

Close Quarters

A Jack & Daniel Slash Story by Biblio



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Synopsis: Trapped alone in deep space for nine weeks, what are two straight, attracted guys to do?
Warnings: None.
Notes: Happy birthday, dear Michelle!

Daniel was the last member of SG-1 to enter the briefing room. "What's going on?" he asked, slipping into a vacant seat near General Hammond.

"An unexpected stroke of luck, Dr. Jackson," Hammond replied warmly. "SG-3 have managed to secure two cargo ships during what was meant to be routine reconnaissance of a supposedly defunct naquadah mining operation on PC4-544."

"Not defunct?"

"Oh, no," Jack drawled. "Far from it."

"The cargo ships are not only operational, they're loaded with naquadah!" Sam said

excitedly, sparing Daniel a swift delighted smile from behind her laptop.

"Wow," Daniel said, dutifully supplying the appropriate reaction.

"It was indeed a satisfactory outcome," Teal'c acknowledged, inclining his head towards a Marine whose face Daniel could vaguely place among the members of SG-3.

"It was a fluke," Jack contradicted, not so gracious.

"Fluke or not, Sir, it's secured us valuable technology, interstellar capability and the resources to construct a lot more naquadah generators," Sam said briskly.

"The Pentagon agrees with Major Carter," Hammond said. "SG-1, I'm ordering you to gate through to PC4-544 immediately, effect the necessary repairs and fly those ships back to Earth."

"Yes, Sir," Jack said brightly, presumably feeling SG-1 had just scored a high-flying point of some kind over lowly SG-3. "I suggest the scenic route, take in the sights."

"I suggest we start gathering supplies," Sam said. "According to my calculations, even taking into consideration the hyper speed capability of the cargo ships, the return journey from PC4-544 to Earth is going to take at least nine weeks."

"Nine weeks?" Daniel said at the same time as Jack, and in much the same tone. "What about our scheduled mission to P2S-4C3?" he protested. "Establishing first contact with the Kelownans?"

"Deferred until your return from this mission," Hammond said briskly. "Their technology has been assessed as equivalent to that of 1940s Earth. It simply can't compare with the opportunity for real technological gain the members of SG-3 have now afforded us."

"It's not meant to be solely about the technological gain."

"That's why I've deferred the mission to Kelowna instead of scrubbing it, Dr. Jackson."

It was a generous concession in the circumstances and not only did Hammond know this, he knew Daniel knew it too.

"How much damage was done to the ships during the attack?" Sam asked the Marine.

"The ambush was carefully timed, Major," he said. "We took full advantage of the commitment of Jaffa to the loading operation, launching our attack when the majority of the naquadah was on board. Colonel Reynolds figured the Jaffa knew better than anyone how explosive that stuff was, and how valuable it was to the Goa'uld. He was right in thinking it would hamper their defence. We caught them outside of the unshielded ships, without staff weapons. Their zats were no match for our firepower. It was a textbook ambush. Those ships are intact."

"Well done," Hammond praised. The Marine visibly puffed with pride.

"If they hit some kind of naquadah mother lode, General, dollars to doughnuts some snakey evil overlord is sweating on delivery right now," Jack said.

"Hence the time constraint. I want those cargo ships in the air ASAP, Colonel," Hammond said.

"Nine weeks?" Daniel said again. "Surely there has to be someone better qualified for this than an archaeologist?" An extremely *busy* archaeologist.

Hammond looked amused. "There's no one better qualified to translate Goa'uld, Dr. Jackson."

The extremely busy archaeologist was not loathe to point out the obvious. "Teal'c?"

"Teal'c will pilot one of the cargo ships, accompanied by Major Carter. Colonel O'Neill will pilot the other, accompanied by you."

"God help me," Jack stated for the record, sour-faced. "General..."

"It makes sense, Colonel," Sam interrupted before he could work up a comprehensive insult. "We'll need a pilot and a translator on both ships. Teal'c can act as both, giving me time to study one ship's systems while Daniel helps you out with whatever's needed on the other."

"Nine weeks!" Jack said with feeling.

"You can catch up on your paperwork, Sir," Sam suggested with an impish grin.

"Do you not have a great many artefacts that require cataloguing, Daniel Jackson?" Teal'c enquired.

"Solitary confinement is not what I had in mind."

"Not solitary, sadly, and definitely no artefacts," Jack said rudely. "General, have you seen how much Daniel packs to go with even *one* of those things? Be nice to hold on to at least *some* of the naquadah."

"That's actually a fair point, Sir," Sam conceded. "Naquadah is a heavy element and I presume two cargo ships were despatched in order to minimise the risk of overtaxing the engines. We'd better limit what we add to the load to be on the safe side."

"Is all this really necessary?" Daniel said. "Wouldn't it be safer, simpler and above all quicker just to send the naquadah back through the gate? For that matter, why didn't the Jaffa just send it back through the Stargate?"

"Subterfuge," Teal'c suggested, somewhat cryptically. "The mine appeared abandoned, there were few Jaffa guards and the naquadah was not to be transported through the Stargate as is customary."

"It's a smuggling operation," Jack realised. "Someone, somewhere, was going out of their way to make sure the goodies didn't end up in the lap of that snakey evil overlord."

"Either way, the Pentagon doesn't want to lose out on those cargo ships and I happen to agree with them," Hammond said. "The hyper drive of a cargo ship saved this planet from a cataclysmic meteor strike not too long ago."

"That was us," Jack pointed out, trying to deflate the Marine. "We saved this planet. SG-1."

"Which wouldn't have been possible without possession of the ship," Hammond reminded them unnecessarily.

"I'm not arguing, General," Jack said. "I hate having to run to the Tok'ra every time we get in a little bit of trouble going through the gate can't fix."

"Then it's settled. SG-1, you have a go."



The area around the entrance to the mine on 544 was strewn with smug, [excessively] testosterone-fuelled Marines and [regrettably] dead Jaffa.

The hastily assembled crates of rations, diagnostic equipment and assorted technical instrumentation were being ferried from the Stargate to the cargo ships by said Marines while Sam and Teal'c completed their damage assessment.

"SG-1 bagged a mothership," Jack bragged in the general direction of Colonel Reynolds.

The large Marine helping Daniel with his [severely rationed] two crates of artefacts and accompanying reference materials blatantly lingered to hear what his C.O. came up with by way of a put down.

"Shame you couldn't hold onto it," Reynolds lobbed back, way ahead on points and not afraid to hammer it home.

"Carter!" Jack called out, spinelessly abandoning an untenable position, something Colonel Reynolds and all the Marines appeared to enjoy very much.

"We're good to go, Sir," Sam replied cheerfully, emerging from the open airlock to crush

Daniel's last faint hope of rescue. "There's a little more damage to this ship than the other, but it's nothing I can't repair en route."

"The other one's dented," Jack complained after the most cursory of visual inspections. This was to be expected. He always wanted the most toys, the biggest, the best, the strongest and longest.

"Cosmetic damage, Sir." Sam was well aware of Jack's Super Size requirements. "The ship's systems are intact and that's what's important. You won't need to worry about repairs."

"And if something goes wrong later?"

"We'll remain in contact throughout the journey, and if there's anything I can't talk you through, we'll drop out of hyper speed so I can ring aboard," she offered reassuringly. "Remember you'll have autopilot engaged most of the time, and the sensors and system monitors are pretty sophisticated. You'll have plenty of warning if anything does go wrong inside or outside the ship."

"What if I need to kill Daniel?" Jack enquired.

Sam grinned. "I'm sure he'll have plenty of warning too, Sir."

Jack pulled a face, playing up to the friendly insult, his eyes soft and amused when they met hers.

Daniel left them to enjoy the small shared moment. He took his belongings on board the cramped, dented ship he and Jack were allotted and set about organising the space. The precious naquadah bars were stacked in ornate golden crates lining both sides of the cargo hold, but he and the Marine were able to squeeze in MRE crates either end of the chest-high stacks. There were other crates and containers holding spare clothing, pillows and blankets, guns and ammo, medical supplies, some arcane implements considered vital to their survival in the event of crash landing, laptops, his archaeology kit, plus various bits and pieces he wasn't interested in. When he was done, only the ring platform was clear.

He thanked the Marine for his help, then went forward to place his specially requested folding table and chairs in about the only open space they had left, against the cargo hold bulkhead.

Jack was surveying his new domain in a lordly manner, Sam and Teal'c patiently standing over him while he identified and activated the ship's systems in an optimistic pre-flight check. After some futzing and fudging, the consoles lit on cue, the engines hummed and the ship failed to explode.

Sam leaned in to check a few read-outs, then smiled and gave the all clear. "I'd suggest routine comms check every eight hours for the first forty-eight hours, Sir. There may be damage that won't become apparent until each of the individual systems has been fully

activated and in use for an extended period of time. Teal'c and I have done what we can, but there are just so many complex subroutines in the programming, and we still don't entirely understand the crystal arrays." She turned to smile at Daniel. "Good luck," she added, patting his arm sympathetically.

"Hey!" Jack objected. "I'm the one who drew the short straw here."

"So you have said on several occasions, O'Neill."

"I'll swap you," Jack dared him.

Teal'c bowed his head to Sam with a faint smile. "I am content."

"See you on the other side," Sam said breezily, making for the airlock, well aware she had the best of the deal in Teal'c, her excitement over the new toy very evident.

"Be patient, O'Neill," Teal'c warned.

"Thank you," the short straw acknowledged politely, slumping into the co-pilot's chair with the weight of the colonel on his shoulders.

"Your patience is not in question, Daniel Jackson," Teal'c said, his face kind. In a rare demonstration of affection, he placed a hand on each of their shoulders. "Remember you are brothers."

He thought Daniel was going to die.

"Nine weeks," Jack complained to the uncaring universe as Teal'c made his escape. "Good thinking on the card table, by the way."

Daniel looked at him.

"Chess?"

Daniel looked at him some more.

"Nine weeks, Daniel. Nine. For the sake of my sanity, I brought along a diversion or two."

"All those batteries would be for the Playstation?"

"MP3. DVD." Jack shrugged nonchalantly, launching tactically so Daniel couldn't shoot the pilot. "A little opera, a season's worth of TIVO'd Simpsons. You know."

"I do know," Daniel sighed, failing to appreciate the view as they soared up through the blue and out into the black.

"I'm sure in time you'll come to appreciate the basketball hoop at least as much as Carter

would've."

"Basketball hoop?" Daniel repeated, unsure himself why he was even bothering when Jack was so obviously playing him.

"Lighten up, Daniel. I'm trained to assess these situations, secure the necessary resources and come up with a strategy for survival." Jack smirked, relishing the moment. "Namely yours."

Figuring his sanity was at least as important as his survival, Daniel effected his own strategy.

While Jack conferred with Sam over comms to program the correct coordinates, establish the hyperspace window and engage the autopilot, Daniel pulled his utilitarian table and chairs nearer to the corner where the bulkhead intersected the hull. This put his work area clear of the escape pods and more or less out of Jack's way. Next, Daniel carried his crates forward and started to unpack the precious cargo with care. He set up and powered the laptop, stacked his Goa'uld notebooks and reference materials ready to hand in case things started to crash or burst into flames, took out a fresh journal and weighed the attractions of an intricately decorated, excitingly alien orb versus a substantial clay cuneiform tablet.

"What's eating you?" Jack demanded, materialising beside him, duties as pilot evidently discharged. "I know you're not exactly noted for your lively, outgoing sense of humour, but it's completely AWOL on this one."

"I have a lot to do."

"And you have a lot of time in which to do it, so, for the sake of both our sanity, lighten up."

"I'm never going to lighten up enough I'll let you shoot hoops with that orb, so put it down," Daniel suggested mildly, deciding he would study the tablet for now.

Jack shrugged easily, ambling into the cargo hold to liberate what he deemed to be the essentials and check their stores were squared away to his satisfaction. "You didn't ask if I really brought along the hoop," he called out, hoping Daniel would bite.

"I don't care."

Jack popped out from behind the bulky escape pods. "Maybe not today, maybe not tomorrow, but soon and for the rest of your voyage," he recited with relish.

"You been working on that?"

"A while. Figured there'd be more build-up before I used it on you."

"Bored already?"

"The problem isn't that I'm bored so much as you are bor-*ing*."

"Sorry to disappoint," Daniel said with a shrug, returning his attention to the tablet.

"Leave that," Jack instructed, abandoning his needling for now. It was a lot less fun for him when Daniel denied the battle. "Carter said we should run through all the ship's systems, get the all-clear before we get too far out from the planet and can't turn back."

It was a reasonable request.

"Okay."

Daniel took the co-pilot's chair again, translating each of the screens Jack called up on the central console display. They methodically reviewed power, life support, shields, cloak, engine status, sub-light and hyper drive controls, comms, internal and external sensors, damage control. This was intricate, focused work, Daniel trying his best to help Jack comprehend what constituted an appropriate read-out in each case. The graphical representations were easier for Jack to follow than the text-based status reports, but he surprised Daniel by working at picking out key words and phrases without his usual restive posturing.

Sam's upbeat request over comms for a status report was their first indication how much time had passed.

"Five-by-five, Carter," Jack responded. "You?"

"Shields are at sixty-three percent, but they were forty at take-off, so I'm confident."

"That constitutes 'good to go' in your book?"

"We weren't flying into a fire fight, Colonel. Or away from an exploding sun."

"Having fun, Sam?" Daniel asked.

"Yep."

"Wish I could say the same," Jack grouched.

"Not enjoying the systems check, Sir?"

"Enjoying it about as much as the company. Next comms check at 12.00 hours Zulu, Carter. O'Neill out."

"Have a good evening, Sir, Daniel. Carter out."

"I'm starved," Jack announced, bounding to his feet. "Want to go grab some food?"

"Sure." Daniel got up to follow.

"What? No comeback about the company not being up to standard?"

"Nope."

"Feeling okay?" Jack put a joking hand on Daniel's forehead.

"Just hungry," Daniel said pleasantly, moving away from another telegraphed cue to entertain Jack.

"Okay." Jack frowned a bit but didn't think it worth pursuing.

Neither of them spoke for a while, setting up an MRE crate as a seat either side of a couple of stacked weapons containers as their kitchen-cum-dining table. The first rations that came to hand were both beef ravioli. The fudge brownie in the pack was edible, and as for the rest of this delightful repast, Daniel thought philosophically it could've been worse. Could've been chicken.

"I think I preferred you when you were pissy," Jack commented wryly, watching Daniel begin the delicate operation of boiling water on the flameless heater for his instant coffee. The individual sachets of Sumatran Mandheling were the one luxury he refused to do without.

"Give it time."

"You know, right now, you're making Teal'c look talkative?"

"You don't like most of the things I say, Jack, so I guess I don't see much point in talking right now."

Momentarily silenced, Jack had no other response to this very inconvenient reminder than to shift uncomfortably on his crate and brood while Daniel took the coffee and cake into the forward compartment, returning gratefully to his cuneiform tablet.



The first nine days of what Jack had dubbed the Voyage of the Clammed passed without incident. The two of them slept, washed and shaved, ate, radio checked, Daniel worked for eight hours straight while Jack screwed around with whatever came to mind or hand, radio checked again, ate again, Daniel worked again, they slept again.

It started out boring, which was to be expected, and was getting to be weird.

Daniel was weird.

He wasn't even all that annoying, which was weird in itself.

He worked his ass off, which admittedly was very much the norm for him, didn't talk Jack's ass off, which was unprecedented, and didn't make the customary fuss when he was shanghaied into various complicated games of chance, skill and high stakes for Jack's edification and entertainment. In fact, he was no trouble at all.

Nothing got weirder than that.

Day ten, Jack stopped needling Daniel and started watching him. He thought he knew Daniel Jackson better than anyone, including, oftentimes, Daniel himself, and this unusual passivity was starting to concern him. He wondered if Daniel was more upset over him killing that whacked-out robot, incidentally saving Daniel's life, than he knew. Of course Daniel being weird in that particular way was nothing new. Jack was just used to him shaking it off quicker than this.

Parked in the pilot's chair with his feet propped up by the self-destruct dome, he listened to opera and took full advantage of his oblique line of sight.

Engrossed in poring over the tiny lines of text carved into the round jewelled thingy and making meticulous sketches and notes in his journal, Daniel was what passed for normal where he was concerned, pedal to the metal, brain on fire and happy in his element.

It was only when Jack butted in Daniel's face shuttered.

Only then Jack realised Daniel's face was a mask, that he was tired and maybe even down, and hiding it. Had been for some time, because this look on his face was the one Jack was accustomed to.

Daniel didn't have a *problem*. Daniel just had a problem with *him*.

Day eleven, Jack kept watching, seeing more and more, liking what he saw less and less.

There were two Daniels, the public and the private.

What shocked Jack, what kept him watching, was that all these hints and glimpses of the private man, those took him straight back to the wide-eyed, wondering kid Daniel used to be. Jack had thought that boy long gone, buried. Now he saw that he was right about the buried part, but not in the way he'd imagined. Maybe Daniel had toughened up, maybe he just hid the hurt better than he used to. Jack didn't like this realisation either way.

He got pissed and stayed pissed days twelve through thirteen.

Day fourteen, which saw as much in the way of action as days one through nine, he had another shitty realisation.

Daniel hadn't noticed.

There was a time Daniel had believed Jack could do anything. Jack and Jack alone. He might not have meant for Jack to know it, but he had believed it. He'd had that much faith. He'd written as much in his journal.

Now, Daniel knew better. He knew Jack better, knew what Jack thought of him, knew it because Jack had told him.

Day fourteen, Jack got no sleep.

Day fifteen, his anger drained away.

This, Daniel noticed.

While Jack slumped grim-faced over his apricots and cereal bar, Daniel watched him.

"Look," Daniel said after about twenty minutes of silence and eye avoidance. "General Hammond's orders notwithstanding, it's not too late to do something about this."

Despite his various shitty realisations, Jack was conscious of a sinking feeling, the one he always got when it looked like he was going to have to Talk. To anyone, on the subject of anything. "About what?" he asked cautiously.

"This." Daniel gestured eloquently from himself to Jack and back again. "Us. I'm as aware as anyone you'd rather have Sam or Teal'c here, and that we've got to get through another seven weeks of it. I'm just saying it's not too late to..."

"What the hell makes you think that?" Jack demanded rudely, floored.

Daniel tilted his head questioningly, frowning at Jack like he was waiting for the other shoe to drop. "You," he said at last.

"You can't be serious."

"Your feelings for Sam are fairly evident. In fact they're, er..." Daniel stumbled over it, horribly embarrassed, but feeling himself already past the point of no return. "They're practically a matter of public record, and you've said yourself Teal'c is your best friend. You trust him."

Feelings? The word didn't make it out of Jack's mouth. In fact, it could hardly be thought over the unpleasant drumming in his ears.

Jack tried again to speak. Something. The drumming got louder, insistent and dizzying.

"I was there, you know," Daniel went on determinedly. "When the computer entity said it

chose Sam as its host because she was the only one you wouldn't destroy. The one who was special to you. It's okay," he added with a microscopic fleeting smile. "I kinda knew where all that left me without you having to say anything, or at least not saying it to me directly."

Jack had nothing. He didn't have a coherent thought in his head, just this goddamned marching band.

"Sam and Teal'c come first and I -- well, you try to resist shoving me through a wall."

Daniel winced a smiled again, trying to make out this was funny.

It was about anger, though, anger Daniel now understood to be remarkable only when absent. It was difficult for him to admit to this, driving him to his feet, away from Jack back to his precious antiquities. His comfort zone.

Jack sat alone, speechless, cold truth slithering.

He still had the public Daniel, the valuable, seasoned teammate. Daniel wasn't mad at him that he could see, and wasn't about to leave SG-1. In fact, Daniel accepted this was what it was, that he was on a team of three plus one, and had adjusted accordingly.

Jack's command was a success.

The team was effective and Daniel was effective on the team. Jack could move on from this minor hiccup, make a little more effort to include Daniel that would go a long way to smoothing over any recent rough edges and refute *any* suggestion that the *colossal* pain in his ass came last.

It was only the friend he'd lose, the young unstinting friend he'd...

"Christ!"

Jack scrubbed at his face, rough and angry. With himself, with Daniel.

Would it kill him to admit it?

Just thinking it, it wouldn't be tattooed across his forehead, would it? No one would be able to tell just by looking at him. No one could tell, no one would even believe it.

What did it matter, what he'd felt for a friend?

There was no one keeping score, no one who would care.

No reason for Jack to bury it in the way that he had or to have put so much distance between himself and Daniel.

Not with any conscious effort, mind you. It had just...happened.

It was different, though. Different than the way he'd reacted when it came to the others.

Cornered, Jack hadn't denied caring for Carter, or that he'd rather die than lose her. He'd worked at his friendship with Teal'c, made room for him, had his back. He had said he was Teal'c's best friend, had said this in front of Daniel.

He'd said and done and showed enough, more than he was supposed to, so much even Daniel knew it.

If he could admit to all that, why was it so hard to face up to this?

That at one time, he'd cared for the pain in his ass, his cross to bear, far more than he was supposed to. He'd loved Daniel, reacted more strongly to him than to...to anyone.

He'd loved Daniel.

Just framing the thought, he saw how blindingly simple it was.

He hadn't *stopped*.

And there was nothing intrinsically wrong with loving Daniel, his friend, except -- and here was the hard part -- except Jack maybe loved him in the wrong way. And too much.

He had no idea what to do with that. He had no idea, period. Ignoring it hadn't made it go away. Just Daniel. Who didn't feel that way anyway.

Not that Jack *wanted* to feel...

"I'm screwed," he sighed.

Naturally, Daniel chose this precise moment to reclaim his abandoned breakfast and coincidentally determine whether there were walls and shoving in his immediate future. He was quite unnerved by Jack's petrified state and, unpredictable, sensitive little bastard that he was, sat back down instead of doing the decent thing and letting Jack die in peace.

Jack stared at Daniel.

Daniel stared back.

This went on for some time.

Daniel's face softened and warmed. He was concerned and he cared for Jack, he couldn't hide that. He'd always been a good kid. He risked a tentative smile.

It could've been reflex, it could've been wind. Jack smiled back. His own face felt like it

had cracked, but he couldn't look away from Daniel's. He'd been watching for days and now he was finally letting himself see.

He became aware of Daniel's eyes, how blue and how brilliant they were. Turquoise blue. They took him to sea, not sky. The laugh lines and the length of his lashes.

He looked at Daniel the way he'd only ever looked at a woman, at the generous curves of his mouth and smooth, pale skin.

Jack's mouth dried on another hard truth, another realisation too much, too late.

Daniel was attractive. Very, very, exceedingly. Matured out of long-haired prettiness into an entirely masculine gorgeousness.

Jack could *see* this.

Precisely why he'd had the smarts to stop looking in the first place!

Jack was *fucked*.

He guessed some of his panic showed because Daniel reached out to him, then snatched back his hand as if burned when his brain belatedly engaged and he remembered Jack bit. Frustrated by distance, by his inability to help, Daniel stood, tucking both hands under his armpits, conditioning starting to win out over compassion.

Jack stood too, taking hold of Daniel before he could back away. He kept hold because he didn't know what else to do. There was nothing he *could* do except let Daniel go, and this was currently beyond him.

"Sorry." He fired out the apology, badly rattled.

"For what?"

"Being such an ass."

"Okay," Daniel accepted this cautiously, trying to break Jack's iron grip with a careful step back. "Okay. You can let go now, Jack."

This did not happen.

"I suppose I should be grateful your hands aren't around my throat," Daniel muttered, completely failing to appreciate either the magnitude of Jack's meltdown or the terrible, insidious effect his attractiveness was having. He dealt with Jack's paralytic weirdness pragmatically, delivering a heavy, well-aimed stamp to the left instep.

"Ow!" Jack yelped, truly grateful for the assist.

"Apologising for being an ass doesn't count if you continue to act like one," Daniel pointed out, moving swiftly beyond arm's length. "What is *wrong* with you?"

"I've lost what little was left of my mind."

"That's apparent," Daniel sniffed, then looked guilty. "Look, I'm sorry," he said uneasily. "I wouldn't have said anything to you about anything if I'd realised it was going to drive you nuts."

"Too late! Everything you've said to me about everything has been driving me nuts for years! You're a colossal pain in the ass!"

"Worth it," Daniel said with a teasing grin, before he remembered they didn't do this.

"Well worth it," Jack agreed deliberately, at least as thrown by the shock of pleasure on Daniel's face at this small kindness as he was by anything else. "And for the record, I don't...mind...having you around."

"Could've fooled me."

It could've been meant to sting, and it did. But Daniel was tired and Jack was tired, and it took less effort to be his friend.

"Want to tell me about that thing you're working on?"

It worked out much better for him than sorry.



Of all the horrible things Daniel Jackson had made Jack do and think and feel over the years, this attractiveness thing was the *worst*. It was impossible for Jack to face up to the attractive thing without its corollary muscling into his consciousness.

Attract-ed.

Jack didn't want to be.

Would have done or given anything to avoid it, in point of fact.

He started out his calculated programme of avoidance watching his beloved Simpsons, usually the best cure for what ailed him. After rewinding the first episode four times because he couldn't follow the plot, he removed himself from the pilot's chair to the cargo hold. This made it easier to watch the screen than the archaeologist, but after several more rewinds, Jack had to admit he'd completely lost the plot.

He retreated to what were laughingly referred to as the living quarters, consisting of four bunks set against the cargo hold's rear bulkhead, plus a primitive communal sluice and latrine that passed for bathroom facilities. Cleanliness didn't come anywhere near godliness that Jack could see.

He couldn't see Daniel, couldn't watch him, not through two bulkheads and with his back turned.

He imagined. Dwelled.

Succumbed to insanities like trying to work out what colour Daniel's hair was. The usual categories -- blond, brunette, redhead -- those didn't apply.

Of course, those were categories for *women* and Daniel wasn't one.

He blamed Daniel for this.

For being a man, for being attractive at him, for being loved in the wrong way.

It was all wrong, wrong, wrong, and it was Daniel's fault he couldn't seem to stop.

He could hardly tell if it made him feel worse or better, if he was less or more fucked that Daniel didn't know how he felt or feel the same way.

He sat brooding on this, but absence wasn't making his heart grow fonder, just squeezing it out of his chest. Aggravated, he -- and his schoolgirl crush -- went forward again, intent on bluster.

Daniel launched a pre-emptive strike of shy, hopeful smile.

Jack suffered another attack of nice. In his weakened condition, finding the kid actually still *liked* him was at least as attractive as any masculine physical attribute he should be ignoring and not noticing in the first place. Instead of a sensible strategic withdrawal to the safety of the pilot's chair, Jack took the spare one. The one next to Daniel. Right next to him.

Daniel was quite pleased.

Jack was out of control.

He picked up the golden jewelled thingy to give his hands something relatively safe to do. Daniel immediately tried to take it back, leaving them more or less holding hands when Jack lost motor function. Daniel used this to his advantage, tweaking the thingy out of Jack's grasp. With danger close, Daniel prudently returned the thingy to its storage case, necessitating a fair amount of bending.

Now he was conscious, Jack could not fail to see Daniel had a really world-class ass.

Carter's was great, he'd looked at that enough when he wasn't even supposed to know she had one, but there was something intriguing -- mesmerising, even -- about the differences here, the shape and the...the firmness.

Should've been the wrong shape, God help him, but looked to be the taut, toned, perfect fit for his hands.

If Jack had had the use of his legs, he'd have got himself out of there pronto, out of sight and out of what was left of his mind. If he'd had any strength, period, he'd have pushed away Daniel's careful, tentative hand, not heard the murmuring words of friendship and help, turned away instead of to. He would never, ever have reached out his own hand to touch Daniel's face.

"What's wrong, Jack?"

Jack shook his head, slack-jawed and struggling because Daniel was so close, so open and gentle, the mask gone for now. His fingers spread of their own accord, thumb rubbing, rubbing over Daniel's cheek.

"I know it must be difficult for you, always having to hold back with Sam," Daniel said softly. "Isn't there something you could do? Isn't there anything I can do?"

Daniel was a bright guy. Not always on the same plane of existence as everyone else, but bright. Bright and, when he did happen to be on the same planet as the rest of them, sensitive.

The intimacy was a little much for even him to miss.

What happened then was what *always* happened with Daniel Jackson, what Jack so often hated about him.

Curiosity got the best of him.

Daniel leaned in, touched his mouth to Jack's for a heart-stopping second, then leaned back, chewing over Jack's lack of response. "Sorry," he said distractedly. "I thought -- er, never mind what I..."

Jack effectively silenced him for a precious moment or two, making a much better job of the mouths and touching thing.

Daniel sat back, dazed, confused, and worrying at it like a terrier with a rat. "Okay," he said. "That...happened."

"Shouldn't have."

"No, no." Those big baby blues were bright and inquisitive. He was completely missing

the point, but damn, Daniel *loved* a mystery. And this one was a doozy. "So. You're, er, you're attracted to me?"

"No!"

"You just..."

"I know!"

"So, a definite maybe, maybe?"

"No."

"Jack!"

"Maybe."

"Me...and Sam?"

It wasn't supposed to be either of them!

"I guess that explains why you've been the way you've been," Daniel said, insanely cheery and intrigued. Missing the point, but busy, busy making progress. "I mean, the situation with Sam -- that I can understand. Your careers and respective positions, the scrutiny, the whole chain of command thing." He was ticking off points on his fingers.

"Me, though! I can see why that's difficult. It can't have done anything for your self-image to become attracted to a man, let alone one you tend to characterise as a geek." He looked interestedly at Jack, apparently not hearing anything that was coming out of his mouth. "Plus, I'm not as obedient -- submissive, even -- as you like."

Daniel shook his head in bemused awe.

"This is amazing, Jack. Seriously. I knew you were having a problem with me, but I never imagined it was this!"

"Go figure."

"Attracted. Ha." Mystery solved, air cleared, Daniel nodded at nothing and no one in particular and went back to work.

"You've got to be kidding!"

"Don't get me wrong, I'm absolutely fascinated," Daniel apologised. "It's just, er, I really have a lot to do." He shot Jack a distinctly [dangerously] speculative look from under his lashes. "We can come back to this later if you'd like?"

"No! No coming back. No later."

Was this not clear?

"Nothing happened, and nothing is going to happen ever again."

"Oh." Daniel bit his lip, frowning over it. "That's a little...disappointing."

"Disappointing?" Jack wheezed, rabbit punched.

"I've never been in this position."

"Daniel!"

"I know, I know!" Daniel put up a pacifying hand. "I understand this isn't solely an academic exercise, but come on! This is *us* we're talking about here. Me and you. You and *me*. Chalk and cheese, id and ego, yin and yang. Admit it, Jack. You have to be curious!"

"No, no I don't!"

"What if I kissed you again?"

"You're insane! Do you not understand I'm in real trouble here? I didn't kiss you for the entertainment value. I could face charges of sexual harassment, serve actual jail time for what I just did."

"You're right," Daniel admitted. "Of course you are. It's just..."

"Daniel, for cryin' out loud!"

"I *really* want to know what attracted you to me."

"You have a great ass!"

Daniel automatically looked around and down, craning to see for himself. Then he realised how ridiculous this was and straightened up, pissy.

"And, you're *anything* but obedient," Jack complained bitterly.

Daniel took this as a compliment.

"So glad you're enjoying this," Jack said with heavy sarcasm, wishing with all his heart Daniel would, one time, react the way he was meant to. Take a pop at him or something. "Don't you feel anything?"

"I...oh. About..." Daniel waved that vague hand from himself to Jack and back again. "I

don't know. I haven't had time to process. I mean, I guess you're not unattractive, Jack, but I think I'd need to kiss you again before reaching any kind of conclusion."

Daniel frequently rushed in where anyone sane feared to tread and this was no exception. He kissed Jack in the interests of cataloguing reactions and calculating respective levels of attraction without necessarily factoring in Jack would kiss him back.

This was so much better, all warmth and firm pressure. Generous curves and some fairly outstanding cooperation. Daniel melting into Jack, moving with him, heating to light and eagerness. They kissed. Slow and soft they kissed, for a long time.

Jack took off Daniel's glasses and slid down with him to the floor. There was no strength in him. They lay close, kissed more deeply, opened up to one another with hands and mouths. Daniel was wilful and sweet, drugging Jack, burning him with lingering hands and the sensuous stroke of their tongues.

When Jack reached between Daniel's legs, he found responsive hardness swelling there. He went for Daniel's belt, tugged at fabric and buttons to bare skin. Daniel jumped when Jack's fingers skimmed the oddly appealing appendix scar at his hip, unsteady fingers catching at his wrist.

They froze, finally grasping how close they were to having sex. Daniel was not ready for it, while Jack...well, he shouldn't want it. He backed off some, lying on his side beside Daniel, propping himself on his elbow. Daniel lay with his eyes closed, breathing rather hard. After a moment, Jack's hand stole across to rest on his flat, enticing belly.

Daniel put his hand over Jack's. His sudden smile was crooked, but at least he opened his eyes. Faced it. "Guess you have your answer," he said humorously. "I'm attracted too."

"But not before now."

"I'm slow that way."

"Me too," Jack snorted, seeing some humour in it. "I've got about ten minutes' head start on you."

"Then it shouldn't be too hard to put it aside."

"It should be put aside."

Daniel moved his hand away. Jack's clenched on the dark fabric smothering Daniel's skin.

Daniel searched Jack's face, trying to read him. "You don't want to stop, do you?"

"I need to."

"You've been able to control your attraction to Sam," Daniel suggested uncertainly.

Jack had no control. And...

"This is not about Sam, is it?" Daniel flushed in stunned, gratified recognition. "This is about you. You...wanting...me."

Jack wanted Daniel, but couldn't see how to make the wanting stop. He couldn't act on the wanting, but he couldn't see how to make himself stop.

"I'm, er, I'm..." Daniel coughed nervously and gazed up at the ceiling. "I'm open."

He was not supposed to say that!

"I'm not."

"Not in general, no. No," Daniel judged, taking this in good part. "It's never stopped you from doing anything."

"It should stop me from doing you."

"I'm, I'm guessing it won't," Daniel deduced intelligently, giving due weight to the way Jack had him pinned to the ground.

"Not with you sprawling like that and telling me you're open," Jack snapped, failing to wither Daniel with his sarcasm.

"You're free to let me up any time."



If Daniel had to describe his current state of mind, he'd go for optimistic confusion. Jack was watching him with all kinds of [admittedly grudging] indecent intent, but he wasn't minding all that much.

In fact, he was quite relieved.

At least now he knew what the problem was between them, and that it could be resolved. Even if formulating anything resembling a plan of action to fix it was currently beyond his capabilities, he felt some of the strain lifting.

There was a certain -- sexual -- awkwardness, for sure, but this was only to be expected between two attracted, straight guys imprisoned alone in deep space for the next seven weeks.

Everyone who found themselves in this sort of position had to cope with it in their own

way.

Daniel had *questions*.

He was particularly interested in what had attracted Jack to him. Jack had already ducked this question [discounting the ass thing as a characteristically flip response] so Daniel wandered after him into the cargo hold, keen to pursue this captivating line of enquiry.

Jack wasn't in the cargo hold. He was glowering in his bunk, whining about his descent into madness, for which he was holding Daniel responsible.

Unmoved by his pain, Daniel sat on the edge of Jack's bunk, scenting an opportunity. "I can't help it if you find me attractive."

Jack grunted.

"I'm not doing anything." Daniel gave a blanket-cocooned, uncommunicative portion of Jack's anatomy a sharp prod. "I'm just me." This thought was slightly depressing. "Guy least likely to..." He cut off the unpleasant, depressing thought uncomfortably. "Never mind."

"Guy least likely to...what?" Jack prodded back.

Attract someone. Or know what to do with the someone if [by some miracle] attraction occurred.

It had worked out between Sha'uri and him mostly because she didn't play by any of the rules as he understood them. He'd never, at any point, felt he was in control of anything with her, not even himself. She loved him body and soul, but she'd also laughed at him. Run so many rings around him, the Abydonians had laughed too.

The single other relationship he'd attempted had lasted all of two months, coming up short on human contact and long on frustrated disappointment. Sarah Gardner had told him in so many words when she left him to his intellectual obsessions.

"I'm really bad at this," he confided, feeling Jack should be warned. "I'm really as bad at this as you tend to think I'm bad at everything else."

"Oh, come on. I'm a middle-aged heterosexual and even I can tell you must've been beating them off with a stick in college."

"I was sixteen. I was prepping for my first masters degree before I was eligible to vote. I was young, I was academically precocious and focused on my research. Nobody wanted me around, nobody cared. There was no beating of any kind. I didn't fit in anywhere." Story of his life.

"So it comes as news to you that you're hot?"

"Hot?" Daniel repeated blankly.

"Smokin' hot."

Daniel frowned at him, turning this over a few times before concluding Jack's strange partiality for him was much worse than he'd thought. A geek? In glasses?

"You have a weird definition of hot."

"Which is a big, honkin' problem for me."

"As a middle-aged heterosexual?"

"You see the irony there?"

Daniel did. "For what it's worth, I didn't think of myself as homosexual before we kissed and I don't think it now. I just, I *like* you."

"Like me enough to have sex?"

"Right now?" Self-conscious, Daniel hitched slightly further down the bunk.

"Tonight. Lights out. You and me, a few blankets, pillows. Get naked, fool around some."

"I find that extremely difficult to imagine."

"You'll find it even more difficult to do."

"I don't think doing it is the problem; it's all the thinking about it beforehand. All the build-up. Like going to the electric chair."

Without warning, Jack's hand slid up his spine, strong fingers steady on his skin under the T-shirt. Daniel shivered, leaning involuntarily into the knowing caress.

There was some electricity involved, yes.

Jack sat, putting his other arm around Daniel. He rested his chin on Daniel's shoulder, breath stirring the hair at his nape. Being held was...nice. Daniel only had to turn his head a little to be face to face with Jack, to push this further. To kiss.

He didn't.

He liked this, he liked it very much.

"We don't have to do anything more than this," he said impulsively.

Jack sighed into Daniel's hair.

"The mere fact of being attracted doesn't mean we have to act on it."

"Huh?"

"Sex is a complication."

"No argument here."

"But we can do this. We can be close."

"Close?"

"Friends."

Jack tried this on for size. "Friends...hug," he said without much conviction. His hand was nice and warm, lingering on Daniel's back.

"All I'm trying to say is we've got time to make sense of this." Daniel tried out his best talk-you-into-it look. It used to work on Jack at one time, mostly because Jack would do anything to stop him talking. That was one thing Daniel figured hadn't changed. "We're not backed into any kind of corner here. There's time. Time to think it through, time to figure out what we want."

"And if we want to complicate things?"

"There's, er, there's time for that too."

"So, close...but no cigar?"

Daniel didn't have a witty retort for this. It was turning out to be much trickier to extricate themselves from these -- moments -- than to fall into them.

"I'm trying to help," he said irritably.

"I know." Jack released Daniel, let him ease out of the way, then sat on the edge of the bunk near him but no longer touching. "Thank you."

"It's okay," Daniel assured him, relaxing slightly at the markedly friendlier expression on Jack's face. "We can't pretend it didn't happen, and we shouldn't, but we can at least put it in the proper perspective."

He thought Jack seemed relieved, and felt he'd made the right call.

Sex with Daniel Jackson. That had to be the *last* thing a self-avowed middle-aged military heterosexual could actually want.



The terrible, insidious effect of Daniel's attractiveness continued unabated.

Jack ate with Daniel, talked [bickered] with Daniel, played chess and cards with Daniel, hung out with Daniel, all the while noticing horribly inconvenient facts about Daniel. For instance, that the great ass and the face came with some nicely defined muscles and legs that didn't quit.

Worse, for a normal, healthy heterosexual guy, Jack spent an inordinate amount of time brooding over what he shouldn't want, couldn't have and had been told he didn't need.

Sex.

He could not stop.

It was insane. He was off the hook, for Chrissake. Daniel had *let* him off the hook. Maybe they had locked lips, but Daniel was giving him a free pass. A little tongue, but no harm, no foul. All Jack had to do was forget about the great ass and the face and the legs that didn't quit.

It was only that he had some experience, at least with women, and he absolutely could not stop imagining what it would be like to slide into that great ass, what Daniel Jackson would be like if he fucked him.

He got no sleep, no rest, imagining.

Awake, he watched Daniel and Daniel knew he was being watched. Daniel was shy about it, about going from being just Daniel to being *Daniel*, but he didn't run from it. The worst thing and the best thing, the heart-stopping thing, was Jack could *have* him. Daniel was vulnerable to him. Daniel was open.

Jack wanted and wanted him, raging inwardly.

Why couldn't Daniel help him out, do the decent thing and completely freak on him? Why did he have to go around *liking* Jack all the damn time? Why did he have to be so damn pleased whenever Jack did the stupid small stuff, like listening to him? Why, every damn minute of every damn day that passed, did he make Jack think and feel and want the one thing they weren't doing, or just weren't doing yet?

Sex.

It wasn't just this flirty, focused madness. Jack had all the physical symptoms too. Cotton mouth. Sweaty palms. A rotten racing pulse, erratic heartbeat, semi-permanent erection

and that goddamned marching band back in his ears.

Night time was the worst. Everything about this was the worst, but night time was the absolute worst. Jack lay awake night after night, knew Daniel lay awake just a few feet from him. Knew how little it would take for him to close the small distance between them. Wanted to go to Daniel so badly he couldn't stand it, the adrenaline and the need surging so bad he had to physically hold himself back. His head ached, his body and his heart ached. He couldn't stand it.

One night, when he literally shook with the effort of holding still, holding back, he rolled off the bunk, scooped up his bedclothes and slunk into the cargo hold, closing the rear door behind him. When he spread his blankets and hit the pillows, the quiet hum of the engines was a blessed relief from the soft, seductive sounds of Daniel breathing and stirring in the dark. Daniel was out of his reach, safe behind the door, safe from the impulse Jack had been fighting.

Jack unclenched, tension seeping into deep, exhausted sleep.

He woke hours later, hot down one side from the blankets, faintly chilled down the other, bones protesting the floor. Daniel was tucked neatly behind him, one hand curled under his cheek, the other around Jack's bicep.

For Daniel, this was a bold statement.

Jack had survived a lot of engagements in his time, fought clear of countless skirmishes. He was enough of a soldier to recognise that when both fight and flight had failed, there was little alternative left but surrender.

He'd worn himself out fighting this one, and for what? Seriously. Weren't these just the death throes of his so-called sexuality and his stupid flyboy pride? He hadn't chosen for this to happen, he'd never imagined it could. Never gone there, never wanted to.

Only he *was* there.

Now, he could never imagine a time he'd be over it. These feelings weren't going to quit, weren't going to fade over time. This wanting and needing were never going to end. It took everything, every scrap of strength he had just to keep his hands off Daniel. He had no control at all over his mind, his dreams and desires.

He was fucked. Him! The infamous hard ass Jack O'Neill, who thought he could stand up to anything.

Anything, it turned out, but for Daniel Jackson being open to him.

Might as well admit he was finished as soon as he'd admitted he loved the bane of his life. If he could be honest enough for that, he could be honest enough for this. He was never going to get past this. The reason it was so damned hard to fight was he didn't *want* to.

Right or wrong, it made sense to him. It made sense of everything.

Daniel Jackson loved him and wanted for them to be close. He was here, he was with him, and Jack loved him back. Found they were close enough.

He slept.

When he woke again, Daniel was waiting and hoping. Jack rolled onto his back, dropped a comforting arm around Daniel, urged him closer. Touched, Daniel allowed his head to rest on Jack's shoulder.

"I'm sorry, Jack," Daniel said, hugging him by way of compensation. "I know what I want."

"I gathered."

"I meant to wait it out with you, I really did. It's just, it's too hard. I can't bear to see you like this."

"Bearing up remarkably well under the circumstances?"

"Eating your heart out."

"You're a soft touch, Dr. Jackson."

"You're a hard nut and I hate to see you crack, Colonel."

"That's an insulting assessment on a number of different levels."

"I'm not saying I'm doing much better. I'm not doing *any* better, come to that. All I can think is you quitting on me before we've even started and I couldn't take that."

"Never happen."

Daniel brushed gentle fingertips over Jack's mouth. "I thought it happened a long time ago," he said gently.

"That was a mistake. I was a stupid sonovabitch. Won't happen again."

"A mistake because you don't want this?"

"A mistake because I do."

"You can live with this?" Daniel sat up to study Jack's face, hoping against hope, entirely too forgiving. "Be with me?"

"Can't be without you," Jack admitted gruffly, yanking Daniel back down to cover for his discomfiture. "Trust me on that."

Daniel didn't respond right away. He had to think it over, take some time, but in the end he offered it up like a promise. "I do."

For Jack, it was so much easier doing the thing than it had been fighting the thing.

It felt more natural for them to hold each other, to touch. Easier to lose themselves in the kiss. They were both more passionate, more responsive and sure. Both with so much feeling to communicate beyond words.

Daniel kissed wholeheartedly and with the whole of his body, those delicate, practiced fingers dancing over Jack's face and hair, ears and throat, roaming the breadth of his shoulders, the length of his back, measuring the tightness of his ass, the strength in his thighs and arms. Daniel was as quick as Jack to push at buttons and smothering clothes, all heat and hardness when Jack moved on him.

His skin on Daniel's skin, cock on cock, minutes, moments of straining, sweating friction, a long leg wrapping tight around him, urgent hands bruising his ass, soft moans, Daniel's tongue in his mouth. *Daniel*. He arched, all his wanting hammering down, blowing his mind.

He collapsed, panting, burying his hot face in Daniel's throat, staying where he needed to be. Their hearts were pounding. Daniel shook, murmured wordless love as he soothed Jack's tremors, smoothed the sweat from his back and flanks.

They kissed again, in tenderness and honesty.

Daniel brought up his hands to cup Jack's face. "I...you know that I..."

"I know."

"And you..."

"I do."

"Better this way." Daniel smiled and kissed Jack, a coaxing whisper of lips that made his belly jump. "I mean you're better this way." He rubbed his face caressingly against Jack's, whispered in his ear. "We're better together."

Like most of the things Daniel said, this was true.

Finis