

SGX: Worlds of Difference.

Part 2. In which our hero broadens his horizons

3. With your shield or on it

Adam was in the gateroom, discussing possible reasons for the slow opening and closure of the iris. He was trying to get the regular staff to indulge in a little lateral thinking. Solving the problem was definitely going to need some new approaches.

So he was on the front line when two of SG14 came barrelling through, yelling, followed by a wild looking bunch of what could only be aliens (taller, longer-armed, bluer-eyed and redder-haired than any human ever). They were carrying weapons that seemed to be daggers, in each of their huge hands. One of the aliens was carrying what appeared to be a bundle of rags, and it was only when he heard someone shouting, "Don't shoot! For God's sake don't shoot!" that he realised the burden was in fact one of the team. And that left a fourth on the other side of the iris, making closure an academic issue.

Like Sergeant Siler, he'd rushed to help, despite the fact that as a civilian it was emphatically not his job. But the airforce seemed paralysed when deprived of firepower and reflex caught Adam unawares. There was a pole of some sort leaning against a wall - a piece of scaffolding by the look of it and he grabbed without thinking. It was the only pole around so he had no-one fighting at his side. He missed the square, the tortoise composed of locked shields held overhead, but his moves were sure and fluent. The pole twisted and hit, twisted and hit again, jabbed, feinted and swept in a wide arc round the enemy feet. Adam was getting into his stride.

One opponent left standing; the one carrying the SG team member. They circled each other warily. The alien was holding only a single dagger, but Adam couldn't risk getting too close. Daggers could be used as throwing weapons as well as striking ones. The pole was worryingly blunt. Even a plastic-tipped spear would have been better than this. And what about the others? Unlike twenty-first century "barbarians" they wouldn't stay down when hit. And he couldn't guarantee having disabled them all. Why was no one helping? Where was everybody?

For him everything had happened in slow motion, but for the onlookers the fight had been breathtakingly fast. Then they saw the shift of his features as he came to a decision. The alien fell forward, its knees buckling at the whack of the pole, but as it fell, the dagger reached and Adam's hand was pinned swiftly to the floor, taking him down with it. The hostage rolled, onto his rescuer, and the pair lay in an untidy heap by the bottom of the ramp.

At which point Adam saw stars and passed out.

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Vlad and Niki came to visit him in the infirmary and filled in the rest of the story. All down, none dead, and the prisoners were talking. SG14 had unwittingly offended some local custom. One of them had stepped into a place of worship wearing shoes. The elders had demanded his arrest and trial for blasphemy, and the team had learnt that the punishment for blasphemy was genital mutilation. Attempts to talk had broken down. Hence the fight and the chase. The hostage would have joined his team-mate at the trial.

The aliens were being persuaded to send one of their number home to release the prisoner - a mixture of diplomatic skill and the offer of medical know-how seemed to be working. Meanwhile, one of them had explained Adam's collapse. The daggers were poisoned.

However, the poison was easily identified and an antidote had been administered. That and the initial slash explained the immobility of Adam's right hand under a mound of dressings. Which was good to know. Equally good to know was that his new friends were highly impressed with his fighting skills, as was General Hammond, who was busy raking over the coals all the airforce personnel who hadn't gone to his aid.

"You are beserker, I think, Brit," said Niki, his eyes twinkling. Adam grinned, self-conscious but flattered. Vlad said nothing, just looked at him as though he hadn't seen him before, as though he was some new species, like the aliens he'd fought.

"But our drinks tonight are stopped," said Niki. He frowned and looked at Vlad. "Cancelled," said Vlad. "Yes, cancelled," amended Niki. "The lady doctor, she do not let you to drink." He looked sad for a moment then brightened. "We shall drink for you, my friend. We shall sacrifice ourselves and have your share of the vodka, yes?" Adam felt almost relieved. He'd never liked vodka, but he had looked forward to the evening. Now it would be spent lying still, doing nothing, and getting very, very bored. But not drunk.

His next visitor was General Hammond, who had heard he was conscious. He praised and scolded in equal measures. It had been, of course, a heroic deed. And Adam was a brilliant fighter. But civilians were not supposed to rush to the rescue. They were supposed to need rescuing, or cheer on the rescuers, but taking up arms? Or scaffold poles in this case? Hardly! But of course no one could deny that Adam had saved lives - and possibly Sergeant Hooper's balls.....and how did Adam come to be able to knock out six aliens with a scaffold pole anyway?

Adam explained, and the general was fascinated to hear about the Roman fighting techniques, and even more fascinated by the description of Hadrian's Wall. He wanted to hear all about Vindolanda, where the visitor could wander through a simulacrum of a Roman camp, complete with sounds and moving figures. He listened to the tales of high, windswept Housesteads, where the soldiers had patrolled the last outpost of the Empire under a foreign sky. And he was amazed at the American connection. He went away shaking his head. "Nashville," Adam heard him mutter. "Nashville."

Sharon brought Teal'c with her and the big man wanted to talk seriously about fighting and poles and strategies. Adam promised to train with him when he was pronounced fit, provided they could train in the open air. Sharon said she'd come and referee, but the looks Adam and Teal'c gave her stopped that idea in its infancy.

"This is not a game, Sharon," Teal'c admonished, and Adam concurred. "Some knocks will be inevitable if we are to hone our skills," added the Jaffa. "But our poles will not be poisoned," he finished, and with that, Sharon had to be satisfied.

Dr. Fraiser was definitely **not** satisfied. Her patient needed rest and he wasn't getting it. She swept the visitors out like a hen herding chicks, except that she was the tiny chick beside the statuesque Sharon and the big alien. They went, however, without a murmur.

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Adam was allowed back to work the following day, with his hand in a sling contraption that kept getting in the way. Keyboards didn't favour one handed operators and the military computers didn't

seem to have reached voice recognition yet. He knew his guitar would be out of action for at least a week, too, and as for getting to a re-enactment, forget it.

Sharon tried to cheer him up with a description of the nearest shopping mall. Vlad and Niki, thoroughly hung over, explained just how much vodka they'd been forced to consume on his behalf, Niki in particular. And General Hammond suggested he might like to join in some military training sessions when he was better - as an instructor as well as a trainee. He grunted approval of the planned sessions with Teal'c. And Teal'c introduced him to the rest of SG1, Teal'c's team.

He instinctively liked Colonel O'Neill and felt instant admiration for Major Carter and her Renaissance Man (or rather Woman) grasp of so many disparate skills. Jonas didn't make any impression on him at all, and even the knowledge that here was another alien failed to spark any interest. The man was obviously competent, but equally obviously bland, lacking the kind of personality that made Jack and Sam stand out from the crowd. They were all friendly. They all alternately joshed him and praised him for his feat with the pole, and they all seemed likely to become friends. Another new situation for Adam Fenwick.

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Sunday.....

" Dear Emma,
I have settled in and feel quite at home. A colleague took three of us new guys on a shopping trip to what they call a mall, to buy stuff for our flats. The flats are provided with basic furnishings"

(a dedicated minimalist would be ashamed)

"and I have bought some cushions and pictures to cheer the place up."

(two huge floor cushions to give a choice of seating other than the couch, and a set of prints of Antarctica or somewhere and a sort of still life with pebbles and seaweed)

"The mall was a bit like the Gateshead Metro Centre but not as big and not, thank goodness, as crowded. You would have liked it. I have had a good first week, with no problems,"

(apart from seven-foot aliens poisoning my hand, that is...but that, of course, is an official secret)

" and last night a couple of the people I work with came round for a drink."

(It was a totally riotous party and he had woken up this morning lying across Niki, who was in turn sprawled out on one of the cushions. He'd thought his legs might be missing but it turned out Vlad was stretched across them and was heavier than he looked. Jack had commandeered the couch and Sam was curled up on the other cushion. Jonas appeared to have taken possession of his bed. No one else was in evidence. His own alcoholic preferences - Belgian lager or Chardonnay- did not seem to have been catered for, judging by the empties in the kitchen, so he wasn't sure why his head was thumping and spinning. Could they *really* have drunk that much vodka?)

" I shall ring Mum tonight but really I haven't any news. Except that I'm fine"

(now!)

"Love, Adam

P.S. Someone gave me another picture as a house-warming present, so the walls are quite full."

He pressed send and looked across at the picture in question. Vlad had handed him a huge package and muttered something about it suiting the occasion. "Is you, Brit," he had said. Then he and Niki in turn had kissed him on both cheeks, which must be a continental custom - like footballers and Frenchmen. It was a large framed poster of an Eastern Orthodox Icon, all golds and rich colours. St. George, presumably. A young knight in mediaeval armour, blonde hair shining (where was his helmet?) held a long silver pole beneath which crouched a sulky oriental dragon, all red scales and green claws. It now graced the wall opposite the couch and Adam decided that he liked it - very much.