

Iron Lore

Location: Gettysburg, PA

Time: 2007-04-06, 23:44 Zulu (19:44 EDT)

The Impala rolled to a stop on a dirt road just outside Gettysburg, Pennsylvania. The mist rising from the fields blurred the headlights as Sam Winchester adjusted the EMF reader, its screen glowing faintly in the twilight. "Dean, this isn't just your run-of-the-mill ghost activity. The signal's fluctuating—like it's alive."

Dean leaned against the car door, sipping his beer and watching the last rays of sunlight disappear behind the hills. "We've got holy oil, the blade of an archangel, a demon-killing Bowie, and The Colt with three rounds in it. That, plus pounds of silver, mistletoe, holy water, and salt. Whatever it is, we've got it covered."

Sam shook his head and pointed at the screen. "No, look—this is electromagnetic interference and quantum harmonics. Whatever we're dealing with isn't just supernatural; it's something else, too."

Dean groaned and tossed his empty bottle into the backseat. "Great. We're hunting Schrödinger's ghost now."

Before Sam could respond, his phone buzzed. Bobby Singer's gravelly voice came through the speaker. "Boys, I've been digging through some old texts—Mesopotamian stuff—and I think I've got a lead. You're close to something big—a Rakshasa, maybe—but it's juiced up with something else. I think the Air Force can help."

"Rakshasa?" Dean interrupted, frowning as he started the Impala. "Like that shapeshifter we hunted in Michigan? The one that could only be killed with brass?"

Sam nodded, already pulling up notes on his phone. "Yeah, but Bobby, I thought Rakshasas were just high-level shapeshifters. Why Mesopotamia? Why the Air Force?"

Bobby's sigh crackled through the speaker. "Because this ain't your garden-variety Rakshasa. The lore goes deeper than what we encountered before. Ancient texts describe them as 'devourers of light and flesh' that can phase between our reality and... somewhere else. They're not just shapeshifters—they're apex predators from before human civilization. The brass daggers thing is just one weakness we know of."

"Great," Dean muttered. "So we're dealing with super-tiger demons that can walk through walls."

"And according to these Mesopotamian texts," Bobby continued, "they feed on both physical flesh and spiritual energy. The more they consume, the stronger they get. Some accounts say they can even absorb the powers of what they eat."

Sam looked up from his phone. "That would explain the fluctuating EMF readings. If it's phasing between realities—"

"—it would create quantum disturbances," Bobby finished. "Which is probably why the military's got their panties in a bunch. That's what gave me the lead. Head to Cheyenne Mountain; it's near Colorado Springs, CO. They've got folks there who might have answers. Now get your asses out there before this thing levels half the Eastern Seaboard. I'll meet you along the way."

Sam frowned. "What's the Air Force got there? The Ark of the Covenant?"

Dean sighed as he started the car. "Cheyenne Mountain? What is this—Wargames? Are we about to play Global Thermonuclear War?"

Bobby's response was short. "Just trust me, idjit; I ain't explainin' over a cell phone."

Location: Rusty's Truck Stop Diner, Somewhere in Nebraska

Time: 2007-04-07, 15:30 Zulu (10:30 CDT)

Dean shoveled forkfuls of apple pie into his mouth while Sam spread maps and printouts across the sticky diner table. Bobby nursed a cup of black coffee, his eyes bloodshot from driving through the night.

"So you gonna tell us what's waiting for us in Colorado?" Dean asked between bites. "Because last I checked, the Air Force doesn't typically handle our kind of problems."

Bobby sighed, glancing around the nearly empty diner before leaning forward. "Remember that Babylonian text we found in Tulsa? The one about 'star demons' that fell from the sky?"

Sam's eyes widened. "You think we're dealing with aliens?"

"Not exactly," Bobby replied, voice dropping lower. "I think we're dealing with something ancient that got its hands on technology it shouldn't have. Something that scared even the old gods."

"And the military knows about this?" Dean asked incredulously.

"They know something," Bobby said, rubbing his beard. "Been tracking energy signatures similar to what your EMF picked up in Gettysburg. But they're calling it something else—classified stuff."

Sam frowned. "How do you know all this, Bobby?"

"Let's just say I've been keeping tabs on certain government projects since the '90s," Bobby replied.

"There was this archeologist who was into what von Däniken was peddling. Knew he was wrong, of course, because monsters are real. Still, his ideas were useful. He disappeared for a while after

getting laughed out of academia, then showed up in Air Force circles a few years back. Details were remarkably absent, which made the situation even more interesting." Bobby shrugged. "Maybe I was wrong about aliens. Thing is, if anyone can help us, it is this guy and whatever . . . thing . . . he's got himself involved in."

Dean sighed. "Aliens, Bobby? Really? Next thing you'll tell me is that Elvis is alive and running a diner in Kalamazoo. But hey, if you're saying there's little green men involved, I guess we better stock up on Reese's Pieces and learn to phone home. Just promise me we're not gonna need any probing equipment, 'cause I left my rubber gloves at home."

Sam considered. "Bobby, are you saying there's a connection between these ancient texts and modern UFO sightings? I mean, we've seen some pretty weird stuff, but aliens... that's a whole new level. What kind of evidence are we talking about here? And how does this tie into the energy signatures we picked up in Gettysburg?"

Bobby said, "I'm not sure of anything, but my gut says this is the lead we need to follow."

Dean pushed his empty plate away. "Great. So we're walking into a top-secret military base to hunt... what exactly?"

"Like I said the other day, a Rakshasa," Bobby said grimly. "But one that's been supercharged somehow. And if I'm right, they're gonna need our help as much as we need theirs."

Location: Cheyenne Mountain Complex Entrance, Colorado Springs, CO **Time: 2007-04-07, 00:48 Zulu (18:48 MDT)**

The Impala rumbled up to a security checkpoint at the base of Cheyenne Mountain under a sky streaked with twilight clouds. Armed airmen stepped forward immediately, their M4 carbines raised as Dean rolled down his window with exaggerated casualness. "Evening," he said with a grin that didn't quite reach his eyes.

"State your business," barked one of the airmen.

Before Dean could come up with something snarky, Bobby's truck pulled up behind them in a growl of diesel exhaust. He leaned out his window and waved a hand impatiently at the airmen. "I think your bosses are expecting me," he said gruffly. "And if they're not, tell 'em to check what's in the bed of my truck."

The airman hesitated but gestured for backup as another approached with a clipboard and radioed inside. The airmen weren't quite pointing weapons at the three hunters. Their unseen backups were another matter. Dean and Sam suppressed itches and twitches. Dean turned to Sam in mock horror to cover his discomfort. "What do you think he's got back there? A nuke? Jimmy Hoffa?"

Sam shrugged nervously but kept quiet as more airmen surrounded them.

After several tense minutes—and after one particularly senior-looking officer arrived—the checkpoint finally cleared them through. The officer leaned into Bobby's window and muttered something about "General O'Neill" before waving them forward. Just inside the mountain, they were stopped again and a very thorough search that left the three and their vehicles entirely bereft of weapons, artifacts, and paranormal paraphernalia for the first time in years. Sam noted the change in the Impala's suspension. Dean merely growled to hide his unease. He watched the Air Force personnel call in a second forklift to move the boxes through the rear-view mirror with some small satisfaction.

As they drove ever deeper into the mountain complex, Dean muttered under his breath to his brother, "Okay, the freaky meter is officially pegged."

"You think?" Sam replied dryly.

Location: SGC Security Office, Level 16

Time: 2007-04-07, 01:02 Zulu (19:02 MDT)

Dean stared at the official document, his jaw clenched tight. "Death penalty? For talking about whatever we see here?" He glanced at Sam, who was already reading through page three with growing unease.

"Sign it or leave," said the stone-faced Air Force major, sliding another pen across the table. "General O'Neill doesn't have time for civilians who can't follow orders."

Bobby signed without hesitation. "Boys, this ain't our first rodeo with the government. These folks know who we really are and I'm guessing all the warrants out for us under various names, and they haven't said boo about it. We ain't gettin' a better deal anywhere." The major nodded slightly to Bobby.

Sam reluctantly signed, but Dean held out. "So we're supposed to trust you with our lives, but you won't even believe us about what's really out there?"

From the doorway, a man cleared his throat. He was wearing fatigues but without rank tabs. His name tag read, "Jackson." "We've encountered parasitic aliens, ascended beings, and time travel. But demons? That's where we draw the line?"

Beyond the doorway, out of sight of the hunters, a female voice responded. "The energy readings don't lie, but spirits? Possession? The science doesn't support it."

"Yeah, well," Dean finally scrawled his signature, "the Bowie doesn't care about your science. It kills demons deadlier than dead."

A voice crackled over the intercom. "If you're done with the trust exercises, we have an apocalypse to prevent. Again."

The man named Jackson stood straighter. "Right away, Jack."

Location: SGC Briefing Room

Time: 2007-04-07, 01:17 Zulu (19:17 MDT)

By the time they reached an underground parking bay filled with military vehicles and armed personnel moving purposefully through starkly lit hallways, Dean was visibly twitchy. "I feel like we're walking into Area 51," he whispered to Sam as they followed Bobby past another checkpoint.

An airman smiled maliciously. "No, your visitor badge is no good for there."

Dean jumped. "Just keep your mouth shut," Bobby growled over his shoulder.

Inside a briefing room lined with monitors and holographic displays, Lt. Col. Samantha Carter stood reviewing data alongside Teal'c and General Jack O'Neill himself.

Dean froze for half a second when he caught sight of Carter—blonde hair pulled into a tight regulation bun and wearing her crisp Air Force uniform—but quickly recovered with his trademark smirk creeping across his face.

Before Dean could say anything stupid—or worse—O'Neill leaned over slightly and whispered in his ear with levity that masked his more serious meaning: "Air Force Lieutenant Colonel and twin Ph.D.'s in astrophysics and engineering. Way out of your league, son. Don't embarrass yourself."

Dean blinked at O'Neill for a moment before nodding slowly. "Gotcha... sir," he said carefully before adding with just enough cheek to stay true to himself: "And spoken for, too, I see."

O'Neill feigned surprise as he straightened up but couldn't quite hide an amused grin.

Sam Winchester cleared his throat awkwardly as Carter turned toward him and extended her hand politely.

"Lieutenant Colonel Samantha Carter," she introduced herself crisply. Then she smiled. "Most people call me Sam."

"Uh... Sam Winchester," he replied before glancing nervously at Bobby for clarification.

Bobby smiled and gestured between them lazily. "Carter here's their Sam; you're my Sam—I think I got the short end of the stick on that one."

Daniel Jackson stepped into the room at that moment carrying an armful of tablets Bobby had handed over earlier and quipped without looking up, "Ours has saved this galaxy four or five times... plus this world more times than I can count."

Dean snorted while Sam Winchester muttered under his breath about being surrounded by comedians.

As Carter explained her findings about naquadah-enhanced energy signatures in their data from Gettysburg, Castiel suddenly manifested beside Teal'c in a flutter of invisible wings. Everyone jumped except Teal'c, who simply inclined his head calmly toward Castiel.

Dean nearly dropped his coffee cup while muttering under his breath: "Dammit Cas! A little warning next time?"

"I am an angel of the Lord," Castiel announced himself. Then he turned to Dean with narrowed eyes. "And Dean—I cannot believe you called this human 'sir,' but you never address me by my proper name. My name is Castiel. It means 'The Shield of God.'"

Dean found himself momentarily at a loss for words.

O'Neill visibly startled but quickly covered it up with a quip: "Life was simpler when the only one who did that was Thor." He glanced sideways at Carter before adding dryly: "Tell me he's not another Asgard."

Carter, too, was tongue-tied. Daniel filled the silence. "He is what he says he is; I see his true form."

Castiel nodded slightly to Daniel Jackson, "You are blessed to be able to see my true form. You are doubly blessed to see my true form... and suffer no ill effects."

Sam Winchester looked between the SGC team and the hunters, his analytical mind working overtime. "So you guys have been fighting alien parasites while we've been hunting monsters? No wonder the government never cared about our kind of problems."

"Wait," O'Neill interjected, raising a finger. "Are you telling me evil space worms are the least of our problems? Can skinwalkers get off Earth? Can a Goa'uld take over one a demon? Or the other way around? Do we need exorcists in the Gate Room?"

The room erupted into a cacophony of questions and theories, with Dean's voice cutting through: "So what happens if one of these snake things possesses a werewolf? Do we get a super-powered furry with glowing eyes?"

As the noise level increased, everyone suddenly fell silent and turned toward Bobby, who had been quietly observing the chaos with his characteristic stoicism.

"I've been a fan of Dr. Jackson's early work for years," Bobby said, nodding toward Daniel. "His theories about cross-cultural influences in ancient civilizations were spot on—just missed the supernatural angle. When he disappeared from academia, then rumors surfaced about him working in Colorado Springs, I knew something bigger was going on. Kept tabs on it. When we found those energy signatures in Gettysburg, I figured if anyone could help us understand the overlap between ancient entities and whatever tech was amplifying them, it'd be Jackson and his people."

Daniel looked genuinely surprised. "You followed my work? Before the... well, before all this?" He gestured vaguely at the SGC around them.

"Son, I've got first editions of all your published papers," Bobby replied gruffly. "Your translations of Akkadian cuneiform helped me exorcise a nasty spirit in Tulsa back in '98."

O'Neil sighed. "This is supposed to be the most secret facility in the world."

Location: SGC Gate Control Room

Time: 2025-04-07, 01:32 Zulu (19:32 MDT)

Chief Master Sergeant Walter Harriman was reviewing gate diagnostic reports when the alarm silently flashed on his monitor. He frowned, fingers flying across the keyboard as he pulled up the sensor data.

"That's impossible," he muttered, studying the energy signature that had suddenly appeared in the briefing room. The pattern resembled gate energy but with harmonics he'd never seen before—almost like the quantum fluctuations they'd recorded during that incident with the Ancient communication device.

The computer automatically flagged it as a potential Foothold situation. Walter checked the security feed and saw a man in a trenchcoat who definitely hadn't been there seconds ago, now standing beside the Winchester brothers.

Protocol dictated immediate lockdown, armed response teams, and notification to NORAD and the Pentagon. But after fifteen years at SGC, Walter knew better than to trigger full protocols without giving the General a chance to assess.

He pulled up the Foothold response system, set it on a five-minute delay, and grabbed a folder of maintenance forms that actually did need signing. As he headed for the briefing room, he studied the energy readings more carefully. There was something oddly familiar about the pattern—something he'd seen in the gate's buffer algorithms.

Walter straightened his uniform. General O'Neill needed to know they had an unscreened, potentially non-human entity in the briefing room. And they had exactly five minutes before all hell broke loose—or as close as the SGC and United States Air Force could manage, which was pretty close.

Location: SGC Briefing Room

Time: 2025-04-07, 01:35 Zulu (19:35 MDT)

"You all heard Dr. Jackson the first time; I *am* an angel of the Lord," Castiel stated with some diffidence. He looked to the hunters and Daniel Jackson for support.

"An actual angel," Sam Carter said skeptically. "With wings and a halo?"

"My true form would burn your eyes from your skull," Castiel replied matter-of-factly. "This is merely a vessel." Daniel Jackson nodded. Dean Winchester nodded vigorously.

There was a perfunctory knock at the briefing room door and Chief Master Sergeant Walter Harriman entered, tablet and folder in hand. "Excuse me, General," Walter said, his voice measured as always. "These maintenance forms need your signature soonest, or there will be particular sorts of Hell to pay."

O'Neill's eyes narrowed slightly at Walter's choice of words. In fifteen years, he'd never heard the Chief use that expression. "What have you got, Chief?" O'Neill asked, taking the folder.

Walter placed the tablet on the table, angled so O'Neill could see the flashing Foothold warning and countdown timer. "Sir, the environmental sensors detected an anomaly in this room . . . earlier today. The computer flagged it for immediate attention."

O'Neill nodded appreciatively at Walter, then glanced meaningfully at the countdown timer. "Thank you, Chief. We're good."

"Yes, sir," Walter replied evenly. "I should return to the control room immediately. To process those forms." He turned to leave, then stopped. His eyes moved to Castiel, then to the Enochian sigils Sam Winchester had drawn in his notes. Walter's expression remained professional, but something like recognition flickered in his eyes.

"Sir, if I may," he said, studying the symbols more closely. "These patterns... they're remarkably similar to the buffer algorithms we use to prevent matter stream degradation during gate transit."

Carter looked up sharply. "What are you saying, Chief?"

"I've been monitoring these energy patterns for years, Colonel," Walter explained. "The mathematical structure of these symbols creates quantum resonance fields almost identical to what we see in the gate's containment protocols. If you're trying to contain something with both physical and energy components..."

Sam Winchester leaned forward. "You're saying these Enochian sigils work on the same principles as your gate technology?"

"Not exactly the same," Walter clarified, "but the underlying mathematics is surprisingly similar. If you're trying to create a field that can affect both matter and energy simultaneously..."

"We could modulate the emitter to match these frequencies," Carter finished, excitement building in her voice. "Chief, can you pull the buffer algorithm parameters from the gate system?"

"Already done, Colonel," Walter replied, tapping the tablet to share the data with Carter's system. "I took the liberty of isolating the relevant protocols."

In unison, O'Neill and Carter said, "Great work, Chief," but Walter was already gone; he still had the countdown timer to stop.

As Walter left, Dean whispered to Sam, "Did we just get saved by a desk jockey?"

Bobby snorted. "Son, in places like this, the ones who really know what's going on are never the ones with the stars on their shoulders."

O'Neill exercised his prerogative to get in the last word. "'What can I say? Someone's gotta sign the maintenance forms ASAP."

Bobby cleared his throat. "Now that we're done with the introductions, let's get back to the matter at hand." He pulled out an ancient, crumbling tablet from his bag. "These Mesopotamian texts describe the Rakshasa as 'devourers of light and flesh'- creatures that devour light itself. If Anubis got his hands on one of these, we're dealing with something that could make these Goa'uld look like a schoolyard bully."

Dean fidgeted while his brother Sam stared at holographic projections displayed by Lt. Col. Samantha Carter. The schematics showed energy signatures matching those from Gettysburg—but amplified by naquadah-based technology.

"This is Goa'uld tech," Carter explained, zooming in on an anomalous spike in the data. "Anubis experimented with bioweapons tuned to specific frequencies—frequencies that we now surmise destabilize organic anomalies like demons or spirits."

Teal'c stood silently in the corner before speaking. "If Anubis feared such creatures, they must possess power beyond his control."

O'Neill leaned forward, elbows on the table. "So we've got an ancient demon-tiger thing, juiced up with Goa'uld tech, and potentially the end of the world. Again. Didn't I set a policy that there'd only be one end-of-the-world event per month?" He glanced at Carter. "Options?"

"The naquadah signature is unique," Carter replied, manipulating the holographic display. "It's resonating at a frequency that seems to amplify supernatural energy rather than suppress it. As you may know, naquadah has two decay modes. If we can induce the secondary decay mode to predominate—"

"—we could destabilize the connection between the Rakshasa and its power source," Sam Winchester finished, earning a surprised look from Carter.

Bobby nodded grimly. "The lore says Rakshasas can only be killed with brass daggers blessed by a holy man. But with this tech amplifying it..."

"We need something stronger," Daniel suggested, scrolling through a tablet. "These hieroglyphs mention a containment protocol Anubis developed—a failsafe."

Dean snorted. "Great, so we're trusting the evil space snake's contingency plan?"

"Not exactly," Carter interjected. "We can modify our emitters to generate a quantum field that mimics the brass dagger's properties, but amplified through the same frequency the Rakshasa is using."

"And I can add Enochian sigils to the emitter," Castiel offered. "It will contain the creature's essence when its physical form is destroyed."

Teal'c raised an eyebrow. "The creature will be drawn to Bear Creek Mine. Our intelligence suggests the naquadah cache there has already activated."

O'Neill stood. "Alright people, gear up. We've got a tiger to catch." He gestured toward the door. "Let's get you boys some proper equipment."

As the group filed out behind O'Neill, Teal'c, who had been observing silently, approached Castiel. His stoic demeanor remained unchanged, but there was a hint of curiosity in his voice. "You are unlike any being I have encountered in my years of service to false gods or in my time with the Tau'ri. Your presence... it resonates differently."

Castiel turned to Teal'c, his head tilting slightly. "And you, Jaffa, carry the remnants of a symbiote. Your resilience to celestial energies is... intriguing. I think I finally understand the Plan is greater than Earth and there are many roads to Salvation. I name you Blessed."

Teal'c considered. "Indeed."

Location: SGC Armory, Level 20

Time: 2007-04-07, 02:05 Zulu (20:05 MDT)

The armory's fluorescent lights reflected off racks of weapons that Dean had never seen before—sleek, alien designs mixed with modified top-of-the-line Earth firearms. Sam Winchester moved cautiously between the displays, his eyes wide with academic curiosity, while Bobby examined a shelf of peculiar devices with practiced caution.

Dean eyed the Kara kesh gauntlet on the table suspiciously. "So you want us to swap out rock salt for alien glowsticks? Not happening."

Carter picked up the hand device. "This Goa'uld technology can generate a kinetic blast capable of throwing a two-hundred-pound man twenty feet. If you have the right markers. It also has neural interface capabilities that—"

"That's exactly what I'm talking about," Dean interrupted. "Neural what? No thanks. I'll stick with what I know."

O'Neill shrugged. "Your call. But these zats," he tossed one to Dean, "one shot stuns, two shots kill, three shots disintegrate. No mess, no evidence."

Dean sighed heavily and reluctantly grabbed the zat'nik'tel from the rack. "Fine. But if this thing breaks down mid-hunt, I'm blaming you guys."

Bear Creek Mine, Montana

Time: 2007-04-07, 05:43 Zulu (23:43 MDT)

The mine was eerily quiet except for the sound of dripping water echoing through its tunnels. Dean gripped the zat'nik'tel awkwardly in one hand, his familiar sawed-off in the other.

The Rakshasa emerged from the shadows like liquid darkness, its tiger-like form shifting between solidity and smoke as it growled low in its throat. Teal'c fired his staff weapon—the blast seared through its shoulder but didn't slow it down as its flesh reknit instantly around a glowing blue orb embedded in its chest.

"Reactor core!" Bobby shouted over comms from his position at the secondary entrance. "That's what's keeping it alive! It's using the naquadah to amplify its regenerative abilities!"

Sam ducked behind an excavator as Dean fired both the zat and his sawed-off shotgun point blank into its face—salt rounds scattered harmlessly as the creature lunged again. "This thing doesn't die!" Dean yelled furiously as he scrambled backward.

The Rakshasa suddenly shifted direction, sensing Carter's emitter device. It moved with blinding speed toward Sam Winchester, who was still programming it.

Winchester, down!" O'Neill shouted, leaping from his position and tackling Sam just as the Rakshasa's claws slashed through the air where his head had been. O'Neill rolled to his feet, placing himself between the creature and Sam, firing his P90 continuously into the beast's chest. The rounds sparked and sizzled, but the Rakshasa barely flinched.

O'Neill cursed, dropped the empty P90, and drew his sidearm in one smooth motion. He fired twice—each shot slamming into the Rakshasa's chest. To everyone's astonishment, the creature howled in agony, its form flickering and destabilizing, wounds smoking as if seared by holy fire. For a moment, it looked as if the beast might collapse entirely, but the naquadah reactor pulsed, and its flesh began to knit back together. "You didn't have to do that," Sam Winchester said, scrambling to his feet.

"I wasn't planning on leaving Carter alone in a world without me and with your brother," O'Neill replied grimly, never taking his eyes off the creature. "Keep working on that emitter. Carter, we need that secondary decay mode now!"

"Almost there, sir!" Carter's voice crackled through their radios. "Emitter charging! You've got ninety seconds to get it into position!" The Rakshasa roared and lunged at O'Neill, who stood his ground, hammering the glowing orb with a round every half second. The bullets seemed to slow it down, giving Teal'c time to activate the Asgard holograms—a dozen spectral Winchesters surrounded the Rakshasa in an illusionary trap.

"Fall back, General!" Castiel commanded, his divine Grace burning cold blue-white against the creature's smoky form.

O'Neill retreated, bleeding from a gash across his shoulder, but his eyes remained fixed on the team. "Dean, the disruptor! Aim for the core!"

Dean grabbed the Kull disruptor and aimed for the glowing orb in the creature's chest. "This better work," he muttered.

The disruptor beam hit true—the Rakshasa screamed as golden energy lanced through its reactor core—and Carter's emitter detonated silently in a sphere of white light that etched fiery containment runes into the granite walls of the mine pit.

When the light faded, nothing remained but ash. O'Neill winced as he pressed a field dressing to his shoulder. "Everyone okay?" he asked, checking each team member visually before allowing Castiel to approach.

Sam Winchester, still catching his breath, looked at O'Neill's sidearm, then at Carter. "General, what the hell did you just shoot that thing with?"

Carter, equally curious, added, "Those rounds did more damage than anything else we tried. Was that some kind of special issue?"

O'Neill shrugged, holstering the weapon. "My smart people said a blessed brass dagger could kill the thing. Couldn't get a dagger, but we've got a base chaplain and they do make FMJ with brass coating. Just not for the P90."

Carter glanced at the sidearm, then back at O'Neill. For a split second, she saw the echo of old pain in his eyes.

Dean let out a low whistle. "Remind me to raid your ammo locker before we leave."

"You didn't have to risk yourself for me," Sam Winchester said quietly.

O'Neill shrugged his shoulders, both of which were now miraculously intact. "Part of the job description. Nobody gets left behind—not on my watch."

Location: SGC Briefing Room

Time: 2007-04-07, 08:00 Zulu (02:00 MDT)

Dean spun his newly issued P90 on the table with disdain while O'Neill watched amusedly from across the room. "Blessed iron-tungsten rounds," O'Neill said casually. "Best we could come up with on short notice. Brass rounds will have to wait until next year's budget. Fries Wraith and werewolves. Strange how this one was lost off-world about a week ago."

Dean shrugged and holstered it reluctantly. "Still feels like cheating."

Sam lingered by Carter's star map showing red markers across Earth where similar caches might exist—Carthage, Xi'an... ancient sites tied to Goa'uld anti-demon protocols.

Bobby pocketed a zat casually as he muttered under his breath, "Guess I'll stick around awhile longer—someone's gotta translate these without blowing up half the planet. Grub ain't half bad, either."

Epilogue

Time 2007-04-07, 09:15 Zulu (03:00 MDT)

As dawn broke over Highway 15 and the Impala roared westward toward their next hunt, Castiel watched silently from above as chevrons locked on an active Stargate deep within Cheyenne Mountain.

"They will resist your help," he murmured softly.

Teal'c inclined his head beside him and replied simply: "As will we. We must be free before we can choose."

Above them both, unseen by mortal eyes, a meteor streaked across Earth's atmosphere—a ship returning home or perhaps something far older falling to rest.

Macte animo. The road stretched on.