

# The First Annual All-Atlantis Paper Airplane Championship

Pennyplainknits

## Summary:

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**Summary:** John clicked on the newest email in his inbox. "The first Annual Atlantis Fun Day." It read. "Including Gate Team tug of war, music from Doctor Z and the ZPMs, an Athosian cook-out, dancing 'til late, and the All-Atlantis Paper Airplane. Championship. Sign-ups (one military and one civilian in each airplane-making team) to Sergeant Campbell by the end of the week."

## Notes:

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**Author's Notes** Thanks to the wonderful and patient for her suggestions, Britishism eradications and beta, even though she can't quite break me of my Oxford comma. Thanks to for the loan of the Agrop. 'Cabo' is a Spanish army rank equivalent to Corporal.

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## Chapter 1

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cover by Thank you!



It began with a bunch of scientists with cabin fever, and one of Elizabeth's bright ideas.

"OK, who threw that?" Rodney snapped, picking up the messily folded paper airplane that had just grazed his left ear. "Honestly, are you all twelve? I was under the impression I was dealing with *adults* here."

"Is wet outside." Radek, who was looking suspiciously innocent, said. "We have to do something for amusement."

It was wet. It had been raining for a solid week, and people were beginning to get restless.

"This is a lab, not a, a, paper airplane championship." Rodney said crossly. "And whoever made this should be ashamed of themselves. Talk about a bad understanding of the principles of flight." He waved the airplane threateningly in the general direction of the lab.

"Actually that's not a bad idea." Elizabeth said from the doorway. She was meeting Radek for lunch, for the third time that week, Rodney noted.

"What? What's not a bad idea?" Rodney asked, confused.

"A paper airplane championship - like Radek said we need something to amuse ourselves. We could hold in in that big room down on the third level."

"The ballroom?" Radek asked.

"It is *not* a ballroom." Rodney insisted.

"It has a disco ball. Strobe lights. What would you call it?" Radek retorted in what Rodney thought was an unnecessarily annoying tone of voice.

"Well, it could be anything. We don't know the disco ball is a disco ball. And -"

"And it's the perfect place." Elizabeth interrupted. "We can award points for longest time in the air, furthest flight. It will be a good chance for the newer people to get to know everyone, and for a little bit of friendly competition."

Rodney snorted. "Hardly competition. We'll wipe the floor with the rest of them. You-" he snapped his fingers at Molby, "Start investigating optimum paper composition. You, Simpson." He pointed "Designs for the wing fold. Radek and I will work on centres of gravity, since he's so fond of throwing airplanes." He was already busy thinking of the best designs. Should he adapt the classic paper dart? Or go for something more avante garde with wider wings? Would they be allowed to cut the paper?

"Rodney," Elizabeth's voice broke in on his thoughts. He took one look at her face and his heart sank. She was going to make him *mingle*.

"We'll have two-person teams. One military, one civilian. It will give everyone a chance

to work together in a stress-free situation."

"But Elizabeth-" he began desperately.

"No buts, Rodney. In fact, we'll make a day of it. A little food, music, maybe some dancing. It'll be fun! I'll draw up an agenda and we can form a working group!" She said brightly.

Rodney's heart sank even further. Great. Enforced jollity, just what he needed.

"Oh, and Rodney? As head of science I expect you to set a good example, so I'd better see your name on the sign-up sheet."

Rodney put his head in his hands and groaned.

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John clicked on the newest email in his inbox.

"The first Annual Atlantis Fun Day." It read. "Including Gate Team tug of war, music from Doctor Z and the ZPMs, an Athosian cook-out, dancing 'til late, and the All-Atlantis Paper Airplane. Championship. Sign-ups (one military and one civilian in each airplane-making team) to Sergeant Campbell by the end of the week."

John read it through. He read it through again, thinking 'we are so winning the tug of war.' Then he read it a third time, his eyes lingering on the bit about the paper airplanes. He tapped his comm.

"McKay."

"Little busy here, Colonel," came the reply.

"Busy designing paper airplanes without me?" John asked, feeling a little worried. None of the regular military would be suicidal enough to approach McKay, would they?

"What?" Rodney asked.

"Do you read your email, ever?" John asked, amused.

"Considering I'm at this moment elbow-deep in malfunctioning control crystals no, not today."

"Stay put McKay, I'm coming down there." No way was he risking McKay getting snapped up by anyone else.

"You don't even know where I am." Rodney said, sounding thoroughly confused.

"So tell me," John said, already on his way to the transporter.

Rodney sighed "Level four, quad two."

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When John stepped out of the transporter the heat hit him like walking into a wall . He found Rodney, true to his word, kneeling in front of a open panel, swapping crystals around, and cursing. He'd stripped off his uniform jacket and rolled up the sleeves of his t-shirt as high as they would go. The tight cloth made the muscles stand out. John took a moment to admire Rodney's biceps, his solid shoulders under sweat-sticky cotton. Oh yeah, so winning the tug of war.

"Hey," he said. "So, malfunctioning crystals?"

"Yep. These control the air conditioning but for some reason they're putting out heat." Rodney sat back on his heels and scrubbed a hand over his sweaty hair.

John felt a prickle of sweat on his own forehead and knew it was only partly because of the heat. Sometimes he was almost sure Rodney knew he was flirting with him, then Rodney would go and do something stupid (like Katie Brown) and they'd be back to square one. Still, John told himself, he'd get there eventually.

"Sheppard?" Rodney nudged his leg and John shook his head to clear it. "Can you hand me that crystal, the twelve-sided one?"

John looked around and found the crystal, which was a pale, translucent yellow, and put it in Rodney's outstretched hand.

"OK, I think I've got it," Rodney said, sticking his head back inside the panel and slotting the crystal in place. He closed the panel and pressed a button on the outside that looked like a snowflake.

"Give that a few minutes and we should be fine." He began to gather his tools. "What did you want, anyway? What was so important that you came all the way down here?"

John tipped his face up to the air vents, enjoying the cool breeze.

"Paper airplanes," he said.

"What? Oh god no. She was serious," Rodney said, pressing a hand over his eyes.

"What?" John asked, puzzled.

"Elizabeth's bright idea, the fun day."

"Yeah, that. Like I said, the paper airplane championship." They began to walk back down the corridor.

"Well, what of it?"

"Well, we're a team, aren't we?" John asked, suddenly unsure. "Unless you'd rather, I mean, have you found someone else?"

"Oh stop *pouting* Sheppard," Rodney said, irritably.

"I'm not pouting," John said, annoyed. Maybe he was, a little, but did Rodney have to call him on it? "Do you want to enter the competition with me or not?"

"We'd better win," Rodney said as they reached the transporter.

John felt relieved, and risked a friendly slap on the back. "Hey, you and me McKay, we're unbeatable."

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Suddenly the whole city seemed to be going fun-day mad. People could talk of little else, gathering in rec rooms and corridors (it was still raining too much to use the balconies and piers like they usually did) to discuss the best way to fold wings, where to get paper, and whether it was even worth competing in the tug of war if Ronon was going to be involved. Zelenka immediately laid claim to the ballroom for band practice every night, something Rodney found intensely annoying.

"Every night at seven, even if we're in the middle of something! It's all, "I have to practice Rodney! Doctor Esposito has written new songs Rodney! Elizabeth will be disappointed Rodney!" Honestly, the way that man pines after her is embarrassing. Pass me that mallet will you?"

John passed him the mallet. The environmentals were still acting up on level four, so Rodney was rerouting some of the conduits inside the big junction box. It involved a lot of bending over things to get at other things, so John was there for tool-handing purposes and to stare at Rodney's ass. He was an experienced airman, he could totally multi-task.

"Wait, Radek and Elizabeth? Really?" he asked, hopping back up on the window ledge.

Rodney turned to stare at him.

"You really are kind of clueless aren't you? Yes, Really. He's been in love with her since Antarctica."

"Are they.. " John asked, fascinated. He let the clueless comment slide, because really, it was kind of true.

"I have no idea. I hope so. Someone in this hell hole should be getting some, and Radek gets snappy when he gets frustrated." Rodney bent forward again to whack something inside the box.

"Well, that's - nice," John said, half tempted to say that if Rodney had eyes he could have been getting 'some' for years.

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John had been wise to get to McKay as quickly as possible, he found. The first day after the announcement Elizabeth confirmed that there would in fact be a prize for the best airplane, and put up one pound of her precious Sumatran beans, and a stack of post-its from her own personal stash (John could take or leave the coffee, but post-its were like gold dust, worth almost as much as non-homebrew alcohol on the black market). Unfortunately, the lure of coffee that didn't taste like it was made from acorns meant half the military wanted Rodney on their side.

"Look," Rodney said, glaring at a woman John vaguely recognised as Ensign Colfer, "as I already told your three colleagues before you, I *have a partner for the airplane championship*. And honestly, do you really think I'd share the coffee with *you*? Didn't you tell me just last week that scientists who were in bad shape like me are a liability to the mission, and should be shipped back to Earth?"

Colfer at least had the grace to look embarrassed.

"Go," Rodney flapped his hands at her, "and take your pathetic caffeine addiction with you."

John snorted as she left their table and made her way out of the mess hall.

"God, its just like the time we started differential calculus all over again. Suddenly everyone's your best friend." Rodney dug into his apple cake, then looked up at John. "What are you smiling at?"

"You calling anyone out on caffeine addiction is a bit rich," John said.

"Yes, well, I deserve it more."

"So where does that leave me?" John teased, unable to help himself.

"Glorying in your post-it notes. Come on, you can trade them to Carson for at least a quarter bottle of scotch or the last three boxes of Mallomars he's got."

"We have to win first McKay."

"Well of course we will - unbeatable, remember?" Rodney grinned so happily at him that John just wanted to ruffle his thinning hair, then kiss him soundly. Being a responsible adult with a firm grip on his libido, he did neither.

"Yeah, unbeatable," he said, then pushed his muffin across the table just to see Rodney smile.

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"You know," Rodney said as they walked down the steps from the gate, "just sometimes I'd like to swap bazaar-world for advanced technology-world." He waved around the scanner, more out of hope than expectation. "Honestly with the amount of time we waste offworld we could have built a puddlejumper from scratch."

"C'mon, McKay," John bumped his shoulder, "we're seeking out new life and new civilisations."

Rodney rolled his eyes. He'd never have believed it the first time he saw John in that chair, but the man was a closet dork. He wished he didn't find that as appealing as he did.

"Rodney," Teyla said, dropping into step on his left. "My people trade on this planet, and we need to maintain the relationships built up over generations. I would fail them as leader if this were not the case."

"And some of us happen to like fresh food," John added.

"Hey," Ronon called from up ahead, "You guys going to spend all day there?"

The market was busy with people and loud with the calls of traders and stall-holders.

"OK, guys. Have a look round, check in every 15 minutes," John said. "Teyla says this place is safe, but don't do anything stupid."

"That means no starting fights, trading weapons, or seducing alien priestesses." Rodney reminded him.

"Would I do that?" John asked.

"Yes, you would. You have." Rodney pointed out.

"I'll be good." John said, grinning. He slipped his aviators on. In contrast to the monsoon-like conditions back home, this planet was sunny and warm.

"C'mon, " John said, "Let's go make friends."

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"Looking for something in particular sir?" the stallholder asked.

"A gift, for my sister. Can I see those?" Rodney pointed to the roof of the stall, where lengths of silk in greens and gold hung.

"Of course; Sir has made an excellent choice." The little old lady stood on a stool to reach them down.

"Watcha' doing Rodney?" John's voice came from behind him, making him jump.

"Jesus, make some *noise* when you move, will you Sheppard? Do I have to get you a collar and a bell?" Rodney snapped.

As soon as the words were out of his mouth he got a mental image of John, naked, his long graceful neck collared in black leather, and he had to bang his knee against the stall to stave off his arousal. He really needed to stop doing that to himself. Getting distracted lusting after your team leader was liable to turn you to Wraith food if you weren't careful.

"Hey, I made noise, you were just distracted." John reached across Rodney, one elegant hand stroking the silks laid out in front of him.

"Nice," he said. "But it's not really your style McKay."

"Ha ha," Rodney jerked the scarf out from under John's hand. "It's for Jeannie, it's her birthday soon and I can get it sent back on the *Daedalus* if I buy it now. I just can't decide which one to get."

John braced a hand on Rodney's shoulder and leaned forward, and Rodney suppressed a shudder at the heat of him.

"That one," he said, pointing at one that had small glass beads sewn in a pattern of interlocking circles, and a heavily tasseled fringe.

"Yeah, that's what I thought too." Rodney said. "I'll take this one please," he told the stallholder, and dug around in his tac vest for the small amount of Pegasus currency they all carried.

"One argent," the stallholder said, folding the scarf and wrapping it in tissue. She touched the cuff of his shirt - little old ladies always seemed to want to *paw* him, Rodney thought irritably, thinking of his Auntie Helen's dreadful friends.

"Will there be anything else? My cloth is much finer than this," she rubbed his shirt cuff between thumb and forefinger, "and I have colours much more flattering to the complexion."

"Yeah Rodney, you do need some more civvies." John picked up a length of blue cloth and held it against Rodney's shoulder. He felt absurdly like a dress-up doll.

"Oh, your friend is right. sir. That is the colour for you. Those eyes! So clear!" She turned to John: "You really must get him out of that black - it does nothing at all for the skin tone."

As Rodney was wondering just when he'd wondered in the Pegasus version of *What not to Wear* John turned his 'making-friendly-with-the-natives smile on her and said:



"Ma'am, I've been trying to get him out of those clothes for *years*."

Rodney choked. He couldn't believe John had actually *said* that, or meant it the way it sounded. But John's elegant hands were smoothing the blue cloth over his chest, stroking out the creases, and when John's hand drifted over a nipple Rodney had to bang his knee again.

"Thank you," he said, gathering his wits, "but I'll just take this for now." He laid the silver coin down on the counter, shrugging the blue cloth off in an untidy pile.

"Of course Sir, thank you." The stallholder handed him the parcel and Rodney stuck it in his backpack, feeling her eyes on him as they walked away.

"So, you buy anything?" he asked John as they walked further into the market, past stall selling grain and flour.

"Yeah, this. Isn't it cool?" John shoved his wrist in front of Rodney's face to show him a leather bracelet made of plaited thongs and matt silver beads.

Rodney, feeling daring, but thinking he could probably get away with it after that little display at the scarf stall, held John's wrist and stroked a finger over the leather.

"And this conforms to uniform regulations how?" he asked.

"There's plenty about me that doesn't conform to the regs, McKay," John said, his drawl drawn out and lazy.

John, Rodney realised slowly, feeling a bit of an idiot, was *flirting* with him. He'd been flirting with him for *months*. This bore further study, but before he could say anything, Ronon came up behind them and Rodney dropped John's wrist hastily.

"Hey Ronon, " John said, unperturbed. "You done?"

"Yeah," Ronon gnawed on the chicken leg he was carrying. He always seemed find the best food.

"OK." John said, scanning the market. "Let's go find Teyla and get out of here."

"You have no need." Teyla said, coming towards them. "I am here."

"You get your trading done?" John asked.

"Yes. It was good to see the Master Tanner again. He was an old friend of my mother. He also gave me these." She gestured with the paper bag she held.

Ronon sniffed the air. Rodney could smell it himself, warm sugar like fresh-baked doughnuts.

"Hesta's Purses?" Ronon asked, a grin breaking over his face.

"Yes. I had not had them since I was quite small, but Master Deb remembered how fond I was of them." She offered the bag to Ronon.

"What are they?" Rodney asked. They smelled fantastic, whatever they were, and he found his mouth watering.

"They are very similar to the pastries we have in the mess." Teyla said. "When I was small, my mother began to take me through the ancestral ring, to learn the ways of the trader. I was quite fearful of the ring at first, and she would bribe me with the promise of these. It is rare to find them now, except at large markets such as this. Would you like to try one? There is nothing in them that would harm you."

She offered the bag. Rodney drew out one of the pastries. It was sticky with syrup or honey and looked like an oversized won ton. He bit into it, tasting nuts and sugar and spices. It was a lot like baklava. It was also delicious, and he quickly polished it off, licking his fingers.

"Thanks, are there any more?" he asked, pulling his thumb out of his mouth with a pop.

Sheppard looked a little dazed, and shook his head as if to clear it.

"Leave some for the rest of us Rodney." It would have sounded sterner if he hadn't been- was he? Yes, Rodney realised, John Sheppard of the liquid hips and oddly attractive ears was *looking right at his mouth*.

"There is one for each of us," Teyla said, interrupting his train of thought, "but now that I know you like them as much as I, we will seek them out again."

"Thanks, Teyla." Rodney said, pleased.

"You are most welcome." Teyla smiled at him, like she was pleased she could share something good from her childhood for a change. They strolled back to the gate at a leisurely pace, Rodney's thoughts buzzing with the implications of that look.

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"Pssst! Psssst! Rodney!" Rodney turned round from his laptop. It was mid-morning and the lab was busy, so he couldn't immediately see who had called him.

"Rodney!"

John was leaning in the doorway. He caught Rodney's eyes and beckoned. Rodney sighed, but pushed himself to his feet and went.

"Can't you radio like a normal person? What do you want?"

"The blue room on the third level. Nineteen hundred hours. Alone." John spoke in a low whisper. It was really most unfair, Rodney thought, that John's drawl made *everything* sound like an indecent proposal. It gave a guy ideas.

"What?" he asked, confused.

"Airplane designs. Only three weeks to go, and I figured we'd get stared on some preliminary models."

Rodney felt simultaneously relieved and a touch disappointed.

"Oh, yes, of course. We'd better come up with something good, I've already got Zelenka gloating about his revolutionary new nose design."

John pushed himself upright and wandered over to the desk, picking up Rodney's red Sharpie and twirling it though his fingers. Rodney watched, finding himself almost hypnotised.

"It'll be *fine*. Oh, and I signed us up for the tug of war too."

"What! No way! I thought you were joking!"

"C'mon Rodney." John tipped his head to the side, "Ronon's all excited."

"No."

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"Do it for Teyla then. That asshole Walker, you know, the one on Grewal's team? He bet a month's worth of movie and TV privileges that his team would beat ours because, 'my team doesn't have a dead weight scientist, and a girl'."

Rodney gaped.

"Does he have a death wish?"

"Nah, he just hasn't been here long enough to get knocked on his ass by her, yet." John smirked, still twirling the pen.

"Well..." The prospect of seeing Walker, who routinely swiped the last cupcake and had loftily told Zelenka hockey was a waste of time, getting his ass handed to him was tempting.

"Plus, you should be good at it." John said off-handedly.

"I, really? You think so?" Rodney was oddly pleased.

"Sure, it's mostly pigheaded stubbornness, and you're good at that."

"Well, thank you Colonel, and here I was thinking you were giving me a compliment."

John stepped towards him, and clipped the Sharpie into the neck of Rodney's shirt. He felt John's fingers brush his skin.

"Nah. But I know our airplane will kick ass. Later, McKay."

Rodney stared blankly after him for a minute. As well as what he was 80% sure was flirting, Sheppard had been doing an awful lot of *touching* lately. It had begun just after the Thing from Another Dimension had gone back home. Nothing blatant or overt, at least not until just now. Nothing that couldn't be seen as just simple contact. A slap on the back, a nudge of the elbow as they sat next to each other. Brushing fingers when he passed him something. At first Rodney thought he was doing it by accident, but now he was almost sure it was deliberate. And, more and more, he was losing the fight against the urge to touch *back*.

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Rodney was still pondering what it all meant as he hurried toward the blue room (actually an unused lab with blue stained glass windows) later that night. Had Sheppard been, well, anyone other than Sheppard, Rodney would have, well, he would have said *something*. It wasn't even the fact that John was male or military. Rodney had fond memories of a week in Antarctica spent with grey-eyed corporal from Boston intent on finding all the ways two grown men could keep warm in a sub zero climate. No, it was that John was, without sounding too high-school about it, his closest friend. And if he was reading him wrong, he risked losing that.

He could wait, he thought. Wait until John worked up to doing whatever it was he was planning, until he had proof positive that his feelings (god, *feelings*) were returned.

Besides, he was kind of enjoying the anticipation.

Sheppard was already in the lab, sheets of paper spread out over the bench.

"Hey, Rodney," he said, looking up.

"Colonel. What's all this?" Rodney gestured at the bench. There was magazine pages, printer paper, comic book pages, a pad of ruled paper, the thick parchment stuff the Athosians wrote important documents on, and several squares of thin paper covered in polka dots.

"Origami paper?" Rodney asked, picking up a square.

"Yeah, Armah does paperfolding. Says he was always fidgeting as a kid, and his gran taught it to him to keep him occupied."

John reached for a sheet of ruled paper and made the centre crease, running his thumbnail down it, making it sharp, then unfolded it and folded the corners to the centre.

Rodney pulled himself out of his reverie as he realised what John was folding.

"Wait, what are you doing? We won't get anywhere with that model!"

"Relax," John drawled. He pushed a stool towards Rodney with his foot. "Sit down. I thought we'd start with a standard model, get some baseline readings, and then we'd know what to change."

"That's actually a good idea." Rodney tore a sheet of paper off the pad and began his own airplane, the folds coming back quickly to him.

"Well, don't sound so surprised, McKay." John stood. "You done?"

"Yeah." Rodney held up his airplane. "You know I was thinking. We need to look at how it's launched as well, then maybe examine all the different papers, work out a formula for each one in terms of how far each goes. That origami paper is light it'll spend a lot of time in the air, but we get points for distance as well as duration, so we may need to see about using heavier paper or weighting the nose, and then -" he broke off. John was looking at him, mouth twitching as though he was trying to suppress a smile.

"What?" he asked.

"Nothing, it's just." John shrugged. "You get intense about the weirdest things."

"That's bad?" Rodney said, confused.

"No!" John said vehemently "No, it's great, it's just - kinda funny, seeing you all thinky about paper airplanes."

Rodney stood. "You want to win don't you?"

"Sure."

"Then stop worrying about how 'intense' I am, and let's fly these airplanes."

"OK. But just so you know, mine is totally gonna beat yours."

"Excuse me? Genius here."

"Perpetually-bored-at-school-kid here. I flew a lot of paper airplanes."

"I bet you did." Rodney moved clear of the bench.

"Yeah, I told Janey Spence in third grade I liked her via paper airplane."

Rodney grinned at the image of a young John, wooing with paper airplanes. No doubt they fell at his feet, even then.

"Did it work?" he asked, launching his airplane.

"Nah," John launched his. It fell short of Rodney's. "She was already sweet on Brad Ross. And she told me my ears were pointy."

Rodney laughed, "Well, they are, kinda."

"I'm crushed, McKay." John felt the tips of his ears and pouted.

"You also lost, mine flew 15 centimetres further." Rodney pointed out, still chuckling.

John bent to retrieve both airplanes, then handed Rodney his airplane back.

"Best two out of three?" he asked, beaming at Rodney with uncomplicated happiness.

Rodney walked back to the edge of the bench.

"You're on," he said.

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"Explain to me again why I'm being dragged all the way out here?" Rodney huffed as he tried to keep up with Ronon's long strides.

"Because I think I recognised something on my run this morning, and I don't have the ancestor's gene to open it." Ronon said over his shoulder. He led Rodney down one of the corridors in level two. They didn't use anything down here because it tended to flood when it rained. Rodney splashed unhappily through shallow puddles. The rain still hadn't let up; luckily the section the not-ballroom was in was watertight, or next week they'd all be flying their airplanes in waders.

"Wait, I thought you went running with Sheppard?" he asked.

"I do, but I get bored. Here, this is what I found."

Ronon had brought them to a solid door set with several panels of locks. Rodney looked at it and pointed the scanner at it.

"Its reading, well, just Atlantis's energy signature, and some low level EM stuff. Half the labs have these reading."

"But they don't have this," Ronon said. He pointed to the symbol cut into the door. "On Sateda our oldest armouries had this symbol. The armsmasters said it came from the Ancestor's weapons houses, and they took the symbol from ruins they found."

Rodney looked closely. From his limited Ancient he could read the symbols for 'fire' overlaid with the symbols for 'gone'.

"Well, the levels of locks mean there's something in here at least. What do you think it is?"

"I think it's an armoury, or a weapons factory," Ronon said.

"Well, let's have a look shall we?" Rodney said.

The door resisted him for a while, but he thought 'please, please' at it, and followed it with images of them attacking wraith, and the door reluctantly swung open.

"Wow," Rodney said as he looked around. The room was huge, with other doors suggesting more rooms to follow. Stacked up against the nearest wall were hundreds of drones. Rack upon rack of what looked like Ancient surface-to-air-missiles ran the centre of the room. Padded cases held the large crystals that controlled the 'jumper's weapons systems. Those alone would have been worth getting excited about, but the half-finished drones on one bench pointed to fact that there was an actual manufacturing base somewhere on this level, too.

Rodney tapped his headset, "Sheppard, get down here. Level two, the half- flooded section in quad eight. No, I'll explain when you get here. Oh, and bring Radek if he's around, and Miko."

"Ronon, " he said, turning to him, "this is-"

"Pretty cool," Ronon said. "Look, I think these are the same as my gun. The design is a lot like the heirloom pistols my first taskmaster had."

He took the gun from Ronon, turning it over in his hands.

"If this is a weapons factory, there should be a test range somewhere. You could try it out." He opened a door at random, then grabbed the door frame to steady himself.

"McKay?" Ronon asked, "what is it?"

"The factory - we saw schematics in the database, but we thought it was off-world. This is where they manufactured their weapons." He ran forward and ran his hands over the terminals, lighting them up. Immediately, Ancient text flashed up on the viewscreens, and a wall he thought was opaque glass became transparent, showing the manufacturing equipment on the level below. On a bench set against the wall were things that looked like half-finished grenades, mines, and a couple of odd, squat pistols. Ronon picked one up.

"Wait, don't -" Rodney began.

"There were more out there- if they were dangerous why keep making them?" Ronon reasoned. He pushed open a side door, and, sure enough, there was a test range on the other side. Instead of paper targets there were tall figures, a little like crash test dummies, mounted on tracks.

"Well?" Rodney said, impatient.

Ronon sighted and fired. There was a loud sizzling sound and the target vanished. It didn't explode or turn to dust, it was simply there one second, and gone the next.

"Cool," Ronon said, deadpan.

"Cool? We have *disintegrator guns*! That is beyond cool!" Rodney's mind whirled with the possibilities - could they retrofit the jumpers with them? Being able to make the Wraith vanish into thin air would be much easier than taking out face to face. What else could they adapt them for? "Sheppard is going to go crazy! He'll be like a kid in a candy store, and he'll get that smile, you know the one, it makes him look..." He trailed off, realising in his excitement that he'd come perilously close to confessing his crush. "I, I mean," he backpedalled "you know what he's like with things that are noisy and dangerous."

"S'probably why he likes you." Ronon said, shoving the gun into the back of his leather pants.

"What's that supposed to mean?" Rodney asked, confused.

"Means you make as much noise as an agrop at sun-up."

"What's an agrop?"

"Like a chicken. We had them on Sateda. They're tasty, but you need to watch for the spurs. They're poisonous."

"Poisonous. Chicken." Rodney said flatly. Then the rest of Ronon's statement caught up with him. "Wait, what do you mean, likes me?"

Ronon shook his head ruefully. "He likes you."

"Well, obviously, I mean he likes all of us, we're his team. He likes Teyla, Elizabeth, you...." He trailed off at Ronon's look of almost fond exasperation.

"He doesn't stare at *my* ass though." Ronon said finally.

"Are you sure? Because I mean, well -" Rodney waved a hand, attempting to encompass the whole 6'4" of muscles and attitude package of hotness - then realised he'd just told the scariest man on ten planets he thought his ass was worth staring at. "I mean, not that I would-oh god," he put his hand over his eyes.

Ronon gave him a feral grin. "McKay, I was in the army-we had plenty of men who loved other men. I'm not gonna hurt you."

"Well, that's good," Rodney said, relieved. "And-he, really?" Well at least he was getting some objective confirmation of his suspicions, though the fact it can from *Ronon* was



a bit disturbing.

"I thought you were a genius, McKay." They walked back into the main room, and Rodney started translating the Ancient on the viewscreens the best he could.

"I am, just, not about this stuff."

Ronon thumped him companionably on the back.

"Never mind."

"So, you really think Sheppard -" Rodney began, but broke off as Sheppard, a team of marines, and Lorne burst through the door.

"McKay, what's the-" Sheppard broke off, taking in the room. "Wow, *cool*," he beamed. He had that look alright, the rare excited smile Rodney associated with puddle jumpers and personal shields, and letting his guard down enough to actually have *fun*.

Radek and Miko, slightly out of breath, came through the door.

"Rodney, is this what I think it is?" Radek asked avidly, looking round him.

"Yes, it's the weapons factory. Thanks to Ronon we've got drones, guns, explosives, you name it. And we've got the capacity to make more."

"Really?" Lorne asked.

Rodney pointed, "Through that door is the factory itself. Now, I need everyone to catalogue the room, see what else we can find. Miko, those drones there are incomplete, see if they match what we've been trying to build. Radek, those large crystals are for the 'jumper weapons, have a look at them. And we need everyone down here from the labs that can be spared. I'd like to move as much as possible upstairs, it may be that once we've opened the room water will start seeping in." Rodney looked round at everybody. "Well, get on with it!" he made shooing motions.

"Major Lorne, why don't you check out the far end of the room?" John suggested as Radek and Miko got to work. "Take Ronon with you, see if he recognises anything else." He turned to the marines. "Looks like we don't need you guys after all. Go see if the science teams need anything bringing down here."

Rodney beckoned to John. "Colonel, let me show you something." He led John back into the factory control room. John immediately crossed to the window and looked down into the factory.

"Again, cool," he said.

"Beyond cool. I'll need to check, but if its in good working order and we can get the

materials, we need never worry again about weapons or ordinance. But that's not all," he picked up the second disintegrator and motioned John through to the firing range.

"Try this out," he said, almost unable to conceal his excitement. Sheppard was going to *love* this.

John fired. Again, there was a sizzling sound like frying bacon, and another target vanished.

"It disintegrates! We have disintegrator guns!" John looked inches away from jumping up and down like an excited child.

"Yes! Lots of them. And once I get a good look at them I think we can integrate the technology into the puddlejumper." Rodney felt a grin stretch his face in response to John's.

"Really? We could pick the darts right out of the sky!"

"I think we might even be able to jury-rig something similar into the *Daedalus*. I'd need to speak with Hermiod and Novak, but if that's the case-"

"Rodney," John breathed softly, "We could take out hive ships. No debris to give us away. No time for the darts to escape." He put the gun down and stepped forward.

"Let me look at the chair and we might even be able to make a surface-to-air beam." Rodney eyed John, who looked a little glassy eyed with excitement.

"McKay, I could *kiss* you," John said, suddenly right up in his personal space.

Rodney looked at him, parted lips, blown pupils, almost vibrating with excitement. What the hell, he thought, they could blame it on the new weapons. Radek was probably being all European and kissing people left, right, and centre.

"OK," he said, heart thudding.

John looked at him. "What?"

"I said OK. You can, um, kiss me."

The seconds stretched out in silence. Rodney felt more and more sure he'd made a terrible mistake. Damn Ronon, and damn his own stupid daydreams that John would-

"Um," John said at last. He looked a little wild, but hopeful.

Rodney nodded encouragingly. He didn't want to spook him.

John looked around quickly, as if checking they were still alone. Rodney heard the

secondary locks click on the firing range door Then, John stepped forward and pressed his lips quickly, and softly, to his. It was sweet, and fleeting, and utterly frustrating.

"There," John said.

"Hey! I just found you the way to defeat the Wraith! I've had more passionate kisses from Great Aunts! Unless...I mean, it wasn't just the armoury, was it..." he trailed off, uncertain again.

John shook his head. "No, I want," he swallowed, "more."

"Oh god, me too," Rodney breathed, relieved. He leaned in to kiss John, intending to show him how it was done, when John stopped him with a hand on his chest.

"Now?" he asked.

Rodney thought about it. He'd been momentarily distracted, but really, he did want to check out the rest of the armoury, and fucking in a firing range was not his idea of a memorable first time together.

"Um, later?" he asked, hoping John wouldn't change his mind, "after I've got everyone started on this?"

John smiled, "My quarters, tonight. That way there'll be no interruptions."

Rodney nodded rapidly.

"Yes, yes, tonight," he said, relieved

"Oh, well, good then." John smiled at him.

"Yeah, good." Rodney grinned back.

He realised they were basically staring like idiots at each other, so he thought open the door, and went through into the control room.

"Later," he said, and turned to look at the consoles, lips tingling from the briefest of kisses.

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John filled his day as best he could. It was still raining solidly. The meteorologists said this was completely normal for a temperate maritime climate, but all the rain was beginning to grate on his nerves. Since he couldn't run outside, he got beaten up by Ronon and Teyla. Ronon kept smirking at him and John was almost sure he *knew*.

Limping slightly, he retreated to his office to do his all his paperwork. As he signed off

the requisition forms for the 'gate room he was slightly perturbed to see Sergeant Campbell's form was covered with small doodles of paper airplanes, and the one from Cabo Vasquez looked like it had actually *been* an airplane. He spent 15 minutes studying them before he decided that he and Rodney had nothing to fear in the way of competition.

Finally he retreated, bored and a little grouchy, to his quarters, changed into civvies, and sprawled out on the bed with one of his new comic books. He told himself he wouldn't be too disappointed if Rodney didn't show, that he was busy and they could pick up where they left off later. He wasn't convinced.

Just as he was about to call it a night the door chimed, and he leapt off the bed, feeling excited and foolish all at the same time.

"Yeah?" he called out.

"It's me," Rodney called though the door.

John though the door open and locked it behind him, then stood in the middle of the room, feeling a little awkward.

"So," Rodney said, fidgeting with the hem of his t-shirt. He'd changed, John realised. Just a clean pair of black BDUs, and a soft-looking grey t-shirt, but John liked it.

"Yeah." he said.

"So," Rodney said again, "Um, busy day?"

"So-so," John said.

"Good," Rodney said, plucking again at the hem of his shirt, twisting it. John wanted to go over there and still his hands, but he couldn't bring himself to move.

"Yeah, good," John said, aimlessly.

"We're really bad at this, aren't we?" Rodney said, smiling crookedly.

"Yeah, we kinda are." Now that he was so close to getting what he wanted he had no idea what to do next. Well, he had *ideas*, but he wasn't sure where to start.

"Oh, for-" Rodney took three steps towards him and slowly, gently, slid his big, warm hand up John's arm and around to the nape of his neck, and just let it rest there. John brought his hands up to bracket Rodney's hips. He tilted his head down just as Rodney tilted his up, and their lips met softly, just like before. It was short, and sweet, and utterly compelling, Rodney's thin slanted mouth under his, fingers dancing at his hairline, scratching on his scalp. Rodney sucked briefly at his bottom lip, flicked his tongue over it, then drew gently away. He left his hand where it was, stroking gently up and down.

"Oh," John breathed, at a loss for words. He let his head rest on Rodney's shoulder, nosing at the collar of Rodney's shirt.

Rodney chuckled, and John felt it with his whole body.

"Coherent, John," Rodney teased, "If that's all it-"

Before he could finish his sentence John kissed him again, deeper this time, slower, but just as sweetly. Rodney's mouth opened easily to his, and John swept his tongue inside, tracing his teeth. Rodney hummed appreciatively when John slid his hands round to palm his ass, and broke off to nuzzle at John's jaw and neck, kissing his Iratus scar. A wave of intense pleasure rolled through him unexpectedly, and John shuddered, feeling his cock twitch and harden.

"John? You OK? Should I stop?" Rodney let John go and stepped back.

"No!" John said reaching out for him. "I want this, I'm just, really sensitive there."

Rodney grinned "Good-sensitive, or bad-sensitive?"

"Good-sensitive, very good, I just, I didn't know it felt like that."

Rodney looked puzzled "You mean no-one's ever kissed your neck before?"

They had. Everybody he'd ever been with had seemed magnetically drawn to his neck; John had never much cared for it, until now it seemed.

"Yeah, I mean, not since Elia bit me."

He sat down heavily in the armchair, wondering how they'd gotten from Rodney sucking on his tongue to this.

"Oooh," Rodney said speculatively, "do you think it has something to do with the dormant Iratus DNA? Does the bite on your arm do the same thing? Have you -"

"Do you really want to talk about this now?" John asked, sprawling back in the chair and splaying his legs, gratified when Rodney's gaze flicked from his face to his crotch and back.

"Excellent point," Rodney said.

"Then come back here," he said. John held out a hand and Rodney took it, straddling his lap, heavy thighs pressing down on him. Rodney's hands framed his face.

"I think we were about here," he said, and John was being kissed again.

When he'd thought about kissing Rodney (and he'd thought about it a *lot*) he'd finally decided that Rodney would be fast and messy, a little slapdash, eager to get to the

main event. He'd forgotten the thoroughness and patience Rodney showed when he thought something was really worth doing. Rodney kissed him with every bit of care he put into fixing broken Puddlejumpers, slowly, sweetly, holding his head just so. Rodney's tongue was slick, and sly, and John let him in willingly, twisting his tongue with Rodney's, revelling in the feel and taste of him, working his hands up the back of Rodney's t shirt and getting a little drunk on the closeness of him. He pushed his hands all the way up Rodney's back, rucking up the shirt.

"Can I take this off?" he asked.

In answer, Rodney got to his feet, stripped his shirt off over his head, kicked off his shoes, and shoved his pants and boxers down. He was pale and solid all over and half-hard already. He looked pretty damn good.

"Eager, McKay?" John smirked.

"Saves time later. Your turn."

John leaned back, letting his gaze travel over Rodney's biceps, his hard little nipples, flushed cock and sweetly vulnerable bare feet.

"Maybe I like looking at you," he said, unbuttoning his shirt slowly and letting it hang open, moving onto his belt.

"Really?" Rodney asked, sounding pleased and surprised, "I mean, I thought you were, and Ronon said you stare at my ass, but I wasn't-"

"I did, I do," John stood, toed off his sneakers and pushed down his jeans and boxers. "I even stand behind you when we practice for the tug of war so I can stare at your shoulders," he added, too horny to be anything but honest. He stepped out of his jeans, shrugged off his shirt and stood there, naked.

"Jesus Christ on a Cross," Rodney swore fervently, closing his eyes. Then: "Wait, you made me do all that practice for your own perverted ends?"

"I made you practice so we can win. Getting to see you all grunting and sweaty was an added bonus." He took another step toward Rodney, and they were kissing again. Rodney steered him toward the bed with a hand on his ass, pushed him up against the headboard and settled in between his thighs. Rodney's skin was smooth and warm, and John wanted to touch every square inch of it.

"You know, there are more enjoyable ways to get me all sweaty, if that was your goal," said Rodney, after a while. His pupils were blown wide and his hair was sticking up at crazy angles from John's hands.

"Would this be one of them?" John asked, lazily stroking his hands down Rodney's back and onto his ass. It felt even better naked, taut and round, and John gave a little squeeze.

"Exact-oooh-exactly," Rodney said, shimmying happily. He bent to lip at John's scar again, pressing his lips softly to it, covering it with licks and tiny kisses. John shuddered again and tilted his head back, giving Rodney free reign. His cock was iron-hard, and he could feel Rodney's cock pressing into his hip.

"God, keep doing that," he panted. It felt like sparks under the skin, like the scar and his cock were directly connected.

"You're that sensitive there?" Rodney asked, trailing a hand down John's chest to his cock and curling his fingers round it loosely, enough to tease, but not enough to get him off.

"Yes," John gasped as Rodney started stroking him frustratingly slowly, while still kissing his neck. His world narrowed down to Rodney's lips and hand and he was jerking his hips up, seeking more, when Rodney stilled his hand and said:

"Let me try something."

"What! No! That's working just fine!" John protested.

"Look, if you don't like it I'll give you a nice blowjob, but just, let me-" Rodney said. He tapped John's arm and John unpeeled his hands from Rodney's body.

"Let me just-" Rodney said again, and lightly ran his fingertips over the bite scar on John's arm, while at the same time stroking his cock.

The effect was electric-John was so sensitised that even the barest scratch of nails felt like fire. He'd never felt anything like it, fully appreciating having an ambidextrous lover in ways he hadn't even imagined. He bucked up in Rodney's grasp and groaned

"Oh, oh god, do that again."

"Knew you'd like it," Rodney said, insufferably smug. "Or maybe you'd prefer this?" And he lifted John's arm to his mouth, licked a stripe across the scar, and blew across it. John gasped, drawing air into his lungs in big gulps, torn between Rodney's hand, still steady on his cock, and the completely unfamiliar sensations on his skin, pleasure like prickles of flame all along his arm.

"Do that again and I'll come," he warned.

"Hmmm," Rodney said "I think I can do better than that." He set his lips to John's throat, sucking hard, stroking John's cock and teasing his arm with gossamer-light touches. Rodney tightened his grip, twisting his wrist, and bit down with the barest edge of teeth, and that was enough. John came, hips jerking up, gasping, moaning, covering Rodney's hand and chest with come.

John floated, completely blissed out, tiny aftershocks rippling through him, until he heard Rodney saying,

"John, John," hoarsely, and saw him jerking his own cock urgently.

"Let me," John said, gathering up his last reserves of energy and co-ordination to sit up and kiss Rodney hard. He joined his hand with Rodney's, feeling his own come coating Rodney's cock, thick and hard and perfect in his grasp. It took one, two, three strokes and Rodney was coming too, groaning into John's mouth, then collapsing on top of him, spent.

John petted his back, his hair, a little haphazardly, then felt Rodney's lips moving against his skin.

"We'll stick together," he said slowly.

"C'n' be bothered to move," John said feeling lazy and satisfied, snuggling Rodney more firmly against him. Rodney wriggled free.

"John, just- I'll promise I'll come back, just let me clean up."

"Do I have to move?" John asked. Now that the fairly spectacular orgasm was beginning to wear off, his body was protesting that it had been roughly treated a few hours before. The boneless feeling that always came after good sex was joined by a deep ache and tiredness.

Rodney huffed and leaned over John to pick up his discarded t-shirt. He wiped himself off, then ran the shirt over John, cleaning him off roughly.

"Are you always this lazy after?" Rodney asked as he lay back down.

"Hey!" John protested half-heartedly.

He opened his arms, he still wasn't ready to stop touching. Rodney was so easy to touch, warm and responsive, and he'd missed honest-to god skin contact almost as much as the sex.

"Stay?" he asked quietly.

Rodney snorted, but cuddled back against him. John put both arms round him and laced his fingers together on Rodney's belly, nosing into his sweaty hair.

"Idiot," Rodney said softly. "Course I will." He stroked one finger over the inside of John's arm, and John shivered again.

"Oh, this is going to be *fun*." Rodney said, voice full of promise.

John drifted off to sleep to the tickle of Rodney's hair on his nose, and the feel of him, warm and comfortable, against him.

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Rodney hummed happily under his breath as he carefully separated out the new gun's components and spread them across the bench.

"Ah hah! Got you!" he said, pouncing on a small crystal that he was 90% sure was disintegrator core.

"You're cheerful. This worries me," Radek said from across the bench. He was *supposed* to be running a diagnostic on the armour factory, but Rodney knew he was actually 3D-modelling his paper airplane's flight.

"Of course I am - *disintegrator beams*," Rodney said. "Tell me you're not?"

He went back to work. He wanted to finish up quickly. Before he'd left at the same ungodly hour that Sheppard went running, John had kissed him hard and said "Lunch?" almost shyly. He had been planning to work through lunch; he had a lot of work to do, they had a paper airplane test flight planned in the evening, but John had looked so appealing, with his track pants slouched onto his skinny hips, and his bedhead gone crazy, that Rodney had had to say yes.

He didn't really regret it.

"Hmm, yes, disintegrator beams." Radek pushed his glasses up his nose. "But we had disintegrator beams yesterday and you were not so..." he made a swirly gesture and went on, "so something happened after you left the labs. Oh!" he gasped, "or *somebody* happened. Yes?"

"Radek, do you need to see Carson about those delusions?" Rodney tried for withering, but the pleasant ache of well-used muscles made it hard to be in a truly bad mood.

"Well? Am I correct?" Radek leaned forward.

"A gentleman does not kiss and tell," Rodney said loftily. He examined the crystal. If they could make them larger, they could slot them into the 'jumpers control panel.

Radek snorted, "You? A gentleman?"

"Still not telling," Rodney said. He thought back to that morning, of John, all lithe muscle, the freckles on his collarbone an unexpected gift, pinning him to the slippery tile in the shower and fucking him fast and hard, stroking his cock just this side of rough.

"We'll do this properly later," John had drawled in his ear, sounding like sex incarnate, "but I've been staring at your ass for three years, and I can't wait another minute." With that he had bucked his hips even harder and came. Rodney came seconds later, thinking that if they did it properly, it might just kill him.

"Rodney?" Radek called him from his daydream and he started guiltily.

"Sorry Radek, you'll have to go somewhere else for your girlish gossip." He began to gather up the pieces and reassemble to gun.

"Ah. Well, I am very happy for you both," Radek said.

"Both? Who said anything about both?"

Radek looked around, checking there was nobody close by.

"Rodney, there is no need. Is Colonel Sheppard, yes?"

Panic gripped Rodney, "Do you want to get him sent back to earth?" he hissed, appalled.

"Has not happened yet. Most people think you've been together years, and the rest of us wonder what took you so long. I think all will be fine." Rodney was reminded that Radek was a perceptive little bastard, and was probably correct.

"You think so?" He was still worried. It would be just his luck to finally, finally have John, and then ruin it by being so transparent anyone could see John was breaking the rules.

"I do. So, I am right, yesterday?"

Rodney nodded slowly.

"Excellent! I must tell Elizabeth."

"What! No! She needs plausible deniability," Rodney spluttered, although Elizabeth, a born romantic if ever there was one, would probably be on their side.

"She suspected long ago. And besides," Radek grinned, looking suddenly boyish, "She won the pool."

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"You are wrong! Quite monumentally and hideously *wrong*!" Rodney declared. He folded his arms and glared at John.

"Rodney," John said slowly. "We are going to do this *my* way. He put the paper he was working on down and stepped forward.

"But it won't *work* your way! The weight will be too far forward, we'll get nosedives," Rodney insisted.

"Not if we fold it how I showed you. It will work."

"I'm sorry, who's the engineer here?"

Rodney had his 'do not push this' face on, smug, and insistent. It never failed to make John want to wipe it off.

"Who's the *pilot* here," he asked. "Rodney, my way will work. I'm doing it."

"No, you're not."

"Yes, I am."

"No, you're-"

John could see this descending into some pretty undignified bickering, so he did what he'd always wanted to do in situations like this.

"You're unbelievable McKay," he said fondly. He twisted both hands into Rodney's shirt and pushed him up against the wall. Rodney hit it with a startled 'huff' but immediately grinned, slowly and wickedly, and settled his hands on John's hips.

"Unbelievable, am I?"

"Oh yeah, absolutely," John said, pushing Rodney more firmly into the wall and kissing him hard. Rodney obligingly spread his legs, allowing John to settle in between his thighs. John kissed him again, flattening his hands out on Rodney's chest, teasing his nipples, sweeping his tongue into Rodney's mouth, growing a little giddy on it, on the warmth of Rodney's body against him, the feel of Rodney's hands on him. He still couldn't quite believe he was allowed to *do* this, that he could kiss and touch as much as he wanted. Rodney pulled his mouth away, looking a little dazed.

"Mmmm," said John, complainingly, missing Rodney's mouth and settling instead for tucking his face in the crook of Rodney's neck.

"Yeah, mmmmm." Rodney petted his hair.

"What were we arguing about again?"

Rodney trailed his fingers up the inside of John's arm.

"I have no idea."

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"May I have your attention everybody?" Elizabeth tapped the mic and Chuck killed the music. She continued:

"Firstly, congratulations to Colonel Sheppard and his team on winning the tug of war. I hope you enjoy your movie privileges!"

Rodney rubbed his wrists. It had been a hard fight, but the prospect of decent movies for a month was a great motivator.

Elizabeth continued, "Secondly, are you all having a wonderful time on our first fun day?"

There were ragged cheers of 'woooo' and 'yeah' from the assorted crowds gathered in the definitely-not-a-ballroom.

Rodney huffed - he'd had a major breakthrough yesterday when, after a week, he and Zelenka had worked out how to replicate the disintegrator crystals. They'd run the machinery for the first time last night, and he'd wanted to carry on testing it.

Elizabeth, however, had firmly told everyone, with the exception of essential patrols, that they had the day off. Rodney had wanted to hide away until it was time for the cook-out and the airplane championship, but John, playing dirty, had turned up to collect him wearing snug low-slung jeans and a well-washed flannel shirt open just enough to show those damn freckles, and Rodney had temporarily lost the ability to speak, let alone complain.

Elizabeth continued,

"We've had another tough year. Sometimes, I admit, I thought we were done for. But, even when we thought our city lost, we got her back. When our people were taken, we rescued them. We've made discoveries that will improve the lives of people in two different galaxies. I am proud of each and every one of you. I love you all, and I think we deserve one fantastic day today! Don't we?" Elizabeth stepped down from the stage as cheers filled the room, and the music started again.

"She kind of reminds me of my elementary school teacher," Rodney whispered to John.

"Is that good?" John asked.

"Yeah. Ms. Hauptman always let me play with the legos while the others were reading. I built her a spaceship," Rodney remembered fondly. She'd been pretty cool, Ms. Hauptman.

"Oh, hey," he said, breaking off from his reminscences, "the cook-out's started. Come on, I want to get to the ribs before Ronon does." He hurried away through the crowd, then stopped. John was just standing there, head tilted, *staring* at him. Rodney felt his cheeks heat. "Well, are you coming?" he managed. "There'll be nothing left."

John strolled over to him. "Some of us aren't as ruled by our stomachs, McKay," he said mildly.

"Yes, well, I've been getting a lot more exercise of late," Rodney looked at him out of the corner of his eye, "I need to keep my strength up."

John snorted, but Rodney felt the ghost of a touch over the small of his back as they joined the line for the food.

It all looked fantastic, sticky barbeque ribs, chargrilled corn, the Athosian dish that was just like lamb kabobs, chicken wings, salads, an entire table of dessert. Rodney piled up his plate, ignoring John's amused chuckle behind him.

"You got enough there?" he asked.

"For now, yes." Spotting an empty bench and table in the far corner he sat down. John slid in next to him, pressing his calf against his.

"You know," he said around a mouthful of kabob, "I was thinking, with the airplane, we could-"

"Geez, finish chewing, Rodney that's gross." John complained.

"Oh come on, you've had-" he was about to say 'your tongue in my ass' but changed it to "giant life sucking bugs on you, that's way more gross."

"I still don't need to see what you're eating."

"Suck it up."

"Not quite what I was intending to s-"

"Rodney, John," Elizabeth broke in "may I join you?"

Rodney knew how they must look, pressed together like that. He tensed up, then felt John's hand on his knee under the table, squeezing.

"Sure," John said "plenty of room."

She sat, and bit into a chicken wing.

"Congratulations again on the tug of war," she said.

"Thanks. Though having Ronon helps." John said, patting Rodney's knee under the table, then flattening his hand out on Rodney's thigh..

"Hey, what about me?" Rodney complained, teasing.

John bumped his shoulder with his.

"You helped too."

"Thanks for that ringing endorsement Colonel."

"It's what I do."

Elizabeth looked sharply at both of them. Rodney knew it was coming a second before she said:

"I see Radek was right."

He would kill him. They'd never find the body. He'd-

"Elizabeth," John began, in his low, soft, cross-me-and-regret it voice, "If"

"John," she said calmly, "I wish you had told me."

"It's, fairly new." Rodney admitted, finding his voice. He slid his hand on top of John's on his thigh, and wove their fingers together.

"That does surprise me," she said, a laugh colouring her voice.

"Is it going to be a problem?" John asked. He squeezed Rodney's hand hard enough to hurt.

"Not if you're discreet. A lot of people owe you favours,"

"Woolsey!" Rodney said suddenly, "We saved his damn life, he definatly owes us something big."

"And even more owe me favours," Elizabeth continued. She looked them both straight in the eye and Rodney felt just the same as when Ms. Hauptman had caught him trying to re-engineer the water wheel with the contents of Sophie Wenger's pencil case. "Don't make me have to call them in. That's all I have to say."

Rodney felt John relax against him, the feeling returning to his hand as John let go.

"Thanks," John said, heartfelt.

"Yes, thank you," Rodney echoed.

She smiled at them, "I wish I didn't have to warn you. Who knows, maybe in a few years..." she trailed off. "Anyway, enjoy your meal, and best of luck in the airplane championship."

Rodney watched her go with a huge sense of relief, John's foot hooked round his ankle as they ate.

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John propped his chin on Rodney's shoulder, watching his hands work. He loved Rodney's hands, even more so now he knew how they felt on his body.

"It is ready?" he asked.

"Almost." Rodney made one final crease, and held the airplane up. "There, one championship winning airplane."

John took it carefully and they made their way over to where all the other teams waited. Lorne was marking out distance lines on the floor. John looked across at the other teams, Zelenka and Chuck, Miko and Sergeant Seely, all the way down to Katie Brown and Cabo Vasquez.

"OK guys," Lorne spoke above the hubbub. "You get three flights. We award points for distance, and for time in the air. Highest average wins. Doctor Weir will measure all the flights, so no arguing!"

Rodney and John had drawn the final number, much to Rodney's disgust. John didn't mind, at least they knew what they had to beat, instead of nervously waiting around.

Katie and Vasquez's flight was a complete disaster. The airplane was obviously far too heavy, and it made a fairly spectacular nosedive in each of its three flights. Rodney clicked his tongue. John hoped he was wondering what he ever saw in her. As if he could read his mind Rodney said:

"Smugness is not an attractive quality, Sheppard."

"Did I say anything?" John asked, innocently.

"You didn't have to." Rodney's mouth turned up in a smirk, and John reminded himself that nibbling on his lower lip was kind of the opposite of discreet. He was already beginning to regret bullying Rodney into wearing the cargo pants, although the view was definitely worth it.

Miko and Seely had two good fights, and John was starting to worry when Miko screwed up the launch of the third fight, and sent it into the floor. When Radek and Chuck stepped up to the mark. Rodney looked at them intently.

"These are the ones we need to beat," he said.

"Hey, if we don't, it's not the end of the world," John said soothingly.

"You said we were unbeatable." Rodney reminded him.

"Well, if we lose I'm sure I can find a way to make it up to you," he said.

"You'd better," Rodney said, eyes glittering with promise.

Radek and Chuck remained at the top of the list on the big whiteboard right up to the end.

"And now, our last constants," Lorne announced, "Colonel Sheppard and Doctor McKay."

They stepped up to the line.

"You want to launch it?" John offered.

"As you keep reminding me, you're the pilot. Just don't screw up." Rodney stepped back, and John carefully balanced the airplane, and launched it. He held his breath, but the airplane dropped a few inches short of the line marking Radek's furthest flight.

"106 feet." Elizabeth called out. "65 seconds." Lorne wrote the numbers on the board.

John retrieved the airplane, checked the folds, and launched it again. This time it was level. John did some math as Elizabeth measured and Lorne wrote, and worked out they were only a few points behind.

"Last one," Rodney said tensely, "Do that again and we've won."

"I'll do my best," John said.

When the airplane left his hand he knew it was a good flight. It seemed to hang in the air forever, and John watched, almost too afraid to breathe, as it floated, beautiful, elegant, and finally swooped down to land a full foot ahead of the furthest mark.

Rodney clutched his arm as Elizabeth measured.

"That was amazing!" he said grinning. "I mean, I knew we would win, but we completely destroyed them!"

"We did, didn't we?" Rodney still hadn't let go of his arm, but he guessed it could be excused.

"111 feet. 81.78 seconds." Elizabeth confirmed. "That's only a foot away from the world record."

"Which makes our final team the winners!" Lorne announced, adding up the totals. "Let's have a big round of applause for all our contestants!"

John found himself engulfed in a hug as the room broke out into cheers.

"We are totally celebrating properly later," Rodney muttered into his ear as he let go.

John felt this was an excellent suggestion.

Elizabeth took the mic from Lorne.



"Well, that almost marks the end of today," she said. "I've had a wonderful time, and I hope you all have too." The cheers got louder, and John caught sight of Teyla and Ronon clapping along with the rest of them. "Now all that remains is for me to hand you over to Doctor Z and the ZPMs, who have promised us music to dance the night away to."

"In that case," Lorne bowed "may I have the first dance, Doctor Weir?"

Elizabeth smiled, "I would be delighted, Major Lorne."

They stepped down from the stage as Radek and his band (John recognised Simpson, Radek and Esposito, but couldn't remember the name of the trombone player or the clarinetist) tuned up.

"Wanna go?" Rodney asked, touching his elbow to guide him to the edge of the room.

John thought about it. People had begun to drift away already, but they should stay for a few songs, or it would look too suspicious. They could slip away once the dancing started.

"We could stay for a few songs..."

"Well, it will give me even more to mock Radek about," Rodney allowed.

They settled back against the wall and watched the dancing. Lorne was surprisingly good, but Elizabeth had two left feet. He caught sight of Cadman, her bright blonde hair easy to spot, approaching Ronon and tugging him onto the dance floor, laughing.

"That could be interesting," he remarked, pointing.

"Pffft, she can cope." Rodney said.

Radek's band was surprisingly good, even if the jazz and swing they played wasn't really to his taste. He grinned when he processed what Esposito was singing,

*I don't care what the weatherman says  
If the weatherman says it's raining,  
you'll never hear me complaining  
I'm certain the sun will shine,*

"Someone's got a sense of humour," Rodney said.

"Actually it's one of my favourite songs. I asked Radek if they would play it for me." Elizabeth joined them, holding a paper bag, which she gave to Rodney.

"Your prize. Don't drink it all at once Rodney."

"Notice how she doesn't even pretend you'll share it?" John said, bumping Rodney's hip.

"I could be persuaded." Rodney's voice was teasing, and suddenly John wanted to get out of there *now*.

"I think that's one of the things I don't want to know," Elizabeth said, laughing.

"You're quite right, so, if you'll excuse us?" Rodney said, already moving toward the door.

"You'd better go," Elizabeth said to him, "no one will notice. And, take the morning off tomorrow."

"See, what did I tell you? Born romantic," Rodney said.

"I could change my mind you know," she said.

"We're going," Rodney said hastily.

\*\*\*\*

They kept it together until they reached the transporter, where Rodney promptly pushed him against door and kissed him, hard.

"We won the tug of war," he said, like he couldn't believe it.

John laughed "We sure did."

"And we nearly broke the world record with our airplane." Rodney kissed him again, hands threaded up into his hair, mouth soft and sweet.

"It was a good airplane," John agreed, a little short of breath.

"And we have the morning off tomorrow." Rodney moved onto his neck, nibbling lightly, "Elizabeth has great ideas."

"Kinda don't want to hear about Elizabeth right now," John panted.

"All I'm saying, is we have a lot to celebrate," Rodney said, mouthing his scar.

"Another excellent idea," John agreed.

"It could be the naked kind of celebrating?" Rodney worked his hands up under John's shirt.

"It could," John agreed, touching the screen for his quarters, and tipping Rodney's

head up for another kiss.

End

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