

Love Never Fails

A UFO Story

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Based on the Characters and series created by
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Historian's Note: The events depicted here take place in late 1993 about seven years after Matters of the Heart, and in middle of 2030 about fifty years after SHADO became fully operational.

This story is dedicated to the memory of our beloved feline companion “Doco” who left this world on September 25, 2010.

Prologue:

June 1, 2030:

The supreme sovereign walked down the white featureless corridor of the main planetary administration building. Being one of the last of his kind to enjoy corporeal existence, he savored the moments as he knew that they would be short lived in light of recent events. He stopped about halfway down the hall and a section of the wall dematerialized allowing him access to the chamber of knowledge.

This room was bathed in soft illumination and was furnished with a single chair. He sat in the chair thinking of how even gender had no real meaning in this sterile dying society. As he opened his mind the far wall transformed from

a blank surface to a complex tactical display showing the entire planet's space born assets, what few were left.

The mother ship had been located and destroyed in the last battle, by the inhabitants of the third planet in the Sol system through their defense organization known as SHADO. The humans had found a way to circumvent the time incursion technology and utterly defeated the invasion force sent against them.

With the destruction of the mother-ship, very few soldiers remained, and their race seemed doomed to a non corporeal existence. Without bodies to manipulate technology, they would never leave their world again.

The sovereign considered all of the humans who had held the position of SHADO Commander including the first and most dangerous. He was only now beginning to grasp the concept of fierce determination that drove these six people, Edward Straker, Paul Foster, Peter Carlin, Nina

Barry, Alec Foster, and Sara Foster. It was Sara Foster's breakthrough in temporal technology that allowed SHADO to defeat the planetary forces.

All of these humans were at one time or another, targeted by the forces and, in fifty Earth years, they had managed to eliminate only one of them. *That was the problem all along*, the sovereign considered. The Commanders of SHADO were too well protected and were not easy targets. It was evident that the forces needed to focus their efforts elsewhere.

The members of the knowledge commune had been debating for almost an earth minute and the sovereign joined the mind tree. As he absorbed the thoughts of the others, it was being suggested that the remaining time-ship and crew be used to eliminate Sara Foster, the current Commander of SHADO. The incursion was simulated and its results were

indeterminate. Another suggestion of eliminating her parents was brought forward and that scenario was simulated. This time the results were immediate and positive, and the sovereign was convinced that they had found the answer. *Order our last remaining ships to carry out the temporal incursion. The targets will be together and isolated on the Earth date October 17, 1993.*

On the wall appeared two images a woman with shoulder length ash blonde hair, and a man whose short cropped dark blonde hair was speckled with grey. The names underneath were unnecessary as the sovereign knew them all too well.

June 10, 2030 17:00Z

SHADO HQ:

Seated at the command console, Colonel David Ford watched the tactical display as the OIC for

the mid-watch. It had been very quiet since the last major battle, just over a month ago and the SID network had not reported so much as a sighting.

Commander Foster had told him that she was convinced the recent action was a last ditch effort by the aliens, as the mother ship had closed within the orbit of Jupiter. This action had allowed Moonbase to launch its FTL missiles and destroy the ship. The smaller craft had made kamikaze style attacks on both Moonbase and the satellites but they only lost one SID, the original one that had been parked at L5 for over fifty years.

General Barry had promised to replace the aging satellite later this year and Commander Foster was still hoping that the last battle was the turning point in the fifty year old war. *SHADO had lost too many good people over the years, including Sara's predecessor and husband, he thought.*

Ford considered his CO, as she bore a striking resemblance to her mother, and at forty three she could still turn every head in the room. It was tragic that her husband Alec had been murdered by the aliens just over a year ago. But Sara Foster had proven that General Barry had chosen wisely and she carried on the work of her departed husband with the tenacity, and bloody-mindedness that had made the first SHADO Commander a legend.

The silence was broken when the SID network unexpectedly came to life, **Red alert, red alert, temporal incursion, force five.**

Watching the readout, Ford's eyes went wide as he saw the time force build. He keyed his mic, "Condition red, condition red, temporal incursion, force five, activate temporal shielding, Commander Foster to control."

Throughout the base the alert klaxon wailed capturing the attention of everyone as they rushed to their stations. Members of the

security force raced down the corridors with weapons drawn.

“Seal the base,” said Foster as she jogged into the control room. “And kill that alarm.” She hurried to the command console, “David, what the hell is going on?”

“The largest temporal incursion I’ve ever seen, Sara,” he said just above a whisper.

Commander Foster watched the readouts, as the temporal energy levels went off the scale. Whatever had been changed in the past was having a cataclysmic effect on the space-time continuum.

“Lt. Geddes, warn Moonbase,” ordered the Commander. “David, have you found the epicenter?”

Ford punched up the time data, “It looks like it originated somewhere in the White mountains of New Hampshire. The date is coming up now.”

Foster and Ford watched the time display scroll and begin to settle, *October 17, 1993*.

For some reason that date rang a bell but Sara could not place it. As they watched the monitors, the scene outside changed from a serene June day to an apocalyptic hell. Half of the monitors went dead and those that worked showed the studio in shambles. Foster counted at least four alien craft on one monitor.

“I want the temporal shielding placed on absolute power priority and institute immediate rationing of all consumables as of five minutes ago. I want the time team to analyze this event and I want that report on my desk in thirty minutes.”

“Yes ma’am,” said Ford.

What the hell did they just figure out? Foster asked herself as she walked back to her office.

Chapter 1:

October 14, 1993:

In the quiet rural neighborhood in western Connecticut, Matt and Virginia were entertaining guests from across the pond.

“Fifteen two, and a pair makes four,” said the Commander as he looked at his hand in disgust.

Seated next to him at their dining room table Matt Hewett snickered as he looked to his wife, “Your turn Gin, I think we’ve got them on the run this time.”

Commander Straker’s prowess at both chess and cribbage was legendary but tonight was proving not to be his night.

Ed and Matt had played two games of chess earlier in the day and each of them had a win. They were going to play a tiebreaking game later that weekend. The four handed crib game was being played as husband and wife partners.

“Okay let’s see,” said Ginny as she looked at her hand. “Fifteen two, fifteen four, fifteen six, that’s all I see.”

Straker looked her hand over to see if he could grab any unclaimed points, something he was well known for. But there were none to be had.

Virginia pegged her points on the board bringing the two teams to a dead heat heading down the home stretch.

“Jen, I hope you can bail us out, honey,” Ed said to his wife.

Jennifer Wallace Straker shook her head, “It doesn’t look good Ed. I’ve got a run for three and his nobs for a total of four, and it’s their crib.”

Sitting in the chair to the right of her father sat six year old Sara Hewett. She had taken a keen interest in the game when her parents started playing it again a few months back. Matt had watched his father and grandfather play on

Saturday mornings when he was a mere lad of six and it was a treat to share this childhood memory with his daughter.

Matt also saw this as an opportunity for Sara to polish her math skills as he and Ginny had opted to home school. Sara was already reading at third grade level and had her multiplication tables down pat. The young girl had also taken a liking to astronomy and the small family spent many nights out back with the telescope watching the heavens.

He turned to his daughter and said, “Do you want to count the hand, pumpkin?”

“Sure Daddy,” she said as she took the cards and counted, “Fifteen two, fifteen four. That’s all.”

“Aw how cute,” said Jen.

“Sorry Ed, she never misses any points,” Ginny said with a grin.

“Her mother trained her well,” he retorted.

“Let’s see what’s in our crib,” said Matt, as he picked up the hand and showed it to Sara. “What do you think honey, do we have enough to beat them?”

Sara nodded her head and said with a giggle, “Go for it Daddy.”

Matt turned to his wife, “All right Gin, we need seven points to win, fifteen two, and trips for six, makes eight.” He moved the peg home with one point to spare.

“Boy was that close,” said Jen. “Are you two up for a rematch?”

“I always game for a rematch, but first I think it’s time for someone to get to bed,” he said as he gave his daughter a wink.

“Aw Daddy, do I have to?”

“Now your mother and I let you stay up an extra hour to see your Aunt Jen and Uncle Ed. But you’ve got a busy day tomorrow. You don’t want to be tired, do you?”

She shook her head as she answered, “I guess not.”

Sara climbed off the chair and went to hug Jen.

“Good night Auntie Jen.”

“Good night sweetie,” said Jen as she hugged her Godchild.

Sara hugged her mother who said, “I’ll be up in just a bit, honey.”

She had saved her biggest hug for her favorite, “I love you Uncle Ed.”

“Sweet dreams, I love you too,” he said, his voice kind and gentle.

Jen and the Commander had married just a few weeks before Virginia gave birth to Sara. Ginny approached the newlyweds at the reception and asked them to be their child’s Godparents. Matt was somewhat surprised when Ed agreed, knowing the fate of Ed’s own son. He was still amazed at the gentleness in the Commander’s demeanor when he was around Sara. It was a

complete contrast to the Ed Straker that ran SHADO. And for some reason his daughter had taken to him early on. *I was very close to my Godparents*, he thought as he walked his daughter up the stairs to her bedroom.

When she had finished her prayers, Sara climbed into her bed and Matt sat down on the side next to her.

“You wanted to talk to me about something sweetheart?”

Matt watched as his daughter nodded, seeing by the look on her face, that this was serious.

“What’s wrong, Sara?”

“Remember what you and Mommy told me yesterday about Uncle Patrick and Aunt Debbie?”

“I do, sweetheart,” said Matt as he remembered the painful conversation with his brother, earlier that week, informing him that he and his

wife were splitting up. The news was a shock for both families and he still had trouble believing it.

“Will that ever happen to you and Mommy?” she asked like she was frightened to hear the answer.

Matt considered his answer quite carefully, “Your mother and I love each other very much, and we’ve never considered separating, so no, I don’t see that ever happening. But if it that ever were to happen, I want you to remember something. We would both love you just as much as we do today.”

“Do you promise Daddy?”

“Cross my heart, pumpkin,” he said.

He could see that she was still not sure of something and he pressed on, “Anything else on your mind?”

“I thought love never fails, Daddy?”

“True love never does honey, but none of us are perfect. People do make mistakes,” he said being honest, yet comforting.

“Not even you and Mommy?”

Matt chuckled at that, “No sweetheart, not even me and Mommy.”

The young girl seemed to ponder this new information for a moment, and then asked, “Daddy, I heard you and Mommy yelling at each other last night. Why were you fighting?”

Matt was caught off guard as he thought that Sara was sleeping while he and Gin had gotten into a tiff over the scheduled shakedown cruise of the new SHADO fast attack sub. Colonel Carlin had asked him to Captain the sub for the two week shakedown and he agreed without discussing it with Ginny. Needless to say, that decision was not well received.

“Well Sara, your Daddy made a mistake by agreeing to something, without talking to

Mommy first, and she was very upset about it. But when two people are trying to work out a problem together it's not really fighting, it's talking through the problem. This isn't the first heated discussion that your mother and I have had and it won't be the last. But it's probably the first one that you have noticed. Sara, we never attack each other, we attack the problem. Do you understand what I'm saying?"

"I think so Daddy, I just wanted to make sure you and Mommy still love each other," she said.

"Don't worry sweetheart, of course we do. Mommy and I will be all right, he said convincingly.

"Daddy, would you read the story about how love never fails for me again?"

"Of course I will," he said as he reached for the book on the nightstand. He thumbed through it and found the passage he was looking for.

Matt cleared his throat and began to read, “Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud, it is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. Love never fails.”

As Matt finished the passage, Virginia came into the room. He could see her wiping a tear from her eye as she sat next to him on the other side of the bed and leaned over to kiss Sara.

“I heard some of what you and Daddy were talking about honey. I don’t want you to worry; I don’t ever plan on leaving your father, even if he does make a mistake every now and then,” she said teasingly as she kissed her husband.

Matt and Virginia had always been openly affectionate to each other in front of their daughter, wanting her to know that she was in a

loving and caring household. They got up from the bed and he kissed his daughter goodnight.

“I already know who I’m going to marry,” said the six year old girl.

“You do?” asked her mother feigning surprise.

“Yeah, Alec Foster, he already asked me but he said Daddy told him we had to wait until we are older.”

Matt was sure that Paul had put his son up to that as a practical joke. The seven year old boy had approached him and asked him very formally for his daughter’s hand in marriage. The scene had turned into a classic comic moment and Jane Foster had it on videotape. *But the two children did get along very well and it wouldn’t be the first time that childhood sweethearts married,* he thought, having found that out firsthand.

“That’s right,” said Matt. “I’ll tell you the same thing I told him, if the two of you feel the same

way when you turn eighteen, I'll give you my blessings, but not until then."

"That's a long time from now, but I guess I can wait," said Sara, resigned to the fact.

"Life isn't a race, sweetheart," said Ginny. "That day is only twelve years away. It may seem like a lot now but it will be here before you know it. And who knows, a lot can change between now and then. You may meet someone else you like better."

"Maybe, but I don't think so," she said showing some of her mother's stubbornness. "Goodnight Mommy, goodnight Daddy."

"Sweet dreams honey, they said as they walked out.

When they reached the top of the stairway Ginny turned and drew Matt in for a long passionate kiss.

"What was that for?" he asked when the kiss had ended.

“You just made some very big deposits in the love bank, that’s just a taste of the interest,” she said in a very seductive voice.

“I think I like the sound of this,” he said. “You know Gin, twelve years really isn’t that far away, and the day I do walk her down the aisle, I’m going to be balling like a baby.”

“That makes two of us; I’ll bring extra tissues to the church. Wouldn’t that be something, Alec and Sara Foster, just think I was only two years older than she is now when I met you,” said Virginia.

“You’re right, I hadn’t thought about that. But it’s a good thing that Jane is pretty strict, at least we don’t have to worry about Alec taking after his old man,” Matt said with a grin as they walked down the stairs.

“Be nice Matt,” she said chiding him.

Virginia went into the kitchen to grab a fresh pot of coffee while Matt sat back down at the

table. Ed had started to deal the cards for another game when the phone rang. "I'll get it," he said as he reached for the set behind him. Matt and Virginia had installed two line telephones throughout the house and he noticed that it was the direct line to the New York tracking station. *Uh oh*, he thought.

"Colonel Hewett," he answered as the mention of rank immediately got his guests attention.

"Major Richardson, sir. Our tracking sensors picked up something inbound, just off the Maine coast but we weren't able to get a confirmation. It was moving at over Mach 5," said the duty officer.

"I assume that you've checked for malfunctions?" asked Matt.

"Yes sir. There's no indication of a problem and whatever the object was, it's gone now," said Richardson.

“Standby,” said Matt as he turned to the Commander. “New York tracking picked something up, but they lost it before they could verify. It was moving at over Mach 5.”

“Where?” asked Straker suddenly very concerned.

“Off the coast of Maine, heading inland,” said Matt.

The two men regarded each other for a moment. SHADO had been plagued by numerous false alarms over the past month. None of the tracking experts had been able to pin down the problem and jumping to full alert every few days for no reason was getting old.

“Skydiver 5 is a few hundred miles off the coast. Shall we have Gay take a look?” asked Matt.

He could see the Commander analyzing the problem. His answer was quick and decisive.

“Yes, have her search from Nova Scotia to New York using the tachyon scanner.”

Matt relayed the orders to the duty officer and hung the phone up when he was finished. Each time a recon patrol was sent out after one of these events it came up empty with the exception of residual tachyon particles. *We are missing something here*, he thought to himself.

Virginia came into the room with the coffee serving tray and she noticed the grim expression on her husband's face.

“What did I miss?” she asked, concerned.

“Another sensor ghost,” said Matt as he helped his wife by pouring the coffee for everyone. “This is the tenth time this month.”

“I wouldn't be so concerned if it wasn't for the residual tachyon radiation,” said Ed as they each considered the problem. “If this was a real incursion into our space we should be able to detect them on the ground.”

“Unless they have developed a way to shield their power system,” added Jen. “What do you think Ginny?”

“It’s theoretically possible,” she said as she absently stirred her coffee. “The system would require a tremendous amount of power but that’s never been a problem for the aliens as the quantum singularity used in their power system has a virtually limitless capacity. But we still should see a tachyon burst if they broach our continuum.”

The crib game had taken a back seat to the technical discussion as the four members of the command staff brainstormed the problem. SHADO had not dealt with an undetected incursion since the upgrades to the SID network nearly eight years ago, but Matt knew that these recent events had the Commander worried. He also knew it was only a matter of time before the aliens perfected the technique of time travel combat having seen it used firsthand during his

mission to the mid-Atlantic communications dome.

The research facilities had been working on a way to detect and map temporal incursions but the idea was still theoretical. It could take years to develop his wife told him one night. Matt had been working on his Masters in Applied Mathematics and he had completed the program only a couple of months ago. His degree had earned him a promotion to full Colonel and he often joked about not having to salute his wife anymore as being a line officer he now outranked her. One night he was helping her with the temporal calculations and even with an advanced mathematics background he found the work extremely complex. Matt still found himself in awe of his wife's abilities, even after seven years of marriage, raising a daughter, and working together.

Forty minutes later the phone rang and the New York tracking center reported that Sky five had

swept the area and declared it clean. With nothing else to go on Ed ordered a return to Condition Green and Sky 5 was ordered to redock with its Diver section.

Ed and Jen won the second game and Ginny stood to bring the serving tray into the kitchen. “Does anyone want more coffee?” she asked.

“I’m all set Virginia. Dr. Jackson has been getting on me about my coffee intake again,” said Ed.

“He’s just trying to keep you healthy,” she retorted. “Jen?”

“No thanks, Ginny.”

“What about you handsome,” Virginia said to her husband.

“No sense making another pot just for me. I’m assuming you’re going to put on tea water?”

“Of course,” she said with a grin.

“I could go for a cup of Earl Grey, if you don’t mind.”

While she was in the kitchen the phone rang again and Matt was surprised to see it was the first line, considering the hour. From the kitchen his wife called, “I’ve got it.”

“Hello,” she said as she picked up the line.

“Ginny, it’s Sandy,” said the distraught voice on the other end.

“My God Sandy, you sound terrible. What’s wrong?” asked Virginia very concerned.

“Is Matt there with you?” she asked.

“Yes, he’s here.”

“I need to talk to both of you. Could you get him on the line?”

“Hold on,” she said. “Matt, could you pick up the phone? It’s Sandy Crawford, she sounds upset.”

Matt dropped the cards and quickly grabbed the phone, “Sandy, what’s wrong?”

“I just got back from the hospital...Jack had a heart attack this afternoon,” she paused as her voice began to crack. “He passed away about an hour ago.”

Matt felt like he had just been kicked in the gut. Jack Crawford was one of his best friends and he had helped save both his and Virginia’s life a few years back. His face must have betrayed his feeling as both Ed and Jen looked at him with grave concern. He could see Ginny crying in the kitchen as she had become close to the Crawford’s over the years.

“My God Sandy, I’m so terribly sorry. What can we do to help?” he asked as he fought to maintain his composure.

“I’m okay right now Matt. My two sons are here with me, and my daughter is flying in to Logan tomorrow morning. Jeff is going to drive down and pick her up. We’re having a small service

tomorrow afternoon and the cremation will be immediately after. You already know what his wishes are. I might need yours and Ginny's help to carry that out."

He knew exactly what his now departed friend had wanted; to be spread along the Crawford Path. Unfortunately it was getting late in the season and the weather was not always cooperative. They would have to plan for a winter hike, difficult but not impossible. He looked at his wife and she nodded, understanding his non verbal question.

"What time is Kathy's flight coming in?" asked Ginny.

"She's taking a red eye nonstop from LAX, Ginny. She'll be coming into Boston around eight," said Sandy.

"Matt we could pick her up at Logan on the way up," said Virginia.

“What airline is she coming in on Sandy?” he asked as he picked up a pen and note pad.

“Delta flight 1560,” she answered.

Matt wrote the information down on the pad. The Delta terminal was next to Shadair and they should be able to get clearance out without too much trouble.

“Have Jeff stay with you. Virginia and I will fly into Logan and pick her up. We should be at Twin Mountain no later than ten thirty tomorrow morning,” Matt said to Sandy.

When they got off the phone, Matt said to Ed and Jen, “Our friend Jack Crawford passed away this evening.”

Ginny had quickly come in from the kitchen and was standing close to her husband for support, and Matt placed a hand on her back.

“Oh my God, I’m so sorry for both of you,” said Jen.

“My condolences, Virginia, Matt, if I can do anything for you...” said Ed very quietly, his voice trailing off.

“Thank you. Would you both excuse us for a few minutes?” asked Matt as he stood and took his wife’s arm. They walked from the dining room, into the study and closed the door. Matt took Virginia in his arms and in support of each other; they allowed their shared grief to surface.

Chapter 2:

June 10, 2030 17:30Z

Commander Sara Foster sat in her office lost in thought as she looked into the round paperweight that normally sat on her desk. This keepsake had been passed down to each person who held the position of SHADO commander. Fondly she remembered the person who

originally owned the glass sphere. *What would you do now, Uncle Ed?*

The doors opened and Colonel Ford walked in with a report in his hand. She put down the paperweight and looked up at her executive officer.

“Is that the temporal incursion report?” she asked.

“Yes it is, Sara,” he said as he handed it to her. She took the report and opened it as Ford turned to go.

“Don’t go David,” she said as she reached over and closed the door.

Ford sat down in the corner seat next to the desk while his boss quickly thumbed through the report. She looked up finally and saw how haggard he looked.

“You look like hell. How is it out there?” she asked just above a whisper.

“It’s bad Sara,” said Ford in disbelief. “Everyone is still in shock over the loss of Moonbase. Lt. Geddes fell apart when her husband was killed in the first wave. Dr McIntyre had to give her a sedative. Those here, who have loved ones outside, are sick with grief...” he said, his voice trailing off.

“What about you David? How are you holding up?” she asked in a compassionate voice.

Ford shook his head, “The only one I have to worry about is my sister and her husband. I’m trying not to think about it. At least I don’t have to worry about Mom and Dad as they died years ago, and right now I’m glad I never married.”

Sara Foster looked at him quizzically. David Ford was a powerfully built handsome man who still maintained a youthful appearance even at fifty. “Why didn’t you ever get married? I don’t believe for a minute, that you couldn’t find someone.”

Ford looked away, embarrassed. He looked as if he was considering something. He finally met her gaze and said, “The only woman I would have married was taken.”

Sara felt her face flush by his admission. It was all of a sudden too warm in the room.

“Me?” she asked in incredulity.

David simply nodded his head in affirmation.

“How long...how long have you felt this way?” she asked still astonished by his confession.

“Do you remember Straker’s retirement party?” he asked.

“I remember,” she said, as her astonishment turned to outright shock. “That long ago?”

David simply held her gaze allowing her to continue.

“I went with Alec that day,” she recalled. “We always called it our first date. Dad was always pretty strict; he wouldn’t let me start dating

until I turned sixteen. And even then I had a ten o'clock curfew. I remember Mom arguing with him about it and what was funny is Dad usually gave in. That time he stood his ground and Mom didn't know how to handle it."

"As I remember your mother was quite the spitfire," he said.

"Yeah, she always was full of fire and sass and there were fireworks in the house that night. Mom and Dad didn't argue all that often so when they did it was a big deal. In the end I was glad that Dad stood his ground. I think Mom was much more mature, at that age, than I was. Dad's decision that day probably kept me out of trouble. But getting back to you, I never knew you felt that way about me, David."

"I had waited for you and Alec to split up but that never happened. And it wouldn't have been right to just come out and tell you how I felt," he said.

“I wonder if Mom and Dad knew,” she pondered. “They had encouraged me to date other guys as Alec I didn’t get to see each other all that often. It wasn’t until he started at MIT that we saw each other on a regular basis.”

“I know that your father knew as I told him myself. I remember the first time I met him. Dad had invited a few people from work to a late summer pool party one Saturday afternoon. Your mother, she was still carrying you, and your father, were there along with Commander Straker and his future wife. The one thing I’ll never forget is how your father looked at your mother. Hell I was only six at the time and even I could see the love between them. And your father surprised the hell out of everyone that day when he scooped up your mother and jumped in the pool with her,” David said as he recalled the events of that day.

“Yeah, he was the only person in the world who could have gotten away with that,” she said as

she looked back down at the report in her hand. Her mind wandered as she was thinking that would need time to go through the computer generated document and find the event that changed history and why.

“I should let you get to work on the report,” he said, seeing her distraction. He got up to leave, “I’ll be in control if you need me.”

“David?” she called and he stopped and turned back to her.

“Now that we both know, what are we going to do about it?” she asked.

“Do about what?” Ford looked puzzled as he continued, “Don’t we have bigger fish to fry right now?”

“Yeah we do, but there is no guarantee we can correct this, although you know me, I’m going to try like hell,” she said pausing for a moment. “We may all be dead tomorrow David. I’ve

already decided that if the aliens breakthrough I'll destroy the base," she finished emphatically.

They stared at each other in silence for a moment before she stood and came around the desk to face him.

"David, I don't know what the future holds, and I don't know if we can repair the past. What I do know is that a few minutes ago I felt incredibly complimented," she said as she stood very close to him.

Slowly he took her in his arms and she returned his embrace as they kissed each other in a very tender way.

When the kiss ended she looked up at him, "Don't forget to fill out the study request."

"I beg your pardon?" he asked in disbelief.

"It's still the regs; we don't know how long we're going to be down here. We need to maintain discipline, and the only way to do that, is set the example," she said.

“Yes ma’am,” he said with a grin.

When he left, she sat down and carefully studied the report, looking for the event that changed history.

October 15, 1993:

The sun was just beginning to peak over the horizon as Matt taxied the single engine Mooney towards the runway. Virginia and he had been up since four that morning and he still felt sorrow about having to tell Sara that they had to go away for a few days. Although she was delighted to learn that Uncle Ed and Aunt Jen would be watching her. The weather looked like it would be good for the next few days both for flying, and hiking.

As Virginia set the autopilot and nav radios she asked, “Are you sure you don’t want me to fly left seat?”

“Thanks honey, but I’ve got to keep myself busy. If I don’t I’m going to fall to pieces again,” he said as he set the brake for the run up.

While Matt accelerated the engine, his wife checked the engine gauges. She looked over and gave him a thumbs-up. He released the brake and continued to taxi to the runway. This early on a weekday they had the airport to themselves.

“Danbury traffic, Mooney four niner bravo, departing on runway three five,” Matt announced as he taxied onto the active.

He lined up the aircraft and pushed the throttle in and the single engine aircraft quickly gained speed. At sixty five knots, he pulled the yoke back and the plane leaped into the air.

“Gear up,” he called and Ginny pulled up the landing gear.

“Gear up, and locked,” she said.

Matt switched the radio from the advisory frequency to the departure channel.

“New York departure, Mooney four niner bravo with you, IFR to Boston, 1000 climbing 4000.”

“Mooney four niner bravo, New York departure, radar contact, turn right heading 010, proceed on course, climb and maintain 4000.”

“Climb and maintain 4000, proceed on course, Mooney four niner bravo.”

Matt looked out at the early fall morning admiring the Bristol blue of the sky. It was a beautiful day for flying. The couple had spent a lot of time in the air together even after Sara was born and she was at the age now where she could really enjoy it. They had already started teaching her some of the basics of aviation and it was their dream to see her solo by the time she was a teen.

“We never finished that tiebreaker last night,” said Ginny.

“Yeah, I know, and here’s the kicker, Ed had a twenty nine hand,” said Matt ruefully.

“No, you’re kidding?”

Twenty nine points was the highest hand that one could hold in the game of cribbage and seeing one was often considered a once in a lifetime event.

“He showed it to me this morning honey,” said Matt. “I told him I’d spot them the points when we do play the game but it’s not the same,” he said with a grin.

They reached their assigned altitude and Matt handed the aircraft over to the autopilot. They would arrive in Boston early enough to get breakfast before Kathy’s flight was due in. He looked over at his wife as she was scanning the horizon. To him she hadn’t aged a day in seven years and he didn’t know if that was a husband’s perception or if she was simply blessed with a perpetual youthful appearance. It didn’t matter as his love for her went well

beyond the physical realm. Last night they had held each other close while they cried themselves to sleep and having someone to share the grief with was a blessing beyond comparison.

June 10, 2030 19:00Z

David Ford walked into the Commander's office, being summoned from his post in control. From the sound of her voice she had found something...something that had greatly upset her. When she looked up, he saw her blue grey eyes drenched in tears. He reached down to close and lock the door knowing that she was a very private person.

“Sara, what's wrong? What did you find?” he asked as he placed a hand on her shoulder in comfort.

He was still coming to terms with the recent change in the dynamics of their relationship

and he felt awkward, even though they now knew each other's feelings. She must have sensed his unease, and she stood and drew him into an embrace as she wept on his shoulder.

"They killed them David," she said through her tears. "They butchered them like cattle."

"Who killed who?" he asked. "Start from the beginning, Sara."

She regained her composure and led him to the couch. They sat next to each other and she paused to collect her thoughts.

"Remember I told you that the date rang a bell?" she began.

"Yeah, I do. What does it mean?"

David handed her a handkerchief and she wiped her eyes and pushed her long ash blonde hair out of her face.

"A few nights before, Mom and Dad got a call from an old family friend, Sandy Crawford. Her husband Jack and my father had been friends

for years.” She paused again as she tried to keep herself together.

“Mr. Crawford died early that evening of a heart attack. The news devastated both of my parents. Aunt Jen and Uncle Ed were staying with us that weekend and they offered to watch me while Mom and Dad flew up for the memorial service,” she finished.

David placed his arm around her shoulders and prompted her to continue, “Go on.”

“Mr. Crawford’s dying wish was to be cremated and have his ashes spread on the Crawford Path. Mrs. Crawford asked Mom and Dad to make the hike with her. My father would never refuse a dying man’s request, especially someone he cared about, and Mom was just as dedicated as he was. The report I just read states that on October 17, 1993 my mother and father, along with Sandra Crawford and her daughter Kathy, were victims of a UFO incident. Kathy Crawford was never found and Mrs.

Crawford and my parents were found a few days later. They had been vivisected, all their major organs removed...” she was unable to continue.

David took her in his arms as she expelled another round of grief. “Their reproductive organs were taken as well,” she cried.

Ford considered this, as similar reports had been received in other UFO incidents over the past year. They had been fighting this war for fifty years and though they had made great strides in unraveling the alien technology, they weren’t any closer to understanding the motives of the alien invaders.

“How does killing your parents change the timeline?” asked David.

Sara pulled herself together and continued, “After my parent’s death I withdrew into myself. Uncle Ed and Aunt Jen became my legal guardians and Aunt Jen stayed home most of the time to look after me. They moved me to England with them and put me in a private

school, but I didn't do very well for the first few years. I didn't get my head out of my ass until high school. Once my grades were back up, Aunt Jen went back into the research section, in London, and continued the work Mom and Dad had started on the temporal detection system. We lost almost five years, as no one else understood the theory behind this process.”

Ford looked at her beginning to realize what had happened, “So there was a delay in developing the incursion technology and temporal shielding?”

Sara nodded, “It took me another six years after high school to get my doctorate and by the time I was working on the project, the aliens were already using their incursion technology against us. SHADO fell about seven years ago and if it wasn't for the temporal shielding we'd all be dead.”

“How so?” asked David, not sure that he wanted to hear the answer.

“After the aliens took over, all current and former members of SHADO were publicly executed. They didn’t want to waste the organs, so the method they chose was death by vivisection. They didn’t even use the neurotoxin. They killed those working in the studio as well even if they had no knowledge of SHADO...” she said as her voice trailed off.

Ford shook his head in disgust as he pictured the macabre scene in his mind. *What monsters*, he thought to himself.

“What about the rest of the population?” he asked.

“The aliens set up a puppet government according to region. Order is kept by the use of mass executions, as punishment, for even the smallest of uprisings. The masses were divided into three groups, forced labor, organ donors, and breeding stock. The alien caretakers are openly brutal. All of this because of my failure as a person.”

“Now wait a minute Sara, you can’t blame yourself for this...”

“Can’t I David? If I hadn’t been such a pain in the ass brat to my Aunt Jen, she could have continued my parent’s research. I should have worked harder to finish school early and started college at sixteen like my mother did. I let my parents down, I let my aunt and uncle down, I let the whole damned planet down!” she said as her hurt turned to anger.

David took her by the shoulders and looked deep into her eyes as he said; “Now you listen to me Sara. It’s not fair for you to beat yourself up over this. I knew your parents well and they wouldn’t hear of you belittling yourself over this. It isn’t your fault; it must have been hell for you, knowing how close you were to them.”

Sara Foster returned his gaze as she considered his words, “I remember when my parents died, before the timeline was altered. I was twenty eight and they were both in their early

seventies. They still looked like they were in their fifties and they should have lived another fifteen years. Their plane went down in a freak thunderstorm. It killed me then and I was grown married woman. Dad told me once that his greatest fear was losing Mom, or her losing him while they were apart. The only consolation for me, was Mom and Dad died together doing something they both loved to do.”

Foster suddenly stood and pulled herself into command mode, “David, I need you to get the time-craft ready for launch. It’s only a matter of time before those green skinned devils find their way in here. I want to be gone before then.”

“You’re going yourself, Commander you can’t...”

“David, these are my parent’s. I have the best chance of convincing them without risking too much contamination of the timeline. If I send someone else, they may not believe them.”

“What makes you think they’ll believe you?” asked Ford now clearly exasperated with his boss, and his new love.

“David, look at me. Mom and Dad will know right away who I am. And I know things that only the three of us know,” she said. “It’s my decision, it’s made, and it’s final.”

Ford knew that tone. He always thought that she had inherited that trait from the legendary first Commander of SHADO.

“Yes ma’am,” he said acquiescently.

Chapter 3:

October 15, 1993 06:50 EDT

Virginia watched as her husband set the single engine aircraft down at Logan Airport in Boston. Over the past few years he had become quite proficient at handling the Mooney and she

was long since able to relax with him at the controls, having flown with some people that frankly scared the hell out of her with their antics. Years ago, she was flying right seat with Paul Foster when he pulled a barrel roll in what she thought was a conventional single engine aircraft. He neglected to tell her that the plane had been modified for aerobatics. *Boy with their toys*, she thought.

Matt was different, much to her delight, as he took his flying very seriously and lacked the brashness she associated with test pilots. He had done quite well in the Sky simulator, although she could fly circles around him in combat. Matt told her one day that women make better combat pilots because they already have SA, or situational awareness. Men, he said, have to learn this skill. It made sense, she had to admit. Keeping track of a toddler most certainly required situational awareness in the nth degree.

Ginny had allowed herself to daydream as she thought about the first time her and Matt flew together in this plane. It was that morning that she realized she had fallen in love with him and by that evening they were engaged. Jack and Sandy had been there to see it. *Sandy, poor Sandy*, she thought, as she imagined what it would be like to lose her husband. Virginia couldn't hold back the tears as she burst forth crying.

Matt had just pulled the plane into a spot at the SHADAIR terminal and shut down the engine. He took her in his arms and she allowed herself to vent another round of grief.

“I was just thinking about our first flight together,” she said through her tears. “I woke up that morning realizing that I had found my life mate. I don't know how Sandy can cope with it Matt. I couldn't...”

Outside the plane two security guards approached and Matt held up his ID. One of the

guards nodded curtly and the pair retreated back to the hanger.

“Sorry, that was the goon squad,” Matt said.

Through her tears she laughed not having heard that term in years.

“You still call them that?” she asked.

“Hey it made you laugh. Come on,” said Matt. “Let’s go get some breakfast before Kathy’s flight comes in.”

She nodded and turned to get out of the plane as he followed. The couple walked hand in hand into the SHADAIR terminal.

By nine o’clock that morning Virginia and Matt had collected twenty year old Kathy Crawford and they were back in the air, flying north to Twin Mountain Airport. Kathy was a student in the astronomy program at Caltech and she and Ginny found quite a bit to talk about on the way up.

Kathy was only three years old when Matt had met her and her older twin brothers Jeff and John, and he had not seen her, or her brother's, since Virginia's and his wedding. She had grown up to be quite a lovely young lady. She had the same honey blonde hair, and deep blue eyes as her mother, but her warm smile was characteristic of her father. At five foot three, she was by far the shortest member of the family.

“Your Uncle Matt spends a lot of time out back with our daughter watching the night sky. We bought the telescope for Sara, but I think my husband enjoys it just as much as she does,” said Ginny as she gave Matt a wink.

“I've always been fascinated with the heavens, you know that honey,” he retorted. “And be honest, you enjoy it as much as I do.”

Virginia just looked at him with a saucy grin.

“Uncle Matt, you know that NASA is supposed to send *Discovery* to repair the Hubble in December,” said Kathy.

“Yeah, I know,” said Matt. “The shots it has taken so far are incredible. I can’t wait to see the how the corrected optics, work out, especially with some of the deep sky objects.”

The trio carried on the light conversation for the remainder of the flight managing to stave off the grief that they all shared.

By ten thirty Matt had the airport in sight and went through the ritual of an open field landing procedure.

“Twin Mountain traffic, Mooney four niner bravo, on final,” he called as he lined the aircraft up with the runway.

He flared the aircraft just past the numbers and it gently settled onto the tarmac. A few minutes later he taxied to a parking spot and proceeded

to shut down the engine and run through the post flight checks.

Matt noticed that Jack's van was in the parking lot as he saw Sandy Crawford and her two sons's waiting at the fence. He knew he was going to lose it when he spoke to Sandy. Virginia and Kathy exited the plane first while he finished the post flight checks. While he tied down the aircraft he heard Sandy and her daughter crying. He looked over and saw Virginia, also in tears.

John and Jeff Crawford came out on the field, "Uncle Matt, can we give you a hand?" asked John.

"Sure, could one of you boys give me a hand tying her down?"

"I'll help," said Jeff.

"I can start loading your gear in the van," said John.

While John was carrying the bags to the vehicle Jeff spoke quietly, “I’m worried about him Uncle Matt. He hasn’t cried at all.”

“We all deal with grief in our own way Jeff,” said Matt remembering his own experience with his father’s death. “I tried to be the rock for the family when my father died, being the oldest and all, but I fell apart at both the wake and the funeral. John will probably have his time at the service. Aunt Ginny and I have been crying, on and off, since we found out.”

“That’s about where Mom and I are,” said Jeff. “One minute we’re fine, the next, well, you know...”

“Jeff, your brother is going to need you. When it does hit him, it’s going to be all at once,” said Matt.

The two men finished tying down the aircraft as John returned for a second load. The three of them finished loading the van and the group

departed for the Crawford home a few miles away.

Ed had forgotten about the legendary traffic jams that could occur on the Massachusetts Turnpike. He and Jen had planned to spend the day in Boston with Virginia, Matt, and Sara. The young girl had her heart set on going to the New England Aquarium that day and Ed did not want to disappoint her. They had left about an hour after Matt and Ginny drove to the airport figuring they would miss most of the commuter traffic.

“My God Ed, I forgot how bad the traffic could be over here,” said Jen.

She had grown up on the outskirts of New York City, where traffic jams were a way of life.

“That’s why Daddy usually flies Uncle Ed,” said young Sara.

“How does he get around the city Sara?”

“That’s easy, we take taxis. It’s fun,” she said with a grin.

“Ed, I’m so glad that you decided to take vacation for a change,” said Jen.

“It’s not like I had much choice in the matter,” he said feigning irritation.

“Yes, and if I were you, I’d get used to this,” retorted his wife as she smiled at him.

Ed and Jen had not taken an extended vacation since their honeymoon six years ago. He was going to refuse this one until Paul Foster and Dr. Jackson ganged up on him threatening to have him put on mandatory furlough. Straker could no longer hide behind the guise of being the only person able to command SHADO as Foster had truly grown and proven his leadership ability. The confidence he exuded now was born of experience and wisdom, instead of the cockiness he had been known for in his early years with SHADO. Ed knew beyond

a shadow of a doubt that Foster was ready to take command should anything happen to him.

When Virginia had married Matt Hewett, Ed had been sure that he had lost any chance of being happy in a relationship. He didn't admit it openly but he regretted never telling Ginny how he felt about her. When Jen Wallace had come to HQ he never expected that they would end up together. Ed was not shocked to find out that Jen was attracted to him as he was very aware of the attractive effect he had on the female operatives, although he had no idea why. But when Jen took the first step by asking him to take her to a family gathering he didn't know how to avoid it without hurting her so he reluctantly accepted her invitation and to his delight he found that he enjoyed her company. They had left the gathering early that evening and stopped at a private swimming pool that Ed had access to. He kissed her for the first time that night finding out that a fire in his heart that he thought was long dead had been rekindled.

Had Ed not been a gentleman the passionate kissing would have turned into something much more that night and Jen had told him, after they were married, that she wished he had not been such a gentleman in one respect, but the fact that he was, had become a major turn on for her.

Jen was forty three now although she still looked to be in her mid thirties. She had not mentioned anything about children and he knew that they would have to do something soon or the argument would become academic. As if on cue, Sara Hewett broached the question.

“So Uncle Ed, when are you and Auntie Jen going to have a baby?”

“Did your father put you up to asking that?” asked Ed.

“Not really, I asked Mommy and Daddy and they said it was up to you two.”

“You’re Uncle and I haven’t talked about it Sara,” said Jen.

She tried to hide it, but Ed could hear wistfulness in her voice. They had both been so busy over the past few years and she had never brought it up. It had never dawned on him until now that she might have been waiting for him.

“Maybe we should talk about it Jen,” said Ed softly.

His wife looked at him as her eyes lit up, “Do you mean it Ed?”

Straker nodded, “I wouldn’t joke about something that important.”

“I’m glad you’re open to the possibility,” said Jen wiping away a tear. “I didn’t want to add more to your plate.”

She leaned over the center console and kissed him as the traffic started to move again.

“Daddy was right. Love never fails,” said Sara, quite sure that very soon, she was going to be blessed with a new playmate.

June 10, 2030 21:30Z

The SHADO time transportation system was a marvel in reverse engineering resourcefulness. Classified under Omega, only a handful of people on the planet knew of its existence as, even today, there were governments that would stop at nothing to get their hands on this kind of technology.

Colonel David Ford pondered these very thoughts as he oversaw the preparations for launch. *A vehicle with the ability to traverse both, space and time*, a time-craft, he thought.

His considerations were interrupted as someone came up behind him and wrapped their arms around him. He could tell that it was

a woman and by the scent of her fragrance, he knew it was Sara.

Dr. McIntyre had ran the relationship study on them an hour ago, one of several requests she did that evening, and it had come up with no contradictions. Still David was somewhat uncomfortable with her open affection, having been alone for so many years. She must have sensed his discomfort as she released her embrace and stepped beside him.

“How is it coming?” she asked.

“The time team is still working on the calculations,” said David. “They should be ready to do an upload in about twenty minutes. It will take about two hours for power up. You should be able to launch by midnight.”

“You’re still not comfortable with this, are you?” she asked.

Ford pondered his answer, “Not comfortable with you going on this mission alone, or not comfortable with us?”

“Either, both,” she said as she looked up at him.

Struggling with his emotions he looked at her, “I have a tough time with public displays of affection, even with someone that I love.”

“I can’t believe that I was so blind never to see that,” she said wistfully. “Oh David, how could you bear it?”

As they conversed they had walked into the lab office where they could speak privately. The couple sat down at the conference table as he continued, “I always knew Alec Foster was a good man. Knowing that you were happy, made me happy. Does that make any sense?”

“True love, a love that’s not self seeking, yeah, it makes perfect sense,” she said as she wiped a tear from her eye.

“Why didn’t you two ever have children?” asked David.

Sara Foster shook her head in resignation. “It’s a long story. Alec and I got engaged while I was finishing my doctorate. He was still at MIT and I was doing my graduate work at Stanford. I had wanted to stay at Brown but Mom convinced me otherwise.”

“Stanford was her alma matter was it not?” he asked.

“Yeah, it was. Mom still knew several of the professors and I know she had a few of them keeping an eye on me. When I graduated and came home, Mom and Dad sat me down and explained what it was that they had been doing all along. Although I was surprised at the scope of it, I had always suspected that their work had much more to it than movies. When they asked me if I wanted to join SHADO, I immediately said yes. I found out that Alec had joined as well. He was going to be part of the London

based aeroceptor squadron and I was joining the research section under Lt. Colonel Kelley,” said Sara.

“I remember when my father broached the subject with me. I was just finishing college and Dad brought me to the studio. Of course I had no interest in movie production, but I had always had a lot of respect for Mr. Straker. As long as I live I’ll never forget when he said to me, *things are not always as they appear*. He opened the silver cigar box on his desk and spoke his last name. When the box answered him and the room began to drop you could have pushed me over with a feather,” he said. “Anyway you were saying?”

“Yes, Alec and I had discussed children, but we were so busy with SHADO that we never made the time. I always figured I could do what my mother and Aunt Jen did as they were both in their forties when they got pregnant. We assumed there was always tomorrow but we

found out the hard way that sometimes tomorrow never comes,” she said as her voice betrayed her sorrow.

“I’m very sorry Sara,” he said as he took her hand.

“You know what’s ironic?” she asked. “I’m just remembering when Uncle Ed and Aunt Jen first talked about children. It was the same day that my parents left for New Hampshire. The three of us were driving up to Boston and we were stuck in traffic. Being a nosy six-year old I asked them why they hadn’t had children yet. I’ll never forget the look on Uncle Ed’s face when he realized that she wanted children with him. Aunt Jen was about my age now and as I remember and she found herself expecting a few weeks later.”

“They didn’t waste any time did they?” asked David.

“No they didn’t. Even though Aunt Jen and Uncle Ed weren’t as openly affectionate as my

parents were, you could still see how much they loved each other.

He had gotten up to pour them both a cup of coffee. Ford handed her a cup as he sat back down.

“Thanks, I needed that,” she said as she sipped the beverage.

They sat in silence while they finished their coffee.

“Sara you look tired,” David began. “You should rest. You know I’m still not comfortable with you going alone.”

She reached across the table and squeezed his hand and gave him a reticent smile. “I was planning on taking a nap before I leave. You can join me if you’d like.”

David felt his heart jump in his chest at the prospect of holding her closely to him in a shared moment of intimacy. He stood and took her in his arms.

“Sara, I would like nothing more than to spend the next two hours lying close to you. But you really do need to get some sleep, and I want to supervise the launch preparations myself. I don’t want anything to happen to you. I would never forgive myself if it did. Can I take a rain check?” he asked.

“I’ll tell you the same thing Mom used to tell Dad, count on it,” she said drawing him in for a long passionate kiss.

Chapter 4:

October 15, 1993 13:00 EDT

Virginia sat in the front row next to her husband at the local funeral home comforting him through another round of grief. Seeing him in pain tasked her greatly, but she knew he would fare better in the long run by allowing his sorrow to surface.

The Crawford's stood in the receiving line and to Ginny's surprise; her friend Sandy was holding the line as a beacon of strength for the rest of the family. She and Kathy had shared a long moment of anguish at the airport but having her family and friends close by had given her the resolve to weather the storm.

"Matt are you all right?" asked Ginny.

"Right now I'm grieving for John. I've been where he is, and I know what he's feeling," said Matt, his voice shaky as he spoke.

John Crawford had broken down as soon as they had arrived, just as Matt had said he would and his brother and sister were doing their best to support him. Virginia could tell that Matt was reliving a painful moment in his life.

"Do you need to talk about it honey?" she asked.

Matt took her in his arms and she could feel him breaking inside as he allowed a torrent of emotion to burst forward. When he had

regained his composure, he held her shoulders as he spoke.

“Jack and John were always at odds with each other. You know Jack; he was a rough and ready woodsman and hiking guide. He made his living on these mountains. He loved the land and he loved the life,” said Matt. “John marched to the beat of a different drummer. Unlike his brother Jeff, who followed his father’s way of life, John is more like his sister. He’s working his way through college and he starts pre med this year.”

“John wants to be a doctor?” she asked.

“Yeah, and if he’s anything like his father, and I’m damn sure he is, he’ll be one of the best. You see Gin, because they were at odds over his choice of careers the two of them left a lot unsaid. And I know firsthand how that can hurt because my father and I did the same damn thing,” said Matt through tears. “My father and I never said I love you, to each other, nearly

enough. And then one day he was gone, and all those opportunities were lost forever.”

“Is that why you shower Sara and me with loads of affection?” she asked with a smile.

Matt nodded as he answered, “I don’t want their ever to be any doubt in your minds how I feel about either one of you. You remember the day we were flying to London on...”

“Vividly,” she said interrupting him. “I swore that I would never let that kind of a rift come between us again. I went through pure hell that week Matt. I was sure you were dead and the thought of you dying, and you not knowing how much I loved you and that I had forgiven you, was more than I could bear. I should have just come right out and told you in Ed’s office.”

“You were a bit more reserved back then,” said Matt with a slight grin.

Virginia had long since shed her reputation as the “ice princess” and was now considered one of the warmest people in the organization.

“I wouldn’t think twice about saying it now. Life is too damn short. How many times have we been in peril over the years?” she asked.

“More than I would like to remember. I still think the closest we came was that time on Moonbase. That was the day I had found out that you were pregnant with Sara and I had to fight with the doctor to get you released,” said Matt recalling the moment. “When the aliens took out the last particle weapon, I figured that was it. The only consolation I had was that I had you in my arms. For better or worse we were going to die together.”

“You always were a romantic. That’s probably why I fell in love with you,” she added.

“And I thought it was because I was handsome, he said lightening the mood.

“Well, that did hurt either.” Ginny paused and looked over at the Crawfords. “Matt you really should talk to John. I think you’re the only one that understands what he’s going through. Knowing that someone else has been in the same place might help him.”

“Yeah, you’re right. I’ll drag him out for breath of fresh air. Don’t go away, I might need moral support when I get back,” he said.

“Sandy looks like she needs a break anyway, ask her if she would like to come sit with me for a bit if you would, please,” said Virginia.

Matt nodded and gave her a quick kiss as he stood. She watched him walk to the receiving line to speak with Sandy. In a few moments he was walking out the door with John in tow and Sandy came to sit with her.

“Thanks Ginny, I was looking for an excuse to come talk with you for a while,” she said as she wiped her eyes.

“Are you okay?” asked Ginny as she embraced her friend.

“Yes, I’m just a bit misty right now. I can’t believe that Jack and I had this many friends,” said Sandy.

The funeral home was standing room only for a while as Jack and Sandy were very well known throughout the area. Jack had made friends all over the country and some of the mourners had traveled from as far as the west coast.

“I don’t know how you’re doing it Sandy. If I lost Matt I’d be a blubbering mess,” said Ginny.

“You and Matt have only been married seven years. Jack and I had almost forty wonderful years together. He was a good father to our kids and a great husband. We both knew that this day would come and we prepared for it by living each day like it was our last,” Sandy said.

“Seven years,” said Ginny. “It seems like only yesterday.”

“Time flies when you’re having fun, by the way, why does Matt call you Gin?”

Virginia smiled fondly as she answered, “He’s the only one I let call me that. You heard the story how Matt and I met when we were children?”

“Yeah, It still sends chills up my spine, it’s so romantic,” she said.

“When we first met I was only eight and a half but I thought I was grown up. Virginia was a mouthful and Ginny struck me as childish, so I insisted that I be called Gin. I went back to Ginny when I hit my teens. When Matt realized who I was he called me Gin out of habit and the moment left me so starry-eyed that he continued the practice. He never calls me Ginny; it’s either Virginia or Gin.”

“Sara must be getting big now?” asked Sandy.

“She sure is. No more piggyback ride up the stairs for her. She’s her mother’s angel but she’s

also Daddy's little girl. Lord, help the man she marries," Virginia said with a wry grin.

Matt and John stood outside the funeral home with their backs to the wind. It was a brisk fall day and most of the leaves were starting to fall from the trees.

"Uncle Matt, thanks for getting me out of there, I can't believe I fell apart like that," said John.

"It's nothing to be ashamed of John; I'd have been more concerned if you hadn't shown any grief at all. We all deal with loss in our own way. I was just like you when I lost my father."

"How so?" asked the young man.

"As the oldest in the family, I felt it was my responsibility to be the rock for Mom and my two siblings. It didn't work out that way. I held it all in and completely lost it at the wake. I was a mess. My brother Patrick ended up being the steadying presence. I felt like an utter failure for

a while,” Matt said as he swallowed a lump in his throat.

“That’s exactly how I feel. I should be in there supporting Mom, Kathy and Jeff. It’s my responsibility,” John said.

“Why, because you were born a few minutes ahead of your brother? That doesn’t make any sense when you think about it,” Matt said kindly. “John, let me give you some advice. Let Jeff stand in the gap for you. Allow yourself to mourn. The rest of your family has already started the healing process and that is something you can’t do until you let yourself have your time.”

“How are you and Aunt Ginny dealing with it? You both seemed to be so together,” asked John with a sob.

“John, right now you’re so caught up in your own sorrow that you haven’t seen the rest of us have our moments of anguish. Your Aunt Ginny and I, had company when we got the call from

your mother. We excused ourselves and went into the study and we both cried in each other's arms for a good ten minutes, and last night we cried ourselves to sleep. Just before we came out here I had another round with it, but the last round was more for you than your father," said Matt pausing. "John, I've been where you are and right now you're not going to believe this but trust me, it will get better."

"Dad and I had so much that we left unsaid. And now he's gone and these things will be forever left unsaid..." his voice trailed off as he fought another round of grief.

"John, your father knew how you felt about him, and I'm going to tell you something else, he was very, very proud of you," Matt said emphatically.

"Dad wanted me to take over the family business, and I let him down..."

"Now you listen to me," Matt interrupted. "Your father had accepted the choice you made and he

told me himself how proud he was of you. He was a close friend and I believed him when he said it. Now he may not be able to tell you now, but I can tell you for him.”

John Crawford seemed to consider this as he took a deep breath and let out a sigh.

“I guess we should get back inside,” he said.

“Yup, I suppose...”

“Uncle Matt?” asked John.

“Yeah?”

“Thanks.”

Matt slapped him on the shoulder, “You bet.”

October 15, 1993 18:00Z

“It’s gone now sir,” said Geoff Blake as he looked up at his boss.

Colonel Paul Foster stood next to the command console in HQ where Colonel Blake was seated.

He looked at the modern tactical display showing the brief path of the intruder.

“Do we want to send up Sky 5?” asked Blake.

Foster considered this as each of these ghosts had turned out to be false alarms. But Foster remembered something the Commander had told him years ago. *I knew an old police captain once Paul. He used to get a hundred crank letters a week. The one he ignored was the one that killed him.* It was a lesson he had taken to heart.

“Yes. Have Major Ellis expand her search out another fifty miles in all directions,” he ordered.

While Blake dispatched Sky 5, Foster walked down to the communications station where Major Ford was working. His dark hair had just started to find some grey.

“Keith, try to raise the Commander on his cell phone.”

“Yes sir,” answered Ford.

Sara Hewett was glued to the glass of the Giant Ocean tank at the New England Aquarium as the huge sea turtle swam by.

“Oh wow, did you see that Auntie Jen?”

“Yeah, I did. Look she’s coming around again,” said Jen.

Quietly Ed Straker watched his wife and his *niece* marvel over the giant gentle sea creature all the while thinking about the subject of raising a family. He had considered himself past that age and he had thought his wife felt the same way but seeing her with Sara convinced him otherwise.

Ed was distracted by the pocket pager as it alerted him to an incoming call.

“Excuse me for a moment, I have to take a phone call,” he said to his wife as he walked to the Harbor Room across from the tank exhibit. The room was unoccupied at the time so he

walked to the window and checked his phone. Seeing the call was from HQ he quickly dialed the number. When the automated system at the studio answered he dialed in the direct line to the control room along with the security access code.

“Major Ford,” said the voice on the other end.

“It’s Straker,” said Ed purposely avoiding using his rank.

“Hold on Commander, I have Colonel Foster for you,” said Ford.

Straker heard the shuffling of the phone being passed and a few seconds later Colonel Foster’s voice came over the line.

“Ed where are you?” he asked somewhat concerned.

“I’m in Boston Paul, what do you have?”

“We picked up another sensor ghost about ten minutes ago. It’s the same pattern as before.

I've got Major Ellis searching the area now," said Foster.

"Where is it this time?" asked Straker as he looked out over the harbor.

"It was picked up over the Maine coast heading west. I told Gay to expand her search by fifty miles in each direction."

Ed considered this, there was so little they could do without a solid contact.

"All right that's all we can do for now. Call me if you find anything unusual," said Straker.

"Will you be staying in the Boston area, Ed?" Foster asked.

"No I don't think so Paul. We should be heading back to Colonel Hewett's residence in a few hours."

Ed ended the call and walked back out to onto the ramp leading to the tank.

When Foster hung up the phone he walked back to the command console.

“Geoff, punch up the course data for all of these sightings,” he said.

Colonel Blake correlated the data and brought it up on the tactical display. Although not perfect the course indications matched up to form a continuous line.

“Well that’s very interesting,” said Foster. “Have this data fed into the computer course, time, speed, everything. I want a detailed analysis of this flight path.”

“Yes sir.”

Paul had discussed this with Colonel Hewett earlier in the week and Matt had said that he was sure they were missing something. Foster hoped he was wrong.

The alien craft settled in an area just below the tree line just northeast of the summit of Mount

Munroe having seemingly avoided detection by the sophisticated tracking network established by the inhabitants of Sol 3. A barely visible glow surrounded the craft as it maintained stealth by employing temporal shielding.

Inside the craft, the alien occupants prepared themselves for the mission at hand knowing that their survival as a space fairing race was in jeopardy. Their targets would be in the area in two planetary rotation cycles. The two primary targets would be nearby and have to be lured into a snare by using an emotional response. The aliens had no analogue in their culture for the concepts of love, caring, anger or hate as they were beings of pure analytical thought. Their understanding of these theories was almost nonexistent until quite recently as they expended resources to study these concepts. Although they had no understanding of the emotions themselves, the behavior of the humans was quite predictable when these perceptions were considered.

For now, all they had to do was watch and wait.

Chapter 5:

June 10, 2030 23:50Z

Sara Foster walked into the time lab at SHADO HQ having managed to get a couple hours of fitful sleep. The prospect of seeing her parents again both excited and frightened her. *At least I'll have a chance to say goodbye.*

She climbed into the cockpit of the two man craft where David Ford was punching data into the computer. He looked up and smiled when she sat down next to him.

“Did you have a good nap?” asked Ford.

“So so,” she answered. “You should have come in with me.”

“Then you wouldn't have gotten any sleep,” he retorted.

“Oh, and I thought you were a gentleman,” she teased.

David stopped working and turned to her, “I am; that’s one reason I refused, besides I really wanted to oversee the preparations. I was serious when I said that I didn’t want anything to happen to you.”

Sara placed her hand on his shoulder and leaned over to kiss him.

“She’s just about ready Sara,” he said wistfully. “I wish you would reconsider your decision about going alone.”

Sara Foster considered his words, ever so tempted to ask him just that. But her sense of duty would not allow her to seriously consider it. SHADO would need someone with the resolve to carry out her final orders and David was the only one left at HQ that she trusted to follow through with an order that would kill the last friends they had. Although it was a bitter thing, this fate was much preferable to the fate

that would await them at the hands of the aliens.

“I’m already taking a big risk as it is David. For every extra person we send back in time we double the risk of contaminating the time line. If it wasn’t for that I’d welcome your company. I’m terrified at the prospect of seeing my parents again. My mother is going to be my age and I’m going to have to fight the temptation to tell them about the plane crash,” she said tears now running down her cheeks.

David pulled her into an embrace as she faced her fears, “You’ll make the right decision; you always do.”

They held onto each other for a few minutes savoring the shared moment of tenderness. They faced each other and she spoke first, “I love you David.” She paused as she looked in his eyes. “Hold down the fort for me all right?”

Ford nodded as he answered, “I will, and you be damn careful. I want to see you again. I love you

too Sara, I've always loved you," he said as he kissed her one last time before getting up to leave.

Sara Foster gave him a reticent smile as she said, "One more thing, if the aliens break-in, I want you to destroy the base. I'd rather our people die quickly, and all at once, rather than being publicly butchered one at a time."

He nodded in agreement, knowing all too well the fate that would await them otherwise.

She watched him step out of the time-craft and she busied herself with the task of preparing for the space-time jump. Slowly the craft began to pulsate as the massive amounts of power were generated and stored in the energy banks to be released in one massive discharge.

"Sealing the hatches," she said over the radio as the countdown reached two minutes.

The hatch to the time-craft closed and the technical staff evacuated the hanger.

“Un-caging gyros,” she said as the craft began to hum with power.

Through the window she could see David Ford, as he stood in the launch control room.

“Temporal incursion, in fifteen seconds, mark,” he said as the countdown drew to the conclusion.

Sara looked down and double checked the power indicator and space-time coordinates as David counted down the last ten seconds, “Ten, nine, eight, seven, six, five, four, three, two, good luck Sara, zero.”

A clap of thunder sounded as the air snapped together as the ship jumped out of the present and traveled through time and space.

Ford stayed in the launch control room knowing that the success of the mission would be revealed in a few minutes, as the return trip was preprogrammed for five after midnight. It

would turn out to be the longest five minutes of his life.

October 16, 1993:

Matt looked out the window of the Crawford's passenger van as John drove them to the trailhead at Crawford Notch. His wife sat next to him having fallen asleep on his shoulder. The past twenty four hours had taken its toll on both of them and Matt's mood was melancholy, even though he was reminiscing of the day Virginia and he had first hiked this trail together.

Last night's memorial service and cremation was a difficult time, and by the grace of God, John had found the strength to be the rock for all of them. Matt could only hope that by sharing his own experience, he was able to help the young man come to terms with the loss. Per Jack's wishes, the four of them each had a small urn with his ashes divided between them. Jack had specified four places on the trail where he

wanted to be spread, with the last spot being on the summit of Mount Munroe.

As the van turned down Route 302, Matt could see a fresh snowfall on the top of the mountains. The sun was just beginning to crest the mountains, and it was a beautiful sight to behold, a scene he never grew tired of. He remembered the first winter hike he and his wife had taken together. Sara was just over a year old and Virginia's mother had flown over, from England, to stay with them for a while. Lynn Lake had insisted that he and Ginny take a few days to themselves. Virginia had stopped complaining about the cold as soon as she saw the winter vista from above the tree line.

Sandy and Kathy were chatting quietly in the first row as the van traveled down the highway. They seemed to be in good spirits considering the circumstances. Matt marveled at Sandy's strength of character, knowing full well what she was going through and he knew they were

all in for a few more bouts of anguish, before this journey was over.

A bump in the road stirred Virginia from her nap and she stole a quick kiss from her husband.

“I’m always doing this to you,” she said apologizing as she sat up.

“I’ve never minded, you know that,” said Matt. “Did you have a good snooze?”

“Yeah, I did actually. Probably because I was in the arms of a sexy handsome man,” she said with an impish grin.

“Do I know him?” asked Matt feigning seriousness.

Virginia smacked him on the shoulder and they both burst out in laughter, drawing the attention of the Crawford’s.

“Are the two of you misbehaving back there?” asked Sandy.

“Not yet, but it’s still early,” he said friskily as he pulled his wife closer.

“Matt...be nice,” Ginny said, trying in vain to keep a straight face.

The lighthearted banter between the five people went on as the van continued toward the trailhead.

“So as you can see Commander, the sensor logs show a definite flight path,” Paul Foster said over the vidlink.

Straker looked of the data on the screen showing a path from the mid Atlantic to the New Hampshire/Maine border. *This has to be more than a coincidence*, he thought.

“Has this data been verified?” asked Straker already knowing the answer.

“At least a dozen times,” said Foster. “The entire termination area has been swept. There’s simply nothing there.”

Ed sat back in the chair trying to think. He considered the possibility that this was a natural phenomenon which the newly enhanced detection equipment was picking up. *A meteor in temporal flux*, he thought to himself.

“Ed this is awful close to where Ginny and Matt are going to be. Do you think there is a connection?”

“If we knew for certain that this phenomenon was alien, in origin, I’d say yes. But we could be looking at a natural occurrence. Have the research team chase down that possibility as well, Paul. Let’s make sure that we aren’t chasing our tails. I’ll call Virginia and Matt, just to have them be extra careful, but we still don’t have anything concrete.”

“Understood, I’ll call you if the tests turn up anything conclusive. Enjoy the rest of your vacation, Ed. Foster out.”

Ed closed the connection and tried Virginia’s mobile number. In a few seconds he received

the out of range message. He left her a voice message detailing the conversation with Paul. When he finished the call he pressed a hidden recessed button and the displays folded back into the desk. The room had transferred back into a contemporary study that could have been found in any home. He heard the lock latch disengage on the door leading to the living room.

Matt and Virginia had installed a small communications and tactical display system in their home. From this small command post a line officer could see any tactical display or communicate with New York, London, or any other SHADO installation. With the traffic in and around New York City, Matt had found its development to be an absolute necessity. Virginia had certified the software, for the system, last month and these units were to be installed in the homes of all the senior command staff.

A few minutes later Jen walked in with two cups of coffee. “I figured I’d find you in here,” she said as she set down the coffee and kissed him.

“Good morning, Is Sara still asleep?” he asked as she sat in the chair next to the desk.

“Yeah she was pretty tuckered out when we got back last night. I don’t think she’ll be up for another couple of hours. So what’s going on at HQ this morning?”

“Paul ran the data on the sensor logs through the computer and came up with a viable flight path,” he said.

Ed summarized his conversation with Foster and Jen paled when he told her where the suspected termination area was.

“Have you warned Matt and Ginny?” she asked.

“I left a message on Virginia’s mobile, but the area has already been scrubbed. There’s nothing there.”

“I don’t know Ed, I just get a bad feeling about this, I don’t know why,” she said as she looked out the window. It had been cold that morning and she could still see the frost on the grass.

“You’re probably worried because they had a run in, with the aliens, on that mountain before. Paul is going to have Gay overfly the area in about an hour. She’ll be running hi-resolution cameras and scanning equipment,” said Ed.

Jen sipped her coffee as she considered that.

“I’d feel better if we had another sighting,” she finally said.

The alien’s were watching two infrared signatures on their sensing systems. Designed to ignore animal life, these two readings were undoubtedly human. They would pass within a few hundred yards of the ship if they continued in the direction they were traveling. Organ and body collection was only a secondary objective

for this mission, by order of the supreme sovereign. But this would turn out to be an easy collection effort. If the humans were young enough they could collect reproductive organs as well.

The two hikers had broken down camp and got an early start on the trail.

“Boy it sure is cold this morning, Mark,” Jan said to her boyfriend as they ascended the northeast trail to Mount Munroe.

“Ah, this is nothing. Just wait until tonight. We’re supposed to get a deep frost in the valleys. The first of the season,” said the young man.

“I’m glad we’ll be at the Lake of the Clouds tonight. At least the common area is kept warm,” she said.

As the couple approached the tree line, Mark noticed something strange a few hundred feet off the path.

“Hey Jan, do you see that?”

“Yeah, what is it?” she asked as she looked at the slightly glowing object.

“I don’t know, let’s go take a look,” he said as he started towards the object.

“Mark?”

He stopped to look at her.

“Maybe we shouldn’t,” she said with fear suddenly appearing in her voice. “You know the rules about staying on the trail.”

“Ah, don’t worry. It’s less than a hundred yards in. Come on,” he said.

Reluctantly she followed him into the woods to get a better look at the object that they had discovered. For some reason she had to fight an irrational fear as they closed in on the object.

According to the sensing system the two humans were now heading directly towards the ship. Two members, of the crew of six, exited the ship to take up flanking positions, allowing the two humans to pass between them. They would approach from behind and use the new neurotoxin weapon that had been recently developed. The device would render their victims immobile without damaging any organs or tissue. They could then do a proper assessment for organ and tissue use.

“I don’t believe this Jan. It looks like a spacecraft,” said Mark as they observed the object from behind a fallen tree.

“It’s much bigger than anything I’ve ever seen,” he continued.

“Who does it belong to?” asked Jan.

“I don’t think it’s one of ours.”

“Are we talking ET here?” she asked very concerned.

“It could be,” he said. “I’m going to get a little closer.”

“No,” she said emphatically. “Let’s get out of here and report this to someone.”

Mark looked over at her and saw the terror in her eyes.

“Maybe you’re right,” he said.

He stood to help her up and they turned to walk back to the path when suddenly Mark winced as he grabbed his shoulder.

“Mark? Are you all right?” she asked. “Mark!”

She looked back towards the path and screamed in terror as she saw them approach.

The van pulled up to the trailhead parking area just before nine and Matt stepped out to unload the gear from the back.

“Need a hand, Uncle Matt?” asked John as he came around from the driver’s side.

“Yeah, thanks John.”

The two men unloaded the backpacks and hiking poles and placed them on the ground.

“Uncle Matt, I never thanked you for your advice yesterday. You don’t know how much it helped,” he said.

The truth was, Matt did know, but he kept that to himself.

“I’m glad I could lend a hand John. Remember what I said, you have my number. You need to talk, you call me, twenty four, seven, three sixty five.

“I will,” he said. “Dad was really blessed to have such a good friend.”

“And I was just as blessed by his friendship. It’s a two-way street John. Hey, I’m going to sign in at the check-in station,” said Matt. “I’ll be right back.”

“Okay.”

Matt walked across the road to the AMC check-in station and walked inside.

“Matt Hewett, I haven’t seen you in a while,” said the man at the desk.

“Hello George. Yeah, it’s been a couple of years. Who’s got the lake this weekend?”

“Jim Burns is up there for the next few weeks. Not too much hiking traffic now with winter setting in and all. How’s the family?” asked George.

“They’re doing well, our daughter turned six this year,” said Matt. “How many people are staying at the lake tonight?”

George looked down at the list, “Including the four of you, ten couples. Oh, one other pair. They’ll be coming up the northeast approach to Munroe.”

“It’s going to be a ghost town tonight. Take care George, see you on the way out.”

“See ya Matt. Give Sandy Crawford my regards, if you would.”

“You bet.”

By the time he got back to the van the three ladies had their gear on and were ready to go. Matt grabbed his pack and quickly strapped it on.

“Do you want to set the pace Sandy?” he asked.

“Yeah, and let’s put Kathy behind me. It’s only her third trip up, not to mention being her first off season hike.”

“Oh Mom,” said Kathy.

“All right ladies, let’s take it nice and easy this morning. We had a frost last night so the trail might still be slippery in spots. Watch your footing and if we’re going too fast for anyone, sing out,” said Matt.

They all bid John farewell and started towards the trail.

“Are we being a little overprotective,” asked Virginia confidentially as they walked along the path.

“Maybe,” said Matt, pausing, unsure how to continue. “I’ve just got a funny feeling we should be extra careful this morning, Gin. Don’t ask me to explain, as I don’t understand it myself.”

Virginia pulled out her cell phone and looked at the message indicator. Noticing that she had no signal she put it back in her pocket.

“That won’t work until we clear the tree line. Once we’re in the clear you should be able to hit the tower on Mount Washington,” said Matt. “Who were you going to call?”

“I was just seeing if Ed or Jen tried to call us. I’ve learned to listen to your intuition Matt, even if I don’t understand it,” she said. “Besides I’m getting the same feeling. I thought it was just me.”

They lined up single file as they hit the narrowed portion of the trail.

Chapter 6:

The aliens had finished the task of harvesting the useful organs of the young human male, but upon examining the female they found her to be very recently impregnated. This was considered a rare find and they were careful to avoid harming her. They placed her in a suspension tube for the journey home. The researchers on their planet will have use for her.

One of them prepared to disable the local mobile communications network, using a brief but intense high energy pulse that would destroy the front ends of the receivers at the tower sites. When they were in agreement, the alien activated the device and the signal was transmitted.

On nearby Mount Washington, the cellular receptors picked up a signal and sent it down to the front end of the receiver. Although protected from overload the designers had never intended the unit to be exposed to a signal of this magnitude. The preamplifiers in the receiver sections shorted out, effectively killing the sensitivity of the site. The transmitters, being made of sterner stuff, were unaffected.

The group of hikers reached the tree line by noontime and they stopped to rest, and to pay respect to the memory of a friend. As Virginia spread the ashes from the urn she had carried, her husband read aloud the twenty-third, one of his and Jack's favorite verses.

After the small service Virginia sat down to admire the view of the snow covered mountainside. Sandy and Kathy were sharing

another minute of sorrow and she did not want to disturb their moment.

“Penny for your thoughts?” asked Matt as he sat down next to her.

She looked at him and laid her head on his shoulder, “I was just thinking about my reaction the first time I saw this place.”

“I believe your exact words were; *My God, it’s so beautiful!*” said Matt.

Virginia smiled knowing he was right, remembering the events of that life changing day.

“We shared our first long kiss right here,” she said.

“I remember,” said Matt as he shifted to face her. “I was going to tell you that I...”

Like she did seven years earlier, she pulled him in for a long deep kiss not allowing him to finish his sentence.

When the kiss ended she looked deep into his eyes and said, “I knew what you were going to say then, just like I knew now, and the words simply weren’t enough to convey how I felt, or how I still feel about you Matt.”

“In that case...” he said as he pulled her to him for another long kiss.

Kathy Crawford nudged her mother, “Do you see this Mom?”

Sandy looked over at Matt and Ginny and smiled, “They fell in love on this mountain, just like your father and I did. It’s nice to see good things happen to people with all the hurt in today’s world.”

“They don’t look like they ever fight Mom.”

Sandy laughed at that, “You just don’t hear about it, Kathy. Your Aunt Ginny and Uncle Matt, have had some real whoppers in their day, but what couples don’t?”

“They remind me of you and Dad. How did you get so lucky anyway?” asked Kathy clearly frustrated with the idea of relationships.

“You’re still upset about Scott, aren’t you?” asked her mother.

“Wouldn’t you be? We dated for a year and then I find out he has two other girls on the side,” she said with anger.

“I’m sorry Kathy, I wish I could tell you I know how you feel, but the truth is I never had to go through that,” said her mother.

“I know, you met Dad a year out of high school, you were engaged a few weeks later, and married within a year. You and Dad had thirty eight wonderful years together and you still loved him like you did on your wedding day.”

“I loved him more than the day we were married,” said her mother.

“Gee thanks Mom, rub it in,” Kathy said, pausing. “I’m sorry; I didn’t mean that the way it sounded.”

“I know sweetheart,” said Sandy. “Trust me; you’re not going to end up as an old maid. Your Aunt Ginny was forty one when she met Mr. Right. Ask her what happens when you rush into things. She knows exactly what you’re going through.”

“Maybe I should talk to her,” she said as she watched as Matt helped Virginia get her pack on. When he finished he walked over to Kathy and Sandy while Ginny checked her phone.

“Do you ladies need a hand?” he asked.

“Uncle Matt, you’re such a gentleman,” said Kathy as he helped both her and her mother with their packs.

A minute later Virginia joined them and the group continued on the trail.

“Did you get through Gin?” asked Matt.

“No, I kept getting a call failed error,” she answered.

She handed him the phone and he looked at it. The signal meter read full strength and the message indicator was lit.

“There’s plenty of signal, and the battery is okay. It looks like the transmitters are working. Perhaps they have network problems,” he said.

Matt looked at her seeing concern in her eyes, “What’s wrong?”

“It’s just a feeling Matt. I’ve had it all day and I can’t seem to shake it. I’d feel better if I knew what the message was.”

“Yeah I know, I’ve been getting the same vibes as well. It’s unsettling. But if something was up with Sara; you know Ed would find a way to let us know. He’s a smart guy,” Matt said with a grin.

“That’s an understatement,” said Ginny, grinning back at him as they started up the trail.

In a deeply wooded area, half a mile removed from the trail, the SHADO time-craft explosively reentered the space-time continuum at the preprogrammed coordinates. Outfitted with special shielding, its arrival went unnoticed to all the sensing equipment of the period. The ship looked like it had been impaled by several trees, due to the temporal shielding, allowing it to exist out of phase of normal space-time. In essence, the craft could occupy the same space as existing objects.

Inside the cockpit, of the futuristic craft, Commander Sara Foster checked her chronometer and navigational readings, making sure that she was in fact, where and when she was supposed to be. She unstrapped herself from the couch and gathered her gear. She paused for a moment, realizing that she now existed as two people. *This is probably why my father was so concerned about time travel.*

Sara had hiked these trails with her parents, as a teenager, and she knew the Crawford Path well. Her father had taught her all the subtle nuances and she had expertly prepared for the hike. Quickly she donned her cold weather hiking gear and her pack. The extra weight would slow her down but she knew better than to go unprepared. The mission was too important to leave to chance. Once she was ready she opened the hatch and stepped out into the woods of the White Mountains. She walked a short distance from the ship and pushed a button on the remote control. The hatch closed and the ship shimmered as it became invisible. She checked the locator function to make sure she would be able to find the camouflaged craft when the mission was over.

Sara set out towards the trail with grim determination to foil the alien plot. She knew that even if she were successful, it would be a bittersweet resolution, as her parents were still

destined to die in a plane crash twenty two years from now. As she reached the trail, the emotional stress hit her full force, and she began to cry.

“Were you able to get through Ed?” his wife asked as he hung up the phone.

Straker shook his head as he answered, “No, the call went right through to voicemail. They should be in range of the tower by now.”

“It’s not like Ginny to leave her mobile off. Do you think they’re all right?” asked Jen.

“There’s one way to find out,” said Ed as he dialed another number.

Ed waited on the phone as the call went through, “It’s ringing.”

“Crawford Notch AMC Station, George Lewis speaking,” said the voice on the other end.

“Mr. Lewis, my name is Ed Straker. I’d like to check on the status of a pair of hikers, Matt and Virginia Hewett.”

“Ah yes, they checked in about nine this morning and they are due at the Lake of the Clouds hut by six this evening. Do you want me to pass a message Mr. Straker?”

“Yes please, could you have them call home as soon as they arrive?”

“There isn’t any phone service at the hut, although we can do a radio patch in an emergency,” said Lewis.

“That won’t be necessary Mr. Lewis they have a mobile. Just have them call in please.”

“I’ll pass the message along but mobile coverage has been out in the mountain area all morning long.”

“I see,” said Ed realizing the implications. “Can you call us when they check in at the lake?”

“Sure, give me the number.”

Ed read off the phone number and thanked him.

“What’s going on Ed?” asked Jen.

“It looks like they have a cellular outage going on this morning. That’s probably why we haven’t heard from them,” he said in a subdued voice.

“I hope so,” said Jen.

“Where’s Sara?” he asked.

“She’s in the kitchen setting up the Chinese checkers set. We promised to play a few games with her, remember?” Jen asked grinning at him.

“How could I forget, she’s just as stubborn as her mother,” he said with a grin. “I really need to teach her how to play chess.”

“She’s a smart girl, you should try. She might even beat you,” Jen said as they walked out of the study.

By five thirty in the afternoon, the four hikers had made it to the Lake of the Clouds. The ground was covered with several inches of new snow. The temperature was a few degrees below freezing and the group was glad to get indoors. While the ladies warmed up near the fire Matt went to the desk to check-in.

“How’s it going Jim?” he said as he filled out the log sheet.

“I’m well. It’s nice to see you again Matt. Are you and Ginny going to sit in with the jam session tonight?” he asked.

“That sounds like it could be fun, do we have enough people?”

“Yeah, we got us a couple guitar players, a bassist, a piano player, a mandolin and fiddle player, a banjo player, and of course I’ll be on drums,” he said.

“We could play some bluegrass with a lineup like that,” said Matt.

“By the way Matt, you got a message from an Ed Straker. He wanted you to call home as soon as you arrived.”

Matt suddenly grew serious, “Did he say what for?”

“George offered a radio patch but Mr. Straker said it wasn’t an emergency,” said Jim.

Matt felt himself relax, “I tried to call on the way up here but I couldn’t get through.”

Jim nodded knowingly and said, “There’s some kind of problem up on the mountain. The cell company has been up there all afternoon working on it. They seem to think they got a bad batch of spares. They replaced a bunch of modules and got it working again but it died ten minutes later. I talked to our man at the summit and he said they were going to be back out here tomorrow.”

“Has everyone checked in Jim?” Matt asked.

“We’re waiting on two couples. One is coming up the northeast approach to Munroe, and the other is coming down from the Washington summit.”

“I see,” said Matt, pausing to think. “Could you radio down to the base camp and have George call Ed Straker back and let him know we arrived safely?”

“Sure thing Matt.”

Sara Foster looked at her watch and figured she had about an hour or so of daylight left and she was still about four hours from the hut. *It looks like the night vision equipment is going to come in handy,* she thought to herself. She had no intention of stopping after dark, a move that would be foolhardy if not for the night vision goggles.

This part of the trail was snow covered and she had to watch her footing. It was cold out but with her heated undergarments she didn't feel the cold.

Sara had to mentally prepare herself to meet her parents as Dr. McIntyre had told her it would be psychologically stressful. *It's not every day that you get to meet dead relatives.*

She was worried about David as well, an irrational fear, as from her perspective SHADO doesn't fall for another thirty years. And she would only be gone for five minutes by his reckoning.

Paradoxes and conundrums, I hate time travel!

The hut 'croc' had prepared a special beef stew for the evening meal. Over dinner Jim Burns told Matt, Virginia and Sandy that the AMC had decided to shorten the season for the Lake of the Clouds. As of next year the hut would close

on the second full week in September. It would be locked up as the Club was moving to discourage winter assents.

“It’s a liability issue now,” said Jim. “Just like all the new safety features on modern power equipment, or the warnings on hot beverages. Common sense ain’t all that common anymore.”

“I couldn’t agree more Jim,” said Matt. “It’s pretty bad when people expect their own government to step in and protect them from their own ignorance. Seat belt laws are a prime example. My wife and I are both pilots and we wouldn’t think about flying or driving, without strapping in. It’s even on the checklist which we both still use, by the way. Many weekend pilots don’t and then they wonder why they run into trouble.”

“You did it now Jim,” said Ginny, grinning. “Matt’s gone off on a rant.”

“All right I’ll shut up,” Matt said, embarrassed.

“You don’t agree with him Ginny?” asked Jim.

“I actually do, but Matt will get wound up tighter than an eight day clock and go on for hours about this stuff,” she said innocently smiling at her husband.

“Yeah, Jack was the same way,” interjected Sandy. “He used to get a real burr under his saddle about certain things. I think that’s why the two of them got along so well.”

“I am really going to miss that ornery son of a gun,” said Jim in a wistful voice.

Jim Burns had known the Crawford family all his life and Matt could see that he was on the verge of breaking down and that was making him misty. It had suddenly become quiet at the table.

Changing the subject Matt asked, “Jim did that last pair of hikers check-in yet?”

“No, they didn’t. That reminds me, I need to radio over to Madison Spring and see if they

checked in over there. Excuse me a moment,” he said as he got up from the table.

Virginia leaned over her husband and quietly said, “You handled that really smooth Matt.”

“I didn’t want to see the poor man break down here at the table. I’d have joined him,” said Matt as he struggled to maintain his own composure.

Virginia leaned her head on his shoulder as he placed his arm around her, grateful to have her support.

“Have I told you today how much I love you?” he asked.

“You tried, but I kissed you before you could get the words out,” she answered.

Not for the first time that day, Matt said a silent prayer of thanks.

Chapter 7:

“That was George Lewis, Matt and Ginny just checked in at the hut. It looks like the local cell tower is still down,” Ed said to Jen as he walked into the kitchen.

“Well that makes sense. At least we know they’re safe,” she responded as she handed him a fresh cup of coffee. “Where’s Sara?”

Ed accepted the cup with a nod of thanks and answered, “She’s in the living room coloring. Have you seen her work?”

“Yeah, she does have her mother’s talent for drawing. Ginny said that she has started pencil sketching, and she shows a lot of promise.” Jen paused considering something, “Have you heard anything else from Paul?”

Ed shook his head as they sat down at the kitchen table.

“No, Major Ellis turned up nothing on her search earlier, and there have been no other sightings,” he said.

Jen sipped her coffee as she muddled this over. She couldn't shake the feeling that their lives were on the brink of change. *Maybe I'm feeling this way because of our decision to have children.*

She and Ed had had discussed having a family late into the previous night, a decision that she knew would irrevocably change both their lives. But that would be a positive change. The feelings she had were dark and foreboding. If they didn't subside soon she would discuss them with her husband.

It had been dark for an hour and Sara Foster had hit the steep portion of the trail. Even with night vision the trail was rough going and she had to be careful. She had to arrive at the hut before ten or she would miss her parents.

She had considered arriving earlier but the risk factors were too great. She was out to change a specific event knowing that the ramifications of

altering other factors would be staggering. She found herself struggling with her own emotions, as she would want to share so much with her parents and not be able to because of the contamination it could cause to the timeline. Even though she planned on using the amnesia drug she didn't want to chance one of them remembering her or any events from the future. She looked at her watch. *Three more hours.*

Two of the aliens had set out to survey the area around the small isolated post on the mountainside. An additional pair waited at the halfway point between the ship and the human outpost. It was their intention to capture one of the humans in hopes that they could lure the two primary targets out. Of course they always had the secondary objective of organ and tissue collection to achieve. Finding another young human female would be advantageous to their plans.

Virginia found herself sitting in with a varied mix of musical talent that night. Although it had some age on it, the upright piano she was playing was well tuned. Ginny had played the piano since she was a child and being classically trained she found that she could follow along with almost any kind of music. She had to admit that her husband's love for country music and bluegrass had grown on her over the years and she enjoyed sitting in with this group. They were just finishing playing *Wolf Creek* a quick snappy instrumental that Matt had practiced all summer. The guitar part was quite intricate and he had it down cold.

When the song was finished the group got a huge round of applause from the small but lively onlookers.

Jim got on the mic from behind the drums and asked, "If anyone wants to sit in come on up."

"Keep playing," yelled a voice from the crowd.

“Your turn to sing Matt, what do you want to do?”

Matt thought for a moment, “Let’s do *High Country Snows*, key of G.”

As Matt opened with the guitar intro, Ginny followed with the piano part. This was one of the songs they had practiced together and she knew it well. It was also a love ballad and that was a big plus, knowing her husband would be singing to her.

Sandy and Kathy were at the table talking when a young handsome hiker asked Kathy to dance.

“No thank you,” she answered. “Maybe later?”

The young man walked away looking somewhat dejected.

“Kathy, why don’t you dance with him?” asked her mother.

“I’m just not in the mood Mom. All men are no good, well almost all,” she said as she watched Matt singing to his wife. “Aunt Ginny is such a lucky lady.”

“There are quite a few good men still around, Kathy. The young man who asked you to dance, his name is Gary, and I know him and his parents well. I also know that he’s available and he’s a nice young man,” said Sandy.

Kathy watched and listened to the words of the song Matt was singing. He had walked over to where Virginia was seated at the piano, and the last verse he sang directly to her. As happy as she was for her *aunt* she found herself being envious as well.

In the space of a lifetime, a man misses much.

‘Til he finds him a woman, and treasures her touch.

When the lakes all lie frozen, and the wild wind blows.

*I'll return to my darling, and the high country
snows.*

She looked over where the young man who had asked her to dance was seated, noticing that he was watching her. He quickly looked away, but not before she saw an enamored look in his eye.

“I think he really likes me Mom,” she said, turning back to her mother.

“Then why don't you dance with him. Kathy, it's been almost six months since you broke up with Scott. It's time to move on. Besides, it's just a dance it's not like you're going to marry him.”

As she considered it her attention was drawn back to the stage.

All the guys were looking at Virginia, and Jim said, “It's your turn Ginny.”

“What...me?” she asked, horrified. “Sing? I can't sing.”

“That's not what your husband told us,” said Jim.

Virginia gave Matt an evil stare as she said, “Big mouth.”

Sandy and Kathy both yelled, “Come on Ginny, show these guys up!”

“Sing one to your hubby,” Sandy added.

“Okay I’ll do it,” said Ginny reluctantly. “I’m only doing this for the girls, and maybe for Matt. He’s going to owe me big time, and I intend to collect. All right boys, *When You Say Nothing at All*, key of D.”

At the table Sandy said to her daughter, “Here he comes again, say yes this time.”

As Ginny played the piano intro, Gary led Kathy out on to the dance floor and as Ginny sang the young couple danced.

It’s amazing how you can speak right to my heart. Without saying a word you can light up the dark.

Try as I may I could never explain, what I hear when you don’t say a thing.

The smile on your face lets me know that you need me, there's a truth in your eyes sayin' you'll never leave me.

The touch of your hand says you'll catch me if ever I fall, you say it best when you say nothing at all.

Matt watched his wife closely as she sang the song. When they made eye contact she nodded to the dance floor and he turned to see Kathy dancing with a young gentleman. When he turned back, Ginny was smiling at him. Their conversation was non verbal but Matt knew when they talked later they would find out that they were thinking the same things.

When the song ended he was surprised to see Kathy stop at her mother's table briefly and the young couple walked out the front door.

“Where do you suppose they're going,” Matt said to Ginny between songs.

“There’s a beautiful moon out tonight, Matt. Maybe they’re taking a romantic stroll under the stars. I could be talked into that later, if the right man asked me,” she said, as she flashed her eyes at him.

“Now that sounds like a good idea,” he said.

“Well, you’re assuming that you’re the right man,” she said deadpan.

“Brat,” he said, waiting for her façade to break.

Virginia managed to hold a straight face for a few more seconds before she burst out giggling.

“Had you going, didn’t I?” she asked.

“Not even for a microsecond.”

Kathy and Gary walked, hand in hand, on the trail leading to Mount Munroe.

“So, how long have you been into astronomy?” asked Kathy.

“It’s been a hobby of mine since I was a kid,” replied Gary. “I still have my six inch reflector telescope I had when I was in junior high. It’s not easy to collimate the optics on an inexpensive telescope.”

Kathy was impressed although she knew he could have looked up the buzzwords. She decided to test his knowledge a bit.

“What’s that star up there? The one that is shared between Andromeda and Pegasus?” she asked.

“That would be Alpheratz, Sirrah. It’s a binary star system with a magnitude of 2.06, it was co-designated as Delta Pegasi, but that name is no longer used,” he answered.

“I am impressed,” she said. “Forgive my caution, but I’ve been lied to in the past. I’ve learned to make people earn my trust.”

“I understand, I’ve been there myself,” he said. “It’s a lousy way to live.”

“I’m majoring in astronomy at Cal-tech,” she said, slowly opening to him.

“For real?”

“Yeah, for real, I hope to work for JPL one day,” she said.

“I could only dream of going to Cal-Tech,” he said. “You’re very lucky.”

Kathy realized that she had found a kindred spirit and she wanted to trust again. She turned to him and looked into his eyes as he gently kissed her.

The two aliens watched the couple from just over the ridge. Slowly, they approached closing the distance between them and the couple. When they were in range of the paralyzing weapon one of the aliens took aim and fired two rounds in quick succession.

Kathy felt a sharp pain in her back and let out a small cry as she passed out.

“Kathy...” said Gary just as he felt pain in his chest. He looked up and saw two red suited figures approach just as he lost consciousness.

The aliens identified the young woman as a secondary target and they quickly gathered her up and began the long trek back to the ship. They did not waste time with the male as they knew they would be able to collect organs later.

Inside the hut the jam session was wrapping up. Jim Burns came out from behind the drums to speak to Virginia.

“Ginny, you really showed these boys up,” he said. “We’d be honored to have you sit in with us anytime. And you’ve got one of the most beautiful singing voices I’ve ever heard. You and Matt should give up the movie business and

break in to music. I'd be willing to bet the two of you could make a go of it."

"Somehow I don't think Matt and I are cut out for that kind of life. Twenty years ago, maybe, but we have a young daughter to worry about and the road is no place to raise a family," she said, sidestepping the real reason.

"Too bad, anyway you and Matt are welcome anytime," he said as he switched off the PA amp and started wrapping the mic cords.

Matt had packed the guitars and stored them in the closet and he walked over to kiss his wife.

"Did you have fun?" he asked.

"You know, I did. I mean it's not the kind of music I normally play, but it has meaning. I can see why you like it so much," she said. "We should do this at home."

"I have a few friends who would be up for that," said Matt. "Hey, are you still in the mood for that moonlight stroll?"

Virginia smiled as she answered, “I think I could be persuaded.”

As Matt and Ginny talked, Sandy came up to them.

“Matt, Ginny, she began. “Kathy and Gary haven’t come back yet. I’m starting to get worried.”

He looked at his watch noticing that they had been gone for about an hour.

“Ginny and I are going out for a walk before bed. We’ll find them. They’re probably smooching under the stars.” Matt turned to Virginia and said, “Gin would you grab our jackets from the back?” As Sandy walked away he added quietly, “Virginia, grab our pistols as well.”

Ginny nodded in agreement and quickly went to the bunkrooms while Matt walked over to Jim.

“Do you have a couple of high power flashlights, Jim?”

“Yeah I do. What’s up?” he asked.

“It may be nothing but Kathy and Gary haven’t come back yet. Sandy’s getting a bit concerned over it,” said Matt.

Jim handed Matt a pair of flashlights from under the counter and Ginny had returned with the jackets and pistols. Quickly the two of them donned their jackets and pocketed their weapons.

“I thought there was nothing to worry about Matt?” said Jim noticing, them pocket the weapons.

“I don’t think there is. But that’s no excuse not to be prepared. We’ll be back shortly,” said Matt, as he and his wife walked out of the hut into the cold night.

Outside Matt scanned the surrounding area with the flashlight. He figured that they could

not have gone far. Beside him, Virginia was checking the snow for boot marks.

“Matt, they might have gone this way,” she said, as she pointed at boot prints in the snow.

“That’s the Munroe trail,” he said, as he shined his light up the path.

They started up the trail and he spotted a dark shape in the snow a few hundred feet up the hillside. Matt quickly made his way up the incline realizing that he was looking at a person lying in the snow. When they reached the person Matt recognized the young man and quickly checked his pulse.

“He’s alive,” he said as he checked the man for injuries.

Matt came across a small dart embedded in Gary’s chest. He pulled it out and he and Ginny looked at it in the light. Ginny recognized the polished metal right away.

“Aliens, Matt,” she said as her voice betrayed her feelings of fear.

Matt placed the dart in a small container and handed it to his wife. He picked the young man up in a fireman’s carry and started down the hill.

“Matt, what about Kathy?” she asked.

“We’re going to need some help,” he said. “How many doses of amnesia drug do you have with you?”

“I’ve got five,” she answered. “And two doses of antitoxin.”

As they reached the hut area a woman’s voice called to them from the darkness, “Mom, Dad, I need to talk to you.”

Two of the men had come out and took Gary into the hut as Matt and Ginny walked to the figure now approaching. Matt was sure that he knew the voice. The figure stepped into the light. Matt and Ginny were both stunned. She

bore a striking resemblance to Virginia, Matt thought. He knew who she had to be, as impossible as it sounded. *And if this is really her, then something is about to go dreadfully wrong.*

“Sara?” he asked hesitantly.

Sara Foster ran to her parents and embraced both of them unable to contain her emotions. She cried as she held them both for dear life. “Mom...Dad,” she said through her tears.

Chapter 8:

Sara broke away from her parents and looked at both of them. Although she had arrived in time to stop them, she knew her biggest battle lay before her.

“Mom, Dad, listen to me,” she began. “In about twenty minutes the two of you, along with Sandy Crawford go off in search of Kathy. A few

days from today the three of you will be found as victims of a UFO incident. I don't need to go into the details do I?"

"How do you know about this? And how did you get here?" asked Virginia, still in shock.

"In my time period, we have managed to decipher and reverse engineer the alien temporal technology. In fact our system works better than theirs," she said exuding a bit of pride. "In the year 2030, the aliens launched an all out attack on Earth. We found out that Commander Straker's suspicions of a larger mother-ship that launched smaller craft to Earth was indeed factual. That's why they always seemed to know what we were doing."

Her parents looked stunned, so she continued her story.

"The ship stayed parked outside the orbit of Neptune and it was discovered by an astronomer about twenty years from now. As a result SHADO started changing its encryption

algorithms more frequently. During the last assault the aliens brought the mother-ship within the orbit of Jupiter and within the range of our FTL missiles. We destroyed it and served the aliens a fatal blow. That was just over a month ago by my perspective.”

She paused to let the information sink in. “On June 10, 2030 the aliens launched a temporal attack against us. One ship came back through time and murdered the two of you. The effect altered the space-time continuum and had it not been for the temporal shielding, everyone at HQ would have been killed.”

“I don’t understand,” said her father. “How does killing us alter the future?”

“Two ways,” said Sara. “The basis for the temporal detection system was derived from yours and Mom’s work. With the two of you gone that work doesn’t get finished for another twenty years.”

Sara paused, hesitant to share the rest with her parents.

“You said there were two ways?” her mother pressed.

“The second problem was me,” she said, embarrassed. “When you and Dad died, I took it hard, very hard. Uncle Ed and Aunt Jen moved me to England and set me up in private school but I lost all interest in education. In short I became a real brat. Aunt Jen had to stay home with me most of the time and I didn’t start doing better until I was in high school. Because of that, I was in my mid twenties before I graduated from college. My work was delayed and the aliens invaded thirty years from now.”

“So you’re telling us that the aliens came back and altered the time line?” asked her father.

“Yes, the two of you were not supposed to die tomorrow.” Sara said, getting misty again.

“That makes sense,” said Virginia. “The sensor ghost that we have been tracking could have been the UFO coming forward in the time continuum. It must have overshoot the date and had to correct. If they did it on the fly, it’s possible that it would breach our continuum during the correction maneuver.”

“It was heading in this general direction,” Matt added. He turned to Sara. “Did you bring any amnesia drug with you?”

“Thirty doses,” she said. “I assumed that you and Mom each have five in your packs.”

“It’s enough. Let’s get inside,” Matt said to them. “Gary is going to need the antitoxin, and I have an idea.”

As the three of them walked back into the hut, Sara considered her father’s reaction. She knew that once he had made up his mind on a subject it was next to impossible to dissuade him.

Inside the hut, Virginia treated Gary Martin with the antitoxin, while Jim, Sandy, Sara and Matt discussed the situation.

“Dad, you and Mom can’t go. It’s as simple as that...” Sara was saying when her father cut her off.

“Now you listen to me young lady. Kathy Crawford is a close family friend, and I’ll be damned if I’m going to sit by and let those green-skinned devils use her as a lab experiment,” Matt said with fierce determination. “You told us that her body was never found. That means that they probably took her whole, and she is still alive.”

“Dad, I hate to do this, but I’m pulling rank on you. As SHADO Commander, I’m ordering you and Mom to stay here,” she said as Virginia joined them.

“What did I miss,” asked Ginny, hearing the end of the conversation.

“Well honey, it seems that our dear daughter is trying to pull rank on us,” Matt said. He turned back to Sara and said, “You may be Commander in 2030, but in 1993, I’m the senior line officer. The decision is mine, it’s made, and it’s final.”

Sara looked at her mother clearly frustrated, “Mom, you outrank him. Do something!”

“I’m sorry honey, I’m in research. Your father is a line officer. He outranks me now, and I wouldn’t countermand him anyway. He’s right you know.”

“Mom!” Sara exclaimed.

“I’m coming too,” said Sandy. “She’s my daughter, and I know these trails as well as my husband did. Besides, I’ve known about these creatures for years.”

Matt spun around in surprise and Sara and Virginia followed suit.

“What do you know about them Sandy?” he asked very quietly.

“Jack knew about them too,” she began. “Six months after you and Ginny got married he began having nightmares. He couldn’t remember them at first. One morning I found him out on the porch looking up at the sky. He remembered everything, the bodies, carrying you and Ginny down the mountain, all of it. He told me never to tell anyone and we rarely talked about it amongst ourselves.”

Virginia looked at her husband with concern in her eyes, “Matt if security finds out...”

“They’re not going to find out. Sara, was there any indication of a security breach in reference to the Crawford’s?” asked Matt.

Sara shook her head, “I checked those records before I left. Aunt Sandy apparently never said a word.”

“That’s good enough for me,” said Matt as he waved Jim over to the table. “Jim, how many weapons do you have in the gun cabinet?”

“Five thirty-aught-sixes and a pump action twelve-gauge,” answered Jim.

“I’ll take the twelve-gauge,” said Sandy. “What do you have for ammo?”

“Double-aught buck,” said Jim.

“I’ll need five volunteers Jim,” Matt said. “Tell them it will be a dangerous search.”

“Correction, four. I’m coming with you,” said Jim.

“Make that three,” said a voice from the hallway.

Matt turned to see Gary Martin walk out and sit down at the table.

“There were two of them Mr. Hewett,” said Gary. “I got a good look at them before I passed out. They were wearing what could only be a spacesuit.”

Matt simply nodded, “Are you sure you’re okay? That neurotoxin is pretty wicked stuff.”

“Kathy was in my care and I let her down. I’m coming.”

Matt had to admire the young man’s determination. It was a trait that he looked for in new recruits.

“All right let’s get everyone ready. We move out in ten minutes. We’ll carry two packs. The rest of us will go lightly loaded. Jim, I need you to get a radio message down to base camp. I need George to pass along a one word message to Ed Straker, *Delphi*.”

As the group got ready to leave Virginia spoke quietly to Matt, “Maybe one of us should stay behind Matt. There is a lot at risk here and Sara shouldn’t have to lose both her parents.”

“You’re welcome to stay here if you’d like. I’d feel better if I knew you were safe,” he said.

“You know I’m going, I thought I might convince you to stay behind,” she said.

“You’ve got two chances of that, none, and less,” said Matt.

“It was just a thought; I know how much you’re looking forward to walking her down the aisle. She married Alec you know.”

“You’re kidding!”

“She followed in our footsteps, in more ways than one,” said Virginia. “At least we did right by her. I always worried about that Matt.”

Matt took her in his arms thinking, *I’m not going to let them destroy my family, or my world.*

At the Hewett residence, Ed Straker hung up the phone. The mobiles were on their way to Pease from New York. They would be in position by morning. A SHADAIR Learjet was being flown to Danbury Airport to bring him to Pease, as well. From there he would board an

Albatross 25 and be flown directly to the Lake of the Clouds.

“Ed maybe you should let Paul handle this,” said Jen.

“You heard the codeword Matt used, *Delphi*, a confirmed temporal incident. No this is my responsibility. I need to be there,” he said.

“Do you need me to drive you to the airport?” she asked.

“No, I don’t want to wake Sara up. I’ll take Ginny’s car and leave the SUV with you,” he said as he took her in his arms.

“Ed, be careful. We’ve got a family to start when you get back.”

Straker held his wife closely, comforting both of them.

“Dad, I’m going to take point,” said Sara, with her mother’s stubbornness.

“It makes sense, you’ve got the night vision,” Matt replied. “The rest of you, fan-out. Jim, take up the rear. Sandy, you and Ginny, stay with me.”

“Matt, just the very fact that Sara is here changes the timeline. At least now we are forewarned,” said Ginny.

“Maybe, and it could be that nothing we do can change the fate that lies before us,” he said contemplating the future.

“Predestination? I didn’t think you believed in that,” she said.

“I don’t. Picture this,” he began. “Time is like a river, with eddies and currents. In order to change our final destination, we need to swim against the current. If you get caught in an eddy, you may not be able to swim out of it.”

“I thought you were an optimist,” she said with a wry grin.

“I am,” he said, in a matter of fact way.

The group of nine followed the tracks left by the aliens and Matt felt the adrenalin pumping through his system as the group headed for a now uncertain future. One thing was for sure; they were not going down without a fight.

The aliens rendezvoused with the second pair, waiting in a clearing along the path. The young female was bound to a tree on the far edge of the field. One of the aliens checked her vital signs. She would be useful after the operation was completed and they were careful to avoid damaging her. When he was satisfied that she was not yet in danger he gave her an injection to counteract the effect of the neurotoxin. They quickly moved out of sight into the nearby woods to wait for their quarry to arrive.

The SHADAIR Learjet took off from Danbury Airport just after eleven o'clock. In the passenger cabin Commander Straker reviewed

the *Delphi* Directive. More than just an *Omega* incident, this procedure outlined the contingency plans for dealing with SHADO personnel from the future. *A temporal war*, Ed thought as the aircraft reached altitude. Straker knew that the very fate of the planet could be decided by what happens in the next few hours.

Matt called a halt to the advance to give everyone a chance to rest. While they were stopped Sara scanned the surrounding area looking for movement. Her father walked up to her and asked, “You see anything?”

“No Dad, but I didn’t expect to,” she said. “The three of you were found in a clearing below the tree line about an hour from here. It’s my guess that the aliens will be laying in wait.”

Matt had reached the same conclusion, and he said, “That’s about what I figured. You said that the alien mother-ship was located by an astronomer. What was his name?”

“Her name was Kathy Martin, she was one of the team leaders on the Hubble Two,” answered Sara.

It couldn't be, thought Matt. “Was she married?”

“I think she was, why?”

“What was her maiden name?” he asked.

“I don't remember, I do know she studied at Cal-Tech,” answered Sara. “Why is this so important?”

“Kathy Crawford is majoring in astronomy at Cal-Tech. And the young man off to the left, his name is Gary Martin. He might just be her future husband,” he said.

Sara seemed to consider this. She finally answered, “That's a long shot Dad.”

“Is it? I don't think we can afford to ignore it,” said Matt.

He paused for a moment and spoke again. “Your mother and I aren’t alive in 2030 are we?”

She spun to face him and he could tell he was right by the look on her face. Her response was guarded. “Whatever gave you that idea?”

“You may be forty three years old but I’m still your father. I know my daughter and I could tell by the way you held us that you hadn’t seen us in a very long time,” Matt said, looking her straight in the eye.

Sara couldn’t hold back her tears, and Matt took her in his arms.

“You and Mom were killed in a plane crash fifteen years ago,” she sobbed.

“That’s twenty two years from now by our reckoning,” he said. “Hell, I’ll be seventy two and your mother would be seventy. That’s not a bad run.”

“You don’t understand Dad. You and Mom aged very gracefully. The only thing that gave away your age was your white hair and mustache. Mom only looked a few years older than she does now. You both should have lived another twenty years,” she said sadly. “I wasn’t supposed to tell you this.”

“Were we flying commercial?”

Sara shook her head as she answered, “The two of you were flying over the Rockies, in the Mooney, when you ran into a freak thunderstorm. You couldn’t go over it and you couldn’t fly around it. Your plane was found on the side of a mountain a few days later.”

“At least we went together,” Matt said remembering his greatest fear. “Tell me something honey, did we ever start to get on each other’s nerves?”

Sara smiled, “No Dad. You and Mom loved each other just as much as you do now, maybe more. I think it’s what kept the two of you so young.”

“How about you, I understand from your mother that you married Alec, he said. “How is he?”

Sara looked away, and Matt knew that something had happened to him.

“I haven’t told Mom this yet. Alec was killed by the aliens just over a year ago. I took over as Commander,” she said.

“I’m very sorry honey...” Matt’s voice drifted off, unable to find the words. He was still trying to come to grips with meeting his suddenly grownup daughter.

“We should get moving again Dad.”

“All right,” he said as he signaled for the group to proceed.

Matt waited for his wife to catch up and he fell into step with her.

“Did you enjoy your chat with your daughter?” she asked.

“It was...interesting,” he said evasively.

“Oh?”

“I think Kathy makes a major contribution to the cause.”

“How so?” asked Ginny.

“Sara told me that an astronomer discovered the mother-ship,” said Matt

“Oh my God, Kathy?”

“Kathy Martin,” he said, knowing that Virginia would make the connection.

“They get married?”

“It’s quite possible. I’ll tell you the rest after,” he said, not wanting to burden her with some of the things he had just learned.

Aboard the Albatross 25, Straker communicated with HQ.

“It looks like you were right Paul. We have a UFO hiding out somewhere in the White Mountains.”

“Do you want to start an aerial search?” asked Foster.

“No, at least not until I speak to Colonel Hewett. Let’s keep our aerial assets on standby and have the US based aeroceptor squadron relocate to the closest military field to the search area. And have Major Ellis bring Skydiver in as close to the coast as she can get,” said Straker.

“Skydiver is already heading inland, and I’ll get the aeroceptors moved now. Foster out.”

Paul Foster will make a good Commander one day, Ed thought to himself.

An hour later the aircraft with Straker aboard landed in the clearing next to the hut. Ed walked into the hut with security while the second aircraft landed with reinforcements.

All of the remaining staff and guests at the Lake of the clouds were evacuated to the base camp and given the amnesia drug. They would be quite surprised to wake up at the five-star Mount Washington Hotel.

Straker set up the portable command post. He established a link with HQ through the satellite and called Colonel Hewett on the radio.

Virginia heard the radio beep with an incoming call. She took it out of her pocket and extended the antenna.

“This is Colonel Lake,” she answered.

“Virginia, where are you?” asked the Commander.

“We’re about two hours from the hut. The aliens have Sandy’s daughter Ed. We have an armed party of nine tracking them now,” she said.

“How many aliens are we dealing with?”

“At least two, but we have reason to believe there are more,” she said.

“Are we dealing with an operative from the future?” asked Ed.

“Yes, we are, and you know her well.”

Chapter 9:

Commander Straker listened as Colonel Hewett brought him up to speed. When Ed realized the implications he was ready to order Virginia and Matt to return to the Hut.

“Colonel, you and your wife are taking one hell of a risk. At least one of you should have stayed behind,” he said to Matt over the radio.

“Commander, you know as well as I do, that wasn’t going to happen.”

“I could order you both back,” Straker replied, very tempted to do just that.

“I’m asking you not to give that order, Ed. It would put the three of us in an untenable position,” said Matt.

Ed considered the situation, knowing that he and Jen would have done the same thing.

“How well armed are you?”

“Virginia and I both have our fifty calibers, the other five men are carrying thirty aught sixes, Mrs. Crawford has a pump action twelve gauge, and Sara has some type of pistol I’ve never seen before,” said Matt.

Ed could plainly see that the rescue party was loaded for bear, and he knew Matt well enough to know that he had thought this through.

“All right Matt, you obviously have a plan,” said Straker. “Fill me in.”

“There is a clearing up over the next ridge. According to Commander Foster, that is where the three of us were found, in the altered

timeline. I suspect that the aliens have setup an ambush for us, using Kathy Crawford as bait.”

“And you’re heading right into the trap” said Ed, clearly upset.

“Ed, the aliens are expecting three lightly armed people, not a, heavily armed, rescue party that know they are laying in wait,” said Matt with grim determination.

“Very well, proceed with caution,” said the Commander with reluctance. “Do you need any air support?”

On the trail Virginia said, “It couldn’t hurt to have air cover Matt.”

“Not yet,” he said. “If we spook them, they’re liable to take Kathy and jump time. No, we have to wait until we engage them. If that ship gets out of here intact, they’ll just try this again. I don’t want to be looking over my shoulder for the rest of my life.”

Matt keyed the radio and replied, “Ed have the air support standing by, but wait for our signal. I don’t want to tip our hand to them just yet.”

“Very well, I’ll be in the air as soon as you give the word. Straker out.”

Matt collapsed the antenna and handed the radio back to Ginny.

“I’ll bet you dinner in Boston that Ed will be flying left seat,” she said to her husband. “He’s just as stubborn as you are.”

Kathy Crawford regained consciousness and realized that she was tied to a tree at the edge of a small clearing. She had no idea where she was or how long she had been out. She looked to her left seeing movement and was sure that she saw a red suited figure. She began to scream for help.

Sandy was the first to react, “Kathy?”

Matt quickly put his finger to his lips, “Stay here,” he said as he quickly ran up to Sara.

“Do you see anything?” he asked.

Sara nodded and pointed, “There, the clearing is just beyond those trees.”

Matt signaled to Gary and Jim and the men quickly joined them along with Sandy, and Ginny.

“Okay, here’s the plan, Matt said. “The aliens probably have a crossfire set up. Anyone who enters the clearing is toast. Gary, Jim, and I are going to circle around the right side of the field. At some point we are going to run into one or two of them. Stay low and chose your targets carefully. Virginia, take Gary’s rifle and give him your pistol.”

“What about the rest of us?” she asked.

“As soon as you hear the first shot, you’re going to create a diversion. Sara has some flash-bang grenades. Toss a couple into the field on the left

side. As soon as the rest of the aliens open up, have the guys with the high powered rifles zero in on the muzzle flashes. Sara will watch and help guide your fire. Sandy, watch their backs.”

The group all nodded in understanding. Matt quickly kissed his wife, “As soon as the shooting starts call in the air support, and keep your head low honey.”

“You too,” she said trying to hide the worry in her voice.

“All right gentlemen,” began Matt. “We move one at a time, and cover each other. Let’s go.”

The three men quickly made their way to the right edge of the field, moving in the manner that Matt had prescribed. Halfway up the side of the field he saw an alien with what looked like a mounted machine gun, sitting at the edge of the clearing. He held his hand up and looked back at the other two men.

Matt pointed at his eyes in a V shape and then pointed to the alien, and both men nodded in acknowledgement. He holstered his pistol and drew his hunting knife. Quietly, he approached the alien from behind and just as he reached it, the alien spun around. Matt lunged and buried the knife into the torso of the alien just to the left of the center of its chest. He twisted the knife and pulled hard and the alien went limp. He laid the alien body on the ground, not making any noise.

Matt disabled the alien weapon as the other two men came up next to him.

He pointed as he spoke, just above a whisper, "There's one more, just behind that tree. I'm going to try to take him out the same way. Cover me."

Matt cleaned and sheaved his knife and drew his pistol.

Using the same technique the three men approached the alien hoping to catch him

napping. As Matt got within ten yards the alien suddenly spun his weapon around and opened fire. The three men hit the ground and all hell broke loose.

Virginia's heart jumped with the first shot and she dove for cover along with her daughter and friend. The aliens on the left side of the field were sweeping the woods with rapid machine gun fire. She pulled the radio from her jacket and raised the antenna.

“Seated in the pilot's seat of the Albatross 25, Commander Straker monitored the radio. Much to the chagrin of security, only he and the copilot were aboard. His aircraft was equipped with a Gatling gun in the nose and Ed knew the craft would handle better lightly loaded.

“Base camp, from Lake, we're under attack,” Virginia's voice, came over the radio.

Ed spooled up the engines and took off not answering until he was in the air.

“Colonel Lake, I’m airborne. ETA is five minutes,” he said.

“Ed we’re pinned down on the western edge of the field by forces from the northeast. There are at least four machine gun emplacements,” she said.

In the background Ed could hear the telltale sound of the alien weapons. He pushed the plane to its limit.

Matt quickly drew a bead on the alien as it sweep in the opposite direction and fired his pistol. His aim was true and the alien collapsed in a lifeless lump of tissue. Matt surveyed the area and it looked as if this side of the field was clear. He waved for his men to follow and the three of them rounded the edge of the field where Kathy Crawford was still tied.

“Gary, Uncle Matt, thank God,” said the terrified young lady as Martin untied her.

The alien fire was concentrated on the far end of the field and they seem to be unnoticed.

“Gary, take Kathy back to where we found the first alien and wait there. It’s my guess that they won’t fire in that direction.”

“Yes sir,” said Martin as he and Kathy made a dash for safety.

“Mom, they got to her,” said Sara. “It looks like Gary is taking her back to the right side of the field. Dad and Mr. Burns are still approaching the aliens!”

“Oh hell,” said Virginia, as she grabbed the flare pistol and fired a round above the clearing. She hoped that her husband would understand the meaning.

The flare lit the entire area and Burns looked up as it reached its apogee.

“Look, a flare,” said Jim.

“Damn, that means Straker is on his way in. Quick, back the way we came.”

Matt and Jim threw caution to the wind as they did not want to get caught in the coming strafing attack. They managed to get to the other side with Gary and Kathy without drawing fire from the aliens.

On the west end of the field, Sara Foster watched as Jim and Matt dashed through the woods on the opposite side of the field.

“They’re safe Mom,” said Sara just as another round of gunfire drove them to the ground.

Virginia heard the Albatross 25 come in low over the trees and the Gatling gun opened up on the alien positions.

Straker could see the muzzle flashes of the alien emplacements and carefully aimed taking out three of the four positions in his first pass. He pulled to aircraft up and circled around for another run as the last position opened fire at his aircraft. Ed jinked the aircraft narrowly avoiding the enemy fire.

No longer pinned down Sara Foster adjusted her night vision gear and focused in on the last alien position. She spotted the alien as it was firing on the SHADO rescue plane. She fire one round from her plasma pistol and silenced the last alien gun.

“I think we got them all Mom,” said Sara as she surveyed the field.

An eerie quiet fell over the scene as the rescue team slowly stood and gathered together.

Sandy saw her daughter come out of the woods with Gary and ran to her.

“Kathy, thank God!” Sandy exclaimed as she hugged her daughter.

Overhead the sea rescue plane circled the field and Virginia called Ed on the radio.

“All clear Ed,” she said.

“Clear the field, I’m coming in,” Straker over the radio.

Ed expertly maneuvered the VTOL aircraft into a hover over the field and the plane began to settle onto the field. The noise from the engines lowered as he throttled back the power eventually killing the engines. The group gathered next to the aircraft as the door slid open and they began to board the plane.

While the civilians were boarding Matt said to his wife, “It looks like our little midnight stroll turned into more than we had bargained for.”

“Isn’t that always the way Matt?”

“Yeah, what else is new,” he said. “Just once I’d like to take my wife on a date, without having to worry about aliens or SHADO.”

“Look at it this way, our lives could have been boring,” she said as she kissed him.

In the woods nearby one of the aliens began to move. Although seriously wounded he picked up his weapon and slowly made his way to the clearing. He looked at the craft that had just landed and noticed that the two primary targets were standing near the tail. He raised his weapon and took careful aim.

Sara Foster still had her night vision gear on and she was looking over the woods as the last of the civilians had boarded the plane. Her heart froze as she saw the alien aiming his weapon at her parents.

“Mom, Dad, look out!” she screamed, drawing her pistol and taking aim.

Matt instinctively pushed his wife to the ground and covered her with his body as the alien opened fire. A sharp pain in the middle of his back formed his last conscious thought before his world went white.

Sara fired her pistol and the alien fell back with a large hole in its midsection.

“Mom, Dad!” yelled Sara as she ran to her parents.

“I’m all right,” said Virginia. “Matt?”

She forced herself up and saw that her husband had been hit, “Matt!” she cried.

He just laid there unresponsive and lifeless.

Straker landed the Albatross 25 at the Lake of the Clouds as the SHADO medics waited for the engines to shutdown. Matt was still alive but he

had lost a great deal of blood and would need emergency surgery. Dr. Jackson was prepping to perform the task inside as Matt would not survive the flight to the nearest hospital.

The medics offloaded the stretcher with Hewett on it and rushed him into the hut with his wife and daughter in tow. Inside Jackson had curtained off a small section of the common room as a makeshift operating theater.

For the next hour the group waited for word as Jackson fought to save Colonel Hewett's life.

When he came out of surgery, the doctor was met by three anxious people.

Virginia could tell by the grim expression, on Jackson's face, that the prognosis was not good.

"How is he Doctor?" she asked ahead of the others.

"Colonel Lake, he began. "Your husband suffered a wound in the middle of the back, the

bullet just missing the spinal cord and his major organs.”

“Then he’s going to be all right?” she asked with sudden optimism.

Her hopes were dashed by his expression, and he continued, “The bullet was laced with an unknown version of the alien neurotoxin. I’ve administered the universal antidote provided by Commander Foster, but it will be some time before we know if it works. I’ve done all I can do, it’s really up to your husband now.”

“Can we see him?” she asked fighting tears.

“Of course,” said Jackson as he led them into the curtained off area.

Matt Hewett looked ashen and his wife could see that his breathing was shallow and labored. The gurney had been lowered to bed level and Virginia sat next to her husband and held his hand. She was openly crying now and her

daughter tried her best to give comfort to her grief stricken mother.

Ed Straker struggled with his own emotions, as Matt Hewett had become a good friend over the years.

He walked out to allow Virginia and Sara, privacy. He was approached by Captain Forsythe.

“Commander, my security team is ready to start the cleanup operation; we’re waiting for your order, sir,” said the Captain.

“Very well, commence operations. How many aircraft do we have en-route?” asked Straker.

“Two more sea rescues and six fighters, sir. The rescues will be here in twenty minutes.”

Straker knew that they would not be able to find the downed UFO without more sophisticated detection equipment. “Very well Captain. Leave one of the sea rescues here, take the armed aircraft.”

“Yes sir,” said the Captain as he turned and left.

Ed stuck his head back in the curtained off area, “Commander Foster, may I see you for a moment?”

“Will you be all right Mom?” Sara asked, as she stood.

“Yes, I’ll be fine, go see what Ed needs,” Ginny said, her voice shaking as she spoke.

Sara walked to the curtains and Ed led her to a quiet spot down the hall where they could speak privately.

“We haven’t been able to locate the downed UFO Sara,” Ed said dropping the formality, now that they were alone. “Something tells me that we’re not going to be able to.”

“That’s probably true Uncle Ed,” said Sara. She had always called in that in private, even as an adult. “The aliens use a method of temporal shielding that allows the craft to exist outside of normal space-time. Our time-craft operates by

the same principle. It's virtually undetectable without special sensors."

"The craft that allowed you to travel to this time period; is it equipped with these sensors?" he asked.

Sara nodded, "Yes, it is. I was hoping to avoid using it, or let anyone from this time period see it."

Straker understood her logic, knowing very well the risk of tampering with the timeline. If Matt Hewett dies it may be for naught anyway.

"Under the circumstances, I think we need to take the risk. What do you think Commander?" asked Ed.

In his own way he had just paid her an immense compliment and the gesture was not lost on her as she smiled broadly.

"I agree." she answered.

Chapter 10:

Matt Hewett found himself in a strange place, almost as if he were inside a cloud. Everywhere he looked it was milky white and bright. Although he didn't know where he was, he felt no fear or sorrow. He looked at his clothing and saw that it too was white.

Well I guess that's it then. I'm dead and this must be heaven, he thought.

A familiar laugh echoed through his head, and he turned to see a white clad figure approaching him.

No Matt, this isn't heaven, think of this as a weigh station between worlds, said the familiar voice. Even though he was still a ways away, Matt could hear him clearly.

Jack? Is that really you?

Jack Crawford came close enough that Matt could now see him through the mist.

Yeah Matt, it's really me. I look pretty good for a dead person, don't you think?

Even in death, his friend had not lost his quick wit, and Matt was forced to smile.

So I am dead, I assume I get to meet the Almighty and He tells me where I will spend eternity. That's how it works, right?

Believe it or not, you're not dead, yet. The Boss is still talking with some people about that decision. I don't think he's decided.

The Boss? I don't think I've ever heard Him referred to in quite that way, said Matt.

Jack Crawford shrugged his shoulders. *It works, I don't question it, he said. Anyway one of the people He is talking with is your wife.*

The Boss is talking with Virginia? Matt asked not yet understanding.

Yeah, take a look.

Matt looked to where Jack was pointing and the white mist had separated and he could see himself still on the gurney. Next to him, Virginia was kneeling at his bedside apparently deep in prayer. Suddenly it became quite clear to him as he began to feel her love, sorrow and grief.

So He does listen, said Matt.

Of course He does! You know better than to question that, said Jack. *Right now he is also listening to your daughter.*

The image shifted to young Sara Hewett kneeling at her bedside, having been awakened by a sudden need to pray for her father. It shifted to the older version as she sat in the back seat of the SHADO rescue plane.

The big advantage here is time has no meaning, otherwise things like time travel could get confusing, said Jack.

So why am I being shown this Jack? Matt asked.

I've learned not to question the Boss, Matt. He has a reason for everything he does. Besides, there is someone else here that wants to say hello. I think you two have some unfinished business to settle. I'll be back in a bit.

Before Matt could say another word, his friend faded away and he heard another familiar voice.

Hello son, I've missed you.

Matt spun around and was shocked to see his thoughts confirmed.

Dad?

Yeah, it's me, said the man.

Matt could not hold back the tears as he embraced his father, all the years of regret of things unsaid rising to the surface with a vengeance.

On the SHADO rescue plane, Sara Foster sat in silence as she prayed for her father, knowing that he needed a miracle to save his life. The alien neurotoxin from the future was often fatal even with the antidote of the same time period.

She hoped that by saving at least one of her parents, she had altered the timeline enough to prevent the apocalyptic hell she had left behind.

Next to her, the Commander prepared the harness that would lower the two of them down to her time-craft. They would use the futuristic ship to track down and destroy the alien invaders from another time.

“Are you okay Sara?” asked Ed.

She looked at him and smiled wanly, as she nodded.

“I’ve been praying for my parents, Uncle Ed. Mom is going through hell right now, and the chances of Dad pulling through, are not good. The mortality rate of the new alien neurotoxin

is near ninety eight percent when delivered by a laced bullet. My husband was killed by the same type of weapon.”

“I had assumed that you married Paul’s son. Was he your second?” asked Ed.

Sara grinned, “I was his. Alec was the fifth person to hold the position of commander.”

The intercom came to life, “We’re approaching the designated area now, Commander.”

“Very well, bring us into a hover over the designated coordinates. Once we’re on the ground, return to the hut,” ordered the Commander.

“Understood sir, commencing hovering now.”

The pilot skillfully brought the Albatross 25 into a hover just above the tree-line and the Commander opened the side door.

“You first Sara,” he said.

Straker helped her slip the horse collar on and he connected it to the winch. Sara stepped to the edge as Ed took up the slack in the winch.

“Don’t forget to cross your arms Sara,” said Ed as she stepped into the air.

He lowered her down to the ground slowly as the pilot held the aircraft in place. A few minutes later she touched down and she released the collar. Straker quickly brought up the winch and he pulled in the collar. He donned it, and stepped into the air and lowered himself to the ground.

Once on the ground he disconnected the collar and activated the auto-return function. The line was retrieved and the winch pulled into the hovering craft.

At the controls, the pilot saw the green light and he remotely closed the door, as he turned back to the AMC hut.

Once the aircraft was out of sight Sara Foster retrieved the remote control for the camouflage system and deactivated the screen. A few yards away, in a thicket of trees, the SHADO time-craft shimmered into being. Straker was amazed how far the technology had progressed in forty years.

“It uses light-bending technology coupled with temporal displacement,” said Sara, explaining the principle of operation.

“You mean it exists outside of normal space-time,” said Straker.

“That’s correct,” she said. “Some of the technology is based on a thesis that you wrote a few years ago.”

Sara opened the door remotely and they both entered the time-craft.

Dad I missed you, Matt said through tears.

Me too son, you don't know how proud I am of you Matt. I've always been proud of you. I didn't tell you, nearly enough and I'm very sorry for that.

Matt broke the embrace so he could look at his father. *You must know that I got married. Virginia and I have a six year old daughter.*

Ray Hewett smiled, *I do indeed. I couldn't have asked for a better daughter-in-law. Virginia is a lovely lady Matt and the two of you have done a great job with my granddaughter.*

I've always felt like I let you down Dad. I made so many mistakes before I met Gin again, said Matt.

Now you listen to me son, Ray Hewett said in a very stern yet kind voice. *Life is about chances, choices, and mistakes. It wouldn't be worthwhile otherwise. You've always done your best to uphold the family name, and you've tried to do what's right. A father couldn't ask anymore of his son. I love you*

Matt, I never said that enough. It's not very often that you get to correct a mistake like that and I'm not going to waste it.

Dad, I love you too, and I know I didn't say it enough.

Matt, I've got to go, Jack will be back in a minute, but I want to say one thing. You learned from our mistake. I've noticed how you shower your wife and daughter with love, the Boss has seen it too. You take care of yourself and I'll see you when I see you.

Goodbye Dad, Matt said as he saw his father fade into the mist.

Virginia was fighting sleep as she sat in the chair next to her husband. Jim Burns walked in just in time to see her nodding off again.

“Ginny why don't you go get some sleep, I can sit with him if you'd like,” he said.

“Thanks, Jim. I don’t want to leave him, whatever the outcome, I want to be here.”

She was still holding his hand and she looked for the clock.

“What time is it?” she asked.

“It’s about four thirty,” said Jim. “Can I get you some coffee? I just made a fresh pot.”

Virginia smiled and nodded her head, “That would be great Jim, thank you.”

Burns walked out into the main room and soon came back with two steaming cups of coffee. He handed one to Ginny.

“Thanks,” she said.

Burns looked at her, “I could set a cot up next to him if you’d like.”

Virginia shook her head, “I’ll be okay Jim, really.”

“All right, I’ll be out in the lobby if you need me.”

She smiled wanly and nodded turning her attention back to her husband.

Please wake up Matt, she thought to herself.

The SHADO time-craft took off from the secluded area of the woods. At the controls, Sara Foster expertly guided the futuristic craft onto a northerly heading.

“Transitioning to normal space,” said Foster as the craft shimmered and it no longer existed outside normal space-time.

“In order for the weapons to work, we need to be in the same continuum,” she added.

“I see,” said Straker.

In the copilot’s seat Straker marveled over the complex yet intuitive arrangement of the instruments. He was reasonably sure he could fly it with a minimal level of instruction.

“The conventional propulsion system is an antigravity drive system,” said Foster. “This craft is extremely maneuverable and due to the principles of the drive system you don’t pull any G forces. The controls are very sensitive, all you have to do is think about it and the craft will respond.”

He had been watching her carefully, noticing the minute control forces needed to maneuver the craft.

“I’d like to try it,” said Straker.

Sara engaged the autopilot and turned to him, “The red thumb button, on the side of the joystick, will disengage the auto pilot. If the craft gets away from you just hit that button and the craft will right itself to a straight and level course.”

Straker disengaged the autopilot and took control of the futuristic craft. In a few minutes he was comfortable with the way the craft handled.

“I could get used to one of these,” said Ed.

Well Matt, it looks like the Boss has made a decision, said Jack as he reappeared.

How long have you been gone Jack? Matt asked.

An hour, a day, a year, I told you, time has no meaning here. By the way, I have a message for your boss. Tell Ed that Tony and Charlene miss him very much.

You mean I’m going to live? Matt asked.

Yeah, the Boss decided that he still has work for you to do. Virginia and Sara must have done some serious praying, as he usually doesn’t change his mind about these things. When you get back, tell Sandy I love her and I’ll see her when I see her. See ya’ buddy.

Take care, Jack...

The mist faded away and Matt slowly opened his eyes and the image of his wife came into focus. She was sleeping in the chair next to his bed still holding his hand. He squeezed her hand gently and she opened her eyes.

“Matt...Matt!” she exclaimed as she leaned over and held him tight. “I didn’t expect you to wake up.”

“I had the strangest dream Virginia,” he said. “I saw Jack, and my father. And I saw you down on your knees praying at my bedside.”

Ginny was surprised, “Matt, I was doing just, that about an hour ago.”

“Really?” he said. “That’s so uncanny. Jack told me to tell Sandy that he loves her.”

She nodded as she considered this, “That could have been a dream. You know how much they loved each other.”

Matt paused for a moment considering. “I guess you’re right,” he said.

He laid there trying to remember everything he had seen. It had seemed so real to him. He suddenly remembered about the message for the Commander.

“I’m also supposed to tell Ed, that Tony and Charlene miss him,” said Matt. “Do you have any idea who they are?”

He watched as her face went ashen, “Virginia? Gin? Are you all right?”

“Anthony and Charlene are his parents, I’m sure I never told you their names, and there is no way you could have known that otherwise,” she said.

They looked at each other in amazement.

The sun was just coming over the horizon as the SHADO time-craft zeroed in on the downed UFO. At the controls Ed prepared to make a strafing run as Sara powered up the weapons systems.

“One good hit will disable the time jump drive,” said Sara.

“I’m going to bring her in right over the trees,” said Straker as he banked the ship in a tight turn.

An alarm on the sensor display drew their attention and Sara quickly checked the display.

“It’s lifting off Uncle Ed,” she said. “If it clears the trees, it will jump.”

Straker pushed the ship while Foster targeted the UFO, firing a shot just as it cleared the trees. Her aim was true and the alien craft exploded in mid air, showering the forest with debris.

“Good shot Commander Foster,” said Straker as he nodded his approval.

“Thank you sir,” she said. “Commander, take a look at this.”

On the scanner was one piece of wreckage that looked remarkably familiar and Ed was sure he had seen this before.

“Is that what I think it is?” asked Ed.

“A body container,” said Sara. “We’ve dealt with them before. And this one looks intact. Can you hover over it? I’ll get the grappling beam on it.”

Ed expertly brought the craft over the object and held his position just over the trees. Sara activated the anti-gravity beam and drew the object off the ground.

“Got it,” she said.

Ed pulled the craft up and set course for the hut.

Ten minutes later, Straker set the time-craft down next to the hut, after lowering the recovered capsule to the ground. When they both stepped out of the ship, the security team was already bringing the alien container into the hut to be opened. Ed and Sara walked into the hut and went to see Matt, having been told that he was awake.

Sara ran into her father's arms crying, "Dad!"

"I guess I should thank you for your prayers," said Matt in a weak voice.

Matt told Ed, Sara, and Sandy about his dream. Of the three people, Ed was the most surprised. He pulled Virginia aside and asked, "Did you ever mention my parent's names to Matt?"

"Ed, that's the strange part. Matt couldn't have known that, and trust me, I never told him," she said.

"What do you think Doctor Jackson? Was he hallucinating?" asked Ed.

Jackson seemed to be in his own private reverie. He finally answered, "Perhaps, it's hard to say Commander. The universe is a stranger place than we can imagine. The question becomes, what do you believe."

"Well I have no doubt where he was," said Sandy, her voice showing not even a trace of misgiving.

The group cleared out giving Matt and Virginia a moment of privacy.

“What do you think happened, Matt?” she asked.

“You heard Sara earlier. The mortality rate of the alien drug was almost ninety-eight percent. By rights I should be dead.” He paused for a moment, “I was given a priceless gift, Virginia. I was able to say the things to my father that had been left unsaid, and I got to say farewell to Jack. And I got a second lease on life. I have no intention of wasting it.” He took her in his arms and held her close.

“Good,” she replied. “At least you won’t be going off to play Captain Nemo, on that new submarine next week.”

“No, Colonel Carlin will just reschedule the sea trials,” he said.

“Like hell he will,” she said adamantly. “I’ll find someone to take the boat out while you’re recovering.”

“You know, I believe you would.”

“Count on it,” said Ginny as she kissed him deeply.

Epilogue:

By the time breakfast came around all of the men who had volunteered for the search, had been given the amnesia drug and flown off the mountain, along with the four SHADO personnel who had seen the time-craft. The only civilians left were Sandy, Kathy and Gary. Captain Forsythe volunteered to fly Kathy and Sandy to the summit of Mount Munroe, so they could spread the last of Jack’s remains.

Straker and Foster decided that they would give Gary and Kathy the amnesia drug just before

nine so that they would remember meeting and dancing, since they were destined to be married.

Matt was able to stand now and he sat at the table with his wife and daughter as they discussed the final solution for the timeline.

“I can’t leave any trace that I was here,” Sara was saying. “Anything you do or say about this event could have drastic ramifications on the future. You’re all going to have to be given the amnesia drug.”

Ed shook his head, “Out of the question, Sara. Our memory of these events may very well be the reason SHADO survives. I think the three of us can be trusted to keep this to ourselves.”

Sara simply nodded as she had worked out a contingency plan for this. *Forgive me Uncle Ed, but I’m going to pull rank on you.*

“Did we get an ID on the girl we found in the tube?” asked Ginny.

“Yes,” replied Ed. “Her name is Janice Miller. She’s nineteen and was engaged to the hiker that the search team found near the UFO landing site. His name was Mark Winters, and apparently, Miss Miller and he lived over in the Pinkham Notch area. They were going to be married next week.”

Matt shook his head, “It’s a damn shame. He was only twenty years old.”

“There’s more,” Ed continued. “Doctor Jackson confirmed that the young lady is expecting. Her future husband had a good job but she won’t be able to afford the house they just built. Fortunately that little problem is being taken care of through certain channels. The mother and child won’t have to worry about it.”

Uncle Ed, always coming to the rescue, thought Sara.

They were distracted by the sound of one of the Albatross 25’s returning to the hut. Sara looked

at her watch seeing that it was almost time to give the three civilians the drug.

Sara watched as her mother walked out of the bunkroom, where Sandy, Kathy and Gary were sleeping after taking the amnesia drug. Straker had ordered the rest of the team off the mountain as the cleanup had been finished. The only thing left to do was cover her tracks.

Her parents and the Commander had all wanted more coffee and Sara volunteered to help her mother make it.

“Is there any more cream?” asked Sara.

“Yeah, there should be some in the fridge. I’ll get it,” said her mother as she walked over to the refrigerator. While her mother was occupied she discreetly spiked the pot with the consumable version of the drug.

“Here you go honey,” said Ginny.

Sara filled the cream decanter and returned the carton to the fridge. She brought out the freshly filled cream and sugar containers and placed them on the table. Her cup had been filled with the last of the old pot and she still had three quarters of a cup left.

Ginny came out of the kitchen with the fresh pot and poured the rest of them a cup.

“Do you want yours warmed up Sara?” she asked.

“No thanks Mom, I’m good for now.”

The anesthesia portion of the drug was fast acting and within five minutes, her parents and the Commander were passed out. They would wake up well before the others so security would not be compromised.

Sara went into the bunk room to check on the Crawford’s and Gary Martin. Their vital signs were all good and she made a quick sweep

through the hut to make sure she had removed all evidence of her presence.

Before she left she hugged and kissed her mother and father. “Goodbye Mom, goodbye Dad, I wish I could see you where I’m going. I’ll miss you.”

She looked at the Commander and said aloud, “Sorry Uncle Ed, you would have done the same thing in my position, and I learned from the best. Godspeed.”

Sara Foster gathered her gear and stepped out of the AMC hut, closing the door behind her. She walked around to the back of the building where her time-craft sat still cloaked from sight. She activated the remote control and the ship shimmered into the visible realm. Sara climbed aboard and stowed her gear.

She sat down in the pilot’s seat and powered up the time-craft. Twenty minutes later the ship was fully powered and she started the two minute countdown to the time jump. The ship

hummed and surged with power as she uncaged the gyro's. As the countdown reached T minus ten, Sara began to cry.

The countdown reached zero and a flash and clap of thunder was the only evidence that the time-craft had ever been there.

In their western Connecticut home, Matt sat at his kitchen table with Ed, Jen and his wife.

“It would seem that our ingenious, suddenly grown up, daughter slipped us the drug whether we wanted it or not. How does it feel to have been out foxed by one of your own Ed?” asked Matt.

“I can't say that I blame her,” admitted Ed. “To be honest, I would have done the same thing in her position.”

“It sounds to me like she took a page out of your book Ed,” said Jen with a wry grin. “You taught her well.”

“It’s really my fault,” said Ginny. “Matt figured that she must have distracted me by asking for cream. I didn’t think for a minute that she would slip us a Mickey Finn.” She turned to him and asked, “So Matt, since you are immune to the amnesia drug, are you going to fill us in?”

Virginia was batting her eyes at him and grinning seductively.

“You don’t play fair, besides there really isn’t that much to tell. I think the thing that Sara was trying to hide was the design of the time-craft that she came here in. Since I never saw it I can’t tell you about it,” he said.

“You must remember some of what she said about the future?” asked Jen.

“I do, but most of it was very personal, family stuff. Gin I’ll talk to you about it later,” he promised.

He turned to the Commander and continued, “I know that you didn’t approve of it Ed, but Sara

might have saved us from ourselves. You know as well as I do that technology can be a dangerous thing when it out distances wisdom. Look at nuclear weapons, how close have we come to blowing ourselves off the map over the past fifty years. Remember that UFO incident that almost triggered a Soviet first strike a couple of years ago?”

“I remember it vividly,” he answered. “One of my biggest fears is that one day, we end up doing the alien’s work for them. Perhaps that is why they think of us as nothing but raw material. We all live on the same world and look at how we treat each other, even in our own families.”

Straker had hit on an unmovable truth and the conversation stalled as they reflected on it.

Matt heard the sound of little feet coming down the stairs and he looked to see his daughter standing there with tears in her eyes.

“What’s wrong sweetheart?” he asked.

“I had a bad dream Daddy. Bad guys were after you and Mommy,” she said through her tears.

She walked to the table between her parents and Ginny took her in her arms.

“It’s okay, sweetie. Daddy and I are fine. There’s nothing to be afraid of,” said Virginia.

“Sara, as long as there are angels to protect us, we have nothing to worry about,” said her father.

“Do you believe in angels Daddy?” she asked.

Knowing that his daughter had saved both him and her mother from a horrible death coupled with the vision of the afterlife, gave him great comfort, and a peace that he had never known.

“I sure do, I’m looking at one right now,” he said with absolute assurance.

The young girl hugged her father and Virginia walked her back up the stairs to her bedroom.

While his wife was gone Matt turned to Ed and Jen, and asked, “So the two of you are heading back to England tomorrow?”

“Yes, Jen and I want to spend a few days at home before we go back to work next week. I’ve got a nursery to paint,” he said.

“He’s going to paint it pink,” Jen interjected.

“No it’s going to be blue,” retorted Ed.

Matt laughed out loud, “Ginny and I had the same discussion. We ended up painting it a neutral color. Besides aren’t you putting the cart before the horse?”

“We’ve got the rest of our lives,” said Jen.

Matt considered that, if the future Sara was right, he and Virginia only had twenty two years left. Somehow it didn’t seem like a lot of time anymore. When she came back down and sat next to him, he put his arm around her, unwilling to waste a moment of the time they had left.

Her eyes met his and he was sure that she understood.

June 11, 2030 00:05Z

At exactly five minutes past the hour, the SHADO time-craft caught up with the present and re-entered the space-time continuum. At the controls Sara Foster proceeded to go through the shutdown procedure. She opened the hatch when she saw David come into the hanger. She still had tears in her eyes and she stood when David boarded the ship. He took her in his arms and she allowed herself to have the emotional release she needed.

“The mission was successful Sara, you did it,” he said as he held her close. “We weren’t sure it was going to work. Right after you left the time team handed me a supplementary report. You must have saved Kathy Martin as well.”

Sara looked at him in shock, “What do you mean?”

“Your parents weren’t the focal point, Kathy Crawford Martin, was. Without her discovery of the mother-ship, SHADO’s secure communications end up being compromised. The aliens were able to target specific events based on those transmissions and that caused the fall of SHADO.”

“So my parents had nothing to do with it?” she asked.

“We would have lost some major battles, but no, SHADO would not have fallen. The construction of the time-craft would have only been delayed by six months, thanks to the dedication of a certain research scientist. Your parents would have been very proud. Speaking of them, how were they?” he asked quietly.

“The hardest part was saying goodbye,” she sobbed. “It’s like losing them all over again.”

Colonel Ford, phone call, on three seven.

David held onto her as the two of them stepped out of the ship. He walked, with her at his side, to the phone on the wall and dialed the extension.

“Colonel Ford,” he answered.

“Colonel, it’s Miss Rodgers, Commander Foster has a couple of visitors.”

As he listened his jaw dropped.

“Have them come down to the Commander’s office. We’ll be right there.”

He hung up the phone and turned to her, “Let’s go to your office Sara. You have company.”

“David, I don’t want to see anyone right now,” she said through her tears.

“You’ll want to see them, trust me,” he said sternly.

She looked at him quizzically and nodded, intrigued by his sudden change in demeanor.

When they walked into the office Sara did not recognize the elderly couple right away and she stared for a few seconds.

“Well are you just going to stand there with your mouth hanging open,” asked the man.

“Mom, Dad,” she cried as she ran into their waiting arms. “You died fifteen years ago. How is this possible?”

Sara didn’t want to let them go and she allowed herself to cry tears of joy.

David turned to leave when Matt called to him, “David, don’t go.”

“Colonel Hewett?”

Matt broke away from his daughter for a moment and walked over to Ford.

“From what my daughter told me, I don’t think it will be too long before Gin and I have a new

son-in-law,” said Matt. “You don’t have to leave; you’re part of the family now.”

Ford shook hands with him, “Thank you Colonel.”

“I haven’t been called Colonel in almost twenty years but I see you never gave up on my daughter. I was very blessed to know that she was being pursued by two real gentlemen,” said Matt.

The four of them sat down at the table.

“Mom, Dad, both of you were supposed to die in a plane crash.”

“I don’t know,” said Ginny. “I feel pretty good for a dead woman, although my hearing is not quite what it used to be.”

“You still look pretty good to me honey,” said Matt as he pulled her closer.

“Stop it Matt,” she said. “Not in front of the children.”

There was something magical, about two people in their mid eighties carrying on like high school lovers, Sara thought.

“I gave you both the amnesia drug. How did you avoid the plane crash?” asked Sara.

Matt took pity on her and explained.

“It’s not in my SHADO medical file, but I’m resistant to any form of amnesia drug. When the three of us woke up, I remembered everything. I didn’t really have much to add as I had never seen the time-craft. But I did remember what you said about the plane crash. One night, a few years later, your mother and I talked about it. This was about the time that Andy was bugging me to sell the Mooney. Virginia and I discussed it and we decided to sell it to him, and buy a new one.”

“How did buying a new aircraft save you from the weather?” asked Sara.

“At that time we were doing a lot of cross country flying so I had the Mooney factory install a complete glass cockpit avionics package, GPS, weather radar, the works. The weather radar system in the new plane probably saved our lives. With the radar, we were able to fly around the worst of the storm. By the way, in my fifty years of flying, that storm was by far the worst I had ever seen. Four planes went down that day including one commercial jet.”

“That storm scared the hell out of me,” added Ginny. “Your father and I figured that was it and we were going to go together. I guess we’re just too mean and miserable, right Matt?”

Sara Foster was beginning to remember a reality that she didn’t know existed. The effect made her dizzy.

“Are you okay honey,” asked Ginny.

“I’m starting to remember things that happen in this new timeline,” she said.

“Temporal vertigo,” said Matt. “When you stepped out of the time-craft you brought your own reality with you. Your brain is trying to process all the new information and put it in its right place. Give it a week or two and the old memories will seem like a bad dream.”

“I’m so happy to see you again, you don’t know much I missed you,” said Sara.

“Yeah, we do, that’s why your father and I are here. He had marked the date down so we wouldn’t forget it, and we planned on both of us, or whichever one of us survived, to be here tonight,” said her mother.

Sara reached across the table and took both of their hands and smiled with gratitude.

“Well your mother and I should get going. I’m sure you’ve got a lot to do...”

“Wait,” said Sara. “It’s very late and I don’t want anything to happen to both of you. Why don’t you stay here tonight?”

“I suppose we could. What do you think Matt?”

“It’s okay with me,” he said.

“Good, I’ll see you two for breakfast,” said Sara as she stood and came around the table to hug her parents.

When they left she turned to David, “The reports can wait until tomorrow as well, I need to get some sleep, and if I remember correctly I have a rain check to make good on.”

“Are you sure,” he asked.

“Yeah, I’m sure,” she said as they walked out of the office, arms around each other.

END

