

STARGÅTE

SG · 1™

INSURRECTION

Book three of the Apocalypse series

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FANDEMONIUM BOOKS

Historical note:

This story is set in season three of STARGATE SG-1,
between the episodes *One Hundred*
Days and *Shades of Gray*.

“Insurrection is the most sacred of rights and
the most indispensable of duties.”

— Marquis de Lafayette

Previously, in the **Apocalypse** series...

Stargate SG-1: Hostile Ground

When SG-1 is attacked on a routine off-world mission, and Daniel is seriously injured, SG-1 flees back through the Stargate. But instead of finding themselves in the SGC they arrive on a desolate world — one with no DHD.

Meanwhile, on Earth, General Hammond launches a desperate search and rescue mission to find the team. If he fails, and O'Neill doesn't return to investigate recent thefts of technology from their allies, there's a very real chance that the Protected Planets Treaty will collapse. If this happens, Earth will be open to attack from Apophis.

Radiation in the soil near the gate is very high so SG-1 decides to move on, despite Daniel's grave injuries. But the team are soon captured by a group of humans who tell them about the Amam, a monstrous race who came through the Stargate many years ago and feed on the people's life force.

SG-1 dismisses this story as myth until they come across a downed fighter ship and find its alien pilot. After saving him from a mob of angry people, the creature repays them by saving Daniel's life — he puts his clawed hand on Daniel's chest and restores him to full health. But, moments later, another alien ship appears and sweeps SG-1 up in its transporter beam.

Waking up cocooned inside an alien ship, SG-1 witness one of the aliens feeding on another human and realize the stories of the Amam are real. With the help of a local man, Hunter, who bears the mark of the Goa'uld Hecate, SG-1 escapes. Hunter promises to take them to a man called Dix, who can help them escape the planet.

Back on Earth, the Protected Planets Treaty has fallen and Apophis's attack is imminent. While Colonel Maybourne leads

Earth's refugees to a new world, General Hammond sends out a final SOS to their friends in the moments before the SGC is destroyed. No one comes to Earth's aid.

Meanwhile, Hunter leads SG-1 through the Shacks, an enormous shanty town, and then underground to Dix's base. It's only when SG-1 meets Dix and recognizes him as Teal'c's son, Rya'c — now a grown man — that they realize the ruins in which they're standing are the remains of the SGC...

They're already on Earth, but it's not the Earth they left behind.

Stargate SG-1: Exile

Rya'c tells SG-1 that they are one hundred years in the future and that he is First Prime to the Goa'uld Hecate. They discover that, a century earlier, SG-1 disappeared on an off-world mission and, shortly afterward, Colonel Maybourne's plotting brought about the collapse of the Protected Planets Treaty. As a result, Apophis was free to attack Earth. Forty years after Apophis's invasion, the Amam (who Rya'c calls Wraith) arrived from another galaxy in a ship built by the Ancients.

Until recently, Hecate has been helping refugees escape Earth and flee to the human colony known as Arbella. However the people of Arbella have recently shut their gate. Their new leadership is suspicious of outsiders and wants their world to remain hidden and safe.

Looking for help, SG-1 travels to Arbella. Carter and Teal'c hope to find a way to travel back in time and change the past; O'Neill and Daniel are more concerned with helping people in the here and now.

They are greeted as heroes by some on Arbella, and as defectors by others. It's clear that Arbella is a divided society. The Combined Military Force (CMF) supports SG-1 and wants to return to Earth and fight the Wraith, but another faction, led by the head of the security service, Agent Karin Yuma, wants to cut off ties with the galaxy and stay hidden.

The president is caught in the middle. Several years ago, his

wife, Lana Jones, disappeared in an off-world mission and he's been opposed to exploration ever since. SG-1 offers to help find Lana, in the hope that this will persuade the president to help Earth. Eventually, they're allowed to leave Arbella to embark on the mission.

SG-1 returns via the Stargate on Earth, which they now know was moved from Area 51 and hidden in Scotland during the Goa'uld invasion. There, they start searching for the president's wife and encounter the Wraith who saved Daniel. His name is Sting. He helps them find the place where Lana is being held: a laboratory owned by a Wraith queen called Shadow, where Goa'uld symbiotes are being implanted into Wraith hosts to create a deadly hybrid army.

Sting's own queen, Earthborn, is opposed to Shadow. Believing that Earth has corrupted them, Earthborn wants to take the Wraith back to Pegasus where they belong. In return for Sting's help in finding Lana, O'Neill promises to help Earthborn pilot Atlantis home. Together, SG-1 and Sting raid the laboratory, where they find Harry Maybourne working for the Wraith. His life has been artificially extended by frequent use of a sarcophagus and he is now insane.

Maybourne betrays SG-1 to a Wraith/Goa'uld hybrid called Boneshard-Sobek. They manage to fight their way free, but Boneshard and Maybourne escape even though the lab is destroyed. Before they leave, SG-1 finds Lana, although she is very weak and confused. With Sting's help they take Lana back to the Stargate and from there to Hecate's ha'tak in orbit around Earth and prepare to return her to Arbella.

But before they leave, Hecate, who they haven't yet met, requests an audience with SG-1. They are taken to her throne room and are horrified when they see her.

Because her host is none other than their old friend Dr. Janet Fraiser...

CHAPTER ONE

Hecate's Ha'tak — 2098: “This must be disconcerting for you.”

Struggling to get breath past the knot in her throat, Sam could only stare at the woman — the *Goa'uld* — walking toward them. Dressed in a simple white gown, like something a Greek statue might wear, with her hair curled and piled high on her head, it was nonetheless Janet Fraiser. Her face, her kind eyes, her expression — they were all as Sam remembered from the last time she'd seen her friend just a few weeks ago.

Give or take a century.

“Disconcerting?” the colonel snarled. “I can think of another word for it, you b—”

“I understand,” Janet — Hecate — said. Her tone was sharp, but to Sam's ears it sounded more like Janet's doctor voice than the overbearing insolence of a *Goa'uld*. “But I would ask that you listen to me, Colonel O'Neill. All is not as it first appears.”

“Yeah? Because it *appears* like you're wearing a friend of mine.”

Hecate glanced down at herself, smoothed her hands over her diminutive form. “Janet Fraiser...” She glanced back up, her gaze finding and holding Sam's. “Janet was dying when she was brought to me. She'd been shot and left for dead by one of your people. A traitor called Major Newman.”

Sam tried to swallow but that knot was still tight in her throat and her mouth was dry. Even so, she managed to scratch out, “Janet would have rather died than become a host.”

Daniel huffed his agreement, his silent anger blistering.

“I won't lie to you,” Hecate said, moving closer to Sam. Her eyes were so like Janet's, the same warm shade of brown, filled with the same bright intelligence, that Sam had to grit her teeth against a wave of grief. She struggled against the conflicting

desire to put a bullet through this creature's head and to pull Janet into her arms and beg her forgiveness for allowing this twisted future to unfold. "I won't lie to you," Hecate repeated. "And I won't pretend that I gave Janet a choice. I'm not *Tok'ra*." Her lips twisted on the name, disdain showing through her pleasant tone. "But I didn't choose this host at random. Janet Fraiser possessed a great deal of knowledge that I valued, and many insights into the healing arts." She glanced toward Daniel. "You know that I'm well regarded for my knowledge of medicines?"

"Of poisons," Daniel corrected, jaw clenching around the words. "If I remember my mythology correctly — which I always do."

A faint smile touched Hecate's lips. "History has been unkind to me," she said. "But so it often is to those of our sex, is it not, Sam?"

Sam didn't answer; she wasn't about to debate feminist interpretations of history with a Goa'uld. Instead she said, "What do you want with us?"

Hecate lifted her chin, folded her hands in another gesture painfully reminiscent of Janet. "I'll come to that in a moment," she said, "but first I need you all to understand something. Although it was not my intention when taking this host, Janet Fraiser has changed me. That is, she has changed my perspective of many things. I sought her medical insight, but, in opening myself to the mind of the host, a..." She hesitated, a flicker of distaste crossing her face. "...a blending, of sorts, took place. I have been changed. I feel..." Again, another frown. "I feel a loyalty to this world, and for many decades now I have been working to free it from the invaders. From the Wraith."

"Huh," the colonel snorted. "Well, congratulations on your spectacular lack of success with that."

Hecate snapped her head around to look at him, her eyes narrowing. "Colonel O'Neill," she said, "I am familiar with your insolence. Janet has many memories of it. But you should

know this: it was I and my First Prime who kept the Stargate open for refugees to flee Apophis's rule on Earth. And after the Wraith came, we continued to do what we could to provide safe passage to those humans who wished to serve us and fight the invaders."

"Your First Prime?" Teal'c said from where he stood at Sam's shoulder, his voice flat with disapproval. "You mean my *son*."

Sam glanced at Rya'c, who was standing beneath the shadowed colonnade of Hecate's throne room. He wore an expression of studied neutrality, but his shoulders were tense and his back stiffened when Teal'c spoke.

"Rya'c was a child when the Goa'uld invaded this world," Teal'c said. "Why would you make him First Prime?"

Hecate smiled. It was a sad, almost wistful expression. "Rya'c serves me well, and has done so for many years. But before him there was another." Again, her attention switched back to Sam, and Sam braced herself. In truth, talking to Hecate through Janet's face was harder than a lot of fire fights she'd experienced; there was no way to fight back, nowhere to take cover, she just had to endure. "Perhaps it will convince you that I'm being honest," Hecate said, "when I tell you that the first to serve me as First Prime was not Jaffa. He was a man called Dixon."

The colonel's frown was dubious, cutting right between his eyebrows. "*Dave Dixon*?"

"Yes," Hecate said with another wistful smile. "Colonel Dixon was extremely loyal to Janet Fraiser. He blamed himself for her apparent death, but when he discovered that she still lived — within me — he dedicated himself to our service."

"Bullshit," the colonel said, although Sam could hear the uncertainty beneath the expletive and saw the way he glanced at Daniel as if to confirm his opinion. "Dixon wouldn't serve a snakehead."

Hecate's expression flattened. "You're wrong, Colonel. He served for many years, helping those humans who wished to

escape Earth.” Her expression shut down, eyes dipping toward the floor. After a moment, and in a very human voice, she said, “He died during the Wraith invasion. Even my skill could not save him. But his name — the name of ‘Dix’ — had become legend among your people, Colonel, and it lives on still.” She lifted her head, once more defiant in a way Sam recognized all too clearly as Janet. “A fitting epitaph for a brave man, don’t you think?”

Sam’s gaze travelled back to Rya’c, the man everyone now called ‘Dix’. As much as it was difficult to believe Hecate, it would certainly be an elaborate lie.

The colonel didn’t answer Hecate’s question, his expression cool and shuttered although his fingers curled and uncurled at his side; like her, he was missing the weight of a weapon in his hands. “You still haven’t answered Carter’s question,” he said. “What do you want with us?”

Hecate paused for a moment, as if changing tack. “Very well,” she said. “To put it simply, I need your help.”

The colonel barked a laugh. “And why the hell would we help a Goa’uld?”

“Because we share a mutual objective.”

“Oh, I doubt that.”

Frowning slightly, Hecate tipped her head. “Wrong again, Colonel. We both want to free this world — this galaxy — from the Wraith, and to destroy the abominations that their queen is creating.”

“You know about that?” Daniel said. He sounded cautious, interested despite his better judgment. “About the Goa’uld-Wraith hybrid?”

“I know a great deal, Daniel. Including how to destroy them — all of them.”

“All the hybrids? You mean there’s more than one?”

“There will be.” Hecate swept her imperious gaze across them as if measuring each in turn. “There will be *thousands*.”

Sam’s stomach clenched at the prospect, but she couldn’t

contradict Hecate's assertion; they'd seen the tank of symbiotes in the Wraith lab on Earth, they'd seen the Wraith being bred as hosts. Queen Shadow was building an army.

"Janet Fraiser always believed that one day the great SG-1 would return to save Earth," Hecate continued. "Many doubted her. Many called her faith foolish and condemned her as a traitor. But now you have the chance to prove that she was right, that her faith in you was justified." Hecate's smile was suddenly very much like Janet's, full of quiet conviction and stoicism. "Your world needs you," she said. "How could you possibly turn your backs?"

Arbella — 2098: Salem sat bright on a rust colored horizon when General Roz Bailey left the Combined Military Force headquarters that morning. The sight of Arbella's smaller moon so early in the day reminded her how rapidly the weeks were passing and how soon winter would be upon them. The dirt crunched, brittle beneath her boots, and the air had lost its humidity, having the familiar bite that she always found refreshing after months of cloying heat. In a few weeks, they might even have snow. If Roz had been one who believed in omens, she'd perhaps have thought how the change of season could herald a shift on a much larger scale for all the people of Arbella. But she was more pragmatic than that. The snow would fall no matter how things turned out with SG-1.

But as she made her way through Laketown, she decided that rational thinking might be an uncommon commodity these days. The atmosphere rang with a tension that some might call anticipation or even excitement. Roz knew it was neither of those things.

Conflict wasn't a new thing on Arbella. Ever since the First Gens had broken ground here, there had been philosophical and political differences so complex and ingrained that one hundred years of history had done nothing to erase them. Some would say that there were two factions that could be traced

back to those loyal to the SGC and those who believed that Stargate Command had been responsible for all the ills that had befallen humanity. On the face of things, she supposed that was essentially true.

But Roz knew it could never be as simple as that. She'd read the history books, and then read them again, the second time around trying to find what wasn't said in typeface — those elusive truths that hid between the lines. The story of Arbella was a troubled and twisted thing.

The most obvious quarrels made themselves known in the Fu-Bar. After too many pitchers of Steiner's Original, the CMF hotheads would clash with those from the security force, resulting in a few broken chairs.

But there were other, uglier, conflicts. The ones that took place in the dark, where whispers were more damaging than shouts.

In the past few weeks, both battlegrounds had witnessed an escalation of hostilities.

Roz supposed it had been inevitable from the moment Rya'c had contacted her. After all, four legendary (or notorious, depending on your position) figures from humanity's past couldn't suddenly rise from the dead without creating a stir. First of all, it was to be expected that the very reality of their existence would be questioned. She herself still found it hard to believe that they were back after all this time. But she'd become something of an expert on SG-1 — and Jack O'Neill was most definitely Jack O'Neill.

From the buzz around Laketown, it was clear that some were more willing to accept the team's existence than others. She'd heard that the likes of Lieutenant Jefferson were spreading word that the CMF was getting ready to storm Earth; that was a rumor she'd have to stifle soon enough, never mind the fact she hoped it might be true. The last thing she needed was some ill-conceived attempt at a coup if the plan to find Lana Jones didn't pan out.

Which brought her to the reason for her morning excursion. Roz was on her way to the Stargate base to meet with President Jones and propose a strategy that she hoped would ease tensions while achieving what she believed would be best for all the people of Arbella.

By the time she reached the end of the cliff's path, the sweat on her skin from the exertion was counteracted by the cold of the summit. She supposed it was a good tactic for gaining the upper hand in negotiations, to have the person out of breath and sweating by the time they met with you.

Roz nodded in greeting to the guards who let her pass without question. Despite being on the opposing team, as it were, she liked to keep good relations all around and so was never averse to buying a drink or two for members of the security force when she saw them in town.

Those good relations, however, were not always mutual.

"Jed," she said to the man who met her inside. Officer Jed Hayden quirked his lips in an expression that was almost a sneer, before turning on his heel and walking down the corridor without a word. She'd been through this routine on more than one occasion and knew that she was expected to follow.

"Wait here," he said, when they reached the anteroom outside the president's office. Fifteen minutes later, he appeared again with the instruction that Jones was ready to see her.

The first thing that struck her when she entered the office was how tired Gunnison Jones looked. Reddish stubble was starting to show on his normally clean-shaven face and shadows had appeared beneath his eyes, making him look more gaunt than usual. The next thing she noticed was that they weren't alone. Agent Karin Yuma sat in a chair against the far wall, straight-backed and cross-legged in neatly pressed slacks and a smart button down. Even in the rough, workaday environment of Arbella, Roz couldn't think of a time when the woman looked anything but completely put together.

"Thank you for joining us, General," said Jones. "I only wish

it were under better circumstances.”

That set her off balance. She wasn't aware that there were 'circumstances'. She'd been planning the opening lines of her proposal since she'd secured the meeting, but now all she could manage was an uncertain "Sir?"

He leaned forward on his desk, eyes scanning across some papers that lay scattered on its surface. "SG-1. I'm sorry your faith in them didn't pay off."

Roz glanced from Jones to Yuma; the woman's face remained impassive. "I don't think we can say whether it has or hasn't paid off as of yet, sir. It's only been —"

"It's been a week, Roz." Jones' tone was brittle and, for the first time since she entered his office, he met her gaze directly. There was something raw and fractured there. She wondered if it had perhaps been dangerous to play with stakes that were so high for him. He had a lot invested in this plan with SG-1, and if it didn't pay off...

"Mr. President," she said, trying to keep her voice as measured as possible, "a week isn't nearly enough time. We don't know what progress they've made in the search. I appreciate that it's your —"

"I don't believe you appreciate anything, General Bailey. You don't know the damage you've done in bringing them here. You brought a *Jaffa* to Arbella, for God's sake!"

"Sir, with all respect, I think the damage already existed. But I was hoping to speak to you about the way we can use this... opportunity to build on relations with Dix and... and perhaps revisit an open door policy..." She trailed off, cursing herself for allowing them to put her on the defensive. She was better than that. This was her best opportunity to persuade the president that keeping the gate closed wasn't necessarily in Arbella's best interests — and she was blowing it.

"With all *due* respect, General Bailey," he said, and Roz didn't miss the emphasis, "the damage was done as soon as they began spreading their dissent among the CMF — *your*

people, might I remind you.”

“Dissent? That’s not even remotely true. Where are you getting this intel?” As if she even had to ask. Yuma was vocal in her silence.

“Eye-witness accounts from Laketown. I hear they started a fight in that dive your people call a bar.”

“Sir, that means nothing if it’s not substantiated.”

Jones clasped his hands together. “You think it’s unsubstantiated, Bailey? Are you honestly telling me that there’s been no seditious talk since they came here?”

Roz looked away, thinking of Jefferson and the tattoos she wasn’t supposed to know existed, and the meaningful glances she’d seen exchanged by the men and women under her command ever since SG-1 had made their presence known in town.

Jones leaned forward, fixing Bailey with a sober look, one that spoke to their years of friendship. “I’m giving you the benefit of the doubt here, Roz, and assuming you don’t have any part in this plot to destroy what we’ve built here. But you are treading a dangerous line.”

She met his gaze, taking a breath to steady her composure. This was too important to let Yuma be the only one who had his ear. Roz knew she had to make him listen to what she had to say.

“Mr. President, I understand your reservations, and I know how much is personally at stake for you. But I trust SG-1. They’ve convinced me that the history we believe to be true is all wrong. I’m convinced they *will* help us. I’m just asking you to give them a chance to prove the same to you... What’s this?” Her last remark was directed at the piece of paper that Jones held out to her. She took it from him and scanned its contents. It showed rows and rows of data and formulas, none of which made any sense to her.

Instead of answering her, he glanced sidelong at Yuma. The agent rose and approached them, gathering more of the papers

from the desk. “They’re print-outs, General Bailey,” she said. “From the data center. The one to which you so kindly granted SG-1 access.” Yuma favored Roz with a cold smile. “Apparently Samantha Carter — excuse me, *Major* Samantha Carter — had a very specific search criteria.”

A sour taste had crept into Roz’s mouth. “I don’t understand.”

“Solar flares, General. Do you know why solar flares are useful?”

Bailey stared at lines of type, unable to answer.

“Time travel. Your SG-1 is trying to travel back to where they came from. So you tell me, General, how exactly can they help us when they plan to erase us from existence entirely?”

Teal’c was finding it difficult to comprehend all that they had discovered. Bad enough that his son was First Prime to Hecate, but to now learn that the Goa’uld he served had taken his friend, Janet Fraiser, as host was almost too much to bear. And Rya’c had said nothing of it. He had hidden the truth from them as long as possible, no doubt knowing how they would react. It spoke a great deal of his guilt.

And yet the story Hecate had told of Colonel Dixon, of their joint role in the deliverance of Earth’s refugees, told a more complex story — if one chose to believe it. But the Goa’uld were creatures of deception, their empires were built upon lies, and Teal’c could trust nothing that left Hecate’s mouth. Yet now Rya’c strode before him at her shoulder, and Teal’c had seen the reverence with which the name ‘Dix’ had been held by the Tau’ri left on the world below, had heard it spoken across continents as a byword for freedom... In truth, he did not know what to think, save that this future must be cut off before it began.

He cast a sideways glance at O’Neill as he walked, satisfied by the tight-lipped skepticism he could see on his friend’s face. They had been at odds over the past weeks, but surely now O’Neill and Daniel Jackson would be convinced that nothing

but ending this corrupted reality would suffice. Permitting the abomination that walked ahead of them to exist was unthinkable; they owed it to the woman who had been Janet Fraiser to keep this future from unfolding.

Sensing his gaze, O'Neill looked over at him. His expression was grim, but he said nothing and Teal'c could not read the colonel's intention in his guarded eyes.

"This," Hecate said, coming to a halt before a nondescript door, "is the heart of my work." Her attention was fixed on Major Carter, and Teal'c did not think that was accidental. The major and Dr. Fraiser had been close friends and no doubt Hecate planned to trade on the fact. "I think you'll be interested, Sam," the Goa'uld said with a smile. "We have made great progress, not least because of the knowledge I have gleaned from Janet Fraiser."

"Stolen," Major Carter corrected, her voice clipped and angry. "You mean the knowledge you've *stolen* from Janet."

Hecate's face softened into an expression eerily close to that of her host. "It is more complex than you understand, Sam," she said. "Come, let me show you."

With that, Rya'c stepped forward and the doors slid open. When he moved to one side, to let Hecate pass, Rya'c's gaze came to rest for a moment on Teal'c and their eyes met. Teal'c saw defiance in his son, as well as resignation. Rya'c was not ashamed of his decision, Teal'c realized, but neither did he expect his father to understand or approve of his choice to serve Hecate.

Teal'c was not sure that his son was wrong in his assumption. Yet, for the first time since they had met, Teal'c felt something soften toward the man before him. He refused to call it understanding, but he found himself forced to acknowledge that Rya'c's decision may have been more nuanced than he had at first imagined.

It was an uncomfortable realization, one on which he did not wish to dwell. Instead, he chose to focus on the room that

lay beyond the doors. It was a laboratory and Hecate swept into the room with a pride that was rather more Goa'uld than Dr. Fraiser.

With few exceptions, the Goa'uld preferred to steal their technology rather than create it and so Teal'c found himself astonished by the extent of Hecate's laboratory. It was a large room, white and clinical, reminiscent of the laboratories he had seen at Stargate Command. A quick look at Major Carter confirmed that it was indeed extraordinary; her eyes were round, as if impressed against her will.

"Where did you get all of this?" she asked, taking a couple of steps into the room. "This is — I'm no biochemist, but this looks like state of the art equipment. Or it was, a hundred years ago."

Hecate's smile broadened. "As I explained, Janet Fraiser's knowledge of medicine and medical research has been invaluable. Much of this equipment was salvaged from research laboratories in the aftermath of Apophis's invasion." She made a dismissive gesture. "Apophis cared little for the advancement of science; he wanted only to take what he deemed valuable." Her gaze drifted over to Daniel Jackson. "As you learned to your cost."

Daniel made no reply, simply folded his arms across his chest.

"Whereas you," the colonel said, "are what? Some kind of Renaissance Goa'uld?"

Hecate spread her hands, a strangely self-deprecating gesture. "I have always been interested in medicine," she said. "An interest only heightened by my blending with Janet Fraiser."

Teal'c noticed Major Carter stiffen at the Tok'ra word 'blending', her gaze darting to the colonel's. Something unspoken passed between them, but Teal'c did not catch its meaning.

"So let me guess," Daniel Jackson said, studying Hecate over the rims of his glasses. "You're going to poison the Wraith. That's your *modus operandi*, right?"

The look Hecate returned him was cool, and Teal'c thought he saw a glimpse of frustration shimmer beneath the surface. "When faced with an infestation," she said, "extermination is the only option."

"Extermination?" Daniel Jackson's eyebrows climbed toward his hair. "The Wraith are sentient creatures. You can't treat them like cockroaches."

Silence followed, awkward in its intensity.

After several heartbeats, and sounding discomfited, O'Neill said, "And we're their *soylent green*, Daniel. You saw the camps, what they do there."

"They will strip this galaxy bare," Hecate added, "as they have done their own galaxy. Sentient or not, the Wraith are a plague. They must be destroyed."

Daniel Jackson made no answer, although he appeared unsatisfied. Instead, Major Carter spoke, "If it's a poison," she said, "what's your delivery mechanism? The Wraith are all over the planet, right? Are we talking a virus or —"

Raising her hand for silence, Hecate said, "Faster and cleverer than that, Sam. We'll use the Wraith against themselves."

"How —?"

"The hybrid," Hecate continued, walking further into the laboratory to where a number of vials sat in a glass case. "I have a source inside the court of Queen Shadow, which is how I come to know of the hybrid."

"A source among the Wraith?" Colonel O'Neill sounded unconvinced. "They don't seem the sort to be bought off with a couple of Goa'uld trinkets."

Hecate smiled, but it was a flat expression. "Nevertheless, it is true. I know of Shadow's plan to create an army of Goa'uld-Wraith hybrids, to use them to conquer this galaxy and then to return to Pegasus and wipe out all Wraith who will not bend their knee to her."

Had they not heard something similar from the Wraith, Sting, Teal'c might have considered such an elaborate plan

to be implausible. However it mirrored Sting's warning too closely to be coincidental. O'Neill ran a hand through his hair, lips pressed tight, and Teal'c suspected his mind was tracking a similar path. However, all the colonel said was, "Go on."

"It is a simple plan," Hecate said, "and yet brilliant."

Daniel Jackson huffed, low in his throat. "Modest."

Hecate ignored him. "The Wraith are naturally intolerant of naquadah," she said. "It is poison to them. They cannot feed on a Goa'uld host or," her gaze slipped toward Major Carter, "a former Goa'uld host. Therefore, in order for a Wraith to host a Goa'uld, their intolerance must be overcome."

"Some kind of immunosuppressant?" Major Carter guessed.

"Yes." Hecate gestured to the vials. "Shadow plans to vaccinate all Wraith so that they may be implanted with a Goa'uld. I have gained a sample of the immunosuppressant and developed a countermeasure. When deployed, it will negate the effect of the immunosuppressant and the hybrids will be poisoned by the very Goa'uld they carry. An elegant solution, don't you think?"

O'Neill remained unimpressed. "If it's so elegant, what do you need us for?"

"To provide a test subject."

A bristling tension ran through them all. O'Neill took a step back, his hand reflexively reaching for a weapon that was not there. "I don't think so," he said.

"No." Hecate lifted a reassuring hand. "You misunderstand me, Colonel. I need you to *bring* me a test subject, not become one." She gestured toward the glass cabinet containing the vials of liquid. "Sam will tell you that, without a live trial, we have no proof that my countermeasure will work in the field." She fixed her eyes on O'Neill. "I need the prototype hybrid, Colonel. And I need SG-1 to retrieve it from Shadow's hive."

A beat of silence followed, each of SG-1 glancing at the other, uncertain. Eventually O'Neill said, "Let me get this straight.

You want us to go pick up this hybrid from the middle of a Wraith ‘hive’ — I’m guessing that’s a ship and nothing to do with bees — and bring it back here so you can see if your poison works?”

“Exactly.”

“And why can’t you send ‘Dix’ here?” His gaze flickered back to Rya’c. “Or some of his buddies down in the Shacks? They’re pretty good in a fight, and they know the Wraith.”

“Because, first, we don’t know where it is,” she said. “The hive is cloaked. But your friend, the Wraith...? He knows. And, more importantly, I need your genes, Colonel. Shadow’s hive —”

“Was built by the Ancients,” Major Carter said, more to O’Neill than Hecate. “She needs your Ancient genes to get inside, sir.”

“Not to mention his skill,” Hecate said with an ingratiating smile. “And you, of course, Sam, as a former host, are immune to Wraith feeding. Together, you make a formidable team.”

Teal’c was amused to see O’Neill roll his eyes at the flattery; vain creatures that they were, the Goa’uld would never understand a man like O’Neill, whose pride lay in his team and not himself.

“So, let’s say we do this,” the colonel said, “which, by the way, I’m *not* saying. But let’s say we get the hybrid and your poison works. You’re gonna use it to kill all the Wraith who’ve been implanted with a snake?”

Hecate inclined her head, “Yes.”

“And their Goa’ulds too? Because that’s a lot of dead snakes...”

Her expression changed, face sobering. “For every victory,” she said, “there is a price to be paid. I’m willing to sacrifice my own kind to rid the galaxy of the Wraith.” Chin lifted, she somehow managed to look down at O’Neill despite her diminutive stature. “Are you willing to do the same, Colonel O’Neill?”

“Well, that’s not really the question, is it?” he countered. “The question is whether I’m prepared to trust the word of a

snake-head. And I gotta tell you, Heck, the odds aren't looking great."

From behind them, at the door, there came an irritable grunt. Teal'c turned to see Rya'c staring at O'Neill, his brow contracted. "Did I not warn you, my Lady, that their prejudices would stand in the way of their cooperation?"

Teal'c lifted an eyebrow; no First Prime he had ever known would be permitted to speak in such a way to their mistress.

Hecate, however, appeared unperturbed. "Perhaps you have less faith in your friends than I do, Dix."

"Perhaps that is because I know them better, my Lady," he said, and offered a stiff bow.

Hecate gave no answer. "I will give you time to consider my offer, Colonel O'Neill, although I cannot give you long. Shadow is moving to implant all her Wraith and once her hybrid army is created, she will leave this world and begin her conquest of our galaxy. And who will stand against her then?"

No one replied and her gaze swept over them all until it caught and lingered on Major Carter. The major shifted under that gaze, so much like Dr. Fraiser's and so profoundly different, but did not speak.

"The Asgard are long gone," Hecate continued, "the System Lords do nothing but squabble, and the Tau'ri..." She let out a breath, a sigh of frustration. "You have seen for yourself what they have become, cowering on Arbella and afraid to lift a finger to reclaim their home world." She took a step closer to O'Neill, fixing him with her gaze. "No, Colonel. I am your only hope. I am humanity's only hope. You may not like it, but just as Janet Fraiser, Dave Dixon and Rya'c have done before you, so you will come to accept that it is the truth. Only together can we free Earth from the Wraith. There is no other choice."

CHAPTER TWO

Earth — 2098: Sting watched with disturbed feelings as the last of the humans they had brought back from Shadow's facility made their way through the trees toward the vast sprawl of the encampment below. Most of them had survived, their bodies repaired by the gift of life, though their minds would be forever damaged.

Curious. Not long ago, he would have thought nothing of their minds. What need had kine for rational thought when their purpose was only to nourish their masters? But his encounter with O'Neill had altered his perspective, given him pause. It was uncomfortable to consider how many like O'Neill he had fed upon, more uncomfortable still to consider how many he must feed upon in the years to come. He was what he was, after all, and nothing could change that.

"Something occupies your mind," Earthborn said, stepping out from the hive to stand with him. "You are troubled."

He turned to look at her, her face concealed in the shadows cast by the ruin of their hive and her thoughts clouded, less tranquil than her words. "There is much to be troubled about, my queen."

Her inner smile brushed against his mind. "A diplomat's answer," she said, and put a hand on his arm, just above his wrist, as she turned her eyes toward him. *You do not like being beholden to the humans.*

"I do not trust the humans," he replied aloud. "And yet in that we have no choice."

"O'Neill is trustworthy," Earthborn said, lowering her hand from his arm. "He will return, and, when he does, Stormfire will track him and we will find him once more."

"Stormfire..." Sting allowed the word to hang between them, the rest of his thought unfinished.

After a pause, Earthborn said, "His mind grows more disturbed, it is true, but he is still able to do what we require. And he has the human to assist him."

Sting permitted himself a slight baring of his teeth. "The human cannot—" But he stopped and thought again of O'Neill, of what he had recently learned of humans. He let out a breath. "Perhaps," he conceded. "Perhaps the human may be of more use than I had previously believed."

"He understands a great deal about Lantean technology," Earthborn reminded him, mildly. And Sting remembered that she, born of this world, had always been more curious about the humans that surrounded them than he. It was a dangerous fascination, however, given who and what they were. Humans could not be friends; at most they could be expedient allies. He was certain that O'Neill felt the same way.

"We must be cautious," he reminded Earthborn. "We cannot trust humans to act in anything but their own interest."

He felt rather than saw Earthborn's wry smile. "In that, then, we are the same. But it does not follow that an alliance of convenience is weak; both parties are invested in the mission's success."

"Yes," he agreed, "until the mission is over. And then..."

Earthborn sighed in agreement. "And then we must all watch our backs."

They stood in silence for some time longer, watching the humans they had saved slip into the camp below unchallenged. Far away, on the other side of the valley, sat the mountain on which the ship of the enemy had once rested. Sting remembered it still; the ostentatious impracticality of the thing perched up there. The parasite-gods had fallen easily to the ruthless efficiency of the Wraith. Their enslaved Jaffa had fought only for the honor of their imposter gods, but the Wraith had fought to live, to feed, and for the survival of their race. Their victory had been assured from the start.

He allowed his eyes to drift down to the sprawling camp,

humans crushed inside ready to be plucked at the whim of Shadow's blades. It left a sour taste in his throat, made his feeding hand ache. There was no pleasure in feeding on such wretched creatures without the thrill of the hunt to stir his blood to life. Shadow's corruption surely stemmed from this weakness — from the way the Wraith had fallen into sloth and gluttony.

Shadow has always been corrupt, Earthborn said into his mind, her inner voice cool against his heated thoughts. *I feel that about her.*

You have never met her, my queen. Yet Sting was aware there were connections between queens, especially those of the same family, which he could never fully understand. *But you are not mistaken. She was always the shadow to your mother's light.*

He felt Earthborn's pleasure at the compliment, but when she spoke again it was to say, "This monster she has created — a hybrid of Wraith and Goa'uld — it cannot be the product of a sound mind. No Wraith of honor would concede to such a blending. It is unthinkable."

"And yet she proposes to create an army of such creatures." He turned his eyes on her, weighing how much to say. "Such a hybrid race would have an advantage over other Wraith. Were they to return to our own galaxy the consequences would be catastrophic."

Earthborn bared her teeth, a hiss of anger. "It cannot be allowed to happen."

"It will not," Sting said, although he felt less certain than his words and hoped Earthborn could not sense the doubt in his mind. Too much of their plan rested on O'Neill, on the survival and honor of a man he might have fed upon only days ago.

"He will return," Earthborn said, proving that he could hide nothing from his queen. Once more her hand touched his, an intimate gesture. *I trust him.* Her thought was a

balm to his troubled mind, it soothed but did not eliminate his concerns. *For now,* she allowed. *I trust him for now.*

Behind them, the hive groaned — a strained settling of its decaying body. Soon it would be dead and they would have to leave.

Earthborn looked behind her, reached out a hand to touch the skin of her mother's ship. "We must make Stormfire ready to depart," she said. "He must travel with us to the Lantean city when O'Neill returns."

"With us?" Sting echoed. "No." Stepping away from her he strove to keep his tone respectful. "My queen, we cannot take Stormfire with us — he is too unpredictable. He could endanger us all. And," he hesitated briefly, but suspected she had already taken the thought from his mind, "you cannot travel there. It is too dangerous."

He felt her irritation bristle, saw it in the ripple of her shoulder blades down her back. "It is not for you to determine —"

"I am your consort," he replied, imbuing his voice with as much authority as he dared.

She turned on him, chin lifted high and lips pulled back from her teeth. "And I am your queen."

Sting offered a bow, but did not break contact with her eyes. "A queen I will not risk on a mission so uncertain. If I die, it is no loss."

"If you —"

Despite the breach of protocol, he talked on. "If we take the Lantean city from Shadow — if we defeat her — we will need a queen to lead our people home. There is no one who can do that but you."

He felt her anger and, beneath it, her fear — a silver thread of it, well hidden, but startling nonetheless. Fear for him, for the loss of him. *I will return,* he told her, rising and daring to reach for her hand. In other times and places, it would not be permitted, but here, where all that they once

were teetered on the edge of destruction, he deemed it possible. *I will return to you, my queen,* he said and touched his brow to hers. *I swear it.*

“Look, I’m not saying we have to trust her,” Jack said. “I’m saying what other choice do we have?”

Daniel ran a hand through his hair and tugged off his glasses. He was tired, his eyes itched, and there was something heavy lodged in the center of his chest making it difficult to think straight. Of all the people he’d known at the SGC, why did it have to be Janet?

He sighed, squeezed the bridge of his nose, and said, “The dubious morality of ‘exterminating’ the Wraith aside, you know it’s impossible for a host to influence a Goa’uld, right? Not while the Goa’uld is conscious. Even Sha’re...” He trailed off, letting the rest speak for itself.

They were back in the quarters Rya’c had provided for them, perched tense and uncomfortable on the ugly furniture of the living area. Hecate had given them an hour to decide; they didn’t seem to be any closer to a decision than they had been twenty minutes earlier.

From where she stood by the window, her gaze fixed on the stars outside, Sam said, “Actually, Daniel, I’m not so sure.”

He blinked at her, surprised to hear Sam, of all people, take that line. “What do you mean?”

With a slight head shake, she turned to face him, almost as if she was dismissing her words before they were spoken. “It’s just something Hecate said...” She glanced at Jack. “She talked about ‘blending’ with... with Janet.” She clamped her jaw shut for a moment, as if getting a grip on herself, and then said, “You heard that too, right, sir?”

“Yeah,” Jack sighed, slumping back into his chair. “I heard it.”

“It sounds like something a Tok’ra would say,” Sam carried on, in case Daniel hadn’t got it.

He had, of course. “She’s not Tok’ra,” he pointed out. “And, Sam, we have to assume that’s exactly what she wants us to think. She wants us to look at her and see Janet.” He rubbed a hand across his mouth, but it did nothing to scrub away the bitter memory of seeing his friend like this, or any of the memories it triggered of his wife. “We can’t let her play us.”

“I’m not,” Sam insisted, although the way her eyes darted off and back to the window made Daniel wonder how much she believed it. How could any of them say they weren’t affected by hearing a Goa’uld’s words falling from Janet Fraiser’s lips?

“Look, the question is,” Jack said, “do we go along with her plan or not?”

From the far side of the room, Teal’c said, “Her plan will not serve to end this timeline, O’Neill.”

Daniel resisted the urge to groan; they’d been over and over this. “Teal’c—”

“There’s no way to end this timeline,” Jack said, pushing to his feet and turning to face Teal’c. “Not soon, anyway. And maybe never. Teal’c, it’s a moot point. We’re here and we have to deal with what’s right in front of us.”

“He’s right,” Sam said quietly. “Teal’c, as much as I *hate* seeing Janet like this, and Rya’c, and *Earth*... we’re out of options. At least for now.” Her attention shifted from Teal’c back to Jack. “Sir, I think we should agree to the plan. For one thing, it could get us onto this Ancient hive ship.” She shot a quick look back at Teal’c. “Who knows what we might find there? Maybe their computers are powerful enough to predict a solar flare that can take us home? There’s nothing here or on Arbella that can help us.”

Jack acknowledged the point with a nod, and then turned his eyes on Daniel. “Thoughts?”

He sighed and slipped his glasses back on, blinking up at Jack. “We can’t trust Hecate,” he said. “But...” His thoughts skittered off for a moment, chasing down a new idea.

“But?” Jack prompted, impatient as ever.

“But maybe we can mitigate the risk.”

“How?”

Daniel frowned down at the floor between his feet, thinking it through. “If Hecate’s serious about freeing Earth from the Wraith — and about leaving, once it’s done — then Earth’s gonna need some help, right? In the aftermath.”

“I guess. What do you have in mind?”

“Arbella,” he said, looking up to meet Jack’s skeptical eye. “I’m serious, Jack. We have President Jones’ wife — we can take her home, like we promised. What better way to get him on our side? To get Arbella to come through the gate and take the fight to the Wraith? We know we already have friends there — they *want* to fight for Earth, Jack. They want to reclaim it.”

“Some of them,” Jack conceded. “But we have enemies there too.”

Which was true, but that didn’t mean it wasn’t worth the risk. “I’ll go,” Daniel said. “I’ll talk to Gunnison Jones, tell him what happened to his wife — explain how we’re going to drive the Wraith out. I’ll be more use there than on the hive ship, and if we can bring the Arbellan CMF through the gate to back us up, then that might just be our ace in the hole. At the very least, it’s an insurance policy against Hecate renegeing on her deal.” He spread his hands. “And if she won’t let us go, if she refuses to let us gate back to Arbella? Well, then we have to ask why she doesn’t want a human army on Earth once the Wraith are gone.”

Jack frowned, his mouth a tight line.

“It’s a good point, sir,” Sam said. “It tests Hecate’s intentions and it means we’re not just relying on her Jaffa against the Wraith. Strategically, it’s a good plan.”

“It’s a dangerous plan.”

Daniel laughed. “Jack, we’re trapped in a screwed up future, caught between the Wraith and the Goa’uld. *Everything* is dangerous.”

Jack’s mouth twitched — what served as a smile for

him — and he said, “Someone tell me we’ve been in worse situations than this and gotten out of it?”

Daniel exchanged a helpless look with Sam, but she just shrugged. Teal’c said nothing, only straightened his shoulders.

“Yeah,” Jack sighed. “That’s what I thought.” Head bowed, he stood in silence for a moment. Sam watched him carefully, as though she was about to say something, and Daniel couldn’t catch her eye. But she didn’t speak and eventually Jack looked up, encompassing them all in a single glance. “I told you before that I wasn’t gonna give orders anymore,” he said. “Where we are now... There’s no Air Force, no chain of command. No United States. Those old rules, they don’t apply anymore. They can’t.”

“Sir —”

“Carter, zip it,” he said. “My point is that if we go into the field, then we go in as SG-1. And we go in with me as your CO and with the usual chain of command in the unit; otherwise we’ll die out there. But if we do that, it’s because you *choose* to follow me. The only authority I have out here is what you give me. I’m not ordering any of you to take this mission. But me? I’m in. I’m gonna find Sting and have him take me out to the hive ship.”

“I’m coming with you, sir,” Sam said immediately.

Jack held her gaze for a moment and then nodded. “Okay.”

Daniel looked at Teal’c, stoic on the other side of the room. “I’ll go to Arbella,” he said, “rally some backup among the CMF.” He tipped his head, studying Teal’c. “I could use someone to watch my back.”

For a moment, he thought Teal’c might refuse, that his insistence on undoing this reality would be too inflexible. But then his shoulders relaxed and he gave his customary nod. “Then I shall travel with you, Daniel Jackson.”

He felt a wash of relief and smiled his thanks, not just because he’d have Teal’c with him but because Teal’c was still part of

this. SG-1 was still working together, despite what Jack thought about his right to command them, despite their conflict over how to resolve the mess they'd found themselves in. SG-1 was still a team. "Then that's it," he said, pushing himself to his feet. "That's the reply you give to Hecate, Jack. You and Sam go to the hive and bring back her test subject; Teal'c and I go to Arbella and bring back an army. And then we fight for Earth."

For a moment, they all just looked at each other. It felt as if they were right at the top of a rollercoaster, waiting to tip over the edge with gravity taking hold and no way back.

Into the tense silence, Jack said, "Well gang, looks like we're splitting up to search the creepy haunted mansion. What could possibly go wrong?"

Arbella — 2098: It was with a practiced eye that Karin Yuma spooned leaves into the earthenware pot. She plucked the kettle from the stove at just the right moment before the water boiled, to avoid scalding the leaves, and added the precise amount to the teapot. She would let it infuse for two minutes exactly before pouring the brew into her cup. Then she would empty it down the drain and repeat the process.

She never drank the tea she made — the leaves that were grown in the peaty soil to the south of Laketown had a harsh and bitter taste — but the routine focused her mind, sharpening her thoughts. She would need a keen edge to maintain effective control of the current situation.

The morning had gone well. Or rather, it had gone as she'd anticipated. Careful planning, vigilance and analysis of all eventualities were the key to a satisfactory outcome. The knock at her office door was yet another expected eventuality.

"Come in, Jed."

There was a pause before the door opened to reveal Jed Hayden. "How did you — ?"

"Sit down."

The young officer was hesitant as he entered the room and

sat in the chair opposite. Yuma had gotten rid of her office desk long ago, finding it more effective to note a person's body language without any visual hindrance — and for them to note hers. She crossed her legs and waited for Hayden to stop fidgeting. Then she smiled and inclined her head, the indication that he should speak, though she knew why he was here.

He took a breath, as if readying himself to talk, but then noticed the steaming teapot on the table. “Oh, may I have some?”

Yuma's patience began to wear thin. “No.”

Hayden frowned and cleared his throat. “Alright. What about the president?”

“I'm sure he has his own tea.”

“That's not... You know that's not what I mean.”

“Speak your mind, Officer. I'm busy and you didn't make an appointment.”

“What did Bailey have to say?”

“First of all, that was classified and pertaining to planetary security. Secondly, I'm sure you know as well as I did what she had to say from where you were listening by the door.”

Hayden tugged at his collar and sat forward in his chair. “Okay, if we're cutting the crap, Yuma, then I'll spell it out. What are you going to do about SG-1?”

“You're awfully quick to believe it's actually them.”

“Well, you believe it's them, so that's good enough for me. So what are you going to do about them? They're dangerous.”

Yuma almost smiled. Jed Hayden had a lot to learn about keeping his composure, but he could read a situation well. It was one of the reasons she had him working for her. “Not so dangerous as you might think.”

His eyebrows shot up. “Are you kidding me? Most of the CMF think they're returned messiahs. You've got more eyes than me in town, Yuma. You must know the buzz. You've got the likes of Stan Jefferson ready to lead a charge on Earth if Jack O'Neill gave the word. With Roz Bailey on their side, that sort

of dissent could blow up quickly. Bailey and Jones have been friends for a long time, and if she has the ear of the president... Well, if that's not dangerous then I don't know what is."

Yuma waited for him to finish, then stared at him until he fell back in his seat and looked away. "Jed, I'm going to ask you a question and I want you to answer me as honestly as possible. That ok?" Hayden shrugged his agreement. "Alright then... Do you think I came through the gate yesterday?"

"What? I don't —"

"It's quite simple. I asked you if you thought I came through the gate yesterday. Because you clearly assume I have no understanding of how things work on my planet."

"I didn't —"

"I'm well aware of the talk in Laketown and I have a full understanding of how volatile the situation could be if not controlled. But this thing will only blow if there's a spark to light the fuse. Do you know what that spark would be?"

"Of course. SG-1."

"That's right, Jed. SG-1. And they're not here anymore. Do you honestly think I'd have allowed Bailey's mission to rescue Lana Jones to go ahead if I'd thought there was any possibility of success?" She didn't have to explain her plan, of course, but Hayden was antsy, and nervous people often made mistakes. He needed to know that all that was required was a cool head here. "SG-1 will fail, they won't come back, and Jefferson, Kiowa and the rest of their crew will finally see firsthand what the history books said all along — SG-1 are cowards who run."

Hayden scratched the back of his neck and shook his head. "But it's Jones's wife. It's personal for him. Won't he be willing to risk more?"

It wasn't that Hayden made a bad point. Indeed, if Gunnison Jones did find that his wife was alive and well, and that Jack O'Neill's people were the ones who'd rescued her, then much of what Yuma had worked for would be disrupted. She wasn't an idealist by any means, but the Arbellan way of life was one

that had afforded her many opportunities, and she would not allow external factors to destroy it. Lucky then, that this was a consideration she'd already taken into account.

"Exactly. It's his wife. And when he realizes that the hope Bailey offered him was worthless, what do you think will happen to his opinion of the good general?"

Hayden nodded, but then said, "What if they succeed?"

"Jed, Earth is occupied by the Wraith. SG-1 is going up against an enemy that made even the Goa'uld turn tail. Do you honestly think they'll win?"

He returned her gaze. "They said they did before." There was silence in which Yuma was almost certain she betrayed nothing of that small doubt inside that had already said the same thing.

The radio at Hayden's hip crackled into life suddenly and he jumped, pulling it free and toggling it on. "This is Hayden, go ahead." A burst of static was the only reply. "Say again?" This time something that sounded like words could be heard through the noise. With a sigh, Hayden said, "I'll have to go outside. Nothing ever gets through these walls."

"Don't let me detain you," replied Yuma as he left the room. She walked to the small stove to boil more water, but just as she was emptying the old tea from the pot, footsteps pounded up the stairs and the Hayden burst back into the office, his expression stricken.

"It's the gate room. They've had contact from Hecate's ship. It's SG-1 and they've found Lana Jones."