

"The UFO Affair" (Part Two)

Based on the TV series "The Man from U.N.C.L.E."
created by Norman Felton and Sam Rolfe
and "UFO" created by Gerry and Sylvia Anderson
written by Pamela McCaughey

Part Two

ACT ONE

SOMEWHERE IN THE ADIRONDACKS.....

Keith Ford knelt behind a thick-trunked tree. He motioned for the others in his team to move up quietly. Nina Barry reached him first.

"Do you hear that?" she whispered to Ford, inclining her head, looking down into the gully at the shining silver UFO.

Ford nodded and replied sotto voce, "What do you think our chances are of getting prisoners?"

"The UFO has been down for almost 48 hours. You know what that means."

He pursed his lips and shook his head, "We just weren't fast enough getting into this location. Commander Straker won't be happy about this at all."

"He knew we were working against the clock. The question is: do those aliens have the captured scientists with them? Why haven't they attempted to take off again?"

A high pitched squeal started emanating from the UFO, "Jesus! Get back! Get back!" Ford and Barry joined the other Omega team members in diving for cover. They heard, rather than saw, the UFO disintegrate in a blast of blinding light! By the time they all popped up from their cover positions, the UFO had been reduced to a small crater in the ground, with very few pieces of debris. And, no visible bodies in the wreckage.

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SOMEWHERE DEEP INSIDE SHADO HEADQUARTERS.....

"So we're back to square one! Dammit!" Alec Freeman watched Commander Ed Straker pound his fist down on his SHADO control desk.

"It couldn't be helped - the team scrambled as fast as they could over there. It was an isolated area - hard to get into. They're lucky to have made it out alive after the blast."

"When can we expect the first reports?"

"I'm sure they'll send them by secure code tomorrow. They're still doing remediation work and cleaning up what wreckage there was. Not much, I gather."

"Radiation levels?"

"Oddly enough, no. At least less after the blast than before. Whatever the aliens are using for propulsion, it must be 'clean' energy. That's a plus for us. Decontamination is that much easier. Ford said they'd package up the debris and send it to the Omega lab in NYC for analysis."

"What about survivors?"

Freeman shook his head, "Not unless the aliens bailed out before the explosion."

"And, the missing scientists?"

"Nothing so far. Omega is continuing to scour the area."

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SOMEWHERE IN THE WILDS OF NEW YORK STATE.....

Illya stopped for a moment. He could have been enjoying the bucolic scenery, but he was out of breath from hiking. His cracked ribs were not yet healed up.

Napoleon stopped with him, "You ok?"

"Just out of breath. I'll be fine."

Taking his binoculars out of his backpack, Napoleon scanned the valley from their vantage point, "We should be there shortly. I guess if you're going to build a secret installation, you have to place it in a fairly inaccessible location."

The two UNCLE agents trekked for another forty minutes before coming within sight of the installation in question. Secluded by the forest, and hidden from the sky by a copse of tall shade trees, the facility looked more like a resort hotel than a scientific laboratory. Illya and Napoleon advanced carefully to the front entrance. Could THRUSH have been responsible for the kidnappings here?

Under normal circumstances, the facility would be a hive of activity - people coming and going, the rooms lit up. The front entrance was unlocked, and there was no receptionist at the inside desk. Napoleon and Illya spent over an hour searching the premises. Even the lab rats were missing.

"Deserted. Completely empty. It's like they just packed up and left," Napoleon was dumb-founded.

"There should have been thirty-seven people here - researchers, scientists, administration people, security. There's no evidence of any kind of mass transport vehicle being in here to take out that many people, plus all their lab equipment and their files. How could thirty-seven people just disappear?"

"They were doing genetic research here - why would that interest THRUSH? Wouldn't a strike on a facility such as this prove to be a logistical nightmare?"

Illya flicked his UNCLE pen-comm, "Open Channel D." When UNCLE Communications Central answered, Illya requested Mr. Waverley, "The facility has been completely cleaned out sir - no people, no scientific equipment. Nothing left but the building itself."

Waverley's clipped British accent replied, "Any evidence of violence?"

"If you mean blood stains or broken furniture, no."

"The distress call UNCLE received was partially garbled, but we could make out enough to understand that they were dealing with intruders."

"Well, whoever the intruders were, they managed to pick the place clean - all the records and research files are gone too."

There was a pause while Mr. Waverley was obviously taking another call, "Mr. Kuryakin, would you and Mr. Solo go to the Warren County jail? We've just received a report that one of the missing scientists has turned up dead, and his body is being housed there. Use your cover as FBI agents - I'd like you to get the body out of there and back here to our labs for autopsy. Apparently there is something very peculiar about the body. It's been mutilated - it's missing all of its internal thoracic organs."

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SOMEWHERE IN WARREN COUNTY.....

"Yeah, I guess they got the jump on ya. They were in here as soon as we opened this mornin'. We released Dr. Singh's body to them," the sheriff huffed, "Guess you FBI boys better get your assignments straight," he was enjoying Illya and Napoleon's discomfiture.

"Could you describe those agents to us? We might know them," Napoleon smiled, disarmingly, "J. Edgar has some special operatives who sometimes handle these weird cases. They call them X-Files."

The sheriff shrugged, "Pretty girl and a fella with a British accent. They had lotsa ID."

"What kind of vehicle did they have?" Illya asked.

"Late model Chrysler station wagon - probably rented."

"And, they loaded Dr. Singh into the back?"

"Yep. Said they were goin' back to Washington with him. Had to make their reports and bury the poor guy decently."

"Any other details you can give us?"

"They didn't stick around for coffee, if that's whatcha mean."

Napoleon grimaced, "Thank you, Sheriff.....um....."

"Felcher. Always glad to help out you G-Men," the sheriff smiled ingratiatingly and leaned forward, "You can tell me - what's this top secret stuff all about? Was there really some think tank out there in the mountains?"

"I'm sorry, Sheriff.....Felcher.....you know how it is.....we're all under a code of silence.....hush-hush and all that.....," Napoleon trailed off.

Felcher nodded, pretending to understand, "Well, you fellas have a real good day, now!"

Illya got behind the wheel of their rented blue Barracuda, "THRUSH agents?"

Napoleon shook his head, "If they were the intruders, why did Dr. Singh's body turn up? THRUSH attack squads are not that sloppy. They'd have taken care of him with the others. Plus, he's the only body so far to be found."

"Why would they mutilate the body and leave it out somewhere for others to eventually find it?" Illya swung the car out of the parking lot and onto the highway.

"Waverley said the internal thoracic organs were missing, right? How did they know for sure?"

"A gaping hole in his chest might have been the tip-off," Illya supplied, sarcastically.

"So now what?"

"Let's check with the local car rental agencies and see about that late model Chrysler station wagon. How many rental places can there be around here?"

* * *

Nina and Keith drove back to the city quietly. There wasn't much to say. They had to get the body to the Omega lab in New York City for an autopsy and report. Then, they had to return to their base camp and oversee the completion of the UFO crash remediation job.

"If the aliens have been coming here for any great length of time, they'd have to become familiar with our modes of communication and information storage, I suppose. I wonder what those research files will turn up?" Keith had his hands on the steering wheel - he was being cautious - he wasn't used to driving on North American roads.

"They weren't all there - the aliens must have removed whatever they felt was pertinent to their needs," Nina remarked, "We only got what was left over. They steal whatever they can. But, recorded or printed material wouldn't be of any use to them unless they could access it or read it. The facility's computer print-outs were all gone, as well as most of the printed files. We know the aliens have been coming here for a long time. Observing us. Getting to

know us."

"So there's no doubt the research on organ rejection was what they were after?"

"They wanted the research, yes, but obviously they decided the scientists were of value to them - at least for organ replacement parts. Dr. Singh's body is proof of that. But, that still doesn't account for what happened to the other thirty-six workers at that lab site."

"I've often wondered if the aliens were able to package humans in some form of storage on their ships and take them back to their planet for organ extraction there."

"Now that's a gruesome thought," Nina shuddered.

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Straker shook his head, "Thirty seven people at that lab and only one body shows up? What the hell happened to the others?"

Keith Ford's voice sounded peevisish on the top security Omega phone line, "We've been over that site with everything - Geiger counters, metal detectors - you name it. Dr. Singh's body was found by state forest rangers almost fifty miles away from the facility location."

"How fast can you get those autopsy findings and the site reports over here?"

"It'll be another twenty-fours at least."

* * *

Illya waited in the car while Napoleon chatted up the car rental clerk. She was pretty, and Solo was doing his best to be charming.

"They showed me their FBI ID cards, and filled out the papers," the girl handed them over to Napoleon, "They paid in cash."

Napoleon scanned the sheets. They gave FBI badge numbers, but he doubted if they were legit. THRUSH was just as capable of manufacturing phony IDs as UNCLE was.

"Could I have a copy of this paper?" he smiled brightly.

The young lady made a photocopy and Napoleon exited.

"Well?" Illya asked, as his partner got into the passenger seat.

"I've got a copy of the papers they signed, but the info's probably all bogus anyway. Fake FBI badge numbers, drivers' licenses and all. Says here the car was rented by agent Keith Ford, and he paid cash."

"Might do to send that info to headquarters and run it through the computers - maybe there's a THRUSH agent who uses that alias," Illya suggested.

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OMEGA HEADQUARTERS, NEW YORK CITY.....

Dr Schroeder looked up as Keith Ford came into the autopsy lab. He was typing his report in triplicate, as required, "I'll have this ready in another half hour or so," he commented.

"Commander Straker is chomping at the bit to have all the reports sent over to headquarters."

"Yes, well, I wanted to be certain I'd included every possible test on this subject," Schroeder inclined his head towards the sheet-covered body on the table, "It wasn't an easy death, I'm afraid."

Keith grimaced, "We figured as much."

"From what I've been able to ascertain, Dr. Singh was still alive when his organs were removed."

"Conscious?"

"Very likely. The aliens have never been known to use pain killers or anesthesia. The tox screens came back negative for any drugs in Dr. Singh's blood stream - at least drugs we know

how to test for."

Keith swallowed painfully, "My God."

"They dumped the body out in the woods nude. There's evidence of animal tampering with the body, but not much. A few chew marks - a bear is my suspicion. The bite marks match bear fangs."

"We saw the UFO explode. The other lab workers must have still been on board."

Dr. Schroeder raised an eyebrow, "Unless their bodies were dumped too and our teams just didn't find the remains yet."

"The teams covered a radius of about fifty miles - Dr. Singh was found just outside that perimeter. After his body turned up, our teams went back out to the site and spread out for another 20 to 30 miles in all directions. Nothing."

"Are we sure only one UFO landed?"

"There were no known reports of a second UFO. It's always a possibility."

"We can send these reports to Commander Straker, but I don't think the case is over yet. There are still 36 bodies unaccounted for. If the aliens dumped Dr. Singh, they may have dumped the others - somewhere."

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"I'm sorry, Mr. Solo," Waverley's voice emanated from the UNCLE pen-comm, "But we've cross-referenced Keith Ford, Keith, and Ford through our computers and came up dry. There are no THRUSH agents or any real FBI agents using any or all of those names as an alias."

"I expected as much. He and the girl just seem to have vanished. They told the Warren County sheriff they were returning to D.C., but I doubt that was the truth."

"The Washington office can check for us. There are a number of labs where autopsy work can be done, and we've known THRUSH had some sort of covert facility in the area. Other than that, it seems we're at a dead end."

"We're headed in to talk to the forest rangers who found Dr. Singh's body. I'll check back later with you."

* * *

The county forest rangers' cabin was several miles off the highway. They had a tall observation tower, and a number of Jeep type vehicles for traversing difficult terrain parked out front. Illya and Napoleon left their rented car and went in.

"Yes, gentlemen, what can I do for you today?" the ranger smiled up at them.

They flashed their FBI ID cards and badges, "We'd like to speak with Ranger Ferguson," Illya stated.

"Well, you're in luck. I'm Ferguson. But, I already talked to you people - this is about Dr. Singh's body, right?"

Napoleon and Illya exchanged brief glances, "When did you see them?"

"Yesterday. A couple of your agents came up to see me. Asked a few questions. I told them the body was over at the county sheriff's office, waitin' to go to the coroner."

"I see. We're just doing follow-up on this," Napoleon said, "Which agents did you speak with?"

"There were two of them - a British fellow and a pretty girl. I think his name was Ford. I never caught hers."

"We won't be able to get access to their report for a few days - mind bringing us up to speed on what happened?"

Ferguson shrugged, "Not much to tell. I was patrolling that sector, looking for illegal animal traps when I found Dr. Singh's body. Naked, y'know. Poor bastard! He was all.....cut up.....his chest cavity was all ripped open. I called back here and got my partner to bring up the Jeep so we could bring him back to the county sheriffs office. We wrapped him in a plastic body bag, and transported him right over to Sheriff Felcher - did you talk to him yet?"

"Oh yes, we spoke with him earlier.....Did you notice anything else about the body?"

"Had a few chew marks on it - likely a bear. We have brown bears here. They generally don't bother anyone, but we always warn people to stay away from them. Especially during birthing season. Mother bears can be real dangerous if you piss 'em off."

"Any other things?"

"Nah. Dr. Singh had real long hair. My partner said that had something to do with his religion. He was from India, I guess."

"That's it?"

"That's it. Stripped and picked clean - just like a trapper does a rabbit."

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"It's just a dead end. Everywhere we go, everyone we've spoken to, Ford and his partner have been there ahead of us, and then gone."

"We tried to trace the car license number you got, Mr. Kuryakin, but the car belongs to the rental company. According to them, it hasn't been returned yet." Alexander Waverley reported over the pen-comm.

"How much you bet it won't be, either. They could have stripped off those plates, repainted the car - or ditched it somewhere. Who knows?" Napoleon added, "We didn't get anything from the forest rangers or the sheriff. Just that the thoracic cavity was slashed open."

"That really doesn't sound like a THRUSH job to me. And, they usually dispose of unwanted bodies more efficiently."

"So what are we dealing with here?"

"It seems unthinkable, but.....," Mr. Waverley paused, "I think you gentlemen should return to New York. We can discuss it at greater length and security then."

ACT TWO

SOMEWHERE IN NEW YORK CITY.....

The two UNCLE agents and their commander went for a scenic drive around New York City upon their return.

"I know we're taking an enormous risk, even discussing this, but after the evidence I was shown a few days ago, I am concerned that we may be investigating something over our heads," Mr. Waverley explained.

Napoleon was thoughtful, "Are you referring to our 'mission' in England last week?"

"You have an amazing grasp of the obvious, Mr. Solo."

Illya shifted in his seat, "Then, is this death really related to the lab infiltration?"

"There are several possibilities. We know the lab was invaded. All the research material was removed. Dr. Singh's was the only body recovered out of 37 workers at that installation - found 50 miles away. And, the description of the condition of Dr. Singh's body is horribly similar to that in the evidence I was permitted to see."

Napoleon supplied the question they were all thinking, "Alien abduction?"

"But, for what purpose?" Illya asked.

"According to the material I've seen, the aliens are a dying race from another solar system, abducting humans for organ transplants. They started their experimentation on cattle and other mammals, and progressed in recent years to utilizing humans. The organization you came in contact with last week is in the vanguard of the struggle - to keep the aliens from taking any more humans, and to learn exactly where they are coming from."

"The lab in the Adirondacks specialized in research into anti-rejection drugs for organ transplants!" Illya added.

"Something the aliens could be plausibly interested in. Plus, the missing organs from Dr. Singh's body could mean they were using him, and perhaps the other workers at the installation, for experimental or other reasons. I suspect your bogus FBI agents are really operatives of the organization you tangled with last week. And, it was either that organization or the aliens themselves which removed all the material and/or the remaining workers from the research installation."

"So what's next?" Napoleon asked, "Do we just leave this situation alone, or do we go ahead and investigate further? We've hit a dead end. And, I'm sure that wasn't just a hollow threat they used on all of us."

"The answers, if there are any at all, Mr. Solo, must lie in that forest out in the Adirondacks. Would you and Mr. Kuryakin care to take a little camping trip out there?"

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Illya looked down at the small tent Napoleon had just erected. He wasn't the "roughing it" type any more than his UNCLE partner was, and he was privately cursing Mr. Waverley for this assignment. He'd put on what seemed a whole bottle of insect repellent!

"Now I remember why I hated Boy Scout camp," Napoleon grinned.

"And, now I'm glad we didn't have Boy Scout camp in the Soviet Union."

They were camped fairly close to the location in which Dr. Singh's body had been discovered. The shores of a very small lake seemed as inviting as any a place to put up their tent.

"I hope you remembered to bring the can opener," Napoleon joked, "Otherwise, we won't be eating much!"

Illya looked down ruefully at the heavy sack of canned goods they'd taken turns backpacking into the campsite, "Couldn't you have brought anything other than beans?"

"What better food to eat around a campfire? Where's your spirit of adventure?"

"I left it back in Leningrad! Along with the best borscht cafe in all of Mother Russia," the blonde UNCLE agent sighed, "Of all things - beans! I can just imagine how pleasant sharing a tent with you is going to be once those beans start working!"

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The fresh air, exercise and baked beans around the cozy campfire had put Napoleon to sleep right away. Their hiking around the site hadn't turned up anything special, and the two UNCLE agents opted to turn in, and continue in the morning when the light was better. Both of them had come equipped with small cameras, sidearms and some other pieces of UNCLE technology. Sitting under the trees and the stars had been a pleasant experience - if it hadn't been for the black flies. Illya complained vociferously about the bugs and said he was going to put in for hazardous pay and a blood transfusion when they got back to New York!

Napoleon felt something at his shoulder. He brushed it off, still partly asleep, "Illya, turn over, you're in my space...." he mumbled.

He felt the sensation again and sat up. The campfire had died down to glowing embers, so there was very little light. He reached out a hand to shake Illya, but Illya wasn't there. Then he felt something hit his chest. And, a hand moved into the tent, grasping for him. Napoleon whispered, "Illya, are you alright? Where are you?" He crawled on his hands and knees to get out of the tent.

The last vision Napoleon had, as he passed out, was that of Illya, sprawled on the ground, with some orange and silver clad stranger standing over him.

* * *

STRAKER'S OFFICE, SHADO HQS.....

"I don't like it, Alec. I certainly don't think this situation has been resolved. I just have this gut feeling that we've missed something," Straker was looking at a topographical map of the Adirondacks, spread out on his desk, "Dr. Singh's body was found here, about 50 miles from the lab facility," the silver-haired SHADO commander tapped a spot on the map, "Why so far away? And, the one UFO we know about, exploded with witnesses to back it up. There has to be a second UFO somewhere out there that we haven't found yet."

Alec Freeman had been watching Straker poring over the map, "The Omega teams have scoured that area in every way possible. They've used all kinds of instrumentation, and they've done any number of flyovers. How could a UFO hide itself that well? Plus, how could it stave off the inevitable explosion?"

Straker was thoughtful, "Maybe they can do things we don't know about yet. But, if they're not hiding on land, where else could they be.....?" He continued to scan the map, "There's a few small lakes in the search area. How deep are they?"

Freeman was lighting a cigarette, "No more than 20 feet or so from what I understand."

"What would the water temperatures be like?"

"At this time of year, probably cooler than air temperature, I should think."

"And, what mix of gases would be present at the bottom of those lakes?"

"I'm no oceanographer - but I know the Omega people would have that information."

Straker snapped his fingers, "The aliens must have managed to hide their extra craft at the bottom of a lake! If they couldn't stay on land, they must have found a means to adapt for longer term expeditions here. Underwater would be the perfect hiding place. Cooler

temperatures, a somewhat different gas content than earth's main atmosphere.....why not?" He picked up the phone receiver, "I want those lakes dredged or checked out somehow!.....Yes, get me Keith Ford."

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BACK IN THE ADIRONDACKS....

Ford and Barry reorganized their field teams and sent them back out to the original research lab-Dr. Singh's body location area. Each team was responsible for diving and/or reconnoitering several different lakes in the vicinity. The lakes were all various sizes and depths.

The field command headquarters was actually established back at the research facility, because it was the only real building for miles. Plus, it had space for their equipment and personnel. Barry and Ford took twelve hour shifts as co-leaders of the mission again. Barry's shift had just barely started when some interesting reports came in.

"We found some very unusual readings at the bottom of a very small lake not far from where Dr. Singh's body was discovered. And, on our recon of the lake's perimeter, we found someone's camping site. Looked deserted. Like they'd left in a hurry."

Barry reached out and opened the plastic-covered file to read the particulars. She scanned a few pages, and looked up, "You're absolutely sure of this?"

"No doubt about it. The missing alien spacecraft is very likely at the bottom of that lake, waiting for the best opportunity to surface and escape undetected."

* * *

Illya lifted his head slowly. It ached. No, it throbbed. He was getting very tired of all the abuse he'd endured lately on the last several missions! And, this time he was wet! Completely soaked through. Slowly, he swung himself up until he was sitting in an upright position. Napoleon was lying beside him, also in a pool of water. As he moved his gaze around, he picked up other human figures in the dim light. Illya tested himself; he put his feet on the floor, and gingerly stood up. Then, his vision became accustomed to low lighting level, and he saw much more. The room he and Napoleon appeared to be in was not high, but what he saw made him gasp. Floor to ceiling glass-fronted storage compartments held naked human bodies - were they dead or alive? - stacked like so much cord wood against a cold winter. There were men and women both in those storage cases, and Illya realized they were floating in some sort of green liquid! He was especially shocked to realize that among those stored human bodies, there were even several children! What the bloody hell was this place?

"Napoleon! Napoleon! Wake up!" Illya shook his partner, "Are you alright?"

With a groan, Napoleon turned over. His dark eyes looked up into Illya's blue ones, "Jesus, Illya, all I wanted was for you to move over....." Solo sat up and immediately held his head in his hands, "Ooooooh! Whatta night....."

Illya pulled Napoleon's hands down from his face, "Take a look around, please. We're not in Kansas any more, my friend."

Napoleon squinted in the dim light. He crawled on his knees over to the wall of human storage compartments, and then looked back at Illya, "What is this place? A funeral parlor?"

Shaking his head, Illya replied quietly, "If it is, then I'm completely unfamiliar with this type of formaldehyde." He indicated the colored liquid inside the cases, "Smell that?"

The dark-haired UNCLE agent breathed in, "What? I don't smell anything at all."

"Exactly. Formaldehyde has a distinctive odor. There's no smell in here."

"Any ideas? Conjectures?"

"You'll think I'm crazy."

"Try me."

"The last thing I remember before losing consciousness was someone in an orange and silver suit."

Napoleon nodded, "Me too."

"And that person was wearing a helmet and a breathing pack - at least that's the image I seem to remember."

"Soooooooo....."

"I think we're probably inside an extraterrestrial spacecraft right now."

Illya watched as Napoleon sank down onto the metallic floor surface, "Little green men?"

"You may have the green part right.....," Illya indicated the human cargo containers, sloshing with the green liquid.

"Then, who's in those compartments?"

"How about the 36 missing research lab people?"

"You counted?"

"There's actually forty containers - 36 contain adults, the remaining 4 contain children."

"Christ." Napoleon said it so softly Illya wasn't sure whether it was a comment or a prayer, "Children?"

"Yes. Four children. I'd guess from their sizes they'd be grade school age."

Napoleon stood up again, a little surer on his feet this time. He laid a hand on one of the lowest cases, which contained the children, "Why would anyone do such a thing?"

"Remember what Mr. Waverley told us? He learned from people occupying the highest offices on this planet that aliens were coming here and abducting humans for spare body parts."

"Are they dead or alive?"

Illya shook his head, "I honestly don't know. I can't make out if that green liquid is a body preservative, or some sort of stasis material."

"That doesn't say much for what's gonna happen to us," Napoleon commented.

"I don't think they have any storage space left in here."

"Maybe that's what happened to Dr. Singh."

Their eyes met - Dr. Singh's body had been found viciously mutilated - all his thoracic organs removed!

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A fleet of SHADO and Omega mobiles were airlifted into the laboratory's main parking area using helicopters. They were large vehicles, with tank-like tracks, thick armor and an arsenal of different weapons at their disposal. Extra personnel came with the mobiles - Lew Waterman, Mark Bradley, Joan Harrington and Gay Ellis. They were the mobile pilots and technicians best suited to work this type of scenario. They would also be accompanied by ground crews inside the vehicles and out. SHADO aircraft were also standing by, doing flyovers, watching the lake carefully, in case the aliens opted to make a run for it.

"SHADO Control, this is Mobile One. We are moving into the lake area now." Joan Harrington's voice came crisply over the comm-link.

"Mobile One, as soon as Mobiles Two and Three rendezvous with you, you can deploy your ground forces," Keith Ford responded.

Ed Straker's voice emanated from another comm-link, "I'd like to get some of these aliens alive, if possible, for interrogation and scientific purposes. Please instruct the ground crews not

to get too trigger happy."

"Roger that, SHADO Command," Gay Ellis' cool British tones replied.

"Mobile Three reporting in," Lew Waterman came through loud and clear, "We've got visual contact with Mobiles One and Two."

Mark Bradley added, "Mobile Four, here. We're just coming up on the other side of the lake. We can see you all from our position."

"Preparing to deploy ground personnel, Roger," Mobile One reported.

"We've got you covered overhead," Peter Carlin, one of the SHADO aircraft pilots, replied.

Nina Barry and Keith Ford were monitoring the progress of the mobiles from their command post, Omega Mobile Alpha. They watched on the radar screen as the SHADO mobiles moved into their designated positions. Then, they continued to observe several clouds of smaller blips as the ground crews, carrying individual beacons, poured out of the mobiles and moved towards the lake on foot.

There was radio silence for a few minutes as the teams hurried across the Adirondack terrain to the lakefront. They all took up selected positions behind trees and foliage, and large rock formations. How long of a wait would it be before the alien ship attempted to lift off out of the lake?

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INSIDE THE ALIEN SPACECRAFT.....

Napoleon and Illya had spent the last three hours searching the room they were in for an egress. The smooth metal foxed them every time. There did not appear to be any concealed doors, windows, exits of any sort. Just cold, polished metal. They were beginning to dry out, but their clothes remained damp.

"Think, Illya! If they don't make exits like humans do, how else could they get in and out of this room - or this ship - for that matter?" Napoleon was getting frustrated. Also, the proximity of those possibly dead bodies was grating on his nerves. He didn't even like going to funerals.

Illya was sitting on the floor, his back propped against one of the smooth walls. He'd been all over the floor, looking for some sort of hatch. Nothing. Now, he stood up and examined the ceiling, quietly. There was no evidence of a control padd, a light switch, no typical human-type technology visible. Perhaps everything in the room was operated from some other area of the ship?

"Give me a boost, will you, Napoleon?"

"What are you up to?"

"I don't know yet - just help me get closer to the ceiling." Illya offered his stocking-ed foot to his partner, and Napoleon lifted the Russian up as far as he could without falling over.

Illya ran his hands over the ceiling surface carefully, thoughtfully. He bent his fingers slightly, so he could detect any changes in the metal. Several times, he had Napoleon take a break, and move to another location of the ceiling.

"You think they get in here from the ceiling?"

"I don't know yet. It's the only other choice we have. No wall apertures, no floor hatches we can detect."

"They've left us alone for quite some time. What do you think they're up to? We've never even really see them - close up and personal - that is!"

Illya nodded, "Either they plan to harvest our organs and dump us, like Dr. Singh, or

they've got other things on their minds."

"What else could they be doing?"

"Several options I can come up with - they're busy abducting other humans, they're busy extracting organs from others and preparing them for transport, or they've got 'company' and have to lie low."

"Company?"

"I doubt if our alien-hunting friends are too far away. They managed to take Dr. Singh's body right out from under our noses - they're always one step ahead of us it seems."

"Even if you're right, everything inside here is quiet."

"That doesn't preclude the fact they might be aware they're being monitored or watched. We were camped by the lake, and we hiked all over the lake area yesterday. Where the hell was the alien ship? We didn't see anything suspicious yesterday."

"Are we even still on planet earth?"

"Scary thought, that." Illya looked around, "This room could also be sound-proof. I wonder why we were wet?"

Napoleon blinked, "Wet?"

"Yes, remember when we woke up, our clothes were soaking wet? Like we'd been dunked?"

Agent Solo felt his own clothes, "And, we're not completely dry yet, either. Maybe the aliens 'washed' us down for decontamination purposes?"

"Unless their ship is inside a body of water and they had to take us down with them.....they were wearing breathing apparatus of some sort."

"That might not have been for underwater. Can they breathe our earth atmosphere?"

"What if it's for both? I never thought about it before, but wouldn't a lake be the perfect place to hide from public view if you were in the 'kidnap and vivisection' business?"

Napoleon grimaced at Illya's allusion to the aliens' mission on terra firma, "I won't say it's impossible. Just.....strange."

"So far, this whole incident has been nothing but strange!"

* * *

Lew Waterman and his team moved up their position closer to the lake. They were ready to place a very small ROV in the water, and send it down for a good look. SHADO had stolen the research from the American Navy and perfected an improved ROV that worked via remote control, and did not require any umbilical wires.

"Omega Mobile Alpha, we've activated the ROV probe, have it on positive track, and should be reaching the lake bottom with it momentarily," Waterman reported.

Nina Barry's voice replied, "Can you send any video footage back to us?"

"Visibility isn't all that great, but we should be able to see something soon on-screen. You'll get our live feed on a 30 second delay."

One of the operatives on Waterman's team said, "Sir, we've got visuals coming up from the bottom right now!"

They watched as the ROV's mini-cam picked up something metallic on the lake bed. Waterman used the remote controls to bring the ROV in for a closer look - there was a flash of blinding light - and - nothingness!

"Christ! What happened!"

"Waterman - please report - we lost the video feed!" Keith Ford yelled through their comm-link.

"You lost the video feed because we lost the ROV!"

"What? Repeat!"

"We've lost the ROV - it's gone - destroyed!"

* * *

Inside the alien spacecraft, Napoleon and Illya heard a high-pitched whine. There was the muffled sound of something exploding outside, and then the whole ship started to shake!

"I think something's happening, Napoleon!" Illya shouted.

"Yeah, and I don't think the aliens provide in-flight movies or pretty stewardesses!"

The shaking stopped momentarily, and a small metallic clang above them captured their attention - they looked up towards the ceiling. Although they'd not seen it earlier, there was now a thin groove there, suggesting some sort of hatch or exit.

"Can you boost me again?" Illya asked urgently, "Perhaps I can get this thing open."

Getting himself steadied again, Napoleon bent over and lifted his partner's foot, so he could investigate the possible opening.

Illya used his fingers to pry at the groove. He kept pushing and pushing, wishing he had anything else to use - a crow bar, a pistol shaft - something stronger than flesh and blood! With a blast of compressed air, the groove became a round platform that knocked Illya off Napoleon and descended to the floor!

Solo grinned, "That's my partner, ever the resourceful one! Now - how do we use this.....elevator...whatever," he indicated the alien hatch.

Illya put a foot on it experimentally. It moved up when he put some weight on it. He laid a finger to his lips to silence Napoleon, and gestured for him to accompany him onto the hatch. They watched the floor fall away as they moved up through the chamber and the hatch hissed shut against a new floor!

Neither UNCLE agent needed to have been a science-fiction fan to realize they were looking at an alien spacecraft's bridge - complete with orange and silver clad aliens staring back at them!

* * *

The waters of the lake began to churn and boil! Waterman called all the ground teams to pull back their positions. They watched, stupefied, as the bright silver UFO spun out of the roiling mass of water and lifted off into the sky.

"SHADAIR One, Two and Three - UFO headed into the air!"

"Roger," the comm-link crackled with Peter Carlin's calm voice, "Have it on visual - should have a lock on it in 8 seconds.....Bearing 5-niner-4-7....."

There were a few strained seconds for the ground teams until they heard Carlin's voice again, saying, "SHADO Control, positive hit on the UFO!"

* * *

There was little reaction time. Illya and Napoleon launched themselves at the closest two aliens they could reach. While the other aliens tried to control the craft, the UNCLE agents and their opponents flailed about on the floor. Napoleon smashed his fist through one of the aliens' helmet faceplates - his hand came away bloodied - and the alien started to gag and thrash about, as though he couldn't breathe, green liquid seeping out onto the floor. Illya was pinned under the other alien. Napoleon pulled the alien off and slammed him against the nearest wall, cracking his faceplate! Green mucousy liquid poured out of the alien's helmet, and he too began to choke and back away. Finally, he joined the other alien on the floor.

Of the two remaining aliens, one maintained control of the ship, and the second one

grabbed a rifle off a wall mount. He aimed it at Illya and Napoleon, without any visible emotion. The two UNCLE agents glanced at each other - was this how it was supposed to end?

* * *

".....it's spinning down towards Section 51.....I think it's going to cash land.....," Carlin reported.

"Roger, SHADO ONE - follow it down - we'll reposition the mobiles and send them back into the new UFO location," Keith Ford replied.

* * *

The alien ship lurched desperately as it absorbed enemy fire! Illya and Napoleon fell just as their executioner fired off a blast that went wide. Losing his balance, the alien stumbled as the ship careened into a steep attitudinal pitch, and Illya grabbed the weapon away from him. The alien still at the control panel was obviously trying to keep the ship from crash landing, but it was no use.....

* * *

With a cascade of dirt and foliage, the alien ship buried itself in a crash tunnel on the ground, "It's down!" Peter Carlin verified. Co-ordinates were relayed from Carlin's aircraft to the ground control crews. The SHADO and Omega mobiles started for the new location, weapons at the ready.

* * *

Napoleon struggled to his feet and grabbed the alien pilot in a stranglehold from behind, while Illya wrestled his now weapon less alien to the floor of the bridge. They were all thrown to the floor as the spacecraft crash landed and slid endlessly on the soft clay....

* * *

Several Mobile teams swarmed over the alien ship - looking for the exit hatch. They kept knocking on the outer surface, taking soundings, using their sensor devices to check for radiation.....

* * *

"I'll bash your helmet in, you alien bastard! Unless you pop the hatch, or whatever passes for a door in this god-dam ship!" Napoleon shouted, still clutching the alien in his arms, "I've had enough of this shit!"

Illya used the alien rifle he's acquired to prod the other alien, "He means it - and I'm sure I can find a way to fire this weapon."

The aliens didn't move or react. Did they understand English? Could they hear through those liquid-filled helmets?

Napoleon squeezed the alien's throat again, "I could snap your neck like a stale piece of French bread - and believe me - you won't live through it! Now open the door!"

Tap, tap, tap.....tap, tap, tap.....Illya looked quizzically at Napoleon, "What's that?"

* * *

Lew Waterman was using a small hammer to make sounds on the alien craft's exterior hull. Mark Bradley and Gay Ellis were sweeping small Geiger counters over the ship's skin, looking for any trace of radiation.

* * *

The blond Russian aimed the unfamiliar rifle at the alien, "You hear that? That's our rescue. So you might as well open this thing up, or they're going to open it like a tin of beluga caviar for you!"

There was a hesitation, and then Napoleon's alien stirred. He twisted around until he

could look Solo in the face. Napoleon could only make out some ghastly alien smile through the green liquid in the helmet. He looked back at the other alien, now under guard by Illya, and nodded. Illya watched intently, as the alien slowly inched over to the command console. He pushed two buttons. One of them was accompanied by a soft hissing sound. The two UNCLE agents saw daylight as the side hatch slid back to reveal a grouping of stunned SHADO personnel. The other button set off a flashing red light inside the cockpit area, and a loud whirring sound!

ACT THREE

"Where the hell have you people been! We just about bought the farm in there!" Napoleon dragged his unwilling alien prisoner out of the spacecraft and threw him on the ground. Illya urged his alien out with the weapon still in his hands.

"Bloody hell - what's that noise?" Waterman shouted. Some of the other SHADO men immediately took the aliens into custody.

"We don't know - the aliens pushed some buttons - the hatch opened and then this...this light started flashing.....and the noise!" Napoleon tried to explain. He saw Waterman's mouth tighten sharply.

"Are there any others in there?" Waterman questioned him.

"You mean aliens or humans?" Illya asked.

"Either one!"

"There's at least two dead aliens inside, and a large number of humans held in stasis containers down below in another area of the ship!"

Waterman and Bradley exchanged looks; Illya saw the concern in their eyes and spoke to it, "I think they're dead."

Bradley replied, "Are you certain?" yelling above the alien sound effects.

Napoleon piped up, "They're soaking in the same green stuff these two jokers have in their helmets."

"It's a breathing liquid," Waterman supplied, "The aliens use it to remain in our atmosphere. Since they're humanoid like us, and they use our organs for replacement, there's been some controversy over whether their liquid could be adapted for humans."

"Soooooo, you think they could be alive down there?" Napoleon queried.

"It's possible.....but that noise isn't a good sign!"

"What do you mean?"

"Can you get us down to that area of the ship?" Waterman wanted to know.

"Probably - but you haven't answered MY question yet!"

"The aliens don't like to let their technology fall into human hands - you may have just permitted the aliens to push the self-destruct mechanism!"

"Oh, Christ, now he tells us!" Napoleon's temper was at the flash point, "We've just been kidnapped, abused, threatened, and almost transported to another fucking planet, and you're pissed because we let the aliens rig this ship for self-destruct! Well, soooooorry, but we didn't read our alien spaceship manual today! How the hell were we supposed to know - we just wanted them to open the escape hatch!"

Illya tried to appeal to reason, "How much time have we got until the ship self-destructs?"

Bradley replied, "We don't know.....if the alien ships are stranded on earth, they generally disintegrate within 48 hours. But, if they use their own self-destruct, it could be just a matter of minutes! We're wasting time here - we could be inside that ship checking for those people!"

Illya wagged a forefinger at Lew Waterman, "Come with me - fast! I can get you down into that compartment area!"

Napoleon gave Illya the "Oh, no you don't!" look, but the Russian ignored it and led Waterman down inside the alien craft.

* * *

They stepped over the two dead aliens, who were dragged out to be bagged for the

SHADO/Omega labs. Illya popped the elevator on the bridge deck to the lower compartment where he and Napoleon had been kept. Waterman was momentarily stunned to see so many human bodies stacked in such precise containers, all floating in green liquid.

"Is there any chance they're still alive?" Illya's voice was strained over the sounds of the whirring alarm.

Waterman shook his head, "They look intact - they're not vivisected! They might still be alive in those compartments! But, how the hell do we get so many people out?"

"I'll make the decision for you - let's start with the children!" Illya suggested.

The man from SHADO agreed - he'd brought his hammer into the ship with him.

Waterman motioned for Illya to stand back, and he swung sideways at the lowest container to the floor. There was a shattering of glass, and a huge puddle of green liquid formed at their feet. Together, Illya and Waterman broke away the rest of the glass and carefully extracted the little girl from her formerly watery container. Her skin was tinted green, and she appeared inert - unmoving. Illya's blue eyes looked up at Waterman in mute appeal - Waterman turned her over and began massaging her back vigorously.

She started to choke and gag on the liquid still in her respiratory system, but as she retched up the green stuff, Illya felt life returning to the child in his arms.

"Take this one out as fast as you can and get some more people in here - we're going to need oxygen tanks and masks, get the med field crew down here - I'll break open as many of the other containment units as I can by myself - GO!"

* * *

Illya's frantic shout for help brought the pounding feet of SHADO personnel. A small group of them worked to release the trapped humans from the stasis containers, and the field medical officers treated them outside the alien ship on blankets. As soon as they could walk, they were removed from the location to a medical helicopter, which airlifted them back to the research lab for further treatment and debriefing.

They all knew they were working against an unknown time frame, and the alien ship could self-destruct any minute. There were seven bodies left to go when the whirring sound stopped suddenly and the ship began to tremble and emit a high pitched wail!

The SHADO people scrambled out and threw themselves as far into the trees as they could. Behind them, the alien ship seemed to turn to vapor - and then it exploded in a thunderous blast of light!

* * *

Mark Bradley was the first one on his feet after the explosion - he was helping Gay Ellis up. Lew Waterman was checking with his teams to make sure everyone was alright. Napoleon looked down at Illya, who was crouched up into a little ball.

"Practicing your armadillo moves?" Solo asked.

"This isn't a funny situation," Illya took the hand his partner offered him and stood up, "I don't know how we'll file a report on this mission."

Waterman and Bradley drew their weapons, "I'm sorry, gentlemen, but you won't be filing any reports - just yet!"

"Are you nuts?" Napoleon blew up, "We just helped you save all those lives, plus capture two live aliens!"

Bradley stepped forward and frisked the two UNCLE agents, "I'm sorry," he said, "But, you two are unauthorized witnesses. We'll have to take you back for questioning and debriefing. I'm sure the merits of this situation will work in your favour."

Waterman gestured them forward with his pistol, "We have to leave now and let the Omega crews do their remediation of the site. Time has not been on our side in this case at all."

* * *

AT OMEGA HEADQUARTERS IN NEW YORK CITY.....

"At least we're getting better treatment this time around," Illya grinned. He was sitting in a plush robe, having just enjoyed a long, hot shower. Two breakfast trays had been provided, courtesy of Omega's catering division, and after their extended alien encounter, both UNCLE agents were famished.

Napoleon looked up from his coffee cup, "Waterman said we could be out of here by tonight, if Straker liaises with Mr. Waverley."

The blond Russian nodded, "Rather sporting of them to provide blinis and cream for me," he dug into his breakfast plate.

"Yes, well, don't get too enthralled with their hospitality. They can always turn nasty - remember?"

"Mmm, don't remind me - my ribs are still tender," Illya said, between bites of breakfast.

The intercom buzzed, and Napoleon picked it up.

"Mr. Solo and Mr. Kuryakin, we'll be conducting the final phase of your debriefing in one hour. Please be ready for us," it was Mark Bradley's voice.

"I like his style of 'debriefing' better than that crepo we had in Britain," Solo remarked.

* * *

The men from UNCLE were dressed and finished eating when Mark Bradley and Lew Waterman arrived at their room. They brought with them a court-style stenographer, a video-cam and some electronic recording devices. Illya and Napoleon were used to this arrangement, as Omega had conducted their initial debriefing in the same manner.

Once all the recording equipment was turned on, tested and ready, Bradley and Waterman continued their interrogation from the night before, using a newly prepared list of questions.

"Gentlemen, please answer as honestly as possible. We're interested solely in your alien experience now. You've quite filled us in on your reasons for being at the research lab and at the lake. Unless there are any other mitigating considerations from your mission for UNCLE, we'd like to concentrate on your abduction, captivity, and what you saw and heard during your time aboard the alien spacecraft," Bradley explained.

Waterman started in, "You were abducted at night?"

Napoleon answered first, "We were in our tent asleep. It was probably after eleven. We turned in, planning to get up early the next morning. I thought Illya was squirming in his sleeping bag, so I sort of woke up in a daze. The last thing I could remember was seeing the aliens standing over Illya. I think they hit me, or something. I blacked out."

"Who woke up first inside the alien ship?"

It was Illya's turn to speak up, "I did. In fact I noticed right off that we were both soaking wet. That seemed strange, especially since the last thing I could recall was being asleep in our tent. Once I had my bearings, I looked around and saw the compartment stacked to the ceiling with human bodies in long glass-fronted cases."

"How many containers were there?"

"Forty - there were 36 adults, and 4 children encased in them. They were floating in a thick green liquid - and they were unclothed."

"What did you do immediately?"

"Napoleon and I spent some time searching the whole room for some sort of exit. It wasn't until I got him to boost me up to the ceiling that I found the rim of a hatch which would lead us to the next floor up."

"What happened next?"

"We got the hatch to come down - it was sort of like an elevator - a small round metal elevator. I pulled on it, and it opened - I don't know if it worked by hydraulics or not. I'm not an expert in alien technology."

"Did the aliens attack you?"

"Yes," Napoleon replied, "There were four of them, and the two who attacked us, we ended up killing. We didn't realize at the time what would happen to them if their helmets were open to the air and they lost their green breathing liquid. Smashing their helmets just seemed to be the best way to put them out of commission at the time. It was a split-second decision - let me tell you!"

"What were the other two aliens doing at this time?"

"They were trying to pilot the ship out of the lake - at least we know now that's what they were doing."

"Did they also attack you?"

"They didn't get the chance - you people fired on the aliens' ship and it crash landed. All that jostling about gave us the chance to take over - Illya took the rifle from one of them, and I got the other in a stranglehold. In a short time, we could hear your people knocking on the outside of the ship's hull."

"How did the aliens manage to rig the ship for self-destruct?"

Illya saw Napoleon's temper rising on that subject and spoke up, "We didn't know what they were doing. In fact, we didn't know if they even understood English. But, we demanded they release the escape hatch or exit for us. When Napoleon let his alien up to open the hatch, he also flipped another control. It wasn't until you identified the strange noise coming from inside the ship as a self-destruct signal, that we knew what the alien pilot had actually done."

Bradley put a few more questions to the men from UNCLE, more technical questions on the type of metal their compartment might have been made of, the alien ship controls they observed while on board, how they helped the SHADO and Omega people get as many of the humans as possible out of the ship before it detonated, etc. The entire session took over an hour. The technicians began packing up all their electronic gear to leave.

"Any word on when we'll be released?" Illya queried.

"Our commander will be in contact with your supervisor later today," Bradley informed them, "Once everything has been confirmed, I'm sure you'll be released shortly."

* * *

SHADO HQS.....

Alec Freeman couldn't remember having seen his commanding officer in such a good mood for a long time. He was jubilant, handing out cigars to operatives - happy as a new father.

Freeman lit Straker's cigar for him, and the two men relaxed into their chairs in Straker's subterranean SHADO office, "Well, this certainly is a red letter day!"

Straker took a long pull on his cigar and actually smiled, "Two dead ones for the labs, and two LIVE ones for us! I can't believe it. This is the first time we've ever gotten up close and personal with the aliens - alive. Everything we've known about them came from their corpses. Now maybe we'll get the chance to hear it straight from them, for a change."

"Too bad we lost that ship of theirs. It would have been nice to take that apart!"

"Yes, that is too bad - but we still lucked out. I'll take what I can get in this war," Straker flung his feet up on his desk, "Y'know, Bradley reported they got all the research station people back except seven. And, four kids the aliens abducted months ago! The aliens had kept them in that green liquid of theirs like lab specimens! Waterman says they were stacked up to the ceiling in separate compartments - like warehouse boxes for shipping."

Freeman shook his head, "I guess that answers the questions we had about how they get humans back to their planet in one piece. Dirty buggers."

"There's just one fly in the ointment, Alec."

"What's that?"

"Those men from UNCLE. They keep turning up like bad pennies. The Omega people have them in custody right now, debriefing them and finding out just what they saw. From what Bradley said, I guess they had actually been abducted by the aliens themselves."

"You're kidding?"

"I wish! Those two snoops were camping beside the very lake the UFO tried to hide in! Guess the aliens were either below quota or just thought they'd eliminate any eye-witnesses!"

"So what happens now?"

Straker took another puff on his cigar, "Omega will be handling the autopsies. They're examining the live aliens, and when they get finished, SHADAIR will bring them back here for interrogation," he smiled again, "I can't wait to see those bastards face to face!"

* * *

"They're what?" Straker fell back in his seat with the receiver to his ear, "How?"

Keith Ford's voice was terse as he explained, "When we took the helmets off them in the lab, they just.....aged before our eyes.....turned into old men.....and died!"

"And, they never talked?"

"Not one syllable. We're not even certain they understand English."

Straker was silent for a moment as he pondered the next course of action, "Dammit, Ford! We needed those bastards alive!"

"I KNOW, sir," Ford replied, stating the obvious.

"Get Dr. Schroeder to do the autopsies along with the other two! And, patch me through to Waterman, I want to know how he managed interrogating those men from UNCLE."

A few seconds passed until Lew Waterman's crisp voice came over the headset, "Yes, Commander Straker?"

"Have you finished with the UNCLE men?"

"You'll have my report when it's finished, sir," Waterman's deferential tone was probably due to Ford's suggestion, "They've been through quite an adventure, and they've been able to provide to us with valuable information about the inside of the UFO, the aliens' technology, and many other key items. Will you be speaking with their superior officer so they can be released?"

Straker's anger had burned itself down to a slow simmer, "Yes, I'll contact him and let him know we've got his agents."

EPILOGUE

Napoleon and Illya were released by an Omega limousine, right outside the front door of DelFloria's Flower Shop. They went immediately into UNCLE headquarters to meet with Mr. Waverley for a debriefing. It was carried on closed doors, and the files sealed, of course, as per orders from Commander Straker.

"Well, gentlemen, I think it's safe to say that this must go down as one of UNCLE's strangest missions," Waverley commented.

"I'm never going to look at science-fiction in quite the same way," Napoleon smiled.

"Or those people who've claimed to have been abducted by spacemen," the blond Russian added.

"It might interest you to know that Commander Straker sent me a commendation for you two - the information you were able to offer his organization is expected to add greatly to what they already know about the aliens and their current state of scientific technology. As he said, they're in a war, and intelligence is one of their best weapons. I think it's safe to say your conduct as UNCLE agents has gone a long way to redeeming our organization in his eyes."

"I'm just glad it's over. I think we should be awarded some vacation time for this one!"

Waverley's eyes danced, "I'm certain we can work something equitable out for you gentlemen. In the meantime, you can consider yourselves at liberty."

"This calls for a celebration - what can we do to mark the end of our first, and hopefully our last, alien encounter?" Napoleon asked.

"Perhaps we could go for a celebratory drink? I have an old friend at the Russian Tea Room who has a secret stash of pre-Revolutionary vodka that's out of this world!" Illya suggested eagerly.

Napoleon rolled his eyes, "Now that's a metaphor I never want to hear again!"

THE END