Daniel knocked again. It was late - terribly late. Almost midnight.

"Keep your pantyhose on!" the familiar, aggravated voice sounded. Jack opened the door with his customary "bite me!" caution, leaning his body into the edge of it to stare at Daniel. He had a look on his face eloquent of 'only you'.

"Can I come in?" Daniel asked nervously.

Jack simply nodded and stepped away from the door, wary and watchful. "Something bothering you?" he asked right out.

"Yes." Daniel noted Jack seemed surprised by the admission. "I'm sorry - it's late," he muttered disjointedly. "I had to talk to you."

"Sit," Jack ordered, herding Daniel first down into the living room and then onto the couch.

Sitting nervously at the edge of the cushion, Daniel was aware of his knees bouncing. Nerves. He rubbed his thigh, trying to steady himself, then found he couldn't stop.

"So talk," Jack invited as he took his customary chair.
The light was muted, just a soft glow from the lamps and the reassuring domesticity of the fire. Daniel was honestly glad of the heat. "I found something," he announced without preamble. "It was tucked into one of my books. I don't use this particular volume often - I found a newer Latin dictionary that was much more…"

Jack tutted impatiently.

"It doesn't really matter," Daniel said hastily. "I needed the older book tonight, to check a fairly obscure reference. I found this." He pulled the letter out of his jacket pocket, his fingers trembling. "It's from you."

"I wrote you a letter?" Jack seemed amused, settling back in his chair, ready to let Daniel entertain him with his latest flight of whimsy. "Any indication how many beers I'd had before I penned this epistle?"


"That was years ago," Jack hooted, rolling his eyes.

"You wrote a lot, but this is the point of the letter," Daniel went on as if Jack hadn't spoken, determined to get through this. "'I wanted to thank you…'" he quoted.

"You're actually going to read it out to me?" Jack interrupted, eyeing Daniel in mild disbelief. "A three year-old letter? It's not exactly breaking news, Daniel."

"It is to me!" Daniel flared, startling Jack. "'For not leaving me alone,'" he read on determinedly. "'More than that, I guess. For telling the general you wouldn't leave me. Fighting for me. Trying to understand.'"

"From now on, I'm sticking to a two-beer limit," Jack interrupted again, rolling his eyes.

"You weren't drunk."

"Yes," Jack contradicted definitely, grinning. "Yes, I was."

Daniel didn't know if it was because he was shaken to start with, or if it was just Jack's smug 'get a life, Daniel, get a clue' look, but he clumsily scanned down to the end of the letter, the words dancing and blurring. "'I didn't know whether it was better for you to know or not but I do know how important the truth is to you.'" Daniel took a deliberate, steadying breath. "'The truth here is that I'm in love with you,'" he blurted.

Jack's mouth dropped open.

"Not me! You! I mean - you meant you were - um - in love with me." Three years. Daniel could scarcely comprehend…Jack wrote this three years ago. "Is it…" He couldn't bring
himself to ask. His tongue felt as if it was glued to the roof of his mouth. He was very close to panic.

"True?" Jack scrubbed at his eyes, then shoved impatient fingers through his tufted hair. "Shit," he complained bitterly.

Daniel understood. In a way, he did. Jack and he had both lost their wives. Daniel felt the same pull to Jack, the same connection that he knew Jack felt to him. Loneliness...Jack was at his most vulnerable when he wrote this, wholly without defences in his isolation. Daniel wasn't - he wasn't angry. Not at all. Shocked. Sorrowful. He would never have knowingly hurt Jack. Never.

"The truth is important to me," he said gently. "You were right about that."

He wasn't sure what the truth was here, if he came tonight looking for confirmation or absolution of his shameful naïveté.

"I know you," Jack retorted. He was relaxing, looking at Daniel with a hint of challenge in his eyes. "So?" he asked softly, already past the shock, moving swiftly, surely on to dealing with it.

Daniel reluctantly admired Jack's flair for this. In some ways he believed he was more resilient than Jack, but his feelings seemed to go deeper. He was hit harder and longer. Never fully recovered. In this instance - well, he was hardly experienced at this sort of thing. "If you're asking how I feel..." he glanced at Jack uncertainly. "I-I can understand..." Daniel was horrified at the thought of seeming patronising, ridiculously finding himself looking to Jack for reassurance. "I know how much you loved Sara, how much you missed her. Your family," he added delicately, sensitive about encroaching more than he had already on Jack's privacy. "You and I - we - we were together almost every waking moment."

They were close. They'd always been close. Jack had chosen Daniel as the one he could talk to, confide in. In the earliest days away from Sha'uri, Daniel had been sure only of Jack. He'd learned to trust Sam quickly, Teal'c pragmatically, in a way that had grown over time with both of them. With Jack it was instinctual.

Daniel had at times felt an attraction to Jack, a desire to be closer. It had never disturbed him. That sometimes-awareness of Jack as a sexual being - it had felt very natural to him. Reassuring, in a way. He'd been glad that his own sexuality hadn't wholly atrophied in the drive of his work. Of course, Jack had clearly had a sexual relationship with the Edoran woman, Laira. And last year, Daniel had become aware - well - there was Sam too.

It helped keep Daniel's own occasional - wondering - in perspective.

"I'm sorry," Daniel apologised sincerely, miserably conscious of overreacting badly. "I was just - it was the shock. I'd never hurt you, Jack - not knowingly, not willingly." He sighed
That Was Then by Biblio

depth, slumping into the embrace of the couch. All his nervous energy was burned out and Daniel was exhausted. "Maybe I shouldn't have come," he murmured, looking up at Jack. "I should have been more considerate. Dredging up ancient history..."

"Ancient..." Jack bit off the word, swallowing whatever else he'd been about to say in gritted teeth.

Daniel's certainty that he knew what this was, that they were fine, was struck away by the bleak pain in Jack's eyes. "Jack?" he gasped, a clammy chill of shock sweeping his body.

"We're not supposed to be having this conversation," Jack said slowly. "Not until I'm off the team." He shrugged. "Flying a desk if my knee doesn't crap out on me. Retired if it does."

"You still..." Gesturing at himself, wide-eyed and wholly unnerved, Daniel couldn't fathom it. "Three years!" Without saying a word?

"Longer." Jack looked gravely at Daniel, unwontedly dignified. "You had a wife."

"She's been gone for two years, Jack."

"You haven't moved on, Daniel. You haven't even dated."

"But that's not..." Daniel paused, in his frustration unable to find the right words. "That was me, Jack. It wasn't about Sha'uri. Not wholly," he admitted honestly. "I needed some space in my life. Something that was about me. There wasn't room for anyone else. I didn't have the time, or the energy." Or the will to commit. "What did you expect from me?" Daniel asked lamely, utterly bewildered by Jack's reticence. "When you did - when we..."

"A chance," Jack said simply. "You're fair enough to offer that."

"I'm sorry." Daniel didn't know what else to say. He'd suspected Jack was waiting, but not for him. The sudden distance between Sam and Jack...Daniel wasn't alone in believing the two of them were deliberately keeping their personal and private lives strictly separate, more than that, they were in denial. This shook everything he thought he knew. "I didn't know," he apologised in a rush of remorse. "I didn't."

Jack got up from his chair, skirting the coffee table to reach down. Reaching for the letter, Daniel thought, until Jack's hands closed on his shoulders and drew him up. Then he thought Jack was going to hug him, as he had so many times before. He didn't see what this was, didn't know until Jack's hands were cupping his face, pulling him close. Jack's stern mouth muffled Daniel's instinctive protest in a warm, easy kiss, lips rubbing coaxingly over his.

Daniel didn't know what to do with his hands. He didn't know what to do with his mouth either, but it was easier to freak out over his hands, the heels of which were
currently braced on Jack's forearms, his fingers kind of clenching on air. His mouth was just - forget it. Rigid. Stiffly - God, it was easier to think of an appropriate adjective for the way this kiss, his mouth - Jack's - felt than it was to allow himself to simply feel.

Daniel was really very grateful to Jack for stopping kissing him when he did. "Oh," he bleated, staggering when Jack leaned back, licking his lips dreamily. Three years - four - felt terrifyingly real to him when he realised that Jack had enjoyed kissing him, and was looking at him as if he'd like to do it again. "Oh, don't!" Daniel pleaded when Jack leaned in, feeling horrible when Jack looked hurt.

It occurred to him that as bad as he was at hugging, he seemed to have a knack for hugging Jack, or maybe it was Jack who had a knack for hugging him, either way, he would. Hug Jack. He did. He hugged Jack. Well, sort of threw himself at Jack. Hurled. Jack fielded him neatly, even though he did reel back a step or two before he got his balance, then hugged Daniel right back, arms tightening with a certain amount of enthusiasm to fold him into his body. Daniel's burning face met Jack's broad wool-clad shoulder and stayed put. "Oh," he bleated again when Jack's lips grazed his ear.

"Daniel," Jack sighed, worlds of affectionate frustration sounding.

I'm a bad kisser with stiff lips and inadequate vocabulary, Daniel thought. What he said though, was 'oh'. Again.

"I had to do it at least once," Jack explained reasonably.

Daniel patted him fondly. It was easier than - not - talking.

"I'd like to do it again."

"We're friends!"

"I know you're inexperienced," Jack said soothingly.

Daniel stiffened slightly. Except his lips. They were there already. And his spine, which wasn't getting with the program at all. "That was not what I said!" he complained into Jack's shoulder.


"Did it show?" Daniel was mortified.

Jack umm'ed and aah'ed consideringly. "It was nice."

"And you'd like to do it again."

"When you know the answers, shout them out," Jack encouraged him.
Daniel found his spine and experimented optimistically with motor functions, stepping back. Everything seemed to have resumed normal operation. More or less. Except his mind, which was reeling.

"Hi," Jack greeted him, gallantly 'not seeing' the blush Daniel could definitely feel heating his cheeks like twin flame-throwers.

"You kissed me," he commented intelligently. "You're in love with me and you kissed me."

"Masterly summation," Jack praised him, his lips quivering. "Now, say this after me," he murmured persuasively. "'I want to go to bed with you.'"

"I don't!" Daniel gulped noisily. Sex? God! No. "Do I?" He didn't know. "I don't."

"No?"

"Know."

"You've got time to think about it," Jack said sadly. "It could be years before I retire."

Years? "What?" What?

"Maybe you should go," Jack suggested. "I'm sorry, you know?"

Daniel wasn't sure how it happened, but one moment he was in Jack's arms trying to think coherently about kissing and sex and the next Jack was pushing him gently but firmly out his front door, leaving Jack alone with his pain.

Or - or something.

He trailed unhappily down the path, accidentally decapitating some of the flowers as he stole looks over his shoulder towards the house. He couldn't believe Jack would allow him to declare Jack's passionate love for him, kiss him, turn his whole life upside down then toss him out on his rear.

What - what in hell just happened?

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In his own humble opinion, Jack was the epitome of nobly borne suffering when Daniel trotted into the gateroom, breathlessly and somewhat disjointedly apologising for being late. He wasn't, but Jack felt pointing this out would only cramp Daniel's style. Carter, on the other hand, was late, and would get it in the neck when she deigned to make an appearance.
Teal’c strode into the gateroom and took up his position on Jack’s left. "Where is Major Carter?" he asked.

"That’s the $64,000 question,” Jack griped. All three of them turned to stare as Carter bustled into the gateroom, looking very pink and flustered. "Are we keeping you, Major?” Jack enquired with awful politeness.

Daniel frowned at him, fixated on his mouth, glazed over and subsided, speechless, blushing and confused, all of which only went to prove Jack should have kissed him years ago.

Apparently sensing a kindred spirit, Carter sidled sympathetically up to Daniel to commiserate about Jack being a mean bastard.

Jack wasn’t trying to eavesdrop, but a man could only watch a Stargate spin so many times before he searched out more enthralling entertainment. One of his kids had just muttered something about a date and it had better goddamn not be Daniel. "A date with whom?" he prodded with robust rudeness.

"And may we know when?" Teal’c imperturbably interpolated, frowning forbiddingly at Carter.

It belatedly occurred to Jack that Daniel was very fond of Carter and a vague show of concern for her would net Jack major brownie points in the sensitivity stakes. "We worry about you," Jack informed Carter, making with the supportive look. She and Daniel looked at one another, huddled closer and eyed him with palpable suspicion. Jack looked to Teal’c for help.

"Indeed," Teal’c ably seconded him, radiating noble concern for his teammates.

"Something keeping you, SG-1?" Hammond’s voice echoed slightly tinny sarcasm right round the gateroom over the PA system.

"We’ll pick this up on the other side," Jack ordered. "Major," he added unforgivably. Carter straightened right up and scowled at him. Hey! Them’s the breaks. What was the point of holding the rank of colonel if he couldn’t use it to annoy his subordinates and put them on the spot whenever he felt like it? "You need advice about guys, ask - guys!" Jack looked at the guys either side of him. "Okay, ask me," he amended fair-mindedly.

"I too am a guy," Teal’c complained as he marched up the ramp.

"Ditto!" Daniel snapped, looking haughtily down his nose at Jack.

"Who said I needed advice?" Carter asked the event horizon.

"You did," Daniel pointed out helpfully, poised on the cusp of the kerwhoosh, looking reproachfully at his alleged ‘big sister’ Sam.
"Advice from you, yes!" Carter snapped, "Advice from..." She caught Jack's eye and prudently decided to hold that thought.

Jack shoved them both into the wormhole, waved cheerily at the general and stepped lightly through. "Advice from...whom?" he boomed the instant he hit firm ground.

Teal'c balanced his staff weapon against his shoulder and looked at Carter with grave, helpful interest. "We stand ready to assist, Major Carter." He folded his arms across his chest.

Daniel nodded agreement, crossing his arms over his chest, looking supportive.

Jack hugged his P-90, which was harnessed to his chest. "Spill!" he ordered. Carter looked distinctly hunted and resentful, but unfortunately she was very fond of all of them...

"Please, Sam," Daniel coaxed.

Particularly Daniel.

Carter thawed perceptibly.

The team ambled off down the neat trail leading from the gate to the walled town the UAV had spotted. So far, no one was shooting at them and there weren't many trees. Jack liked the place already.

"I got an email," Carter confided at last, not looking at them.

The guys made encouraging noises.

"From Neal," Daniel interjected informatively, raising his eyebrows significantly.

"Neal who?" The only Neal Jack knew that Carter might know was General...

"Kerrigan."


"I think it's a bad idea," Carter blurted. "For my career," she added, low-voiced and flushing.

"Do you like him?" Daniel asked gently, as usual striking right to the heart of the matter.

Carter looked at her boots, her ears pinkening.

"He's a good man," Jack observed honestly. "I like him."
"I find General Kerrigan to be a worthy individual." The big guy nodded measured approval at dear little Samantha. "He holds a position of honour and responsibility, discharging his duties with great diligence."

"You have sparkage," Jack pointed out after thinking about seeing the two of them together, usually on the training exercises they ran with Kerrigan at the SGC.

"Real chemistry," Daniel seconded sunnily. "I agree with Jack and Teal'c. Kerrigan is nice, smart and interesting, you like him, he obviously likes you."

Carter looked all girly and conflicted for a moment. "He's a general."

"Whoah! Hold it right there, Carter!" Jack frowned at her. "Kerrigan isn't your C.O., hell he isn't even in the same command! He's commandant down there at the Air Force Academy. There's no question of favouritism or undue influence. No problem in the regulations. No one would think you were trying to break through the glass ceiling..." Carter looked impressed at Jack's keen grasp of the minutiae of gender politics, smiling at him approvingly. "...with stilettos and fishnets." For some reason Carter's smile congealed.

"No one who's met you, anyway," Daniel backed Jack up with commendable loyalty and regrettable ambiguity.

"Thank you," Carter said tartly.

"You are a skilled warrior, Major," Teal'c complimented her.

"And you can have lots of interesting talks about..." Jack strove for something interesting Carter could talk about. "Pool!" he suggested triumphantly.

"And physics."

"The repair and restoration of elderly motor vehicles."

"Knitting."

"Sam can't knit," Daniel objected to Jack.

"Well, she can't cook either, but I think it's unkind to draw attention to that, don't you?" Jack eyed Mr. Sensitive askance. "Hobbies make for enough dinner conversation to see you through to dessert or paging yourself or going out the bathroom window, whichever comes first." He turned to his 2iC. "Guys like a well-rounded date," he informed her kindly.

"Major Carter is indeed..."
"Teal'c!" Daniel hissed, sharply elbowing 'Teal'c is not Jaffa for tact' in the ribs.


Daniel and Teal'c made with the 'what he said' eyebrows and vaguely positive noises.

For some reason, Carter looked deflated, which Jack didn't think was very nice of her after that shower of compliments and moral support from the rest of her loving teammates. She stomped off down the trail to take point radiating enough potential for aggravated assault to make Jack feel heartily sorry for any innocent indigenous types unlucky enough to stray across her path.

Teal'c fell back to cover their six, while Daniel tried to look like he was utterly unaffected by the close proximity of any colonels who might have kissed him last night. Within a very few steps the proximity was positively intimate and Daniel was red to the roots of his hair.

Jack had a horrible urge to laugh. He could hardly believe he'd been so pitiful he'd written Daniel a sappy love letter and to have the damned thing sitting there for three years right in Daniel's office under both their noses was hysterical. Momentary mortification aside, Jack wasn't the man to look a gift epistle in the envelope.

He'd more or less told Daniel the truth the last night. Jack was (a) crazy in love with Daniel - something which was weighing heavily on Daniel's mind right now if those sweet, surreptitious little concerned looks he was sneaking at Jack were anything to go by - and (b) insanely attracted to him.

Jack figured getting Daniel to reciprocate (a) would lead naturally to relief of (b) with all despatch. Although, to be fair, he'd take (b) right now if he could get it and work on (a) longer term.

"Looking forward to the mission?" he asked pleasantly, making a start.

"What's that supposed to mean?" Daniel asked warily.

Okaaay. It was going to take a lot of work just to get into the primer.

"We're peaceful explorers!" Daniel's customary 'hello, ignore the big, ugly guns, we're not really going to hurt you no matter how bad the guy standing behind me looks' speech reached its crescendo. He rushed on to introduce his friends. He had it on the authority of "Silence of the Lambs" that knowing a person's name made it harder to kill them, which was why he always introduced Jack to the alien first. "This is Jack."
Jack knocked himself out, unenthusiastically lifting a single finger from the butt of his P-90 in greeting.

"Major Carter."

Sam's smile lasted nanoseconds.

"And this is Teal'c," Daniel gestured elegantly. Teal'c kindly came to his rescue, amicably inclining his head in greeting.

"I am Ghennehessere of the Seven Sisters." The lady in question inclined her head right back, her brilliant smile widening.

Sam appeared to take this personally.

Daniel wasn't very good at subtext, but he sensed Sam's hostility might correlate to a recent discussion about well-rounded dates and the fact she was standing in front of a date who was as well-rounded as they came. Er - outside of porn movies. "Um - S-Seven Sisters?" he enquired politely, sidling between Ghennehessere and Sam's itching trigger finger.

"We serve our people."

Experience had taught Daniel to be cautious. "In what capacity?" he asked promptly.

"The Seven Sisters are guardians of Genizah."

"Genizah?" Daniel turned excitedly to his teammates, none of whom were interested, although Sam kindly gave it a try for his sake. "It's a Hebrew word. It's been the custom for almost two thousand years in Rabbinic Judaism to set aside a depository into which Hebrew texts could be consigned. The root, of Persian origin, is attested not only in Hebrew and Aramaic but also more widely in Semitics, with the meanings of hide, cover and bury. In the rabbinic literature of the first few Christian centuries, it carries similar senses and is used to describe special treasures stored away by God, such as the Torah and the souls of the righteous!" Daniel looked hopefully at Jack, who was gaping past him at Ghennehessere.

"She's a LIBRARIAN?" Jack stuttered incredulously. "I thought she was the town..."

Sam clapped her hand over Jack's mouth and muttered something about negotiable affection.

"Do you wish entry to Genizah?" Ghennehessere asked Daniel. "Are you a scholar of repute?"

"I - have a reputation, yes," Daniel replied cautiously, avoiding his teammates' eyes.

"I'm not thrilled about the four of us going into the city," Jack warned him, low-voiced. "CQB is a bastard."

"CQ..."

Sam slipped over to his side. "Close Quarters Battle," she whispered.

"Ghennehessere isn't exactly visibly armed," Daniel observed after a brief moment of contemplation. "Er - not that the embroidery isn't exquisite..."

"Hmm," Sam nodded agreement. "I'm curious to know how they got the stitching into fabric that - filmy," she said brightly.

"This appearance does not please?" Ghennehessere asked, glancing down at her narrow wisps of heavily embroidered, lightly looped and criss-crossed flame-coloured silk. The air around her shimmered like a sultry heat haze, revealing a small woman with mouse-coloured hair, grey eyes and a filthy grin. She didn't seem in the least concerned that she was now being sighted down the length of two raised gun barrels and a staff weapon. Daniel sensed it took a LOT to shake Ghennehessere. Jack shrugged and relaxed a hair when she made no aggressive moves whatsoever, simply looked them over in the friendliest manner possible.

It was possibly her appearance.

A rather dirty knee protruded from a pair of elderly pants, her feet were clad in sandals that looked comfortable rather than stylish and the shirt appeared to have abandoned all hope. It also appeared to have belonged to someone closer to Teal'c's height than Ghennehessere's, only the fearsome bundle of keys belted at her waist keeping it under control. "Then you are beyond the lure of earthly pleasures." Ghennehessere's brow wrinkled thoughtfully. "Thank the Goddess. It is tiring having to eliminate the faithless," she confided.

"Eliminate?" Jack asked with a grin that suggested he'd decided to like her even if she was an unlikely kick-ass something or other.

Ghennehessere stuck out her hand suddenly, her palm upraised, glaring up at the sky. "Goddess, not again! Give me strength to last 'til Quarter Day."

The heavens opened, the sudden torrential downpour battering them. When Ghennehessere turned on her heel and ran like hell towards the forbidding gate they'd been parked outside of for the past half-hour, the team followed. They arrived breathless, steaming, shivering, and in Jack's case whining, wedged into the lee of the gate.
"Your technology doesn't operate the gate automatically?" Sam asked, startled.

"The Goddess teaches humility," Ghennehessere responded with a vehemence that suggested the Goddess was talking out of her ass on this one. She plucked the keys from her waist with the ease of long practice, pulling one clear of the others to open a small door in the gate for them. Sam went through first to sweep the area, calling back to let them know it was okay. Teal'c went through with Ghennehessere, then Daniel followed with Jack.

Ghennehessere locked the gate behind them and Daniel looked around interestedly. Immediately before them was a sweep of velvety grass, starred with tiny flowers of many pastel shades, dropping steeply away after a hundred yards or so. What there wasn't, was a city.

"We presumed, from the height of the wall, there was something in here," Jack said after a moment. "Something big."

"Genizah," Ghennehessere agreed placidly. "The Goddess teaches caution as well as humility. Many things are hidden."

"That fits with the meaning of 'Genizah'," Daniel agreed eagerly, backing up from the shelter of the gatehouse to investigate the construction of the ramparts. He was surprised to find there weren't any. This was a wall. Literally.

"Who is your goddess?" Teal'c asked disapprovingly.

"Your technology is similar to that of the Nox," Sam suggested. "I'd really like to…"

"Can we PLEASE get out of the rain!" Jack glared at them all. "You remember the last time I got water in my ear?" Various sour faces suggested Jack's loyal, loving teammates remembered this with perfect clarity.

"This wall isn't defensive," Daniel said to Ghennehessere. His friends shut up and looked at him like he'd grown another head. "There are no ramparts. No battlements," he explained.

"It's too damned big to be decorative." Jack patted the cool obsidian stone consideringly. "What gives? And the answer better not be the goddess," he added crisply.

"Genizah has its defences," Ghennehessere tossed out casually as she stuck her hand out into the deluge pounding down outside. The wind was driving the rain into the gatehouse. "The wall is not among them. It merely serves to keep the unwary from our door long enough that we might reach them. This place is not safe for any who do not walk with the Goddess." She looked out at the rain, rolling her eyes. "We will run," she said decidedly.
"Oh, yes," Jack emphatically agreed.

Daniel pulled his glasses off and tucked them into his pocket, then raced down the path after his friends. Sam was still on point, reaching the edge of the drop first, reeling back in shock.

"Holy Hannah!" she gasped. "If there isn't a city, then what…"

"Genizah," Ghennehessere answered with simple pride.

Daniel wiped his face and stepped up to the edge of what seemed to be a ha-ha of fairly epic proportions, Teal'c taking his shoulder in a firm grip as he leaned forward. It was blurry, but if he squinted, he could still make out some detail. There was a lake below them, a stone causeway spanning from the mainland to an island about half a mile out. The causeway connected to a second gate, more stark obsidian walls rising steeply from it to encircle the island. From this vantage, Daniel could just make out the peaks of roofs and towers. "That's a library?" he breathed, awestruck.

"Daniel Jackson refers to the Genizah," Teal'c explained to Ghennehessere while Daniel ogled the promised land shamelessly. "Library is the word used by the Tau'ri."

"Er - Daniel is a linguist - a scholar of the written word," Sam explained to their interested hostess, markedly more friendly now she wasn't faced with filmy anything.

"And the spoken," Jack interjected. "Trust me on that. He's way, way…" Jack held his hand above his head, making little chopping motions. "Way up there on the spoken."

"Then you are all the more welcome," Ghennehessere said happily to Daniel, heading confidently on. A precipitous, winding path led down to the causeway.

When Daniel followed Ghennehessere, Jack was steering, constantly turning his head from snatching precious, longing glimpses of the library to the mundanity of watching where his feet were supposed to go in order to ensure the rest of him didn't unexpectedly go somewhere else.

"I bet they don't argue much about the fines round these parts," Jack said to Daniel.

Daniel didn't care. He was in lust. He just wanted to get in there and get tactile. "Can you tell us something about your collection?" he asked Ghennehessere.

"Your technology."

"Your defences."

"Your goddess."

"No," Ghennehessere answered pleasantly. "All is revealed at need."
"We need," Jack emphasised his point with an annoying little macho gesture involving his P-90.

"We will talk of our books," Ghennhessere told Daniel, completely failing to be intimidated. "We have many volumes from this world."

"And others?" Daniel queried, glancing at the island again.

"The Goddess has visited many worlds and found their histories pleasing, though some..." Ghennhessere glanced frowningly at Sam and Teal'c. "Enslavement by the false gods is a tale told by many."

"You know about the Goa'uld?" Sam challenged.

"I know that you carried one," Ghennhessere retorted. "That you," she nodded at Teal'c, "carry one still. An infant."

"I am Jaffa, born to serve the false gods until these..." he acknowledged his friends, "came to my aid. We fight now for the freedom of both our peoples."

"Freedom is a worthy goal," Ghennhessere approved. "A man may fear or worship what he does not understand. I ask you: which is the slave? The man whose body is owned by another but is free in his mind, or the man who binds himself body and soul to the service of a master he chooses?"

"The man should learn," Daniel interrupted. "It's only by understanding that we're able to confront our fears and gain the necessary perspective to free ourselves from them."

"A wise answer for one so young and lovely," Ghennhessere approved embarrassingly, smiling. "You may call me Ghenn."

"You may not," Jack retorted.

Daniel turned to scowl at him, which made it difficult to avoid the smug, knowing smirks of his very interested so-called friends, who were looking him up and down consideringly. Lovely? Jeez.

"All of you may," Ghenn amended easily. She leaned close to Daniel as they negotiated a sharp drop where the path turned abruptly in on itself. "Your father is stern," she muttered.

Sam tried and failed to suppress a snort of laughter. "Colonel doesn't mean 'father'," she pointed out, her voice shaking.

Ghenn eyed Jack consideringly. "No? Someone should tell the colonel so, then."
Jack's ability to threat assess the library was hampered by being severely waterlogged and Daniel being fetchingly damp and ruffled right at him. The whole wet T-shirt thing was...well...it was the only thing dragging Jack's eyes - and mind - from the way Daniel's BDUs were clinging to the shapely curve of his ass. He was aware of Daniel and a lot of dark, forbidding stone, a fire, Daniel, a few moth-eaten, vaguely Roman epic movie-looking chairs scattered about, and Daniel.

Mostly Daniel.

Their linguist was poised at the foot of the vast, imposing flight of stairs that rose above them to a gallery. Daniel was so eager to get up those stairs and start fondling diverse volumes, he was positively quivering.

"Do you have any books on technology?" Carter asked oh-so-casually.

Ghenn nodded vigorously, ambling over to a large, utilitarian library table set at right angles to the fire. It was heaped with scrolls, books and papers, in what struck Jack as organised chaos. Ghenn was able to put her hand immediately on something buried in the heap, neatly extracted it and spoke quietly into it. "I have called Eiliana, Scollen and the others to attend us," she informed them. "They will bring clothing and food. Genizah knows you now. All are welcome!" Ghenn beamed at them.

"Genizah knows us?" Jack asked slowly, frowning. He eyed the fire, decided he'd get reasonable line of sight on Daniel's damp derriere, then sauntered over to toast his rear.

"Sir, I think I have the answer," Carter answered, starting to smile. "Every library has a computer, right?"

"Computer?" Ghenn queried. "I do not know this word."

"It is from the language of the Tau'ri," Teal'c offered. "A computer is an electronic machine that carries out complex calculations, deals with numerical data and with the storage and rapid retrieval of stored items of information." He looked smugly gratified at Carter's glance of surprised admiration.

Jack wondered if there was any subtle way to tactfully let General Kerrigan know Carter totally got orgasmic on the techno talk.

"Genizah is more," Ghenn said cheerfully.

"Artificial Intelligence? A more sophisticated machine that can learn independently?" Carter asked, getting interested. "Capable of - oh my!"

"Crap!" Jack seconded when he got a look at the new arrivals, sauntering down the stairs. "Two of the Seven Sisters?" he demanded.
Ghenn was laughing all over her face.

"I can't help but notice one of the 'Sisters' is a guy!" A tall, gorgeous, naked guy oozing enough oomph to power a small city. That was bad enough but Jack could hardly bring himself to look at the other naked Sister. The gender was right, but everything else was totally ewwwwwy, including the way Stud was looking at a woman old enough to be Teal'c's mom.

"Blessed Disciples of the Goddess," Ghenn greeted them fondly.

"You take 'em where you can get 'em, huh?" Jack asked, faux-sympathetic. "Now THIS is more like it!" Jack darted forward to relieve the bustling, rosy cheeked dumpling of a Sister in a red velvet dress of her heavily burdened tray of enticing goodies. There was something that looked like tea and would probably taste like shit, but the nibbles more than made up for it in his opinion. "And you are?" he cosily asked the apple-dumpling.

"Tuyettana'al'anor'mi'son'a'gon."

"Tuyett? Nice to meet you! I'm Jack and why don't I help you with that?" Jack offered happily. Tuyett looked up at him roguishly, handed him the tray and pinched his ass in a slick sleight of hand that commanded his utmost respect.

"I'm Daniel, this is Major Carter - you know Jack - and Teal'c," Daniel introduced them perfunctorily as he homed in on Ghenn. "Genizah?" he prompted, looking pointedly at the stairs.

"Eiliana and Scollen," Ghenn chided Daniel gently, turning him to her fellow disciples.

Up close, Jack had to admit Eiliana had a serenity that reminded him of the Nox, a certain something in her eyes that made sudden sense of Scollen' s besottedness. Hell, Jack had learned to think outside the box too. He realised he was watching Daniel - again - glancing up to see Scollen look at him knowingly. Jack found himself grinning.

"Ah!" Ghenn called gladly. "And this is..."

"Lurch," Jack blurted involuntarily, gawping at about seven feet of cadaverous retainer walking funereally down the stairs, his arms draped with bright clothing.

"Lokhail," Ghenn enunciated carefully, eyeing Jack in puzzlement.

"O'Neill's humour is unique to himself," Teal'c commented.

Tuyett helped herself to a fancy cake from the tray. "Goddess blessed is the day Lokhail came to us!" she gloated, toasting Jack with the cake.

"He's the cook?" Jack looked Tuyett over carefully. "That makes you?" he invited.
"Commander of the Armies of the Goddess," Tuyett admitted cheerfully, hefting another cake with a 'well if no one else wants it' look.

Scollen chuckled, bowing gracefully. "I live but to serve, O Great One," he said ironically.

"You're the Army of the Goddess in its entirety?" Jack enquired politely.

"I suffice," Scollen purred, cat-satisfied.

"You must have very advanced weapons technology," Carter interjected.

Jack had to admire her damnable persistence. She hadn't mentioned technology as many times as Daniel had mentioned the books but was solidly gaining ground.

"And the last two Sisters are?" Daniel prompted, allowing himself to be extracted from his soggy jacket by Lokhail, although he emerged from his T-shirt a few moments after that blinking and disconcerted, grabbing instinctively for his belt buckle as Lokhail closed in again.

Jack had to fight himself not to offer an assist.

"Cathalla and Crescy," Eiliana softly answered. "They are querulous and old and will not make a journey to the Atrium without a new volume at the end of it, and a rare one at that!" she said humorously.

"They're old?" Jack asked Eiliana with exquisite courtesy and considerable disbelief, keeping his eyes firmly above her jawline to avoid nightmare recall later.

"Do you require assistance, DanielJackson?" Teal'c's voice boomed.

"Er - yes, I think so!" Daniel called agitatedly as Lokhail cornered him behind the library table. "Our culture has a nudity taboo!" he bleated, beating at the housekeeper's hands.

The Sisters looked at one another, radiating puzzlement. Ghenn shrugged, called off Lokhail, who handed Daniel the clothing with a deeply reproachful look, then the five of them politely turned away.

Daniel skirted the silent line, giving Lokhail a wide berth as he made it to the relative safety of his soggy teammates, sorting and handing out clothes to them. Jack got a really lovely creamy tunic with a sensible bosom. He held it up against himself and swished a little.

"Yes," Daniel said, his eyes gleaming with mischief.

"What?" Jack grinned.
That Was Then by Biblio

"Your butt does look big in that."

Teal'c was eyeing Scollen's buttocks thoughtfully. "My own culture is not averse to nudity," he commented.


The members of SG-1 retreated to the four points of the compass, backs modestly turned as they dispensed with their sodden fatigues and went native. They were all dressed in similar pants and open-necked tunics, Carter in creams, Teal'c in black and deep grey, Jack in chocolate and spice, Daniel in navy and blue.

Rolling his tunic sleeves up casually, Daniel caught Jack staring at him and blushed. He made a big production job out of retrieving and cleaning his glasses, slipped them on, decided he was as dressed as he could get and called out distractedly to Ghenn and the others that they were coming, ready or not.

Jack took that as a compliment. He also took the mangy roman epic chair next to Daniel's, leaving them cosily knee to knee. Literally. It was kind of nice to see Daniel nervous and stealing little looks at him the whole time. Jack really hoped that meant Daniel was beginning to see him differently. He hoped Daniel was thinking about him, wondering...

It had been a really long time since he last let himself hope. Loving Daniel was mostly endurance, hanging grimly in there until he could ask for - be - himself, Jack, not the colonel, not have Daniel worrying about how they were supposed to work together if he couldn't offer Jack the chance he needed.

Gawd. How pathetic could one man get?

The scary library talk ebbed and flowed, interspersed with snippets about the history of each of the Seven Sisters. Ghenn didn't say much but listened as the others chatted freely. They'd all travelled here from their own worlds and all had stayed. Tuyett had apparently started out as the Commander of someone else's Army but like the others, she was a compulsive bibliophile. They were all in this for the meaning of life stuff. Daniel thoroughly approved and Jack didn't disapprove. None of the Sisters had their heads up their asses and if they could take care of themselves, why the hell not have some fun?

"You will wish to communicate with your leaders, yes?" Ghenn asked.

"He's very particular about that, yes," Jack agreed solemnly.

"Genizah is yours to access. All are welcomed, all are known," Ghenn said happily. She handed him a small, sleek high-tech thingy, which Jack accepted with aplomb. He'd talked into and at stupider things in his time.
"We need to establish a wormhole to communicate with our leader," Carter hinted broadly.

"Genizah will provide," Eiliana replied placidly.

"Can we PLEASE look at the books now!"

Everyone looked at Daniel, who was practically exploding with impatience.

"Carter? You go with Scollen and Eiliana," Jack ordered, feeling Carter would trade a little bare skin for a crack at a weapons system.

"It was I who impaled his head on a spike!" Tuyett exclaimed excitedly.

Teal'c clapped his hand ritually across his chest in heartfelt Jaffa salute, bowing his head humbly before Tuyett.

"And Teal'c, you..."

"I will accompany Tuyettana'al'nor'mi'son'a'gon," Teal'c announced superbly.

Jack shot him a very hard look. No one liked a smart-ass.

"We have much to discuss about the pointed disposal of one's enemies," Teal'c went on.

"Knock yourselves out," Jack ordered stiffly.

"I must attend the faithful in the Mandir," Ghenn said gloomily. The Blessed Disciples of the Goddess made sympathetic noises.

"Temple," Daniel supplied for the benefit of his friends. "Does that make you the high priestess, Ghenn?"

"Daniel?" Jack interrupted cheerfully, trying to focus his linguist on more immediate priorities than Ghenn climbing into a pulpit. "You're with me."

Daniel was bouncy with excitement, Hammond was contactable and disposed to let them play nice in hopes of getting to keep at least one of the sleek little high-tech hand-held DHD's, the aliens were very nice, the food was good and Daniel was bouncy. With excitement.

"This is incredible!" Daniel enthused, angling the screen of his particular high-tech thingy so Jack could share the incredibleness of it all.
Jack made all the right noises about the niftiness of the interactive library map, the interactive bit being the Genizah itself, which had whisked them from the Atrium across the city-library in a sleek inertia-less transport pod, a cross between a train and an elevator with plush, comfy seats, opened the doors at the right stop and begun to navigate them to the right room, a swirly symbol lighting in the wall ahead of them as they walked.

Jack had taken a left instead of the requested right and a different 'Not this way, stupid, that way!' type spiky symbol had appeared. Genizah had very sophisticated motion sensors. Carter was almost as drunk with possibility as Daniel.

"No way you're going to make it," Jack commented with quiet confidence, noting the hungry looks Daniel was casting each closed door they passed. He wished Daniel was looking at him like that.

Daniel shook his head vigorously. "If I start browsing, I'm doomed." He glanced at Jack self-consciously. "We don't know how much time we have here. Hammond could yank us back at any time or the Seven Sisters could turn round and bite us in the ass." Daniel shrugged awkwardly, looking unhappy. "It's happened before."

Usually when Daniel really, really wanted something, Jack thought grimly. "The only ass in danger round these parts is Eiliana's," he said emphatically.

Daniel brightened up. "I think they're great together."

"Eeeeeky," Jack said agreeably.

"Jack!"

"But pretty great, yeah," he finished, grinning. "What are we looking for, anyway?"

"Volumes referencing Heliopolis," Daniel breathed, his eyes glowing. "We're here." He pointed at a door ahead of them. An arch of golden light glowed above it.

Jack thought Genizah knew a sucker when it saw one and was putting on a show for Daniel.

Instinctively he moved ahead, going through the door first. He found himself in a round room, a window straight ahead of him, tall but narrow, illuminating a huge heavy wooden library table that stood in the middle of the black and white tiled floor, which was quite a way down. There were two mezzanine galleries, the one they were on and one below them, each running right around the walls, though the bookcases stopped either side of the window. There was a spiral staircase connecting each gallery down from the door level to the floor level.

Jack heard a gentle clatter to his right and realised Daniel had snuck past him. By the time Jack got to the top rung of the staircase, Daniel was trotting towards the window on the level below, staring at his handheld thingy. When Jack stepped onto the mezzanine,
Daniel was happily browsing the shelves, gloating over regal bindings and crisp gold lettering.

"You know, I think there's far more to the Genizah than the library," Daniel announced, stooping to check a lower shelf.

Jack gaped at Daniel's ass, leaning feebly against the railing for support.

"I think it also contains artefacts and sacred...Ooooh!" Daniel hunkered down, stroking the spine of a book with wondering, trembling fingers. He looked up at Jack, wide-eyed, speechless and glowing, begging him to understand.

Jack understood passion just fine. He did the moth to the flame thing, sat down with his back against the railing and empathised his lovelorn ass off. Daniel was easily coaxed to sit beside him, wanting to share the thrill, balancing the book across their thighs so Jack held some of its weight, looking at Jack and having to take a deep, calming breath before he dared to open it.

One day, Jack sincerely hoped Daniel got all puppyish and bouncy like this for him.

"You know what this is?" Daniel asked softly as he drank in the first page, the exquisitely coloured hieroglyphs glowing against the creamy vellum. "The Book of the Dead."

"The one that guy Budge translated?" Jack answered, smiling. "The one you don't know why they keep reprinting him?"

Daniel looked up at him, touched and delighted Jack remembered this small, important thing, his smile from his heart. "It's beautiful," he breathed reverently.

"Yes," Jack agreed, in all sincerity, looking at this sweet, beguiling guy he was in love with, all lit up and glowing.

"It's exciting," Daniel said in quite another voice. "Illuminated manuscripts were copies of rare and fragile, usually far older, originals." He looked up at the shelves, biting his lip. "I'd give anything to see the Papyrus of Ani," he sighed, cradling the precious book to his chest.

"Anything?" Jack asked before he could stop himself.

Daniel jerked back to reality, stammering and hopelessly confused.

Jack rescued him from a tangled sentence, brushing his thumb over Daniel's lip. Then Jack kissed him, slowly, tenderly, rubbing his lips over Daniel's, persuading him from stiffness to startled pliancy. He pulled away, looking searchingly at Daniel.

"Oh," Daniel commented intelligently.
Jack grinned, kissing Daniel again. He loved the way Daniel's mouth moved with his, hesitant, curious, gentle. This was exactly what he hoped, that Daniel was generous enough and open enough to give him a chance. Daniel jumped when Jack pulled the book out from between them, his hand following Jack's as he laid the book with due care on the floor behind him. Then he slid his arms round Daniel, kissing him again, wanting to hold him close and make this good for both of them.

The truth was, he was as nervous as Daniel. Right now this meant a hell of a lot more to Jack than it did to Daniel, whose major concern was probably not hurting the feelings of a good friend who happened to be in love with him.

This time though, Daniel tentatively kissed him back, tasting his mouth, delicately learning its contours. When Jack sucked on Daniel's lower lip, Daniel sighed surrender of a sort, opening, allowing Jack's tongue to slip into him, stroking gently. Jack didn't push it, he kept things warm and easy, kept his arms loosely clasped around Daniel's back, very aware of sudden, restive shifts and more shyness than he'd been expecting.

He felt damned good when Daniel's hands slid up to rest on his shoulders. He felt even better when Daniel's tongue flickered against his. Jack returned the pressure, the two of them kissing more comfortably, their tongues slipping easily over one another. It was still mostly about curiosity, but it was damned good.

When Jack pulled away, Daniel's eyes were closed, his cheeks flushed. His tongue flickered out to touch his lower lip, to taste Jack on him. When he opened them at last, Daniel's eyes were dazed and brilliant. Jack hugged Daniel, folded him in, wrapped him close.

"Jack..." Daniel whispered, troubled. "I'm not sure I..."

"Sssh," Jack said fondly, stroking Daniel's hair. "Just let it be for now."

"Come to my room," Daniel boldly invited.

"To talk?" Jack asked cautiously.

He was answered by embarrassed silence.

When Jack took a good look at Daniel's furiously flushed face, he guessed no, not just to talk.

Daniel sat at the library table surrounded by rare, precious books and illuminated manuscripts, his pen stuttering in his notebook, his heart pounding, his mind skittering as Jack smiled at him. Jack hadn't stopped smiling since he'd - they'd - kissed. "God!" Daniel tossed his pen down, disgusted with his own distraction.
That Was Then by Biblio

Jack turned the page of the book he was perusing with neat, economical grace, still smiling quietly.

"You kissed me!" Daniel accused him.

"I plan to kiss you again," Jack responded smoothly.

Daniel's erratic attention immediately focused on Jack's mouth.

"Unless you object."

Still staring at Jack's mobile mouth, Daniel sighed heavily.

"Do you?"

"Mmm?"

"Object?"

"Yes."

"You do?"

"Please."

"What?" Jack asked gravely, his mouth twitching.

Daniel cleared his throat and looked desperately at his book. "This is so unfair," he said after a moment, with low-voiced shame at his childishness.

"I agree."

Jack's evident sympathy made Daniel look up.

"I really was going to wait," Jack promised.

"I believe you," Daniel assured him after a moment. Oddly, he did. It was the only explanation Daniel could come up with for him not having seen any hints that Jack wanted him. None. He completely refused to believe he was so naïve he could have missed a torch of the proportions Jack seemed to be carrying for him.

Completely.

"It's okay to have second thoughts," Jack hinted, stealing looks over the top of his book, some turgid treatise on the art of war.

"Second?"
"Thoughts. You know."

Daniel knew Jack needed to narrow the field if he was to have a clue what he was supposed to be having thoughts about and that was pretty much it for what he knew.

"About me coming to your room tonight."

"Oh." Daniel winced at his gaucheness once again. "That." Not surprisingly, Jack appeared to be expectantly awaiting more by way of an answer. Daniel decided not to give one, at least, not one Jack could use against him. At this point he didn't know why he'd blurted out that invitation. Except that Jack was a good friend who was, unexpectedly, a really great kisser. Really, really great. "Jack?"

Jack looked up inquisitively.

"I do." Daniel slumped at the table, propping his chin on his hands.

Jack slumped too. "You do what?" he asked sympathetically.

"Like it when you do that - thing - with the book," Daniel said sadly.

Jack's expression suggested he didn't have a clue what thing although he was pretty sure which book.

"Look at me over the top of it," Daniel confessed, horribly embarrassed and incurably honest.

"Cool," Jack observed with quiet satisfaction.

Somehow, this was more compelling to Daniel than the kissing. Jack wasn't at his ease, in fact, he seemed hyper-aware of Daniel, watching every move he made with hungry eyes. The important thing though - Jack wasn't pushing. Jack always pushed. Not this time. "This - chance - is important to you, isn't it?" Daniel asked diffidently, plucking nervously at his pen.

"It's - everything."

"I didn't think I had to say this," Daniel said haltingly. "I thought you knew. In case - I never knew!" He looked anxiously at Jack. "I do l-love you. I do." He sat up, retrieved his pen and determinedly re-read the sentence he'd been reading for half an hour.

"It's a start."
The evening meal was served at - what else - a library table. It had a large gold urn more or less in the centre of it, containing a cheerfully sloppy floral arrangement. There was a lot of gold at the table, including the goblets they were to drink from, the plates, the large serving platters Lokhail was placing strategically where people could reach them, and the cutlery.

The food itself was plain and plentiful, steaming hot and smelling very good indeed. Looking at each of his friends, Daniel couldn't remember the last time he'd seen them this relaxed. Sam's grin was dangerously close to soppy, Teal'c was hanging avidly - comparatively speaking - on Tuyett's every word, and Jack's hand was warm at the small of Daniel's back.

"How was your day?" Sam asked brightly, probably as a precursor to telling them about her own.

"I read a really great book."

Everyone looked at Jack.

He smiled, a fat, smug smile. "Less of the attitude, kids. I had my own tickets at the public library when I was three - my Nana used to take me every Friday afternoon. I still remember the first book I borrowed. It was about a plucky little lost lion cub."

Daniel was enchanted.

"This book was even better." After some cautious prodding, Jack decided the blue root vegetables weren't actively hostile and ladled a heaped spoonful onto his golden plate. Then he added some savoury smelling meat stew and fluffy, golden dumplings, some creamy mashed whatever, and thick gravy. "It was about a general called Tacticus."

"Not Tacitus," Daniel interjected for Sam's sake. "I checked." He'd checked because he hadn't believed what he was hearing.

"The guy was well named," Jack commented lightly.

"Thank you," Tuyett beamed. "I am of his house and I was named for his greatest victory, Colonel Jack."

"This I learned," Jack said approvingly. "What can I say? Gotta love a general who loves an enemy willing to die for his cause."

"Why?" Sam asked cautiously.

"It means you both have the exact same aim in mind," Jack observed blandly, taking a big mouthful of stew and blue tuber. He chewed thoughtfully and was pleased to approve.

Sam chuckled.
"There's more," Daniel warned her.

"Much," Jack agreed pleasantly.

Seeing that Jack was engaged with another heroic portion of stew and mashed something, Daniel tried to give a flavour of how Tacticus’ mind had worked. "There is a sure way to avoid defeat in a situation in which you are out-manned, out-gunned and out-maneuvered," Daniel recited.

"Which is?" Sam asked before she could stop herself.

"Don't have a battle." Daniel nibbled some dumpling and had a think. "I liked this anecdote in particular: 'When your enemy is in an impregnable fortress, see that he stays there'."

Jack looked up brightly. "Does the Genizah do take-out?"

"Genizah gives freely," Ghenn answered easily, rolling her goblet between her small, capable hands. "The choice to take or to learn is yours."

"That's what you all did!" Daniel realised, looking at each of the Sisters. "You all chose to learn."

"Knowledge attained without effort is dangerous," Ghenn agreed seriously. "Though I think you know this. For those unburdened by the responsibility and effort of earning knowledge, there is no greater weapon. They fail to give of themselves, instead taking from others. Do not the Goa'uld tell this tale?"

"They are parasitic," Teal'c answered coldly. "They take everything from those whom they conquer and enslave, even their souls." He glanced compassionately at Daniel for a moment. "They use the fear and ignorance of men to rule them, twisting faith and noble purpose to serve evil ends. It is a tale told by too many, a tale I would end to see my people live - or die - free."

"There is much cost in the earning of such a goal," Eiliana observed. "Much responsibility."

Teal'c bowed.

"It is a worthy aim, Teal'c of Chulak," Tuyett judged, Scollen murmuring agreement.

"I guess that means the answer is no," Jack commented.

"You take what you learn," Ghenn reminded him, grinning.
"I agree with you," Daniel said slowly. "We're guilty of taking short-cuts ourselves and they never work out."

"Our standing orders are to seek new allies and procure technologies to aid in the defence against the Goa'uld!" Sam argued hotly.

"I know! I don't need to be reminded!" Daniel snapped. "It doesn't change the fact it's ultimately self-defeating. Look at the Death Glider the Air Force tinkered with or the use your naquadah generator has been put to."

Sam frowned at him, taking a few sharp bites of her blue tuber.

"Have you seen it providing clean energy anywhere on Earth?" Daniel asked. And answered. "No. Providing any kind of tangible benefit to the quality of life among the poorest peoples in the world?"

Sam was looking uncomfortable, but she didn't have a riposte for that.

"No." Daniel answered his own question, making a strenuous effort to calm his voice. "With our current geo-political climate, you never will. We cut our own electricity bill, Sam."

Sam flinched, scowling at him.

"I failed to blow you up with one," Jack interjected helpfully.

"Exactly! Thank you!"


Daniel looked seriously at Sam. "Our government is only interested in weapons technology, in the national advantages they can wring from what we bring back without arousing suspicion about our advances. If they were looking to use the Stargate to benefit mankind, it wouldn't be a secret."

"You're lecturing us on naïveté?" Jack asked.

"Realism, I guess," Daniel said, sitting back. "I try not to sugar-coat what we do and why. All I'm saying is that in the rush to fulfil those standing orders and keep the Stargate program viable, Sam and I cut corners on scholarly responsibility and ethics."

Sam nodded, reluctantly conceding the point. "I try," she said slowly, shrugging helplessly.

"I know," Daniel agreed gently. "Me too."
"There are many dilemmas," Ghenn agree sadly. "It is ever a struggle to choose whether to look within or to ask an answer of others. On Quarter Day, the Mandir is filled with supplicants to the Goddess."

"In times of great need, also," Eiliana reminded her.

"There are two men who farm side by side," Ghenn confided. "Each a good man and just, yet they battle for ownership of a river valley that runs between their lands. Each has water aplenty, yet they fight for the day the river runs dry. Must one farm die that the other may live? Each farmer came to the Goddess begging her intercession on his behalf, their pleas so powerful they turned an old friend to an enemy between one breath and the next."

"The goddess is never going to win that one," Jack said crisply. "If she's open to advice, try this on for size. She gets to keep the valley - dedicated to her or whatever - but allows both farms to use the water."

"Gives of her bounty?" Ghenn asked, clearly much struck by this idea.

"Whatever," Jack agreed generously. "And if tempers are fraying, I'd suggest making that valley sacred too. Smite mightily any pissy farmer dumb enough to stray onto it without permission. Both the farmers will be so ticked off at the goddess for stiffing them both, they'll forget the feud in no time." He beamed at his rapt, and in some cases confused, audience.

"Jack is from Minnesota," Daniel felt compelled to explain.

"O'Neill is used to the resolution of petty disputes with angry neighbours, many of which begin with the fatal phrase, 'I caught a crappie this big!'" Teal'c said dryly, holding his hands an improbable distance apart. "The crappie is a fish," he explained. He noted that his hosts each held the polite silence of the uncomprehending. "It may help to know that among the Tau'ri, Minnesota is known as the land of ten thousand lakes and no fish."

Daniel jumped two feet in the air when the knock on his door sounded. He rushed over to let Jack in before he panicked completely, flung the door open, stumbled and found himself practically nose to symbiote with a fraternally concerned Jaffa.

"Are you not alright, DanielJackson?" Teal'c asked gently, inexorably inserting himself into Daniel's rather nice bedchamber.

"Um -"

Teal'c took both of Daniel's shoulders in a kind, supportive clasp. "I have noticed your unease when in proximity to Colonel O'Neill," he informed Daniel gently. "If you are at
odds, then I am unsure as to the cause or the justness of your dispute. I am however brother to you both and cannot stand idly by while you are in need."

Daniel took a moment to digest this. He wasn't sure why he'd impulsively invited Jack to his room. He wasn't sure if Jack was interpreting this to mean they would have sex. Daniel wasn't sure if he was interpreting this to mean they would have sex. He was sure he couldn't talk about them having sex, certainly not with Teal'c, and possibly not with Jack, who really wanted to have sex.

"I'm fine," he said at last.

"You do not wish to talk about it."

"Am I interrupting?" Sam called from where she was hovering in the doorway. "I can come back," she offered reluctantly, looking keenly at Daniel.

"Sam!" Daniel called, hoping that whatever she wanted, she was willing to talk about it and he could shake off both his friends before he had to open up and confide anything that could get Jack court-martialled. "Come in!"

Sam smiled and wandered in, looking around Daniel's room. "Doesn't this remind you of all those Elizabethan swashbuckling movies with Errol Flynn?" she asked, admiring the gorgeous canopied bed, its exotic cloth of gold draperies and the substantial, exquisitely carved furniture. The black and white tiles on the floor, large leaded windows and wooden shutters all added to the effect.

"Tudor architecture didn't come with under-floor heating and perfect humidity control," Daniel said dryly, glad of the distraction.

Sam put her palm against the stone wall. "This grey stone is nice," she sighed. "It's like limestone, warmer, not so bleak and perfect as the obsidian on the exterior walls."

Teal'c looked quizzically at Daniel.

"Are you okay, Sam?" Daniel asked.

"Yes," Sam answered, looking slightly surprised. "Yes, I think I am. I've spent a lot of time with Eiliana and Scollen."

"It's got you thinking?"

"You have decided to allow General Kerrigan to pay court to you," Teal'c observed with warm satisfaction, revealing a more than passing familiarity with Elizabethan swashbucklers himself.

Sam blushed and nodded, her eyes sparkling. "Something like that. I mean - it's just a guest lecture at the university - and dinner."
"Wear that copper coloured dress," Daniel ordered. "The silk one."

"It is most becoming," Teal'c agreed.

"Really?" Sam beamed at them.

"Indeed. Your butt does not look big in that."

Jack tapped quietly on Daniel's door.

"Sam?" a cautious voice called.

"No."

"Thank god!" Daniel announced with heartfelt sincerity, opening the door and peeking out nervously. "I was scared she'd come back."

"Should I ask why?"

Daniel shuddered.

Jack decided to get straight to the point. If he was breaking every rule in the book, he was damned if he wasn't going to break them good and hard. He slid an arm around Daniel's waist, shoved the door shut behind him then steered them both towards the bed.

"Are - are we going to have sex?" Daniel asked nervously.

"That isn't up to me," Jack answered, surprised. He sat Daniel down on the edge of the bed and knelt in front of him, easing Daniel's thighs apart to move between them, resting his hands at Daniel's hips. Daniel looked at him gravely for a moment, then held his face between gentle hands.

Jack let Daniel come to him and kiss him with more confidence than he was expecting. He opened to a flickering, probing tongue, responding enthusiastically as Daniel plunged into his mouth with something like eagerness. He pushed back aggressively against each limber rasp of Daniel's tongue over his, smiling when Daniel's arms wrapped tight around his shoulders and hugged him close.

Jack let his fingers trail slowly down from Daniel's hip to stroke lightly over his crotch. Daniel's breath caught. Jack began to rub Daniel rhythmically through the roughness of his BDUs. As Daniel deepened the kiss, he began to get hard from Jack's confident stroking. Jack unbuttoned Daniel's fly and pushed the BDUs down, allowing his swelling erection to spring free. As he felt Jack's skin against his for the first time, Daniel gasped, breaking off the kiss, his head falling forward onto Jack's shoulder.
"Can I?" Jack asked huskily.

"Please," Daniel invited him honestly, not even attempting to deny he wanted this.

Daniel was blushing furiously when Jack surged up to pull off his T-shirt, finally baring the smooth creamy skin he’d coveted so long, but Daniel’s eyes were heavy and slumberous, his lips parted on quick, panting breaths, his face tight and achy.

"Jack."

He yanked off Daniel's pants without finesse, sent him sprawling back naked on the bed while he stripped with shaking, clumsy fingers, staring at Daniel’s fine, strong body, the elegant cock jutting aggressively towards the flat slope of his belly, then he fell on Daniel like a starving man on a banquet.

Daniel cried out in shock as Jack’s mouth closed avidly over his cock, his hips arching helplessly. Pinning Daniel’s hips securely, Jack licked lightly over the sensitive head of his cock, making Daniel squirm. His skin tasted of mint, the tang of that weird stuff he showered with zinging Jack’s tongue as he licked voluprously over the still swelling cock. Daniel was making incredible little noises, muffled, breathy and greedy, moaned into his stifling hands.

When Jack suckled a heavy ball velvet in his mouth, hot against his squeezing tongue, Daniel hooked a leg convulsively tight over Jack's back. Jack took Daniel’s cock into his mouth, sucking luxuriously. Daniel writhed, his sensitive fingers clenching suddenly in Jack’s hair.

Jack sucked Daniel deeper into his mouth, rubbing his tongue over the throbbing flesh. Daniel moaned desperately, his whole body quivering. Jack opened his mouth wider and took Daniel in deeper, sucking him slowly, savouring the taste and touch of him, the smell...

"Ohgod," Daniel moaned, another of those delicious quivers shaking his body. "Jaa-aack, do me. Please. Just do me."

Jack pursed his mouth tight, sliding slowly down Daniel's cock as far as he could take him in his throat, then eased back, sucking steadily.

"OhgodJackohgod," Daniel whimpered, drunk with sensation, his head tossing restlessly on the pillows, narrow hips straining up into Jack's pinning hands.

Jack opened wide and swallowed Daniel deeper, rubbing him with his tongue, sucking powerfully on his cock, shocks of pleasure seeming to shake continually through Daniel's now sweat-sleek body as Jack watched him intently, memorising every curve and contour.
With the breath sobbing in Daniel's throat, Jack felt he had to end it quickly, reaching up to massage Daniel's sensitive balls with careful fingers. Daniel hoarsely yelled out his name and came convulsively, shooting his load over Jack's tongue, spilling down his throat.

Sucking sleekly, swallowing pulse after pulse of come, Jack rubbed Daniel's belly soothingly, bringing him down easy. When he lifted his head at last, Daniel grabbed his face and hauled him up into an ecstatic, grateful kiss, tears glistening on his cheeks.

"I can't believe you did that," Daniel whispered shakily. "I can't believe you did that!"

"It was good," Jack promised, accepting another thank you kiss. He soothed away the tears, licking the salt-taste from his fingers.

Daniel ate his mouth, thrusting hungrily into him, moaning when Jack captured his tongue, sucking on it as he'd sucked on Daniel's cock.

He loved the feel of Daniel under him, warm and vital, slender and surprisingly strong, his skin slick with sweat, flushed with pleasure. He loved the feel of Daniel on him, his hands quick and curious, touching everything, everywhere, at once. He loved Daniel wanting to kiss. Jack happily obliged with a deep, tender kiss that had Daniel clinging to him, his arms wrapped around Jack's neck and head in something close to a chokehold.

Daniel was as sweet and generous as Jack had dreamed, more passionate than he'd imagined and very guy about getting what he wanted. He wanted to kiss, he wanted to stroke Jack's hair and touch his face, trace the shape of his lips and the scar in his eyebrow. He was rosy, sweaty and sated, wide-eyed and wondering, so open, so vulnerable it hurt.

He was also infuriatingly stubborn and downright naughty, groping Jack's ass with abandon, looking up at Jack with melting blue eyes, his hands everywhere but where they were supposed to be, which was on Jack's begging cock.

Jack nudged Daniel's thighs apart, pushing his hips unsubtly into Daniel's.

"Again?" Daniel asked, blushing and brilliant eyed as Jack's cock stroked sleekly over his.

"Whaddya mean, again?" Jack demanded indignantly, fighting a losing battle against a sloppy smile. He rocked his hips into Daniel's again, hissing as Daniel's still hot, throbbing cock rubbed his just right.

"Mmm." Daniel liked that, he liked that just fine.

His hand came up to cup Jack's cheek and Jack kissed the palm, smiling to himself as Daniel went all breathless and shy. Jack's heart thudded painfully. "God, I love you," he breathed, rocking his hips slowly, none of which helped Daniel recover his composure.

He hugged Jack tightly to him, helpfully pushing generously up into each of Jack's powerful thrusts, nibbling nervously on Jack's shoulder, which was decidedly erotic.
When Jack pulled roughly at Daniel's thigh, wanting the weight of his leg across his back again, Daniel wrapped both legs around him. Jack hissed his pleasure, hooked his arms over Daniel's shoulders, holding him right where he needed him.

He lost it a little then, driving into Daniel's supple, generous warmth, jolting the perfect, fine boned body on the bed like he'd dreamed so often, his skin sliding over and over Daniel's quivering belly, the force of their grinding cocks slowly arousing Daniel. The whole time Daniel was kissing him, his lips brushing softly over Jack's cheek and temple, grazing his throat and jaw.

Jack kissed Daniel, stroking sweetly into him, his mouth finding the gentleness Daniel deserved instead of this pounding…but it was so good, so right moving Daniel this way, feeling him shake and pant beneath Jack. Good hearing Daniel's refined voice harshly gasping Jack's name over and over again as he got excited, got hard, his heart hammering against Jack's as he drove into Daniel, using the whole of his body, powering into each thrust with his knees.

Daniel's legs slipped down to the bed, his feet planted to shove him up to grind into Jack, his fingers clawing at Jack's ass, slipping on the sweat, trying to haul him closer as they strained together.

Jack groaned over the hot, silk skin slippery against his own, the warm, firm muscles quivering as Daniel lost it, their hips stuttering. He opened his eyes wide to drink in Daniel's astonished gratitude as he convulsed silently beneath Jack, sudden heat splashing over Jack's belly.

Then Jack let go, let it all go, roaring out in triumph as he came explosively, his cock spasming, orgasm pulsing long and luxurious.

Daniel was whispering insistently into Jack's throat. When he finally made sense of it, Jack laughed exuberantly, feeling like a total stud, tumbling onto his side, pulling Daniel into a greedy, gloating bearhug of tangled arms and legs, his semen warm and slick on Daniel's belly and groin.

"Honestly, Jack," Daniel complained, sounding as dazed and shaky as he looked.

Jack affectionately kissed his nose.

"I really had decided we should just talk."

With an armful of affectionate linguist sprawled all over him, hugging every part he could reach, Jack wasn't disposed to move. He wanted to just idle here and gloat over Daniel for a while. He found the silky hair tickling his throat irresistible, stroking it gently. Daniel stirred sleepily, nuzzled into him and settled again.
Admitting that a forty-seven year old Special Ops colonel shouldn't squeal with excitement was far easier than stopping himself from doing it. Jack couldn't even remember the last time he felt this relaxed. Dammit, this hopeful. Daniel had appeared to enjoy making love with him, very much. He'd enjoyed the cuddling and kissing afterwards as much as he'd enjoyed the sex, although he was more than a little tongue-tied. He also hadn't been able to tear his eyes off Jack until he tumbled into the profound sleep of the thoroughly satisfied.

This morning, Daniel was comfortable. No panic attacks, no falling out of bed in complete shock. No sex either, but Jack was years beyond pride. He'd take Daniel any way he could get him.

"Um…" Daniel diffidently greeted the dawn of a new day and a face full of Jack's chest hair.

Jack cupped Daniel's chin and pulled him into a soft kiss, moulding their mouths together and making like crazy glue. Nothing pornographic, just some pleasurable tactile reassurance. Daniel allowed himself to be persuaded, tried out a little erotic lip nibbling and emerged from the embrace ruffled, breathless and smiling.

"Let's have sex," Daniel asked decidedly. "Please," he added politely.

"Isn't that my line?" Jack snorted.

"I'd like…would you touch me, Jack?" Daniel asked.

"Worried last night was just about you being horny?" Jack asked shrewdly. With Daniel, honesty was always the best policy.

"No-oo," Daniel said slowly, looking troubled. "I - I wasn't thinking clearly, and we - er - we moved too fast. I want to know…I want your hands on me, Jack."

"Lie on your back," Jack ordered, deciding he could get with this program.

Daniel did so, tucking his left arm behind his head. As Jack laid his hand on Daniel's belly, Daniel's right hand came down to rest over his.

"You think too much, Daniel." Jack knelt up, moving to sit between Daniel's legs, which he nudged apart to hook loosely round his hips.

Daniel was staring up at Jack, the shy, wondering look very much in evidence again.

When Jack took Daniel's cock in his hand, Daniel gasped out loud, scrunching his eyes shut in embarrassment as he got aroused painfully fast, just from the warmth of Jack's cupping palm around him.
"Lie still," Jack asked him. Maybe this wasn't what Daniel had in mind, but Jack reached up to hold Daniel's hand, entwining their fingers as he began to touch Daniel's cock gently. He watched Daniel, stroking him softly, seeing what felt good for him, seeking out and learning each sweet spot. Daniel liked when Jack brushed his thumb over the head, pressing in just a little. He shook when Jack began to rub gentle circles, his fingers clenching hard in Jack's hand. "Daniel?"

"It's good," Daniel gasped.

"Hmm?" Jack kept right on rubbing, enjoying the sudden flush staining Daniel's cheeks, the sweat standing proud on his brow.

"Very good!"

"Relax and enjoy it." Jack smiled. Daniel was enjoying it enough his knees were gripping Jack's waist, his ass lifting clean off the bed as Jack rubbed maddening, methodical circles all over his straining cock.

Daniel moaned out when Jack caressed his balls, his ass and thighs clenching reflexively, pearly fluid beading the head of his erection. Jack hitched closer, taking his cock and Daniel's between his hands, stroking them both, rolling and squeezing them together with firm, massaging pressure.

"That's - that's - oh!" The SGC's resident linguist and inspirational diplomat failed to find words to adequately describe what Jack was doing to him. Instead, Daniel sat up very quickly, hugged Jack to him like he hadn't been hugged in forever and kissed him passionately.

Jack had never been with a more grateful or surprised lover. It was worrying. He was seriously rethinking his position on Daniel's sexual experience. It was becoming apparent that the two partners Jack knew of - Sara and Sha'uri - were it. Given Daniel had apparently not been able to tell the difference between his ex and a psychotic mass murdering Goa'uld, and Sha'uri hadn't even known how to kiss, Daniel was possibly in for a few shocks between the sheets.

"You've experience of oral sex?" Jack asked delicately while Daniel was nibbling him again. He found this very cute, very distracting and very erotic in its own very Daniel way.

Daniel sat back and looked at him. "You want me to - um?" He lifted his eyebrows enquiringly. "Sarah was - she - er - Yes. I - I have experience."

The determination with which Daniel avoided Jack's eyes probably meant Daniel's ex Sarah was a selfish bitch in the sack. Jack realised he'd moved WAY too fast. Not that this meant Daniel wasn't willing to try new things. He was touched when long slender fingers pushed one of his hands aside, Daniel carefully and somewhat curiously stroking Jack while he stroked Daniel.
They found a rhythm quickly, connecting as they'd always done, each with an arm around the other's waist. They flowed into a passionate, fluid kiss, mouths moving over one another, tongues flickering out to lick and taste.

It was Daniel's gentleness that got to Jack, the slow, satisfying sensuality as they rubbed and squeezed their cocks together, hands beginning to grip and glide. Warmth and pleasure were rippling through him when he felt the tremor in Daniel's thighs, hugging tight either side of his hips, then Daniel sighed into his mouth, slick heat pouring into his hand. With a few more urgent strokes Jack came too.

Daniel looked at Jack's semen on his hand, then he brought his fingers to his mouth and licked them, intensely curious. He was apparently okay with this because he kissed Jack hard on the mouth, then his cheek, and finally his shoulder, resting his head there.

Jack had learned a few things, some important. Among them that Daniel needed to touch and be touched, needed affection as much as he needed sex. They still had some time before dawn broke, so Jack held Daniel, stroking his hair.

"You okay?" he asked after a while.

"I - I think so."

"Apart from being in a state of shock?" Jack asked more gently.

"A-apart from that, yes," Daniel agreed determinedly.

"And the whole having to rethink your sexuality thing?" Jack prompted.

"Honestly?" Daniel sat back, his eyes sparkling with mischief as his hand snaked between them to stroke wonderfully over Jack's cock. "I don't have the energy to care."

It was raining again, the sky slate-grey and swollen, darkening the room so much Genizah had obliged with some nice lighting directed carefully to illuminate where he was working. Daniel had said thank you and still felt silly. He was extremely glad that Jack, Sam and Teal'c had been lured off by Tuyett and Scollen for a demonstration of superior firepower. He needed some space and quiet time alone to think.

Breakfast had been very trying. It had taxed his communication skills to the utmost to respond coherently to his friends' and the Sisters' enquiries about how well he'd slept when Jack was taking full advantage of the two of them being tucked away together at the end of the huge dining table to fondly cup and stroke Daniel's ass.

Daniel had wanted to haul Jack straight back to bed and go at it again.
He was shocked at himself. All his rationalisations, his seemingly mature decisions had melted away from him the moment he saw the heat and hunger in Jack's eyes. It hadn't even occurred to Daniel to prevaricate. He'd just tumbled giddily into bed and let Jack go wild.

He'd had sex with Jack. Sex! Good sex - he thought it was good, anyway - along with the shock of Colonel Jack O'Neill knowing exactly what he was doing and doing it so darned well. Jack was either extremely well-read on a wider range of subjects than Daniel had ever thought possible or - or he'd done this before.

Daniel sat back, nibbling on the end of his pen, frowning in the general direction of the window, realising abruptly that he felt decidedly unenthusiastic at the thought of Jack being so very good at sex with anyone else. It was selfish, but he was quite grateful Jack was passionately in love with him. It seemed to make Jack completely uncritical where Daniel's sexual technique or lack thereof was concerned. It was encouraging that Jack had no immediate complaints or constructive suggestions for improvement. Daniel was hopeful he wasn't suffering from any odious comparisons with men who had a lot more going for them than he did.

As far as critiquing his own performance was concerned, all Daniel knew was that he hadn't been uncomfortable with Jack, even if he had been surprised several times. The sex was good - he did actually think it was good, at least the part Jack had been in charge of was good - and so was being with Jack. He'd rather enjoyed lying tangled up with Jack afterwards, soaked in sweat, his belly liberally coated with semen from both of them, too breathless from their lovemaking to speak, just enjoying being so close he could feel Jack's comforting heartbeat steadying slowly against his chest.

So many new sensations to process. The hair on Jack's chest and thighs, chafing his skin as they made love. The powerful muscles driving Jack's body into his. The unaccustomed weight and strength pinning him on his back. He couldn't find words to describe how Jack's cock had felt stroking and grinding over his, not without wandering into Harlequin romance territory. Throbbing was probably the best of an embarrassing array of adjectives.

Daniel's eyes slid again to his radio, sitting virtuously within reach, right there on the table, as per S.O.P. Unfortunately, the Air Force lacked the foresight to provide a suitable code for SG-1's civilian consultant to order SG-1's team leader to return - urgently - so he could drag him into bed and they could have sex again.

Maybe lunchtime, Daniel thought optimistically. Could they sneak off for a quickie? The - frottage, he thought the term was - would take too long, the way Jack got completely off on rubbing himself enthusiastically over every inch of skin Daniel possessed…

Daniel snapped himself out of his reverie, acutely aware of the precious, severely limited time he was wasting so profligately. He conscientiously returned to his book and was annoyed to find he had to re-read his own notes to make sense of the chapter he'd reached. He knew now that Ra had discovered Heliopolis over fifteen thousand years ago,
plundering its technologies, claiming it as his own along with the network of Stargates, cementing his position as Supreme System Lord.

Strangely, the only technology that had survived Ra's predation was the communication device bearing the universal language. Perhaps Ra had left it intending to return at some point to study the device further?

Daniel looked at the glyphs in his book. Then he looked some more, in case there was a sudden improvement in his flagging comprehension. Then he sighed, sank lower in his chair and nibbled his pen again broodingly. He was not happy that Jack had had sex with men, certainly enough that Jack had gotten very good at it. Daniel didn't feel judgemental, except about himself. Faced with irrefutable evidence of Jack's sexuality, Daniel reluctantly had to admit that he could be a tad naïve about people. Even his closest friend, it seemed.

He didn't think it was the end of the world to think the best of people, to have patience, and being immodest for a moment, resilience. Getting Jack to talk at all took the relentless patience and resilience of Chinese Water Torture, and there was no way the topic of Jack's sexuality was ever going to come up voluntarily from either of them.

It probably still wouldn't, even though Daniel was now the focus of Jack's sexuality. It was just completely embarrassing that the only way Jack could communicate a fundamental truth about himself to his closest friend and inadequate confidant was to throw Daniel on the bed and go down on him.

Damn. Even thinking about it...no matter how Daniel tried to rationalise it, he was very unhappy with the thought of Jack using his filthy, talented, wonderful mouth on anyone else. Very.

Even knowing it was childish, irrational and wholly his problem - it was his insecurity, not Jack's - didn't stop him wanting to share. He was going to have to talk to Jack. About sex. Preferably without getting hysterical over any answers about who, when, where and what, that may or may not be forthcoming.

He was not going to ask how he compared.

He was also not going to allow Jack any basis for further comparison in the future. If Jack wanted Daniel, he was damned well going to get him. And only him. He was definitely going to have face facts. There was no conceivable way this sea-change in his friendship with Jack was temporary. Going down on your friend - it - it wasn't the kind of thing a man could take back. Jack was indubitably thinking long term commitment.

He felt totally out of his depth. Jack had been prepared for something to happen between them for three years, while Daniel wandered blithely along at his side, oblivious to the subtext. Twenty-four hours after he discovered Jack's feelings for him, Daniel had gone to bed with him. It seemed pretty obvious why - his own feelings for Jack went deeper than he'd ever suspected.
No, not deeper. Not that. It was more that there was a different texture to his feelings, a need he'd failed to interpret, that had quietly grown until it exploded out of him, down Jack's willing throat.

Daniel sighed, embarrassed all over again. He could hardly believe he could feel those occasional twinges of awareness, those small tugs of attraction from time to time and never, ever realise what they meant. So much for him being the empathic, introspective one.

He tried to imagine himself doing what he understood to be conventional relationship type things with Jack - like dating and grocery shopping and stuff - and failed. The last time he'd allowed Jack to lure him into an evening of socialising, Daniel had wound up face down in a mound of green Jell-O, presumably while Jack - er - sublimated.

Had Jack ever had a relationship with a man? As opposed to mutually enjoyable, healthy sex? Daniel was surprised by how much he wanted the answer to be no, that in some way he needed to be the first. The only. He really needed this to mean as much to Jack, to be as huge and encompassing a shift in Jack's life as it was in his own.

He guessed if he and Jack were together, and Jack was definitely acting as if they were, then his partner, Significant Other - lover - whatever he was supposed to call it, needed some ground rules. There were limits to Daniel's patience, resilience and altruism, which meant Jack's paternally protective 'Me! Me! Me!' possessiveness had to be severely curtailed.

Apparently landing himself a boyfriend was more than enough for Daniel to cope with. He couldn't handle a surrogate father with all the brakes off too.

Actually, he wasn't sure he could handle the boyfriend. Daniel was completely unnerved at the thought of spending all the time with Jack that Jack would presumably want, and wholly deserved if they were together in some loving, mature, mutually supportive relationship. Not that Daniel didn't like being around Jack, but they'd never shared their personal space.

As close as they were on missions, Daniel had never been past the bathroom in Jack's house, while Jack rarely if ever came to the loft. And that was the simplest part of sharing space, making room for another person in your life, your home. Making it home for them. Daniel was happy alone, never disconcerted by his own solitude, never at a loss for occupation or distraction or pleasure. He wasn't sure how to share his space with Jack when it made Jack so uncomfortable to be there.

There were also all those times after missions when they needed lots of space from one another to generally cool off and see reason, a vital process which would not be aided in any way by Daniel sulking alone in his bed because he didn't get to have sex.
As a shaft of sunlight danced across the polished surface of the table, Genizah helpfully extinguished the overhead lighting it had provided while Daniel worked. "Thank you," Daniel muttered absently, still wrestling with the thorny issue of equality and fairness as it pertained to whose bed he got to have sex in.

An unwelcome thought intruded. He looked up sharply, his eyes widening. "Were you watching us?"

The lights glowed coyly blue.

"This is not the Atrium," Daniel complained in the general direction of the rough stone staircase the travel pod had deposited him at. The familiar golden 'walk this way' symbol glowed on the archway above his head. Daniel turned in time to see the travel pod whisk itself away. "That's not fair!" he called after it.

He headed cautiously down the stairs, more curious about what Genizah wanted him to see than alarmed at its wilfulness. He'd been cloned into a machine that thought and felt like him, believed it was him. He'd also had a computer chip implanted in his brain that evolved an annoying personality and resilient self-awareness. It wasn't much of a stretch for Daniel to accept this level of artificial intelligence, or a measure of self-determination from a machine. He reminded himself that humans too could be categorised as machines, electro-chemical in nature. Genizah seemed altruistic, at least as far as he and his friends were concerned, and Jack's threat assessment in his reports to Hammond continued to hover between 'zip' and 'zilch'.

The staircase was palpably older than those near the Atrium, which was presumably the newest part of Genizah. Daniel took the turn and continued on down another flight, then another. He found himself at the top of a narrow walkway of steep gradient, without windows, inky darkness pooling ahead of him. As he stepped hesitantly forward, muted light flared. As he walked on, the next section ahead would illuminate and then darkness would close in behind him.

Sensing that Jack would not approve of him plunging into the depths of Genizah all alone, Daniel decided to test the library - er - computer's possibly hostile intentions. He turned abruptly and walked back the way he came. Genizah helpfully lighted the section of hallway ahead of him, as before. There were clearly no problems about him retracing his steps if he needed to.

Aware that he should have radioed in as soon as he was deposited unexpectedly here instead of at the Atrium, Daniel opened a channel to Jack.


"Um..."
"Daniel."

The warmth in Jack's voice was enough to make Daniel go red and probably have Sam and Teal'c checking their glorious leader out for concussion or something. Jack sounded like it was six months since he'd last seen Daniel, instead of six hours. And he'd missed Daniel. Badly.

"You don't have any objections to me checking out more of Genizah, do you?" Daniel asked hopefully and decidedly disingenuously.

"Alone?" Jack asked after a short pause.

"Not - entirely," Daniel admitted, glancing around warily.

"What's that supposed to mean?" Jack asked sharply.

"Genizah is kind of with me." Daniel looked self-consciously up at the ceiling. "The computer - the artificial intelligence that runs this place - um - pays attention. To - er - stuff."

"Stuff?"

"Stuff that goes on," Daniel hissed meaningfully. "You know!"

"Ah," Jack responded evenly after a brief, crowded silence. "Problem?"

"I don't know," Daniel said, surprised at the question. "I don't think so." He was pretty sure a building would not have a problem with a couple of bipedal humanoids going at it with considerable enjoyment and a certain amount of flattering - to Jack - volume.

"Genizah wants to show me something."

"Keep in radio contact," Jack ordered with great good humour.

"You don't think I should wait for you?" Daniel asked, surprised and slightly put-out Jack didn't feel like racing to his side for any particular stuff they couldn't talk about on the radio. After three years, surely Jack's libido should be a tad more focused? Um - then again...He looked up at the ceiling. The ceiling appeared to be looking back at him.

"Never mind," he added hurriedly. "Daniel out."

Figuring out sex with Jack was going to be difficult enough without an audience, no matter how benevolent it seemed.

Shaking off his disappointment, Daniel turned and walked carefully down the sloping hallway. After five minutes' steady descent, he found himself at the top of another narrow staircase, this one sweeping round in a tight curve, the stones worn smooth and slippery beneath his feet. Picking his way carefully down, Daniel re-evaluated the section of Genizah he'd just come through. It seemed to be a bridging section, linking what was
perhaps the original building with an early extension built to house the growing collection. He was fascinated, speculating wildly about the potential age of the library.

He emerged in a gallery, a dodecagon, floored with the same stones worn smooth, each of the sides containing arched double doors of venerable wood and simple latched construction, and an identical staircase leading off to other galleries, perhaps. The scale of Genizah was truly humbling to a child of Earth's culture. Daniel wasn't thinking about the number of volumes, giddying though that was, but the scale of the endeavour, the building of a collection from this and other worlds spanning centuries - millennia. The determination, the passion for gathering the knowledge and histories of so many cultures, the welcoming of true scholars to guard the integrity of the collection, and of the search for truth - it awed him.

Before he moved away from the staircase to investigate, Daniel fished in his pack for his chalk, then prudently marked an arrow on the wall. Symmetry was very hard on his sense of direction, but not as hard as temptingly tactile bibliographic seduction.

It felt to him as if Genizah weighed heavy in the silence here. There was no dust or damp, none of the detritus Daniel associated with a site, just a familiar hush of age and history in the cool gloom he didn't want to break. He switched on the digital camera then slowly walked around the gallery, filming each of the doors in turn. There were symbols carved into a panel set at head height on each door, although he had to admit the head in question must have been closer to the ground than his was. He had to stoop awkwardly to film each of them in turn. As far as he could tell, the symbols were similar to what Jack referred to as 'the swirly thing' Genizah used to guide them around its interior. There was no key provided to the language, so Daniel made a mental note to show Ghenn the footage later and ask her what each panel said.

Genizah wasn't attempting to guide Daniel to any particular door, so he made his own choice, opening the one next to the staircase that brought him here, ready to begin a logical survey. He found himself in an entryway, walking rapidly through to a sharp right turn, where the room opened out. Genizah lit the room dimly for him as he stood poised at the top of the few steps leading down from the wide stone walkway that ran all the way around the walls, which were painted a light grey. The ceiling arching overhead was covered in a trompe l'œil of the heavens, stars of gold shimmering against the vivid deep blues of the background.

He lost interest in the magnificent ceiling almost immediately.

The room was filled with tall, plain earthenware jars, which meant only one thing.

Scrolls!

Eagerly, Daniel trotted down the steps, dropped his pack beside the nearest jar, kneeling to slip on a fresh pair of latex gloves. He looked the jar over carefully, finding an identical pattern of symbols on the side of the jar repeated on the cover that sealed it. An inventory?
There appeared to be a substance, some kind of resin coating the seal to make the jar airtight. Daniel touched one delicate fingertip to it, finding it gave easily, the shape of his finger indenting the glossy red surface. Nudging his fingers beneath the seal, he found it moved, so he stretched it experimentally. The seal gave at once, peeling neatly away from the jar. Thoroughly approving, Daniel lifted it clear and set it down on the cover of the jar next to his. It seemed an excellent, productive use of advanced technology to him.

Excitement rising, Daniel looked the contents of the jar over carefully, wanting to be sure the equivalent of papyrus or paper for this world was physically up to being handled. He took a deep breath and carefully eased a scroll free of the jar, looking around for a work area. It was in the centre of the room, on a level recessed lower than this one. When he got closer, Daniel could see a stand on the table that held two transparent sheets, a light source below it. He relaxed, realising he'd be able to view fragile scrolls without damaging them. He sat at the table, placing the scroll in front of him, carefully feeding the edge into the viewer.

Jack would no doubt find his excitement amusing. It wasn't even as if he understood the language. Without carbon analysis he couldn't date the scrolls, but he could hold the history of this place in his hand. The library - Genizah - was truly an amazing thing. There was nothing like it on Earth. Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, the oldest library in existence on Earth, was established in 1451 by Pope Nicholas V for what he'd described as the convenience of the learned. The BVA had over two million printed works, some of them illuminated manuscripts dating back to the 2nd century AD. The perfectly preserved book Daniel had held in his hand this morning was older than that. The scrolls - Wow!

"Why books? Why not a digital record?" he mused.

"We have those also," Ghenn replied softly from behind him, making Daniel jump.

"I didn't hear you come in," he said, startled.

"When you did not return to the Atrium for mid-day meal, I came looking. Genizah brought me here," Ghenn smiled and walked over to join him. She looked over his careful preparation of the scroll approvingly, relaxing.

"Could you read this for me?" Daniel asked hopefully.

Ghenn stood at his shoulder, her hand resting lightly on his shoulder as she leaned into him to support her as she peered at the scroll. "Im'a'Tokin will walk in the light of the Goddess, shelter beneath her guiding hand and know her in all her aspects."

"Im'a'Tokin?" Daniel queried, looking around at Ghenn.

"The people who inhabit this world, Daniel."

"The faithful?"
Ghenn nodded.

"Do the people value education and knowledge?"

"They grow fat on the land," Ghenn snapped with unwonted sharpness.

Daniel noted her reaction, deciding to leave what was obviously a thorny issue until later to probe further. "What are the aspects of the goddess?" he coaxed.


"You don't seem enthused by this Goddess you serve," Daniel observed mildly, watching Ghenn.

"I don't serve the Goddess, Daniel," Ghenn corrected, leaning once again into his shoulder tiredly. "I serve the people."

"Who grow fat on the land?" Daniel asked, feeling a tad crowded by Ghenn's proximity and what he felt to be a slightly smug glow from Genizah.

"The Goddess is bountiful," Ghenn said flatly.

"And the people are ungrateful?" Daniel eyed her, frowning over the seeming contradictions.

"They raise their voices to the heavens in praise of the Goddess," Ghenn announced somewhat resentfully.

"Oh." Daniel frowned over this. He wanted Ghenn to back off so he could play with his - her - scrolls but she seemed so miserable, he felt mean for even thinking it. "If they turn to the Goddess in times of need and in times of plenty, then they seem to be - " Fixated was the word that came to mind. "Faithful," he said lamely.

Ghenn gloomily nodded.

"The Goddess makes the tough decisions…"

Ghenn perked up visibly. "Ah! Colonel Jack is a clever man!" she said enthusiastically.

"I know!" Daniel agreed firmly.

"Though he is not as clever or as beautiful as you," Ghenn added softly, leaning again.

"Oh."
It was weird, Daniel reflected. He'd gone for years without anyone sniffing his hair, and within twelve hours it had happened to him twice.

He sensed that Jack would not understand about Ghenn.

She patted his cheek gently, laughing a little. "Genizah makes you most welcome, Daniel," she chuckled, her hand cradling his face.

There was a definite blue tint to the light.

Daniel cleared his throat nervously, beginning to wonder if Genizah would understand about Jack.

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Jack was pleased to see Daniel. He showed Daniel how pleased he was to see him by enthusiastically pinning him against the bedroom door and kissing him hard. He was surprised to find Daniel slightly resistant and very stiff-lipped. He was also looking up at the ceiling over Jack's shoulder.

"You weren't kidding," Jack said, stepping back in surprise. He looked up at the ceiling too. "It's really watching us?"

Daniel nodded solemnly.

Jack shrugged and pounced again. Daniel struggled half-heartedly, abandoning any pretence at reluctance the moment Jack's mouth met his, when he wrapped his arms round Jack's neck and made like a limpet. Daniel's enthusiasm was touching. Jack made encouraging noises and opened wide, sighing greedily as Daniel's tongue slid sweetly over his and rested there. As he melted into Jack, Daniel's hands dropped to his ass, pulling him hard against an eager erection.

Jack saw blue. Light that was.

They stopped kissing, eyes rolling up to look suspiciously at the ceiling.

Daniel seemed quite shocked. "You have no discrimination!" he accused the room at large.

"Thanks," Jack retorted ungratefully, coldly removing Daniel's hands from his ass.

"Not you!" Daniel said impatiently. He pointed one slender finger up at the ceiling. "Genizah doesn't seem to care who I ...um..." Daniel trailed off, avoiding Jack's eyes.

"Get a little action with?" Jack asked softly. He rocked his hips into Daniel's. Colour flooding his face, Daniel bit his lip. Then he grabbed Jack's ass again and kissed him fiercely, plunging greedily into him as he shoved him towards the bed. Jack obligingly tumbled onto his back, Daniel squirming nicely on top of him.
Daniel lifted his head abruptly. "Oh."

"Crap!" Jack bitched reflexively.

"You don't even know what I was going to say!" Daniel complained, scowling at him.

"We can't have sex," Jack snapped promptly.

"That's - that's not the point!"

"There are curtains round the bed. Unless you-know-what has X-Ray vision -"

"It's not Genizah," Daniel denied, failing to put up any kind of struggle when Jack gently removed his glasses. He was also stroking Jack's hair, which suggested the situation wasn't irretrievable.

Jack made with the supportive face.

"When did you…um…" Daniel paused. "I mean…How often - how many…" He looked anxiously down at Jack.

"Could you be more specific?" Jack asked carefully, doing a little hair stroking of his own. He felt a distinct constriction in his chest when Daniel nuzzled shyly into his hand.

"It doesn't matter," Daniel said unhappily, looking guilty and apologetic. "Really," he added unconvincingly.

"It's probably a bad idea if we roll up for chow all sweaty and blushing anyway," Jack sighed.

Daniel looked depressed. He stopped squirming and lay still, plucking nervously at Jack's T-shirt, obviously bursting to say or ask something, and just as obviously not able to get the words out.

What exactly would an insecure, inexperienced guy be worrying about this early in an unexpected homosexual relationship? A sensitive guy who didn't have a selfish bone in his body? An inkling of the truth dawned on Jack. "It was thirty years ago," he said without preamble, wincing at the inconceivable gap between then and now. "A long, sullen summer." Daniel perked right up, grazing his mouth over Jack's cheek like the sweet man he was. "It doesn't matter who."

"No," Daniel promised softly, with a small, gentle smile.

Jack cradled Daniel's head and kissed him tenderly. "It was good, and he was the only one." He kissed Daniel again. "After - I went to the Air Force Academy. Never regretted it, you know? I just never looked back. That was then…"
He rolled Daniel neatly onto his back. This was now. Daniel. Worth breaking every rule in the book for. Absolutely worth it. When it came down to it, Jack was a better man with Daniel. Maybe he’d do his job differently, opening himself up like this, but there were days he figured he couldn’t do a lousier job, when his kids couldn’t take him any worse than he was or find him more of a strain to be around. Too many days he seemed to push trust to the limits.

Daniel cupped his face, drawing him down, his face warm with expectation and relief. Jack was surprised it mattered so much to Daniel, but he seemed to have said the right thing so he let it go. They kissed, gently exploring one another, mouths moving restlessly together, Daniel’s lips parting invitingly. Jack sank into him, shocked through with love and want, and fierce gratitude. He’d lucked out, falling for a man who was so giving.

Their kiss was easy and generous, both of them wanting it to be good. Daniel’s eyelids fluttered and closed as he sighed, going boneless beneath Jack, suckling sensuously on his tongue.

The sudden click of Jack’s radio made him start violently, rolling instinctively off Daniel. He dashed a shaking hand across his eyes, then answered the hail. “SG-Niner, go,” he said curtly.

“Sir?”

“Carter,” Jack acknowledged wearily. Daniel curled up silently at his side looking mortified. Jack turned to face him and took Daniel’s hand in his, squeezing reassuringly. It wasn’t the end of the world they were both a little hormonal. He just had to get a grip on himself.

“Ghenn wants us to gather for dinner early. She thought Daniel might like to hear more about the people. We’re having a picnic down by the lake,” Carter reported enthusiastically.

Jack was annoyed to see the treacherous little shit he’d stupidly fallen in love with light up like Christmas. "Cool."

Daniel slithered off the bed and made for the door, tossing an impatient look over his shoulder.

"We’ll be right there," Jack said witheringly. "SG-Niner out." He got up and stomped out of the room in Daniel’s wake, watching his shapely six and trying not to think about skinny dipping.

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"Well, isn't this nice," Jack commented complacently. "I've never seen a Jaffa sprawl before."
Teal'c placidly helped Tuyett to a plate of tiny mouth-watering sweet pastries that had apparently escaped her attention, although they hadn't escaped Jack's, who'd already eaten all the best ones.

Ghenn's version of a picnic involved them all lolling around in the sweet-smelling grass, which was dotted with so many vibrant flowers, Jack kept expecting to glimpse the Yellow Brick Road.

Eiliana was asleep and Scollen was working on his tan and watching her fondly. Looking at the two of them snuggled up, Jack highly doubted Genizah would be shocked by anything he and Daniel got up to, certainly not at this point on Daniel's learning curve.

Carter was stretched out, her chin was resting on her fists, her legs hooked at the ankle, swinging idly.

Jack wasn't fooled. Carter was maybe listening with half an ear to what Ghenn was telling them about the history of her people, but she was mostly furiously processing everything she'd learned about the big honkin' space gun Scollen had let them play with. Jack didn't know what a kiron particle was and he doubted Carter did either, but it didn't stop her mentally backwards engineering the thing regardless.

Whatever turns you on, he thought benevolently.

His mood had a lot to do with how close his linguist was, sleepy and languid in the heat of early evening, calling out lazy questions now and again to Ghenn as he basked in the sun, idly trailing his fingers through the grass. Daniel was extremely sexy in sunglasses, Jack felt. He was sexy and sprawly, with just a hint of smooth skin where his T-shirt was riding up to bare the small of his back...So Jack was thinking about making love with Daniel. There was nothing new there.

"Where is this goddess you speak of?" Teal'c asked. "Is she a being of flesh and bone? Or a figment of men's minds and your own technology?"

Ghenn considered this. "I think she is both," she said thoughtfully. "The people turn to her with every pride and every woe, and she is with them always."

"There are no gods," Teal'c said decisively. "There are beings whose technology is far in advance of our own, giving the appearance of godlike powers to the superstitious and the poorly educated."

"There are plenty of educated people on Earth who believe in God," Carter corrected him, frowning.

"There are many faiths on Earth, many gods. The Tau'ri once worshipped the Goa'uld, believing they were Gods," Teal'c reminded her.
"So did you!" Carter riposted.

Teal'c bowed his head, acknowledging the fair point. "What proof have you that the God of the Christians, the Jews, the Muslims is not a being of power such as Oma Desala or another race we have yet to encounter?"

"Teal'c's right to question, Sam," Daniel called out, lifting himself up to rest on his elbows. His T-shirt rode up another couple of inches, baring way too much precious skin.

Jack forgot about religion and fixated on sex. He wanted to lick sweat from the small of Daniel's back. It was way up there on his 'to do' list.

"There is nothing in the bible that is not explicable with the level of technology races such as the Asgard had two or ten or twenty thousand years ago," Teal'c said sternly. "Far beyond what the Tau'ri know even today."

"Teal'c's a humanist," Daniel said lazily, stealing a melting little look at Jack over the top of his sunglasses.

"A humanist?" Tuyett queried, gratefuly accepting the cooling drink Teal'c thoughtfully procured for her.

Sucker!

"Humanism is a belief system which puts human interests and the mind of man paramount," Daniel answered, still making with the little melting looks. "Humanism rejects the supernatural, belief in a god...essentially, Teal'c puts his faith in other people, Jaffa or human."

"I see." Tuyett nodded thoughtfully, exchanging a look with Ghenn.

"It seems to me a good way to live," Ghenn smiled at Teal'c, who inclined his head graciously.

"A man should take responsibility for his own actions," Teal'c said gravely. "He should choose what his own will and conscience dictate, weighing what is right for him and those he holds dear against his obligations to his people. He should strive always to serve the greater good, though it brings harm and dishonour upon himself."

"What is your greater good?" Tuyett asked him, clearly much struck by the argument.

"For my people to live free."

"And what of you, Daniel?" Ghenn asked, curious. "Are you also a humanist?"

"Daniel is an idealist," Jack said promptly. "A romantic."
The romantic idealist surreptitiously kicked him in the ankle.

"Idealism is complicated to explain," Daniel began. "It's a doctrine - a principle of belief - that in external perceptions the objects immediately known are ideas, in other words that all reality is in its nature psychical, or pertaining to the soul or to the mind. Unlike Teal'c's belief system, idealism considers thought or the idea as the foundation of knowledge and existence. It's also a tendency towards the highest conceivable perfection."

"I, on the other hand," Jack interjected proudly, "am a realist."

Carter snorted in a decidedly unflattering manner. "The colonel is a cynic, Ghenn," she corrected crisply.

"A frustrated idealist," Daniel announced, pleasurably rolling each syllable over his tongue. "Surly, snarling, and taking a pessimistic view of human motives and actions."

Ghenn and Tuyett chuckled unkindly while Carter avoided Jack's eyes.

"And what of you, Sam?" Ghenn asked warmly.

"Carter is a sceptic," Jack said firmly. "A doubter."

"That's a little simplistic," Daniel objected. "Scepticism is the doctrine that no facts can be certainly known and it's a healthy thing for a scientist like Sam."

"Do you not have faith, Major Carter?" Teal'c asked.

"I do," Carter said stiffly. "In some things, I do."

"Yet you have lost your faith in others?" Teal'c persisted.

"If the Goa'uld weren't evil, would you have lost your faith in them?" Carter shrewdly riposted.

Teal'c looked at her for a long time, frowning over her question. "I do not know, Major Carter," he said at last.

"If this being you speak of, this being of 'godlike' power is benevolent and does no harm, is she still evil?" Ghenn asked Teal'c. "If the people believe her to be a Goddess and nought will sway them?"

"Nothing?" Jack queried, vaguely interested. "Seriously? You make it sound like you've tried, which is a damned odd thing for a high priestess to do."

"Would it serve the greater good of the people to be made to lose some of their faith in their goddess?" Daniel asked doubtfully.
Ghenn sighed, looking miserably uncertain.

"I dunno," Jack said dubiously, looking at her. "Sounds like they're getting a little too cosy and dependent to me."

"That they are," Tuyett agreed emphatically.

"The goddess must be run ragged if she takes this gig seriously," Jack added, still looking at Ghenn consideringly.

"The people serve the goddess?" Daniel asked Ghenn gently. "The Sisters serve the goddess..." He smiled at her. "And yet - you serve the people?"

Tuyett toasted him with her glass, grinning broadly. "He's a clever one," she admired.

"We've seen your aspect as Slayer, when we first arrived," Daniel went on musingly.

Solely out of consideration for his sensitive lover, Jack refrained from any obvious Buffy jokes.

"This is your aspect as Seeker?" Daniel asked inquisitively.

"What about the Mother?" Carter asked, sitting up.

"That is the face of the Goddess the people see," Eiliana answered, yawning and sitting up to take an interest.

"And the Maiden?" Daniel asked.

The Blessed Disciples laughed uproariously. "She hasn't been that for years!" Tuyett chortled.

The Goddess Ghennehessere's gamine, flirty grin was directed right at Daniel.

Jack did not like the way Daniel went red. He didn't like it one bit. Abruptly he recalled that smug little blue light over their heads as he kissed Daniel. What was it Daniel had said? No discrimination? Jack turned to scowl at the library, interfering, matchmaking heap of bricks that it was.

No way he was getting beat out by masonry.

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With Jack brooding darkly at his side, Daniel was finding it difficult to keep up with the conversation.
"Trust me!" Sam told Ghenn brightly, her eyes sparkling with mischief. "The last thing you need is a horde of motivated agnostics on your case."

Gratified, Teal'c bowed.

"What you need is something like the ten commandments," Jack interjected. "A whole list of instructions to make sure the folks at home get this simple message: 'Thou Shalt Not Annoy The Crap Out Of Thy Goddess'."

Ghenn beamed approvingly at clever Colonel Jack.

"What is crap?" Tuyett asked curiously.

Sam grinned. "It's best you don't know."

Tuyett looked inclined to argue this point.

"Jack is full of it," Daniel supplied helpfully. There was another snort of suppressed laughter from Sam, Teal'c's eyebrow reached new heights of hysteria, while Jack loftily ignored them all.

"I sense you disapprove, Daniel," Ghenn told him softly. "I feel that I must take action. I have striven to shelter and care for my people, to repay their faith in me as fully as I am able. When my people turn to me - how can I refuse what guidance and withhold what aid I am able to give?"

"Do you educate your people to question, to doubt?" Sam asked interestedly.

"The teaching of the young ones is in the hands of the priests," Ghenn said gloomily. "It is tradition. I left the teaching of the young to those I trusted most."

"Ghenn does as much as she does because of the priests," Eiliana told them. "When I came here, they were all but ruling in her name. She strove then to appear to the faithful at prayer in the Mandir, to speak for herself, and with the people. They heard her clear at last."

"They are ecstatic in Ghenn's presence," Scollen seconded his beloved.

Jack looked Ghenn over from her dusty bare feet to her raggedy braids with impolite incredulity, avoiding the repressive look Daniel directed at him.

"They grow more dependent on my presence with every year that passes," Ghenn snapped, frustrated. "If I withdraw again, then the priests will speak for me and much will be done and asked in my name that I do not approve."

"Smite them," Jack suggested, grinning. "Carter is right."
"I am?" Sam asked, looking up in surprise.

"It happens," Jack said unkindly. "Education is a good place to start. You've got this whole damn library," he reminded Ghenn, eyeing Genizah somewhat coldly. "Pick yourself out the best students in the schools and shift their asses in here, make them study and earn their keep. Teach them to think for themselves."

"Science and mathematics are very important," Sam agreed earnestly. "Teach them scientific method, experimentation and analysis, logical deduction."

"It'll take some time, but once the students are ready to be teachers, take the priests out of the schools and make them minister to the needy or whatever," Jack ordered briskly.

"There are no needy," Eiliana objected, seeming slightly insulted.

"The goddess provides?" Jack sing-songed witheringly.

Ghenn looked deflated.

"Jack!" Daniel protested. "You could make some allowances for the fact Ghenn is as tied by doctrine and ritual as the people are." He looked at her apologetically. "Although, I think you are too rigid in your thinking, Ghenn. The religion is focused on you, so it's up to you to work with the people to help it evolve naturally. You'll have their co-operation because it's the will of the goddess."

"You need to threat assess," Jack said. "What would happen to your people if you were gone tomorrow?"

Ghenn's mouth fell open.

"What would they need to know? To do? They'd need leadership," Jack suggested briskly.

"We have a council," Ghenn interrupted.

"Chosen by the goddess?" Jack asked sternly.

"Chosen by the people!" Ghenn snapped, glaring at him.


"It is not!" Tuyett snorted. "They're good men and true but they have the Goddess and turn to her with all difficulties."

Ghenn avoided Jack's ironical eye.

"You," he accused, "are ridiculously tender-hearted."
Daniel, who'd had this aggravating accusation levelled at him more than once, was glad to see that Ghenn took it no better than he did. The look she tossed at Jack was decidedly resentful.

"I think the goddess could be tempted to smite you, Sir," Sam said smugly.

"Indeed," Teal'c agreed. "Though O'Neill's plan is not without merit. Tell your councillors that they must not come to you with problems, but with solutions. Then you may agree a course of action, which you will make them responsible for carrying out, and grant them the authority to do so."

"It's called delegation," Jack said cheerfully, winking at Ghenn, who thawed visibly, winking back.

"If they make mistakes?" she asked slowly.

"They will learn from them," Teal'c told her gravely.

"I think having your trust will make them do their best for the people and for you," Daniel suggested soothingly. He was rewarded with a blinding smile that made him blink. Jack too, unfortunately.

"No one is saying it's going to be easy, Ghenn," Sam said warmly. "It will take time. I do think the colonel is right, though. Plan for what your people would need to know and be able to do if they didn't have you to rely on. Leadership, education, defence, science..." She smiled at the Blessed Disciples. "The Sisters can help with all of these."

The Sisters looked suitably staunch and supportive.

"In time, you'll be able to introduce the people to your technology," Daniel added, "when they've made sufficient advances in their own. As for the priests..." He hesitated, then plunged in. "Honestly? I'd find them something useful and productive to do, something they can contribute to the pastoral care of the people and get them out of the Mandir."

"And make them do it!" Jack seconded emphatically.

"There is wisdom in all you say," Scollen said approvingly. "This is a land of plenty and the living is easy. Ghenn must seek to challenge the people in new ways, to learn and to grow as you advise."

"There are other ways," Daniel suggested. "Music and art, performances of plays, dance, singing."

"Those we have in abundance!" Ghenn said happily.

"In praise of the goddess?" Daniel asked gently.
Ghenn frowned. "Not all. I begin to see what you mean, Daniel. I should ask more of my people. I should ask them to celebrate more of their lives, their joys, as well as mine. At first they may do so for my sake, but they will grow to do it for their own. You have given me much to think on." She looked at each of them in turn, smiling, her grey eyes shining in the last of the evening sun. "It was a good day you came to us. I thank you all."

"Are you going to Mandir again tonight?" Daniel asked hopefully, blithely ignoring Jack's swift, deeply reproachful look. Although this possibly wasn't a healthy attitude for cooing new lovers, Daniel was nevertheless aware he could have sex with Jack any old time, while a visit to an alien temple accompanied by the deity herself was probably a one shot deal.

"I need not go again to the faithful until Quarter Day," Ghenn answered impishly. "Time enough to plan for what I will do to - for," she corrected herself conscientiously, "For my priests."

"How about a life of silent contemplation for the really annoying ones?" Jack suggested heartily. "Someplace many, many, many miles away."

"There is a place of great beauty and solitude high in the mountains," Ghenn said softly. "It is special to me."

"So? Get them to build you a temple up there!" Jack smiled evilly. "A nice, big temple, worthy of their goddess."

"The priests are not skilled at such labour," Ghenn objected feebly, appearing strongly drawn to this particular siren call of Jackian temptation.

"Practice makes perfect," Jack beamed at her.

"What was all that about?" Jack demanded the instant he'd closed Daniel's bedroom door behind him.

"Jack?" Daniel asked, looking up in surprise from his book, neatly propped against the pillows of the bed.

"All those doe-eyed looks from our pint-sized Venus," Jack grumbled with markedly less pissiness. He looked Daniel over appreciatively. "I can't tell you how sexy that is," he said huskily.

"Reading?" Daniel hoped not. None of his books would be improved by the liberal application of various sticky bodily substances.

"You on a bed," Jack said vaguely, unbuckling his belt.
Daniel sat up straighter. "Are we?" He gestured from himself to Jack.

"Yes!"

Daniel closed his book and moved over on the bed to make room for Jack, who was stripping with slightly unnerving single-mindedness and speed. He slid the book to safety, then tugged at his T-shirt.

"Ah!" Jack rebuked him, waving a stern finger.

"You want to take my clothes off?" Daniel asked slowly. It begged the question 'why?'

"Do you mind?"

"I'm not sure," Daniel admitted honestly. "We'll have to see." He realised that wasn't exactly a sign of wholehearted commitment and hurriedly explained. "It's all so surreal, Jack," he apologised. "I've known you for five years and now…oh."

"Oh?" Jack asked smugly as he prowled over to stand by the bed, looking hungrily down at Daniel.

Daniel's gaze was fixated on Jack's cock, flushing, filling with the blood rush of arousal to jut hard against his belly. Oh, indeed! Daniel nodded wordlessly as Jack climbed onto the bed and stretched out beside him, slipping his hand beneath Daniel's rumpled T-shirt to rub his belly, his hand firm and sure. Daniel lay very still on his back, eyes closed, breathing hard, really needing to know what his body's response would be as Jack's firm fingers traced every contour of muscle, then began to rub rhythmically with the heel of his hand.

He tingled with sensation, feeling so alive, so vital, so much in the moment. Jack's hand slipped lower, between his legs, cupping his crotch, fingers gently massaging. Daniel gasped out loud, jumping violently as he got hard, aching and hard...He reached up shakily, took Jack's face between his hands and pulled him down into a breathless, urgent closed-mouth kiss.

"I didn't know this!" Daniel panted, overwhelmed by the eroticism of having Jack on him naked like this, his fingers scrabbling on Jack's hot skin, writhing as Jack aggressively ground his erection over Daniel's. "How could I not know this?" he asked distressfully.

"You don't see yourself as clear as we do," Jack said simply.

"How could you fall in love with me?" Daniel asked shakily.

"Ah, Danny," Jack said caressingly, his sudden, sweet smile blinding. "How could I not?"

Daniel opened his mouth and found he had nothing he could say in response to that.
"I'm sure," Jack promised.

"Jack?" The tenderness in Jack's eyes was more convincing than what he was saying, more feeling than Daniel had ever seen from his friend. "I - I'm sure too," he said shyly. Kind of late in the game and alarmingly clueless, but maybe for him it was always about Jack. He...he was always about Jack. So much so, he hadn't seen it. "Did you know?" he asked hesitantly.


"What do you want to do?" Daniel asked, stroking Jack's strong, broad back, gloating over the straight spine and hard muscle.

"Anything," Jack said softly.

Daniel pushed at him, and Jack backed off to allow him to sit, straddling his hips. Jack peeled off his T-shirt then kissed him very gently on the mouth.

"I love you," Jack mouthed silently, grinning wickedly as Daniel blushed and blinked at him.

Jack hitched up long enough to efficiently extract Daniel from his BDUs, then allowed himself to be pulled into an embrace side by side with Daniel. He lit up when Daniel hooked his leg over Jack's butt and hauled him close, Jack's hand at once stroking over his thigh and ass.

"I want to be close," Daniel asked quietly.

"That's good," Jack said tightly, his eyes dark and needing.

Daniel was restless, aching with arousal, losing himself in the pleasure of touch. His fingers stroked and rubbed over crisp hair and smooth, hot skin. He was awed by the sheer size and vitality of Jack, the breadth and weight of his bones, making Daniel seem so slender, almost fragile by comparison.

"I would never believe you're the height you are, or the size," Jack mused, turning Daniel's hand this way and that, spreading his fingers. "God, look at you. You're perfect."

Daniel shook his head diffidently, looking bashfully at Jack, who seemed just right to him. Softening a little here and there, lines where there were none when they first met. The sleek grey hair and the fascinating scar in his eyebrow. Daniel liked real and vital, flawed and human. That was attractive.

They leaned in to kiss, wrapping arms around one another, holding and stroking easily, curious hands sliding over hip and waist, thigh and ass, back and shoulder. Daniel
pushed his hips into Jack's, smiling as his aching cock ground pleasurably into Jack's throbbing heat and hardness. Jack cupped his ass, holding him tight as they pushed into one another, Jack's practiced physical grace driving their bodies compulsively together again and again.

The kiss deepened, Jack sliding into Daniel's mouth, tongues softly touching, tasting. Flickering teasingly, caressing gently, then rasping, thrusting hungrily, like their hips. The tingling shocks of pleasure throbbed low and sullen in Daniel's belly, pulsing clear through to the head of his cock. Jack was kneading his ass, clawing him closer, their hips urgent and straining.

So quick...they wanted it, needed it so much it took so little, kissing and being close, being loved, Jack pushing into him there, just there...he sobbed into Jack's mouth as he shook, was shaken through with heat and dizzying pleasure, cock surging...Daniel convulsed, hips jerking as he came hard, spasming, spurting slick heat over Jack's groin.

Jack breathed Daniel's name as he came, his kiss eloquent as they clung together, panting and quivering, tumbling exhausted into sleep, sweating bodies bathed by beneficent blue light.

"What's your relationship with Genizah?" Jack asked Ghenn as he slid a platter of mild cheese and tasty, thinly sliced meat over to Daniel.

Ghenn looked up from her oatmeal - it looked like oatmeal - in surprise.

"It's a computer? A building?" Jack persisted, waking up in a tangled heap with Daniel to find Genizah watching over them very much on his mind. "An entity of some kind?" Genizah seemed to him alive in some way he couldn't fathom, couldn't pin down.

"It's a fair question," Carter agreed, her face lighting up with avid curiosity.

"I agree, Major Carter," Teal'c added his voice to hers. "I too have wondered."

Caught with a mouthful of cake, Daniel took a long drink of cool milk and settled for nodding bright-eyed agreement.

"It was I who built Genizah," Ghenn admitted. "I grew tired of being alone."

"There aren't any others of your kind?" Carter murmured sympathetically.

"They went out among the stars and did not return. I loved this place and stayed, believing the others would come back to me in time. When they did not..." She gestured eloquently at the walls around her. "I sought occupation. If I were to die, then the history of my world and my people died with me. I found I did not want to pass from living memory," she admitted.
"Our people have a similar drive," Daniel said gently. "Long before man developed a written language to communicate and record ideas, history was shared in the oral tradition, told by one generation to the next."

"It was for that I turned to books!" Ghenn said eagerly. "I travelled through the gate to other worlds, to meet their peoples and hear their tales. I found their technology to be infinitely inferior to my own, and knew that if I was to record our history, I must use a medium that could be touched and read by all."

"Books!" Daniel gloated.

Jack smiled at him fondly, swallowing it hastily in favour of scowling darkly at Carter, who had an 'aww, isn't the colonel sweet' look on her face. When Carter failed to look suitably suppressed, Jack figured he needed to work harder on the tough guy thing. Or, as pushy as Carter was these days, maybe he could swing 'respect for your elders'.

"It was easy enough to make scrolls on which to record our lives and history, satisfying to build this place to hold them." Ghenn smiled at Daniel. "You came to the oldest part of Genizah."

Daniel smiled back. Jack straightened up, crossing his arms over his chest, not especially thrilled by the ready understanding that existed between his linguist and Ghenn. There were times when he felt Daniel's instinct to communicate was decidedly indiscriminate.

"What about the computer?" Carter asked inquisitively. "I take it Genizah is both the building and the artificial intelligence that monitors and controls the library? You built the computer?"

"You were lonely," Daniel said, all soft and sympathetic.

Jack pulled a face.

"I was," Ghenn confessed. "To build such a machine was a new thing to me, and I made many mistakes. Genizah and I, we learned much along the way."

"You made Genizah capable of learning?"

"I did, and more."

"It has a personality," Daniel said with feeling.

"It's self-aware?" Carter queried with odd certainty, as if she knew the answer. She looked round at them self-consciously. "I haven't got much sleep while we've been here," she admitted. "The lights kept coming on and waking me up. Genizah didn't talk, but there were things it wanted me to see and learn from."
"And I," Teal'c corroborated.

"I had my weapon and my radio, Sir," Carter glanced apologetically at Jack.

"Easy, Major," Jack said casually, not about to get on Carter's case when he'd spent both nights getting sweaty and sated with Daniel.

Everyone looked at Jack and Daniel.

"Genizah guided me to the original scrolls and Ghenn gave me a primer for her language," Daniel cheerfully supplied.

"She did?" Jack asked coolly.

"That's what I was reading last night when..." Daniel bit off the words, went red to the roots of his hair and generally made like a stupefied guppy.

Everyone looked interestedly at Jack.

"I think Genizah has the hots for Daniel," Jack said meanly, rolling his eyes meaningfully. Carter did the math, fortunately didn't know she was supposed to add one, figured Daniel was a big, healthy boy capable of making his own entertainment and went pink. Daniel also did the math, looked as if he'd like to subtract one forcibly and subsided, visibly seething and speechless with embarrassment.

"If the faithful are not of your species, how do they come to be here when you speak of being alone for so long?" Teal'c asked Ghenn, kindly rescuing Daniel.

"My species is not that of the Im'a'Tokin," Ghenn answered him quietly. "The people were brought here in a ship, herded like animals to break and take this land. I slew the being who took them from their world and brought them to mine."

"A Goa'uld?" Jack asked.

Ghenn nodded. "It was the first I knew of such a species. Those survivors who bore the larval symbiote I returned through the gate to their home."

"Survivors?"

Ghenn looked modestly at Teal'c. He smiled at her approvingly.

"Cool Slayer chick!" Jack agreed.

"And the people the Goa'uld had enslaved?" Daniel asked, recovering some of his composure. "The Im'a'Tokin?"
"Their world was destroyed when the Goa'uld came, so my home became theirs. I did not seek to be their goddess," Ghenn promised earnestly, "but they were a primitive people, slow to reach understanding, reluctant to embrace the freedom I bestowed upon them. They were much in need of guidance and..." Ghenn hung her head, sighing.

"It sounds as if they'd exchanged one slavery for another," Daniel suggested, frowning.

"I think that also," Tuyett agreed.

"As do I," Teal'c seconded.

"You're just going to have to wean them off your ecstatic presence, one step at a time," Jack advised. "It'll work a hell of a lot better than going cold turkey."

"Turkey?"

"It's an Earth expression," Carter answered readily, as usual unable to resist explaining things to the baffled. "It means rapid withdrawal."

"Can we see Genizah?" Daniel asked hopefully.

"The machine itself?" Carter perked up visibly. "Please," she asked eagerly.

Jack hid a smile as Ghenn laughingly agreed. He loved when his kids got like this, excited over the littlest things.

"Jack?"

"You go on," Jack told Daniel. "I'd better check in with Hammond."

"Okay."

Jack embarrassed himself, he was so pleased by Daniel's disappointment. Gawd, he was a hopeless case. He watched them all head off up the stairs under Teal'c's eagle eye, then slipped the sleek little gizmo Ghenn had given him when he got here onto the table. He hit the buttons in the sequence he'd been shown, which appeared to first speed dial the Stargate, then interface with the radio system without breaking a sweat.

"Colonel O'Neill?" Hammond's voice sounded.

"Yes, Sir," Jack said cheerfully.

"Anything to report?" Hammond asked.

"The kids are poking round the library computer right now, Sir," Jack answered pleasantly.
"Have you made any progress on obtaining one of the energy weapons you saw demonstrated yesterday?"

"Never happen, Sir," Jack reported, pulling a sour face he was glad the general couldn't see. "Tuyett asked way too many questions about Earth's current geo-political status. She's got a damned good idea what we'd do with one of those weapons and the odds of us firing it on any threat from space were too remote for her taste. I appealed to our gracious hostess, who laughed and said no."

"What about the device you're using to communicate with right now?" Hammond probed.

"Couldn't get one if I tried," Jack said promptly. Not that he would. "The motion sensors in this place are scary. And no, I doubt there's any chance we'll get one of them."

"Do you see any potential in Ghenn and her people as allies in the defence against the Goa'uld?"

"I think you can rely on Ghenn to take out any Goa'uld stupid enough to stray across her path with hostile intent, but apart from that?" Jack shrugged. "No."

There was a silence. Jack suppressed a sigh, knowing what was coming.

"Without the potential for any kind of tactical or technological gain," Hammond began.

"Twenty-four hours, Sir," Jack interrupted.

"This was supposed to be a quick survey mission, Jack," Hammond answered after a moment.

"I know."

"You're scheduled to ship out to P3R-965 in thirty-six hours for a three-week diplomatic exchange that could yield tangible technological gains."

"I know that too, Sir," Jack said wearily.

"If your continuing presence there could guarantee some kind of material advantage to us..." Hammond hinted, generous as ever, giving Jack a graceful out.

"It won't." What else could Jack say? He couldn't lie just because he wanted Daniel to have a good time.

"I can understand how Dr. Jackson and Major Carter feel about your new friends, but the SGC isn't financing off-world vacations," Hammond responded crisply. "Return to the SGC immediately and begin preparations for your departure to 965."
"Yes, Sir," Jack acknowledged. He hit the kill switch on the little gizmo and went off to break the bad news. Loping up the stairs towards the transport pods, Jack hesitated. "Guess you heard that, huh?" he told the wall, feeling stupid. "You don't get to have him. Don't pull anything stupid, willya? We get out of here with our asses intact this time, there could be a next time, kapish?" Awkwardly, he patted the wall, then strolled round to his waiting transport pod.

Jack hopped into the pod, which whisked him off to who knew where. He prudently refrained from further comment until he was deposited at his destination. When he emerged in a small hallway with huge doors at the end of it, he stopped, looking up at the obliging golden swirly thing. "Daniel is spoken for. Get over it." The swirly thing turned surly red. "No," he added. "I'm not sorry."

When he pushed the doors open, he found his kids oohing and aahing over what looked for all the world like a rainbow tornado, a tapering column of light turning in the centre of the room at blinding speed, a myriad of colours flaming in turn. The stone floor stopped right at the edge of it and of course Daniel and Carter had their noses practically in the thing.

"Woah!" Jack yelled. "Fall back! Tryin' to give me a heart attack, here," he grumbled.

"There is no danger, O'Neill," Teal'c smoothly contradicted him.

"As long as we don't touch it," Carter added brightly.

"And if you do?" Jack asked, sidling towards Daniel, who was enraptured.

"Try to imagine every molecule in your body imploding instantaneously at the speed of light," Carter supplied helpfully.

Jack plucked Daniel to safety, ignoring a very rude alien word tossed his way.

"Go pack up and say your goodbyes," Jack ordered Carter curtly.

"Sir?" Carter protested, taking a hasty step forward.

"Hammond's orders, Major," Jack warned her.

"Jack!"

Oy. Same old, same old.

"We just found this place! Sam hasn't even begun to analyse the energy source or the particles..." Daniel argued.

Carter nodded anxiously. "We could learn a tremendous amount from..."
"We can't," Jack said flatly. He looked across at Ghenn, hovering unhappily nearby. "Can we?" He didn't know what it was, maybe his gut... "Which aspect is this?" he asked gently, going with it, pointing to the column of energy. "The real one?"

"The Mother," Ghenn admitted shyly, too honest for her own good.

"The face you've shown to the people all this time?" Jack suggested softly, feeling smug as Daniel and the others gaped at him. Teal'c was gaping in his own way of course. "Think about it," Jack loftily advised them. He hadn't, until this moment, but he'd better start now if he didn't want to look dumb in front of Daniel. "All this time the people refuse to be swayed from their worship of the goddess because..." He did a kind of 'ta-da!' gesture at the dance of light.

"Her true form inspires awe," Teal'c said gravely.

"And you were lonely," Daniel added sympathetically, walking over to Ghenn's side. "So you kept returning to them."

"Even now the people are a little afraid," she confessed, taking his hand.

"You created each of your corporeal aspects to help you communicate better with them," Daniel said understandingly. "And your friends?" he asked Eiliana and the others, looking on.

"We are real, Daniel," Tuyett promised. "Travellers like you."

"The goddess gives of her bounty," Carter announced suddenly, a smile lighting her face. "You created all of this. This building, the city, the defence system, all of the technology the people needed - your essence, your energy powers it." Carter nodded slowly, wide-eyed and delighted. "That's the kind of thing I can have faith in," she told Ghenn sweetly.

Teal'c laid his hand on her shoulder, one of his rare, real smiles lighting his face.

"You hoped we'd stay, right?" Jack asked, feeling a bit of a bastard for making such a big deal out of who won and who lost.

Ghenn looked at Daniel. "Here there is knowledge of many worlds, many technologies. To those who accept their responsibility, that knowledge is given freely," she reminded him.

"If we need help," Daniel said slowly.

"All are known. All are welcome," Ghenn answered simply, her eyes still on Daniel.

One more than the others, Jack guessed. He didn't know what Ghenn had seen in them, to 'know' them, but he guessed she saw in enough in Daniel to want to keep him. She wasn't
lacking in discrimination, she didn't want a little threesome action...she just wanted Daniel happy, so he'd stay.

"I'll pitch it to Hammond," he promised Daniel and Carter. They both smiled at him gratefully, Carter turning to hug Eiliana and, more gingerly, Scollen, who yanked her into a huge bearhug. Carter looked very flushed and quivery when she turned to say goodbye to Tuyett. Jack was amused, figuring she'd be calling General Kerrigan as soon as she got back. At least she would if she had any sense.

Daniel got himself comprehensively snuggled by Ghenn while Jack hovered nearby, glowering. Eventually he cleared his throat loudly and Ghenn threw herself at him, murmuring something disjointed but extremely flattering about Colonel Jack's wise counsel, which made him feel like a vizier or something. Jack peeled her off, patted her on the shoulder and escorted his linguist, who seemed disposed to linger regretfully, out to the transport pod. Daniel was delightfully squirmy and resistant, but sadly this wasn't the time or the place.

The short ride back to the Atrium was cramped and gloomy. It wouldn't have killed Jack if they'd been forced to hang out here longer either, but on the upside, he got to go home with Daniel and make love to him in his own bed. They piled out of the pod, the Sisters crowding sadly round them.

Lokhail was waiting for them, their packs at his feet. Carter went forward to check them, calling out in a very few minutes they were leaving with everything they'd started with, plus a book each. A gift from Genizah. Or Ghenn. Jack still didn't really get that part.

"Your aspects enable you to share and express what you've learned from the people, from your disciples," Daniel suggested to Ghenn, who lit up, nodding eagerly as his compassionate understanding. "Your relationship with them is symbiotic," Daniel went on. "You're losing balance because you give too much. Take what your faithful offer, but channel their offerings in a way that does them good."

"We've met beings in a similar situation to this before," Carter agreed. "Beings worshipped as spirits by a culture stolen from Earth by the Goa'uld. When these spirits finally revealed themselves as aliens to the people, showing their true forms, they were not rejected. Their actions and their guidance meant more to the people than their physical form. They'd proved themselves."

Ghenn smiled at her, the Sisters murmuring excitedly among themselves. "I could hope for such an outcome."

"I think you'll have it," Daniel said.

"Me too," Carter agreed.

"Ah, you're not so bad once people get to worship you," Jack commented.
"Your true form is most beautiful," Teal'c observed. "I find that I prefer this one." He bowed gracefully.

Ghenn blushed comprehensively.

"You aspire to help your people to freedom. It is a noble endeavour," Teal'c approved.

"You were very impressive," a soft voice whispered to Jack as the animated conversation flowed.

Jack looked modestly at Daniel.

"I was impressed," Daniel emphasised.

And turned on from the look of things, Jack thought, taking in the flush and batting baby blues.

"How did you work it out?" Daniel asked, looking all innocent and admiring. "About Ghenn and Genizah?"

Jack found he couldn't actually tell Daniel a whopper. He gave it a shot but nothing came out but a sickly smile. "I went with my gut," he offered cautiously, realising he was a goner.

"You have terrific instincts," Daniel praised him warmly, sidling that bit closer. "I've always thought so."

Recalling several instances right off the top of his head in the past few months alone where Daniel had got in his face for calling it wrong, Jack cheered right up. Apparently, Daniel was a goner too, which kind of took the pressure off Jack for being such a hopeless sap.

Daniel was looking round edgily. Then he leaned in. "Dinner?" he mouthed.

Jack glanced around too. "Your place?" he mouthed back.

Daniel looked surprised, but pleased.

"Cool!" Jack beamed at him. Then he noticed Carter and Teal'c were both looking at him and ordered them to head out. He and Daniel brought up the rear. The Sisters and their goddess decided to walk them out until they opened the door. It was raining. Teaming. Hitting the steaming ground so hard it was bouncing. "If I were you," Jack coldly advised Ghenn, "I'd start with this. No one likes getting water in their ear."

"We can vouch for that," Daniel agreed somewhat emotionally, rolling his eyes.

"What's that supposed to mean?" Jack demanded.
In all the years Daniel had known Jack, he'd never cared what he looked like round the man. He was beginning to realise that Jack was right...that was then. Now, he was standing indecisively in front of his closet. He'd been standing here for ten minutes and he still couldn't decide what to wear. There was nothing in his wardrobe that clearly conveyed 'fuck me but let me eat first'.

Not that...they hadn't talked about...But - um - he - er - he guessed they'd have to. It was possible Jack was already thinking about it. Um - after three years of waiting, Jack probably couldn't stop thinking about it. Not that Daniel wasn't curious. He'd read that intercourse between men was extremely pleasurable.

Maybe he should just ask Jack. If he wanted - and he was very, very curious - and of course Jack wanted intercourse, was there a thirty-day cooling off period or anything before you got to have it? Or could they just have it now?

Daniel's vote was for now. He was getting turned on just thinking about it. From his reading, he was sure of the mechanics. What he had no idea of was how it would feel to have Jack moving inside him. He was surprised by how much he wanted to know.

A rectal examination at the hands of Janet Fraiser didn't seem like an adequate basis of comparison to him.

Jack would probably tell him they should take it easy and not rush among other boring, responsible stuff. Daniel wanted to be irresponsible for once. He wanted to be giddy and have fun and just go at it. He wanted to fuck.

That decided, he pulled on some black jeans that were astonishingly tight in the ass, along with a very fine black shirt. Optimistically hoping that would do it for Jack, he trotted through to the kitchen to check on dinner. He'd gone for a simple fragrant Thai curry, creamy with coconut, adding strips of tender chicken, bamboo, mange tout, sweetcorn, shallots and peppers, which was simmering nicely. He didn't think there was anything Jack could take objection to, and if things got out of hand earlier than anticipated, it would reheat well in the microwave. There was even expensive imported beer chilling in the fridge.

Now he had nothing to do but prowl around restlessly picking things up and putting them down again, jumping at every sound until the colonel deigned to show up. The sudden knock at his door had him across his apartment like a greyhound. He opened it with some semblance of dignity, hoping he wasn't sweating too obviously, ridiculously flattered Jack had come early.

"Hey," Jack said simply. He walked towards Daniel, slid an arm round his waist, backed him into the apartment, quietly closed the door behind them, then kissed Daniel hard.
Daniel exuberantly wrapped his arms around Jack's neck and kissed him back, nibbling on Jack's straight, firm lower lip. "Mmm," Daniel sighed as Jack wrapped around him in the climbing into his skin sense. They traded kiss after kiss, both of them smiling, something like relief in Jack's fervour, reassurance in Daniel's answering gentleness.

"I'm sorry," Jack apologised sincerely, nuzzling his cheek into Daniel's.

"For?"

"Dragging you back. I know you barely scratched the surface of the library, I know how frustrating it was to lose it." Jack looked at him seriously. "I could have snowed Hammond..."

"I understand why you didn't," Daniel interrupted hastily. "I want to go back, I'm sure we'll have the opportunity to do that some day." He'd whiled away some time tonight on a mission proposal for just that purpose and he was sure Sam would contribute too.

"Me too," Jack snorted. "Hammond has as much success resisting your wiles as I do."

Daniel was distracted from asking about his alleged wiles by the way Jack confidently took his hand and led him up the steps into the dining area like he'd done it a thousand times before.

"It's not the first time I've held your hand," Jack pointed out innocently.

"No," Daniel agreed, frowning, vividly recalling several occasions Jack had inexplicably felt the need to reach out and touch.

"God, I hope I don't look as smug as I feel," Jack announced with complete lack of conviction. He freed Daniel to tug off his black leather jacket, draping it casually over the back of the nearest chair.

Daniel looked at Jack in his black chinos and form-fitting T-shirt, realising how attractive the man was. Sexy. Seriously sexy. "Hungry?"

"Starved."

Damn.

"I brought wine."

Touched, Daniel smiled at Jack. "You did?"

"I like wine."

"You do?"
"More than you like beer," Jack said tartly. "What are we eating and can we eat it now, because I want to go to bed with you, as soon as possible."

"Romantic," Daniel commented, turning away to hide a triumphant grin. He chuckled as a muffled curse from behind him indicated Jack realising that if he'd brought wine, he certainly hadn't been holding it when Daniel opened the door. Hard as it was for Daniel to believe, Jack O'Neill had been so excited about seeing him tonight, he'd left the wine in his truck. Daniel knew he got Jack excited, he'd seen ample evidence of that with his own eyes. He just didn't know he got Jack - excited. If asked to pick an adjective, bored would have seemed the obvious choice.

"It was good to have a mission like that," Jack commented as he wandered into the kitchen and made for the fridge in search of something to drink. "No one got hurt, everyone got to have fun, we got to help Ghenn out, we got presents."

"And I got laid," Daniel added solemnly as he ladled the rice and curry onto the plates and carried them over to the table.

Jack winked and waved two bottles of Grolsch at him as he followed him through. He sat opposite Daniel, stretching his long legs out to play footsie.

"Are we okay, Jack?" Daniel asked thoughtfully as he tried the first forkful.

"Okay?" Jack queried, giving the curry an approving thumbs up.

"It wasn't exactly professional for us to have sex off-world," Daniel said diffidently, aware he'd been into it as much Jack was.

"No," Jack admitted soberly. "If that had been a high-risk mission - no. As much as I want you...We couldn't."

"We have one night and then we go off-world for three weeks, Jack," Daniel reminded him. He understood the ground rules, there was no question of endangering Sam and Teal'c by not being there to cover their backs because he and Jack were otherwise engaged. "What if it is a quiet, peaceful mission?"

Jack took a long drink of beer, looking steadily at Daniel, seeming unsure about what he could say.

Daniel ate in silence for a few minutes. "If it's any consolation, I don't think I could stand not being with you either," he admitted candidly, aware he had no real conception of how much frustration Jack had endured, seeing Daniel every day, sleeping at his side night after night off-world. "Maybe we could take some time off," he suggested to Jack. "Go someplace with a big bed and fuck our brains out for two weeks."

Jack choked on his curry, snorting with laughter.
"Would that help?"

"In the short term? Sure!" Jack grinned. "How about Maui?"

Daniel shrugged lightly, willing to go anywhere that made Jack happy.

They wolfed down their food, Jack glancing at him from time to time. "You're not obligated, you know," he said firmly, grinning when Daniel looked up at him surprise. "I've been watching you forever, Daniel," Jack smiled. "Maybe I am going a little crazy now, and knowing I'm in the wrong isn't stopping me like it's supposed to. I've been a lot crazy for a long time and I need to be selfish for a while, I need to have you with me for a while."

Daniel reached impulsively across the table to take Jack's hand, which turned at once in his. "I understand," he promised. "I trust you." Jack would never risk their lives, he cared too much about all of them and he was too good at what he did for that. He was too good a man.

"Yeah?" Jack said quietly. "I don't trust myself too much." He lifted Daniel's hand to his lips, kissing his palm tenderly, leaving Daniel tongue-tied and bashful.

"We can spend time together Jack, talking, but not sex. It's not fair," Daniel responded. "It's not safe." Jack looked up, grimacing. "I knew I shouldn't - but I couldn't stop myself."

"Me either."

"Three weeks," Jack sighed.

"Three years," Daniel reminded him, wincing.

"Worth it," Jack mumbled, refusing to meet Daniel's eyes. "And this isn't only about sex."

"I plan to take advantage of that every way I can," Daniel promised, squeezing Jack's hand. He got up then, tugging Jack after him, stumbling awkwardly behind him but holding onto his hand anyway, Jack's other arm slipping around Daniel's waist.

"I want to make love," Daniel informed Jack clearly.

"I gathered," Jack replied, his voice shaking.

Daniel glanced back at him, realising it wasn't humour he heard. The expression in Jack's eyes - no one had ever looked at Daniel liked that before. No one.

"I want," Daniel blurted as they walked into the bedroom, Jack turning him so they were face to face.
"You want?" Jack said softly.

"I want you to fuck me," Daniel asked boldly.

"Funny," Jack smiled at him blindingly. "I was going to ask you the same thing."

"I don't have a clue what I'm doing," Daniel responded, desire surging through him, leaving him trembling. "I couldn't, Jack, not like that," he pleaded. "I need to understand."

He stepped up close, resting his hands at Jack's waist. "I couldn't hurt you." He kissed Jack's throat passionately. "I'm supposed to have wiles," he complained into soap and spice-scented skin. "Why aren't they working?" Jack's hips pushed a bulging erection unsubtly into his. Daniel smiled smugly at him, busying himself with unbuckling Jack's belt.

"Eager beaver," Jack commented, a questioning lilt in his voice as he backed Daniel towards the bed.

"I've been thinking about it, and yes, I want it," Daniel said steadily, his breath catching as Jack began to unbutton his jeans. He reached up to clasp Jack's face. "I want you," he said directly. "How do we - er - "

"Hold that thought!" Jack ordered, turning abruptly on his heel and darting out of the bedroom.

Daniel undressed without finesse, putting his glasses safely on top of his TV, tossing his shirt on the chair, shoving his jeans down then kicking them clear. He was walking unsteadily towards the bed when Jack came back into the bedroom. He tossed a small tube to Daniel, who was lucky to catch it without his glasses, then got on with getting naked as fast as possible. Daniel climbed onto the bed and looked at the tube. Lubricant.

"What are you expecting?" Jack asked kindly, grinning fiendishly. "The colonel asks this like he hasn't been planning to deflower the innocent young linguist for three years," he commetated to an imaginary audience as he stalked proudly towards the bed.

Daniel prudently refrained from looking Jack anywhere but straight in the eye. He didn't want to see anything that would make him nervous. "I lie on my stomach and you - you know."

"Okaaay," Jack drawled as he climbed onto the bed and curled up at Daniel's side. Daniel had no objection to being cuddled or kissed, enthusiastically giving his all. "Mmm," Jack murmured approvingly, nipping at Daniel's ear. "Does that sound appealing?"

"Not really."

"You're very supple," Jack admired, stroking Daniel's hip. "And you have very long legs."
"This is a good thing?" Daniel asked dubiously. He thought he looked funny when he walked.

"It is when you lie on your back with your legs wrapped round my hips while I fuck you," Jack said dreamily.

"Can we kiss?" Daniel enquired, deciding he liked the sound of this. His mental images were decidedly erotic, very heavy on Jack's slippery skin and lots of sweat.

"Try and stop me."

Daniel briskly handed him the lubricant and lay down, assuming the position expectantly.

"There was a little more in the way of nervous shrinking in my fantasy," Jack pointed out, eyeing Daniel laughingly.

"Get over it."

Jack settled himself comfortably between Daniel's legs, rubbing his stomach like he had when he'd masturbated Daniel the first time.

Daniel pillowed his head on his hands, watching Jack watching him, gasping as Jack's fingers teasingly trailed over his straining cock. He rocked his hips demandingly, hissing as Jack stroked him softly, rubbing easy circles. Daniel's eyes fluttered closed as he lost himself in sensation, his belly tightening with each firm, sure touch.

He jumped when Jack's finger nudged at his ass, moaning out when Jack began to finger his balls, squeezing just a little, just right, just theeeere..."Jack!" he yelped as the nudge segued into slow penetrating pressure. Daniel opened his eyes and scowled at Jack. "Your finger is in my ass," he accused him indignantly.

"I don't feel I can deny this."

"It's the most ridiculous thing I've ever seen!" The only thing that could make this more like a rectal exam would be Jack wearing latex gloves.

While Daniel watched him suspiciously, Jack's finger stroked gently inside him, seeming to reach purposefully for..."JAAACK!" Daniel howled, electrified, white flashes going off behind his eyes as he shook, his body molten with pleasure.

"Does it matter how stupid it looks?" Jack asked gently.

"Nggg."

Ecstatically dazed and giddy, Daniel lay in a quivering, occasionally howling heap as Jack accelerated him up the learning curve finger by finger. He had no objections to raise against the slick, snub touch at his anus, shaking and shaking as Jack penetrated him, the
That Was Then by Biblio

head of his cock slowly breaching Daniel's ass, Jack groaning desperately as Daniel's body suddenly gave and he plunged deep, his balls coming to rest hot against Daniel's ass.

"OhgodJackohgod," Daniel whimpered, arching his shoulders uncomfortably as voluptuous sensation flooded his body. His ass burned like holy hell, clenched tight around Jack's impaling cock, every throb, every pulse of blood shivering through him. He whimpered again as Jack impossibly swelled inside him, only dimly hearing the shaken, stifled moans from his lover, at the edge of his control.

They stayed that way for what seemed like forever, Daniel absolutely pinned and helpless, impossibly full, a little scared by how much he liked the feeling. He caught his breath as Jack's hips rocked back, crying out as Jack thrust into him.

"Am I hurting you?" Jack demanded harshly.

"No," Daniel gasped, opening his eyes, pulling Jack's steadying hand from his hip to kiss it. He moaned gutturally as Jack's cock stroked satisfyingly deeply inside him, shocked by the way his body thrilled to it. How much he felt. It felt even better when he hooked his ankles behind Jack's back, his fingers clenching on the quilt chafing beneath his jolting body as Jack fucked him steadily with deep, smooth, slow strokes.

Jack's face was tight and greedy, his eyes impossibly tender.

Daniel needed to kiss him badly, reaching up to him. Jack leaned forward slowly, infinitely careful as his weight sank slowly onto Daniel's belly and chest. Daniel hissed as Jack shifted inside him, Jack flinching with him, then their mouths met, Daniel driving deep into Jack, driving into his rasping, pushy tongue again and again.

He moaned breathily as Jack's hips rocked, Jack losing it a little, needing to thrust again. "Oh, Jack, that's good." Good for both of them. He could see the pleasure he was giving Jack on his face, the low grunts that sounded in Jack's chest as he stroked into Daniel over and over, his back arching, ass and thighs clenching as he powered each thrust from his knees.

"Worth the wait," Jack promised extravagantly.

"Goddamn straight!" Daniel agreed fervently.

"You waited what? All of two days?" Jack complained sarcastically.

"Shut up and fuck me, already," Daniel ordered. He gave a shy little shimmy and almost finished Jack off.

"Don't do that!" Jack snarled, shaking like a leaf.

"I'm not going to just lie here," Daniel argued.
"Then this will all be over embarrassingly quickly."

Daniel considered this thoughtfully. Then he kissed Jack very gently.

Jack eyed him suspiciously.

Daniel kissed him again.

As Jack thrust into him, Daniel arched up, Jack slammed into a spot inside, Daniel saw stars, his whole body exploding with pleasure as he came hard. Jack roared incoherently as Daniel's ass clenched around him, heat erupting inside his ass.

Daniel lay dazed and quaking as he felt every extraordinary spurt and twitch of Jack's softening cock. Jack pulled out of him, moving leadenly, sweating and exhausted, to curl up with Daniel in his arms.

"See! See!" Jack hissed. "You are soooo sleeping in the wet spot!"

"I thought that was good," Daniel insisted defiantly and breathlessly.

Jack paused. "I never suggested it was bad," he back-pedalled shamelessly. "There was a certain intensity..." he hinted broadly.

Daniel kissed Jack's shoulder.

Jack seemed quite pleased.

"When's it my turn?" Daniel asked winsomely.

"I thought you quote 'couldn't'?" Jack looked slightly appalled at Daniel's energy and blatantly prurient interest in his ass.

"That was then."

FINIS