

Someone Else's War

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This is a crossover with Buffy the Vampire Slayer and set in the early 1980's.

"Wootton is one of the brightest men I've ever met but... he makes Dr Jackson look like Father Christmas."

Straker smiled and looked across at Colonel Lake, sitting in the passenger seat. "We made an ally of Jackson."

"Don't think most people would agree with you. He comes just below the aliens on -"

"Is this the turn?"

She looked up. A narrow, twisting lanes overhung by trees ran away to the right.

"That's it."

As the car turned down it, it was as if night had suddenly fallen. Tiny patches of failing sunlight penetrated between the trees but the main illumination came from the beams of the headlights. At length they came to a pair of high iron gates. Lake got out and tested them. They were locked, so she spoke into the intercom.

"Hello? This is Virginia Lake. We're expected."

There was no reply except for the gates swinging silently open.

She got back into the car and they drove along a more open driveway, through some run-down parkland. There was no sign of life, animal or human. Up ahead, they could see the turrets of Whitchurch Place emerging over a rise. It revealed itself as a massive Victorian Gothic monstrosity of the worst sort. Towers and wings were heaped together with no rhyme, reason or sense of proportion. Gargoyles leered at them from every surface. Dark stained glass reflected back little light.

Straker grimaced. "Remind me to tell Alec about this place. He keeps saying horror's the way forward."

"You won't get to film here."

The front door creaked open and they got out of the car. An aged butler in a tail coat emerged to greet them.

"Miss Lake, Mr Straker, if you will follow me."

He led them through a gloomy, high ceilinged hall into a dark, book lined study. The furniture was heavy, dull mahogany. The curtains were half drawn. The only thing that put the scene in the modern world was a top of the range computer standing in one corner. Straker glanced at it, knowing it was the kind of equipment many universities would give their eye teeth for and not far behind what SHADO used.

Behind a desk the size of a dining table sat a wizened old man.

Straker stepped forward, hand outstretched. "Sir Charles?"

The man did not move. "I just wanted to see you before you dress for dinner. Now you may go."

Straker's eyebrows shot up in surprise. He looked across at Lake but said nothing. She gave the tiniest of shrugs: *I warned you.*

Their rooms were in one of the wings, a long walk from the front door. Straker found his bag unpacked and his dinner jacket laid out on the four-poster bed. Lake had warned him not to bring anything compromising because of the servants, though he had seen no one except the butler. He dressed quickly, then knocked on the door of her room.

She was wearing a high-necked, full length, black velvet gown. "Sir Charles does not approve of modern dress, as I found to my cost."

"All I want is to discuss the project and get out of here."

Sir Charles Wootton, though he knew nothing of SHADO itself, could be vital to their defence against the aliens. Among his many interests, he had done substantial work on the miniturisation of electronics. If reports of what he was doing at the moment were correct, it would allow each Interceptor to carry a computer as powerful as that at SHADO HQ. As for what they could build at HQ, the possibilities were going up and up. So Straker was prepared to put up with the man's arrogance and eccentricity in return for the prospect of saving lives.

Any plans he had to press the subject at dinner, however, were scuppered by the arrival of another guest.

"Oh, hello. I didn't know... Not that Sir Charles tells me anything."

The young man wore large glasses, an ill-fitting tail coat and a slightly nervous smile. Straker did not know quite what to make of him. Whoever he was, he did not have the security clearance to even know the project existed - as Wootton did - let alone what it was for. Whoever he was, perhaps he might give something of himself away in conversation.

He introduced himself. "I'm Ed Straker, of Harlington-Straker Studios, and this is my associate Virginia Lake."

"Pleased to meet you. I'm Rupert Giles. I'm cataloguing Sir Charles' collection of cuneiform tablets. It's one of the best in the world in private hands."

Curiouser and curiouser, Straker thought. He almost dismissed the young man as irrelevant - what could cuneiform tablets have to do with the aliens? - except that there was something about him. Something of the tingle he got when he was about to recruit someone for SHADO. His gut instinct told him the young man was someone to watch, though his common sense told him that Mr Giles would grow up to be an Oxford don at best.

Nevertheless, with things not going the way he planned, it was best to keep an eye on everything. He spent the next ten minutes learning about the origins of writing in ancient Mesopotamia. Giles began with the basics but when he saw that both Straker and Lake were following him, he was off at high speed, only pausing occasionally to explain a technical term. As far as Straker was concerned, it was interesting but not important. He was impatient to talk to Sir Charles, strike a deal and get back to SHADO. That was not going to happen tonight with this young man present.

He was almost sorry, however, when Wootton appeared. The conversation was interesting.

Giles shut up immediately except to murmur: "He's rather deaf."

They were seated at a dining table that could easily have taken twelve - Wootton at the head, Lake at the foot and himself opposite Giles. The old man made no attempt at conversation, he simply gestured to the butler for the food to be brought in. A silver tureen was

placed on the sideboard and something green and murky ladled out of it.

"Pea soup." Giles whispered. "And it tastes like -"

"Fog?"

He chuckled - and was absolutely right. They continued with *the piece of cod which passeth all understanding*.

At that point the butler returned and spoke to Wootton, who sniffed angrily and turned to Straker. "It seems you have a phone call."

He had not heard it ringing, the house was too large and the doors too heavy. The butler led him to a phone in the chilly entrance hall.

It was Alec, as he had expected. "Sorry to bother you but we've got a spinner headed your way."

"Are you sure?"

"No, it's not down yet and there are a couple of other targets in the area. That's assuming they're not just after organs but I thought you'd want to know."

"Where's Sky One?"

"The Pacific. You can quote that to Henderson next time he says we can't afford two. Hang on and I'll get you the latest."

As he waited, the doorbell rang - a real bell, not an electric one. Again, the butler answered it. Could he be the only member of staff for a house this size? He must have raced up the stairs to lay out their clothes.

The door opened onto a young couple, smartly dressed but surprisingly pale. They spoke quietly with the servant, who left them standing on the doorstep as he went to fetch his master.

"Hello, Ed?"

Straker had almost forgotten he was holding the telephone. "Go ahead."

"We lost them but assuming they don't do anything sneaky they're within ten miles of you. You've got an ordinance factory - we're checking on them - and a dormitory town within range. I've got the mobiles out. Are you coming back?"

"No, I don't want to be on the road if they're after us. Besides, you know where we are - and there *might* be something going off here."

Alec sounded concerned. "You need anything?"

"I'll let you know."

He terminated the call but kept the receiver to his ear, wanting an excuse to remain where he was. Sir Charles soon hurried past him, scowling. He went outside to meet his guests.

"I wasn't expecting you tonight. I have people here."

That was all he caught so he returned to the dining room. He needed to talk to Lake and the man Giles might know what was going on.

She looked up as he came in. "Alec?"

He nodded. "Might be some business coming our way but he's got it under control."

Then he described his sight of the visitors.

Giles looked slightly perturbed. "Very pale, you say?"

"That's right."

"And they didn't come in? Weren't invited to?"

"No."

It was obvious he knew something but it did not look like he would say what. Could there be something more to his work than ancient history? Straker searched for the right question. Before he could find it, the door opened once again and the butler summoned Giles to the

library. The young man's hand clutched the arm of his chair for a moment, apparently afraid. Then he did as he was bidden. Straker was tempted to follow him but he needed to talk to Lake.

"Is this as odd as you expected?" he asked.

She shook her head. "Worse. He's not playing straight with us, is he? There's certainly more to Rupert..."

He too had the feeling that the young man was in danger, though whether from the aliens or someone else he was not sure. "I think we should look around while we have the chance. It seems dinner has been abandoned."

She followed him out. The hall was empty and every door off it closed. He was unsure which was the library or even if it was in this wing. If he found it, he did not know whether to avoid it and take the chance to explore elsewhere or to try and find out what was happening in there. He was beginning to think that Sir Charles was a lost cause or worse but he still did not want to be seen actively distrusting him.

As they set off down the corridor, one of the doors flew open and Giles came racing towards them. He was clutching something to his chest.

Seeing them, he shouted: "Run. Get out of here."

Straker took Lake by the arm. "Seems the best idea."

As the young man passed them, they turned to follow him. He led them up the stairs and through a maze of winding corridors without pausing for breath. Behind them, Straker could hear pursuit. He risked a glance over his shoulder. The pale couple were after them but they did not look as they had. Their faces had transformed, thickened into monstrous parodies of humanity.

Shock made him stumble. He would have fallen but Lake held his arm and kept him upright.

Ahead, Giles had entered one of the rooms. He was holding the door open, bouncing up and down in agitation.

"Come *on!*"

With a burst of speed, the two SHADO officers launched themselves through. He slammed the door behind them.

"If you can put up a barricade, I'll find something to hold them off with. "

Straker looked around. It was a small bedroom with mismatched, poor quality furniture quite unlike the rest of the house. The piles of books indicated it was where Giles was staying.

Straker and Lake ran the bed up against door, just as their pursuers began to pound on it. They followed that with the bedside cabinet and an old trunk.

Giles had hold of a bentwood chair. He snapped the legs off it is easily. "Never did dare sit on it."

"What are you doing?" Lake asked.

"Making stakes."

"Stakes?"

"I think you owe us an explanation." Straker told him.

The young man sighed. "Are you sure you want one? You won't believe it."

The Commander thought back to those monstrous, misshapen faces. They were outside anything in his experience and that both annoyed and intrigued him.

"Tell us."

Giles was whittling the chair legs to a point with a pocket knife he had taken from the

chest of drawers. He did not look up at them. "They're vampires."

"*Vampires?*" Lake was incredulous but Straker held up his hand to silence her, unsure of the young man's sanity and veracity.

"We'll run with that for the moment. Assuming they are, what do they want and what do we do about it?"

Giles turned and snatched up a baked clay tablet that he had placed on the windowledge. It was what he had carried from the library. He handed it to Straker. It was covered, both sides, in the triangular cuneiform script. Straker had a vague idea of its age and point of origin but otherwise it meant nothing to him.

He handed it to Lake, asking: "That's what they want?"

Giles nodded. "Or rather, the translation. It contains instructions for the raising, control and dismissal of a powerful demon named Buktab."

A demon. This was getting better and better. "And you have the translation?"

He nodded.

"Where?"

"In my head." He slammed his fist down, suddenly angry. "He sold me out. Literally. He sold my brain, my knowledge to that pair out there."

Lake asked: "Couldn't someone else translate it?"

"Good point." he agreed. "The technical terms are difficult but - oh, well..."

With a sigh of regret, Giles brought down a heavy volume on top of the tablet. He repeated the process until there was little more than powder left, no readable fragments. "If they still want it, they'll have to get it from me."

For a moment, his eyes met Straker's. It was obvious he knew what they would do to obtain the information. Straker shuddered to think of it. *Vampires*.

Giles went back to his stakes. Lake crossed the window, looking for a way out. Her face fell.

"Sir, you'd better take a look at this."

What now? he thought, though he knew before he saw them. Outside on the lawn, illuminated by the light from the windows, were two red suited aliens.

He told Giles.

"*Aliens?* Well, I suppose it's no more ridiculous than vampires." He chuckled slightly. "What do we do about them?"

"We hope my faith are in my second in command isn't misplaced."

"Caught between the devil and the deep blue sea." commented Lake. "I'm glad Alec's taking care of this but even so..."

The door had stopped shaking. He wondered what they were up to now.

He drew his gun and contemplated the shot from the window but the angle was too steep. He heard a crash of glass and the two of them disappeared into the house. He wondered if Sir Charles was aware of their presence yet. Had he deliberately lured them here, sold SHADO out as he had this young man, or was it merely coincidence?

He turned back to Giles and questioned him about ways to deal with the vampires.

"It's not really my job, you understand, but if there's no Slayer available..." He covered most of the methods outlined in horror films and in turn questioned Straker about how to fight the aliens. When he heard they were pretty much like humans in that respect, he nodded. "I can hold my own in a fight. Wish I'd brought one of my swords - or a crossbow. Didn't think I'd need them."

"Aren't vampires attracted to old, dark houses?" Lake asked.

"What would they feed on? They hang around schools, universities, nightclubs."

That made sense but Straker had no time to think about it. He craned his head out of the window to see if there was a way down. If everyone else was inside, they might be safer in the garden. His car was still parked at the front. It might be guarded but if not, a tactical retreat sounded like the best option.

There was a drainpipe but it was four windows over and they were on the third floor. The exterior windowledges were broad and the gaps between them were only about a foot across but still, it would be very risky. He told the others and they took a look for themselves.

"Does anyone have any better ideas?" Lake asked.

Both men shook their heads.

She bent down, gripped the hem of her dress and tore the seam almost to her waist.

"Don't suppose I can claim that on expenses?"

She was about to climb out but Straker put a hand on her shoulder to stop her. "I'll go first. I'll call out if there are any unexpected problems. If nothing goes wrong, follow me once I've got to the pipe. If something does... explain to Alec."

He climbed onto the windowledge before anyone could stop him. Good job it was claustrophobia he suffered from, not vertigo, because it was a long way down. He set his back flat to the wall and inched his way along, looking down every few steps to see how close he was to the edge of the ledge. It projected quite a way beyond the window itself but the gap was easily big enough to be a problem.

He reached the end, shuffling as close as he dared. He closed his eyes for a moment, took a deep breath, then opened them, gauged the distance and stretched out his foot. His heart was pounding. It was further than he thought. He was going to miss.

His foot came down on the far side. He breathed a sigh of relief, though it still left him with his legs spread across nothingness.

He shifted his weight to his other foot. Then he realised that it was right on the edge. There was no room for him to put the second foot down.

Leaning that way, he worked the leading foot backwards and forwards until there were a few clear inches.

He dug his nails into the brickwork, then heaved himself across. He wobbled, almost staggered. He pushed himself back against the wall, breathing hard. Just three more of those to cross.

His back was against the glass of the next window, giving him a little more room. He thought about opening it and going in but the chances were that someone was still about in the corridor. Even if that was not the case, to bend down and heave the sash up might well unbalance him. Assuming it was not locked.

He continued his slow progress and crossed the next gap with less trouble. He knew what he was doing now. Nearly half way to the drainpipe. He speeded up a little.

With any luck, Alec would already have the mobiles out in this area. And knowing Alec, he would be concentrating on the house. Or would he be steering well clear so as not to get in the way of the negotiations Straker was supposed to be conducting?

His foot slipped. He had become distracted. He had reached the edge of the ledge and one foot went over. He felt a moment of blind panic as he fought to stay upright.

He could not go back. He swung his leg out, onto the next sill.

Made it. He breathed deeply. That was what you got for being over-confident.

He carried on, carefully.

He made it to the drainpipe and hooked one arm around it. Looking back, he could see Lake and Giles silhouetted in the light from the window. He was not sure if they could see him but when he waved, they waved back and Lake climbed out.

He did not wait any longer but swung himself round and grabbed hold of the pipe. It was tempting to simply slide all the way down - tempting but stupid. He would have no skin left on his hands, even if he did not hit the ground with an almighty thump. Using the brackets that held it to the wall as foot holds, he took it in short stages. Even so, his hands were sore by the time he made it to the bottom.

He looked around but he could see no movement in the darkness. He unshipped his gun, just in case. He took a few steps forward and looked up. Lake was halfway along. Giles had disappeared back inside. He hoped there was no problem.

He tried to get his bearings. As far as he knew, his car was still out front. It might be a two-seater but they could squeeze three in at a push. Unless Giles had keys, any other vehicle would have to be hot wired and was also unlikely to be as fast or equipped with a phone. He really needed to call Alec. Although what he was going to tell him about the vampires...

He was still not sure he believed that himself.

Lake had reached the top of the drainpipe and Giles was making his way along. From inside he could hear what sounded like a fight. That was probably good news if it kept all of the opposition occupied. What the two sides would make of each other he had no idea.

Lake landed beside him. "Haven't done that a long time. *Can* I claim this dress on expenses?"

He half smiled. "Repairs, maybe."

"And my shoes?"

He noticed she was now barefoot.

He waited impatiently for Giles to join them. Once he had, he inquired which was the shortest way to the front entrance and the young man led them off to the right. It seemed to take for ever, the building was so large. Eventually they rounded a corner to see Straker's car still where he had left it.

"Can you two both get in the passenger seat?"

They nodded.

"Then we get away from here, park-up and call Alec. Once we have back-up, we come back and deal with them. We have no chance on our own and -" He hesitated because of Giles' presence. "- and our people should be in the area by now."

They proceeded towards the car, watching carefully in all directions. There seemed to be no one about but the front door was ajar. The car was right beside it, another parked behind it. The vampires must have come in that. *Vampires drove?*

The creatures came from the wrong direction. Not the door, the cars. They were hidden behind both, four of them. Vampires outnumbered the humans by one, even if they got no help from the house.

Giles was pressing a stake into a Straker's hand. Lake already had one.

"What are our chances?" Straker asked quietly.

"Do you really want to know? We could run but they don't tire very fast."

The lead vampire, a stocky youth in a T-shirt, lunged at Giles. He sidestepped and brought up a wooden cross that was in his other hand. Straker had no time to see more as a petite red head who looked about fourteen landed on top of him, knocking him over. Her face

was full of the joy of the kill, distorted as it was. Straker's was turning purple as she throttled the life out of him.

He thrust the stake upwards. She batted it aside with one hand.

"Naughty, naughty."

He felt helpless, useless. His vision began to darken.

Then the girl exploded into dust and Lake was standing over him.

"Behind you." he croaked.

A blond boy struck her across the shoulder as she twisted away.

Straker rolled over, grabbed his stake and jumped to his feet. The vampire had Lake by the wrist and was trying to stop her wriggling. He saw Straker coming. A straight armed jab knocked the Commander against his car.

The fourth assailant, a tall, skinny girl, leaped on top of him.

"Mmm, you're nice - for a geriatric."

She pounded his head against the bonnet. He rammed his knee into her groin, trying to wind her. It did not work. No breath?

She stopped pounding, her teeth headed for his neck, one hand holding his stake arm down.

Giles was pushed down on the bonnet beside him. His arm was still free. As the stocky youth moved in for the kill, he thrust the stake upwards - into the girl.

Alive but dazed, it took Straker a moment to react. The vampire was biting down on his victim. Straker put the stake through him but his aim was off. He could barely stand up straight. The vampire looked startled but largely unhurt.

As the vampire turned, roaring, Straker dived for the stake Giles had dropped. The vampire followed him down. They rolled on the ground, Straker momentarily on top. He rammed the wood through his chest. It worked. The creature was dust and Straker dropped the few inches to the earth.

He desperately wanted to stay there. He was covered in bruises, breathing was torment and his head fell like it had been through an industrial mangle. But he had to know what had happened to Colonel Lake.

Giles gave him a hand up, pointing away from the house. The blond boy was dragging a semi-conscious Lake across the lawn. The two men stumbled after them. Straker glanced at his companion. Giles also looked like he could barely stand but his expression was determined.

The vampire stopped, sizing up his chances.

Giles spoke. "You do realise your bosses want us alive?"

"Yeah, right."

"I have information."

There was a low rumble down towards the drive. Straker recognised it immediately. He smiled. "And I have reinforcements."

The vampire looked from him to the approaching mobile and back. Straker could see him thinking. Then he dropped his prisoner and fled.

All three humans sighed with relief. Yet they were by no means finished. As they made their way to the newly arrived vehicle, figures approached them.

Giles stiffened. "I assume you were telling the truth? They are yours?"

Straker nodded wearily as Alec Freeman ran up to them, calling over his shoulder for medics.

Straker had no breath to spare on pleasantries. "Two aliens entered the house but there

are... other hostiles in there. Wootton and any of his people are suspect."

Alec nodded. "Leave it to me. You three have had it."

Straker ignored him, continuing towards the house until Freeman put a hand out to stop him.

"Do you realise you're bleeding?"

He probably should have but he had not. He touched his scalp. It was warm and sticky. Alec was right. Except that he had been inside the house when they had not and he understood - thought he understood - about the vampires.

His people were beginning to close in on the exits.

A figure sped through the front door, young and pale, knocking one of the SHADO operatives flying. Someone shouted a warning but he did not stop. A moment later they were firing at him.

A bullet hit him. He staggered but kept on running. One, two, three more shots. Each time he faltered but kept on running.

"That's impossible." said Alec.

"Bullets won't stop him." replied Giles.

The vampire sprang into his car and gunned the engine. He reversed straight at one of Straker's men.

"Get out of the way!" the Commander yelled.

At the last moment, the man dived to the side. Straker breathed a sigh of relief. The car did a handbrake turn on the drive and roared away.

"I rather think that's that." said Giles. "Though I might have to make myself scarce for a while."

He was right, at least about the first part. The three of them wearily allowed their wounds to be tended while others searched the mansion. They found four bodies: Wootton, his butler (with stake in hand) and the two aliens.

"One of them had his head ripped clean off." marvelled Alec. "Helmet and all. Never seen anything like it. If there was anybody else in there, they scarpereed out of the back before we could find them."

There was no sign of the female vampire. Presumably she had been staked. That saved awkward explanations. A mile away, the UFO had self-destructed. That pretty much wrapped things up. Except for one thing.

"Amnesia injection?" asked Giles warily.

"It's standard procedure." Straker reassured him. "Don't worry, there are no side effects. We've been using it for years."

"But... But..." he looked from Straker to Freeman and back. "Can I have a word with you in private?"

Straker nodded. It was the least he could do. He suspected he knew what it was about.

They walked a short distance into the garden before Giles began. "The information I gained tonight -"

"About the demon?"

"Yes. I can't afford to lose it."

Straker sighed. This was difficult. "I thought you said it was the only copy?"

"What if it's not? What if someone raises him? I'd be the only one who could deal with him - assuming I had the information from the tablet."

The young man was tense. He had unconsciously dropped into fighting stance. Over his

shoulder, Straker could see Alec heading towards them. He shook his head. This was between the two of them and he doubted that Giles would physically attack him. He was too sensible and too badly injured.

He sighed. "You realise that the more you know, the more danger you're in?"

Giles gave him a wry grin. "Story of my life."

"And I have your word you'll tell no one?"

He laughed. "Who would I tell? I have no desire to draw attention to myself and anyway, who would believe me? Even among my own people? It's a long jump from vampires to aliens."

"Isn't it?" Straker smiled reluctantly. "OK, I'll fix it."

It did make sense to him, though it was not an easy decision. If Giles had had the ability to rob him of such powerful knowledge, he knew the decision that he would want taken. But it was breaking all the rules...

They walked back towards Freeman. "Alec, I want you to record Mr Giles as having had the injection."

Alec paused, wary. "You mean without giving it to him? Fake it?"

"That's right."

"Sir..." Which meant trouble - trouble that had to be stepped on now.

"That's an order, Colonel. No discussion."

Alec scowled, which made Straker feel more than a little guilty.

"Do I even get an explanation?"

Straker hesitated, trying to find the right words. "It seems... It seems ours isn't the only secret war."

Freeman sighed, the tension evaporating. "I don't think I wanted to know that."