressed the shutter.

The suit looked ready to attempt to grab the camera, but Trajan had taken the precaution of waiting until one of the SSPD cops was stretching his legs along the main street and just a few yards from his building. The suit turned round and walked away at his best speed. Trajan resumed his mission to a nearby convenience store.

[August 25, Monday]

The strength of the interest in Samantha’s Glider Plus project which had grown in Washington could be judged by the fact that someone had decided that it would be a good idea to transfer her to a research centre in D.C. She wanted her husband to go with her but he was needed at the SGC in order to be available to the Almed. General Hammond called a meeting in his office to discuss the situation.

“Okay, what are our options?” said Trajan. “We send Dr. Mrs. Trajan to Washington and she becomes a nervous wreck. No offence.”

“None taken,” said Samantha.

“We explain to Washington that Samantha’s security status is still undetermined?” said Major Carter.

“But we’re too polite to mention that the reason is foot-dragging in Washington?” added Colonel O’Neill.

“And we point out that even if her security status is sorted out, the other Dr. Trajan has to stay here at the SGC in connection with work of national importance, so there are medical considerations.” said Trajan.

“And so the mountain has to come to Mahomet?” said General Hammond.

“Unless they can come up with an alternative to a junket in the scenic splendour of Colorado,” said Trajan.

“Is this Catch Twenty-Two?” said O’Neill.

“Yes, sir,” Carter realized. “S.J. can’t go to Washington because Washington won’t give her the necessary security clearance because of bureaucracy in Washington. It’s a classic circular paradox of the sort you’d expect from a complex bureaucracy.”

“By the way,” Trajan added, “I don’t know if I’ve mentioned this, but the information I’ve been getting from the Almed about the materials needed to build their gadgets suggests it would be an idea to go along with the Glider Plus program to obtain materials from our asteroid belt.”

“Yes, sir, I’ve reached the same conclusion,” said Carter.

“Which is a further reason to keep Dr. Trajan here and in contact with the Almed?” said General Hammond.

“Yes, sir,” said Carter.

“Very well,” said the general. “I’ll put the ball back in the Pentagon’s court.” He glanced at his office clock. “We’ll hold the briefing for SG-One in twenty minutes.”

Samantha Trajan was the first out of the door, intent on getting back to work. Her husband hung back.

“By the way, General,” he said, “when S.J. gets her clearance, will she be able to resume her work on spacecraft? She was promised a trip on a Glider Plus mission but the

Goa'uld attacked her SGC before that happened."

"I take it you've promised to use every scrap of influence you have to get her into space?" the general said with a smile.

"Pretty much," Trajan admitted.

"When your wife gets her full clearance, I'm sure the Air Force will be eager to get the benefit of her expertise as soon as possible, Dr. Trajan."

"Right. So now I have to decide whether to tell her it's still maybe or whether to tell her it's a definite yes, which will leave her at risk of exploding from impatience."

"My suggestion would be to go with the former option," said the general.

"Advice I'm inclined to take, sir," Trajan said with a smile. "One way of deflecting her a bit would be to let her study the engineering plans of the X-Five-Oh-One. She might be able to make some useful suggestions in that area, too."

"I'll see what I can do," the general said with a nod.

"Thank you, sir. Only it's bugging the hell out of her. She's a qualified spacecraft systems engineer but she's never been allowed to play with a real spaceship while I, a humble mathematician, have."

"I'll see what I can do, Dr. Trajan."



The Trajans' problems were soon supplanted in General Hammond's mind by something which he found profoundly unsettling. When he returned to his office after the mission briefing for SG-1, he received the news that an attempt to dial the stargate on the Almed planet for a routine exchange of information had failed. A second attempt half an hour later also failed. As did four further attempts at half-hour intervals.

[August 26, Tuesday]

Samantha Trajan made an early start to her Tuesday morning; Major Carter collected her and they headed to the

SGC to work on a joint project, which was too top-secret to share with Samantha's husband. He delayed his departure to the SGC to write some letters and make some phone calls. He was wondering if he had completed everything as ten o'clock approached. He was deflected by a ring on the doorbell.

Two uniformed police officers were in the hallway. Trajan decided not to bother asking how they had navigated the lift, which required a key to gain access to his floor.

"Dr. Trajan?" said the one on the right. Both were the same height and identically tanned.

"That's me," said Trajan. "What can I do you for, Officer . . . ?"

"Cooper, sir. And this is Officer Sawyer. We're here in connection with your B&E case."

"Blackmail and extortion?" Trajan said with a frown, letting them hear a British delivery rather than an American accent.

"Breaking and entering," said the one on the left. His dark hair was starting to develop grey strands and he behaved like the senior man.

"Maybe I should watch more American TV," said Trajan. "And I don't actually have a B&E case."

"We had a report of a B&E at this address," said Officer Cooper.

"Not from me," said Trajan. "And I ought to know, if I live here. I've neither been broken nor entered. Are you sure whoever took the call got the address right?"

"Maybe we should come in and have a look around," said Officer Sawyer.

"To what object?" said Trajan. "There's no crime scene and you'll just be wasting police time as well as mine."

"We've had a report and we need to check it out, Dr. Trajan," Officer Sawyer said in an uncompromising tone.

"Fine. Here you are, checking out and here I am, telling you everything is okay. And who made this report, anyway?"

"One of your neighbours."

"Which one? No one mentioned it to me, which seems rather strange."

"I don't have that information, sir."

"Okay, it looks like someone has made a mistake. But let

me assure you, that my security firm monitors both the apartment and the approaches, so they would have spotted anyone coming up to the front door, like yourselves, or anyone abseiling down to a window from the roof, and they would have informed me if anyone had broken in."

"We're just asking you to co-operate, Dr. Trajan," said Officer Cooper.

"And I'm telling you I don't need any assistance from the police force," Trajan returned, "because I haven't been burgled. But I'll certainly send your chief of detectives an email of appreciation for your diligence. Now, if you'll excuse me, I have work to do."

The police officers looked as though they might offer further argument, but they left reluctantly. Ever suspicious, Trajan went to his phone and reported the encounter to Captain Hilton Tills, the weekday security officer. He also emailed pictures of the police officers captured from CCTV footage.

When he checked in at the security post at the SGC three-quarters of an hour later, the staff at the security desk handed over his SGC pass and referred him to Captain Tills' office.

"Get anywhere?" Trajan asked after an exchange of greetings.

"Nope," said Tills with a wry expression.

"I don't like the sound of that."

"You, me and General Hammond likewise. All I know for sure is that your visitors are not members of your local P.D. Their badge numbers belong to white, male cops who bear a superficial resemblance to your visitors."

"But the pictures don't match up in the facial recognition program? So what are we assuming? Can't be NID."

"Our default bad guys still have severe problems," said Tills.

"So what were these bad guys hoping to do? Bug the place?"

"It's about all there is. Unless they wanted to do B&E under your nose."

"Wouldn't one of the SGC's usual bug sweeps have found theirs?"

"Maybe they think they have something better than our detectors."

"Or maybe they had something else in mind. Who knows how their minds work at wherever?" Trajan said with a sigh. "Assuming they do have minds. Why does the name Cooper sound familiar?"

"D.B. Cooper?" suggested Tills. "The hijacker who parachuted off a plane in the Seventies with a bag of cash and was never seen again?"

"You mean, the bastards were winding us up and they didn't care if we knew it?"

"I guess so," Tills said with a nod.



In the early afternoon, the Trajans responded to phone calls from Dr. Bill Lee and reported to his laboratory.

"This is going to be good," Samantha remarked. "I know that look," she added with a smile for Dr. Lee.

"Remember your implant?" said Dr. Lee. "This is an index of technical work done at your SGC from the first data set, and I need to find out which ones you remember."

Samantha accepted a printed summary sheet, which consisted of project names and a brief summary of the work done. "Is it okay to write on this?" she asked.

Dr. Lee handed her a green pen. "Tick the ones you know about, please."

Samantha wielded the pen. "This is what was done over the last three or so years so I can only tick the ones I was involved in myself. I have heard of most of them but there are some that are new to me."

Dr. Lee handed her a red pen. "Would you mark those, too? The new ones?"

"Hasn't all this been done once?" said Trajan.

"Someone thought it would be a good idea to get Samantha to do it again to see if there are any discrepancies," said Dr. Lee.

"You mean, this is Security-inspired BS?" sighed Trajan.

"What about that report the general sent to the Penta-

gonians? The one about crosslinking?" Samantha added in response to her husband's frown.

"Maybe you should take that into consideration," Trajan said with a significant look at the summary sheet.

"There is a theory in circulation," said Dr. Lee, who had missed the significance of the exchange, "that if we didn't have Security breathing down our necks, we'd get twice as much done."

"At a conservative estimate," said Trajan.

"How are you getting on with the rest of it?" said Lee.

"Not," said Trajan.

"The decrypt key has to be a prime number known only to the other Trajan and a few trusted staff at the Pentagon," Dr. Lee decided. "How was he on primes, the other H.T.? What was the last one he found?" he added to Samantha.

"This H.T. has already asked me and I don't know," she said. "I've never had the prime number bug."

"It would have been nice to know if he was ahead of me," said Trajan. "In theory, I should be able to start with the highest prime I know and then work backwards. And if none of them works, he was ahead of me. But I now think I need some input from an external decryption expert."

"We need to give the Pentagonians a chance to prove how smart they are?" said Lee.

"Well, they have to be good for something," Samantha remarked.

[August 27, Wednesday]

Dr. Trajan made another trip to Dr. Lee's laboratory the following morning. He eyed his colleague suspiciously. Dr. Lee was holding what looked like a medical injection gun of the sort used for vaccinations.

"Have you got a licence for that?" Trajan asked with mock nervousness.

"I've created an I.D. implant based on the one from Samantha," said Dr. Lee. "And there's also a new locator

circuit built in. You're on the list of potential volunteers for trying it out."

"What if I don't volunteer?"

"Everyone will call you a wimp and laugh at you."

"That sounds like you've been having tea breaks with my wife."

"I'm still finding out about my other self at her SGC," Dr. Lee admitted. "The right arm, if you're feeling brave."

"I usually have injections in the left."

"Which is why I'd rather put this in your right arm."

"Makes sense," Trajan admitted as he removed his pull-over.



Dr. Trajan eyed his wife suspiciously as she approached him. Lunchtime had arrived and he was feeling ready for a pause in his work. "If you're thinking of tagging my arm because of some imaginary crime against humanity," he remarked, "I'd appreciate it if you did it to the left one. Because I've just had one of Bill's new locator chips implanted in the right one."

"Yes, Bill told me," Samantha returned with a laugh. "Actually, I have some jobs for you."

Trajan attempted The Look with a questioning edge. "I don't need any jobs. I have lots."

"This is how we did the Glider Plus. I did the grunt work and you fine-tuned it."

"I thought the other me was supposed to be the boss?"

"He was sensible enough to delegate stuff in my area of expertise. Or Bill Lee's."

"Okay, boss."

"No rush," Samantha said with a smile. "But in the next couple of hours would be good."

"So that's boss in the sense of slave-driver?"

"That's boss in the sense of me firing up your competitive spirit. The other you gave me lessons in motivation."

"Do I get to have some lunch in the PMR first? Or am I expected to choke down a sandwich while I work?"

"As long as it's not a five-Martini lunch," said Samantha.

[August 28, Thursday]

Following a summons to General Hammond's office the next morning, Dr. Trajan captured a thought then made his best speed to the area of the gate operations centre. He was expecting to be told that contact had been re-established with the Almed and he was about to have his brains picked again. Instead, the general passed a photograph across his desk. It was a ten by eight glossy colour print.

"Two people, apparently one male and one female," said Trajan, somewhat mystified. "The taller has an arm round the shoulders of the shorter. But you can't tell much more from a back view. Except that the woman is wearing one of my wife's outfits. Or an identical copy."

"How about a front view?" The general offered another photograph.

"Me or a lookalike," said Trajan. "Or a good bit of photo-editing. With a woman in sunglasses, who looks like Samantha or a lookalike. And the same remarks about what she's wearing apply. Am I allowed to ask where this is going, General?"

"Allegations of conduct unbecoming," General Hammond said though his grim expression.

"I don't get this. How can I be unbecoming with my wife?"

"The allegation is that the woman is Major Carter."

"I can guarantee that I've never put my arm round Sam like that on the main shopping street in Silver Spring, sir."

"Someone is suggesting otherwise, Dr. Trajan."

"That could indicate I'm not the target? Not being an officer under your command, General." Trajan peered more closely at the almost head-on view of the couple. "Do you have a magnifying glass?"

The general took a large glass magnifier in a black frame from a desk drawer and passed it across the desk. Trajan studied the picture closely.

"I think the woman is wearing clip-ons. The sunglasses. So has to be S.J. Major Carter doesn't wear glasses, so she wears standard Air Force shades, not having anything to clip clip-

ons on to.”

General Hammond took charge of the magnifier and the photograph. “I believe you’re right, Dr. Trajan,” he decided after making a close study.

“So this is some sort of smear aimed at Sam?” said Trajan.

“Probably at both of you.”

“Has anyone thought to ask Sam if she has an outfit like this?” Trajan brandished the photograph.

“It’s on the agenda now, Dr. Trajan.”

“Do we know who’s behind the allegations? And can we charge him with conduct unbecoming? In particular, with perpetrating a very poor and obvious frame-up?”

“I’d prefer to let this develop a little to see if we can make your accuser drink from his own poisoned well,” said the general.

“I hope you’re going to have quiet words with Major Carter and my wife about this, sir. Sam is subject to military discipline but S.J. could go ballistic about the frame-up.”

“I’m sure the other Dr. Trajan will restrain herself when she has the full facts, H.T.,” the general said with a smile.

“So am I, sir. But I’d keep all the zats locked up, just in case. Especially if someone whose name begins with ‘K’ and ends with ‘insey’ is in the neighbourhood. Is there any more of this ‘evidence’ on offer, by the way?”

“More photographs and some CCTV from a distance. Enough for innuendo but not enough for proof.”

“Figures. I hope you plan to stomp all over this quickly, sir.”

“Be assured that the longer they drag it out, the more severe the stomping will be,” said the general. “And you can take that to the bank, Dr. Trajan.”

“A very reassuring thought, sir. Do we know when these pictures were taken?”

“There are time stamps, yes. And some of them correspond to times when Major Carter was off-planet.”

“Interesting.”

“That’s another aspect we’re covering; whether this is really an attempt to expose the stargate project.”

“Hence the need to give the perpetrator some rope?”

"I'm sure you wife will also get that point, Doctor Trajan."

"Actually, when I got here, I was expecting you to tell me the Almed are back in contact."

"All attempts to dial their stargate keep failing," the general said with a frown.

"Which is exceedingly worrying," Trajan added.



A phone call from the USAF regional weather bureau deflected Dr. Trajan from returning to work after lunch. His wife had seethed a little over the latest piece of trouble-making but she and Major Carter had decided to do nothing until they had a target in their sights. Samantha was spending the day in Dr. Lee's laboratory, studying the data recovered from her chip in search of further inspiration, which had left Trajan free to lose himself in some complex mathematics.

"We're having a problem with our new super-duper computer," one of Trajan's occasional contacts announced after a routine exchange of greetings. Major Andrew Calton was in charge of Data Management Services.

"And what do you expect me to do about it?" Trajan demanded, being deliberately unco-operative.

"How about fix it? We need to know if the stupid diagnostic program is working and the last two guys couldn't tell us. So much for computer experts."

"Strange you didn't come to me earlier, seeing as how I owe you two."

"Yeah, your name was top of the list but the Air Force said you were out of the country. Anywhere interesting?"

"You know the Air Force. They stick you on a plane, you sip your gin and tonic, you read a book and the next thing you know, there's some guy shaking your arm and saying: 'We've arrived, sir.' And when you ask where you are, you get the old 'need to know and you don't, sir' routine."

"Then you bust your skull, you get back on the plane, and when you wake up again, you're back in Colorado?"

"That's it exactly. Okay, I'll get on to my boss and see about a trip to Denver."

[August 29, Friday]

A problem-free Friday morning gave way to the afternoon and General Hammond was beginning to think that he might make a start for home on time, for once, after the usual routines of winding up a week. His adjutant returned things to situation normal very quickly.

"Sir, I've had a call from Samantha Trajan," Major Renny reported. "She wanted to know if Dr. Trajan is here."

"He was supposed to be going straight home after his trip to Denver," the general said.

"Yes, sir. I've checked and his return flight landed, as scheduled, and he was last seen heading for Silver Spring. His cellphone is switched off."

A knock on the office door announced the arrival of Colonel O'Neill. "I hear we've lost Trajan, sir," he said. "Carter tried pinging his locator chip, or whatever it's called. Nothing."

"Nothing?" repeated the general.

"I was going to say, sir," said Major Renny. "There's no response from the chip. Security says it's out of range or the device failed."

"Or it's being blocked," said O'Neill. "Carter's opinion."

"Is our equipment working properly?" said the general.

"Checked and double-checked by Carter, sir," said O'Neill.

"Security is checking CCTV on Dr. Trajan's route home from the airfield, sir," said Major Renny.

"Stand by to go and look for him, Jack," the general ordered. "I want to hear what the CCTV shows soonest, Warrick," he added to the major.

"On it, sir," said Major Renny,

Half an hour later, General Hammond had facts to guide him. He summoned SG-1 and SG-4 to the briefing room for an update. "We have found Dr. Trajan's car," he announced. "CCTV showed it going into a blank area where there are no cameras working on his route home. The car is parked at the side of the road with a broken window on the driver's side."

"You mean he really has been kidnapped, sir?" Major

Carter said incredulously.

"That's likely," said the general. "No response from his locator chip?"

"I think the signal could be being blocked, sir," said Carter, "but there might be a way round that."

"We need to send a chopper up to look for his signal," said O'Neill.

"Which direction, though, sir?" said Major Renny.

"We also need to check the airports," Dr. Jackson suggested.

"Just put him on a truck or in a van and drive him where they want to go. That's the simplest method of abducting someone," said Major Pointer, the leader of SG-4.

"Drive where?" said the general.

"Back east, if Pentagon spooks are behind it," O'Neill offered.

"Sir, we used some Almed technology in the new I.D. chips," said Carter. "I might be able to tweak the detector enough to give us a rough location. Then if we put a chopper in the area, that should left us home in on Dr. Trajan. Or maybe we can use a satellite . . ." Carter began to scribble notes on her pad.

"We're still hopeful of getting something from CCTV, sir," said Major Renny. "Other vehicles going into the dead area at the same time as Dr. Trajan. But there are lots of possibles."

"Carry on with that," said the general. "And Major Carter, do your tweaking."

As an expert in spacecraft communications, Major Carter was bursting with ideas for locating the missing Dr. Trajan. She exercised rigid personal discipline and went with the one most likely to produce a result. Then it was just a question of waiting for a suitable satellite to pass over the SGC. She soon spotted a signal from Dr. Trajan's chip heading in a south-easterly direction.

SG-1 and SG-4 were sent ahead of the kidnappers in a fast jet. By then, the question of the next step had been thrashed out. General Hammond had rejected the idea of waiting for the kidnappers to reach either their destination or a hand-over

point. Colonel O'Neill's orders were to collect Trajan but to avoid taking any risks with his safety.

The SG teams were half an hour ahead of their target when Colonel O'Neill began a final briefing. Satellite images and local CCTV had identified the vehicle carrying Dr. Trajan as an unadorned dark green van with Colorado licence plates. A doctor and two Emergency Medical Technicians had been added to the group's strength.

"Okay, listen up," said O'Neill. "We have three vehicles; a small bus and two large vans. Our most obvious strategy would be to box them in and force them to a stop. Unless someone has a better idea?"

Everyone else looked at Major Carter, who put on a smile of embarrassment. "Actually, sir, there is something we can try."

"Something good?" O'Neill invited.

"I was just thinking, sir," said Carter. "We could overtake their van and zat it."

"And make them crash? Killing all on board?" said O'Neill.

"If we fire one of the new zats at the bodywork several times, that will fry the electronics for the engine and it'll just stop, sir," said Carter.

"I thought two shots kills and three shots disintegrates," said O'Neill.

"We can vary the power setting, sir," said Carter.

"Ah!" said O'Neill.

"Then someone can stop to offer them help . . ."

"And zat everyone aboard safely?"

"Yes, sir."

"But the new zats haven't been issued yet," said Major Pointer.

"I have a couple of prototypes," said Carter. "Samantha and I have been trying out some ideas."

"Of course, you have," said O'Neill. "Okay, Pointer, you'll lead in one of the vans and the rest of SG-Four will follow the bus in the other van. Doctor, you and your people are with us in the bus."

"Putting us in position for boxing if the zat prototype

doesn't work out?" said Major Pointer.

"Exactly," said O'Neill. "When the bus is overtaking their van, T., you open your window and zat them when they're level with you."

"Three times into the bodywork?" said Teal'c.

"Or four, if you're feeling frisky," said O'Neill. "How much time do we have now?"

"They should be passing us in about twenty-five minutes, sir," said Carter. "They're not breaking any speed limits."

"Okay, give Pointer a heads-up when they arrive so he can get in front of them," said O'Neill. "Then we'll find out what the new zats can do."



Waking up on a strange bed was a surprise and disturbing. Dr. Trajan was wearing street clothing minus his shoes. Finding his wife at his bedside in what he quickly realized was the infirmary at the SGC was as unsettling as it was reassuring.

"Janet, he's awake," Samantha called when she realized that her husband's eyes were staying open.

"I know where I am but why would be good to know," said Trajan.

"What do you remember?"

"Driving home from the airport after the job in Denver. Then it's just a blank."

"You were ambushed," Samantha said as Dr. Fraiser began a quick check of her patient's vitals. "And kidnapped. Sam worked out how to track you using your new I.D. chip, and Colonel O'Neill found you in a crate in the back of a van."

"Crumbs!"

"You were sedated by someone who knew what he was doing," said Dr. Fraiser. "Your kidnappers chose something that would leave you fully functional when it wore off. So we decided to let you sleep it off."

"Suggesting they wanted to coerce me into doing something."

"That's what everyone thinks," said Samantha.

"What time is it?" said Trajan.

"Five past eight. In the evening. And it's still Friday," Samantha added.

"And you've been sitting there all day?"

"Sam let me take over in her lab to track your kidnappers using satellites until SG-One and SG-Four got into position to rescue you."

"So you weren't rampaging around, demanding someone did something, and generally causing havoc?"

"I think I'll get out of the middle of this," Dr. Fraiser said with mock nervousness. "Just stay where you are for the next few minutes, H.T. Then I'll be back to tell you if you can get up."

"It's okay, Janet," laughed Samantha. "I'm not going to clobber him. No matter how annoying he gets."

Trajan tried to give her the Carter Look but failed. "So what have you been doing since I was uncrated?"

"I was doing some work in the labs until they phoned me when you started showing signs of waking up."

"You've had quite a day of it. Sorry about that."

"So have you."

"But I had the benefit of being unconscious while all the bad stuff was happening."

"How are you feeling now?"

"Thirsty. And quite hungry. Ah, the cavalry."

Colonel O'Neill and Major Carter moved chairs over to Trajan's bed. He was the infirmary's sole patient, which meant that there was no question of disturbing anyone else. The new arrivals delivered an account of the rescue mission, with O'Neill stepping in whenever Carter became too technical.

"Do we know who the guys in the van are?" Trajan said into a natural pause.

"A couple of hoods and a girlfriend," said O'Neill. "Just hired to move the van from point A to point B."

"Which means they didn't point you at NID, or whoever?"

"They got their instructions by phone and their payment was in the van when they collected it," said Carter.

"And it was one of S.J.'s improved zats that made the whole

thing work?"

"I'm not sure it would have worked so easily with one of the old ones," said Carter.

"And some Almed stuff in your chip," O'Neill said before Carter could begin to go into detail.

"And I was all boxed up in a crate while everything was happening?"

"Someone decided they should leave you in the box when they found you," Samantha said with an indignant glare at Colonel O'Neill.

"That makes sense," said Trajan. "It's easier to move a box than an unconscious body. Both from the moving point of view, and for not attracting attention. There's nothing like a limp body for making people nosy. And the more secrecy, the nosier they get."

"Thank you," said O'Neill. "I knew someone smart like Trajan would get it. You were obviously okay in there. We had a doctor with us, and he checked you over."

"It was a bit pragmatic, sir," said Carter.

"But logical," said Trajan.

"Exactly!" said O'Neill.

Dr. Fraiser's return to discharge Trajan cut short the debate. "If you're feeling okay, H.T.?" she added.

"I expect to become rather indignant at what's been going on in due course," said Trajan. "But I'm feeling rather hollow inside right now. Like I haven't had anything to eat since breakfast."

"Just don't try to eat both lunch and dinner," said the doctor. "And don't be too surprised if you don't need much sleep tonight."

"I'll see everyone in the PMR when I've had a quick shower and a change of clothes," said Trajan. "Unless the general wants to see me pronto?"

"Hammond is being pragmatic," O'Neill said with a hint of a smile in Major Carter's direction. "He's leaving it till tomorrow."



Lockdown

[August 30, Saturday]

General Hammond had an air of resignation when he conducted a short debriefing on the rescue mission the next morning. The three prisoners were still in custody but they were a complete dead end. Forensic examination of the van, its contents, including the transportation crate, and the money used to pay the hirelings had produced nothing useful.

The Trajans and SG-1 had assembled in the conference room. SG-4 was enjoying down-time ahead of an early mission on Monday morning to a planet where the stargate was located in a region some four hours ahead of SGC time.

“That crate sounds very intriguing,” Trajan remarked when the general had finished with his updates. “It sounds like something that wasn’t knocked together in a couple of minutes.”

“It’s a Mark Four Russian Defector Extractor,” said Colonel O’Neill. “That’s what one of the FBI nerds told me. Something to keep a prisoner quiet for up to thirty-six hours.”

“But we don’t think the Russians were behind it?” said Trajan.

“No, but we don’t plan to tell them that,” the general said with a hint of a smile. “Not just yet.”

“Make the buggers squirm?” laughed Trajan. “You know what, I’m expecting to hear those three desperadoes will be turned loose because there’s nothing anyone can charge them with that isn’t rather inconvenient on national security grounds.”

“That’s looking very likely to happen,” said the general. “And you remember nothing at all about your abduction?”

“The last thing I remember is sitting in my car at some traffic lights,” said Trajan. “Wondering whether to try a short-cut or go straight home. Knowing whichever I chose would be

the wrong decision. I don't even remember someone breaking the window and zapping me."

"Still no connection with NID, the kidnappers, I'm guessing," said O'Neill.

"None," said the general.

"We need to know how they knew Trajan was going to Denver," said O'Neill.

"Good luck with that," said Trajan. "I'm sure my trip there had to be cleared with Washington."

"Which is Leak City," said Samantha.

"I'm afraid I'd have to agree with that," said General Hammond. "What we have to ask ourselves instead is why rogue NID agents tried to kidnap Dr. Trajan. To put it bluntly, why have they given up on his wife?"

"So you're on board with that, sir?" said O'Neill.

"Yes, Jack," the general said with a smile. "Due to the complete lack of other candidates. We're sure they have Corporal Sheringham's data chip. It's probably they made Samantha's disappear. The best guess is that it has to be because they're worried about what else is on the data chip. In addition to what was covered by the debriefing reports."

"Do we know if they've actually decoded the data, sir?" said Major Carter. "In Washington, I mean? I'm assuming the NID rogues haven't cracked what's on the chips they stole."

"That's too top-secret for me to know," said the general.

"Which means they haven't," said O'Neill.

"I agree," the general said with a smile. "Which makes it likely NID were trying to take the man most likely to work out the decryption key out of circulation. Either to make sure the data is never decoded or in the hope of using drugs to make Dr. Trajan co-operate."

"Which means we should make decoding the second set of data on the chip our number one priority," said Major Carter.

"After making sure no one else gets to either of our Drs. Trajan in the meantime," said the general.

"That sounds like we'll be enjoying your hospitality here for a while, sir," said Trajan. "Without trips home."

"With your agreement," General Hammond said with a nod. "SG-Five will be taking you into Silver Spring at eleven-

hundred to allow you to collect anything you need for what will be, hopefully, a short stay here.”

“That’s a short stay here at the whole SGC? Not just at our apartment here?” said Samantha.

“Including access to the laboratories, the library and so on,” said the general.

“This is all very ironic,” said Trajan. “I was stuck here because the Pentagonians wouldn’t let S.J. out. Now, she’s stuck here because of me.”

“But what really matters is that we’re together,” said Samantha.

“Well, yes,” said Trajan.

“And we could still go on Glider-Plus missions if they’d let us.”

“And there’s another irony,” said Carter. “The NID rogues, who are keeping H.T. here, know exactly how much rest of the galaxy you two can hide in, and how little chance they’d have of finding you.”

“Meanwhile, back on Planet Earth,” said General Hammond, “Dr. Lee is on his way here for a briefing at ten-hundred, Dr. Trajan. We have a job for you and him tomorrow. But you’ll hear more in about an hour.”

“Got that.” Trajan made a note on his pad. “Are we getting one of the Pentagonians coming here to help with decrypting the second set of data. Or can everyone wait a couple of years while I learn the job?”

“The matter is under consideration,” the general said with a nod.

“So we’re thinking the encryption of the second data set was done by the other Dr. Trajan?” said Carter. “Or with his help?”

“Just don’t expect this Dr. Trajan to crack it anytime soon on his own,” said the other Trajan’s counterpart.

“But you should be able to do it,” said Samantha.

“With the help of someone who knows about decryption,” said her husband. “Not my field. Bill Lee came up with the idea that the second data set starts with something from the first set.”

“Why?” said Samantha.

"To make it easier for the person doing the decryption. So they'd know they were on the right track quite quickly. But thinking from the security point of view, just repeating the information would make it too easy. So I now think the second set of data does start with something from the first set but it was rewritten. It's the same information but expressed differently."

"Why?" said Samantha.

"Security," said Trajan. "If some hotshot finds the decryption key, what he or she gets from just the start of the second data set can be checked back against the first to prove that the key works. Then the whole rest of the job can be done in a computer with armed guards at the printer station and the hotshot elsewhere, resting on his laurels."

"I take it you're recommending I bring in the hotshot right away?" said the general. "Because I can assure the Pentagon that he needn't see more than a tiny fraction of the decoded data?"

"Unless everyone is prepared to wait for me to learn a lot more about code-breaking," said Trajan. "One thing more, general, I think you need to insist on the work being done here on security grounds."

"And so that you can see the dirt on the other Senator Kinsey in all its glory?" the general suggested with a smile.

"I think we'll have to fight for places in that queue," laughed Trajan.

"I'm sure what you've told me will persuade the Pentagon to give this matter priority status," said General Hammond.

"The second data set could also hold an emergency data dump from Samantha's SGC, sir," said Carter. "Something given to each of the refugees at the last minute. Possibly useful intel on the Goa'uld."

"That ups the priority even more," said O'Neill.

"Agreed," said the general. "Further comments? Suggestions?"

"Not right now, sir," said O'Neill after glances to left and right.

"In that case, dismissed," said the general. "And thank you for your continuing co-operation, Samantha and H.T."

Despite indulging in a lot of speculation with his wife, Dr. Trajan was still wondering what the mysterious mission could be when he and Dr. Lee reported to General Hammond's office at 09:59 hours. When invited to do so, the visitors sat and put on receptive expressions.

"I have a job for you," said the general, "which will involve travelling off-base tomorrow."

"Does this mean going off-world," said Dr. Lee, slightly nervously.

"Not this time," the general said with a smile. "You're going to Area Fifty-One."

"Isn't that the same thing as off-world?" remarked Dr. Trajan.

"Well, almost," the general admitted with a smile. "The President has decided to deploy one of the locking devices Dr. Lee and Major Carter developed from the Almed shield technology. To prevent unauthorized use of the dimensional interface that Samantha Trajan used to get here."

"By whom, General?" said Trajan. "Or are we not allowed to ask that?"

"This is confidential but the White House has received whispers that Senator Kinsey is trying to gain access to the device."

"Oh-oh," said Lee. "Politics."

"Correct," said the general. "I've done some more digging and my sources suggest he would like to send NID rogues to parallel dimensions where he was elected president to find out what he has to do to get himself installed in the Oval Office."

"Which would be a threat to world security and happiness greater than that from the Goa'uld and every other bad guy in the universe," said Trajan. "Oh, did I say that out loud?"

"There is also a suggestion that Kinsey would task the NID rogues with digging out dirty secrets on others for blackmail purposes," the general added.

"And, of course, they would feel free to use torture and drugs and killing relatives to extract information?" said Trajan. "As they're not operating in our parallel?"

"Exactly," said the general. "But if we install a locking device, with multi-key encryption supplied by Dr. Trajan, -

then it will become difficult, if not impossible, to misuse the dimensional mirror.”

“Well,” said Trajan, being cautious, “if we really serious, dumping the thing into the Sun from X-Five-Oh-One would be the best way of making sure no one ever misuses it again.”

“I’m sure that has been considered,” said the general, “but the plan is to store the three keys for the encryption at the White House, here and at a third location to be determined by the President.”

“The Alpha Site would be a good idea,” said Trajan. “But that’s not our problem. As for the key, I have quite a good idea for that.”

“I’ll need exact dimensions of the dimensional mirror, sir,” said Lee.

General Hammond passed a memory stick across his desk. “This is not to leave the SGC and not to be copied.”

“Burn before reading,” Lee murmured.

“SG-Five will collect you at your home at zero eight-thirty tomorrow, Doctor Lee,” said the general. “And fly with you two to Area Fifty-One. How long do you think it will take to fit the lock?”

“Twenty minutes?” said Lee. “About that.”

“So quickly?”

“Well, yes. It’s just a question of fitting it and securing it,” said Lee. “I assume they’ll want to try to break the lock? Do we need to be there for that?”

“Perhaps for an hour or less,” the general decided. “Depending on whether the attempts to defeat the lock look like having success.”

“I take it I’ll be handing the other two keys over at Area Fifty-One and bringing the third back here?” said Trajan.

“You will be given sealed instructions for the other keys,” said the general. “To be opened when couriers identify themselves to you. And no, you don’t have to go to stores to draw a cloak and a dagger,” he added in response to Trajan’s thoughtful smile.

“Clearly, I’ve been working here long enough to become predictable,” Trajan remarked. “Now, I have to decide if that’s good or bad.”

[August 31, Sunday]

Dr. Trajan did a 'Honey, I'm home!' routine when he reached his apartment at the SGC at the end of Sunday afternoon. He realized that he was talking to himself. He knew where to go to find an audience, though. His wife was the labcoated woman with the longer blonde hair in one of the laboratories; the only one to be occupied.

"Hey, James, how's it going?" Samantha remarked when she spotted the new arrival.

"They've taken away my Double-Oh status," Trajan said as he adjusted his safety glasses. "What are you up to?"

"We've working on a personal shield," said Samantha. "It's an update to the ones used by Goa'uld system lords modified by some of the developments from the Iron Hand project and some ideas we have about the one that fake NSA agent had, which you zatted to bits."

"I know someone who could do with one of those if they help you to avoid being kidnapped." Trajan ignored the crack. "I never expected him to have a shield: like the one he had. I just thought he'd be wearing the usual armour of arrogance the Goa'uld have. Sure of himself and his authority, and sure he could be out of here before anyone could do anything about it, thanks to the endemic inertia in the system."

"We're using some ideas from the way that Ancient stasis field was swirling at the edges," said Samantha. "To make the shield adhere to the contours of the human body."

"Sounds very high-powered," said Trajan.

"And you're our guinea pig of choice," Major Carter offered with a smile.

"I can hardly wait," laughed Trajan.

"As long as you use it for the proper purpose," Samantha added.

"I don't care what you boffins say," said Trajan. "My personal Iron Hand is great for getting the tops off jars and bottles. And it will be really good for emergency plumbing if I don't have a spanner handy."

"Scientific breakthroughs are wasted on some people,"

Samantha said with a heavy sigh.

"In the meantime, I've got something good," Trajan added.

"Like what," Samantha invited.

"We're both going to Nevada tomorrow. With Sam and Teal'c as technical advisors and security to keep the Pentagonians happy."

"To do what?"

"To study the X-301 project; the hardware and the data; to address setting up the detection process for recall devices."

"Something you're going to have to work out because it wasn't on my data chip? Well, the bit that's been decoded."

"With the big advantage that we know that the other Dr. Trajan used Bragga analysis to work out how to locate the recall devices."

"And with the big disadvantage they you don't have a clue how he did it?" Samantha said with a smile.

"One is not totally clueless," Trajan said confidently.

[September 01, Monday, evening]

On their way back to the visitor quarters at the SGC after their trip to Nevada, Dr. Trajan and his wife encountered Dr. Daniel Jackson.

The archaeologist was in uniform and wearing a sidearm. The time was approaching 7 p.m. and the Trajans were thinking about dinner. Dr. Jackson had been on a reconnaissance mission with SG-2.

"Been anywhere interesting?" Trajan asked. "You look a bit damp."

"I think it was the monsoon season on the planet," said Daniel. "And amazingly hot. We ended up as wet inside our waterproofs as out. Colonel Kowalski was moaning about ending up about three feet tall when he stopped shrinking. But we found some interesting bits at a Goa'uld mining operation, which had been bombarded to bits and abandoned."

"Who by?" Trajan asked with a frown.

"Not a clue," said Daniel. "Did you two enjoy your day out?"

"It was wonderful," said Samantha. "Really great. And the people in Nevada are all hoping the Glider-Plus program is approved. We actually had a long lunch with three Pentagonians, who want Glider-Plus to go ahead."

"That's encouraging."

"We almost dropped dead with shock when they turned up."

"Some of us are getting very cynical in their old age," said Trajan. "Tell her the Pentagonians definitely like her project and she resorts to mocking laughter."

"Just as well Sam went with us," said Samantha. "Someone spent most of the journey back talking to Teal'c in a language I've never heard."

"Polishing his language skills?" Daniel suggested.

"I think there's more to it than that. He was making a lot of notes. Then he did some of his talking to his writing pad and laughing."

"About what?"

"You know that detecting Apophis' recall devices involves Bragga analysis?"

"I won't even ask what that is," laughed Daniel.

"Wise move," Samantha returned with nod. "H.T. tried to explain it to me but it made my head hurt. But when Bragga published his paper, everyone said it was a beautifully elegant piece of math but no one would think of any practical use for it. H.T. keeps laughing about how wrong they were. And he's wondering how he's going to get a letter of apology to Professor Bragga without being arrested for compromising national security."

"Does this mean you can detect the Goa'uld booby traps now?"

"Once H.T. gets his head round the theory of it. Which he will. Can I borrow your gun?"

"To do what?" Daniel asked nervously.

"To make him tell me what he was discussing with Teal'c."

"I was asking him about his experiences of flying gliders," Trajan said with mock alarm. "I've been reading up on pilot

debriefings; the ones that are standard for Air Force pilots when they test a new make of aircraft. And I found out no one has ever run the list of questions past Teal's about gliders. So I was getting some data on what they can do in practical terms. To go with what Sam and the others who've flown X-Three-Oh-One prototypes reported."

"Okay, I buy that," said Samantha. "And I apologize for being a typical unreasonable woman and sounding off without knowing the facts."

"Really?" Trajan said with a sceptical smile.

"Of course not," said Samantha. "But you can show how sensitive and caring you are by pretending to believe me."

"Oh, right," said Trajan, struggling to keep his face straight.

"The one who laughs first loses," Samantha explained to Daniel. "Unless he starts tickling me, which is an admission of defeat."

"Not according to my rules," said Trajan.

"What H.T. was doing makes it sound like everyone is getting very serious about Glider-Plus," said Daniel.

"Well, maybe," said Samantha, refusing to get her hopes up.

"I reckon the Pentagonians can see dollar signs," said Trajan. "They know how many zillions of dollars it takes to launch a shuttle and how long it takes to get a mission ready. Training time for missions won't be affected but they'll be able to do lots more if we have something you can just fly up to orbit, or to the asteroid belt, for about as much as it costs to take a trip in a private jet."

"That's something the Pentagonians are good at," said Samantha.

"Sharks, feeding frenzy, kickbacks and campaign contributions?" said Daniel.

"Exactly like that," said Trajan. "Oh, yes. Something else that's been added to the mission wish-list is that the two of us could have a look at the log files in the gliders and see if we can see anything useful in the way of local intelligence."

"You think that's likely?" said Daniel.

"No," said Trajan. "But one of the Pentagonians came up with the idea."

“Right,” Daniel said with a laugh.

“Are you joining us for dinner?” said Samantha. “When you’ve dried out a bit? We can tell you more then.”

“Sounds like a good idea,” said Daniel.

“PMR in half an hour?”

“It’s a date.”

[September 02, Tuesday]

A meeting with Dr. H.T. Trajan was one of the first items on General Hammond’s calendar for his Tuesday morning.

“First order of business,” said the general when Trajan had taken a seat, “thank you for your notes on Senator Cornwell’s pet project. Your conclusion is that it will definitely need triple the planned budget to prove that the system won’t work?”

“At least,” Trajan said with a nod. “And there’s also the likelihood that Cornwell will be after the same amount again for modifications, which won’t work either. And the tragic thing is that it’s only Cornwell’s political clout which is blocking a proper review of the science to find out that it’s full of holes. And even more tragic is that Cornwell will just walk away after all the millions have been wasted without a stain on his reputation.”

“We live in tragic times, Dr. Trajan,” the general agreed.

“‘I was only trying to serve my country,’ says the senator accused of wasting millions of tax dollars. Which makes it all right.”

The general responded with a thin smile. “A couple of other things. Would you check Dr. Lee’s costings on the ZPM renewal project? I’m not sure he’s taken everything into consideration.”

“ZPM costings.” Trajan made an entry on his notepad. “On that subject, has anyone thought of asking the Almed what they know about refurbishing ZPMs? Or are they still out of contact?”

“All attempts to dial their gate are still unsuccessful.”

“Pity.”

“Have they told you that, or have you picked up any hints that have expertise in that area?”

“Not as such. But given their advanced knowledge of materials technology, they could help us make our refurb jobs more effective. Or even help us to make new ones from scratch. Or they might just refuse to help us, in which case, we haven’t lost anything.”

“I’ll refer your suggestion to the proper authority, Dr. Trajan. For when we can contact the Almed again. There’s one other matter. It’s in the nature of a personal favour. General Denzil’s niece thinks she could have a mathematical explanation for the Thiery Effect,” the general read the name from the cover of a file folder. “If you can look it over and give an opinion, Supply will owe the SGC a rather big favour.”

Trajan took charge of a blue binder with a printed stick-on label. “I’ll get right on it after I’ve done the ZPM costing, sir. And my wife has explained what the Thiery Effect is all about, of course. Can’t say I’ve ever heard of it.”

“That makes two of us, Dr. Trajan,” the general said with a smile. “I’ve kept the best news for the last: Glider-Plus has a go.”

“That was quick.” Trajan looked at his watch. “It’s not even nine o’clock on Monday morning.”

“I assume the decision was ninety-nine per cent made and the Pentagon is eager for a cheap way to put the asteroid belt within our grasp and resupply the International Space Station. Accordingly, there will be a mission briefing here tomorrow afternoon with the captain of X-Five-Oh-One. It will be your responsibility to get your wife out of her lab and present in the briefing room.”

“Permission to draw a zat from the armoury and a wheelchair from the infirmary, sir?”

“I’m sure your powers of persuasion are equal to the task,” General Hammond said with a smile.

“One thing that’s occurred to me, general: why don’t we just load up X-Five-Oh-One and lumber the gliders back here to look for the recall devices? Why do we even have to risk my wife on a mission?”

"Because the Powers That Be want to know that the location system works before they authorize the trip back to Earth for the Five-Oh-One, instead of sending her on another mission."

"So there's something else they could be doing in that region of space? But it's too secret for people at my pay grade to know?"

"In one, Dr. Trajan. That will be all."

On leaving the general's office, Dr. Trajan headed for the laboratory area. His wife and Major Carter were drinking coffee and watching the display on a monitor screen when he joined them. Trajan made a big production out of retrieving a sheet of paper from a dark blue folder. "Congratulations, S.J., you've got a new job."

"I don't want a new job," Samantha said indignantly. "I like the one I've got. It's not fair. Whenever we get a new toy, Area Fifty-One steals it. Or the Pentagonians."

"Tell me about it," said Major Carter.

"You've got juice," Samantha said hotly.

"Me?" said Trajan.

"You know you have. I need you to use it. I mean it, H.T. They are not keeping Sam and me off the personal shield project."

"Samantha."

"I mean it, H.T. They had the stasis project but they're not having this and I expect you to use every bit of influence . . ."

"Samantha Jane, would you kindly shut the hell up for twenty-three seconds?"

"Why twenty-three? Oh, yes, it's a prime number."

"Sammy, they want you to stay on the shield project."

"What?"

"In fact, they're not going to take no for an answer."

"You're kidding."

"I kid you not. They also want you for another project. You're getting what you wanted."

"Falls over in amazement. Doing what?"

"Sometimes, but not often, the Universe does deliver." Trajan offered the sheet of paper. "The agenda for a meeting about an extra job. To be held tomorrow afternoon."

"This is a big deal, is it?" Samantha said sceptically.

"Read, mark, learn, inwardly digest and be impressed."

"That name's familiar, Colonel Devonport," said Samantha as she read the circulation list. "Where from?"

"He's the Captain of the X-Five-Oh-One," Trajan returned casually.

"We're going to be on his spaceship?" Samantha's eyes widened. "We're actually going to be on a spaceship?"

"Yes, Samantha, pester-power does work."

"This is proper Glider-Plus mission? Not some private joy-ride you've arranged?"

"I do have a certain amount of juice," Trajan said with a laugh, "but not that much."

"Where are we going?"

"The Pentagonians have bought your argument that mining the asteroid belt for iridium and other scarce metals would be a good idea. Glider Plus is on."

"This is great. This is really great," laughed Samantha.

"If you're going to explode with joy, could you arrange to be pointing away from Sam and me at the time?" Trajan suggested.



As an SGC Specialist who was about to venture off-planet, Samantha Trajan's duties included drawing a uniform from the stores. But when she tried it on, her husband rushed into their bedroom in the visitor quarters in response to a cry of anguish.

"What do I look like?" Samantha complained, staring in horror at her reflection in a full-length mirror. "It's all creased and it doesn't fit."

"You only get those creases in clothing fresh out of storage," said Trajan. "They disappear after the kit has been worn and washed a couple of times."

"Like yours, you mean? And my coat doesn't have any badges on the shoulders. Just a name tag on the front." Samantha swung her shoulders forward in turn to show the lack of an SGC-X patch on her right shoulder and the Earth-

origin patch on the left.

“Trajan, S.J.” her husband read from her uniform.

“You don’t have a name tag,” Samantha recalled.

“The people who need to, know who I am. And I’ve never had one.”

“Why?”

“I don’t know. The first time they sent me through the stargate in one of these outfits, there was no name tag on the jacket and I assumed they’d not had time to make one. When I did mention it, one of the soldiers told me it was a dead man’s uniform and they’d just cut his name tag off and returned the uniform to stores.”

“That’s horrible.”

Trajan shrugged his shoulders. “I just assumed it was routine ‘freak the nerd out’ talk and ignored it. But when the jacket got slashed when some nutter tried to stab one of the foreign devils . . .”

“Oh, my gosh!”

“It’s okay. He wasn’t very good at it and Teal’c swiped him with the blunt end of his staff weapon and knocked most of his teeth out before he could take a second swipe.”

“Good for Teal’c.”

“So when the stores delivered a new jacket to me while the old one was being repaired, it still didn’t have a name tag on it. And none of the others since has had one.”

“So you’re Dr. Nameless?”

“Or someone so famous he doesn’t need a name tag. I thought it might be some sort of plausible deniability thing, but I never bothered to find out.”

“Deniable why?”

“We have no mathematician called Trajan on any SG team. I don’t know why anyone would want to deny something like that, but you know what politicians are like.”

“Slippery, yes. I think I should have one of those SGC-X badges, like yours.”

“Patches.”

“What?”

“They’re called patches. And don’t forget, we’re not going on a proper stargate mission. We’re just using a gate to get to

our spaceship.”

“All the space shuttle missions have their own badge. Patch.”

“STS missions are a really big deal needing months of preparation. And they’re run by NASA, which isn’t a secret organization. Apart from all the cover-ups of UFOs and faking the Moon landings.”

“I still think I should have some patches. Don’t you agree?”

Having been privy to some of Dr. Fraiser’s psychological opinions, Trajan realized that being part of the group; having something to belong to, was very important to Samantha, and that even something as trivial as having patches on her shoulders, like everyone else, and a uniform which didn’t look straight off the shelf at the stores, could make a real difference to her morale and hence the success of the mission.

“Yes, I do get it, S.J.,” he said when he realized his thinking time might be misinterpreted. “You want what it says on the tin. If you’re in a uniform, you should blend in with the rest, not stick out like a sore thumb.”

“Or a British mathematician with a fake Canadian accent?”

“That as well. I tell you what,” he added, “I’ll see what I can do. You can sew, can’t you?”

“Of course, I can sew,” Samantha said indignantly.

“Just checking,” laughed Trajan. “And by the way, your bum doesn’t look big in your uniform. In fact, you’ll probably have about the same silhouette as Sam when it fits properly. Except that she’s a bit more muscular because she works out.”

“Are you saying I should work out?”

“Not unless you’re planning to get into fights on alien planets. Or you want to be super-healthy and super-fit.”

“Like your other wife?”

“Like my wife here says my other wife is. I wouldn’t know, never having met the lady. Come to think of it, maybe you’re not meant to wear a uniform. Maybe we can get you a nice frock in an appropriate camouflage and a pair of matching high heeled boots. Nothing flashy in the way of jewellery. Maybe some discreet diamond studs for your ears, and something chunky with diamonds and rubies in the way of a bracelet for formal dinners in the mess.”

"You're winding me up, you S.O.B."

"I know. Aren't I a rotter?"

"So what's your real answer?"

"Don't panic. I'll get Corporal Fynes on the job."

"Why, does he make frocks in his spare time?"

"She is an absolute whizz at making standard military kit look almost elegant. She did all the tailoring on the stuff I bought in Silver Spring when you first got here, remember?"

Trajan mentally bookmarked \$50 as Corporal Fynes' fee for a rush job after he had used the computer system to confirm that his wife was on the crew list of the X-501 as an SGC Specialist. He also took the opportunity to send a message to Corporal Fynes of Supply.

"Is that Frances?" Samantha looked relieved. "I never got her second name."

"Right. As far as what you need to put in your kitbag," Trajan added, returning to the task in hand, "I should check with Sam."

"What do you usually take?"

"A couple of bars of soap, a towel, tooth-brushing kit, electric razor, spare underwear and a spare pair of trousers; I have a check-list I can show you. I can't say I've ever noticed if the lady soldiers wear make-up in space, but Sam could put you straight on that. Oh, yes, and it would be an idea to put your hair in a pony-tail in case the ship loses gravity."

"Because it's not a fact of life in space?"

"Not on anything smaller than a decent-size moon."

"Okay," said Samantha, taking notes.

"And when you get aboard the Five-Oh-One, you say: 'Specialist Trajan, S.J., reporting for duty, Captain.' That's the etiquette. And don't salute because you're not military. Wait for him to offer his hand and say: 'Welcome aboard, Dr. Trajan,' then shake his hand. That's what we civilian Specialists do."

"Okay, I'll try to remember that." Samantha added to her notes. "I don't have to wear this to today's mission briefing, do I?" She looked down at her uniform in disgust.

"You should wear that outfit only on missions. We do occasionally get Specialists who like to hang out in the

uniform, but someone usually puts them right on the protocol before they get laughed at too much. You'll be fine when the good corporal has done her thing. She'll make you fit to go on a recruitment poster."

Someone knocked on the door.

Trajan admitted a well-muscled woman of about thirty. She was slightly above average height and her natural expression was a hint of a confident smile. Trajan passed a well-folded \$50 bill to her in a handshake. "Quick work."

"I was nearby, sir," said the corporal.

"Corporal Fynes, you've met the other Dr. Trajan," said Trajan.

"At least Frances isn't laughing at my outfit," Samantha said in a somewhat warning tone.

"No problem, ma'am," said Fynes. "I'll soon have you sorted out."

"Have you ever seen my husband in his uniform?" said Samantha.

"All I had to do for your husband, ma'am, was make his right sleeve half an inch longer. He's that close to a standard size."

"I wish I was," sighed Samantha.

"Hey, all I have to do is what I do for Major Carter, ma'am. No problem at all."

"Yes, you did a wonderful job last time, on the stuff H.T. bought for me by remote shopping," Samantha acknowledged.

"My cue to get lost and be amazed when I get back," said Trajan.



Getting his wife to the mission briefing, Dr. Trajan found, was completely painless. In fact, she rooted him out of their quarters and insisted on their being the first to arrive at the briefing room. Samantha was wearing her lab-coat and civilian clothing but she now owned a uniform which had the proper military look.

SG-1 and SG-2 arrived next. Then General Hammond

escorted Colonel Neil Devonport, captain of the X-501, and his second-in-command, Major Arnold Cordero, into the room.

"You're the boffin stroke nerd who sorted out Five-Oh-One's flight controls?" said Devonport as he took a chair next to Trajan. "I've heard a lot about you."

"I assume you've been exposed to Colonel O'Neill?" Trajan replied with a smile.

"Just a little," laughed the colonel. "We almost met a few times last time you were aboard but whenever I asked about you, they told me you were busy and it would be better to talk to you later. But there never was a later."

"That's life all over," said Trajan.

General Hammond opened a blue binder and started the meeting by introduced Samantha to the unfamiliar faces. "As everyone is aware," he continued, "we're about to launch a mission to P-Two-R-Eight-One-Three to recover Goa'uld death gliders. This will involve the SGC personnel using the stargate to rendezvous at an intermediate planet with the Five-Oh-One, which will take them to the target planet. They will return here by the same route after the recovery operation. You've been on missions like this before, of course, Samantha?"

"Yes, sir. Four times," said Samantha.

"Successfully?" said Colonel Devonport.

"All but one. The first one became what the SG teams called a reconnaissance in force. The glider was too damaged to be worth salvaging so we collected parts and did some work to find out how easy it would be to disassemble a glider and bring it through the stargate."

"They do actually fly through the gate," Colonel O'Neill mentioned.

"Yes, but you have to get them stopped in time," said Samantha. "And then there's the parking problem in the gate room. We calculated we could get two in whole or four in if we did some minor disassembling. And given all the bother of removing them with that hoist they used to bring in the stargate, it made more sense to go for four at a time than two."

"I'd buy that for a dollar," O'Neill remarked with a glance at Trajan to acknowledge his source.

"The first mission was modified when we found the glider was too badly damaged to be worth salvaging whole," Samantha added. "That wasn't apparent until we found fried stuff inside it. Colonel Kowalski contacted the SGC and General Hammond cut the mission short. Well, your counterparts, General. We just brought some control systems back to study. That's how we found the recall device. As you know."

"Then you went to P-Two-R-Eight-One-Three?" said the general.

"Yes, we got all four of the lightly damaged gliders," said Samantha. "And some good parts from the wrecks."

"H.T., you're up to speed on your part in all this?" said the general.

"Yes, sir," said the other Dr. Trajan. "We've done a lot of dry runs on sample electronics, and after the trip to Nevada, it looks very doable. Subject to tweaks on the ground, if necessary. And S.J. has seen the whole process work, so we're quietly confident we can get the job done at the crash site on Eight-One-Three. Given a lack of interruptions by hostile forces."

"That seems more than usually likely," said General Hammond. "As we all know, the original scouting mission found that the DHD on the planet had been damaged. Major Carter got it working to get the SG-teams home but all subsequent attempts to dial the gate have failed."

"Suggesting the damage was to more than to the DHD," said Major Carter.

"Could be," said Colonel Devonport. "The Goa'uld don't seem very interested in re-establishing access to the planet; intelligence reports suggest they are not interested in that region of space."

"Maybe because they were getting their asses kicked good and proper while we were there," O'Neill suggested.

"We're still not sure who launched that attack," said Devonport, "which is worrying. But we do seem to have a very good opportunity to acquire repairable gliders for study

and training. Especially if their recall devices can be neutralized.”

“Mission conditions?” said the general.

“MALP data told us the weather gets really hot in the afternoons,” said Major Carter. “The temperatures heads for the higher eighties or low nineties them.”

“We shall be landing the recovery party approximately thirty minutes after the local dawn,” said Devonport. “The temperature will be in the mid-sixties then and comfortable for working. We’ll have about five and a half hours before the local noon. We should be ready to go long before then. How does that fit in with Samantha’s experience?” The colonel directed an inquiring look across the table.

“That’s when we got there,” Samantha offered. “Just after dawn. As far as I remember, it was our longest mission. It lasted three and a half hours and we recovered all four gliders from it. Disassembled to go through the stargate, of course. That worked okay where I come from.”

“As we’ll be loading them directly into the Five-Oh-One’s cargo bay, we won’t have to spend time disassembling them,” said Devonport, “Which should speed things up.”

“The SG teams will ring down to the planet first and establish a perimeter,” said General Hammond. “The Specialists and engineers will ring down only after the perimeter has been secured. SG-Two will take a drone and do an aerial survey of the site which was attacked when SG-One was there.”

“Do we expect to see anything much, sir?” said Colonel Kowalski.

“Just confirmation that the site has been abandoned,” said the general. “It was just bomb craters when you were there, Samantha?”

“Yes, sir,” she returned. “The stargate was still working there, as I said, but it looked like the planet had been abandoned.”

“Once the parking area is secure,” the general resumed, “You need to work quickly but with accuracy as your primary consideration. We all know what needs to be done and I would appreciate it if everyone would concentrate on their

personal assignments and trust everyone else with theirs. Samantha has been on four of these missions before. Our aim is to add a fifth success to her C.V.”



Recovery

[September 03, Wednesday]

Before starting his day's assignments, Dr. Trajan made a quick call at General Hammond's office with a piece of public relations. The general flicked through the modest contents of a binder with no pretence at comprehension.

"General Denzil's niece has made two assumptions," said Trajan. "One is invalid but I've made some suggestions about where to look for a work-around. The other needs a lot of work to find out if it will work, but I've given her some guidance on ways to get there."

"So you haven't solved all her problems, Doctor?"

"It's her problem, sir. I've just pointed her in some right directions. Which she'll appreciate a whole lot more because if she bridges the gaps, it will be her solution, not mine."

"Good. As far as the cryptographer is concerned, someone at the Pentagon has tried to get your Glider-Plus mission cancelled to give decoding Samantha's chip priority."

"That sounds like a quick way for him to get dead if my wife finds that out," said Trajan. "But typical of the Pentagon."

"Fortunately, saner heads prevailed," said General Hammond. "So the cryptographer has been put off until next week."

"I'm relieved to hear that. S.J. would have been impossible to live with if she'd been put off now."

"Not to mention everyone else who hopes to get his hands on Gould gliders." The general locked the folder in the top-left drawer of his desk. "This should do us some real good when we need it, if General Denzil's daughter can make your suggestions work."

During the afternoon, Dr. Trajan left the SGC to attend a training course on how to behave if abducted, and during a rescue operation. The course took place at the nearby Air Force Academy, which had suitable facilities for field training. SG-2 provided security for Trajan and bad guys for the active phase of the course.

“Have fun?” Colonel O’Neill remarked to Lt.-Colonel Kowalski when his and Kowalski’s teams met in the mess hall later in the afternoon.

“Trajan shot two of the extraction team,” Kowalski said with a laugh.

“Were they wearing ski masks?” said O’Neill

“They were pretending to be Special Forces, so, yes.”

“Trajan’s First Law of Combat: anyone hiding behind a mask is an enemy,” said O’Neill.

“What about the Lone Ranger?” said Kowalski.

“If he’s wearing a mask, Trajan will shoot him.”

“Batman? Robin?”

“Definitely Robin,” said Major Carter.

“By shot,” said Dr. Daniel Jackson, who was finding the conversation fascinating, “I assume you mean paint-balled?”

“Yes,” said Kowalski. “I hope that’s why he felt entitled to shoot first and not bother with questions.”

“I suppose it was valuable experience for the extraction team,” said Carter. “Coming up against a kidnap victim who was prepared to join in saving himself.”

“I think I’ll go back to the Academy and tell them that,” Kowalski returned with a laugh.

[September 04, Thursday]

Dr. Trajan had decided not to take the risk of mentioning either the Pentagon’s attempt to sabotage his wife’s-glider recovery expedition or his own adventure at the Academy. Thus Samantha was nervous but full of enthusiasm for the mission when they reported to the gate room in uniform with full expedition kit the next day.

"You are looking very smart, Samantha Trajan," said Teal'c as they joined SG-1; Trajan following habit.

"I took her outside and dragged her through a hedge a couple of times to get the right look," said Trajan.

"Thank you, Teal'c." Samantha ignored her husband pointedly.

"Nice outfit," O'Neill added. "I thought it was the other you at first. Corporal Fynes? The fifty-buck special?" he added to Trajan, who nodded with a smile.

"I was relieved to find she's as good as advertised with uniforms," said Samantha, not catching the reference to the payment. "All I have to do now is prove the same about myself."

"You're a Carter, for heck's sake," said Colonel O'Neill. "We all have every confidence in you. In both of you."

"Thank you for the endorsement, sir."

"All set for another trip through the stargate?"

"A bit nervous. I always rely on H.T. for moral support. Didn't people used to fly out of the other end in the early days?"

"That was a problem in our dialling protocol," said Major Carter. "We fixed it."

"Glad to hear it. You always let me hold your arm when we go through the stargate," Samantha added to her husband.

"I do? What does my wife say about that?"

"Your wife, who doesn't know about the stargate?" Samantha said in a 'you idiot' tone.

"Oh, yes. Silly me." Trajan offered his arm for grabbing by a nervous traveller. "Are we talking about clinging desperately or a gentle stroll across the universe?"

"It's usually clinging but being in uniform like this, just linking arms would be appropriate."

General Hammond arrived to see the group off on their journey to a planet, around which X-501 was orbiting. SG-2 took the lead. The Trajans followed with SG-1.

"My problem is I think too much about the physics of what's just happened," Samantha said as she and her husband emerged safely from the wormhole at their destination. "And it freaks me out."

“Ignorance would be bliss?”

“I suppose so.”

“Maybe we could just put you in NID’s Russian box and push it though. That way, you’d never know when it’s happening.”

“Maybe I should just convince myself that the Ancients worked out any bugs in the gate system zillions of years ago and there’s nothing to worry about.”

“Wouldn’t that be excessively sensible?” her husband mused.



X-501 arrived overhead. SG-2 assembled in a tight group on the platform for the ring-transporter and disappeared.

“If I scream, nobody listen,” Samantha said as she, her husband and Major Carter were waiting their turn to be ringed aboard X-501.

“If you get too loud, we’ll zat you,” said Trajan. “Just keep your arms in and you’ll be okay.”

There was the usual rush of swooshing sounds, lights, metal rings appearing and disappearing.

“Oh, my gosh! That was weird,” Samantha gasped when they were in orbit. “That was so mediaeval with those rings going down and up. It’s like something out of Leonardo’s notebook.”

“I wonder he was really a Goa’uld?” remarked Trajan.

“There’s probably a book and a movie in that,” Major Carter said with a laugh. “This way, S.J.”

The trio moved to a reception area.

“Welcome back aboard, Major,” said Colonel Devonport. “Dr. Trajan. I hope we won’t have to rely on your services this time out.”

“No need to worry, Captain,” said Trajan. “We have lots of genuine spacecraft experts along this time.”

“Such as your wife, the other Dr. Trajan,” said Colonel Devonport. “Welcome aboard.”

“Delighted to be here; you’ll never know how much,” Samantha said as she shook the captain’s hand.

The last members of the expedition ringed aboard. Trajan steered his wife to their quarters. Samantha was bursting with curiosity but she knew that the visitors were expected to make themselves scarce until their vessel was en-route to its destination.

Samantha parked her gear then went next door to join Major Carter, leaving her husband free to make some notes on a mathematical problem, which had been bothering him for several days. A summons from Colonel O'Neill told Major Carter that the crew had relaxed from launch mode in normal space to running mode in hyperspace. It was time for the SG teams to hold a joint briefing.

Samantha rushed back to the adjoining cabin. She stopped in the doorway and stared at her husband. "What are you doing?" she asked with a note of incredulity.

"Gazing at you in loving admiration? Something inexcusable that's obvious to you but not to me?" Trajan waited for the point.

"And drinking coffee and eating biscuits."

"I felt like a snack as a reward for my efforts." Trajan waved his notepad at his wife. "This session has been quite productive."

"Aren't you excited? We're on a spaceship. We should be exploring it, not sitting around snacking."

"Sweetheart, being on a spaceship is just like being at the SGC; all metal walls and military stuff, not many windows and everything air-conditioned and standard. Plus, I've been over every inch of this spaceship, checking for botched repairs that hadn't failed."

"In that case, you'll make a great tour guide."

"Haven't you been all over the plans dozens of times?"

"I want to see it working. All of it."

"I'd better put my yomping boots on, then."

"I wonder if I could get like you, so blasé about being on a spaceship?"

"It goes with the uniform. You can get used to anything. And we are supposed to be a species of infinite adaptability."

"Ever since I was brought into the stargate program, and I found out there are spaceships out here, I've wanted to be on

one. This is the best day of my life. Apart from our wedding day, of course,” Samantha added quickly.

“Actually, lots of people get married but how many get to be on an actual spaceship? I don’t mind if this is the best day of your life, S.J.”

“No, I wanted to marry you more than being on a spaceship.”

“Even if you’d been given the choice? One or the other?”

“Oh, yes. You first, spaceship second.”

“And I’ve got to live up to that,” Trajan said reflectively.

“Oh, I’m sure you’ll manage,” laughed Samantha. “They tell me you’re quite clever. Come on.”

Trajan abandoned his notebook and showed his wife to the bridge. He approached the captain’s chair, where Colonel Devonport was busy with the inevitable report.

“Permission to take my wife’s guided tour of your ship, Captain?” Trajan asked at a suitable point.

“Shouldn’t that be the other way round, Dr. Trajan?” the colonel said with a smile.

“After the amount of studying she’s done on the Five-Oh-One’s systems, she probably knows more about the ship than everyone else put together.”

“You know, I can believe that,” laughed the captain. “Carry on.”

“The drive room first,” said Samantha. “It’s this way.”

“I did actually know that,” Trajan said as he hurried to catch up with his wife’s disappearing form.

[September 05, Friday]

Dawn at the planet designated as P2R813 came in the early afternoon by the time frame aboard X-501. The ship arrived with its detectors at full range, alert for any signs of danger.

“Still no signs of Gould activity?” Colonel Devonport said when his command had reached a high orbit.

“No, sir,” said Lieutenant Steen at the main sensor station.

“But we are detecting a curious sort of gravitational lensing

effect,” said Major Carter. She and Samantha had taken up positions on either side of the lieutenant.

“So?” said Colonel O’Neill.

“It’s what you could expect from a badly calibrated cloaking device, sir. Extrapolating from some crumbs H.T. won from the Almed.”

“There’s another ship out there? In ambush, maybe?” said Colonel Devonport.

“Or wrecked and abandoned, given the attack we saw on the planet, sir,” said Carter.

“Did anyone else see that?” said Dr. Trajan.

“A sort of a flicker,” said his wife. “Maybe a cloaking device with a wonky power source?”

“Whoa!” said O’Neill as the other ship suddenly became visible.

“On target, ready to engage, sir,” the weapons technician reported.

“No life-signs detected,” Lieutenant Steen reported. “Minimal power readings. Barely any. Just enough for basic life support.”

“You can’t see any more gravity whatever?” said O’Neill.

“No, sir,” said Steen. “No further signs of gravitational lensing.”

“It looks shot-up, sir,” said Carter as an image appeared on the main viewer. “Maybe attacked by Jaffa serving a rival system lord, if we assume it belongs to Apophis.”

“The Gould never could play nice,” said O’Neill. “What is that? Ever seen anything like it before?” he added to the captain of X-501.

“New one on me,” said Devonport. “Teal’c?”

“I believe it to be called a ka’tak,” said Teal’c. “A larger version of the tel’tak scout vessel.”

“Capabilities?” said Devonport.

“Hyperdrive, shields and a cloak, and very limited weapons,” said Teal’c. “It relies on speed and stealth to achieve its objectives. A vessel used mainly by minor System Lords.”

Colonel O’Neill thought that he could detect a note of contempt in the voice of someone who had once been a slave

to a major Goa'uld System Lord. Apophis was able to operate much larger and much better equipped spacecraft.

"Ring system?" said Carter.

"Indeed," said Teal'c.

"Okay, I recommend we check it out as a threat before we proceed further," said Colonel Devonport.

"Agreed," said Colonel O'Neill. "Teal'c, Carter, you're with me."

"I'll sent two Marines to the ring room to back you up," said Colonel Devonport.



The boarding party searched the ka'tak quickly and efficiently. There no one aboard, there were no bodies and none of the escape pods was missing. The conclusion was that the ship had been ambushed but that the crew had managed to hide it with the cloak until the attackers had abandoned their search it.

The crew was presumed either to have been rescued by another spacecraft or to have ringed down to the planet to use the stargate. In that event, they had either been able to escape using the stargate or, if they had arrived after it had been damaged, they had been rescued by a spacecraft, they were still on the planet somewhere or they were dead.

Colonel Devonport assigned two of his complement of six Marines to the team which would ringed down to the planet to secure the area around the Goa'uld death gliders. Then the main mission began.

Dr. Trajan reported to the armoury to collect an MP-5 sub-machine gun in addition to his 9 mm sidearm. He returned to his cabin to collect his wife and his small pack.

"Jesus H. Christ, H.T., what's that?" Samantha demanded as soon as she saw the weapon.

"It's just a gun," said Trajan. "Look, Samantha, we're going into what could be hostile territory. We aren't expecting trouble but we do have to be prepared for it. So that means carrying packs with supplies of food, clothing and medical supplies. And it also means all firearms-capable personnel will

carrying arms and ammunition. It must have been like this on the glider missions you've already been on."

"We were wearing ordinary clothes under Air Force coveralls, not uniforms, and you didn't have a gun."

"You mean, all the security was handled by the SG teams and you and the other Specialists were some distance from it?"

"There was no one standing next to me holding a gun like that. Do you expect to have to use it?"

"No, of course not. It's just another piece of kit, S.J."

"Okay. But this different reality is biting me. I suppose the story is that if you don't have a gun, you'll need one? Because that's the way the Universe works?"

"Something like that."

"And you can shoot one of those things."

"You know that. You don't get them unless you know how to . . ."

"And you've done it for real. Not just on the range."

"Yes."

"When you were through the stargate with SG-One?"

"Not just with them. Kowalski's mob are pretty good at getting into trouble. Look, S.J., if we don't go loaded for bear, the Universe will chuck one at us."

"I don't think I want to have this conversation any more."

"Look, sweetheart, it's just a piece of kit. I don't expect to have to use it but I do have to drag it along."

"Okay."

"It goes with the job."

"Okay."

"Now say that like you mean it."

"I'm freaked out, H.T."

"And I'm trying to unfreak you.."

"I hope you're not going to tell me to lighten up."

"I wouldn't dare," Trajan said with a laugh. "Even though I'm armed to the teeth. Look, Samantha, I was lugging one of these around all through my last mission with the Five-Oh-One . . ."

"The one with Senator Kinsey?"

"Right. And even though we were in a war zone, I never

had to use it once. Because we were able to keep out of the way of all the trouble.”

“To protect your VIP?”

“Right. And if I’d do that for Kinsey, just think how out-of-trouble I plan to keep my wife.”

“Okay, I’m getting less freaked. I just get nervous, being so close to a gun like that.”

“Which is quite reasonable. But if someone starts shooting at me, I like to be able to shoot back, if only to put them off.”

“Okay. And I do mean that, H.T.”

“The sooner you get some work to get stuck into, the better.”

“That can’t happen soon enough.”

The Trajans headed for the ring-room. They arrived as SG-2 was following SG-1 down to the planet.

“Are you all right, ma’am?” one of the Marines asked, noting that Samantha was looking rather pale.

“I’m just being a wimp about all these guns,” Samantha returned. “I’m okay. Can we get going?”

“We’re just waiting for a go from the ground, ma’am,” said the Marine.



The mission moved smoothly into the next phase. The Trajans and Major Carter began to power up systems on the parked gliders and hunt recall devices. Teal’c and Dr. Jackson looked for log files to copy in search of intelligence information. Colonel O’Neill kept his attention rotating around the site, alert for danger and ready for trouble should it arrive. Eventually, he noticed that the activities of the science party had assumed a more leisurely tempo. He approached the group.

“Carter?” the colonel invited.

“Well, sir,” the ladies said simultaneously.

“Not you, Carter; her, Carter.” O’Neill’s finger moved from the former Dr. Carter to point at Major Carter. “And you’re not Carter any more, you’re Trajan, which is just as confusing.”

"Oh, yes," the new Dr. Trajan realized.

"Jack, why not just call them Carter One and Carter Two for the moment?" suggested the original Dr. Trajan.

"Who gets to be Carter One?" O'Neill asked cautiously.

"How about the one you've known longest?"

"That's fair," O'Neill decided. "Carter? One?"

"Well, sir," said Major Carter, "we've collected all the power readings, the way Samantha did with the other gliders in her parallel, and H.T. has just finished doing the Bragga series . . ."

"Okay, and I guess Carter Two has something to say which I won't understand even more?" protested O'Neill.

"Trajan One?" Samantha said with a smile.

"We've spotted all the recall devices . . .," Trajan began.

"That was quick," said O'Neill.

"Thanks to S.J., who invented the method, we knew what we were looking for and how to find it," said Trajan. "Swapping out the right circuit boards and crystals will take just a few minutes now we know where they are."

"Then the gliders will be good to go?"

"After we repair the original damage, which shouldn't take long, sir," Major Carter offered. "The whole idea was to make them easy to repair so we'd be tempted to try to adapt them . . ."

"Fine. I'll let you get on with that." O'Neill extracted himself from the conversation before it started to get too technical and involved.

"Before you go," said Trajan. "Fly, yes, fight, no. The weapons are a mess. We're still evaluating that situation."

"Okay, do what you can," said O'Neill.

"Have you ever flown one of these, Sam?" Samantha asked Major Carter as O'Neill strode away at a brisk pace, beginning a progress conference with Colonel Devonport over his comm-system.

"Oh, yes," said Carter. "I had to elbow a few guys aside to get my turn, though," she added with a laugh.

"I wouldn't mind being a passenger in one of them," said Samantha. "With no one shooting at me."

"Isn't that half the fun?" said Trajan.

"No," said Carter. "Okay, what I suggest we do now is we get all the bits we need to fix up these two gliders from the wrecks. Let's see if we can get them into flying condition before our time window runs out."

"Sounds like a plan," said Dr. Trajan.

"This is going to be fun," Samantha added.



Colonel Devonport made a final check of dimensions, then instructed his vessel to land in a clearing close to the glider park. The landing area offered a tight fit but there was a cleared corridor to the parking area. His crew began to load complete gliders and a collection of parts into the cargo hold.

"Carter? One?" Colonel O'Neill invited as he joined Major Carter, who was supervising the operation.

"We now have two gliders in partial working order, sir," Major Carter reported. "The flight systems are okay but the weapons need work. We had to use some parts from the other two gliders but they can be put into working order with a bit of time. We have the spare parts."

"No weapons?"

"Not yet, sir. But Teal'c and H.T. have been crawling around the wrecks that were dumped over there and they've salvaged more than enough parts to repair our main four gliders completely."

"Now, that's what I wanted to hear."

"We should be able to work on them in the cargo bay, sir."

"That can wait until we get back to Earth."

"Yes, sir. Are you volunteering to tell that to Samantha?"

"Carter Two is all fired up to finish the job?" the colonel said with a smile.

"And she's not the only one, sir," Major Carter admitted.

O'Neill's radio came to life. "Kowalski, nothing to report."

"Very well," O'Neill responded to each of the reports from the pickets.

"Remind me, Jack," Kowalski added after the last report had come in, "what's the next meal? Lunch or dinner?"

"Now you got me not sure," O'Neill complained.

The loading operation was completed without incident. The pickets fell back to the clearing and X-501 sailed up into orbit. After a scan of the immediate region for hostile craft, which proved negative, Colonels O'Neill and Devonport took stock.

"Okay, we're in a stable orbit, and we have a cargo hold full of gliders, parts and Specialists, who are working on the gliders," said Colonel Devonport. "Do we head for home or do we push our luck, to quote Dr. Trajan."

Colonel O'Neill glanced automatically in the direction of their orbital companion; the ka'tak. "We have a big opportunity," he decided. "I was ambushed by Trajan and Daniel on the ground and they said at the very least, we should get all the data we can off the computers on the good ship Nameless."

"The hulk?" Devonport said with a smile.

"It's as good a name as any," O'Neill returned with a shrug.

"I was just thinking that X-Five-Oh-Two would be much better."

"Trajan's next option is to put a working party aboard to survey the damage and see if it could be put into flying order in a matter of hours. We know the life-support is still working from the first look. We could build on that."

"I guess, if we restrict our window here, the odds of anyone coming looking for that ka'tak while we're here are very low."

"Trajan said they can't be calculated because there's no data to work from."

"So we make an executive decision based on our own assessment of the risk factors?"

"What we're paid to do," O'Neill returned with a nod.

"What sort of a boarding party did Trajan suggest?"

"Him, to translate logs, his wife to check the systems and two or three technicians, who are used to working with machinery and gadgets, to help the lady."

"Leaving Carter, Teal'c and Dr. Jackson, plus our techs, to do the same with the gliders we recovered?"

"I think it would take a direct order to get Carter and Daniel out of your cargo bay right now," O'Neill said with a laugh.

"Now they're in full nerd mode?" Devonport said with a

smile. "It sounds like a good plan."

"To quote Trajan: if we don't do it, we'll be kicking ourselves and saying we should have done it all the way home."

"Because that's the way the Universe works?" laughed Devonport.

"Roger that," said O'Neill.

"Okay, I suggest we give the Trajans two hours for a review of what they can do with the hulk," said Devonport. "In the meantime, we'll go to just short of action stations. All systems fully manned and ready for a surprise, and the Five-Oh-One providing maximum cover for the hulk."

"With the nerds still working in the cargo bay here?"

"As long as they're ready to strap in or hold on if something starts."



Samantha Trajan ringed aboard the ka'tak with her husband and two technicians as pairs of hands. They arrived with small packs, cases of instruments and supplies, and appropriate weapons.

"Have you ever used those things?" Samantha asked as her technicians secured their weapons within easy reach.

"In combat, you mean?" said S.M.T. West. "Like Dr. Trajan? No, ma'am."

"We've had training, of course," C.T. Berford added. "But we'll be following his lead in the very unlikely event that we need them."

"Let's hope that doesn't happen," said Samantha. "Do we have to call you Captain?" she added to as her husband.

"Technically, yes," Trajan realized. "And you two are?" he added to the technicians.

"Natalie West, sir. Senior medical technician." She was around thirty years old, of average female height and she looked like she would be someone useful to have around in a brawl. An air of quiet confidence radiated from beneath a mop of Caledonian red hair.

"Roger Berford, sir. Communications technician." He was

the same age as the other technician, half a head taller and he looked as if he would struggle to make his way around an assault course. His dark hair was stubble and he looked as if he would be totally lost without his datapad.

“Two people who are familiar with handling gadgets, like myself,” Trajan said. “Pairs of hands who can make themselves useful when the expert figures out what needs doing.”

“This guy figured out the flight control systems for the Five-Oh-One, with some help from Teal’c, so he’s not just a pair of hands,” said Samantha. “He’s someone to listen to.”

“Another spacecraft engineer, Ma’am?” said West.

“He sees himself as more of a mechanic than an engineer; a fixer rather than a designer; but he’s someone you’d want on this sort of job.”

“Thanks for the endorsement,” said Trajan. “The crew of the Five-Oh-One have already looked over the essential systems and we’re okay for life support and short-range communications. And the rest room is over there, marked WC. Our job is a survey of the major systems.”

“I had a quick looking at the drive,” said Samantha. “I think it’s okay but the control systems for the hyperdrive are a mess.”

“Sub-light and its controls?”

“That should work. But I need to run some checks first.”

“Okay, could you run a comprehensive but swift check of what else works? As I said, we know life support is okay because that was checked as soon as anyone came aboard. We need to find out what works, what can be fixed and what’s hopeless. Drive, shields and cloak first, then anything else you can think of.”

“Okay,” said Samantha, “and if you can get busy with translating the instruction manuals so we’re not working completely in the dark?”

“Sounds like a plan,” said Trajan.

“You’ve been on one of these missions before, ma’am?” said C.T. Berford. “Glider retrieval?”

“Oh, yes, this is my fifth,” said Samantha. “But this is the first time they’ve let me work on a spaceship this size. Unlike

Captain Trajan.”

“I’ll leave you making the most of it,” Trajan said with a smile.



“Trajan, report,” said the temporary captain of the good ship *Nameless* when he reached one of his preset time markers.

“Are you trying to sound like Colonel O’Neill?” laughed his wife.

“Not a time for larking about, S.J.”

“Sorry,” said Samantha. “What is it I’m supposed to do?” she added after a pause.

“Tell me how you’re getting on.”

“We’ve hardly got started.”

“We’ve been aboard for eighteen minutes and counting. Is there an automatic repair system, by the way?”

“Yes, but it’s too busy working on itself to think about anything else.”

“Okay. What’s the situation with the drive?”

“I’m making some progress but it’s too soon to say if the hyperdrive controls are fixable. There are a lot of fried crystals in the control boxes, but I’ve located lots of replacements in those lockers you told me about, so we could be okay. But there’s also a lot of fried circuitry going to the controls. But if I had some circuit diagrams, I might be able to figure a way round the bad bits.”

“Okay, I’m still ploughing through files, but I’ll carry on looking. It’s better to have some defence than none at all, S.J. And if hiding is all we’ve got, what about the old hiding in the star’s chromosphere trick?”

“The shields don’t work even more that the hyperdrive doesn’t. Dead crystals and totally fried circuits. That needs a major overhaul on the ground. But the rest of it, the drive and the cloak, I get the impression that whoever attacked this ship knew exactly where to shoot to take out the control systems but leave the drive and the power systems intact.”

“Planning to come back later and salvage it, you mean?”

“That looks likely, yes.”

"That sounds good from our point of view. What about the cloak?"

"That actually looks easily fixable. The problem the last crew had was that someone did a repair that caused more damage than it fixed."

"That sounds like the mess the Goa'uld made of Five-Oh-One's fine control for the flight systems."

"Yes, that looks like what the Goa'uld do. I think they went wrong quite a while ago and they've been on completely the wrong track ever since. Everything they've done has made it more unreliable . . ."

"Hold on a minute," said Trajan as he received a call from X-501.



Aboard X-501, the crew were approaching that point at which they had to keep reminding themselves to remain vigilant in the face of nothing happening. Lieutenant Steen, at the main sensor station, swallowed a yawn then noticed a flicker.

"Captain, sir," he warned. "Possible company."

"Shields up," said Colonel Devonport. "Full Red."

A tak'lak dropped out of hyperspace a very cautious distance from the planet. It had more than enough time to spot the presence of an unknown craft, in addition to the stranded ka'tak, as it began to slow down prior to going into orbit.

X-501 juddered as the shields absorbed and deflected a shot from the enemy ship. Two shots from X-501 rocked the tak'lak as it began to pick up speed.

"After him," said Colonel Devonport. "Let's chase this guy away."

"I don't think they can go to hyperdrive, sir," Lieutenant Steen reported two minutes later. "We must have hit something vital."

"Let's see if we can catch them," said Colonel Devonport. "And find out exactly who they are."

"What about our people on the other ship?" said Colonel O'Neill.

"Limited pursuit. They should be safe enough here for the moment."

"Okay," said O'Neill. He moved to the communications station to contact Dr. Trajan and deliver an update on their current situation.

Trajan's report was brief of necessity. "Is it okay to manoeuvre this ship closer to the planet to make us harder to spot?" he finished.

"You're in command, Trajan One," said O'Neill. "Do what you think best. We'll be back for you as soon as."

"Looking forward to that, Trajan out," said the captain of the hulk.

"They must be here to try to salvage this spaceship," said Samantha when Trajan had briefed his crew.

"If they are, that suggests you're right about the damage being a lot more fixable than it looks," said Trajan.

"Right," said Samantha, feeling quite pleased with herself.

"On that subject, can you fix the cloak? Quickly?"

"I think so. I think I can by-pass the repairs."

"Okay, if we can disappear, that will be a big leap forward."

"Shouldn't we be concentrating on the hyperdrive first?"

"If you can't run, don't be found. That's the way the priorities stack up. It's a military thing."

"I'll take your word for it, Captain."

"I wouldn't make jokes about that, ma'am," said C.T. Berford. "Dr. Trajan really is our captain and responsible for the ship and us."

"Yes, I hope you realize that if you crash this thing, I'll get the blame and they'll stop it out of my pay?" said Trajan.

"Never mind, we'll be okay living on my salary," said Samantha. "Being invisible isn't protection if we can be spotted the way Sam spotted this ship when we got here."

"Not everyone watching detectors is as smart as Major Carter, and the system here was on the blink," Trajan countered. "We should be okay if it's working properly. But I'll see what the instruction book has to say about it. So you're going to drop everything and fix the cloak as your immediate priority, then move on to the hyperdrive controls?"

"Check."

"How long will fixing the cloak take?"

"Five minutes? It's just a bit of re-routing circuits."

"Okay. Can I give you any help with it?"

"Another pair of hands would just be in the way."

"Okay, I'll crack on with reviewing the instructions for useful info."

"Check. Trajan out. Oh, Trajan back in again. We could do with some coffee."

"I'll get someone to put the kettle on."

"Is anyone else aboard, ma'am?" S.M.T. West asked with a frown.

"Just us and him," said Samantha. "That's what you call the British sense of humour."

"Shouldn't one of us be making the coffee, ma'am?" said West.

"Do you know your way around this ship?"

"Well, no."

"H.T. does by now. He'll know the layout from all the Goa'uld files he's been looking at. And where he can plug his coffee machine in."

Five minutes later, Trajan said: "Coffee, chaps," as he began to unpacked a black plastic box.

"Did you bring some biscuits?" his wife asked.

"Of course, I brought biscuits. What sort of caterer do you think I am? I also brought some snacks in case anyone gets famished."

"Me for one of those," said S.M.T. West. "Hey, this is good," she added through a mouthful of something crumbly and full of flavour. "What is it?"

"You don't want to know," said Trajan.

"Is this Goa'uld grub?" his wife said suspiciously.

"Worse. It's Air Force field rations," said Trajan.

"I didn't think you could make them edible," said C.T. Berford.

"It certainly strains your ingenuity to the limit," said Trajan. "Meanwhile, what have you got, Scotty?"

"What happened to all the military crap?" laughed Samantha.

"I just wanted to find out if your universe has *Star Trek*."

"Yes, we do."

"So what you got, cloakwise?"

"I'm just about and find out." Samantha tapped a control.

"There. Okay, that's working."

"Well done."

"All appreciation gratefully received. Okay, now we'll get on with checking out the hyperdrive."

"Can I move the ship while you're working? Using the sub-light drive?"

"I suppose so. Why?"

"If we can go into a lowish orbit around that planet, that should give us a better chance of not being seen by the next ship to pop out of hyperspace until we know if it's friend or foe."

"The flight control computer won't be working."

"It's okay, it's just a simple orbital transfer. I'll work it out on a piece of paper."

"Do the Goa'uld have paper?"

"I've brought my own notepad. And a pen."

"Good thinking, Batman. Make it so. Does the bald guy say that in your *Star Trek* too?"

"Quite a lot," Trajan said with a nod.

"You're very calm about all this," said Samantha. "Anyone would think you did this every day."

Trajan shrugged his shoulders. "If we're going to get away with it, there's nothing to worry about. And if it's going to go pear-shaped, we won't be alive to worry."

"Very zen, sir," laughed S.M.T. West.

"Okay, after we've had our coffee, everybody works for the next hour," said Trajan. "Then we'll have a compulsory rest period. We'll all sit down and do nothing for fifteen minutes. That includes you, Samantha Jane, so no arguments."

"Aye, aye, Cap'n," laughed Samantha.



Ten minutes into the pursuit, Colonel Davenport took stock of his options. At full sub-light thrust, X-501 was just a little

faster than the other ship, but the difference was small. The Colonel started by trying to put himself in the position of whoever was in charge of the tak'lak. "What are their options?" he invited.

"Keep going and see who runs out of fuel first?" said Lieutenant Steen.

"Keep going and repair the hyperdrive on the fly, and hope to get away by a sudden jump to hyperspace," said Major Carter.

"What are our options?" the colonel invited. "Slow down, chase them a bit longer and then let them think we gave up in disgust? Remembering we still have four people back at the planet and it will take us eight days to get into weapons range at this rate of closing."

"Sir, I've got a plan," Carter said to the two colonels.

"Never thought you wouldn't have," said O'Neill.

"We have two gliders in flying trim, sir, and we've made a start on repairing their weapons. If we could get that done and launch them as fighters, we might be able to do enough damage to slow them down enough to let the Five-Oh-One engage them."

"You can do that?" said O'Neill. "Fix the weapons?"

"Harold Trajan and I stripped many working components from the weapons systems of the death gliders on what he called the junk heap," Teal'c volunteered. "We should have sufficient parts for Major Carter's repairs. Death gliders would be able to catch that tak'lak. But they have low endurance. We would have to strike very quickly."

"Carter, how long to fix the weapons?" said O'Neill.

"Twenty minutes tops, sir," said Carter. "We know exactly what we have to do, and we're already well on with the work . . ."

"Okay, we'll go with Sam's plan?" said Colonel Devonport.

O'Neill nodded agreement. "Get the gliders ready to fight. Then we'll have some arm-wrestling to decide who gets to fly them."

"You and Teal'c are the obvious choices, sir," said Carter.

"You've more than earned your chance to try out a glider, Sam," O'Neill decided. "You and Teal'c."

"Great!" Major Carter followed Teal'c back to the cargo bay with renewed enthusiasm.



Samantha Trajan polished her glasses before delivering her preliminary report. "The good news is I think we can fix the hyperdrive controls," she began. "The bad news is it could take several days without more help. The quickest solution involves some engineering work that needs to be done outside. And we don't have the equipment to do it. That's all on the X-Five-Oh-One."

"So what's your answer?" her husband invited.

"Carry on with preparatory work for when the Five-Oh-One gets back. Do what we can with what we've got while we're waiting. There's lots of circuitry we can use as alternatives but we need to know what we're disconnecting in case it's something vital."

"Quite," said her husband.

"But you already knew that."

"But you were just thinking out loud, of course."

"It's true what the general says; you could have been a diplomat."

"I'm not sure that's necessarily a compliment, given the shady deeds diplomats get up to. But I'll receive it in the sense intended. I wish we had Daniel here."

"Why, is he an expert on hyperdrive technology?"

"No, but he could translate these Goa'uld technical manuals faster than me because he's done more of it and he doesn't have to work everything out from first principles."

"But he probably doesn't know all the technical terms you know."

"There's always a snag when the Universe hates you. But the good news is I should be finished with the stuff we need for the drive in about five minutes."

"Fine. You can help us with the repairs then. I hear you got quite a lot of practice at that on the Five-Oh-One."

"No rest for the wicked," Trajan remarked.

Ten minutes later, Samantha abandoned her self-assigned work area to watch what her husband was doing. "How come you're doing all your circuit reroutes ten times faster than anyone else?" she asked when Trajan turned and looked at her.

"I'm matching the codes where I can," said Trajan.

"What codes?"

"These ones, here. Look." Trajan pointed to a junction point.

"These codes in Goa'uld? Which only you can read?"

"Those two don't match," said C.T. Berford, peering to the junction in question.

"No, but they're equivalents," said Trajan. "And they belong to systems we can do without, which is why I'm using them. If I'm working noticeably faster than anyone else, it would be an idea if you directed me to the connection jobs you want done as a priority."

"Yes, I was just thinking that," said Samantha. "In fact, you do the connecting and we'll concentrate on the testing and we might even be able to get this done a whole lot faster than I expected."



Colonel O'Neill arrived on the bridge of X-501 at a brisk walk and settled in his mission-commander chair. "Carter and Teal'c are getting suited up," he told Colonel Devonport. "The gliders are good to go."

"Sir," said Lieutenant Steen, "they're slowing down."

"How much?"

"We'll be in weapons range in four minutes, sir. Less."

"What's happening?" said O'Neill.

"Sir, looks like their sub-light drive has packed in. They've stopped accelerating and they're just drifting at their final velocity."

"Match speed then close cautiously," Colonel Devonport ordered.

Four life pods ejected from the tak'lak.

"Veer off starb'd," ordered Colonel Devonport.

X-501 made a sharp right turn. The tak'lak became an expanding cloud of debris, which the X-501's shields deflected effortlessly.

"Locate and rescue survivors," Colonel Devonport ordered. "Do you want to tell the glider crews to stand down, Jack?"

"No," said O'Neill, knowing that he would have to.

Four silent Jaffa prisoners ended up in the brig. Teal'c identified them from their forehead tattoos as serving Sebek and Mayet, two upper-tier Goa'uld with System Lord ambitions. It seemed reasonable to conclude that these two had combined to drive Apophis' forces off the planet where the glider trap had been set.

X-501 headed back to the planet at its best speed. The mission commanders remained unsure whether the detour had been completed as fast as could reasonably be expected or whether the Trajans and two members of the crew had been exposed to an unacceptable level of risk.

"So, Jack, was this side trip designed to lure us away from the Trajans?" Colonel Devonport wondered as the two commanders and their deputies were taking a private coffee break.

"How would they know they're on that ship, sir?" said Major Carter.

"They'd know some important nerds will be," said Colonel O'Neill.

"Aren't we being a bit too diabolical?" said Major Cordero, the second-in-command of X-501. "How would they know we were here?"

"The Universe hates us?" said O'Neill.

"Sounds like you've been over-exposed to Dr. Trajan, Jack," laughed Colonel Devonport.

"I don't know about that," said O'Neill. "If you assume the Universe does hate us, things do start to make a lot more sense."

"If Apophis does come back here, sir," said Carter, "and finds the derelict and those gliders gone, he could well assume that whoever blew him off the planet in the first place was responsible rather than us."

“Assuming his spies don’t find out about our four prisoners,” said Major Cordero.

“Life doesn’t do uncomplicated,” said O’Neill.



X-501 approached P2R813 with its detectors at maximum range, alert for trouble. It soon became apparent that there was no sign of the derelict. The lack of a rapidly expanding cloud of debris was slightly reassuring, but not very.

“Could they have flown off somewhere?” Colonel Devonport wondered, half to himself.

“It’s possible, sir,” said Major Cordero, “but I wouldn’t have thought they’d have been able to fix the hyperdrive in the time available.”

“Not even with two certified geniuses working on it?” said O’Neill.

“It’s unlikely, sir,” said Carter. “The initial survey said the hyperdrive controls were toast.”

“No sign of them on the planet, sir,” Lt. Steen reported. “Well, no sign of their ship, that is.”

“Crap!” said Colonel O’Neill.



Reunited

[September 06, Saturday]

The last thing that General Hammond needed was the arrival of Colonel Simoncel from the Pentagon to take charge of Dr. Trajan. The visitor was full of his own importance and believed in showing documents for the minimum time needed to establish his credentials and offering a bare minimum of explanation at the Security post at ground level.

The C.O. of Station Zebra took an instant dislike to the visitor when he breezed into General Hammond's office.

"Dr. Trajan is away on a mission vital to national security," General Hammond told his visitor after taking his time over reading a two-line requisition on impressive notepaper.

"Off-world?" said Simoncel.

"I'm not at liberty to discuss the mission without proper clearance." The general played the stuffy bureaucrat.

"I think you'll find that I have all the clearance you need, General," returned Simoncel, unfazed.

"Subject to necessary verification."

"When do you expect Dr. Trajan to return?"

"He's on an open-ended mission, so the only answer I can give is 'on completion'."

"I'm here for Dr. Samantha Trajan, General, not her husband."

"In fact, both Trajan are currently off-world."

"Both of them?" Colonel Simoncel looked genuinely surprised.

"Yes."

"Separately?"

"No, the same mission. Each has knowledge necessary to ensure the success of the mission. Dr. Samantha Trajan's knowledge of physics and Dr. Harold Trajan's mathematical talents."

“Major Carter is a physicist.”

“But she doesn’t have the same uniquely relevant experience, which Samantha Trajan brings to the mission. Because they are quite different versions of Major Carter. Samantha Carters with different histories and different areas of expertise, not duplicates of the same person.”

“And you actually let Samantha Trajan go off-world?” Colonel Simoncel was still struggling with this news.

“Both Trajans have knowledge vital to the success of the mission.” General Hammond continued to stonewall. “Which has full approval from the Pentagon. As you would know if your clearance is sufficient.”

“Samantha Trajan has knowledge vital to the security of the planet, General. She is one of our most valuable assets.”

“I am well aware of the importance of her knowledge, Colonel. And talking about Dr. Carter as an asset is highly offensive. She is a human being, she is a member of the SGC staff, she is a refugee from a version of our planet which has been overrun by the Gould. She deserves more.”

“Nevertheless, General, she has knowledge of great value to us in a number of areas.”

“Which has been retrieved here at the SGC and made available to those who can use it,” the general pointed out.

“The Pentagon feels that the process can be accelerated.”

“With all respect due to your superiors at the Pentagon, Colonel, the process is being conducted here by experts who have Dr. Trajan’s best interests at heart as well as those of the country.”

“That is a matter to be determined, General.”

“And I doubt that Dr. Trajan would choose to be separated from her husband.”

“As a major of the United States’ Air Force, she will go where she is assigned.”

“For your information, Colonel, Samantha Trajan has always been, and remains, a civilian employee here at the SGC. She’s not military.”

“With respect, General, we only have her word for that.”

“I have been in daily contact with her since her arrival at the SGC, Colonel, and I think I can tell whether someone has

been subject to military discipline. And that certainly does not apply to Samantha Trajan. Neither has she ever received training as an officer.”

“Details can be somewhat fluid, General.”

“That sounds more like the NID talking than the Pentagon,” General Hammond said suspiciously.

“We all serve our country, General.”

General Hammond’s phone rang.

“Message from Five-Oh-One, sir,” said one of the communications technicians. “Four death gliders retrieved with their recall devices removed. But the derelict ship with the Trajans and technicians West and Berford aboard has gone.”

“Gone?” repeated the general in a tone of mystification.

“No longer there when the Five-Oh-One returned to the planet after pursuing an enemy spaceship, sir. No further information after that.”

“Thank you.” General Hammond replaced the receiver. “I think our problem has just taken an unexpected twist,” he told Colonel Simoncel.



X-501’s crew completed a thorough sweep to the limit of the ship’s detectors, and included the three small moons in the survey. All that came out of the survey was the discovery of two more bombed encampments on the surface of the planet. There was no sign of the good ship *Nameless*.

“If it was Sam Carter aboard, we’d think she’d done something really cute,” Colonel O’Neill said to the group gathered around Colonel Devonport’s chair. “If it’s another version of Carter plus Trajan, it has to be double cute.”

“Or quadruple,” said Major Carter. “If it’s cute squared.”

“If we had Trajan here, he could explain that,” O’Neill said with a heavy sigh of frustration.

“Did they fix the engines?” said Devonport.

“No sign they went into hyperdrive, sir,” returned Lt. Steen. “The only recent residuals are from us and that tak’lak.”

"They definitely didn't land somewhere?" said O'Neill. "Say, to avoid being picked up by a Gould mothership, which suddenly appeared out of nowhere?"

"There's no evidence that another ship of any size was here since we were last here, sir," said Lt. Steen.

"And they're not behind that planet?"

"We would have seen them on the way in, sir," said Lt. Steen.

"If we eliminate the impossible, as Sherlock Holmes said," said Dr. Jackson, "what's left is what happened."

"If they didn't go anywhere, they must still be here?" said Carter.

"And we can't detect them because . . . ?" O'Neill invited.

"They must have fixed the cloak," said Carter. "Possibly because they couldn't fix the engines. I wouldn't have thought they'd have been able to do that in the time available."

"Not even with two certified geniuses working on it?" said O'Neill. "So why haven't they yelled 'Boo!' at us?"

"Unknown, sir," said Carter. "Unless they're too busy to look. Or their tweaks mean they can't see what's around them."

"I can't see you because you can't see me?" Colonel O'Neill said incredulously. "Really?"

"Maybe," Carter said with an apologetic smile.

"Sir, I'm getting a message," said Communications Technician Thiery.

"Where from?" said Colonel Devonport.

"No obvious point of origin, sir."

"Carter?" said O'Neill when she rushed to the detector station.

"I don't know, sir," said Major Carter. "I can't detect anything at all close to us."

"Sir, it's a challenge rather than a hail," said C.T. Thiery. "From the tone of it. I don't recognize the language."

"Let's hear it," ordered Devonport.

The brief message burst from the speaker system. It did, indeed, have a hostile tone.

Whilst everyone else was frowning, Daniel Jackson began to laugh. "That's H.T.," he said.

"And you know that because?" said Colonel O'Neill as Major Carter said, "Nothing at all on the detectors, sir. And definitely no point of origin for the signal."

"The language is Goa'uld," said Teal'c. "And the message is: 'Whom do you serve and whom do you trust?'"

"It's a quote from a new TV series that's in preparation," said Daniel. "H.T. is a fan of the writer and producer. That's a sort of a theme statement from the series."

"Put me on broadcast," said O'Neill. "Trajan, report," he added when C.T. Thiery nodded to him.

"*Mudlark*, ahoy, this is ESS *Nameless*," Dr. Trajan's voice said from the bridge speakers.

"I still have no idea where that's coming from," said Carter.

"Trajan, where in hell are you?" said O'Neill.

"Five hundred metres off your port quarter, Colonel. About ten degrees up-bubble relative to your equator."

"Why can't Carter get a fix on your transmission?"

"I've been tweaking things while the other Dr. Trajan and her staff have been working on the drive controls."

"Why didn't you contact us sooner? We've been looking for you for half an hour."

"We're in a low orbit around the planet. We must have been round the back when you arrived. You've only just hove into view. You were obviously going round the planet in the same direction but in a higher, slower orbit. And we're all been rather busy over here, trying to be elusive in case some more Goa'uld minions turned up."

"Do you have hyperdrive?"

"We'll know in about ten minutes, when S.J. finishes her setup tests on the jury-rigged control systems. All the bits are in place. We just need to be sure they'll stay there and the work-arounds will work. How did you get on?"

"We chased the intruder until its engines gave out and the crew ejected and blew it up. We need to be out of here before someone realizes it's overdue."

"Understood. I have some data to transmit to you about what we've been doing. Just in case there's a loud bang when S.J. turns the ignition key. This one just is like the Five-Oh-One was. But fifty times worse. Modifications on

modifications which were never going to work in the first place.”

“Major Carter?” said Colonel Devonport.

“We’re receiving the telemetry stream, sir,” Carter reported.

“Daniel might want to ring over here,” Trajan added. “I’ve got something that will knock his socks off. A new Rosetta Stone.”

“Tell me more,” Dr. Jackson invited.

“Ancient texts with translations by Goa’uld scavengers. If these translations are any good, this is a major find.”

“Before anyone goes anywhere,” said Devonport, “let’s get a test of the hulk’s hyperdrive done. Dr. Trajan, I’d suggest a half-hour trip in the direction of home; subject to everything staying okay at your end.”

“Just what my Chief Engineer suggested,” said Trajan. “Followed by thorough checks of everything when we’ve put a good distance between ourselves and this planet.”

“Okay, let’s sort out the details.” said Devonport. “Has anyone checked your command for a recall device, by the way?”

“First thing we did after Samantha got the cloak working,” said Trajan.



The test of the salvaged ship’s hyperdrive proceeded without incident. Both craft dropped out of hyperspace together and X-501 manoeuvred to within fifty metres of what Colonel Devonport had begun to call X-502, not knowing that Dr. Trajan had renamed the vessel *ESS Aldan Sheringham* in honour of the Special Forces corporal who had saved his wife’s life. Aboard the salvaged craft, Samantha Trajan and her technicians began to run system checks.

“Where’s Daniel?” Colonel O’Neill asked, having noticed that X-501’s bridge had become less crowded.

“He’s with H.T., sir,” said Major Carter. “But don’t even think about trying to get any sense out of them for a while. They’re in what you’d call language nerd mode. Permission to ring over to the other ship to see what Samantha’s done with

the control systems?”

“I guess,” said O’Neill. “Clear it with Devonport first. This is why you should never have lots of nerds along on a mission,” he added to Teal’c. “Carter Two will get Carter One talking spaceships down in the engine room, and Daniel and Trajan are talking about a language that’s been dead for a million years. So there’s just the two of us left to hold down the fort. If only we could stick Specialists back in their box as soon as they’ve done what they’re there for.”

“In fact,” Teal’c said with an apologetic smile, “Samantha Trajan has asked me to join her team as an honorary spaceship-nerd.”

“In that case, I’ll join you,” O’Neill decided. “I’m hungry.” Teal’c raised his eyebrows in question.

“Wherever Trajan is, the food will be excellent,” O’Neill told him.



Dr. Trajan abandoned his academic work to play captain when the new guests ringed aboard.

“Trajan, report,” Colonel O’Neill said as he emerged from the ring transporter. “That’s Captain Trajan,” he added for the benefit of Samantha, who was checking systems within earshot, waiting for Teal’c to join her.

“We have life support, cloak, hyperdrive and sub-light drive,” said Trajan, “we’re nearly done with checking our repairs to the hyperdrive system’s controls. No problems thus far. The shields are beyond repair and the weapons are a joke. Even if they were working.”

Samantha listened in astonishment as her husband delivered a report on the state of the ship’s systems, which was a model of conciseness and completeness.

“Fine,” said O’Neill after Trajan had added that it would be wise to monitor the hyperdrive’s control systems closely during a flight home.

“Doesn’t he outrank you?” Samantha remarked when she judged that the reporting process was completed. “He’s the captain of this spaceship and you’re just in charge of an SG

team, so shouldn't you be reporting to him? No offence about the 'just'," she added quickly.

"And none taken," Colonel O'Neill said with a smile. "Trajan? Sorry, Captain Trajan?"

"As captain of this ship," said Trajan. "I can lord it over anyone who comes aboard. Except the overall commander of the mission."

"Ah," said Samantha. "Okay."

"But that's military crap," Trajan added, "which a civilian consultant probably wouldn't be up to speed on."

"Now we've sorted that out," said O'Neil, "any food?"

"Yes," said Trajan, "there are some snacks in a transport box in the control room."

"Snacks," O'Neill said to himself with a smile of anticipation.

"And cake," Trajan called after the retreating figure.

"Excellent!" drifted back to him.

O'Neill loaded a mess tin with snacks and a generous chunk of cherry cake. He frowned disapproval at Dr. Jackson, who had an untouched slice of cake on a plate beside his notepad. "Enjoying yourself, Daniel?" he remarked.

"The archives here are really cool, Jack," Daniel returned. "We have translations and there are also some transliterations."

"So?" said O'Neill.

"Jack, when you say the Goa'uld words, you're creating the sound of the original Ancient words," said Daniel.

"So?" said O'Neill.

"So it's of great interest to linguistic nerds," Trajan offered. "But of absolutely no interest to the people who have to try to keep the nerds alive when they're off in their own little world."

"Check," said O'Neill, with a hint of a smile.

"Assuming the transliterations are valid," Trajan added to Daniel.

Daniel responded with a wry smile.

Colonel O'Neill suddenly decided that he had other things to see elsewhere as the nerds resumed their discussions.

"Yes, but why do them otherwise?" Daniel said as the colonel moved out of earshot. "The Goa'uld aren't noted for

their sense of fun.”

“Agreed,” said Trajan. “If there isn’t power and oppression involved, they don’t want to know.”

“Unless the transliterations were done to impress someone? Look at me, I speak Ancient, here’s me doing it.”

“That would work.”

“But it’s just idle speculation, of course.”

“Alternatively, it’s a possibility that we can leave hanging in the air to await confirmation or demolition if any more evidence surfaces.”

“There’s a lot of that about,” Daniel said with a laugh. “How’s S.J. getting on, by the way? I guess she’s in her element.”

“Loving every minute of it. Mind you, it’s a bit of a let-down for me.”

“In what way,” Daniel said with a frown.

“Well, you take your wife on a posh cruise on a spaceship, and instead of hanging out with me in the lounge bar, she’s off somewhere telling her sister what she’s been doing at work all day.”

“That happens to every married man eventually,” Daniel said with a laugh. “The day he finds he’s no longer the centre of the universe.”



When the checks had been completed and the experts were happy to let the salvaged ship continue the homeward journey, military protocol took over. With little regret, Dr. Trajan passed control of the ESS *Aldan Sheringham* on to Major Cordero, the second-in-command of X-501, having explained that ‘ESS’ stood for Earth Space Ship.

“You have command,” said Trajan, relinquishing the captain’s chair.

“I have command,” Major Cordero sat down and discovered that the mysterious hole in the left arm-rest was just the right size for an official Air Force issue coffee mug.

Trajan produced his log book, which he had improvised from a parchment-like material found in a cupboard aboard

the abandoned ship, and made his final entry. Both parties added signatures to make it official.

"So, Major, have you ever been the captain of your own ship before?" Trajan asked.

"No, this is the first time," said Cordero.

"Well, I can tell you they're not a bad crew. Once I'd had a couple of the more mutinous dogs keelhauled, the rest of them fell into line quite quickly."

"Listen to Captain Bligh," laughed Samantha.

"Not a comparison I resent," said her husband. "William Bligh, the Navigator, was one of the ablest captains of his generation and much admired and respected. Except by the spoilt brats who ended up in exile for the rest of their lives on Pitcairn Island."

Colonel O'Neill decided to return to his flagship before the two ships jumped to hyperspace.

"Look at this," said Major Cordero as O'Neill was waiting for Teal'c to rejoin him before ringing across to X-501. The new captain was placing several sheets of paper into a binder. "This belongs in a museum. The navigation computer was off-line and Trajan needed to manoeuvre the ship closer to the planet. So what did he do? Worked it all out with a calculator, a pen and a piece of paper, and sheer brain-power."

"The guy is a genius," O'Neill said with a shrug. "Of course, he did."

"You know what? I'm glad he's on our side, not theirs."

"Oh, we all give thanks for Trajan's genius in our own ways," said O'Neill, deciding that he could manage another piece of cake before he returned to X-501.

"Where did the cake come from?" O'Neill asked Trajan as he cut himself another slice.

"I made it," said Trajan.

"What?"

"I made it."

"You made cake on a spaceship thousands of light years from home?"

"There aren't any cake shops in outer space, Jack. And even if there were, they probably wouldn't take our credit cards."

"There you are, T," O'Neill said to Teal'c. "That's why I

always say you can never have too many Specialists along on a mission."

"Pardon me if I appear to laugh hollowly," said Trajan.

"I have it on good authority that my sense of humour is highly prized by some people." O'Neill looked at Samantha to indicate the source of his intelligence information.

"It's so weird, you could almost be British, Colonel," she remarked as she completed topping up her coffee mug.

[September 08, Monday]

The expedition stopped at a convenient planet with a stargate during the homeward journey. The Trajans, Major Carter, Dr. Jackson and the two technicians who had assisted Samantha with the repair work had become Major Cordero's crew aboard the ESS *Aldan Sheringham*. The major doubled as captain and pilot. Colonel O'Neill received orders to bring both spacecraft home to Earth when the Pentagon had digested his preliminary report on the mission.

Four more technicians with relevant training arrived through the stargate to serve as crew for the *Aldan Sheringham*, allowing the Specialists to devote their full attention to further study of the vessel's system and writing reports. The prisoners were off-loaded from X-501 and sent to the Jaffa homeworld.

When the two spacecraft dropped out of hyperspace at the Solar System, the Specialists and the original crew members ringed back to X-501. Samantha Trajan was yawning at the end of the short walk to their quarters.

"Someone running out of steam?" laughed her husband.

"I don't think I've got the energy to pack my stuff."

"Do you want to collapse for a while? I'll give you a shout when we reach orbit."

"Sounds like a plan."

Samantha took off her boots and her jacket, parked her spectacles in their case and lay down on her bunk. Within a couple of minutes, she was fast asleep. To Trajan's surprise,

she woke up again as he was thinking of giving her a shake.

"What time is it?" Samantha asked through a yawn.

"Nineteen-twenty," said Trajan. "We're all packed up and we're waiting for full night over Nevada before we land. The *Sheringham* should be down and stowed out of sight by now."

"Maybe I'd better get up." Samantha looked at the stack of luggage. "Where's your gun?" There was no sign of the sub-machine gun.

"Back in the armoury. The captain doesn't expect you to attack me."

"That's nice of him. What's in that carrier bag?"

"A towel, undies, socks and stuff anyone planning to have a reviving shower before dinner would need."

"Good thinking, Batman. You know, it's been a funny sort of a trip. Especially for you."

"You reckon?"

"Well, there you were at one point, captain of an actual spaceship. But now you're just 'Specialist Trajan, H.T., reporting back aboard, Captain'. What a come-down."

"I suppose it is, if you put it like that. On the other hand, it means the Five-Oh-One saw off the enemy threat, we made it home and we're not liable to be blasted by Goa'uld minions any more."

"It's funny, but I didn't really think about that aboard the Five-Oh-Two. Sorry. The *Sheringham*."

"You just went into nerd mode because you had a nerd job to do, like the rest of us?"

"Colonel O'Neill might have a down on nerds but we're pretty dam' useful people at times."

"I won't argue with that," said Trajan.

"Strange but I never thought going to sleep in outer space would be just like going to sleep on Earth."

"Sleep isn't something I associate with the Five-Oh-One."

"Especially not the last time you were here?"

"Right. I didn't dare close my eyes in case McKay got another of his brilliant ideas."

"Yes, he's like that. How come they took your word over his? He's a physicist and you're a mathematician."

"He's not a linguist in his spare time so he can't read

warnings in the ships logs and notes on dead ends. But I do think he's starting to develop a bit of judgement now."

"If I ever want to hear something nice about McKay, I'll send you a postcard. Do we have to sign anything before we go? Military crap?"

"No, just shake the captain's hand and tell him how much you've enjoyed yourself."

"What, you mean he's got a couple of hours to spare?" Samantha said with a laugh as she collected the carrier bag. "Where are you going to be when I've had my shower?"

"Right here." Trajan produced a notebook. "I've got some ideas to write down."



Fully cloaked, the ESS *Aldan Sheringham* made a daylight landing at a US Air Force facility in the Nevada desert. A vast elevator lowered it into a similarly vast cavern and a camouflaged roof closed overhead. Major Cordero braced himself for an invasion of nerds.

The excitement aboard the *Sheringham* was still intense when X-501 touched down after slipping through a belt of clouds. The larger craft could make itself invisible to radar and suppress all electromagnetic emissions, but it needed the cover of darkness. Its cargo of Goa'uld death gliders and spare parts was off-loaded with all speed then the spacecraft, minus its passengers from the SGC, returned to deep space.

The passengers settled into overnight accommodation. They had an early flight booked for the 800-mile journey back to the SGC.

[September 09, Tuesday]

For the Trajans, returning home involved a quick stop at their apartment in Silver Spring before they continued on to the visitor quarters at the SGC. In space, they were in danger from the Goa'uld and their minions. On Earth, someone else

was out to get them. When they had dumped luggage in their quarters at the SGC at 09:34 hours on a sunny morning, they knew that they faced a debriefing session and then the threads of normal business remained to be picked up.

"That's something for your CV," Samantha remarked as she switched on her window with the rolling surf. "Spaceship captain. How many hours was that for?"

"Long enough for our primary transport to fight a battle with an enemy spacecraft," said Trajan. "And long enough for me to coach my crew into getting my spacecraft able to protect itself by becoming invisible and then able to manoeuvre out of the danger zone."

"And when you think about it, all of that is true."

"Are you taking the mickey out of me with that Canadian accent?"

"What goes aboard, comes aboard, Captain."

"You're just jealous because O'Neill didn't make you the captain."

"No, I think I'm more surprised at how you took it in your stride."

"I seem to remember a certain person accusing me of trying to be Colonel O'Neill. Maybe that was the right attitude to take."

"I suppose it was."

"I still can't get over what you said to the captain of the Five-Oh-One when we left. 'I love your spaceship nearly as much as I love mine.'"

"Oh, yes?" scoffed Samantha. "Who was it who said I should give him a tip to show him how much I appreciated the cruise?"

"Some trouble-maker," said Trajan.

"What time's the main debriefing session?"

"Six minutes from now."

"We'd better get going, then."



In the conference room, General Hammond was armed with a thick wad of printed documents. SG-1, SG-2 and the

Trajan delivered mercifully brief summaries of their mission reports. The general had the look of a leader who had received some welcome praise from above. He kept the question and answer session brief, then moved on to his own summary.

"I would like to say a special word of appreciation for the work of Dr. Samantha Trajan," the general concluded. "She made significant contributions to both the primary mission, the glider recovery project, and the unexpected secondary mission.

"Despite being on her first off-world mission from this SGC, and finding herself in a combat zone, she maintained her focus and she played a leading role in the recovery of the X-Five-Oh-Two. That spacecraft is packed with new-to-us technology for our research divisions to study, and it will make a significant contribution to the defence of our planet. Well done, Samantha."

"Nice to be appreciated, sir," Samantha said with a smile.

"There was also a little alarm in Pentagon circles that you were put into what turned out to be a danger zone."

"Nice to feel wanted," said Samantha. "But it's what we do."

"As for the rest of us," Trajan remarked, "nice to be thought not valuable enough to be missed. Now we're back, could I ask if everyone called Trajan is still liable to be kidnapped by agencies with increasingly dodgy plausible deniability?"

"You will be pleased to learn that both the NSA and the NID are the subject of in-depth investigations," said the general, "and those in charge at both agencies have been left in no doubt whatsoever that any further attempts to abduct you two will be laid at their doorsteps, with appropriate sanctions, no matter who is involved."

"Sweet," Colonel O'Neill murmured in approval.

"We have also upgraded the security at your apartment," the general added, "very discreetly, and you'll be free to return home tomorrow."

"I hope they painted the machine-gun towers a nice shade of Air Force blue," Trajan said with a smile.

"By the way, Dr. Trajan," General Hammond said through

a ripple of laughter, "the Almed are eager to talk to you. Urgently."

"The Almed?" Colonels O'Neill and Kowalski said together.

"Yes, they resumed contact at twenty-thirty hours last night," said the general. "They were rather put out when we had to tell them Dr. Trajan was off-planet on a mission and out of contact."

"No doubt they have personal phones that still work when you're in another galaxy," said O'Neill.

"Actually, sir, that's almost true," said Major Carter. "Not quite that range but probably enough for the SGC to have kept in contact with X-Five-Oh-One."

"Why does that not surprise me?" muttered O'Neill.

"Hello," said Samantha. "Is anyone going to ask why they were out of contact for so long?"

"They were attacked by the Gould," said the general. "Two minor System Lords, who kept their stargate redialled continuously and sent a joint fleet to attack their planet."

"But they kicked their Gould asses?" said Colonel O'Neill.

"I gather it was a close-run thing," said the general, "but that's how it worked out. I gather they were able to use some warfare tactics they learnt from the mass of reading material they received from Dr. Trajan's local second-hand bookshop and more official sources. Their leaders are now interested in full diplomatic contact with Earth and exchanges of technology, information and tactical training."

"Mutual self-interest works wonders," said Lt.-Colonel Kowalski.

"Exactly," said the general. "Washington is setting up a meeting at a suitable venue on Thursday. We will be receiving the Almed delegation then."

"That big time difference is going to be a problem," said Samantha. "Even if it's down to about eleven hours now."

"But not our problem," said the general. "Our entire role will be meeting and greeting the Almed visitors before they move on to their conference. In the meantime, we resume our normal work schedules here."

"What about the gliders, sir?" said Samantha.

"I'm sure the people in Nevada will want to consult you about them quite quickly, Samantha," the general said with a smile.

"I was thinking more about going out again and getting some more."

"A second glider retrieval mission is receiving active consideration."

"But don't hold your breath," murmured Kowalski.

"I think you're being a tad cynical, Peter," the general said with a laugh. "Dr. Trajan, would you stand by here for a session with the Almed scientists? Jack and Peter, a word in my office. Everyone else, you have two days off. Enjoy them. Dismissed."

"Where are you going for your days off, Daniel?" Samantha asked as most of the group left the briefing room.

"I have a couple of museums to visit," said Dr. Jackson. "Artefacts that could be more of the stasis devices. I assume you and Sam will be spending it in a laboratory, looking at the bits of glider you brought back here."

"We think of it as modern industrial archaeology," said Major Carter. "Sounds like H.T. is going to be busy with the Almed now they're back on touch."

"I suppose it will keep him out of mischief," Samantha said with a laugh. "And help him to get back to earth. I get a feeling he's still waiting for an alarm to go off and make him take more command decisions."

"Even nerds can learn to do that," Daniel pointed out.

"Even so," said Samantha, "I was very impressed by the way he took over on the *Sheringham*. He handled the responsibility just like the other H.T.; organized, keeping track of everything, eyes on the big picture most of the time; except when he had to focus on a detail."

"He's the same person, S.J.," said Daniel.

"Yes, he is. That's the point. Under fire, as it were, he becomes a real leader. Like Colonel O'Neill."

"Well, he's had a fair few chances to study Jack under fire," said Carter.

"No, it's more than that. Colonel O'Neill would have us believe he's a complete technophobe. So why would a super-

nerd like H.T. Trajan defer to him so readily? Because he sees in Jack O'Neill, the same sort of analytical processes he uses himself to make his decisions, and that commands respect and co-operation. And I think the colonel understands a lot more than he lets on."

"I think you might be over intellectualizing this, S.J.," laughed Major Carter.

"You mean, you don't feel the same? Surely, you do what Jack tells you to do not just because he's a couple of steps higher on the ladder but also because you trust him to make the best decision possible on what's known."

"Well, yes," Carter admitted. "And I certainly agree with that last bit about understanding more than he lets on. Are you going to change back into a civilian first?"

Samantha looked down at her uniform. "Oh, yes. The pockets are a lot bigger on a labcoat."



Dr. Trajan sat in the briefing room and made notes for a quarter of an hour. Then the Almed made contact. A small delegation arrived in the gate room and was shown up to the briefing room. Trajan recognized the physics professor Mek Klosate and the younger mathematician Nathan Chorn. The leader of the delegation was Barom Edogan, an administrator of status roughly equivalent to General Hammond. Edogan continued on to the general's office for a private consultation.

Trajan offered the remaining visitors refreshments. They settled for apple juice. "Before we get to the serious stuff, can you give me a quick summary of what happened since the last time we heard from you?" said Trajan.

"The first thing that happened," said Professor Klosate, "was an unknown planet dialled our stargate. And when the connection lapsed, another dialled in. And the two kept dialling us in alternation faster than we could dial out. By then, we were sure that the Goa'uld were coming to attack us. Two minor System Lords, called Sabek and Mayet, had put aside their differences in search of useful slaves."

"No one I've ever heard of," said Trajan. "I don't know

about Daniel.”

“There’s some discussion about whether they hoped to take control of our planet or it was just a reconnaissance in strength to probe our defences,” said Professor Klosate.

“Our big problem is that we’ve been reading all the stuff we’ve had from you Earthers,” said Nathan Chorn, “but we don’t have the practical experience to apply it properly.”

“Which is something Administrator Edogan will be discussing with your general,” said the professor. “We’ve realized we’re the equivalent of what your Colonel O’Neill calls nerds. We know a lot about a limited amount, mainly science-based, but we need instruction from non-nerds to broaden our horizons.”

“We certainly have lots of them,” said Trajan. “Non-nerds who’d be up for the challenge if it lets our nerds have a look at your weapons. I take it you saw off the Goa’uld okay?”

“There was a running battle in space,” said the professor. “And we fought them off with very few casualties on our side. Thanks mainly to the briefings we’ve had from General Hammond and others about the attack by Apophis, which Earth fought off. The strategies we got from your literature worked by and large.”

“With some Almed polish?”

“Indeed. We believe we gave the Goa’uld plenty to think about. And now that their attacks on our stargate have died down, we hope to return to normal contacts.”

“But you think they might come back?” said Trajan.

“It’s possible,” said the professor. “Our main theory is that the two Goa’uld formed a temporary alliance to reconquer us because they felt that a successful expedition would sap the morale of other rebels and discourage further rebellions, if they are likely to end in re-conquest.”

“That sounds reasonable,” Trajan said with a nod. “And getting back accomplished weapon-builders would do them a lot of good.”

“Agreed,” said the professor. “Our leaders decided to concentrate our most destructive weapons on the forces of Sabek and, to their delight, Mayet turned on her ally, as our reading of strategies found in your literature suggested.

Sabek's forces turned tail and fled eventually. Then Mayet found that we were too strong for her reduced forces."

"Divide and conquer," said Trajan.

"Yes, I believe that's what it's called," said the professor. "And a very useful tactic, which our forces were able to use very successfully, came out of work done by yourself and your wife."

"Oh?" invited Trajan.

"We were able to fly the stasis devices, which Samantha worked out how to activate, to the hulls of Goa'uld spaceships," said Chorn. "And use them to disable essential systems as the stasis field expanded. Until the power supply ran out."

"Sneaky!" laughed Trajan. "Samantha will love that."

"We also postulated that the uncontrolled stasis devices would be able to disrupt the integrity of the spaceship's shield network," said the professor. "And create areas of weakness, which we would be able to subject to concentrated bombardment to collapse the physical structure of the spaceship."

"And if you can collapse enough critical areas, it falls apart or becomes dead in space?" said Trajan.

"That was the theory and, to our enormous joy, that's what happened in practice," said Chorn.

"But we tended to lose the devices if the enemy spaceship exploded," said the professor. "We put detectors put on them but the velocity of the debris field's expansion could be rather high."

"That's certainly explains why you were so excited when S.J. powered up a stasis device here," said Trajan.

"The Universe smiled upon us," said the professor. "Something which happens very rarely, I understand."

"Anything I say about the Universe is usually a protest about some example of maladministration," Trajan admitted. "Anyway, what's the business of the day?"

"We've been trying to make sense of how some new-to-us parts of Goa'uld spaceships work," said Chorn. "We weren't able to capture any complete ones; they managed to disappear into hyperspace; but we did collect some large fragments. We have records of power distribution and consumption, which

make a sort of sense. But we feel there could be more hidden in the data. I've said something funny?" he added in response to Trajan's grin.

"It's funny coincidental rather than funny ha-ha," said Trajan. "This sounds like a job for a technique I've been working with recently. Which I'll have to get clearance to share with you."

"Of course," said the professor.

"But we could set the ball rolling by you showing me the sort of data you've collected and telling me what you hope to extract from it. And that should tell me if what I have in mind is going to be of use to you."

"In that case, I'll turn the floor over to Nathan," said Professor Klosate.

"Then we can get on to what you came to talk about."

"Yes, we're still having problems understanding aspects of what you call Feynord Theory," said Chorn.

"You, me and the rest of the universe," Trajan said with a laugh.



When the stargate closed behind the Almed visitors, Dr. Trajan was directed up to the control room. General Hammond had another job for him. A decryption expert, Special Agent Clyde Mast, had been brought in from the Pentagon to decode the second set of data on Samantha's implant. It would be Trajan's job to supervise the work. When they were introduced in General Hammond's office, S.A. Mast immediately demanded to know Trajan's security clearance.

"If you haven't been given that information," Trajan told him, "then your own clearance isn't high enough for you to know it."

"That's unacceptable," said Mast, glaring at the uniformed figure before him in indignation.

"Dr. Trajan's security clearance is not a factor," General Hammond said firmly. "Would you kindly concentrate on your own area of expertise, Agent Mast, and leave security

matters in my hands.”

“Very well.” Agent Mast was clearly miffed but he had realized that he was in an argument which he could not win. His attempt to gain the high ground right from the start had failed.

“Special Agent Mast has been assigned an office and visitor accommodation.” The general offered a report binder containing the details to Trajan. “I suggest you issue him with the agreed sample of the data and let him take a shot at it.”

“Sir,” Trajan returned with a nod. He opened the door and escorted the visitor into the corridor.

“Are you Air Force even though you’re English?” Mast asked as they were heading for the elevator.

“SGC civilian Specialist,” said Trajan.

“But you’re in uniform.”

“For operational reasons relevant to the job I’ve just been doing, I’m wearing the uniform of an SGC Specialist.” Trajan pointed to the patch on his right shoulder.

“So you’ve been through this stargate thing?”

“We don’t talk about that. Security.”

“Right. I hear you’ve been working on the data.”

“To the limit of our competence,” said Trajan. “We decided it would be more productive to bring in an expert rather than get someone here to learn something he’s likely never need to use again. And you’re the top man with a high enough security clearance to be here, they tell me.”

“Ah,” said Special Agent Mast, feeling that he had reclaimed a portion of the moral high ground. He was a few years older than Trajan, a couple of inches taller and he outweighed the mathematician by at least thirty pounds. In his case, size really did matter.

[September 10, Wednesday]

Samantha Trajan experienced a moment of dislocation when she woke up the next morning. Then she realized that she was back at the SGC because someone had tried to kidnap her

husband and the identity of the perpetrator remained undiscovered.

"Aaaagh!" she said, realizing that her husband was awake.

"What?" Trajan recognized frustration rather than distress.

"Two days ago, I was millions of miles away from here on a spaceship, and I can't tell anyone about it."

"You can tell me."

"You don't count. You were there. And what about you? Two days ago, you were a starship captain."

"Easy come, easy go."

"And a hundred years from now, people will be able to visit the Museum of Space Science and see the log of the *Sheringham*. And right at the start of it, they'll see that the very first captain was Specialist Trajan, H.T."

"For about five minutes."

"That doesn't matter. It's there in the logbook. You as the first captain. I bet our friend Meredith Rodney McKay has never been a spaceship captain."

"And it also says that same logbook, Chief Engineer: Specialist Trajan, S.J. Something else McKay has never done."

"That same logbook that's on the *Sheringham*, where no one can see it except the crew?"

"The people who count know about it."

"And after the transfer of command to Major Cordero, you're listed as the science officer. I should have been calling you Mr. Spock when you called me Scotty."

"Shudda, wudda if you'd thought of it at the time?"

"That's life all over. I've got a list of things I need from home. That's another bit of life all over; we can go home now but I have a ton of things to do here. And so do you."

"I'll have a word with the adjutant to see if we need some escorts for a trip to Silver Spring this afternoon."

"Good thinking, Mr. Spock. You know, you'd look really weird with pointed ears."

"Can you think of anyone who wouldn't?" laughed Trajan.

"Do you think you'll thump that code-breaker nerd today?"

"You never know your luck," Trajan returned with another laugh. "Actually, he's not too bad when he stops trying to

prove to everyone that he's the top dog and he buckles down to doing some work."

A delivery of mail arrived whilst Samantha was taking a shower. Ready for a new day, she glanced at the items on her husband's desk as she waited for her husband to stop making notes and take her to the mess hall for breakfast. There was no mail for her but she spotted a draft of an academic paper.

"Type Two Bragga Analysis Applied To Pattern Extraction From Apparently Intractable Data Sets," she read from the title page.

"I thought I'd be the first to write a paper that actually uses it," said Trajan. "I'm going to send a copy to the prof. Assuming I get clearance to send that to the AJAM."

"First and only, I reckon," laughed Samantha. "Old Bragga will be really thrilled, though."

"As long as he doesn't mind being taken off the list of authors of curiosities which no one will ever use."

"What's this?" Samantha picked up a neatly bound small document. It was an 8-page reprint from an issue of the American Journal of Applied Mathematics. "'The author wishes to thank Dr. H.T. Trajan for putting her on the right track.' Is that a pat on the back for you?"

"No, it's name-dropping. It means the author knows Dr. H.T. Trajan and the rest of you don't. And she can go and consult him when she gets stuck but the rest of you can't. And it also says that even if he pointed me towards where the solution could be found, I solved it. Me. This solution is all mine."

"Academic one-upmanship?"

"Actually, you were right the first time."

"And you were winding me up?"

"Very little escapes you, Mrs. Holmes."

"Who is this author, by the way? I don't recognize the name."

"The daughter of an Air Force general in Supply, who asked for a favour from the SGC and who now owes one to our general."

"Politics and devious stuff like that?"

"Somewhat. But also encouraging a young talent, who could be saving the galaxy when we're old and grey. Meanwhile, let's eat."



Dr. Daniel Jackson was looking very animated when he gained entry to General Hammond's office. He produced a picture of a canopic jar and offered it across the desk.

"An apparently Egyptian artefact which has Gould connections?" said the general.

"Being offered for sale on the black market," Dr. Jackson said with a nod. "It has markings similar to the ones on the device Samantha found in my collection. I think it's something we should acquire."

"Is the person who's selling this likely to know the significance of these markings?" said the general.

"No, sir, it just seems to be something that's been passed by a tomb robber to the black market."

"What do you think the value to us would be?"

"As you may know, sir, canopic jars were used to store the entrails of mummified bodies as part of the ritual for the after-life. Maybe the Goa'uld turned stasis jars into something resembling canopic jars."

"For what purpose, Dr. Jackson?"

"I'm not sure. But a jar of the size shown in the photograph could hold a symbiote."

"For transportation? If a Gould is running away from a stronger enemy? Or some other purpose?"

"Or as somewhere to put an enemy. A small and ornamental prison."

"An interesting idea," laughed the general. "But where is this going?"

"I think it would be a good idea to at least examine the jar. To find out if the seals on it look intact and suitably ancient."

"And, as we're talking about the black market, you'd appreciate some bodyguards?"

"Yes, sir. Especially as I'll have to show I have the asking price to get a look at the artefact."

"Which is what? The asking price?"

"Thirty-thousand dollars," Daniel said in an even tone.

"Dr. Jackson, do you have any idea how many forms I'd have to fill out to raise that kind of cash money?"

"Actually, sir, the money isn't a problem."

"Dr. Trajan?"

"Yes, sir. It's a project that would appeal to both of them."

"So all you need from me are some bodyguards?"

"Yes, sir."

"Where would this transaction take place? Egypt?"

"No, Atlanta, actually."

"Give me a mission proposal and I'll consider it," said the general.



His wife put on a token show of reluctance when Trajan arrived at her usual laboratory to collect her for the trip to their home. He decided that he had understood about one-third of the things that she had told him about Goa'uld spacecraft systems as their transport pulled into the short-stay parking area at their apartment block. The front seats were occupied by two members of the SGC's security staff.

"I'll do a walk-by of that guy lurking over there," said the corporal in charge of the escort detail. Both he and the driver were in street clothes.

Samantha glanced quickly to her right. Trajan did not react. The corporal walked past the lurker in the apartment building's lobby then shook his head quickly to confirm that the lurker did not have a firearm. The driver positioned himself with a clear shot at the stranger as he and the Trajans advanced into the lobby.

"Dr. Trajan, have you ever been on a spaceship?" the man called as he approached the new arrivals.

"Of course, I have," Trajan returned with a mocking smile. "I work for the US Air Force. They've got lots of them, according to what's on the internet. Who are you?"

"Brent Guyver, Silver Spring Post, sir. Dr. Carter . . .," he turned toward Samantha.

"Trajan." Samantha held up her left hand to show a wedding ring.

"Ah. You're a major in the Air Force and an astrophysicist . . . ,"

"I'm not in the Air Force and I'm a spacecraft systems designer," Samantha interrupted. "Apart from that, you were spot on."

"Can we start again?" said the reporter. "This isn't going well."

"Ain't that the truth," Trajan murmured.

"I suppose you're not a qualified pilot, either?" the reporter said to Samantha.

"When we fly, someone else does the driving. Most of the time," Samantha added with a half-smile toward her husband.

"Sir, you need to quit the area," said the corporal in charge of the guard detail. "If you wish you speak to the Trajans officially, you need clearance. I'm sure your editor knows the phone number of our press office."

"I was told that wouldn't be necessary," said the reporter.

"Not by me," said Trajan. "And I'm not available to people I don't know whenever they feel like having a word with me. Good day."

The journalist seemed to be on the point of objecting but he could see that he was outnumbered.

"Do we know who's doing all this stuff to annoy us yet?" Samantha said in the lift.

"I'll have to have a word with the general," said Trajan. "We've had too many distractions recently."

The security team made a quick visual check of each room in the apartment, confirming what at the security videos showed; that there had been no intruders. The corporal went up to the roof, just being thorough. Then the security team retired to the lift area with mugs of coffee, leaving the front door ajar.

The Trajans worked quickly to collect the items on Samantha's lists. She put on a thoughtful frown as they were about to leave.

"Did what you did count as flying?" she murmured. "When we were on the *Sheringham*? When you flew it closer to the

planet to make it less obvious to a Goa'uld spaceship coming out of hyperspace."

"It was more manoeuvring than flying," said Trajan. "Just a few burst on the thrusters to achieve the delta-V for orbital transfer."

"But if you pushed it, you could put spaceship pilot on your CV?"

"I'm not that desperate, S.J.," Trajan said with a laugh.

"Yes, you do have lots of other talents to sell," Samantha admitted.

[September 11, Thursday]

Dr. Daniel Jackson claimed most of Dr. Trajan's afternoon the next day. They were both interrupted just as their discussions about the data recovered from *Sheringham's* archives were reaching a natural conclusion. The first production versions of the new zat weapons had been delivered, and all those were likely to have to use them were receiving the opportunity to try them out.

"Is it true they test how long to they can survive in a cement mixer loaded with rocks and gravel and water?" Daniel remarked as they were heading for a lift and a journey up to the range where the new weapons would be demonstrated.

"That's what Samantha told me," Trajan said with a nod. "But I'm still trying to work out if she was having me on."

"It does sound a bit extreme," said Daniel. "I mean, they don't do that with the other weapons they give us."

"Probably some nerd trying to impress the brass," Trajan decided. "Look what my new guns can stand up to. Although, I can see that leaves the new zats open to the charge of being over-engineered."

"And they end up being made so flimsy they fall to pieces if you grip them too tightly?" laughed Daniel.

"I think we'll just have to make sure we get our hands on some of the first issue and make sure no one takes them off us," said Trajan.

The day concluded with a briefing for a second glider recovery mission, which was scheduled for the following week. The mission would go off before the Goa'uld realized what was going on, with any luck, and it would leave their enemy with the problem of spotting the target for the next run if the Goa'uld did cotton on.

SG-1, Major Oliver Simpson and SG-6, and the Trajans would travel to the planet by stargate and rendezvous with X-501, which would recon the area first and check in using the stargate when the captain was satisfied that the coast was clear. SG teams and Specialists would return via the stargate and X-501 would return to Earth with the gliders and unload them in Nevada, as before.

The meeting segued into a briefing for an operation the following day. Dr. Jackson's mission to buy the canopic jar, but only if it proved to be authentic, had received a go.

[September 12, Friday]

The visiting expert took three days to crack the encryption system. The other decryption key used the last prime number but two on Trajan's list.

Special Agent Mast was allowed to know that he had succeeded but he had to live with the frustration of not being allowed to have sight of the main bulk of the decrypted data immediately, and knowing that access would depend on the whim of his superiors at the Pentagon.

General Hammond summoned Dr. Trajan to his office when the visiting agent and his escorts had left the SGC, heading for the Pentagon and the super-computer which would translate the bulk of the data on Samantha's implant.

"Our friend was looking quite pleased with himself, Dr. Trajan," the general remarked as he waved his visitor to a seat. "A man with his place in the pecking order reinforced."

"A successful nerd is a happy nerd," Trajan returned with a smile.

"I gather you have a suggestion to make?"

"Yes, sir. As you know, the Pentagonians have promised us copies of all the stuff relevant to the SGC; missions logs, project reports and so on. How interested would we be in the extras, which we won't be allowed to have sight of?"

"You mean, specifically, the dirt on the other Senator Kinsey?" the general said with a frown.

"And anything else out of the same box, yes."

"You're heading into a minefield, Dr. Trajan."

"Yes, sir. But it occurred to me that the Pentagonians aren't the only ones with access to the most powerful computers in the known universe. We know people who probably make theirs look like an abacus."

"Where is this going, Dr. Trajan?"

"The Almed are feeling grateful to us at the moment. It occurred to me that we could offer one of their mathematicians the fun of cracking the encryption code on part of the second data set, and invite the Almed to offer comments on the work done at Samantha's SGC."

"That's an interesting twist," the general admitted.

"And it would also give us a check on the accuracy of the version we get back from the Pentagon."

"This is the well-known Trajan paranoia coming to the fore?" the general said with a laugh.

Trajan shrugged his shoulders. "I admit I'm someone who wouldn't believed a Pentagonian if he told me it was raining and I was getting wet. But confirmation can be an essential element of trust. And we civilian staff are known to do things without thinking them through to the military implications."

"You mean, you'll give me plausible deniability?" said the general.

"I would hope always to keep you clear of there, General," said Trajan. "But that's certainly the emergency fall-back position."

"Okay, I'll think about this and get back to you," General Hammond decided.

[September 14, Sunday]

General Hammond had to make a short visit to his office at the SGC on Sunday evening. A week which had begun with promise and seemed to be getting better had reached a crunch point. The general drafted a short covering note, which was transmitted to the Pentagon with a copy of Dr. H.T. Trajan's letter of resignation.

Trajan's letter was brief. It began with praise for the personnel of the SGC and gave as the grounds for his leaving, the campaign of pointless harassment against himself and his wife. The latest incident, he had written, had persuaded him to say that enough was enough.

The general's note concluded with the view that both Dr. Trajan and his wife could well end up on the Almed planet and whilst they might still remain available as consultants, there could be no guarantee of their availability on demand, as at present.

□ □ □

In the main room of their own apartment at Silver Spring, Samantha Trajan looked thoughtfully at her husband, then asked: "Have you really resigned?"

"I've written a letter," Trajan returned. "Whether it will be accepted remains to be seen."

"Your counterpart almost did that once."

"Oh?" Trajan invited.

"I had a run-in with Dr. Moersby once . . ."

"That scumbag?"

"You don't get on with yours?"

"I was instrumental in getting him booted out of here. He made false accusations against one of the staff and tried to use political connections to make them stick. Yours tried the same trick on you?"

"He accused me of plagiarizing his work when it was my idea in the first place."

"A familiar story."

"Only, my head of department went straight to General Hammond when he heard what had happened and told him that he had the utmost confidence in Dr. Carter's probity and if she was railroaded out of the SGC, he'd be on the next train and he'd never work for the US government again. Nothing personal, General, and I shall make it clear you're not involved in this, he said, but I couldn't work here if politics takes the place of the truth."

"Wow!" said Trajan.

"Your counterpart was a man of principle who didn't hesitate to stand up for them."

"Who happened to be married to the second most gorgeous woman in the galaxy, who was also a billionaire?"

"Actually, he'd earned the billions from his patents. She'd only made a few tens of millions out of her career."

"Only tens of millions? Oh, to be that sort of person."

"You would have been that sort of person if you hadn't given most of your own patent income to various universities. And you're still worth eight million dollars, according to what you told me when we were deciding if we could afford to get married. Or was it eighty million?"

"One or the other. You might tell that story to General Hammond on Monday. He's sure to ask you how serious I am about quitting."

"If he does, I can take the opportunity to ask him if all my debriefing reports are redundant now the nerd from the Pentagon has found the decryption key."

"No, they remain very valuable. They're your commentary on the bare facts. Your contribution adds shades of meaning and the extras, like what the people at your SGC considered the most important stuff to be."

"Really?"

"That's what the General told me is how people at his level see things."

"Nice to be taken that seriously." Samantha's smile became a frown. "What would we do? If you quit here?"

"We could go and work on the Almed planet and stay available to the SGC as consultants."

"That would be the patriotic thing to do. If we go to the

Almed planet, will they let me work on their spaceships?”

“I’ll have it written into my contract of employment,” Trajan said with a nod. “And a guarantee ride on one for you.”

“I like this idea a lot,” Samantha decided.



Loweston

[September 15, Monday]

Arriving at his apartment in the visitor quarters at the SGC, which was now an office again, and thinking about dinner at the PMR, Trajan went into a routine, "Hi, honey, I'm home!" before he spotted the visitor. "Oh, hello, General," he added switching his demeanour from frivolous to 'on duty'.

"Dr. Trajan, excuse the intrusion but we need to talk," said General Hammond.

"I've not been too far away from your office all afternoon, sir."

"In private."

"That sort of talk." Trajan looked at Samantha.

"This involves your wife, too," said the general. "Without going into details, can you confirm you were involved in Project Loweston?"

"That's the sort of government project which inspires threats of personal obliteration; being wiped from the face of the planet; if you even react to the name."

"I've heard much the same," the general said with a nod. "By the way, the Pentagon is still very upset about two government agents being plastered all over the Six O'Clock News yesterday."

"They made the mistake of trying to threaten me in a supermarket car park when I went shopping at lunchtime," Trajan recalled. "With most of SG-Eight there as well because they also had shopping to do. They spotted something not quite right about the two guys right off, so they got close and waited to see what happened."

"When the spokesman gave me the ritual speech about dropping everything and going off with them, I just laughed in his face. And when his partner pulled a gun to intimidate me, SG-Eight flattened the pair of them."

“Someone called the cops; there was a patrol car right out in the street; and a TV news crew, also there doing some shopping, got lucky with lots of pictures of the bad guys being handcuffed and put in a police car on charges of attempted car-jacking and abduction.”

“There are some at the Pentagon who think you set the whole thing up, Dr. Trajan. Given that those two were on an authorized mission.”

“Which implies that I knew it was going to happen, sir,” Trajan pointed out. “Which raises the further issue of who tipped me off and why? The conspiracy theories just grow and grow.”

“It didn’t help when you told the TV reporter that you’re a consultant with the US Air Force and you believed they were foreign agents who were threatening your life,” said the general.

“Yes, that was a bit naughty,” Trajan admitted. “But when the two guys just disappeared from police custody, extracted by phoney FBI agents with beautifully faked IDs, the news services felt entitled to draw their own conclusions and ignore the smoke signals from the Pentagon.”

“The thing that sticks in my memory most is the strangest letter of resignation I’ve ever seen, which you delivered to the duty officer two hours later. You said were quitting because of breach of contract by your employer, our government, but you were unable to go into details on national security grounds.”

“Funny how receiving threats at gunpoint in a car park kills off your enthusiasm for the job, sir.”

“I had a phone call from the President himself, ordering me to talk you round, Dr. Trajan.”

“I apologize for any personal embarrassment to you, General, but I’m sure we’re all well aware that we’re caught in the middle of political manoeuvring. There are some dangerous nut cases at the Pentagon and this incident should give the President an excuse for some pruning if he has the courage to take it.

“As I said, this is all trouble-making in Washington but it does impact on my work here. As you well know, someone has

been trying to rattle my cage since the beginning of August. Having a gun pulled on me is the last straw. So I've decided it's time to confront them."

"That resignation letter certainly did that," the general said with a smile. "And the hints about going to work on the Almed planet with your wife."

"And I'm willing to bet that you didn't even hear a whisper about Project Loweston until I started acting up, sir?"

"Yes, the level of secrecy suggests deep embarrassment as much as something vital to national security."

"How does S.J. come in to all this, General?"

"Someone at the Pentagon thinks something in her debriefing notes is relevant to the project, whose name we dare not speak."

"I thought Loweston was dumped in the Pentagon's basement with all the other stuff that cost a bomb and never worked out?"

"I gather it's too important to abandon, and there's a review whenever there's a chance that new relevant information has come to light."

"Yes, that makes sense. But the last I heard, there are still huge gaps between the theory and what we can actually do."

"Someone at the Pentagon seems to think the two of you might be able to help with some of the gaps."

"I wouldn't bet on that. Have you got anything on why the harassment includes Samantha as well as me?"

"Yes, that would be nice to know," said Samantha.

"I have had some hints that part of the idea behind the harassment is to find out how stable Samantha is," said the general. "Whether she can come unglued easily. Dr. Fraiser was highly indignant over the misuse of her confidential psychological reports. She recognized quotations from them."

"Have you had a resignation letter from her, too?" laughed Trajan.

"Not yet," the general returned with a smile. "But it could happen."

"Much as it grieves me to do this, I'm struggling to see why NID would be doing something like that to us," said Trajan. "Or NSA."

"I agree," said the general. "And I can confirm that both agencies are trying to keep a low profile at the moment and both are under intensive scrutiny. In fact, I can't see NID surviving in its present form."

"Especially after part two of my chip data has been decoded," said Samantha. "Okay, it's about another version of NID but there has to be enough on the chip to sink them."

"As long as we don't end up with a worse bunch in their place," said Trajan.

"Which is the way the Universe works?" laughed the general. "In the meantime, we are expecting two visitors on Thursday of this week. In the afternoon. So if you and Samantha could both clear your schedule for that afternoon? Discreetly."

"Will do," said Trajan. "Is our glider mission still on for tomorrow and Wednesday? S.J. will go ballistic if that's called off."

"Gosh! Yes," said Samantha.

"That mission is not affected," General Hammond assured her.

"I'm surprised the Pentagonians are letting us go in case we do a runner when we're in range of another stargate which isn't controlled by the Air Force," said Trajan.

General Hammond put on a creditable version of the Carter Look.

"Where will we the meeting be?" said Trajan. "On Thursday."

"The visitors will be given accommodation here in the guest quarters, as for someone meeting people from off-world. And you will go to their apartment."

"All very informal and low-key and hush-hush."

"I hope someone's going to tell me where to find this project that dare not speak its name in my debriefing notes," said Samantha. "Because I've never heard of your name for it and I have no idea what I said that could be connected with it."

"It's likely the Trajan Group was consulted in your parallel, Samantha," said the general. "But, of course, they were given another working title for the consultation. The Pentagons

want to know if you had any personal involvement in the project or it was just something recorded on your chip, like the other projects you had no part in."

"So I may be thrown out of the meeting right away because I don't know anything useful?" said Samantha. "So I'd better have something else lined up to do on Thursday afternoon, just in case? Just as well I'll still have a ton of work to do from the glider mission."

"Someone else might not even get to the meeting unless the Penta-gonians give him a cast-iron guarantee that the arseing about is over and an explanation for why it was done in the first place," said Trajan.

"I shall pass on your views right away, Dr. Trajan," the general said with a grim smile. "I could also mention as that as you're working out your notice period, further involvement by you in Project Loweston might be inadvisable on national security grounds."

"I bet you wish you'd thought of that," laughed Samantha, tagging her husband's arm.

"A bet you wouldn't lose," Trajan assured her.

"Your wife also mentioned that your counterpart threatened to resign over a matter of principle," the general added.

"Actually, I'm not sure if letting the Pentagonians know that would be a good idea," said Trajan.

"Why?" demanded Samantha.

"They might start thinking I chuck my toys out of the pram at the least provocation," said Trajan.

"I think you're over-thinking the problem, H.T.," the general decided. "You'll be interested to learn that I've not been idle myself as regards who is harassing you. I have some fingerprints which look like they belong to Colonel Samuels."

"Kinsey's stooge at the Pentagon, right?" said Trajan.

"Not any longer," said the general. "He now seems to be working for someone else."

"So I'd better cancel the hit on Senator Kinsey?"

"It might be advisable," the general said with a laugh.

"While we're talking, can I ask you if you know why is Encatta Industries trying to extort damages from me for defective work when I've never heard of them and I've never

done any work for them?"

"I'll look into it, Dr. Trajan," the general picked up a pen.

Trajan spelled out the name. "Do we know if the Pentagonians have decoded Samantha's second data set, by the way?" he added.

"If they have, they haven't told me," said the general. "And that project you suggested with the Almed? It could involve advising them of your wife's origins, which is not yet policy."

"Okay, it was just a thought," said Trajan, who could tell from the look on Samantha's face that he was in for a grilling when the general had gone.

[September 16, Tuesday]

SG-5, SG-6 and the Trajans attended a briefing for a second glider recovery mission the next day. SG-1 had been due to lead the mission but they were off-world still and they 'had a situation', the exact nature of which remained undisclosed.

Lieutenant Susan Sulkin, an engineer and a member of X-501's stand-by crew, which was still in training, had been brought in as an engineering Specialist with a broad range of knowledge to replace Major Carter. She was tall, skinny, much given to nervous smiles and used to the routines of star-gate travel.

The planet where the group of damaged cum decoy gliders had been abandoned was dry and cold, which mean that fur hats and boots, and thermal gloves and underwear would be the dress of the day. As before, the Specialists would remove the recall devices and the gliders would be loaded aboard X-501 for transport back to Earth.

Major Peter Grend of SG-5 was in overall command of the mission, which provided Samantha Trajan with a link to her previous glider-recovery missions. Grend had been in charge of the security team on all of her four trips off-world in her own parallel universe.

[September 17, Wednesday]

Major Grend made a thorough check of everything when his expedition had assembled in the Embarkation Room in the early morning, which corresponded to the warmest part of the destination world's day. When he was satisfied, Grend - glanced up at the stargate control room. General Hammond began his descent for a final few words.

"Heard anything about SG-One?" Trajan remarked to the major.

"Only that they've lost two Specialists. That's vanished, not dead," Grend added. "They just disappeared."

"Bloody Specialists, eh?" said Trajan.

"A-firm!" said Major Grend with feeling, but through a smile. "All ready to go, sir," he added to the general.

"Okay," said General Hammond. "As we said at the briefing, we're hoping to grab more gliders before the Gould realize what we're doing. With any luck, we'll leaving them with a massive headache over spotting the target for the next run, if they even realize what we're doing."

"In and out before they know we've been," said Trajan.

"The captain of X-Five-Oh-One has reported that the area is clear," General Hammond added, "and he is standing by to land to recover the gliders when the Specialists have looked them over. You have a go, Major, and God speed."

The stargate at the SGC formed a wormhole to the distant planet and the SG-teams travelled through first, followed by the Specialists. The cold was insidious rather than a slap in the face. There were five death gliders to process, and the Specialists were wondering if they would ever feel warm again by the time they had located and removed all of the Goa'uld recall devices.

"Are we ready to call in the Five-Oh-One?" said Major Grend.

"Not yet," said Trajan. "I've got something else. Another gadget."

"What is it?" said Samantha.

"I don't know," said Trajan.

"That's total ignorance with not a clue?" Samantha said with a chilly and deliberately annoying smile.

"You know what, Samantha Jane?" Trajan said in a warning tone, "I think someone is enjoying her day out far too much."

He was rewarded with a brief glimpse of his wife's tongue and a cheeky smile.

"It's a device which isn't on any of the other gliders we've looked at so far," Trajan added. "Including the ones from the last expedition."

"These are a different mark," said Lieutenant Sulkin. "A later one."

"Where is it?" said Samantha. "This thing you can't identify?"

Trajan indicated the location on a glider blueprint. "That's the nearest access panel. You'll need to put a camera in there."

"There's nothing like it on the other gliders we processed here?" said Lieutenant Sulkin.

"No," said Trajan. "This gadget is unique to this glider. The recall devices are all installed in plain sight. This thing isn't."

"We'll need to have a look at it," said Samantha.

"Which is precisely why I brought it to your attention," her husband returned with a sarky smile.

Lieutenant Sulkin removed an access panel and inserted a camera on a flexible stem. Trajan directed her to the right area.

"This thing looks like it can't be accessed without cutting through something and doing structural damage," the lieutenant decided.

"That's suspicious," said Samantha. "No maintenance possible. We could really do with removing it and putting it in a stasis field."

"Or stick a stasis generator near to it for the moment," said Trajan. "Pity we don't have any."

"What do we do?" said Major Grend. "Five-Oh-One's waiting."

"Bring them down and load up the other gliders while we figure out if we can remove this gadget," said Trajan. "We'll

take it back to the SGC if we can, along with the recall devices, and see if anyone can work out what it's supposed to do. If we can't, we'll just have to be satisfied with four gliders."



Having seen X-501 on its way with a cargo of five death gliders, Major Grend ushered his command back to the SGC. In the corridor outside the gate room, Dr. Trajan suddenly found himself face-to-face with Dr. McKay, who was about to go out through the stargate to brief SG-13 with some further information relevant to their on-going mission.

"You're going out on a mission too?" Dr. McKay said, his tone implying that wherever he was going, it was much more important than Trajan's destination.

"Just back from a Glider Plus job," said Trajan in a neutral tone.

"I should be on those, using my system for finding the hidden recall devices." McKay looked more closely at Trajan and added: "Whenever I go off-world, they never give me a uniform that fits."

"I suppose some of us are just lucky enough to be the standard size," said Trajan.

McKay was just about to take umbrage at a perceived reference to his generous figure when a female voice behind him said: "And others are too tight-fisted to go to the expert."

McKay turned with a different sarcastic rejoinder forming, then he stopped to stare. He had recognized the voice but the glasses and the long, blonde hair tied back in a pony-tail confused him.

"Have you met my wife? The other Dr. Trajan?" Trajan said behind McKay.

"Sam Carter married you?" McKay said, combining incredulity with a note of indignation, and even betrayal, as he stared at the uniformed woman before him.

"Ah, yes," said Samantha. "The infamous Dr. Meredith Rodney McKay, who thinks no one else ever has a good idea and that gives him a licence to steal other people's ideas and

claim them as his own."

"What?" spluttered McKay indignantly.

"And he even has the cheek to claim parallel inspiration when lab notes prove that it was my idea in the first place," Samantha added with even more indignation.

"Looks like the parallel universes are as close as advertised," said Trajan. "And maybe it's just as well they don't issue firearms to all Specialists as a matter of routine."

"I am this close to thumping you, Meredith McKay." Samantha raised her hand to show the index finger and thumb less than one centimetre apart.

"What have I done?" protested McKay.

"How long have you got?" Samantha said belligerently. "Tell me, your system to find recall devices, has it ever been tried out in the field?"

"Not yet," said McKay, "but . . ."

"Well, ours has. And it works every time. Which is why we're using it, not yours. Okay?"

McKay had no opportunity to respond, Major Renate Holman took a firm grip on his arm and marched him into the gate room before General Hammond could launch a search party.

"You were a bit tough on him," Trajan mentioned to a background of the sound of the stargate activating.

"It's just that I've been on the receiving end of so much of his stuff," returned his wife, "that I don't want him to think he's going to get away with any more of it. Not even the smallest bit."

"Are you going to the debriefing?" Trajan said when his wife started for the lift to her laboratory.

"Do I have to?" Samantha hefted the piece of new circuitry removed from the death glider. "I want to show this to Bill Lee."

"I'm sure the general will accept apologies for your absence."

"Good. See you." Samantha resumed her mission.

After a perfunctory debriefing; a brief report that everything had gone to plan, apart from finding a new gadget; General

Hammond took Dr. Trajan aside to impart some information. "You asked me why Encatta Industries is pursuing you for damages," he said.

"Oh, yes," said Trajan. "I've not been able to penetrate that fog myself. Not yet."

"It seems they acquired a system which was designed for the Air Force and based on some work you did, and it doesn't work for them."

"Acquired how?" Trajan asked with a frown.

"That has not yet been explained to me."

"Sold off secretly? Stolen? Leaked?"

"I'm still waiting to hear more from my contacts at the Pentagon, Dr. Trajan. But I doubt it was acquired with official approval."

"Well, at least I have something to work with," Trajan decided. "Thank you for your efforts, sir."

[September 18, Thursday]

Three visitors from the Pentagon interrupted Dr. Samantha Trajan's investigations the following day. Someone high up in the food chain had decide to let them question both Trajans on what they knew about the projects variously known to them as Loweston and Topspin. Dr. Lee was also invited to a session in the briefing room. Unknown to his colleagues, he had done a small amount of preliminary work on Project Loweston.

The leader of the visitor group was Dr. Heinrich Shabrakian. Trajan knew that he was a physicist but had no idea of his speciality. Shabrakian was in his fifties and his lack of a reputation suggested that he had been doing classified work for at least two decades. Trajan had never heard of the other two Pentagonians; Drs. Cathy Holmes and Malcolm Paice; which suggested that they were following the same career path as their leader.

Dr. Trajan began the session by delivering a summary of what he remembered of Project Loweston. Dr. Lee delivered

a much briefer summary. Then Samantha offered her recollections of Project Topspin.

“Working on from Dr. Trajan’s resolution to the Biretta Paradox, we come to the rather surprising conclusion that . . . ,” Samantha was saying when her husband interrupted her.

“Point of information, but this Dr. Trajan doesn’t have the first clue how to resolve Biretta,” he said.

“Your other self did,” said Samantha.

“The guy must be a genius. Can you explain how he did it?”

“Not really. It’s way beyond me.”

“Can you at least throw me a bone?”

“He did say the secret of understanding it is to realize you only need five dimensions to describe it, not nine.”

“Five?” said Drs. Trajan and Lee together, expressing incredulity.

“I think it would be helpful if Dr. Trajan continues her contribution and we leave all questions, on topic, to the end,” said Dr. Shabrakian, exerting his authority as chairman.

“My apologies,” said Dr. Trajan. “I should be used to people telling me the impossible isn’t by now, but it never seems to happen. Clearly, it’s a deep and enduring character flaw.”

Samantha Trajan resumed her remarks, taking just over a minute to complete them.

“Okay,” said Dr Shabrakian “Comments?”

“It’s possible that resolving Biretta will help us with some problems which are looking intractable at the moment,” said Dr. Lee. “But none I can think of related to Project Loweston. And without knowing where the other H.T. went with his solution, how do we know which problems to apply it to? We could end up wasting a lot of time.”

“We could always proceed cautiously until our resident genius figures out what his counterpart did,” suggested Samantha.

“You must have a wonderful relationship if you can be so sarcastic to his face,” laughed Dr. Shabrakian.

“No apology needed,” Trajan said before his wife could comment. “I need to stay on her good side if I’m going to get

anywhere with this problem before the century is out.”

“As far as I remember, H.T. cracked the kernel of the paradox in less than two weeks, once he’d figured out the dimensions thing,” Samantha offered. “And to quote the other Dr. Trajan, just knowing a problem can be solved, because someone else has already solved it, can speed up the process of discovery.”

“I think we can afford to sit on our hands for the moment, knowing that Dr. Trajan will bridge the gap in two weeks.” Dr. Lee offered an almost cheeky smile to his colleague.

“All I can say to that, Bill,” said Dr. Trajan, “is that you have one hell of a lot more confidence in my abilities than I do.”

“At least you know that you can solve the problem based on what you know now,” said Dr. Shabrikian.

“Actually, that’s not a given,” said Trajan. “The other me must have known all sorts of stuff I don’t know right now, given that our lives have been so different. Could we get the CIA to interrogate my wife to see if they can get her to cough up a few more bones?”

“You could always bribe her with some of her favourite ice cream,” Samantha suggested.

“I propose,” said Dr. Shabrakian, taking control of the meeting again, “that we go ahead with our projects-in-hand on the assumption that Dr. Trajan will have a significant insight, but be prepared to call out a panel of mathematicians for one of his famous skull-busting sessions, if necessary.”

“Sounds like a plan,” said Samantha.

“We did all hear what Bill Lee said just now?” Trajan enquired. “That cracking this won’t solve any problems to do with Project Loweston?”

“That assumes you know all the problems associated with Loweston,” Dr. Paice pointed out.

“Which is true,” Trajan admitted. “But I agree with my wife and Dr. Lee. If we can crack Biretta, it will give us a useful tool to use on quite a number of problems. But I’m still not convinced it will do anything at all for Loweston.”

“I think you can let me be the judge of that, Dr. Trajan,” Dr. Shabrikian said with a confident smile.

"A job to which you are entirely welcome," Trajan returned with an answering smile of obvious insincerity.

Dr. Shabrikian wound up the session and the visitors left to look at the gate room, which seemed to be a main reason of their trip out West. General Hammond arrived as his Specialists were looking at one another saying, "Five dimensions?" in increasingly disbelieving tones.

"The visitors were looking quite uninjured, Dr. Trajan," the general remarked with a smile. "Despite your fears of fisticuffs."

"I do seem to have amazing powers of self-control, General," Trajan replied. "I didn't even repeat my personal opinion on what Loweston is, which provoked such outrage the first time I voiced it."

"I tremble to ask what it was," said the general.

"That Loweston is just cold fusion in a bad wig, a charity-shop suit and luminous socks. It won't work. No matter how many billions of my tax-dollars the Pentagonians chuck at it."

"But you are about to give them a major prize when you solve the Biretta Paradox," Samantha pointed out.

"I won't even ask what that is," the general said with a laugh. "I just wanted to give you a heads up that Senator Balotini will be visiting the SGC next week."

"I suppose, if we're never in the same room together, you can be fairly sure I won't blow her kneecaps off or smash her teeth down her throat," Trajan said with a smile.

"Dr. Trajan . . . ," General Hammond said in a warning tone.

"Oh, did I say that out loud?" Trajan's smile broadened. "It's okay, General, I won't do anything to embarrass you. But you should be aware that I'm not Mr. Perfect and I do bear grudges and I will make an opportunity to settle accounts with the senator. But probably not next week, if everyone is careful to deny me the opportunity."

"Thank you for your frankness, Dr. Trajan."

"It's no more than you deserve, sir."

"Is it safe to be in the same room as him?" Dr. Lee said nervously.

"As long as he doesn't have a gun," laughed Samantha.

"Does the woman know what we actually do here?" Trajan added. "If she doesn't, that would explain why she wants to waste our time on some silly political stunt, which she thinks will get her up the greasy pole, maybe even to vice-president."

"The voice of politics is often louder than that of common sense," the general remarked to bring the discussion to a close.

[September 19, Friday]

SG-1 returned from a frustrating mission. The next morning, Colonel O'Neill and Major Carter made their way to the laboratory level for a catching up session with the Trajans.

"What have you done with H.T., Sam?" Major Carter asked as she approached the workbench, on which the device extracted from the death glider was mounted in a testing rig.

"He was muttering to himself in a corner when last seen," said Samantha. "It's okay, he gets like that."

"Yes, we know," said Carter. "Oh, he's in next door with Bill Lee." She waved to the figures beyond the glass partition. They returned the wave and joined the visitors.

"We thought we'd lost you and your Specialists," said Trajan. "But you sorted things out?"

"Kinda," said O'Neill.

"Are you allowed to tell us what you were doing?" said Samantha. "It was too top-secret for anyone to know when you were away."

"We were sent to investigate what looked like a weapon," said Carter.

"Something big enough to shoot down a Gould mothership in orbit," O'Neill added with a tinge of regret.

"But?" said Samantha.

"But we turned our backs for two seconds and there the two guys from the Pentagon were . . . gone," said O'Neill.

"It turned out the locals had adopted the weapon as their totem pole," said Carter. "As a means of communicating with their god. And they snatched Doctors Klim and Paulsen when

they strayed into the bushes, looking for other stuff.”

“Looking for a control bunker, they said,” remarked O’Neill. “Having conveniently forgotten they’d been ordered not to stray.”

“So what did you do?” said Trajan. “Shoot up the native village, grab the nerds and leg it for the stargate?”

“‘Zat the bastard’,” said Samantha. “Daniel once told me that’s my dear husband’s standard reaction when the village fanatic starts ranting about his gods.”

“And were I not an Air Force colonel with certain responsibilities,” said O’Neill, “it would be a race to see who’s quicker on the draw, him or me, at times. But Daniel talked them round,” O’Neill added with a smile.

“How?” said Samantha.

“He told them if they think it’s a good idea to worship their idol,” said Carter, “why should they be surprised if someone else does the same? Or even upset?”

“I’d buy that for a dollar,” laughed Trajan.

“Daniel had to do about a hundred buck’s worth of talking,” laughed O’Neill. “He reminded them how big and heavy and solidly stuck to the ground their totem pole is, then he asked them why were they worried about their two prisoners stealing it?”

“In fact, Daniel did such a good job of being logical,” said Carter, “they even let Klim and Paulsen do some more worshipping, and look for their control bunker, before we headed back to the gate.”

“Then we surprised the hell out of them by activating the gate,” said O’Neill. “And just vanishing through it.”

“Good for Daniel,” said Trajan.

“And?” said Samantha. “What did they find? Klim and Paulsen?”

“The totem pole was a weapon once,” said O’Neill, “but it’s like an artillery piece with the breech and the sights removed now.”

“Just so much scrap metal?” said Samantha.

“Good for a totem pole,” said O’Neill. “But no good for defending what’s left of the ruins near it.”

“The control bunker was just a hole in the ground,” said

Carter. "But the priest in charge of the totem pole was settling in there when we left. It was way better than the hut he was living in. How did you get on with your gadget, Sam? The general said you and H.T. found something new on one of the gliders."

"It could be some sort of a tracker," said Samantha. "Which confirms that the checking method is effective for the original job and it's also able to spot unanticipated anomalies."

"What sort of range?" said O'Neill. "The tracker?"

"One theory is that a Goa'uld ship with stealth capabilities, like the ones on the *Sheringham*, could switch on the tracker from Earth orbit," said Samantha, "and pin-point where we're studying the gliders. On Earth or anywhere else."

"Which would do the Gould how much good?" said O'Neill.

"The theory doesn't go that far," said Samantha.

"It probably made sense to the Goa'uld who came up with the idea," said Dr. Lee.

"And I don't buy it anyway," said Samantha.

"But before anyone asks, she has absolutely no idea what this thing is really," said Trajan.

"Okay, that's me paid back," said Samantha. "We're straight now, okay?"

Trajan gave her a big grin. "By the way," he added, "have you heard we're all off to Nevada the week after next?"

"To our Glider Investigation Facility, yes," said Carter.

"That's what they're calling it?" laughed Trajan.

"Can't come soon enough," said O'Neill. "Carter won't let us forget she's owed a glider flight from the first mission. She was all suited up to go after that tak'lak bandit when its engines blew. You won't believe she knew some of the words she was muttering when her joy-ride was called off. Apart from the one she used on Nine-Oh-Seven, of course."

"S.J. thinks she's definitely owed a ride in a glider," Trajan said as Major Carter was trying to stay on the right side of insubordination. "And there will be trouble if she doesn't get one."

"Let's just hope we don't lose any more nerds at the end of

next week,” laughed O’Neill. “Are you stuck here over the weekend?”

“No, the general says the harassment problem has been addressed,” said Trajan. “So we’re having a weekend at home.”

“Someone shot Kinsey?” said O’Neill.

“I don’t think it was as permanent a solution,” Trajan returned with a note of regret.

“What’s this about you being about to become disgustingly rich?” Carter asked with a laugh for something which had to be a silly story.

“Oh, you’ll love this,” said Samantha.

“There’s a firm which got hold of something developed by the Air Force via industrial espionage,” Trajan explained. “But they can’t get it to work so they’ve been making noises about getting ready to sue me for damages, as it’s allegedly based on some work I did.”

“But,” laughed Samantha.

“But I’m shaping up to blow them out of the water with a personal damages claim for trashing my reputation and abusing of my human rights,” said Trajan. “I’m going to demand a hundred and forty-five million dollars from them.”

“Good grief!” gasped Carter. “That should make them sit up and think.”

“I hope they get that message,” laughed Trajan.

September 22, Monday

The Trajans made a leisurely start to a new week. They had been warned not to start anything too absorbing as the SGC would be receiving a Very Important Visitor. Dr. Trajan had to struggle to keep his face expressionless when he and his wife reached the briefing room and he saw the VIV. General Hammond had yet to arrive; an important phone call had detained him.

Trajan directed a jaundiced stare at the senator’s aide: Colonel Samuels. Newly promoted from lieutenant-colonel,

the former Senator Kinsey stooge at the Pentagon's Stargate Mission Analysis Department was now feeling bold again. He had been on the sidelines for a while and he was hoping to make up for lost time on Senator Ballotini's team.

"Dr. Trajan. It's good to see you again." The senator's smile was that of a professional politician.

"Forgive my lack of enthusiasm. Or not, as you choose," Trajan returned.

"It doesn't take an expert to spot the bad blood," Samantha remarked.

"The Senator was responsible for the clowns in the car park incident and all the other harassment," said Trajan.

"For which I am having to serve a period of penance, Dr. Trajan," said the Senator.

"Really?"

"In my defence, I can assure you that the importance of the project demanded extraordinary screening methods to ensure the staff we wish to deploy are psychologically stable and able to maintain the security of the project in all circumstances, no matter how extreme."

"To quote my favourite colonel," said Trajan, "you can't imagine how reassured that makes me feel."

"I hope we can be mature about this and work together, Dr. Trajan."

"And I hope I can suppress my urge to shoot you in the back of the head as a favour to the planet. Oh, did I say that out loud?"

"Senator, could we check this, please?" called one of her lesser aides.

"Phew!" muttered Samantha, watching Senator Ballotini turn away to look at something displayed on her assistant's laptop. "I never thought I'd be married to a man who goes round shooting people in the back of the head."

"And I never thought some goon from the Pentagon would pull a gun on me in a supermarket car park. Or that the woman who sent him to threaten me would still be allowed to be out of gaol."

"Politics, H.T.," said Samantha.

"To quote Teal'c; indeed."

"Apologies, Senator, everyone," said General Hammond as he hustled into the room. "Can we get started?"

"Of course," Senator Balotini claimed a chair facing Dr. Trajan and arranged a sheaf of documents in an overlapping fan in front of her place setting to mark out her territory. "My committee has commissioned a thorough review of all aspects of the projects variously known as Loweston and Topspin, and who better to conduct it than two people who were involved in both projects in their respective alternate universes?"

"Dr. Trajan?" General Hammond said into a pause due to Trajan staying unexpectedly silent.

"I'm just trying to think if there's a better way to waste my time," general," said Trajan. "And Samantha's. And not finding one."

"Did you not yourself identify the relevance of your wife's notes to the project, Dr. Trajan?" Senator Balotini asked with a smile.

"Actually, no," said Trajan. "But don't forget how tightly compartmentalized it has always been. I'm a mathematician, so I'm in that box. My wife is a physicist, so she's in that box. And the contents of the boxes aren't encouraged to mix. So whatever Samantha said about her Project Topspin was just stuff of no real significance to me."

"Well, the contents of your boxes will be mixed now," said the Senator. "You two are uniquely qualified to get Project Loweston back on track. I have all the relevant files you'll need here. Of course, none of it will be allowed to leave the confines of the SGC. You are charged with seeing to that, General."

"Don't tell me," sighed Samantha. "We're confined to barracks, too."

"Only until you integrate the knowledge in these files into a viable project." Balotini turned looking at an expensive watch into a theatrical gesture. "Okay, can I pass these files over to your custody, General? I have to go and look at a potential headquarters for the revived Project Loweston now."

Caught up in her own importance, the Very Important Visitor took her leave with due ceremony and made a grand

procession out of leaving the SGC. Her three-vehicle convoy moved off at a brisk pace, as if itching to use sirens to clear a path for the VIV but suffering the frustration of not wishing to attract attention.

"She didn't get your reference to luminous socks," Samantha said as she and her husband were sorting seventeen files into a logical order.

"Probably just as well," said Trajan. "I'd have been getting black looks from the general if she had."

"This is never going to work out, you know."

"Yes, I do know. But I know where this is going. Balotini is going to blow zillions of tax dollars on getting something going, then she'll slope off on some other brilliant project. And when this one flops, it will be the fault of whoever's in charge at the time and nothing to do with her."

"Alibi in place?"

"Oh, yes. What I'm still struggling to work out is how she got things this far. There has to be something up her sleeve we've yet to find out about."

"Here we are," said a familiar voice. Major Carter arrived at the conference room with another visitor.

"I don't believe it," said Trajan.

"You and H.T. know each other, of course," the major said to the visitor.

"And I recognize her," said Samantha. "Dr. Porton came to my SGC to confer with the other Dr. Trajan several times. I got a couple of posh lunches out of it as a member of the Trajan Group."

"How far did you get?" said Dr. Porton.

"At the last meeting, the other H.T. and the other you were wondering how to tell the Pentagon that Project Topspin was just smoke and mirrors after all. Then the Goa'uld attacked before they could put it in writing."

"Ah," said Dr. Porton.

"So, Claire, are you here with a song in your heart? Or were you press-ganged, like the rest of us?" said Trajan.

"The latter," said Dr. Porton.

"This is going to be real fun," sighed Samantha.

[September 23, Tuesday]

Dr. Porton was assigned an apartment in the visitor quarters next door to the Trajans. Their short corridor became a high-security area and an apartment on the other side of the corridor became a work room, where the Trajans and Dr. Porton began their review of the combined project notes on Projects Loweston and the bare bones available on Project Topspin. All three could see no prospect of progress but they were careful not to express that view in case too much negativity led to the job being prolonged out of sheer vindictiveness.

"Okay," said Trajan in his role as chairman of the group, "we go ahead as discussed. We all read all of the files individually and we make our own personal notes on what could be useful material and what would be major snags."

"Guess which will be the bigger list," said Dr. Porton.

"Negative waves," said Trajan.

"Get used to it," laughed Samantha.

"Working on it, boss," said her husband. "Anyhow, when we've made our eyes bleary, we compare notes and come up with a joint synthesis."

"I like that," laughed Samantha. "Joint synthesis. I bet J.S. becomes a rival to B.S."

"We work for ninety minutes then we do nothing for twenty except have a cup of coffee and try to regain our sanity," Trajan added.

"That's his system," said Samantha, "compulsory breaks so you don't lose the will to live completely."

"I think it's a bit too late, in my case," sighed Dr. Porton.

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As the morning progressed, Dr. Trajan spotted that Dr. Porton was reading with less and less enthusiasm. She perked up a little when the trio took a picnic lunch up to the observation gallery atop the mountain. She descended into gloom again when the work resumed. At an afternoon coffee

break, Trajan decided to violate his nothing-serious rule.

"We can see it's bugging you, Claire," he said. "Can we help?"

"I don't think anyone can help," Porton returned.

"This is something to do with Balotini? I happen to know she believes that people deliver their best work when they are put under extreme pressure. Having been on the receiving end of a lot of it. Both of us. It would be nice if she could remember this is not Soviet Russia and she's not Comrade Stalin. She doesn't have the moustache for it."

"If you put your fingers in your ears, would it protect your eardrums if I started screaming?" said Porton.

"That bad, huh?" said Samantha.

"Worse. But we have to things to do, not talk about my problems."

"Actually, the only useful thing that could come out of all this would be for me to crack the Biretta Paradox. But I can't see any prospect of getting anywhere with that as long as I can't concentrate on the work because I'm wondering what Balotini did to you."

"You also think she was behind what happened to me?" said Porton.

"She has form for dirty deeds," said Trajan. "Is there any way I can help? Or is it too embarrassing?"

Dr. Porton thought for a few moments, then shrugged her shoulders. "I made some bad investments, H.T. I got some bad advice. Now, the bank is threatening to call in a loan I took out when I bought my apartment; which I stand to lose with just about everything in it."

"And she's the prime suspect? Balotini?"

"She hasn't been smug enough to put it into words but she's done enough gloating and offering false sympathy to leave me in no doubt that I have to produce a result for her quickly, or else."

"How much is the bank loan?" said Samantha.

"Three hundred forty-seven grand."

"Crumbs!" said Samantha.

"Do you know the details of your bank account?" said Trajan.

“Well, yes,” said Dr. Porton.

“I was just thinking, I could move, say, three hundred and fifty grand into your account in a matter of minutes. We have all these computers around us and the necessary secure internet access.”

“I couldn’t pay you back, H.T.,” Dr. Porton said quickly. “I don’t know how long it will take me to get straight again.”

“The money is unimportant,” Trajan countered. “What really counts is striking a blow for truth, honesty and the American way.”

“I don’t know, H.T.”

“Look, Claire, you can’t function like this and it’s all that woman’s fault. But I have a plan. And all it needs is the agreement of the other Dr. Trajan.”

“Which you have,” said Samantha.

“Okay, let battle commence,” said Trajan.



Dr. Trajan decided to transfer \$360,000 to Dr. Porton’s account so that she would have some working capital left when she had paid off her loan. The Trajans resumed their chore of document scanning, leaving Dr. Porton staring at printed confirmation that her bank balance had become very healthy suddenly.

When she came down to earth again, Dr. Porton began to compose a letter to her bank manager to accompany a cheque for the amount of the recalled loan. Work was out of the question for her.

The group gave up all pretence of work at four-thirty. Dr. Porton put her letter into the outgoing mail. The group had an early dinner in the mess hall, then retired to the Trajans’ quarters for an informal evening.

The familiar warning klaxon for an off-world activation of the stargate sounded at eight-thirty. A telephone call a few minutes later sent the Trajans into their bedroom to change.

“When did you two join the Air Force?” Dr. Porton asked, gazing in wonder at two figures in SGC-X uniforms.

“We’re doing an official job for the SGC.” Samantha

turned to show the patch on her right shoulder. "Not the Air Force."

"Which is too top-secret for me to know about?" said Porton.

"It might not be but we don't have clearance to tell you," said Trajan.

"Didn't you say there are some monster trucks on TV?"

"Oh, yes." Trajan flicked through channels to the right one. Then his wife practically dragged him to the door.

Professor Mek Klosate and two escorts; the equivalent of one-half of an SG-team; were waiting for the Trajans in the conference room on the level above the embarkation room. The professor had arrived to discuss some results on the stasis devices with Samantha.

Trajan switched on a TV set and gave the escorts the monster truck event as an alternative to sitting near an incomprehensible technical discussion and an hour's boredom.

The Almed had discovered that the Ancient stasis devices had a maximum effective range of around ninety metres. A fully charged, unrestricted device could create a bubble of that diameter in around thirty minutes and maintain it for half an hour.

The field then collapsed abruptly as the power ran out. Despite extensive searches through archives, no clues had been found as to how long a fully charged device would work in conjunction with one of the missing containment jars.

All three participants took notes through the question and answer session. Dr. Trajan got the feeling that Professor Klosate had got at least as much out of the session as his wife had. The escorts seemed happy enough with their TV programme, and they seemed to find lots to laugh at during the advertising breaks.

Trajan remembered that the professor had mentioned a tepid fusion project earlier and dropped a heavy hint. The professor promised to provide some working documents later in the week. Samantha took the opportunity to asked the professor whether the Almed had ever thought about building larger versions of the death glider.

Professor Klosate told her that the Almed had captured gliders in use, and promised to find out if anyone was working on a similar development project.



SG-1 returned from the buying mission in Atlanta in the afternoon. Dr. Jackson had concluded that the jar was genuine and the seals were ancient and intact. A quick scan at the SGC had found that it contained an immature Goa'uld symbiote, which was long dead. SG-1's next stop was the visitor quarters to show off their prize.

"You didn't get any change? From the thirty-grand?" Trajan asked as he looked into the opened jar.

"Sorry, no," laughed Daniel.

"You know what?" said Trajan, "we should get a fireplace in here with a mantelpiece. We could have a nice clock in the middle and one of these on either side."

"We wouldn't be worried about burglars here," said Samantha.

Trajan sniffed the jar. "No pong of something rotten. Are we thinking this is some sort of stasis device after all?"

"Yes," said Daniel. "Dr. Fraiser found the symbiote was remarkably fresh for something that went in there thousands of years ago."

"My best guess is that the power supply dropped to a trickle level for some reason," said Major Carter. "Enough to prevent decay, or reduce it to a very slow rate, but not enough to preserve life. But I might know more when I've done some more scans."

"I can't wait to see your results, Sam." Samantha rose from her chair and rushed into the bedroom. She returned wearing a labcoat.

"Hoi! You've got a job," said Trajan. "Right here."

"Teal'c, would you mind sitting on him if he tries to get in my way?" said Samantha. "It will still be here in the morning, after Sam and I have had some fun," she added to her husband.

"There's no answer to that," said Trajan. "And if you think

I'm getting into a fight with Teal'c, you've got another think coming."

"You think the body of this is the missing piece of Daniel's Device?" said Samantha as she watched Major Carter return the canopic jar to its packing. "Different design, obviously, but the same concept?"

"I hope so," said Carter.

"This is going to knock some Almed socks off when we tell them about it," said Samantha.

"Well, if my partner-in-crime is deserting me, I'm having a tea break," Trajan announced as the ladies hurried away with the canopic jar. "Anyone interested? Or coffee."

"Any cake going?" said Colonel O'Neill.

"Oh, yes," said Trajan. "How was Atlanta?"

"It rained," said Daniel.

"Very quiet," said O'Neill. "After Teal'c arm-wrestled the jar guy's bodyguard and beat him in three seconds flat."



Samantha returned an hour and a half later. "Am I in the dog-house?" she asked on the way to shed her labcoat in the bedroom.

Trajan offered a look of bafflement. "No, you're at the SGC."

When Samantha returned to the main room, Trajan received a helping of the Carter Look, which quickly dissolved into guilt. "Because I deserted you to go and have some fun?" Samantha added. "Are you pissed?"

"You do know that means drunk where I'm from? No, I'm not pissed off. I know your threshold of frustration and I know you can become as much of a loose cannon as me if you're pushed beyond it. And I'm sure what you were doing in the lab was of infinitely more use than Balotini's job."

"You're being incredibly reasonable about this." Samantha fixed her husband with a penetrating stare.

"You mean, suspiciously so?" he said with a laugh. "Actually, I had a couple of ideas while you were away; nothing to do with Balotini's crap; so I've been skiving, too."

"You're not just saying that to make me feel okay?"

Trajan offered his notebook as proof.

"I have no idea what any of this means," said Samantha. "So you must be telling the truth. Just looking at it makes my brain hurt."

"Must be good stuff, then. So, did you have fun? Have you solved the mystery? Are you now feeling refreshed and ready to pick up Balotini's job with renewed vigour?"

"We had some fun with the artefact, we didn't get very far and no, I'm not itching to get back to Balotini's boring slog, as someone I know calls it."

"Such is life," Trajan said with a smile. "This is why I was skiving. I got bogged down with this."

Samantha accepted a page of notes and scanned the text rapidly. "What don't you get?" she asked with a frown.

"This bit." Trajan pointed to the offending paragraphs.

"But that's obvious even to a person of the meanest intelligence."

"But I have extremely generous intelligence, so I don't get it."

Samantha dissolved into laughter.

"It's a lot easier to make you laugh than Sam."

"Mainly because I know what you're thinking when you look at me like that."

"And, mercifully, Sam doesn't?"

"I hope not. Why don't we think about this tomorrow?"

"Sounds good to me," said Trajan.

[September 24, Wednesday, late afternoon]

Having seen SG-1 on their way on another mission of exploration to a planet which had not been visited before, General Hammond returned to his office in nice time to field a telephone call from Senator Balotini.

"Senator?" said the general, his tone inviting an explanation for the unexpected call.

"I hear Dr. Porton is on medical leave, George," Senator

Balotini said in a dangerous tone.

"Suffering from stress, Senator. Dr. Frasier has concluded that she is in no condition to work at the moment. But Dr. Trajan and his wife are continuing the work on the project."

"I need her back on the project, George."

"Our choice is between a break of several days or a total breakdown, Senator. Dr Frasier has determined that Dr. Porton is under severe emotional pressure and she needs a break. This is not negotiable."

"Very well, but I want her back on the project soonest."

"Dr. Fraiser has her under observation, Senator. When she's cleared, she will be back on the job."

"She's not to leave the SGC, General."

"That's understood, Senator."

General Hammond broke the connection and checked a card on his desk to find an extension number in the visitor quarters.

"I have just had a phone call, Dr. Trajan," he reported.

"You sound remarkably unfazed, General," said Trajan.

"Thanks mainly to your heads-up, Dr. Trajan."

"There's not a lot that trumps the medical card, sir."

"I imagine you're thinking leopard and spots right now."

"All I'm thinking is 'back to the wilderness' and 'forever'. I take it gaol is out of the question?"

"Even if, as you suspect, Dr. Porton was given bad investment advice deliberately, and her bank manager was 'got at', the trail will have been cut long before it reaches Senator Balotini."

"Which is not necessarily a hindrance all the time, General."

"I know it's futile to tell you to desist, Dr. Trajan, but I would ask you to remain within the law while you're seeking retribution."

"You have my word that nothing I do will reflect badly on either the SGC or yourself, general," Trajan returned in an even tone. "You might be interested to know that I've already run a check on the alleged financial advisor. It would appear that Dr. Porton is the only client of his who lost a bundle."

As he concluded the call, Dr. Trajan decided that it would

not be a good idea to mention to the general that three private inquiry agents, all ex-military and/or ex-police, were about to have a quiet word with the financial advisor.

Feeling even more unenthusiastic about his review job, he decided to follow his wife's example and do some skiving.

Half an hour earlier, Samantha had rushed in with some data for him to analyse. Her skive had involved finding out what Major Carter was up to.

When Trajan had created a three-dimensional map of the data, Samantha plucked the sheet of paper from the printer and headed for the door, turning down an opportunity to explain herself.

Trajan rode a lift to the laboratory level, then took the precaution of letting the adjutant know where he was in case General Hammond had further questions for him. Major Carter and two technicians were making adjustments to an impressive piece of equipment. Samantha was sitting at a desk, tapping a pen on a pad and looking frustrated.

"What's this supposed to be?" Trajan said, looking over her shoulder.

"It's a basic piece of math where I come from," said Samantha.

"It's definitely not basic maths where I come from, so someone is going to have to explain it to me."

"And yet, it was you who created it."

"Another me in another place. And this has a lot of holes in it."

"That's all I can remember of it."

"I suppose I might be able to figure out what it's supposed to do if someone who knows that does a proper job of explaining it."

"Fifteen-all," remarked one of the technicians, who was presumed to be a tennis fan.

"What will understanding this bit of maths do for me, by the way?" Dr. Trajan added.

"I think it's the key to matching Daniel's Device to the jar."

"I thought that data you showed me was that?"

"That didn't work out. This might, if you can fill in the holes."

“Okay, lady, let’s see what else you’ve got. Every scrap will help.”



In the evening, the stargate activated to deliver a data transmission to Dr. Trajan. It included a warning from the Almed about the presence of recall devices in death gliders, which would activate if they were left in place after a process of reverse-engineering.

Trajan was pleased to be able to draft a reply telling the Almed that the Terrans knew all about the devices and knew how to neutralize them. He included all available data on the tracker found during the last retrieval mission with a request for suggestions as to its source.

The messages from the Almed concluded with the news that they had considered building a larger version of the death glider in the past, but there had always been higher priorities, and a suggestion of a meeting of experts to explore the prospects for a joint project.

Trajan attached a separate note to his formal reply to tell General Hammond that he felt that getting the Almed to join in with Glider Plus would guarantee that the development program took no more than the two years of Samantha’s estimate, and that it would be completed during the term of the current president and be eligible for inclusion in his political legacy.



New Direction

[September 25, Thursday]

The Trajans spent forty minutes away from their review work the next morning. They had to attend a final briefing on a third and last glider retrieval mission, which was scheduled for the following day. SG-1 and SG-5 would be on escort duty for a trip by stargate then spacecraft to retrieve eight gliders from a planet which had been abandoned by its Goa'uld overlord following a concerted attack by a rival.

The planet's mining operation had been bombed thoroughly, the stargate had been toppled and buried, and the DHD destroyed in what Colonel O'Neill has described as a snake-on-snake skirmish. The mission's plan was to sneak in and sneak out again with a cargo of gliders before the overlord was feeling strong enough to send enough of her ships to secure the planet until the stargate could be restored.

General Hammond took most of the afternoon off as he knew that he would be on duty in the evening. It was part of a conscious effort not to lose touch with his home life despite the constant demands of his job. He was just settling back at his desk when Colonel O'Neill arrived with a thick wad of documents for his attention.

"Some bedtime reading for you, sir," O'Neill announced.

"Is this you applying creative writing to your mission reports, Jack?" The general put on an expression of dismay as he tested the combined weight of the documents.

"You might want to start at the back, sir," O'Neill said with a smile. "That's where the really interesting stuff is."

"Oh?" General Hammond opened the last binder at the last few pages and scanned the neatly printed text. When he looked up again, he found that O'Neill was wearing a rather smug smile.

"Really interesting," O'Neill repeated.

"I take it this didn't come from the Pentagon?" the general said.

"I take it you've not heard anything back from them yet, sir?" O'Neill countered. "But as long as we have Trajan and his real smart buddies, we don't really need them."

"I don't think I want to know any of the details about where this came from, Jack."

"That makes sense, sir."

"And I'm uncomfortable about Dr. Trajan going behind my back."

"He's aware of that, sir. But he did it for two good reasons. Number one being that if this stuff was entrusted to his wife and Sam Two was involved in the work, then she should have a copy to check it over."

"I think you'll find that the Pentagon will be getting Samantha to do that, Jack."

"Yes, sir. Which brings us to Trajan's second reason. That it would be nice if we had an honest copy that we know is accurate to check against anything that comes out of the Pentagon."

"This would be Dr. Trajan's instinctive mistrust of organizations close to where political decisions are made? Especially in the light of Dr. Porton's experiences at the hands of Senator Balotini?"

"That, and we all know how the Pentagon has this habit of leaving out stuff they don't want us to know, sir. Be honest, would they ever let us see all that dirt on Senator Kinsey?"

General Hammond looked down at the open file. "This is another Senator Kinsey we're talking about, Jack."

O'Neill made a dismissive hand gesture. "Same snake, different colour, sir. The other FBI suspected the other Kinsey of having talks with the Gould and it looks like they told him he could be puppet ruler of Earth if he helped to take out the SGC."

"There's also a fairly detailed dirt file on Kinsey compiled by the NSA when the President ruled that Kinsey had become a threat to national security. Our Kinsey hasn't done the stuff at the end of this dossier but the further you go back along the time-line, as Trajan pointed out, the closer it will be to what

our Kinsey has done.”

“That’s likely,” the general said with a nod.

“As you know, sir, Carter Two has told us the White House was blown off the map in her parallel, and her president with it, when the attack on the SGC began. I’d bet quite a lot that Kinsey was already proclaiming himself president from his new capital in Virginia when that happened. That’s where the NSA found he had set up a headquarters. But you can read all that for yourself.”

“Who has had sight of this, Jack?”

“Trajan, Mrs. Trajan, me, you. That’s it, sir. Trajan is planning to let our people here have the benefit of the nerd stuff somehow if the Pentagon looks like it’s dragging its feet. You have the only printed copy of the Kinsey stuff.”

“But there are electronic copies?”

“Like Trajan said, sir, the more copies there are, the harder it is to make it disappear. And on a simple need-to-know basis, you need to know the Kinsey stuff. You might not do anything with what you know, but you do need that option.”

“Understood,” General Hammond said with a nod. He let out a heavy breath. “Let us hope no one ever find out what Trajan has done.”

Colonel O’Neill shrugged his shoulders. “He’s not going to tell anyone, sir. Nor am I.”



In the early evening, a delegation from the Almed planet arrived at the SGC. The visitors had chosen to make a very early start to their day with the time difference down to around ten hours. One of their leaders wished to confer with General Hammond. The scientists with her had matters to discuss with the Trajans, who were in uniform as they escorted their guests to a meeting room on Level 17.

Delegate Silsa Postrian was around fifty and her rank as a senior member of her planet’s government entitled her to four armed escorts. General Hammond contented himself with just Colonel O’Neill, Teal’c and Major Renny, his adjutant, on his side of the conference table.

"Our administration wishes to meet representatives of the rebel Jaffa," Delegate Postrian announced when the preliminaries were over. "Given the history of the Jaffa as the Goa'uld security forces," she added with a glance in Teal'c's direction, "they feel that a meeting on our planet would be rather, well, uncomfortable."

"That's putting it mildly," laughed Colonel O'Neill.

"Accordingly, we would ask that a meeting be held here, on neutral ground, where the Jaffa would feel safe. Or rather, comfortable," the delegate added with a quick smile for Teal'c.

He responded with a graceful nod.

"What would happen at this meeting, ma'am?" said the general.

"The Jaffa have a long history of warfare in the service of the Goa'uld, and a rather shorter history of warfare against them. We would hope, with the additional assistance of Terran military experts, to receive the benefits of that experience and make our efforts against the Goa'uld more effective. Which, I hope you will agree, is in all our interests."

"Indeed," murmured Teal'c.

"Tactics and what to look out for?" Colonel O'Neill added.

"In one, I believe your people say," said the delegate.

"The meeting, it would be just with ourselves and representatives of the Jaffa?" said General Hammond.

"I gather that trying to include the Tok'ra in a four-way meeting might be unproductive," the delegate said with a smile.

"There are tensions," the general said with a sigh.

Teal'c nodded gravely.

"This sharing; it wouldn't be just one way?" said Colonel O'Neill. "Like, your way?"

"You are interested in a weapon which hits the target before the trigger is depressed, Colonel?" said the delegate.

"Some of those would be nice," O'Neill confirmed.

"I hope Dr. Trajan has explained that we're still trying to work out the theory of that weapon and we're a long way from even attempting trials of a prototype?" said the delegate.

"I just figured that you, being so smart and all, might have

got there by now," said O'Neill.

"I'm sorry to disillusion you, Colonel, but we're not particularly smarter than you," said the delegate. "We just work from a greater knowledge base in certain areas. On that scale, one could say that both the Terrans and the Jaffa are smarter than us in military matters. Hence our desire for talks with both parties."

"Cool," said O'Neill.

"So a preliminary agenda for the meeting would be an exchange of information on tactics which each party has found particularly successful against the Gould?" said the general. "I'm sure my superiors will see the obvious advantages in contacting the Jaffa and trying to arrange a three-way exchange of information and, maybe, some technology."

"Some technology would be on the table, yes," said Delegate Postrian. "Subject to conditions of practicality."

"I know that one," said O'Neill. "It means stuff that we could use right out of the box without having to spend six months trying to figure out how it works."

"Dr. Trajan's influence again?" said the delegate.

"With input from Major Carter," said the general.

As the meeting got down to the task of sketching a preliminary timetable for the three-way conference, the Trajans were engaged in preliminaries with their guests, the physicists Lorhn Skovars and Margan Chorn.

The guests had been slightly intimidated by the presence of armed escorts in the elevator but they had recovered their poise when the men with guns had stayed outside the meeting room.

"You're in uniform, so you're going out on missions?" Margan Chorn said to Samantha as Dr. Trajan was pouring out glasses of apple juice for everyone.

"And you've been on a spaceship?" Lorhn Skovars added.

"Not quite," said Trajan as his wife beamed wordless affirmation.

"A spaceship and something else?" Lorhn said with a frown.

"More than one spaceship?" Margan divined.

"I am definitely going to defect," said Lorhn. "You can't be building your own yet. No offence," he added quickly.

"As a historian, you're familiar with the concept of prize ships and shipwrecks?" said Trajan.

"Oh, yes. That's how we got our first spaceships," said Lorhn. "We repaired some wrecks the Goa'uld had been forced to abandon."

"That's also how our allies in the Jaffa and Tok'ra got theirs," said Trajan.

"And that's how I got my spaceship," said Samantha.

"You have a spaceship?" Skovars asked with a frown.

"We came across a derelict," Trajan explained. "S.J. got enough of it working to let us get it home, and that makes it her personal spaceship."

"That makes sense," said Skovars, modifying the frown with a smile. "Where is your spaceship now?"

"She's letting the Air Force look after it," said Trajan.

"You won't believe how much it costs to run them," Samantha added with a smile.

"Actually, we do know. Roughly," Chorn added. "As you know, H.T. has been authorized to talk to us about your Glider Plus programme, Samantha. Our leaders are minded to offer you technical assistance as something which will be of good value quickly to the Tau'ri."

"We're also interested in your ideas for our own benefit," said Skovars. "We think that larger, glider-based craft of the size Samantha has been talking about will be of use to us."

"I thought you had spaceships as big as our space shuttles?" said Samantha.

"But the technology is less advanced than glider technology, which makes them less efficient and less flexible," said Skovars. "The Goa'uld were never interested in that area, and we've not gone there, either."

"Just as long as you don't try to take over her project," Trajan warned with a grin for his wife. "Because she might get dangerous. Especially if I happen to have a gun she can borrow."

"You might have noticed that we make fun of each other all the time," Samantha said patiently. She looked down at her uniform. "But it puts a new twist to the relationship when you're a long way from home and near the front line on a

derelict spaceship, and he's making what could be life and death decisions based on what I'm telling him. It proves that he takes me seriously. As seriously as I take his views when the chips are down. Which is nice to know."

"But terrifying," said Margan Chorn. "Life and death decisions?"

"Of course, I didn't realize that at the time," said Samantha. "I was too focussed on the work I was doing to spot that."

"Making her spaceship work again," Trajan explained.

"It wasn't until we were off duty, a long time later, that the life and death bit hit me," Samantha continued. "At the time, I really enjoyed being part of a small team, working against the clock to get the job done but making sure it was done right. There's only one thing that freaks me out a bit: when I see all the SG teams armed to the teeth, and when I turn around and find H.T. looks just like them."

"Like a cowboy from the Wild West?" laughed Skovars.

"Except, he'd from the civilized East, from England," said Samantha.

"They used to rule half your planet at one time, according to H.T.'s history books," said Skovars, "so they must have a long tradition of carrying guns. And he must have been to dangerous places lots of times before. Or places where danger could arise but didn't."

"That's true, but I don't like being reminded of it," said Samantha. "I was at the Air Force shooting range with Colonel O'Neill once, he'd given me a lift there, and he knew where H.T. was because of the way he was shooting a submachine gun. That's disturbing; that my husband has been in enough danger that someone like Colonel O'Neill can spot where he is by the sound of how he shoots a gun."

"He just knows how H.T. shoots on the range, Samantha," said Margan Chorn.

"No, it's more than that," said Samantha. "He's been in real danger. I know. I've seen his bullet-hole."

"But you're not armed to the teeth when you go through the stargate?"

"Gosh, no! All I've ever shot is a zat-gun. At a target."

"As I keep saying," said Trajan, "it's common sense to be ready for trouble. Because if you aren't, well . . ."

"The Universe will chuck a bucketful at you," Samantha finished. "Because, basically, the Universe is a real rotter."

"You know the theory but it doesn't stop you being freaked out when you see me armed to the teeth?" said Trajan.

"Exactly."

"I'm surprised you want to go on these dangerous missions," said Margan Chorn.

"Are you kidding?" laughed Trajan. "She's like a kid at Christmas when she's on another planet, working on a mission that her work inspired. Full-metal-nerd mode, to quote Colonel O'Neill."

"Translations of what he said into English are available for a small fee," Samantha said with a grin at her husband.

"I think we'd better sketch out a report on our joint glider venture for our mutual superiors while my wife and I are still talking to each other," laughed Trajan.

"On that subject," said Margan Chorn, "the device H.T. found in that glider mission? It might be a beacon rather than a tracker. Which would give advance warning of gliders approaching to attack."

"Why would the Goa'uld install something like that?" said Trajan.

"They didn't. You know they use slave labour to build all their gliders and motherships? Usually Jaffa captured from someone else."

"You're saying some of the slaves are a bit rebellious on the quiet. And they have access to technology and some pretty advanced knowledge of how to use it?"

"That's the theory, anyway."

"In that case, it would be nice to know where these gliders were built," said Samantha, "and see if we can liberate these guys and see if they'll join us."

"The problem with that," said Trajan, "is the Tok'ra are most likely to know that and they're very good at not telling us stuff so we can't go butting in and rock the boat."

"He thinks that's more proof of his theory that the Universe hates us," said Samantha.

"It certainly seems to be not on our side a suspicious number of times," laughed Margan Chorn.

[September 26, Friday]

The sound of the off-world activation klaxon drew General Hammond down to the gate control room the following morning.

"The Almed, sir," Sergeant Harriman reported. "We're receiving a data transmission for Dr. Trajan."

"Do we know the content?" said the general.

"No, sir. It's encrypted. Transmission completed, sir."

"Confirm receipt," said the general.

"Yes, sir."

Moments later, the stargate reverted to its dormant state.

"Is it all right to interrupt Dr. Trajan, sir?" said the sergeant. "As he's working on a priority-one review?"

"I think something from the Almed is sufficiently urgent," the general decided.



Dr. Claire Porton was still officially on medical leave, but doing nothing did not come naturally to her and she had been unable to resist joining the Trajans in the work room for morning coffee and some company.

She was surprised to find Samantha sitting, staring at her husband, as if trying to hypnotize him, from the other side of their work table.

"What's going on?" Dr. Porton asked with a laugh.

"He's had a message from . . .," Samantha stopped and frowned.

"How clued up are you on what happens here, Claire," said Trajan.

"I know you go to other planets, obviously," said Dr. Porton. "But I'm not on the mailing list for your newsletter."

"Are you going to get us shot?" said Samantha.

"This is, actually, relevant to what we're doing here," said Trajan.

"You realize you're going to have to tell me now?" said Dr. Porton.

"One of our allies has sent us some data on attempts to get a tepid fusion project off the ground," said Trajan.

"Tepid as opposed to cold?" said Dr. Porton.

"Well, I suppose it's a lot hotter than tepid," Trajan admitted. "But not at the temperatures you find inside a star. Quite a long way short of that."

"There must be a snag, though," said Samantha.

"Hasn't he told you all the details?" Dr. Porton said with a frown. "Surely your security clearance is high enough."

"It's nothing like that," laughed Samantha. "The reports arrived encrypted and he's still working on them. All he's decoded so far is the covering letter."

"The snag is that there are gaps in the theory," said Trajan. "This is a sort of starter pack, and the professor I got it from says anything the Tau'ri, that's us, can do about bridging the gaps will be very welcome. The project is currently stalled on . . . , the planet I got the data from. They put it aside when the need to defend themselves against a concerted attack by a mutual enemy became more pressing."

"Which they fought off?" said Dr. Porton.

"With our help," said Samantha. "Which is why they're grateful."

"Is this something you're going to offer to a certain senator, whose name I can't say without using some extremely unladylike language?" said Dr. Porton. "As an alternative to Project Loweston, which is just a complete waste of time?"

"No," said Trajan.

"This place isn't . . . you know?" Dr. Porton waved pointing fingers at various items in the room including a desk lamp.

"Bugged?" said Samantha. "It better hadn't be."

"No, it isn't," said Trajan. "You can rely on that."

"In that case, I know of a group doing research in this area," said Dr. Porton. "Based around the Cernan Effect."

Trajan looked at his wife, who shook her head and said,

"Me, neither."

"It's a bit exotic," Dr. Porton said with a smile.

"Where are you going with this, Claire?" Trajan invited.

"It wouldn't be against the interests of this country to pass it on to them rather than letting it be incorporated into Project Loweston."

"But could we get away with that?" said Samantha.

"Does anyone know what's in that message you got from whoever?"

"Not even me, for most of it," said Trajan.

"What would your general say if I asked his permission to go and talk to this group and share you information with them?"

"He'd ask me if I'm trying to get him shot for sabotaging Project Loweston," said Trajan.

"But this is nothing to do with Loweston, H.T.," said Porton.

"I bet the Pentagonians won't agree with that interpretation," Trajan returned. "Especially given a certain nameless senator's juice."

"Even if you tell the Pentagonians that this group will be able to act on the information you have immediately instead of waiting months to get the revived Loweston set up and going again?"

"You can't tell the Pentagonians anything," Samantha remarked. "They know everything."

"I should have seen that coming," laughed Dr. Porton.

"And we don't need to do anything right away," said Trajan. "As I said, what's on offer is essentially a starter pack. Our allies think some thought by both of us; S.J. and myself; might help to bridge some gaps in the theory. And they think we'll get more out of it by working out how to use materials which we know can be sourced locally."

"You're going to have to give the general something," said Samantha.

"I can give him some of what the professor sent," Trajan decided. "And tell him I need to consult the . . . our allies again when I've thought about the rest."

"Hey, have you seen the time?" Samantha said suddenly.

"Going somewhere nice?" said Dr. Porton.

"That depends whether we run into any bad guys," said Samantha. "Are you going to be okay on your own, Claire?"

"I have all these nice security people keeping an eye on me," said Dr. Porton. "And I have a couple of books I've been meaning to read for months."

[September 28, Sunday]

In the visitor quarters on Sunday evening, Dr. Porton found herself unable to prevent herself from staring at the Trajans. "I'm sorry, but I'm finding it impossible to believe you've been half-way across the galaxy since I last saw you," she said eventually. "And I can see why you'd much rather be doing your stargate stuff than wasting your time on that woman's pile of crap."

"Maybe not quite half-way across the galaxy," said Trajan.

"But you went to another planet through the stargate," said Porton, "you had a ride on a spaceship to yet another planet, you grabbed some technology then your spaceship took you back to the second planet so you could come home through the stargate."

"If you put it like that, it sounds like we owe the SGC a small fortune for a holiday of a lifetime," said Samantha.

"Don't say that in the hearing from anyone from Accounts," said Trajan, "or they might take you up on it."

"And H.T. was the captain of a spaceship once," said Porton.

"And yet, he looks just like a nerd in fancy dress when he's got his uniform on?" said Trajan.

"Actually, it really suits you," said Porton. "Which just shows how deceptive appearances can be as far as the fancy dress aspect goes."

"That's what I keep telling him," said Samantha. "But anyway, how are you doing, Claire?"

"I've been discovering the pleasures of having nothing to do," said Dr. Porton. "I've been sitting in front of Sam's

beach window, reading stuff in your library. I've been watching some TV, and realizing why I don't miss it. And they let me go up to the observation gallery at the top of the mountain last night to watch for meteors."

"See any?"

"I was only there for half an hour, but I saw four."

"How's the rest cure working?" Samantha asked.

"I'm almost not able to resist an urge to start doing something again," said Porton. "But I know your Dr. Fraiser won't let me just yet. I take it your mission; and I'm not going to ask you what it was about; went off okay?"

"Almost okay enough to be boring," said Samantha. "Except, being on a spaceship and other planets won't be boring for me for ages; if ever. And someone I know doesn't care which planet he's on as long as he has a notebook and something to write with."

"Someone's a little miffed because I spent too much time with the notebook and not enough time being amazed about being on a spaceship," said Trajan.

"Productively? With the notebook?" said Porton.

"I think what everyone's been losing track of is Biretta's amazing talent for over-complication," said Trajan. "When you cut through the fog of over-egging, you suddenly realize that Samantha is quite right. All you need are five dimensions."

"I'm going to have to see some very solid proof before I accept that," said Porton.

"Working on it, boss," Trajan said with a smile. "I'm now thinking that Biretta created a very elegant triple symmetry, hence the need for nine dimensions in his theory."

"Not fifteen?" said Porton.

"I think that would have made his brain hurt," said Trajan. "Hence his use of just nine. But I now think his whole idea was based on what will prove to be a false analogy. Something that seemed valid at the time of his work; but I think later discoveries and revisions of earlier work have unravelled it."

"That sounds very important," Samantha remarked. "I just wish I knew what it meant."

"Everything starts to fall into place there," said Trajan. "If

you reject the triple symmetry, the paradox turns out to be a coming together of two quite independent threads, which just look like they're related because they have a lot in common."

"So you've successfully resolved the paradox?" said Dr. Porton.

"Actually, I'm thinking it should be renamed Biretta's Distraction because there never was a paradox in the first place."

"You mean, you're going to resolved it by proving the paradox never existed in the first place?" said Samantha. "That's positively diabolical. And rather sad."

"How so?" said Trajan.

"Because it's the last major piece of work the other you did before the Goa'uld attacked us. And he'll never get the recognition he deserves."

"He will get some recognition," Trajan pointed out, "because my report will state that what he told you was instrumental in my solution. What?" he added when Dr. Porton pulled a face.

"I was just thinking, if only Samantha hadn't remembered the other you worked with a Cold Fusion Team, that would knock out a big part of that woman's case."

"But it has to be significant that there was nothing about cold fusion on S.J.'s chip," Trajan pointed out. "Which means that either the team had produced nothing worth going on the chip, or they had barely started doing whatever it was they were doing."

"Not an argument that woman would want to hear, H.T."

"Which doesn't stop us including it in our report," said Trajan.

[September 29, Monday]

When Senator Balotini's arrival at SGC was announced at the end of a busy Monday morning, General Hammond felt quite proud of being able to resist the temptation to mutter, 'Oh, joy!' in the manner of Colonel O'Neill as he replaced the

receiver of his green telephone.

When she reached the general's office, the Senator was wearing her habitual expression of annoyance. Having to park her entourage at the main gate, she felt, was an insult to someone of her status.

"I hope Dr. Porton has been cleared to resume her work, General," she said in her best subtly threatening tone when she had seated herself in front of General Hammond's desk with the air of visiting royalty.

"My chief medical officer reports that Dr. Porton is much improved, Senator," the general returned in an even tone.

"I'd like a progress report from Dr. Trajan."

"Dr. Trajan is not on the base, Senator. Either of them."

"Where are they?" The senator was annoyed.

"I can tell you only that they are not at the SGC, Senator, and that the movement orders came directly from the Pentagon."

"I suppose Porton will do."

"Dr. Porton is not here either, Senator."

"Are they even on this planet?"

"All I can tell you, Senator, is that they all left here together. But I have no information on where they went after that, or whether they are still together. Their movements are clearly on a need-to-know basis and I am not on the to-know list."

A range of emotions chased across the senator's face. She realized that if she tried to make a protest, she would just make a fool of herself. The general was a military man, who was under orders from a higher power. "Very well," the senator said at last. "Let me know when the Trajans and Porton return here. I'll try to fit them into my schedule later. You are expecting them back?"

"Oh, yes," said the general. "They didn't take any luggage."



The Trajans returned to the SGC after nightfall. They were looking quite cheerful after their unexpected day out.

"No Dr. Porton, sir?" the clerk at the main gate asked as he

handed over SGC IDs.

"You can park her ID for the moment, Sergeant," said Trajan. "She's been reassigned."

"To somewhere too top secret for anyone else to know," Samantha added.

"We get that story all the time, ma'am," the sergeant said with a smile. "Do we need to arrange for her things to be packed up and sent on?"

"I imagine that's already in hand," said Trajan.

"But very stealthily so no one knows she's gone," said Samantha.

"Sounds like I should forget I've ever heard of her," the sergeant said as he moved Dr. Porton's ID to a small safe.

"Wise move," laughed Samantha.

The Trajans took a lift down to the visitor quarters. Dr. Porton had escaped but Trajan and his wife still had to complete the review of cold fusion material and write their report.

As a result of manoeuvres over the weekend, the review team had been whisked to Denver to meet the Inter-Fusion Team. This group had been exploring the possibility of triggering a controlled fusion reaction at temperatures lower than those of "hot" fusion.

The group had been delighted to read the material which Trajan had received from the Almed. Very quickly during the meeting, Trajan had realized that the team was intent on drafting Dr. Porton. They had just wanted to meet the lady face-to-face to find out if she was someone they could work with. As for Dr. Porton, she was happy to be working on something that looked like producing results within her lifetime.

September 30, Tuesday

Samantha Trajan pulled a face as she watched her husband abandon her for a briefing on a stargate mission, but she accepted that she had done less of her share of the review

work recently. On the positive side, the end of that particular assignment was in sight.

Trajan sat down at the table in the briefing room next to fellow Specialist Dr. William Lee, then flicked his eyes between Colonel O'Neill and Dr. Jackson.

"What?" he invited, trying to read their expressions.

"We were just wondering if you still work here," Daniel said.

"No one has told me I don't," said Trajan. He nodded greetings to SG-5 and SG-6 as the other teams joined the group. "As far as I know, my letter of resignation is still in Hammond's desk drawer."

"I hope no one put money on Trajan being gone," Major Grend of SG-5 remarked as he sat down.

"People are betting on that?" said Trajan.

"Some people are a bit short of amusement," said O'Neill.

The arrival of General Hammond cut short further discussion. He activated an overhead projector. "We have sent a MALP to this planet," said the general, "and it showed an array of equipment about thirty yards from the stargate. A drone flight showed a similar array around three-quarters of a mile away from the gate."

"In a neat little hut without walls but with a roof to keep the rain off," remarked O'Neill. "It rains a lot here?"

"The bright green of the vegetation says it does," remarked Daniel.

"No signs of life anywhere?" said Trajan.

"None in the range of the drone flight," the general confirmed. "No electronic transmissions detected. Accordingly, the mission will be to examine both equipment arrays to determine their function, if possible. Drs. Lee and Trajan will inspect the array at the stargate. SG-One will inspect the other array."

"Major Carter will consult with the Specialists, as necessary, by radio and remote video. SG-Six will deploy their drone for top cover. SG-Five and the rest of SG-Six will secure the stargate."

"The complete lack of writing on the instruments, or whatever they are, is curious," said Major Carter. "The MALP has

photographed the array nearest the gate from all sides and we can't see even part numbers. We assume the other array is the same from the drone's pictures."

"Sounds like some sort of automatic equipment," said Dr. Lee.

"But not something watching the gate," said Trajan. "Or the MALP would have attracted some attention. Is it equipment or just boxes piled up?"

"Other suggestions include it's some sort of supply dump," said the general. "Which doesn't explain what looks like an identical secondary site some distance from the stargate."

"Components of something like a radio telescope?" suggested Lee.

"The drone didn't find any others within five miles," said Carter.

"We hope to learn more when you get there," said the general. "You move out at fourteen hundred, which will get you to the planet at about three hours after dawn, local time."

There was a brief question and answer session, then the SG Teams dispersed. Their agenda was drawing equipment and taking lunch before their departure in the early afternoon.



The planet offered grey skies and a smell of something sweet and a little rotten. The air was still and neither particularly warm nor chilly

"It's not raining," Colonel O'Neill remarked as he emerged from the stargate.

"Has been, though," said Dr. Jackson. "But not very much."

There were no signs of life, human or animal, in the immediate area of the stargate. Dr. Lee deployed his detector and reported that there were no electronic signals within its range. The drone pilot launched his miniature aircraft and reported that other site was unoccupied.

Major Carter, Dr. Jackson and Teal'c set off for the other site at a rapid walk. Colonel O'Neill stayed behind to deploy SG-5 and the rest of SG-6 to defend the gate. He was just

about to set off for Site Two when the drone operator reported trouble.

"What sort of trouble?" said O'Neill.

"Heavy interference, sir. I'm losing the video. Shit. Lost everything, sir. The drone must be down on the ground now."

"Trajan?" called the colonel. "Where's Trajan?"

"Jack?" Dr. Trajan emerged from the far side of the wall-less hut and waved a hand.

"What's going on?" called the colonel. "What did you do?"

"Nothing," Trajan returned. "We're still looking for something that's switched on. Nothing is, though."

"H.T.," said Dr. Lee. "There's something drawing power now."

"Strike that," said Trajan. "Something that wasn't switched on before is now."

"What's switched on?" said O'Neill.

"We're trying to figure that out. Give us five minutes," said Trajan.

"Okay. Carter? Come in, Carter," O'Neill added into his radio. "Can anyone at all hear me on the radio?" He scanned the local group. Those in earshot shook their heads. Those further away continued to scan the perimeter for trouble.

Four minutes drifted by.

"Well?" O'Neill called to the Specialists.

"Bill thinks it looks like some sort of communication device," said Dr. Trajan.

"That's going from its output," Dr. Lee added.

"Could it be screwing up our comms?" O'Neill said quickly to cut off a technical lecture.

"That's highly likely," said Trajan.

"Can you switch it off?" O'Neill hefted his MP-5.

"It would be better to find the power supply and turn it off rather than filling it full of lead," Trajan said.

"How long?" said O'Neill.

"Three or four minutes, five tops."

"Okay, everyone stay where you are," O'Neill called to his troops. "We'll have comms back in five minutes."

"I hope you're right," Dr. Lee muttered to his colleague. "What if we can't figure out how to switch it off?"

"I, too, have a gun, and it's loaded, and I know how to use it," Trajan reminded him. "And the SG teams have C-Four demolition charges. Sometimes, there isn't time for the clever stuff, Bill."

"Right, the military solution," Dr. Lee said with a nervous laugh. "That has its place, too. Test that bit, there."

"Colonel?" Trajan added to O'Neill. "If we switch this off, someone might send out a repair crew."

"We'll worry about that if it happens," said O'Neill. "Get it switched off soonest."

"Move back a bit," said Dr. Lee. "The power line has to be one of these."



Four minutes later, Trajan waved a hand to attract Colonel O'Neill's attention then offered an upraised thumb.

"Sir?" burst from the radios. "Carter for Colonel O'Neill. Are you receiving me?"

"Carter? Get back here," O'Neill ordered.

"Yes, sir. What happened?"

"There's some doo-hickey here that just switched itself on and screwed up our comms," said O'Neill. "Trajan and Lee have switched it off but I need to be sure it stays dead until we're out of here. And there's a whole bunch of other stuff here that could start up."

"Yes, sir, we've barely started examining Site Two."

"Screw Site Two, get back here."

"Yes, sir," said Major Carter. "On our way."

"It could be some sort of monitoring station that's sending a routine report," Dr. Lee said to Dr. Trajan. "Like an automated weather station sending a routine report on local rainfall."

"Or something that detected our radio transmissions," said Trajan. "Some sort of burglar alarm."

"Knowing our luck, it's that," said Lee.

"But why didn't it report the MALP?"

"Maybe it's only interested in people, not machines. Do we try and put these panels back on?"

"Let's just keep documenting until Sam and company get back," said Trajan. "I'm not detecting any more power use."

"No back-up to the burglar alarm," said Lee. "That's good, isn't it?"

"Good for us, yes," said Trajan.

"Sir, the drone is working again," the pilot reported. "It must have made a soft landing. I've got it flying again."

"See anything?" said O'Neill.

"Shit. There's a vehicle heading our way, sir. Looks big and nasty."

"E.T.A.?"

"Ten minutes, sir."

"Okay, we're out of here. Simpson, dial home. Let's get the MALP back to base. And the drone."

Major Simpson of SG-6 took up station beside the DHD and dialled Earth. Just after the MALP and the drone had been sent back to the SGC, Major Carter's party arrived at a run.

Colonel O'Neill hooked a thumb toward the stargate and told them to keep moving. Dr. Jackson stopped to argue.

"Jack, we're not going to try to talk to them?" he gasped.

"Sir, there's a whole lot of stuff here that's new to us," Major Carter added from the ramp up to the stargate.

"Don't start," O'Neill ordered. "We're out of here. Just don't," he added when Major Carter put on a stubborn expression. "Everyone move out. Now."



The stargate closed behind Colonel O'Neill. He and Teal'c were the last to return home, just behind Drs. Lee and Trajan.

"Complications, Jack?" General Hammond asked from the foot of the ramp at the SGC.

"Successfully avoided, sir," O'Neill returned. "The mission went outside the envelope right away and I pushed the abort button before it went out of control."

"Everyone safe?"

"Yes, sir."

"Good. Debriefing in one hour," the general added.

Major Carter hurried up the ramp to confront Dr. Trajan. "Tell me, tell me, you got telemetry and pictures," she insisted.

Trajan handed over his data-logger. His wife arrived in the gate room at a run as Dr. Lee was trying to make himself invisible to evade the inquisition from a frustrated military scientist.

"You're okay?" Samantha demanded as she reached Trajan. "You're back way too soon."

"There were complications," said Trajan.

"Lots of them," added Dr. Lee.

"Look at this." Major Carter offered the data-logger to Samantha.

"Debriefing in fifty-five minutes, kids," O'Neill warned. "Don't make me come looking for you."



After the debriefing, Major Carter and Drs. Lee and Trajan rejoined Samantha Trajan. "It's like Sam thought," Samantha announced. "The stuff you found is a development of Goa'uld attempts to make failed and worn-out Ancient technology work."

"Technology that's incompatible with ours," said Trajan.

"Certainly as far as comms go," said Samantha. "How pissed are they going to be about what you did to their stuff back on the planet?"

"All we did was take some access panels off and look," said Major Carter. "There wasn't time for much more."

"More or less the same with us," said Trajan. "Only we did some measuring as well. And we disconnected a power pack to get our comms back."

"No vandalism, no strolling off with bits and pieces?" said Samantha.

"H.T. was planning to start shooting if we couldn't find the off-switch," said Dr. Lee. "But we had just about enough time to be a bit nosy before the trouble started."

"You took some really cool pictures," said Samantha. "I've made a great slide show."

“Is anyone likely to work out what this gear does?” Trajan wondered.

“Unlikely,” Major Carter said with a sigh. “We didn’t have time to get anything much done.”



Glider Base

October 02, Thursday

General Hammond was prepared for trouble when Dr. Fraiser arrived in his office. She had been brief and terse on the phone when asking for an immediate meeting. Her agenda involved threatening to cause a major stink about Senator Balotini's unauthorized use of confidential medical records in her harassment campaign against the Trajans.

"We cannot do our job if our patients can't rely on us, and they can't rely on the Service not to abuse their medical records, sir," the doctor explained in a tone which brooked no interruption. "This breach of trust strikes to the very root of the contract between the state and everyone who serves in a branch of the military. This is a resignation issue for me, General, and I will go public on it if I have to."

"I think you'll find yourself following in Dr. Trajan's footsteps, Doctor," said the general. "If you get no satisfaction from this. Write me a report and let me put this through channels before you burn any bridges."

"Yes, sir."

"You have my personal assurance that this matter will not be swept under a carpet in Washington," the general added. "But I need to warn you that Senator Balotini is currently chewing her office carpet because her big idea for a cold fusion team is to be dropped as impractical. So there's a certain amount of circling the wagons going on at the moment as she and her allies try to extract themselves from a bad situation with as little damage as possible."

"I'll take your warning under advisement, sir," the doctor returned.

The Air Force had reopened an airbase in Nevada for flight testing of Goa'uld death gliders and development of Glider Plus craft. The base offered a vast underground hangar surrounded by a lot of desert. It had been used for developing rocket-planes and the early stages of stealth technology. Some rapid refurbishment work had revived the base in time to receive the first delivery of gliders.

The main door of the underground hangar was large enough to allow the *Sheringham* to land inside it. X-501 had been flown down from orbit under the cover of night, and with radar-deflectors active, to discharge its cargo of glivers spare parts from wrecks.

By the time of the next recovery mission, a cloaking system copied from the one on X-502 had been installed on X-501, which had landed at the base in daylight to offload more gliders. A third and final delivery of gliders had been made using the same method.

How the glider programme would develop remained undecided. Some experts thought that the Glider Plus vehicles could be passed off as next-generation spacecraft, which would eventually replace the space shuttle. Some had even suggested a joint project with the Russians, who would be able to build on their (rather limited) Buran experience. But given the Russian state's descent into kleptocracy following the collapse of the Soviet Union, that option seemed remote.

SG-1 and the Trajans were pretending that their trip out to the desert was work, but there was a holiday atmosphere on their flight from their local air base.

"Am I risking life and limb by asking how you're getting on with that top secret job you hate?" Major Carter asked when the aircraft was on its way.

"Nearly finished," said Samantha. "Two days tops, According to H.T., who's supposed to be really good at working out things like that."

"Oh-oh," Trajan remarked. "Someone's going to be in big trouble if that doesn't work out."

"Did you ever work out what that gadget was?" asked Dr. Jackson. "The one you found on the second trip out?"

"H.T. had another opinion from the Almed," said

Samantha. "They now say it's not a beacon after all, it's a kill-switch. Press a button on your zapper as it goes overhead and the glider stops flying."

"Added by whoever it is the Goa'uld have building their gliders for them?"

"A sneaky small rebellion," Samantha said with a nod.

"So these gadgets," said Colonel O'Neill, "could they be used to zap gliders which are attacking our people on other planets?"

"In theory," said Samantha. "But you can't rely on the gliders attacking you having the secret off-switch. We got eight gliders last time out but only two of them had the incapacitators."

"Were they newer than the first lot?" said Daniel. "In other words, are the incapacitators being put into the latest production models?"

"We don't have enough of a sample to be able to tell," said Samantha. "Another theory is that the devices are being sneaked aboard at repair stations, so there might be more of them in the future."

"Unless someone snitches to the Gould," said O'Neill.



Drs. Jackson and Trajan found themselves abandoned soon after the aircraft landed. Major Carter and Samantha felt that they were owed a ride in a glider, and both had indicated, in their own ways, that there would be trouble if they were denied much longer. Colonel O'Neill was also snatching an opportunity to put in some flight time with Teal'c in the rear seat.

"Would the one I'm married to please indicate to avoid embarrassment?" said Trajan when the fliers rejoined the other visitors.

"Why?" said one of the flight-suited women, who were identical with their helmet visors down.

"Because I'd hate to tell Sam she's dead if anything happens to my wife," said Trajan. "Only to find I'm talking to my wife."

"You'd never say anything like that to Sam," scoffed the woman on the left.

"And my wife would never let anything like that go unchallenged," said Trajan.

"You see how sneaky he is?" Samantha complained.

"Sneaky is good," remarked Colonel O'Neill. "Everyone set?"

The two pairs made their way to gliders parked at the side of a paved runway. Drs. Jackson and Trajan watched the pre-flight preparations from a distance, and followed the gliders with their eyes for as long as possible when the aircraft leapt into the air and zoomed up into a cloudless blue sky.

Then they retired to the mess hall for cold drinks and discussions about the quality of local attempts to translate material downloaded from the data systems on the *Sheringham*.

They were lost in their own little world when their table filled up with other people bearing cold drinks and, in Colonel O'Neill's case, a healthy wedge of cake.

"Miss us?" asked Samantha.

"Why, have you been somewhere?" said Trajan.

"It was really great," said Samantha. "We were at the edge of the atmosphere in just a couple of minutes. Those things can climb!"

"Did you see the sky go black?" said Trajan. "And the curvature of the planet? And the terminator off in the distance? And all those stars overhead?"

"When did you get a glider flight?" Samantha's tone was accusation mixed with incredulity.

"The Almed gave me a ride into space last time I had a long trip to their planet. Just before we met, in fact."

"And you didn't tell me?"

"I didn't think you'd want to hear that I'd been in space on an Almed spaceship in case it rubbed in the fact that you were still a groundhog."

"Okay, I get that," Samantha admitted.

"So we're pals again? And I can stop cringing?"

"Yeah, it doesn't have much amusement value," Samantha said with a laugh. "Have you been here all the time?"

“Working,” said Daniel in a defensive tone.

“I suppose someone has to,” laughed Samantha.

October 03, Friday

To the regret of Colonel O'Neill and Major Carter, the group was not allowed to return to the SGC the fast way; in three gliders with landings in the car park. The next morning, Samantha disappeared off to her laboratory and Dr. Jackson joined Dr. Trajan in the visitor apartment which had become the office for the review of the data from Projects Loweston and Top Spin.

“Have you finished with that?” Jackson remarked, nodding to the dark blue binder sitting in solitary splendour on a table.

“I have,” Trajan said with a nod. “S.J. thinks there’s something else to go in it but she can’t get her head round exactly what. So she’s having a think while she’s doing her glider work and if nothing pops out, she’s going to sign off on this at lunchtime and forget it.”

“And you’re sure nothing will come of it?”

“S.J. and I have bent over backwards to address every single scrap of information and I defy anyone else to come to a different conclusion. There is nothing here that could be the basis for a viable project. No matter who Senator Balobloody-tini blackmails or robs.”

“Oh, well. Have you heard the latest news? Kinsey has disappeared.”

“He’s not hiding in the L.A. Underground with the A-Team, by any chance?”

“He could even be off-world.”

“At a secret NID hangout?”

“Who knows?” Daniel said with a shrug. “But how would he get there?” he realized.

“The Russians are supposed to have a stargate.”

“Yes, I suppose he could have bribed someone.”

“Or maybe he’s gone to another dimension where he’s the president to kill and replace his other self.”

"I wouldn't rule that out," laughed Daniel. "Assuming his people were able to crack the lock you and Dr. Lee put on the dimensional mirror."

"There are other mathematicians and physicists around," Trajan pointed out. "Lots of people he could have bribed or blackmailed."

"Something else I heard is that the coded material on the chip in S.J.'s arm suggests the Kinsey in her universe was in touch with the Goa'uld and he may have conspired with Apophis to breach security at the SGC. It's looking like he aided the invasion on condition that he became the vassal overlord of the planet."

"I take it that came from a highly unofficial source?" said Trajan.

"Highly," laughed Daniel. "Are you and Samantha off to Nevada now? She was in her element there yesterday."

"That's still a bit up in the air. The Air Force would rather have me a bit closer to home for conferences with the Almed. In fact, liaison work with the Almed will be a large part of my job from now on."

"So you won't be joining us on trips through the stargate to save the world any more?"

"Only very occasionally," Trajan returned with a note of regret.



Having obtained his wife's signature on the report at lunchtime, after she had made a few cosmetic alterations, Dr. Trajan reported the completion of the job to General Hammond. He was invited to report to the general's office immediately. Colonel O'Neill was there ahead of him.

"I take it there's no good news for the Senator in here?" the general said as he accepted the dark blue binder.

"Only that she put the review in the hands of people who could be relied upon to do an honest job," said Trajan. "And spare the American taxpayer billions of wasted dollars. She could claim some credit for that."

"Right," laughed O'Neill.

"Before you go, Dr. Trajan," the general added, "You should know that a political decision has been taken to give two of the captured gliders to the Russians. They will be briefed on them at the local Air Force college, not here at the SGC, then taken out to Nevada for flight training."

"Why?" said Colonel O'Neill. "Why give the Russkies gliders?"

"For a reason which will become apparent in due course," said General Hammond.

"I take it there is an actual reason and you're not fobbing us off?" said Trajan. "Because you've been ordered to," he added quickly.

"You take it correctly, Dr. Trajan," said the general.

"And you do know we're going to spend a lot of time speculating about that reason?"

"Just try to keep it to a minimum," the general said with a smile. "You might be interested to know that Dr. Mironova will be one of the Russian visitors. Well, your wife will, in view of the friendship she had with her counterpart."

"That's our counterpart of the Captain Mironova who was a member of SG-One where S.J. comes from?"

"Indeed," said the general.

"Oh, joy," muttered O'Neill.

"Talking about Russians, what about the stasis devices they looted from the Germans at the end of the war, sir?" said Trajan. "Things have gone very quiet on that front."

"They are missing from the inventory, is the official word," said the general. "Our people believe they were stolen or sold as curios decades ago."

"They're not in some secret laboratory, being experimented on, but the Russians don't want us to know that?" said Trajan.

"We've not heard of a laboratory complex suddenly going into stasis," the general said with a laugh.

Relieved of the burden of the cold fusion review, Dr. Trajan felt at a bit of a loose end. He decided to visit his wife's laboratory to pass on the news.

"Why are the bloody Russians getting two of my gliders?" Samantha demanded with predictable indignation when

Trajan had shared his news.

"Oh, they're your gliders?" said Trajan.

"Yes," said Samantha in a challenging tone.

"Just checking," her husband returned mildly.

"So? Why?"

"For a reason that's too top secret for us to know today. And I include Jack O'Neill in the us category. Yes, really," he added in response to his wife's expression of scornful disbelief. "That's what the general told us. I expect we'll be told more next week."

"Just as long as they don't start giving pairs of gliders to our other so-called allies," Samantha mused.

"That would give you an excuse to go joy-riding some more in spaceships to get replacements."

"Ha! The Pentagonians would just tell us to make do with the ones we have left," scoffed Samantha.

"You're becoming an appalling cynic in your old age, S.J.," laughed Trajan.

"I wonder who I caught that from?" Samantha returned.

October 07, Monday

The Trajans spent a rare weekend divorced from work entirely. After two days of being civilians, they reported to the SGC on Monday morning prepared for changes to their normal routine. General Hammond had been called to Washington and Colonel O'Neill had been assigned the job of briefing the Trajans and Sergeant Beth Rodin of SG-8, a Russian-speaker who was recovering from a bad attack of flu and not quite fit for active duty. The meeting took place in the briefing room near the gate room.

"The Russians will be here on Thursday," O'Neill began. "They will be quartered at the Academy and Sergeant Rodin will be their liaison."

"Why are they getting two of my gliders?" Samantha came straight to her point. "Our gliders," she added as a note of conciliation.

"Politics," said O'Neill, realizing that he was dealing with someone who did not accept military discipline as a given. "It's a distraction, Sam. They get two gliders and we don't bring them in on Glider Plus with the Almed."

"Okay," said Samantha. "We just like to be told these things. Does that mean Glider Plus is definitely going ahead?"

"I haven't been told that."

"Yes, the Air Force is very good at not telling people things. I bet we're the last to be told."

"In fact," said Trajan, "we'll probably be arrested for being AWoL from the Glider Plus project because no one has told us it's on and where it is and we should be there."

"I can see that happening," laughed O'Neill.

"But coming back to the point, it does make sense," said Trajan. "We reckon input from the Almed on Glider Plus should knock the development program down to a couple of years for sure. They've been talking about building larger versions of gliders for ages but they've always had other, more urgent priorities."

"Like survival?" said O'Neill.

"Yes, an unfortunate distraction," Trajan said with a smile.

"So you're going to tell us the glider work will go more smoothly if we have just two agendas to contend with?" said Samantha. "Ours and the Almed's? As opposed to three, if the Russians were involved?"

"Or not, now you've told us?" O'Neill said with a smile.

"Sorry," said Samantha. "But we could have been told all this last week. Sorry. I'm interrupting again."

"The plan," O'Neill resumed, "is for the Russians to be given a two-day orientation on glider systems. Their team will consist of General Chekov, Dr. Mironova, four engineers and four pilots."

"Pyotr Chekov was the Russian liaison to my SGC," said Samantha. "But you know that from my debriefing reports," she added with a guilty smile in O'Neill's direction.

"And as you know him so well," said O'Neill, "you, Trajan and Rodin will 'entertain' the general and Dr. Mironova over the weekend; that's keep an eye on them in Nevada; while the pilots are getting their initial flight training and the engineer

nerds get to take a glider to bits and put it back together.

"The general and Mironova fly back to D.C. on Monday. The others will continue their training through the rest of the week. On Wednesday or Thursday of next week, SG-One will fly two gliders to a base in Russia."

"Not the one where they'll be based, I'll bet," Samantha remarked.

"That's something else that's top secret," said O'Neill. "No doubt they'll try to strip them down and make sure we haven't left any nasty bugs in them before they go on to their permanent base."

"Hah! I bet we get the blame if they don't put them back together properly," scoffed Samantha.

"Don't we always?" said O'Neill.

"What about the *Sheringham*?" said Trajan.

"There will be a big hangar with some gliders in it," said O'Neill, "and you'll have no idea what else could have been in it; apart from anything you know about the rocket-planes that used to be there."

"Which is quite a lot," said Samantha. "I've been reading up on them. They were really cool."

"But there's probably no point in telling the Russians," said Trajan. "I'm sure they've seen lots more top-secret files than us."

"If you want to annoy them, you can always tell them how wonderful our rocket-planes were and did they ever build any?" O'Neill suggested.

"I'm writing that down," Samantha laughed, making a note on her pad.

"Where do we report on Thursday?" said Trajan.

"Be at the Academy for zero eight-hundred. The Russians have a early start and we're expecting to get them there for zero nine-hundred and into the classroom as soon as possible. Trajan . . .," O'Neill paused and looked at Samantha in expectation.

"It's okay," she said with a smile, "you don't have to call him Doctor Trajan. I get it's a military thing and there's respect there."

"Fine." O'Neill looked back at Trajan. "You and Rodin will

be riding shotgun. Samantha, you and Carter will explain the technical stuff to the Russians. That's Dr. Mironova and four engineers."

"How much?" said Samantha.

"Full disclosure, I was told."

"Crumbs!" said Samantha, looking appalled.

"Yes, that's what I thought," laughed O'Neill. "You'll be getting briefing notes delivered to your lab this morning. Trajan, you'll check the quality of the translation from the original languages and Samantha, you'll check the quality of the translations from his English into physics nerd-speak."

"Okay," said Trajan, aware that his wife was doing her best not to laugh out loud at the expression 'physics nerd-speak'. "That's 'done by the end of the day'? Or sooner?"

"By the end of tomorrow will be okay, Hammond said, if you're working on something you don't want to drop."

"He is, I'm not," said Samantha. "But we'll work round that. We're really giving a full set of glider technical manuals to the Russians?"

"I also fell over in amazement," O'Neill told her with a smile. "But the President thinks this will get them right off our backs, if we give them something huge."

"Maybe for about ten minutes," scoffed Trajan.

"I said as much to Hammond," said O'Neill. "But this decision is way above our pay grade. Hammond will be wanting a word with the three of you in due course. Sergeant, you're still on light duties and Dr. Fraiser will be checking you out on Wednesday afternoon to make sure you're good to go to Nevada."

"Yes, sir," said Sergeant Rodin.

"And that concludes what I have to say," said O'Neill. "Questions?"

"Is anyone getting another ride in a glider?" Samantha asked quickly.

"Not unless you're Russian," said O'Neill. "And no, being able to speak Russian doesn't count."

"They're not sending us there? To Russia with the gliders?" said Trajan.

"No, the thinking is that the Russkies won't want any of us

around to see what they do with their gliders.”

“So we’ll be free to concentrate on Glider Plus with the Almed?” said Samantha.

“Unless some other big emergency comes along to get in the way,” O’Neill returned with a cynical smile. “And if Trajan is right about the Universe hating us . . .”

“I think we need to have a serious talk with whoever’s running this Universe,” Samantha decided.

Colonel O’Neill left to catch up with his official memos. Samantha began the process of getting to know the sergeant by asking her if she had worked with her husband before.

“Are you going to warn me about his weird sense of humour?” Rodin said with a smile. She was a naturally wiry woman of around thirty, just over average height and her dark hair was worn as a cropped helmet. Two weeks of influenza and recovery had left her looking a little gaunt.

“So you do know him?” laughed Samantha.

“Dr. Trajan has been out on some of the survey jobs we do with SG-Nine. Interpreting the data we collect. And I remember one time when the two of you were in the gym. This was before you were married. I think you were feeling the walls closing in a bit.”

“Right. He used to take me there to punch a sandbag for a while to work off my frustration.”

“This might have been the first time you went there. I remember, he watched you pound the bag for a while, then he winked at me and said: ‘You know you hit like a girl?’ And you gave him a real look and said: ‘But I am a girl.’ And he said: ‘Oh, that’s okay then.’ And you started laughing and decided you’d had enough of a work-out.”

“Yes, he did lots of that,” said Samantha. “Finding things to distract me and build up my morale. Making me laugh was what worked best.”

“Do you think he’ll be able to make the Russians laugh?”

“If they’re anything like the ones I used to know, there’s a good chance of it,” said Samantha. “General Chekov was the Russian liaison to my SGC. He was used to getting frost from Colonel O’Neill and stonewalling from General Hammond, but the other H.T. and I got to know him quite well and he’s

really okay.”

“Relations with the Russians were a bit less tense where you’re from?” said Rodin. “And there was one of them on SG-One?”

“Yelena Mironova,” Samantha said with a nod. “She did a lot of laughing. Especially when Colonel O’Neill was winding her up.”

“That I’d love to see,” laughed Sergeant Rodin.

October 08, Tuesday

General George Hammond was feeling moderately content as lunchtime approached. His paperwork was almost up to date, the current SG-team missions seemed to be proceeding smoothly and he had Dr. Trajan’s assurance that the scan of the technical manuals for the Goa’uld gliders would be completed by the early afternoon. All of the necessary arrangements for receiving the Russian visitors were in place and he was looking forward to lunch.

Then his adjutant entered the office. General Hammond closed his eyes for a moment and let out a heavy breath. The voice of experience was whispering in his ear.

“Sir, we’ve just had a silent alert signal from the Provost Marshall’s office,” Major Renny announced.

“No problems anywhere else?” the general asked.

“No, sir. The only thing out of the ordinary is the main gate passed through two carloads of Secret Service agents a few minutes ago.”

The general dialled the number of the Provost Marshall’s office; and got a busy signal. “Get the standby SG team in here, Warrick. And Colonel O’Neill. We have a situation.”

Two hours earlier . . .

Samantha Trajan closed a report binder and looked at her husband, who was comparing an original text in Goa'uld with the translation in a technical manual. "I've just had an idea," she announced.

"Have you ever noticed that you keep getting ideas when you're supposed to be doing something else?" said her husband.

"This is a good one. And we're well ahead of getting this checking job done on time. You said yourself we'd be done by three o'clock."

"See you when you get back, then."

"I think it runs in the family. This guy I'm married to is pretty good at getting ideas when he should be doing something else."

"If he's married to you, I'm not surprised he gets ideas," Trajan said with a laugh. "Okay, you and Sam have fun."

Samantha collected her labcoat and hurried away. She returned an hour later looking pleased with herself. There was an experiment in progress and Trajan would be told the results in due course.

Three-quarters of an hour later, Samantha took a phone call from Major Carter and disappeared again, with her labcoat, for a conference.

Trajan was not surprised to receive a summons to the laboratory level a few minutes later. Sergeant Rodin there ahead of him. He learnt that his wife and Major Carter have developed a personal protection shield, which was much better than the devices used by Goa'uld System Lords, and they were testing it.

"What do Beth and I do, offer our admiration if it works?" said Trajan.

"No, we put one on you, you stand over there," Samantha pointed to an uncluttered corner of the laboratory, "switch it on and let Sam shoot you."

"Yeah? How big an idiot do you think I am, Samantha Jane?" scoffed Trajan.

"Oh, I know this one," Major Carter said brightly.

Trajan attempted to administer the Carter Look.

"We've been trying the shields, Sam and me," said Samantha, "but it's making our arms itch for some reason. So we want some more volunteers."

"Why would we let you make our arms itch?" Trajan exchanged frowns with Sergeant Rodin.

"We want to find out if it's a general problem or specific to us," said Carter. "Something electrical interfering with our nervous systems, for instance."

"Hence our need to try it on a man and another woman with different DNA," Samantha added.

"That's boringly sensible," said Trajan. "So no one's getting shot?"

"Point number one, you can't shoot off guns in the lab area," Samantha pointed out. "And point number two, we've already tried that on the range; well, Sam did, using a dummy. Both prototypes of the personal shield work. We've moved on to wearability issues now."

"Is there a screen I'm supposed to strip naked behind?" said Trajan.

"It's like a money belt," laughed Major Carter. "You wear it under your jumper and there's a switch you activate by pressing it with your elbow."

"How long does it take before I start itching?"

"Classified," said Samantha.

"So I won't know I'm expected to start to itch after, say, ten minutes, and make it happen because I'm expecting it?"

"Right."

"Is anyone going to explain to Beth that I have to do what the mad scientists say because I'm married to one of them," said Trajan, "but she doesn't have to get involved?"

"Am I going to come out in a rash?" said Sergeant Rodin. "If I start itching?"

"No," said Samantha. "And if you do start itching, it should stop the second you switch the shield off. That's a good point. If you do start itching, either of you, we'd like you to try switching the shield on and off to confirm it's what's causing the itching, okay?"

"Very scientific," said Trajan.

"Are we going to get these in the field?" said Sergeant Rodin.

"If the mad scientists can make them for less than a million bucks each," said Trajan.

"Yes, that's the aim of the work," said Samantha, ignoring her husband's remark pointedly.

"In that case, I volunteer," said Sergeant Rodin.



A telephone summons to the Provost Marshall's office was a mysterious but unworrying interruption to Dr. Trajan's work as he was beginning to think about lunch.

He and his wife had almost finished the scan of the death glider instruction manuals and Trajan was expecting to have the job finished within half an hour of returning from the mess hall.

With accusations of skiving ringing in his ears, Trajan left the apartment in the visitor quarters, took the lift up to the surface and headed for a known destination; he had been there at least half a dozen times for one reason or another.

"What's up?" Trajan asked on arrival.

"You have some visitors from SID, Dr. Trajan," said Major Gillan. "Could you wait here for the moment?"

Trajan sat down and helped himself to a discarded copy of the local newspaper, expecting the boredom treatment. He did not like the sound of SID. It smacked of arrogance and bullying.

He read the paper for half an hour under the intermittent inspection of a uniformed sergeant, who was transferring the details from paper documents to the computer system. Then he allowed himself to be escorted to a windowless room containing two visitors, a table and four chairs.

"Dr. Trajan, sit down," said the larger of the men in the room. They were both wearing a reasonable quality suit with a white shirt and pearly grey tie, and both had an offensive air of confidence.

Trajan looked pointedly at the large mirror on the wall

facing him and sat, feeling like a guest actor in a police procedural television series. "Okay, what's going on?" he invited.

"I'll be asking the questions, Dr. Trajan," said the spokesman.

Trajan glanced to his left, toward the door, but the Provost Marshall had retired to his office. "In that case, I'll be the bloke sitting here saying nothing," he returned.

"Failure to co-operate can and will be taken as evidence of guilt."

"Lawyer?"

"You're not entitled to one."

"Wrong answer. You are?"

"Special Agents Grant and Finlay of SID," said the other agent.

"I'm assuming the 'S' stands for Special," said Trajan. "Plus 'I' for 'I'm not going to tell you squat' and 'D' for Department?"

"Dr. Trajan, I require you to tell me everything you know about the assassination of a US Senator," said Grant, the original spokesman.

"Someone's shot Kinsey?" Trajan said with a smile. "Not before time."

"Senator Balotini," Grant said, frowning disapproval.

"She's dead?"

"Obviously."

"And did they put the flags out? Because I didn't see any."

"The murder of a United States Senator is not a cause for celebration," the agent said, outraged.

"In this case, I disagree," Trajan told him with a mocking smile. "And there are lots more of them left, eating up tax dollars like there's no tomorrow. Can I shake the hand of the guy who shot her?"

"She wasn't shot."

"Blown up? What?"

"That's classified."

"Hey, I don't think you know," Trajan realized. "Security clearance not high enough?"

"What were your movements yesterday evening?"

"Hush, I'm too busy gloating to answer questions," Trajan returned.

"What were your movements from seventeen-thirty hours onwards yesterday?"

"If you had a high enough security clearance to know them, the Air Force would have told you. Which tells me that you're just some jobsworth squirt who's holding the fort until someone with a bit of grunt gets here. And hoping to impress the boss with a confession. Which won't be forthcoming, I'm afraid." Trajan attempted to exude his own air of relentless confidence.

To Trajan's astonishment, Special Agent Finlay produced a Glock automatic pistol and put it on the table; carefully out of Trajan's reach.

"Is that the murder weapons and do you want me to put fingerprints on it?" said Trajan, trying to remember whether he still had the personal protection shield switched on. He had not been afflicted by the itch, which Samantha had likened to a sensation of small bugs crawling on her arms. "Or do you want me to stick that where the sun don't shine and punctuate you a bit so one of your pals can shoot me for resisting arrest and close the case?"

Trajan's fun was spoilt by the sudden arrival of Colonel O'Neill, who confiscated the weapon and evicted the agents in the direction of the Provost Marshall's office to await General Hammond.

"That was well timed," said Trajan. "Or not. Things were about to get interesting."

"I was watching from in there." O'Neill turned a thumb toward the mirror.

"Of course. You know I'm wearing a personal shield?"

"Carter mentioned it but I thought it would be a good idea to get you sprung before they started to wonder if you wear a shirt with a big "S" on it and some natty red pants under your clothes."

"What happened to Balotini?"

"She was bugged to death. The nasty stuff from three of the ones that bit Carter."

"What happened? Some sort of security breach at the bug

factory and she was bitten in the panic?"

"No, someone borrowed some of the bugs, six to ten someone said, and Balotini got the juice out of three of them."

"So how does that make me Public Enemy Number One?"

"The guy who kept threatening to shoot Balotini in the back of the head?" O'Neill said incredulously.

"You mean, the guy who would have had to shoot her as he has no access to where they're studying those bugs, Jack?"

"You're a smart guy, Trajan. You could be that diabolical."

"I could be diabolical enough not to do anything diabolical."

"That's what your wife said."

"She knows they arrested me?"

"Hammond gave her his personal assurance that you would not be railroaded."

"He knew those characters came for me?"

"He started by looking for the guy people keep trying to kidnap. Sam told him you'd come up here, so he joined up the dots."

"Am I going to be allowed to tell those characters I've been here since yesterday morning? Or is my alibi a state secret?"

"I should just say nothing and let Hammond kick some ass on your behalf," O'Neill recommended.

"Maybe they're going to use the rest of the bugs on Kinsey. Except, that would be a bad idea," Trajan realized.

"What's bad about it?" O'Neill demanded.

"We've got the goods on Kinsey," Trajan reminded him. "We'd have to start digging all over again to get them on the next scumbag to come along. Oh, did I say that out loud?" Trajan added, wondering if General Hammond could be on the other side of the one-way mirror.

"You know, I'm starting to feel a small twinge of regret for hoping it was Kinsey who got it," O'Neill admitted with a half-smile.

"I was watching TV last night. The Monday Night Football game. I don't remember a newflash about the extermination of a senator."

"They haven't released the news yet."

"Trying to come up with something less startling than juice

from an alien bug?"

"Could be." An orange light on a wall-mounted telephone began to blink. O'Neill lifted the receiver and identified himself. His side of the conversation consisted merely of saying, "Sir!" just before he hung up the receiver. "Hammond wants you back at work on the glider manuals right away," he said to Trajan.

"Under an armed guard?"

"No, you're not being treated as a suspect any longer. Hammond has been on the phone to Washington and that's official."

Trajan glanced at his watch. "Am I allowed to have lunch first?"

"Yes, that's a good idea," O'Neill returned with a smile.

The door opened and Samantha Trajan rushed in. "I'm ready to thump someone," she announced.

"Better not try it on me," said Trajan. "I'm not sure whether my shield is still switched on. Is there any way of telling that? Apart from trying to shoot yourself? I'm still not itching, by the way."

"We'll work something out when we're sure it's worth doing," said Samantha. "Hands up."

"Boringly sensible. How did the sergeant get on?" Trajan added, arms in the air, as Samantha hauled up his jumper at the back and left side to inspect the personal shield's controls.

"Beth gets a very mild tingle after a few minutes. We know that's real from one of us switching the shield on and off and not telling her when it was switched on."

"A bit of a tingle would be a good way of knowing it's switched on. Positive reassurance."

"I'll make a note of that."

"Did you just thump me?" Trajan said when Colonel O'Neill winced.

"Sorry. You felt it?"

"Actually, I think Jack felt it more than me," Trajan said with a laugh.

"Anyone interested in lunch before the lady starts shooting?" said O'Neill.

"Excellent idea," said Trajan.

"You're switched on but the power pack is down to about four per cent," Samantha reported. "The field might not stop a bullet at close range now. We haven't done nearly enough testing yet to know."

"Now she tells me," Trajan said in response to the big grin on O'Neill's face.

"Good thing we stopped you playing Supernerd with those idiots," said Samantha.

"Is it possible Kinsey had Balotini killed?" O'Neill said as the group headed for the mess hall.

"Because . . . ?" said Trajan.

"Because Kinsey wants to take over the SGC so that he and his dirty pals can make more money out of the stuff we find off-world."

"True."

"But Balotini wanted to divert you and Sam Two onto her project. And when she found out what a big deal Sam Two is, she was bound to want Sam One as well."

"Okay, I'll buy that," said Trajan.

"And then Bill Lee. And pretty soon, she'd have been going after all the nerds at the SGC because that's where the Air Force concentrated some top ones. The people who can tell if the stuff we bring back from missions is world-shattering or just mildly interesting."

"That's a pretty paranoid viewpoint Jack," Trajan said with a laugh.

"I have one word in answer to that: Kinsey."

"You're right, of course," Trajan said with a nod. "He did sell out Earth to Apophis where Samantha's from. Forget I spoke."

"Even if it was a different version," said Samantha, "I wouldn't put it past this one."

"Kinsey as prime suspect, then?" said O'Neill. "He's looking like a busted flush right now but taking over the SCG would deal him right back into the game."

"Balotini has to have made so many enemies that I'm sure the Secret Service isn't short of other people to harass," said Trajan. "That's something; did you ever hear about the plan to close the labs at the SGC and start a super-nerd centre

somewhere else?"

"Yes, but things have gone very quiet on that," said O'Neill. "I've not heard Hammond sounding off about it for weeks."

"I was just wondering if Balotini helped to sabotage the idea," said Trajan. "So she could grab selected people for her scam. The Pentagonians wouldn't be too happy about shifting people again after moving them from the SGC to their super-nerd centre."

"And if she did, you'd be grateful to her?" laughed O'Neill.

"Oh, sure!" scoffed Trajan. "And when you consider how Balotini was done in . . ."

"The bug poison?" said Samantha.

"That cuts the list of suspects right down to . . . well, someone who knows it exists, like Kinsey, our prime suspect," said Trajan. "Or someone working for him. But where does this get us, Jack?"

"Oh, the usual place," O'Neill said with a shrug of his shoulders. "We think we know who and what, and we can't do a damn thing about it."



When Dr. Trajan requested a mid-afternoon meeting with General Hammond, he was invited to descend to the general's office right away.

He presented the general with final drafts of the death glider technical manuals and sat back in his chair whilst the general flicked through the binders.

"We're still waiting for someone to start shouting 'April Fool', Sam and I," he said when the general placed the documents in his out-tray. "About giving gliders to the Russians."

"I have much the same feeling," the general said with a smile. "And I'm a little surprised you haven't asked me if I still have your resignation letter."

"I'd be in the dog-house if I rocked the boat when my wife is on the threshold of seeing the Glider Plus project start," said Trajan. "And I'm getting used to the lack of joined-up

government that goes on. I suppose it's very difficult when a secret of the magnitude of what goes on here is involved. How to tell a gang which assumes go-everywhere, ass-kicking rights like SID that we've got more juice than them."

"I understand the President got the State Department to let them know that they were risking a major diplomatic incident by trying to take you into custody."

"With the risk of consequent major career damage?"

"Indeed," the general said with a laugh. "Now that you've finished with the manuals, are you planning to take a short vacation until Thursday?"

"I think Samantha has other plans. You know what she's working on with Major Carter?"

"The personal shield, yes. That it's working is wonderful news."

"They want to get a working prototype finished before the Pentagon snatches it away from them. So she's going to be here all day tomorrow. And she's been dropping hints about some work I can do for them."

"No rest for the wicked. One thing more; the people at the Pentagon have been asking about the artefact that Dr. Jackson bought in Atlanta." The general looked down at a notepad. "The canopic jar?"

"The last time I saw it was when Sam and Major Carter passed it on to the Almed."

"Not something the Pentagon would want to hear."

"Come to think of it, Samantha and I raised the cash to buy it, so it's our artefact. And I'm sure Professor Klosate will get lots of useful stuff from it."

"Something the Pentagon wanted to do."

"I'm sure the Almed are much better qualified to find out how it works, General. And that they'll share their results with us when they get any because they still feel they owe us."

"I shall attempt to put that into diplomatic language," said the general. "And work in the interesting legal point about your ownership of the artefact."

October 10, Thursday

The extra security at the Air Force Academy on the outskirts of Silver Spring was very discreet, which meant that the Trajans were directed to an isolated building at the centre of the campus by sentries who knew them by sight, and they were whisked into the building at speed when they had parked their vehicle.

They met Sergeant Rodin in a small classroom. She was looking very smart in her dress uniform rather than a set of the fatigues worn by SG teams at the SGC. She presented the new arrivals with identity badges on a neck chain. Samantha slipped into a labcoat after deploying her ID.

"Two sets of manuals, for a pilot and an engineer, on each desk," the sergeant explained, pointing to the four wide desks, each outfitted with two chairs, which had been moved into a line in front of another desk. "and one for you, ma'am."

Samantha went over to the main desk to flick through her set of manuals.

"The manuals stay in this room," Rodin continued. "They'll be collected and locked up each day, and turned over formally to the Russians when they arrive in Nevada on Saturday morning."

"They know that?" said Samantha. "They won't be giving us a hard time about it?"

"All explained and understood ma'am," said the sergeant.

"Just smile and tell them you're a visiting nerd and Air Force security is nothing to do with you," Trajan recommended. "And thump them if they start to get annoying."

"Yeah, that would go down real well," laughed Samantha. "What will you two be doing while I'm educating the visitors?"

"Sitting at the back of the room, ready to render assistance if needed, and probably reading the paper or messing about on the internet," said Trajan. "But very, very discreetly so it looks like we're doing something important."

"Ma'am?" a member of the security staff called from the door to the corridor. "The visitors have arrived."

"Am I in charge?" Samantha said as the group headed for the door.

"You're the glider expert," said Trajan. "It's your show."

The visitors were already in the entrance hall. Colonel O'Neill was with them. Samantha responded to a gentle shove from her husband and began to shake hands. Trajan noted the presence of three women; two engineers and one of the pilots. The Russians were also playing the emancipation game.

"Yelena! Zdrastvi! Ochen rad," Samantha said when she reached Dr. Mironova.

"You are Dr. Carter? Who knows another me?" said Mironova.

"Trajan now," said Samantha.

"You married Trajan, the mathematician?"

"That's right." Samantha shook the hands of the engineers to complete her round of the group.

"This way, folks." O'Neill had moved along the central corridor to the door to the classroom.

Pairs of pilot and engineer settled down at the desks and began to devour the manuals unprompted.

"You're sure you don't want us to do this in Russian?" Samantha said to the general. "All our people doing the session speak good Russian."

"Everyone on our side speaks good English, Dr. Trajan," he replied. "And we prefer to be one translation away from original rather than two."

"Yes, that makes sense," said Samantha.

"Do you know any Russian, Colonel?" Dr. Mironova asked O'Neill.

"I know, 'shto on gavoreel', which means, 'what he said'." O'Neill looked at Trajan.

"But he is not saying anything," Mironova said with a frown.

"Oh, he will," O'Neill said with a hint of a smile. "I also know 'nyeh vozmozhno' which is Russian for 'no way'. Shall we get moving to your first meeting, General?"

"Yes, I look forward to this," said the general. "We will see you on Saturday in Nevada, Dr. Trajan."

"Should be fun," the mathematician returned with a smile.

"Okay, ladies and gentlemen," Samantha began as O'Neill ushered his charges away. "What I plan to do is give you an overview of the Goa'uld death glider's systems, which will take about an hour, then we'll take a break for coffee. Okay?"

"They really are called death gliders?" said one of the pilots.

"And they can fly into space?" said another.

"Yes, they're called that by the Goa'uld and you should hear what Colonel O'Neill has to say on that subject," said Samantha. "And they're powered, so technically, they're not gliders, but what do the Goa'uld know? And yes, they can reach near-Earth orbit to let them operate out of a mother-ship. I know because I've been in one and it was great. You've got a real treat waiting for you in Nevada. Okay, if you open the blue manual, you'll see a summary of the drive system."

"Are we really allowed to mess about on the internet?" Sergeant Rodin remarked to Trajan as Samantha regained control of her group and began to introduce the Russians to the wonders of alien technology.

"Help yourself." Trajan moved the portable computer along the desk. "I'm going to be scribbling in my notebook until the coffee break."

"Cool!" Sergeant Rodin opened the computer and prepared to enjoy a spot of skiving.



During the mid-afternoon coffee break, which was indistinguishable from the main session in that the Russians continued to bombard Samantha with questions, one of the guards extracted Trajan and took him to a secure phone line, which gave scrambled access to the SGC. He found himself speaking to General Hammond.

"Dr. Trajan, we've received a message from the Almed to say that Professor Klosate has matters to discuss with you. I have been advised that Dr. Mironova will be going to their planet with you. Hello?" the general said into an extending pause.

"Sorry, sir, I was just wondering if my hearing had gone wonky," Trajan returned. "Is it *Be Nice To Russians Week* and

no one told me?”

“The Almed are curious about other nations on our planet, Dr. Trajan, and they have been making good use of the foreign language courses you’ve supplied to them. We’re giving them a chance to talk to a Russian citizen and get her advice on their pronunciation.”

“You know, this is quite diabolical,” Trajan said with a laugh. “A member of the Russian team gets unrestricted access to the Almed. And while that’s going on, I can talk stasis stuff with Professor Klosate and take lots of notes for Samantha to study.”

“Our political masters do occasionally go for a good idea.”

“Yes, I suppose they’re not complete idiots. When does all this happen?”

“You, Dr. Mironova and Sergeant Rodin go through the stargate at zero six-hundred tomorrow morning. Early evening, local time, for the Almed.”

“Will I be in uniform?”

“We’ll be following normal protocols for SGC Specialists, so yes. Which is why Sergeant Rodin will be present. And in charge.”

“Of course. I’d better remember to set my alarm clock. Who’s going to be back-up for Samantha tomorrow?”

“SG-One’s next mission has been postponed due to adverse weather at their destination. Major Carter will be assisting your wife with the detailed explanation of the Gould glider systems for the engineers.”

“Carter One and Carter Two versus the Russians? I know where my money’s going.”

“You, Dr. Mironova and Sergeant Rodin will be given a full briefing here this evening when we have all of you together. And I’ll see you when you get back.”



Dr. Mironova was still struggling to come to terms with the news of her outing the next day when she joined Colonel O’Neill and Major Carter in one of the corridors of the visitor quarters at the SGC. The engineers and pilots were still in the

assembly area, finding questions for Samantha Trajan. Mironova had spent the day in meetings with General Chekov and she was looking forward to a chance to relax.

"Looking forward to tomorrow?" Major Carter said with a smile.

"If it is not a wind-up," said Mironova.

"If you didn't hear it from Trajan, you can be sure it isn't," O'Neill said with a laugh.

"I was surprised to hear about the time difference," said Mironova. "It is the sort of thing we have to cope with here on Earth but I did not expecting it in space. I know that sounds silly."

"Actually, it's a variable time difference," said Carter. "Their day is two minutes longer than ours. Which might not sound like much, but it means we gain an hour on them per month. It was a twelve-hour difference at the end of July. It's down to ten now."

"Which means our times will match next July?" said Mironova.

"Then go out to lunch again," said O'Neill. "Trajan's right, the Universe does hate us."

"I would like to ask you about him," said Mironova. "I have heard so many contradictory things about Dr. Trajan."

"Actually, it would be interesting to know what you know about him so we can fill in blanks," said Carter.

"I know that he was a bright child," said Mironova, "who was fast-tracked through his school. He took his national examinations a year earlier than usual and he went to the University of London at seventeen years old to study chemistry. He had to take mathematics and physics as ancillary subjects, and he was found to have an extraordinary talent for making mathematical connections."

"That's Trajan," said O'Neill.

"There was a prize of \$100,000 for solving the Brandell Paradox," said Mironova, "which he did. He switched courses to mathematics and he was awarded a first degree in just over one year. Then he did research with the professor of mathematics at his college. He was awarded a DSc degree for his published work at the age of twenty."

"Which is really impressive," said Major Carter.

"He was recruited by the US Air Force at a large salary for a space-related programme, details of which remain classified," said Mironova. "He was recruited to the stargate programme soon after it began."

"And you won't embarrass us with details from mission reports which have found themselves into Russian hands?" said O'Neill.

"Your turn, Colonel," Mironova said with a smile.

"Trajan is one of the few nerds I've met who can curb their nerdiness when the real world gets in the way," said O'Neill. "And the only guy on the planet who takes notes when his wife is telling him something."

"Only when they're talking science, sir," Major Carter pointed out.

"Yes, I know that," said O'Neill. "But it still looks weird."

"That a man would take a woman so seriously, sir? At least it proves he listens to her."

"You know, that's a line I'd expect from the other Sam."

"You think she's corrupted me, sir?" Carter said with a smile.

"I think she's made you more assertive in ways that could get you into trouble with someone less enlightened by me," said O'Neill.

"S.J. has definitely made you question your boundaries, Sam," said Dr. Jackson, who had just joined the group. "In a purely positive sense."

"So it's just as well you're blessed with sound judgement and some of Trajan's tact and diplomacy," said O'Neill.

"And we all know our place in the team?" said Carter.

"Exactly," said O'Neill. "And that little smile you do when you and the other Samantha go all Trajan one-oh-one on me is what he calls a dead giveaway."

"And he is married to your cousin, Major?" said Dr. Mironova. "What is the other Samantha like?"

"As smart as Carter but with less tact," said O'Neill.

"When you see Samantha and H.T. from a distance," said Daniel, "they look like the most quarrelsome couple on the planet. But if you sneak close enough to eavesdrop, they're

always discussing some obscure part of their own speciality and teasing each other with extreme scepticism.”

“Something like Carter and Trajan when he’s explaining one of his loopholes in the laws of the Universe,” said O’Neill.

“We’re never as bad as that, are we?” said Carter.

“Actually, it does look very similar ever since you stopped taking his loopholes so personally and lightened up a bit,” said O’Neill.

“H.T. and Samantha are perfectly matched in terms of personality and education,” said Daniel. “And they really enjoy winding each other up.”

“National treasures,” said O’Neill. “With a weird sense of humour.”

“I look forward very much to meeting them,” said Mironova.

“Just be alert for Trajan’s wind-ups,” O’Neill warned.



Another Country

October 11, Friday

Dr. Trajan, Dr. Mironova and Sergeant Rodin went through the stargate to Almed promptly at 06:00 hours local time on Earth and 15:30 on Almed. They returned at 10:34 hours, Colorado time.

They had watched evening start to descend on another planet. The SGC looked exactly the same, as always.

“Good trip?” General Hammond asked the group at the bottom of the ramp to the stargate.

“It was very strange,” said Dr. Mironova. “I thought the highlight of my day would be just seeing your stargate. I never expected actually to go through it to another planet. Where they could speak Russian. Or that I would be given a pack of books to carry to Dr. Trajan’s friends. Or that we would end up playing *Scrabble* with that Russian-language set, which Dr. Trajan found.”

“The Universe is full of surprises,” the general said with a smile. “You didn’t mind being a pack mule?”

“Not at all. But I am still coming to terms with the large degree of informality the Stargate Command affords to its Specialists when they go to other planets.”

“Diplomacy can be effective in many ways, Doctor.”

“That is what Sergeant Beth said. What now, General?”

“Back to the Academy to rejoin your party. Sergeant?”

“Yes, sir,” said Sergeant Rodin. “Ma’am? This way.”

The general frowned at the gift-wrapped parcel, which Dr. Trajan was carrying, as the two women left the gate room.

“It’s a late Christmas present,” Trajan said with a smile. “Mainly because the Almed didn’t find out about Christmas until a few months ago.”

“Was your trip productive?”

“Oh, yes.”

"In that case, my office."

A little closer to ground level, Dr. Trajan took a seat in the general's office, parked his parcel on a corner of the desk then dumped his pack on the floor.

"The Almed have run a complete set of non-destructive tests on the canopic jar that Daniel retrieved," Trajan reported. "The body has a sandwich structure. The inner part is fabricated by moulding, then a layer which stabilizes the stasis field generated by the device in the lid is coated on to it, and a protective armoured coating is applied at a thickness suitable for engraving and decorating before it's cured."

"Is that something we could do?" the general asked.

"Not my area of expertise, I'm afraid, sir, but I do have a complete description of the layers and the Almed have been able to reproduce the process successfully. Whether we can do it will be up to the materials people at the Pentagon. The Almed think we probably can, though."

"That's encouraging. Have the Almed made jars to match their devices like the one Samantha found in Dr. Jackson's collection?"

"They didn't say that but it's reasonable to assume they have if they've given us a set of instructions for making the containment shells. There is one slight problem, though," Trajan added.

"The story of our lives," the general said with a laugh.

"Even if we can build more of the bodies, the Almed are still puzzling over how the stasis generators in the lid work. So duplicating the tops is still out of reach. In the meantime," Trajan dug into his pack, "here's a copy of the Almed technical report, and also two sample bodies, which they made for the Pentagonians."

General Hammond set the bound copy of the report aside and picked up one of the bodies. They were the size of a fragmentation grenade and open at the top. One of them had been sliced in half at the equator to allow the sandwich structure to be seen. "The report covers what the Almed know about the lids?"

"Yes, sir. The lid mechanism seems to be basically the same in all the devices even though there are small design

differences. We can power all of them up and switch them on, but no one can figure out how they operate. So I'm not sure there's anything much new for the Pentagonians."

"We can but turn our discoveries over to them, Dr. Trajan. Are you going back to the Academy now?"

"I have some ideas I want to add to a report I'm compiling first, but that's my next destination. Do you happen to know if Dr. Jackson is here?"

"He, too, is recording some ideas."

"In that case, I'll drop in on him."

Trajan collected his pack and the parcel and headed for the lifts. Dr. Daniel Jackson was staring into space when Trajan arrived at the archaeologist's quarters.

"Inspiration, inspiration, wherefore art thou?" Trajan remarked as he went through the open door.

"Not here, that's for sure," Daniel said with a laugh. "Someone trying to buy his way back into his wife's good books?"

"I come bearing gifts for you," Trajan returned, handing over the gift-wrapped parcel. "The canopic jar has been poked and prodded and given up its secrets. So Samantha and I thought we'd give it to someone who'll appreciate it as an early Christmas present."

"What about the Pentagonians?"

"I daren't repeat what Samantha had to say about them when she pointed out that we bought it and we can do what we want with it. And the best bit of it is that no one can accuse us of being involved in trafficking stolen Egyptian artefacts because it's not Egyptian. But for reasons which can't be revealed on national security grounds, its very existence will have to be buried."

"That's a very pragmatic view," laughed Daniel.

"But one that gets everyone off the hook."

"With the added bonus of not polluting the historical record by trying to include things that aren't Egyptian into Egyptian history."

"Looks like I have competition for Pragmatist of the Year," laughed Trajan. "In the meantime, back to the grind."

"I think this is the best Christmas present I've ever had,"

Daniel said as he peeled off protective wrappings. "Thank you and Sam so much."



Dr. Trajan completed his notes, then he was deflected further by a consultation with Dr. Lee over a survey report submitted by SG-8. He arrived at the Air Force Academy to be told that everyone was in the mess hall. He spotted his wife deep in conversation with Dr. Mironova as he headed for the service counter.

"Looks like someone's run out of skives," Samantha remarked to her companion.

Mironova followed the direction of Samantha's eyes. "Is there something wrong with Dr. Trajan's memory?" she asked.

"Not really. It's as good as anyone else's. Why?" Samantha said with a frown.

"It just that you seem to know everything about him but he keeps asking you questions about yourself. It's like you've been married to him for a long time but he has only just met you."

"Oh, that. It's . . . "

"Complicated?"

"Well, that's one way of putting it."

"Or classified?"

"Kinda."

"Have you ever been in space? Can you tell me that?"

"On a spaceship?" said Samantha. "Oh, yes."

Trajan arrived at the table with his tray. "She blagged a ride on a glider," he explained before Samantha could start talking about 'her' spaceship.

"It was really great," said Samantha. "You really want to make a nuisance of yourself until they let you have a ride in one."

"Another thing I have noticed is Samantha seems to know a lot about what I like," said Mironova. "Is how she does that classified?"

"Oh, no," said Trajan. "General Hammond got someone to

hack the KGB for your file as part of the visitor preparation process.”

“Oh,” said Mironova.

“Tell me you don’t believe that,” laughed Samantha.

“It could be true,” said Mironova. “Dr. Trajan can do a wind-up really very well.”

“Years of practice from working here and not being able to tell most people what I really do for a living,” Trajan explained.

Returning to the mess hall after taking a telephone call, Colonel O’Neill observed Samantha talking to the Russian visitor, whose counterpart she had known. Nattering, Trajan would call it, O’Neill recalled with a smile. The British had some very good descriptive words, he had found.

October 12/13, Weekend

Some information from the Almed gave Samantha an idea for making the personal shield use less power by better containment of the field. The device would not be something which could be switched on before the wearer went through the stargate, and switched off during the post-mission debriefing, but the improved version would be available for an extended period of time when the wearer was in danger; just as the Goa’uld used their personal shields.

Samantha sketched out some ideas and secure-mailed them to Major Carter with her husband tapping his watch and glaring at her. Trajan’s older sister and her husband were heading for a holiday in southern California, and they had arranged a detour to visit the Trajans who, in theory, were on leave until Wednesday of the following week; the day after Alison and Rod Coltraine flew on to San Diego, where Rod would be making a reciprocal visit to a friend from his university days.

Neither Trajan was convinced that they would manage four days off.

October 14, Monday

Dr. Trajan went into the study at his apartment to field a phone call an hour or so after lunch. He heard someone arrive as he was turning down a chance to have his finances audited for free.

He was surprised to find Colonel O'Neill in the sitting room. "Afternoon, Colonel," he said.

"Trajan," the Colonel returned with a nod.

"Something on?"

"I've been sent to kidnap your wife."

"Oh, right. Does she need to pack a bag?"

"Carter thinks it will take a couple of hours, tops."

"No point in asking what it's about?"

"No one told me," said O'Neill.

Samantha emerged from the main bedroom wearing a jacket and carrying a shoulder bag. "See everyone later," she called on her way to the front door.

"Have fun," said Trajan.

"I'll do my best," Samantha returned with a laugh.

"Does the Air Force often send one of its colonels to kidnap your wife?" Alison asked when the front door had closed. She was three inches shorter than her brother and knew exactly how much distance to place between them to avoid having to look obviously upwards to meet his eye-level.

"He's not on his own," said Trajan. "He'll have a squad guarding the convoy and securing the front door until O'Neill gets back downstairs with Samantha."

His big sister's smile told Trajan that she didn't believe a word of it.

"The colonel must have been in town," Trajan admitted.

"Why did he call you Trajan?" said Rod.

"Because . . . it's my name?" Trajan returned with a mild frown.

"Why didn't he call you Doctor Trajan?"

"Oh, right. Because he's a colonel. Only generals and above, or majors and below, call me Doctor Trajan."

"Do you ever meet any generals?" Rod asked sceptically.

"The boss where I work is a two-star general," said Trajan. "So yes, quite frequently."

"What does the president call you?"

"Doctor Trajan, seeing he's way above generals."

"And how often do you meet him?"

"No more than two or three times a year."

"Rod still doesn't get that you're a really big deal over here, H.T.," Alison said with a laugh. "But totally unknown in the UK."

"No, I get it," said Rod, "but I really expect a celebrity to be living in Washington or New York or even L.A. Not at the back of beyond in Colorado. Spectacular though some of your scenery is."

"True, but Samantha and I both work for the Air Force," Trajan returned, "and there are lots of open spaces around here where hardware that goes off course can crash."

"That's another thing I'm having trouble with. Samantha being a spacecraft systems designer. Isn't NASA supposed to be in charge of space stuff here?"

"The US military has a much longer history of making space stuff work than NASA. And we're less at the mercy of committees and Senators with contractors in their states gagging for government contracts for crap projects. So things get done so much faster."

"So when your general tells you 'jump', you ask 'how high' on the way up?" said Rod.

"We're civilian employees of the Air Force," said Trajan, "who choose to accept a measure of military discipline because it's necessary for doing the job and, we hope, keeping everyone safe. We know that when a bloke with two stars on each collar gives us something to do, it's never a suggestion. But we do have the option to exercise our conscience and quit."

"And you're very big on loyalty," said Alison. "If I were on your team, you're the sort of bloke who'd have my back, no matter what."

"Aren't I wonderful?" scoffed Trajan.

"That's what Samantha said. And you know what? I believe her."

"Which proves what?"

"That's what they say in all the films where Americans are battling impossible odds," said Rod. "The generals and politicians are real shits, and the people at the sharp end are the only ones who show any loyalty."

"Oh," said Trajan. "Well, in the movie I'm in, some, but not all, of the politicians are total tossers but the general where I work, as I told you, is an okay guy who always has our backs. And we have his. So where does that get us?"

"I don't think anyone will go to your movie," laughed Rod. "Not enough dramatic tension. It'll bomb at the box office."

"Okay, that's my working life trashed," said Trajan. "What other part of my self-esteem would you like to go for next?"

"Do you know anyone who's not in the Air Force?" said Rod. "Your wedding pictures were full of uniforms."

"Apart from the handsome guy in the glasses," said Alison.

"As opposed to all the ugly guys without?" said Trajan.

His sister gave him a creditable version of the Carter Look.

"That's Daniel. He's an archaeologist and linguist," said Trajan.

"So you do know people who aren't in the Air Force?" said Alison.

"I know you. And I know what's-his-name. That bloke you married."

"Do you wind up Samantha the way you try to wind me up?"

"She's even better than you at wind-ups, so it's a mutual thing."

"Okay, I think that's enough curiosity for the moment," said Alison. "If we ask H.T. too much about what he does, he might realize he has to kill us," she added with a mocking smile at her younger brother.

"No, I don't actually kill people," said Trajan. "We have staff with guns who do that."

"Do you know where the shops are or are we going to have to wait until Samantha gets back?" said Alison.

"I even know where the real shops are," said Trajan, "as opposed to the hypermegamarts."

"We are going to remember that we don't have staff to carry

vast amounts of stuff with us when we head to the coast?" said Rod.

Alison gave her husband the sort of understanding smile, which Trajan was used receiving from Samantha. But she had been taking note and the shoppers spent a lot of time looking and a small amount of time buying some small essentials. Trajan was surprised to find Samantha checking for emails when they returned to the apartment. He realized that the shoppers had been away for over two hours.

"Have a good time at the office dear?" Trajan remarked to his wife.

"We're going to knock your socks off on Wednesday," Samantha promised, deleting spam busily.

"I must remember to take an extra pair. Are we back on leave again now?"

"Depends whether you start getting ideas you need to write down," Samantha returned with a smile.

"Yes, I see what you mean," Alison said with a laugh.

October 16, Wednesday

The two Samanthas had succeeded in extending the life of the power pack for their personal shield even further by incorporating more Almed technology as well as reducing the power requirement for a given protection level. Their aim was to allow the wearer to dial up a setting appropriate to the threat level varying from angry people with rocks to someone waving an M-60 machinegun around.

A summons from General Hammond interrupted a demonstration for Dr. Trajan and the members of SG-1. The group of six assembled in the conference room near the gate room, all displaying thinly veiled curiosity.

"I am aware that SG-One will be flying gliders to Russia tomorrow," the general began, "and that mission takes priority over this. But we have a situation requiring your combined expertise."

"Not off-world then, sir?" said Colonel O'Neill.

"In Area Fifty-One. Yes, I know that amounts to the same thing," the general added with a smile.

"This sounds like it's going to be good," said Samantha.

"Someone checking inventory has rediscovered a coffin-size container, possibly recovered during an NID mission off-world," said the general. "They have been scanning unknown items now they have the more powerful Almed technology to do it, and this item has been confirmed to have a stasis field in place. I have been ordered to send the six of you to investigate, as you have all been to Area Fifty-One before and you have the necessary clearances and expertise."

"To do what, sir?" said Major Carter.

"Switch off the stasis field so that the contents can be investigated at Area Fifty-One. You have until sixteen-hundred today to achieve this. SG-One will proceed on to the glider base, either when the stasis field has been unlocked or at sixteen hundred, to prepare for your transport run to Russia."

"So take all our kit to Area Fifty-One with us, sir?" said O'Neill.

"That's right," said the general. "The Trajans will either return here or stay at Area Fifty-One overnight, depending on what is found in the container."

"Kit for us, too," said Trajan.

"Your flight to Area Fifty-One and transport have been organized," the general indicated the briefing sheets distributed around the table. "I hope any surprises you receive are not unpleasant."

"Bearing in mind that the Universe hates us, sir?" said O'Neill, beating Trajan to the punch.

"Let us hope it's not feeling particularly vindictive today," the general said with a smile. "Dismissed."



As experienced travellers at short notice, the group knew exactly what was needed for a night away; or two nights away in the case of SG-1. Their flight sped the group to Area 51, where they went through the usual identity-checking

procedures, which always seemed to be carried out by terminal sceptics.

The storage building was a vast, single-story structure; with even more underground. The container in question had been moved to a cross between a laboratory and a mechanic's workshop at ground level. It was made of a metal alloy which glowed like lightly tarnished silver. Its sides and lid were rectangular, rather than shaped like a coffin, and it looked big enough to hold an average-size human body. The box was standing on three supports, which raised its top surface to a convenient dining-table height.

"Guns?" Colonel O'Neill remarked with a quizzical look at Teal'c.

"The design is not Goa'uld, O'Neill," he said.

"Not enough decoration," said Dr. Jackson. "Not any decoration."

"Do they know where the lock is?" Trajan called to his wife, who was in conference with one of their escorts and Major Carter.

"It's on the lid," Carter returned. "Undetectable to the human eye but the instruments are showing what looks like a knot, for want of a better description, in the stasis field."

"Something you two can unpick?" said O'Neill.

"We're getting some ideas," said Samantha.

The ladies offered ideas and Dr. Horton, one of the local staff, used his radio to order equipment. Horton looked very young and he had the air of stretched patience of a young genius, who kept having to prove himself. The first idea produced no results. To everyone's surprise, the second trial produced a surface shimmer on the container and it suddenly looked brighter and almost untarnished.

Dr. Horton had ordered up a pair of robots with manipulator arms to work near the container whilst the humans supervised from a distance. Released from the stasis field, the lid of the container slid sideways easily. It was opened a crack to allow gas sniffers to check for danger.

"No toxic gases, no dangerous radiation, no nothing," Dr. Horton reported.

"Well, that's the last thing I was expecting," Colonel O'Neill said when the lid was off and one of the robots was pointing a camera into the container.

Inside was silvery padding and the body of an adult male with a dusting of beard, sparse dark hair and a slender frame. He looked thirty or maybe even forty years old. The amount of space that he occupied inside the box suggested that he was about six feet tall.

"Okay, who would you lock in a box with a stasis field?" said Trajan. "I'd vote for Senator Kinsey now Balotini is no longer with us."

"So would I," laughed O'Neill.

To everyone's surprise, the man opened his eyes, and put on an expression of shock when he found a strange device looming over him. Dr. Horton got on his radio to summon a doctor as the man was saying something in an unknown language.

"Hello, my name is Daniel Jackson and you are not in danger." The language Specialist had run over to put a human face in range of the prone man and set about establishing contact.

"Daniel," O'Neill said in a warning tone.

"It's okay, Jack, I'm switched on," Daniel returned. He pointed to his left side just above waist level to indicate that he was talking about his personal shield.

"That language I know," said the man in the box. "My name is Barlin. I do not seem to have two names, like you."

"That's okay," said Daniel. "You're now on a planet called Earth. I assume you're not from here?"

"My last memories are of being on Colony Twelve. Can I get out of this thing?"

"Of course. Why were you in it?"

"I do not know. My clear last memory is of going to sleep after a busy day . . . there is not a word in this language for what I was doing."

Barlin climbed out of the stasis chamber without hesitation and with the all the grace of a trained athlete. Daniel performed a round of introductions, realizing that Colonel O'Neill's rank meant nothing to the visitor, who had focussed

his attention on the ladies.

"You know that's a stasis chamber?" Samantha said when Barlin looked back at the container.

"Why did you put me in that?" said Barlin.

"We didn't," said Samantha. "The box was found on another planet and brought back here for study a while ago. We've only just figured out how to open it."

"Brought to this planet?" said Barlin. "Does that mean you have spaceships?"

"Yes, and we have an alternative," said Daniel.

"You have stasis technology?" said Barlin.

"Not yet," said Samantha. "But we're aware of it and just starting to get to grips with it. We know just about enough about it to unlock your container."

"You have no idea why you were put in the box?" said Dr. Horton, trying to take charge on home territory. "You're not terminally ill, for instance?"

"Not that I know of," said Barlin. "And I'm not a criminal, who was locked up for everyone else's protection."

"Not that you'd tell us that," laughed Samantha.

"Well, no," Barlin admitted with a smile.

"Ah, the doctor," said Dr. Horton.

A middle-aged woman in a labcoat joined the group. Dr. Castree asked the patient for permission to give him a quick physical examination, and received consent. Barlin was taken to a chair. The doctor's smile quickly acquired a fixed quality, and it soon slid into a frown of puzzlement.

"Problem, Doctor?" said Dr. Horton, who had been watching her covertly from the vicinity of the container.

"Mr. Barlin is walking and talking," said the doctor, "and his pupils are equal in size and reactive to light. But he has no pulse or heartbeat, and he's not breathing. As far as I can tell, he has a fully mechanical body. He'd probably bleed nanobots if he cut himself, not blood."

"Before anyone asks, this is all new information to me," said Barlin.

"You're not aware of having a mechanical body?" said Dr. Horton.

"The last I knew, I was flesh and blood," said Barlin. "I do

not understand how this is possible.”

“Neither do we,” said Dr. Horton. “But we do know that there are a lot of very clever people in the galaxy and the technology to build a body like yours must be out there.”

“Are you telling me that I am some sort of robot but I am not aware of it?” said Barlin.

“Not exactly,” said Trajan. “We have a concept called the Turing Test. Basically, it involves sitting a human being in front of a screen with a keyboard and having a typed conversation with another personality to see if the human can tell if he, or she, is talking to another human or a computer. I’m betting you could pass that test easily.”

“Which means what? About me?” said Barlin.

“It means that while you definitely have a mechanical body,” said Major Carter, “we don’t know what to make of the personality inside it. You could either be an artificial intelligence created in a computer and uploaded to the body. Or you could have the consciousness of a flesh and blood person, which has been stored in the mechanical body somehow. Possibly because your biological body failed for some reason. Disease, injury, or something. You don’t remember anything like that?”

“As I said,” said Barlin, “the last thing I remember is going to bed after a normal day at work and a normal evening. But I have no idea how long ago that was.”

“Does your planet have a stargate? A chapa’ai?” said Daniel.

“What’s that?”

“A device created by a race we call the Ancients to allow travel from one planet to another using stable wormholes,” said Carter.

“Really?” said Barlin. “You have one of them?”

Major Carter nodded.

“I’ve never heard of anything like that,” said Barlin.

“Like most of the people on this planet,” Daniel remarked.

“True,” said Trajan.

“So where does this leave me?” said Barlin.

“First of all, you’re a person in the same sense that any of us with a biological body is a person,” said Trajan. “You seem

to have an intellect equivalent to that any of the flesh and blood humans around you, which makes the origin of your personality irrelevant; computer program or transferred consciousness from a biological being.

"Whether your personality is artificial or natural, you're a thinking, self-aware being and just the same as the rest of us in that regard. And possibly superior in the physical department."

"The only grounds for caution we might have arise from your nurture rather than your nature," said Daniel. "Natural or artificial, your personality reflects the rules and values of the society you came from. Where you grew up or where your personality was created. We need to get to know one another to find out where we have common ground and values, and where we diverge."

"This is going to sound a bit personal," said Samantha, "but do you have any idea what your power source is?"

"Or how long it will keep running?" Barlin realized.

"I think we need to get Barlin to the medical centre for an urgent examination," said Dr. Horton.

"I would certainly agree with that," Barlin said with a nervous laugh.

Drs. Castree and Horton escorted Barlin to the exit door, where Dr. Castree's vehicle was parked. One of her escorts entered the building to stand guard over the opened stasis chamber. Samantha Trajan and Major Carter examined the container briefly then reapplied the lid and reset the lock.

The time was 14:50 hours on an overcast afternoon. With over an hour in hand before SG-1 needed to head for the glider base, Colonel O'Neill called a coffee break and acquired directions to the mess hall. When the group was armed with drinks and snacks, Samantha Trajan and Major Carter began a discussion about what could be done to unlock the mysteries of the stasis chamber.

"I wonder if friend Barlin has an off-switch," O'Neill remarked at random.

"No more than we do, Jack." Trajan said with a frown.

"It's a machine," O'Neill said with a look of protest at

Trajan for a perceived betrayal.

"Jack, I agree with H.T." said Dr. Jackson. "Barlin is a fully human personality."

"It's a machine, Daniel."

"He has a mechanical body, yes, but he has a mind, a consciousness, a personality that is indistinguishable from yours or mine or anybody's. You can switch off a machine but you have no right to switch off Barlin any more than we have a right to switch you off."

"This isn't another Urgo, Colonel, if that's what you're worried about," said Trajan.

"Yes, that thought did cross my mind," said O'Neill.

"Barlin is a self-aware being, who is capable of independent life. There's no element of parasitism involved," said Trajan.

"He's right, Jack," said Daniel. "Barlin is actually here, in front of us, not in our heads. As real as any other lifeform."

"The guys at the Pentagon are going to go nuts when Horton springs this on them," said O'Neill.

"Shame we won't get to see that," laughed Trajan.



SG-1 received orders to leave for the glider base right away. Their flight took off at 15:32 hours. By then, cautious medical exploration had revealed that Barlin had an entirely manufactured body. The bad news was that there was no obvious means of topping up his power cells; if he had power cells rather than an internal reactor of some sort, and no obvious means of checking his power reserves.

Messages travelled between Area 51, the Pentagon and the SGC. The Almed were brought into the loop at an early stage. Barlin represented such a new level of technology and such a completely unknowable threat level that the generals at the Pentagon and their political masters saw passing the problem on to the Almed as a good solution.

The Almed were interested at once in a new mystery, and all parties agreed that they had the best chance of finding out how Barlin's power system worked. Barlin himself was in favour of any solution which did not involve his being

returned to the stasis chamber with fading power cells.

During the flurry of communications, the Trajans and Dr. Horton took over an office and talked to Barlin about life on his home planet, life on his current planet and life on Almed. Barlin's civilization had FTL spacecraft and access to hyperspace. Barlin had never heard of the Goa'uld but the concept of the Ancients as builders of a system of stargates made sense to him. His people had found scraps of time-ravaged technology, which clearly pre-dated their civilization by millions of years.

When Dr. Horton was summoned to an adjacent office for one of a series of private telephone calls, Barlin smiled at the Trajans. "He is a very intense young man, do you not think?" he remarked.

"He sees someone after his job round every corner," said Trajan.

"What do you think of the Almed planet, Samantha?"

"I've not been there yet," said Samantha. "I've met visiting scientists from there at the place where we work, but I've never been there."

"But you think they're my best hope?" said Barlin.

"As far as being able to do non-destructive testing and examination of your body, definitely," said Trajan. "And they are definitely the ones to solve your power problems as quickly as possible."

"Will you be going with me if I go to Almed?" said Barlin.

"Actually, we're supposed to getting some overdue holiday time about now," said Trajan. "You could have some time off, S.J."

"Do I look like I care about holidays?" his wife demanded.

Trajan studied her closely. "Actually, you have the look of someone who might cut off my privileges if she doesn't get a trip to Almed."

"Perceptive," laughed Samantha. "That's a good way to describe you. So we're both going if the Pentagonians let us?"

"I shall move mountains to make it happen," Trajan assured her.

The Trajans had more than enough time to explain the difference between military members of their organization,

like SG-1, and the Specialists of the SGC like themselves, and a lot more about life on Earth, before a final decision was relayed to them.

Taking Barlin straight to Almed worked for all parties concerned.

October 18, Friday

The Trajans and their companion had made a brief stop at the SGC on Wednesday night to allow the Trajans to change into their SGC Specialist uniforms and pack some more clothes and other essentials. Then they had proceeded on to Almed. Dr. Trajan had been told that there was no need to check back with the SGC until he had something concrete to report.

Barlin did not know whether he needed a sleep period. As they were going from one planet at five and a half hours beyond the end of its normal working day to another planet just starting its working day, all three travellers were wondering if they would start to droop as the Almed started thinking about a midday meal.

After much discussion, a flight plan had been worked out to bring the two Goa'uld death gliders carrying SG-1 to Base Fourteen in Russia in the early evening. The whole trip would be made in daylight and the gliders would land just before local sunset, which would occur at 18:01, Moscow time.

At the SGC, General Hammond had made an early start. By 09:08 hours, he had cleared his in-tray and the contents of his out-tray were in the system and on the way to their next destinations.

The general was wondering if the mail system would dump enough paperwork at the next delivery to delay a planned early lunch, when his adjutant burst into his office.

"Sir, things are going crazy in Russia," Major Renny reported. "They're trying to lock down communications but they seem to have lost their gliders. SG-One is in one of them."

"Who the hell is in the other?" demanded the general.

“Unclear, sir. And there’s more. We’ve been trying to dial the gate on Almed for a scheduled contact but we can’t make a connection. Sir, it looks like their gate could be locked open and they’re under attack again.”

“Some days, there is just no good news,” General Hammond said, half to himself. “What’s the situation in Russia?”

“As far as I can tell, sir, there’s a full-scale panic going on. There was a widespread power failure and they lost contact with Base Fourteen, where the gliders went, for a while. Some of the Russians are accusing us of not finding a recall device. Others think SG-1 was under orders to steal the gliders back.”

“As Dr. Trajan says,” the general said sourly, “you don’t have to look hard to find idiots everywhere. I’ll be in the communication centre until further notice.” He had lost his appetite.



Carters In Action

October 18, Friday

Two gliders carrying SG-1, with Major Carter and Teal'c at the flight controls, made a fast transit to Russia, flying up to the edge of space before dropping down again to travel at the maximum speed without causing inconvenient sonic booms over populated territory.

According to their schedule, Colonel O'Neill and Teal'c would spend the next day at Base 14 giving more Russian pilots some basic flight systems orientation. Major Carter would provide engineering briefings and Dr. Daniel Jackson was there as a Russian-speaking liaison officer.

The gliders were directed to paved area outside a hangar complex. Guards surrounded the gliders immediately. SG-1 descended to the stained concrete feeling more like most-wanted criminals than honoured guests bringing valued technology to the Russian Federation.

As soon as SG-1 and their escorts entered the hangar for the official hand-over ritual, the flood-lights went out, leaving gloomy daylight at the hangar mouth, and alarms began to sound all over the air base. There had been a sudden and extensive power failure across Base 14 and the surrounding area. The lights had gone out in buildings everywhere. Everything needing electrical power was off.

A commotion outside turned heads. SG-1 recognized the distinctive sound of old-style zat weapons in use. The group inside the hangar reached the doorway in time to see a glider taking to the air. Then the uniformed intruders outside the hangar started to use their zats. The Russians in the hangar replied with handguns. O'Neill and Teal'c joined in with their updated zats. The ambushers began to retreat towards a parking area, using the available cover.

Colonel O'Neill tapped Major Carter on the back and

directed her to the remaining glider. Teal'c disarmed a Russian soldier who tried to object and Dr. Jackson began to offer an explanation in Russian. The first glider was out of sight, flying low when O'Neill and Carter set off in pursuit. Teal'c returned the Russian soldier's weapon, and he and Daniel Jackson raised their hands in diplomatic surrender.



When he had wriggled to a comfortable position in the pilot's seat, Colonel O'Neill addressed the task in hand. "Carter, can we track the bandit?" he asked his back-seat companion, aware of a lot more clouds gathering now that the sun had set.

"Sir, we can but the Russian air defence won't be able to," Major Carter returned. "What are you planning to do?"

"Shoot the sucker up a bit."

"We don't have any weapons. If you recall, they were deactivated for the transport flight."

"Yes, Carter, but I have a national treasure in the back seat. Do what you can."

"Yes, sir," Carter returned with a laugh.

"Sierra Golf One Niner to Base Fourteen," O'Neill said into the radio, "am in pursuit of the stolen aircraft."

"Base Fourteen to Sierra Golf One Nine," said a voice with an English-Russian accent, "return to Base Fourteen immediately."

"That's a negative," said O'Neill. "Can you track me? Or the bogey?" O'Neill counted up to five through a period of silence. "I'll take that as a negative, Base Fourteen."

"Sir, the transponder is on-line if you want it," Carter reported.

"Sierra Golf One Niner to Base Fourteen, squawking," said O'Neill. "Do you see me?"

"We see you," the English-American voice said after a pause. "Stay in contact with the target but do not engage. Repeat, do not engage."

"Roger that. He's trying to shake us. But not very well."

"Understood," said the Russian.

"Carter, these inertial . . . things?" O'Neill asked as he

matched the violent manoeuvres of the other glider.

"Dampeners, sir?"

"Have they got them?"

"Yes, sir. But they may not know how to switch the system on."

"I thought this was way too easy."

"Sir, I can see six interceptors closing on radar. I don't think they're fast enough to get anywhere near us."

"Not our problem. How are you getting on with the weapons?"

"I've nearly made all the connections."

"Before we get to China would be good."

"You think that's where we're going? Yes, I guess you're right."

"Are you going to tell me how many minutes?"

"Sir, H.T. only does that if he has the option of blowing something up if the clever stuff won't work in time."

"I knew that. You have to have a lot of respect for a nerd who can blow something up when he knows it's never going to work."

"He's a pragmatist, sir."

"I've often wondered how he knows how long to say. How many minutes."

"You didn't hear this from me, but I think he guesses how annoyed you're getting and takes it from there."

"I would so love that to be true," laughed O'Neill.

The stolen glider stopped trying to be difficult to follow and resumed its previous course. O'Neill concentrated on keeping the distance between the two gliders exactly the same to tell the fugitive that he was not going to escape.

"Okay, you have the port cannon now," Major Carter reported a few minutes later.

"Port. Check," said O'Neill. "That's the arm I don't salute with?"

"Yes, sir," laughed Carter.

"Okay, let's give these suckers a fright. If we wait much longer, we won't be able to see what we're doing."

O'Neill closed in on the fugitive and shot to damage the other glider's port wing. Then he reported what he had done

by radio and asked for instructions. He was told to stand off and let Russian fighters intercept the other glider.

"Just make sure they shoot at the right one," O'Neill said before signing off.

"Sir, I don't think their weapons will be effective, even against a damaged glider," said Carter. "I doubt they'll be able to get a missile lock."

"Let them find that out for themselves," said O'Neill. "They're too pissed to hear it from us."

The Russian fighters failed to engage the target. They were unable to obtain a lock but released some missiles anyway. Colonel O'Neill received permission to attack again. He went for the starboard wing this time. Even less stable, the other glider had to make a very heavy landing in a field. Four Russian fighters began to orbit the area, ready to start shooting at anything that moved in the vicinity of the crashed glider, standing guard until ground forces arrived.

Colonel O'Neill looked down at the darkening expanse of farmland and wondered just how much, if anything, the Russian pilots could see of what was happening on the ground. Then he received orders to return to Base 14 immediately. Two of the interceptors attached themselves to the remaining glider.

"Carter, do you get the feeling our Russian buddies don't trust us?" O'Neill remarked.

"I think they're entitled to be paranoid, sir," said Carter.

"There's a lot of it about."

O'Neill turned the glider onto a reciprocal course and increased his speed. The three aircraft became just running lights in the dark sky. Eventually, a large area of darkness on the ground came into view.

"Carter, what do you think they'll do if we keep on flying when we reach the base?" O'Neill said suddenly.

"Panic?" Carter suggested with a laugh.

"That's a very Trajan remark," said O'Neill. "But oh, so true."

"I think we've all been corrupted by his pragmatism, sir. Even if we can't be quite as outspoken as he is."

"He brings out our inner pragmatist? Yes, I suppose he does. Are those Russian guys struggling to keep up with us?"

"We're only about three minutes from landing, sir. So they won't drop too far behind."

"Maybe I'd better slow down and put some Russian minds at rest." O'Neill clicked his radio button. "Sierra Golf One Niner to Base Fourteen, request instructions for landing."

"Base Fourteen to Sierra Golf One Nine, land at the hangar where you took off," said a voice with a west-coast American rather than Russian accent.

"One Niner, copy that," said O'Neill. "ETA two minutes."

The airfield was an island of light in surface darkness, which was broken only where the state's institutions, and the rich and privileged, had back-up power and light. Colonel O'Neill made a slow sweep over the area of the hangar then turned back for his landing. He was aware that ground-based missile batteries were tracking him.

Teal'c and Dr. Jackson were waiting just outside the doorway to the hangar, surrounded by a large group of heavily armed Russian soldiers. The emergency lighting system was still awaiting relief from the local power grid. The lights were as bright as normal but more widely spaced.

O'Neill made a near-vertical landing in front of the hanger. A posse of armed soldiers arrived with a set of portable steps.

In the background, the two escorting fighters made conventional landings on the east-west runway two minutes later. Its blaze of light went out, making the night seem even darker. O'Neill was sure that the Russian pilots planned to use a refuelling stop to get a look at the strange, new aircraft, which they had been following.

Direct questions and some eavesdropping had told Dr. Jackson that a total of fourteen Russians from the far east of the country had been arrested on suspicion of working for a foreign government.

The FSB, which was the KGB after some cosmetic rebranding, and local military and militia forces were still active in the area. The agents had been working for the Chinese for pay rather than ideology, according to the official story.

"They're honest crooks rather than political traitors," Daniel Jackson remarked as the group was finding places to sit in a spacious but windowless office with a sentry parked outside the glass panel in the upper part of the door. SG-1 remained prisoners in all but name. "Well, that's a distinction we can all appreciate."

"Speak for yourself," laughed Major Carter.

"I was," Daniel said with a smile. "The big question is what do we do now?"

"See what the Russians can rustle up for dinner to fortify us for all the endless questions," said Colonel O'Neill. "There will be lots and lots of them."

"I suppose we still have one glider to do the briefings tomorrow," said Carter.

"That's right, be positive," laughed O'Neill. "A phone to put Hammond in the picture would be nice."

"But that probably won't be forthcoming until we've been cleared of suspicion," said Daniel.

"How in hell can they be suspicious of us?" O'Neill demanded. "We brought the damn glider back. What more do they expect?"

"A written apology for being able to do something they couldn't?" said Carter.

"Because they're Russians. Figures," said O'Neill.

"To be fair, sir, our people would be just the same," said Carter.

"I'm not feeling very fair, Carter," O'Neill said indignantly. "We should have brought Trajan along. I'm really missing his brand of tact and diplomacy. Not to mention his talent for telling Russians he's not going to take any crap from them. In their own language so there can't be any misunderstanding."

"Yes, he'd be a big help," laughed Major Carter.

[October 16, Wednesday on Earth]

Barlin found jet travel very interesting. His civilization had quieter flying machines, which had more in common with

glider technology than the means of jet propulsion invented on Earth. He was also used to quieter ground vehicles with electric power from efficient and high-capacity storage units.

Barlin was amazed to learn that he would have to descend 28 levels below ground level at the SGC to reach the gate room. His trip was broken at the level of the visitor quarters, where he had a conversation with General Hammond whilst the Trajans changed into their uniforms and did some packing.

It was only when the wormhole formed in the stargate that Barlin seemed to accept that interstellar travel by this means was possible.

The Trajans took up position on either side of him for that long step into the vertical puddle. There was the familiar period of disorienting shimmering. The Almed stargate swished out of life behind them as the Trajans and Barlin descended a ramp.

"Are we under another mountain?" Samantha said on finding herself in another enclosed space.

"No, we're on the ground floor of a building," said Trajan. "But this place looks different somehow. You've had the decorators in?" he added to Nathan Chorn, the spokesman for the welcoming party of two.

Chorn was accompanied by a tall man in his early fifties, who was wearing a dark-green overall. He looked as if he had just stepped out of a laboratory or a workshop.

"In a way," laughed Chorn. "Dr. Trajan, Dr. Trajan and Barlin, allow me to introduce Professor Krobenz, our artificial intelligence specialist."

"Mr. Barlin, I am enormously pleased to meet you," said the professor. "And the Trajans, of course."

"Nice to be made so immediately welcome," Barlin returned.

"As you may know, Barlin was, well, unpacked, at one of our top secret military installations," said Trajan. "So there was paranoia on steroids flying around on our planet."

"And you have a complete set of memories from the age of five or six up to your present age?" said the professor. "But none of how you ended up in stasis, and none of involvement

in stasis work where you lived?”

“Yes about the memories, no about stasis work,” said Barlin. “And none about how my power calls are recharged or how the remaining charge level is determined.”

“Do you two want to dash off to your laboratory, Professor?” Trajan suggested. “For some urgent consulting?”

“Yes, that would be an excellent idea,” said the professor. “May I apologize in advance if I seem more interested in your body than the person inside it, Mr. Barlin?”

“I would be very grateful if you did,” Barlin said with feeling. “One of the ladies on Earth suggested I’m recharged by an induction system.”

“That makes good sense,” nodded the professor. “It doesn’t interrupt the integrity of the exterior. I do find it strange, however, that you have no awareness of your power level.”

“What is it you call it?” Chorn remarked as the professor and Barlin left the gate room, “Mad Scientist Syndrome?”

“We’re as guilty of that as anyone else,” said Samantha. “I’ve never gone through a stargate into a building before. Except coming back to the SGC.”

“As H.T. noticed,” said Chorn, “this isn’t the building he’s used to arriving in. We moved the stargate. That’s why ours was off-line for about eleven hours.”

“We didn’t know that,” said Samantha. “We’ve been on holiday.”

“In theory,” said Trajan. “With lots of work-breaks. Why did you move the gate?”

“Our military people have acquired a touch of Terran paranoia,” said Chorn. “The gate was where it used to be for centuries, maybe even millennia. The other building was constructed around it, of course, and rebuilt several times. But after that last attack by the Goa’uld, General Gerrin, the head of planetary defences, thought it might be an idea to move it. If the Goa’uld can’t get through it, because we now have an iris like yours, they might try to attack the building by landing troops on the ground nearby.”

“But if they do, it will be the wrong building?” said Samantha.

“That’s right,” said Chorn. “The plan is to keep moving the

stargate from one closed building to another every so often.”

“You should get another gate so there’s no down time,” said Trajan.

“We’re working on that,” said Chorn.

“Of course, you are,” said Samantha. “We are going outside, I hope?”

“Someone wants to be a tourist while your professor is working out how to give Barlin some power and what makes him tick,” said Trajan.

“Oh, yes, you haven’t been here before, Samantha,” said Chorn. “Do you want to park the packs?”

“Do you want to have a quick root through them before the vultures descend?” laughed Trajan. “We’ve got a mixture of books and CDs and CD-ROMs.”

“I definitely want to park this pack,” Samantha said with feeling. “Books are really heavy.”



The new location for the stargate was an inland town some 320 miles from the coastal town, where the gate had stood for so long. Dr. Trajan quickly got the impression that Elorur was as full of secrets as Area 51 on Earth. Nathan Chorn warned the visitors that they could look as much as they liked but they should not expect to be over-burdened with explanations. The much higher ratio of uniforms to civilian dress in the streets told its own story.

To Samantha’s delight, the town was a centre of research for spacecraft as well as flight in the atmosphere. She was able to meet her Almed counterparts, who would be joining the Glider-Plus project.

Whilst Samantha was enjoying her working holiday, Trajan found himself being asked to give lectures on exotic branches of mathematics to physicists, who seemed to have permanently pained expressions when he was talking. The Almed were very interested in Bragg analysis. Trajan assumed that the current planet-wide paranoia was behind the interest, but he was outside the need-to-know zone.

His wife acted as a translator for Almed physicists when she

felt that she understood the topic on offer, and she insisted on doing lots of touristy things during off-duty hours.

(October 20, Sunday on Earth)

The attack on the Almed stargate following the usual pattern; another stargate dialled up their gate, kept it occupied for 38 minutes, then yet another gate dialled in. Deep-space monitors reported that four Goa'uld motherships were approaching the system.

Dr. Trajan sensed, from the familiar rising tension, that the Almed were not confident that their previous tactic of using stasis devices to disrupt shields would be as effective again, but Nathan Chorn revealed that they did have a prototype of a planetary defence weapon available.

Chorn took the Trajans, who had cut short an evening meal, to an underground bunker. There, they were introduced to Professor Avras Tapan, the mother of the physicist Lanan Tapan, who had visited the SGC several times. She was in her early sixties, compact and full of energy and very busy. Samantha took to her instantly. Then they met is General Lowist Gerrin, the head of planetary defences. In attitude, he could have been Colonel O'Neill's older and rather more responsible brother.

Samantha was offered a chance to leave the planet by spacecraft to what might be just a temporary place of safety elsewhere in the Almed system.

Realizing that the same option was not on offer to her husband, she announced that she would not leave his side, no matter what. She was full of fear, anger and resignation, having been in the same situation before.

General Gerrin wanted Trajan to oversee the monitoring of a new and untried weapon. His help, the general explained, could be a major factor in their survival.

The Almed, Trajan learnt, were using Bragga analysis to map the integrity of the crystals used to direct the beam from their energy weapon. Keeping the power flow rate and density

within supportable limits was vital.

The project appealed to Trajan's inner nerd, and he could see the general's point. Only by inflicting as heavy damage as possible to the approaching Goa'uld forces would Almed have a hope of survival.

"If only I could tell Prof. Bragga about this," Trajan said to Samantha as he was waiting for Professor Tapan to brief him. "He'd be tickled pink to know his work is being used all over the galaxy."

"I'm feeling a bit useless with nothing to do but scratch my sense of *déjà vu*," Samantha admitted.

"The Universe owes you a better outcome," said Trajan.

"The same Universe that hates us?"

"The same Universe that's going to hate us even more when we win this time. Hang loose and keep an eye on the big picture, S.J. Make sure we don't miss anything."

"Okay," Samantha said doubtfully.

"Sometimes your number isn't called, sweetheart," Trajan added. "And that's when things are at their hardest. When you don't have anything specific to do. But that doesn't mean you should sit on your hands in a corner. We'll be tightly focussed on our specialities . . ."

"You mean, you won't notice if the building catches fire?"

"Right," laughed Trajan. "Which is why we need someone like you to do an overview, look for things that someone is doing that could help someone else."

"You not just being nice to me, H.T.?"

"You're a national treasure, Samantha Jane. We need you as a head coach. Lurk and watch, and holler if you spot something useful. And remember, whatever happens, we'll face it together. I will never leave you."

"Okay," Samantha said, still a shade doubtfully.

The bunker was a square space with a high ceiling, which took away any sensation of the walls closing in. Its lighting was daylight bright; uniform and with no obvious concentrations of brightness. Large video screens and control panels looked familiar to Earth eyes, even if the language of the labels was a mystery to Samantha.

Samantha hovered nearby whilst Professor Tapan explained

how the monitoring system worked. The professor would be operating one of the computer work-stations and talking to the staff at the weapon, which was located on a mountain twenty-three miles away. Trajan's function would be to look over the professor's shoulder and man an adjacent terminal to keep an eye on the data-processing work.

"Are we allowed to know what the weapon actually does to the target?" Samantha asked. "Or is that a secret."

"It interacts with Goa'uld shields," said the professor, "creating large fluctuations and effectively shaking the outer skin off the spacecraft and cracking the internal structure, causing catastrophic decompression of the interior."

"That sounds quite lethal," said Trajan.

"If it works," said Professor Tapan. "We've never tested it at anything close to full power."

Four Goa'uld motherships emerged from hyperspace and headed for the Almed planet. Several troop-carriers of Jaffa evaded the Almed forces in orbit and landed on a beach near where the stargate had stood for so many years.

A battle of ground forces followed. The motherships were surrounded by ranks of gliders as a defence against the previous Almed tactic of attaching stasis devices to the hull to freeze essential systems and disrupt shields. The battle in space approached the planet.

Some 250 miles away from the ground assault on the stargate, at the command bunker, the occupants kept running final, final checks. The motherships were approaching in a group from an awkward direction. The Almed had to wait until they came over the horizon.

In theory, they could fire the weapon through the planet with the correct modulation, but this desperation move could reduce the output too much to be effective and it was likely to cause catastrophic earthquakes.

The four motherships rose into the sky as unseen satellites. The first shot from the weapon was fired after the last mothership had risen above the horizon. Then the crew at the weapon made frantic efforts to switch in the next bank of energy cells as quickly as possible.

In the command bunker, Dr. Trajan beamed his approval as patterns and structures, which he could see in the flowing data, began to be reproduced as 3D diagrams generated by the Bragga analysis.

"I don't know if we can fire again," said Professor Tapan after flicking through her displays. "I never expected this much damage to the crystals. But we do have a chance, knowing whereabouts to find the least damage."

"If we can overload the good crystals selectively," said Trajan, "I'm sure we can get off one more full-power shot. But the weapon will be totally wrecked after that," he added to General Gerrin.

"Fighting off two motherships is better than fighting three," said the general. "Give it all you've got, Professor."

"Actually, it could be one and a half," said Samantha, who had been conferring with a technician at one of the detector consoles.

"What?" Trajan and the general said together.

"We think one of their ships is about to pass behind another. If we fire when they eclipse each another," said Samantha, "you might punch a hole right through the nearer ship and damage the one behind it."

"That would be wonderful," said the general. "If we can get another shot off."

"Sir, we have a possible eclipse coming up in four minutes," said the detector technician, who was working with Samantha.

"Work faster, everyone," said Trajan. "Okay, here's my analysis."

"Don't wait for him to check his data, just use it as is," ordered the general.

"If we can boost the power," Professor Tapan said, fingers flying over her keyboard, "we could be able to create a lens effect using the shields of the nearer spaceship."

"In effect, shoot so much power at it that the beam carries on to the one behind it?" said Trajan.

"If we can just hit the nearer spaceship in the right place at the right angle," the professor said with a nod.

"If you can bring in power pack three as well number two, that would give us the extra power. But I shouldn't use more

than twenty per cent of it," said Trajan.

"Or we'll blow the weapon up instead of getting the power into space," said the Professor. "Include pack three," she ordered over her link to the weapon site.

"The data we have says the crystals will probably stand up to it for long enough," said Trajan.

"Eclipse in two minutes, sir," the detector technician reported. "The eclipse will last for five minutes, though," he added after a whispered consultation with Samantha.

"Let's use a little more time to get everything right," Professor Tapan said, the analysis displays putting growing confidence into her voice. "We can do real-time regulation using the live energy map Dr. Trajan has created," she added to the general, overflowing with enthusiasm for something which was working beyond her wildest expectations. "Get precise, auto-compensated regulation."

"Do it," the general confirmed with a thoughtful nod.

Trajan could see that General Gerrin was having a Colonel O'Neill-type 'information overload' moment.

"We going all in on this one, as the Terrans say," the general added.

He began to issue orders to the Almed ships in orbit to prepare a co-ordinated attack on the further mothership when the beam weapon fired in order to increase the chances of overloading its shields.

"Ready," said Professor Tapan after an endless pause.

"Shoot," said the general.

In their underground bunker, the occupants could only imagine the surge of raw energy, which tore a hole in the planet's atmosphere before ripping into the shields of a Goa'uld mothership; and then leaping beyond. In addition, the Almed ships in orbit opened fire with everything on the outermost Goa'uld mothership.

"There's chaos up here, sir," reported a command-unit spotter out in space. "Another of the motherships blew up when they fired the weapon again. A third ship is going dark and drifting. The beam blasted right through one ship and the beam and our missiles ripped a huge piece off one further out. The last mothership is moving off now, taking some gliders

aboard. Now, it's gone to hyperspace. Just fifty-some gliders left in orbit."

"Mop up with caution," said the general. "I don't want to lose any more of our lives. And let us not forget that a retreating mothership can still turn round and come back if it thinks our guard is down."

"Proceeding with orders received," said the spotter.

"Well done, everyone," the general added to the people around him. "And I think we've made an important discovery. We need to have someone in Samantha's role at times like this; someone taking an overview of the technical situation whilst the rest are focussed on the tactical situation and our individual assignments."

"National treasure," Trajan mouthed to his wife.

"Once more, we owe our visitors from Earth a tremendous debt of gratitude," the general added.

"On the other hand, there was a strong element of self-interest involved, with the Goa'uld knocking on the door," Trajan pointed out. "We were trying to save our own hides as much as yours."

"Mutual self-interest," said Samantha.

"Just the same," Trajan said quickly, "if you're feeling grateful, it would be churlish to turn down any offers of technology and information that would be useful to us."

"Dr. Trajan, the eternal pragmatist," the general said with a laugh. "But as Samantha said, we do have mutual self-interests and we do appreciate the unstinting help we get from our allies in our common struggle for survival. Which makes it very much in our interests to do what we can to protect Earth."

"Talking about protecting," said Trajan, "have we heard anything back from the weapon site? Are they okay there?"

"The weapon is still standing," Professor Tapan said. "I've had a report to say it looks intact. Everyone was betting it would explode. We might get away with just replacing the crystals."

"Sounds like we used just about the right amount of power," said Trajan.

"Looks intact but fried inside?" said Samantha.

"I would imagine so," said the professor.

"The good thing is that you have scads of testing data you'd never have got otherwise," said Trajan. "No one would ever have sanctioned a test at this power level."

"Just as long as we haven't created unreasonable expectations," said the professor.

"Does that ever not happen when the military is involved?" Trajan murmured.

The grin on the general's face as he headed out of the control room confirmed that he had heard the remark. His priority was to get the prototype weapon back into working order as soon as possible and to rush the construction of at least one more.

There were leaders to brief and cajole.



Almed mathematicians and physicists were studying the data from their weapon as the Trajans left the command bunker, their work done. The attacks on the Almed stargate had ceased with the defeat of the Goa'uld fleet, and their hosts had recommended that their guests should return home whilst the going was good 'for their own safety'.

The Trajans, of course, knew that the Almed were trying to ensure that the visitors did not learn too much about how the weapon worked.

Back at the SGC, the Trajans gave a brief account of their adventure to the duty officer, who told them that General Hammond had planned to arrive early to debrief SG-1, who had been having an adventure in Russia. The Trajans would be included in the session.

They retired to the mess hall to await a summons, feeling more like sleep than taking part in a discussion group. They had left Almed in the late evening after an exhausting day. The last thing they wanted was to have to start a new day on their home planet.

"You know we can send EM signals through an open wormhole to the planet of origin when someone dials us up?" Samantha said as they reached a table in a quiet corner of the

mess hall with food and drink. "Radio and microwaves for TV?"

"This is in fact true," said Trajan.

"What if you started shooting intense radiation in bursts at the planet that's attacking you?"

"Anyone standing near the gate would have to bug out of the way pronto or be zapped."

"And if you kept it up for long enough, and swung your radiation gun around, you'd stand a good chance of hitting their DHD."

"And zapping it?"

"Right. No DHD, no hostile dial up."

"From that planet."

"True. But it should work at least once. And slow the attackers down if they have to start using another stargate."

"Send a memo to General Hammond and leave it with him as an option."

"Because he'll have enough to handle right now with us and SG-One?"

"Right. It's an interesting idea, though."

"That was a pretty interesting holiday," said Samantha, smothering a yawn.

"Better than sitting on a beach, doing nothing but watch the surf breaking?" Trajan found himself unable to avoid echoing the yawn.

"Interesting doesn't necessarily mean good, H.T.," Samantha said with a laugh. "Hey, look who's here?"

Trajan turned his head to look toward the entrance to the mess hall. SG-1 collected drinks and snacks, then headed to the side of the room to join two familiar uniformed figures.

"Been somewhere, kids?" Trajan asked, beating O'Neill to the punch as their friends arrived.

"You'll never guess what happened to us," both Samanthas said together.

"You had fun on Almed?" said O'Neill.

"We got attacked by the Goa'uld," said Samantha. "I dread to ask what happened to you in Russia."

"We were attacked by the Chinese," said Daniel.

"Wow! What happened?" said Samantha.

“Sneak into our debriefing and you’ll get the lot,” said O’Neill.

“Actually, we’re waiting for the general to come in early for our own debriefing session,” said Trajan. “I gather he’ll be doing all of us together.”

“What happened in Russia?” said Samantha.

“There was a small gang of Russians waiting for us when we landed,” said O’Neill. “They’d been paid millions of dollars by the Chinese to grab one of the gliders almost as soon as we got out of it.”

“It was a brilliant idea,” said Daniel. “Strike during the inevitable bureaucracy and delays of the hand-over process, and fly over the border to China before the Russians were sure what was happening.”

“But we were able to chase the runaway and splash it when the locals found that their missiles couldn’t lock on to it,” said O’Neill.

“I thought all the weapons on the gliders were deactivated for the delivery flight?” said Samantha.

“I had Carter in the back seat,” said O’Neill. “She got one working.”

“So your Carter prevented a nuclear war between Russia and China?” said Trajan. “Which would have wiped out all life on Earth?”

Major Carter acquired a pink smile of embarrassment.

“Mine shot down two Goa’uld motherships with one Almed bullet,” Trajan added with quiet pride. “Saving their planet from an invasion and conquest and a return to slavery under the heel of the Goa’uld.”

“Way to go, Samantha Trajan,” Teal’c said with a broad smile.

“National treasures,” said O’Neill.

“Just equal members of a team of equals,” said Samantha, which drew a nod of approval from Major Carter. “Everything we achieve, we achieve together.”

“Yes, I recognize the quotation,” Daniel said in response to a smile.

“What?” Samantha demanded in a dangerous tone in response to the look which she was getting from her husband.

"Which national treasure," said Trajan, "was busting a gut to visit a planet that was about to be attacked by the Goa'uld?"

"I suppose you think that's funny?" The tone remained dangerous but with a smile just a fraction of an inch away.

"I think it's further proof that the Universe hates us."

"You know what?" Samantha was unable to bite back the smile. "I'm starting to believe that."

"Get ready to duck," O'Neill warned when Samantha's smile suddenly became a scowl.

"I've just realized," she said, "you're going to tell me the Russians are getting another of my gliders to make up for the one you had to shoot down."

"Just as well I dropped a hint about the Almed giving us some of the gliders they hoovered up after the attack," said Trajan. "After they've given them a tune-up, of course."

"Did you actually see the weapon?" Major Carter asked.

"No, we got the bum's rush almost as soon as the attacks on their gate stopped," said Trajan. "For our own safety, of course, but General Gerrin didn't even pretend to believe that was true."

"We've got lots of scraps but nothing like a coherent story," Samantha added. "And who was it told the general he'd have to excuse his wife, who doesn't get: 'Thank you for your help, now please get lost before you Hoover up any more of our secrets', and 'Americans don't really get diplomacy'?"

"I made him laugh," Trajan said defensively.

"Go on, say it," Samantha invited in response to the look on Major Carter's face.

"I was just remembering the Colonel saying how much he was missing H.T.'s diplomacy skills when we were in Russia," Carter said with a smile. "I'm starting to get what he meant."

"He's probably the only guy on the planet who could make a Russian laugh," O'Neill remarked.

"You just have to think of them as honorary Goa'uld," said Trajan.

"Didn't I tell you that's what he does?" O'Neill said to Carter.

"But the Almed are grateful for our help," said Trajan. "I

think they'd be prepared to cough up half a dozen gliders in return for a chance to crawl all over X-Five-Oh-One when it arrives to collect them. Although, I didn't mention that to them when we were there."

"Mainly because he only thought of it while we were on our way here from the gate room," said Samantha. "Which means he won't be shot for telling the Almed more than the Pentagonians want them to know."

"Always a good plan for a long life," Colonel O'Neill said with a nod of approval. "Talking about long life; what happened to the robot guy, Barlin?"

Trajan looked at Samantha, who shrugged her shoulders. "No idea," said Trajan. "The Almed worked out how to top up his power pack; you were right, Sam, it was an induction system," he added to Major Carter. "Then things started happening and he got lost in the shuffle. I shouldn't think he's in any hurry to come back here in case the Pentagonians try to take him to bits."

"That happens when the Gould show up on your doorstep," said O'Neill, "things getting lost in the shuffle."

"Which is a pity," said Trajan. "Thinking back to when Samantha arrived here, people were wondering if she could be some sort of Goa'uld android. And I was just thinking, if she's going to be dashing off to work on the Glider Development Programme in Nevada from now on, it might be useful to have a spare here at the SGC. Ow!"

"Do you want to try for the other arm, Dr. Wiseguy?" Samantha asked with a fierce scowl after tagging him.

"One paralysed arm will do me for the moment," Trajan decided.

"So how many motherships were there?" O'Neill asked to get onto safer ground.

"Four," said Samantha. "The Almed have a prototype planetary defence weapon, which took out one of them when they reached orbit but nearly wrecked itself. H.T. showed them how to get off another shot."

"Which took out two Goulds?" said O'Neill.

"And the last one ran away," Samantha said with a grin. "Which is just as well as the weapon ended up fried inside

after the second shot.”

“Sounds like that was the sensible thing to do,” Daniel remarked. “Run for their lives.”

“Excuse me while I duck again,” said O’Neill.

“What now?” laughed Samantha.

“We had to use our new zats on some Russians so that we could get to the other glider,” said O’Neill. “The Russians know we have something new in the weapons field and they want that, too.”

“They can keep on wanting until they come up with something they can give to us in return,” said Samantha.

“Now, she is someone who should be our president,” said O’Neill.

“We’d better not let S.J. go east anytime soon or she’ll be thumping Russians left, right and centre,” laughed Trajan.

“And not without good reason,” Samantha said darkly. “Although, they might not let me in.”

“Why not?” said Major Carter.

“What if I’m a Jonah?” said Samantha. “Every planet I’m on is attacked by the Goa’uld,” she added in response to frowns.

“Brilliant theory,” said Trajan. “Apart from a couple of big holes.”

“Like?” Samantha invited.

“Like, no attacks on the planets where we got gliders, and the latest attack on Almed was just part two of the attack they made about six weeks ago. And they must have had the attack plan rolling long before you decided you were going there.”

“Maybe the Goa’uld are mind readers,” said Daniel. “Or maybe they scavenged a gadget that lets them predict the future.”

“You’re as bad as him,” scoffed Samantha.

“You know what would be really nice?” said Trajan. “A holiday on a planet where no one is going to attack us.”

“If you ever find somewhere like that,” laughed Major Carter, “let me know. I’ll go with you.”



Epilog

[November]

Back from three days on Almed, the Trajans were trying to get back into synchronization with Earth time. They had left their host's planet at the end of the working day. They had arrived in the early hours of a normal working day at the SGC. Having given a preliminary account of their mission on Almed at the inevitable debriefing session, they had been awarded three days off to write a full report and enjoy some R&R.

Samantha had chosen to tackle the sprinkling of physical mail, which had arrived during their absence. She was leaving the electronic mail until she had enjoyed some sleep.

"H.T., Professor Bragga has sent you a dollar bill," she called to her husband, who was surveying the wine cellar and thinking about his restocking options.

"Why?" Trajan returned.

Samantha started to laugh. "He bet his assistant that out of all the mathematicians in the world, you'd be the first to come up with a practical application for his theory. The AJAM must have accepted your article."

"Me versus the rest of the world? That's a pretty solid vote of confidence. Where does the dollar come in to it?"

"The bet was two dollars. That's your half of the winnings."

"The Prof. really deserves a gold medal. If not for his work, we wouldn't be on the way to Glider Plus and the Almed would slaves again."

"Why don't you tell the President to give him a medal next time you have a chat with him?"

"Why didn't I think of that?" Trajan abandoned his stock-taking to add a reminder to his notebook.

Samantha crossed the room to peer over his shoulder. "Crumbs! What's it like to have that much juice? Telling the President what to do."

“There’s a constant struggle to avoid selling your soul by getting into hock with the politicians. But if I ask the Almed to endorse my recommendation, that should keep me on the right side of the ledger.”

“Good thinking, Batman,” Samantha approved. “I can’t see our President ignoring a request from someone with as much juice as the Almed First Counsellor.”

“Just as long as the Prof. doesn’t start getting hate mail from people who assume a gold medal from the Establishment means he’s sold out to them,” Trajan remarked.

“The Universe hates us, according to this guy I know,” laughed Samantha. “What’s a bit of hate mail compared to that?”



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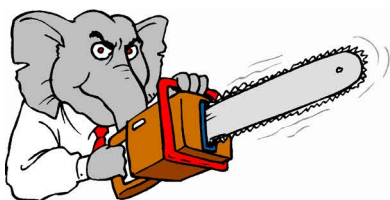
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