

## **SGX 27 Giving Thanks**

The turkey gobbled.. Maybe that was the only sound a turkey throat could produce. A couple of white birds, possibly geese or the equivalent, honked to each other and rushed off. Under different circumstances it could have been amusing to watch them waddle quickly away.

They soon returned, carrying between them a basket woven crudely from some broad leaved grass, and put it in front of the turkey. He peered into it and then pushed it with his beak towards the visitors. It contained some kind of grain.

‘Dinner time again,’ Sharon muttered. The others didn’t answer but they all got out their rations. Better to offend the turkey by refusing the offering than die of some kind of food poisoning a long way from home. When they got out their water canteens and Adam started to share his with Vlad, a starling flew down and returned Vlad’s own flask. He hesitated. Then he decided that water was water. The planet had breathable air and apparently earth type plants and birds. They would have to be cautious about food but the water should be safe. Assuming they hadn’t simply returned his original earth water. He thought not. This water smelled fresh and pure, unlike the filtered denatured liquid they carried with them. Adam reached out a warning hand as Vlad drank then realised he was too late. Whatever the flask contained, Vlad now contained it too. He would just have to hope.

The birds removed the grain basket and stared at their guests, or prisoners. They seemed puzzled, as if they didn’t know what to do with these visitors who wouldn’t eat with them. Then the turkey appeared to shrug and all the birds settled, sitting on the ground, simply watching the team eat. Although he knew that the chicken flavoured rice dish in his plastic container had never been anywhere near a real chicken, Adam felt obscurely guilty and could see Ron and Sharon shared his feelings. Vlad and Bob ate stoically, apparently unconcerned.

Then a large hawk of some kind swooped and a wren near Sharon was suddenly limp in its talons. It didn’t fly off with its prey as an earth hawk would have done, but laid it at the feet of the turkey, who, to their amazement, began to eat. So much for the likeness to earth birds. It went so far and no further. And Adam’s guilt over the ersatz chicken disappeared at once.

When they had eaten, the turkey beckoned with his head, his wattles swinging. Curious rather than alarmed, they followed him beyond the small copse and found themselves looking at a low sandstone cliff or wall. It was probably natural in origin, but only in origin. The entire length of the wall had been carved with pictures.

The birds stood back and let them look at their leisure. It was, apparently, a history. A kind of Bayeux Tapestry in stone, Adam thought, hysteria threatening to take over his already stressed mind. Vlad seemed to realise how his lover was reacting

and steadied him with an arm round his shoulders, careless of their companions. Adam was grateful and leaned in close. There were altogether too many birds.

The pictures showed a slow social development. The first drawings were of birds in earth style nests and groupings. Gradually, the groupings changed so that geese mixed with swans, wrens with parrots and so on. There were always small sacrifices but no wholesale slaughter. Apparently the little birds accepted the slight risk of death in exchange for the general social benefits. At least, that was how the travellers read it. Future investigators might find greater insights.

The birds seemed to have reached a level roughly equivalent to the first hunter gatherer tribes on earth. They harvested wild grains and fruits, stored them against seasonal weather changes, and took part in hunting expeditions, bringing down animals that looked like rats or squirrels. There was no attempt to farm in any meaningful way, though patches of grain had sprung up in places where the gatherers had dropped or spilled their cargo. The basket weaving must be an extension of nest building. Some of the birds in the carvings were seen offering one of their eggs to bigger birds. A protection racket? Or an agreed means of controlling predation?

Then Sharon gasped. She had reached a section of carvings that showed humanoid visitors. From the addition of the gate, and the ships drawn in the background it was probable the 'humans' were Goa'uld. A few scenes showed them trying to mine something and perhaps trying to coerce the birds into helping. The pictures were not clear, to non-avian intelligence. At any rate, the birds had not liked them. Or perhaps had liked them too much. Liked their symbiotes. A scene showed the birds holding down the Goa'uld and pecking at their chests, removing and swallowing the worms they found. No surprises then, about the abandoned Stargate. Any survivors must have decided that whatever this planet held was not worth the risk.

The turkey noticed their interest and stepped close to Ron. He sniffed and shook his head, wattles swinging again. Then he tapped the picture with a leathery hand and sniffed again, this time in unconcealed disgust. He hurried them past the next few scenes and bent to pick up a stone lying near the wall. It was a flint, almost certainly brought from a distance, and deliberately flaked or otherwise sharpened. Carefully, looking frequently at his guests, he drew them.

On the stone, they saw themselves emerge from the gate, collect samples, arrive at the copse and then at the wall.

The turkey, and his goose guards, or whatever they were, looked expectantly at them, and gobbled. He offered the flint to Bob and then the geese used their large webbed feet to clear a patch of flat stone below the wall.

Bob bit his lip. Skill as a pavement artist had never been written into the job specifications. A quick interrogation suggested Vlad as their most likely artist. He

did his best, showing them leaving SGC and travelling through the gate, He showed them travelling back and the scientists investigating the leaves they took. He drew shipments of grain (depicted as brimming baskets), given in exchange for more leaves. He showed, or tried to show, ill people being made well by ingesting the leaves, a rather brief version of what would actually happen, to be sure but nonetheless true. And most important he sketched the Goa'uld and his people's fight to keep them away from their own planet and others.

A rapid gobbling and chirping and suddenly they had a basket of mixed leaves, presented by one of the geese, a couple of blackbirds looking anxious and hopeful in the background. It was amazing how quickly they had come to recognise expressions on bird faces.

Bob was trying his radio again, with no results, and looking at his watch. He was frowning and told the others they were going to have to hope SG1 weren't the rescue team. Teal'c would not fare well here. But neither would any team that came in shooting first and asking questions later.

Vlad hastily scribbled a picture that should let the turkey know what was in store and his art must have been adequate. A gobble set off a cacophony of calls, fading into the distance. Within minutes four huge condors appeared, holding a basket between them. Some gestures and sounds suggested that this was transport to the gate. The trouble was, there was only room for two. Bob had no intention of leaving without the others, and so the rest of them drew straws. Pebbles, rather, picked for their sizes. Adam and Vlad were to go to the gate – by air.

Before they set off the turkey detained them with a peremptory wing gesture. A couple of finches flew to them and for a dreadful moment they thought they were to be attacked after all. But it seemed the birds wanted some of their hair. Once they had a sample of each they wove it so rapidly that their beaks and fingers blurred. The result was a ribbon, short and striped, a bit like the ribbons worn by military medal holders back on earth. It was carefully hung on a vine chain and lowered round the turkey's neck. Then an exquisite nest, threaded with multicoloured feathers was presented to the team. Sharon accepted it, with a murmur of delight that seemed to satisfy their hosts. The ceremony, if that was what it was, ended when one of the condors stamped his foot; it was time for Adam and Vlad to go.

As soon as they were settled in the basket the eagles took to the air. Vertical take off. High speed. Adam felt his stomach try to stay on the ground and grabbed Vlad in a momentary panic. Vlad, more used to strange flight manoeuvres, just held him tightly. After a few minutes the Russian felt able to peer over the side. The countryside was speeding below them. He considered telling Adam to look at the view then thought better of it. Nausea in a small open basket at this speed would be unpleasant. He stroked Adam's forehead and tried to ignore his own nerves about the inevitable landing. He suspected it would be rough.

It was, but it was bearable, and once they had stopped, Adam's face turned from chalk white to merely pale and they stepped out near the Stargate. Just in time. SG1

were coming through and Vlad had to shout to make them understand that they were OK, that the birds were strange rather than hostile and that Teal'c must turn back. At once. Sam, too, might be at risk, if the birds smelled her Tok'ra links.

So Jack waved his team back to the safety of the gate threshold and allowed Vlad to bring him up to date. By the time he was thoroughly acquainted with the facts another basket arrived, this time with all the other three on board. Sharon and Ron looked about as sick as Adam but Somerfield was euphoric about the ride, calming down when he saw O'Neill but still grinning like a child at a fair. The condors who had brought them all stood around silent; Jack got a mild taste of how SGX had felt when they first arrived.

Only a mild one, because they were ready to leave. They bowed to their carriers and stepped up to the gate. Others would come. The planet would bear investigation and the birds would probably help. As well as his pack, Adam carried the basket of leaves. Sharon cradled the feather nest. Gifts for earth.

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A couple of weeks later, Bob invited Vlad and Adam to his home for Thanksgiving. He was concerned that his foreign team members might miss out on the nationwide celebrations. He needn't have worried – Sharon had organised all the foreign staff she knew into a party and had found a restaurant that would open and provide them with a traditional meal. But Vlad and Adam felt obliged to accept their leader's invitation.

Martha had cooked a perfect meal. She was unable to understand why her husband and his colleagues were less than enthusiastic about turkey, and why, when they had eaten so frugally during the first course, the young men claimed to have no appetite left for pumpkin pie. But they thanked her very sincerely, helped to clear away and left at a reasonable time, giving her the rest of the evening with her husband so she had no complaints.

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Vlad and Adam were home and together.

'Thanksgiving.' Vlad rolled the word round his mouth. 'Am thankful for you, English. Whatever is happen next year, am thankful for you.'

Adam just kissed him and pulled him into the bedroom. He didn't want to know about premonitions and possibilities, He just wanted his Russian around him, inside him and with him all night; their very own thanksgiving ceremony.