

Chapter 10

The survival of the pilot no longer being hypothetical, teams went out to find Mitchell's bogey. And, since Starbuck hadn't taken a particularly devious path, it was easy to find the *Blackbird* by searching the line from where Mitchell had seen the ship enter the atmosphere to where Starbuck encountered O'Neill's fishing line.

Getting the thing to base was more of a problem. Starbuck had locked the canopy, and no one wanted to risk tripping an explosive anti-theft device by trying to jimmy the lock. Finally one of the base's converted Tel'tak's had been pressed into duty as a flying crane. The Colonial fighter was put in a hastily-devised cradle and flown back to base dangling under the supply ship.

Once there, Carter and the base's technical staff were all over it. The locking mechanism was easy to defeat. *Which means that this isn't really designed for espionage*, thought Carter. The stealth design was only to hide the ship from the enemy during combat.

The interior looked much like the F-15 fighters Carter had trained in before the war. Joystick and missile launch controls were obvious. What she wondered, though, was how this thing could fly so far and so fast. There had to be a naquadah reactor, or something better, in the belly of the ship. One dial looked suspiciously like a reactor power gauge, but the words on the dial didn't make sense in any Goa'uld dialect she knew. Well, there was one person on-world who knew more Goa'uld and Ancient than anyone else in the Galaxy. ' "It says 'Tyllium Level'," said Daniel Jackson. "Not that I know what Tyllium might be. If the dial is like the gas gauge in my car, it's about half full."

"Well, let's follow the cable," said Carter. She reached behind the control panel and found a wire-lined tube. Following it wasn't too difficult. Fortunately, Colonial engineers preferred to screw things together rather than weld whenever possible. Within half an hour Carter and her team had all of the interior metal of the ship removed, making it easy to trace where everything went. Very little computer control, she noted. The joystick was connected directly to the engines, for example, there was no fly-by-wire. So where does that "Tyllium" gauge connect?

It turned out to connect to a large tank behind the pilot's seat. The tank was well shielded. In fact, it looked like – Carter went back to her toolkit. If it wasn't for the shielding, her body would have told her the answer. With the shielding, however, it was necessary to use instruments. She was looking

for a very specific neutrino pattern, one only found by ...

“Daniel, this ship is full of Naquadah. Tyllium is Naquadah.”

“It makes sense,” she continued. “A naquadah reactor heats the fuel and produces extremely hot plasma. The specific impulse must be enormous!”

“Uh, Sam?” said Jackson. Carter stopped, looked at him. “What does that mean?”

“This ship will go really, really, fast. The only limitations are how much acceleration the pilot can stand. Mitchell wasn’t flying one of the 300 series he wouldn’t have been able to get close. Whoever designed this ship has an extremely advanced technology, Daniel.”

“More advanced than ours?”

“If we didn’t have access to Ancient, Asgard and Goa’uld resources, yes.”

“So these people don’t know about the Goa’uld.”

“Not since they developed a technological civilization.”

“That makes sense, from what Starbuck told me yesterday.” Jackson filled Carter in. “They probably threw off the Goa’uld and lost their technology. When they started developing again they did it on their own. It’s happened on other worlds – Kelowna, Tolan, even Earth.”

“Anything else interesting about your conversation?”

“Yes. She thinks we’re all machines?”

Sam was interested, and concerned. “Replicators?”

“Maybe. She called us ‘Cylons.’ I’ve got no idea what that means. Apparently, though, she thinks we know all about her.”

“Obviously we don’t. Didn’t she figure that out from your questions?”

“I think she believes it’s a clever ruse.”

O’Neill sauntered in, coffee in hand. “Hello, troops. Find out anything about the ship?”

No, I’ve been sleeping all night, just like you, went through Carter’s mind, but she stopped herself. No need to be that snippy. Instead she said, “Aside from the fact that it holds a single pilot, is powered by naquadah, has no superluminal capability, matches no known technology, and has a life support system built for one hundred per cent humans, no, Sir.” “Sir” was not-so-faintly stressed.

“OK.” O’Neill obviously saw that he had offended, but he didn’t know how or why. “Wait – do you say no superluminal capability? Meaning?”

“Yes, Sir. It can’t fly faster than the speed of light.”

“Then how did it get hear? The pilot – Thrace, isn’t it? – is obviously pretty young, she didn’t travel in that thing from another star.”

“Another ship brought her in system,” said Carter, “I’m sorry, Sir, I’ve been working all night and didn’t think ... “

“There’s another ship out there – at least – one dropped her off, and it’s likely that it’s going to come back to pick her up.”

“Didn’t we know that already?” asked Jackson.

“We suspected that,” replied O’Neill. “Now we know.” He pulled out his pocket comm set. “Colonel Wilkes, this is General O’Neill.”

“Go ahead, Sir.”

“Scramble available F-302s and X-307s. There is a good chance that our visitor has friends. Send out the welcome wagon.”

“Yes, Sir!”