

A Life Worth Saving

A UFO Short Story for the SHADO Writer's Guild Challenge

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Based on the Characters and series
created by Gerry Anderson



Historians Note: This story takes place immediately after the episode *The Cat with Ten Lives*.

“Look, I don’t care what it takes,” Straker said, his voice like a knife. “I need the parts for the replacement interceptor shipped up to Moonbase on the next supply flight.”

She could tell by his expression that the upcoming conversation was going to be an uphill struggle, as she watched him battling with the supply department. Judging by the look on his face, and the way he was rubbing his temple, she knew that the Commander was at his wits end. *Maybe this isn’t such a good idea.*

“Right, I want to know when that ship lifts off.”

Straker hung up the phone and looked up at his Executive Officer.

“Colonel Lake,” he said, in a calmer voice. “What can I do for you?”

“Security just brought in Jim Regan’s cat,” she began. “Somehow, he managed to break free of the dogs and climb a tree. One of the men used a trunk round to get him down.”

“Where is the animal now?”

“Jackson has him in Medical Center. The injuries from breaking loose from the dogs are mostly superficial.”

A brief look of concern passed over the Commander’s face. It was subtle, and most people would have missed it. But Virginia Lake wasn’t most people.

“Commander, I think he’s getting ready to do an autopsy,” she said, her voice betraying her feelings.

“An autopsy, I thought the cat was still alive?”

“Jackson said something about finding out how the aliens used him to control Regan. I wouldn’t put it past him to use live dissection.”

“Hmm. There is always the possibility that the cat could control others,” said Straker, “as much as I dislike the idea, Colonel, Doctor Jackson might be doing us a favor, although I highly doubt that even Jackson would resort to that.”

“You don’t believe that anymore than I do.”

Ginny watched him closely, as he seemed to weigh the decision. Finally he stood and opened the door.

“Come along, Colonel.”

“Where to, sir?”

“Medical Center, where else,” he said, with a sigh.

“Thank you, sir.”

“Don’t thank me yet. Depending on what the good doctor tells me, I may order him to put the cat down right away.”

“I don’t believe that for a minute,” said Ginny. Her voice sounded stern, but she was smiling.

On the way to Medical Center, Straker considered his decision. Virginia Lake was a formidable force to be reckoned with when she wanted something, but his reason for interceding was driven by another force. Unknown to all but his family, Ed once had an Abyssinian cat as a pet. And even though the animal in Jackson's care, *or more accurately clutches*, was a Siamese, the pointed ears reminded him of Max.

Ed found the idea of using the animal as a pawn, repulsive. It was his belief that human compassion and integrity separated them from the cold heartless aliens they battled. Doctor Jackson, however, did not always adhere to those principles.

Jackson was at his desk when the Commander and Colonel Lake walked in.

“Commander, Colonel Lake. How may I help you?”

“I would like to know what your intentions are, concerning Regan’s cat.”

“For now, I intend to keep it sedated. I’ve ordered a brain scan, a CT scan, and x-rays, to determine if the animal was subject to any surgical procedure. I’m still not convinced that this feline is actually harboring an alien personality.”

“But you told me a few days ago that one of the bodies recovered from the crash site was completely human...”

“Yes Commander, I did. I also said it was a possibility that a feline could serve as a host. But after doing more research on the subject, I don’t consider this likely.”

“Explain,” said Straker.

Jackson picked up a set of transparencies and placed one of them on the overhead projector. He switched on the unit and dimmed the lights.

“This is a cross section of the human brain,” he began, pointing to the image on the right. “This section here is the place where complex analytical reasoning takes place. The image on the left is that of a chimpanzee. Again, the section of the brain that processes analytical thought is very pronounced.”

Jackson switched slides.

“This is a brain cross section of a cetacean, a bottlenose dolphin, to be specific. As you can see, there is also a pronounced enlargement of the cerebral cortex.”

“As I recall,” said Virginia. “Dolphins and chimpanzees are considered to be the closest to humans in the area of intelligence.”

“That is correct. It has to do partially with the ratio of body weight verses brain weight, although there are many other factors to consider.”

The doctor brought up the final slide.

“The feline brain makes up about point nine percent of the body weight, slightly

less than the bottlenose dolphin. You can see the development of the cerebral cortex is similar to that of the former examples.”

“Okay, Doctor Jackson, you’ve shown us how all of these examples are similar,” said Straker. “Tell me why this cat would not be a likely alien host.”

“Of course, Commander,” said Jackson. “As you know, the brain controls every aspect of the bodily functions, heart rate, breathing, digestive system, and so on. We had always assumed that this was totally autonomous, and completely separate from the cognitive functions of the brain. That is why a patient could stay in a coma for years and still survive. But a recent study has suggested that

there is more interaction between the autonomous functions and the higher centers, of the brain. This is why mental health issues can cause physiological changes. It is now believed that the personality traits of an individual can have a significant effect on lifespan. Cats can live to be almost forty years old, but their normal longevity is between fifteen and twenty years. One interpretation of this theory is, a personality meant for a human could cause rapid aging in a shorter lived species.”

“In other words,” said Ginny, “if an alien personality was to be transferred into a cat, or another small animal, it would, essentially, burn itself out.”

“That is correct, Colonel Lake. It’s still just a theory.”

Ed was listening to the medical explanation but he was convinced that a simpler solution was at hand.

“How was this cat able to control Regan?” asked Straker.

“I am still not sure, Commander. The amount of psychic energy required to manipulate a subject over a quarter of a million miles away would place considerable strain on the animal’s system. One of the things I am looking for is an implant.”

One of the medical technicians came in and handed Jackson a set of folders.

“Ah, we’re about to find out,” he said.
“These are the results of the x-rays and the brain scan.”

Jackson put the x-rays up on the backlight and switched the unit on. Near the nape of the neck, was a small implant, with what looked like wires running to the brain stem.

“I recognize this,” said Straker.
“Remember Dawson, the medical technician who killed Paul Roper’s wife?”

“Indeed, Commander. The implant and interface do look remarkably similar. This would explain a great many things.”

Doctor Jackson snapped on the brainwave display and inserted a disk that was in the folder. The instrument

displayed an irregular sine wave pattern that had flattened peaks in regular intervals.

“Commander, Colonel, look at this. Do you notice the flattened pattern?” asked Jackson, as he pointed out the waveform.

“I see it,” said Straker.

“This pattern is remarkably close to the brainwave pattern that was taken from Technician Dawson just before he died.”

“The implant seems to be altering the animal’s brainwave pattern,” said Straker.

“That is one possibility,” said the doctor.

“Can you remove it without harming the cat?” asked Ginny.

“The other possibility, Colonel, is the implant is simply a powerful transmitter. The brainwave pattern may be permanent. In which case, keeping the animal alive is a security risk.”

“To answer her question, can you safely remove the implant? And more to the point, will we be able to ascertain whether the animal is still under alien control?” asked Straker.

“Perhaps, with the help of Doctor Shroeder, his veterinary skills surpass mine. As to the second question, we can run another brain scan. The brainwave pattern should be significantly different than what we are seeing at the present.”

“Do it. And let me know as soon as the procedure is completed.”

Ed glanced over to Virginia, who had been standing behind him. He was rewarded with a warm smile. *Well, at least she isn't angry with me anymore,* he thought, remembering the icy cold glare she had given him when he ordered Regan back to duty. It wasn't the first time that she was right and he was wrong. Her expressive method of communications was a time saver, however, as Alec would rant and rave for over an hour. Virginia was able to get her point across in about half a second, and there was no mistaking her meaning.

It was after midnight when Jackson called the Commander. Doctor Shroeder

had been able to remove the alien device without causing any harm to the animal and the post op test had been completed.

While the doctors were in surgery, Virginia had stopped by the local pet shop to pick up some cat food, litter boxes, a couple of cat beds, and a carrier. She met the Commander in the corridor on the way to the Medical Center, carrying one of the cat beds.

“You didn’t waste any time, Colonel. I assume that you are planning on adopting our guest.”

“He’s a beautiful cat, Commander. It’s not like anyone else was interested in saving him. So, yes, I would like to have him.”

“Lt. Johnson seemed quite taken by him as well.”

“I like Ayshea, but, in this case, I’m pulling rank on her,” said Lake, giving the Commander a sideways look.

“I see. I’ll make sure that I don’t get in your way when you want something, Colonel. Anyway, I’m sure that Miss Holland won’t object to your claim. Her arm was torn up pretty good by that little bundle of joy. Are you sure about this?”

“I saw,” said Ginny. “Ayshea said he was quite friendly, the cat was on his way out when he attacked Miss Holland. It had to be the alien influence. If we can free him of that, I’m sure he’ll be fine.

Speaking of Miss Holland, when is Janice coming back?”

“Next week,” said Ed. “Remind me to start forcing people to take their time off. Miss Ealand had over three months on the books.”

“Shall I start with you?” asked Ginny, giving the Commander a wry grin.

“Touché.”

They walked into the Medical Center where Doctor Jackson was setting up the brainwave monitor.

“Well, Doctor?” said Straker.

“Ah, Commander, Colonel, please have a seat.”

Jackson set the monitor so both displays were visible to the command team. Two

radically different patterns danced on the screens.

“The monitor on the left shows the brainwave pattern, of the feline, before the procedure. On the right is the pattern after the procedure. As you can see, the pattern is significantly different, indicating to me that the alien influence is no longer present.”

“He’s going to be all right?” asked Virginia, barely containing her excitement.

Her enthusiasm waned when she saw his expression.

“There is something else, isn’t there?”

“I’m afraid so, Colonel.”

Jackson flipped on the backlight and placed three CT images on the display.

“The scan on the left was taken of a normal two year old adult cat. The coloration indicates normal blood flow and brain activity. The scan on the right is an eighteen year old adult feline. You can clearly see the lack of activity and blood flow in certain areas. The center scan is, of course our test subject.”

The center scan was much closer to the older subject, looking even worse than the eighteen year old.

“This is what I was afraid of. The stress of the psychic connection has caused extreme aging. The damage, unfortunately, is irreversible. I’m sorry, Colonel.”

“How long does he have?” asked Straker.

“It’s hard to say, Commander. I would give him a few months, a year on the outside, certainly no more than that.”

“I don’t care, I’d like to take him home anyway. He didn’t deserve what happened to him,” said Ginny.

“Any objections, Doctor Jackson?” asked Ed.

“I would like to keep the feline here overnight, for observation. This was, after all, major surgery. If everything looks fine tomorrow, I have no objections.”

“May I see him?”

“Certainly, Colonel,” said Jackson. “This way please.”

The seal point Siamese was curled up in the corner of the cage. His fur had been shaved in several places besides the back of the neck.

“Doctor Shroeder and I treated the animal’s other wounds as well. The hair should grow back in a couple of weeks,” said Jackson.

Virginia opened the cage and placed the cat bed inside. She would have picked him up and put him in the bed, had it not been for Jackson’s concern about moving him too much while he was still under the sedative.

“He is a beautiful cat, Colonel,” said Ed.

“I think so. I can’t wait to take him home.

Ed watched her as she gently stroked the sedated cat, seeing a side of his Executive Officer that he had never seen before. *Virginia would make a good mother*, he thought to himself.

Virginia brought Sam, short for Samson, home on Friday evening. The seal point spent the first few hours exploring her single story flat. Once he was satisfied that it was safe and acceptable, Sam curled up on the couch next to Ginny, keeping her company while she read.

His hair had grown back remarkably quick and a week later the spots, that had been shaved, were barely noticeable. If it had not been for Jackson's ominous

prediction, Ginny would think that Sam would live for years.

Sam took well to most of her visitor's, not that she had many. Nina, Gay, Jen, her mother, all showered her new feline companion with affection. Sam didn't seem to like Paul, for some reason. Foster had stopped by, one evening, to bring her some paperwork she needed. When Sam saw him, he puffed up, hissed, then scurried under the bed, and didn't come out until Foster had left. When asked about it, Jackson surmised that Sam may have remembered the image of Foster when the alien device was controlling him, and through him, Jim Regan.

Virginia soon found out that Sam disliked being left at home alone, more than a few days in a row, so she convinced the Commander to allow her to bring him in a few days a week, providing that she kept him in her office.

“I can’t believe Ed lets you bring him into HQ,” said Alec, as he sat across from her desk. “He must be getting soft in his old age.”

“This is Straker we’re talking about, right?” asked Virginia.

“He’s mellowed a little bit, since I’ve been at Dreamland. Certainly you must have noticed?”

The truth was, Ginny had noticed, in fact, she saw the Commander in a much better light than most people. Virginia had been Executive Officer for two months now and, in that short time, she and Ed had developed a somewhat close rapport, often able to communicate non-verbally. But this is something she would never share with Alec.

“Maybe, just a bit,” she lied.

While the two conversed, Sam arose from his favorite pastime and climbed out of the cat bed to investigate the unfamiliar face. After a cautious sniff around his shoes, Sam jumped into the lap of Colonel Freeman and presented his head to be scratched.

“Well hello there,” said Alec, as he massaged the top of Sam’s head.

Virginia couldn’t suppress a chuckle as her latest love basked in the attention.

“I think he likes you,” she said.

“Obviously he has good taste.”

Freeman was quite pleased with himself and Ginny decided to burst his bubble, “He likes Jackson too.”

Alec looked down at the feline disapprovingly, “Traitor.”

“Well, Jackson and Shroeder did save his life. That’s got to count for something.”

“I suppose. I’m amazed that Jackson didn’t use him for a lab experiment.”

“Ed surprised me when he came to Sam’s aid. I suspect that the good doctor was planning something along those lines,” said Ginny. “Speaking of Ed, Sam seems to have taken a liking to him, as well.”

“You’re kidding, right?”

“I’m serious. Tuesday afternoon, Ed and I were working on the budgetary allocations for Moonbase. To make things easier we sat at the conference table and Sam spent most of the time in Ed’s lap,” she said. “By the way, I’m not supposed to tell anyone that, so don’t say anything.”

“I’m not sure I believe it. You don’t have pictures, do you?”

“Do you really think Ed would let me get away with that?” she asked.

“No, I suppose not.”

Sam jumped out of Freeman’s lap and rounded the desk. Looking up at Ginny he expressed his dissatisfaction.

“Meeeroooow!”

“What little blue eyed boy? Is Uncle Alec ignoring you? Come here blue eyed baby,” she said, as she scooped him from the floor.

“You were supposed to be paying attention to him, Colonel Freeman.”

“Terrific, now the cat outranks me,” said Alec, in a serious voice. But he was grinning, ear to ear.

A week later, Virginia arrived at her flat, much later than she usually came home. When she opened the front door, her housemate began expressing his discontentment, loudly.

“All right, little boy, I hear you.”

Ginny put aside her purse and jacket and reached down to pick him up. Sam rubbed his head against her chin, his happiness evident in his purring.

Sam had a hearty purr and Ginny found it to be quite soothing. After a few minutes, she set him down and hung her jacket up.

“Let’s get you something to eat, okay?” she said, walking into the kitchen.

Virginia set down food and water for Sam and started water for her tea. *It's going to be right to bed for me tonight,* she thought, as she went into the bedroom to change.

Once she had dressed for bed, Ginny strolled into the kitchen and poured herself a cup of tea. She took it into the living room and sat down on the couch. She was soon joined by Sam, who had finished eating.

“Did you miss, Mama, blue eyed baby?”

Sam stood on his haunches and nuzzled her neck, apparently quite pleased to have her home.

“A sighting, sir,” said Lt. Paulson, to Colonel Grey, the duty officer.

Grey stepped over to the radar console.

“That’s in the atmosphere. Can you confirm?”

“It’s not a strong signal, sir. I’m having trouble holding contact.”

Paulson’s hands danced over the console, in an effort to firm up the contact.

“Got him, sir! He’s close, less than ten miles from the base.”

How the hell did he get by Moonbase?

Grey watched the blip disappear from the radar screen. He punched up a detailed map of the area and his heart froze when he noticed the street name.

Grey picked up the phone, “Security, this is Colonel Grey. I need you to get a team out to Colonel Lake’s flat, right now. We have an incursion in progress and she may be the target.”

Grey hung up and turned to Paulson, “Tara, get Sky 3 in the air, they’re the closest, and contact Colonel Blake. I need him to lead the mobile team.”

The Colonel got on the phone once more, “Ed, John Grey. We have a problem.”

Straker was on the road in less than two minutes, having just arrived at home when the call from HQ came in. Colonel Lake lived a few miles west of him by air, but it was several miles by road. It

would take him almost fifteen minutes to get there, and he was the closest.

I never should have let her take that cat, he thought, as he raced down the road, disregarding the posted limit.

His progress came to a halt when he came across a road block. An accident was blocking traffic in both directions. Backtracking would take over an hour. He picked up the phone and called HQ.

Sam's head came up, when he heard a noise in the back of the house. Testing the air, he jumped off of Virginia's bed and paced into the kitchen. Ginny was normally a light sleeper, but the past few long days had caught up with her. She

didn't stir with the noise or Sam's movement.

Watching the back door, Sam let out a low growl as the knob slowly was turned back and forth. When the glass was broken in, Sam ran back into the bedroom.

A gloved hand reached inside and unlocked the deadbolt allowing the door to be opened, revealing an alien, who carefully surveyed the room. Removing a metal cylinder from its belt, it made its way through the house, slow and quiet.

In the bedroom, Sam was nudging Ginny's head trying, in vain, to wake her. When the alien appeared in the doorway, Sam let out a loud cry.

“Oh, Sam, go to sleep,” she said, still not quite awake.

The alien ignored Sam and moved towards the bed, the cylinder in its hand. It almost had the device to Ginny’s neck, when Sam leaped off the bed and into the face of the red suited intruder. As Sam dug in deep with his claws, the alien stumbled back, knocking over a lamp. The noise woke Ginny with a start.

When she saw the intruder she instinctively reached for the pistol on her nightstand and took aim at the alien, firing two quick rounds that hit it in the midsection. The alien fell back, with Sam still firmly attached to its face.

Virginia heard the front door burst open.

“Colonel Lake!”

She recognized the voice as Ed’s.

“In here,” she said, her voice quavering.

Straker rushed into her bedroom and looked down at the alien corpse lying on the floor, its face riddled with deep gouges. When he looked to her she dropped her pistol and started trembling. He came to her and took her in his arms.

“Are you okay?” he asked, in a voice more gentle than she was used to.

“Uh huh.”

Virginia had her head rested on his shoulder, looking down at the alien corpse. She saw the claw marks on its

face and suddenly started looking around, “Sam? Sam!”

“Meeeoow”

Sitting next to her and Ed, on the bed, the seal point climbed into her lap. She scooped him into her arms, cuddling him.

“You’re a brave big boy, defending Mama like that,” she said, as Sam rubbed his head on her face.

“He’s got a loud purr, said Ed.”

“Yeah, he does. God, Ed, I can’t stop shaking.”

“It’s like an accident, you shake when it’s all over. It looks like Sam just might have saved your life.”

“Yeah, he did. I was dead to the world. I didn’t wake up until the alien smashed into one of my lamps. Sam was firmly attached to its face. He’s a good boy,” she said, praising her companion again.

“Colonel Lake? Commander?”

“In the bedroom,” she answered.

Sam jumped out of her arms and dove under the bed when Blake and his two partners came in.

Suddenly self conscious, she held the sheet up to herself. Ever the gentleman, Ed found her robe and wrapped it around her.

“Thanks,” she said.

“Why don’t you grab some clothes and spend the night at HQ. It’s going to take

Blake and his team a while to clean this up.”

“All right.”

Ed supported her as she stood, and walked her to her bathroom.

“Could you grab the outfit I have on the valet, and bring it in to me?”

“Of course,” said Ed.

While Ginny dressed, Ed was on the phone with HQ.

“The UFO took off as soon as the mobiles got into the area, Ed. Sky 3 got it just offshore.”

“That’s good news, John. Give Captain Wallach my complements.”

“How’s Virginia?” asked Grey.

“A little shaken up, but she’ll be all right. Sam may have saved her life.”

“Sam?”

“Her cat, the one that belonged to Jim Regan and his wife. He just about tore this alien’s face off.”

“I’m not surprised, cats can be just as protective as dogs,” said Grey. “Is Ginny coming back here for the night?”

“Yeah, it’s going to take Blake and his team a while to clean things up. I’m going to drive her over.”

As Ed hung up, Virginia came out of the bathroom, fully attired.

She picked up the cat carrier near the door and opened it, “Come on Sam, we’re going for a ride.”

Staying low to the floor, because of the commotion, Sam came out of the bedroom and made a beeline for the carrier.

“He always goes in that easy?”

“Most of the time,” she said, as she closed the gate.

She hefted the carrier while Ed picked up her overnight bag and they walked out to his car.

Virginia was quiet on the way to HQ, still, ill at ease, with her close brush with death. She had chosen the house because of its seclusion but realized that isolation had a price. Her lease was up next month and she had wanted to find

a place closer to HQ, but the only thing available was in a high rise a few miles from the studio. *After tonight, a high rise doesn't sound so bad. I'll have to see if they allow pets.*

When they arrived at the living quarter's section in the base, Ginny broke the silence.

“Ed, I haven't thanked you for rushing to my rescue.”

“That's quite all right,” he said. “It's not like you needed my help. By the time I arrived, you and Sam had the situation well in hand.”

“That doesn't matter,” she said, just above a whisper. She drew him in her embrace and kissed him on the cheek. To her surprise, he didn't resist.”

“You’re still trembling,” he said, as gently as he had earlier.

“Uh huh.”

She knew that her reaction, now, had nothing to do with the alien. Ginny pulled away just enough to look up at him. They locked eyes for a moment and began to draw closer, when a noise at their feet distracted them.

“Mrrreeeoowww”

Sam’s protest drew their attention away, breaking the moment. They released each other and Virginia reached down to pick up the vocal feline.

“I think someone is insanely jealous,” she said, as she snuggled with her new friend.

“I should let you get some sleep. Are you okay?”

“I am now, thanks.”

“Sleep well, Colonel.”

“Good night, Commander.”

Once she was alone, she looked Sam in the eyes, “You couldn’t have waited another minute?”

“Meeooww”

“You are jealous,” she said, as she cuddled the seal point.

Epilogue:

Sam passed on just before Thanksgiving, out distancing Jackson’s best estimate by almost three months. Virginia was

home one night when he climbed into her lap and went to sleep, sadly never waking up.

At HQ, Ginny was showered with sympathy cards, and much to her surprise, Ed bought her an urn to keep his ashes, and his gesture had brought her to tears. Later, in his office she shared her thoughts with him.

“Ed, I didn’t cry this much when Craig died,” she said, still teary eyed.

“I think you were much closer to Sam. He was family and I’m going to miss having him around. I enjoyed having him walk into my office like he owned the place. He was always a welcome distraction.”

And people say he's cold hearted, she thought. They really have no idea.

“Thanks.”

“His, was, a life worth saving,” said the Commander. “You convinced me of that, and by doing so, saved your own life in the process.”

“I'd give my life to have him back,” she said, her blue grey eyes filling with tears.

“Colonel, why don't you take the next week off? You need some time to grieve.”

“Ed, I can't. Thanksgiving is coming...”

“No, Colonel. That's an order,” he said, but he was smiling. “I'll cover the shifts for you.”

“All right, on one condition,” she said. “You have to take Christmas off, I’ll cover for you.”

“That kind of negates the order, doesn’t it? But, I’ll consider it. Best I can do, Colonel. Now, on your way out, send Foster in. It’s high time he starts pulling his weight around here.”

Virginia chuckled at that, although she knew he wasn’t serious. She stood to leave, but just before she reached the door, she turned back to him.

“Thanks, Ed, for everything.”

“You’re welcome. Now if you’ll excuse me, I’d like to get this paperwork done so I can go home sometime today.”

His voice was stern but he was grinning.

“Yes, sir!” she said, giving him a salute as she left.

END