

## Chapter 23

Except for the fact that beyond those walls is pure vacuum, thought Laura Roslin, this looks exactly like any military base on the Colonies. Proof positive that both Colonials and Tau'ri were human. Depressing proof, but proof.

Well, this facility (the only thing you could call it) had one difference. A large circular ring, standing on one end, dominated the large hanger. Marked with symbols that looked vaguely familiar from the Colonies past – unlike most of their students, school teachers on the Colonies were at least vaguely familiar with archeology. The center of the ring was covered with metal. Roslin had been assured that the covering kept anyone, or thing, uninvited from passing through the gate. She was also told that when the gate was set for outward traffic, nothing could come inward. However, the entire gate region was surrounded by heavily shielded weapons, including machine guns and even canon. Apparently Stargate Command didn't believe its own propaganda.

The trip from Massilia to the gate had taken place in the *Galactica*, which had escorts from both the Colonial Fleet and the SGC. Once they were far enough from the system's sun, Adama had sent the *Colonial One* back to the fleet to tell them all was well, and to run like hell if they didn't here from the *Galactica* within another 24 hours. O'Neill had thoughtfully provided a place they could run, a world called Chulak. Supposedly there was enough firepower concentrated there to fight off Cylons, supposing the Fleet wasn't chased down before it arrived.

Plans had been made, with what help Valerii could (was willing?) to provide. Roslin *knew* in her heart that Valerii was on their side, but there was no proof, so suspicion remained. O'Neill's point of view seemed to be "it can't hurt, might help." During the trip out, she had reviewed some of SG-1s missions. Apparently they had saved the Galaxy from various noxious forms of domination several times. Ability, or luck? Roslin suspected a combination of both.

The team, herself, Apollo, Starbuck, O'Neill, Teal'c, Carter, Jackson Mitchell, Valerii and Baltar, were standing at the foot of the stairs leading to the gate. All except the prisoners were armed. Historically, prophets had not been armed on the Colonies or on Earth (though there had been exceptions, Jackson said), but Roslin thought she could handle the zat'ni'katel. She just had to remember not to hit the same target twice unless she really meant to kill.

Behind a shielded bulkhead, a tech was performing a countdown that had the hallmarks of ritual. “Chevron Five, locked. Chevron Six, locked. Chevron Seven – engaged.”

The iris protecting the Stargate from the universe had opened. A ball of foam? shot out, then contracted. It left behind a shimmering blue surface, looking much like a not-quite-tranquil body of water.

In front of the team was an ungainly contraption which Roslin had been told was a Mobile Analytic Laboratory Probe, commonly referred to as a MALP. The military use of acronyms was apparently as universal as its base design. The MALP was moving, rolling up to the gate, and then disappearing into the lake without noticeable hesitation. After a few seconds, it began sending back telemetry. The view from its cameras was displayed on large screens set up behind and above the Stargate. Apparently the gate was in a room, not so large as the cavernous base here on the moon, but large enough to hold a large number of men. It was, however, empty.

“Near Earth normal atmosphere, gravity about ninety-five percent of Earth’s, General,” came the same voice voice over the loudspeakers. This was not ritual. “No signs of life. There’s the DHD.” The Dial-Home-Device, Roslin knew. Heavens knows what was dialed, but without it they would have to take additional equipment in order to be able to come home. The MALP was moving to look all around the thing. “DHD appears intact,” said the disembodied voice. The MALP continued its search of the chamber. “The ring platform is right under the MALP. No other entrance or exit apparent, that’s probably the only way in or out. Shall we try it on the MALP?”

“No,” said O’Neill, “let’s not tell anyone we’re here yet. Everything else OK?”

“You’ve got a go, SG-1.” That was the designation of the Tau’ri team, Roslin had learned, though Mitchell was its usual leader now. *What about us?* she wondered, then realized that the staff here thought of the Colonials as just underlings needed by its miracle working team. Ah, well, we’ll see about that.

“OK, campers, let’s move out,” said O’Neill. He walked up the ramp and came up to the Stargate, gun drawn. Just before he stepped through the gate, he turned and motioned the Colonial team to come up, along with the rest of SG-1, and then walked through. Carter, Teal’c and Jackson followed, all also with guns drawn. Valerii and Baltar, unarmed, followed. Behind them were Starbuck and Apollo, whose guns were drawn and pointed at the prisoners. They went through.

*Leaving just me*, Roslin thought. She was acutely conscious of all the people behind her staring at her. She put a hand out, pushing it through the surface of the gate horizon. *Didn't feel a thing*. She pulled the hand out. It *looked* normal.

From behind her came a voice, “You can back out anytime until your entire body has passed the event horizon, Madam President.”

That pushed her more than anything else. “Thank you, Sergeant,” she called over her shoulder, and stepped through.

The trip was – strange. It felt as if the atoms of her body were being stripped from her (true), compressed (also true), shaken a few times (probably false), and reassembled (true). She stepped out of the gate on the other side and promptly stumbled. The moon’s gravity had been much less than that maintained by the Fleet. Here the gravity was slightly heavier than the Fleet. In fact, the last time she had felt this heavy was on Kobol.

“We’re here. We’re on Kobol,” she said, trying not to sound too surprised.

“Apparently so,” said Daniel Jackson, “if the writing on these walls is correct. It says that this is the entrance to the temple of the God, and all should abase themselves.”

“I don’t think we’ll do that,” said O’Neill. “It gets my knees dirty, and I hate that. Any sign of another way out?”

Carter was passing some kind of instrument over the walls. “None that I can find, sir.” She pointed the gadget towards the ceiling. “If the echo on this is right, we’re about fifty feet underground.”

“OK, then,” said O’Neill, “unless there’s something overwhelming about this place, let’s go.” He moved toward the rings. “Uh, Carter, this elevator does go up, doesn’t it?”

“As far as I can tell, sir, the nearest ring platform is on the surface.”

“Well, then, let’s go.” O’Neill motioned the team onto the platform. He paused to move Baltar and Jackson towards the center. Then he faced outward and pointed his gun outside the circle. The others did as well, Teal’c pointing a large staff. Roslin followed suit.

O’Neill had some kind of heavy bracelet on his wrist. He pushed a button on it.

Rings rose from the floor. There was a great light, the rings fell back to the ground, and the scene beyond them changed.

“I know this place,” said Baltar, “I’ve seen it in a vision that Six showed me.”

The ring platform was in an alcove just off a large – ballroom, Roslin decided. Chandeliers hung from the ceiling, providing light. The decor was fabulous. A narrow doorway between the two restricted the exit so that only one person could enter the ballroom at one time. A good security measure, she thought.

“That’s odd, sir,” said Carter, scanning the walls and ceiling, “we’re not on the surface. There must have been an override on the ring platform. We’re still underground.” Indeed, Roslin noticed, there were no windows. All the light was artificial. In fact, it was now fading. Then O’Neill started moving towards the door. The lights got brighter again. Motion sensors. The whole setup had lasted – how long? Probably as long as Kobol based civilization. If the builders were not gods, then they had godlike technology.

There was one large, obvious exit from the ballroom, other than the ring platform. A large door, suitable for big parties to enter simultaneously. The SG-1 team fanned out to either side of the door, then out into the hallway beyond. When they were through, O’Neill motioned for the *Galactica* contingent to follow. Apollo motioned Valerii and Baltar to go first, then he, Starbuck, and Roslin followed down the hall.