

In Training

A UFO Story

Written by Matthew R. White

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Based on the Characters and series created by
Gerry Anderson

The Character Major Vladimir Natiroff was
created by Deborah Rorabaugh



Historian's Note: The events depicted here take place about two weeks after Glitch in the Machine.

Prologue:

Captain Matthew Hewett stood in the control room of Skydiver 6 watching the sonar plot of three unidentified contacts. Matt was sure that these contacts were UFOs but he needed confirmation before he could order an attack. His crew had alerted him to the situation almost two hours ago, and this was turning into a long chase.

“Sonar, give me a bearing.”

“Closest contact is at bearing two six five relative, speed is forty knots, skipper.”

“Very well, helm, come to new course three, five, zero, increase speed to fifty knots,” Matt ordered.

“New course three, five, zero, speed, fifty knots, aye sir.”

Lt. Maxwell, the ship’s XO walked over to his captain.

“What’s your plan, sir?”

“Well Gordy, we’ve been tailing these guys for over two hours, and we still don’t have a positive ID. I want to get a good idea of where and who they are. If we sail a perpendicular course it will give the sonar operator a baseline for a good working range figure. While sonar is calculating the range the computer will have more data to identify them. In the mean time let’s get the weapons warmed up.”

“Aye sir,” he said and turned to the weapons officer. “Rig tubes one and two, fully ready.”

“Rig tubes one and two fully ready, aye sir.”

The new torpedo’s on Skydiver used swimout technology and Utronic control links that were tied into the fire control system of the very modern submarine. The attack system was able to control six torpedoes simultaneously without the use of wire guided systems. The new system allowed the submarine to reload and change course at will without worrying about the control wires.

“Weapons are fully ready sir,” reported the XO.

“Very well,” Matt paused. “Sonar do we have a working range on the contacts yet?”

“It’s looking better, between ten and fifteen thousand yards. The computer is still chewing on the classification sir,” said the sonar op over his shoulder.

Matt watched the waterfall sonar display and he could see the telltale signs that these were submerged spinners. *Three of them, he thought. And much too close to the New York tracking center for comfort!*

“I have a firing solution sir. Range thirteen thousand five hundred yards, speed forty two knots, bearing, two, six, zero, true,” said the fire control officer.

“Classification?” asked Matt as he turned back to the sonar operator.

“The computer identifies contacts sierra one and three as, type one alien spacecraft. Sierra two is a type two craft.”

Shit, Matt thought to himself. “Very well, fire control, target sierra’s one and three. As soon as the tubes are clear reload and target sierra two with both torpedoes.”

“Aye sir.”

“Helm, come to course two, seven, zero, slow to one third,” ordered Matt.

The helmsman acknowledged the order and the sub tilted as it changed course. As soon as they were steady on the new heading Matt would order the attack.

“Sir, contacts are slowing,” reported sonar.

“All stop, quick quiet!” Matt ordered loudly.

The submarine slowed and the noise level dropped off sharply. It was unknown what type of underwater detection system the aliens utilized but was assumed to be passive acoustics

as it was still the best method to maintain stealth. Any active system always gave away more information than it brought in whether it was Ultrasonic or acoustic based.

“At full stop, sir. We’re drifting upward slightly.”

“Very well, hold your position,” ordered Matt.

“Aye, sir.”

“Sonar, report.”

“They’re coming this way sir, course zero, eight, zero, speed, ten knots and increasing slightly, range, ten thousand yards.”

“Fire control, launch tubes one and two! Helm, all ahead one third.”

The new torpedoes quietly swam out of the tubes and proceeded swiftly and silently to their targets. Matt watched the sonar display showing them as they ran true to the target.

“Torpedoes running normal sir,” reported fire control. “Reloading.”

“Target’s have just increased speed, sir,” reported the sonar operator. “Speed is now forty knots.”

“Left full rudder, all ahead flank!” Matt’s orders were loud, “Come to course one, eight, zero! Prepare to launch countermeasures.”

He knew they had been detected and he hoped to confuse their sonar system by leaving a knuckle in the water with the abrupt change in speed and direction. The countermeasure devices were noisemakers that would mask the submarines acoustic signature allowing it to escape, hopefully.

As he watched the sonar plot, Matt thought of his pregnant wife, now almost six weeks along and he wasn’t ready to make a widow of her.

“Launch countermeasures!” he ordered.

“Countermeasures away.”

“Con, sonar, have positive detonation on torpedo one!”

“Give me a time on torpedo two, and a bearing on sierra two,” ordered Matt.

“Estimate ten seconds sir. Target sierra two is still changing course, now heading zero, nine, zero.”

The type-two spinner was bearing down on them, *time to turn and fight*, thought Matt.

“Positive detonation on torpedo two, sir,” reported sonar.

“Very well, helm, right full rudder, come to course two, six, zero, slow to one third. Fire control, launch torpedoes!”

The submarine banked hard as it came around brining its weapons to bear. It was an even fight now, but Matt knew this craft was much more heavily armored than its smaller cousins. He had seen it firsthand.

“Torpedoes away sir.”

“Sonar, give me range and time on target,” ordered Matt.

“Range, seven thousand five hundred, closing rapidly, torpedo time on target, thirty seconds, sir.”

The XO walked up beside his captain and said, “We should get it, sir,” said Maxwell.

“I hope so Gordy, the last time I saw one of these new ones, it shrugged off a particle beam like it was just sunlight.”

Two explosions rumbled through the water and were heard onboard the sub, a cheer went up in the control room before Matt raised a hand to silence it.

“Sonar, confirm, did we get it?”

The sonar operator turned to his captain shaking his head, “Negative sir, it’s still intact, four thousand yards and closing.”

“Damn, left full rudder, all ahead flank, come to course one, nine, zero.”

Matt hoped to get away from the alien craft long enough to reload his weapons but he already knew they would not make it. The alien craft closed to within two thousand yards and fired its weapons hitting the starboard side engine. The shock threw the XO to the deck and he laid there motionless.

“Helm evasive action!” Matt ordered.

“Helm control is out sir! We’re taking on water.”

“Full up bubble! Emergency blow!” ordered the captain of the dying ship.

Sparks flew from the equipment as it shorted out and the submarine went through its death throes.

“Diving controls inoperative sir. We’re going down!” shouted the helmsman.

“Propulsion is down sir!”

“Sonar, give me a sounding!” the captain ordered.

“Two thousand fathoms, keel to bottom. That’s well below crush depth, sir,” he said gravely as he looked at his CO.

Matt knew the ship was lost and he performed his last duty by walking over to the rescue buoy release and pulling the lever. At least SHADO control would know what happened to them.

Skydiver was nose down and listing to the starboard side when it slowly went straight and level. The fires went out and the noise diminished as the rear hatch to the control room opened and Lt. Colonel Carlin walked in.

“Attention on deck,” ordered Matt.

Peter Carlin surveyed the simulator for a moment then came face to face with Captain Hewett.

“Trainee’s to debriefing,” he ordered to the rest of the crew and then turned his attention back to Matt. “You did well, Captain,” said Carlin positively.

“I lost the ship Colonel; I killed all these people and in the process made my wife a widow,” he said pensively.

“You did better than most. There are only three Skydiver captains that have managed to get both of the smaller craft. Waterman, Ellis, and me, I just thought you might like to know the company you’re keeping. Commander Straker told me to keep an eye on you.”

“I beg your pardon Colonel; you mean there is no way to win this? I thought they only did that in the movies, sir.”

Carlin shook his head, “Believe it or not, a version of the *no-win scenario* has existed in the submarine services of both the United States and the United Kingdom long before it was a movie staple.”

“I didn’t know that sir.”

“Yeah, this test is as much about psychology as it is about tactics. So cheer up, you did all right

on both counts. And by the way, if Gordy here ever decides to move on to his own command, I'd gladly have you as my XO."

"Thank you, that's high praise sir."

Matt followed Carlin and Maxwell to the debriefing room, thinking he was going to tease his wife for not warning him about this test. *I think someone is going for a swim...*

Chapter 1:

Ed Straker sat in his office looking over the training reports that had now become a priority, as manpower was short due to the recent heavy losses. Ed was looking for the best of the new trainees to if they could be placed into accelerated status.

In the early days of SHADO all of its manpower came from the military or from people who were once in the military. Over the past few

years, that trend had changed, starting with the recruitment of Virginia Lake and Phil Wade, from Westbrook Electronics. They had worked out so well that Straker started looking outside of the military for most of his research and development personnel.

Of course that created a whole new set of problems as most civilians did not set well in the military parlance. Virginia was an exception, and so was her husband, Ed thought to himself as he read the training report on Matt Hewett. Lt. Colonel Carlin was quite impressed with the way Hewett had handled himself in the simulator and he had given him a crack at the command simulation.

Matt had handled the test like a master, tying Carlin's record and ending up just behind Ellis and Waterman. Already Pete Carlin was trying to convince him to sign on Skydiver One as he had noted in the report. But Ed had bigger plans for Matt and so far it was working out

nicely. The project was still classified command staff only and only one other person in the organization knew all the details of its existence.

While Ed read through the reports, Jen Wallace walked in the office with two coffee mugs.

Ed looked up and accepted the coffee with a smile, “You know Jen; I still think you have an ulterior motive.”

“I never denied it Ed. You know that,” she said with an impish grin.

Ed reached over and closed the door and she bent down to kiss him on the cheek and sat in the corner seat next to the desk. They had been seeing each other socially since the gathering at Keith’s almost two weeks ago. So far they had kept the relationship discreet and those who knew about it had also kept it under wraps. At some point in time Ed knew it may have to become more widely known but for now it wasn’t necessary.

“Well Ed, what is this studio function tomorrow evening?”

“It’s an awards banquet, I’ve always loathed going to it because it’s a black tie affair and Sir Esmond always insists that I have a female companion. For the first time ever I’m looking forward to it.”

“I’ll take that as a compliment,” she said grinning shyly.

“It was most certainly meant as one,” he said watching as she blushed at the compliment.

Jen felt herself becoming flushed and changed the subject. “So how are the trainee’s coming along?” she asked.

“Not as well as I’d like but there are a couple of exceptions.”

“Anyone I know?”

“As a matter of fact, Matt did extremely well with the Skydiver orientation, so well that Peter

Carlin wants him on his team,” said Ed a bit worried.

“I heard he was taking the *no win* test today.”

“Yes, he did, and he ended up tying Carlin’s score. That puts him in the top three, tied with Peter for third place. Not bad at all especially for a civilian. I still don’t understand that, the military parlance suits him so well yet he never served in uniform, until now.”

“When are you going to tell him about the mission?” she asked.

“Soon; I’m not going to be able to keep this under wraps forever and Virginia is nagging me about it as well. She told me yesterday that Matt suspects something is up and she doesn’t want to lie to him.”

“It’s a good thing Ginny doesn’t have too much to hide from him; he’s very perceptive you know.”

“Yes, I know,” Ed said ruefully. “Just like someone else I know.”

“I don’t know who you could be talking about,” she said innocently.

“The only other information she has to keep from him, for now is the Omega classified material.”

Jen shuddered at the mention of the code name for the time travel technology. Only a handful of people at SHADO knew of its existence.

“Matt has already surmised that the aliens can manipulate the space-time continuum. We were up late the night before they got married talking about the alien bypass method and Matt is quite versed in special relativity for someone who isn’t a physicist. He surprised the hell out of Ginny when they were up on the mountain that night. I didn’t think much about it at the time as I hadn’t yet read anything on Omega. I still have nightmares about that stuff.”

“Does he suspect that we’ve deciphered some of the puzzle?” asked Ed somewhat worried.

“Ed, you’ve met him. He has a very sharp mind, but I think he’s smart enough not to say anything about what he suspects, even to Ginny.”

“Let’s hope so.”

“So Ed, are you coming to my place for dinner?”

“Do I detect another ulterior motive?”

“Absolutely, I’ll have you know that I’m quite at home in the kitchen and nothing would please me more than to make you a nice meal,” she said straightforwardly.

“I think I like the sound of this. How could I possibly refuse?”

Virginia was working in the kitchen when she heard Matt’s car pull up. The two of them were supposed to go out for dinner but Ginny knew

he had gone through the command test today and he was going to be spent. She decided to spend the afternoon making lasagna, one of Matt's favorite dishes. The dish she had prepared tonight was a vegetable lasagna recipe she had got from her mother.

She also had an ulterior motive as sooner or later she was going to start with the cravings and Matt would be in her debt, a debt she had every intention of collecting on, lovingly of course.

The door opened and she heard her husband come in. "Virginia?" he called as he hung up his jacket.

"I'm in the kitchen honey," she said as she pulled the dish from the oven and set it on the cooling rack.

Matt walked into the kitchen smelling the aroma of good home cooking. He took his wife in his arms and kissed her deeply.

“Something smells good, but I thought we were going out tonight, Gin?”

“We were, but I knew you would be exhausted after today so I decided to cook, I hope you don’t mind?” she asked looking up at him batting her blue grey eyes.

“No I don’t mind at all, except you should be taking it easy,” he said with concern in his voice.

“Now Matt, I’m pregnant, not sick. It’s a normal healthy condition. The doc told me what I can and can’t do, and trust me I will listen to her.”

“Like you did when you were on Moonbase?” he asked feigning sarcasm.

“Hey you, be quiet,” she said as she wacked him in the arm. “Why don’t you get yourself comfortable while I put dinner on the table, and then you can tell me all about your day?”

“That sounds like a good idea,” he said as he turned to go upstairs.

While Matt was upstairs Ginny set the food down on the dining room table. She lit the candles and lowered the light. She sat at the table and waited for her husband to come back downstairs. His expression when he saw her was all the reward she needed.

“What did I do right to rate all this? I like to know so can I do it again.”

“I just wanted to have a romantic dinner at home with my husband, is there anything wrong with that?” she asked with a seductive smile.

“Oh not at all, this is perfect.”

“So how did you do on the test?” she asked as he sat down with her.

“Well, it’s a good thing it was a simulation, otherwise I would have made a widow of you today. Colonel Carlin told me that the test is designed that way, but it doesn’t sit right with me for some reason.”

“You don’t like to lose, do you?” she observed, knowing him well enough to make that assumption.

“No, not when the stakes are that high. Besides, I don’t believe in *no-win scenarios*. I like to think that every situation has a solution; elusive as it may be.”

“You’re an optimist.”

“In every sense of the word, the word impossible doesn’t exist in my vocabulary,” he said honestly.

“I heard that you tied Peter Carlin for an overall score.”

Matt just shook his head in disbelief, wondering how she found out so fast.

“Boy nothing slips by you does it?”

“Not if I can help it. Anyway I’m very proud of you; you’ve come a long way in a short period of time.”

“Well, I’m married to Colonel Virginia Lake. I have to uphold the family honor and reputation,” he said teasingly.

After dinner was over Matt helped her clean the kitchen and the couple sat on the couch cuddled up enjoying their tea. Virginia already knew that starting Monday, he was going to be gone for another week on a vital mission. In a way she wished that she didn’t have foreknowledge of this as she would be able to relax and enjoy his company.

Ed had insisted that he not be told until they both flew over to HQ as SHADO had been plagued with security leaks for months now and he was compartmentalizing information much more than normal.

“Virginia, what’s on your mind?”

“Nothing, why?” she said trying not to sound evasive.

“You seem preoccupied with something.”

This could be problematic, she thought, How am I going to keep secrets from him in a year if he can already read me this well? Ginny believed in honesty and she hated the idea of hiding things from her husband.

“No, I’m fine. I was thinking about turning in early though. What do you say?”

“I not really tired yet, but I’ll go up with you.”

“Good. Sleeping wasn’t what I had in mind,” she said with a grin as they stood up and walked to the stairway.

“Have I ever told you how blessed I was to find you again?” he asked as he slipped his arm around her.

“Yeah, you have, but I never get tired of hearing it.”

For the first time since he had taken on the role of a film studio executive, Ed Straker was truly enjoying the awards banquet. Having someone with you that you were comfortable with made all the difference in the world. He had taken Virginia to this function last year and it had turned out to be an awkward night for both of them.

Jennifer Wallace looked stunning in the long black evening gown she had chosen for the affair and she had taken his breath away when she answered the door. When they walked into the dining room, every male head in the room turned to watch her. Ed was beginning to realize how lonely he was and how much he was beginning to care for her.

“So Edward, are you going to introduce me to your lady friend?” asked Sir Esmond.

“Oh, of course Sir Esmond, my apologies, may I introduce Miss Jennifer Wallace. She just

transferred from our special effects division in New York.”

“Miss Wallace, it’s my pleasure,” said Sir Esmond. “You replaced Miss Lake, did you not?”

“Pleased to meet you, Sir Esmond,” she said. “And yes, I did. Virginia recently married a man from Rhode Island and transferred back to New York.”

“I see, lucky man, that one. And so aren’t you Edward.” Sir Esmond paused then leaned over and spoke quietly to Jen, “This is the first time that he has not introduced me right away, so you obviously have him quite distracted my dear young lady. He’s a good catch, so don’t let him get away.”

Jennifer blushed wildly at that.

“Well now I’ll let the two of you be, come along Charles,” he said to his aid.

Jen and Ed watched him shuffle to the next table as he made his rounds.

“He’s a very perceptive man Ed.”

“You don’t know the half of it. One day he said to me that I must have some other function here besides running the studio. It was all I could do to keep a straight face. Ever since then I’ve never underestimated him,” he said shaking his head.

“I don’t know how you keep the studio business all in your head with everything else you have to do,” Jen said admirably.

“Well, first of all I have a good secretary. Miss Ealand helps me keep tabs on the lower profile projects, and many of the HQ operatives have double roles in the studio. I share the load with a few key individuals.”

Dinner had ended around eight and the awards portion usually lasted about an hour and a half followed by music and dancing until midnight.

The music was a mix of ballroom and modern music as the tastes of the guests was widespread. Ed would normally leave right after the awards had been given out, but tonight he intended to spend some time on the dance floor with the lovely lady he was with.

To Ed's pleasant surprise, Jen was quite at home with the waltz and the tango, and much to his dread, the cha, cha.

"Jen I don't cha, cha. Virginia tried to get me to do this last year; I tripped over my own feet!"

"Don't worry Ed; I'll catch you if you fall. Trust me this is easy, just watch and follow my lead."

Ed would normally never try this in public but something about the way she spoke to him caused him to throw caution to the wind.

In a few minutes he was doing the dance like he had done it for years and he found himself enjoying it.

“How did you know I could learn this so fast Jen?” he asked very surprised.

“I taught dance part time while I was in New York. I can teach anyone, even someone with two left feet, she said. “Don’t worry, I don’t mean you.”

“I thought you were light on your feet. How long have you been a dance instructor?”

“I took lessons in junior high and by the time I graduated I had a job as a teaching assistant at a local dance school. I stuck with it through college, for the exercise if nothing else.”

“I’m impressed,” said Ed sincerely.

The couple danced the rest of the evening away, neither one of them wanting the night to end.

Ed pulled up to her apartment around quarter of one, and got out of the car to walk her to her door.

“Jen I had a wonderful time tonight, the best time I’ve had in...Well a long time.”

“I did too Ed, I really enjoy being in your company, you’re such a gentleman.” She paused for a moment, “I’m going to have a cup of mint tea before bed, would you like some?”

“I think I’d like that,” he said as they walked into her apartment.

Her apartment though modern was decorated conservatively and it was extremely neat and Ed was not at all surprised based on her organizational skills.

Jen walked into the kitchen to put the water on and said to him on her way to her bedroom, “I’m going to get comfortable, I’ll be right out.”

“All right.”

A few minutes later the tea kettle started to whistle and Ed got up to attend to it. He poured the boiling water into the two cups and set the tea to begin steeping.

“Oh, thanks Ed,” she said as she came out of the bedroom.

They talked for a bit while they had their tea, mostly about their past.

“So you grew up in New York City, Jen?”

“We lived just outside the boroughs. My parents just moved to Florida a few months ago. They just sold the house I grew up in.”

“I was surprised that you went to Cal Tech rather than a school back east.”

“I did pretty well in high school and my SAT scores were high enough to get me accepted to Stanford, MIT, and Cal Tech. I chose the latter because I always wanted to see California,” she said.

“MIT was my alma mater. I was in the lunar landing research program in 1962.”

“Wow, I was twelve years old!” she said with a giggle.

“Does our age difference bother you?”

“No, I’m thirty six years old myself Ed, and still single. At our ages twelve years isn’t that much of a spread. Besides I’ve found that older men know how to treat a lady.”

“I’m surprised that you never married, Jen.”

“I never met the right man. I dated while I was in college, and had a few steady boyfriends but most of them only had one thing on their minds and I wanted more than that. Bouncing around in the service didn’t help either.”

“I can understand how that could be a problem,” said Ed remembering his own experiences.

As he sipped his tea, he found himself captivated by her warmth and the intensity of her emerald green eyes.

“Enough about me Ed, tell me about you. I know you were married once,” she asked inquisitively.

Ed told her about his failed marriage and how the startup of SHADO had cost him dearly on a personal level. She listened with an empathy he had never seen or felt before and he felt comfortable enough with her to share some of his more painful memories.

He soon realized that he was falling in love with her.

“I’m so sorry about your son Ed. I wish I could have done something to help.”

“You actually did, as I recall it was you who drove Virginia to the hospital and then to the airport that day,” he said quietly.

“That’s what she was up to; she never told anyone why she had to leave so abruptly, not even when she came back. Ginny never violated your trust Ed.”

“I know. She has always been a good friend and now I can thank you properly for your help that day,” he said as he gently kissed her.

They finished their tea and Ed stood to go, “Well Jen I should let you get some sleep. I’ll see you tomorrow.”

She stood and walked to the door with him.

“Good night Ed, I had a great time.”

He drew her into his arms for a long kiss.

“Good night Jen.”

“Bye.”

Ed watched her close the door smiling and he turned to walk back to the car. *Damn, why don’t I just tell her I love her*, he asked himself realizing that pursuing a relationship gave him more apprehension than dealing with the aliens.

Jen leaned back against the door, riding on a cloud, she had almost invited him to stay the night, but she didn’t know how he would react to such a forward attitude especially since she

had initiated the relationship. She decided that it was his turn to make the next move, and she prayed for the strength to hold out. *Boy this isn't going to be easy!*

Chapter 2:

The Shadair SST sped over the North Atlantic bond for London carrying two very upset passengers. Ginny had told Matt that morning about the flight to London and he was a bit miffed about that. When he found out about the planned mission he flipped.

“Virginia, how long did you know about this?” Matt asked heatedly.

“I found out last Wednesday, during the command briefing. Matt you know there are certain things I can't tell you about,” she said defending her actions.

“I know that, but this directly affects us, damn it I had the right to know. Who the hell does Ed Straker think he is?”

“He happens to be your commanding officer.”

“Yeah, I’m beginning to think this was a mistake. What the hell was I thinking?”

Matt was standing up pacing the cabin now, angrier than Ginny had ever seen him. She understood having not always agreed with the way Ed handled certain matters. And she knew Matt really wasn’t angry with her although it still hurt her to see him this way.

“So what else haven’t I been told about this mission?” he asked heatedly.

“Ed, is going to brief us both when we arrive, I don’t know much more than what I’ve already told you,” she said, allowing some of her frustration to show.

“For the love of God Ginny, why the hell didn’t you tell me?”

“Matt I couldn’t tell you, it was classified,” she said getting angry.

“You know me Virginia, and you know I would never compromise our security. You don’t trust me.”

“Matt that’s enough! Trust has nothing to do with it and you know that!” she said her blue grey eyes filled with anger now. “I didn’t agree with this any more than you do. I had my orders, and so do you, Captain!”

That brought him up short, and Ginny cringed inside already regretting saying it.

“If you’ll excuse me Colonel, I need a breath of fresh air.”

She watched him walk to the back cabin, the anger in her blue grey eyes slowly being replaced with tears, feeling isolated in the separation that had come between them.

Matt was angry, mostly with himself for losing his temper with his wife and in doing so opening a rift between them. *Me and my big mouth*, he thought to himself. He knew that she would have told him if she could have and his issue wasn't with her. It was with Commander Straker.

He couldn't understand why Ed would not allow her to share information on a mission that he was going to be involved with as he would need to prepare himself both mentally and physically to meet the challenge. For now he needed to set things right with his wife, she certainly didn't deserve this.

Ginny was looking out the window when Matt sat back down next to her and took her hand. She neither responded nor resisted and that left him unsettled not knowing where he stood.

“Darling, I'm sorry,” he said sincerely.

“You need to read this, Matt,” she said with a twinge of bitterness in her voice as she handed him a folder, still avoiding his gaze.

Matt opened the folder and quickly scanned through it, finding all the details to the mission he was about to be sent on. He looked at his watch noticing the time matched the time on the cover page. Straker had intended for him to learn of this en-route to London. *Damn, I should have not gotten so upset over this,* he thought to himself.

“Virginia?”

“Matt, I just don’t want to talk about this right now, okay? I’m hurt and I need time to sort it out. Please just let me be,” she asked, her voice filled with both anger, and pain.

“All right.”

For the next hour Matt sat in silence next to his wife feeling lonelier than he ever had in his life.

Straker called a meeting in his office as soon as Virginia and Matt Arrived at HQ. Also present at the meeting were, Colonel's Blake and Wallace, and Captain Patterson the current CO of Skydiver 3.

“Thank you all for coming,” began Straker. “As of right now, forget anything that you might have been told or seen about this mission. Colonel Foster and I are the only two people with the correct information.”

The room went very quiet and Matt and Ginny looked at each other both realizing that their little tiff was for naught.

“Who here knows anything about Operation Quicksilver?”

Matt looked around the conference table and saw that no one appeared like they knew the answer. He finally spoke up.

“Operation Quicksilver was a part of Operation Fortitude; both of these ops were

disinformation campaigns designed to mislead the German high command prior to invasion of fortress Europe during World War Two. Quicksilver specifically dealt with the fictitious First Army Group or FUSAG commanded by Lt. General George S. Patton. The allies were able to convince the axis that the invasion would be at Pas de Calais under the command of Patton.”

“Very good, I see someone knows their military history. For the past six months we have been plagued by security leaks and undetected alien incursions. I intend to put a stop to this once and for all. So for starters, Colonel Foster and I decided to start a little disinformation operation of our own. Each one of you was given a piece of a puzzle that fits together nicely, and completely inaccurate.”

“So Commander this document that my wife gave me on the plane...”

“Is complete disinformation Matt. But she didn’t know that, and neither did you,” said the Commander.

“So there is no project, this is a ploy to ferret out the leak?” asked Ginny.

“The project is real but the scope is quite a bit different than was implied. Captain Hewett and Captain Patterson will be given sealed orders that they will only open once they are underway. Skydiver 3 is being loaded with the necessary equipment and supplies. Captain Patterson, you will maintain radio silence throughout the mission. While you will retain command of Skydiver, Captain Hewett will be in over all command of the mission. Understood gentlemen?”

“Yes sir,” they said in unison.

“By the way Matt, You’ll have one additional staff member meeting you on board, Lt. Watson. He’s a communications specialist and Keith’s protégé. He knows nothing of the details

of the mission. I'll leave that to your discretion once you are underway. Now both of you get going, I want Skydiver at sea within the hour."

Before he got up to leave, Matt turned to his wife and quickly kissed her as he said, "Got t' go. Love you."

"Matt I need to..." she said getting up to walk out with him.

"Colonel Lake," said Straker. "They're under a serious time constraint; you should have said you goodbyes on the plane. Get going gentlemen."

Matt looked back at his wife briefly hoping she understood the look in his eyes. He walked out with Captain Patterson.

After they left Ginny rounded on the Commander suddenly no longer angry with her husband but infuriated with him.

"Why wouldn't you let me say goodbye?"

“I was serious Virginia,” Ed said quietly. “They have to be underway within the hour, and we have work, to do here at HQ, that’s why I wanted both of you in London.”

Virginia sat back down wondering just what Ed had up his sleeve. She hadn’t seen him this intense since the upgrades after the Timelash incident.

“I believe the aliens have been listening in on our communications signals. Yes they are encrypted but the technology is dated. That was one reason for switching over to fiber communications. It’s next to impossible to break into. By far the most informative link is the satellite link between HQ and the New York Tracking Center. All of our command level staff briefings go through those links. Not to mention all the raw tracking data shared between the two facilities.”

“Commander I thought all the communications was via Utronic beams now?” asked Geoff Blake.

“Not all of them, Geoff. It was decided that the old satellite system would be kept in service until the fiber net had been finished as a cost savings offering. I objected of course but it became a matter of money. I had to decide what was more important, particle weapon development or new communications satellites.”

“So what exactly is this mission?” asked Jen.

“The Transatlantic fiber run was finished about a month ago. The only thing needed to get it operational is the installation of a fiber switching station in the mid Atlantic. The pressure dome that will house the equipment has already been built on a seamount somewhere in the middle of the North Atlantic. Matt’s mission will be to get to the site and

install the system and get it tested and operational.”

“Why the time constraint Ed?” asked Ginny.

“We’re taking advantage of a lapse in satellite coverage. Military satellites used by different countries. The aliens would have no trouble hacking into them and utilizing them for their own purposes. That’s one of the items on the agenda for next month’s IAC meeting; releasing some security technology across the board to keep this from happening.

Ed handed out three sealed folders to the Colonels seated around him.

“These orders are eyes only. The information doesn’t get transmitted by any electronics means whatsoever. And with the exception of you Geoff, as you’ll be flying to the states, it stays here at HQ.”

“Understood sir,” the three Colonels said.

“That will be all.”

Jen caught up with Ginny outside the Commander's office as she was heading towards the elevator to the computer room.

"Ginny, wait up," she called.

They both stepped into the elevator and Ginny selected the bottom floor.

"All right Ginny, what's wrong?"

"Nothing, why?" she answered evasively.

"Don't give me that," Jen pressed; her hands on her hips. "I've known you too long. I saw the look on both your faces and it was screaming unfinished business."

"Matt and I had a fight on the way here. It really wasn't that big of a deal," Ginny said dismissively.

"Tell that to your face," Jen paused. "I can't see the two of you fighting over anything, so what happened?"

“Matt was angry that I didn’t tell him we were coming over here when I found out about it. He made plans to take me out to a show this week and this unexpected trip spoiled it. We’ve both been so busy and we haven’t had a night out together in a couple weeks. Every time we plan something either one or both of us are too tired.”

“You think you’re tired now, just wait till the baby comes along. My sister and her husband didn’t get any sleep for a couple of months after their baby was born.”

“That’s why we’ve been trying to spend time with each other now. We know that we won’t have the chance later on,” said Ginny, wistfully.

“Maybe you two should have waited a while before starting a family.”

“Matt and I talked about it; we didn’t want to wait any longer. As it is I’m already considered being at risk.”

They walked into the main computer room and Ginny sat down at the programmer's console. She continued, "I pulled rank on him during the fight Jen."

"Oh my God," she said putting her hand to her mouth. "You must have been angry."

"Yeah, I was, and I really shouldn't have done that. Matt was talking to me as my husband, not as a SHADO captain."

"Well he shouldn't have taken it out on you either, you were just following orders," Jen remarked bluntly.

"The thing is Jen, is he apologized a few minutes later, and he meant it. But I didn't forgive him as I was still hurt and I didn't tell him I was sorry for what I said. He probably thinks I'm still angry with him," she said sadly.

"So you tell him when he gets back, or you can *show* him," Jen said suggestively.

That remark briefly brought a smile to Ginny's face until she remembered how long they were going to be out of touch.

"I really needed to tell him before he left and right now I'm ticked off at Ed, but you probably don't want to hear about that."

"Well even though I'm seeing him, he is still a man."

That comment brought both of them to laughter.

"Ginny, all kidding aside, you know Ed. If he sent Matt out the door in a rush like that, he had a good reason for it."

"I know, I guess I'm just angry with the situation. Hey speaking of Ed, how are things going with the two of you?"

"It couldn't be better, well yes it could, but these things take time."

"Oooo, this sounds promising," Ginny said evocatively.

“Well I have to get back upstairs before I’m counted amongst the missing. I’ll tell you about the banquet at lunch tomorrow.”

“I’ll be looking forward to that, see ya’ Jen.”

Skydiver Three skimmed over the surface of the ocean as it headed away from the SHADO naval base. On the bridge Matt watched the ship move over the water at nearly seventy knots. The wind in his face was exhilarating. Captain Patterson stood next to him watching the horizon through his binoculars.

“How soon will we reach the safe dive point, Bob?”

“Not long, about ten minutes or so,” he said as he scanned the surface of the ocean. He lowered his binoculars and looked over. “I heard you did well in the command simulation, Captain.”

Matt looked at Patterson somewhat surprised, “Boy I guess the Commander was right. Gossip does travel faster than light.”

“Peter Carlin runs a pretty tight knit group. We all know each other quite well and we like to keep tabs on who might be coming into our little niche in the universe.”

“I see, well I don’t think I’ll be replacing anyone, besides I’m a newlywed. I don’t think my wife would like the idea of me being gone for a month at a time,” Matt said ruefully.

“Too bad, we can always use an extra person in the duty rotation. And on this boat as well as Skydiver Five the patrols are two months long. Speaking of your wife, I don’t know Colonel Lake all that well, but she is a very attractive lady. You’re a lucky man. My wife Liz doesn’t like it either but to her this is much better than the days that I served on boomers for the US Navy.”

“I have family and friends in the navy, what boat were you on?”

“I was the communications officer on the *USS Will Rodgers* and transferred to the *USS Ohio* as the weapons officer, when she was commissioned in 1981.”

“So you haven’t been with SHADO that long.”

“Just a little over three years now, I had started out in the navy as an aviator, and transferred to submarines. It made me unique, and at the time just what SHADO was looking for,” said Bob thoughtfully.

Patterson picked up the mic and called the control room, “Control, bridge, sounding?”

“Sounding one-two-five fathoms sir.”

“Very well, prepare to dive.”

“Clear the bridge,” Patterson said to everyone topside.

Matt followed the XO down the ladder and onto the open elevator platform that led down to the control room. They were soon joined by Captain Patterson and the platform began to drop to the lower half of the control room.

“Straight board shut sir, rigged for dive.”

“Very well, submerge the ship, ten degree down bubble, make your depth one five zero feet,” said the captain.

“Ten degree down bubble, make depth one five zero feet, dive, dive, dive,” repeated the XO.

Skydiver three quickly and gracefully slipped beneath the waves of the North Atlantic still moving faster than highway speeds.

“Helm come to course two one zero, all ahead full.”

“Come to course two one zero, all ahead full, aye, aye, Captain.”

Captain Patterson turned to Matt, “We should be on station, about midday tomorrow. In the mean time my cabin is at your disposal.”

“Thank you,” Matt said quietly.

Matt walked back through the upper deck berthing compartment to the Captain’s cabin. He wasn’t tired but he did have an important letter to write, a letter that would never be delivered unless something disastrous happened. The tiff which he had with his wife on the way to England, still weighed heavy on his mind, and he wanted to talk to her before he left. But circumstances did not allow it and his heart bore the burden of things unsaid. *That was real stupid Matt, starting a fight just before a mission, real smooth,* he thought to himself.

He sat down at the desk and grabbed a pen and paper and began to write. *My dearest Virginia, If you are receiving this letter...*

Chapter 3:

If something can go wrong, it will, at the worst possible moment, Ed thought to himself as he listened to the dirge of SID reporting twelve UFO's heading in. The interceptors had been launched but they wouldn't get all of them.

“Trajectory termination?” asked Straker as he walked out of his office.

“It's coming up sir, best guess right now is the North Atlantic,” said Ford.

“Damn, that's too close, signal to all SHADO stations maximum security alert.”

“SHADO control to all stations, this is a maximum security alert, condition red!”

Virginia walked into the control room looking like she had been up all night. She walked over to where Ed was standing.

“What's going on Ed?”

He looked over to her, “Our friends are back in force, the interceptors are almost in position for an attack.”

“Do we know where they are heading?” she asked concerned.

“Take a guess.”

“Oh my God. Can we warn them?”

“They should have received the message but they are under strict radio silence,” said Ed.

“How the hell did they find out what we are doing?” asked Ginny with both surprise and apprehension in her voice.

“The interceptors are launching their missiles,” said Ford.

Ed and Ginny watched the tactical display as the missiles from the interceptors merged with the targets. Four of the twelve blips disappeared from the screen.

“Moonbase confirms four targets destroyed,” said Ford. “Trajectory termination is the Atlantic Ocean, near the equator sir.”

“Are Sky One and Sky Two in the air?”

“Yes sir, they launched about two minutes ago.”

“How long before they hit the atmosphere?” asked Ed.

“Two minutes, sir.”

“Carlin and Waterman should get them,” added Ginny hopefully.

“Yes, unless they split up at the last minute,” said Ed.

Ten minutes later Carlin and Waterman were involved in a dogfight with four of the UFO’s. The aliens were using cooperative tactics they had never seen before.

“Lew, you’ve got one on your six! Pull up!”

Waterman pulled his jet into an aggressive vertical climb and kicked in his afterburners. When he had gained enough altitude he pulled an inverted loop and dove on the UFO that had been tailing him. He fired his missile, destroying the alien craft.

“Look out Pete; you’ve got one at four o’clock.”

Carlin executed a split S and the UFO flew by him. He narrowly missed the particle beam fired at him. He brought his jet around and closed on the UFO rapidly, firing his missiles as soon as he was in range. The UFO exploded in a ball of flame.

“The other two are bugging out Pete.”

“Where are the rest of them, Lew?”

Waterman checked his instruments, “They’re not on my scope, Colonel.”

“All right let’s splash these two. I’ll take the one on the left.”

Carlin and Waterman made short work of the two remaining craft sending both of them to crashing into the sea.

“Sky One to SHADO control, we splashed four but the other craft did not engage. I don’t have them on my scope.”

In HQ Straker flipped up the mic, “Understood Peter, good shooting on the ones you got. I want you and Lew to start a search pattern and continue as long as fuel permits.”

“Understood sir, Sky One out.”

“What do we do now?” asked Ginny, her face lined with anxiety.

Ed looked at her knowingly, the worry in her voice echoing his own thoughts. “Pray that Skydiver Three is paying attention to their sonar equipment.”

Ginny watched him go back into his office swallowing a lump in her throat. She regretted,

not for the first time, not telling her husband she was sorry.

Matt was awakened from a restless sleep by the intercom just before sunrise. Wiping the sleep out of his eyes he turned and saw Bob Patterson talking to the control room.

“What’s going on Bob?” Matt asked when he finished.

“HQ just put out a general alert, Four UFO’s just slipped through the defenses,” he said with more than a hint of concern in his voice.

Matt sat up pushing the covers back and swung his legs over the side of the bunk. He was not used to the cold floor on his bare feet. “Where did they lose track of them?”

“The central Atlantic, just north of the equator,” said Patterson.

“That’s too close for comfort.”

“My thoughts exactly, I’ll be in the control room.”

Matt quickly and deliberately dressed and walked out of the cabin. By the time he reached the control room, Patterson had already ordered a reduction in speed to allow his sonar to work at maximum efficiency.

He walked over to the sonar suite and watched the waterfall display. Matt picked up the extra set of headphones and listened intently to the water, his eyes almost closed as he focused on the sounds. A very faint noise could be heard and the sonar operator seemed to be concentrating intensely on the display. Grimacing with concern, Matt set the headphones down and walked over to the plotting table where Bob Patterson was working.

“Helm come to course two seven zero, make turns for five knots,” ordered the captain.

“Steer course two seven zero, making turns for five knots, aye, sir.”

“I think sonar has something,” said Matt, quietly.

“What makes you say that?”

There’s a very faint sound in the water, you can just about hear it, but it’s there.” He looked at the Captain with an expression of concern.

“Con, sonar, new contact, designate sierra two-five,” called out the sonar op.”

Bob looked at Matt with a wry grin, “I guess you were right,” he said as they turned to the sonar station.

“Sonar, tell me what you’ve got,” ordered the captain.

“Distant contact, appears to be submerged, bearing one eight zero true, speed, forty five knots, course three five zero, estimated range twenty thousand yards.”

“It’s heading this way, hell even a Russian *Alfa* isn’t that fast,” said Matt, shocked as he assimilated the information.

“Contact lost sir,” the sonar operation said as he turned to the captain with a puzzled look on his face.

“What?” said the captain.

“It just disappeared. One minute it was on the scope, and now it’s gone.”

“Helm rig for silent running, sonar, deploy the towed array.” His orders were sharp and brisk and the crew quickly responded.

Matt watched in silence as the crew followed their orders. The hair on the back of his neck was standing up and he didn’t know why.

Virginia was so engrossed in what she was doing that she didn’t notice her friend walk in until she smelled the aroma of fresh brewed

coffee. She looked up as Jen handed her a cup of the steaming liquid.

“For me? Jen you’re a Godsend.” Ginny took a sip of the special blend that Jen always made.

“Ginny you looked like hell when I saw you in control earlier. Didn’t you get any sleep last night?”

“Not really,” she said shaking her head. “I tossed and turned all night long. I finally got up around three and came in here to get a jump on this work.”

“I noticed that you got the service channel up and running,” said Jen with a grin.

“Yes, and the other end is ringing, or it will be when Matt plugs everything in and turns it up.”

“You really want to talk to him don’t you?”

“I need to Jen. Matt was sweet enough to come back and say he was sorry even though I knew he was still upset over the whole matter. And I

slammed the door in his face,” she said now in tears.

Jen had known Ginny for over five years and had been her friend for most of that time. They had become very close over the past couple of years and Jen had never seen her, this distressed. She went over to where Virginia was sitting and hugged her as Ginny let her pain out freely now. When Ginny had dumped all the grief she was holding she looked at Jen.

“Thanks, I needed a good cry,” she said wiping her eyes.

“Hey, what are friends for. Ginny, I’ve got to get back upstairs, are we still having lunch later?”

“Yeah, but I want to be back down here by twelve thirty. That’s when Skydiver three is supposed to dock with the dome.”

“Don’t worry, I won’t keep you from your honey,” she said with a smile as she headed for the door.

“Bye.”

“Con, sonar, contact reestablished, six thousand yards closing fast, target classified as a Type two alien craft, speed forty knots, course three four five, bearing one six five, true.”

“Fire control rig tubes one and two fully ready, helm all ahead full, sonar retract the towed array,” ordered that captain quickly.

Matt listened with disbelief, *how the hell did he get so close undetected?*

“Towed array retracted sir,” reported the sonar operator.

“Very well, helm, left full rudder, all ahead flank, come to course one seven zero.”

The maneuver left a huge knuckle in the water and brought Skydiver’s torpedo tubes to bear on the closing UFO. Matt knew it would take more than two torpedoes to destroy this type of craft.

Would they have time to reload? He didn't think so.

“Torpedoes ready sir”

“Launch torpedoes,” ordered the captain.

“Torpedoes away sir, running normally.”

“Reload both tubes, quickly!” shouted Patterson as he looked at his stopwatch waiting for the explosions.

“Con, sonar, target changing course, now heading one eight zero.”

The tension in the control room was so thick it could be cut with a knife Matt was thinking as he watched the battle unfold.

“Con, Fire control, tubes reloaded, sir.”

“Very well launch torpedoes, and reload both tubes.”

Two explosions resounded through the water, the reports penetrating the hull of the submarine.

“Sonar, report. Did we get it?” asked the captain.

“Negative sir, contact now on course three four zero, speed thirty knots, range three thousand yards, closing fast.”

“Brace for impact,” yelled the captain.

The UFO closed the distance to Skydiver rapidly passing by the second wave of torpedoes before they could arm themselves. The alien craft fired a particle beam hitting Skydiver amidships.

The explosion violently rocked the submarine and Captain Patterson lost his grip on the pole. He was thrown forward, the back of his head hitting the map table. He collapsed near the access tube door for Sky Three a pool of blood forming under his head.

“Reactor is down. Propulsion is out.”

“Emergency power!” yelled the XO. “Fire control, what’s the status of the torpedoes?”

“They’ve armed and they’re locked onto the alien ship. Time to impact, ten seconds.”

While the XO fought to save the ship Matt went to the captain’s side and checked his pulse. It was too late, Patterson was dead.

“I need a medic up here,” ordered the XO.

“Don’t bother, he’s gone,” said Matt heavily as another explosion rumbled through the hull of the ship, the two torpedoes and a larger secondary explosion that he knew was the alien craft.

“Target destroyed sir,” reported the sonar operator as her looked back at the XO.

The XO spoke into the phone and a few minutes later the corpsman and his assistant came into the control room. Matt watched in silence as two of the crew bagged the captain’s body and carried it below. *Another good man gone, another widow made,* he thought.

The reactor officer approached the XO and said, “The reactor scrammed when we were hit, sir. It will take about thirty minutes to get it restarted. Propulsion is still down; the engineer is still working on it. The starboard engine was hit and it might be a bit noisier than normal. He estimates about two hours to repair.”

“Can we still blow tanks and surface?”

“Yes sir, ballast control is still in good shape, we can maintain trim.”

“Very well, prepare to surface, let’s get a message off to HQ as to our status...”

“Belay those orders,” said Matt fiercely as he walked up to Connors.

“I beg your pardon Captain Hewett,” said the XO clearly miffed at having his authority questioned by someone he perceived as an upstart.

“Lieutenant Connors, I am officially informing you that I am assuming command of this vessel

as of now, 07:42 hours. Duty officer you will note the change of command in the ships log. I have the deck and the con,” Matt ordered, with an authority in his voice no one on board, had heard before.

“Captain Hewett, this is against standard procedure,” Connors said emphatically. “I’m the assigned XO on this ship; if something happens to the captain the ship becomes my responsibility.”

“Yes Lieutenant and you were just about to violate a major mission order. Do you normally make a practice out of barking out orders without stopping to think?” asked Matt as he held the XO’s gaze.

“This mission is over! We can’t possibly continue with the ship in the condition it’s in.”

“Perhaps you’ve read a damage report that I haven’t. As I see it, we can be underway in a couple of hours,” Matt said very quietly.

“Lieutenant, just so we understand each other,

I'm in command of this vessel now, the decisions and responsibilities are mine, and mine alone and if you have a problem with this you may file a complaint with command upon our return."

"Very well, sir. For the record, I strongly object to your actions and in my opinion they place this ship and crew in jeopardy, sir."

"So noted. I want a detailed damage report in fifteen minutes. I'll be in my cabin."

"You didn't waste any time, sir," the XO shot back viciously.

Matt turned to face him, holding his anger in check.

"Lieutenant, I'm going to do you a favor and ignore that last statement as it was probably made out of grief over the loss of your CO. For your information I need to write a letter to his wife, unless you would like the task of doing that. If you make another comment like that I'll

have you in front of a court martial. Are we clear on that?”

“Clear as crystal, sir.”

“Carry on,” Matt said as he turned to walk to his cabin. “Helm, maintain trim, communications, maintain radio silence.”

“Yes sir,” came the chorus of replies.

Ed walked into the main computer room where Ginny was still busy setting up the interfacing for the new communications link. She didn’t notice him until he walked up to her console.

“Oh, hello Ed. I didn’t hear you come in,” she said apologetically.

“That’s all right; Jen said you were hard at it.”

“Yeah, I’m just trying to keep my mind off of other things.”

Ed sat down in the chair across from her. “Virginia, I’m sorry I didn’t let you speak with

Matt before he left, I understand the two of you had words on the plane.”

“Did Jen tell you that?” she asked somewhat perturbed.

“You know better than that. No I heard it by other means.”

“Oh my God, the flight crew heard us?” she said as she blushed madly now.

“Let’s just say the two of you provided some interesting in-flight entertainment,” he said giving her a rare smile.

“How embarrassing, wait till Matt finds out.”

“Anyway I wasn’t being callous. I did have a reason for wanting them to leave right away.”

“I understand Ed,” she said sincerely.

“Lew Waterman got another one of those UFO’s off the coast of South America about an hour ago. It was a type two craft,” he said quietly.

“That still leaves three unaccounted for.”

“Yes it does,” he paused unsure how to continue.

Virginia had known Ed for years and she picked up on the fact that he was hiding something.

“Ed, what are you not telling me?” she asked her voice full of apprehension now.

“There was an explosion about two hours ago in the North Atlantic. The SOSUS network picked it up and it was roughly in the area where Skydiver Three should have been. We didn’t hear any hull collapse noises so we don’t think it was Skydiver, plus the rescue buoy was never deployed,” he said trying to minimize it.

“That doesn’t mean anything Ed, and you know it. But thanks for telling me yourself. I’d rather hear it from you than second hand in the control room.”

Virginia had reservations the day she was told that Matt was going on this mission and she couldn’t get the ill thoughts out of her mind.

“How are things with you and Jen?” she asked changing the subject.

Only the slightest of pauses before he answered told her that he was uncomfortable with the subject.

“Fine,” he said as lightly as he could manage.

Virginia didn't press the subject. Even though Ed considered her his best friend, she was still a woman and she could see that he wasn't at ease discussing Jen with her.

“She taught me to cha, cha,” he unexpectedly offered.

“Now I am jealous,” Ginny said with a broad grin briefly forgetting her problems. “Thanks Ed.”

“For what?” he asked innocently.

“For cheering me up.”

“Anytime, what are friends for?” he asked as he stood to leave.

“Are you sure you and Jen aren’t in cahoots?” she asked suspiciously.

“Of course not, why do you ask?”

“Because Jen just said the same thing to me not two hours ago.”

“Maybe you’re just lucky to be blessed with good friends,” Ed said as he was leaving. “I’ll let you know if I hear anything.”

“Thanks.”

Chapter 4:

Matt looked over the damage report. While significant, it certainly wasn’t bad enough to scrub the mission. Repairs were underway and the reactor had been restarted successfully. Matt wrote a condolence letter to Bob Patterson’s wife Liz, praising his dedication to both his duty, and to the safety of his family.

Next to the letter he had written to Virginia the day before, it was the hardest letter he had ever had to write.

The intercom interrupted his thoughts.

Matt flipped the toggle switch, “Yes.”

“We’re ready to get underway sir. The engineer recommends a speed of thirty knots or less if we want to remain relatively silent. The starboard engine will start cavitating if we move any faster.”

“Very well Lieutenant, proceed on course best silent speed.”

“Aye, sir.”

He stood up from the desk and walked out of his cabin. His next decisions were sure to raise some eyebrows.

“Sonar, report all contacts,” ordered Matt as he entered the control room.

“Sir, I have no contacts at this time.”

Matt stepped over to the chart table where the XO was updating their position. He was still puzzled about how the alien craft was able to appear so close to their location in the last battle. He was also concerned that they knew where to look in the first place. Somehow the security surrounding the mission had been compromised and Matt needed to contain the leak. The irony of it all is that he planned to use the same ploy Ed had used earlier.

“Message from HQ sir,” said the communications officer as he handed Matt the form.

“Thank you,” Matt said as he read the message.

The dispatch sent to all stations indicating that one of the four UFO’s had been destroyed off the coast of South America.

“Just two left XO,” said Matt.

“How’s that sir?”

“Here, read,” he said as he handed Connors the message.

The XO read the dispatch and nodded. “So the one we ran into was probably the only one in the area.”

“Maybe; or the one that Captain Waterman got was a sacrifice. Lieutenant Connors can the emergency buoy be programmed for a delayed activation?”

“Yeah, it can. But why would you want to?”

“To send our friends and their allies on a little snipe hunt,” said Matt. “Rig the buoy and gather all the loose materials we can find, extra uniforms, magazines, unclassified paperwork, anything that will float,” he paused considering the last bit. “That includes the body of Captain Patterson.”

“Sir!” exclaimed the XO, clearly in shock.

“I know! I wish this wasn’t necessary, but it is!” Matt paused and then continued more subdued.

“I intend to kill two birds with one stone. The buoy will not only alert HQ that this ship is down but the aliens should pick it up as well. Lieutenant, I intend to save both the mission and this ship, and I will use every ounce of cunning and experience I have available to me to accomplish that goal. If you have any ideas that will help make this work I want to hear them.”

“If we dive very deep, we can squeeze another ten knots of speed out of her for the same noise figures. I’ll get to work on the buoy; it will only take a few minutes to rig up, sir. Do you want to leave the logs and letters in place?” asked the XO.

“Yes, it’s important that everyone at HQ believes that this is real.”

“Aye, aye sir.”

Matt watched as the XO went to work on the buoy thinking about the hell this was going to

put Virginia through, assuming she wasn't going through hell already.

"Helm, all stop," he ordered.

"Answering all stop."

Skydiver gradually slowed and came to a slow drift forward as its crew prepared the diversion ploy.

"All waste to disposal tubes," Matt ordered as he prayed the rescue team would recover the body of Captain Patterson before the sharks got to it.

"Buoy ready for deployment sir," reported the XO.

"Deploy the buoy, and cut the tether"

The emergency rescue buoy quickly rose to the surface and the timer activated as soon as it broached.

“Helm all ahead one third, twenty degree down, make your depth forty five hundred feet, come to course two one zero,” ordered Matt.

Skydiver surged through the water diving deeper into the depths of the ocean.

“Passing one thousand feet, sir.”

“All ahead full.”

“All ahead full, aye, aye, sir.”

Matt picked up the handset and dialed up the 1MC.

“Attention all hands, this is the Captain. We are commencing a two hour speed run and should arrive at our destination at approximately 16:00 hours this afternoon. That is all.”

Matt walked over to the XO and said, “Stop and clear the baffles in an hour. I’ll be in my cabin.”

“Yes sir.”

The Albatross 25 search plane homed in on the signal from Skydiver Three's disaster beacon. By chance the aircraft had been en-route from the United States and was close to the area where the beacon was located.

“Sea Rescue Five to SHADO control, entering search area.”

“Copy that SR Five. Please advise when you have visual contact. SHADO control out.”

The plane flew for ten more minutes before the copilot spotted the rescue buoy. They transformed into VTOL mode and landed on the water near the buoy. In the back of the aircraft the rescue operator hooked the winch up to haul it in. To his dismay he saw that the cable had been severed a few feet from the bottom. The entire area was littered with debris and uniforms and what looked like a body bag floating nearby.

The pilot maneuvered the plane so the bag could be recovered and the rescue worker

opened it to check for identification but he immediately recognized the man as Captain Patterson. He called forward to the pilot to give him the grim news.

Straker walked up to the communications console where Captain Ford was working.

“What did they find Keith?”

“It’s definitely wreckage from Skydiver Three sir. The rescue team found the disaster buoy with the communications cable severed and debris on the surface. They recovered one body sir.”

“Who was it?” Ed asked quietly.

“Captain Patterson, but sir, he was found in a body bag.”

Ed was concerned as to how that could have happened. *Another mystery to solve*, he thought to himself.

“Is Sea Rescue Three on the way?”

“Yes sir, they’ll be on location in ten minutes.”

“Have SR Five return to London immediately. Maybe the ships logs will tell us something.”

“Yes sir.”

Ed walked back to his office dreading the prospect of telling Virginia that her husband had been lost.

Skydiver Three continued on the second leg of its speed run after its XO stopped to *clear the baffles*, a maneuver designed to ensure that they were not being followed. In the captain’s cabin, Matt Hewett looked over the documentation for the Mark VII fiber optic switching system. It was based in the Mark V fiber multiplexers he had installed at NORAD six and a half months ago. The installation at the seamount would do more than just join New York and London. Six other fiber cables were in

the process of being laid out on the seabed to join other parts of the world to the network.

The intercom buzzed breaking Matt from his thoughts.

“Yes.”

“We’ve just received a message from HQ sir. They’ve initiated a SubSmash alert and started a SAR mission to the area.”

“Very well, maintain radio silence.”

“Aye, sir.”

Matt thought about the pure hell this was going to put Virginia through and he found a new appreciation for the difficult decisions made necessary by the rigors of command. Ironically he found himself in the same position that Commander Straker was in last week and he now regretted his harsh judgment of the man.

Ed and Jen looked over the logs from the recovered rescue buoy that once belonged to Skydiver Three. There was no question now, the ship was lost. Virginia was on her way to the office and Ed asked Jen to stay while he gave his best friend the grim news. Ginny sounded troubled on the phone and Ed suspected that she already knew why he had called. His feelings were confirmed when she came into his office with tears in her eyes.

“Virginia, please have a seat,” said Ed softly.

“They’re gone, aren’t they,” she said through tears.

She sat at the conference table with Jen sitting next to her, hand on Ginny’s shoulder. She looked up at Ed with a haunted expression in her tear filled blue grey eyes.

“We picked up the buoy about two hours ago; Skydiver Three was attacked by a type two alien craft. In the initial attack Captain Patterson was

killed and your husband assumed command,” he added.

“Yeah, that’s Matt. Always taking charge...” Ginny couldn’t finish the sentence as she fought to maintain control.

When she had regained her composure, Ed continued, “Skydiver was able to destroy the UFO but suffered severe damage themselves. The log shows that they had lost both the reactor and propulsion and they were taking on water. The depth of the water in that location is almost seven thousand feet. The last log entry was about an hour after the initial attack and it stated that they had slipped below crush depth and the reactor would not restart. The entry ended mid sentence...”

At that point Virginia completely lost her composure and began weeping uncontrollably laying her head on the table. Ed sat down next to her and looked over at Jen seeing tears in her emerald green eyes. He struggled to maintain

control of his own emotions as seeing both his best friend and the woman he loved in tears was heavy burden to bear. While he comforted his friend he came to a personal decision of his own.

Ginny sat up when she had cried all she could cry.

Ed picked up an envelope from the table and handed it to her, “This letter was found in the buoy along with one addressed to Captain Patterson’s wife Liz. They’re both in Matt’s handwriting.”

“Thank you,” said Ginny sadly.

Ed watched as Virginia held the letter in her hands staring at it for a while. She looked over to Ed and said, “I think I’d like to go to my quarters and read this privately. I appreciate the comfort both of you have shown me but I need to grieve alone for a while.”

“Of course, Jen would you walk Virginia to her quarters please?”

“Certainly.”

Ed watched the two women get up and leave the office thinking about all the good people that had been lost today, especially Virginia’s husband. Ed had seen real leadership potential in him and SHADO needed men like that to carry on the fight.

Virginia leaned heavily on her friend as they walked to her quarters. When they arrived Jen followed Ginny in and they both sat on the couch.

“Ginny are you going to be okay alone?”

“I’ll be all right Jen, I know I’m going to break again after I read this, but I want to grieve alone this time. If I need someone I’ll call you okay?”

“All right, I’ll be in the control room.”

“Thanks, Jen.”

Virginia sat and just looked at the letter for a while before she finally opened it. She noticed the hearts drawn in different spots typical of notes Matt had written to her in the past. The pleasant memories brought a brief smile to her face and she began to read.

My dearest Virginia,

If you are receiving this letter then I have most likely been killed in the line of duty. While we have only been married for a short time, I feel like we have been together for years. I wanted to put some of my thoughts on paper for you to have and maybe read when difficult times arise. For me to list all the reasons that I had chosen you above all others to spend the rest of my life with would take a lifetime. You have a deep sense of caring that comes naturally; most people, including me, have to work at it. You are an inspiration to me, a light in the darkness of life and you are the greatest gift

that I have ever been blessed with. On the flight to London I had put you through hell by my callous selfishness and for that I'm truly sorry. I want to describe for you our first night at our new home...

Both she and Matt had assumed that she had become pregnant the first night they stayed at their new home. It had been a very warm day and they were both hot and sweaty. Their bathing suits were packed away in a box somewhere and they couldn't find them. She smiled as she read Matt's account of how that little detail didn't stop them. The encounter had been quite passionate and his description of it sent pleasant shivers up her spine as she remembered the feel of his caress and the touch of his lips. For a brief moment she had forgotten that he was gone, until the reality of what had happened took hold again. As she read the last lines of the letter she could no longer hold back her tears.

Virginia, I love you more than life itself, and I only hope I was able to return the love you gave to me.

Eternally,

Your loving husband,

Matt

Ginny went over to the luggage her and Matt had brought from New York and found his bathrobe. She knew that he had worn it the night before they left for London and had not washed it before he threw it in the suitcase. It was a bad habit of his that she had tried to break him of, but right now she was grateful that she had not been successful. She clutched the robe for dear life as laid on the bed crying her heart out comforted by the low note of his cologne. *I didn't even tell him I loved him before he left...*

“Helm, slow to five knots, come right to course two six zero.”

It had been almost three hours since the buoy had been deployed and Matt had put quite a bit of distance between them and the datum point. He decided to risk running an extra hour at full speed to clear the area.

“Steady on course two six zero, sir.”

“Very well, sonar, deploy the towed array,” ordered Matt as he was walking to the sonar station.

“What are your plans sir?” asked the XO.

“Well Brad, I figure we’ll listen for a while, if it sounds clear, we’ll sprint for another hour.”

“Sprint and drift ay skipper?”

The two men went over to the chart table.

“It works for the navy and they can’t hear nearly as well as we can.”

“How long do you want to listen?” asked the XO, as he updated their position on the map.

“Let’s give it a good twenty minutes, just to be sure.”

“Aye, sir.”

Matt looked at the charts and saw that they would shave another hour off the arrival time with the sprint/drift scheme he had worked out.

“Con, sonar, new contact, close aboard, designate sierra two six, range ten thousand yards, bearing 180, speed, thirty knots, course zero one zero.”

“Sonar, do you have a classification?” asked Matt now hovering over the sonar operator’s shoulder.

“The computer is still chewing on it. It’s not a UFO sir. Single screw, plant noise sounds like a 688 class.”

A minute later the computer screen listed the classification.

“I have the classification sir; it’s the *USS Baton Rouge*, a *Los Angeles* class attack submarine.”

“Any chance they’ll hear us?” asked Matt.

“Not at that speed, unless they Yankee search us sir.”

A Yankee search involved the use of active sonar something that was almost never done by American submarines. Matt knew that most sub drivers in the States would order all the active sonar fuses pulled and red tagged per the captain as soon as they left port.

“Helm left ten degree rudder, resume base course, make turns for three knots,” ordered Matt.

“You don’t think they’ll ping us sir?”

“No way, not unless he already knew we were here. No he’s on a sprint right now.”

In a few minutes the American sub had passed by and Matt was about to order another sprint when the sonar operator sang out again.

“Con, sonar, new contact, designate sierra two seven, speed fifty knots, range seven thousand yards, closing rapidly, course zero one zero, bearing one seven zero, classify contact as a type one alien craft.”

“Sonar, retract the towed array, helm make turns for fifteen knots, come left to course one five zero,” Matt ordered.

“You’re going to engage it sir?” asked the XO.

“Brad, there are one hundred and ten men on board that submarine and they won’t stand a chance against that UFO. We don’t have any choice. Fire control rig tubes one and two fully ready.”

“Aye, sir.”

“Captain what about the mission?” asked the XO pointedly.

“Conflicting orders, Brad, that’s why they’re called command decisions,” said Matt

confidently. “Sonar, give me range to the target.”

“Four thousand yards and closing, sir.”

Matt watched the contact on the sonar display and called over his shoulder, “Fire control, report.”

“I have a firing solution, tubes ready for firing sir.”

“Very well, fire one,” said Matt.

“Firing one,” said the weapons officer, “one away, running normally.”

The SHADO torpedo proceeded quietly to the target following a preprogrammed course. In another forty seconds it would arm itself and switch to high speed.

“Fire control, time on target?” asked Matt.

“Thirty seconds sir, fifteen seconds to arming.”

“You know skipper that American sub is going to turn around if he hears the explosion,” said the XO.

“Yeah, and we’re going to have to do our impression of a hole in the water.”

“If he Yankee searches us, the gigs up, sir.”

“Then we’d better pray he doesn’t do that,” said Matt ruefully.

“That’s a big gamble sir,” said the XO with a wry grin.

“Con, fire control, torpedo is armed and homing.”

“Very well,” said Matt.

The homing torpedo had closed to within a thousand yards of the spinner and switched to high speed. Its active sonar came on and the mindless robot homed in on the alien craft. The spinner attempted to out run it but its top speed underwater was no match for the one hundred knot speed of the SHADO torpedo. The

explosion ripped through the water and could be heard through the hull of Skydiver.

“Positive detonation sir, I have breakup noises, target destroyed.”

“Sonar, tell me about sierra two six,” Matt ordered.

“Contact sierra two six has slowed to five knots, I’m having trouble hearing it sir.”

“As you should, those 688’s are as quiet as a virgin whale determined to retain her status. Helm right full rudder, come to course two seven zero, slow to five knots. Sonar, deploy the towed array.”

“Aye, aye sir,” came the chorus of replies.

Chapter 5:

Jen found Virginia back down in the computer room madly entering data into the console. As

usual Ginny was too engrossed in her work to notice Jen until she walked up to the programmer's console.

"Oh, hi Jen, I didn't hear you come in," she said quietly.

Jen walked around the console and sat down next to her friend.

"Ginny, what are you doing?"

"Finishing the communications interface," said Ginny typing with a zealot's fervor.

"The Commander gave you time off to morn."

"I'm sorry Jen, my husband gave his life for this project and I'll be damned if it's going to sit here unfinished. I don't care if I have to go out on Skydiver myself," she said as she viciously typed in the information.

"Ed is planning another mission right now," Jen said hoping it would raise Ginny's spirits.

"Good! Count me in."

“Ginny, you know he’s not going to let you go out there while you are carrying Matt’s child. Hell had he known that you were pregnant he wouldn’t have sent you to Moonbase last month.”

Ginny stopped for a minute and looked at her friend.

“Then I’ll finish what needs to be done on this end, and I’ll tell you something, Jen. Natiroff had better find the leak before I do, because when I get done, there won’t be enough of the responsible party left to put on a postage stamp,” Ginny said angrily.

Jen had never seen her friend in this state before and it unnerved her.

“Why do you think there’s a leak? Only six of us were at the meeting on the Commander’s office and...” she paused not wanting to continue putting her hand to her mouth.

“And two of them are dead, I know,” said Ginny finishing the sentence. “Think about it Jen, this mission was classified at the highest levels in SHADO. The sailing orders were sealed and Ed mounted a huge disinformation campaign just before the mission. That means either someone in the know is a traitor or the information slipped out of HQ in real time by some other means.”

“Major Natiroff has turned the base upside down trying to find a breach. He keeps coming up empty,” said Jen with frustration in her voice.

“Then he’s going about it the wrong way. Skydiver Three was on silent ship routine, but here at HQ we knew approximately where she was. Who had access to that information?”

“No one but the command staff,” said Jen.

“And who else?” asked Ginny leadingly.

“Anyone who has access to the control room.”

“Exactly” Ginny said. “One of the things Matt said to me was how easy it was to ascertain information by just observing the happenings in the control room during an alert. When he was at NORAD he was never allowed into the computer room, or the war room unescorted, and that was with a Top Secret clearance. In SHADO a fresh recruit can walk into the control room at any time and not be questioned.”

“But Ginny, you know how stringent our security requirements are. Our clearance levels make Top Secret look like a hall pass in high school,” said Jen convincingly.

“How many new recruits do you see getting hauled into Ed’s office each month for not following security procedures?”

“Quite a few, actually,” she said conceding the point.

“New recruits are easy pickings for the aliens. They’re vulnerable because they don’t yet understand the danger. The aliens capture

them, reprogram them, and cut them loose. We lose at least a half a dozen people every year that way and I've argued for years that we should have additional security in the control room, especially when a classified mission is taking place," said Ginny.

"That makes sense; you could be on to something," Jen said as she got up from her chair and started towards the door.

"Where are you going?" asked Ginny?

"I'm going to go twist Ed's ear, are you coming?"

"This I've got to see. Let's go."

Skydiver Three was involved in a cat and mouse game with the American submarine they had saved. For almost two hours Matt watched the waterfall display at the sonar station as the sub would fade from the screen only to reappear.

“The captain of this sub knows what he’s about, skipper,” commented the XO.

“He shouldn’t even be able to hear us at this distance. Something is making noise and that is what is giving him the contact. Helm, all stop, hold trim,” ordered Matt.

“All stop, hold trim, aye, aye sir.”

Matt decided to wait it out hoping the American captain would get bored and continue on his way. He turned to Connors.

“XO, pass along by mouth to all hands, quite ship routine.”

“Aye sir.”

The American sub stayed in sonar range for another hour before it finally proceeded on its original course. Matt waited another thirty minutes before resuming course for the dome.

“I guess you were right skipper, I expected him to ping us.”

Matt shook his head, “No way Brad, the US Navy puts their best skippers in the 688s. Someone with that amount of experience is not going to pull a beginners stunt like that. Hell even a greenhorn captain knows better than to use his active sonar when he has a working contact. No, passive sonar will tell you everything you need to know. It just requires patience.”

“You seem to know quite a bit about undersea warfare tactics for someone who never served in uniform, sir,” said Connors.

“My mother’s family was full of navy people, and a good portion of them are in the silent service. That sub we just evaded; the navigator on board is my one of my third cousins.”

“No kidding, sir.”

“Yeah, it’s a small world. Anyway, at the family gatherings all of the navy members would get together and swap sea stories, and play computer sub simulations in head to head

mode. I used to get my tail smoked until I figured out how the game was played. After that I could hold my own. I used to think in the terms of the old World War Two tactics and modern submarine warfare is nothing like that. As far as the simulators go, you'd be surprised how sophisticated they have become over the past few years," said Matt.

"The problem with this platform, skipper, is that it's not designed to be used in a fast attack role. It was meant to be a stealth launch platform for the sky aeroceptor. In fact without Sky Three attached, this thing handles like a pig. It's noisy as hell and it can't even get out of its own way."

"I wondered about that, but if we were to add some standoff anti-submarine warfare capacity, like the new Sea Lance missiles that the US Navy has in development to replace the old SUBROCs, it would give this boat more teeth. Hell, the Russians have just about pioneered

that technology and it works quite well. I'm surprised that the US took so long to jump on board."

"Sea Lance, I've heard of those. They're nuclear tipped aren't they?" asked the XO.

"There is a conventional variant of the weapon as well. For our application we wouldn't need a nuke. That would be like trying to swat a fly with a two by four."

"Colonel Carlin has been trying to incorporate some sort of standoff ASW capacity into the fleet for a couple of years now, but he keeps running into budget constraints."

Matt thought of all the money that was wasted by the nations of the world defending against the perceived threat from each other, money that would be better spent defending against a common foe. *Divide and conquer*, he thought.

"What's our ETA to the dome?" he asked.

"Two hours sir, about 18:00."

“Very well. XO, you have the con, I’ll be in my quarters,” Matt said as he turned to walk out of the control room.

“Aye, aye sir.”

Virginia and Jen watched through the one way glass of the interrogation room while Straker and Jackson interrogated Laura Weston. Unlike most compromised operatives Lt. Weston appeared to be a willing participant in collaborating with the enemy. Virginia’s expression was one of controlled rage.

She had never been a person prone to animosity but Ginny felt nothing but pure unadulterated hatred towards this woman. It was so obvious that Ed had refused to allow her into the interrogation room.

“It’s very simple Commander,” Weston was saying. “We’re going to lose. How long do you think it’s going to be before they develop

countermeasures against your puny little weapons? That last attack almost destroyed Moonbase. They next time you won't be so lucky."

"So that justifies selling out your own kind, Lieutenant?" Straker asked harshly.

"In the new order, there will be two types of people, those like me, who will be grateful servants, and those like you, cattle to be led to the slaughter," she said smugly.

"So how many more like you are planted in this organization?"

"More than you suspect, *Straker*," she answered in a voice thick with sarcasm.

"We're not children you know and we do have ways to get the information we need. Doctor?"

Jackson swabbed her forearm and administered the injection of truth serum. He looked at his watch and nodded his head after a few minutes.

“Now I’m going to ask you again,” said Straker leaning close to her. “How many agents do you have in SHADO, and who are they?”

Weston looked up at him with a defiant grin on her face and seemed to enjoy the confrontation with the SHADO commander.

“You really are such pathetic little creatures; do you think my allies would send me here unprepared?”

Straker looked at Jackson as he contemplated his next decision. “Are there any other methods we can use Doctor?”

“Yes Commander, but they are a bit on the extreme side, however I must caution you, if her mind has been trained to resist we may find these methods useless as well.”

Give me five minutes with her, Ginny thought to herself as she watched through the glass, her heart filled with rage. Unconsciously she had

balled her fist and Jen noticed the expression on her face.

“Ginny, don’t do this to yourself,” she said pleadingly.

“I’m fine Jen. That woman was directly responsible for the death of my husband. She wasn’t coerced, she wasn’t controlled. She acted on her own volition,” she said in quiet rage.

“You need to let it go, she’ll get hers.”

“Oh yes she will, and I want to be the one that pulls the trigger. She robbed me of my husband and my child of his or her father.”

“Ginny, you listen to me. You know as well as I do that it would break Matt’s heart to see you this way. Don’t let yourself be consumed by hatred.”

“Jen just leave it be,” Ginny said sharply. “My hatred towards this woman is the only thing helping me deal with my grief right now.”

She abruptly turned and walked out of the room and headed towards her quarters.

Jen watched her walk out, feeling hurt by her friend's words. She fought back tears as Ed walked in.

“Jen, what's wrong,” he said taking her in his arms.

“It's Ginny; I've never seen her like this Ed.”

“I know she's having a tough time of it, but why are you crying?” he asked softly.

“She snapped at me, she's never done that before. It just caught me by surprise that's all.”

Ed wiped the tears from her eyes and said, “I'm sure she didn't mean it Jen.”

“I know she didn't. She was just standing in here, and I could see all she wanted to do was tear that woman's head off. I've never seen her so enraged.”

“Well if it’s any consolation I don’t blame her. In fact I seriously considered letting Virginia loose on this woman. If I thought she could get information out of her without straight out killing her I just might have.”

That statement brought a grin to Jen’s face.

“Do you think there are others like her?” she asked.

“I hope not Jen,” he said sincerely. “I’m ordering a level four security check on all HQ personal, including the command staff.”

“That’s never fun.”

“I know, but it’s necessary,” he said as they walked out of the room.

Skydiver Three arrived at the dome just before 18:00 hours. Matt estimated that it would take about two hours to rack and power up the communications equipment followed by another two hours of configuration.

“Helm, commence docking, maneuver the ship at your discretion.”

“Commence docking, aye, aye sir.”

“So skipper, how long should this take?” asked the XO.

“If everything goes according to plan, we should be wrapped up and heading back by 22:00 hours. Lt. Watson, go below and see to it that the equipment is being moved to the lower docking port.”

“Yes sir.”

Matt turned back to the XO, “Lt. Connors, you’ll be in command of Skydiver while I’m in the dome installing the equipment. If our friends show up undock and get Skydiver to safety.”

“Sir, we can’t leave you behind.”

“You can always come back for us. And one more thing, if you run across another type two spinner, remember that you’ll need four torpedoes to destroy it.”

“We’re docked skipper,” interjected the helmsman.

“Very well, XO you have the con.”

“Aye, sir. Good luck skipper.”

Matt walked out of the control room into the upper berthing compartment and climbed down the ladder to the engineering section. Two of the crew, were lowering a box into the docking port access room.

He climbed down the ladder into the small compartment in the belly of Skydiver and looked over the equipment.

“All right men, let’s get this stuff off loaded. I don’t want to be caught while we can’t move.”

Matt climbed down the ladder into the underwater communications shelter and looked the facility over while the equipment was being brought down. All the fiber ports were very well labeled and the installation looked as if it would be trouble free.

When the equipment was all down he walked back to the hatches and spoke to the engineering crew. “We’re going to seal the lower hatch so you can blast out of here if the need arises.”

“Understood sir, good luck.”

Virginia was lying back on the bed in her quarters holding her husband’s bathrobe closely. She was angry with herself for snapping at her friend and for allowing Laura Weston to bring out so much hate in her. Jen’s observation that Matt would have been upset had struck a nerve and when she read his last letter again she began to cry.

The door buzzer startled her and she sat up, “Yes, come in,” she said as she unlocked the door.

“Virginia?”

“Oh, hello Ed.”

“Jen asked me to come and check on you. Are you all right?”

Ginny shook her head as she answered, “I bit her head off Ed, I’m sorry I didn’t mean to.”

“She knows that,” he said gently.

“Yeah, I’ll bet. That’s why she sent you to face the dragon alone. You’re actually quite brave you know. The way I was feeling an hour ago, I would have bit your head off as well.”

“I half expected that when I came in,” admitted Ed as he sat in the chair across from her.

“So did Jackson get anything out of her?” she asked.

“Unfortunately not, I’m afraid. We have her in holding for the night and we’ll try again tomorrow.”

“What really got to me Ed was she wasn’t controlled or coerced. She did this of her own free will. How did she manage to pass the evaluations?”

“I’m not convinced that she wasn’t changed in some way, if you remember Craig had no appearance of being altered either,” said Ed reluctantly.

Virginia did not agree with that assessment, as she had noticed a change in Collins immediately. She kept that to herself, saying instead, “Yes, but Jackson ran a test on Craig, he was being externally controlled. He ran the same test on Laura Weston and it came up normally. It doesn’t make any sense.”

“I just can’t see anyone cooperating with them of their own free will, especially someone who passed a SHADO screening. If that did happen then we have a much bigger problem.”

“I know,” she said getting up. “Well I’m going to go back downstairs and get some more work done.”

“Virginia, Jen and I are going to dinner; would you like to join us?”

“No thanks, you two go on, besides, three’s a crowd. By the way, have you told her yet?”

“Told her what?” asked Ed uncomfortably.

“That you love her, it’s written all over your face you know.”

“I...” he started to say before she cut him off.

“Don’t deny it Ed; I’ve known you too long not to notice.”

“No, I haven’t told her yet,” he said quietly.

“Don’t wait Ed. Don’t let fate rob you of any happiness. Life is too precious to waste even a moment of it,” Ginny said emphatically.

“Now you’re beginning to sound like Paul.”

“You know Ed, a few years ago, a comment like that would have earned you a slap in the face. But now I’ll take that as a compliment. Who’d have thought?”

“Yes, times change. Well I’d better get moving Jen’s waiting for me.”

“Remember what I said Ed,” she said as he walked to the door.

“I will.”

Chapter 6:

Captain Hewett and Lt. Watson spent the next hour installing the communications equipment in the racks.

“So Mike, are you married?” Matt asked the young communications technician working with him.

“No sir, I’m still single, I can’t even imagine what some of the married guys on the boat are going through right now.”

“Fortunately HQ will wait forty eight hours before notifying the families.”

“That doesn’t help you out sir,” Watson observed.

“Yes, I know,” said Matt ruefully.

“I’m sorry sir. I didn’t mean...”

“That’s okay, forget about it.”

They finished mounting the equipment in the racks and started connecting the power supplies.

“Captain Hewett, your wife is sadly missed at HQ sir. She’s such a nice lady.”

“Thank you, I’ll be sure to tell her, but you’ve probably never seen her angry.”

“Oh yes I have sir,” Watson said.

“Oh yeah, tell me about it.”

“It was about three years ago sir. Colonel Lake had just been reassigned to HQ as executive officer. Anyway some average Joe assaulted the Commander and left an ultimatum ordering the surrender of SHADO with him. Two of the three targets in the note ended up being destroyed. Well Colonel Foster and your wife figured out

who the aliens were planning to use to destroy the base. Turns out she was a beautiful blonde with blue eyes and Colonel Foster fell in love with her. This girl was gorgeous Captain.”

“So what happened?” asked Matt.

“Well Colonel Foster brought her to HQ and when Colonel Lake found out she hit the ceiling, sir. I saw the look in her eyes that day and it scared the hell out of me. I wouldn’t ever want to be on her bad side sir. Anyway she stormed into the Commander’s office and they had words. The door was open and you could hear it all the way out into the control room. Ayshea Johnson and I looked at each other hoping we could just stay out of the way.”

“Yep, that’s my Ginny. She still has the temper and I’ve seen it firsthand. So is that it?”

“Rumor has it that Colonel Lake and Colonel Foster had words the next morning, but no one seems to know any of the details, sir.”

“That’s quite a sea story Mike,” said Matt with a smile.

“Oh trust me sir, it was real, every bit.”

“I believe you Mike. Hey would you hand me that voltmeter please?”

“Certainly sir.”

Matt checked the power connections on each of the modules to make sure that nothing had been cross connected.

“Okay Mike, this looks good, let’s power up the racks.”

Lt. Watson walked over to the power distribution panel and powered up the racks one at a time while Matt checked the startup sequence of each piece of gear. *This is going faster than I thought it would*, Matt thought to himself.

Jen and Ed walked out of the restaurant both of them feeling relaxed for the first time that day.

“Jen, this was a great idea, thanks for talking me into it,” he said.

“Ed you spend too much time cooped up in that office during the week. You have to get out once in a while, to maintain your perspective, even if it’s only for an hour.”

“Alec used to try to get me to break away for dinner once in a while; I should have listened to him.”

“I didn’t know Colonel Freeman that well but he sounds like he was a good friend,” she said sincerely.

They stopped at the Commander’s car and he opened the door for her.

“Yes, he was the best. I miss him Jen,” he paused a moment before continuing. “You know we always go through life and miss the chance to tell those we care about how we feel about

them, and then suddenly it's too late. I don't want that to happen to us."

He gathered her in his arms and continued, "I love you Jen. I knew Saturday night that I loved you, and I don't want another minute to go by without you knowing about it."

She placed her arms around his neck and kissed him deeply. When the kiss had ended she said, "I knew Ed, I could see it in your eyes, but I wanted you to tell me. And I've loved you for a while now."

"Is that why you've been bringing me the good coffee for the past month?" he asked smiling.

"I told you I had an ulterior motive. Surprised?"

"Nothing that you do surprises me anymore. So where do we go from here?"

"My place is closer," she said with an impish grin. "Assuming we don't have to go back to HQ tonight."

“There’s nothing we can do there until morning so your place it is.”

She climbed in the car and Ed walked around to get in the driver’s side. He closed the doors and started the vehicle.

“I’ll just call HQ and make sure everything...”

The phone rang, interrupting him.

“Straker.”

“Commander, It’s Ford. Weston has escaped sir.”

“What?” said Ed angrily.

“Natiroff assumes that she must have had help. There’s no way she could have escaped otherwise.”

“Lock down the complex. I’m on my way in.”

“What’s wrong Ed?” asked Jen very concerned.

“Weston has escaped. Don’t ask me how.”

“It had to be someone in security, Ed. No one else could have gotten her out.”

“That’s what I’m afraid of. Get your harness on,” he said as he pushed the vehicle to its limit.

Virginia found that she could not get to sleep even though she was dead tired so she got up and went back to the computer room to do some more work on the communications interface. Because she had immersed herself in the project to help assuage her grief she was almost done.

She soon buried herself in her work and did not notice the door open in the computer room.

“So look what we have here.”

Virginia jumped at the voice that she recognized all too well, Laura Weston. With her was Jeff Marks from security, both of them, holding pistols on her.

In the mid Atlantic communications dome, Matt Hewett finished configuring the last of the fiber switching systems. He had sent Mike Watson back to the ship with the unneeded tools and was packing up the portable computer when the service channel phone started ringing. Matt saw that it was the line to the UK and he switched to the correct channel and picked up the phone.

Matt listened as the phone rang at the other end.

Virginia was startled when the service channel phone rang. *That's impossible*, she thought.

“Answer it, Colonel,” said Marks. “I think you are smart enough to know what not to say.”

Virginia picked up the receiver toggling the off hook switch in one motion.

“Computer room,” she answered slowly.

“Virginia?”

“Oh my God, Matt! Is it really you!” she said, unable to contain herself.

Weston put her pistol in Ginny’s face and said, “Hang up, now!”

Virginia placed the receiver in the cradle leaving the circuit open.

“So Matt Hewett’s alive. No wonder our allies could not find the remains of Skydiver on the ocean floor. Very clever, it’s too bad he’s on the wrong side. That’s all right; we know where he is now. Skydiver has been hit once. It won’t survive another attack. And you have helped us kill him. Got any thoughts about that?” asked Laura smugly.

“Go to hell, you bitch,” said Ginny now getting angry.

“You should learn to be nicer, I could just kill you right now...”

“No wait,” said Marks. “I just communicated with our allies. They want her alive. They’re on

their way to intercept Skydiver now. They're never going to know what hit them. Wait here while I check the corridor."

Virginia watched as Marks left the room figuring this would be her best chance to get the drop on Weston.

"Weston and Marks, the two traitors," said Ginny distracting her and hoping Matt was still listening.

"Shut up, and let's go or I will kill you."

Weston approached her menacingly which was the reaction Ginny was hoping for. She spun around unexpectedly and tackled the woman into the wall. Weston dropped her pistol on the floor and Ginny dove for it. They both struggled over the weapon and Ginny broke free leveling the weapon at Weston. She heard a shot fired and felt a stabbing pain in her back as the world began to spin and she lost consciousness.

Marks had returned to witness the end of the struggle.

“What did you do that for Jeff? I thought they wanted her alive?”

“Relax Laura; it was only a tranquilizer round. She’ll be out for an hour and after that she’ll be too sick to put up a fight. I told you to watch out for her. Here, cuff her,” he said handing a pair of handcuffs to Weston.

She placed the cuffs on Ginny and retrieved her pistol. Marks and Weston picked her up and carried her out of the room

On the other end of the line Matt listened in horror as it had seemed like these two traitors had just killed his wife. He breathed a sigh of relief when Marks said that the round was a tranquilizer. When he heard them leave the room he hung up the phone and grabbed his gear running to the hatch.

Ed and Jen ran into to the studio entrance and down the corridor to Ed's first floor office. As soon as they were inside the office Jen pulled her Glock and chambered a round. Ed opened the cigar box and spoke into it.

“Straker.”

Voice print positive, Commander Straker. Security lockout level four in effect.

“Security override, authorization Straker Epsilon 1471295.”

Security override confirmed.

Straker activated the lift and it began to descend. When it reached the bottom the pair were met by two security men.

“Hold, sorry Commander.”

“That's all right, have you found them yet?” asked Ed.

“No sir, the Major and Colonel Grey are in control coordinating the search.”

“Very well, no one is to leave this complex.”

“Understood sir.”

Weston and Marks ducked into a storage room still holding Ginny captive.

“They’ve got the whole base locked down Jeff, what, do we do now?” asked Laura.

“They still don’t know I’m a double. I’ll go out and scout us a way out, while I’m at it I’ll mark this room as searched. That will buy us some time.”

“All right, I’ll stay here and keep an eye on the Colonel.”

Marks left the room and casually headed for the control room.

Matt quickly walked into the control room of Skydiver and picked up the handset, dialing up the 1MC.

“Attention all hands, this is the Captain. We will be under attack shortly by an unknown alien craft. All hands to battle stations. XO, I have the con.”

“Aye, aye sir, Captain has the con.”

“Helm break seal, all ahead one third, come to course zero two five,” Matt ordered, pausing briefly. “Once we’ve cleared the seamount make your depth six hundred feet. Fire control, rig tubes one and two fully ready. Sonar, keep a sharp lookout.”

“Aye, aye sir,” came the replies.

“Communications, break radio silence, get me SHADO HQ.”

“Aye, *aye* sir.”

In the control room of SHADO HQ, Captain Ford could hardly believe his ears.

“Commander, I have Skydiver Three for you sir.”

Straker walked over and flipped up the mic as he caught the look of relief on Jen’s face.

“This is Straker. Matt I’m pleased to hear your voice.”

“Likewise Commander, but I don’t have a lot of time. You have two traitors in your midst, Weston and Marks. They were in the main computer room as of ten minutes ago. Ed, they’ve got Ginny, they shot her with a trunk round.”

“All right Matt, don’t worry about your wife, the base is locked down and we’ll get to her. What’s your situation?”

“We were hit during the skirmish with the UFO but we’re still operational. The mission to the dome has been completed and we’re retuning to

port, but Marks knows where we are. He somehow communicated that information to the aliens.”

“All right Captain get your ship out of danger.”

“Understood sir, Skydiver Three out.”

Outside of the control room Marks heard his name mentioned. He quickly dashed to the elevator that led down to the lower level.

“Major Natiroff, pull the file on both Marks and Weston and find out what they have in common,” said Ed.

“Yes sir.”

“Colonel Grey, deactivate all security credentials for Jeff Marks.”

“Already done, Ed. So far he hasn’t tried to access anything with his pass code or access card.”

“Has anyone checked Colonel Lake’s quarters?” asked Ed.

“Yes sir, she wasn’t there. She’s been spending a lot of time down in the main computer room,” said Grey.

As Straker was getting the search organized Doctor Jackson walked into the control room.

“Commander Straker,” he said in his normal quiet demeanor.

“What is it Doctor?”

“I ran a blood DNA analysis on Laura Weston. Her DNA patterns have been altered.”

“How so?” asked Straker.

“The genes that control telepathy have been significantly enhanced. She is most likely communicating with the aliens in real time.”

“Is it control, or communications?”

“It’s hard to say, it could be either, or it could be both,” said Jackson.

“Can we pick it up on a level four security scan?”

“I’ve already ordered the blood samples of everyone in the control room to be checked. They are all clean Commander. We are about halfway through the screening of the HQ staff.”

“All right then, let Colonel Grey know if you run across any more compromised personnel. Watkins, Landers, come with me.”

“I’m coming too, Ed,” said Jen walking up to him.

“Jen I...”

“Listen Ed, she’s my friend too, “she said quietly. “Besides someone has to make sure you don’t get yourself killed.”

Ed locked eyes with her, the rest of the conversation was held without words, as he saw fierce determination in her emerald green eyes.

“All right, join the party,” he said. “Just keep your head low.”

“You too,” she replied.

Skydiver Three had just completed a thirty minute speed run to clear the area of the communications dome. The automatic self defense system was set to arm itself twenty minutes after the hatch was sealed.

“Do you think the dome will have enough firepower to defend against a type two craft skipper?” asked the XO.

“It should, said Matt. “The torpedoes have twice the capacity of the ones we carry and the dome is heavily armored. They’d have to hit it with something pretty big to knock it out. My guess is they’ll come after us first.”

“Were down to four torpedoes sir, I don’t know if we’d survive another attack.”

“In that case, it was a pleasure knowing you Brad,” Matt paused. “Look, there are a lot of

unknowns here. Let's not buy ourselves more trouble."

Brad Connors looked at his Captain with amazement.

"I don't know how you're doing it sir?"

"What's that Brad?"

"Your wife is being held at HQ, how are you dealing with that?"

"It's quite simple; I've done everything that I can do from here. Ed Straker told me they'd get to her and I trust him. It's all I can do, and in the meantime I have a job to do and that's to get this ship home safe," said Matt contemplatively.

"Con, sonar, new contact, designate sierra two eight."

"Here we go again," said Matt. "Helm; slow to five knots. Sonar; tell me about the contact."

“Distant submerged contact sir, range, twenty thousand yards, speed, thirty knots, course zero two six, bearing, two one zero true.”

“Very well, helm, come to course three five zero, make turns for three knots, sonar, deploy the towed array.”

“Aye, aye sir.”

“Fire control, give me weapons status.”

“Tubes one and two are rigged fully ready, still working on a firing solution, sir.”

“Very well,” said Matt.

Matt walked over to the chart table moved the marker for the enemy ship. The XO joined him at the table. “What’s your plan skipper?”

“He’s right about here,” said Matt pointing at the map. “We’re roughly three miles northwest of him and by the time he closes to within ten thousand yards we should be about here,” he pointed to another spot on the map. “As soon as

he gets to that point we're going to turn around and go quiet."

"Laying in wait; I like it skipper, do you think we can pull it off?"

"We had better, Brad. If we don't get the first shot in, we're done."

Marks walked into the room where Weston was still watching Virginia. She was still unconscious from the trunk.

"The gigs up," he said. "They know I've turned."

"Damn, now what do we do? Did you get to mark this room as searched?" asked Weston.

"I didn't bother; they'd only check it again. What about the ventilation shafts?"

"They only lead to the air processing center on this level and we'll never be able to pull Lake along with us."

“Let’s get to the armory. At least we’ll be able to hold them off until we can get some help,” said Marks.

“Help from where?”

“We have one more operative who has avoided detection.”

“How, they’re doing a level four security sweep. The blood work will turn up altered DNA, won’t it?” asked Weston.

“Yes it would, but this person has not been altered in any way, and she’s a hard core supporter of the cause.”

They walked out of the room and quickly made for the armory dragging Ginny with them. When they arrived Marks took an access card out of his pocket. Before he could insert it Weston stopped him.

“Wouldn’t have they deactivated your card?”

“Yes they would, but this won’t read as my card,” he said as he inserted it into the slot.

“How did you manage that?”

“Our other operative has a very high security clearance. Right now the log will show that Natiroff entered this room.”

“Who is she?” asked Weston.

“I’ll tell you when you need to know.”

They entered the room and locked the door from the inside.

Chapter 7:

“Sonar, do you have a classification yet?”

“No sir, it sounds like a type two but the power plant noise is different.”

“How so?” asked Matt now hovering over the shoulder of his sonar man.

“It’s lower in frequency sir, by a significant margin.”

Matt watched the waterfall display as the sounds from the contact painted a unique picture on the display.

“All right, let’s call this one a type three, start a recording on him, and make sure you bypass the filters. I want raw data on the disk.”

“Aye, sir.”

“I wonder what its capabilities are skipper?” asked the XO.

“I don’t know Brad, and I get the feeling I’m not going to want to know,” said Matt as he contemplated his next actions.

In the calm before the storm he had time to think about his pregnant wife and unborn child, both in danger in a place where they should have been safe. Trust and loyalty were traits that Matt held dear, as did his father and his father’s father. *If those traitorous bastards hurt*

one hair on Virginia's head I will kill them myself, my career in SHADO be damned!

Ed and Jen walked into the main computer room weapons drawn, they quickly checked the room finding it to be empty. Jen walked over to the programmers console and noticed Ginny's purse under the table.

“Ed?”

“What did you find?”

“Ginny's purse is still here, her pistol is still inside,” she said.

Straker pulled the antenna up on his radio, “Team one to team two.”

“Go ahead Commander.”

“The main computer room is clear. That leaves the air recycling plant and the armory. You two take the air plant, Colonel Wallace and I will check the armory.”

“Yes sir.”

“Come on Jen, let’s go.”

The two of them walked out of the computer room and down the corridor.

“They shouldn’t be able to get into the armory Ed.”

“No they shouldn’t. They also shouldn’t have passed the psychoanalytical tests either. Cover me Jen,” he said as they arrived at the door to the armory.

Straker punched in his access code but the door would not open. He tried his access card with the same results.

“My codes aren’t working,” he said.

“Let me try mine,” said Jen as they switched places.

Jen keyed in her access code and inserted her card to no avail. She looked at the Commander, “It must be locked from inside Ed.”

“So that means they’re in there.”

Straker went to grab the radio when a voice in the corridor stopped him.

“Not another move Commander, you too Colonel, both of you drop your weapons,” said the thickly accented female voice.

In the hallway stood Lt. Colonel Olga Karmarov, SHADO’s Director of security.

“Do as she says Jen,” said Ed as he dropped his weapon knowing that the woman holding the gun on them was his equal in marksmanship.

He watched as she pressed a button on a device she held and the door slid open.”

“Inside, both of you,” ordered Karmarov as she followed them in. “Weston, grab their weapons and close the door.”

“Yes ma’am.”

Once inside Weston locked the door and smiled smugly at the Commander.

“Sit down over there next to Colonel Lake.”

Jen and Ed sat down either side of Ginny who was recovering from the trunk round.

“Just one question Olga, why?” asked Straker, his voice full of contempt.

“It’s really quite simple,” said the older grey haired woman. “I worked for you for twelve years Commander, twelve years of blood sweat and tears. My marriage failed because of this place and I got nothing for it.”

“You’re not the only one who suffered personally; three other marriages were destroyed by the startup of SHADO, including mine. So you’ll forgive me if I don’t seem sympathetic,” said Straker angry now.

“That’s not the reason Straker. My ex-husband was a useless drunkard anyway. I was well rid of him. I never questioned your choice of Alec Freeman as second in command of SHADO. But when he retired you brought in Colonel Lake,

and even that wasn't so terrible, she was good at what she did. But your last choice I could not live with. Foster gave you nothing but grief from the time you recruited him, unlike some of us who followed orders without question."

"So this is all about revenge, and pay back. Let's sell out the entire planet because Olga Karmarov didn't get her due. You disgust me," said Straker.

"The aliens offered me something you couldn't, absolute power. When this is all over myself, and a select few will be living lavish lives of luxury while the rest will become organ donors. As for the three of you, the research director, the intelligence chief, and the commander of SHADO, you will serve your purpose quite nicely. And with Virginia being pregnant, well, she may end up on the dissection table, such a waste of knowledge."

Karmarov turned to Marks, “Jeff, tie up both, the Commander and Colonel Wallace. We can’t have them trying to escape now can we?”

On Skydiver Captain Hewett updated the sonar plot preparing to attack the, type three, alien craft. His greatest fear was he would not have enough torpedoes to finish the job.

“Sonar, tell me about the target.”

“Range has decreased to eleven thousand yards, sir. Speed is still thirty knots.”

The XO walked over to Matt and asked, “What do you think skipper?”

“I don’t think he knows we’re here. What puzzles me is his speed it’s been consistent since we picked him up. If he were chasing us he would be moving faster and stopping to listen occasionally.”

“Unless he was told where we were going to be at a certain time, and he’s trying arrive at the same time,” suggested the XO.

“What did we give HQ for our best silent speed Brad?”

The XO looked at the damage report, “Twenty knots sir.”

“Now it makes sense. He figures that he has a ten knot advantage in speed, and he’s assuming that we are running silent. Helm come to course one four zero.”

“Steering course one four zero, aye sir.”

“Sonar, can you hear him without the towed array?” asked Matt.

“Quite clearly sir.”

“Very well, retract the towed array. Fire control, warm up the weapons.”

“Warm up the weapons, aye, aye sir.”

The weapons officer activated the internal electronics and guidance systems of the torpedoes loaded in the tubes. They were now ready for launch.

“We’ll launch at ten thousand yards,” said Matt.

“Ginny are you all right?” asked Jen quietly.

“I will be, as soon as my head stops spinning,” she said ruefully.

Straker stared at the woman he once trusted with the security of SHADO, using his raw hatred of the traitor as a focus of concentration as he worked his bonds loose.

In the control room Major Natiroff brought in the files for Marks and Weston. He had a puzzled look on his face.

“What’s wrong Major?” asked Colonel Grey.

“This doesn’t make sense sir. Both Marks and Weston have discrepancies in the psychoanalytical profiles but they were both cleared by Lt. Colonel Karmarov.”

“That’s unusual isn’t it?”

“Yes sir, the Colonel almost never gets involved with the personnel aspect of the job. She normally leaves that to me.”

“These two aren’t new recruits, how long have their tests come up abnormal?” asked Grey.

“Marks gets screened quarterly as is done with all security personnel. Weston is in research so she is tested every six months. Both of their tests were fine until six weeks ago. Karmarov signed off on both of them citing mission stress as the cause. The computer didn’t kick it out because of her security rating.”

“Is Karmarov in today?”

“She’s supposed to be but she’s not in her office,” said Natiroff.

“Find her and have her brought to the control room.”

Detaining the Director of security was almost like detaining the Commander but Grey was in a foul mood and didn't care. He despised traitors as much as the Commander did and it was looking like Colonel Karmarov was a traitor.

“There is one other thing sir,” said Natiroff. “The access records show that the armory was entered by me about an hour ago.”

“Go on.”

“I haven't been to the armory today, at all.”

“That's impossible,” said Grey.

“Difficult, but not impossible, with the right clearance, you can have a card read as anyone.”

“Who has that type of authorization?”

“Commander Straker, Colonel Foster, and Lt. Colonel Karmarov, sir.”

“Where is the Commander?”

“He last reported in about fifteen minutes ago, he and Colonel Wallace were checking the armory.”

Grey punched up the access status on his station. The last entry was recorded over an hour ago by Major Natiroff.

“According to this no one has been in there other than the false record you reported.” Grey switched to the internal security channel. “Commander Straker, come in please, this is control....Commander are you receiving?”

Grey turned back to Natiroff, “Major, assemble a team that you can trust and get down to the armory. It’s my guess that the traitors are holed up in there.”

“Yes sir.”

“Con, sonar, contact changing course, new course three-three-zero, range ten thousand five

hundred yards, closing fast, speed, increased to forty knots.”

“He’s heading right for us skipper,” said the XO.

“I see that, fire control, launch torpedoes.”

“Aye sir, torpedoes away.”

“Helm, new course, one eight zero, fire control, reload both tubes,” said Matt as he concentrated on the plot.

“Course one eight zero, aye sir.

“Con, fire control, torpedoes running normally, time to arming one minute, tubes one and two reloaded sir.”

“Very well warm up the weapons, and prepare to fire.”

“Aye sir.”

“You’re not wasting any time are you?” asked the XO.

“I’m dealing with an enemy vessel of unknown capabilities and I have a damaged ship, no I’m not leaving anything to chance,” said Matt.

He walked over to the sonar station and watched the waterfall display knowing this was going to be a slugging match. The thought of his wife in danger crept into his thoughts, *Dear Lord, please keep her safe*, he prayed silently to himself.

Major Natiroff ran down the corridor of the lowest level of HQ closely followed by his squad of handpicked men. Vladimir Natiroff was extremely loyal to Commander Straker and the thought of him being betrayed by his immediate superior tasked him immensely.

True to the ideals he learned from Straker, Natiroff took point, determined to be the first one in during the planned assault. He positioned his men so they would be able to storm the room as soon as the door was open. One of his

men started to disassemble the access panel to cross wire the door mechanism.

Inside the armory the three traitors had their backs to their captives. Straker had managed to loosen the ropes that bound his hands. His Glock lay on the table no more than six feet away. He nudged Virginia and leaned to her speaking in a whisper.

“My hands are free so I’m going to make a grab for my gun, if the opportunity presents itself. When I do, I want you to hit the floor. Let Jen know, quietly.”

“All right, be careful Ed.”

While Ginny passed the message along, Ed watched the three traitors very carefully as he formulated a plan to get his gun. They would look back about every ten seconds or so which gave him more than enough time. He knew that security would be coming to check on them as

he and Jen had not checked in for a while and the opportunity might present itself.

“Con, sonar, target changing course, now heading zero one zero, speed, fifty five knots. Torpedoes are in pursuit, sir.”

“Very well,” said Matt. “Fire control launch second wave of torpedoes.”

“Aye, aye sir, torpedoes away, running normally.

The UFO had increased to its maximum speed, but the torpedoes chewed up the distance rapidly. Matt watched the traces merge on the waterfall display and the explosions were heard through the hull.

“Positive detonation sir.”

“Any breakup noises?” asked Matt.

“Negative sir, new contact, designate sierra two nine, bearing three five zero, speed, forty knots,

range, fourteen thousand yards, heading, one four zero.”

“Where the hell did he come from?” asked the XO.

“Sonar, is this an alien craft?” Matt quickly asked.

“It doesn’t read like one sir, single screw, plant-noise sounds like an *Alfa*, sir. He’s making holes in the water and he doesn’t care who knows about it.”

“Tell me about sierra two-eight sonar.”

“Target has reversed course, he’s now heading one eight zero. He’s still doing fifty knots. I have a classification on sierra two nine, Soviet *Alfa* class attack submarine, hull number two sir.”

“Helm come to course three four zero, make turns for ten knots. Fire control, tell me about my torpedoes.”

“Still running normally, they’ll go active in about fifteen seconds.”

Matt wanted to avoid the *Alfa* but he had no choice but to sail towards it to avoid the UFO. *If that Russian sub gets hit this will most assuredly cause an international incident, just great!*

The security tech working on the door gave his boss a nod, and Natiroff said quietly to his people, “Remember, Karmarov is a crack shot, if she is armed take her out, no hesitation, trust me comrades, she won’t.”

The security Major and his men took their positions.

“Get ready...three...two...one...now!”

The door was triggered open and Natiroff tossed in a flash-bang grenade, and he and his men charged the room weapons drawn.

Ed saw the grenade roll in and yelled, “Down!” as he covered his eyes. The rest seemed to

happen in slow motion as Jen, who had freed herself from the ropes, pushed Ginny to the floor landing on top of her hoping to protect her pregnant friend even if it cost her own life. Ed dove for the table grabbing the Glock as he fell to the floor and rolled gun now in his hand.

Marks and Weston were caught by the flash bang grenade and had been rendered immobile, but Karmarov had ducked behind a cabinet. She dropped three of the security team with her Sig including Natiroff. Very quickly she spun around and drew a bead on Wallace and Lake intending to kill the two women that Straker most cared about, a look of hatred and malevolence on her face.

Ed was on his belly now with his weapon drawn and with catlike reflexes he aimed his pistol at Olga Karmarov and fired a single round. His aim was true and the bullet hit her just above the eye line and she was thrown back, her own weapon going off in the process.

Ed quickly stood and made sure that security had the situation in hand before turning to his lover and his best friend.

“Jennifer, Virginia?”

“I’m all right Ed,” said Jen as she picked herself up. “Ginny?”

“Yeah, Jen, I’m all right, just sick to my stomach from the trunk.”

Ed and Jen helped her sit up and Ginny looked at her, “Jen you could have been killed.”

“Yeah, we both could have, but we weren’t.” She looked at Ed, “I thought Matt was a good shot.”

Straker stood up as the medical team arrived. Two members of the security team were being taken to the Medical Center and one to the morgue. Straker walked over to Schroeder and asked, “Who was the casualty, Doctor?”

“Landers sir.”

“And Natiroff?”

“A wounded shoulder, he won’t be playing tennis for a while, but he should make a full recovery.”

A commotion behind Ed grabbed his attention.

“...but I don’t want to go to Medical Center,” Ginny was saying arguing with a med staffer.

“Virginia!” Ed said sharply. “You’re going to Medical.”

“But Ed I...”

“No Colonel, that’s an order.”

That brought her up short, “Yes sir,” she said curtly.

“I made your husband a promise that I’d look after you,” Ed said much softer. “It’s a promise I intend to keep.”

Virginia looked up at him and smiled warmly. He turned to Jen who had stepped up to his side.

“And how about you?” he asked lovingly.

“I’m fine although I don’t think that woman missed by much,” she said looking at the graze mark on her jacket.

Ed paled when he realized how close he came to losing his new love. He collected her in his arms not even thinking about the repercussions that it might bring.

“Do you think we can trust security to keep quiet about this Ed?”

“I don’t think I care anymore Jen, I love you, and I’m not going to keep it a secret.”

They walked out of the armory with Ed’s hand in the small of her back.

Chapter 8:

The second round of torpedoes exploded thirty seconds after they went active. The explosions resounded through the hull of Skydiver.

“Positive detonation, sir, no breakup noises, target has slowed to twenty knots.”

“Helm, slow to three knots,” Matt ordered.

“Con, sonar, sierra two nine has just reduced speed to five knots.”

“All stop, quick quiet.”

Matt walked to the sonar suite and watched the waterfall display as the contacts faded to a thin line on the display.

“What do we do now skipper, we’re out of torpedoes?” asked the XO.

“I’m hoping that the UFO decides to make a break for it. With four torpedo hits it should be a sitting duck, especially if it goes airborne.”

“And if it doesn’t?”

“Then we’re going to have to bluff our way out of this one Brad.”

“Con, sonar, the *Alfa* just flooded his tubes.”

“What’s he up to?” asked the XO rhetorically.

Matt just shook his head; he had not expected the Russian Captain to do that. He walked over to the chart table looking the area over. There was nothing special on the charts about it, at least nothing that was marked.

“What are you thinking skipper?” the XO asked as he looked at the charts with his captain.

“There are only two reasons he would be flooding tubes, a live fire test, or he has orders to shoot something. They follow the same rules of engagement that the Americans do.”

“Wouldn’t a live fire test be published?”

“Not necessarily,” said Matt. “If they are testing something they want deniability for, they wouldn’t tell anyone about it, and it’s the same with the Americans. You know Brad there are those who think that’s what happened to the *USS Scorpion* a few years back. It’s rumored that they wandered into the middle of a live fire exercise being conducted by the Soviets. Of

course both side denied it, but that's to be expected."

"Con, sonar, high speed screws, torpedoes in the water, bearing three five zero."

"Left full rudder, all ahead flank, come to course two-two-zero."

"Aye, aye sir."

Skydiver quickly and noisily picked up speed as it left a massive knuckle in the water. With torpedoes in the water on an unknown course there was only one course of action. Be somewhere else, quickly.

"Con, sonar, torpedoes maintaining course, it looks like they're aiming for the UFO sir."

"Helm, slow to five knots, come to course three-zero-zero," ordered Matt. "Give me a time on target."

"Time on target for the *Alfa's* torpedoes is one minute sir, they just went active."

“Sonar, what’s the distance between the UFO and the *Alfa*?”

“Seven thousand yards sir, closing.”

The two torpedoes exploded a minute later the explosions being heard through the hull.

“Sonar did they get it?” asked Matt.

“Negative sir, and the UFO has changed course. It’s heading directly for the Russian submarine.”

Damn, thought Matt. If they take out that Russian sub they’ll be hell to pay!

“It’s too bad he’s not in the air sir,” said the XO. “Sky Three has more than enough firepower to take it out.”

Matt looked at the XO with an idea forming in his head, “Tell me about the weapons system on Sky Three.”

“Hypersonic missiles sir, they have a top speed of Mach eight, and fringe of space capability.”

“Can they be launched underwater?” asked Matt thinking out loud.

“It’s never been tried, hell sir, I don’t think it’s even been simulated.”

“Are you qualified in the cockpit Brad?”

“Yes sir.”

Matt considered the plan as it was a long shot but he had few options left. He looked at the XO and made his decision.

“Man the cockpit XO.”

“Aye, skipper. I’ll have to power up the APU’s and disconnect from shore power or the weapons failsafe will not disengage.”

“Very well,” said Matt as the XO walked to the access tube. “Helm, right standard rudder, come to course zero one zero, make turns for ten knots.”

“Aye sir.”

“Sonar, tell me about both contacts,” ordered Matt.

“Contact sierra two eight is at bearing zero three zero, speed, twenty knots, range four thousand yards. Contact sierra two nine is at bearing three five zero, speed, five knots, range five thousand yards.”

“Distance between targets?”

“Five thousand yards, skipper.”

“This is the XO, I’m in position skipper. Powering up APU’s and tracking system. I have target lock. I’m warming up the weapons.”

Brad Connors had powered up all of Sky Three’s systems and was in the process of disconnecting the umbilical connections between the Sky and Diver sections. When he finished opening the circuit breakers, he called over the intercom. “Sky Three is on its own power sir, ready to fire.”

“Commence firing XO.”

Connors triggered off four missiles that traveled through the water with surprising ease reaching a top speed of two hundred knots.

“Impact in five seconds, sir,” reported the sonar operator.

The four missiles impacted the UFO in quick succession the four explosions followed by a much larger secondary explosion.

“Con, sonar, shockwaves, shockwaves.”

“All hands, brace for impact!” Matt ordered as he grabbed the handrail.

The shockwave from the UFO impacted both the Russian *Alfa* and Skydiver Three. The deck tilted sharply as the submarine was tossed by the turbulence.

“Reactor scram sir!”

“Engage emergency power! Helm, turn us into the wave!” Matt shouted over the noise.

Although the shockwave only lasted about ten seconds it seemed like an eternity to Matt as the ship was tossed around by the shockwave.

“Helm, trim the ship, sonar, give me status on the two contacts,” ordered Matt.

“Contact sierra two eight has been destroyed. Sierra two nine is blowing tanks to surface.”

“XO this is the Captain, are you all right up there Brad?”

“Yes sir, I’m powering down Sky Three now.”

“Lieutenant Bell, get me a damage report.” Matt said to the reactor officer.

“Aye, aye sir.”

Matt walked to the access tube and helped the XO out.

“That was a one in a million shot Brad.”

“It was the big one sir. What the hell, begging the Captain’s pardon sir, was that thing carrying?”

“I don’t know I don’t think it was a nuke, but it felt like one.”

“Where’s the *Alfa*?” asked the XO.

“He’s up on the roof, I don’t know how much damage he took but at least he’s still afloat.”

The reactor officer came up to Matt and handed him a clipboard, “Damage report sir.”

“Thank you, Lieutenant.”

Matt looked over the report noting that despite being tossed around the sub was still seaworthy.

“How bad is it, skipper?” asked the XO.

“Mostly superficial, the reactor is being restarted. We’ll be underway in about thirty minutes,” he paused briefly. “Well I have an after action report to write. I’ll be in my quarters. XO you have the con.”

“Aye, aye sir.”

Ed and Jen walked into Virginia's room in the medical center. Ginny looked worried but smiled when she saw her two friends.

“Well how are we feeling?” asked Ed.

“I'd feel better if they would let me sleep in my own quarters.”

“She's feeling better,” Jen commented.

“Oh you be quiet,” said Ginny. “Have you heard from Matt?” she asked seriously.

“I just received his after action report. They destroyed the last UFO about an hour ago. It would appear that your husband used quite an unorthodox method of combat. When Peter Carlin sees this he's never going to stop hounding me about Matt transferring to Skydiver duty.”

“Like hell, he's coming home with me. So what did he do?”

“They were out of torpedoes so Matt used the missiles on Sky Three to destroy the UFO.”

Ginny shook her head, “Leave it to Matt to come up with something that crazy. When is he going to be in?”

“He has a scheduled arrival time of 18:00 tomorrow afternoon. By the way Dr. Schroeder has you slated to be released tomorrow morning, so if I were you I’d get a good night’s sleep so you can meet him at the pier tomorrow. Besides, maybe you’d like to give him these,” said Ed as he handed her a small box.

Virginia opened the box and looked inside. The box contained the SHADO underwater combat officer’s badge. She looked up at the Commander questioningly and concerned.

“You’re not considering assigning him to Skydiver duty are you?”

“No, I still want him to take over in New York, but Colonel Carlin and I both agree that he’s earned these. I always could use him in a pinch.”

“So much for having him home on weekends,” Ginny said with a grin.

“We should let Ginny get some sleep Ed,” said Jen.

“I suppose you’re right, good night Virginia, see you tomorrow.”

“Good night Ed, Jen.”

“Bye,” said Jen as they walked out.

Virginia watched her two friends walk out of the room arm in arm. She was happy that Ed had finally found someone to share his life with and she was glad that he was comfortable enough to allow his affection for Jen to show.

Her thoughts wandered to her husband and the tiff they had before he went on the mission. *Never go to sleep angry with each other, her mother had told her. Matt tried to apologize and I slammed the door in his face. The first thing I’m going to do when I see him is tell him how sorry I am.*

Ed looked at the clock on her nightstand and saw that it read 3:30 AM. She was still awake playfully caressing his chest with her finger as she lay next to him in the afterglow.

“You know Jen, we’ve got a busy day later, you should try to get some sleep,” he said tenderly.

“I know, but I want to savor this moment. I’ve dreamed of being in your arms ever since I was reassigned to HQ. Surprised?”

Ed turned and took her in his arms as he answered, “A little. I just don’t know what a beautiful young woman like you see’s in a broken down old war horse like me.”

“Hey, I happen to like horses, and you’re not that old and *certainly* not broken down,” she said with a wry grin.

As Ed played with her hair she looked deep in his eyes and asked, “It’s been a very long time hasn’t it?”

“Am I that much out of practice?”

“Oh no, not at all, it’s just that you were so passionate. It’s like you had all of this bottled up for years.”

“I keep forgetting how perceptive you are. Yes, it’s been a very long time,” he said wistfully.

“Well I’ll say this much for you Ed. You certainly haven’t forgotten how to sweep a girl away,” she said as she pulled him in for a long kiss as she rolled onto her back.

Ed looked at her when the kiss ended and said, “You know at this rate we’ll never get any sleep.”

“So let’s sleep in. I have to work second shift tomorrow and as the Commander don’t you have a little flexibility in setting your hours?” she asked with a bit of naughtiness in her voice.

“Come to think of it I don’t have anything scheduled for the morning...”

“Good,” she said pulling him back into a kiss.

Virginia stood at the pier of the underground SHADO naval base. Skydiver Three had surfaced and was on its way in to port. Standing with her was her best friend Gay Ellis Bradley and her husband Mark.

Mark Bradley was assigned to oversee the retrofit and repair of his ship and although it cut into his furlough time, he would be home with his wife at night.

“Gay, I hope this doesn’t mess up your plans with your husband,” Ginny said to her.

“The repairs are going to take at least a week into his patrol so I’ll be at sea before he is.”

Ginny looked out at the tunnel and could make out the image of the SHADO submarine as it approached. “Here they come!” she said having trouble containing her excitement.

Skydiver Three entered the tunnel and emerged a minute later in the large pool inside the base.

Ginny saw Matt on the bridge and although she couldn't hear him, she knew he was giving orders to dock the submarine. Ginny saw a broom tied to the periscope of the ship and she looked at Mark, "What is the significance of the broom?"

"It means your husband knows naval tradition. The broom indicates a clean sweep, that is, Skydiver Three destroyed every target that it engaged. It is also used to signify a successful mission."

"That figures, Matt never ceases to amaze me with the bits of trivia he's aware of. He shocked the hell out of me when Ed asked us about Operation Quicksilver."

"Oh, Patton and FUSAG, connected with Operation Fortitude," said Mark.

"Mark is a military history buff as well," said Gay.

Ginny leaned close to Gay saying, “That’s the trouble with men, they’re all smartasses.”

“I heard that,” said Mark as the two women shared a laugh.

Skydiver Three was alongside the pier now and Ginny could hear her husband’s voice above the engines. The confidence that he seemed to exude filled her with pride. The dock hands had tossed the lines to the men on the deck of the sub and the lines were winched in bringing the sub to rest at the pier. At the same time the engines on Skydiver went quiet and an eerie silence filled the cavern.

Ginny could hear Matt clearly now as he continued giving the docking orders.

“Switch to shore power and local communications.”

“Aye, aye sir.”

“Shutdown the reactor.”

“Reactor shutdown and cooling sir.”

“Very well, prepare for change of command.”

The boson pulled the pipes from his pocket and played a three note whistle as Mark Bradley walked up the gangplank to the bridge.

“Permission to come aboard sir?” asked Bradley.

“Permission granted. Nice to see you again Mark,” said Matt as the two men shook hands.

“You too Matt, I heard you did quite well out there. The Colonel is quite impressed.”

“I’d have done better if Bob Patterson had survived,” Matt said wistfully. “It was a damned shame. He was a good man.” He shook his head thinking of Patterson’s wife and family.

“I know it, but Bob would have been proud of the way you finished the mission.”

Captain Mark Bradley stood at attention and Matt followed suit.

“Captain Hewett, I relieve you sir,” Mark said formally.

“I stand relieved. Good hunting Captain Bradley,” said Matt as he shook his hand.

Matt turned on his heel and proceeded to walk down the gangplank and Virginia ran up meeting him halfway almost knocking him over as she held him for dear life.

“I think I was missed,” said Matt as his wife smothered him with kisses.

“Whatever gave you that idea?” she asked her eyes filling with tears.

“Virginia, I am so sorry that I...”

“No,” she cut him off firmly. “I’m the one who needs to apologize. You tried on the plane and I wouldn’t accept it. And then I thought I had lost you forever. What’s worse, was me pulling rank on you, I’ll never forgive myself for...”

“Now hold it a minute, if I can forgive you the least you can do, is forgive yourself. Besides,

you were right. I had no business criticizing Ed for a decision he felt was necessary to make. I found that out this week. The hardest thing I've ever had to do was allow all of you to think we had been sunk. And Gin I've got to tell you I almost lost it when I thought Marks had killed you."

"Well we can make up to each other when we get home tonight. Our flight will leave as soon as we are aboard. I have all our stuff packed and Gay is taking us right to the airport. By the way, I have something for you, but don't get any ideas about transferring," she said as she pulled the box from her jacket.

"What's this?"

Ginny just grinned as she handed him the box. Matt opened it and saw the gold officer's underwater combat badge. "Whose idea was this?"

"Here, let me," she said ignoring the question.

Ginny pinned the badge to his Skydiver uniform and looked him over nodding her approval.

“Colonel Carlin said that you earned it and Ed approved. I already told Peter he couldn’t have you but he’s persistent you know.”

“Well I don’t know Gin,” Matt began with a grin. “Commanding Skydiver does have certain...”

“Don’t you even think about it!” she said in a tone that would brook no argument, but Matt was grinning ear to ear. “You’re playing me, aren’t you?” she finished.

“Virginia, you’re so easy to spin up,” he said laughing now.

“Brat!” she said as she hugged him.

They walked down the gangplank to where Gay was waiting for them. Matt picked up his bag and the three of them walked to the car.

Epilogue:

The Commander listened carefully as Captain Hewett surmised his impressions of the alien underwater tactics.

“Commander, the Skydiver fleet is ill equipped to deal with the threat of underwater combat with UFOs without adding some type of standoff ASW capability,” said Matt emphatically.

Straker sat back in his chair considering the problem.

“I take it that you have a solution Captain?” he asked pointedly.

“I do Commander. The US Navy is currently developing a standoff weapon the UUM-125, better known as the Sea-Lance missile,” said Matt confidently. “It has two variants, the A model which carries a W89 thermonuclear depth charge, or the B model which carries a

Mk-50 homing torpedo. In our application the B model would be the weapon of choice.”

“So are you suggesting that SHADO develop its own version of the weapon?”

“No sir. Why reinvent the wheel? Although the SHADO research section could probably help the subcontractor solve some of the guidance problems that have stalled the project. I’m sure the information could be passed through certain channels. It won’t be the first black project that the navy has undertaken.”

Ed regarded the image of Matt on the video screen and considered the option.

“I’ll discuss this with General Henderson. Anything else on the engagements that you wish to bring up?” asked Ed.

“You may want to look at my impression of the first attack; it’s on page ten of my report. If you want to discuss it, I would suggest we wait until

I'm back in New York and on a secure line, sir," said Matt somewhat pensively.

"Very well, I'll call if I have any questions. Straker out."

Matt closed the connection with HQ and sat back in the seat. The SST was almost halfway across the Atlantic and he and his wife would be home in just a couple of hours.

He felt her eyes on him and he looked over at her seeing her crooked grin as she looked at him with upturned eyes, a lock of her hair partially covering the brow of her right eye. Her grin grew into a warm smile as he gazed into her eyes.

"You handled the briefing pretty well," she said admirably.

"Yeah, but I'll be talking to him again, probably as soon as we get home."

"Why?"

Matt dug into his brief case and pulled out the copy of his patrol report and handed it to his wife. “Read page ten,” he said as he looked out the window, lost in thought.

Virginia quickly flipped to the page her husband had indicated and scanned his narrative. About three quarters of the way down the page she stopped and looked at him in shock. “Time travel?” she asked incredulously.

“Gin, it’s the only thing that makes sense. We know that the aliens can control time by virtue of the bypass method they use in achieving and surpassing the speed of light. How much harder would it be for them to utilize it in combat?” he asked.

“Are you sure that it didn’t just duck into an underwater valley that shielded it from the sonar?”

Matt shook his head, “You would have seen a gradual fade in the signal as it was shadowed from our sensors. No this was an abrupt loss of

contact. One microsecond it was there, the next, it was gone.”

Ginny just lowered her eyes; Matt was no fool, and he had figured this out. For her to continue to deny it would only insult his intelligence.

“You know something that you’re not telling me, don’t you?” asked Matt quietly.

She just looked away nodding her head and Matt could see tears forming in her eyes. He smiled at her and said, “Don’t worry; I’m not going to repeat the mistake I made on the way over here. I can understand why this would be classified even within the organization.”

“You’re not angry with me?” she asked clearly relieved.

“I have no reason to be angry with you. Security comes with the territory and I learned that lesson all too well on Skydiver. You don’t know how much it killed me to let you believe that I was dead,” Matt said tenderly. “Honey I never

should have gotten upset with you on the way here and I shouldn't have questioned Ed's judgment."

Virginia turned and reached for him holding him tightly as she let herself have the emotional release that she so desperately needed.

Ed thumbed through the patrol report that Matt had written and found the page that had been mentioned on the call and he shook his head knowingly when he saw the part speculating time travel being used as a weapon. Matt's report was only one of a handful that had undisputable evidence of temporal manipulation being used in combat. The first incident, codenamed Timelash, where the aliens had used time in that manner still gave him nightmares. Ed knew it was inevitable that the aliens would try this again.

He reached for the intercom, "Keith, would you have Colonel Wallace come in here please?"

“Right away sir,” said Captain Ford.

A few minutes later Jen came into the office and said, “You wanted to see me Ed?”

“Yes, have a seat and read this,” he said.

Jen sat in the corner seat next to his desk and read the section of the report Ed had shown her. When she finished reading she looked up at him with a worried look. “What are you going to do Ed?”

“Matt’s already figured out three quarters of this on his own. I’m going to bring him the rest of the way,” he said.

“You’re clearing him for Omega?” she asked surprised.

“Yes, unless you can think of a reason I shouldn’t.”

“No, I didn’t mean it like that, it’s just I’m surprised you would confer that level of clearance to a new member of SHADO,” she said.

“Well normally I wouldn’t,” said Ed. “But Matt is a unique case. In a very short period of time he’s become a valued asset to this organization. And you know that I trust his wife without reservation. Virginia is a very good judge of character, you should know that.”

Jen considered that, as it was Ginny’s recommendation that moved her career along the path it had taken, eventually landing her on the command team.

“Matt will be the only Omega cleared operative under the rank of Lt. Colonel,” she said.

“True, but that’s only a temporary situation. In less than six months he’ll be running the New York tracking center.”

“Well Ginny will be happy,” said Jen remembering the conversation they had earlier. “Did you need me for anything else Ed?” she asked as was getting up.

He looked up at her and asked, “My place tonight? I’d like to make dinner for you if that’s all right?”

“I think I’d like that. See you later,” she said smiling as she walked out of the office.

Ed leaned back in his chair as he watched her walk back to her station. Jen had become a lifeline in his sea of turmoil and he had almost forgotten what it meant to be cared for. *I should have listened to Alec years ago*, he thought as he remembered something his friend had told him. *Take time to smell the roses.*

Matt Hewett held his wife close in the tender moments following their impassioned encounter. As he lay on his back staring up at the canopy covering the bed he was gently stroking her hair and caressing her shoulders as she lay snuggled next to him.

On the way home from the airport she had begged him to stop to get a jar of sour pickles and a chocolate fudge sundae. Matt was somewhat amused at that particular combination but remembering his dad telling him about the cravings that his mom had during pregnancy; he decided it wasn't all that strange.

As he looked up, Ginny reached over and gently drew in into a kiss and then asked, "You're a million miles away, what's wrong?"

He turned to look at her and smiled, "You haven't known me long enough to know me this well."

"You're really not all that hard to figure out after a fashion. So, talk to me. What's bothering you?"

He let out a sigh and turned to face her, "I wasn't at all ready for the scope of what Ed told me today." Straker had called and left a message on the secure line that had been installed last

week. Matt had been visibly shaken by the information that Ed shared with him.

“You mean Omega? Tell me about it. I still have nightmares about the first incident. At least now I have someone I can talk to about them,” said Ginny. “Why do you think I woke up crying in the middle of the night last week?”

“That incident was two years ago wasn’t it?”

“I remember it like it was yesterday, I almost wish that the amnesia had been permanent,” she said shaking her head. “I’m sorry I couldn’t tell you then what the dream was really about.”

“That’s all right; I feel the same way about having to let you believe I was dead. You don’t have any idea how hard that was Gin. I know how I felt when Moonbase was attacked last month and how much hell I went through not knowing if you were dead or alive. It didn’t make it any easier knowing how we left things on the way to London.”

“That was hard,” she said as she wiped a tear from her eye. “I was so mad at Ed for not letting me say goodbye. I think the hardest thing of all was reading your last letter. Matt it was absolutely beautiful, especially the intimate parts where you described the night we...well you know. It gave me goose bumps and I felt like such a crumb not being able to tell you how sorry I was.”

Matt pulled her closer and said, “I think you did one hell of a job tonight.”

“Who says I’m finished,” she said grinning impishly.

“I think I like the sound of this, it’s a good thing we came to bed early,” he paused. “Hey what do you say we take the plane up to Boston next weekend and walk through Quincy Market and have dinner at that outdoor Italian place we went to the day we met?”

“That sounds so romantic, a repeat of our first date. Do you think we can get tickets to see the Boston Pops that night?” she asked hopefully.

“I don’t see why not, I’ll call tomorrow and set it up, assuming I survive tonight,” he said with a grin.

“I’ll go easy on you. I need to keep you around awhile.” She put her hand on his face and looked him deep in the eyes. “I love you Matt, don’t ever forget that.”

He looked in his wife’s blue grey eyes seeing her love for him overflowing. “I won’t, but don’t you forget I love you just as much Gin.”

She pulled him in for a long kiss that turned into the beginnings of something better, neither one of them getting much sleep that night.

END