

Chapter 11: Dreaming the Bad Death

“- Henry Evan Lorne, Major, US Air Force .-“

July 2 of the year 2008 unfolded like a dream. Drills, physical training, range time – P90 record was holding steady but the MP5A3 was playing a bit hard – then it was equipment maintenance until the techs finally decided to release his bird so he could get some hours in the air. That was the dream part, flying happened a lot more rarely than any recruiter was going to tell you.

Henry was a fighter pilot, so you'd think he'd get priority time in the sky. Ha! He was lucky if he got to fly once a week anymore, or a mission a month. If they'd told him that you get less time in the air the better you got... well, he'd still have signed up for the Air Force, but at least he'd have been more mentally prepared. And maybe not 'displayed just the qualities we're looking for' every time he sniffed a promotion.

See, as crazy as it sounded, the Air Force didn't want pilots, it wanted *leaders*. Or at least spreadsheet veterans. So you got to live the dream as a fresh-faced lieutenant, but once you got promoted to Captain, never mind higher like him, it was frowned upon to fly. Despite how it was literally necessary to remain an effective fighter pilot.

Instead, the brass wanted you in the office, running programs, 'leading' people through spreadsheets, and doing paperwork the rest of the time. Paperwork that magically multiplied in those increasingly rare days where you did get air time.

Henry envied the heavy pilots, they averaged more hours per month than the fighter guys no matter how much they rose in rank. He still had more flights than them on paper, but that didn't mean much. While a heavy pilot might get to fly for 12 hours in one day, a fighter pilot had to spend almost all of that on just take-offs and landings.

Higher-ups sold it as the equivalent of ten different flights, but in reality it was more like getting the worst blue balls in history after getting edged ten times in a row. Henry was sure he wasn't the only one who thought the brass did it on purpose. They probably resented going through the same in their time, and now were actively spreading the misery.

The paperwork stack in Lorne's office would be massive by the time he got back too, enough he could light a bonfire with it.

He was about to put his neglected M9 pistol through a few paces for completion's sake, when an airman came running into the range and, upon seeing him, hurried over and leaned in to whisper urgently.

"Sir! Colonel O'Neill wants you in the briefing room right now."

"Did he say why?"

"No sir, just to do it pronto."

"Alright, airman, dismissed."

"Sir."

Henry took minute to stash his weapons in his bag to properly maintain later, and went to see what the fuss was about at the fastest clip that still passed as a march.

"Harry," O'Neill called as soon as he was through the door. "Glad you could finally join us!"

Speaking of spreading misery... The Colonel's name was actually Jonathan but he somehow got stuck with 'Jack,' so now he was doing it to Henry too. Supposedly that meant he liked you, but the mountain of paperwork back in the office raised some doubts. "Well, you know how it goes, sir, the longer you let a girl wait the hotter she runs, and we're all out of ice cream..." Henry's gun joke fell about as far as his mouth did when he saw the news report being projected on the wall.

"...this stunning footage just in from our affiliate station..." the Colonel tapped the remote. "-what seems to be an alien craft-" Tap. "We're hearing reports of confirmed sightings from all across Europe and Asia as well-"

What the hell?

The Colonel shut down the TV feed, then turned a dial on the projector which switched the input from cable to VCR. Suddenly, the wall was taken up by a close-up shot of a craft descending through the atmosphere. Despite having one of the least aerodynamic shapes Lorne had ever seen.

It was vaguely pyramidal, but it looked more like a squash than anything else, and those two 'wings' on the side would have a hell of a time just altering the thing's trajectory, never mind make it fly. A tap of a button by the Colonel switched to a picture from a different angle, which showed

four engine nacelles on the rear of the craft. On its rear, instead of the underside. How did this thing fly?

A third image gave a partial down-up view of the thing, or a similar thing. And empty space beyond.

The photos had been shot from *satellite*. While the thing was descending *past* said satellite.

That thing came from *space*.

“These pictures were taken about three hours ago,” the Colonel revealed. “And the footage you just saw went on air less than ten minutes ago. That’s how little time passed between then and at least a dozen sightings all over the world.”

Lorne looked around for the punchline, thinking that someone had finally figured him out for a conspiracy nut.

Nothing.

Since he knew better than to pretend he didn’t know he was being considered as the Colonel’s eventual replacement, Henry didn’t pretend not to notice the pointed glances that *were* aimed his way. “What are we looking at, sir?”

“The vengeance of my obstinacy,” the Colonel muttered in that ‘distracted’ manner of his that everyone knew to pretend they hadn’t heard, though it felt like more than just fishing for subversives this time. “That, boys, is the reason I both do and do not regret turning down the McMurdo appointment. This is not a prank, or a drill, or a hallucination – yes, I had the medic check me and the air in here for drugs just before calling you all in. We’re looking at honest-to-god alien aircraft.” The man turned to look at them seriously. “Guess whose job it is to run ‘em down?”

The briefing was the most clearly-remembered blur of Lorne’s whole life, and the whole USA was on DEFCON 3 by the end of it. Suddenly the base couldn’t get all hands in the air fast enough, but at the same time they couldn’t fit everyone into the suddenly opened battlespace because this went beyond all of their wargames. The battlespace was cramped, you couldn’t fit all the personnel in at once, never mind all their equipment.

But veterans were in top demand all of a sudden, so Henry was barely out of the briefing before he was taking off in his F-15 Eagle.

It took his squadron both too much and too little time to intercept the first bogie, and he wasn't sure what to think when he locked on its tail.

The craft didn't attack, which he supposed was good since their orders boiled down to 'chase but don't engage unless it becomes hostile first.' But it also made him work to keep up with it, which wasn't so good. It was clearly a transport more than fighter, a fighter jet shouldn't have trouble keeping up with the equivalent of a tanker.

Did those things in space have faster craft? Did they have their own jets? How much faster than this would they be? How maneuverable? Because if they had the same gravity-defying bullshit and could do u-turns on a dime, Earth was fucked.

The craft led him on a chase through Washington state, and then Washington City itself right over the White House.

Henry stayed on the bogey's ass, but when the adrenaline drained after the first half hour, he began feeling like he was having an out of the body experience. He wondered if maybe thinking all those internet conspiracy theories were true didn't make him crazy after all. Nobody in the force knew he was into that stuff, he wasn't stupid. His family didn't know either, even though his dad was the one who got him into it in the first place.

He didn't think it would be the alien ones that turned out to be real, he was sure if any of it turned out true it would have to be the simulation. It wasn't entirely logical, technically aliens were the ones that broke the current view of things the least. If one of those things landed and spat out a Roswell grey, he wouldn't even be surprised.

But he'd had weird dreams his whole life, and deja vu didn't even begin to describe the sort of stuff he sometimes saw coming in advance. He also used to sleepwalk as a kid, and there would be weird drawings when he woke up the next day. And every other week, he'd wake up in the morning with a soul-deep feeling that nothing was real, or at least not as real as it should be. Even now, chasing a real-life alien UFO, his gut feeling told him this was nowhere near the core of the onion.

His gut feeling hadn't been wrong about anything before.

... It wasn't telling him *not* to disbelieve aliens though.

It also wasn't telling him not to freak out over the worst scenarios either, now that he was dreaming them back up.

Fuck.

He chased the bogey up until it thumbed its nose at him and flew up and away into the higher atmosphere, where their jets had no hope of following. That was when he got orders to return to base, instead of topping off from the tankers floating around to maintain air coverage.

He didn't get to check his bird over after landing, having to hurry back to briefing the moment he was out.

"...alleged alien craft pursued by an Air Force F-15 illustrates just how close they came to both the White House and several treasured national monuments before climbing out of range of the pursuing fighter," the TV in the rec room said as he marched by the door. "We're hearing reports of confirmed sightings from all across Europe and Asia as well. According to White House sources, there has been no communication from these vessels, but neither have they taken overtly hostile action."

Yet.

"The President has called for calm, but we are told our armed forces are on high alert."

And then some.

Somehow, he doubted that'll make a difference.

It was defeatist talk, they'd only matched speed so far, not weapons, but that gut of his...

The officers spent a while doing their best to speculate on the capabilities of the newcomers, based on what the tentatively-dubbed 'dropships' had done. There wasn't much to go on, but even that hinted at nothing good. It was even worse when one of the more egghead types said that use of atomics was a *minimum* to be able to traverse space, never mind through whatever means had allowed those things to appear out of nowhere.

A televised speech by President Hayes came and went.

“Sir, what about the Russians or the Brits? Hell, even the Chinese!” Lorne asked what everyone else was wondering. “Do we have word from them? Are they hearing anything?”

“There's been no response of any kind from the alien craft, no,” the Colonel replied. “The White House has tried every frequency there is, and so are we, but nada.”

“Why all this?” Asked Jordan. “Why would they come all the way from wherever the hell it is they came from, fly around with a bunch of F-15s on their asses for half a day, and then just split?”

Nothing good, Lorne thought, and he knew he wasn't the only one.

That was when Master Sergeant Siler came in and went to the colonel with a satellite phone. The one linked to the confidential tight-beam satellite the base only had for when they expected heavy cybernetic interference. Which Lorne only knew about because he was still being considered for the intelligence track, and as backup in-the-know in case war broke out with factions capable of that sort of warfare. Like the other great powers.

Colonel O'Neill ordered them all to silence, took the phone, listened to it for a while, and said “Understood sir” before shutting it off and handing it back. He waited until Siler left before facing them again. “We're about to make a complete break from military doctrine, for what the President and the Joint Chiefs all tell me are very good reasons. Reasons which we have been ordered to assist with all hands. Also, I am making it an order that any questions alongside ‘is the MIB real’ are hereby prohibited.”

Those ‘reasons’ turned out to be a one-legged guy called Daniel Jackson with a chip on his shoulder the size of mount Everest, an ace combat pilot nobody had ever heard of by the name of Cameron Mitchell (not the actor, a *Colonel* come out of nowhere), and Samantha Carter, the famous astronaut who'd made a huge splash a year or so back by dying on a space mission. Except she was also a fighter pilot now, and getting her own jet?

All of them looked at Henry like they knew him, which brought some of the worst déjà vu of his life to date. But they were on double time, so he ignored all the strangeness in favor of the much bigger strangeness of a dossier. Somehow, it had intelligence on the capabilities of the ‘redacted’

and their ‘bombers’ (the name for the ships they’d dogged the whole day) and ‘gliders’ (the jet-equivalents that Lorne had been worried they had, which they did).

The files made for very uncomfortable reading, because those capabilities outstripped the best the USA had.

He was re-reading the combat specs a third time when an airman came with orders from the Colonel to come back to the briefing room again pronto. As he jogged off the airfield, he saw an airman headed Mitchell’s plane.

Soon, he was back with the rest of the senior officers on the base, to receive the worst news to date – NASA had just recorded hundreds of ships suddenly appearing in high orbit over the planet. Lorne looked at the pictures. These ones were outright pyramids, except wrapped up in baby walkers.

“The President has been contacted by the leader of those ships up there,” Colonel O’Neill said, to dead silence. “And was given reassurances for peace. Reassurances which he does not trust, and neither do I. The reasons for that you’ve just met.”

“Sir,” Lorne ventured. “The airman I just saw headed Mitchell’s way-“

“Was giving him the same news I’m giving you.”

So those three strangers ranked higher on the President’s confidence than Lorne did, and the rest of the officers on-base, and the Colonel too. They were also higher on the Colonel’s own confidence than them.

Henry was dying to ask if the Men In Black really weren’t just a silly movie, but managed to hold his tongue. If that were the case, they’d have been told so by now, wouldn’t they? Or at least Earth would have deployed their silver bullet before this, if they had one.

Was that what those three were?

“Alright, all of you go, carry out your orders. Except you, Harry – you’ll be taking charge of those three’s escort and be my eyes and ears in the air.”

They all left to do as ordered, and soon they were indeed all in the air, flying at speed towards the McMurdo navy base in Antarctica. The VIPs were all very professional, but otherwise just talking

on a private frequency among the three of them. Lorne could've breached it, but need to know was a thing.

Unfortunately, they were only two thirds of the way to Ross Island when Henry got a hail from the Colonel, on encrypted channels. A message for the trio.

“Sierra Golf One,” Henry spoke over comms. “We're receiving an encoded message. Stand by...” He decrypted the message and his heart sank. “Message reads: McMurdo has been destroyed. Return to your previous position and stand by for further instructions.”

“Understood.”

The F-15s all turned around and headed back the way they'd come. And it was a long way too, too long to make it with what was left in their tanks. They had to top-off from one of the refueling tankers that... had been scrambled en masse some time after they left the previous base. Which meant that, at some point between then and now, the USA had gone from DEFCON 3 to DEFCON2.

Mitchell's plane was just disengaging from the tanker when the shoe finally dropped.

“Thanks for the top-up, boys... Sierra Golf leader, we're going to be right back where we started-”

Suddenly the tanker was hit by an energy weapon and exploded.

“Fuck!” Lorne cursed.

“Son of a bitch!” Mitchell cursed at the same time. “Carter, break right! Break right!”

That means we break left. Lorne and his wing mate broke left just as the other two broke right. Further bolts from the same trajectory missed them. “Sierra Golf Flight,” he barked over comms. “Request emergency vector change to 165 at 369. Please-“

“Sierra Gulf Escort, Andrews confirmed,” the Andrews air traffic controller said at once. “Route vector authorized with KC-10 support to the target.” More blasts rained down around the formation, but... the blasts weren't aimed at them, they were aimed at the city! “Please confirm.”

“Confirmed,” Lorne said blankly, staring at the absolute destruction and death of millions of people. “Sierra Gulf Escort, Five-nine. Good luck, Andrews.”

“Sierra Gulf Flight, Godspeed.”

They turned away and flew away from Washington DC as fast as they could. Their last sight of the USA Capital was of the sky raining hundreds upon hundreds of golden energy bolts that eradicated everything on impact.

The flight was dead silent for a long time, no words exchanged even when they passed near other towns and cities, all of which were being bombarded from orbit like the first.

They had made it all the way from the north to the south-most end of the west coast, and they were staring at the distant rain of fire eradicating Los Angeles, when something finally intruded on their collective disbelief. A whistle from the radio. The encrypted frequency again.

“We're receiving another encoded message with new flight instructions,” HERNY relayed to Gulf Leader. “Message reads: The Russians have the other one.” The other what? “Do what you need to do.”

“Hello,” Jackson said with the air of someone torn between vindication and tired irritation at permission arriving entirely too late.

Lorne kind of had the same feelings, but not aimed the same way. If these three were Earth's trump card, why the hell were they only being deployed now?

“Coordinates received,” it was Carter that replied this time. “Stopping for gas. I estimate ETA at 19:30 Zulu.”

“Let's do what we need to do,” Mitchell said as the F-15s sped away from the mainland.

It was night time over the North Atlantic, before someone found a reason good enough to break the moment of silence for the dead. A moment which had by then stretched and stretched to several hours.

“That last KC-135 pilot was a bit stingy,” Mitchell's voice came with a cautious tone. “Fuel's gonna be close.”

Lorne was more bothered by what he was seeing on radar.

“I have multiple contacts down range approaching at Mach 3.5,” Carter voiced his worries.

“Gliders?” Jackson asked.

Here it comes.

“Yeah, that's a good bet,” Mitchell confirmed. “They're coming through at eighty thousand feet. Sierra Golf Escort,” *here it comes*. “We must complete our mission. Do you understand?”

“Affirmative,” Lorne replied. The F15 had officially never lost an engagement, but unofficial was a different matter. All things considered, going out during an op was about the best end for an active-duty soldier. “Sierra Golf One and Two, proceed to target. We will engage.”

“Here they come,” Carter gave on last warning, before hers and Mitchell’s planes turned and sped away.

Lorne and his wing mate turned 180 degrees to engage the death gliders. He saw a bunch break off to pursue One and Two, but couldn’t do anything about that.

It was an ugly dogfight, those things had plasma guns, and antigrav made them every bit as ridiculous as the files said. Also, they were outnumbered six-to-one.

The only reason they managed to take one of those things down with them was because Lorne’s stomach was much stronger than other people’s, so he could handle harsher turns than even his bird could. Ultimately, he survived only a minute more than his wing-mate, and while his wing-mate managed to eject, he wasn’t so lucky.

Death was so sudden he didn’t have time to feel the heat.

That was how Harry Potter, in the dark of night above the Pacific Ocean, finally woke up and remembered what all had happened.

He’d done the ritual, he’d been successful, he’d skipped lucid dreaming entirely to complete projection of the spirit and soul into the subtle planes. From there, he’d aimed his past life regression with all the precision he could muster and found *nothing*.

There was no past life, time looped or not, where he lived through a return of the void pretenders. Worse, the more he looked inward and back along his history, the farther back through prior incarnations he had to search, until he may as well have been looking at when the body-snatchers had been on Earth the first time.

So instead of inward, he looked outward. Used all he'd learned of Time at Hogwarts during the day before to chart a path *outside*.

Until, somehow, he rose higher and higher in – in vibrational frequency? Higher than the physical world, higher than *Magic itself* until he bounced head-first against a wall. The Wall. Or at least that's how it translated in his dreams before, like a shell around... everything past which he couldn't fly.

Except this time he did, because he wasn't just dreaming anymore. He marshalled all his focus and willpower, all the spiritual strength he didn't even notice in a mere dream, and smashed straight through.

Holy shit, thought Harry James Potter as flaming debris fell down around him where he floated like a ghost in the sky. *I didn't relive a past life, I went and incarnated in a whole new one!* A universe where there were no wizards, or magical creatures, and the Stargate from Giza had *not* been thrown into the sun thousands of years ago.

Only... something was wrong. The world, the universe – it felt small. Far, far too small, and getting smaller.

Harry looked at the sky. Stars were going out. They didn't disappear from the sky, but the eyes of the spirit saw things besides the physical light, and he could tell.

The stars in the sky were the real ones. But the lights beyond, the galaxies...

They weren't there. What lights the sky showed were just... projections of some kind.

The world seemed to slow the quicker he thought, as his entire spiritual body began to... *exist* at a faster speed the more he focused on making sense of the physical world. Time... was still time, but he was more than a mere ghost. The spirit spanned multiple layers of reality, it seemed, and the higher you ascended in terms of vibrational frequency, the faster you were than everything else.

He flew into the sky and beyond at the speed of thought. It was full of spaceships up here, and he recognized them now. Not just from the vague myths back home, but also because his life as Henry Evan Lorne... was in its *fourth* iteration? Not counting the multitudes of loops, like when the alternate SGI messed with time to try and steal the main-line SG1's ZPM that one time. Which he

only knew about from reading mission reports, after being sworn into the secret of the Stargate during his *first* life as Evan Lorne.

That time, he served on a spaceship.

Then *Atlantis*.

Either Preston B. Whitmore back home was wrong about Atlantis, or there was more than one and the city-ship version just happened to be in a completely different galaxy.

Focus on the here and now, Harry chastised himself as he hovered in orbit. The now where the Earth was being glassed by hundreds of alien spaceships. The here where there was no Magic to turn against them, and no Magical World either, secret or otherwise.

Harry flew in and out of several of the ha'taks as the moment stretched into infinity. All of the system lords were here, except for maybe a couple.

He went to the mothership next, finding it would've been easy even without its comparatively huge size and star-like shape. Death was intense and loud when he was like this, and two people had been murdered quite gruesomely in the past few days and change. One was just leftover impressions. The other was still blood and stench.

He found the man and his snake lying on the floor of a grand observation deck, split in perfect halves from mid-spine up. Ba'Al, based on what he remembered of Lorne's life in the prior timeline. Dead. To in-fighting?

Couldn't it have happened earlier than this? Humanity was already doomed.

Looking around more, Harry ran into Vala Mal Doran, except she was a host. She had always been a host in this version of things.

It's 2008, the thought struck Harry like a bludger. *It's just 2008. The aliens are invading in 2008. Is this what's going to happen back home?*

He recalled at least *two* lifetimes where Harry Potter lived to die of old age, so hopefully not. And...

He had different memories where the aliens didn't do this, where the things were already dead and gone by this time. He did remember Anubis' attack, and also knew of the much earlier attempt to

glass the planet, by Apophis and his son, which he only knew from reading SG1 the mission reports about it. Now, everything was suddenly different because it had *always* been different.

This is why I'm only remembering now?

Harry... he didn't live out that first life as Evan Lorne, did he? Not completely, not even into his middle age. Same for the second, or the other various loops that were more short-lived than a mayfly. Instead, time rewound to an earlier time. Every time.

Someone messed with time.

Harry looked up, past the bulkheads into the space beyond, and past the distant heliosheath as well. No *real* extragalactic light reached his eyes anymore. The longer he lingered, the less of the Milky Way *itself* seemed to go on existing, stars disappearing seemingly at random throughout the rapidly shrinking... event horizon, for lack of a better term of... whatever this bubble galaxy was.

Someone was *still* messing with time *right now*.

Harry considered flying out there to see things up close, but he didn't know what kind of danger he'd be risking, what the nature of the... beings doing this even was. It had to be someone, stuff like this didn't just happen, it wasn't how time worked. He may not know enough to do anything with it, but he knew what time looked like, even what time manipulation looked like, and it wasn't this.

The phenomenon didn't show signs of slowing down either. If anything, it was the opposite. The longer it went on, the faster *everything* seemed to move. Instead of standing still, 'time' began to move like molasses around him. It was as if the vibrational state of everything was increasing. Because... Because what? What for?

To vanish in a whiff of smoke like everything else?

Harry flew back down to Earth, trying not to think about how sure he *wasn't*, that he could trace a path back home where he came from.

By the time he caught up with SG1, he'd descended to their frequency too. He only had to descend half-way, but it hadn't been as easy as going up.

“Oh, yeah!” Dr. Jackson was saying sarcastically. “Just go ahead and fall asleep back there, Jackson! It's going to be a long, dull ride!”

“Yeah, sorry about that,” Mitchell said, not sounding sorry at all. “How many on our six?”

“Too many!”

Eight death gliders caught up then, and SGI manoeuvred to avoid their fire.

“We can't shake them at altitude,” Carter sounded strained. “We're gonna have to go down to the deck.”

“Yeah, we're right behind you.”

The two jets rolled and descended quickly to just above the water.

“I've got another contact,” Carter reported. “Six bogies, dead ahead, coming right at us.”

“Sorry, Sam, we're kind of busy right now,” Mitchell replied as the gliders fired at them. Thankfully, the F15 reputation was well earned, so the strikes didn't land.

“I don't think they're gliders,” Carter said in realization. “They're MiGs!”

“Jackson, get on the radio!”

Jackson began speaking Russian over the radio

“What the hell did you just say?”

“We're Americans. Please shoot the people chasing us!”

The MiGs flew past the F-15s and engaged the gliders, taking out three of them immediately.

Harry scowled from where he was riding the aft of Mitchell's plane. *I'd have managed that too if it weren't twelve against two.*

“We have been expecting you,” the Russians said over radio. “Good luck!”

“Yeah, back at you.”

A thank you in Russian came over radio, before the MiGs proceeded to engage the remaining gliders while SGI flew to safety.

“I can see the coast,” Mitchell said a while later. “Sierra, rejoin, we're going to head on down.”

“Copy that.”

Harry stayed nearby for the rest of the trip.

SG-1 flew over half of Russia until they reached an ex-military base. The nearest landing area was some way off, which *would* make it harder to track them if this was any other enemy. Or if their enemy was actively following them, which they thankfully weren't. Either way, they had to take a cargo truck the rest of the way.

Once there, they found a hangar where a stargate was standing uselessly, no power source or dialling computer of any sort in sight. When confronted on this, the lone Russian officer had nothing encouraging to say. Everyone else who hadn't died in the ongoing glassing of the planet, or against the aliens in the air, was at home with their families.

“Where I should be,” the soldier finished.

“I need to speak to the lead scientist on this project,” Carter demanded as politely as possible, given the circumstances.

“He is not here. None of them have been here for weeks.”

“Really?” Mitchell's incredulity could certainly be excused too.

“We had no idea of purpose of artifact. We named it Anchor because it was found on bottom of ocean.”

Dr. Jackson reached the end of his patience first. “Are there any grown-ups around that we could talk to?”

The Russian officer and he proceeded to exchange several insults in Russian.

“Boys, we need power,” Carter said to distract them.

“What you see now is emergency batteries. We lost main power to facility over three hours ago.”

“Ookay, we understand that,” Jackson said stressfully. “But we've come a very, very long way to use this device.”

“I cannot give you what I do not have.”

A high-pitched noise outside finally alerted the living to the impending arrival of something whose approach Harry had felt a premonition of since before SG-1 had even landed their planes.

“What was that?” Jackson wondered.

“It sounds like a ship. Al'kesh?”

Harry flew up through the ceiling and found that it was, indeed, an al'kesh. The ship uncloaked and landed on top of the facility, extending its shield to cover the whole building. As good a sign as it was bad. Harry looked inside.

Teal'c. Wearing Ba'Al's mark.

Well shit.

Harry descended back through the ceiling amidst falling debris.

“We must get out of here,” the Russian fretted.

“Hey, your weapon!”

The Russian gave Mitchell a machine gun. Meanwhile, Carter and Dr. Jackson pulled their handguns. The four then ran to the sound of where the ship landed. They got into cover just as rings activate inside the facility, depositing Teal'c and two Jaffa in the room. Contrary to what Lorne knew of the man while part of Stargate Command, Teal'c moved out alone without securing the area. Because of that, when he came around the corner, Mitchell was able to surprise him and hold him at gunpoint from up on the steps.

“Hands up!”

Teal'c raised his Zat at Mitchell. Nearby, Carter pulled her weapon on the other two Jaffa, who begin to draw their weapons as well, instead of having them already deployed as they *should* have. This was extremely sloppy behaviour. Just two of Ra's Jaffa were able to take out the entire special forces team that went on the first voyage to Abydos, thanks to superlative skill in stealth and *ambush*. But here, nothing. From Teal'C! Meanwhile, SG-1 *did* exert the fullness of their skills. What was going on here?

“Don't,” Carter warned the two, who only froze when Dr. Jackson stepped up to cover them with his own handgun.

Harry stared at the scene. There was no Magic here, but he thought he could see *something* akin to them all over the Jaffa warriors. Something that had been most obvious when they exhibited their incompetence, and when they decided to consider the tiny handguns as serious threat to their lives. Which they were, but it had never stopped an uninformed Jaffa before.

“Teal'c?” Mitchell said in surprise.

“How do you know my name?”

“I can do better than that. You're from Chulak, your best friend goes by the name of Bra'tac, and you're the First Prime of... Jackson, whose mark is that?”

“Ba'al.”

‘It figures’ was written all over Mitchell’s face. “What did he promise to win you over?”

Contrary to what Lorne would have expected of the man, Teal’c replied. “The freedom of my people.”

“I'll give him credit for knowing which button to push.”

“Ba'al is dead,” Teal’c volunteered information. For some reason. “Slain by his queen.”

“Oh, don't tell us,” Dr. Jackson grumbled. “Qetesh.”

Teal’c was looking seriously taken aback. “Indeed.”

“Why?” Jackson asked.

“That is none of your concern,” Teal’c replied in what was the first thing he did since arriving that was actually in-character for the man Lorne knew. “Allow us passage through the Chappa'ai and your lives may be spared.”

‘May.’

Mitchell didn't have it, which was fair. “Or, you tell us what you're up to, and your lives will be spared.”

“My only concern is my mission.” Trying to find reason *not* to kill people was, however, perfectly in-character for the Teal’c Lorne remembered, if mostly by reputation and those mission reports.

“Which is?” Mitchell pressed.

“To avenge Ba'al's death,” Dr. Jackson answered for him. “The final task of a First Prime.”

Teal’c surprise was very blatant this time, and for once Harry couldn’t blame him. “Indeed.”

A shame this was only possible because this entire confrontation had been so blatantly steered by third-party influences at the start.

“Well, that sounds great,” Mitchell said with false cheer. “We'll help out, right guys?”

“Sure, why not,” Carter easily agreed.

“I'm not busy,” Dr. Jackson did too, because what else could they do?

“Let's do it.”

“I do not require your assistance,” Teal’c said, which was true.

The building chose that very moment to shake, and there was the sound of energy weapons striking it. Looking outside, Harry saw that the place was finally under attack from space. The al’kesh shield was limiting the damage that came through, but it wouldn’t last for long.

“My ship has been detected,” Teal’c said what Harry had just seen. “Its shields have been extended to protect this building and the Chappa'ai, but it will not hold for long.”

Mitchell blinked. “What do you say we all get out of here?”

They two sides faced each other off for some tense moments as the building shook around them.

Finally, Carter had enough. “We can all die here when that shield fails, or we can go through the gate together and continue this discussion on the other side. It's up to you.”

Teal’c lowered his zat. Mitchell lowered his gun. At that signal, the other four broke their standoff as well.

Teal’c held up a small device, turned and made for the stargate. “This device will power the Chappa'ai.”

“I like that,” Mitchell commented as he followed suit. “No hesitation.

The humans and jaffa all walked toward the gate. Harry floated after them, though his attention was beginning to be drawn to the sky again. For some reason, no more stars were vanishing from the sky, but the vibration level of everything still continued to rise.

Debris started to fall onto the gate. Fortunately, Teal'c reached it and placed the portable dial-home device on it. After tapping only *four* symbols instead of seven, never mind eight, the gate apparently figured out both the right address and its own point of origin and started spinning.

Maybe it's just a speed-dial equivalent, Harry thought to himself, though he had doubts.

The attack was growing in intensity every second, but finally the gate activated.

“Let's go,” Mitchell yelled. “Go!”

Everyone ran up the small ramp into the wormhole just as the energy blasts penetrated the shield into the building. Harry flew in on after them.

It was strange passing through. He wasn't dematerialized, even though the spirit *was* some manner of matter, however subtle and diffused. He remained aware throughout too, got to see the rapid, winding tunnel of blue light in all its shimmering glory, and the stars beyond too. It all went by in a moment though, even though it seemed a bit longer to his accelerated perception of reality.

Since he was self-aware and could fly, he couldn't resist a bit of whimsy and sped ahead of the others part-way through transit.

He came out the other side first, despite that he'd gone through last, and had the disquieting feeling that something had noticed.

They were underground somewhere. There were three platforms here, separated by walkways from a central core device of some sort. There was open space above and below the assembly. One platform held the gate, one a ring platform, and one a control console.

When the others came through, the Jaffa got their turn getting the drop on SG-1 this time, and Teal'c took Mitchell's gun and pulled his zat on him when the Colonel finally came through last.

“Give me a reason why I should not kill you where you stand.”

“Because, you're a good man.”

Teal'c only answer was an angry glare.

“Because, somewhere, deep down, you realize we're supposed to be on the same side.”

Teal'c aimed the zat at Mitchell's head.

“Because we can offer you the freedom of your people,” Carter claimed from behind them.

This finally made Teal'c hesitate.

“Really?” Mitchell didn't even pretend to play along, but then – that earnestness was what enabled him to follow in Colonel O'Neill's footsteps as leader of the team.

“This is Ba'al's failsafe,” Carter guessed. “It has to be. I think this whole place is his time machine.”

The words ‘time machine’ somehow did what everything else hadn't, and won Teal'c over. The man deactivated his zat and looked around the cavernous space. He walked further into the cavernous chamber. The walkways lit up as he stepped on them. As he did, Dr. Jackson moved close to Teal'c.

“Teal'c, you have to understand, in the timeline we just came from, the Goa'uld are defeated and the Jaffa are free. Now, Ba'al used a machine to go back in time and change all of that. He made you his First Prime and Qetesh his queen so he could control you.”

Perhaps Teal'c had been thinking about this for so long that every other possibility had been ruled out, but he was still rather quick to say... “This is the secret for which Ba'al was murdered.”

“So that's why you think Qetesh is on her way here?” Mitchell asked. “She wants to use this device for herself.”

“That cannot be allowed to happen,” Teal'c declared.

“See? We agree about everything.”

“Teal'c,” Carter looked around, spotting the console. “If you let us use this device, we can return history to the way it was meant to be.”

“The Goa'uld will be gone?”

Carter nodded.

“My people will be free?” Just like that, it was good that he chose to do this but...

“You have our word.”

Was it really so easy?

Teal'c looked at each of the members of SG-1. “Let it be done.”

Apparently, it was. For better or worse.

Carter rushed to the control console. There was a light blue globe at the centre of it. “It'll just take me a few minutes to figure out exactly how it works.”

“That may be all the time we have,” Teal'c replied, handing Mitchell his machine gun. “By my reckoning, Qetesh will be here at any moment.”

The point was clear. “Thank you,” Mitchell said, surveying the room while they all moved to the console as well. “Well, you heard the man.”

At Carter's handling of the inputs, lights began to move over the sphere. Suddenly a representation of the Milky Way appeared at the top of the tower core. Many stars were visible in the gases. All the stars that still existed were there. And none of the stars whose disappearance Harry had noted previously.

“There must be satellites orbiting every one of these stars,” Carter deduced, probably correctly since Ba'Al was clearly not responsible for whatever was messing with reality on such a ridiculous scale. “There's hundreds of them, each sending real-time telemetry back to this computer through sub-space.”

Mitchell glanced at her. “Exactly how does that add up to a time machine?”

Carter pushed on the globe. “They're looking for something specific.” In the hologram above, one of the stars grew into a sun and sped down to float above them where they could see it up close. Readings appeared next to it.

Dr. Jackson stared. “Solar flares.”

“Exactly,” Carter said in a eureka moment. “Until now, other than Ancient technology, the only way we know of traveling backward and forward through time is to pass through a wormhole as it intersects the magnetic field of a solar flare.” Evan Lorne recalled reading about that, but Harry Potter had some choice things to say- “Now with enough satellites and enough computing—”

“Yeah, yeah, yeah, that's brilliant,” Mitchell interrupted as he came to terms with the terrible lack of good cover around the place. “Which button do we press?”

“Yeah,” Dr. Jackson mused. “I think it's a little more complicated than that.”

The sun disappeared. “Actually, not much. We just need to choose a time and place sometime before Ba'al can put his plan into motion.”

Because every SG-1 mission ran on drama, that was the precise moment when the ring platform activated.

“They are here,” Teal’c noted unnecessarily, and he and the two Jaffa prepared to fight.

Mitchell became more urgent too. “Sam.”

“Well, if you want to go back to the Cretaceous period, we can go right now, otherwise we have to wait for a flare capable of sending us back to a time and place that's a little more useful.”

Mitchell handed Dr. Jackson a pistol, which was not a moment too soon because he had barely enough time to take aim on the Jaffa appearing on the transport platform.

The next couple of minutes were a nasty firefight, where Mitchell, Jackson, Teal'c and his two Jaffa had only the luck of the draw on their side, and they only survived if they shot before the arriving Jaffa had time to aim their own weapons. The first and second group of enemies were dispatched this way, in a hail of plasma blasts from the three Jaffa, bullets from Mitchell’s machine gun, and Dr. Jackson’s two pistols.

But the reinforcements took their toll soon enough. Teal’c two jaffa died first, mainly because Mitchell and Jackson had gotten the better cover spots. All the while, a new sun would descend above Carter, only to disappear like the others.

“Sam!” Jackson called as a third group of Jaffa arrived by the rings.

Her only reply was to toss him her pistol, which he began firing. Another sun appeared in front of Carter. “I've found one, but you're not going to like it!”

“Why not?” Mitchell yelled over the gunfire.

“It'll send us back to 1929.”

“That's ten years too soon!

Jackson disagreed. “Well, it'll have to do, because I'm just about out of bullets—”

His words cut off as a staff blast finally found him. It hit him in the abdomen and sent him falling over the edge of the platform. Carter stared for a moment in shock, then went back to work while Mitchell and Teal'c kept firing. “Once I dial the Stargate, we'll have less than twenty seconds to get through!”

Putting words to action, she began the dialling sequence.

“Dial it up and get your ass down here!” Mitchell ordered as more Jaffa arrived.

But his order would go unheeded because one of them took a moment to assess the situation, decided Carter took priority, and shot her in the back.

“Carter!”

As if it was Carter's last spite, the gate activated.

“Teal'c!”

Mitchell dropped his weapon and ran for the wormhole. Before he could follow, Teal'c was hit by three blasts and fell to the floor.

Harry watched Colonel Mitchell disappear through the stargate. He thought of following him through, but his intuition told him it wouldn't work. Perhaps because he shouldn't try his luck twice with whatever had taken notice of him before. Or perhaps...

He looked outside past the walls of rock as only the third eye could. Because of that, he got to watch as *all* the stars left in the sky disappeared all at once, except the lone sun around which this alien planet revolved.

The ring platform activated one last time, depositing Qetesh herself, alone. With a start, she surveyed the bodies, then noticed Teal'c was still alive, lying against the steps to the core.

“Teal'c,” she noted in that ugly growl that Goa'uld all used. She approached the dying jaffa and laughed. “You are the most...” She crouched down beside him, “stubborn Jaffa I have ever known. Perhaps I shall choose you as my First Prime after all.”

Teal'c grunted. “I... think not, Qetesh.” His thumb moved in his clenched fist. “I... die... free.”

With those last words, his hand fell slack, released the hand grenade he'd just primed, lit in red light. Qetesh only had time to see it and realize she couldn't do anything before it exploded, destroying her and the entire time machine complex.

Bloody alien bombs, Harry cursed as he flew aside and then shot down at speed. None of it had touched him, he was already dead, but it was easy to forget what scale their technology operated as, when his own memories of fighting aliens had more to do with the wraith and replicators. Both were more advanced, as these things went, but the combat doctrines were also very different.

On the bright side, the shock did snap him out of his spectator behaviour and made him remember something that might just be relevant here.

He plunged into the seemingly endless depth as fast he could go. Dr. Jackson's body was still falling, the bottom of the shaft was very far away indeed. It was good that they wouldn't need to go all the way.

Harry studied the dead body, and the spirit that hadn't quite yet accepted the fact.

He reached in, grabbed the man by the arm, and pulled Daniel Jackson out of his corpse.

Either by reflex or because he remembered some of his past experiences with death, Jackson instantly ascended as high as he could go along the vibration spectrum. Harry followed him up, just so neither of them lost track of the other.

“What – where – who –“ Dr. Jackson flailed where he now floated. He wore a white robe now, for some reason. “Who are you? Are we dead? Am I dead? Are you an Ascended? You look familiar...”

Harry smiled crookedly. His combined lives as Evan Lorne amounted to longer than his life as Harry Potter several dozen times over. He wasn't surprised he still looked like the man he was here. "Major Evan Lorne, Atlantis expedition, second-in-command under Lt. Colonel John Sheppard."

Jackson stared at him and snapped his fingers. "That's it, I remember now! You were the one who showed us around on the Unas planet! What are you doing here? Where are we? Why am I seeing *you* of all people when I'm dying?"

Harry was about to reply to... any and all of those questions when he realized that 'where are we' was the most important one by far.

Finally, the planet they were on had vanished like everything else.

Where they were now was a doorway. The inside of it, where Doctor Jackson now stood in a white sweater and slacks, looked like a diner. On the outside of the doorway was a very mind-bending 'everything and nothing' psychedelic sprawl that Harry wasn't sure was entirely real. Or illusion.

He didn't have time to study it because he stood on the threshold. Literally. One foot inside, and one out. He wasn't ignorant as to what kind of metaphor this made. And more importantly-

"Great," Jackson muttered, looking around. Away from him. "This place again."

This place. A diner. The diner Harry had dreamed about the night before he went on the Walk. Had he... somehow seen this coming in advance? Diviners couldn't see their own future though, and he had never met Daniel Jackson then, or anyone he was involved with in this life. This entire *incarnation* hadn't happened yet, he'd expected to induce a past life regression when he did the Irish ritual.

Instead, he'd ended up living an all-new life as an all-new person in a completely different...

No. Not *completely* different, he could feel it. Something...

"So," Daniel addressed the various people sat throughout the booths. People among whom was *not* found the man with the metal hand that Harry had dreamed arguing with these ones. "I guess this diner was granted 'infinite' status after all."

No one acknowledged him.

“And no Oma either, or Morgan. Lovely.”

“Back to playing the fool, Daniel Jackson?” The bartender asked without looking up from the glass he was polishing. “Were you not the one who drove her to take up her toilsome fate, the last time you were here?”

Misleading through implication first thing? Was that really their opener? What kind of afterlife was this?

Jackson, though, reacted nigh explosively. “I distinctly recall you dooming the galaxy to recurrent tyranny and omnicidal extinction because you wanted to make one of your own suffer.”

The man ignored Jackson.

“Figures,” Jackson muttered. “Trouble making up my mind is mortal ignorance, changing my mind is sub-sapient fickleness, but when I *don't* change my mind it's lower lifeform pig-headedness, right? How is this higher wisdom again?”

Harry turned on his feet as if to enter, and that was when *everyone* inside gave a start and looked at the two of them where they stood. At him.

“You are new.”

“JESUS!” Daniel jumped in fright. The voice had come from right next to him. The bartender was no longer tending the bar. Without anyone blinking, he was just there now. Right by the door.

“I was right,” Harry murmured, too disquieted to relish his triumph. “There was someone behind this. I knew it. Time does *not* work this way.”

“You do not belong here,” the unnaturally nondescript man said.

The more Harry looked at him, the less nondescript he became until he had no trouble registering what he looked like. Beyond the stereotypical elderly British senior, there stood a tall, lean man with the bearing of a warrior pursuing what he wanted of Harry with the unerring dedication of a hunter long out of practice-

“Does your master know where you are?”

My what?

Harry had meant to say it out loud, but he couldn't. He couldn't talk, couldn't move, couldn't blink, couldn't look away from-

“Oh, so *he's* the one you can't ignore,” Jackson griped, oblivious to Harry's sudden leap from caution to inner terror. “Please tell me that means you ascended all by yourself and can do whatever you want. Like getting me out of here, hint-?”

Something was happening, beginning to happen, *someone* – on the *cusp* of beginning to happen or to *end*, and it might just be himself if whatever-he-is doesn't stop trying to get inside his head right now or-

'Or else what?' The foreign thought came from that place where Godric usually was.

With a desperate wrench driven by horror and existential dread, Harry evoked himself from that instant when his eyes met the basilisk stare.

He barely caught himself on the doorframe before he fell into Chaos.

In front of him, the diner seemed to tremble as the stranger jerked away and turned to stone with a grinding noise.

'Olwen's tits, where are we?' Godric balked from where the desecrator of mind had just been. *'Guess we'll have to fight out way out.'*

Unfortunately, Harry remained the weak link in their partnership. He barely started raising the sword when he was incapacitated from all sides by pouncing streaks of startled smoke. Half of them caught the mind-invader before he fell, the rest entangled Harry with gossamer threads of white light. He didn't know how he'd called the sword to his hand, but it was here, shining deathly green that prevented the others from fully immobilizing his arm.

“What the fuck?” Jackson gasped.

The one of Harry's attackers who'd just lost his hand trying to grab the sword by the blade shied away from the green light. He swirled away to immobilise Jackson instead.

The grinding had barely stopped when a high-pitched whine replaced it and the mind-violating whatshisname turned back to wispy light and fake flesh struggling not to shiver himself apart.

“That – was *extremely* unpleasant-” His words failed him when he noticed that Godric was aimed at his throat.

“Try it for months,” Harry rasped. “Even just a few days. *Then* get back to me about whether it’s a fair price for what you just did.”

“You would bring death into this place,” the man-but-not-really grunted as he straightened. The others near him floated away, their outlines rippling as their appearance was replaced by stately faces and immaculate raiment of snowy brilliance. “Death borne upon a soul-bound armament, what a barbaric horror you are.”

“Says the mind rapist,” Harry spat.

“Brazen words from a boy who does not even see the strings he dances to. So be it then. Barbaric problems require barbaric solutions.” With a face void of mercy, the man sidestepped Harry’s sword. “If your master ever deigns to finally reveal himself, tell him to mind his own business or we might just have to mind it for him. This is his only warning.” The man grabbed Harry by the face. “And *this* is *your* warning. See what is waiting at the end of this path he has you walking.”

With force *not* borne of strength, the man threw Harry out of the doorway into the chaotic maze of light-wave tunnel ways.

Harry flew back so fast he barely managed to glimpse the paths and spectres he shot past, before he fell back into his previous life – no, it was-

“Ngh,” Herla grunted as he failed to break the chains holding him down. His mind was clearing despite the potions he’d been tricked into eating at the feast, but his flesh failed him – his strength – he couldn’t muster it. “Why – would you do this? Breach – sacred rite – you-”

The King of the Little Folk interrupted him with a mad cackle. “You big topworlders, always crowding the rest of us aside and imposing your ways, and you’re always so shocked when we hit back!”

“You – must know she’s-“

“Of course he does, *dear* brother,” Danu’s own voice sounded this time as the possessing *thing* divested her of her last gown. “Sweet brother. Strong, brave, *honourable Arth.*”

Herla's insides twisted in disgust at the deep, growling voice of that creature that had stolen the most beloved of maidens with its glowing gaze, but the potions made his body respond in the most gruesomely wanton way as the body of his own sister lowered itself down on his-

Five months after he'd gone to sleep, Harry James Potter finally crashed awake back in Potter Manor, amidst hoarse shouts of joy and relief that he didn't have wits to spare for.

Frame of reference, the voice of salvation came from his memories of not that long and far too long ago. *You shouldn't be too hasty to broaden it.*

This once, he'd been spared.

But only after living through the end of the world. And the galaxy. And time. And...

Because it was Harry Potter's lot in life to suffer at the whim of mind-rapists with god complexes, his former life as Herla Cyning now taunted him from the far past, with dread enough to make him want to swear off all carnal acts for the entirety of his life.