

TRIAL BY FIRE

- Outline -

by

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When Max Krahwinkle, a sixteen-year-old college freshman suffering from an obsession with archaeology, spends his term break on a private and unofficial dig at Chaco Canyon, New Mexico, he unearths more than he bargained for. The stone stele he finds could substantiate a theory that archaeologists have ridiculed for decades. Unsure of what to do with his discovery, he contacts the one professional likely to hear him out at least: Dr Daniel Jackson.

Intrigued if suspicious, Dr Jackson lets himself be persuaded to travel to New Mexico to meet the boy and see for himself. The evidence comes as shock, for Max has interpreted the facts correctly. The stele bears an engraving reminiscent of the so-called Sign of Tanit, which not only suggests that the artifact or at least its makers must have originated in ancient Carthage – the engraving also is a virtual match for the stargate glyph designating the Tau'ri. If genuine, it could add a new and ominous slant to the name the Hopi have given the long-dead settlers of Chaco Canyon: Anasazi – 'ancient enemies'.

Back at the SGC, a thorough examination of the stele and some more research confirm Daniel's assumptions. Determined to trace the origins of the artifact, he travels to North Africa, where he gatecrashes a dig at Kerkouane. The dig is sponsored by Oxford University and run by Dr Siobhan Kelly, a former colleague, who is somewhat less than pleased to see Dr Jackson. Despite her misgivings, she permits him to have a look at the site. One of the vaults in a subterranean temple holds a circle of six stelae, each engraved with a different glyph. Daniel immediately suspects that the circle is incomplete: there has to be a seventh stele – the one Max Krahwinkle has found at Chaco Canyon.

With the information Dr Jackson sends back to the SGC, Sam Carter establishes that, together, the seven stelae indeed provide a viable gate address, and one that is not included in the Abydos cartouche. A team from Area 51 closes down the dig to secure any potential Goa'uld artefacts. Furious, Kelly contacts her own government, and an agreement is reached. In recognition of Whitehall's continued silence about the Stargate Program and over Colonel O'Neill's objections, Dr Kelly, leading authority on Punic cultures, is to join SG-1 as they gate to the planet indicated by the seven stelae.

The planet – P2X 159 – appears to offer less of a challenge than the puzzling finds on Earth would have suggested. The stargate is located near a temple precinct, and when the team finally reach a major city, situated on the coast, they are welcomed with open arms by the Synod, the ruling council of priests. As far as they are concerned the arrival of SG-1 is an

answer to their prayers to Meleq, the supreme deity. A seafaring society, the Tyreans depend on maritime trade for survival and prosperity. Both are threatened by a band of 'Phrygians' – heretics and outlaws – who disrupt religious observance. Incensed by the lack of devotion, Meleq has already sent severe storms and floods.

Desperate to contain, if not eliminate, the threat, the Tyreans ask for the help of SG-1. Made cautious by past experience, the team are wary of committing themselves, but their initial skepticism is overcome when a badly damaged ship limps into harbor. Most of the crew and passengers have been killed, among them the Tyrean high priest and two of his acolytes. Faced with the evidence, SG-1 agree to stay and help discover the base the pirates are operating from.

The same evening twelve children are chosen to 'pass through the fire'. As SG-1's host Hamilqart explains, this is a ritual to initiate firstborns into the cult of Meleq, thereby to appease the god. Hamilqart's only son, nine-year-old Luli, is fanatically proud and delighted to be one of the chosen. Not so his mother, whose doubts are met by a stern reprimand from the boy.

At dusk the children are solemnly escorted to the same temple grounds where the stargate is located for a night of fasting and prayer. Remembering the reaction of Luli's mother, Jack O'Neill decides to have a stealthy look at the temple, to allay his own doubts if nothing else. Dr Kelly happens to entertain the same idea, if for different reasons, refusing to turn back when he spots her. They have barely arrived at the temple when the precinct is raided by the Phrygians. The attackers abduct the children as well as O'Neill and Kelly.

When the priests raise the alarm, the Tyreans' outrage at this latest desecration is heightened by the fact that two of the strangers have been seen among the raiders. Kandaulo, the leader of the Synod, orders Sam Carter, Teal'c, and Daniel Jackson to be arrested and detained. They manage to gain the concession to return to the temple under guard and produce proof that Jack O'Neill and Siobhan Kelly were victims rather than perpetrators of the attack. When Teal'c finds proof that O'Neill and Kelly have been captured, the Tyreans are convinced. Knowing that their CO's life may be at stake, the remaining members of SG-1 redouble their efforts to pinpoint the raiders' hideout.

The captives have been taken by ship to a remote island. Upon arrival, O'Neill and Kelly are brought before a man who calls himself Tertius. The potentially dangerous encounter is unexpectedly defused when Jack O'Neill returns Tertius' handshake, the simple gesture taking the man by surprise. The revelation that Jack is a *tribunus laticlavus* – second in command of a 'legion' – helps matters further. The Colonel begins to understand that these alleged pirates are not quite what the Tyreans have made them out to be, but in order to learn more, he will have to become one of them, by undergoing their initiation rite. Over the protests of Dr Kelly he agrees. Once he has passed the test, Tertius reveals to him that they have been trying for

decades to end the Tyreans' slavery to the false god, Meleq, whom they call Ahriman – pure Evil. The worship of Meleq involves the sacrifice of children, and the twelve chosen ones, like many intended victims before them, have been abducted to save their lives. However, brainwashed into fanaticism, the children react with violent disbelief when Jack tries to tell them the truth.

In the meantime, the team have narrowed the likely location of the Phrygians to one of three islands. They join the Tyreans in an attack that catches the so-called pirates completely unaware and finds Colonel O'Neill less grateful for the rescue than one may have expected. But before he can explain himself to his team, Luli denounces him to his countrymen as a heretic and a follower of the Phrygians. O'Neill and Tertius are transferred to a separate ship for journey, and the team are not allowed to see them. Dr Kelly goes free, but she can contribute little to enlighten SG-1.

Upon arrival, the prisoners are taken to the temple precinct to await Meleq's judgment. So are the children, who will undergo their 'rite of passage' at sunrise. The team and Kelly are ordered to remain at Hamilqart's house, but Daniel contrives to slip away and return to the temple site, hoping he will be able to locate Colonel O'Neill and possibly effect his escape. While on the temple grounds Daniel makes a startling discovery. The previously blocked off inner sanctum of the temple has been opened in preparation for events to come and, in addition to Goa'uld décor, it holds a huge bronze statue of a bull. It is the statue that finally allows Daniel to make a vital connection: Meleq is identical with the Canaanite god Moloch, whom they have previously encountered by hearsay. More worryingly, Moloch is also known as Baal.

He manages to find Jack and Tertius, but they are too heavily guarded to make escape a feasible option. They have a chance to talk, however, and Tertius reveals that those of his men who have survived the attack will come looking for him. When Daniel breaks the news about what he has found out, it comes as a blow to Jack O'Neill and, for different reasons, to Tertius who believes himself betrayed by O'Neill.

Daniel returns to town to brief Sam and Teal'c and, aided by Hamilqart's wife, they and Dr Kelly are able to leave the house and make for the cove where Tertius' men have gathered. Withholding the one piece of information that has so upset Tertius, Daniel describes to the soldiers the situation and the place where the prisoners are held, thus persuading them that the team are on their side. Convincing them to accept orders from a woman proves more difficult, but in the end they accept Major Carter's lead. Using the darkness to blend in among the excited crowd of worshippers, SG-1 and Tertius' troops make their way to the temple.

By the time they arrive, the ceremonies are in full swing, and they are able to take up their positions in and around the temple unnoticed. Colonel O'Neill and Tertius have been

brought out into the inner courtyard to await the appearance of Meleq/Baal. When Baal, together with his Jaffa, materializes with a ring transporter, Tertius' men react in the same bewildering way as their leader. The confrontation between O'Neill and Baal causes uproar among the priests and guards. Unable to get a clean shot and having lost the support of the soldiers, Sam tries to create a distraction, but Tertius has realized his error and orders his men to attack. In the ensuing mayhem, Baal, though wounded by one of Tertius' archers, manages to escape and Kandaulo is killed.

As the Tyreans, rallied by their priests, attempt to avenge the sacrilege, they are stopped by a group of women, led by Hamilqart's wife, who insist that the strangers are right. The inner sanctum of the temple is opened for the Tyreans to see, but the priests still claim that the child initiates are not dead but living with Meleq/Baal. Only when one of the women identifies an amulet that Drs Jackson and Kelly have found in one of the hundreds of urns containing ashes and bone fragments, the Tyreans begin to accept the truth. As Tyreans and Phrygians finally are forced to communicate, it emerges that Baal has rigged a social experiment on P2X 159, posing as a god to both parties and deliberately setting them against each other.

The priests are banished, and SG-1 as well as the Phrygians offer their aid in rebuilding Tyrean society.