

#### **4. HERE BE DRAGONS**

Colonel Somerfield reviewed his team. The Russian major, hung over as usual, slouched in a totally un-American attitude beside Sergeant Vaughan, whose heavy-lidded eyes suggested she, too, had enjoyed the weekend. Airman Potts stood smartly to attention, his uniform pressed and clean, his eyes vacant but glowing. Airman Potts enjoyed inspections, his one chance to shine. Bob Somerfield sighed. As a well brought up Baptist from a conventional and serious minded farming family, he knew he ought to disapprove of Vlad and Sharon and give praise to Ron Potts. But he also knew that when the chips were down he'd rather have the dissolute major and the lively sergeant beside him any day. How Airman Potts had been chosen for a Stargate team was beyond him, but he had, and he was in *his* team and they would all have to make the best of it. Jack O'Neill had suggested leaving him behind somewhere, by accident, although Jack would have been the first to go back for him. Teal'c had offered to help train him but had given up in baffled bemusement. Bob sometimes thought Potts was a Pentagon plant, sent to spy on the Russian. Maybe he'd had extensive training in acting dim. But as the weeks went by, this theory held less appeal and Somerfield realised Potts was simply a cross he had to bear.

Vlad was talking about a party they'd been to - some house warming affair for a civilian. Sharon's eyes sparkled as she turned to her colleague.

"That picture you gave him was great! Did he like it? Has he hung it up yet?"

"Yes, in the lounge. Is looking good - a portrait of Adam, I am thinking. With a scaffold pole, yes?"

"Well, those guys didn't breathe fire but their hair *\*was\** red," Sharon giggled, and Bob realised they were talking about Adam Fenwick, the computer geek who'd startled everyone with the pole act.

"You people seem to have taken up with this Fenwick guy," he said, and Sharon nodded.

"He's nice - quiet and quite friendly." She looked at Vlad for confirmation and the Russian nodded vigorously.

"Is different," he offered. "Is not normal."

"I think you mean usual," said Sharon.

"OK, usual," agreed Vlad. "And I am liking his hair."

"His *hair*?" Sharon was startled.

"Yes, is like St. George in picture. That's why I buy him. And the pole of course." And with that, Vlad turned to inspect his weapons and check his pack harness.

They were going on a routine exploratory mission. Preliminary reports told them the planet they were going to had no sentient beings (though that kind of report could never be taken for granted), but had a lot of rocks, rocks that might contain minerals that could be invaluable to Earth. If the report was right, and if the rocks did prove useful, robot miners could be sent in to harvest the ore. Only small quantities would be garnered. No one wanted to alert the general population and business communities to off world discoveries, but some minerals would be useful in the development of weapons and spaceships by Stargate Command. Bob still got a shiver down his back at the word "spaceship". It took him back to his teens, to Startrek episodes and Space Invaders games. Now it was an everyday reality, and he couldn't even tell his wife and kids about it. Not that Martha would be interested, anyway. She'd say, "Yes, honey," and get on with whatever she was baking or sewing for the next church fair. But he wished he could tell the kids.

Adam saw them go. He'd come down to check out the speeded up iris operations and watched his friends walk through the wall of liquid nothing with a slight shudder. Rather them than him. And rather not them. But that was their job, and his was to make theirs easier and more efficient. But he would miss their company at lunch.

Niki was in the canteen and so were most of SG1. Not Teal'c. He was meditating or something. Better for you than lunch, apparently. Niki was missing Vlad. The pair hadn't known each other until their flight from Moscow, but sharing a flat had brought them together and they now shared friends as well. But Vlad was close to his fellow team members and Niki was finding the other weapons developers a cliquish crowd, not hostile, just not particularly friendly to foreigners. He greeted Adam with obvious pleasure. Could they go out for a drink that evening? Adam felt cautious. His head hadn't really recovered yet. Russians were known to be great drinkers - something to do with the climate and the dark winters, he believed. Not to mention the availability of vodka. Sam appeared to feel the same way and suggested they all eat out. That sounded good - a meal would let them pace the drinking, or even back off without occasioning comment. Niki seemed happy to agree and they arranged to meet after work.

SG1 enjoyed mixing with other teams. It helped to bring them back to earth and it was usually interesting to swap ideas and experiences with other gate travellers. The official reports tended to be on the dry side. Their own included. Apart from some medical staff, they had had comparatively little contact with civilians until Niki and then Adam joined the base. Jonas, and his predecessor, Daniel, didn't count. The Europeans were like a breath of fresh air, entirely different from their American colleagues in experience, outlook and temperament. Niki, of course, had been introduced by Vlad, but Teal'c and Sharon had found the English computer guy and brought him into the circle.

Dinner was good. They ate Chinese and ordered a banquet, loads of courses of delicious food that kept them occupied and satisfied all evening. Adam was amazed. He admitted he'd never had a banquet before. His occasional meals out with Emma had been for just the two of them and sweet and sour pork was about the extent of Emma's sense of adventure. He loved the shredded duck they rolled in pancakes, adding their own sauce, and crispy seaweed to taste. Niki was pleasantly surprised too. Chinese cuisine wasn't popular in Leningrad, where he lived, and he tended to equate Oriental with Eastern Russian. They drank lager, quite sparingly, to the relief of most of them, but Niki's eyes were sad when the waiter claimed the restaurant didn't have any vodka.

"What you are drinking at home, Brit?" he asked Adam. The nickname seemed to have stuck, and Adam wondered what would happen when and if other Englishmen arrived.

"Warm beer?" suggested Jack

Adam told them his preferences. Sam approved wholeheartedly.

"Emma is your girl? Your affianced? Yes?" continued Niki.

"My girl, yes. Fiancée, no. Not yet, and maybe not ever," said Adam, surprising even himself with his answer. Everyone had assumed, for years now, that he and Emma would marry, but he realised with a start that it was unlikely, and even slightly distasteful. She was, in many ways, more like a sister. Certainly just a good friend.

Niki was drinking two lagers to everyone else's one. He had reached a stage of pleasant semi-inebriation. The others were far more aware of it than he was himself.

"Vlad is missing," he informed them and when he got puzzled stares, amended, "He is missing me." More odd looks so Niki tried again. "No, I am missing Vlad. My house are empty. Vlad, I think he is missing St. George." All eyes turned to Adam, who found himself blushing, confused and amused at the same time.

"My picture?" he asked. "I thought he bought it for me. Was it his?"

"Yes, picture of you. With pole. He buy you. Is liking you."

"Like me? Well, I suppose the hair's the right colour, and I did thrash about with a pole," admitted Adam.

"Is like you. Is \*liking\* you. So is buying." Niki sat back with the air of a job well done, unaware of the effect he'd had on his audience.

Adam decided to ignore the entire conversation. The amused looks were embarrassing but were also stupid. Obviously the Russians liked him. They'd bought him the picture, after all. Well, Vlad had.

When they left, towards midnight, Niki was reeling and Adam volunteered to take him home.

"Our apartment blocks are almost next door." He waved away offers of help. Somehow he managed to pry Niki's keys out of his pocket, and manhandle him up the stairs. He dumped him on one of the beds and tugged his shoes off.

"Go home, Brit," Niki mumbled. "Is not safe here. Here be dragons." And Adam couldn't decide if he meant America, Stargate Command or the Russians' flat.