

Expecting

A UFO Challenge Story for the SHADO Writer's Guild

Written by Matthew R. White

© June 27, 2010

Based on the Characters and series created by
Gerry Anderson

The character of Major Vladimir Natiroff was
created by Deborah Rorabaugh



Historian's Note: The events depicted here
take place about ten months after Soul Mates.

Chapter 1:

Virginia Lake-Straker walked into the studio building just before 8:30 in the morning and she slowly made her way to Ed's office.

"Good morning, Janice," she said as she walked in.

"Virginia, what are you doing here? You should be resting."

"I got board sitting in the house so I decided to come in and take care of some of the studio business for Ed."

"You know he's going to be sore if he finds you here."

"Don't I know it," she said. "I'm sure he already knows. Ever since we found out I was expecting he's been very protective of me. A little overzealous if you ask me."

"That's just because he loves you so much. Considering where the two of you were when you found out, I don't blame him."

Ginny considered that. Seven months prior, she and Ed were studying the captured UFO that SHADO had recovered from Loch Ness. One of the technicians working on the craft accidentally shorted out one of its circuits sending the two of them into an alternate reality. That universe was a dark evil place that still gave her nightmares.

“I suppose you’re right, he waits on me hand and foot at home.”

“Now that I would like to see,” said Janice, laughing.

“So, Ginny, do you know how much longer?”

“Ed and I went to see the doctor yesterday. He thinks it will be another week, but this is my first so that skews things a bit.”

“Boys or girls,” she asked.

“We wanted to be surprised, did we ever get one when we found out we were having twins. So

what does he have on the studio agenda this morning?”

“Well, let’s see, there’s a dozen or so scripts to look over, paperwork to be signed, and an 11:00 meeting with Howard Byrne.”

That should be about as much fun as a root canal!

“Do me a favor and let Mr. Byrne know that he’ll be meeting with me instead of Ed.”

“Certainly, Virginia, anything else?”

“If you could bring in the paperwork while I try to get comfortable.”

“I’ll do that.”

Virginia settled herself into the chair and began to attack the paperwork in front of her. Ed had been stressed out yesterday and she wanted to lighten his load anyway she could. He had been the picture perfect model of an expectant father but she could see the stress piling up on him.

To his credit, Ed had delegated some responsibility over to Paul, John, and Geoff, allowing him to spend more time with her. Virginia wanted to work right up until the last couple of weeks but her doctor told her she needed much more rest considering the fact that she was over forty. *Damn doctors, they're overprotective as well!*

Around 10:30, she called down to Ed's office.

"Straker," answered the gruff voice on the other end.

"Are we in a bad mood today?"

"Oh, hi, I didn't know it was you," his demeanor changed instantly. "What are you doing upstairs, is everything all right?" he asked, concerned.

"I'm fine, Ed. I just had to get out of the damned house for a while, so I had security drive me in. I figured that I could clear up some of this studio business for you."

“Virginia...”

“Ed, I was climbing the walls. I needed to get out,” she said in a tone that would brook no argument.

Ed had heard that tone before and he knew when to quit.

“All right, but I wish you’d leave the Byrne meeting to me. I don’t want you getting stressed out over it.”

“Oh trust me, Ed, I won’t be the one getting stressed,” she said, pleasantly. “I’ll simply listen to his objections, smile nicely, and then I’ll tell him how it’s going to be.”

“Where did you learn that from?”

“Oh, some handsome gentleman that I know,” she said, conspiratorially.

“We’ll, since you’re here, maybe you’d like to have lunch together?”

“I think I could be persuaded, if the right man asked me.”

“I’ll take that as a yes. I’ll see you around 12:30.”

“Love you, Ed.”

“Love you too.”

Just before 11:00, the direct line to Miss Ealand’s desk rang.

“Yes, Janice.”

“Mr. Byrne is here to see you.”

“Send him in please.”

The office doors parted and the tall dark haired actor walked in.

“Mrs. Straker. I was expecting your husband.”

The condescending attitude was something that Ginny had almost forgotten about in the world of SHADO. But it seemed to be alive and well up

here in the studio. She was, however, the boss's wife, and with Ed, that translated into equal partner.

"It's nice to see you again, Mr. Byrne. Please forgive me if I don't stand, it's a bit of a chore right now."

"Oh, no problem at all," he said, as he sat down.

"So, what's on your mind?"

"The series, we got lucky this year, as the networks picked it up for another season. But I have a friend who works in the office and she told me that if the episode quality doesn't improve, the series will be dropped."

"Howard, you've been over this with Ed a dozen times, script approval simply isn't in your contract, and the writers wouldn't approve it anyway."

"Virginia, have you read any of these?"

"I'm sure Ed has."

“Would you be willing to take a look? These two are the worst of the bunch. I’ve highlighted the parts that really stand out as being trite.”

Virginia quickly scanned through the screenplays. One of her pastimes was reading and she dearly enjoyed a well written book. As she read the scripts, she realized that Byrne was right, these were very poorly written.

Her face must have betrayed her thoughts, as Howard said, “You see what I mean?”

“Yeah, I agree some of this is pretty awful, but I still can’t give you script approval.”

“Two of the five writer’s, Fontana, and Jefferies, are excellent. In my opinion they saved the series last year.”

“I’ll tell you what, Howard, let me talk this over with Ed and see if we can come up with a solution.”

“I’d appreciate it, Virginia.”

When Byrne had left, Ginny went back to finishing the paperwork she was working on. By 12:15, she was done with the studio business for the day. She opened the silver cigar box on the desk.

“Lake.”

Voiceprint positive, Lake Virginia L.

In a moment she had exchanged identities, going from Virginia Lake-Straker, Producer, Harlington Straker Studios, to Colonel Virginia Lake, Executive officer, SHADO operations. She and Ed had decided it would be easier for her to keep her maiden name for SHADO purposes. It worked well for Gay and Mark.

When the lift had descended, Virginia slowly got up from her chair and made her way to the door. A SHADO Lieutenant was waiting out in the corridor, with a wheelchair.

“Colonel Lake, the Commander instructed me to bring you to his office,” he said, gesturing at the chair.

“I’m pregnant, not crippled, you know,” she said, clearly irritated.

“Yes ma’am, but he was quite insistent,” he said, with a pleading tone to his voice.

Virginia knew that if she didn’t take the chair, Ed would tear a strip out of this poor young man’s hide, She took pity on him and slowly sat down.

“I appreciate this, ma’am.”

Ginny couldn’t help but smile, knowing exactly what he meant.

Ed had left the office open and the lieutenant wheeled Ginny in. As they entered, Ed looked up from his work. “Oh, hi sweetheart,” he said. He then turned to the Lieutenant. “Thank you, Lt. Watson.”

“You’re welcome, sir.”

Ed closed the door behind him and bent over to kiss his wife.

“How are you feeling?”

“Overprotected, I could have walked myself, Ed,” she said, as she nailed him with an icy glare.

“Virginia, we talked about this. The doctor said that you’ve been pushing yourself too hard. If he knew that you came in today he would have put you in the hospital for the duration.”

Virginia couldn’t be too frustrated with him as he was right. And she knew his concern was out of love.

“I’m sorry, Ed, I really needed to get out of the house. After we have lunch I’m going to our quarters to lie down for a bit. Then I can ride home with you.”

“How did you make out upstairs?”

“Everything that was pending is done, so you don’t have to worry about it.”

“I do appreciate it.”

“Yeah, well you can prove it when we get home. I need a back rub.”

“I think I can arrange that.”

“Good, let’s go eat, I’m hungry.”

In the corridor, outside of the Commander’s quarters, a SHADO technician was working on a service panel. He was so engrossed in what he was doing that he did not hear Lt. Watson behind him.

“What are you working on, Gregg?”

Gregg Carlson was startled and involuntarily jumped.

“Easy, Gregg, are you all right?”

“Yeah, sorry Mike, I didn’t hear you come up.”

“So, what are you working on?”

“One of the intercom circuits has some hum on it. I’m trying to find the broken pair.”

“Oh, I don’t remember seeing that on the trouble log.”

“Yeah, I just found it, and since I was going to fix it right away, I didn’t log it.”

“All right, Gregg, just make sure you log it in when you’re done, you know how Captain Ford is when it comes to details.”

“Tell me about it, he’s worse since he got promoted last year.”

When he was alone again, Carlson pulled a small device from his pocket and wired it into an unused telephone pair. When he had finished, he activated the device and closed the access panel. He walked down the corridor to the elevator that led to the main computer room and telephone switching room.

“I swear to God, if one more person say’s to me that I’m eating for two, or three in my case, I’m going to have them thrown in the brig!” Virginia looked exasperated as she shook her head. “I’m sorry, Ed, I don’t know what’s wrong with me. My emotions are all over the place today.”

Ed just smiled at her, overcome with love at the sight of seeing his wife in the full bloom of her pregnancy.

“What are you looking at?”

“You. Have I told you today how beautiful you are?”

“Ed, you need to have your eyes checked. I’m as big as a house, and I’m waddling around here like a duck.”

“So?”

“I just don’t understand what you find so attractive about a pregnant woman.”

“Ask any expectant father, his wife always looks more beautiful when she’s expecting, and the

further along she is, the more beautiful she becomes.”

“Personally, I think you all need your heads examined.”

“You should listen to him, Ginny, he’s telling you the truth,” said Lt. Lake, as she strolled up to the table.

Ed stood and grabbed her a chair, “Please, join us,” he said.

“Thank you,” she said, as she sat down.

“Ginny, your father looked at me the same way when I was carrying you.”

“But Mon, when Dad died you were only three months along.”

“That’s right, and I was just beginning to show. I’ll never forget the look on his face when he noticed.”

“I still think Ed’s blind, but I’ll take the compliments.”

“So, have the two of you figured out how you’re going to manage your schedules once the little ones arrive?” asked Lynn.

“The first year isn’t going to be a problem,” said Ed. “But after that, we’re going to have to divide our time on separate shifts. We’ll hire a nanny for the times our shifts overlap, and we want to limit that as much as possible.”

“Well, don’t forget me. I’d love to spend time with my grandchildren.”

“Don’t worry, Mom,” said Ginny. “We won’t forget you.”

Lt. Watson rushed into the room and quickly walked over to the Commander.

“Excuse me, sir, a sighting.”

Ed quickly stood up, giving his wife a quick kiss as he did so.

“I’ll see you two later.”

Ed quickly left the room with Watson in tow.

“Well, that’s one thing we can always count on. The aliens crashing the party,” said Ginny.

“You knew you were going to have to deal with that.”

“Yeah, I know. Ed gives so much and this place just keeps taking. I worry about him.”

“Listen, Ginny, I never knew Ed before the two of you started seeing each other. But I’ve talked to people who did. From what I’ve been told, he’s much more focused and even tempered than he was before.”

“I suppose. Mom, would you wheel me to my quarters, I suddenly feel very tired.”

“Of course, dear.”

Ginny and her mother continued their conversation on the way, “You know, Mom, Ed’s right. I’ve been pushing myself too hard. It must be my stubborn streak showing.”

“You should be careful. You know you’re not a spring chicken anymore.”

“Yeah, I know, but I was cooped up in that house for two weeks, I needed to get out.”

“Well, it won’t be much longer now.”

“The doc said another week.”

“I’ll bet you that go before then.”

“That would be nice, my back is killing me.”

They arrived at the quarters that Ed and Ginny shared and Lynn wheeled her daughter inside.

“I’m surprised that you didn’t want to go to the control room.”

“I normally would have but Ed has enough to worry about without me adding to it. Would you stop by and let him know I’m lying down.”

“Certainly, get some rest, I’ll see you later.”

“Thanks, Mom.”

UFO on positive track, 146-135 Green, Speed, SOL 2, Range, five million miles, closing.

“It just came out of nowhere, sir, one minute the screen was clear, then it was just there,” said Colonel Grey. “It’s too close for the interceptors to make contact.”

“Damn, what the hell have they come up with now?” Straker asked, rhetorically. “All right, alert Skydiver 1, they’re the closest. “Get me Colonel Carlin once he’s in the air.”

“Yes sir.”

Carlson found the circuit he was looking for in the bundle of wires, which went upstairs to the living quarters. He attached another device, to the pair of wires, and activated it. When he was sure that he had connectivity, he hid the device in the wiring trunk so that it would not be seen.

He packed up his tools and removed a third device from his pocket. He pressed one of the buttons and nodded to himself when the indicator lit green. Carlson put the device back in his pocket and left the room. He still had other work that he needed to catch up with and he was going to have to hurry.

Lt. Lake walked into the control room and saw that the Commander was busy. She waited for him to notice that she was there. When he saw her, he walked over to where she was standing.

“Is Virginia all right?”

“Yes, she’s fine. She just wanted me to let you know that she was lying down.”

“Thanks, I appreciate that.”

“What do we have, sir?”

“One UFO, it seemed to come out of nowhere. Sky 1 is going for intercept, but the weather is

very bad. As good as Peter Carlin is, he may not get this one.”

“Sky 1 to SHADO control,” Carlin’s voice came over the speaker.

Straker walked to the command console and flipped up the mic.

“This is Straker. Give me some good news, Peter.”

“I got a piece of it, sir, it’s going down. Grid reference zero point seven, by fifty three. I’m going to try to follow it down”

“All right, Colonel, but be careful. Straker out.”

Ed turned to Colonel Grey, “John get a hold of Colonel Blake and have him meet up with the mobile team. I want that UFO, in one piece.”

“Yes sir.”

Chapter 2:

The UFO had gone down in a heavily wooded area of northern England and as of 18:00 hours, it had still not been located. Ed Straker stood next to the command console where Colonel Grey was monitoring the search progress.

“Thanks for staying over, John. I didn’t want to have to call Paul in early.”

“Anytime, Ed, I still can’t believe he’s getting married next week.”

“Times change, John, and people grow. Paul is coming into his own.”

“You never had any doubt, did you?”

“Of course I did, but I saw a lot of potential in Paul when I brought him on board, but becoming the leader he was capable of being was up to him. He still has a ways to go but the important thing is he knows it.”

“Is Virginia still asleep?”

“I assume so, I haven’t heard from her, as a matter of fact I was just going to check to see if she’s all right.”

“Go spend some time with her, Ed, I’ll call you if anything happens.”

“Thanks, John.”

When Ed arrived in their quarters, Virginia was just sitting up. She smiled at him as he walked through the door.

“Did you have a good nap?”

“Actually, I did. I think I slept better knowing you’re only a few corridors over. So, what happened with our friends?”

“The UFO just appeared five million miles out. By the time SID had positive track, it was too close for a lunar intercept. Peter Carlin got a piece of it on the way down, it landed somewhere in the woods of northern England.”

“What the hell are they up to now?”

“I don’t know, and that worries me.” Ed paused for a moment, “Hey, are you hungry?”

“I could eat a little.”

“Good, let me get the wheelchair.”

To his surprise, she did not argue as he brought it over to the bed. Ed locked the wheels and helped her sit down. She noticed his bemused expression.

“You were right. I pushed myself too hard today. That’s why I slept all afternoon.”

“Just promise me you won’t do it again.”

“I just don’t like being at the house without you there, I don’t know why, it’s just a feeling.”

They were completely unprepared for what happened next.

In the woods, the downed alien spacecraft began to pulsate emitting an energy wave. The

force quickly built in intensity as the craft supplied more power to the task.

In SHADO HQ, Mike Carlson dropped the tool he was using responding to the alien force. With a blank expression he reached into his pocket and retrieved the device he had used earlier that day. He pressed the two buttons in a predetermined manner and the indicator on the device flashed red.

At the speed of light, a signal traveled from the device to its companion receiver, located one floor down. Upon receiving the right code, the receiver sent an electrical pulse up the telephone cable that led to the junction box across from the Commander's quarters. The device exploded with a force that tore out a twenty foot section of the opposing wall and ceiling. The force rumbled through the entire complex, startling everyone who heard it. Alarms sounded all over the complex.

“What the hell was that,” yelled John Grey. He spoke into the mic, “Security report.”

“Force three, explosion, sir. Section 5, living quarters. Sir, it’s near the Commander’s quarters.”

“Get someone done there, now!”

“Captain Ford, get me the Commander.”

Ford punched up the line to Straker’s quarters, only to find it was dead. “It’s no use, sir, the line is out.”

“Very well, take over, I’m going down there. Get a hold of Colonel Foster and get him in here!”

“Yes sir.”

When John Grey arrived at the corridor leading to the Commander’s living quarters, security was already there. They gazed at the hallway that had been blocked with rubble from the explosion.

Trapped, he thought, and no way to know if they are even alive.

“God almighty, help us,” said Grey.

The force of the explosion felt like an earthquake inside their quarters, Ed instinctively threw himself over his wife to shield her, knowing it wouldn't matter if the roof collapsed.

As the lights went out, the shaking, caused by the explosion, finally stopped.

“My God, Ed, what the hell was that?”

“I don't know,” he said, as he fumbled to the nightstand for a flashlight. When he turned it on he looked around the room. Everything looked normal, save a few items that had fallen from the shelves, until the beam came upon the door to the room. The heavy metal door was bowed in, as if it had been hit by a battering ram. Ed immediately knew what had caused it.

“An explosion,” he said, “right outside this door.”

“Why didn’t the wall collapse?”

“One of the first battles I fought with Henderson was reinforcing the walls of all the occupied areas. He wanted to save money by leaving these rooms unprotected.”

Straker recalled the conversation with Henderson, almost fifteen years ago...

“So, Ed, have you looked over the plans for SHADO HQ.”

“Yes, General, but I’d like to see some changes made to the design specs.”

“Oh, really, what’s not to your liking?”

“I noticed that all the vital areas of the base have reinforced walls, except for the living areas. I’d like to include those, as well.”

“It’s an awful lot of money to spend for very little return. Money that may be best spent somewhere else, like an additional submarine, or satellite. Think about this, Ed.”

“It’s insurance, General. During an alert we may have multiple shifts at HQ. People are an investment too. They need to be protected. HQ is the one place that I don’t want to cut corners on. It’s the nerve center of the entire operation.”

“All right, Ed, I’ll endorse it.”

“Thank you, sir.”

“And Commander?”

“Sir?”

“Make sure that you pick your battles over finances carefully. The money supply is not limitless.”

Virginia considered the events that Ed had just told her about. “It didn’t sound like much of a battle, Ed.”

“Those were better days, back when Henderson and I were still civil to each other. It went downhill from there. I just never thought that it would be our lives I saved that day.”

“Ed, it’s getting stuffy in here.”

Ed stood up and checked the ventilation ducts. He noticed that there was no air movement. He walked over to the bathroom, opened the door, and flipped on the switch for the light almost out of habit. To his surprise the light came on. When he checked the vents, he could feel the normal movement of air through the ducts.

“The ones in here are still working. At least it should keep us from suffocating.”

Ed looked over at his wife, when she suddenly reached for her belly.

“Ed, I think it’s time.”

“You mean...”

“Yeah, I think that was a contraction.”

Ed looked at his watch, “Let me know when you have another one.”

She looked at him with a smile, “It looks like Mom was right again.”

“How’s that?” asked Ed.

“While she was bringing me here she told me that I would go before next week.”

“Did you take the bet?”

“I knew better than that. Damn her anyway, she’s never wrong.”

“Just like somebody else I know.”

Ginny gave him a look that would freeze water, before she broke into a grin.

Paul Foster walked into control with a very concerned look on his face. They still had no

idea if Ed or Ginny were alive. That left him as the senior officer. *Damn, I'm not ready for this!*

“John, what the hell happened here?”

“The explosion happened with no warning at all. Ed had just left the control room, not ten minutes before. We can't get through to his quarters, the line is cut. We don't know where they were when it happened.”

“Is the base locked down?”

“It was locked down automatically after the explosion.”

“All right, the upgrades are finished at New York, right?”

“Yeah, they went online last week.”

“Contact Colonel Wallace, at the New York research facility, and have her proceed to the tracking center to assume command. Transfer all tracking responsibility to the New York center. If for any reason she loses contact with HQ, she is to assume overall command.”

“Yes sir.”

Foster turned to Ford, “Captain, signal to all SHADO stations, maximum security alert.”

“Yes sir.”

Foster turned back to Grey, “As soon as New York is online, evacuate all non essential personnel. I want everyone who leaves to go through a level four security scan.”

“Paul, don’t you think this is a bit much?”

“Someone, or something, just killed, or tried to kill the Commander and his wife. For all I know, this whole place could be rigged to blow. I don’t want to be caught with SHADO not having a person in charge. Has security done an explosives sweep yet?”

“Major Natiroff is doing that now.”

“Tell him to look for anything that is out of place, no matter how insignificant it seems. I’ll be in the office. I have to call General Henderson.”

John Grey watched Foster walk into the Commanders office, thankful that he didn't have to make that call.

“All right, Ed, that's it.”

Thirty seconds long and ten minutes apart, he thought to himself.

“Ed, have you tried the phone?”

“A while ago, it's dead.”

“Help me stand up, please. I need to walk around a bit.”

He helped her to her feet and she walked over to the door.

“Ed, do you think this was localized, I mean, what if no one else is alive down here?”

“The other vital sections are reinforced just like this one. It may take a while for someone to get to us but I'm sure we'll be fine.”

The truth was that Ed was wondering the same thing, but telling that to his pregnant wife would not be prudent, even if she does sense his feelings. Over the past several months, the two of them had learned to block the empathic connection that they shared, almost as a matter of sanity. Jackson had theorized that they would eventually develop mental shields to drown out the empathic buzz. Ed still wondered how he would have managed dealing with the emotions of a hormone washed woman. On occasion, he would allow himself to sense her feelings. He was left with a new appreciation of what a woman experiences during pregnancy.

“Here comes another one, Ed.”

He looked at his watch, *Nine and a half minutes, getting closer.*

As Foster finished with the General, the intercom buzzed.

“Yes, Keith?”

“I have Colonel Wallace for you, sir.”

“Thanks. Put her through.”

A moment later, Jennifer Wallace appeared on the vidlink.

“Paul, what the hell is going on over there?”

“We had an explosion at HQ, Jen. The Commander and his wife are unaccounted for. We don’t know if they’re dead or alive.”

“Oh my God, Ginny,” said Jen.

“I know, she’s a good friend of yours. I’ll let you know as soon as I have word. In the mean time, I have to assume that this is an attack of some sort. In the event that HQ is taken out, I need you to assume overall command of SHADO.”

“Paul, I’m not ready for that.”

“I know, neither am I. But SHADO needs us. Blake is tied up with a UFO search and you’re the ranking officer in the States. Look, Jen, if

things get bad and you need help, you can always call Alec in Melbourne. Hell, I may call him myself.”

She nodded, steeling herself to the task, “All right, keep me in the loop, okay?”

“I promise.”

Foster got up from the desk and pulled the plans for HQ out of the cabinet. He laid the plans down on the Commanders desk and looked over the living area section. Paul reached for the intercom, “Captain Ford, could you come in here please?”

“Yes sir.”

Ford walked into the office and looked at the blueprint for HQ on the desk.

“You wanted to see me, Colonel?” he asked.

“Keith, you know all the crawlspaces on this base as well as anyone. Are there any ways to get to the Commanders quarters other than this corridor?”

“There is a service crawlway between the two sets of living quarters,” he said, as he pointed it out on the print, “for plumbing, ventilation, some phone wiring. It’s a pretty tight squeeze. The main phone trunk for that section is directly across from the Commander’s room. All the circuits that go through there are dead. I had to reroute several circuits to get medical back online.”

“Is there any way to get accesses to the phone circuits in these rooms?”

“There’s a punch down block at the end of the service crawlway. We could tie into that.”

“Do we have anyone on staff thin enough to get down that passage?”

“Yeah, Lt. Watson could do it.”

“Find him and have him come in here.”

“Yes sir.”

Ed was in the middle of timing another contraction. Virginia was vocalizing now, as she dealt with the labor pains. He felt her relax and checked his watch. *Six minutes apart, and forty five seconds long*, he thought.

“Let me get you some water,” he said, as he walked to the refrigerator. He poured a small cup of water and handed it to her.

“Thanks,” she said, as she took it from him.

“I’ll bet you didn’t plan on being a midwife did you?”

“No, but I’m glad I’m in here with you rather than being on the outside, worrying.”

“I’m surprised that you’re not pacing the floor.”

“I’d be bumping into you if I did.”

“Oh be quiet,” she said.

“In all seriousness, Virginia, this is a scenario that our people have been trained for. And right now there is nothing I can do about it. Besides,

you and I have been away during a couple crisis situations over the past year. The command team performed brilliantly in our absence.”

“And Paul?”

“I trust him much more now than I did two years ago. Ever since that little meeting you had with him after the Psychobombs incident, he seems much more focused.”

“How did you know about that?”

Straker laughed, “You should know by now that I know everything that goes on around here.”

Virginia shook her head, “I thought I was pretty discreet about it.”

“You were, but I knew that you were angry with him, as I also knew that he would want to clear the air. So, when I asked where the two of you were, I was told that you had a meeting with him. Simple deduction.”

“Smartass.”

“I would like to know what you said to him that day.”

“I really shouldn’t tell you, but I think I can trust you to keep it quiet. I told him that had I been in command, he would have been cooling his heels in the brig.”

“You would, wouldn’t you?”

“You’re damn straight I would. I was just as ticked off at you that day.”

“I knew that. I expected you to put up more of a fight.”

Virginia gave him a saucy grin, “Had I known then what I know now, I would have. Your days of taking unnecessary risks ended the day you married me.”

“Yes, Commander Lake.”

She swatted at him then winced, “Here comes another one.”

Chapter 3:

Foster, Ford, and Watson looked over the blueprint that was spread out on the Commander's desk.

“So, what you're telling me, Keith,” said Paul, “is this punch down block, feeds the phone circuits in these four rooms?”

“Yes sir. If we can clip on to the pair that goes to the Commander's quarters, we can run a wire to the junction block in the main corridor.”

“Which junction did we lose, Colonel?” asked Watson.

“25A, the one across from the Commander's quarters. Why?”

“Gregg Carlson was working in that section earlier today. It wasn't in the trouble log so I asked him what he was working on. He told me that one of the lines had a problem with noise. I told him to make sure he logged it when he was done.”

“I’ll check the logs, Colonel,” said Ford, as he headed for the control room.

Foster keyed the intercom, “Tara, find Major Natiroff and have him call me.”

“Yes sir.”

Foster looked at Watson and asked, “Do you know which circuit to tap into?”

“It should be the top pair, number 25-26, but I’ll have to pull the documentation to make sure. There is another main trunk next to the service crawlway. I can grab a spare pair and tie it into the switch system downstairs.”

“All right, do it, get some help if you need it.”

“Yes sir.”

As the young Lieutenant turned to leave, the phone rang, “Foster.”

“It’s Major Natiroff, you asked for me, Colonel?”

“I need you to find and detain technician Gregg Carlson. He’s to be held under suspicion of

being a saboteur. Run every single security check we have on him.”

“Yes sir.”

In the woods of northern England, Geoff Blake sat in the command mobile, and watched, as one of his teams closed on the downed UFO. Straker wanted this craft retrieved in one piece, but Blake was doubtful that they would be able to accomplish that aspect of the mission. A damaged UFO seemed to deteriorate in the atmosphere much faster than normal.

“Command to Mobile 1.”

“Mobile 1, go ahead sir.”

“I want you to proceed on foot, just before you are in visual range. Don’t risk exposing yourself.”

“Understood sir.”

“Command to Mobile 2.”

“Mobile 2.”

“I want you to approach from the opposite side. Just before you enter visual range, proceed on foot.”

“Yes sir.”

Blake was an experienced field commander, who did not want to expose his assets to unnecessary risks. Most UFO's had a crew of two and he had six men in the forest, with three standing by as backup.

Blake had been informed of the explosion at HQ and he knew that the Commander and Colonel Lake were still unaccounted for. That worried him, as he had immense respect for Straker. And even though he didn't always see eye to eye with Ginny, he respected her leadership abilities.

God, I hope they're all right.

“Ed...here comes...another one. They’re...getting...stronger.”

He checked his watch, noting that the contractions were getting much closer together. The last one was just over five minutes ago, and over a minute long. They had been trapped for nearly three hours now, and Ginny had been in labor for almost as long.

“Come on, Virginia, breathe...”

“What do you think...I’m doing...do you...want to come...here and...do this?” she asked, clearly annoyed.

Ed just grinned at her, knowing that irritability during labor was normal for some women.

“That’s it, how far apart now?” she asked.

“About five minutes.”

“I think you had better plan on doing the delivery yourself.”

“I’ve already figured on that.”

“Did you find everything that you need?”

“Yes, it’s all right here,” he said.

“You’re not worried?”

“Men and women have been having children together long before doctors were around.”

Virginia gave him a grateful smile, again, considering how lucky she was.

“Ed, did we make the right choice here?”

“What do you mean?”

“Our children aren’t even born yet, and we’ve already put them at risk,” she said, with tears in her eyes.

“Virginia, listen to me,” he said, as he took her hand. “We can’t second guess ourselves. Trust me, we’ll get out of here. There’s still power in the bathroom, and the ventilation system is still working in there. That means the base wasn’t destroyed. Our people will be trying to get to us. It’s just going to take time.”

“I’m sorry Ed. I’m just a bundle of nerves.”

“No, you’re just an expecting mother.”

“Gee, thanks...Here comes another one...”

Ed checked his watch, *less than five minutes this time.*

“What do you think, Lou, can we start moving this rubble?” asked Foster.

“Yes Colonel. The outer shell is intact. It was the inner walls and ceiling that collapsed. The problem is, that some of this stuff is wedged in pretty tight from the explosion. It’s not going to be easy to clear away.”

“Can we cut through the walls instead?”

“It will take just as long, this stuff is unlike normal commercial construction. I think the best bet is to clear the corridor and burn through the door. If the explosion was across from it, the door will be too deformed to open.

One other thing, Colonel, we may have to blast some of this away.”

“What are the risk factors?”

“We can use small shaped charges to direct the blast energy where we need it to go. We just have to be careful where, and how, we place the charges.”

“All right, keep me posted.”

Foster turned to walk back towards the control room. He turned the corner to see Lt. Watson and his crew opening the service crawlway.

“Do you have everything you need?” asked Foster.

“I should, Colonel. I’ve already identified and tied in the circuits downstairs. I just have to run the wires up here. By the way, we found something hidden in the wiring downstairs. Charlie, give the Colonel the device we found.”

The SHADO technician handed Foster a strange looking device that resembled a warble tone generator.

“What is this?”

“I thought that someone had left a toner on the 50 pair cable leading upstairs, but I’ve never seen one like that.”

Foster turned to a security officer and handed him the device.

“Run this over to Natiroff. Tell him we found it on the cable downstairs.”

“Yes sir.”

“Lt. Watson, call me as soon as you’re ready to hook up the telephone circuit.”

“Will do, Colonel.”

The UFO exploded, showering debris over the heavily wooded area. Inside the command

mobile, Colonel Blake swore. “Damn it all to hell and back.”

He turned to the operative next to him, “Get HQ on the line.”

“Yes sir.”

Blake sat down in front of the vidlink as the image of Paul Foster appeared.

“Any news, Geoff?”

“Nothing good, Paul, the UFO just exploded. No apparent reason. Our teams were within fifty yards when it blew.”

“Any casualties?”

“Rogers, caught a piece of shrapnel in the shoulder, but the medic says it’s superficial.”

“How about aliens?”

“There were none around the craft, so either they went up with the ship, or they’re unaccounted for.”

“All right, you’ll have to search the area if you don’t find them in the wreckage.”

“Understood, any word on the Commander or his wife?”

“Not yet, but we should have a phone circuit installed in less than twenty minutes. I just hope they were still in their room and not in the corridor.”

“That makes two of us, Paul. I’ll keep you posted. Blake out.”

Gregg Carlson sat, in one of the detention cells, in the security section. Several members of the security team were tempted to give him “a tour of the cell block” and the only thing keeping that from happening was the discipline instilled by Major Natiroff.

Natiroff and Foster walked into the cell to question him.

“Carlson, we can do this one of two ways,” Foster began, without as much as a greeting. “We can do it with, or without, your cooperation. It’s your choice.”

“I don’t have any idea what you’re talking about, Colonel.”

“Oh, I think you do. Care to explain this?” he asked, holding the device that was found downstairs in the switching room.

“It’s a warble tone generator, so what.”

“That’s what it’s supposed to look like, but when we analyzed it, we found that it is nothing of the sort. It’s alien technology. Would you like to try again?”

Carlson went white and suddenly began to shake violently, as he went into convulsions.

“Quick, alert medical,” Foster ordered, but he knew they would be too late.

The shaking abruptly stopped and Carlson's lifeless form lay on the deck, his eyes wide open in a blank stare.

When the medical team arrived, they placed the body on the gurney and wheeled him out.

“Have Jackson run an autopsy on him. I want the results as soon as possible,” Foster said, as they left.

It had taken Mike Watson twenty minutes to reach the end of the crawlway, but he was able to stand in the cubby hole that was designed for servicing the plumbing and other services to the four rooms.

He tested the circuit, and found a short coming from the cable leading to the destroyed hallway. Watson opened up the bridging clips and tested the side going to the room. It tested normal after being isolated from the damaged wiring.

Watson picked up his radio to call the control room. “Captain Ford, the circuit is hooked up, go ahead and try it now.”

In the control room, Captain Ford punched up the diagnostic routine. The test showed a working phone at the end of the line. He picked up his phone and dialed the number to the Commander’s room.

Ginny was startled when the phone rang, and Ed quickly grabbed it.

“Straker.”

“Commander, thank God. Are you two all right?”

“We’re fine, Keith. I’m assuming there was an explosion. How much damage did it cause?”

“The explosion was right outside your room. sir. We’re trying to dig you out now, but it’s going to take time.”

“All right, who’s in charge?”

“Colonel Foster, sir.”

“Get him on....”

“Ed, here comes another one,” interrupted Ginny.

“Hold on, Keith,” he said, checking his watch.

In control, Keith listened to the events taking place over the phone. Being the father of two children himself he knew that the Commander had his hands full.

Foster walked up to the communications asking, “Any luck?”

“I have the Commander on the line now.”

“Let me speak to him.”

Ford handed him the phone, saying, “He’s a bit busy right now, sir.”

Foster listened to the phone, hearing Ginny yell on the other end.

Uh oh, he thought.

“Ed, what was I thinking...letting you do this to me!”

He was somewhat amused at his wife’s outburst, wondering if she would remember it when this was over.

“That one’s done,” she said.

“Sorry, Keith,” he said into the phone.

“Ed, it’s Paul.”

“Oh, what’s your situation out there?”

“Blake called in about twenty minutes ago. The UFO exploded for no apparent reason. They’re searching the wreckage now.”

“What about the explosion?”

“Sabotage, the perpetrator was one of the telecom techs, Carlson.”

“Where is he?”

“Jackson is doing an autopsy on him now. He went into convulsions when we questioned him.”

“I see. Anything else.”

“I have Natiroff sweeping the base and I’ve evacuated all non essential personnel. Colonel Wallace is at the New York tracking center and they are handling the network right now.”

Ed was impressed. Foster had covered all the bases.

“How about the continuity of command?”

“I gave Colonel Wallace instructions to assume command of SHADO in the event she loses contact with HQ.”

“Good job, Paul. I need you to do a couple of things for me. Find out where Carlson has been since his last security scan and get Dr. Shroeder on the line for me.”

“Yes sir.”

Major Lou Graham picked up the phone in the hallway to call HQ.

“Control, Captain Ford.”

“Keith, it’s Lou. I’m getting ready to set the first round of charges off. Were you able to get in touch with the Commander?”

“Yeah, both he and Colonel Lake are fine. They’re inside their quarters.”

“All right, call them and let them know I’ll be setting this off in five minutes. Let security know as well.”

“Yes sir.”

Ford turned to Foster and said, “That was Major Graham, he’s going to set off the first charge in five minutes.”

“Okay, get a three way call set up between control, medical and the Commander. Let them know what’s going on. I’ll let security know.”

“Yes sir.”

“Have you been timing the contractions, Commander?” asked Shroeder.

“Yes, right now they are pretty consistent. They are slightly less than three minutes apart and about ninety seconds in duration. The intensity has increased significantly over the past hour.”

“Has her water broken yet?”

“About twenty minutes ago.”

“Has she had any urges to push?”

“Not yet.”

“All right, Commander, it sounds like she is just about at the end of the first stage of labor. She is proceeding much faster than I would normally expect. You need to have her tell you if her contractions feel different or she has a strong urge to push on the onset.”

“Ed, here we go again.”

“Hold on Doctor.”

“Breathe, Virginia.”

“I...am.”

“That’s it, Ed.”

“Virginia, you need to let me know if the contractions feel any different, okay?”

“All right, Ed.”

“Commander, the rescue team is going to set off a charge in about thirty seconds.”

“Virginia, they’re going to set off charge outside.”

“Okay.”

The sound of the charge, although loud, was nothing like the one that trapped them.

“Are you two okay?” asked Shroeder.

“We’re fine.”

Major Graham looked at the area after the charge had exploded. Many of the heavy pieces had been broken up and the crew set to work clearing away the rubble.

Chapter 4:

“We’ve swept the entire complex, Colonel. We found nothing else and I’ve even checked all the crawlways.”

Paul Foster was still worried; sure that he was missing something.

“All right, maintain security alert for now. You can secure from lockdown but no one gets in, or out, without going through a scan.”

“Yes sir.”

“Oh by the way, did we turn up anything on Carlson?”

“The only thing out of the ordinary was a fishing trip to Scotland last week.”

“That’s probably when he was compromised.”

“We may have to reevaluate our screening procedures, Colonel.”

“That’s a decision the Commander with have to make.”

When Natiroff had left, Paul flipped on the intercom.

“Keith, get Colonel Wallace on the line.”

“Yes sir.”

A moment later, Jennifer Wallace appeared on the vidlink.

“Paul, do you have any news?”

“That’s one reason I’m calling. We got a phone line working, Ginny and Ed are all right, but they are still trapped.”

“Thank God they’re alive.”

“There’s more; Ginny is in labor.”

“Oh, my! How’s the Commander handling it?”

“The same way he handles everything else. That man amazes me. Jen, I need to bounce an idea off you. I have to believe, that the UFO incident this afternoon, and the explosion at HQ, was somehow related. It seems too much of a coincidence.”

“It’s been quiet since that sighting. I’ve doubled the watch here to make sure we don’t miss anything. I’m not sure that we can do anything else.”

“That’s what I wanted to talk to you about. You have copies of the sensor logs from this afternoon’s incident, right?”

“Of course, they are automatically retained both at HQ and here, why?”

“Professor Reinhardt developed a program to look for anomalies in the sensor logs. If we look at the data we obtained, just before we sighted the UFO, it might give us a clue. The Commander or Colonel Lake would know exactly how to do this, but I’m out of my element here.”

“You’ve got the right idea, Paul. I’ll start looking the data over now. If I find anything I’ll let you know.”

“Thanks, Jen.”

Commander Straker would have done this already, so wouldn’t Ginny. I still have a lot to learn.

“I’m breathing, damn it, Ed, I’m breathing okay?” Ginny said, exasperated. “Look, Ed, I’m

sorry, I don't mean to be bitchy. I don't know what's wrong with me."

"I do, you're about to have a baby, two babies."

"I just hope you'll forgive me when this is all over."

"I don't think that's going to be an issue."

"You don't think that's going to be an issue," she said. mimicking him. "Wait, here it comes again, and I have to push. Oh my God! Ed!"

"Are you all right?"

"What do you think, do I look like I'm all right. Damn you for doing this to me!"

Ed picked up the phone, "Are you there, Doctor Shroeder?"

"I'm here, she getting a bit testy, that's normal."

"So I gather. All right, where do we go from here?"

"Not much has changed since you took the course, the biggest problem you're going to face,

is often, when delivering twins, the second baby is born breech. That presents its own set of complications, but we'll cross that bridge if we get to it. Has she started to crown yet?"

"Not yet."

"When she does, let me know, if you can. Normally, this can take a while if it's her first but she is progressing much quicker than I expected."

"When have you ever known Colonel Lake to waste time?"

"I heard that," said Ginny.

"So, Lou, how much longer?"

Major Graham looked at the tunnel as it was being slowly cleared. "At least another hour, Colonel, and that's just to break through to the other side. Figure two hours before we can get a crew inside. Then there is the door itself. From what the Commander said, the door is bowed

out of shape from the explosion. It will take an hour to cut through it. I'd say three, maybe four hours."

"I suppose it could have been worse."

"I agree there, Colonel. I'll let you know if anything changes."

"Thanks, Lou."

As Foster walked back to the control room, Graham thought, *God, he looks like hell.*

Colonel Jennifer Wallace sat at the head of the conference table with a team of tracking operatives she had assembled. On the vidlink was the image of Professor Reinhardt, joining the meeting from London.

"Okay, people," began Wallace, "the aliens just pulled a number on us and we have to figure out what they are up to. So I want ideas, I don't care how farfetched they may seem."

“Colonel, with the exception of the Professor, the Commander and Colonel Lake are the only ones who understand the big picture,” said Lt. Thompson, the youngest member of the team.

“So, Lieutenant, you’re telling me that we should just give up and go home?”

“No, ma’am, of course not.”

“How about a slipstream drive?” suggested another operative.

“We would have picked up the neutrinos from the conduit. There was no evidence of that on the logs,” said Reinhardt.

“There was a buildup of tachyons about five minutes before the UFO was confirmed,” added someone else.

“Are they using extreme speed, like in the Timelash incident?”

“The wave pattern would have been different. This pattern was like someone dropped a stone in a pond.”

“What if they are using time travel to get around our defenses?” asked Thompson.

“Elaborate, please,” said Jen.

“We know the aliens can manipulate time, so what’s to stop them from going back in time, before they hit the solar system, and then coming back to our time at a point close to earth. They could bypass all our outer defenses.”

“They would have to have precise spatial coordinates, and the further back in time they go, the more complex the equations become. But it is possible,” said Reinhardt.

“Does that conclusion fit the data?” asked Jen.

“The tachyon pattern would match.”

“Is there any way to increase the amount of warning?” she asked.

“Yes ma’am, we can modify the detection parameters to classify this phenomenon as a

confirmed sighting. We might get some false alerts but it gives us more warning.”

“Very well, I’ll take the false alarms, get working on it. In the mean time, I’ll let Colonel Foster know what we found. Professor, thank you for joining us. The rest of you are dismissed.”

A few minutes later she was on the vidlink with Paul.

“So they’re using time travel again? I thought we covered that angle.”

“We only covered one possible scenario, Paul. There a dozens of ways they can use time travel against us.”

“What’s the solution?”

“I ordered the tracking team to modify the detection parameters. We’ll be ready to upload the new program in less than an hour. It will give us an extra five minutes of warning, although there is the risk of false alarms.”

“It’s not much but I’ll take it. Do you have any other thoughts?”

“Yeah, Paul, you should consider combat air patrols over all our major installations.”

“I was thinking about that, it uses a lot of fuel and raises a ton of political questions, but I think your right. I’ll call Henderson and let him deal with the political fallout. Let me know when you do the update.”

“I will, Paul, Wallace out.”

“Damn you, Ed Straker! You son of a Biiiiitchhhhhh!”

“My, are we getting upset?” asked Ed, teasingly.

“You think this is funny don’t you! Just you wait till I’m done here. Your ass is mine!”

“Is that a promise?”

“Oh, you’re very funny! You’d better not get within swinging distance! Oh, here it comes again, Eeeed!”

“All right. Push...Push...Push!”

“I’m pushing! What do you think I’ve been doing for the past hour! You want to come up here and fricking do this! You think this is easy!” she screamed.

“Come on, Virginia, we’re almost there, don’t forget to breathe.”

“I’m breathing okay, damn it, I’m breathing!”

“All right, sweetheart. One more push on the next contraction.”

“Okay, I can do this. You hate me don’t you?”

“Never happen.”

“Oh my God, here we go again. Ed! Aaaaah!”

“Push!”

“I’m Puushiiiiing! Daaamniit!”

Just after midnight, Virginia gave birth to her first child. The room filled with the cries of the newborn.

“Ed, a boy or a girl?”

“It’s a girl. She’s just as beautiful as her mother.”

“Oh, Ed, let me see.”

Ed placed his daughter in his wife’s arms, while burning the moment in his mind. Virginia cradled her newborn, her blue grey eyes full of love.

“Hold on to her for a minute while I get the cord taken care of.”

Ed tied off the umbilical cord in two places and cut it. He picked up the phone.

“The first one’s a girl, Doc!”

“Congratulations, but we’re not done yet. Make sure you keep the babies warm. Now she should

be ready to deliver the next one, shortly. Let me know right away, if the baby is coming breech.”

“All right, Doc, hold on.”

“Virginia, let me get her wrapped up, the doc says that the next one will come in a few minutes.”

“Okay, but I want to hold both of them when we’re done.”

Ed took his newborn daughter and wrapped her in a blanket. He held her for a minute before gently placing her in the makeshift crib, made from one of the dresser drawers.

In the control room, Keith announced, “The first one’s a girl!”

A cheer went up as the good news was received. Paul walked over to Grey who was still at the command console. He had two cups of coffee and handed one to Grey.

“Thanks, Paul.”

“John, you should take a break. You’ve been here all day.”

“I will, later. After I know that Ed and Ginny are all right.”

“It sounds to me like they have it under control.”

“Colonel Foster, I have Colonel Wallace on the line,” said Ford.

“Foster.”

“Paul, we’re uploading the new program now. We’ll do a restart in two minutes.”

“We’ll stay on the line.”

Graham watched as the rescue team cleared away the debris.

“We’re through, Major!”

“Can you fit any one in there yet?”

“Give us another ten minutes.”

“Let me know as soon as you can see the door.”

“Yes sir.”

“Ed, here it comes again!”

“Okay, round two.”

“You make it sound like a boxing match!”

“I thought you were really going to hit me.”

“I couldn’t reach, you’re lucky. It’s getting stronger, I’ve got to push!”

Ed watched, as his second child began to crown, almost entranced in the miracle of seeing his children born. Birthing philosophy had changed over the past few years, as husbands were allowed into the birthing rooms with their wives, but Ed never expected to be delivering his own children.

“All right, honey, we’re almost there. One more push ought to do it.”

Virginia simply nodded. Ed picked up the phone.

“Doc, the head has crowned.”

“That’s good news, Commander. I don’t foresee any complications with the birth, but as I said, it’s important to keep them warm. Twins normally have to be incubated after they’re born. You said they were due next week?”

“That’s what her obstetrician said. And he was planning on them being four weeks early.”

“Then we had better plan on incubation.”

“How soon before you can get to us?”

“I just heard from Major Graham, they’ve cut through the debris and are getting ready to cut through the door. He thinks it will take an hour.”

“Ed, here it comes, aaaaahh.”

Ed dropped the phone and got ready, “Okay, honey, push!”

Ten minutes after midnight, Virginia brought her second child into the world. With a slap on the back, the room was again filled with the cries of the newborn.

“It’s a boy,” Ed proclaimed to his wife.”

“Oh, let me...”

Ed placed his newborn son in her arms, as he kissed her.

“It’s a boy!” said Keith, as another cheer went up in the control room.

“So, Paul, how long before you and Jane have children?” asked Grey.

“We’re not in any rush, but I know she doesn’t want to wait too long, probably within a year.”

“It’s an incredible experience, Paul, but you’ll find that out.”

“So I gather.”

Major Graham’s team had finally made it to the door to the Commander’s quarters. They set up the cutting torch and began the long process of cutting open the heavy steel door.

Virginia and Ed looked over at the door seeing the light of the torch as it cut through the metal.

“Better late than never,” she said.

They were holding their newborn children, swapping them every few minutes, both of them entranced in the moment.

“Oh, Ed, they’re so beautiful!”

“We really out did ourselves, didn’t we?”

“Yeah, we did. Thanks, Ed, I couldn’t have done it without you here. I hope I didn’t say anything too nasty.”

“I’ll let you make it up to me later,” he said, teasingly.

In the control room, Foster was on the phone with Major Graham.

“We’re cutting through the door now, sir.”

“You said before it would take about an hour?”

“Yes sir, the metal used in the door is pretty tough stuff. I’ll call you when we’re through.”

Red alert...red alert, multiple sightings, 242-113 Blue, speed SOL 2, range six million miles, closing, trajectory termination, grid reference 51 by 0, southern England.

“Here it comes,” said Paul. “Scramble the London land based squadron.”

“SHADO control to London Squadron, scramble, scramble!”

The nearby SHADO airfield became a flurry of activity, as the pilots rushing for their planes. The squadron leader, Major Hebert, climbed into his aircraft and brought it to life.

“Delta leader to SHADO control, send target data.”

“Roger, Delta leader, link established, sending target data now.”

Hebert taxied his aircraft to the runway as the other members of his squadron fell in behind him.

“Delta leader to group, okay boys, we’ve got twenty five bandits inbound. Let’s give them a little welcoming party, shall we? Formation takeoff and form up on me.”

The SHADO squadron sped down the runway and leaped into the sky.

“The squadron is airborne, sir.”

“Very well,” said Foster.

Paul picked up the phone and dialed.

Ed picked up the phone, “Straker.”

“Ed, we have twenty five UFO’s inbound.”

“How far out?”

“We picked them up six million miles out. They’ll hit the atmosphere in another five minutes.”

“The same trick as before, what do we have in the air?”

“The London squadron has scrambled and Sky 1 is flying CAP over the base.”

“You got them in the air quick. Are they heading this way?”

“Yes sir, it would appear so.”

“How did you pick them up so fast?”

“We modified the tracking program to detect certain patterns of tachyon emissions. I don’t know all the details, the group in New York worked it out.”

“That’s all right, who’s the squadron commander?”

“Major Hebert.”

“All right, Paul, keep me posted.”

Straker hung up the phone and looked at the door. It would be at least another half hour.

“Ed, what was that all about?” asked Virginia.

“A UFO attack.”

“How many?”

“Twenty five, the London squadron is already in the air.”

Virginia could sense worry in him.

“They’re heading this way, aren’t they?”

“Yes, let’s hope and pray that Major Hebert and his crew are on their A game today.”

Chapter 5:

The UFO’s did not stay together, as they have done in the past, but separated and spread out to attack from different directions.

“Damn,” said Foster. “Get me on with Major Hebert, now!”

A few seconds later, Hebert came on radio, “Delta leader to SHADO control, go ahead Colonel.”

“Dave, the UFO’s are splitting up and circling. This is what I want to do. Have eight of your aircraft rendezvous, with Colonel Carlin, over the base. The remaining six aircraft are to proceed to intercept the UFO’s on the zero, one hundred twenty, and two hundred forty degree bearings from the base. Place two aircraft on

each bearing. When you have made the initial intercept, proceed to track the remaining UFO's in a clockwise pattern."

"Like the spokes on a wheel, I understand Colonel. We'll give 'em hell, sir."

"Okay, you heard the man, Delta two, your with me, Delta's three and four, take one twenty, Delta's five and six, you've got two forty. The rest of you rendezvous with Dancer at home plate."

John Grey had just come back into control and saw the exchange.

"I'm impressed, Paul, where did you come up with that?"

"One of Ed's combat seminars."

"Taking a page out of the old man's playbook, huh?"

"Why try to reinvent the wheel, John."

"Let's hope it works."

“It will work, besides, if it doesn’t, I’ll never let him live it down.” *If it doesn’t work, we won’t be here to talk about it.*

Ed watched, as the team cut through the last bit of metal in the heavy door. It fell to the floor with a resounding thud.

“Commander Straker, Colonel Lake, I’m glad to see you both in one piece.”

Ed shook the Major’s hand.

“I knew you wouldn’t give up on us, Lou.”

“And who are the new arrivals?”

“Virginia?” Ed said, motioning to his wife.

Virginia was proudly holding both of the infants and she smiled as she answered, “Well our little lady is Charlene Virginia, and our young gentleman is Robert Edward.”

“That’s a Russian custom,” said Major Natiroff, as he came in.

“My family adopted the tradition years ago, and Ed agreed with it.”

The medical team, led by Dr. Shroeder, came in. “Okay, let’s get the babies into the portable incubators, and down to medical. And Colonel, let’s get you on the gurney.”

“Virginia,” Ed said quietly to his wife. “I’ve got to get to control. I’ll see you as soon as I can.”

“I’ll be all right, Ed, go. I love you.”

“I love you.”

He kissed her then headed for the control room. As he walked out, she reluctantly allowed Shroeder to place her babies in the incubators.

A cheer went up in the control room, as the Commander walked in.

“Am I glad to see you, Commander,” said Paul.

“What do we have?”

“Twenty five UFO’s in a circular attack pattern. I used your spoke play on them. We’ve splashed twelve, so far.”

“Any loses on our side?”

“No sir.”

“How close are they now?”

“Ten miles, sir, if they get much closer than that they’ll run into a hornet’s nest.”

“Very well, release six more planes to break and attack.”

“SHADO control to second wave, break and attack!”

“Received, sir.”

Ed was impressed. Foster had apparently preplanned the second wave. *Yes, I can see that today’s duty log is going to be very interesting reading.*

As the second wave came in, the UFO's began to retreat. But the ungainly craft were no match for the SHADO aeroceptors. In ten minutes the remaining UFO's were destroyed. Straker ordered SHADO to stand down to yellow alert.

Major Natiroff came into the control room, as they were wrapping up, and walked up to the Commander.

“Well, Major?”

“The base is clean, we didn't find anything else. Sir, we may need to rethink our screening procedures.”

“I agree, but we'll talk about it Monday morning, when we are both rested. In the mean time, I've got a family waiting for me in medical, speaking of which, I've got some cigars to hand out.”

Ed walked to his office and grabbed a couple of boxes off his desk then headed for the medical section.

“Ah, Commander, I was just about to call you,” said Shroeder.

“Is everything all right?”

“Yes, mother and babies are doing fine. I’ll be releasing them later today, that’s what I wanted to tell you.”

“They can go home with us?”

“Yes, they’ll be out of the incubators later this morning, and both of them are over five pounds.”

“How is my wife?” asked Ed.

“She just finished feeding her babies and she’s resting right now.”

“Is she still awake?”

“She should be, but she needs her rest don’t keep her up too long.”

Ed quietly walked into his wife’s room noticing that she was sleeping. He looked at the sleeping babies in the incubators, his heart warmed by being in the presence of his family. Ed resisted the urge to remove them from the incubators, to hold them, not wanting to put them at risk.

“Hey, stranger, have you seen my husband around here anywhere?”

“You’re supposed to be asleep.”

“I know, but I didn’t want to miss you, did we get them?”

“Yeah, we got them. Paul really came through, I was impressed. And your protégé didn’t do too badly either.”

“Jen, how did she get involved?”

“Apparently, between them they came up with a way to detect the alien’s latest trick. You trained her well.”

“The doc says we can go home tomorrow.”

“Yeah, he told me. By the way what’s in that manila envelope?” asked Ed.

“Oh those, they’re just a couple of scripts from Howard Byrne’s series. He’s right you know, Ed. The writing in these is abysmal. Take a look at them.”

Ed opened the envelope and thumbed through the scripts. As he read some of the parts that had been highlighted, his expression betrayed his thoughts.

“Pretty bad, huh?” she asked.

“The scripts I read were nothing like this.”

“Out of the five writers, two of them are good. But the other ones, well, you see.”

“Well, we’ll worry about it next week. Why don’t you get some sleep, I’ll be back in a little while.”

“Ed, you need to sleep as well.”

“I will, there’s an unused bed right next to yours. I love you sweetheart.”

Ginny sat up and he took her in his arms.

“I love you too, Ed.”

“Jackson finished the autopsy on Carlson,” Foster said, as he handed over the report.

“Alien implants?”

“Yes, quite similar to what we’ve seen before.”

Straker and Foster were both enjoying a couple of cigars with Ed savoring what may be the last one he has for a while. Virginia had been on his back to quit ever since they were engaged. He had promised her that he would give them up once the babies were born.

“Well, Paul, how was your first command?”

“To tell you the truth, Ed, I was terrified. Jen and I had to think outside the box. I began to realize, soon after you and Ginny became

engaged, that I didn't know all that I thought I did. That was a sobering thought."

"I'm glad that you learned it on your own, Paul. It will make you a better leader. I think you proved it today. You used all your resources and asked for help when you needed it. That can be the toughest thing of all."

"I missed a lot of things that you would have done right away. That could have been costly."

"But it wasn't, and you realized your mistakes and you'll learn from them. It's called experience."

"I don't think I'll ever be ready to take command Ed."

"We never are ready. We just do it because it has to be done, like you did today. Well, Paul, I need to get some sleep. My family is being sprung at noontime and I don't want to fall asleep at the wheel. Good night."

"Take care, Ed."

Ed made his way back to the medical center and quietly entered Ginny's room. He got himself undressed and slid into the bed next to the one occupied by his wife. He counted his blessing and offered a silent prayer of thanks, for the safety of his family.

He briefly thought of his son John, who had tragically died over four years ago. It was strange comfort that the woman, who tried to save John's life, had now given him two children to care for, and in doing so, helped to soothe the old hurt.

As Ed Straker drifted off to sleep he thought, *I'm a lucky man, indeed.*

END