

UFO - The Battle Continues
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TARGET REACQUIRED Chapter 7
by Jeff Stone

MOONBASE

7-12 pm GMT

DECEMBER 25, 1983

What a way to spend Christmas, Nina Barry mused grumpily. Right now, she ought to have been relaxing in the Leisure Sphere with the rest of A Shift, knocking back the diesel fuel that passed for whiskey up here around the plastic Christmas tree. But, because of the current crisis, thoughts of chestnuts roasting on open fires (however figuratively) had to be shelved; for the immediate future, she was stuck in the Control Room, tired eyes glued to the eutroniscope.

"The sunspot flare-up has passed its peak, so signal resolution should return to normal soon," Lt Ellis announced crisply. That was good; trying to make out the MAJIC plane through the solar static was a task best suited to someone with eight eyes. The two Barry had were getting awfully tired.

The snow cleared for a moment, just long enough for her to spot something VERY unusual. Frantic fingertaps brought up more evidence. "Lt Ellis?"

"Yes."

Barry, her gaze fixated on the screen, could sense her superior now standing behind her. Barry pointed at a blip, almost invisible amongst the noise. It was a digital stillframe image, rendered in chunky monochrome pixels.

"That's the MAJICS AWACS plane," Barry said. "Stealth-coated or not, it's a pretty easy target to pick up. But these blips..." She called up a second stillframe of the moment of clarity she'd had before. Eight blips were faintly visible. "Now, I'm pretty sure four of those returns are from Stealth fighters..."

"Fighters?! What the hell are fighters doing up there? Could they be an escort for the AWACS?" She could hear a tone of worry creep into Ellis's voice, an echo of the one that had started up inside her the second the mystery blips had appeared.

"That's my bet. Hard to tell what sort of planes they are... Nighthawks, or maybe Darkstar drones. From what I can see here, they're moving off towards the northeast now. But it's those *other* four blips that have me worried. They can't be ghosts from the planes; they're too small, and they're heading in the opposite direction." She indicated the dimensional/directional data displayed on her secondary readout. "And they're also going a lot faster. They're heading right for the UFO at the Pole."

It took the two women about three seconds to realise what was happening, and then Ellis sprinted for her command desk.

NORTH POLE

7-13 pm GMT

The polar ice above the UFO had now completely melted, leaving a thirty- metre aperture of boiling water in its' place. The brilliant whiteness of the light the alien craft was emitting made it seem as though the frozen covering was still in place...until the light went out.

A millisecond later, a solid column of red energy exploded upwards through the hole, shooting into the sky. At the base of the column, a ring of similarly-coloured light spread out in all directions, swiftly vanishing over the 360-degree horizon. The light-column shut off after ten seconds, and the deathly stillness of the polar night returned. Below the ice, there was no trace of the UFO. The water temperature immediately began plummeting again, only to rocket up into the thousands-of-degrees mark a few seconds later, when four 10 kiloton nuclear warheads detonated uselessly overhead.

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The atomic blasts at the North Pole went unnoticed by the Earth's inhabitants, but the alien energy pulse that immediately preceded it was felt by every living being. Across the world, clocks stopped, car engines sputtered and died, radio and TV transmissions were blotted out. In Nanking, an electric maglev train carrying 400 passengers simply fell off it's propulsion rail and toppled into a river chasm. The lights went out at Yankee Stadium during a night game, the fans and players still illuminated by the mass of random symbols flickering across the JumboScreen.

Life support machines at Royal Melbourne Hospital shut themselves down. Power lines in Cairo burst into flames. One of the few benign stories of the time told of ATM machines in Wellington disgorging their entire cash supplies to stunned shoppers. For most of Humanity however, it was misery, darkness, panic. Millions of circuitbreakers tripped, power substations exploded, airliners fell from the air like lead figures.

The entire world was thrown into chaos simultaneously, with vastly differing consequences depending on one's geography. A disaster this sudden, this enormous, had never been seen before; a crippling body-blow to the very foundation of modern society. It came to be called Black Christmas.

Amidst all this chaos, no-one noticed what was to turn out to be the most ominous side effect of the energy pulse. The cattle in the fields, the beasts of the jungle, the denizens of the lakes and oceans, the pets in countless homes...all stopped what they were doing and looked up toward the sky.

DIVER 3

ARCTIC OCEAN

7-14pm GMT

SHADO's numerous vehicles were hardened against radiation, and so remained operational. But the impact was still felt. Lt Sean S. Bevin, new commander of Diver 3, watched helplessly as the readouts on his personal cabin monitor went haywire. Numbers and letters cascaded down the screen, and worrying scratching noises emitted from the speaker. As soon as it had come, the mechanical insanity was gone. Normal readouts reappeared, the picture as stable and clear as it had been a moment before.

Bevin got up from his chair and entered the submarine's cabin; he found his crew as bemused as he was, staring at their now normal workstation screens in a silent chorus of bemusement.

"What the *hell* was that?!" Bevin asked, simply to say SOMETHING. He got the expected blank looks from his crew, and sighed. "Alright, people. Let's go over every single system on this boat and see if we're in the clear. Aaron, get me SHADO HQ."

He turned to his engineer. "How's the reactor?"

"All systems nominal, skipper. Ticking over like a Seiko. We lost control of it for about ten seconds there, the coolant started superboiling and then..." A shrug. "Normal. I don't need to tell you that should NOT happen."

"Hmmm. Alright..." *I'm saying 'alright' too much. Makes me look like a panicky twit.*
"Let's keep going on the main batteries. We can do a full check of the reactor systems as we go. And let's not forget we still have to find the captain." *Some chance; what can WE do? Still, it helps to be optimistic...* "Helm, ahead full once we switch to batts."

Diver 3 glided on through the frigid depths, racing towards a quarry that was no longer there.

RESCUE ALPHA

NORTHERN SIBERIA

7-15pm GMT

"So...what else is real?"

Straker looked up, almost startled by the sound of a voice in the cockpit. It was Captain Robinson, and she was in one of her talkative moods again.

Since takeoff from Norksaya, everyone on board had been busy with their respective tasks. For Robinson, that meant getting the tilt-rotor to the proper altitude and keeping it on an even keel as it battled through the worst storm seen in Siberia for years. Windscreen wipers were useless as ways of keeping the forward view clear, and the glass heaters weren't much more help. Now, though, they were making steady if bumpy progress through the search pattern, and Robinson was free enough to chat. Straker didn't much care; his presence on board was largely superfluous anyway. He'd refused to sit back at the airfield, and you didn't argue with the Commander.

"What do you mean?" he asked.

"UFOs are real, so what else is? Is Bigfoot real?" Straker smiled. "I wouldn't know. The US Air Force didn't regard Sasquatch as a security hazard, sad to say." He coughed slightly. "Any news about our pilots, Lt Colby?" Colby, the navigator, looked up from his scope.

"Nothing new, sir. The solar storm is causing the beacon signals from all four men bounce all over the place. The enhancement software's taking longer than I thought to sort out the noise."

"And the storm itself?"

"Latest reports say it's dropping away," Colby replied. "It'll be a while before that means anything to us, though."

The plane shook alarmingly as a cross-wind began an offensive. Robinson's hands flew over the trim and pitch controls, adjusting them slightly. The buffeting ceased, and she turned to look at Straker.

"How about Nessie?" she ventured cheerfully.

My God, she's a good pilot. Conditions that'd put the wind up the best SHADO has, and she isn't even nervous. "You'll have to ask Lt Frazer when he gets back from his furlough. He'll swear blind he almost caught her."

Conscious that she was trying to be jokey in a situation that didn't call for it, Robinson said "Yes sir," and put her full attention back on her job.

SHADO HQ came through on the jury-rigged emergency line set up at Norskaya, and Robinson routed the call through to Straker's chair speaker.

"Yes, Alec. What's up?" "Complete chaos, to be blunt. Did you just have a lot of engine and computer trouble?"

What an odd question. "No. A miracle, considering the weather."

"Well, you're one of the lucky ones, then. Right now, our planes and MAJIC's are about the only machines operating anywhere. Those UFOs set off some kind of incredibly powerful EMP pulse. It's knocked everything out of commission, and I mean EVERYTHING. Right now, London is in pitch darkness, and we've just heard that FIVE Jumbo Jets have crashed at Heathrow. Upwards of 1000 casualties there alone. There are no fire engines, no ambulances...hell, even hospital generators are kaput. It's the same everywhere. Martial law has been declared in the UK and the States, among other places, but there's no way to let

people know about it. We're trying to get reports in from our overseas stations; little is clear at the moment. Everything electrical that was working at the time the pulse happened has been disabled or permanently knocked out. That includes power stations, of course. It's more or less Doomsday."

"My God..." Straker closed his eyes for a moment, and exhaled softly.

"So that was the Aliens' plan. That 'invasion' before was just the opening gambit. The real attack is to come."

"Yes, and they'll waltz past what's left of our defences now."

Robinson couldn't believe what she was hearing. Her mind tried to grasp the enormity of what had happened, but thoughts of her family and friends kept getting in the way.

There was nothing outside the windows of the plane, just snow and night...they may as well have been in space. A tiny bubble of warmth, heat and light struggling through the sky of a world gone dead.

Her nephew Tom had just had been admitted to hospital for a kidney transplant...what if he'd been on a dialysis machine at the time the lights went out? What if Debbie and Craig were driving home on the M1 from Christmas dinner at their parent's place? What if, what if...

The raging storm outside had no answers for her. *The REAL attack is still to come. Millions of people are dead or injured. In the past couple of days, I've talked to aliens and seen the world as I know it end. I'm OK, though, because I've joined an organisation that doesn't exist, and I'm flying a jumped-up helicopter through a snowstorm in the middle of Siberia. Tom...Mum...Dad. This can't be real. UFOs aren't real. This is a dream, it has to be. Fly the plane. Just fly the plane.*

SIBERIA

7-28pm GMT

Waterman had finally made it to the copse, and he began searching for a place to set up his tent. The morphogen was making his head spin, and he wasn't sure if the numbness in his limbs was from the drug, the cold or both. Nor was he sure he cared anymore.

After a few minutes of scrabbling, he'd managed to dig out a small hollow beneath a bank of sturdy trees. The large amount of snow he'd piled up in the process now served as a crude second windbreak. Waterman unzipped his survival tent and threw it to the ground, where it instantly sprung open. He banged the retaining pins into the frozen earth with the blade of his entrenching tool, trying not to dwell on the complete lack of sensation in his hands. Finally, the tent was ready, and he dove inside. Once the flap was zipped up, Waterman could instantly feel the rise in temperature; the tent was made of a experimental substance that, when exposed to cold temperatures, effectively tripled the heat produced by it's occupant. It wasn't exactly tropical, but it was warm enough to keep body and soul intact.

Setting a fire outside was impossible. He'd have to wait until the storm blew over. Firing off one of his emergency flares would also have been madness; the little rocket's plume of orange smoke would've been lost in the swirl within seconds. All he could do was sit tight and hope the tracer beacon was still working.

After eating some of his scarce rations, Waterman started to feel a little more human again. The pain of his broken arm was coming back, which was a case of good and bad luck arriving as one package. He wasn't going to get frostbite, but he'd be in agony once the morphogen wore off completely. He eyed the one remaining injector ampoule he had left; the temptation to use it now was unbearable.

The wind outside had died down a little, so he decided to see if it was clear enough to launch a flare. With all the reluctance of someone getting up in the morning in the depths of winter, Waterman unzipped the tent flap and crawled out into the storm. He stood up, looked around, and jumped.

A man was standing not six feet away from him, dressed in furs. He was holding an enormous assault rifle, and it was pointed straight at the SHADO officer.

"Oh...SHIT," Waterman spat.

**MAJIC AWACS-1
ARCTIC OCEAN
7-30pm GMT**

*****SIGNAL TRAFFIC TRANSCRIPT*****

ENCRYP: Paragon - - - TS/MJ-DMLD

TMCD: 7292583

Fr: DMLD

To: MJ AWACS-1 Romanov

BE ADVISED THAT LIBERTY BELL-ULTRA CONDITIONS ARE IN FORCE.
PROCEED IMMEDIATELY TO DMLD ALT RNWY 9. SPECIAL EXECUTIVE MEETING
WILL COMMENCE UPON YOUR ARRIVAL. MJ-1 HAS ORDERED BLUE ROOM MADE
READY FOR EMERGENCY CONSULTATION.

FEMA CONTINGENCY PROCEDURE 'SPARKPLUG' IN EFFECT THROUGHOUT
CONTINENTAL UNITED STATES/UK AS OF 19-28 GMT. CATASTROPHIC
DISRUPTION OF NATIONAL POWER GRIDS HAMPERING IMPLEMENTATION.

COMPLETE RADIO SILENCE RE: SHADO IS ORDERED. EXECUTIVE MEETING
WILL DETERMINE OUR POSITION RE: FUTURE DEALINGS.

PLEASE ADVISE IMMEDIATELY REASONS FOR FAILURE OF PLAN
'BLINDSIDE'.

ENCRYP: Paragon - - - TS/MJAWACS-1

TMCD: 7312583

Fr: MJ AWACS-1 Romanov

To: DMLD

EN ROUTE TO ALT RNWY 9 AS ORDERED. PLAN 'BLINDSIDE' FAILURE DUE
TO OUTSIDE FACTORS. WILL ARRIVE WITHIN THREE HOURS.

ROMANOV

Handwritten postscript on original message docket:

We dropped the ball by a matter of minutes. This changes everything! What options do
we have? It is VITAL that Straker learns nothing of this. Our position must be 'we're as in the
dark as you are' from the outset. I have no doubt at all that he'll be barking at our heels as soon
as the current problem resolves itself.

My God, we're in for it now.

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