

Part 6. In which musical training proves useful

15.....season of mists....

The call to the briefing room next morning was almost a relief.

Vlad and Adam were still getting to grips with Emma's bombshell - only three weeks from explosion point.

Sharon was still breathing - just - after a sultry weekend with Teal'c.

Ron had been to see his folks, and had remembered why he'd left home in the first place.

Bob had enjoyed an ordinary, family-oriented few days. He *thoroughly* enjoyed them when they were few and far between, but felt stifled by too much domesticity and the strain of keeping his work secret.

So they all turned to General Hammond with genuine smiles of welcome.

Which faded a little as SG1 followed him in.

The two teams were to 'baby-sit' (Jack's term) a small group of biologists who wanted to explore a planet found recently and known to be covered in dense vegetation.

"Not trees," Hammond said, forestalling comments.

The MALP had shown vines, shrubs and fleshy plants that cried out for investigation. If the Amazon basin held medical secrets beyond their dreams, what might they find here?

"And B2Z-430 is so much more accessible than most of the Amazon," said Sam.

The biologists in question were introduced. Well, reintroduced so far as some of them were concerned. Hammond had asked Dr. Bill Lee to put a team together. Lee had worked with SG1 in the past, and so had Lieutenant Menard, picked for his military standing as much as his scientific background.

"The group will be taking samples and making notes," Bill told them. "The serious research will be done on earth, later."

The final selection had acknowledged the need to involve international partners. Dr. Jean-Pierre De Bretenoux had never been off world but was a biologist of some repute. His inclusion would please the French and add scientific credibility to the mission.

He was also a complete surprise. Taller than Teal'c, and slightly broader, he was nobody's stereotype of a Frenchman, not least because of his satiny black skin. It also appeared that he spoke perfect English, with what sounded like an English accent to everyone except Adam.

"West Indies?" Adam hazarded a guess.

"Martinique," he confirmed and added when they all stared, "It's a Departement of France, you know. We even use the euro. And I have an EEC passport."

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After the briefing, in which Hammond had placed O'Neill in overall charge, the teams, one team for the time being, got ready to depart. The scientists had what Jack considered to be too much equipment but Hammond overruled him. Sam, excited to be with a scientific group, was firing questions at both the men she knew. Teal'c looked bemused and Jonas was, as usual, scurrying around, trying to endear himself to everyone, like an outsize puppy.

"Have you worked with them before?" Adam was less than sure of his team's past history. Vlad shook his head.

"Only Teal'c, in weapons training," he said. "He is saying they good. Their colonel is special, I think."

"Well, we'll see," said Adam. He brushed his hand surreptitiously against Vlad's and they grinned at each other.

"Not as special as you, St. George." Vlad carried on fastening his boots.

Bob liked Jack. They had a lot in common and usually saw eye to eye. He didn't mind deferring to him on this mission - someone had to be in control. Jack wasn't fond of the Russians but Vlad might change his mind. The bigger group would give Ron some much-needed experience. As for Sharon and Teal'c - their new relationship hadn't exactly escaped his notice. He just hoped it would stay under wraps - perhaps not the best metaphor - whilst off world. Adam was harder to assess. Bob liked the quiet Englishman, his weapons ability and his unassuming demeanour. He wasn't sure how he'd gel with SG1 but then remembered he already knew most of them socially. If Teal'c could be pried away from Sharon he'd probably play diplomat - blend them all into a true team. If that didn't happen, it would be Jack's responsibility, and for once, Bob could enjoy a mission with a sense of freedom. He ignored the scientists. He would baby-sit because SGC asked him to. They were Jack's worry.

Jack was not at all worried. His SG1 was good enough to take on anything the universe could throw at them - they'd proved that time and time again. The backroom boffins would no doubt be trying in every sense but he trusted himself and Bob Summerfield to keep them under control. He wasn't worried about Teal'c and Sharon, either. In fact he was mildly pleased for his friend. He was still sizing up Vlad and Adam as they headed for the gate room. Europeans. A closed book. Probably as alien as the Asgard, but despite a tendency to distrust Russians, he'd keep an open mind.

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"They didn't tell us it was a sauna." O'Neill sounded personally affronted. Even Jean-Pierre, P'tit Pierre to his friends at home, on account of his height, and Johnny to his new friends in USA, was taken by surprise.

"Hotter than the jungle in the rainy season," he said. "Let's hope there are no snakes."

"Goa'uld?" Jack automatically went on the alert and Jean laughed.

"No, the kind that live in trees and leaf litter. But they won't usually attack you if you don't attack them. And the MALP saw no signs of anything big so I think we can rule out boas."

The ground steamed. Mist coiled round the incredibly green greenery. Really, there wasn't any other way to describe it. Green. Green that made the usual trees look like a desert. Green that attacked and seduced and...Green that was hot. Sauna hot. Jungle hot. Certainly, thought Adam, enough green to keep the scientists happy for a while. And enough, thought Jack, to drive the military to despair, trying to see through the mists and branches.

One problem was that plantland started at the gate. No mid-distance view to prepare them. No view at all. And no clear ground. No-one wanted to camp in the open - open being a debatable term. Should they use the machetes they'd brought? Perhaps not yet. When Summerfield suggested weaving nests or hammocks in the vines, he was firmly shouted down, by everyone.

"Hey! Over here!"

It was Jonas, with Ron in tow, who found the rocks. They formed a gully, just to the right of the gate. Although it was filled with greenery, so much so that it had not been immediately visible, there were overhangs that in places created an illusion of caves, mossy but with space to move. The explorers settled into one of these with sighs of relief.

They were able to erect tents and change their clothes. The MALP had shown heat, so they'd come in tropical kit. Now they took off as much as possible, retaining belts and pockets to carry water flasks and weapons. After a brief rest, some long drinks, and a liberal coating of anti-bug spray all round, they began their mission tasks. The scientists would direct the others to plants of interest and everyone could collect samples.

"Don't forget to wear gloves." Bill was firm, despite the groans. "No rashes or reactions if possible."

At least two of the military would stay on watch at all times and nobody was to go out of Jack's hearing. Originally, he said sight, then realised this wasn't an option. Sound was strangely muffled in their new green world but it did carry, and he thought he could rely on them to stay close.

Bill took Sam and Jonas as his assistants. Teal'c and Sharon followed Jean-Pierre. That left Adam and Vlad helping Joe Menard while Ron was assigned to finish unpacking and straightening out the camp. Jack and Bob took the first watch.

When they met again after an hour, and gave their reports, Bill was guardedly enthusiastic. There was an enormous variety of plant life, some of it superficially similar to earth forms and some totally unclassifiable. They had started to collect and label some of everything. Leaves, petals, seeds and stem scrapings went into sealed containers. Photographs of the entire plant or at least the part they could see, together with temporary names based on their initial reactions, accompanied the samples. Joe reminded them that sometimes, on earth, permanent names were given based on these early labels.

"Just think," said Sam, "Rosa Samantha. That has a good ring."

"There's a clematis with a vaguely Jackish name, already," Jack offered, earning himself some strange looks.

Teal'c and Jonas, at this point, had to have the whole system of plant classification and the naming of new specimens explained, which took some time, and quite a lot of amusement.

Until Ron said, "I wonder what they call themselves," and blushed wildly when everyone stared. He explained that while he was unpacking, alone, or at least not talking to anyone, he'd felt the greenery crowding him and willing him to understand....something.

"I know it's fanciful," he said, "But I'm not a fanciful person, and it's what I truly felt." Vlad, however, reminded him of the turtle and the conversation broke up in laughter.

They ate, as usual, from ration packs. Nobody was willing to clear the local vegetables as edible. Bob had brought some cards and got Jack, Bill and Joe to join him. Adam and Vlad were on guard duty. The others chatted or rested, sipping coffee that tasted better than it looked. Everything reflected green.

Nothing happened. Slight rustles in the leaves turned out to be slow green insects, large clumsy versions of shield bugs. They showed no interest in the alien group and shambled off when a torch beam hit them. Humming sounds reminded Vlad and Adam unpleasantly of arrows, but were identified as coming from bat-like creatures, equally shy of the light. When Teal'c backed up Ron's 'fancy', they all laughed uncomfortably. But nobody agreed or disagreed.

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Sharon was sharing a tent with Sam. It wasn't a choice, just the result of there being only two women on the expedition. They took first watch of the night, an arbitrary night, based on earth time. Sharon wished she could be with Teal'c. An unrealistic wish. But still . . . After two uneventful hours they woke Teal'c and Joe. The lieutenant would take his share of military duty unless it conflicted with his scientific mission. The 'all's well' report was delivered in a whisper and the women sought their sleeping bags gratefully. Heat is tiring.

Sam had meant to question Sharon about her affair. Like Jack, she was pleased for Teal'c, but wanted to get to know Sharon better, make sure she was the right girlfriend for 'their' alien. But before she could formulate a question, she was asleep. Girl talk would have to wait.

Sharon was tired but her thoughts were on a treadmill. The weekend. Teal'c's iron arms around her. Endearments in an unknown language. A sense of being protected, watched, wanted.

She shivered, an odd sensation in the heat. Someone *was* watching her. Sam's eyes were closed. Maybe the guard had passed the tent. Teal'c was on guard. Teal'c. The weekend. She dozed, waking occasionally in the half light, sipping from her water bottle, day dreaming herself back to sleep. Teal'c. His arms. A sense of being wanted. . .

A sound like a zipper opening brought her fully awake and sitting. There was no one at the tent door but a long rent in the roof showed the source of the sound. A branch swayed near, thorns big as thumbs scratching on the fabric. The sense, again, of being watched.

Then the welcome voices of Ron and Jonas waking the two colonels for the pre-breakfast stint. Sharon lay back. Sleep was gone but she rested, secure in the knowledge that people were indeed watching over her. Her thoughts drifted between Teal'c and the mission. Thoroughly awake, she could consider both with happiness and interest.

The sense of security was breached suddenly.

Sam woke, shaking her head and grunting something unintelligible. The shakes grew wilder and Sharon couldn't get any sense out of her companion. Sam pawed at her right ear and moaned. "It's marching in hobnailed boots," she said. She was adamant that it wasn't a dream. There really was something in her ear. Walking. She could hear it. Feel it. She wanted it *out*. *Now*.

Sharon went for help. She didn't feel up to calming and investigating at the same time. Teal'c was with them in seconds, torch in hand. He shone it in Sam's ear, while Sharon held her hand and made inane but soothing remarks. "There, there," and, "It'll be OK." After a moment Teal'c and Sharon stared in disbelief as one of the shield bugs, a baby, judging by its size, poked its head out of Sam's ear, saw the light, almost retreated, then scuttled out and down, beneath the sleeping bag and out of sight. Teal'c managed to say something bracing, to stop both women being sick, then got out of the tent taking deep breaths himself. Sam dressed, shaking everything as she picked it up. The little bug was under one of her boots. Sharon flicked it out of the doorway and they finished getting ready. The tear in the roof had evidently let the bug in. Sharon glared at the thorns and felt, stupidly, as though they glared back.

The others were suitably impressed by Sam's bravery, Sharon's quick thinking, and Teal'c's resourcefulness. Although now that it was all over, the event gave rise to some jokes.

"You are talking to your passenger? Asking for its ticket?" Vlad's joke might have been in poor taste but it relieved the tension. Bob said something weak about bees in the bonnet. Adam managed to stop himself relating English stories about earwigs. No-one had anything else to report. Adam and Vlad had shared a larger tent with Jack and Bob, and Adam wished his night had been less uneventful. However, this was work. The women's tent was mended and everyone made a mental note to check for 'creepy crawlies'. Sharon and Sam moved their tent slightly further from the thorns but space was limited and it was probably a waste of time.

Bill allotted the day's tasks and handed out equipment. He was careful to change the partnerships. Teal'c had been frowning at Jean-Pierre after their work together and it seemed prudent to put Sharon in a team away from the biologist. Johnny had a tendency to flirt with anyone available and might not have realised that Sharon wasn't. Available. Teal'c might feel better if he stayed by her side. The alien wasn't likely to make a fuss but it wouldn't hurt to be careful. Both colonels joined Jean-Pierre and Sharon went with Joe and Teal'c. Adam and Vlad were on duty.

They enjoyed being together, not speaking, but glancing occasionally. Their involvement wouldn't interfere with their watch but their closeness added piquancy to the work detail. Adam frowned when he realised he could feel eyes on him permanently. Vlad had his back to him at times. The others were concentrating on their sampling and labelling tasks. The bats? The bugs? Ron's 'presence' in the greenery? He shrugged and smiled at Vlad who was coming back towards him.

By lunch time, they had all felt the watching. All afternoon it grew stronger, but there was nothing to see, to find. Ron and Sharon described a yearning that Jack scoffed at. Vlad and Jean-Pierre both recalled explorers in wild places, the steppes or the jungle, being convinced that they were under surveillance, but that was after weeks, or at least days, usually of solitude. The only thing they could do was ensure nobody was ever alone. Even when they needed to relieve themselves they must stay together. Sharon and Sam were of course partnered. So the groupings switched again, but otherwise the day wore on without incident.

"We're joining Jean-Pierre and Ron. There's room in their tent." Sam told Jack rather than asking. Jack approved. Teal'c was back in glower mode but couldn't quite bring himself to disrupt the entire sleeping plan. Not that he had much intention of sleeping. Not if Sharon was in danger. Or any member of his team. He and Joe took first watch.

Adam and Vlad managed a goodnight kiss before Jack and Bob came to bed. Adam sighed. Another uneventful night lay ahead.