



Title: Option C

Author: Jilly

Fandom/Genre: Stargate: Atlantis

Pairing: John/Rodney, Other M/M

Content Rating: Mature

Warnings: Little bit of violence, shotgun wedding (sort of)

Special Thanks: To fanarts_series for the lovely artwork. You're amazing, my dear.

Author's Note: Takes place somewhere in the first few seasons where both Elizabeth and Carson are still around, but sliding everything forward in time to after DADT was repealed, so homosexuality is not a violation of the UCMJ.

Summary: Following an energy source, Rodney drifts into a sacred temple he was warned not to enter. There are only three ways out of the situation. Option A – leave Rodney behind. Option B – shoot a bunch of people and hope they all get out alive. Or Option C – get married. At least, that's what they think Option C is.

Word Count: ~10k

Option C by Jilly James

"I don't want to get married!"

Sheppard looked up from where he'd been contemplating the tips of his boots and fixed McKay with a glare. "Yes, because when we came through the gate this morning, I was thinking what a great day it would be if only there were a shotgun wedding at the end of it."

Rodney stopped his pacing, arms crossed over his chest, and gave John a *look*. When John just raised a brow, Rodney threw up his hands and started pacing again. "There has to be another option!"

"There are only three choices... we leave you here, we remove ourselves from the planet with prejudice, or this. Since I'm not leaving you, and I'm not prepared to kill a bunch of people because you couldn't follow the rules, going through with a wedding that won't matter, and neither of our countries are going to acknowledge, seems like the *sane* option."

Rodney glared again, then his shoulders sagged and he scrubbed his hands over his face. "It was an accident," he finally murmured, sounding unbearably frustrated.

"Yeah, I figured."

"There's some kind of energy source here, similar to what we found near the 'gate, and I was just trying to figure it out, and I didn't even realize I had entered the temple, and—"

"I get it, Rodney," John interjected. "Garrick said as soon as the ceremony is over, we're free to go, so no harm no foul. Let's just get it over with. I'm sure we'll be laughing about it by tomorrow. We sure as hell have had missions with worse outcomes."

Rodney blew out a breath and finally took a seat on the stone bench at a ninety-degree angle to the one John was seated on. "This is asinine." He gave John a searching look. "Why you?"

John fought back a scowl. He didn't like the implication that there was a better choice. "For starters, because I'm the team lead, and it's my responsibility. But also because Teyla and Ronon would take any vows made here more seriously. More than half the couples on this planet seem to be same sex, so they don't care about the gender of your partner. For you and I... well, it's not like either of our governments are going to honor a wedding performed by a Myarian."

After an awkward silence, Rodney sighed and said, "I don't..."

When he didn't continue, John focused more intently, because Rodney didn't often sound that uncertain. "What?"

"I don't understand this place. They're pre-industrial, yet they have technology that I can't explain. I never found the energy source, but it's a reading like I've never seen before."

"And what do you think it means?"

Rodney dragged his hands through his hair and seemed frustrated. Then his expression shifted to what John privately thought of as Rodney's *'ah-ha!'* face. "You read the mission report about SG-1's visit to Cimmeria?"

John frowned, trying to place the name, then his brows shot up in surprise. "You think this is a Thor's Hammer type thing?"

"I don't know, but there's similarities that make me think the technology isn't theirs. And some of it's clearly defensive. And they've said the Wraith never come here."

"Well, the tech isn't Ancient." John knew was Ancient technology *felt* like. It was a huge mystery why the Wraith had skipped this planet, but so far their leader, Garrick, had been unwilling to discuss it, just saying the *'gods have provided for us.'*

"I know. I wish they'd be more forthcoming. And why haven't the Athosians ever heard of these people?"

"While you were chasing energy signatures, I got as much out of Garrick as I could. He said that they haven't interacted with peoples from other planets in longer than

they have recorded history. All he'd say on the matter of their defenses was that their gods '*provide for us.*'"

Before Rodney could rant, John held up a hand. "I don't want to hear it. I'm already thinking about partnering you with an anthropologist for our next first contact mission. Don't give me any more reasons."

Rodney's eyes nearly bugged out of head, and John bit back a grin.

It was nearly an hour before Garrick returned. The man was kind of obscenely good looking, with wavy hair, brown eyes, and about an inch shorter than John. "You have discussed your bonding and wish to proceed?"

They quickly got to their feet. "Do we have a choice?" Rodney snapped and John gave his arm a warning squeeze.

"There is always a choice," Garrick responded, seemingly unfazed. "But you cannot leave the temple unbonded. And now that Colonel Sheppard has joined you, he may not leave either. This was made clear. You could have chosen to stay in the temple and wait for other candidates."

John gave Rodney's arm another squeeze. "We're fine," he said before Rodney could say anything. "It's the two of us, no other applicants need apply."

Garrick dipped his head in acknowledgment. "And you understand you will be together for life?"

Rodney made an impatient sound. "Sure... in sickness and in health for as long as we both shall live. Let's get on with it."

Brows shooting up in surprise, Garrick nodded. "Very well. I'm relieved you understand the nature of bonding. It's a sacred thing you undertake. And though I understand you bond out of necessity, I am encouraged that you will embrace one another and your life together."

Before Rodney could work up a full head of steam, Garrick led them further into the temple to a room ringed with glowing pillars. Rodney sucked in a breath. "This must be the energy source."

While Rodney was trying to drift away to examine one of the pillars, prevented by John's grip on his arm, John took note of the four other people in the room. All men. One of which was standing on a dais. It was the man who had been introduced as Garrick's husband. Or bondmate... whatever they called it.

Garrick gestured to the man on the dais. "You remember my bondmate Terryn? He'll perform your joining. The rest of us will stand as witness."

In short order, they found themselves in front of Terryn, clasping each other's forearms in such a way that the inside of their wrists were touching. Terryn began to wind an odd looking cord around their arms. It looked like some kind of metal, but it moved like rope and felt soft as silk. Their bound arms were positioned over a table that glowed in way similar to the pillars in the room.

John was paying close attention, but Rodney was clearly impatient and examining the room more than taking note of the actual ceremony.

Once their arms were bound together and positioned correctly, Terryn looked at them intently. "It is your wish you join with one another for life?"

"Yes," John replied quickly, giving Rodney a nudge when he failed to reply.

"Oh. Yes. Of course. Want to spend the rest of my life with him."

John heard the sarcasm and refused to dwell on the flash of unhappiness he felt at the implication of that sarcasm.

Terryn exchanged a look with Garrick, but inclined his head, then pressed both his hands to the table. The soft warm glow of the table suddenly flared to a bright flash and John felt a sensation race up his arm and settle in his chest. He felt like he was being stretched impossibly, and felt like he couldn't breathe.

He had this overwhelming awareness of 'other' and he suddenly realized it was Rodney, who was feeling just as panicked as John. Time seemed to stall, and it felt like they were stuck in this moment with a profound connection zinging between them that shouldn't be there.

Suddenly, everything was back to normal, but John felt oddly exposed. Like he'd been opened up for everyone to see. Terryn was unwinding the cord from their arms, murmuring, "A very powerful bonding. You'll do well."

What? John belatedly realized he was still holding onto Rodney's arm, but couldn't seem to let go.

"What the hell was that?" Rodney exclaimed even as he held onto John a little tighter.

John watched the myriad expression cross Weir's face while she tried to formulate a reply. So far, she'd managed to not ask questions while John's team and Carson had laid all the information out for her.

Once Carson had given his assessment, basically that there was nothing medically wrong with John or Rodney, Elizabeth braced her elbows on the table and blew out a breath. "So, according to this leader, Garrick, your '*life energies*' are bound to one another, and you need frequent physical contact until the '*bond settles*'? Is there a way to confirm any of what he said?"

Carson shook his head. "Other than empirical evidence, no. All their medical tests appear normal. We'll need to see what happens when they're apart, if anything, and how long they can stay apart if there is an issue." The doctor continued to run down the list of things they would try and John just rubbed his forehead, feeling a headache coming on.

At the moment, he was mostly worried about Rodney, who had been silent the entire time. Rodney McKay. *Silent*. What the fuck was he supposed to do with that? Worst part was that even though Rodney was silent and stony-faced, John had the feeling Rodney was really upset. And it wasn't some intuition from knowing Rodney. No, this was like the feeling he'd had during the bonding ceremony. Like he had some other *sense* of Rodney.

And it wasn't at all *strange* that he had to keep fighting back the urge to touch Rodney. Nope, not weird at all. To be fair, the urge to touch Rodney wasn't all that new, but that it was nearly a compulsion? That was definitely a new bit of weirdness.

John hadn't even begun to process the ramifications if this bonding thing was true, but, if he had to be bound to someone for life, of anyone he knew, he'd want it to be Rodney. And that made him feel a flash of guilt.

Rodney shot him a look and John met his eyes directly, now convinced that they were tuning into each other's emotions. Brow furrowed in confusion, Rodney eventually turned his attention back to what Carson was saying.

As soon as the meeting broke up, Carson wanted John and Rodney back in the infirmary, but Elizabeth waylaid John. "Please stay a moment, Colonel."

As soon as they were alone, John cocked a brow in inquiry.

"John, I need to know if you're going to be able to continue to perform your duties."

Surprised, he could only stare for a few beats. "There's nothing wrong with our *minds*, Elizabeth. There's not even anything wrong with our bodies, we just have a few things to figure out."

She nodded but looked thoughtful. "Please be sure to fully brief Major Lorne in case there is a problem, and until we know the full ramifications, I believe your team should be off rotation."

He wondered why Elizabeth thought he couldn't come up with these things without her prompting. "I already took care of the schedule, and have a meeting with Lorne later today."

John blinked and realized he was no longer where he thought he should be. He was lying down in the infirmary when he should have been in his office talking to Lorne and also testing the supposed need for frequent contact that Garrick had warned about. The need to be near Rodney had gradually grown out of control, but he white-knuckled his way through it. Or at least, he thought he had.

"How are you feeling, Colonel?" Carson asked, stepping next to the bed.

John belatedly registered a hand wrapped around his wrist and knew it was Rodney. "Uh... my brain feels kind of drafty," he murmured absently, twisting his head to find Rodney's bed pushed next to his, the man still apparently out of it.

"What does that mean?"

"I have no idea. Is he okay?"

Carson nodded. "You both passed out. According to Rodney he was noticing distinct discomfort at the 75 minute mark, and passed out with no warning about 15 minutes later. Major Lorne reported approximately the same timing for you."

"Sounds about right. How long were we out?"

"As soon as we put you in physical contact, you woke within two minutes."

John was about to ask about Rodney, but felt the hand on his wrist tighten a moment before Rodney's eyes popped open and he groaned, clapping a hand over his eyes. "Well, hell."

"You want to tell me what's going on with you?" John asked as soon as the door to Rodney's quarters closed.

Rodney didn't reply, just started shoving some clothes in a bag with a fair amount of aggression. Much to John's surprise, Rodney had agreed that they'd sleep in John's quarters since they apparently couldn't go without physical contact comfortably for more than an hour. Aside from a few questions when he'd first woken up, Rodney continued to be silent.

Fed up, John yanked the bag away. "What the fuck, Rodney?"

Throwing down what remained in his hands, Rodney started to pace, dragging his fingers through his hair. "I messed up! I get it. This is my fault."

John only ever got faint glimmers of emotions from Rodney, but he was now able to label the current feeling as *'guilt'*. So far, they hadn't really discussed the faint sense of each other's emotions. Carson knew, but he seemed to get that it was taboo for the moment.

John blew out a breath, trying to figure out what to say. "Look, we've all fucked up in ways that had consequences at one time or another, and we move on and we deal with it. The only way we're going to be able to *deal* with this is for you to be you. Not this pod-person Rodney drowning in guilt. And in case you can't absorb the subtle nuances of the situation, I'm not angry with you." At least, not at the moment. John reserved the right to have a meltdown later.

With apparent surprise, Rodney asked, "Are you telling me you're *okay* with this?"

With a snort that was somewhere between humor and derision, John shook his head. "I haven't even begun to figure this out. But for better or worse, *and I can't believe I just said that*, we're in this together. So, please go back to being a snarky impatient bastard, because this," he waved vaguely to indicate the whole situation, "*this* isn't working."

"Fuck you, Sheppard," Rodney retorted, lips twitching. "Better?"

"Much." He noticed Rodney was looking around the room speculatively and had a sudden insight. "Oh no. You already agreed. *My* room."

Eyes narrowed, Rodney returned, "I was under duress."

"Right. Get your stuff, and then let's get dinner."

"Maybe... maybe we should do dinner first."

John had thought Rodney's pallor was due to emotional upset. "Oh Jesus, Rodney, when did you last eat?"

"Uh..."

"Come on. If you pass out on the way, I'm leaving you."

"Liar."

They were sitting side by side, watching Life of Brian, avoiding going to bed, when without thinking about it, John curled his fingers around Rodney's wrist. Very quickly it had become their way of making contact. Skin on skin was a must... touching through clothes didn't satisfy the bond. Holding hands seemed strangely awkward. Though there was something about having his hand wrapped around Rodney's wrist that seemed more intimate in a way.

"We're going to have to talk about this at some point," Rodney muttered, eyes fixed on the screen.

John snorted. "We've been talking about it all day." Though he knew that's not what Rodney meant.

"You know what I meant." He hesitated, still not looking John's direction. "You seem to be dealing with this better than me."

"I'm just putting one foot in front of the other right now, Rodney. I wouldn't exactly call it *dealing*. Coping maybe."

"That's just semantics."

"Not really."

John woke slowly, trying to piece things together because he was spooned up behind someone and that didn't happen to him often since coming to Atlantis. Also, the body was definitely male.

Oh. Right. Rodney. The *bond*.

"You're spooning me," Rodney suddenly said.

Rolling his eyes, John removed the arm he had wrapped around Rodney's waist. "Rodney, it's not even 0500. We talked about this... the bond seems to want us in physical contact, so this was bound to happen. I'm tired, so can we be awkward later?"

"Would you just roll over?" Rodney said irritably.

"For fuck's sake," John grumbled, but obligingly turned his back to Rodney, and wondered if he'd be able to get back to sleep now that he was annoyed, largely due to the fact that he rather liked the situation they'd been in. He felt a moment of discomfort, because it seemed unfair that there were aspects of this that didn't bother him... *at all*.

Barely a beat later, he felt Rodney shift, then settle behind John, wrapping his arm around John's waist.

John couldn't help but laugh. The situation was so weird and now Rodney was spooning him on purpose. And he really liked it, but pushed that away as fast as he could. "Seriously?"

"Oh, shut up."

"Touch me."

John nearly dropped the tablet he'd been working on at the absentminded request from Rodney. "What?"

Without looking up from the worktable, Rodney replied, "I need to concentrate and the bond is... you know... pulling at me." He was hunched over whatever doohickey he was working on, not really paying much attention to John.

The request had thrown John for a loop because normally when one of them felt the pull of the bond, they just reached for the other's wrist. They didn't discuss it. Ever.

Blowing out a breath, he quickly considered his options, then shrugged and tugged up the back of Rodney's shirt.

"What...!" Rodney exclaimed, standing upright.

Settling his hand in the small of Rodney's back, John grouched, "Exactly how did you think I was going to accomplish your request? Your hands are in use and I don't think you'll be able to work with my hand pressing on the back of your neck."

"Right. Right." Rodney returned to his task, but after a few minutes, muttered, "This isn't helping my concentration."

John pulled his hand away, wanting to ask if that was a good thing or not, but he didn't.

It had been four days. They went to bed every night not touching and always woke up with Rodney either draped over John, or spooning him. Rodney was very grabby in bed. Also, they usually both had erections.

But they never talked about it.

Something was really wrong with Rodney and John was out of his seat and running before he could fully process the feeling. All he could think was *get to Rodney*. It was only as he was almost at Rodney's lab that he wondered why he hadn't just used his headset.

He charged into the lab on high alert, only to come up short when Zelenka and Rodney both gave him looks somewhere between startled and befuddled. The only other person was one of Rodney's other minions who happened to be in tears and pretty much ignored John. There didn't appear to be any danger.

"What's wrong?"

"Nothing's wrong," Rodney replied tersely. "What's wrong with *you*?"

"You can't bullshit me on this... something freaked you out."

Rodney grabbed John's arm and pulled him out into the hallway. "Did you *see* that?"

"What?"

"The crying!"

"That's what freaked you out?"

Rodney glared.

John held up his hands in the universal sign of surrender. "No judgment."

He was trying to flirt. *Trying*. John Sheppard didn't have to *try* to flirt, it was as natural as breathing. Usually.

She was a pretty, petite, brunette... practically perfect, but it felt all *wrong*.

Both he and Rodney had been reacting negatively to the other being in physical contact with others, so they were testing the waters, so to speak. And it wasn't going well. At least from John's side. He didn't want to be doing this. And that was fucked up in ways he didn't want to think about.

Suddenly, Rodney was there, hand wrapped around John's wrist and hauling him up out of the chair. Dr. Morris made a strangled sort of sound of protest as John was pulled away.

They were halfway down the hall before John managed to get over his surprise enough to say, "What happened to the test?"

"It was a poorly conceived experiment," Rodney retorted without looking back or breaking his stride.

"Right."

"Do you want to finally talk about the empathy issues?" Beckett prompted as he was checking John over *yet again*.

John winced. "No." When Carson gave him a *look*, he sighed. "Rodney and I don't talk about it and..." he trailed off.

"And so you pretend like it's not happening."

"It's awkward," John protested defensively. "Besides, it's not like we're completely aware of each other's emotions. It's just glimmers here and there. Well, most of the time. We're trying to give each other some privacy, which is in short supply with someone you have to be in physical contact with once an hour."

Carson stepped back and leaned against the next bed. "Rodney reluctantly admitted that you two are needing more frequent contact."

He really, really didn't want to talk about this, but the situation wasn't getting better, it was getting worse. It had been almost a week and at this rate, they'd never get cleared for field duty again. "Yeah. We're not quite making it an hour anymore."

"The Myarian leader, Garrick, he said that once the bond settled, you'd be able to spend time apart?"

"Yes," John replied cautiously.

Carson gave him a look. "So, the bond isn't settling, and there has to be a reason why. I can keep running tests, but I'm not who you need to talk to."

"Garrick," John agreed with a nod.

"Rodney," Carson corrected immediately. "And then maybe you should talk to Garrick."

They didn't talk. No, they just went to Garrick looking for answers.

Garrick looked at them both intently for several long moments. "There are only a few reasons a bond will not properly settle. In some instances, the pair are poorly

matched, but it's quite rare. Your bond was strong, so that cannot be the cause." He hesitated, but finally asked, "Your intimate congress... what is the state of the bond after?"

John's brows snapped together in confusion and he glanced at Rodney, who looked equally bemused.

Then Rodney's expression cleared and he choked a little. "Do you mean sex?"

Garrick inclined his head. "If that's the terms you prefer, yes. How is the bond after you have engaged in sexual intimacy?"

John could see the writing on the wall and was literally unable to say a word.

"We don't... I mean..." Rodney stumbled over his words. "We haven't had sex."

"That would be why the bond won't settle. The final piece of the bond is achieved through complete physical intimacy. If you fail to join, then the bond will drive you to be in physical contact with greater frequency. Eventually you'll need to return to the temple and remain until you decide to complete the bonding."

He was glad Ronon and Teyla were waiting near the jumper so this bit of news could stay between the two of them. At least for now. They probably weren't going to be able to keep it to themselves long term.

And dammit, now they *had* to talk. To each other.

Fuck.

"Are we going to talk about this?" Rodney asked as soon as they were in John's room.

John dragged his hands through his hair, no doubt making it stick out at odd angles. "Well, Carson only excused us without explaining things because we said we needed to talk to each other first... so, yeah. I guess we're going to talk."

Rodney glowered a little. "You haven't *wanted* to talk to me."

"You haven't exactly been pushing the clear communication either, Rodney."

"But *I'm* not mad at *you!*"

Sighing, John flopped into the chair. "I'm not mad, Rodney." At Rodney's incredulous look, he held up a hand. "Most of the time, okay? Most of the time I'm not angry."

“So why won’t you talk to me?”

“It’s not like you’ve-“ John cut himself off, because that would get them nowhere. “Sorry, that’s not gonna help.” He blew out a breath and decided to just go for it. “Look, the reason I haven’t pushed is because, in a lot of ways, this isn’t...” he trailed off, not sure he could really say it.

“Isn’t what?”

“This isn’t a hardship for me.”

“What?” Rodney jerked back a bit, brows snapping together. “What does that even mean?”

“I don’t mean that I wanted to see our lives get bound together... ‘cause that’s just... no!” He took a deep breath to steady himself. “The physical contact and the being close... that’s not a problem for me.” He really hoped Rodney got what he was trying to say. “At all.”

“You mean... I...” Rodney seemed at a loss for words, which made John oddly proud of himself, even if he’d much rather Rodney could speak coherently right now.

“I mean I’ve been attracted to you since we met, and the more the we’ve gotten to know each other the more...” he paused and rubbed the back of his neck, really hating having to spell it out like this. “The more I know about you, the more I want you. So it hardly seems fair that most of this doesn’t bother me especially since you have no choice in the matter.”

Rodney stared at him open-mouthed for several seconds. Finally, he seemed to give himself a mental shake and glared at John. “You’re an idiot.”

Before John could really react to that, and he wasn’t sure how he felt about it, Rodney hopped to his feet and started pacing, hands moving furiously. “I can’t believe you didn’t tell me! We could have been having sex all this time.”

Trying to process the implication that Rodney was okay with the sex, he absently responded, “We’ve only been bonded a week, Rodney, it’s not an eternity.”

Rodney stopped all movement and glared. “I mean since we met. How many wasted opportunities is that?” He paused and cocked his head to the side, staring at John intently. “I’m sorry.”

John couldn’t handle these emotional swings. He had been feeling elated that they were really in this boat *together*, but now he was just confused. “What?”

“That’s it. My last sincere apology for not paying attention and wandering into that temple.” His expression shifted to something a little vulnerable. “I regret doing something that has such far-reaching consequences. But I won’t regret getting to have you, John.”

There was just enough discussion of *feelings* going on to make John uncomfortable, but also really, really happy. “If it were anyone else, I’d be losing it, Rodney. And I reserve the right to have a meltdown later, but it’s... *you*.”

“Dammit, don’t say things like that. You’re making me feel all... mushy.”

John started laughing. He had a feeling everything was going to work out.

There were a lot of things they *should* be doing. They should get some work done, they should talk to Carson, they probably should even talk to Elizabeth. But by unspoken agreement, they decided to do none of it and just stay in John’s quarters.

Talking had left John a little emotionally raw, and he could tell the same was true for Rodney, though it didn’t stop Rodney from grouching under his breath about all the wasted opportunities, which had John biting back a smile.

They were in the middle of their second movie when Rodney suddenly said, “This is stupid,” pushed the laptop away and straddled John’s lap. “This is not going to be like the ‘*we’ll talk later*’ thing. I’m done waiting, Sheppard.”

Grinning, John replied, “Whatever you say, McKay,” as his hands settled on Rodney’s hips

“Remember that,” Rodney said somewhat snarkily, but he was so fixated on John’s mouth, half the emphasis was lost.

The moment seemed to stretch on until they both got impatient and moved together at the same time. The first brush of lips was barely a tease, and John felt his nerve endings come alive. The second touch was firmer and the moment their tongues touched as Rodney slid his tongue in John’s mouth, the bond jolted in a *really* pleasant way.

Rodney pulled back, wide-eyed. “What was that?”

“I don’t know, but if I get that as a reward every time you put a part of yourself inside me, I’m gonna have a new favorite hobby.”

Smirking, Rodney retorted, “It was going to be your new favorite hobby anyway.”

“Oh really?”

“Damn right.”

“Bring it.” *Game on.*

After a flurry of movement, flying clothes and searching kisses, John found himself on the bed with Rodney rolling on top of him, their bodies and cocks aligning so naturally it was like they'd done this a hundred time.

“This okay?” Rodney asked breathlessly.

“More than,” John gasped as Rodney rolled his hips in a really spectacular way. John grappled for some lube and stroked it messily over both of their cocks, but getting a little carried away as he got his hands on Rodney for the first time. And they couldn't seem to stop kissing.

When John slid his hands down to cup Rodney's delectable ass, Rodney captured him by the wrists and pressed them above his head. John broke the kiss and half-heartedly glared up at his lover. “You're going to seriously keep denying me the wonder that is your ass?”

Rodney flushed a little, but then glared. “It gets me too turned on, and I don't want this to be over instantly. You're just going to have to wait for another time.”

John's cock hardened to the point of near pain. “That sensitive?”

“You have no idea.”

“You know I'm going to exploit that at the earliest opportunity, right?”

“Fucker.”

“Yeah, that's pretty much what I was thinking.”

Rodney trailed teasing bites along John's jaw and down his neck. “We'll see.”

Verbal sparring was quickly forgotten as they moved against each other. John pulled his hands free, so he could get enough control back to return them to kissing. The kissing seemed vital. He needed some part of Rodney in him, and the bond surged in the most incredible way every time.

John felt a telltale tension building in the base of his spine. He wanted to protest, because it was happening so fast, but suddenly fast was *good*. He clamped both legs around Rodney, straining for completion. The bond was buzzing between them, sharpening his awareness of Rodney until he could feel everything Rodney felt.

Astonishment took over the bond, zinging back and forth, amplified by the shared emotion.

Rodney started to pull back. "What the..."

"Fuck, fuck, fuck," John panted, banging his head back into the pillow. "Figure the bond out later, just don't stop."

Rodney rolled his hips again and suddenly John could feel it as if it were happening to him and as if he were doing it. They both groaned at the same time and began to rut against each other, John pulling Rodney back in to a kiss. They had to keep kissing. The unusual duality of sensation through the bond was ratcheting things up harder and faster than should be possible.

When the orgasm hit, it wasn't subtle... it was like a lightning strike, except it didn't seem to end. Pleasure not his own spiraling him up again when it seemed like he was ready to come down.

He wasn't sure how much time passed before he had some awareness of anything beyond the echoes of climax. "Damn," he barely managed.

Actual penetration might literally kill them.

Rodney's face was pressed into John's throat, his breathing labored. "I so get to name that."

"What?" John asked, not at all sure he could string two coherent thoughts together at the moment.

"I'm calling it a resonant orgasm. Best thing ever."

John started laughing and pulled Rodney's head back so he could kiss the crazy man again.

John woke slowly, registering that they were in sleep position number 2—Rodney sprawled half on top of John, which is pretty close to the position they'd gone to sleep in. After sex, Rodney had just shifted his weight and sleep seemed to instantly happen.

Something about the way Rodney kept hold of him all night struck John as territorial. Which seemed about right knowing Rodney.

They'd fallen asleep sweaty and covered in cum, but John was so relaxed, he was finding it hard to care. He focused on the bond, which felt *really* different. Instead of

this annoying almost buzzing sensation that drew them together for contact frequently, it was now a peaceful hum that just made him feel connected to Rodney. He wondered what it would be like when they were apart?

He noticed that he didn't have that complete awareness of Rodney's emotions like he'd had during sex. Curious if it was something they could learn to control, he closed his eyes and focused for a few seconds. Concentrating, he was able to both increase and decrease his general awareness of Rodney.

Rodney twitched and made a sound of protest. "Are you seriously poking at the bond?"

"I was curious. I guess you felt that?"

"Obviously. Stop it. Go to sleep."

Tests were on the horizon, lots of tests, but for now, he was content. Well, almost content. He shifted their position until he was spooned up behind Rodney, one hand resting firmly on the most delectable ass he'd ever seen.

"You've been just waiting for that," Rodney grouched even as he wiggled back, trying to get closer.

"You have no idea."

"And why would penetration of any kind increase the bond, and even stabilize it?" Carson asked Garrick bluntly.

John quite literally wanted to find something to hide behind, but he kept the soldier's mask in place and tried to pretend they weren't talking about him and Rodney. The morning had started so well with hand jobs in the shower before reporting to medical to brief Carson.

The doctor had questions they hadn't been able to answer and decided at some point he wanted to talk to Garrick directly. Then they'd decided to devise some tests, particularly to see how stable the bond was. After four hours apart with no effects other than John and Rodney not liking it, Carson had decided he and John were making a trip to see Garrick.

Garrick was looking at Carson thoughtfully for several moments. "When a pair's life energy is bound together, it creates an energy pathway between them, and the energy needs to flow. When one is a solitary creature their entire life, it's instinctive to try to block that pathway, but during moments of intimacy, it's actually instinctive to open the channel.

“The more intimate the contact, the better the energy exchange is. Your life force becomes one. There is no more intimate a physical act than accepting a part of your bondmate into your body.”

“Any part?” Carson asked shrewdly.

John wished the ground would swallow him whole.

“If you’re asking me if it makes a difference if it’s a tongue, or a finger or a penis, the answer is no. What matters is how open the energy pathways become during such intimacy. It is possible to learn to deliberately open that pathway without physical joining but it can take years where the pair is confined to the temple while they learn to merge their life energy without physical intimacy.”

“Fascinating. So, can I infer that John and Rodney’s bond is now stable? They’ve been apart for nearly eight hours. We need to know if they’re going to continue to be plagued by agitation, pain and loss of consciousness.”

“As long as they exchange life energy at least every few days, they should have no negative effects. And the more intimate contact they have, the more comfortable and natural it will be to leave that pathway open all the time. They could conceivably go without physical contact for several weeks at that point, but I cannot envision a circumstance where a bonded couple would want such a separation.”

Damn right, John thought.

“And this technology that binds their *‘life force’* together... that’s something that you won’t explain further?”

John only paid half-assed attention as Garrick explained, yet again, that they wouldn’t discuss it.

Ronon knocked him on his ass, yet again, but this time didn’t offer him a hand up, just gave him a flat look. “Anger usually makes you more focused.”

True. When John got pissed he was usually cold and lethal. “I’m not angry,” he replied as he got to his feet.

The disbelieving look Ronon gave him made him rephrase. “Hostile is more accurate.” And getting more hostile by the minute. Carson and Elizabeth had decided John and Rodney had to continue to stay apart to test the limits of the bond.

“I won’t spar with you again until you can focus, Sheppard.”

John wanted to argue, but he really couldn't. Sparring with a Marine when he was so scattered was one thing, but sparring with Ronon like this could get him seriously hurt. He settled for a nod and headed for the showers.

He ran into Lorne on the way back to his office, but the man held up both hands and immediately said, "I am not sparring with you again."

John scowled and ignored him.

Two days without Rodney and John's emotional range ran from annoyed to hostile, with little else to temper it. And pretty much all he got through the bond from Rodney was more of the same. He'd heard more than one horror story about Rodney venting his wrath on his minions. Restraint wasn't exactly Rodney's forte. He briefly wondered if people were taking bets on how long it would be before one of them snapped.

A few hours later, he hit his limit and went searching for Rodney. He didn't give a fuck about what Carson and Elizabeth wanted anymore. When he found out that Elizabeth had sent Rodney out of the city, he almost came unglued. He had to walk away or he'd have hit them both.

As much as he wanted to, he couldn't spar. He'd hit the tipping point from hostile to full on rage, completely bypassing anger, and he'd probably kill someone. He took his frustration out on a heavy bag until he could no longer lift his arms. The state of his hands necessitated a trip to medical, but he refused to talk to Carson, just demanded a couple of wraps and some ointment and went back to his quarters.

Lying in bed, unable to sleep, he thought about ordering Lorne to tell him where Rodney was, but he still was in control enough not to put his second in that position. But tomorrow... tomorrow John was done. He was getting Rodney back.

In the morning, he ordered a meeting between him, Elizabeth and Carson, because he'd had enough. He was gonna do something drastic if they kept fucking with him.

Immediately Elizabeth started to say something, but John wasn't in a listening mood. "I don't want to hear it. You two have had your way, but you're messing with shit you don't understand. That none of us understand. We barely got our bond stabilized and you took him away. I'm so hostile, I can barely function, and I'm starting to see the two of you as my enemy. My instincts are at war with my mind and it's taking everything I have to stay in control. Get him back on the city *now*."

Elizabeth started to reply, but Carson gave her a look and held up a hand. "We'll take care of it, lad. You'd do me a favor if you'd stay in your quarters until he's back. You don't need to take on any more physical abuse and frankly, neither does anyone else."

John bit back a growl and returned to his room. After nearly four hours pacing, the door open and Rodney stumbled in as if he were pushed.

He wasn't sure who moved to who, but it didn't matter. They were all over each other and completely non-verbal. The bond was wide-open and he couldn't tell which sensations were his and which were coming through the bond.

Rodney practically slithered down his body and swallowed John's cock, but through the bond, it was like he was blowing Rodney at the same time. The concentrated sensations hurtled them towards orgasm and an insane pace and everything seemed to white out.

John came back to himself on the floor with Rodney sprawled over him, both of them trying to catch their breath. "Fuck."

"Succinctly put." After a couple minutes, Rodney grouched, "I'm exhausted, I haven't been able to sleep, but I am not sleeping on this floor. Get your ass up, Sheppard."

Grinning into Rodney's hair, he retorted, "You're lying on top of me Rodney. Lead by example."

With many grumbles of complaint, Rodney got to his feet and pulled John to the bed. They'd barely settled into a comfortable position before their complete exhaustion allowed sleep pulled them both under.

Rodney aimlessly exploring John's chest woke him to find it was now nighttime. "Carson and Elizabeth both went to see Garrick before they pulled me back from the mainland. Garrick apparently lost his composure -- I'd have paid to see that by the way -- and told them both off."

"Why?"

"It's one thing to test the limits of the bond, but once we started to get upset, we saw anyone keeping us apart as a threat. They were interpreting it as us being moody about being away from one another, but the bond was getting unsettled. Garrick told them to stop trying to quantify that which they cannot possibly understand, and that the test was reckless and irresponsible."

"You sound entirely too happy about that dressing down."

"Carson may be a good friend, but I'm pissed as fuck that he wouldn't listen to me about how negatively this test was affecting us. He thought I was being melodramatic."

John ran a soothing hand up and down Rodney's back. "It won't happen again, Rodney."

“Damn right.” He took a couple deep breaths and John could feel more of Rodney’s agitation bleed away. “Elizabeth says we have to pass a psych eval and then our team can go back into the rotation.”

“Well that sure as fuck killed my good mood.”

Rodney snorted. “Like I can’t fix that in about five seconds.”

John let his hand drift down to Rodney’s divine ass, giving it a squeeze, smirking when Rodney gasped. He rolled them so he was pressing Rodney down into the bed and leaned down for a slow, lazy kiss. He no longer cared about Carson or Elizabeth, crazy tests or psych evals.

The bond surged in pleasurable waves and Rodney was the only thing he could think about, all he could focus on. Finally, everything was right.

The next morning, they were dragged from their beds earlier than they would have liked because Beckett wanted to talk to them.

John was tense the whole way, wondering *what now?*

Rodney put a hand on his arm and pulled him to a stop. “I’m pretty sure it’s nothing bad. I wasn’t in any mood to listen yesterday, but he was trying to apologize.”

He took that in for a second. “And Weir?”

“I don’t recall that she said much. I wasn’t paying attention to much of anything once Carson explained why I was coming back.”

John took a breath and nodded. “All right. Let’s get this show over with.”

They wound up in Beckett’s office, and he assessed the pair for a few seconds. “I need to apologize to you both. I do think we needed to assess if you two could be out of contact enough to be in the field together, and what it would mean if you got separated. But keeping you apart for three days was unnecessary and, once I had concerns, I let myself be persuaded to ignore it and continue the test. I just want to assure you it won’t happen again.”

Not sure he was entirely ready to let it go, John asked, “What about Weir?”

“She’s still pushing to continue the tests, to understand the extent of the bond, but with more caution than we’ve used thus far. With the three of us opposed, she doesn’t have much room to work. She feels you two shouldn’t have a say as the military and science leaders of the expedition, because it’s a conflict of interest.”

John's jaw was clenched so tight he was lucky something didn't break. "She can't treat us like lab rats."

Carson held up his hands. "I agree. But she took it to Lorne and Zelenka to see if she could get them to back her up, and they gave her a resounding no."

Rodney gripped John's hand and John blinked as he felt odd soothing feelings coming through the bond. He'd have to ask about that later. Despite the fact that Carson now seemed to be on their side, he wasn't prepared to talk about issues related to their bond any more than necessary. The doctor would have to earn that trust back.

"You think she'll leave it alone now?" Rodney asked intently.

"I doubt it. Expect she'll take it further up the chain. I've already written a report, and I invite you to read it. Lorne and Zelenka are doing the same. I'd suggest both of you prepare something as well. But before you do that, I've scheduled you both with Heightmeyer this morning." Before either could protest, Carson held up a hand. "The sooner we can get you in the field, the sooner we can prove that there's no reason to ground you."

John fired off two rounds, both hitting their target in the head and two more Wraith were down. The place was fucking crawling with them and there were too many between John's team and the jumper.

Their first mission back since the bonding and they stumble on the Wraith. Fortunately he hadn't seen or heard any darts yet, but that could only last for so long.

He and Ronon were fighting practically back to back. Rodney and Teyla were too far away for comfort, and he was trying to keep track of both of them even as he dove to avoid some stunner fire. A sense of panic filtered through the bond and he adjusted his position to look for Rodney. He saw that Rodney was cornered and a Wraith was advancing on him. He'd gotten separated from Teyla.

Rodney fired his weapon, but John knew it wasn't going to be enough.

John was in motion, but knew he wouldn't make it in time to stop the Wraith from...

There was a solid yank on the bond as the Wraith got its hand on Rodney's chest. John ignored it and kept going, despair and rage driving him forward, even as he was certain that he couldn't get to Rodney in time.

The Wraith and Rodney dropped when John was a mere meter away, and even though it was down, John still put two in the Wraith's head.

To his utter astonishment, and profound relief, Rodney was alive and getting to his feet. John didn't understand, but they didn't have time to figure it out.

Ronon and Teyla were there and they made it the last short distance to the jumper, but at the very last second, John noticed *all* the Wraith were down. A few were twitching, so they weren't dead, but not one was on their feet.

"There could be more coming, Sheppard," Ronon urged from beside him.

John got the jumper in the air and targeted all the Wraith before heading back to the 'gate.

Seeing Rodney alive and looking the same, plus the feel of Rodney through their bond was the only thing keeping him calm at the moment.

As soon as he set the jumper down in the landing bay, John reached out and yanked Rodney to him. "How are you okay? Did it not get you?"

"It got me," Rodney mumbled against John's shoulder.

"How is this possible?" Teyla asked, utterly bewildered. "Rodney is well, and all those Wraith are dead. They all collapsed at the same time."

"I felt..." John had to pause to keep himself under control. He couldn't lose it right now. "I felt a pull on the bond just when that Wraith put his hand on you."

"Your life energies are bound to each other," Teyla whispered, "so the Wraith cannot feed from you."

Part of John had wanted to keep the information to just his team, but he knew that wasn't possible, so they'd told Carson immediately. Besides, it would have been impossible for the doctor to miss the marks on Rodney's chest.

He couldn't seem to get more than a couple feet from Rodney, which caused his bondmate to shoot him worried looks, but Rodney didn't say anything, just put up with his hovering.

Carson looked genuinely baffled by the new development, then his expression shifted to thoughtful. "It probably should have occurred to us that there could be some effect on the Wraith. They feed off life energy, and your life energies are now altered, even if it's not something that we can measure or analyze. And from what

you described, it seems like it's more than just something they can't feed on. It sounds like the energy is actively bad for them."

Weir was staring the team open-mouthed, clearly trying to process the new information. "We'll need to run more tests. Some kind of experiment--"

John slammed his hand down on the table. "What kind of test would you suggest? Should we capture a couple Wraith and volunteer ourselves to be dinner?"

She reared back in her chair, looking appalled. "No! Colonel, I would never suggest anything of the sort."

"We are *not* guinea pigs."

"No-no, of course not." Something in her expression made John think she was aware that she'd gone a little off the reservation lately. "I apologize if my interest in your bond has led you to believe I would even consider something like that."

Instead of letting her off the hook, John just sat back in his chair and didn't respond.

After a tense silence, Beckett picked up the reins of the meeting. "Rodney and Colonel Sheppard have already agreed to let us continue the non-invasive tests of their blood and tissue samples, and have also agreed to undergo a few more scans. We had already run every test we could think of, so I don't expect this to yield anything new. Whatever creates the bond between them is not something we can measure.

"Perhaps of more interest is that what happened to all the Wraith who were not in direct contact with Rodney. We know they have a telepathic link, so either the affected Wraith blasted some sort of telepathic distress that dropped every Wraith nearby, or there's more to the Wraith interconnection than we currently know."

"And where do we take it from here?" Weir asked cautiously.

Rodney leaned forward a bit. "There's nowhere to take it. We can't prove any hypothesis without putting John or I under the hand of a Wraith and I think we've made our position on that pretty clear. As it stands, there are two people on this expedition who cannot be fed on by the Wraith. Carson can do his medical voodoo, but there's nothing else to say."

"Perhaps we should talk to Garrick once more," Teyla ventured. "Many in this galaxy would choose to be bonded if it meant they could no longer be prey for the Wraith."

John and Rodney exchanged a look. Carson had told them that Garrick had refused to see anyone from the expedition except John and Rodney. "It won't protect them from the Wraith in any other sense," John replied.

Teyla inclined her head in agreement. "Yes, but to not be a food source before my death would be a comfort. And to perhaps bring pain to the one who killed me. Yes... I think that would be preferable."

Another exchange of glances with his bondmate before John nodded. "We'll go talk to him tomorrow."

John crowded Rodney back against the door. "I can't believe you're okay. Don't do that to me again."

"I'm sorry," Rodney whispered, holding John tightly. "I have no plans on leaving you... it took too damn long to get you and I hate wasted effort."

They stayed like that for several minutes before Rodney added, "But just think... I gave the Wraith food poisoning!"

John rolled his eyes and pushed Rodney towards the bed.

Garrick rested his chin on steepled fingers, expression thoughtful. "We have an ancient tale of creatures like these Wraith you describe. The energy from a lifebond is toxic to them. Our gods gave us our bonds as a means to protect us."

"And the reason the Wraith don't just bomb you from orbit?" Rodney asked. "They have the capability. I know you have that tower near the gate that scans whenever we come through. Do you have other technology that protects your people?"

They'd asked similar questions before, but not gotten an answer, so John wasn't sure if this time would be any different.

Garrick and Terryn looked at each other for a long time before Terryn replied, "The ancient lore indicates that those that would feed off life force would find the energy of this planet to be difficult to tolerate. But also that there were objects left by the gods in the heavens that would protect us."

Rodney leaned forward, his interest apparent in every line of his body. "And would you allow us to take our ship into orbit to see what might be there?"

Garrick's eyes narrowed. "We could not be held responsible for that. The tales indicate that any threat from the heavens would be destroyed. How it ascertains threat is unknown."

John figured they might be able to persuade Garrick to let them send up a remote piloted craft to see what the fuck might be up there, but it was a conversation for another date, despite the fact that Rodney was practically vibrating with interest.

Teyla was next to broach the thorny topic they'd come to discuss. "There are many who would choose to engage in a bond rather than be food for the Wraith. Would you be willing to bond those who wished it?"

"And where does it end, Lady Teyla?" Garrick asked seriously. "Will then the people of this galaxy wish to dwell here? Will they attempt to take our planet by force? We fear no threat from above, but from the ancient ring? Yes, this gives us concern."

"Millions have died," Teyla stressed, "as food or for sport. Your planet could be a source of hope for many."

"Bonding is a life commitment to one other person. It would be a cruel intimacy to force on two people who sought only to escape death. It would be like a prison. Colonel Sheppard and Doctor McKay were lucky in their regard for one another."

"And if we brought only those who had a commitment to one another?" Teyla pressed.

Garrick held up his hand. "We will speak of this no more today. I must confer with the elders, but know that if a threat to my people comes through the ancient ring, we will bury it." At Teyla's disapproving expression. "You advocate for your people, and you will not fault me for doing the same for mine."

The mission debrief didn't go well in John's opinion. There were too many ideas about how to proceed when things really were in the hands of the Myriarians. John really didn't care for the speculative look in Weir's eye, so he reminded her that Garrick would see that 'gate buried before letting any harm come to his people. That didn't get as much back-off from her as he thought it should.

Her interest in a potential weapon in orbit around that planet was also an issue. While John was all for some big ass space gun, he wasn't anxious to get blown out of the sky by whatever was up there that had kept the Wraith at bay for thousands of years.

There was no resolution by the end of the meeting and no one seemed happy. John felt he had to issue the order that this could not be discussed outside the attendees of that meeting until they had an answer from Garrick.

Once everyone had gone their own way, John pulled Lorne into his office and discussed contingency plans just in case Weir went off the reservation again. He really didn't think she'd do something crazy, but she'd surprised him a time or two, and he'd rather be prepared.

He suddenly felt an odd tug on the bond. It wasn't bad, but it was definitely a pull.

Noticing his distraction, Lorne pushed away and got to his feet. "Go see your husband, Sheppard. Everything else can wait till tomorrow."

John nearly choked. "What?"

Lorne gave him a *look*. "Seriously, sir? You two are bonded for life and you object to the term '*husband*'?" Then he walked out leaving John sitting there open-mouthed.

Oh my god, he was married! And *more* married than probably anyone in Earth history. He had a brief moment of utter panic, before taking a breath and thinking it through for a few minutes. He told Rodney repeatedly that even though he was coping with this bond thing, he hadn't really dealt with it, and now it was really hitting him.

He suddenly remembered the tug on his bond and tapped his earpiece. "McKay, where are you?"

"*Our quarters*," Rodney responded immediately.

"On my way."

He found Rodney lying naked on the bed, arms folded behind his head, cock rapidly filling under John's gaze. "Took you long enough, Sheppard."

While hurriedly stripping out of his BDUs, John asked, "Did you deliberately tug on the bond?"

"Yep! Skin hungry scientist here who focuses better with lots of hot coffee and even more hot sex. So get your ass in this bed. We still have three days apart to make up for."

John settled next to Rodney, but just framed his face, pulling him in for a slow, deep kiss. "Whatever you want."

"Good policy," Rodney said on a smile as he pulled John on top of him.

“So what was that little bit of panic earlier?” Rodney asked while seemingly using his finger to doodle math equations on John’s chest.

John blew out a breath. “Lorne called you my husband, and I realized we’re basically married. And it just kind of hit me. We’re married, and it’s forever... and I’m a shitty husband.”

Rodney stopped doodling and looked at John intently. “I really didn’t want to get married.”

“Yeah, I remember.”

“Because I didn’t want a phony marriage. Not with you. But the real thing... I can deal with that. Besides, anyone married to me is going to be an awesome husband. You’ll have me as an example.”

“You’re so fucking modest.”

Rodney was drumming his fingers and looking off into space. Finally, he said, “Let’s do it for real.”

“What do you mean?” John asked, brow furrowed.

Rodney’s lips tipped up in a genuine smile. No snark, no sarcasm. “I want to marry you, John.”

The End