

Trojan Horse

Based on "UFO" the science-fiction TV series created by
Gerry and Sylvia Anderson and Reg Hill (1969-1970)
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Lovingly dedicated to my father, Donald C. Ritchie, who passed away from cancer in 2007.

Chapter One

"We have a bogey coming in, Colonel Roy," MoonBase Operative Michael Norris reported.

Roy turned round in his small shift commander's cubicle. Unlike the old ones, this type was designed to swivel a full 360 degree circle so every area of the command sphere could be viewed easily, "Think it's anything serious?"

"It's not responding positively to the Alien-Tect, sir, so it's not likely a UFO. It's also moving way too slowly for an incoming spacecraft of any kind, including our own. But there's a definite metallic composition to it."

"No chance it could be some sort of old space debris, or a satellite gone astray?"

"We'd have been alerted to something like that, and the SIDs are always monitoring the interspace between Earth and the Moon," Tracker Norris checked his other monitors, "Just crash landed, Colonel... I have the co-ordinates on hand."

Roy got up from his cubicle and leaned over Norris' shoulder to look at the monitor as well, "The co-ordinates put it only a few kilometres from MoonBase: SOPs mean we'd better investigate anyway. Let's put a team out there asap."

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In the new millennium, SHADO and Omega had manufactured new Moon Hoppers at the same time they had designed and commissioned a similar type of vehicle for the MarsBase. More heavily armoured and packing lots of firepower, the new Hoppers could carry ten operatives, all their gear and could serve as an emergency shelter for several days.

At the controls was Bill Burroughs, an old MoonBase hand who preferred his tours of duty in space. Unmarried, unattached and loving it, he was known as 'the happy bachelor', working and wenching his way through SHADO's space program. Blonde, handsome and charming, he seemed the eternal boy, and none of his past lady loves had ever been able to hold a grudge when the relationship was over. His romantic record was even better than that of Alec Freeman, SHADO's former Earth-side Romeo.

Seconding him was Josh Alexander, one of the younger operatives.

"We're going to come in on it, momentarily," Alexander said, "We're right on target with the co-ordinates."

The Moon Hopper rounded a large outcropping of greyish rock and settled down amid a flurry of moon dust as it landed. There, in front of them, was the object. It was small. About twice the size of an earth-side Hummer. Neutral-coloured with a spongy-looking exterior.

"Guess we better suit up and go and have a look at it," Burroughs radioed in.

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"Can't be a meteorite," Alexander puffed as he and Burroughs crossed the distance between their Moon Hopper and the space object, "Doesn't look solid enough, or battered enough."

Burroughs reached the thing first. He laid a gloved hand on the exterior gently, tentatively, patting it down, "You're right, it doesn't feel solid in the way a meteorite should..." he slid a finger down a thin seam on the side, "And a meteorite sure doesn't have an opening..."

Young Alexander, on his first space tour, had been pretty gung ho up until this point, but Burroughs' warning brought his weapon out of its holster and up for action, "Shit, Bill, what is this thing?"

Burroughs changed frequencies on his headset, but Josh could still hear his report to Moon Base, "Get another hopper out here asap - we've got something weird..."

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The second Hopper, crewed by a now curious Colonel Roy and an operative named Fremanis, arrived at the correct co-ordinates within 20 minutes, having scrambled as fast as they could. They exited their hopper and joined Burroughs and Alexander at the downed piece of space junk.

"We scanned the whole thing, but it still isn't registering on the Alien-Tect. It also isn't registering as any known type of space rock or mineral," Alexander informed the other two, "Bill found what may be an entrance."

Colonel Roy raised an eyebrow, "Since when does space junk have an entrance?"

"Exactly," Burroughs nodded, "We got suspicious and thought we should have some back-up in case this thing isn't what it appears to be."

The four men walked back to the greyish semi-sphere, and Burroughs pointed out the seam in the stone-like exterior. Colonel Roy moved forward and used his gloved fingers to follow the seam, which traced an odd pattern. He pressed on it. If it had been possible to hear sounds in space, the aperture might have hissed when it opened. As it was, the four Moon Base staffers stared at each other and then looked back at the opening.

There was an actual interior, and inside, they could see two red and silver suited aliens lying in their seats... dead...

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"Where's Colonel Roy?" Straker asked, "He's usually here to greet us when we arrive," Dr. Raychaudhuri followed the General out of the airlock cylinder.

Operative MacKeigan smiled in welcome. General Straker made only an annual pilgrimage to Moon Base these days, "He'll be back in soon, sir. He's outside on a job - we had a meteorite drop in on us a couple of hours ago."

"A meteorite? Sounds pretty pedestrian for the base commander's attention," Straker replied.

"He sent a team out as soon as it hit, but they requested backup... just a moment, sir..." MacKeigan tapped a button on his headset, "Yes? Go ahead." He paused, obviously receiving a message of some importance. Several seconds passed as he listened. Finally he turned back to Straker and Raychaudhuri, "Not so pedestrian after all - they're bringing back two dead aliens."

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Mitali Raychaudhuri, encased in a sealed hazmat suit, had finished removing the aliens' pressure suits, helmets, eye protectors and all their other accoutrements. Several teams were

still on the lunar surface working on transporting the meteorite-cum-alien ship back to Moon Base's secure area for examination. How the aliens managed to conceal their ship from the Alien-Tect equipment would be a question for the techs. Mitali's immediate concern was to establish a cause of death for the aliens. She had to work fairly fast as General Straker was eager to get the whys and wherefores of the case before he went back to earth. MoonBase's current resident CMO, Dr. Pauline Dube, was ready to help with the post-mortems, although she'd done very few alien autopsies. Any dead aliens found on the moon were usually decontaminated and shipped home to the Omega labs in NYC. And now Straker was asking them to do the work normally reserved for the exobiologists back on Earth.

The bodies lay side by side on twin steel tables, stripped and washed down. Mitali and Pauline, clad in their hazmat suits, were going over them with hand held scanning devices. Moon Base was not equipped with an MRI or ultra sound units, although they did have a small X-Ray machine. Moon Base's sickbay was somewhat rudimentary in that any staff suffering major enough injuries or illnesses for such advanced testing were prepared and shipped home asap on the SHADO shuttles, and new staff sent up to replace them. Dr. Dube could prescribe drugs, sleeping aids, set bones and do minor surgery, but her medical mandate stopped at more serious conditions.

"What do you make of these swellings around the glandular area of the aliens' necks?" Dr. Dube asked.

Mitali moved over to Dr. Dube's alien body to take a look, "Hmmm. If I didn't know any better, I'd say we were looking at a case of the mumps."

Dr. Dube smiled, "Well, the aliens are very close to us anatomically, maybe they get some of the same diseases we do."

Shaking her head, Mitali replied, "I've never seen evidence of this kind of illness in an alien body, but there's always a first time. Let's get to the cutting and see what's going on."

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"How the hell did the aliens get by our scanning equipment?" Straker demanded. He was not permitted to smoke on MoonBase, which always made him somewhat tetchy, and the very idea the aliens could sneak one in, frightened him.

Colonel Roy brought up a series of photos on the briefing room view screen, "These pictures were taken shortly after we got the ship back here to MoonBase. The interior shell is a standard, if miniaturized, version of a regular alien craft. The exterior is, by all testing, a metal alloy of unknown origin -

our techs have theorized that this combo-material is what blocked the Alien-Tect."

"Are you saying this little ship is some sort of prototype?"

"Look, we know the aliens have several different types of craft they utilize against us. There's the standard 'flying saucer' which has been a real workhorse for their space fleet - those ships serve as transportation, fighters, you name it. Then there are the smaller fighter style craft they've been using against our ships making the Moon to Mars run. They can only function at limited distances and probably have to be deployed from a much larger mother ship, sort of like small planes fly off from a navy flattop on earth. This one is so small it can only carry two aliens, and we just can't see that it would be used for long distance travel."

"So, what *was* it used for?"

"We don't know yet. Our people are still tearing it apart. It doesn't have the powerful energy to propel it from one star system to another. It looks like it's used for local travel - perhaps within our own system. We know the aliens recently had a base of operations on Mars

until we shut it down. There's nothing to stop them from having other bases within our system - further away from Earth - but still just around the corner for their superior technology. What's to stop them from building bases on one of the moons of Jupiter?"

"Long range scanning hasn't turned up any activity there yet, has it?" Straker said.

"We didn't know how long the base had been hidden on Mars, sir. It could have been there for years. It wasn't until we built our own facility there that we discovered their presence. We always have to be prepared for the worst with the aliens, sir."

Straker sighed. He didn't like to think it possible the aliens were sitting that close and cozy, but it seemed like a plausible reality and it was better to face such realities, "Keep me updated on every new development as the techs examine this thing. I'm going to see Dr. Raychaudhuri about a couple of dead aliens."

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"So what killed these two aliens, Doctor?" Straker chewed another piece of nicotine gum.

"Oddly enough, sir, as much as we can determine - some form of the mumps." Mitali flipped some photos up on her laptop for the General to look at.

Straker did a double take, "The mumps?" he huffed, "How the hell did the aliens catch the mumps?"

"It's not our form of the mumps exactly, it's a mutated version. These cells were taken from the aliens and compared to cell photos from our medical library of our mumps. There are similarities of course, but the alien version appears to be much more virulent - I'd say the incubation time for the aliens' deaths from this disease was no more than 48 hours. Research on the space shuttles has shown that disease bacterium reproduce even faster in zero gravity, so it may be that viruses work the same way."

The General shook his head, "Both are races are humanoid, I suppose similar diseases could occur on both worlds. But how would the aliens have been exposed?"

Mitali flipped different illustrations on her screen, "I don't have a clue. I could conjecture and say the aliens somehow happened upon the illness when they captured someone for organ removal and it travelled through a segment of their population, mutating on its way. Even we have no drugs to control the mumps once contracted, and children are inoculated against them. But we have no way of knowing if these procedures are practised by the aliens, or if the mumps were in fact an accidental import from one of our own people they abducted. We also don't know if the disease was as deadly to the aliens en masse, as it was to the two unfortunates we found on the lunar surface. And, my guess is that the aliens always suffer from lowered immune systems, due to their need for non-transplant-rejection drugs."

"You did the post-mortems and still don't have much to tell me."

"The aliens have a more delicate physiology than we do. We've figured their inter-species breeding programs were partly aimed at absorbing some of our superior physical heartiness. While mumps isn't terminal for humans, and we do have drugs to prevent it, what if the aliens don't? And, once it's contracted, even on earth, the patient just has to wait it out. What if one of our childhood diseases infected a portion of the aliens and they couldn't combat it or come up with medication for it? As I said, the mump germs I found in the alien bodies are mutations, similar to, but still unlike ours. I would have my doubts that our own drugs would be as effective on this newer strain of the illness."

"What does our version of the mumps do to the body? I really sort of forget other than the lumpy glands in the throat...I was in grade school when I caught them."

"Mumps are caused by a virus that usually spreads through saliva and can infect many

parts of the body, especially the parotid salivary glands. These glands, which produce saliva for the mouth, are located in the back of each cheek, in between the ear and the jaw," Mitali brought up another schematic on her laptop screen, "The mumps causes these glands to swell up and become painful. It ceased to be a common illness around 1967 when an effective vaccine was developed and used to inoculate all children from that time forward. It's now considered a rare condition. And the bonus, if you can call it that, is that a one time infection produces an immunity to the illness for the rest of the patient's life. And of course, there is the old problem of adult men getting mumps and being affected with sterility due to an inflammation of the testes. "

"What are the symptoms?"

"It can start with a fever, ranging from 39 degrees Celsius, and up, depending on how little resistance the patient has, and also how young the patient is. Headache, loss of appetite, and a difficulty swallowing food or speaking follows. Even the tongue can swell up in some cases. The worst scenarios include the mumps progressing to encephalitis (inflammation of the brain) and/or meningitis (an inflammation of the lining of the brain and spinal cord). When the patient starts vomiting, suffering drowsiness, and convulsions, these are signs of brain involvement. And high fevers, if not controlled, can do damage as well."

"How long does it take for the disease to appear?"

"It can take just a few days or about two weeks - depending again on the person's immune system. The damnable thing is that because it is a virus, antibiotics are useless against it. And, doctors even recommend against using aspirin because the aspirin has been associated in the past with the development of Reyes Syndrome, which can lead to liver failure and death."

"So this simple childhood disease isn't as simple as it looks," Straker remarked sourly.

"Cared for properly, the mumps are no worse than chicken pox. But, for a population infected by it for the first time, there could be major problems. Look at what happened when European explorers brought smallpox and other illnesses with them and infected the native North American peoples - one whole tribe in Newfoundland, Canada was wiped out like that!"

"How is the disease transferred?"

"Generally speaking, its transferred by close physical contact, drinking out of the same glass as an infected person, being pelted with saliva from coughing, laughing or sneezing. You really have to work at it to get it, sir."

"Well, keep the alien bodies on ice and send them home in sealed containers to the Omega labs in NYC. I don't want any trouble."

Chapter Two

Bill Burroughs had hit the jackpot. He'd been gently flirting with one of the new female operatives for several weeks now, and she was showing definite signs of interest. Barbara was a pretty, petite, green-eyed vixen, with a sly side-long glance that promised more than just coffee in the wardroom. Although it wasn't easy to find privacy at MoonBase, Bill had found a few out of the way places that provided a modicum of secrecy and while Moon Base didn't permit real alcoholic beverages on the premises, he discovered that the top flight of stairs in the observation deck afforded a very intoxicating view of the earth and the stars after the astronomers' day's work was over.

"Bill, are we supposed to be in here? I mean, what if..." Barb giggled as he led her up the stairwell, holding her hot little hand in his.

"Dr. Brydges knocked off several hours ago. We can relax in here and look at the view - remember I told you the view from here was great?" Bill hit a padd on the side and a screen drew back to unveil the incredible black sky, with Earth hanging like an enormous blue and green Christmas ball, surrounded by millions of gleaming points of light.

As always, the view had its effect. Barbara stood there speechless. It was incredible, "My God, it's..."

"Gorgeous, isn't it?" Bill supplied, smiling. He eased her down on the stairwell so he could sit beside her and cuddle up.

"I guess we work so much here we never really have time to appreciate where we are."

Bill had heard that before a dozen times from at least as many girls, but he pressed on, "All work and no play makes Barbara a dull girl..."

"That's soooooo cliche!" she laughed, as Bill expected her to do. He countered with his best groaner, "You know my grade six teacher told me she expected me to become an astronaut - I had all that space in my head!"

Barb rolled her eyes, "You're going to have to come up with better lines than that!"

"We don't have to talk at all, if you think my conversation is lacking..." Bill nosed in for the kill - Barb closed her eyes and pursed her lips for the kiss...

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"Dr. Dube? Could I see you for a few moments?" Pauline looked up from her desk, "Barb Clerihue, is it?"

"I seem to have developed a very sore throat...it feels like I swallowed a melon..."

"Sit down and let me have a look...yes...hmmmm...your glands feel swollen...when did this start?"

"Not very long ago...just over night..."

Dr. Dube gnawed at her lower lip before saying, "Barb, I'd like Dr. Raychaudhuri to have a look at you, would you mind?"

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Mitali had been preparing the alien bodies to be transported home. She and General Straker would be catching the very next shuttle home. She reported to the SickBay on Dr. Dube's request. Presenting herself at Straker's guest quarters, she steeled herself to make her report.

"General, we may have a complication."

"Shuttle's going to be late?"

"No. I just came from examining Barbara Clerihue. She has the mumps."

Straker sat down in his chair with a thump, "How the hell is that possible? All our people are checked against that sort of thing, innoculated, you know the drill."

"I just had Pauline do a culture. It's the mumps, sir, there's no doubt about it. I had Barbara sent down to the quarantine section asap. The culture shows that her illness is not our human mumps. It's the alien strain."

"Christ!" Straker swore, "I thought we had those alien bodies sealed up?"

"We do, sir. I did it myself. The only people who came in contact with the bodies were Bill Burroughs, Josh Alexander, Reinis Fremanis and Colonel Roy - and they were wearing space suits. They went through decontamination procedures immediately upon returning to Moon Base. They passed. Pauline and I wore our hazmat suits and I wore a suit again to seal the cases in which we're shipping the alien bodies."

"What about the techs handling the alien ship?"

"Hazmat suits again, sir, and again, remember mumps is transferred by close human contact, not by contact with inanimate objects. Plus the area with the alien ship has been sealed off and only a select group of the techs were even permitted access. They had to wear the suits and be decontaminated every single time they came out."

"What's Barbara's condition right now?"

"We're monitoring her hourly, and Pauline only goes in to her wearing a hazmat suit. We've assumed every protection in this case, sir. Barbara has the swollen glands in her neck, she's evidencing a rising fever, and she has been nauseated as well."

Straker's face was a storm cloud looking for a place to burst, "Damn it all, Mitali, how did this happen?"

"I'm not at all sure as yet, but I'm working on it."

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Pauline Dube shook her head as she pulled the sheet up over Barbara's face. It had barely been three hours since she had entered the SickBay complaining of a sore throat. She walked out of the sealed quarentine section in her hazmat suit and stripped it off, preparing for decontamination.

"I'd like to start a post-mortem - how soon can we prep her?" Mitali asked Pauline as they walked back to SickBay, talking.

The autopsy determined cause of death as a combination of inflammation of the brain and brain damage caused by a fever that rose out of control too quickly. Barbara's temperature went over 112 degrees Fahrenheit. Once she became unconcious, her brain functions stopped. Mitali delivered this news to Straker in private.

"How effectively can we keep this information from the crew here?"

"Not very. They don't know the details, but everyone knows Barb is dead. I can't stop the talk. They're human, sir, humans talk, worry, spin out scenarios amongst themselves..." Mitali's com went off and she looked at the text message, "I have to go back to SickBay. That was Pauline. We've got another case of mumps."

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Straker stared sternly at Bill Burroughs through the thick plastic glass separating the outer room from the quarentine space. He was already semi-concious and it didn't look good. He'd lasted a couple more hours than Barbara had, but the prognosis did not seem any better. Dr. Dube was inside the quarentine space with Bill, checking his vitals and taking blood samples for testing.

Mitali joined Straker at the window, "What in hell is happening here?" the General

growled at her. He'd run out of nicotine gum and his mood was dark.

"I tried to get Bill to remember for me if there was any chance he might have come in contact with the alien bodies without his hazmat protection. He mumbled something about taking off his helmet to scratch his nose, but I don't know if that really happened or it was the fever talking. The suits the men wore were collected and destroyed as usual SOP. It doesn't seem possible that a virus could have survived outside the alien bodies, let alone attached themselves to the suits and survived lunar conditions. But, then again, we're not dealing with a normal virus here, either, sir."

"I thought you said it could take as long as two weeks for the mumps to incubate?"

"Human mumps, General. We're obviously dealing with a total mutation of the virus in just about every expectation. Barb died in three hours. Bill's managed to hold on for five hours - but he may have had a stronger immune system. His fever is climbing and he's evidencing the exact same symptoms as Barb did. I just diagnosed three more crew members with the mumps. They've being transferred here asap to keep them away from the rest of the population. We've got a full blown epidemic on our hands. That's why I've decided we cannot afford to have any shuttles land here or take off for Earth until we get control of this situation. Colonel Roy needs your direct orders sent back to SHADO HQ to enact this quarentine - now!"

Within several hours, a dozen more MoonBase personnel came down with the mumps. While some of the initial operatives who'd worked on the alien craft, albeit under tight anti-contamination lockdown, were among the ill or dead, still others had been nowhere near the alien bodies or the ship. Several of the techs working on the alien craft had gotten sick, but those still able to work were feverishly taking things apart and analyzing the ship's outer skin to determine how it shielded the interior from the Alien-Tect equipment.

Drs Dube and Raychaudhuri were getting exhausted. After the first seven deaths, they'd given up the idea of doing post-mortems in favour of spending all their time with the afflicted.

"I've gone through all the med files of our staff here. Those who've died were innoculated as children. Those who have so far shown no sign of getting sick appear to have had the illness as children," Pauline explained to General Straker.

"So, the vaccine for our strain of the mumps is ineffective. What if we innoculated everyone once again - we could have the drugs sent up here."

"That's just it, sir, the drug is no good when the illness is incubating. It has to be given before contact with the mumps. Most of us get the drug when we're kids. The mumps is one of those diseases of childhood that has almost been stamped out. The vaccine became available in 1967, that's true, but how many young people born after 1980 have actually been innoculated for it? It's like TB and smallpox. In fact, new strains of TB have been discovered in Canada in the last decade and they too are totally resistant to the original drugs utilised to combat them back in the day."

"Are those of us who've had the mumps as kids immune to the alien disease?"

"I can't say for certain. Dr. Raychaudhuri and I don't like to make promises we can't deliver on. Because the alien mumps are similar, but not identical, to our strain, only educated guesses can be made."

Straker shook his head, "And we're marooned here because we can't take any chances this disease could spread to Earth. Not to mention the loss of much needed supplies and the imminent arrival of the Mars ship, and they're also looking for supplies and new staffers for the return trip. This is a mess, Dr. Dube, and we have to come up with some sort of medical answer!"

General Straker was moved beyond anger. He was genuinely sorry for the deaths of his people, and he was frustrated by the speed and apparent immunity of the disease to any medications. All shuttle launches to and from the Moon had been cancelled until further notice.

The arrival within several weeks of the Aries ship from MarsBase was another big risk. Personnel, scientific collections and other items were en route. Some staff were coming home to be replaced and others were supposed to come up from Earth to go back to Mars on the return flight as their replacements. Most Mars-bound staff spent time training on the Moon before shipping out, and the Mars ships desperately needed extra fuel sources for their return voyage. If the alien virus was decimating the MoonBase staff, it could be potentially lethal for the MarsBase staff as well. That whole process was in danger of being suspended.

Commander Ritchie, of the Aries One, talked with Straker via a subspace communications link, "Look, General, we can't turn back. We need supplies, fuel, fresh personnel. We have no choice but to complete the trip. MoonBase is a vital connection for us - goddamn it - I don't have to tell you that!"

Straker's frustration level was no better, "We can't even ask for a transfer of the Aries to the International Space Station - if we did that we could end up jeopardizing the secrecy of our whole organization!"

Ritchie shook his head in consternation, "What about a transfer in space? Could we have the shuttles meet us? We'd have to space walk everything across, but it's a viable option."

"We'll have to look into this idea and get back to you."

* * *

MoonBase had started to work with a skeleton crew three days earlier. Many had become ill, more personnel had died, and in an effort to provide as much rest as possible to the so far unafflicted, shifts were shortened and some areas of research were shut down for the time being.

The doctors had begun taking blood samples from those not as yet ill to compare them to the samples from the dead and dying to see if there were any differences which might spell a cure or at least a means of containment.

Dr. Dube threw herself into a chair, "There are no differences I can see, Mitali. I don't understand why some are getting the disease, and dying, and some are not showing any sign of the mumps yet."

"I've cross-referenced all the dead with their medical records. The only constant is that none of them had the mumps and some of them were inoculated as children. The few who had the mumps as kids seem to be fine."

"And with you and me, you were inoculated and I actually had the mumps myself. So why aren't you getting sick?"

Mitali shrugged her shoulders, "I grew up in Calcutta - it's a pretty rugged situation there at times - disease wise. I even had typhoid three times!"

"Are you saying resistance to the alien mumps could be dependent on original environment?"

"This disease has crossed all cultural and racial barriers. Black and white, Hispanic and Asian. There's a lot of differences in food sources, drinking water, seasonal temperatures, medical care in some cases, you name it. If there is some sort of factor that is in common to all those who haven't yet gotten sick, I don't know what it is. I feel like we're just spinning our wheels."

"You know, we haven't taken any new blood samples of the people who haven't gotten sick yet. We've been so taken up with the dead and dying that we haven't spared much thought for the others."

"General Straker hasn't gotten the mumps yet - let's start with him."

* * *

"I've pulled up all the med files on everyone here who hasn't gotten sick as yet," Mitali laid a stack of hard copies on the table, "Perhaps these printouts will provide some sort of information."

Straker rolled up his shirt sleeve so Dr. Dube could take a blood sample, "I'm not feeling sick, Doctor," he temporized.

"I know that. We've decided to check all those who seem healthy..." she capped off the vial and snapped a small bandaid on the puncture wound, " You were never inoculated. The vaccine wasn't available when you were a schoolchild in the 1940's and 50's. So you had the mumps when you were a kid as a result."

"Are you saying those of us who had the mumps might not get the alien version?"

"Only a theory so far, sir. When we survive an illness like the mumps, our bodies create antibodies which become more effective than the vaccine in most cases - meaning we don't get the disease again. Having the inoculation doesn't necessarily mean you won't get the disease, either. There are several different types of vaccines available, depending on what part of the world you live in. The American version, or some version of it, has been in usage since 1967. There are other vaccines routinely given in places like Croatia and India that were descended from the Russian drugs, not to mention the drugs developed for Japan, and later given to children in some European countries. It's also been discovered that some of those drugs were more potent than other versions - meaning that some of the inoculations were virtually useless and some were actually effective."

"Why the hell inoculate if the drug is no good?" Straker replied sarcastically.

"Recent outbreaks of mumps in the United States have been investigated - some children had been given the drug - but still got the illness. And in the last few years there's been a real issue about inoculating kids for anything - look at that matter about vaccines possibly causing autism in children. There are some parents who have simply refused to have their kids given any kind of shots. And over time, as certain diseases were knocked off, kids were no longer offered those inoculations."

"Is there any chance we could study the DNA of the alien mumps and grow our own vaccine here?"

"We just don't have the equipment for that here sir, or the talent. Even if we were able to run a DNA test on the germ, it wouldn't help us - we'd need access to our disease control lab SHADO runs at home on earth. Not to mention the vaccine is mostly grown in tissue from chicken embryos."

"Chicken embryos?" the General snorted derisively.

"Yes, chicken embryos," Mitali repeated, as she came into the Sick Bay, "The vaccine is grown from a weakened form of the virus in cold chicken embryos. There is sometimes an allergic reaction to the vaccine in people who are also allergic to eggs, feathers, that sort of thing."

"So, if the human version of a mumps vaccine is to inject a weakened mumps virus into the recipient, and I know this is true of many preventative vaccines, what about doing the same thing with our people?" Straker wanted to know.

"I thought I just explained we don't have the where-with-all to do that sort of thing here, General," Pauline admonished him.

"We haven't been able to ship out the alien bodies yet, have we?"

Mitali shook her head, "They're still here in protected storage."

"Is there any way we could retrieve the alien virus from those bodies and create our own vaccine?"

"We're not immunologists, Sir, neither one of us have any idea how to create..." Pauline started to explain, but Straker cut her off.

"Dr. Dube, we've got people dying here, and people at hazard from an alien illness. We have no choice but to take some risks! Get that virus, isolate it, and start thinking about how you're going to make it work - talk to our disease control labs on Earth - we have to do something!"

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"That's right, I said chicken embryos," Dr. Dube said to her viewscreen, "I need them shipped up on the next shuttle, but we're going to have to have both of the crews in hazmat suits so they don't come in contact with any of our staff here - that's really vital..." she went on to describe some special medical research equipment she also wanted sent asap, "The Aries flight will be arriving from Mars soon and we're all in desperate need for supplies, a lot of which of which have to be passed on to the Mars Base people. Our only choice is to allow some of the shuttles to come up and pass them through with everyone protected. Until we have this matter under control, we cannot allow more people to be exposed. But, the supplies HAVE to come in somehow. This is the best compromise Mitali and I could come up with for the moment."

"We've never done this sort of thing before, General, so you'll have to bear with the process. It will take a couple days to create the drug and make sure it's safe for usage. I feel like Jonas Salk perfecting his polio vaccine..." Mitali explained to Straker.

"Since the two Moon shuttles have come up and deposited their cargoes, all has gone off rather well - they returned earthside, all without any opportunity for passing the virus," Pauline added, "The MarsBase items have been stored against the Aries flight's arrival, in a secure holding area. Marsbase would have to make do with its current people until such time as it is safe to bring them back and transport new workers."

"I've had several conversations with Commander Ritchie, en route from Mars. He's well briefed on the situation of course," Straker confirmed, "We'll be moving the MarsBase supplies the same way we moved in the MoonBase items from our shuttles."

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"General, we've isolated the vaccine and have a small amount in progress for a test run," Dr. Dube informed Straker. Together, they stood looking at an electron microscope.

"How fast can you start using it?"

"That's just it. We need a test subject. If this were a real lab, we'd have rats to test it on. In our circumstances, we're going to have to test it on a human - someone who doesn't have the mumps yet. Once a person has the disease, the vaccine is useless."

Straker rolled up his sleeve, "I'll volunteer myself - we have to get this thing rolling..."

Dr Dube shook her head, "I appreciate your willingness, sir, but you're not a good test subject - we need someone who hasn't had the disease ever. This vaccine has to be allowed to work in a pristine situation."

Mitali nodded, "You can use me. I've never had the mumps."

Straker replied, "You're too valuable to use as a test subject - if the vaccine is toxic, or doesn't work - you could be stricken with the illness and die."

"Then we better hope we followed all the instructions from our own disease control people correctly..." she rolled up her own sleeve and Pauline prepared a needle.

* * *

Within 24 hours of administering the test vaccine, Mitali was still in the pink of health. Pauline had done blood work on her, checked all her vitals constantly.

"We might have a winner here, sir. Mitali is fine so far."

"But didn't you say it could take as much as 48 hours for the disease to manifest?" Straker queried.

"That's true, but we're already into the second day of Mitali's receiving the vaccine. Once we reach 48 hours with no difficulties, I'd like to consider administering it to some other staff members," Pauline explained, "I've also been sending her test results back to our people on earth and they concur with me on this."

Slowly, Straker nodded, "Start working on some of the others. I presume you'll be monitoring them the same way as Mitali?"

"Yes, General. We are monitoring and documenting everything as scrupulously as possible."

* * *

"Your results have been nothing short of impressive, ladies," General Straker congratulated them, "You've created a miracle here! Our shuttle people will all be inoculated too, so they can come into the base and then go back home again without taking any germs with them!"

"Yes, we're planning to do just that when the next crew arrives. I understand Commander Ritchie's MarsBase ship is due to arrive anytime. We'll be doing the same for them as well." Pauline told him.

"You know, sir, there's something Mitali and I have been meaning to take up with you. You've been off any kind of nicotine for all this time, it might be a consideration to quit altogether."

Straker waved her off, "The only reason I haven't gone stark raving mad about this is because I kept promising myself a nice box of Cuban cigars when I got home!"

"Well, 'cold turkey' is the hardest and most effective way to beat the habit. You've certainly *had* to go 'cold turkey' all these weeks. It seems a shame to waste the effort."

"Doctor, this is my last vice. A man has to have some something to relax with."

Epilogue

Paul Foster's familiar face filled General Straker's viewscreen in his underground SHADO office, "So who looked after your feline children while you were stuck on the moon, trying to save humankind from the mumps?"

Straker sat back with a cigarillo in hand, "Dr. Zama did a great job. Cleo and her kittens were well cared for," he blew out a circular puff of smoke, "I can't TELL you how good it is to be home!"

"I understand you almost had that nasty habit kicked," Foster smiled impishly.

"Mitali has been blabbing again!" the general grinned back, "There *is* a difference between a forcible abstention and really wanting to quit, you know."

"I take it all the nicotine gum in at MoonBase did not deter your cravings?"

"Most of it was stale and unpalatable."

"That should tell you something, Ed. Smoking isn't 'cool' anymore."

Using his rank to change the subject, Straker said, "I take it your labs there in New York received all the info Mitali and Pauline sent. The drug people there should be able to inoculate all your agents. Our theorists are split on the incident; some think it was accidental - that the aliens must have taken a victim who had the mumps and it mutated and attacked *them*. Some think the whole thing was a sort of *Trojan Horse* - an attempt to inflict a dangerous illness on humans."

"Either way, it was a frightening prospect that the aliens could have introduced one of our old illnesses back into our population - especially since the incidents of mumps worldwide are so few. Are children still being inoculated for mumps these days?"

"Not as much as they should be, I'll bet. This conundrum over whether some vaccines were connected to causing autism pushed some parents into the other camp and their kids didn't get any immunization at all. The problem lies in the false belief that any illness can be totally controlled or eradicated. Even outbreaks of diphtheria and smallpox still occur annually."

"I'm going to make sure all our field people get their shots, too. Even myself. No point in asking for more trouble. But all this proves one thing: the aliens are just as susceptible to our diseases as we are. There may be more physiological similarities between our two species than we realize."

The general looked serious for a moment, "It's those similarities that bring those bastards back here all the time. They've tried so many things: interbreeding, forcing a marine species of their own world on ours. And we know they've been interceding with us historically for centuries. They're like a parasite we can't get rid of."

"The Alien-Tect will have to be over-hauled too. It didn't pick out the alien metals in that meteorite-ship at all."

"Every gain we make has a short shelf life. And it's just a matter of time before they start attacking the MarsBase. They surely must know we destroyed their own base there."

"No rest for the wicked, I guess," Foster temporized.

"That's just it, Paul. There *is* no rest - for any of us who want to keep this planet safe."

The End