

# UFO: How It Ended

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*This story is written in the fictional world of the 'UFO' space fiction series by Gerry Anderson that was shown on ITV (British television) in the 1970's and again on BBC2 (British television) in late 1996 and Jan 1997. Much of the text before the paragraph starting "So on that December 2nd" is a brief summary of the television episodes. The 'HR' star serial numbers are in the Harvard Revised Photometry catalogue, see e.g. the Bright Star Catalogue published by Yale University, New Haven, Conn., USA. I made these general changes to the scenario: (a) Earth computer technology updated; (b) The single 'Sky 1' replaced by a reasonable sized and distributed fleet of special fighter aircraft. Please email any complaints and remarks to the author.*

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## THREAT TO SECRECY

I am Commander Ed Straker, head of SHADO, Supreme Headquarters Alien Defence Organization, a secret international organisation which operated, and still operates as far as it can, from a large isolated building in southern England which most people knew of only as Harlington-Straker Film Studios. Only we and a few of the world's top Ministry of Defence and CIA and similar men knew what was under the studios. Now that so much has happened, I see no reason at last not to tell how we tried to act in the best interest of mankind, now that yet another secrecy is blown and its workings spilt and useless, revealed to the public. It is not our fault that we had to operate in secret, away from risk of angering those driven by popular fascinations with the exotic that have led men into so much risk. All too well this has proved again that unnecessary curiosity for its own sake can kill far more than cats and waste much work and materials for little or no eventual benefit. While people outside speculated what UFO's were and tried to piece together what information escaped before government agencies hid it, we inside knew what they were and why they have been coming to Earth across the huge interstellar distances for centuries. That they exist was finally proved some years before SHADO started, after modern jet fighters got fast enough to occasionally manage to disable one and force it to land.

As to why all this had to be secret, I knew what might happen if the truth came out, mass space hysteria fed by decades of overdramatised unrealistic popular space fiction hankering unthinkingly after contact with God-knows-what from the beyond. Have not I and many others seen and heard of the catastrophic effects on too many island cultures of Men when sea-sailors came and brought the outside in? At least Earth could remain an island and master of its own affairs. That secrecy brought its own price, as I know too well: the long job of setting up SHADO and building its headquarters hardly ever let me spend time with my wife and cost me my marriage, and my only son died because vital medicine being rushed to him was delayed when I had to divert transport to get SHADO armed ground mobiles to a UFO that had landed in western Ireland and all its unknown perils to people living near the place, while my already-estranged wife Mary wept and cursed me for putting my son's life second to getting a film ready on time.

Why did we go to all that expense, even running an armed base on the Moon and all traffic to and from it having to be disguised as other things in the face of public anger at the amount being spent on space when other matters went short, with the eventual result which that brought about and I feel all too likely that it would not have happened anyway?

People disappear sometimes, to escape debt or persecution or family trouble, by criminal action, by undercover official action, or whatever. Some disappear near UFO sightings, too often for it to be certainly coincidence: one was Leila Carlin, sister of Peter Carlin (one of my pilots), vanished during a UFO incident in a forest some time before. That persistent menace to public common sense, UFO cultists, had their own ideas. Many UFO's seen by the public are actually aeroplanes, Venus, Jupiter, Mars when near opposition, the bright yellow star Capella seen alone when glare drowns other stars and its twinkling is mistaken for artificial flashing, aeroplanes, ball lightning, or the like, or hallucinations, and many said that all UFO's were such things. But we knew otherwise after radar tracked some in space on paths which no unpowered natural space object would follow, and certainly after a secret Ministry of Defence team showed me the wreck of one and the body of its humanoid alien pilot in one of those red liquid-breathing spacesuits that few had ever seen but we now know all too well. When the

body, and others afterwards, were dissected, we nearly always found transplanted organs in them, often several, some of human origin, or at least was so reported to us by a secret lab that examined the bodies for us; that on top of other incidents and a general feeling of danger finally drove me and others together to press for SHADO to be formed and given budget and authority to find means to track and stop the UFO's until their command realises that Earth now can defend itself at last. That lab told us later that DNA tests had found Leila Carlin's heart transplanted in an alien UFO-pilot's body.

Our movements and actions in the air and on the ground were inevitably seen by people, who started comparing notes and wondering if a secret anti-UFO force was involved; but routine Government denials and disinformation kept that risk to secrecy at bay.

So life continued, and satellites and our Moonbase routinely detected incoming UFO's when they were still millions of miles away as they came in from the endless remoteness. Our air and ground and undersea and space craft destroyed many and forced others to an ever more ingenious variety of tactics to try to get through, as is described at length elsewhere in the TV/video reconstructions of some of our actions that have been published recently after all this had led to its end result and the secrecy was of no more purpose. Our job was made much easier by their habit of going close by the Moon so its gravity by a 'reverse slingshot' effect helped them to slow from full space speed. From time to time one got to Earth and landed and got away, such as one that came in anti-lunar (= opposite to the Moon) and down to the Canadian Rockies, and as one of our pursuit fighter aircraft got near it ducked in among mountains near the Kicking Horse Pass where the Canadian Pacific Railway goes through, and three days later it got away; but we destroyed most of them that when approached did not quickly abandon their missions and sheer away to remote space. Sometimes one or more would hang about a little out of Interceptor range.

So on that December 2nd Moonbase and our remote satellite SID (Space Intruder Detector) detected four incoming UFO's, and Col.Foster who was there sent the Interceptors up. The alien craft backed off and stopped just out of range of our missiles, but by the time it was clear what they were doing the Interceptors had been all too effectively drawn away, while six more in tight formation came in anti-lunar and descended from Iceland towards the Hebrides. We sent planes after them; three were near enough, and pursued them south, steadily gaining on them. Stornoway town on Lewis saw them, leaving me with another pursuit sighting to cover up for. They fled south down the strait between the Hebrides and Scotland without trying to dive, as my new SHADO fighter air-to-sea torpedoes can pursue fast and far underwater. Deep sea, no longer a sure refuge even when none of SHADO's submarines are near, passed below them and became open heathery land and scattered crofts on Skye as my fighters ever drew nearer, but the land was hilly and ahead were the jagged teeth of the Cuillin Hills, the remains of an ancient volcano. My planes fired a volley. The UFO's desperately used what jamming power they had, limited, but just enough as my craft and theirs dodged round the peaks. A missile found a target, but the fireball which consumed it was only some cooking propane in a deer-shooting shelter; deer and sheep fled and the high rock spines of Sgurr Alasdair and Sgurr Mhic Choinnich looked down unconcerned. Other missiles went in random directions and the fighters had to dodge.

The mishap checked my planes while the UFO's took what shelter they could in the Ord River valley past Tokavaig while they got a short-duration emergency overdrive into use and ran frantically across the Sound of Sleat to Loch Hourn, but my planes close-hauled them again up the inlet and into Glen Barrisdale. The people in Ambraigh croft in the bend of the

deep valley had the sight of their lives as the alien craft swerved desperately to port below treetop height rather than show themselves on a skyline over the ridge ahead to any other planes or radar that might be about; the time when they could go where they wished and ignore men's defences was over. My planes fired a volley of missiles. The alien intruders just escaped, but the explosions sent them into a tumbling spin eastwards as the first flames rose from Doire Asamaidh forestry plantation on the steep valley side where the missiles hit. But that extra push sideways saved the UFO's, else the operation would have ended here in a routine SHADO success with "targets crashed" and a big ground explosion to be explained to the public as "an accidentally dropped practice bomb". As it is, as video taken automatically by the planes showed afterwards all too clearly, one of the UFO's missed by only two feet an ugly spike of rock which would have bashed its underbelly in and probably cracked its drive block and made it explode, and the rest escaped nearly as narrowly. They straightened and skimmed over the high sharp summit ridge of Sgurr a' Choire Bheithe into radar-blind safety among high mountains. Low fuel and an approaching storm front sent my planes back to base.

Fort William and then Ballachulish saw the UFO's briefly. They chose the deep narrow trench of Glen Etive as safer than the shelterless waste of Rannoch Moor. Foster sent other planes after them, from the east, to shoot them down from behind the concealing height of Ben Cruachan as they approached Taynuilt, but the UFO's turned off east. The SHADO planes turned towards them over the wild mountainous land, but availed only for four missiles fired at overlong range after a brief sighting to run away out of contact with their optical sighting systems blinded by atrocious weather and achieve no more relevant kill than three deer on Stob Coir' an Albannaich as the aliens ran southeast. Traffic on the Rest and Be Thankful pass on the A83 east of Inveraray knew them only as an unearthly whistling in the black storm overhead and an interference on their radios.

Having more Interceptors would have avoided this; but there is a limit to budgets for projects kept secret from many of the people who have to decide what official money to put where. I sent some Mobiles in. On the road they look like ordinary half-tracked military vehicles. As they approached the fastnesses of the Grampians at first light, their crews knew it was one of the worst areas for ground forces to hunt landed UFO's. They swore and became short-tempered and sleepy as they drove about in narrow hill-lanes delayed by farm tractors and sheep, and climbed over rocky slopes and sodden moor in rain to put sensors in dozens of lochs and lochans and bays and sea inlets that the alien craft might have submerged in to hide on their furtive unwelcome mission. I remembered various traceless boatman and diver disappearances: the standard alien spacesuit works well underwater, and one add-on for it is an underwater motor and propeller backpack. The huge spread and complicated underwater geography of Loch Lomond alone could have hidden a fleet of them, as the Mobiles struggled north from Dumbarton against watercannoning rain and gale on the long narrow lakeside road praised by the poet Burns in his own time but never again by us. We detected an explosion well enough - contractors rockblasting to widen and straighten the worst kinks in the road. Great, roadworks and contraflows on top of everything else. A garage at Inveruglas did not want to know about our Ministry of Defence fuel cards. After the top end of the lake the road became better, and we made better speed to Crianlarich, which seemed like a city among the endless distance of bare alien-looking moor whose main bird life seemed to be jet fighters. Submersible sensors found nothing in Loch Lubhair and Loch Dochart, nor in Lochan na Bi just west of Tyndrum, and what local people we overheard mentioned nothing useful; and dark comes soon in winter that far north.

We parked in Tyndrum on the bare ridge that it is named after in Gaelic as the rain finally started to ease off, and slept in our vehicles; two lochans on the moors northeast of Crianlarich would have to wait for our backpack helicopter motor-and-rotor sets in the morning, if the wind let up. News that some Glasgow University electronics department students were helping in a secret Defence project meant nothing at all to us as we searched and found nothing. The area's abundant jet fighter population carried only useless practice missiles, and availed only to clutter the radar screens. We tried further east, but after three more blank days as we met to sleep parked in the Slochd pass under the bare peak of Carn nam Bain-tighearna the weather forecast drove us back south away to base, for I had no intention of risking valuable Mobiles being trapped in deep Highland snow for days or weeks. Moonbase radioed to say that the other four UFO's were still near Earth a bit out of Interceptor range.

On the 6th, one of our spotter planes reported UFO's in the air over the Great Glen in Scotland, and I sent fighters there. The objects fled, but near Castle Urquhart suddenly vanished, leaving us with yet more fuel consumed in vain. The pilots logged it as 'fairies' and returned to base. What we call 'fairies' waste much time: the Great Glen is a minor but persistent earthquake fault zone, where rock creaks and shifts slowly under tectonic pressure, causing diffuse widescale underground piezoelectric currents, which in the air above induce shifting magnetic fields, which induce electric fields which occasionally get strong enough for air to break down so large glowing balls of plasma form and fly about and can be dangerous to aircraft that get too close to them. A report on the 8th near Fort William proved to be the same. On the night of the 17th a snowplough driver and a man in Alltnafeadh farm in Glencoe saw circular objects with shimmering equator bands flying north along Glencoe in the faint light of a crescent moon, keeping low to the hillsides, but the local police did not bother to pass the reports on.

That night another UFO came in from remote space, and the secret Utronics equipment in Moonbase detected it 15 million miles out. Two Interceptors blasted out of their protecting silos under the dusty regolith and ancient impact-altered rock near Moonbase, with ominous bulky UFO-buster space missiles fastened to their bows, The UFO tried to dodge, but a missile accelerated faster. The alien pilot fired his lasers at the missile, as uselessly as a cornered fox turning on the hounds, as always. The missile's onboard computer knew where and how to hit the UFO to get through its anti-meteorite force field and hole its casing and split its drive block. The alien motor blew in a fullscale 'brew-up' which evaporated the UFO and all its parts and kit and crew and contents in a moment of intense white fireball, as often before - and we did not know that it would be the last time. During this the six previous UFO's rose from Loch Elde Mòr in the Mamore Forest mountains around Ben Nevis southeast of Fort William and away to space safely, for the Moon was over the Pacific Ocean; the other four UFO's went away with them. If we had several orbiting Interceptor bases ... but there is a limit to practicality with real-world technology and politics and secret budgets and one planet's resources. Police reported no new persons-missing in the area.

Time passed with no more incoming sightings. Four of our aircraft equipped with special anti-UFO air-to-air missiles wasted time chasing 'fairies' along the Pindos mountains in Greece, and a bigger flock of them a week later. If the geotectonic ground strains that cause them led up to a bad earthquake, we better not risk our transport planes being stranded on earthquake-broken runways or requisitioned for disaster relief. In our ground bases, and the big hall in Moonbase where one of the staff acting Santa Claus in a captured alien spacesuit (with faceplate open) brought in a UFO-shaped Christmas cake, our duty staff had Christmas

undisturbed. Such seasonal work-related burlesquing went some way to relieve an undefinable feeling that something big and unwelcome was to happen.

It happened soon enough. On January 3rd Moonbase radar reported three UFO's incoming 17 million miles away in the direction of Aries. They were clearly coming to Earth, and this time they would pass near the Moon. In they came from none knew where beyond the endless emptiness. What need drove them to that long and hazardous mission from their far home? In they came, and what we knew of their purposes drove away any sympathy that we may have harboured for their far travelling, and Foster, currently in charge of Moonbase, sent the Interceptors against them as usual. The UFO's came in, heedless as in the old days before we set up, and thankfully not much good at quick evading when at full space speed. The Interceptor pilots, thankful of easy targets for once, aimed and fired. The UFO's lasered at the missiles - which one and all exploded uselessly far from their targets. The Interceptors frantically reloaded and fired again, with the same result. The UFO's carried on, so close that shocked base staff could see them, streaking a path against the stars from Perseus over the north pole and across Ursa Major into Bootes. When they reached Earth atmosphere I sent planes against them, and the same happened. When they came across an airliner they followed it closely to avoid shot, and finally veered off and disappeared into the geography in southern Borneo, where it was moonless night. Long before we could get anything to the site on the ground among the roadless hilly jungle and unbridged rivers, the UFO's landed and did whatever they had come for, and left, again passing in sight of Moonbase, knocking out seven more missiles sent against them. Their rounded alien forms vanished into infinity whence they came, with I knew not what packed in spare spacesuits or those gas-cylinder-shaped life-support containers of theirs on a one-way journey to their homeworld or local base which no man had returned from yet.

Over the next three months SHADO expended 47 Interceptor space missiles for no UFO kills while our scientists frantically improved and altered things, until we felt that we had the mastery again. On April 19th when two UFO's came we were ready for them. An Interceptor close-hauled one after a hard chase over the spectacular rings of jagged peaks around the Mare Orientale, and a missile got close enough to damage it; but it got away while the Interceptor was reloading, and the other UFO took it in tow and went away with it. At least forcing an enemy mission to abort was better than nothing. Two other missiles went into malfunction and were lost. The next time on April 24th they were ready for us again and brushed our missiles off - and attacked the Interceptors and damaged two of them. One managed to land but the other crashed in Sinus Medii with loss of its pilot, while in a remote part of north Burma among mountainous jungle the UFO's did whatever they had come for and got away. What was happening? A growing gloom gathered in Moonbase, and for some reason I found myself thinking of the December 2nd landing. What had happened needing 15 days on the ground? I had had no reply to my last-ditch suggestion for the world's airforces to be issued with anti-UFO missiles and orders to use them, which would have let thousands of security-uncleared ordinary fighter pilot types (and all too likely via some of them the general public) know that UFO's and aliens are real despite official denials. Over the next three weeks we managed to get a replacement Interceptor up to the Moon in parts and assembled at Moonbase and into its silo.

On May 7th Moonbase detected four incoming UFO's, and knew that there was no point doing anything but warn headquarters and try to predict a landing area, and to ready our missiles for any last point-blank defence. They passed the Moon and came in by night over

Scandinavia to Germany, where we scrambled fighters after them. They disappeared from radar southeast of the Dogger Bank and were next detected wave-skimming up the Firth of Tay. Before anything could reach them they had covered fifteen miles of exposed Strathmore plain and dived into the deep narrow wooded gorge of the Pass of Killiecrankie where heavy railway supply trains to Inverness and Thurso for Scapa Flow navy base often had a hard climb into the Highlands. It was moonless night. The mountains around the upper Tay west towards Crianlarich made it dangerous for fighter pursuit and a diabolical area for radar to try to look for anything low-flying. I desperately rang the area's ordinary police to look for 'crashed or straying unusual-shaped experimental aircraft' there. We heard nothing more until morning, while a report from the area fought its way from police to army and through the Ministry of Defence hierarchy and at last to the only man there who knew that SHADO existed and were the people to handle the situation - by which time we knew from the BBC TV news.

The place was north of Arden on the west shore of Loch Lomond in the low land in the mouth of Glen Fruin. I sent Mobiles there, and in the urgency rode in one with them although it took me far from my office and its communications with the world and Moonbase. The worst had happened. Four UFO's stood on the grass inland from the road, openly in sunlight, their rounded bulks discoloured as if hastily sprayed with anti-oxidation coating. Thousands of people were gathered round. The local police were as culture-shocked as the rest, seeing for the first time beings from another world, and were doing no more than control traffic and try to give the crews enough room to work. Army units had arrived, but were merely standing by, also culture-shocked, and faced with a crowd that clearly would massively resist any attempt to clear the area, and already-leaked publicity. At least thirty people in alien spacesuits stood round the craft or were unloading stuff, in front of a huge crowd, and not in secret darkness or remoteness as always before. Many of them had opened their helmet faceplates and were breathing atmosphere: something seemed wrong. Then one of them spoke, in an obviously local human voice.

"Hi Mom, we're back, like we said we'd be!" he called over the noise.

Others called out similarly, more excitedly, and people in the crowd called back. Whatever I had expected at a UFO landing, did not include seeing them unloading a bunch of thoroughly spaced-out Glasgow University geology students who had been on a field-trip that they certainly had never thought they would get. Not often before had humans in those spacesuits in those craft ridden a returning road still knowing who they were.

"We've been on Mars and Ganymede!" said one of them who had already opened his helmet faceplate, "They said they'd take us for the ride if we helped them with their exploration work. We went scuba diving just here and look what we found! Yeehaa! None of your space story film stuff, we've been on the real thing! just like those Apollo films from the Moon, except these suits are much lighter and handier. And real aliens with us!! That Ganymede's a cold hole, but they've got special oversuits for that sort of place.". Ganymede is a moon of Jupiter. Others called out also, with such a babble of talking all at once that our Mobiles' computers had their work cut out separating and recording the voices.

I watched with distaste, and looked for and turned angrily on the commander of the Army unit: "Instead of clearing and cordoning off the area and thinking of a plausible cover excuse, you just stand by and let this go on, as if they were scheduled planes at an airport with proper security around, instead of God-knows-who bringing God-knows-what from God-knows-where!?"

"It's OK, they're special planes just off the secret list." the commander said, "One of their

pilots told me, and someone rang us to confirm it. Like the Stealth Fighter: that looked alien enough when someone saw it accidentally, but it turned out to be USA Earth stuff. I suppose it's something like that HOTOL project. That space travel talk of theirs is a publicity stunt, they said."

That, these UFO's certainly were not, whatever anyone may have said over the phone. Luckily the film studio that we run as a cover has good make-up staff to disguise my face before I set out; the film producer Mr. Straker turning up leading a military team would endanger our secrecy. I disguised my voice. I desperately tried to plan disinformation to cover all this. Call them secret aircraft made by humans, like that Army man said? If so, people better not believe what the students were saying, as if they did ... I could not call them secret human spacecraft that could travel Solar System type distances only, as they said they had gone from Mars to Ganymede so fast that the craft must have gone faster than light or nearly so - unless I could bring suspended animation into the story, more and more fanciful and less and less convincing. And, more damagingly, some of them described a ride to Alpha Centauri in a day or two, much too realistic for me to tell them it was a simulation or deceit. Saying they were human-made long-range spacecraft would cause nearly as much unwanted public excitement and sensation as the truth. With public all round me there was little that I could officially do or reveal; I felt as out of place as those aliens, and cursed the secrecy rules which silenced me as effectively as any liquid-breathing spacesuit or diving suit would have. The truth was no longer only 'out there' but sitting on the grass by Loch Lomond in sight of a hundred thousand people as the news spread.

Perhaps I could round up the students and reporters and interrogate and amnesia-treat them and tell them that my cover story was the truth - if there was not so huge a crowd for them to be lost in as soon as danger threatened, and the matter was getting all over the place on the Internet and CB and ham radio. The Internet, that friend and enemy of officialdom, giving, unplannedly and in some people's view inappropriately, every young irresponsible student type and backstreet computer fan the power of the CIA to gather and spread information but not responsibility who they spread it to. Or I could simply try to discredit the returnees - but unless these landings are stopped there may be another such group, and another, and more. Our usual amnesia drug that we used on outside people who had had contact with aliens or with us, only works for the memories of the last twelve hours; but with the landing deleted the returnees *might* be persuaded that the rest of their voyage was a hallucination; but how on earth to round up and truth drug interrogate and amnesia-drug half of north Strathclyde!? Despairing grandiose plans to restore secrecy evaporated in the cold shock of reason telling me that this one had got away. When ever would orders come from London and enough men to clear and cordon the area and perhaps send ground and air attack craft in? I had to remember that, although for us it was one more UFO incident, but a serious one, for most of the crowd it was that longed-for moment that they had never thought would come, the First Contact with men from beyond space, and breaking it up by force would risk the most serious consequences.

Previous SHADO drill in handling UFO landings was hopelessly inapplicable. "They were taken to the Moon and Ganymede to help in exploration?" I thought, and would have said if I could, "That's absurd, those aliens have been around for centuries and by now with their surveying and sensor kit they surely know everything about the Solar System that they need to know. More likely a show to look friendly, for what purpose? Certainly not kindness for its own sake."

I had had as many SHADO fighter aircraft as I could moved to RAF Leuchars near Edinburgh, but when will more ground troops come? I went into a Mobile and radioed. Men had to be rounded up from remote battle training grounds or from leave. What could come quickly would have to come in radio silence. The sun grew hot. Hungry smells and burner noise from a fish and chip van did not help my men's attention to duty. A police car loudspeaked telling people to "please leave if you've seen everything you need to, to let other people in and avoid jams when everybody leaves". I swore to myself yet again, for there were plans that needed as many as possible of the people to stay there.

I looked again at the improbable-looking alien craft sitting openly among so many people, and their crew. The usual alien spacesuit helmet has a round top and a lower part which tapers somewhat downwards, grey opaque except a big faceplate, which is rectangular with rounded corners and also tapers somewhat downwards: it has a somewhat threatening appearance. As this sort of spacesuit is liquid filled and so constant volume, it is easier to prevent that bane of spacesuit design, pressure ballooning forcing the limbs out straight. Its life support gear is surprisingly small for its duration on a refill: even without long-trip adaptations an alien on the Moon once walked over two hundred miles with no more suit-recharging kit than he could carry. From us examining them, human spacesuits have been improved quite a lot, although we do not tell outsiders where we got the ideas.

Someone in an alien spacesuit came up to us and looked at us. His face was human. Seeing him in that spacesuit made in no factory on Earth breathing liquid in his helmet when there was good air all round gave some of us the shivers. He opened two valves on his suit. Inside his helmet a surface appeared and dropped down his face as the liquid flowed into a small tank. He blew a jet of the liquid from his lungs against his faceplate, then in half a minute of deep gurgly coughing and spluttering went to air breathing. He had surely done it more than once before, as there was none of the drowning-style panic and thrashing about that we had seen the various times we had to get rescued abductees (including once Foster) out of alien spacesuits. Someone said "how come newborn babies manage it so easily?". He opened his helmet faceplate.

I turned to a police control van again: "Damn the silly TV blowing this out live onsite like some common airshow before checking with authority, such a sensation that they even pushed live football aside for it, which I've never known before. Why didn't you send all this traffic round the A814 [the coast road via Helensburgh] and not let them see this lot and their silly passengers pretending they've been in space starting a sensation just for a lark!?"

"I tried. The roadblock south had to be at Balloch or nearer, so it didn't trap any of Dumbarton inside, and they just started to park there and surge across the fields like a tide. They're far too many for us. If I'd put a backup checkpoint at the coast road junction, checking who were residents behind the cordon coming home would have jammed the coast road as well, with all the people coming. And they're cutting across from Helensburgh and Garelochhead. I'm not risking thousands of them leaving cars blocking the coast road to walk across country to get past roadblocks. It'd take an army to stop this lot. Then an ambulance had to go up the valley to Luss, and I had to reopen the road. We've enough to do finding parking room off the road for them all. The Chief Constable said he's not stripping Glasgow so the gangs have a spree while we're all drawn off for a crowd gawping at whatever these four things are." He still sounded very culture-shocked.

More people kept arriving. I watched in dismay and shock as a police sergeant, forgetting where he was in desperation to follow his training to keep traffic moving, ran up to the UFO's

and pleaded with an alien, red liquid-breathing spacesuit and all, for loan of earth-moving gear to make gaps in roadside ditches and hedges along the roads so cars could park on more fields. Luckily the spring had been dry and the land was firm; the UFO crew, whose captain's auto-translator knew English, unloaded an odd-looking ground vehicle that could move earth, and drove it to the places, and did the job, aided sometimes by a few motorists who had a spade in the car and realized afterwards with some awe what they had worked alongside. The day dragged on and the sun was hot; the students took their spacesuits off. Some in the Army unit suspected that the students' talk of space adventures was not what they had been told by radio that it was, and said so. The UFO's and the police loudspeaked at intervals telling the crowd to stand back. The SHADO men watched helplessly.

I went up to the students, feigning a casual civilian-type curiosity. Among much excited talk about where they had been, they showed me some alien writing, some copied by them and some original. I had seen alien writing before. There were styles that may have been standard printed font, cursive, shorthand, and code, including one somewhat Chinese-like sample on a cut piece of bluish plastic sheet. They let me photograph it all.

One UFO released a small observation missile which rose about 4000 feet and flew about and returned. The UFO then to my dismay loudspeaked, warning in English that many more troops and what sounded from the description like armed forces scientific staff were on the way, and some short messages in an unknown language. The aliens, and the students, and some reporters who had films and tapes that they did not want to lose, ran to the UFO's, then into them. As every Army helicopter that could be gathered in haste appeared over Beinn Tharsuinn behind the place and Ben Vrackie to the east and split to land men in riotsquad kit in blocking positions in a arc round the site trapping the crowd against the lake, the UFO's took off south, low along the packed A82 and not over the exposed empty Kilpatrick Hills where they could be shot down without endangering anyone on the ground. In Bellahouston Park in west-central Glasgow, ignoring the extra sensation caused, they landed and unloaded the humans, who scattered into the crowded streets long before anything official could get there through the snarled-up city traffic. The UFO's shot straight up to space; I in tired shock saw no purpose in wasting any more shot and fuel on them, as we still had too little firepower on site to swamp the enemy's new anti-missile ability.

The planned massive Army cordon had little to do but pick up litter as it watched the crowd disperse, for a general who came realised that with the crowd in its excited state any attempt at a big camera-seizing operation would risk a massive riot beyond any use it would serve when so many people had got away with evidence already. Security force reaction had been grossly muddled, and too little and then too late. 'They caught the shadow and let the substance escape', as the saying goes: or rather 'they caught the SHADO', as Foster joked sourly afterwards: we were trapped in traffic there much longer than I like when other calls may have arisen. The police and armed forces returned to base. I dreamed of work all night as I slept in a Mobile on our way back to base.

The sensation slowly faded. At an emergency conference we decided what to say. The circular craft seen in the Glasgow area were USA experimental aircraft, as they themselves had told that Army squad indeed; the student types who they unloaded were local RAF cadets, and their talk of off-planet adventures was a rag-type stunt and a joke at the MOD's expense, and they had been disciplined for it. My film studio filmed or computer-generated supporting 'news' footage. Reaction to the alarm had been delayed by having to round up three of my staff from a cafe in the village of West Harlington near my base; I had to remind them of the

standing order to have all meal breaks at their workplace. The matter seemed to be settling down to how it was before.

Several politicians who had objected to spending money on SHADO or any other UFO-related organization suddenly changed their opinions on the matter. Two of them had been on holiday boat-fishing on Loch Lomond and, after a lifetime of refusing to treat as reliable for any job at all anyone who believed in UFO's, to their shock and dismay saw four of them flying over only fifty feet above them, clearly by day as solid craft and not just balls of light.

As to why the Earth end of the alien system suddenly revealed itself to men, there are various guesses. That they returned the students was probably to avoid scaring off other such groups; but why did they want such groups? Why didn't they return them secretly by night to a remote glen, perhaps with their memories of what had happened erased or overwritten? Perhaps they were merely trying to split human opinion by seeming friendly to create a pro-alien faction; perhaps a more serious plan. Suddenly starting to lose many men and craft by SHADO action after having their own way here for centuries or longer may have strained their long tradition of obedience to standing orders. Employing so many humans would expose them to human ways including human endemic insubordination, and may have woken in some aliens a spirit of cooperation and older and gentler feelings than the rules of secrecy that necessity forced on them; even before this, the UFO that took Foster got away too damaged to return to its base, and came back to the Moon to dump him out before it blew up. Or perhaps other reasons. We tried to patch up our plans and position.

New improvements to our anti-UFO in-air and space missiles promised to make them immune to UFO misleading and return fire once more. We hoped to prevent any more landings, whether for their usual missions or for any more disruptive Arden-style stunts. The next three UFO attacks were all seen off; there were no more 'brew-ups', but all the UFO's were damaged and forced to limp away with their missions unachieved. Once Moonbase saw a remote explosion, as if a badly damaged UFO had got so far but had to be evacuated and detonated. A threat by the secret international committee that finances and controls SHADO, to close us down as unprofitable, receded at last. No more UFO's came for a while, and we caught up with work in our film studio public front at last. The geology students were back at their ordinary courses, and people seemed to have stopped believing their tales of space travel. But some Glasgow electronics postgraduates who had gone on what they said was a secret Government project, were still incommunicado and nobody knew where they were.

We still had Moonbase, which we needed for the GWD special equipment that we use to detect gravity disturbances caused by incoming UFO's slowing to sub-light speed, as it does not work well in Earth atmosphere and radio noise. If we have to change to having a tighter close-in defence of Earth, we will have to let all sorts of ordinary airforce fighters be equipped with UFO-buster missiles and let their pilots know that UFO's are real, with the expected consequences. "And if we can't see them till they're close up, we'll waste a lot more time chasing 'fairies!'", as I had to point out to the Committee once.

After that they avoided the lurking peril of Moonbase as they had before, and came in to Earth anti-lunar or by decoy tactics or among meteor showers, but bolted to space when fighter planes got near. An occasional one landed. The Arden event was retreating into legend and official silence and disproof as fast as something that spectacular could be expected to. Five UFO reports in the USA Cascade Mountains proved to be 'fairies', but the sixth was genuine; they ducked into a small lake and waited until it was safe to bolt to space anti-lunar;

nobody was reported missing in the area, but, in a USA diving magazine and much too late, we found an underwater photograph of someone in a red 'modern hardhat diving suit' with a motor-and-propeller backpack seen by chance in that lake - the photographer was one lucky scuba diver, coming back to tell of it. Police had to keep clearing cultists' camps off the farmland at Arden. The MOD wrote a sharp letter to the garage at Inveruglas. Loch Lomond had more tourists than before. Routine settled back in, as reported at length elsewhere, and seemed set in until the enemy gets tired of losing craft and pilots and stops coming.

## THE DEFENCES FALL

On July 5 in Moonbase they were tidying up after the USA Independence Day celebrations. A siren sounded: "Incoming targets, five", and gave trajectory details. Interceptor pilots left books and board games and dropped into tubular sloping chutes which piped them through hardened silo walls into their craft's cockpits. Static defences were manned. Some new improved missiles had come: this would be a chance to try them out. "Yaah, liquid-breathers!" one of them shouted over his radio, "How many more times before you thieving foxes learn that this chicken-keeper's bought a shotgun at last!". They blasted out of their silos in a shower of disturbed regolith and up into space. Each had a missile ready to fire and three more in reserve: 12 missiles against 5 targets.

Behind them the sun shone on craters never seen by Earth-bound men as the moon dropped away. John Harrison in I.2 and his onboard computer noticed an extra star in the hindquarters of Leo the Lion, brightening fast on the last stage of their far journey across the void from their unknown home: he was the first to see a UFO in that action. More soon appeared. The Interceptors' computers radio-linked and assigned code numbers to the targets. He, and Mike Kaminski in I.3, fired together at target T1; the missiles as always were programmed to avoid each other and friendly craft. Part of his computer display was suddenly hidden by a new 'window' showing a close-up of a UFO with something on its underbelly marked for his attention. Lacking time to appreciate art right then, he swore briefly as he pressed Alt-Tab on his computer keyboard to hide the distraction under the proper display. He waited impatiently as his missile-firer reloaded and prepared to fire at T3 so his missile and I.1's hit it together. It would be satisfying to see UFO's evaporate in fireballs again: seeing them limp away or be towed away and in some dread remote base far beyond our slow short rocket-powered reach and knowledge be repaired and re-used was not the same.

He aimed his craft and fired as Len Carrington in I.1 did; his computer at accelerated electronic thinking speed worked out what to do in this and that case in the battle ahead. The action was proceeding as planned, as it should, and routinely did before that ill-starred January 3rd. Fortunately rockets within their speed range accelerate better than UFO's. Alien technology was advanced, but showed little sign of having advanced further for a long time. As always had been, except occasionally a meteorite used as a crude bomb, and an attempt at kamikaze ramming, the only hostile return fire would be laser, which his craft, and now thankfully again his missiles, were proof against unless a UFO managed to aim at the same place too long.

I.3 fireballed as two UFO's missiles hit it together piercing its fuel tanks.

Other missiles from the UFO's took out all of the first four SHADO missiles fired. I.1's second missile hit T5 in the underbelly, but much of its impact and blast was wasted destroying the extra bulge fitment that his computer had noticed and tried to tell him about. T5 made radio noises, perhaps calling for help, as he and I.1 bolted for home. They never got there; his craft shook and his computer screen showed an 'error window' as an enemy missile took out his steering. His computer tried to steer with his docking-jets, and showed on a 'window' enlarged pictures of one UFO after another; they all had the same new underbelly missile-pack bulge. The same happened to I.1. The UFO's closed in. He fired one more missile, but hit nothing. Before he could start any auto-destruct sequences, something broke his cockpit canopy open and cut his harness and pulled him out. "So I end, with my skin as a spacesuit." he thought, and closed his eyes and mouth and nose and tightened his chest and belly muscles

as hard as possible, but something scooped him up and after the longest three seconds of his life he was in a pressure hold on board a UFO, with little hope of walking on his Earth again. The UFO's clustered round the two Interceptors and took them away into far remoteness.

Moonbase's shocked staff guessed what had happened from the pilots' radioings and the distant radar images. The enquiry and wondering what to do next began, after I had been helicopter-snatched out of a traffic jam at roadworks on the A40 in Ealing and airlifted the rest of the way to my office. In the hazards of running an armed space-patrol I had inevitably occasionally lost an Interceptor (the first soon after Moonbase came into operation during a massive over-late attempt by the aliens to destroy it), but not like this and so easily. *All three gone*. The words echoed in my brain. Until now I gave a lost Interceptor's number to its replacement, but not after this. Where were they getting all that new technology from? Why hadn't they used it earlier, without losing so many men and craft first? That was the agenda topic, but discussion soon became general.

"The further from base and backup, the harder it is to do things and to get an invasion past the beachhead stage." I said, "That's why the Viking settlements in America never came to much. And Cortez could never have conquered the Aztec empire without local allies. That's why I favour the 'Minas Morgul theory', that means they've got a big outpost base quite near us, perhaps in our asteroid belt." Minas Morgul is a place in Tolkien's fiction, a big enemy base outside the border mountains of Mordor, which was the great enemy's land.

"When those geology students at Arden told of their adventures in space, they said they'd been to such a base, but it was in the Alpha Centauri system."

"We've only got Moonbase, and that can't do any big jobs, they've got to be shipped up from Earth. How long to get three more Interceptors made and sent there in bits in shuttlefuls and reassembled there - if *they* let us? It'd cost them a lot to take Moonbase out by attacking it head-on, but until we get more Interceptors there we can't stop them shooting every Moon-shuttle down and starving Moonbase out." someone said. "And what to tell the pilots' next of kin!?, all this secrecy."

"Can't someone build an Apollo or shuttle big enough to carry an Interceptor up from Earth complete and fuelled and armed to fly and fight as soon as released? Even if it only serves to disturb the aliens and any damn misguided or brainwashed human helpers of theirs from their celebrating in the Great Hall of Moonbase."

"Human helpers?" someone queried.

"Like that lot they unloaded at Arden, obviously." I said, "And that alien body we got hold of a bit before Regan died that turned out to be all human. Now as well as destroying all my Interceptors they've likely got two of my Interceptor pilots for their plastic surgery and overwriting their memories and retraining to reprocess them into alien UFO-crewmen to replace two of their men that they lost by SHADO action."

"Just like I'd reprogram and re-use a suitable captured computer." Col.Freeman said grimly, "And likely given the identity of one of their men who he'd shot down before. All his personal life and memories of loved ones and achievements in training and battle gone as casually as deleting an unwanted computer file."

"Once they attacked Moonbase and it had to use its emergency close-in defences." I said, "During this a UFO got through to Earth and picked up a man called Regan and his wife and 3 others on a country road at night near a spaceport. Its crew kept the rest of them, but when they found Regan was one of my Interceptor pilots they implanted orders in him and let him go, so next time he flew in an Interceptor he tried to kamikaze into Moonbase and only just in

time came to his senses and pulled away; that was one narrow escape for us. Regan still crashed and it left us without Interceptor 1 until I could replace it. He'd been a good pilot.

When public are in earshot I'm hopelessly 'gagged and handcuffed' by needs for secrecy, as you all know. Likely the alien top commander involved is also hampered by orders, in his case to take from Earth what he must and leave as few other signs of his presence as possible, so natives don't realize what's happening. That's likely why there are no provable cases that I can think of right now, of them in former centuries pretending to be gods wanting human sacrifices in exchange for such goods or services they could offer easily. OK, cultists say some old rock-drawings look like men in spacesuits; but they could as well be natives in fancy ceremonial clothes."

"Are you sure they never did? There's flying craft in all sorts of old legends." someone said showing me a photograph, "OK, the rock paintings in the Tassili N'Ajjer in Algeria that some people go on about are too generalized to prove much, but what about this old rock painting from Fergana in Uzbekistan? That's a man in a spacesuit and helmet, or I've never seen one. Complete with helmet-to-suit fastening rings and two pipe-connections. Likely they usually only contacted in remote areas because in organized literary societies there was too much risk of some native king trying to grab their craft trapping them with an army too big for them to shoot their way out back to their craft."

"What do you think they had to offer their contactees, in exchange?"

"Odds and ends that they could do easily at a quick visit, likely, such as: Some infertile women can be cured by giving her reproductive system a careful blow-through with sterile saline to clear muck out. Removing cataractous eye lenses. Using their guns to shoot man-eating or crop-raiding animals or clean out robber dens, and so start legends about heroes with magic weapons. Bits of simple technology. Round up the village or tribe and truth drug interrogate everybody to clear up disputes and find thieves and work-dodgers."

"But how could people ever be so hard as to sell their own flesh and kin in exchange for that sort of thing!?"

"Those were hard times. Even in Britain well into the 19th century, petty thieves were routinely hanged as the only practical way to keep property safe. Chronic food shortage, made worse by endemic thieving and drought famines and neighbouring peoples crowding in wanting more room, and no way to keep money or property safe, and nobody had heard of police. All that sort of thing makes people hard. Superstitious uneducated people do all sorts of strange things to try to bribe favours from their gods, including offloading undesirables by 'giving them to the gods'. Don't forget that in the African slave trade, West African chiefs and kings routinely sold their own people, or prisoners taken in local tribal wars, to European slave ships in exchange for cloth and suchlike, well into the 19th century: 'we were their aliens, and big wooden ships were our UFO's'. Aliens driven by their own hard necessity knew this; often safer for them than raiding a large village or camp of natives who may fight back with arrows and spears. One thing aliens would *not* likely do here at the end of long communication lines, is a lot of heavy construction building temples and making big stone spheres and suchlike. Anyway, that time of routine contacts ended long ago."

"Like in Mu and Atlantis?" said someone.

"Mu is damned trash cultist stuff and I don't want to hear of it again." I interrupted angrily, "Atlantis is Minoan Crete and the big Santorini alias Thera volcanic eruption and tidal wave about 1400BC plus someone misreading a symbol for 'hundred' as 'thousand' making it ten times as big each way and ten times as long ago. Lets get back to the present day."

"Likely also it's only those secrecy orders that's stopped him from taking out Moonbase by kamikazeing a UFO into it at interstellar speed or bombing a big meteorite into it, because it'd make a flashbang that'd be seen easily on Earth like that big meteor hit in the Middle Ages that made Giordano Bruno crater. That may change, since he knew for some time that we knew that his people exist, particularly if he's so desperate to 'improve your performance or you're for organs' that he shows his people to Men to try to split us by encouraging a pro-alien faction. Also, if they let no-one reach the moon the fascination for space that encourages such factions would turn people against the aliens, so SHADO could operate openly, and they likely by now know that, which restricts what they can do against Moonbase. If there were none of these damn silly popular space cultisms to become pro-alien factions, we could operate in public like any ordinary Armed Forces branch like the Marines etc and have far more budget and help and support to pay for far more craft and men than now, and the public and the ordinary police could tell us about ground and near-the-ground UFO incidents in time, and the aliens know it.

This going public to men may be in breach of his orders, and now he's realized that he may as well be hanged by his superiors for a sheep as for a lamb. A mess on both sides. Perhaps he's in trouble for not noticing Moonbase being built in time so they could take it out easily before it got into operation, as well as for losing so many men and craft after that; the attempts they've made to put Moonbase out of action have been too little and too late. They did once try to kamikaze a UFO into our headquarters, but one of our fighter planes destroyed it. They didn't try that again."

"Yes, many tricks but all with the same kit, didn't understand or like having to use anything new. I could name some humans who are like that. Comes from having lived unopposed without change for too long. Well, they've got different kit now. Face it, the turkey shoot's over. We've had it too easy so far, sitting here shooting them as they come. Now they've got much better antimissile lasers, interference guns or something like that, and now their own missiles. It can't be factories sending us bad stuff which goes wrong in use, we test everything thoroughly before we send it up. Now they've got two Interceptor wrecks to examine, and likely their pilots captured alive. If so, one syringe of alien truth drug each and they're open books."

"Why they used only lasers before in space could be some old standing order or custom or religious rule against wasting metals as space projectiles. After so long running a space effort they're likely down to the leavings of the leavings of their metals resources plus what they asteroid-mine where they can and they need all their ingenuity to make spaceworthy craft at all, and they haven't got the means to make them routinely resistant to atmospheric oxygen. Something's knocked them out of their old stasis and given them new stuff, and I want to know what."

"From what I.1 managed to send back, it seems those damn new missile kits of theirs can turn like a tank's turret and fire any way on the UFO's current horizontal, not only straight ahead like our Interceptors and fighters."

"I take it you meant before that instead of sitting cosy in a shooting hide on the Moon we should set forth across the outer wilderness to that alien 'Minas Morgul', if it exists, whatever they call it, and attack them far from our bases in their own den like when Tsar Ivan the Terrible of Russia didn't stay near Moscow waiting for Tartars to come but marched out far across the steppe and attacked them in their own capitals Kazan and Astrakhan to stop their continual raiding. How? The Tartars and the Russians had the same sort of transport, but in our

spacecraft how the devil to get enough attack force to wherever that place is!? It's as if we're on foot through foodless waterless desert and they've got helicopters. To them Alpha Centauri's the next town; to us even our own asteroids are beyond reach to manned craft. I did have ideas that way once, when I had better hopes than now of finding and copying how UFOs' drives work."

"About us saving people from alien abduction, if we went public many would say we'd save lives for far less cost in money and materials each by preventing road accidents, or fitting heart-attack-prone people with automatic heart restarters, or medical work in poor nations, or the like."

"There are other opinions among aliens also: one tried to defect to us that time; one saved Foster's life on the Moon once, and was shot on sight for it by a misunderstanding."

"I reckon there's chlorine-breathing aliens here already, the amount of scuba divers I've seen with yellow cylinders." Foster joked tiredly to try to relieve the tension, "I know the standard industrial gas cylinder identification colours even if a lot of scuba divers don't."

A message came over my personal radio that two more UFO's were incoming: I heard it over a deaf-aid-type earpiece without other people hearing it. I told them about it and pushed my chair back in case I had to run to my headquarters's control room, but continued the meeting.

"How much longer do we call them 'UFO's'? They are no longer unidentified."

"If we must admit that UFO's are real, there's one thing governments'll have to stamp on hard. Too many silly cults say that if Man is a good little boy for long enough and cleans his teeth every day and eats all food offered without query, or clears away all pollution and preserves nature, etc, then the kind aliens will take him for a nice holiday in space, and solve all his problems, etc. Not bloody likely. I get sick of such schizo rubbish. Like the trouble the police have had at Arden since that landing. Like the UFOism that that place Roswell in America has such a trade in, after that UFO crashed there that time. Could we prosecute such people for aiding the enemy in a time of war? That's only a beginning of what'll likely be let loose if we admit in public that aliens and UFO's exist. Far too many people'll trust them blindly, and they'll take advantage of that."

"I'm beginning to wonder how much longer we can keep SHADO secret. The aliens know nearly everything about us: like that time they made an imitation of our headquarters under the Atlantic to give our men false orders: they got everything right including what colour tie I wear. And other evidence. So far it's stopped with the aliens, who kept away from men except when abducting. Until now, and they told those geology students about us, and those students are telling everybody else. The world's governments have just about managed to gag the main public media from spilling all those beans, but they can't stop the 'alternative press' and the Internet. Against all that, disinformation and secrecy orders to the press and TV are just about holding the lid on and persuading most people to bracket us with the 'Men in Black' and such myths, and to believe that those students were hoaxing and the UFO's were USA aircraft. We were dangerously near becoming public knowledge, like those tales about Area 51 and all that, but it's starting to slacken off, thank God, else - it'd only take one of our men to 'not like what's going on' and go public.

Even before that, more and more people saw our Mobiles, and air battles with UFO's, and the like, and people started to put two and two together. FBI men and the like have started nosing about after whatever they think we are. NASA men are complaining about what to them are unexplained restrictions on scientific space activity, that keeping our space work

secret is causing them. I was never more thankful about security than when that moon mining firm Dalotek that was operating near Moonbase, shut down. But if there's another public-relations landing like Arden - well, we better not allow another. And people round here have been starting to guess there's something odd here, by how little they see the studio staff in the village, and the same when this place was being built, workmen sleeping on site, everything down to food and beer and newspapers for the workmen trucked in from afar, no return for losing one farm and parts of three more for land for this place, our own fuel pumps for visitors' cars even, no compensation for John Maldon at Home Farm converting that barn into bed-and-breakfast rooms only to get no trade for them. OK, OK, one of the first security precautions is for a place to have its own bar, better than having men work on building hidden rooms or putting secret stuff in and then they go to the White Horse and drink loosens their tongues in front of a lot of farm men and trippers.

Talking about landings and disappearances, does anyone know where those Glasgow University electronics postgraduates are? December last year, same time as those geology students went away, *we now know who with*, they said they'd be away working for a secret Government project, but nobody's heard anything of them since."

"Some say: 'If the Arden craft were human planes, then gas-mains can fly.'".

"Erh??".

"In the last war the Germans sent rockets called V2's at London. One landed at Beckton, I think it was, and made a big bang. The UK government covered up and said the explosion was a gas main blowing up; but people had seen the rocket come over, and talked sarcastically about 'flying gas-mains'".

"If we admit what we've been doing against aliens, we'll have 'all the hosts of Mordor' against us, as you said, all those cultists and space story fans. And if we say the aliens have been abducting, a lot of them'll call it 'typical CIA-type disinformation and smear campaign', that sort of popular mythology, and silly TV comedy programmes treating it as yet another unjustified fear to poke fun at, and so on, until the comedian responsible may well end up telling his wisecracks to the inside of a UFO's hold on the one-way road."

"Something different:" I interrupted, "At Arden some of those students showed me some alien writing they'd got hold of in their travels, some original, some they'd copied onto paper. They let me photograph it. The photographs are here."

They looked at them. What secrets of technology far beyond ours did they tell of? One of them was the 'Chinese-like' piece, about 30 characters scraped with a sharp point into a cut piece of tough bluish plastic sheet.

"Where was that piece from?" said someone.

"One of the students said it was in an repair and storage base of theirs on an asteroid orbiting Proxima Centauri, that they went to. It's part of some old UFO hold lining that they must have ripped out and replaced some time ago. It was in a heap in a storage area."

"Well, the other samples are nothing I've ever seen, but that blue piece is no sort of alienese, it's good Earth Chinese. The rune-like deformity comes from it being scratched in a hurry into a hard surface. I was in Hong Kong for 17 years, I learned Chinese there."

The Chinese at various times invented gunpowder and rockets, flamethrowers, printing, and multi-arrow-firing machines long before Europeans did, and what I had read of cult belief in a long-ago advanced human technologization before the modern one, plus other more sensible guesses, started to surface in my mind, but were interrupted when someone asked

"Well, what does it say!?"

"Hang on while I sort it out: old-style literary Chinese tends to read like an over-abbreviated telegram, and worse if he's trying to be brief. It looks like: 'Chiang Erh-wang of Nankow in Hopeh was carried in this dragon chariot in strange red armour, drowned but living. He [had been] hunting in the mountains, slept, and woke in here. [It is] Wan Li's 3rd year [as emperor]. May the Emperor of Heaven be merciful.'. That was 1575, in the Ming dynasty. The Emperor of Heaven was the chief of the Chinese gods. Nankow is north of Beijing."

It was nothing sensational, merely the same yet again but long ago. A Chinese man, rich enough to learn to read and write, caught away from habitation by night and abducted, put into a liquid-breathing spacesuit long before humans had or imagined any sort of spacesuit, desperately recording himself as he could unimaginably far from home before his unknown but to me guessable fate. One human life from a young crowded water-rich world to save, at least for a while, several aliens from a drying dying world - which side would a neutral judge support? But I am not neutral, and I defend my own human people.

Later, after all this had blown over and there was no point in the secrecy, I sent an agent to Nankow to enquire. After so many wars and disorders since there was still a Chiang family there, whose archives recorded the disappearance. He had been a travelling official; landowners that he called on sometimes took him hunting as a pay-off. Even so the only memorial tablet his people got for him was a piece of alien repair shop waste, and that four centuries late.

"I'm not sending any more Interceptors to the Moon until we've got much better weapons." I said, shocked, "From now on the Moon gets supplies if they let it, else we pull out back to Earth."

"But - our whole position - all the money invested -" General Henderson, older than the rest, started.

My earpiece suddenly started making frantic noises. I said "sorry, excuse." curtly, calling for quiet, and phoned a number.

"What is i..." I started, irritated at the interruption, when the reply came.

"They got SID!" came an alarmed voice with a background of communication room noise and alarmed shouting, "Those two UFO's just went past it and instead of it our radar now shows only a debris cloud!"

I announced what had happened. "Damn. Missiles from a distance, I suppose. After all the trouble proofing it against UFO's lasers and so on, and that far out to be right away from Earth ground noise it'll be a hell of a cost putting another up, plus having it made with all that special Utronics stuff in and keeping it secret. I'm sick of having to make up cover stories for all these bills. Those filthy new missiles of theirs." I said, "Bang go all the special surprises on board SID in case anything tampered with it or poked inside it. All three Interceptors, and now this. This time the boffins better give me properly UFO-weapon-proof and jamming-proof Interceptor missiles, before I send anything more up. I've wasted enough transport replacing missiles only for the aliens to crack the new ones within a month, since all this started. And on top of that we now need a reliable fast-working compact anti-missile system. What the hell's got into them, all this new stuff sent against us all of a sudden!? Or do we go back to letting them quietly come and take people as they want and otherwise leave us alone, buying peace by selling human lives?"

"How many lives?" Foster replied, "I've seen photos of UFO's with another sort of underbelly clip-on that looks like a scoop-pack. I've seen in the desert east of Asyut in Egypt

where something in the night shovelled up two tentfuls of Bedouin, tents and all. Nine days ago one of our aircraft was over the Auvergne mountains in France chasing one that had one of those scoop-packs; as it shot up to space out of a deep valley near the Puy de Sancy it ejected what proved to be a bale of three trash-compacted hang-gliders: where are their pilots? I wouldn't like to be shot down and have to parachute with one of those around. They're getting bolder and bolder."

The debate went on for a while, but got nowhere. Transport to Moonbase in the next weeks was often buzzed by UFO's but not interfered with. Scientists desperately tried to design a new Interceptor to stand up to the new threat. More airforce planes were armed with anti-UFO missiles as I tried to organize a tighter defence closer-in within what governments would pay us for. There was quiet for a while. Two radar echoes that may have been UFO's came and stood about 300,000 miles off Earth. Our spacecraft suppliers started making another Interceptor. The public tales about us had stopped and were retreating into myth. Relatives and department-mates of the Glasgow electronics postgraduates received telephone calls or email messages from them saying that they would be back soon; that was that matter tidied up and shown to be irrelevant. Then came the 11th of October.

The six alien craft came in from the direction of the middle of Virgo, reached the Moon, swooped low over the empty Interceptor silos near Moonbase, and away to Earth. They all had the new feared underbelly bulge. They came in prograde over the North Atlantic. As seen on a spy satellite image they all turned into fireballs - but it was only air heated by fast deceleration from space speed, as with a re-entering Moon-shuttle, and they came out of it unharmed over France near Bordeaux. Jet fighters came after them, but UFO's make no hot exhaust for heat-seeking missiles to follow. They rose out of reach to 40 miles, fainted towards south England making us scramble our fighters there draining their fuel tanks, turned across East Anglia out to sea towards Norway, then suddenly turned northwest and descended, came ashore near Morpeth, and ran for Scotland. Three of my fighters came after them and tried to take their best chance over the empty lands of Ettrick east of Moffat away from ground witnesses and risks of ground casualties, but again their missiles behaved oddly, and the pilots saw that this time the UFO's could shoot back effectively. The fighters were VTOL and could hover but very fuel-expensively, and after an eddy of chasing and shooting over the bare dominating heights of Ettrick Pen and Capel Fell they kept back away and had to be content with following until they had to return to base. One of my planes was hit, but its pilot baled out and floated down to the north slope of Bodesbeck Law above the Moffat Water watching pursuit going away northwest over the Southern Uplands.

I sent from RAF Leuchars other planes with new improved anti-UFO missiles, but by the time they made contact the intruders had passed Motherwell. One of the UFO's radioed in English on an RAF frequency: "Do not fire. We have Earth-men on board." as they swooped too low over Govan and Clydebank in Glasgow for us to risk any of them exploding. They flew northwest and settled on flat land north of Arden by Loch Lomond, on a warm weekend with the lakeside road busy.

It was the same again, and the men available could not cordon off or clear the area in time. People gathered as the news spread. Several live-TV news reporters helicoptered in, astonishingly promptly, over the heads of police trying in vain to keep this one private. The craft seemed a somewhat different colour from most previous sightings. 42 people from the far distances in red spacesuits made in no factory on Earth came out onto Scottish grass as people who had seen the craft coming in low over the city bypassed attempted checkpoints and

swarmed in over the fields and hills in huge numbers. I and Foster were in RAF Leuchars at the time, and we quickly helicoptered to the site as people still swarmed in like army-ants. I decided not to try a ground assault.

Of the 42, 28 went easily to air breathing with the usual unattractive noises and opened their faceplates. Two others were obviously less used to it, and had to be tied to frames, and strained at their bonds in the usual drowning-like panic like Foster had before, as they went to air mode. The two saw me and Foster, and when untied opened their faceplates and ran over to us. They were John Harrison and Len Carrington, and they addressed me as Commander in full public earshot. They said afterwards that they had not been forced to do or say anything; but their captors long ago found how to quickly effectively coerce or extract information without their victims knowing that they had been coerced.

The 28 were the electronics postgraduates and some other people from the university and the area: I knew, as I had brought a file of missing persons. Now I knew where they had telephoned from, and how they had been telephoned in late November and early December the previous year to offer them the secret research jobs, and how the army detachment at Arden on May 7th had been telephoned: a way impossible when most telephone calls went by cables on the ground, but all too easy now so many calls go via interferable radio or microwave links to and from satellites. That UFO's have been eavesdropping on communications is likely enough; but that they make calls pretending to be someone on the ground seemed silly - and then in these days of satellites all too possible and the idea made my blood run cold. A missing persons list that we had at last got hold of a fortnight before this said that, some time ago at the same day and area as the Kicking Horse Pass incident, three Canadian telephone engineers who also were satellite linkup experts had disappeared during site work on cables.

We listened in angry secrecy-gagged frustration and a tired feeling of inevitability to a councillor from Dumbarton who should have known better going into a by now predictable speech about cooperation between peoples, and bringing back local employment which had been poor since the area's heavy industry had declined, and so on. There was nowhere private to talk except in our craft or theirs. John and Len stayed near me, remembering too late not to acknowledge me in public. In a long struggle like crabs moulting, their human forms emerged from their encasing alien spacesuits. A crewman came up and took the spacesuits back. I could tell by his face through the liquid in his helmet that he was no offspring of Earth. Where did all this lead, inappropriately like some ordinary expedition returning? Yes, it had happened again. I felt helpless and unreal. The crews stayed near their craft and their weapons. I could not say anything against the aliens, because I dare not risk the human mass casualties that a crowd attack on them and their well-armed craft would cause, and many in the crowd would aid the aliens and attack us instead. Some of the 28 unsuited and went into a Glasgow University coach, still in a highly excited state at where they had been. It looked reasonably soundproof, and I and Foster went in with them.

"They said they were a secret government body when they booked us." one of the postgraduates said, "We took a bus to the right time and place that evening, and what I thought were divers came out of the loch. Not scuba divers, but in those things like spacesuits that some deep-water work divers wear. No flippers, they had motor and propeller backpacks instead. They said they were the people who'd booked us. Then six UFO's came out of the loch. We couldn't see them well, it was dark, and I didn't believe in UFO's before that. They said they were experimental vehicles. We got in. Those geology students came later: they were

scuba diving and found us, and the crew were going to swim out and take them on board because of secrecy, but they came in by themselves to see what we were. After a day or two they put us in suits like theirs and the ships lifted and flew out of the water and up the valley. We went down Glencoe in the moonlight: I recognized it through a porthole. We wondered just what was happening. After a bit we went straight up into space. I never thought that'd happen to us. Yeehaa! We've been millions of times further than Aldrin and Armstrong and the rest! They paid us well, never mind how, to help them develop some stuff. The places we've been! I've seen the Sun as an ordinary 2nd magnitude star at the end of Cassiopeia. Those spacesuits of theirs are something else! One of us tried his in air-breathing mode, and in space it ballooned his arms and legs out straight unless he wrapped a lot of banding round them to hold the pressure in. The Russians had to do that with their cosmonaut spacesuits. But in liquid mode it behaved just right in space. Real right panic it is for anyone going back to air mode the first time, but we've got used to it."

So they talked, in such a high at distances and alienness that they had seen that no amount of stern words would have got anywhere. Of all the worst things to happen. Contact with peoples previously unknown, a job only for the few most experienced and responsible men accustomed to running organizations and delegating responsibility and taking decisions after long consultations with all possible bodies and showing the proper managerial attitude, had gone to - that rash young lot, just at the worst age for being automatically for anything which is against the established order, plus a few older harder armaments trade men only interested in profit and never mind who from.

"Look, it's that Straker and Foster from that Shado that they told us about!, bunch of CIA-type secret licenced murderers shooting every alien craft and alien they saw just out of scaredness and xenophobia." one of them said.

Hearing yet again evidence of what my long-term enemies now knew, and how they were trying to turn public opinion against us, on top of now knowing how they had been pushed out of their long stasis, anger at the massive spoilage of my organization's spacecraft and orders and purpose finally broke wide open my training and disciplining to automatic secrecy when in public as their excited remarks confirmed what had been going on. I addressed them:-

"OK, so they didn't tell you the truth what they were when they rang you, tapping the satellite or whatever they did. Doesn't excuse you collaborating with them like you did when you found what they are. As you seem to know a lot about SHADO, I'll speak my mind. You disloyal sewage designing that fancy new missile system for those creatures from the far end of nowhere, you cost me all three Interceptors in one day, at least one of their pilots dead and the rest captured, and our main detector satellite soon after, no way to stop them starving Moonbase out whenever they want, much harder to stop UFO's from reaching Earth and taking whatever they want and getting away routinely. And you made anti-missile kit for them before that. If you think I'll sit by and let you be feted like the first astronauts while a fancy lawyer in court lock-picks through the prosecution's case for locking you up and throwing the key away for aiding the enemy that you sewage of traitors deserve, 'you're for organs', as your fancy new friends'd likely say. Now I know what happened, you totally irresponsible wild young lot like I'd have rejected after the first few seconds of interview and never let anywhere near my organization until you'd had several years in security-non-sensitive jobs to settle down and get experience, never mind letting you loose in armed interstellar spacecraft."

"Sewage?" one of them replied, "Yes, we smell right for that, been shut in their spacesuits in long-trip mode for weeks on end, shows we're not soft business-class airline passengers

riding cosy in a pressure cabin. At least we worked with them properly and didn't just shoot them on sight. And two of us invented a handy anti-oxidation coating for their ships so they can stand a long time in air. Cool off, man, who said the turkey-shoot stage was going to last for ever like some space-invaders game? Or that Earth could act isolationist for ever like Tokugawa Japan did before Commodore Peary sailed into Yedo in 1853? I saw one of us 'press the button' on SID: Zap splat! One less electronic noseybody!".

"Very well," I said, also not liking what I was to know all too well later as long-trip asteroid miner undersuit smell, "you bright young irresponsible bunch ready to try anything new, show off in those alien spacesuits making out you are the new Gagarins off to bring news back from where nobody's been before. Never mind how many Earth people each of those spacesuits have likely contained before, on the one-way road, in the long record of people disappearing in UFO incidents until at last we could stop them. Soon likely they'd have stopped coming. Now look what you've done, running your private little 'Area 51' collaborating with them getting a real fancy high of thrill being in a space thriller come to life. Next time think!, before rushing ahead improving weapons of some lot from God knows where beyond the light-years without checking with authority first. Because of what you did just for profit and as an interesting postgraduate project, the outer part of Earth's defences against that lot of marauders is down and the inner part crippled, and look like staying so for weeks at least. Do you know what that means!? I don't think they'll just fly by and do nothing as we try to re-arm Moonbase, like before when they were used to meeting no resistance. What am I expected to do? Become 'Supreme Headquarters, Alien Diplomatic Organization', having to be polite to those creatures and guide them in and out like a harbour pilotage, and Earth is no longer master of its own affairs!?"

"Oh, they abduct, do they? Don't give me that sort of stuff. Typical secret agency type disinformation to reinforce old paranoid, by the sound of it. Anyway, they say a lot of UFO's are not the real thing but balls of discharge from funny electric effects in the air which also affect anyone's brain that's near and make memory gaps which their subconscious fills in afterwards with whatever they've been brought up with, and nowadays that's often space stuff such as abduct-and-return experiences."

It had happened as I thought it would. Government and financial bodies of one sort and another tell so many lies and half-truths and cover-ups that when someone does tell an unwelcome or unexpected truth it is too often not believed.

The coach driver started his engine. It was time to go, or it would be my turn to go on an unwanted journey. I went out. As I reflected that the coach engine's dirty diesel-powered smell was at least something Earthly after all that had happened, one of the UFO's sealed itself and took off after the coach, clearly checking for any 'unfair' attempt by human authorities to detain the coach's passengers on their way home. So confident that now one was running armed escort here. The councillor had promised all there safe-conduct and such politeness "on behalf of Earth's peoples and nations", although he had no right to: if he was an accredited United Nations space envoy with due official backing, then I am a Klingon. The rest of the 28, and the alien crew, went back on board. There was nothing that we could safely do, as I and Foster looked with helpless anger from close up at their craft's new ominous underslung missile-packs which have made them so bold in public, and at their designers, and at the small picture of an Interceptor which one of them sported as a kill trophy. The craft took off and away. The people went home.

## TIME OF DISASTER

Time went by, and the attempt to get it universally believed that the craft were USA aircraft was harder than before as landings multiplied. Two of my operatives went public, but with a desperate effort we managed to get them discredited as cranks and their memoirs suppressed, and then the old standby, having them committed to a secure institution; which the two lots of returnees read of in the papers and 'for a while were wise'. Our aircraft damaged a few UFO's and saw more off but never again destroyed one. Over the next four months we managed to get an Interceptor up to Moonbase in shuttlefuls of parts and assemble it there, a long job, as all of it had to be in small enough pieces to be carried inside, and the makers, not told what the parts were for because of secrecy, far too often ignored official pleas for priority but queued it in with ordinary work. When a solar ion storm radio blackout at last happened when no UFO's were in detector range I finally sent it on a test flight, but when dared I use it? The designers on Earth could give no date for its necessary anti-missile system, for they also could not be told what it was for to override their excuses and put it before other work and time-wasting proceduralisms.

I went to the makers yet again. They demonstrated at length a fast patrol boat equipped to submerge and scoop up scuba divers, that had been much ordered by inshore naval and fisheries patrols; but my space missiles were no further advanced. I had that gagged and handcuffed feeling again, for yet again secrecy, even more necessary in the face of public pro-alien feelings after the Arden events, stopped me from telling him why they were so urgent. When I went out to my car afterwards I heard a radio report that in the poisoned land of Bitterfeld north of Leipzig in eastern Germany, polluted so badly with chemicals during Communist times that men see no near future of it coming clean, four UFO's had taken off from a large chemical works. My staff had not noticed them until they were nearly out of atmosphere, as nothing had been seen to land in the area. We have wasted enough plane time on 'fairies' and weather balloons and the like; 'when the balloon goes up' is no figure of speech with us. A jet fighter (not ours) got near enough to photograph them; thankfully they did not have the new underbelly missile-packs. As they went near the Moon to get extra speed by the gravity 'slingshot effect', they radioed, but, after what the Arden events revealed, Moonbase was even less interested in such pleas from 'a fox caught nosing round the hen run saying it was just looking', but sent the new Interceptor after them; it fired, and jolted one, but did not make it explode. They went away into the deeps of space far beyond Man's reach, towards Mars. But I had an undefinable disquiet that something was different.

That was on 1st October; eight days later a single incoming UFO seemed no different from many others. It came in anti-lunar as was now usual, and neared Earth retrograde, as its pilot saw our planet change fast from a sky object into a world below him. It passed over the dreaded inland salt-deserts of Iran, the Dasht-e-Lût and the Dasht-e-Kavîr, places as unearthly as the emptinesses that it had come from. By now many of the Earth's more reliable airforces were under secret orders to pursue UFO's, and it knew that. It put up three lots of them wasting their fuel by feinting in various directions, but 7 miles above Tabûk in western Saudi Arabia it finally went into a landing run northwards. Mafrâq airfield in Jordan was put on alert, but north of Ma'ân it turned northwest to the Negev, and lost distant pursuers' radar by ducking under the lip of the spectacular desert erosion crater called HaMakhtesh HaGadol, the Great Mortar. I sent after it two of my fighters who were over southern Lebanon chasing what had proved to be 'fairies'. It flew north low up the middle of Israel, startling a lot of people, and on my men's

radar disappeared again into the geography near the Israeli Air Force (IAF) base at Ramat David, where fighters got up and there was a flurry in the air. My men flew there, and saw the place, with disbelief. The UFO was sitting on the ground among the fighters quite quietly as if it belonged there. As they approached, it and three fighters taxied into a hard silo, whose doors then shut. A radio voice from the ground ordered my two planes to land. They had to obey, as they were too short of fuel to run for it.

"You've got a UFO here." Ken Ashleigh, one of my planes' pilots, said, "We saw it. We were assured the cooperation of the world's major airforces against them. Your army will have to keep it in here while specialist weapons are brought in to deal with it."

"We've got nothing here unidentified or that doesn't belong here." the base commander answered, "If you want to look around, you can."

They were shown round, and in silos but not in that one. As they went round, a man came in, wearing a full space-type pressure suit with IAF symbols on it. Its flexible parts were blue, and at the time it was in air-breathing mode, but its helmet and life-support kit including a liquid tank were of alien spacesuit type. Another jet-pilot type came, certainly human and in flying overalls, but his breathing was gurgly, and his face was discoloured by alien spacesuit type breathing liquid. When my pilots were allowed back to their planes to collect property they heard over their radios that the previous four UFO's had returned to Bitterfeld, following an airliner closely to avoid shot as UFO's often did in these times, and had gone into buildings. My pilots managed to get refuelled, and returned to base.

Over the next 2 months I heard of 5 other such incidents, and I knew what they meant. A complaint in the United Nations by a man representing various medium and small nations about "our peaceful space exploration and research craft being harassed and shot at by unidentified jet fighters and in one case by an armed rocket-type spacecraft based on the Moon" only confirmed my suspicions. Several uncoordinated groups of Men had made and used UFO-type FTL (faster than light) craft. Our attempts to keep it all secret took more and more of our time and effort and got ever more desperate.

The Israeli FTL group that Ashleigh found is innocent: they were told their FTL knowledge by the German Bitterfeld group as a 'backup copy' in case of overt or covert interference from the major powers. The Bitterfeld FTL group are an industrial firm who got their FTL knowledge by means that they will not specify, except to say "At least we got on with the job and developed it, instead of discussing considerations for ever and ever amen, and just when we think they've finally finished they dig up several more considerations and they're off again and the work never gets started." and suchlike.

From Magnitogorsk in Russia also, UFO's took off which had never flown in, and some of them did not return. It came out later as I had suspected, that place was making them for aliens, who were supplying the drive units (sealed to prevent humans looking inside them); the place was paid by being allowed to keep for itself one in every three or four of the craft that they made. Approach by us to their government achieved nothing.

All this was despite the secret international agreement that we were part of, to keep the Outside out and Man from getting the means for a wide-ranging space exploring habit. Many are in two minds about Earth starting a big space effort. For one thing, metal lost on a planet is got back in the end much more often than metal lost in space: ever more metal is lost in derelict spaceships and space stations, some enormous, that have been lost track of, and in non-return missiles and probes, and the planet's people have to go further and further for construction metals and fuel, until choice is so limited that the standard alien spacecraft had to

be made of metal that rots fast in our air. It is expensive in men and work, and the more that is surveyed and mapped, the more the astronomer and explorer types want to push further, and so on it goes. Why did aliens suddenly start selling UFO-drives to men, and then let men have their space drive technology, risking us building better space-interceptors to stop them raiding? The second part was almost certainly not 'the aliens' but a few aliens or even just one betraying his own side to get a position of power in some large Earth company's or small nation's new space effort, or in exchange for supplies or weapons: a disobedience within a disobedience, a total mess on both sides. I also have the sense to guess that UFO-drives supplied by aliens might contain a precaution against anti-alien use of any craft that they are built into.

The dreaded thing happened. Never since the second Arden landing had we and the secret committees who control us managed to make our cover properly secure again; it strained out, and now it split and broke open like a volcano blasting out the incinerated remains of careers, secrecies, assurednesses, and political and organizational reputations and policies. The world learned the truth. All the 'hosts of Mordor' came out against us: Aetherius Society, Scientologists, space fiction fan groups, every crank cult that developed, until reason returned at last. SHADO headquarters was under seige by demonstrators for weeks, people dressed as fictional aliens and their idea of the real aliens, the placards "Straker Murderer" and similar, and so on, until I had to have its grounds perimeter fortified like an army base, and there was no more point pretending it was only a film studio. It was far from a 'total disintegration of modern Earth society', but for us and for many it was bad enough. Many groups with unrelated grievances such as long-term unemployment joined in. In Washington riot police fought a savage 11-day battle to defend CIA headquarters from rampaging crowds. Distant roadblocks and the waterless hot width of the Nevada desert kept most of the trouble away from Area 51, but could not stop many of its staff from going public. NASA (except a few of its top men who already knew of us officially) suddenly and angrily saw the reason for a strange pattern of secrecy orders and censorships and restrictions that they had been under for years, and flight schedules burdened by many bulky secret loads to and from the Moon on different excuses, and, saving their own skins at our expense, did not mince words about the delays it had caused to scientific work and space kit research and development. Some Moon-mining commercial firms complained similarly.

Far too many people are space-mad. UTC's (UFO-Type Craft) are all too easy for large companies or small nations to build, now the secret is out. We have had to protect landed aliens from mobbing cultists, and find them bed and workshop room at our headquarters in what used to be my public front's film studios, and let them park their spacecraft on our lawns. Public knowledge of our amnesia drug got us flamethrowered even more by the newspapers and TV and civil liberties groups for weeks, and now we are forbidden to use it.

Man now has FTL, got in no honourable way. It could have been otherwise. Those alien spacesuits that those eager young students proudly paraded in at Arden, and the alien craft that they flew in, could have been of human design and make. Now that man has FTL anyway, the secret labs that supplied us the GWD gear, labs so secret that even I was not allowed in or to know what was happening in them, admitted they discovered the principle of FTL at least ten years before. They could have released it to a single space authority to get it working so we could easily know what authorized spacecraft were where and use patrol FTL craft to easily stop all alien craft much further from Earth. As it is, they hid it, and published convincing articles saying why it was impossible, leaving my labs to have to poke about in unsafe parts of the few available UFO wrecks to try to find what I now know that man already knew, until

many doubtful groups got FTL technology from aliens in secret deals probably grossly against our moral rules and both sides' laws, and encouraging an interstellar scramble for position. The 18th and 19th century scramble for colonies, each major nation having to take what it could before someone else grabbed it and added it to its power base, was expensive enough in lives and sea-ships and national effort; but Earth's surface is finite, and that stage ran to its natural end. But space is far bigger, and a scramble for colonies could run indefinitely; we are likely to get entangled in interstellar politics, and people to get lost in space and need finding in an impossibly huge volume.

Some of the Glasgow students had brought back photographs from Mars and Ganymede. They also inevitably claimed discoverer's rights to name things, and in the cover-up were refused, but after secrecy collapsed they reasserted their claim and had to be listened to. This caused trouble at the Astrophysical Space Commission's names committee.

"For a start, some of the people's names they've used are totally against our rules of who to commemorate:" said a member, "the rule is scientists and other famous people, and traditional mythologies; OK, Shakespeare is acceptable, such as for Uranus's moons, but I don't like this bunch of James Bond character names that lot are trying to put on the maps of Mars; and all these names in alienese, such as for this dry stream bed - kliv-vig-"

"Khlivighdakaghep. Circumflex means long vowel." said one of the students who had been allowed to attend, and explained what the name referred to.

"Oh indeed!?" I replied angrily, "Even if you translate it into Latin to get nearer to convention, as 'Fossa Khlivighd', I see little reason for me as the leader of SHADO to put up with a place that near Earth being named in memory of some alien who came here to raid once too often and was killed by SHADO action. Try 'Fossa Kaminski' (he died piloting Interceptor 3 resisting them), or after one of the many people who disappeared in UFO incidents before SHADO started. Lets try translating them: 'Gakhkabaz' would become 'Mons Furcatus', that's 'Forked Mountain'; Keghdinakaghep (it says Keghdin's an alien who they flew with), Gakhkakaghep, Tiqabkhvâran (it says that's Yellow Rock Slope), etc, and transplanted Scottish placenames - what a mess - I say ignore the lot and give the places more fitting names. Perhaps their claim is technically valid, but after what they caused aiding the enemy inventing that fancy missile system -".

"Please, quiet, if we want to recycle that dispute in here it better be as a separate motion." the chairman interrupted somewhat desperately.

"And we *were* the first Earth Men to Mars, after all." said the student.

In the end for the sake of peace and quiet I was overruled and the names had to be accepted. The other matters on the agenda and the 'any other business' were settled and the meeting finished unremarkably. I went home and for some reason dreamed of being interrogated in the Lubyanka in Moscow, the sort of thing that I have thankfully not gone through in real life. I was glad to wake.

We had launched one FTL craft before the Arden landings changed everything. Ever since the UFO crash at Roswell in New Mexico in 1947, Area 51 in Nevada has collected what UFO wreckage it could, and tried to study it. Of one wreck, the drive block survived in a damaged and doubtful condition, and attempts to look inside it safely proved vain. Finally they declared it unsafe and had to get rid of it. By then SHADO had started, and the Astrophysical Space Commission told us about it, so we had a small unmanned probe built around it, rather than merely take it into space and blow it up. The probe was launched, and tailgated a UFO's FTL travelling field to an alien world, recorded what it could, returned, and signalled to us.

Thankfully its drive had held out that long. It showed a stark world of rocky barren mountain ranges and dry air and thin clouds, little or no open water, and what may have been patches of vegetation and habitation in damp hollows and flat areas; it seemed to have a large moon. The probe's ranging equipment had failed, so it could have been looking at a moon, or an asteroid or stone close up, and there is the risk that the aliens had detected it and fed it false information; but later the pictures proved to be genuine. I was optimistic then about soon making a SHADO FTL fleet and taking the war to the enemy's planet, so helping not only Earth but also any other planets they may have been raiding; but that proved elusive, and the first Earth-made FTL craft was not SHADO's.

I once managed to get an agent into the Bitterfeld UTC-making works. One of the pilot-instructors there was clearly an alien, named Kahless or Qeilis. The agent was no Star Trek fan, or he would have spotted the obvious, as Col. Freeman sharply pointed out to him when he contacted base next to report. The agent kept his ears open, and, although the above codename taken from human space fiction was usual, he twice heard English-speaking trainee UTC-pilots call their alien superior 'Slick Harry', but thought it was just a nickname, although 'Harry' was not particularly slick in manner; only later did we hear the name Zlîkhakhâriv, and there may be more than one alien with that name; probably he chose the alias to use among English-speakers merely to avoid the nickname. The workmen said he had twice rescued valuable cargo and several alien crewmen from UFO's which were about to explode after being damaged by Earth missiles.

It is a measure of our helplessness in that time of chaos and pro-UFO frenzy that we could not have the place suddenly taken out by a special-forces unit and everybody arrested and everything seized or destroyed, but got via the agent only observations and a duck leg bone that the alien had bitten the meat off at a dinner. But the agent, who had noticed something suspiciously different about the way the alien pronounced Earth languages, got the bone quickly to a lab, which in a bit of saliva on it found a few live cells shed from the alien's salivary glands or mouth lining, and multiplied them in tissue culture - and their DNA was human. Comparison with our database of DNA scans of disappeared people and their relatives told us what it could, unless his salivary glands were a transplant.

Next day the works management truth drug interrogated everybody including each other, as it did at intervals, and my agent baled out just in time; two secret-service men, and a thief, and a man pushed by a mortgage to the edge of selling information where he could, were not so lucky. The Committee who set SHADO up had harboured a plan to cause a series of destructive UTC-drive explosions on the ground in such places, to scare the world's nations into formally banning all FTL research and production; but the UFO technology package included alien security equipment and techniques, and the workmen were willing to endure such interrogation techniques at intervals as a price of freedom and ability to reach the stars rather than have their long-yearned-for FTL ability and achievements snatched away by what many call 'the ugly underhand side of international power politics, secret-agency-ism, fear of the unknown, people in charge not liking change or afraid of losing authority, destabilization, assassination and sabotage, as bad as the worst sort of paranoid delusion but real.'. The mood of the times had infected even my agents, and some of them told me directly "If you order us to risk causing heavy innocent civilian casualties, we're going public, even if it means the electric chair."

One secret agency (not SHADO) tried it, once. Their men trained and set out. It would be a quick cleanup and arrest all personnel. A coal-fired industrial boiler furnace near the place

would consume a dozen at a time the alien-type spacesuits that I dislike seeing as much as I ever did, and much else; pile all possible in and round the UTC's and set them to fireball, or fly them away; use any security destructor the place has, or pile stuff in the open and put it and the whole premises to the flamethrower. Disguised as businessmen, they flew to Lima in Peru, fought for breath in less than half an atmosphere of air where the railway struggles over the high Andes near Morococha three miles above sea level, and reached the place at Huancayo on a high cold plateau among mountains. There they met men who had gone before, took hidden weapons which had been taken in in falsely labelled containers, rushed the UTC works - and found its men armed against them. Local special police who had received secret orders to aid the agency men, decided where loyalty lay and attacked them instead; their commandant afterwards came out with that old fairy story, alleged non-receipt of a message. Instead of a quick in and cleanup and out there was a long shoot-out while more help for the works men came from the area.

Five works men died and seven were wounded forcing agency men back briefly from the works's UTC's, but it gave just enough time for their pilots to get in them. The UTC's, named in the native Quechua Indian language, some with those underbelly missile packs that had blasted away the policies that SHADO had been set up for, took off and aided in the defence. One of the attackers got a radio warning out, and an unmarked incoming Hercules transport plane carrying a larger holding force of agency men and US Marines turned away.

Notices and overheard orders were in Quechua, some duplicated in alienese, not English or Spanish which the agency men could have understood. The agency men, unacclimatized and weakened by hypoxia in air so thin from altitude that SHADO regulations would have demanded oxygen or pressure suits, and in a ugly mood at being resisted, looked for an easier target and rushed the works's family quarters to take hostages, and found even them armed. An AK47 shot accounted for its 10-year-old user's right collarbone (with its recoil) and the agency men's commander's life. The attackers surrendered, and from them much was found out and became public; the world's secret agencies patched up what they could, and tried to claim that the captured men were nothing to do with them; negotiations to get them freed dragged on and sucked in other complaints. That the danger had forced the defenders to arm children so young added an unwelcome emotional point. There was yet another angry demonstration at the gate of my headquarters.

At the same time that secret agency sent a sabotage frogmen team to a Nigerian FTL work site at Port Harcourt. An ordinary-looking rusty old freighter with a Liberian flag of convenience released seven subskimmers. These are a sort of RIB that can deflate on the run and transform into an underwater diver-rider, and back; 3 men rode on each. As they got near their target, something detected them, and the harbour's new submersible dredger ran along their single-file with its front scoop open and pumped them into its dredgings tank 'along with all the rest of the rubbish that gets in the water round here'. That anti-diver tactic was to be heard more of later; this time the craft brought its catch to port to custody intact and they could tell of it. Some officials connected with the agency tried to prove that the frogmen were a marine biology expedition; kit and weapons and papers found on them, and the inevitable truth drug, said otherwise, but could not prove hard enough for a law court that the FTL site was their target. The port set up an underwater patrol squad using the subskimmers, and sometimes let marine biologists use them. The affair achieved mostly to stir up the public yet more and make people wary. FTL work sites near navigable water strengthened security or moved inland.

The side-fallout from the Huancayo and Port Harcourt affairs was one more thing on top of what I was not needing already. All they achieved was to blow yet more secrecy wide open and warn the FTL users of risks and make them wary and make any such future take-outs much more difficult. A film that my film producer public front was making to help pay the bills had been at a standstill for three months. By NASA's permission but not mine my studios were full of aliens and their kit sheltering from cultists and pressure of public curiosity and using the rooms as workshops and accommodation. As I went out tiredly into the morning I no longer cared much that I was showing a SHADO badge in public - 'Supreme Headquarters, Alien Diplomatic Organization' yet again, I thought sourly. Some say that the morning is the 'm-yawn-ing', a bleary no-good time of day that should be banned, and I was tempted to agree. I and the grounds gardener looked briefly and dully at four large sheeted-down UFO's parked on my back lawns, and the dents and spacesuit footprints and vehicle ruts where others had been. I thought of what had happened since the Arden landings, and of what had blown out and become public, and of the area's road signs now duplicated in alienese. A visiting NASA man said to me "I know it's 'per ardua ad astra', as the RAF's motto says, but we don't need secret anti-FTL hostility making it even more arduous.": a persistent popular error, for the RAF motto correctly means 'through *high places* to the stars'. West Harlington parish priest's visits and pious prayers for peace between all parties involved achieved little useful. The village was growing untidily into an unofficial spaceport servicing area.

These matters had made urgent new small but important spacecraft parts that we had ordered from a factory called 'Z & K' west of Toronto in Canada. They made good parts, but I could not wait any more for them to finish the consignment or for the chances and delays of transport, or risk hostility from space-minded people recognizing me caught in traffic or in an airport. There was only one way: one of my jet fighters, carrying cargo pods which one of my pilots had made from empty drop fuel tanks. I am not much use as a combat pilot, but I could fly it, over the heads of the hazards and nuisances and delays of the ground. I helicoptered to the nearest airfield where one was, took off as soon as I could warn the various air traffic controllers on the route, refuelled in Newfoundland after the shortest possible Atlantic crossing, flew up the St.Lawrence River to Toronto, found the factory, and landed on its airstrip.

On the way in I saw a large pool beside the office at the back. I asked for Mr.Peter Spaldick and Mr.John Carrick, for so their two top men had called themselves in letters and emails. Their workmen seemed unused to those names, but called them by what were clearly attempts to pronounce very un-English names. As I went out at the back and crossed a garden to the office, I saw a standard-shaped UTC standing on a lawn. On top of it birds were eating pond snails and leeches and worms among a dense growth of stagnant-smelling pondweed, as if it had been a long time in its storage pool and had just been brought out for use. This surprised me, as Earth-made UTC's can withstand our air. After previous experiences, I was disinclined to nose round one when its pilot was likely nearby, but I did - and found it was of no earthly make, for its maker's plate was in alienese and said 'made at Zlikhabaz'. By then I knew from books written by contactees enough to decipher that as 'Wildfire Mountain', perhaps a volcano whose underground heat source they had tapped to run an industrial area on some planet after they had long ago used up all its fossil fuels and actinides. Long ago the dominant language among them would have suppressed all others, and centrally organized education would stop any tendency for speech in different areas of their planet to diverge and shift to dialects and then new separate languages.

I went into their office with a growing apprehension which was soon realized. The two were aliens. They were wearing spacesuit undersuits. They announced themselves in the usual strangely-accented English as Zbaldek and Khvâraqh. Zbaldek looked for a moment as if he had seen a snake, and muttered in his own language something like "khak khet Streika Shadwapalqeg". I recognized my name and the next syllable all too well, and knew to watch for trouble. They were not necessarily trying to hide their nature as part of some grand infiltration and takeover conspiracy; many Chinese have a local-type alias forename in countries whose natives find Chinese-type names hard to pronounce or remember. I had to be wary, as their workmen would not take easily any threat to the badly-needed new engineering jobs that the two had brought into a long-term depressed area. Khvâraqh gave a quick annoyed order into a microphone, and a man went out to hose their ship's outside down. (*'khak' = "he", 'khet' = "that, the aforementioned", 'palq' = "(one's) superior", '-eg' = "-est, topmost"*)

They stayed polite and let me collect the parts made so far. I towed the parts out on a works hand-trolley myself and put them in my cargo pods and the empty rear seat. They gave me brochures and offered to show me round the works, but I was in a hurry. From what I overheard and saw, it was clear that the area and Toronto Airport air traffic control knew what they were and treated it as part of daily life. I had heard rumours of something of that sort in the area, but had ignored it among a frenzy of false alarms caused by cultisms and silliness. I flew home and unloaded and waited to see what would come of it and whether I would ever get the rest of my consignment, now that they knew who and what they had been making parts for.

## STRAKER THE ALIEN

New authorities sorted themselves out of the chaos. During it all, the British government's term of office finished and they had a general election. This was a far from suitable time for such a thing, but it went ahead. The outcome seemed less harmful than my misgivings feared. An unusually large number of crank and facetious candidates got an unusually high vote, but the usual parties were returned, and the electioneering helped somewhat to get people's minds back to normality. A Minister who had helped to set up SHADO lost his seat in Derby North - causing me more trouble than merely losing a supporter. Soon after that someone in NASA thought it clever to persuade a new inexperienced committee to take me off SHADO for a while and to order me to lead a remote space-exploring fleet which assorted space groups had put together. I protested in vain, for they persisted in calling me "the best suited because of my experience in space matters".

The craft landed by night on grass by my headquarters five days later to pick up me and the rest of their stores and crew. When I went out to them in the morning their shape gave me a shiver despite their NASA and ESA symbols, for they were nothing that I had ever flown but the standard UFO design that I knew all too well as an enemy to be shot on sight. They bore serial numbers ESE4 #0, ESE4 #1, etc, and Pittsburgh maker's plates. ESE4 means 'Earth Space Expedition 4'. They also bore cartoon character names; I took one look at that ridiculous and totally out-of-place result of the limited imaginations of space base workmen and spoke my mind and had to choose more suitable names in a hurry and get them painted on, on top of all the other work. I was not going to allow a repeat of when an early Apollo expedition's crew during flight codenamed its two modules 'Cornet' and 'Peanut'; on all later Apollo missions NASA chose more suitable module names before launch. The habit of secrecy lingers in me, and I decided that this was a suitable time to try out a new enciphering code that we had developed, to write certain records in: a list of 200 or so letters and common syllables were each given a 2-digit hexadecimal number to represent it. I overheard someone say "We called at Selsey on the way, gave Mr. There's No Such Thing As UFO's Or Aliens rather a shock."

I went to craft #0, which was the command craft. My second-in-command, not chosen by me, was the nearest that could be got among Men to an interstellar astronaut, an astronomer called Peter Stamford who had had a brief space training course with NASA. He used alienese words for some of the ship's parts until I told him to talk English. I got in the unearthly-looking craft and looked around its limited crew space for somewhere private to put my briefcase and suitcase where they would not be kicked or knocked down or looked in.

"You'll have to trim that lot down to what fits in a crew issue backpack, like it said in the information you were sent." he said, and showed me a pack and a crew overall with my name and rank and a number 'ESE4 0.0' and shoulder flashes.

"I take it that overall thing goes on instead of my clothes, not over them. I know that much at least." I said, "I didn't expect conditions onboard to be quite so cramped, suddenly ordered off SHADO and told to go careering about in the wild trusting my life to an alien UFO-engine. What on earth got into NASA's head making it act like that? I'm not used to careering all over the galaxy in a UFO. Exploration mission, huh! I'm used to a proper desk in a proper office in an on-planet base with good fast communications to everywhere. I told them that, but they wouldn't listen."

"That overall's a spacesuit undersuit, your spacesuit goes over it." he said, "And once you said that you'd soon find how UFO's worked and then SHADO would make its own and set

forth and go in hard and clean out the aliens on their own homeworld, and then you *would* have to come with the fleet to command it, and in a uniform and not that business suit. What we're on is a scientific expedition."

"That's still not what I was planning, unless they put reconnoitring first. What I was wanting was a proper big enough combat-ready assault fleet manned by disciplined Armed Forces men, straight there and do the job and straight back, and not this miscellaneous lot with far too many untrained civilians among them and their plans for space sightseeing." I replied.

There was too much breeze to sort papers in the open, so I had to manage on my hands and knees in a corner in the craft. Out went all my carefully chosen and ironed changes of clothes and toiletries. Out went a spare pair of shoes wrapped to preserve the shine on them. I had had too much to do tidying up SHADO affairs and clearing my desk and handing over to deputies to pay much attention to the information sent to me about my new posting. Stamford was numbered ESE4 0.1, and so on the rest of #0's men. I was too busy to say what I thought of being 'called nothing', but had to accept the result of someone's computer-derived habit of numbering things and people from 0 not 1, reinforced by a naval habit of calling a ship's second-on-command '[the captain's] number one'.

"That computer printer of yours can't go with us." he said, "Its ink cartridge'll boil dry in space, and the ship's acceleration G'll crush it flat. The ship's computer's got its own printer that can resist G and run in vacuum."

A ground man outside #0 had finished painting out 'Miss Piggy' and replacing it with 'Explorer', and had taken his stepladder away. All stores had been loaded, and the new crewmen had been assigned to their ships and duties. The men were clearly ready for off. I went into #0 again and radioed round asking if everyone was ready and had carried out all final checks. They had, so I ordered the ground staff to back away and the pilots to seal the craft and take off into orbit, trying to seem in charge rather than a figurehead. My crew went to the spacesuit lockers.

"Suiting up now? I thought I at least'd be travelling in pressure and able to wear ordinary clothes and work in comfort." I queried.

"We'll be in spacesuits most of the time. Easier and a lot less trouble." said John Lambert, #0.2, the pilot, a typical NASA type, "UTC's can be pressurized, but airlocks take room and airlocking loses some air each time, and the better and faster the airlock's air recovery pump is the more room and weight and power it takes up."

I had worn astronaut spacesuits a few times in emergency drills, so I knew what it would be like. I sighed tiredly and ordered everybody in all the ships to suit up. But when they took the spacesuits out, I backed off in distaste, for they were alien-type. One had my name and rank and number on.

"I'm not putting *that* on." I stated, looking at it much as I would have looked at the muzzles of a firing squad's rifles.

"You'll have to." said Lambert, "That's the only sort of suit we've got with us, and it'll hamper us far too badly to accept if we have to keep #0 in pressure just for you."

I had to put it on, and saw in a mirror the fated-looking sight which I had long dreaded, my own body encased in an alien spacesuit and my face looking out through its faceplate. At least it had NASA and ESA symbols on. I knew enough about it to start its life-support system, in air-breathing mode. Around me my crew suited up and sealed their helmets - and in a chorus of drowning-type noises flooded their lungs and went into liquid-breathing mode easily as if many of them had done it several times before.

"What!?" I queried, "I wasn't told ...".

"In this sort of ship you can have comfort *or* maximum speed, but not both. I thought after all this time you'd know more about UFO's than merely how to destroy them." said #0.1 before he went to liquid-breathing, and quoted from a handbook: "In the long high-G speed changes of UTC's going into or out of interstellar speeds, liquid-breathing spacesuits help a lot to prevent internal G-force injuries to the respiratory tract and sinuses. If you insist on breathing air all the time, getting to and from interstellar speed'll have to take several times as long. That's one reason why *they* breathe liquid."

I felt fated and trapped. I wondered what all of that committee's motives were in sending me off like that. With an effort of will I managed to imitate; it reminded me of what I had heard of experiments carried out on unwilling human convicts and the like in the past. I was to be shut in it for 12 weeks, unable to talk (except by a synthesizer) when my vocal cords were submerged. After years of defending one planet from a secure home base, it was hard to be ordered to wander randomly in the wild leading a pack of UFO's looking like one of those I had fought against, with my Sun shrunk to one of the remote stars. Like the world's first scuba divers we had to learn on the job; only those who flew after us and could be taught what we and others found out the hard way, could have a full long-trip interstellar spaceman training before setting off.

"To talk, operate this switch." Lambert had told me. I had heard of deep divers' voice undistorters to correct high-pitched helium voice and breathing mask 'gasmaskyness', but with my breathing tract full of liquid it would have nothing to work on. But I operated the switch and tried to talk. A piece of kit on my spacesuit said what I was trying to say, but in such a strong alien accent that I stopped in shock. That was my first use of the now well-known ultrasound and computer device which detects the current shape of the liquid-filled mouth and throat and produces the appropriate vocal sounds. They produced the intended sounds most of the time. "Now we don't even sound like humans." I thought desperately; but that fault has been put right since. Some of us did not have these devices but had to talk by typing on a synthesizer keyboard.

We took off after dark, frustrating the reporters. The stars appeared as we rose out of a deep overcast. As we got into orbit #2 radioed: "Our biochemist, he's Prof. Jackson, #2.3, he's one of that six that we picked up at Arden on the way down, he's busily photo-ing out of the portholes. He was photo-ing about inside the craft and on the ground before. I thought I better rep..."

"Stop him and put him on the line." I said sharply, and then to Jackson: "Commander Straker here: I thought I told you all quite clearly that any film or other recording materials people bring is expedition supplies and I'll authorize how and when it's used, never mind who paid for it or claims to own it. We've got astronomers to photo the star patterns properly. Wasted film can't be re-used like video can, and out in space where's the shop to buy more!?" That was done; but as we were about to set off for a test run to Mars I got another complaint the same, interrupting my reflections how things had changed, Mars suddenly being next door instead of beyond our furthest manned reach.

"I'm an armed forces man. I believe in jumping hard on insubordination." I said, "I've got to get to #2 to back my orders up."

Instead of flying #0 to #2 and docking with it, or taking out some sort of small vehicle, Lambert handed me a backpack propulsor. It was my first go with one except on a simulator. I put it on and opened the hatch and set off for #2, and radioed for a man from #1 and a man

from #4, both reliable spaceman types, to meet me there. Seeing us coming like a volley of missiles Jackson 'sorried' over his suit radio in a mistype-ridden panic, but we kept coming, in two minds about having a motor fastened to me directly by a parachute-type harness rather than riding in a comfortable vehicle. After some overshooting I reached #2's hatch and hung onto a handle near it.

We got in #2. I went into air-breathing mode, as I insisted on using my own voice for that sort of serious disciplinary matter. It was my first time at it, and the others had to tie me to struts through the panic stage. I ordered the others there to do the same. Jackson's camera looked suspiciously professional. I had seen enough lab equipment of various sorts to 'smell a rat' when I looked in his apparatus locker. I took a syringe-pistol from my suit's outside pack and advanced. Jackson backed off, tried to turn the others against me, but realized that he may as well admit without a truth drug interrogation as with one that he was not what he had said he was but a freelance reporter using any trick to get to site and as prepared for us to find ourselves far from base among alien life without a biochemist as one of his kind was two years before for a climbing expedition to find themselves in a remote part of Nepal with no geologist but an unwanted reporter instead. Lucky I found so soon, on a remote expedition that I was not wanting to go on anyway. Most of #2's crew were Services men, and agreed with me.

If aliens can do it, I can: I tapped a phone satellite and frantically rang for a biochemist round those universities which were in the office-hours zone as the Earth turned. I found one in Sydney in Australia. As #2 dropped through the atmosphere, its crew and the two who came with me unsuited and thrashed the reporter. We landed in a field and left him in a field with a dose of amnesia drug in him, for all our expedition's acceleration anti-G pods were booked and he had no useful skills and was too thin and soft for heavy manual work. Old feelings towards public media persist in me. We flew on while the area went into a UFO alarm, landed on a university lawn, picked up the biochemist and his hurriedly packed crate of apparatus and test chemicals, and were gone to space to join the rest as they orbited round again.

"Oh, and put that clock right." I ordered when back in orbit as I reached for my backpack propulsor's safety catch before returning to #0.

"It's sidereal." #2.4, an astronomer, pleaded. That means that it was set to gain 4 minutes each day, to follow Earth's rotation against the stars rather than against the Sun.

"That's irrelevant here, we're off Earth and will be for some time." I ordered, "As far as I'm concerned it's just a wrong clock and very confusing in an emergency. Put it right. We're running on Greenwich Mean Time."

That was my first but not last confrontation over clock and timekeeping discipline in space. I had trouble getting ship #5 out of running by Chicago time. Also, for some idiotic reason the human biological clock tries to run to a day about 25 hours long, and spaceship crews are tempted to run by a day length to match when away from Earth's days and nights, and suffer for it when they get back on Earth and find themselves an hour jet-lagged every morning until they get used to it again.

We set off, thankfully only 7 hours delayed. I decided to go to Mars first as a 'shakedown'. It felt strange, going easily in a few days where not long ago had been beyond limit reach, as the unEarthly motors lifted us up and away. As we 'slingshotted' round the Moon to get extra speed free, I saw Moonbase: from near it one day my three Interceptors had set off and none returned. At UFO speed we could go in a nearly straight line instead of having to go a long way round orbiting. It was my first go at living in a spacesuit sealed for several days and nights on end, something which human-type spacesuits are not designed for. It took

us a lot longer to slow down at Mars, for its tiny moons have little gravity, and I realised why UFO's had kept on risking Interceptor missiles on the usual near-moon route to Earth instead of routinely coming in anti-lunar. The dry thin-aired world which had caught men's imagination and inspired much fiction ever since Lowell thought in error that its dark markings were irrigated cultivation, became steadily nearer. We landed somewhat bumpily on a sand patch at the east foot of Olympus Mons.

With various degrees of shock and wonder everybody stepped out and stood about in red-suited groups looking at the pinkish sky and the bulk of the Tharsis volcanoes, on that world where so many fanciful stories had been set. We found nothing but sand and stones and rock; we would have to return with much heavier digging and drilling and blasting kit to find if Mars had brought forth any life in her warmer damper youth, and if any dormant spores and eggs of that life still lived frozen into permafrost waiting and waiting for a summer which may never come again. There we were, the first men to Mars, as Armstrong and Aldrin to the Moon, but much more and sooner than expected - but no. Those students from Glasgow had been before us, brought there by outsiders, to look wondering into the huge cleft of Vallis Marineris from somewhere on its north rim. It was getting towards evening, and a bright bluish-white dot appeared in the darkening sky, following the shrunken Sun down. That dot was my Earth and all that was in it including my home, and my headquarters where I should have been. So on Mars I stood, looking like an alien, commanding UFO's, achieving nothing at all by not being at my desk running SHADO keeping the UFO's away.

I called everybody to parade in number order. This was many of them's first time at it, and was done with much confused suit radioing. It helped us much that we had copied from captured alien suits and passed to NASA a two-earpiece stereo system programmed to show the direction of incoming radio signals including allowing for the head's attitude in the helmet. Such a first exposure to being under command should have been in a proper space-navy training base with flight and combat simulators at hand and not out on Mars with only what equipment we had brought with us. Some of the ships had missile-packs, but real missiles used up in training cost.

As I looked across them, I noticed #4.3 (if he was in correct number order). As ship #4 (Endeavour) was all astronomers except its pilot, there was little doubt who that expanse of red spacesuiting encased. I had not noticed before, as all the suit speech synthesizers sounded the same or nearly to us, except for a bleep code saying what his number is. I went up to him.

"Well, if you want to keep believing there's no such thing as UFO's, or aliens in them, like you say on 'The Sky at Night' [a UK BBC TV astronomy program], my organization's quite willing to let you keep on believing that." I said.

It was something of a shock seeing Patrick Moore's familiar down-to-earth face looking out of an alien spacesuit faceplate so far from home. It reminded me again how mixed a lot of people I had been put in charge of. He had worn film prop spacesuits in comedy shows occasionally, and that is all, and held to matter-of-fact disbelief in UFO's and such, until NASA invited him on a real space trip, and he found more than he expected. As I watched, he went to air mode, linked his suit radio with an intercom wire to a box with a BBC label on, and videoed and commentated excitedly, still sceptical that any of the expedition's space technology had non-human origins. Personal supplies of sound storage and film were under expedition orders; but he, being who he is, had better be allowed it. He would see plenty to get excited about where we were going. I thought briefly about seismic-sounding the ice on Jupiter's moon Europa which some say there might be a liquid ocean and possibly life under,

but decided that the Jupiter sub-system could wait for a special expedition.

We collected samples, left instruments to run automatically and radio their results home, got back on board, and took off. After a few survey orbits we battened everything down and got in the anti-G pods for my first interstellar run. I avoided the Alpha and Proxima Centauri system (I did not say why), and specified Sirius. By then I had learned as much as I could of how our ships' drives casually bypassed Einstein and went several light years in a week or two; but I still felt cold, that by NASA's orders I must go so far from the sun which bred me that natural human-invented space drive powers would take me several lifetimes to return. This was not helped by Lambert, at the end of the coordinating radio orders, exclaiming "... and now, *ikhâ zgarikh!*". This means 'Forward, section!', but in no Earthly language. We settled in for an FTL run, switched the ships' drives to FTL mode, and were gone. Many of us made the wildest of excited exclamations over the radio, but not me, as the Sun shrank and shrank, and the nearest stars moved visibly against their backgrounds.

We reached Sirius as planned. The deceleration was long and unpractised: more about how UTC's handle at FTL would be needed before we could make an adequate flight simulator for them. Sirius is a well-known fairly close double and so has no planets that we could 'slingshot' round to lose speed quickly. Its components had interfered with each other's development: B, now a white dwarf which some call 'The Pup', had been the bigger star, so ran hotter and sooner choked its core with its onboard hydrogen fusion reactor's helium ash and tried to swell into a red giant, but as it expanded its shell kept spilling over the 'gravity col' and falling into A, which grew bigger and brighter on the result, until B became a white dwarf long before it would have by itself; but A will live longer for it. In the distant future it will be A's turn to try to swell to red giant, and its shell spilling over will accumulate on B and every so often 'catch fire' in a fusion explosion causing a nova which would be spectacular as seen from Earth. We recorded what we had the time and apparatus for, and moved on.

We saw strange sights, in spacecraft full of Earth astronomers nearly out of their minds with excitement at seeing close up their favourite sky objects. We went in among the Pleiades, and the starlight bright enough to read by. We saw many double-stars that orbited so close that they went round each other in a few hours and pulled each other into tidal bulges so from close up they looked like a pair of eyes. I have walked on Earth-like planets still in the pre-Cambrian stage with nearly oxygenless atmosphere and no life on land. On one such we found the polluted outflow of a natural nuclear reactor, where ground water had amassed that world's 3%-U235 natural uranium until it went critical. A few miles from it in a pool we found various small animals, one with a front arm with a toothed grab which it reached into crevices and burrows with, like the Earth Cambrian Burgess Shale fossil *Opabinia*; hundreds of millions of years lay between us and one of them's far descendants who might build spacecraft and possibly land on an ageing Earth.

On one planet that a few million years ago caught a blast of fresh supernova blowout, our atomic physicist came out of #5 following an instrument reading across native plants struggling to reforest the blasted land and gaped at natural plutonium minerals (isotope 244, so no fission risk, unless something concentrates it and starts it fast-breeder in the wild to curium-245), and even a little natural curium-247 sesquioxide. I have seen weird life forms, and many things. We found a few planets with sentient natives on, but none of them were the UFO-aliens; by my orders we merely observed them from flight and landed only in remote places, and even that often scared them.

On HR1784.III (29 Orionis III) the geologists found a rock stratum that told of an

industrial period that used up all reachable metal ores and fossil fuels and actinides and burnt out 46 million years ago without finding how to keep technology permanent. Carbonized or oxidised remains of garbage of modern consumer-society life showed in a fossilized rubbish tip. A deuterium shortage in the planet's water showed that they had developed and routinely used fusion reactors for power. The eroded buried foundations and wall stumps of an industrial-age city with an underground railway showed as a stratum in a long sea-cliff; in one place it was at beach level, and we could walk in some of its streets again, where the sea had dug them out. We saw natives performing rituals there, as if appealing to gods who lived in its still-buried parts. Elsewhere on that planet we saw ice-worn weird cross-sections of hard rock in which was embedded a port city with huge dock structures and tall buildings still surviving which had been sunk, buried deep in millions of years of sea sediment, intruded with basalt dikes, and pushed up metamorphosed in new snow-capped fold mountains now far inland.

In another place we found a scatter of fossilized automatic rifles and other battle debris in a flood wash which had cut into soft sandstone. "In the time of technology this was a dune desert." said a geologist from our ship #3, "I can tell because the grains are very rounded. In sand made by ...".

"Down!" came an alarm shout interrupting, and a radio codeword for "gunman lurking".

We fell flat on the sandy ground and scribbly semi-arid weeds, and crept warily to the place - unnecessarily, for 46 million years separated us from the native who had fired the machine gun which a 12-foot-high wooden native idol in a shrine now held at the ready like a rifle. The combination was foreboding, for the modern natives had no likely way to find out again after so long what guns look like and what they can do and thus to imagine their gods and legendary heroes using them, unless they had recently seen other off-planet outsiders before us using guns.

That planet's natives are now back in the pre-metal age, kept low by predatory animals, with even all reachable stone (except rare new flows of obsidian lava) suitable to make crude sharp tools and weapons from, and clay to make pottery and bricks, used up forgotten ages ago; but on its two small moons we found meteor-battered evidence that once they tried to reach for the stars. Pictures of space pioneers in strangely-designed spacesuits survive still in unchanging airlessness on walls in the geologically ancient remains of a moonbase that reminded me sharply of my own which I was so far from. Below each, his name is still clear, but no hope of ever reading the writing. One picture (as proved by a map in one corner) showed that same port-city, live and lit and working and full of traffic; motor ships went to and from it across and along a narrow ocean which was obliterated long ago as its two bordering continents collided and crushed their edges at an inexorable two centimetres per year; above it a large aircraft was launching a space-plane like our Moon-shuttles. Data in tapes and disks in ancient meteor-battered abandoned equipment had faded to blank before my ancestors evolved from lemurs into monkeys.

Near the moonbase we found three abandoned spacecraft. Long ago, when Earth was halfway through the Eocene period, those meteor-torn wrecks had been new and manned and supplied ready for use. In an alien spacesuit in that alien place I felt inside the remains of a rocket nozzle which long ago backblasted flame and flight-power made by fossil fuel from oilfields exhausted geological ages ago. Such is the end of achievement, and its pilot's millionth generation descendant now uses as top-range technology a bow of wood and animal tendon firing a wooden arrow tipped with an animal fang or bone splinter. We declared that place sacred, and left that moon taking nothing except photographs. A later expedition that stayed

there longer has found enough fossils to tell of a fearsomely massive species extinction event at the time of technology; most of the large and middle-sized wildlife that we ran into there are replacements evolved from small scuttling hole-hiding forms that had survived the crisis.

Our time-awed reflections were interrupted by a somewhat alarmed exclamation from Peter Stamford, who had been exploring the ship's computer's crosshairs pointer round a screen display of the nearby stars: "This star, HR1787, that's 27 Orionis, is one of several around here that look likely [to have life on a planet], but when I moused it this came up. It's near our route, but we better not go nearer than 100 A.U.'s to it, or we really *will* know what it's like being on the other side.". It was a warning in a 'notes window' that its third planet's sentient natives have an international body which runs a tight close-in effective defence of armed fast but not FTL craft which destroy without challenging first or listening to hails and pleas anything from outside that comes near and anything else from their own planet that goes out of atmosphere.

"I can see what likely happened there." I said, "When that planet went like it is: industrial prototype craft, scientific craft, craft from small and medium governments, any escape pods or spacesuited men that come out of them, all were the same to the patrollers' lasers and missile guns, unless (very rarely, except for a tightly supervised minimum of necessary communication and surveillance satellites) the patrol command authorized it, until the planet's firms and local groups stopped trying to get anything into space.".

"Whoever set that computer up, however did he know all *that*? I thought we were the first humans around here." one of my crew queried in surprise.

"Someone in NASA, I suppose." Stamford replied, "The big blow-up when all that lot came out scared Area 51 into coughing up a quantity of maps and manuals from UFO wrecks that before that they'd stonewall denied having them or anything like them, and now we can translate them. Including a lot of good astronomical information kept hidden down the years that we could have used.".

"And likely a lot of student types also could have translated it, since all that. I should have expected that once a book about their language escaped, it'd set off a fan cult. I get sick of cultisms." I said, "And info from stray aliens since, that lot thinking they can move among us unrestricted, like that one at Bitterfeld. Better someone else than us found about it the hard way.".

"I wonder what set them off isolationist?" said Stamford, "Aliens raiding? Or just didn't want to let popular space-crazes lead to a habit of routine interstellar travel wasting their fuel and metals and attracting outside attention to them? Same as the amount of Britain's metal reserves that's ended up lost on the bottoms of deep oceans as ships sunk on unnecessary voyages: that's what happens from not being self-sufficient.".

His second idea made sense, and I agree with such a policy; remote exploring is addictive, and the more you explore successfully the more and further you want to explore at more and more expense and fuel and metal consumed for little useful purpose. Eleven fast patrol craft came out against us from among asteroids as we came nearer. We kept well clear, and got nothing from there except a missile fired at long range; it thankfully ran out of propellant without hitting anything. We went as close in as seemed safe and observed it for three days. We saw enough of them on overheard video links to know that they are not the UFO-aliens.

"Somewhere down there out of reach behind those defences is an organization like SHADO, and a headquarters and a training base like I would like to have, and people with motives that I could understand, but much better financed and equipped than us." I said, "No

chance of us slipping last *that* lot and 'doing an Arden' here, and I haven't got enough backup to 'do a Peary'. I didn't come here to do that sort of thing, anyway. I'd like to meet its top man as a colleague, though. From the lack of radio traffic I suspect they allow little or no off-planet permanent settlements or asteroid mining: they'll know it's likely too easy for large remote asteroid mining service bases to become independent set-ups and develop FTL in secret, given lax supervision when there's too much for the amount of patrolmen that they can afford to run to keep track of at once. The more legals to have to keep the illegals weeded from among, the more risk of something going badly wrong - as happened to us after Arden."

"I suppose we could send craft to hang about at a safe distance and listen, like we're doing." someone radioed in from another of my ships.

"Until they set up countermeasures such as temporary extra-remote patrol bases or get out of reserve some extra-long-range special patrol craft, and make a quick end of the next lot, and I wouldn't blame them." I replied.

"It also says that, once every few years, a few aliens are allowed to land in one place, so the planet's international space defence board can keep an ear on what's going on outside. Like some Dutch sea-ships were allowed into Nagasaki in Tokugawa Japan from time to time." he said.

"Ditto Area 51, I suspect." I replied, "Even before all this blew up, once in a while I got an order from above to let such and such a bunch of UFO's land and let another agency's men catch them on the ground, and not to log the results of tracking them. They never told me why."

We turned away and explored elsewhere. I did my share of collecting specimens. We learned as we went, including such things as flying loose in a spacesuit with a backpack propulsor, and how to find my way around without a constant up and down, and how to work weightless. Scientists in the party had to get used to expedition conditions and keeping their stuff in its own place and doing their share of expedition work, and that experiments that cannot be done in vacuum must wait until we are on a suitable planet or be done in a pressure box.

I and the other Armed Forces men gradually knocked the rest into the start of an experienced disciplined space force by the time we finally got near the Solar System again. Only the start of one, without the 'reprocessing mill' effect of three months in a proper Armed Forces training base. Some of the astronomers were gradually turning into proper space navigators. That was a difficult conversion: it is hard enough being in space near the Sun where the familiar sky of stars presents itself in all sorts of strange attitudes as the ship turns, compared to sea and land navigating where the horizon stays horizontal; and on top of that, as we fly about, the sky star pattern changes and we had to learn many times more landmark star patterns than a ground astronomer ever has to, for example what the Hyades cluster in Taurus looks like from many different directions, and which faint-looking stars are bright but distant and become dominant when we get near them.

When man has accurate 3-dimensional star maps, this stage of training space navigators can be got through much easier on a simulator at base (with rough rules such as 'Go towards Capella till the Hyades look like a pistol' inevitably developing to compete with official coordinate positions and directions and distances; at least they are a useful backup if the astronavigation computer goes wrong); but first someone must fly far without such aids to get enough parallax sets of sky star patterns to make that accurate map. So I reflected yet again as I tried to sleep weightless strapped to a bunk, our world reduced to a cluster of UFO's roaming

the emptiness, ordered by NASA to fly alien-fashion in the outer wilderness. In the morning we reached Rigel (Beta Orionis, HR1713), a 4-star system without planets. It was nearly a thousand light years from Earth and a very long run, but the astronomers insisted on it. Three of the stars are so hot that they are blue and emit so much hard ultraviolet that at 100 million miles it would soon have killed exposed human skin; I was thankful that the liquid in our helmets stopped it as the astronomers hung around recording the surface activities of the four stars instead of letting the rest of us get on and get away from the place. Those blue stars are unusual and very bright; if Rigel was as near as the Big Dipper stars, it would appear brighter than Venus, and if it was as near as Sirius, it would appear as bright as the full moon.

After long wandering I was thankful to be lit by my home's Sun again at last instead of yet another anonymous wrong-coloured HR-number. Earth gradually and thankfully separated itself from the Sun's glare and turned from a dot to a globe and then from a sky object to a world below us. We landed one evening by our headquarters. As we came in, my ship's surveillance gear found the word 'SHADO' on two public road signs. The land between us and the village was no tidier than when we left. Harlington Grange Farm had given up hope of getting its two biggest fields back; luckily at the first big public incursion it had no standing crops liable to damage except six acres of fodder kale. There were several more huts and sheds. The arrangements were in an equal mess. My brief scrambled radio message as we came in announcing our return had been passed to wrong people and not to all the right people. The first to greet me inside my base grounds was no official or dignitary but an alien in a filthy boiler suit and a building-site helmet and a human-made army pack full of tools worn by one strap. At least he had the manners to put his pack straight and stand at attention when he saw who I was. He told me his name, but I was too tired to remember it or to try to pronounce it. My base's film studio side, still trying to function, was away on location, and many of my staff were away with it. NASA had brought the press in without asking me or SHADO first.

The astronomers showed off to the cameras in their spacesuits, with enough material for years of books and articles and popular astronomy programmes. Then was taken the photograph of me that I liked the least to see published, in an alien-type spacesuit sitting at the controls of a UFO, looking like an alien, my face engrained green by breathing liquid. I remember the smell when we finally took our spacesuits off. I was thankful to walk on Earth grass and see my office again, and the stars in the constellation patterns that they should be in, and to look at myself and see a Man of Earth and not a UFO-captain.

The aliens that someone in NASA let squat in my studios were still there; I resignedly decided that letting them stay there where we could keep an eye and an ear on them (as long as they did not get into the secret areas in the basement) was a better option than letting them do and plot what they like unwatched in a separate disused Ministry of Defence premises near Preston as someone had suggested. Soon after dark they came out into what was left of my base's near back garden and held a ceremony, in which they carefully faced and saluted in a particular direction, which I quietly noted. I overheard and understood enough to tell that it was a memorial service for their kin who had died on space operations near Earth over the years, addressed to 'Those Who dwell on Karsum-Inagh'. Karsum-Inagh seems to be an abode of their gods like the Greek Mount Olympus. That ceremony had been seen before, including several times at Arden; usually in public in Britain facing Snowdon or Ben Nevis as a replacement, but not always and not this time. When they do it at Arden, one of them dives in the loch in his spacesuit taking down with him some token offerings, perhaps as a replacement for a sacred lake called Ayazesh on their homeworld which I have heard them mention. That

seems to be the only time diving or swimming in Ayazesh is allowed, and at Arden they have seen aiming guns and showing signs of irritation if human boaters or bathers or divers or anglers intrude on that part of the ceremony or poke about there afterwards.

I closed down my film producer cover as a now purposeless consumer of effort and time and ordered the 'Harlington-Straker Film Studios' signs to be taken down and tried to settle back to my desk and SHADO base routine, but I soon found that a restlessness had entered me, and a wanting to put a spacesuit on and be away, and every night for some time afterwards my dreams returned to the remote vastness and strange planets.

A little later in a published report one of the astronomers gave names to many of the stars and planets that we had surveyed quickly in passing: 'Tambok' and 'Gapribdi' are examples; too late to do anything but complain I realized that despite orders he must have got at my cipher book and made names by 'decoding' our star and planet survey catalog numbers (same as chemists recently made systematic names for the elements beyond 103 by coding each digit of the atomic number into a syllable and appending '-ium'). Another secrecy gone.

Getting their reports published took some trouble. The established scientific periodicals, trying to keep a level head and a reputable face through the mass excitement, binned as always before without even sending a rejection slip anything that smelt of UFO, until some of the astronomers on their way home had to land ESE4 #3 in Elsevier the publisher's car park before a periodicals editor there would accept that such things and their crews' travels were real.

Other expeditions went out later, and brought back scientific findings and sometimes useful information. From seeds trodden or blown onboard, alien weeds appear on Earth, including a bout of a highly dangerous HR7203.IV-ian plant with natural landmines on its roots. FTL users have conferences, which for form's sake and to keep an ear on events I or one of my men attends if possible, including one that I remember all too well where I had to talk in alienese with a Korean *zgarikh*-leader who seemed to live in a spacesuit including scuba diving in it and no interpreter free and no other language in common known well enough, although in my airforce days English was the universal language of flight. But where does it lead?, except to waste and loss of matter and energy spread across the galaxy never to be got back again. Now we have access to the galaxy, which likely we will explore, and get to know more and more of it; and then will we feel we are shut up in it, and feel a longing looking remotely at nearby other galaxies and being unable to go there, and then at even more expense and trouble try to design intergalactic craft? And then try to find how to hyperspace jump to the parallel universes that some theoretical types talk about? And then what? Many say that other stars' planets are not ours but are in trust for whatever sentient life will arise on them in future geological ages.

Some time someone should go look at the Zeta Reticuli system, which we see near the south end of Eridanus. It is about 37 light years away, two Sun-like stars about a tenth to a sixteenth of a light year apart (HR1006 and HR1010), each apparently single and thus able to hold onto planets, near enough to tempt any natives of each who develop space travel to try to reach the other even without FTL. Some fringe cultists have developed a mythology of small grey aliens coming from there, but SHADO has seen no such beings; soon we will find the truth about that, and an overdue end to many cultist speculations.

## THE OVERLOADED GUARD

The UFO-aliens have been spacefaring long enough to know that a planet's space effort should all under one command and control, not a lot of competing rogue groups. Some on Earth agree; some major Earth government bodies are trying to organize an international command called ISAB, International Space Administration Board, which would incorporate SHADO enlarged and converted into the start of an Earth space-navy to stop all human and other spacecraft landings and departures individual or scientific or commercial or national that ISAB have not authorized and to bring back or keep under close central authority all off-Earth human colonies and casual settlements and bases. This came up at SHADO's next general meeting as I tried to get back into routine and also had a hard job keeping the meeting to topic and not letting it shift to general talk about my adventures as commander of ESE4.

We now could guard Earth with a big fleet of interceptors, independent and not needing to return to a base for weeks, far faster than our old ones, to keep Man at home and the Outside away, if public opinion would let us. Yet another small nation strains its people's budget on a space effort to try to make up from the Outside what it is denied on Earth, a gallant attempt and its craft's pilots are famed in the area and streets are named after them and suchlike; but multiplied across all such groups I know where that leads, the wastage of metals and energy and effort and the risk of fights over territory, and getting into difficulties, and the responsible delicate job of First Contact far too often done clumsily and anyhow by the first unsuitable bunch that finds the place, until something is done about it.

"Like that idiot councillor Macallister of Dumbarton," said Foster when I mentioned this, "promising them all sorts of things in Earth's name tying us up with agreements even after a UFO-pilot had been flying about with Carlin's sister's heart in his chest."

"That is, do we honour his promises and agreements, or not?" said another, "If we don't, Earth'll get accused of treachery."

"Never mind that." said General Henderson, who had proposed me to head SHADO when it was set up, "I don't believe I'm hearing this, people talking as if we're already in diplomatic contact with them. They're enemies at war, and they must be treated as such. I'm sick of jobs left unfinished because the army got called off by silly politicians and their polite minuted proposed and seconded meetings with gangs that we should have cleaned out at the start instead of wasting time while they build up their forces. Such as Iraq's still a risk because Washington didn't give Schwartzkopf 24 hours more to wipe out the Iraqi Republican Guard that time. Same as Israel's had much more trouble down the years than it need have because they didn't clean the West Bank out in 1949 like many say they could have. The British Admiralty tried to blow the whistle on Nelson at Copenhagen once, but he ignored the signal and finished the job, good for him. Get enough men and ships to do our job properly, arrest all aliens who are loose on Earth and all who have helped them, tell them that all agreements between them and Earth bodies are null and void, do what Commander Straker said to stop them from coming back and to stop every Tom Dick and Harry on Earth from wandering about at random out there getting into trouble and causing trouble, get back to like it was before. And now we've got a bunch of them squatting right in here upstairs; the sooner NASA etc find somewhere else for them where they can be adequately surveilled, the better."

"And restore the secrecy how??" another queried, "All for not having enough Interceptors in the first place. I knew all along that three wouldn't always be enough. The space fans won't like it if we go into the isolationist policy, and we know what's happened already when the

truth came out. A SHADO big enough to enforce such a policy couldn't have been kept secret anyway."

"Rudyard Kipling wrote a poem called 'The Lost Legion' about the 19th-century sea version of that sort of wild rogue group, including some boasting openly of being unauthorized." said Len Carrington, "I and the other Interceptor pilots did our job to keeping the aliens away and our people safe, until thanks to those students my ship was 'shot from under me' and I was spaced, stuffed into one of their dirty spacesuits, then brought back as an exhibit and let go to curry favour with people. The only way is: when yet another such group's first UFO-type spacecraft flies up and away, seeking profit far away and fame at home, trained disciplined space-navy patrolmen see it and ignore hails and pleas and excuses but obey orders; the unauthorized spacecraft vaporizes tracelessly in a fireball as an ISAB patroller's missile cracks its drive block open, and with it its pilots and onboard scientific staff before they can pass their skills to other unsuitable people, and yet another rogue group with fancy outreaching ideas learns the hard way to keep its interests and metals in its own place, like that planet HR1787.III's space patrol, good luck to them."

"That could be, but is not yet." I said, "As he said, space-minded public opinion bays against such things. CIA headquarters in Washington was left looking like Berlin in 1945, I saw it, nearly every window out, bullet and petrol bomb marks everywhere. Trade sanctions against unwelcome FTL groups don't work: sanctions often harm too much else and newspapers go on about it causing unemployment and thus hunger, and embargoed groups have too many other places to get stuff."

"I know." said a CIA man, "I was inside through that lot, it was our 'Siege of Gondor'. The sheer mass hatred against us who defend their own nation's interests. We tried to get an army tank in to get some important men away in it, and even that had to back off. Apart from that: what with Magnitogorsk and Mo i Rana and other places, we reckon that soon the aliens'll have got from Earth replacements for all their ships that SHADO destroyed. Also, I wonder how much control alien top command back on their planet *do* have now over what their people are doing here; even before all this blew up, that one who landed on the west coast of Ireland and another UFO chased him and shot him, was obviously trying to defect to us."

Of the CIA's role in politics, other people have other views, but this meeting was not the place to bring them out. Of his last sentence, we knew all too well already. Men build UFO's, and from it the aliens seem to benefit most. They say we destroyed many valuable craft and skilled spacemen of theirs, so Earth must provide replacements. At Arden they put up a stone memorial cut from a meteor inscribed in alienese and English bearing the names of all aliens and their craft that had died 'in operations near Earth', i.e. mostly by SHADO action. Some nations as payment for UFO technology ordered men to enlist with aliens, and they had to learn that hard-sounding unattractive language of theirs, and accept new names in that language after aliens lost by SHADO action, to replace them, and had to answer to and refer to themselves by those names. The UFO which had been a permanent fixture on Shantron Hill north of the Arden lowland was gone at last and replaced by a proper ground radar and sensor station. Aliens come and go, but there is much less casual raiding by them than before: there are dark rumours as to how they are getting now what they used to raid for. Communications companies use UTC's to set up relay stations allowing easy telephone and Internet contact far across the inner Solar System, and make little or no attempt to stop aliens from using them.

The name 'UFO' is very persistent long after they were identified, and causes confusion with genuinely unidentified flying objects. At least with UTC's we are at last properly easily

cleaning up the space junk that decades of unthinking untidy satellitism left orbiting Earth. At least all this often pointless exploration afar keeps some of the wild types away from making trouble at home. There is now a fullscale spaceport at Arden on the west shore of Loch Lomond, and the once green mouth of Glen Fruin is covered in public buildings and service buildings and security areas and vehicle parks and spacecraft standings, and that part of the lake is boomed and defence-netted off to store spacecraft underwater as is still standard practice among the aliens, and the closed branch railway from Dumbarton to Balloch had to be remade and extended to Arden with much disruption along its route, and the lakeside A82 road had to be widened and rewidened, and road signs along it are duplicated in alienese and several Earth foreign languages.

At least UFO's and UTC's in atmosphere are much quieter than airliners and do not disturb people on the ground at night, unless they come very close or shine bright lights about, or let their navigation aids cause electrical interference on the ground; one woman that I met said that her idea of an unwelcome UFO was the old Trident airliner: 'Unlimited Fortissimo Overhead'. UTC's are also much better than winged craft or rockets at casual landings without runways, as we know all too well, and more so if they can get serviced on the quiet on Earth - as we found later with asteroid miners and the like stray-landing and their rough and ready ways of getting men and supplies.

Neither we nor the now well-known UFO-aliens are the first out there. It was the same in the ancient past, and countless young inhabitable planets were seeded from afar by micro-organisms carried on unsterilized spacecraft before native life could arise, if there is anything in the amount of planetary life systems which have the same biochemistry as Earth's. Evolution keeps bringing the same thing up again: for example, what crawled out of HR2822.III's jungle rivers was not a fish with lungs but an octopus, but 100 million years of life on land reshaped it into a spider shape (with endoskeleton) with its belly clear of the ground to cut down friction in running, and then four of the legs shrank into feeding appendages leaving a four-legged animal with a head at the front, and matters went from there roughly the same as on Earth.

"That two near Toronto aren't the only two." John Hollingworth, another of my pilots, said with feeling, "I come from Derby, and there's one of those new space kit factories there: they landed a lot of it prefabricated from space and set up in some empty buildings. That last election - the 'abomination of desolation where it ought not to be', that alien Khlîvakaghd Ekhkukhvâranib that Derby North constituency sent to Westminster instead of that good man Sir Alexander Battersby who was a minister and it came out was crucial in one of the secret committees who set up SHADO. There's four aliens managing that place, and one of them joined the Labour Party to look more like he was fitting in as part of the local population, and he got nominated. Why the hell did Westminster decide to have any sort of election in the middle of all that chaos and excitement!?! Wait six months for people to sober down and get sensible again, and it wouldn't have happened. OK, I know, the previous government's term ran out and they had to follow rules regardless like space fanciers accuse us of wanting to control everything. When the count came out: first yet another clown frivolous candidate in silly clothes, then - when I heard the Returning Officer struggling through that alienese name, and he was the winner, I thought it was a bad hallucination. After all I've fought for in our fighters and Interceptors against them sneaking in and abducting people and scaring people and brainwashing people, and now one of them's my M.P.

Oh, I know, they brought a lot of jobs to a depressed area, and all that. Their workmen

have threatened to defend the place with guns if any agency or legal power moves against it. They call it NDSP, North Derby Space Products. They've been taking on engineering apprentices as if there's no tomorrow. Just when the council'd got near getting the area residential and offices only and all the old dirty energy and materials consuming factories cleaned away. And ditto later that AkhkakhvandeK Kegdumighd at Westhoughton in Lancashire after that by-election, set up on some old Coal Board land, incredible lot of out of work coal miners there thankful to get jobs again. Trying to look familiar and part of the area, his place as a sideline even runs a factory shop called 'Keggy's Electronics'."

"And again bang goes the 'hidden agenda' discouraging manual workers." said someone, "Every time a lot of manual workers cause police a lot of trouble, is another reason or excuse for the government to mechanise places or close them down or send the work abroad out of the way. That hidden agenda exists and no-one's going to tell me otherwise. That ex-minister who turned public evidence during all this told the truth, never mind what his associates tried to allege. Some of the big battles like dock strikes and the coalminer strike that brought Heath down, if one bunch of pickets had imitated police riotsquad 'short shield' tactics and trained by one of them that had learned it in the Army, and a lot of others'd've imitated, God knows what it'd've ended up as."

"Oh indeed is there?" Henderson replied, somewhat sharply, "One reason why we didn't have more Interceptors etc in time is trouble finding enough secure factories with secure transport routes to the launching sites, to have them made, all these places closing down. That's why Straker had stuff made at Z & K's, and we know how that ended."

"I know of those four in Derby, we try to keep track of that sort of thing. Some of those factories used to make stuff that SHADO needed, but no more now *he's* around." I said tiredly, and then as a last hope: "Is his position there legal?, since he won't be a UK citizen."

"He is." said Hollingworth, "Some idiot in the Home Office naturalized him as soon as he heard of it. To be expected when the country was that far spaced out. Yet another thing that it's time a few heads rolled about. How else has Man benefited from all this, anyway?"

"They told us how to make the EER [Elements and Energy Recoverer]. They call it a *gekhhkar*." I said, "For those who don't know, it's a derivative of the fuel-cell that tracelessly digests most things and separates metals or metal oxides even from very dilute concentrations, and returns nearly all energy of oxidation as electricity to help run the vehicle or premises that it is in. The first we made, by copying one we found in a UFO wreck, SHADO used as an office confidential waste destructor. Refuse disposal depots are after them, to recover metals from new rubbish and old tips. A little EER is a useful mini sewage destructor as part of a long-trip spacesuit. Dredger-submarines with big EER's in are becoming common and are recovering an incredible amount and variety of metal from old sea-tipped rubbish and wrecks and seabed. The faster types are often used as self-refuelling naval or fisheries underwater patrollers, and have proved useful. There are specialized EER-equipped fast submersible patrol craft coming out. Perhaps all this EER-equipped machinery recovering metals will thankfully make wild space-roaming asteroid miners and the need to keep order among them unnecessary."

"And another use for them." said Carrington, "I scuba dive. The club I'm in knows all too well that those things tend to have their own traceless way with unauthorized or unwelcome divers found in wrong places or taking stuff; many sport divers take their air back home unused when they see one with a patrol symbol on floating awash digesting the contents of a full dredgings tank. Underwater archaeologists don't like them either. Whatever changes, it

affects someone or something else. People shouldn't just rush in and bring new things in. Six weeks ago a party of six from my club (not me, I was on duty at the time) diving near Hayle in Cornwall ran into a self-appointed inshore fisheries patrol squad in a steam-jet patrol boat like we'd never heard of before. Its crew boarded us in riotsquad kit and stuffed our inflatable boat collapsed whole into its furnace and then beat us up and stuffed us in its brig for 'going equipped for shellfish poaching and stealing wreck' and 'no boat-launching permit' as it returned to base. Its next stoking batch was all our diving gear except the lead weights. Including our cylinders: they were those new composite things instead of all metal. On land afterwards the cops said they couldn't find any culprits, and later its crew in their uniforms and riotsquad kit headed a street parade quite openly. It started during the pro-alien frenzy: nothing to do with them directly, but an ex-navy man there saw a chance while central authority was busy elsewhere to turn the energy released in his area by all that excitement away from useless space-ism to set up a small-scale sea equivalent of SHADO that he thought was needed."

"Steam!? At sea that stuff went out with the Ark, and it was never used much for small craft anyway." someone said.

"It wasn't slow heavy chuff-chuff cylinders and pistons and jointed stuff like on old railway engines." Carrington said in some shock, "It made a jet of high-pressure steam straight through and out the back. Far lighter and faster. Not as fast as the best internal combustion motor boats, but it did its job. Flash boiler that can run in 5 minutes from cold, furnace like an incinerator, the whole set-up computer controlled to run efficiently on all sorts of rough fuel such as waste solvent or old engine oil or burnable rubbish, a countercurrent heat exchanger to get flue gas heat back into the intake air, and to dry wet fuel. Its furnace intake can easily crush a big RIB into a cylindrical bale and swallow it. A hand mangle to get most of the water out of wetsuits before they are shovelled in. Special nets and sonar and two torpedoes with capture grabs to catch submerged divers. Lethally powerful underwater ultrasound guns. Its stern tapers to a blast nozzle that you better keep well away from. Front and side blast nozzles for manoeuvring and they're also handy close-up weapons. And our diving gear was the fuel for that blast and speed. We reckon it got another lot before us: one of us saw one of them shovelling a lot of glass fibre from fibreglass out of its ashpan, and half-melted metal parts out of stab-jackets and regulators."

"EER-sub's are some of the best new kit we've had for some time." said a Navy man, "And they can digest the metal parts including steel cylinders. I'd heard of those new steam-jet boats: a new firm in Liverpool's making them, got a lot of overseas orders for them. Some call the undersea world 'inner space': like with outer space, everything that happens in or on one area of it should be put under one command. The gear looks similar sometimes; so does the need to patrol. Many of us don't like all sorts of weekend fun types skylarking about underwater nosing about everywhere and taking stuff without lines or linesmen or logging or licencing and getting into trouble needing rescuing or getting in the way of armed forces exercises. Or on the surface as yet more unnecessary sea traffic for us and Customs to have to weed the undesirables from among. We only dive without linesmen on covert operations. You stop the space undesirables, we stop the sea undesirables. Some time as the world's mines and oilfields get emptier, all this free-and-easy travelling and using up stuff for pleasure and unnecessary finance business must stop and never mind public opinion, or there won't be any left for maintaining law and order."

"So some navy men *would* say, and I say otherwise." said Carrington, "I like scuba diving, so do millions of others, and uniform-minded control-everything sea-patrol types aren't going

to keep us all out and keep the underwater world for their sole use. Next thing after that is wanting to go back to movement restrictions and needing travel permits even within the country and so on. There are right and wrong places and times for tight control and enforcement."

"Likely many of the small independent bunches of spacemen that have started would say the same about ISAB when it starts, and get much public sympathy and complicate matters, with all the Beyond just out there and them not allowed to explore it." Foster remarked.

"Also one way and another the aliens have told men new ways to generate power, and various electronics and computer and nuclear technology tricks and the like." I said, "And in immunology they've taught us how to kill off particular 'stem cell' lines without damaging the rest, to stop it from rejecting a transplanted organ or to stop the auto-immune damage to joint cartilage that causes some sorts of arthritis."

"I don't suppose that what the aliens ultimately come here for has changed much after all that has happened." said Carrington warily, "Too many small nations make their own contacts with them, and I don't trust some third-world dictatorships. I saw a TV news report of human South American riot-police breaking up a demonstration which was calling to know where political prisoners had vanished to; but their rifles were alien-type, they made pulse noises instead of bangs. What had they had got the rifles or the plans for them in exchange for? In several non-European nations with FTL space programs that also are cracking down on endemic criminalism, there are dark hints as to the fate of arrested hardened criminals. What did some of them get UFO-type space technology in exchange for?, as well as doing the aliens a service by cluttering our radar screens with unlisted Earth spacecraft until it is hard for us to tell who is what until it lands."

"That is, how many times will the big nations have to send the army in before we see the last of divisive groups?" said Henderson, not for the first or last time, "When we do a cleanout like that other agency tried at Huancayo, we send in four times as much even if they can't be got there covertly, and we don't trust native cops. When will ISAB properly override all divisive commercial and political and scientific and space-fan groups so it can reduce space travel to and from Earth to a properly controlled authorized minimum and authorize and arm a force to enforce this? HR1787.III has such a defence, so it's practicable. If their craft aren't fully FTL, their pilots and commanders won't be tempted to turn from patrolling to unauthorized remote exploring. When ISAB's set up and the sooner the better, it must stay efficient and patrol and control minded and run properly Navy-fashion and not get science and exploration for its own sake minded or packed and corrupted with business and finance types splitting their time with other business and getting themselves and it entangled in finance and investment and property dealing and suchlike or letting all sorts into space if they pay. If we take too long, ISAB's first job'll have to be to set up a big expensive FTL fleet to find and destroy or bring back dozens or hundreds of unnecessary remote human settlements and bases and work sites spread across the light-years before they get too many and too big to control tightly enough; and the more such a fleet can maintain itself remote from Earth to save on shipping supplies out to them, the more likely a commander of such a fleet will be to break from central command and himself set up separately on some planet to avoid him and his men ending up idle on Earth after he has cleaned everything up."

"What's the matter with exploring out there, now it's become possible at last like we've wanted for a long time?" a delegate from another committee objected.

"Humans showing off in alien spacesuits still make me uneasy." I said, "We had to take

several rescued abductees out of them, before our secrecy went where an evaporated UFO goes. They make me think of an ox with its horns and back and towing-harness prettily garlanded not knowing that is it due for sacrifice to the native god whose idol it is towing on a ceremonial cart. Very many people still don't believe that aliens abduct, but blame 'CIA propaganda' and the like and hallucinations caused by 'fairies', including people who care only to get UTC technology and don't care who from or how. The latest news that I have about FTL groups is: Bitterfeld, and that lot at Mo i Rana in Norway, are thinking of joining us. No sign of space stuff at Ramat David in Israel, they must have moved it to Dimona or somewhere. Huancayo have set up a long-term base on Mars and already a baby's been born there and they've claimed settlement rights on part of the area called Coprates Chaos there."

"And I presume there are no takers for letting that Clive Eckwarren-nib, or whatever Hollingworth said, into that committee instead of Sir Battersby who he kicked out?" said Col.Freeman, "That was a blow, him going. Joking apart, if we let Bitterfeld in now, we'll have an alien in ISAB's top staff: that pilot-instructor zzz-zzsl - uhh Slick Harry's still there."

"Zlíkhakhâriv." I corrected, "And as regards people knowing who is what, we don't need silly stuff like this leftish French student poster." I showed a poster that showed a man in a spacesuit drawn as much as possible like French CRS (= riot police) riotsquad kit, piloting a UFO, and the French for 'To the CRS: your people have come for you: now go home.'. "Just a routine pun in an anti-authority slogan: Sorbonne students have reason not to like the CRS, and the alienese for 'nation' happens to be *kars(u-)*. But that apart, three days ago the French CRS wrote wanting us to train a few of their men to pilot UTC's. It's being planned at a CRS base in Quincy-sous-Sénart on the southeast edge of Paris. One thing that prompted him was old tales about a big wood called the Forêt de Sénart west of his base from before city spread reached it: flying objects and people disappearing and suchlike, now that he can guess well what they were. That sort of hard trained type looks like good starting material for good space patrolmen, apart from the language barrier, if they stay with us and don't become yet another separate uncoordinated FTL group and slide from patrolling to exploring. And our public image can manage without newspaper typesetting idiocies such as 'the SHADO agriculture minister'. If we do go for the isolationist policy rather than maintain some sort of contact out there. But most likely all we'll manage to achieve is some sort of loose coordination between groups, unless all the big powers throw all their weight behind us in time - *if* their voters at their next elections tolerate such a policy, which a lot won't. There'd be far too much public opinion against it. The secrecy's gone. It all boils down to not having had enough Interceptors in time to stop that December the 2nd Highlands landing."

"That paranormal and UFO-ism periodical Fortean Times that started publishing space travellers' reports including some about your trip." said Foster, "It's gone all formal scientific and renamed itself 'Extra-Solar Geology Reports'. Its previous telepathy and suchlike non-UFO fringe readership don't like it at all. New front cover with a UTC flying above some stylised strata. Ye gods things have changed, a formal periodical showing a UFO on its front."

"Yes, I know." said another, "The astronomy periodicals and the established Earth geology periodicals wouldn't take that sort of matter at first, they naturally kept right away from anything with that sort of image, it took them time to get used to interstellar travel being real and routine, so FTL spacemen published where they could, including at least once 'getting heavy' with an editor when he refused to publish so much dull heavy scientific article matter in what at the time was still a popular magazine."

So discussion went on. Nor were matters and clarity of purpose helped by such things as a

supposedly responsible television channel broadcasting this statement by an alien, in English with some sounds oddly distorted by a mouth and nose and throat somewhat different from ours: "Like you we respected the right of those with inherited defects to live and breed, not to be punished for what was not their fault, and all that: and we are at the inevitable result. Only about one in 50 of us gets through life with no transplants for organs deteriorating too soon. Long ago we found how to transplant from anyone to anyone; at least we aren't pestered with tissue type matching. No hope of transplanting from animals much: nothing that we still have is the right size and anything like long-lived enough. Watch out with all your well-intentioned helping people with genetical defects to breed so mutations accumulate, that you humans don't end up where come of your secret agencies accuse us of being, organ transplants as common as all other surgery put together, and having to burden your economy with a space travel effort to raid parts at hazard where you can far from home! There is no Good Power that will come from the Beyond with a fiery sword and right all wrongs in this world or the next and give us heavenly crowns if we obey moral teachings and help the unfortunate as hard as possible for long enough. We used to believe there was, but the 'Great Beings', as we called them, never came, only ever more bad side effects of what we thought were good moral courses, and endlessly having to sacrifice one to get spare parts to save several others." That I could believe: they have had technology far longer than us, and their scientific pioneers like our Edison and Marconi etc are ancient past or forgotten.

But we patrol round Earth as we can, a tedious job of sorting good from bad. In the old days things were simpler and easier, and we shot down anything of UFO type that came. The last UTC that anything under me 'fireballed' was not enemy or unauthorized but merely abandoned and unsafe with a faulty drive that could not be switched off in the usual way. The sooner ISAB patrolmen can stage a mass fireballing destruction of seized unauthorized UTC's lowish over Earth's night hemisphere, to warn others off, the better, some say; but that is not yet.

We achieve something. Our rocket-powered Interceptor I.4 has been semi-retired after seeing little action; we use newer faster much longer-range armed craft with UTC-type drives. During a patrol in I.6 our pilot Harrison received a short and cut-off alarm call from a cleanup gang who were breaking up an old orbiting Apollo rocket stage as a break from endlessly one at a time radarizing for and chasing and laser-evaporating or sending capture-and-return missiles after hundreds of small orbiting objects such as spanners and screws and bits of solar panel which at orbiting speeds are as dangerous as bullets or small shells. He ran towards the place. As he neared it, he saw not two but three UFO-like shapes. One of them, which had an underbelly missile-pack, threatened to shoot the others, which were unarmed work craft, if he came nearer, but he did not stop. The extra UFO ejected two propulsorless men in white astronaut spacesuits with spherical helmets, and ran for it, thinking that Harrison would have to let it run while he chased the men, who were going at 40 miles a minute away from their craft; but he fired a missile at them and chased the pirate.

The stranded men thought that their end had come, until the missile slowed and stopped as it reached them. It let them cling onto it while it went back to the two work craft, which were still tethered to the Apollo casing; the missile's steering struggled with its lopsided load. It had to go into fuel-emergency mode, using some of its warhead contents for propulsion, but it got there. They kicked off from it and grabbed their craft, and freed them. Harrison knew they were safe when they asked him what to do with the missile so it wouldn't go off. The pirate ran for the Moon and, as we found later, hid near the big far-side dark-floored crater Tsiolkovsky

in an abandoned mining complex, which it or something had previously forced open. It got away that time.

A week later Harrison challenged the same UTC about 1.3 million miles from Earth. It claimed to be an alien diplomatic mission, but its radio man's attempt at an alien accent was unconvincing. He ordered it to surrender. It claimed diplomatic immunity and protested, then fired missiles from its underbelly pack, but I.6 deflected them. It surrendered. It was Earth-made, in Pittsburg in USA. It had illegal weapons and bags of white powder and explosive sabotage charges in its hold. Its crew were all human, and pleaded orders or else from an unspecified boss. A blood sample from each showed via I.6's DNA-scanner and computer that they were a known gang of general-purpose criminals from Detroit, with little courage when confronted seriously. His crew shoved them into his brig, primed their craft to fireball ten minutes later, and left for Earth to get supplies. On the way his radar saw a small object, which his computer tried to guess a shape for by its brightness variations and return signal clarity compared with radar wavelength. His #2 laser summarily evaporated the lost spacesuit over-glove as he descended and Earth changed fast from a sky object to the ground below him. On the way he received changed orders where to go, and landed on an unoccupied wharf area in Bristol docks in England.

When he got out he was greeted by a long speech thanking him for helping to bring new employment to the area after sea shipping had declined, etc. The welcoming parade was a rank of docker-type rougns in identical thick docks issue overalls and riotsquad kit, some also with oxy-gas blowtorches with backpack cylinders or industrial propane flamethrowers run off a backpack tank. Beside them, freshly cleaned, was an incinerator-truck with their symbol on, which, as he found later, a few weeks before had consumed half a ton of pop music instruments and staging and camping gear and general rubbish when the council got sick of complaints and called for them and sent them in hard to break up a pop-and-drugs concert four miles away; at other times when called out from dock work they had as efficiently taken out a walled compound that aggressive tinkers had fortified themselves in, and carried out a very hard 'arrest' of a large pack of reporters who had photographed and made notes without permission and usurped standing room and transport seats intended for delegates for a union meeting nearby. The sea patrol that Carrington had luckily avoided was not the only such unofficial hard action group that had developed in those months.

As soon as possible in what was clearly a formal welcome meant for someone else, and wondering about the rights and wrongs of such part-time riotsquads, he explained what had happened and muttered about crossed radio channels: this communication confusion caused a long enquiry later. The docks company was starting a trade in asteroid metals landed there directly. Asteroid mining was starting; great, that gave me something else in space to have to try to keep law and order among. He lifted ship to get above the radio-blocking ground clutter, asked "what now?", and was told to take them to Detroit in USA. He complained about not being an airliner and about the risk of being kept off space patrol by a silly ground court witness-summons. I sorted matters out. I have no record of what the law decided about the docks riotsquad. As he started to lift off into space, the asteroid miners' craft came in and landed. It was the ordinary UFO shape, with a German Bitterfeld maker's plate on; the negotiations went on unremarkably. Its captain was an alien, who had picked up his human fellows somewhere; they were working for him willingly, to learn asteroid mining, or at least they could not remember any compulsion.

So much for one action; but space at large is far bigger than Earth's seas, and we cannot

patrol it all. If 'Minas Morgul' is in our solar system, what will happen if human civilian spacemen such as asteroid miners blunder into it? Or is it that Proxima Centauri asteroid where a Glasgow geology student found far from home the only relic of Chiang Erh-wang? If so, the current fragmented space political situation and frequent pro-alien sentiment would not easily let me attack it (and perhaps find it evacuated), and even less let me attack their home, if we find it; the likeliest current guess is HR4918 which is marked on an Earth-viewpoint star chart that we found in a UFO wreck.

I have defended Earth, but I will not start a costly long war across space or saddle Earth with having to hold down long-term a planetful of hostile aliens far away: that would cost far more lives and wasted materials than ever were lost by letting the aliens take what they come for as they did unopposed without scaring populations or causing other damage for centuries before SHADO started: as one of them said to me via an early contactee, 'Why do you attack us? We mean no harm to the people of Earth.'. Star Wars can stay fiction as far as I am concerned, unless we can take their homeworld out quick and be sure that is the end of the matter; and that would need ISAB set up and such a big space navy carrying such a big ground army that it could not be kept secret from the public, and that would need public feeling towards the aliens to change a lot from how it is now. An alien takeover here? For the same reason I cannot easily foresee millions of alien troops in forts and camps on a hostile Earth: it is too far from their home at the end of a long communication line. But if the aliens' world is as near the end of its resources as they seem to want to make us think, one massive attack on their production and transport centres should destroy their power base and the rest would be easy and not need a big permanent human force, unless they have the will and means to turn to guerrilla warfare.

## AMONG THE ALIENS

From recorded matter that we managed to get hold of, and via unauthorized or furtive trading contacts from the occasional alien who was more communicative than the rest, and one way and another, we now know more about the alien side of various incidents. I feel little point now in expressing support for either side; I merely collate what we know or can deduce.

One example is a report of a case that made the aliens be more thorough and careful when 'reprocessing'. Many years ago, during a fight between USA and North Vietnamese jet fighters in the Vietnam War, pilots reported a UFO. Ground staff ignored it; such wartime sightings, often called 'foo fighters', have long been common due to such things as wingtips or instrument lights refracted or reflected distortedly in curved cockpit canopies, or air electric effects caused by the plane. One two-man plane of each side was shot down. Their four men baled out. Other pilots watched in shock as the UFO scooped them out of the air and was gone. Four empty parachutes drifted to earth like moth wings dropped by a hunting bat, and that was all that Earth knew of it for a long time. By then the aliens were starting to lose men and craft at intervals as Earth fighters and missiles got better, so they used their own way to replace four of those men, knowing like we and NASA know, that jet fighter pilots are good starting material for training into spacecraft pilots.

The four did without query the same work as any other UFO-crewmen for many years. Then one day in the Proxima Centauri asteroid base they and the rest were called to see warning video footage taken by a UFO that had been chased by my Interceptors and had got away. In it they saw their home Earth, jet fighters like those they had flown in, and Earth spacecraft destroying UFO's routinely easily at last, and heard what the aliens then knew of me and SHADO. A list of Earth airforce bases awoke suppressed memories in one of them, and he managed to make the other three remember who they had been. They hid it and waited to be sent on the Earth run again and get back to their people as they could, but an order came for them to be posted to all separate places. They waited no longer, but took a chance to take weapons and steal a UFO and run for it. They nearly managed it, but an automatic alarm system locked doors and called guards.

They held out long, but at last 'fought there and fell in a far country'. One of my men remembered what he read of three Irishmen abducted to Iceland long ago by Vikings: they were Dubhthach (which his captors spelt 'Dufthakr'), and one who his captors renamed Ulfgeirr (= 'Wolf-spear'), and another; at last far from home they rebelled and fell in battle. Likewise these four, who on Earth had been bitter enemies each two of the other two, used no longer the space-language but declared their regained loyalties and true origins in their regained English and Vietnamese now badly distorted by surgical alienizing of their mouths and throats, and fought to the last shot side by side, until the last one to fall, badly wounded, raised his alien rifle in defiance as if it was an M15 or AK47 of his home world, named me as his commander, and died trying to salute Earth-fashion at a window across the far void to his home Sun shrunk to a magnitude 2 star added to one end of the 'w' of Cassiopeia.

Another example is the 'Square Triangle' incident, when I let a UFO land in southern England, to try to capture it intact. Before SHADO started, a UFO came to Earth from an outpost base called Khvînazgarikhk. The name means '4-section-place', but that does not tell us where it is. A section of UFO's is 10 or so. A jet fighter damaged the UFO with a lucky shot with a heat-seeking missile, for its hull was still hot from entering atmosphere; but it got away. As it got near its base again, its damaged drive block started to split, and its pilot, instead of

warning everybody and steering his ship away and bailing out, panicked and ran to base in it and docked and got out. Its steering was damaged also, and it hit the base hard and injured several base personnel badly. It could have fireballed any moment, but a man called Ighdan from another ship ran in and got the injured men away, and got important cargo from the ship, and put the ship on autopilot to go away from the base fast, and finally got away only three seconds in time before the ship blew up. Else the explosion might have shocked other docked UFO's and made them fireball in a chain effect and destroyed part of the base. The edge of the fireball burnt him badly and broke several bones and tore his spacesuit causing decompression injury, but he lived. The last man he rescued was a space-navigator called Ighdavûyak. The *ighd* is a flying animal, their equivalent of an eagle, and *vûyak* means 'onrush': their names run much in a track of warriors and weapons and aggressive animals, like among some past and present Earth peoples. The guilty pilot was 'sent for organs', but Ighdan was rewarded and given the new name *Zlîkhakhâriv*: *zlîkh* is 'wild or uncontrolled fire' and *khâriv* is 'one who ventures or risks'.

He became famous because of that. He and Ighdavûyak always flew together after that, on the Earth run and on many far explorations elsewhere, and became a symbol of their space operations. They went on many missions, including one when their UFO was badly damaged continuing to fight four USAAF fighters to keep them busy to cover the escape of four other UFO's less able to fight or evade because they were carrying valuable heavy loads, until SHADO and its new space kit started and our radar found their UFO and an Interceptor routinely summarily destroyed it with a missile. I recorded a routine job done, like destroying a wasp nest, but the alien commander was angry at losing two such famous and symbolic men by 'shooting first without due challenge or defiance given before' and also realised that this double loss becoming public knowledge among his men and people might either cause excess ship losses in wild vengeful attacks or cause defeatism and loss of morale.

A little later, a UFO with an underbelly scoop came in anti-lunar and dodged our planes by night and scooped up tent and all two men who were on a hunting holiday in a forest near a USA airforce base. They were Derek Allison and Peter Duclos. A very efficient truth drug found they were jet fighter pilots, a skill that was valuable raw material for their purposes; on a drying dying world they could not afford to keep losing skilled pilots without replacing them any way they could. After plastic surgery, overwriting of memories, and several months hard training, Derek Allison and Peter Duclos and their personal memories and achievements were no more, and instead Ighdavûyak and *Zlîkhakhâriv* crossed the light years on far missions again. They had got their famous man and his usual companion back, and most of their people did not know that they were not the real thing; nor did the two themselves.

Once, *Zlîkhakhâriv* had to stay at base to attend to something, so instead an alien called *Khîvighd* flew with Ighdavûyak. *Khîv* is a sort of teargas: it turns up in their names sometimes like some other weapon names. They came, aiming for southern England, so I let the UFO land, to try to capture it intact. Because of shortages caused by heavy craft losses by SHADO action they only had one rifle between them. They landed in a forest and came out: *Khîvighd* had the rifle. A game warden and his Alsatian found them. *Khîvighd* tried to capture the game warden without shooting, but the dog defended his master fiercely. *Khîvighd* fell, breaking his faceplate. He recovered quickly from the shock of unexpected sudden change to air breathing, got up, broke away, and shot the game warden, and the dog hid in bushes. I got Mobiles to the site, a bit too late. Ighdavûyak came out and took the game warden's body onboard for what organs could be salvaged from it.

But he who was now Ighdavûyak was back on his true birth planet, where he had met game wardens in similar deciduous woods before. Memories resurfaced, hard and imperfect like a weed pushing through hard tarmac, but some got through, and Dave Allison, USA fighter pilot, realized with utter shock where he was and who he had been and what he had been converted into and what he had missed while away. He did not trust his fate if he surrendered to Earth authorities after having aided the enemy so much; he did not trust his human memories not to re-submerge soon and leave him simply an alien again. The likely state of his mind was obvious: he saw no other course than blowing up his accursed alien UFO and his alienified altered body in it, so that he and it could not be used against Earth men any more. We kept the wreckage, and can tell enough of what happened by the pattern of the damage, now that UFO engineering is common knowledge. It was not a full fireballing, but enough. SHADO labs later examined his charred body and found from its DNA and marks left by surgery that he had once been human, and who he had been. At the time I could not explain the explosion and recorded that there was only one alien and that the charred human body could only be the game warden, but captured alien records found later say that on that mission the UFO had the usual crew of two; the other body was likely nearer the centre of the explosion and completely destroyed in it.

That left Khlîvighd stranded unarmed on the ground with no way to call for rescue, and with his helmet faceplate broken in the fight and much breathing liquid lost. While he was looking for someone to surrender to, a civilian shot him by mistake for someone else as part of something which I will not go into here; the dog led my men to him too late. But Peter Duclos is still out there, Zlîkhakhâriv travelling the light-years honoured and named for someone else's deed negating the effect of an action of his own former airforce against the alien enemy and remembering as his own someone else's childhood and family on a narrow strip of farmable land in sound of a UFO-base under the high barren ridge of Aghanzdârigh far across space from his true birthplace. It is said that after this he earned his name again, rescuing three crew and much cargo and equipment from a UFO which had been hit by a SHADO plane missile while returning from Earth and got away in an unstable condition; he got himself and those he rescued safely away from it only 4 seconds before it fireballed, and our Moonbase saw the explosion. Some say he may have returned for a while, as a pilot-instructor at Bitterfeld. But publicizing all this would achieve little; far too many people would accuse it of being 'yet more secret-agency-type smear campaign and disinformation'.

The abductions may become unnecessary and perhaps may be stopped or reduced, by a costly route that none of us had intended. People who we let know the truth officially, including about the abductions, soon picked up the other side of the picture from unauthorized sources and for the aliens often felt much more sympathy and curiosity than dislike. In the end with popular feeling about space still in a very excited state we saw no better course than to send nearly every genetical expert and advanced biochemist that could be found, robbing many important projects, to help the aliens find a cure or medical workround for as many as they can of the many inherited organ deterioration and deformity traits that they had accumulated down the millennia of not letting natural selection operate on themselves. Or at least to help them find before use which of their organs would reliably last long enough when transplanted for them not to have to use human organs in spacemen and others who cannot be got to a transplant centre quickly when an organ fails quickly and unexpectedly. More than anything else this means helping their authorities to push their medical people out of their static unwillingness to abandon long-established practice and into a habit of fresh research

again at last - as those Glasgow students did to their armaments makers all too well. The details of the procedures are not secret, but I see no point going into them here; but, to help develop them, into the emptiness aboard alien craft many of our important biological scientists went, and at the time I wrote this few had yet returned, although it seems that they are safe; we waited to find how many would return and how many would settle somewhere out there.

They were carried without access to portholes, and our computers did not manage to find where their planet is by correlating with other views such sky star pattern information as they brought back. What they saw of the planet agrees with what our early FTL probe saw: it is dry, and much of it is mountain ranges; most placenames seem to end in *zdârigh* (ridge), *zdâran* (line of peaks), *baz(igh)* (peak(s)), *khvâran* (steep bare slope), *kaghep* (dry gully), and similar; *ghinâ* (river) and *voru* (valley with a stream or river in) are all too unusual, and *zesh* (lake) is even rarer; there is one small sea. The flat low areas are largely covered with vegetation, but much of it is tough dry bushfire-prone xerophytic stuff; they learned long ago to leave it thus however much it costs them to enforce it and patrol against nomadic grazing and random clearing, as, the more bare dry soil and desert sand shows to space in the dry season due to farming or grazing or woodcutting, the less the rain gets.

They were assigned to a line of low buildings in a deep valley with a narrow strip of damp and cultivation under the high ridge of Ighduvzdârigh, jagged like a stegosaurus's back against the northern sky. A road and railway built before any surviving records go under it and on through wide dry places to ancient deep mines at Khvîyanzdârigh ('Diorite Ridge'), long ago emptied of old metal ores, but, as at some other places, volcanic activity causes a circulation of hot ground water slowly dissolving metals from the rocks around there; by dangerous work in hot deep places this water is tapped as it flows out, to collect the metals and the heat; a place spoken of with apprehension for any native or off-worlder sent there, but they rotate the workers and avoid casualties as far as possible. Most volcanoes are controlled to erupt steadily and as much heat and chemicals as possible are recovered from the gases and ejecta. Some rock strata that have not been dug out and recycled and rerecycled down the ages to recover metals speak of ancient times when the planet was much wetter. To the west are high mountains called Karsubazigh, 'The Mountains of the Nation', said to be the original home of the people whose language and influence spread to the rest of their planet as they first industrialized. Among those mountains is a many-spiked peak called Karsum-Inagh, 'The Spears of the Nation', of old the home of their gods and forbidden except to a few priests a few times a century, before their industrial and space age brought a more practical attitude to matters; in its shadow is the sacred lake of Ayazesh.

"We found signs that other humans had been there before us." one of them told us, "The aliens had cleaned up well, but not completely. One of us found on a windowsill where someone had scratched in English 'Oh for one last landing on the globe that gave us birth, / to rest our eyes on fleecy skies and the cool green hills of Earth.'. No wonder, knowing that his last sight would be some dry *khvâran* running up to a jagged barren ridge, bits of tough dry scrub, and the aliens' sun glaring from a hard brassy desert sky that might send a flash-flood once a century if they were lucky. Like them we got sick of that *zgarikhk*, I mean section-house, by a stone bridge over a dry gully called Khvâyakaghep, that we started nicknaming 'the Rio Grande'."

"The science fiction author Robert Heinlein wrote those two lines." I said, "That lot must have been fetched from Earth after that."

"In a cave on the *khvâran* above our place we found a settlement log of theirs even. I

read about them trying to celebrate Christmas on the alien planet with no hope of return. To get Christmas dinner they set snares made from stringy vegetation (as they were not trusted with weapons or long knives) and managed to trap in it one of the gazelle-like animals that scavenged for the scarce vegetation. Nativity play even. Due to lack of numbers the roles of two of the Three Kings fell on 'Clive' and 'Iggy', the two alien caretakers there. The script for it had been printed on a desktop computer back in our 1910's when on Earth any sort of computer was totally unknown even in fiction; the Roman alphabet printing package they used was a crude self-made front end for a graphics system meant for alien engineering drawings. Some insight on their state of mind after long exile came from the amount of alienisms that got unheeded even into their Nativity play, e.g. Caspar (played by a human) saying to the Holy Family: 'We followed the star a long weary way over mountain and *khvâran*. We sought water for our camels in vain in many a dry *kaghep*, and only just in time we finally found a little water when we dug a deep hole in a hollow ...'. After dark they went out, and Christmas carols in English and French echoed from the black basalt cliffs of the Estandâran 400 light years from home under constellations drawn in no Earth star atlas."

The aliens in the past have indeed tried other ways to get their gene pool into a healthier state and not so prone to organ failure. Among them, as among us, the inevitable return-to-nature movements start occasionally, but have no wild to return to and get nowhere: only the unmined remains of ancient coal seams speak of huge continuous jungles now long gone. But silting and long slow tectonic movement made a large shallow bay of their one sea ever shallower until it became an huge tidal flat which in times of heat and onshore wind created much sand to blow inland, and tide flowing on and off such a big area fed dangerous tidal rip-currents. This had to stop, so a few centuries ago they diked it off. It stayed damp, fed by ground water that until then had surfaced uselessly into the sea. They planted it to forest, as a renewable source of materials. Browsing animals had to be let in, to keep inflammable undergrowth eaten out to keep fire risks down; but in their turn they needed controlling and watching.

So the next return-to-nature movement was let live there by hunting as their remote ancestors once did, leaving machines and the space age. They tried hard enough, and by breeding as soon as they were physically able to before any organs failed and much before socially acceptable they managed to keep their numbers from dropping too low while natural selection started to weed out the worst of the inherited sterility and childhood and young adulthood organ failure traits; the forest-dwellers' numbers bottomed out and started to rise, and a few more than before reached middle-age untransplanted. But their many and various genetical defects proved harder to lose than seemed at first, as recessive traits skipped generations and reappeared in descendants, on top of the ordinary survival problems of a forest society of mostly children and teenagers with far too few older people to hold and pass on lessons learned by one generation's experience; in necessary contacts with the rest of their world many sought to return to their planet's modern life of machines and space-bases, and in the recent shortages of manpower were allowed to. Thus they lived in their allocated forest area, while the rest of their planet's people stayed industrial and space-faring, until now the forest-dwellers are down to a few - but at last more than a third of those live to 40 Earth-years old untransplanted; this is a useful start.

Now Man is himself a spacefarer, and nearby star systems are at last open to him. 'Good luck to him, he'll need it', some say. The sooner all Men further out than the Moon are under one command, the better, never mind divisive groups that obey no orders. The sooner I know

more about what is happening among the aliens and who is obeying or disobeying who among them, the better; even those who have given or sold UFO-drive technology to Men, or otherwise associate with Men, say little except what is necessary for work. The astronomers are having the time of their lives, and at least three new scientific periodicals have started, to keep up with reporting their findings. We have taken star sky surveys hundreds of light years away, but using them and Earth-sky maps as parallax sets to make accurate 3D maps is not simple, because stars move while their light is travelling. I would like an aliens' homeworld viewpoint star chart. We have seen many star nova explosions which on Earth only our unborn descendants will see after the light has reached here. It sometimes seems an age since the general public and aliens first looked at each other on the grass at Arden by Loch Lomond, and the time when we destroyed all UFO's we could with no risk of effective return fire or political consequences seems like a prehistory; but it is not long ago. One current project is to try to make a UFO-type propulsor small enough for a man in a spacesuit to wear it on his back; if they let a man in only a spacesuit take off from Earth to space and fly far otherwise unaided, and become common, men so equipped look like becoming another factor hard to control.

## LIFE MUST GO ON

Where SHADO's authority ends in space and on the ground has still not been defined properly. Now that everybody knows about SHADO, I get sent or offloaded all sorts of space matter that is currently outside my remit. Much of it is such things as asteroid miners stray-landing trading bypassing Customs and picking up new men without telling anyone official, and the like, but variations occur. One day about 1pm my office phone rang.

"Hull docks police here. There's six dockers here, they say they're really London business reps who were space-abducted. They persisted, their stories all agree, they seem sober and look like sensible types. Sounds like the sort of thing that you better handle directly while we get on with our work."

"Oh no, another thinking that SHADO is 'Send Here All Doubtful Observations', ever since our secrecy was blown." I replied irritably, "OK, put them on the line." I sighed. By then I was tiredly expert in distinguishing real abductions from the result of hallucination-causers such as drink and drugs and insanity, and getting too close to a 'fairy' so the electric field round it causes amnesia and overwrites his memory with religious or fictional cultural background junk from his subconscious according to his upbringing.

"I'm Mr. Baxter." said one of them, "There's 6 of us. That lot went too far. Not content with showing off in alien-type spacesuits and spaceships, now they space-abducted us like some say aliens do, and made us do a lot of heavy manual work for them, when we went to them to finalise some business.". He gave their names and addresses and details in a rough-sounding voice in an awkward mixture of workman and formal businessman that did not sound quite right for merely a workman type pretending, "It was a space expedition with a clutch of UFO's run by a man called René Leroux, exploring and prospecting. We're (or were) in E & J Enterprises Ltd." and gave an address and phone number, "They sent us to discuss some business with Leroux's bunch, who enticed us on board their UFO's and were up and away with us. That was 7 months ago. They let us radio-phone our families to say that 'we were off on an expedition' and that was all. You're supposed to be the UFO people, I want something doing about it. Kept away from our jobs and personal lives for 7 months, made to do heavy manual work, given a lot of muscle that we don't want and scares people off. They dumped us here early this morning and made us help them load up supplies and were gone back to space again."

'There is no new thing under the sun, only new versions of old things.' some say. Yes, back to that again. Long before spaceships were heard of, sea ships abducted, often when wanting crew. Navies had official press gangs; trading ships had their own ways, and often in those days before modern police and radio a landsman in a port town would wake from a sleep drug put in drink to find himself at sea as crew on a ship.

I told him to hold while I rang E & J and an assistant radioed for Leroux. Both were contacted and linked in, making the phone call 4-way. "For 'UFO' read 'UTC', as usual, all these comings and goings till I can't tell who is what." I thought tiredly yet again. Our recent logs had recorded the landing.

"All right, we did." said Leroux from several million miles from Earth via two remote relay satellites, sounding as if he had been in liquid-breathing mode recently as well as the acoustic effect of a closed space helmet, "When we were setting up, we were busy, so we trusted E & J to find some of the supplies and members we needed. We foolishly 'sent cash up front'. They stalled and stalled sending the supplies and men, but wanted it tying in with a deal

for us to bank our money with them to finance a share trading plan. We refused. They stalled and said sorry-but. I'm sick of how society's got. Everybody wants to trade; nobody wants to get their hands dirty. We started legal proceedings to get our money back. They called the payment this and that sort of fee and said more sorry-but and got a fancy lawyer to make as much delay as he could, but started moving, at least they started sending teams of agents, and brought in so much financial this and that that it was worse than a computer hardware manual to understand, and negotiations dragged on, and we had to leave other work to do everything ourselves. In the end and all their bloody sorry-but, our patience snapped. When their next lot of city slickers in fancy Savile Row business suits came with that business manner of speech that I can't stand, we let them come onboard and were up away with them. That was 7 months ago. OK, we did it. It was their fault telling lies and holding our money hostage like that, bloody lot of financier smooth asses when they knew full bloody well that we needed supplies and working expedition members and not wasting our time with City stuff."

I quickly sent my computer through some files. That cleared up one group disappearance that we had been routinely sent a copy of.

"Just like SHADO and various CIA-type Earth bodies 'eliminated difficulties' in the past, as it came out in all that in the papers and TV recently;" said Baxter, "they say they dislike such bodies; now they imitate them. First night onboard, our stuff vanished as we slept, and instead we found overalls with the ship's badge and our names on, and work gear like the rest of the men had, and 'if you don't work, you won't eat.'. On the first likely planet we found, we had to help them clear jungle and dig down to rock that the geologists wanted. The surface was so deeply weathered that we had to dig a bloody long way down to find sound rock, making us use full-weight rockdrills at once all day and heave boulders about and uproot trees and work as hard as they did. Don't we know miners' and geologists' words all too well now! If I offered them money to try to come to an arrangement they called it 'giving lip' and told us to carry on.", and described what they went through getting used to steady manual labour under a foreman and suchlike.

I could tell that his voice and mind, and likely hands, were roughened by the hard work and training that he had been put through. This is another sort of thing that I was expecting and not wanting: action-minded men out in the wilds away from ability to call on central government, taking the law into their own hands, later starting remote settlements made largely of manual workers and accustomed to self-rule and not liking losing it when authority reaches them in strength, rather than none at all or as one 'law-man' who has to wear every official hat in the area. But indeed so the USA started; so even England started long before that, when Anglo-Saxons invaded post-Roman Britain and took over and their war-leaders called themselves kings.

"We all did our share of the manual work, including me." said Leroux, "It was them started it, holding our money hostage and delaying us to make us risk it in their financiering about. We found in the end it was 'cos someone else invested money with them and 'stead o' keeping it safe till the share deal they invested it on and lost it when something went bankrupt and now they're in a blue funk to pay the money back on top of paying for the share deal again. Finance and that sort of City stuff is a quagmire and a shark pit, I keep out of it. We're spacemen and miners, not some City firm. *Someone's* got to get their hands dirty and make and get the raw materials for all the fancy stuff that you office types use and rely on, including for your computers and things that you process finance stuff on, and they just treat us as the next lot of money lenders to trick money out of and never pay it back. Pioneering in the wild out

here we need workers, not paper-pushers."

"And when they had slack time waiting for weather to blow over they thought it was clever to give us a lot of riotsquad training and also docker training, 'giving us a useful trade' he called it, turning us into waterfront thugs. To be expected with that Leroux coming from a waterfront family. Tricking us onboard like sea sailors used to. At last we got back to Earth. We'd put so much muscle on from the work that when they at last gave us our clothes back, none of them fitted, including our good business suits. I suspect also they used anabolic steroids on us, like some body-builders use. If we bought new office suits we'd look like night club bouncers, not at all the thing to make customers confident. That lot of roughs don't know what a presentable suit is. To them 'suit' means 'spacesuit'. We said 'what about being paid for all this work', and he said 'I'm paying you the money your boss cheated off us and never gave us back, get it off him.'. They gave us Hull dockers' issue overalls they'd got hold of from somewhere, and dumped us here about 5 a.m. with our stuff in backpacks, and a set of docker's tools each. And on the way in they'd rung the docks the previous day and told a foreman we were a new work gang for them, and the foreman put us unloading a ship all morning and we were told to join some workmen's union *and* to join the docks turnout squad that they keep in case there's trouble in the area, and we've only just got away and found the police. One of my great grandfathers was a docker, but nobody since in my family."

"I know we did. The average age of dockers goes up and up because they get next to no good young entry because everybody's kept at paperwork in school all day every day far too long and when they're finally out and can get jobs it's too late and they can't take proper work, only paperwork, and instead of doing the work waste their time city-slickering about scrounging off people. Same as the trouble the Army has getting good young entry nowadays. We turned them from something useless into something that we and the area needs."

"Oh is *that* what happened!? I demand that something is done about that lot." said a Mr.Sinclair at E & J's, "Abducted or enticed, the effect's the same. Six good reps gone and I had to replace them. I thought there was a law against kidnapping. I thought your lot were paid to *stop* space-abduction."

"And against tricking us into sending them cash up front and then holding it hostage like that to try to tie us up in a lot of damn useless pinstriped parasite financiering about instead of letting us go and look for metal ores that Man needs like our job is." said Leroux.

"Turning good reps into that class of dangerous thug." said Sinclair, "There are three things not to trust: a dog which is half wolf; security men who have been paratroops; workmen who can batoncharge. And those space-roughs think the change is an improvement."

"Yes, we do." said Leroux, "I've known office types use up ten times as many man-hours writing reports and memos about how to do something than they would have used putting overalls on and getting the job done and over with."

"If we've been replaced, what happens when we get back to work?" said Baxter.

"Sorry, but ..." Sinclair started.

"Oh indeed? That's all you bloodyfool business bosses are," Baxter replied angrily, his tone changing, "after all we've been through, sorrybut, sorrybut, same as whenever we asked you for a holiday, and after being used as spacemen and navvies trucked about in that Leroux's bloody unnatural UFO's now here we are stuck here as dockers. I could tell Leroux's men were getting stuffy about your tactics with them, I warned you, but you wouldn't listen. Like when John Melksham was off four months with a broken leg and when he came back you'd sacked and replaced him sorrybut and never mind he'd got a family to support. Just let us at you and

your board with our new training and kit."

The argument went on for a bit longer, then ended as Leroux's ships got out of radio range, and they are still out there somewhere; he presumably knows that he is liable to criminal charges for false imprisonment etc if caught. My desire to keep law and order in space clashed with sympathy for work spacemen hindered by office men: over years of getting stuff for SHADO's space work I have had my own troubles and rows with office types. Later the six came to my base; our psychiatrist found them 'sane, but with an aggressive waterfront mentality very different from what is described in the interview reports of when E & J's employed them', and I wondered just where Elliott had got his retraining techniques from.

But, about setting up remote settlements, I have read enough fiction where Men settle Mars and later official or business insensitivity and political attitudes culminate in a Mars War of Independence, not to care for that option either; but Man is in space, and it will not be easy to bring the past back. However much a controlling group tries to enforce isolationism, it is unlikely that Man's exploring itch would be kept in check long, now that so many people know FTL technology; groups would form expeditions anyway, and if blocked may build spacecraft furtively or turn to armed defiance; the controlling group may well turn from controlling and only authorizing what is necessary and start exploring for its own sake, particularly if it included men from the world's many minor FTL users. Any ISAB to General Henderson's plans will have to be formed and armed massively and fast to be able to get total power over near space, for the FTL users also know this and are coordinating and arming themselves, and ISAB would be much likelier to get a long expensive war than a quick cleanup. Or we will have to join the FTL users' association, even if it means being in the same meetings as that Zlíkhakhâriv from Bitterfeld and that Keghdin from Huancayo and the rest, and turn it into an ISAB by gradually changing its attitudes from within. For what we thought was Man's best interests we tried to stop the public from knowing that UFO's and aliens and FTL travel are real, and I and SHADO are demonized now the truth is out.

And the space-longing still comes on me. NASA did more to me than perhaps they intended, ordering me out afar leading that expedition, for a restlessness still comes on me after too long in my command office guarding Earth's perimeters, and local affairs no longer satisfy me fully. At a staff meeting someone started another hare about Zeta Reticuli, and I tried to brush it off and get my men back to duty; but it brought the yearning on full power again, to wear a spacesuit and lead spacecraft, and be the first to land on any planet those two stars had, whatever the cost of me being away from my office that long, for the ancient vacuum's awesome vastness called me; I heeded little the talk of dinners and city pleasures and music and women and world affairs, but only the empty distances. Little do those content with life on the ground know how it is to those with the space-longing. That evening an unscheduled UFO came in, and I found myself no longer wanting to summarily destroy it but to be at its controls exploring afar or at least to meet its crew and find where they had been and what they had seen. It proved to be human asteroid prospectors coming for supplies. I remembered a poem called 'The Seafarer' written long ago by an Anglo-Saxon with a sea-longing, that I had come across: it describes at length cries of cold-winged seabirds and hardships of long voyages in open craft in bad weather, "but ... / longing leaves me not, but leads me ever / out forth to fare, that I far from here / should find the lands of foreign peoples / ...". I found myself altering it: about being in a spacesuit for weeks and "... my longings lead me to the light-years / ... / to stride the worlds of strange beings / ...": but that sort of thing only made the need worse, and I tried to get back to work. The urge passed off slowly and reluctantly, but it passed off at last,

for that time; but certainly it will return some time. At least next time I need not look like an alien: a NASA-issue liquid-breathing spacesuit is being designed, with a different styling and helmet shape.

One of my men recently offered me a paper which was a history of Man's space history so far, but altered so that Man developed FTL technology unaided, and all aliens and alien craft that have contacted Men replaced by Earth men and craft who in later years would be famed as hardy pioneers much commemorated in things and places named after them. He was hoping that, even after all that has happened, time will heal and restore the old secrecy and disinformation. That would be easier if the aliens pull out of the confusion of purpose that has developed among them and go back to their old remoteness and non-contact, particularly if recent human help with medical techniques succeeds in making their raiding for transplant organs unnecessary at last. Is that sort of isolationist disinformation the future, or me having to go off on more long remote space-explorations, or what? If matters try to slide into a single World Authority controlling all of men's affairs despite popular opinion merely so it can control and then perhaps stop all human space activity, or reduce it to a very few contacts kept secret from Earth's public, I foresee a lot of trouble.

My secret side sometimes takes me to a Defence area at Warton near Preston in Lancashire, which some call 'Britain's Area 51'; I used to cover it by saying I was filming nearby. A busy day there ended so late that there was no point me going anywhere except into a sleeping bag in an office. "What *is* happening between the aliens that we see and their government back home?" I thought as I tried to get to sleep, "Will it even end with 'our aliens' having to fight beside us against a fleet from their homeworld trying to restore its central authority and its policy of non-contact and secret raiding?". I had at last got my film studios back: the aliens who NASA billeted there a while before without asking SHADO first had at last been found a place of their own with enough land for security perimeter away from cultists and curio-seekers: a shut-down Ministry of Defence ammunition factory near Preston. This had been suggested before, but I wanted to be sure that enough humans had been seconded to them 'to help them' to keep an adequate eye and ear on them. That was as far as I could go in the current public opinion climate on space matters, after thanks to the public UFO landings at Arden by Loch Lomond human space capability had suddenly opened out from the Moon being very expensive limit reach to being able to routinely explore many light years away. Time will show whether my base's grounds will stop being an unofficial spaceport. The secret committee that set up SHADO knew what sort of thing might happen if people at large were suddenly exposed to routine FTL capability: now it has happened.

Next day I had to chair a meeting to set up a system to coordinate between UFO / UTC pilots and Earth's air traffic controls, of all things, after all that I had fought for and against, sitting with aliens yet again, having to be polite to them, including having to call Khlívakaghd 'The Honourable Member for Derby North', not knowing whose transplanted organs may have been in them. I had to put up being saluted alien-fashion by some human space pilot trainees that visited from Mo i Rana in Norway. "Why don't we invite the aliens in for drinks!?" Freeman asked me sarcastically once when I suggested something that he thought was too permissive: I never thought it would happen in reality so soon. The more I hear alienese spoken by humans, the more often anything said in it tends to sound to me like a riotsquad commander's orders or action reports. There is no chance of human/alien halfbreeds: our and their embryo development control mechanisms are far too unlike for a hybrid foetus to develop.

"Aliens this, aliens that, so much even that in the last first aid booklet that I saw, the 'water in lungs' section listed 'alien-type spacesuit' as well as 'new-born baby' as special cases." one of the Warton staff said at an information exchange session while we were there, "I sometimes go to Conwy in north Wales, and look what they called a new children's day centre there.". He showed me a photograph of a 2-storey building front. On a large sign above the ground floor windows was 'Tĭbakhkkhvâran' in the Roman alphabet on the left and in alien writing on the right. Between them an AK47 magazine overlaid a steep rock slope, as a rebus spelling of the name. Around the words were spacemen and spacecraft human and alien above a cratered airless landscape. "I was hoping to get away from work and space for a while, and the signwriter made this! This should have been 'Ty Bach Chwaraeon', Welsh for 'The Little House of Play!' The people around aren't all pleased, they'd had all they wanted of space during 'all that' and afterwards."

"What did the man in charge actually tell the signwriter?" I replied.

"He said, 'Ty Bach Chwaraeon' and decorations appropriate', just that."

"And I take it the signwriter didn't know Welsh." I said, "Like recently I heard of someone showing someone an old hardhat diving suit and asking for a wall painting of 'this equipment being used in a suitable and useful way', but what he got was a painting of men in the suits with no lifelines or airlines but NASA-ish life-support backpacks in space asteroid mining. Yes, the signpainter thought they were an early type of spacesuit. What did he expect?, talking indirectly like that expecting to be understood in these days when to most people 'diver' means fins and a self-contained breathing set."

"The usual local signwriter did know Welsh but he had flu and passed the job on to a man he knew who came from Mackworth's the lorry trailer firm to mend council lorry trailers and he painted signs as a sideline."

"The Russians could tell you why: they use the same word 'skafandr' for 'spacesuit' and 'diving-suit'." my pilot Len Carrington said, "Talking about diving, that self-appointed 'sea patrol' at Hayle's been caught, and three bunches imitating them have quietly shut down. They tried it on eight divers who were all cops, from Bristol police station diving club, and that electric-prodded someone in authority into putting a stop to it at last. Two of the men in the 'sea patrol' turned out to be local cops themselves. Three weeks ago when I was near there, 'Ack Keggy' came in his UTC with two inflatable boats strapped to its roof, sure a new way to take people on a diving trip; rather a surprise, they'd expected a minibus. It got them there so quick they got two more dives in that day."

"Mackworth's?" said someone, "Making a mongrel name between 'Mack' and 'Kenworth' [two makes of USA lorry] they're risking lawsuits from both."

"No. It's a British firm, in a place called Mackworth near Derby, the place has been called that for centuries."

Derby. I had gone there many times to consult with the minister Sir Alexander Battersby who had been MP there. Mackworth is a village and a suburb on the northwest edge of Derby. "Derby North." I said grimly, for Derby now had something far more exotic and ominous than merely two suburbs called New Zealand and California (but the residents do not use those names much), "That 'Clive Ecky's constituency. That alien Khlĭvakaghd Ekhkukhvâranib who came with that prefabricated space kit factory that they set up there during all that sensation and pro-alien frenzy after the Loch Lomond landings. Why the %\$@ did Britain decide to have a general election in the middle of all that!? Alientown. SHADO lost a vital supporter when that UFO-naut ran for MP there and turned Battersby out. A year ago he'd have been

routinely summarily evaporated along with his UFO by a missile from one of my Interceptors, and the public wouldn't know about it, until those clever-dick contactee students designed new weapons for them. Straight for one of our main props he went like a missile hit on a power station. Easy to guess where local sympathy lies, if you saw some of the floats and costumes in that works's last annual carnival. Ditto later that AkhkakhvandeK Kegdumighd at Westhoughton. If that second volley of missiles on that December 2nd hadn't blown those four aside to safety this whole bloody matter would have ended before it started splattered up the side of a glen in the Highlands with no leak to the public and no harm except fuel and missiles expended and a forestry plantation set alight."

"What UFO abduction cases have there been reported recently?" someone asked.

"The usual amount of hallucinations." I said, "Two cases of shanghaiing for crew by stray-landing asteroid miners: one was the Elliott case. The other was a UFO that came in to RAF Leuchars but its crew were all human, they were a bailiff and a writ-server and two assistants who'd tried to recover debts off someone but he rang an asteroid miner friend of his who was home and the miner and his mates came and overpowered them and sleep-injected them and took them on board split between separate ships. Back to that old risk of being in a seaport before proper harbour police started. Eleven weeks later prospecting on Enceladus [a moon of Saturn] they managed to slip away from work together and steal a ship and get home. Interceptor 6 had to use a missile as a man-rider to put a man on board it to land it on Earth for them, couldn't trust it to get closer or dock with him in case it ran into him because nobody in it was a good enough pilot, and that left it with one less missile when the miners' other ships came chasing, but they backed off without shooting."

"I see two more papers have front-paged the Ormskirk abduction and one's asking why SHADO isn't doing something about it." said a local man.

"I sent someone to ask round the area." I said, "That Stephen Peterson who disappeared, his home atmosphere had been bad for some time. I say it's an ordinary teenage runaway when one of those secret black triangular aircraft from here that people see and think they're are a sort of UFO happened to be around, plus drink and imagination and his father Peter who started all this stupid chase-about can't see his own faults or admit he was the cause. He'd been kept under tight control like a small boy and punished for the least fault or complaint until 'the worm turned' and he loaded up and ran. A fair number of teenagers do 'run away to space' and find it's not all excitement after all, nothing to do during long flights across emptiness and then bouts of hard work. His father's car that went missing with him's turned up at a dealers in Oxford: he must have run away in it. Total waste of our time. Our job's patrolling in space, not doing the Council welfare's job."

"Black triangles - you shouldn't have let that out. There's at least three people here not security-cleared to know about that." said a local officer.

"I know and I don't care." I said irritably, "You lot were a bloody long time admitting even to me that they were British human craft, and only after three of those new fast fighters of mine chased and damaged one that time. I've wasted too much fighter time and fuel chasing them and 'fairies' and suchlike while genuine UFO's came in safe and landed."

"What happened about that landing 3 days ago? I thought you and they'd more or less agreed that there were right places to land, not all over the place."

"There's so many uncoordinated groups and comings and goings that we can't keep track of all their craft." I replied. "Ten days ago three ships came in and Moonbase detected them; they didn't look like any Earth make but they had IFF's [= 'identify friend or foe']. Aliens are

quite capable of copying Earth IFF's, so Foster told an Interceptor to follow them in as far as it could and then sent two fighters up. They landed in a wood near Badby in Warwickshire in England and I sent two Mobiles there. It was aliens loading up, but after all our fuel used their load was only 23 of those pigs that transplant labs breed to have human-sized organs and human tissue-type genes genetical-engineered in. The crew had forms from NASA: little we could do except check their papers and warn them about going through usual channels. Many of the delays and handcuffs and countermandings that I and SHADO have to labour under boil down to NASA, always NASA, gone alienophile and wants interstellar craft at any cost now it knows they exist. One of the crew was a human and there was a human on the ground with a cattle lorry, they wouldn't say what their business with the crew was. What *is* going on between them and humans in league with them? Will that lot's loads always be only pigs? Once humans didn't get mixed up with aliens and I knew what was what and all UFO's were enemies to be shot on sight. The sooner ISAB is formed, the better."

"Any more ideas where they come from?" said Col.Freeman.

"That memorial ceremony of theirs." said Dr.Doug Jackson, one of my base staff, "I've seen it 3 times, and others have seen it at Arden and Huancayo and Magnitogorsk and other places. Usually they face the highest mountain in the area, but not always if there aren't a lot of humans watching. If you plot on star maps the azimuth lines of the directions they saluted at the latitudes and local sidereal times when they did it, the lines tend to cross around here, where Virgo and Corvus and Hydra meet." He opened a large star atlas.

"Yes indeed!" I said, "That Earth-viewpoint star map that we found in a UFO wreck, with the star HR4918 marked on it and a cryptic note in alienese beside it, which I can now decipher thanks to books written by contactees. Yes. HR4918! As seen from Earth it's nearly a degree north of halfway from Beta Corvi to Gamma Hydrae. Mag 6.31, a bit too faint to be in Norton's Star Atlas. RA 12 57 33.1, decl. -22 45 14 at AD2000 precession epoch. Spectrum class G5. If it's a main-sequence star it's about 400 light years away. That's a fair trip even for a UFO, I should know!, after where I've been and what I've seen, stuck in a spacesuit like theirs for nearly three months solid. The only thing else we know is what the returnees at Arden said about an asteroid base that they thought was in the Alpha Centauri system. Harvard University sent an expedition there 2 months ago in three UTC's and they're 5 weeks overdue back, all this casual tripping out there just what I didn't want to start."

That talk of far travelling set off in me another bout of the space-longing that my adventures with ESE4 started, but I fought it down. The image of me in a spacesuit exploring afar and never mind what work back home got left undone, receded slowly and unwillingly, but it did, and I got back to work.

Afterwards I set off along the M61 for my next meeting, in Nottingham. Such journeys take me past the long bulk of Winter Hill, known for its television mast, and over a ridge at Westhoughton. Westhoughton gives me the shivers, whether I pass it southbound when the ridge stands high over the flat bare land, or northbound when the road leaves built-up areas and there is a sudden view over emptiness. My opinion of the place is not helped by knowing of a coalmine disaster there in 1912 when 344 men and boys died and the matter was treated as routine. And there another group of aliens have set up a space kit factory, this time on old Coal Board land; many of their workers are ex-miners too thankful for the steady work again to be choosy about where their bosses came from. There AkhkakhvandeK Kegdumighd meets his constituents, an alien openly among men, where few had believed that such things were real. I was glad to get away from the place. As I reached the junctions north of Worsley, a

UTC (Earth-made UFO-Type Craft) flew over westward, now a routine sight. Instruments in my car confirmed its identity: it was registered with NASA; but I felt a loss and a collapse of a stand that I had been making.

At Stockport the motorway ran out, and I was back to the A6 through tedious suburbs and a succession of shopper-ridden villages and towns. As my dashboard clock ticked away valuable time as people and side road traffic crossed in front of me yet again, I thought of the still nonexistent Disley and New Mills and Furness Vale bypass whose lack had impeded SHADO badly once before all this when a UFO came in antilunar and landed near where I was headed, in hilly forest in Wootton Park between Cheadle and Ashbourne, and of a firing squad: it is time some of the horde of comfortable committeeing findings-referring councillors and civil servants were summarily court-martialled for aiding the enemy by not building a strategically important new road when they could. The Ministry of Defence told the police to cordon the area off as a 'dangerous chemicals leak'. The off-world craft's crew did whatever furtiveness they had come for as my Mobiles' drivers stared hopelessly at a road-navvying sewermen's red traffic light at unannounced roadworks in Bridgemont near Whaley Bridge. Once in Ealing in London later I had to be helicopter-snatched out of a traffic jam. As my Mobiles approached Wootton for the badly delayed long search, the UFO took off vertically, but luckily a SHADO jet fighter from Warton near Preston was near enough and routinely destroyed it with a missile before it could reach space, contents and crew and all in a white-hot fireball, leaving that time nothing to help other aliens or be a risk or inciter of unwise curiosity to men.

But not this time. After Buxton the A515 over flat moor is faster than the A6 through endless narrow winding dales. I passed Ashbourne. A mile after Brailsford my radio told me that the meeting was off, as the man who I was to see had been called elsewhere, leaving me away from base for no good purpose. The wind and my radio's background noise seemed to have an unreal tone as I dropped from Kirk Langley to Mackworth and Markeaton on the edge of Derby. There seemed to be an alien shadow over the quiet Midlands countryside. No need for instrument search; as a negation of all that I had set up and fought for a right turn sign said 'Derby (Mackworth) Spacefield, NDSP' and a picture of a UFO, plainly and ordinarily like any other road sign logo, pointing down Radbourne Lane, not now a country lane but ominously dual-carriagewayed. The first sign in alienese proved to be nothing more unearthly than directions to 'Makwath' and 'Mâkîtan'. I turned there and went along the edge of Mackworth suburb up to what the Ordnance Survey had named Mackworth Fields. Something had set up there. Enemies do not go away like wasps if you ignore them, and I felt that I had to risk the place. After turning right I passed a new small hotel to serve spaceport customers, with traditional English styling and bar licencee's name, but its name in flowing italics on a long board facing the road was, as a shocking intrusion of what SHADO had tried hard to keep away, 'Keghânuzgarikhk' (meaning 'Section-house [among] Trees'). Merely a fancy by its owner, but a sign of what was ahead. Later the name spread from the one building to a growing shop and service area by the access junction, and after road alterations the name 'Keghânuzgarikhk Roundabout' across the top of direction signs there.

I knew what was there, of course. I need to. I still sometimes consult with Sir Battersby, now in the political wilderness, still in his address in western Derby in the shadow of NDSP, North Derby Space Products, and the old and new workers' housing round it. He was crucial in opposing many who refused to believe that UFO's existed or that SHADO was needed. Why does he hold on there?, under an alien MP and a red-spacesuited alien councillor from that

factory, yet more exotica among the Islamic and Indian and continental names that appear everywhere. Once when I was there to visit him I saw an NDSP works procession: first in it was a total affront to all that SHADO had stood for down the years: an alien in a red spacesuit, not 'Clive Ecky' but one of his associates, openly drove a large articulated lorry with an NDSP logo carrying not an Earth-made UTC (UFO-Type Craft) but a UFO made beyond space. And signs duplicated in alienese, as on the road that I followed to whatever was on the flat hilltop. As I passed Skitteridge's Wood and the watertower along the hill edge I saw the place.

Fields Farm was gone. The wood and scrapmetal shop was gone. It was as Ringway or Heathrow had been in their beginnings, a cluster of sheds and buildings at one edge of a field, and security fencing all round. But many of the craft there were circular and came and went far farther than anything Man had designed. "Do not kekhâg over main roads or built-up areas except in an emergency" one sign said in both languages in pilot jargon, telling pilots not to use a particular navigation aid which is liable to stop anything electric in the area. My car phone rang. It was Clive Ansberg, a member of the committee that formed SHADO. After we had checked each other's identities, he asked me where I was.

"That spacefield on the north edge of Derby, that NDSP place that the road signs already call 'Derby Spaceport'. I was passing going to Nottingham to see a Mr. Peter Baxter who then was called away. Will this take long?"

"Thankyou. Park there and wait. I'll come for you in a UTC marked 'PCE #4' and 'Navy!'."

"My car ...".

"It'll have to stay there. Just wait for me there."

"What's this about? Can't we discuss it by phone? I've got a lot on. I could think of better places than a UFO-ery in 'Clive Ecky's' manor to have to hang about in alone and known instead of getting back to my office when I could have gone straight down the M6 and M5 to my office since I'm not needed in Nottingham after all. To think this was once Sir Alexander Battersby's seat and an important supply area for SHADO."

"It's the same matter as Peter Baxter was called away about. I'll tell you the rest when I arrive."

I parked inside the security fence and waited. Birds sang in hedgerow trees. Mechanics poked about in vehicles and spacecraft. A shut-in or shut-out dog started barking continuously somewhere. A white Cessna aircraft spluttered exhaustily, revved, taxied from behind three UTC's, and took off southwest. Someone passing in the road recognized me from a newspaper and said so. I went back into my car and radioed my office and tried to keep up with events there. A UTC landed, but not the right one. Once, such a craft landing would have been the sensation of the country for a week and in paranormal events files for a century; now the people in Mackworth suburb treated it as routine as a lorry arriving, although people from outside came along the road to watch. Its pilot wore an overall and a building site helmet and need not have come any further than from NDSP's works. Birds sang. The dog made a pained yelp and shut up. A kestrel flew down from a tree, sat on something on the ground, and put its head down to feed. Finally Ansberg's UTC came in. It had some sort of underbelly clip-on pack inside a plastic cloth cover. As it landed I radioed my office for someone to take my car home. The kestrel flew off with something with a long stringy tail dangling from its claws. I ran to the UTC and got in, and it took off north-northwest along the Pennines.

## PROXIMA CENTAURI

"You're to lead another expedition." Ansberg told me, "This one's mostly USA Marines and Navy men. 60 UTC's, all armed. Search for alien bases. It's time we checked up on them a bit. First I'm going to Arden to pick someone up, then straight to Area 51, and I don't mean that science fiction bookshop in the Emporium in Oldham Street in Manchester."

"Sounds serious. I've never been in there. Why me again? I've got work to do back at my base. Why wasn't I told first?"

"Orders. Security. You know as much about space combat as anyone."

The Pennines became the Southern Uplands of Scotland. Through a porthole I saw the upstanding bulk of Ettrick Pen among the nearly empty hills. Finally lower land started and we crossed Glasgow and the Kilpatrick Hills and Loch Lomond to Arden. The low land in the mouth of Glen Fruin was grossly changed from a few years ago. The spaceport had developed by itself. No human committee had signed authorization to put it there. The two Auchentullich farms and the patches of wood were gone, swept away by spacecraft standings and helipads and runways and hangars and accommodation and service buildings. The Fruin Water had been straightened and canalized through the site. The top end of the triangular lowland was a dry dam-lake; in time of flood risk its sluice would be shut to catch the worst of the floodwater and any flood debris. Radar and *kekhat* scanners stood on Shantron Hill to the north and Ben Bowie to the south. Someone on the lakeside road's BBC radio reception faltered as the UTC came in and set down between some buildings. Two USA Navy officers with backpacks and carrying tied-up AT (= alien-type) spacesuits with NDSP maker's labels got in. I remarked "Once that would have seemed a strange mixture, but not now; but when ever will our own design of deep-space suit be ready instead of us having to look like the enemy?". We took off west over the coastal mountains and the Hebrides and away west to sea.

He sealed ship and arced up into space for a quicker journey. We had to live on the air in the cabin for the journey. The sun went back into the east fast as we ran far above ocean and the land beyond. "We've had complications about spacesuits." he said, "Those new NASA ALBS, that's 'Air or Liquid Breathing Switchable', spacesuits are on issue at last, but we've had a lot of teething troubles with them, after all the dollars they've spent on them. I know they had to be styled unlike AT suits, we here are sick of everybody looking like aliens, but if you ask me, they redesigned too much from scratch and tried to put too much fancy stuff in them instead of starting with the AT design which has been in use for centuries and just changing what they had to. Several times I had to 'call out' the development team for being too ingenious making parts with too much to go wrong in use. And after all that we need a version armoured against small-arms and laser fire. With modern light strong materials I thought that'd be easy, but it made more delay."

"Yes," I said, "like in Apollo times when NASA spent a million dollars developing a pump-action writing pen that worked weightless, while the Russian spacemen used ordinary pencils."

"I know," he said, "and out there where's the shop to get spare parts? No wonder civilian UTC men read press reports and stick to AT suits and often won't trust any change, sometimes not even in what colour it is. Bitterfeld make good AT suits, life-support gear as good as alien-made, and the carcass stronger. Then Bitterfeld brought out an armoured AT suit called AAT, and it's tested out OK, and that's the issue suit for your men here. We bought a few and copied them here: sorry about the patent laws, but us buying in all those armoured suits would

be too much of a clue and too hard to cover up for."

"Its patent may have time-expired long ago. Three years before all this blew up something had been coming out of the sea grabbing men from boats and fishing villages round Brittany, even charging into houses. Whatever it was was immune to bullets. A priest tried to exorcise it. Didn't do any good, but it got in the papers. I sent a sub there, and it torpedoed three submerged UFO's. They'd come in during a meteor shower. The sub found debris including remains of spacesuits different from their usual suits. We bought a Bitterfeld AAT suit recently to try it out, and it was the same. In summary, I'm to look like an alien again. Talking about Bitterfeld, that alien Zlîkhakhâriv there's gone. He said he'd trained enough successor pilot-trainers here and he and Keghdin from Huancayo had a big job waiting away in space somewhere and they took a ship and flew away together. Khlîvakaghd in Derby says his four have had an offer like that, but they'd rather stay where they are."

We landed in a wide desert between mountains, dotted with runways and hangars and dry salt lake beds, and tufts of tough desert grass. This is Area 51. In there were many secrets including the labs that had found how to make FTL drives and not told SHADO until too late; some there thought that, after stopping the alien raiding, we also would slide from patrolling to exploring and burden Earth with a space effort expanding indefinitely. The area was nearly as barren as Mars - I should know, I had been to Mars. It was early morning there. He offered me a meal.

"I've already had fish and chips at a takeaway trailer back at Mackworth, and I want to get to work first." I said, realizing that I was going to have to face the same day twice without a night between and then jet-lag, "Where are the men who'll be under me?"

He showed me. 200 pilots and navigators and 4000 space-assault troops were drawn up in a new design of uniform. I divided 4200 by 60 and realized that I was going to have to select the best instead of taking them all. But at last I was in charge of the situation in space for the first time since 'all that' blew up. I was ordered to train them all fully and select at the end.

Textbooks of the aliens' language were needed. Some contactees had written such a book competently, but SHADO had had to make and photocopy a version altered to remove pro-alien and anti-SHADO sentiment in exercise sentences and even while explaining that when used in their language the word changes to "Shadwa-" before suffixes by analogy with some native words of their language. A long translation exercise describing Zlîkhakhâriv and Ighdavûyak's rearguard stand against the four USAAF jet fighters also had to go.

Training started, and continued over the weeks. This should have been done long ago, if I had had FTL capability in time. Nothing much interrupted it. I was allowed to keep in contact with my office but not to say where I was. Many of my jobs were familiar, such as censoring the men's outgoing letters. After a month I had to forbid all mail out after a strange reference to being 'among the dry lilies' showed that some were resorting to tricks to sneak information out: 'li' is Roman for '51'. One then complained that his marriage was at risk because of this lack of communication. One of the base officers phoned the man's wife and 'ripped her off a strip' barrack square fashion for not realizing that things outside the household matter sometimes. She realized.

One night I dreamed that fictional alien robots called Cylons were strafing the area, and woke to a thunderstorm. Reality was as unwelcome as the dream, for we had enough to do without coping with a desert flash flood. It was nearly as black as night. Lightning flashed round the barren mountains and the radar and radio masts. Seven inches of rain dumped on the area in five hours drummed on aircraft and spacecraft and sluiced down hill gullies into the

plain and found no proper channels to carry on along. Everybody scrambled to shut windows before rain blew in and wet papers and computers. Sheet wash armed with sand and stones went where it would. Groom Lake filled. Base staff prayed that all the underground silos would be watertight. By teatime the sky had cleared and the storm was over except the mopping up and cleaning up. A government man due in that day had to come in a UTC instead of his personal executive jet because of flood wash deposits and water on runways. But we got over it. Over the next week long-dormant seeds germinated and the desert was briefly green and covered in flowers. Training and preparation went on.

Again I ran into the decades-enduring brainwashing pervasion of Star Trek and such which after the Arden landings helped to fuel the massive pro-alien public excitement and all that it led to. I forbade all space fiction from the leisure rooms, but most of the men had watched such stuff earlier; after being variously exposed through childhood and teenage to tractor beams, teleporting, 'shielding', and suchlike, suddenly being on real armed interstellar ships they of course knew that real technology was less, but on a battle simulator stress of emergency too often brought out long ingraining of the nonexistent and such things as being able to be beamed out of traps and ambushes, and it would have needed more time and effort than I could spare then to train it out. Such men's files had to be marked 'unsuitable for space command', and again I cursed the Arden contactees and wished for weapons as in the stories; the only real 'photon torpedo' was a common asteroid miner nickname for a small work craft for two men in spacesuits to ride astride, that had been recently developed.

"So far we have kept away from their bases." I said to my men assembled by our spacecraft on the last afternoon, "Now we go against them in strength, at least as a display of force to show them, and factions on Earth, that we can still act effectively, and after our first scrape with them you will thank me that I made you all train the same and ignored all pleas and papers claiming exemption from combat training.". It was the first English they had heard or read for a while except letters from home: for the last several weeks they were under orders to use alienese for all base and training and personal matters, to get fluent with it. Some had complained about this, but it had to be done, as in any combat they may need to understand quickly first time anything that enemy personnel may say and any enemy written matter, and as any of them may need to interrogate captured enemy personnel quickly; and they might even might end up having to control a large population of aliens. After this they sang a rough aggressive song that they had written in both languages about what they wanted to do at the place of action, and I joined in.

Their ships stood behind them, still covered with camouflage sheeting, many more than in the ESE4 exploration. They were the usual UTC shape, and they all had underbelly missile packs, improved and with various sorts of missiles in. Larger FTL craft of different shapes were on various drawing boards but as far as I knew were not yet being made. 60 such ships were many more than I had hoped to have. This changed matters. I shut my eyes and saw them as the jeeps and fighter-bombers that had last let desert-edge people chase raiding Bedouin farther and faster than a horse or camel could go, or other new kit that had at last given defenders mastery over raiding gangs. This time all the men had trained together for four months and I was commanding a proper space navy and not a university department on a space tour. Peter Stamford, an astronomer who I knew from ESE4, was there, now a qualified astronavigator, and he had trained with the rest. I called base security to back me up for a last and thorough kit inspection and body search by me and some base officers, ignoring the predictable moans as a confiscations bin filled with alcoholic drink (reason obvious), smoking

materials (air fouling in small enclosed places), chewing gum (scruffy vice and liable to make speech unclear and lip-reading impossible at the wrong urgent moment), gambling kit (causes trouble), and unauthorized personal diaries (security risk if captured). Cameras and film and blank videotapes accumulated in another bin and were added to ships' stores if suitable.

"You can have that steak dinner some of you ordered at the base restaurants. Eat up and back on duty by 1900 hours. Soft drinks only." I said.

"But we've booked that place for the evening, dancers and ...".

"And have to set off short of sleep and all hands drunk or hungover. That's not happening here. I've known cases in the air force on nights before going away, any excuse to get drunk, when men even asked to be put in the punishment block for the night because that was the only place they'd be let go to bed early and a good long night's undisturbed sleep before an early start and a long busy day. Anyway, takeoffs at 2130 hours tonight."

The sun got lower. A heavy haze stopped nosy public from spying from mountains outside the perimeter with powerful astronomical telescopes such as the common 10-inch Celestron which by day when the astronomer has nothing better to do can read a car number plate 3 miles away. We unsheeted the ships and loaded up and checked our stores and weapons. The thin crescent moon set. 17 minutes before planned takeoff my radio beeped.

It was Ansberg: "You complained about having to leave so many good men - well, you can take them all after all."

"I can't. They plain simply won't fit in! I'd have to carry them on top in cargo nets or something silly like that."

"Oh yes they can. Go to silo 3A. Try not to lose them or break them."

I drove two miles to the base of a mountain. A pair of huge steel doors had opened. Something was coming out on a huge many-wheeled platform. It was black and as big as an aircraft carrier. It bore identity and unit codes and the name 'Kaminski', after my pilot who died in Interceptor 3 on that fateful day. Another followed it: it was named 'Turton' after a pilot of mine who died earlier when his Interceptor, damaged by UFO laser fire already improved by the human Arden contactees, crashed in Sinus Medii on the Moon. This changed matters; my fleet now had power to match its men's readiness. Crew to navigate them and handle their weapons had been trained separately and were already on board. With their angular crystal-like shape and special coating they were well stealthed against radar, "no more signature than a Cessna" unless the radar was perpendicular onto a 'facet'. I and the other fleet command men took three hours exploring them and meeting their crew and learning about their abilities. I chose Kaminski as my command ship, with my previous choice of command ship UTC #0 onboard it as a shuttle.

A little after 1.30 a.m. we took off straight up and away from the ecliptic plane and roaming nosy asteroid miners' radar, looping round south later. The journey was short by UTC standards; a few years ago its destination was proverbially hopelessly far beyond man's reach. Away from the Earth's shadow the men marvelled at the two new ships and felt much stronger, as alterations to their action song showed. Further from sunlight they showed as little but a gap in the stars. The fleet sped on through emptiness.

"Alpha Centauri's coming near. I wonder what we'll find on its planets after all the space stories I've read." said one of my men.

"No hope of *that*." Peter Stamford replied, "As you can well see naked eye by now, it's a double, about 20 AU's apart, and doubles don't have planets, the varying gravity field as the two orbit each other'd soon throw any planet off into space or make it fall into one of the stars,

unless it's a very long way out like that faint red star Proxima Centauri: that's it over there. Pity: from their spectrums they've got twice as much metal proportion as our Sun, and any Earth-type planet here'd be rolling in metal ores. No planets, no asteroids: anything artificial orbiting them'll be easy to find unless it's very small or it's been stealthed against radar somehow. There's at least one asteroid orbiting Proxima close in, if those returnee students that caused all this were shown the truth."

"Yes, I know." I said, and ordered, "Until further notice: Tight-beam radio only, or come close and pass a communication wire. That includes spacesuit radios. Scramble codes as program 4. Codewords always to be used for things in the codeword list. No alienese words to be used, for example an ES1 type sensor is an ES1, not a kekhâg. Unless you have to use their language to interrogate any of them."

Proxima gradually grew into a glowing red ball, faded-looking like the Sun seen low through dust-haze. A small planetary system huddled close in to it; anything remoter had been long ago perturbed away by the two big stars. It was still a lot to search among. But we knew something of where to go. I was starting to wonder how such a small system can have so many five-mile-long potato-shaped nickel-iron asteroids with three largish craters in a triangle on one end, when the navigator of UTC #7 saw an alien base and its artificial constructions. Nickel-iron from digging out rooms in the asteroid had been made into domed living and work areas, ship docking, and storage. Here far out of reach the insubstantial-seeming sky-strangers that raided remotely and left had permanence and a place to live. Here over four centuries ago repairmen had cut out and dumped Chiang Erh-wang's last message to his kin, scratched on a UFO's hold lining on the one-way road in an alien spacesuit as futilely as a frog scabbling at the lining of the stork's stomach which will soon digest it. And later my pilot Carlin's sister, and my pilot Regan's wife, and many others, all digested by the aliens' transplant operating theatres, and secrecy stopped me giving their relatives proof of death so they could collect life insurance and inherit property and know what had happened to their loved ones.

Each human death saved, at least for a while, several alien lives. But I am human and not neutral, and my feelings hardened again towards the sky-raiders destroying men's lives to save their own bodies from the end result of many generations of not having the courage to use force if necessary to stop their people with inherited defects from breeding. We were there, a short journey, an end of delaying and talking. It was France sailing against Algiers or Britain sailing against the South Arabian pirate states last century, or Ivan the Terrible marching on Kazan earlier, or the men of West Harlington village several years before we set up there taking up guns and homemade flamethrowers and homemade riotsquad gear against thieving gipsies and their slippery excuses which had refused gentler ways to move them on. The governments responsible would be for it if the pro-space-contact public found out. Since the old secrecy perished I was sick of looking over my shoulder at what misinformed public and sensationalizing and emotionalizing public media said, same as men taking their own action against a chronic nuisance have to keep an eye on the police.

I had another surge of anger at lost opportunities. I no longer thought of the stork's fine white plumage and its flying skill but its high-powered stomach dissolving hundreds of lesser lives each year. If that secret lab had told us its FTL discovery so we could design and make our own interstellar craft instead of miscellaneous unauthorized people buying them from the enemy, if those students had made those 'UBP' underbelly missile-packs for us and not for them, I could have done this years ago and saved the lives of the humans who they had abducted since. But at last I was there with a navy and 4200 hard combat-trained men and not

useless negotiators insisting on proper procedure and intellectuals venerating regardless anything from the beyond. Committees had loaded me with assistants and advisers and statistics collectors of unclear function and they expected an easy number and a desk, but they found themselves with a gun in a spacesuit with a backpack propulsor like the rest. Boots on floors and mechanical clicks as weapons were readied and tested sounded behind me. My men were eager for action, forgetting shivers at the black abyss of distance between them and home.

It was an easy takeover at Algiers last century, but not at Proxima this time. As we approached carefully, telescopes saw the fixed missile-guns, UFO's with underbelly missile-packs - and seventeen Interceptors like the three that I lost on that July 5th of dread memory but with improvements. If only I had had so many, some at orbiting bases away from the Moon - if a secret budget would have gone so far in making and refuelling them. Some say 'a spaceship's rocket motor is a ship's boiler furnace that needs banknotes for fuel': I have heard a fill of such accountants' talk versus saving human lives from raiders. I thought with thankful relief that we had gone there unnecessarily, that another secret space agency had already gone there and cleaned the place out. Then a powerful telescope at maximum magnification saw it was not so. All the craft were alien-made. Those defences were not there, or at least not visible, when those Arden returnees were there, although they were not allowed into all secret places. The aliens had used all too well their time since those students pushed them out of their old stasis, while Earth remained divided and indecisive. Seeing alien-made Interceptors aimed against our UFO-type craft was very shocking, and I yet again cursed the Arden contactees. Would the aliens in the base be friendly, or pretend friendship, or what? Are they genuinely reforming their ways and phasing out the raiding, or not?

Kaminski and Turton could soak up many small craft missiles, but some of the fixed missile launchers were a different matter. We had approached in radio silence from the direction of faint star areas in Antlia and the middle of Hydra where there was the least risk of any of our craft blocking an obvious star as seen by the base: they as well as humans likely look at the stars much when there is little else to do. From there the constellations look nearly the same as from Earth. In space stars do not twinkle, and an obvious star winking in and out would be noticed.

I kept Kaminski and Turton back, in line and head-on to the base, far away enough to be seen as only a third of a degree of arc wide black against black, and sent the UTC's forward. Alien craft came out and a confrontation started.

Inside, Ekhkinighd the new base-commander saw that the very worst was true of what interrogation had got from his sacked predecessor Pazdulaghg, on top of losing so many men and ships against SHADO. Even before recent events despite all security processing an engineer had tried to defect to Earth, taking much space technology information with him; he landed on the west coast of Ireland and was found and shot only just in time and at the cost of his ship and the pursuer's. Pleas to central for better weapons got nowhere. Tapping Earth phone satellites had managed to lure some human electronics and engineering students into a trap by a big lake, and as a bonus he also got some nosy scuba divers that turned up. A big catch, intended for the usual fate, but on top of many previous losses his ships that went for them had such a hard chase and narrow escape that when the abductees desperately or misguidedly offered to design weapons for their captors as they had been promised over the phone, he accepted.

Electronic jamming kit came first; it helped for a while. The students were too many and

some had no useful skill, but any harm to the surplus ones might have stopped the rest from cooperating, so he had to return the surplus, and the rest had to see them returned safely - at two public landings at Arden.

By then the rest had designed the UBP and made one from metals in the base, and it worked. Pazdulagh took most men off the now dangerous Earth run to asteroid mine for metals, and his workshops managed to make six more UBP's. He armed five ships with them on the next Earth run, and that was the end of my Interceptors. At last the supply of abductees improved and the ship and crew losses stopped.

Matters should have stayed like that, but two big public contact landings and having humans loose in his base talking about life back home weakened discipline and encouraged other contacts; subordinates of his started getting supplies from humans in exchange for non-strategic technology such as how to recover energy and metals efficiently from dilute dispersion in mixed rubbish, selective transplant immunosuppression, and suchlike; matters went too far and an engineer flight-testing a UFO deserted to Earth in it and this time was not stopped. Others imitated, and Pazdulagh learned the hard way what outside influences can do to an enclosed society. FTL technology found its way to humans. Unauthorized contacts multiplied, and he got by other ways what his superiors wanted, plus for a while many Earth-made new UFO's to replace the losses, until someone told the humans how to make their own FTL drives and that was the end of that trade and the start of a big threat. At last central called him to account, too late, and his successor had a SHADO FTL fleet on his doorstep able to cross the light years easily. Still, Ekhkinighd could see only ordinary UFO-type craft against him, and perhaps he could face it out or divert us into talking or come to an arrangement. His Interceptors and fixed defences readied their motors and missiles in defence of their base, even as mine did at the big alien attack soon after my Moonbase was built. The fleets manoeuvred as they approached each other. My fleet's computers assigned code numbers to the enemy ships.

What Ekhkinighd planned is unclear, but within five minutes there was a streak of light as EI.7 (E = enemy) fired at my UTC #25. There was a flash as the missile was stopped by a missile from my #37. The battle quickly became general. I called my UTC's back and sent Kaminski and Turton forwards. The two big ships' close-in defences brushed off small ships' missiles like stones off riotshields, and their heavy lasers disabled Interceptors and UFO's one after another like riot-police shooting stone-throwers. A fixed launcher missile was stopped nearer to Turton than I liked: it showed what we had to face there, if it was the most powerful sort that they had. I ordered each big ship to ready a 'Lucifer': that is a big missile with an unstable heavy-duty UTC drive block as warhead: wasted against small ships but an efficient base-smasher, but expensive, and as liable as a lesser missile to be damaged in flight by a counter-missile. A near explosion blew a segment off my #15's spinning equator girdle. Its onboard computer thought a moment, then a small built-in explosive charge blew a segment off 180 degrees away, evening the balance and stopping the dangerous vibration. Both big ships fired missiles into one of the base's missile launchers as it opened to fire. Something fused or distorted inside and jammed, and trying to fire its next missile set off a magazine explosion that blew away that launcher and two others and nearby compartments and opened corridors. That was the end. Turton stood guard while Kaminski went near and untelescoped a boarding tube into the damage. Its end found an intact bulkhead and blew a circular hole and auto-clamped an airlock on it, and started to pump troops into the base.

Men rushed into the base which no human had made, far older than most human

buildings, a place of technology far older than man's, seeking an enemy known before to most only as a phantom. Fighting went forward inside. Bullets bounced off our AAT spacesuits; door-bursting charges and blowtorches run off backpack cylinders cleared the way ahead. The defenders saw in their own base the SHADO badges on our helmet foreheads, a feared symbol known before only in reports from afar, and knew that their prey of millennia were striking back. Now my men were thankful for the weeks of drilling in the aliens' language, when they heard enemy orders and saw notices on walls and doors. The only resistance was from rifles and workmen's fire tools and an endless variety of sharp and blunt objects. Thrown or sprayed laboratory chemicals and a security squad's sleep gas did nothing against our spacesuits.

Outside, most remaining enemy craft fled into the distance and out of the Alpha Centauri system, the Interceptors with the rest, for they were all FTL; two self-destructed. EI.11 fired its last missile and tried to ram Turton but missed because of control damage; it turned and tried again, but my #34 shot it, and it fireballed. By now I was in the base with my men. A workman went for me with a plasma torch while I was aiming elsewhere, but I got away with only a heat-warped patch on my faceplate in fifteen seconds of grappling until someone broke his torch arm with a piece of metal strut, and I shot him. We reached the control room. A bazooka blast cut control links, and so they could not delete every copy of the base's log. Ekhkinighd surrendered to me in broken English, but spoke otherwise in his own language into a microphone. One of my men warned urgently, and two rooms away a twelve-foot propane-powered blast from a backpack blowtorch-flamethrower combination stopped an alien technician partway through a destruct sequence. The base was ours.

A wall map led us quickly to the medical area. My squad found an alien pilot naked, showering off long-trip spacesuit smell. His left arm was obviously a transplant, darker skinned and hairy and covered in needle tracks. "I thought so: they've been 'cesspool-emptying'." one of my men said grimly: somewhere on Earth after the contacts started a government had found its own disposal of a prisonful of hardened criminals. Uncontrolled criminalism can ruin an area and do far more harm than sporadic UFO raids ever did, and for a time I was unsure which side of the matter to support. After millennia free armed Earth men were for the first time at the end of the first stage of that ancient one-way road. Here Carlin's sister had ended, and earlier Chiang Erh-wang; many more had been sent to the homeworld. We ran on and interrupted a transplant operation. The donor was an alien, so we carried on, but one of my men called me back. The donor's info card read 'Keghdin Wankaywib'. Here Keghdin had been sent for betraying FTL technology secrets to humans, re-surnamed after Huancayo in Peru where he had committed many of the offences, after he had been enticed back to base and found too late that a new commander and new security men from central were reasserting the law there. His liver was out in a surgical basin and a digestive gland was partly detached. The alien staff tried to flee, but we held all the doors. A badge on one of them said he was a surgeon; I ordered him to patch Keghdin up, for Keghdin had told men much that now was letting us take the battle to the enemy's places.

In the next compartment the same long-hidden fate was happening. The donor's card named him 'Zlîkhakhâriv Biterfeltib'. We were in time, and he was undamaged. Many of my men were impatient at their time being used saving aliens from other aliens. I read from the card which anaesthetic he was under and told the surgeon to inject an antidote to it. To many of my men's shock the donor stood up woozily, saw our human faces under our opened AAT spacesuit faceplates, looked confused and shocked, saluted USA fashion, named himself in English as Peter Duclos, USAAF fighter pilot, and gave a serial number. Perhaps being among

humans on Earth for a long time had slowly eroded his mind reprogramming, and finally as with his flight mate Derek Allison an unexpected event woke his suppressed human memories, but at a luckier time. Later he was taken home, and difficult plastic surgery re-humanizing his appearance and mouth and throat.

The base's log was huge and told us much that had happened down the ages, and solved hundreds of disappearances old and new. I had heard of Pazhdulaghg before, from one of the Arden returnees; some of them had nicknamed him 'The Old Lag', but not in his hearing. I saw the place in a corridor where four baled-out pilots scooped out of the air in Vietnam got loose and tried to steal a UFO to fly home and fought and fell far from home. Personnel records listed as dead many aliens who I knew were alive: the four at NDSP, and Akhkakhvandeck, and Zbaldek and Khvâraqh, and many others, who had deserted their superiors and a lifetime of orders and tight control to choose their own livings as they saw humans doing when the contacts started. Mental stresses of coping with losses caused by SHADO had got too much for Pazdulaghg and his assistants, and they had clearly let matters get beyond them and covered up randomly in reports to central, more and more frantically, until his replacement had to try to tidy the mess.

In a lockup we found six asteroid miners, their leader an alien and the rest human, who my pilot Harrison had seen at Preston Docks. They had habitually called at the alien base to sell metals and buy supplies, until at their last call the old order was back and they were arrested. Two of them were now minus a kidney; it is clear what was planned for them. We let them have one of the base's UFO's to replace their own Bitterfeld-made UTC, which we could not find there, and to replace their tools from the base's stores. They were lucky; the Harvard University expedition's members, which were looking at asteroids near the base when Ekhkinighd took over, had been processed through the system.

We did not find the rest of the Arden students either. Records said that Ekhkinighd had sent them on to the homeworld to carry on their work, as others before, where they may still be working for the aliens, not knowing what was happening back home, and I knew that, hundreds of light years away where Earth and humans are not known of, UBP's and other devices designed by those humans could be blasting aside desperate costly defences put up by some far planet's natives against the sky-abductors.

Even before the Earth fleet interfered there 'the party was over' and the old remoteness and tight control was being enforced again, as we should have expected with a people living on so little homeworld resources; the aliens among us will have to choose between return to their own people and exile among humans. I wondered whether to garrison the base or to destroy it, perhaps using drive blocks of surplus or unsafe captured UFO's as demolition explosives. We repaired and manned all usable captured spacecraft, loaded the captured base staff into them, removed all weapons and equipment, and went home. I saw no point in waiting there to seize or contact their next transport in, for some of their craft got away and would have spread the alarm. If their central authority wants to treat with us for the prisoners or whatever, they will have to come to Earth for it.

We went home and landed by night where we took off from. I flew UTC #0 out of Kaminski and found Ansberg, who was at a remote hangar. He came back in it with me. "What's happened here? Baby been playing with the blowtorch?" he said about scribbles of laser damage on Kaminski and Turton. I reported what had happened, and unloading and repairs started.

"I'll need to send some of the men and fleet back there to garrison the base, we can call it

Base Proxima-A." I said, "I'll need ...".

"I was told not to allow that." he replied, "We didn't intend you to get into a big involvement like you did. All men and ships to come back to Earth. Expense and political considerations prevent leaving garrisons away for now. We couldn't keep it secret for long, and a lot would have to be done to stop it from being interfered with by popular opinion and anti-war groups. Some of the committees and agencies have important men in and will have things to say about you using their attachés as troopers not allowed to keep you within your remit or to report out. There have to be checks and controls: those men and their orders weren't just inconvenient handcuffs for you to get rid of at the first chance. Seven pocket computers that you confiscated off them, had secret stuff in and we want them back. Mister (not 'Private') Peter Clifden was one of them: the CIA wanted not him mentioned in dispatches in hospital with a plasma torch burn through his guts got saving common privates fighting for a gun position, but him ready for another assignment and the report on your activities out of sight there that he should have been allowed to collect and prepare. Well, what's done's done: you've cleaned that place out, many say it needed doing."

"It needed doing as soon as that lab here found how to go FTL instead of telling nobody and saying it was impossible."

"A garrison at Proxima would be merely somewhere else to have to defend expensively. If the aliens haven't done it already they can set up a new base at Barnard's Star, Wolf 359, Epsilon Eridani, or any other of many nearby single stars that may have asteroids, several times as hard to find now they knew they have to avoid risk of attack by humans, and looking for them all would get us into the expensive long-term space effort that we need to avoid. As you know, our Utronics sensors, and some sorts that we have learned off aliens, can see far, but not for light years as in some popular fiction. Only their carelessness of letting humans see the stars and the base's outside there and then returning them made it easy for you to find the place. The Alpha Centauri system is a very easy place for Earthmen to find that they are at by seeing the stars; not so other places."

"Then we better act quick and attack their central set-up straight." I said, "If they can't even make UFO hulls and engine casings routinely oxygen corrosion resistant for long, they're so near the end of their resources by the look of it that it'll have strained them even more doing what they have. Against what I've seen them with a proper armed SHADO FTL fleet with twenty or so ships like these two would clean the whole thing up as easily as army tanks crushing thieving vagrants' shacks and caravans. Particularly if we can find and team up with anyone else out there that's had what we've had. Never mind discussing considerations for ever while they build their defences up."

"Why do you think they've been raiding other places?"

"DNA from organs, for one thing. Such as, a body recovered from a UFO crash contained 4 small kidneys and 3 small livers not of his species or anything related and not from Earth; the donors need not have been sentient, as long as they were the right size range and long-lived enough and otherwise compatible. 29 Orionis III (I went there on the ESE4 expedition) has man-like sentient natives who had been in a Stone Age condition for millions of years but yet knew what a heavy machine gun was when they found the fossilized remains of one left by a technological period that passed 46 million years ago, as if they had seen guns used recently. A few Proxima-type cleanups, the later ones aided by more captured alien technology, yielding hundreds of captured UFO's to convert to human space-navy use, may encourage Earth's nations to dig deeper into their pockets, and the final big fleet against the alien homeworld to

stop the raiding once and for all, unless the aliens surrender first."

"And if we have to go after them, when are we going to stop looking like them? All the deep-space suits that I've seen in use are alien-type, eternal alien-type, and different colours and badges don't stop them from giving me the shivers; the NASA ALBS suit is *still* held up for teething troubles."

The secret committee had to decide what to do next. After some controversy, Keghdin was allowed to address it, since he like many of his kind now knew that he had no safe return home and his future life had to be with humans. No decision was made on interning the aliens who are loose on Earth, and they reacted better to the news of the battle than I had expected, knowing of the trap that we had rescued Keghdin from. At least the action showed that Earth can negotiate from strength from now on. News of it inevitably got out, and caused some trouble. A sensationalizing editor got hold of abduction news, and more careful rumour-calming was needed to allay public feelings to prevent another long disorder: that created yet more pro-alien propaganda. Official uses of 'alien' in its old legal sense of 'unnaturalized foreigner' confused the issue; this use is tempting to newspapers because it typesets into less space in headlines. Keghdin returned to Huancayo, and Peter Duclos to Bitterfeld, two who had ridden the 'one-way road' and lived to tell of it, and continued training UTC pilots. Bitterfeld and Mo i Rana put themselves under SHADO command. Kaminski and Turton went back under the mountain in Area 51, and perhaps dreamed of far voyages, if ships' computers can dream; there is now a third of those ships, called 'Leila Carlin'.

Humans exploring the near stars know that running into alien bases is less risky than before now Earth can strike back. Arrivals of outside aliens and stray contacts started again within the year from some other base, as I thought might happen, and some talk by them of trading and of help to overcome the need for so much transplanting, as before when some of our biologists went away with them; us holding so many of them captured at Proxima made them much more willing to negotiate with us. We and they know that in times of mutual wariness keeping in contact is the better part of keeping track of what each other are doing, particularly if an arms race develops. There are so many comings and goings in UFO-like craft that missions intent on abducting may go unnoticed, but random abductions seem to be less or stopped; but there are many suspicions of less reputable nations allowing 'cesspool-emptying', and unofficial groups helping them to round up and take away unwelcome gangs of vagrants. HR4918-ian spacemen have a rule "take what we need and cause as little other disruption as possible"; but theft forced by need is still unacceptable to the victim. Talk of rounding up all living and written sources of FTL technology until it is forgotten, to put the clock back, got nowhere: too many people know it, same as too many people know the basics of how to make an atom bomb. What good actually comes from giving them a breeding stock of the much-publicised 'transplant pig' like in the Badby Wood incident, remains to be seen. Among the aliens who live among us organ breakdowns are frequent, as I knew would be, but our legitimate supply of transplant organs human and other can cope. Life goes on.

Later I flew again. After the big fleet returned my space-longing gradually became strong again, and I was thankful for a need to relieve it. We went to the same place as before, but in one ship, manned by me and Len Carrington and Peter Carlin. It was alien-made. Once having such a craft in our hands intact was SHADO's ultimate dream, and the public seeing one land would have been a sensation for years; now it seemed ordinary. It had found its way into our hands via the many random mixings of humans and aliens that had happened, and it had no giveaway Earth-type antioxidation coating. We set off, accelerated to FTL speed towards the

Southern Cross, passed the Alpha Centauri system, looped back as if we had come from HR4918, reached Proxima uneventfully, noted what we could, left safely, and set off back to Earth without pursuit before anyone or anything there could ask us who we were or who our orders were from or check us against expected ship movements.

"It's happened as I thought it would, him not letting us put a garrison here like I said we should have." Carrington said, "After all our big cleanout here and Earth so near, they're back and they're rebuilding and re-arming fast."

"Yes, and this is the place where *that* happened, within our reach at last." Carlin said, "What's to stop us coming back and shoving them off out of here again?, just the same as when they kept coming in UFO's which we kept shooting down and the public knew nothing about it."

"I'm not as sure as you eager young fighter pilot types, that they haven't made precautions in case we send heavy attack craft there again." I replied. "That's why I wanted to have a garrison and a radar and Utronics station here, but the silly temporizing politicians wouldn't let me. Now the aliens have been thoroughly shocked out of their ancient stasis, and now we have FTL technology, there are so many nearby star systems where we and they can get metal and fuel and energy for that cleanup to start an escalation and ever more lives and metals and fuel wasted per abduction prevented. Unless we get on with the big cleanup quick, who will have to concede what when commonsense puts an end to it?"

"Likely we the more, if all those free and easy space explorer groups don't go under one Earth command." Carlin said, "Huancayo and Magnitogorsk want to coordinate with us, I heard, and I say we should let them, Kegdind and those other two in with them or not. Now I've had time to study the long-range photos, three of the UFO's there were Earth make and the symbols on them weren't alien standard. Those are the first three that left as we came in."

"That again. More stray trading across the lines, I bet, or some scientists not caring what info they spill as long as they get astronomy info back, and the aliens know it." Carrington said, "Now that two more Earth FTL groups are with us, that's a stage nearer to a unified command forming. Why can't The Committee be properly open with us and let us act? Never mind them letting that fancy new space navy collect dust under Area 51, it should be out there cleaning out more alien bases *and* bringing back all unnecessary remote human settlements and making sure that those that remain can't become hostages or tie up budget defending them or become anyone's separate power base out there. Tell me the old old story: unsupervised remote explorers or scientists start mining for materials and before we know it their kit repair shop's grown into a fullscale industrial base including a spaceship factory and they claim independence. What came from that French CRS riotsquad officer who came that time wanting to be in on any big international space patrol setup that developed? All sorts have tried or wanted to get in on the space craze, so I wasn't much surprised when the CRS wanted a go."

"I haven't heard from him a while. I'll go look on our way back." I said.

## INTO SPACE AGAIN

We came in antilunar. A patrol queried my craft but knew my voice after I hurriedly went into air-breathing mode. The cold mountains and icecaps and bleak plateaus of Spitzbergen and Norway passed below us as we descended, again back from far distances. We crossed sea and Holland and Belgium, many places of old famed battles, across northeast France, and along the east edge of the sprawl of modern suburban Paris. People looked up at us briefly as we descended over country and patches of wood and urban fringe. Ahead spread the fifteen square miles of dark treetops of the Forêt de Sénart. At least three times since 1800 craft like ours had landed there by night and brought peril to its thickets for lone farm workers and isolated dwellings in the area. One winter night in 1753 something flew in and took five people from a house in the village of Épinay-sous-Sénart, and in the forest the same night some poachers and gamekeepers fought and fell side by side against an enemy who had come from no man knew where; one man escaped to tell of it, hiding in bushes seeing the fight through a haze of unreal feeling caused by what he thought was devil magic but we know well what caused it. Now the city had grown and spread around the wood, and men have flying craft like theirs. The streets below us seemed empty as we came down over Quincy-sous-Sénart and looked for the CRS base. We landed in its grounds, wondering whether the electronic side-effects of our craft's alien motor and *kekhatg* navigation scanner were more or less welcome to the area than routine teargas from CRS riot police training in its grounds. Some of the CRS men came out and called their officer Bouvier, who knew of me.

We hurriedly sheeted our ship tightly and started the system to circulate the air inside the sheeting through oxygen-absorbing canisters. "Oui, Monsieur Stréikeur, you call about our space group, I went to England about it." he said, "We have photographs of them inside.". His men in their rough-looking overall-like uniforms looked curiously at our red AT spacesuits and grey helmets, and our faces discoloured green below our lifted faceplates.

We went in. It was not a purpose-built police base but a château-style country house built about 1800 by a very rich man, I suspect one who had become rich from property seized from the old titled landowning class during the French Revolution. It had a grand central staircase with a horse and hounds deer-hunting scene painted up a wall inside it in a mediaeval style.

He showed us some photographs and a long video. They showed their space group, of 35 men in 11 UTC's, in the usual CRS colour style but adapted to their spacesuits, which were yet another AT variant: their flexible parts were dark blue, with their usual uniform badges; the helmets were AT type but painted dark blue with two yellow lines round like on their riotsquad helmets. In space they stuck to their training and parade drill including routinely wearing batons; they also wore laser guns copied from an alien design. It showed them trying to drill and practice batoncharging, on Chryse Planitia on Mars; gravity 0.38 of Earth's made the expected comic disaster out of the 'quick march!': the men jumped about like springboks until they got used to it and settled into a slow-motion run in step. I had had the same but more so trying to keep my Moonbase staff in marching drill in lunar gravity. But too likely they had gradually changed from what was hoped would become part of the start of a hard efficient space patrol force into yet more roaming explorers. They claimed to be the first Earth men to Wolf 359 and Tau Ceti, although others have since claimed earlier visits. He said his men had met aliens including HR4918-ians without conflict in their wanderings, and I suspect traded with them. The group were now in space again.

An HR1787-style close unified guard round Earth was still some way away, and Man is

still a space explorer. I went back to West Harlington and caught up with other business, including yet again trying to set up a unified near-space traffic control system; NASA and an FTL users' group, needing a space expert who was also an MP if one was available, chose AkhkakhvandeK KEGHDUMIGHD, never minding that I feel no easier than I ever did with an alien in my headquarters or with a red spacesuit among the uniforms and office suits at the conference table. One of the UTC's that some of them came in, to cut down its radar return signature when flying roof first had a tall 'dunce's cap' which all too likely also hid a gun or some missiles. Next day was a long and rather tedious scientific conference about what we call 'fairies', electrical effects in the air that sight and radar often mistake for UFO's and cause hallucinations and waste much patrol and interception time. It went into much detail including the difference between Type A and Type B 'fairies', and how various sorts of sensors react to them, and that there were still unanswered questions about Type B.

A week later I was still at my headquarters when Moonbase's sensors detected 11 unscheduled incoming spacecraft, which proved to be the space CRS coming in to Paris. I took some of my men to meet them. We wanted to go in an executive jet, for I had seen quite enough of the insides of UFO-type spacecraft and spacesuits for a while; but they could land where there is no runway, so we went in four UTC's. I wore my uniform since I would not be leaving atmosphere: as SHADO had lost secrecy and my film director cover was blown, my office-type suit, inappropriate in an armed force, was now purposeless. I can pilot UTC's, but I was too busy with other work during the journey to fly it myself. My pilot was in a spacesuit. We landed in time to see them land, in a back area of Orly Airport, less used since Charles de Gaulle Airport took over Paris's international air trade.

40 men in full CRS riotsquad gear came out of the 11 craft and paraded, a single but over-strength section: a standard CRS section is 32 men. They were obviously in uniform for the first time since being in spacesuits for weeks. A superior CRS officer had arrived to see them. They talked excitedly to him and my party about their travels, until he called them back to drill. He gave an order, and they put their shields forwards and got into flying wedge formation and batoncharged. Thankfully they seemed to still have some patrol and control mentality left in them after the distance and alienness and strange things seen. Breathing liquid discoloration and a downwind smell of long-trip spacesuit undersuit gave another impression and reminded me of how affairs had got. My ship's pilot was near me. I saw with a feeling of tired inevitability that he was AkhkakhvandeK. He had come in his role as an MP as well as that he ran a space kit factory in Westthoughton. No wonder things were as they were, if an alien is who I had to work with instead of Sir Alexander Battersby who lost his seat in Derby North to the alien Khlívakaghd Ekhkukhvâranib in that general election held at an utterly inappropriate time in the middle of all that pro-space excitement after so much had blown out and become public.

"Two of them look unhandy at it!" the superior officer queried in French, "And, from my copy of your unit personnel list, 40 minus 35 minus 3 equals what have you been up to out there!? casually picking up extra crew here and there as if you were a bunch of sailors.", and to the men, "Halt, form one rank, then in order from the left give your details!".

They obeyed. Three of them gave a NASA scientific position instead of a CRS rank, as I and he had expected. The section-leader did not like carrying non-combatants any more than I do, and had put them into unit uniforms and through as much of their usual training as he could in the time.

"You two, 7th and 8th from the left, you look clumsy at drill, fall out!". he ordered. They

obeyed. He saw to his annoyance that one of the two was a woman and looked pregnant. He reprimanded them for sloppiness, ending in a sharp question, but got no answer. He asked the question again, louder. One of the two answered with a few words of ungrammatical French trailing off into an incomprehensible language.

"Where did these two come from!?" he asked the section-leader.

The answer surprised everybody: "Tau Ceti III" and a coordinate position, "but their blood's normal human, his is O,Rh+ and hers is A,Rh+. It's not some recent explorer settlement, the land looks like people have been there for centuries. Several sorts of Earth-type farm livestock there, no sign of powered technology. We had to dress them in spare unit issue for hygiene: when they came aboard they were in dirty unwashed sheepskin with the wool left long to be warm and the sheep grease left in to be rainproof, it was winter there."

He let me examine the two and let the three NASA men email home about their discoveries. Two Tau Ceti natives in full French CRS riotsquad kit are among the less expected of the various things that I have been shown and allowed to examine. I talked in HR4918 alienese; that caused excited-sounding remarks but no comprehension. I took samples; back at West Harlington later their tissue and DNA and minor blood groups also turned out to be totally human and pointed to western Europe. In France later as over the weeks they learned more French and a linguist recorded their language, they told what they knew of the history of their people.

"The first of us lived in the sky, in a land called Iwerind." they said, "There we called ourselves the Iwerin. Once we lived in peace there, but the Goidel people came in ships with sharp iron swords and took all the best land. Iwerind had no iron ore, we had stone and wood and bronze weapons only. Then the gods saw this and told us that another world needed people, so they put some of us and their animals and tools and crop seeds into their flying ships and brought them down to our people live now, where you took us two from. Some of the gods visit us sometimes. They bring us things and sometimes treat illnesses. Sometimes when our people in one area become too many for the land to support or some try to take land or food from others, they take some away because they say that other lands need people.". They were a late-teenage couple and had recovered from the culture shock of contact with us and Earth technology better than older people would have.

"What are the gods like?".

"They have their own language. Among us only the priests know it, they will not let anyone else learn it. They wear red armour with grey helmets and fly in the sky without wings. Are you gods or only priests?, for you know their language and spoke it to us and you use flying ships like theirs and your ship armour is like theirs but another colour and your faces are those of men."

The commander knew as well as me who those 'gods' were, and explained the truth. The language of the two got attention from amateurs and xenolinguists only at first, for some learned groups still rejected anything that smelt of UFO. Someone in Dublin University saw that it included the words 'ond' = "a stone" and 'fern' = "anything good" - the only two words known of an old Irish native language called Ivernian that died out "recently" according to a book called 'Beulra' (= 'Glossary') by Cormac mac Cuileinnain who was king and bishop of Cashel in Munster in Ireland and died in 908 AD. Of course the language of those two was not exactly the same language that Irish Gaelic replaced long ago, for in exile its speakers had spread and their speech split into dialects and changed, but not as much as many Earth languages had in that time, for as its speakers spread across their world beyond space they did

not meet any old native languages to influence them. It contained some words that are also in Gaelic, some likely borrowed one way and some the other way before the aliens took them from Ireland to stock another world in case something made Earth useless for them. Words from HR4918 alienese were very few and not certainly distinguished from the inevitable quota of chance resemblances between words of unrelated languages. Some of their folk-tales and names in them are known also from Irish myth and tale.

This utterly unexpected recovery of the Ivernian language came later and became a sensation among linguists but is irrelevant to security in space; but discovering its speakers changed matters. "If on Tau Ceti III, where else are exiled Earth humans living dozens or hundreds of light years away beyond the heavens?" I said to the SHADO and other men who had come with me, "With the new fleet and more ships like them on the way I was starting to think we were catching up on having enough space-navy to search round guarding what is needed and bring the rest back by force and destroy whatever they have built to stop space undesirables from getting supplies and taking over ready-made facilities, but that seems to have been decided centuries ago, unless we are equipped and willing and allowed to look for them everywhere within a thousand light years including beyond the alien homeworld. Have any of them reached a scientific age? Are any of them likely to get FTL technology and become a space power or by chance exploring find the world of their ancestors? If not, is there any point us looking for them? If we find them, do we contact them or not? And Man is still a space explorer."

"These CRS certainly still are: from what they said it'd clearly be hard for them to settle back into ordinary duty on the ground after the places they have been and what they have seen." said Akhkakhvandeck, "Like that bit that you translated and adapted from that Anglo-Saxon poem called 'The Seafarer': 'To rule from my base is my reckoned duty / and around Earth's edges my own people / to guard at their gates, as I was given command; / but longings lead me to the light-years, / ancient vacuum's awful vastness, / out forth to fare, that I far from here / should stride the worlds of strange beings, / not heeding harp or handed wealth / or fun with a woman or affairs of the world / or anything else but the empty beyond. / Those who fill their time with fatness of cities / do not know what need NASA put in me / when they ordered me out into exile-paths / in alien craft outward faring; / but such yearnings are mine now the beyond I have seen.'. I get the same sort of feeling sometimes even though my kind on space runs are conditioned to obey orders and keep secrecy and not get distracted."

"I know: some of my men who came back from Proxima Centauri said the same sort of thing. It used to be like that at sea, but the sea is finite and now we know it all. But out there, all that empty distance and no end to it.",

"Do you mind!?" Col.Freeman asked, for he had come with me, "You're making *me* feel like that now, wanting to put a deep-space spacesuit on and be up and away instead of doing the job that I'm paid to do."

The space CRS men got into a coach and drove back to Quincy-sous-Sénart to collect their off-duty clothes and get some leave, but the space-longing would soon call them back. They were not draining CRS budget as much as might be expected; at one time or another they had prospected and mined among asteroids, traded and ferried supplies for other spacemen, and got fees from NASA for taking the three scientists with them. That is, they had become yet more general-purpose free-roaming spacemen. On remote planets they had learned such survival tricks as making a shelter by making a gridwork of cut branches which they hung their shields on as roof tiles. We followed them, over the Seine and past the ominous thickets and

trunks of the Forêt de Sénart and old local tales of unEarthly events in the area. As we got out, the wind changed. Our eyes started stinging and watering. "Them again." someone passing in the street said, for the local residents well knew what it was. "Khlfv Sêres-zgarikhkav." AkhkakhvandeK muttered in his own language and pulled his spacesuit helmet faceplate down. "That's not so easy for the rest of us right now." I thought. The local CRS section were training round their base there.

Bouvier called a halt to it as we went in. His men were soon asking about all the strange things that their far-travelling fellows had seen. But that is not what the CRS is for, and not what I and my party from England were there for. We went into the base's officers' room to decide whether to let them fly off on another far exploration, or forget the whole idea and send them back to street duty despite their wishes and their spacecraft back to NASA, or put them properly under SHADO command. In the end the meeting agreed on the last option, but things were not the same as in the old days. Opinions supporting independent spacemen kept coming up, public opinion dogged my heels, and as an MP supporting SHADO's interests the alien AkhkakhvandeK Kegdumighd could not replace Sir Alexander Battersby, as I am reminded all too well every time I go through Derby or drive back from Warton near Preston and come to the ominous skyline ridge of Westhoughton. Time would show whether after their wanderings those CRS men adapt as near-space patrolmen as planned or whether the best space-navy recruits are those who have not developed a wandering habit, same as some navy men say that among frogman trainees previous sport diving experience causes a free and easy underwater attitude which can be hard to overwrite with a proper naval attitude to underwater work and combat operations. After sunset the meeting ended, and we came down the hunting scene staircase for the last time. They took us to Orly Airport in one of their lifting-sided personnel carriers, and we flew back to West Harlington, having achieved as much as I could reasonably hope for.

We started to get back to base work. Various things had arisen. I started to wade through an accumulation of listings from a running computer search of press transmissions and scientific and popular publications for UFO-related matter.

"Whose is all this non-work nature study stuff wasting our printer's time and ink cartridges?!" I asked the computer man, "'The status of the common toad (Bufo bufo) in intensively farmed areas'; 'The effect of predation by feral escaped wild boar on the toad (Bufo) population in the Weald', etc etc. How ever does this affect space or security against alien threats!?"

"I know, that new search package has been 'toadying', I can't help it. Computers do that sort of thing. Most of them obey instructions to the letter and don't think." he pleaded, "I can't put 'IGNORE BUFO' in the search parameter file, I've got to let it look for 'BUFORA', that's a British UFO-watchers' society that's got involved in all this."

"Can't you write an extra bit of program to stop this sort of thing?"

"This computer hasn't got a compiler on. I was never taught to write programs, only to use packages."

I sighed at the helpless specialization of most of the later generation of computer users and turned to other matters.

"Five UFO's came in without IFF's from roughly Beta Corvi direction." said Foster, "Moonbase sent four of the new UTC patrol craft after them, but yet again someone blew the whistle on them. I'm sick of that. They looked like landing in Normandy. A factory in Evreux in Normandy said they were theirs. I sent Mobiles. The UFO's all had UBP's. My fighter pilots

didn't like the look of them. Crew were all HR4918 aliens. A bunch of factory men to meet them, and more armed factory guards than my men wanted to pick a fight with. They traded and left. I overheard something in alienese about those prisoners that we captured when we cleaned out that base at Proxima. Interference, interference, and we aren't allowed to do our job properly, not even to keep a garrison in Proxima-A to stop them rebuilding it stronger. I'm tempted to say we send a force to Area 51 and grab those 3 big ships out and run them ourselves. This trading and temporizing and talking while they build up's getting nowhere."

"Anything else serious?"

"Germany, near a place called Sigmaringen, in Baden-Wurttemberg, about 30 miles north of the Bodensee. A campful of gipsies vanished overnight, their camp had been cleaned out in a violent fight. The area was as silent about it as we used to be, except to say the gipsies had been stealing, that old accusation. UFO landing marks. Some of the attackers' footprints were AT spacesuit, some were ordinary workman's boots. No gun bangs heard. I got there in a UTC just in time to stop a bunch of the local people from carting everything to a scrapyard and bulldozing the area to destroy the evidence."

"I knew it. They're back to that again, and now collusion by local people making it worse. A few humans in league with them can't easily plot to take over the world like in thrillers, but they sure can disrupt things locally."

"Not aliens. The only spacecraft that had come near were human."

"Who kept those suitable as labour, or traded them with aliens somewhere out-away for supplies or kit, likely. Some of them have learned too many mind-rewriting tricks and the like off the aliens. I've heard rumours of that sort of thing before. This lawlessness must stop."

"Those last 4 words are what the people there said about those gipsies doing such things as picketing a local road claiming to be officials checking things, taking bicycles and packed lunches from schoolchildren passing. This was the end of a long escalation of trouble, police moving them on, prosecuted at every opportunity for illegal street trading and breaches of laws about motor vehicles and illegally occupying land, them thinking that gave them even more excuse to go over fences pinching stuff, etc, both sides accumulated grievances against the other, and this is how it ended. It could be that some of the spacemen had come from the area and, when they came back to meet relatives and found them being harassed and persistently stolen from by organized vagrants, they weren't afraid to do something about it."

"Oh. Law into their own hands again, and not certain that some local government man isn't involved, tired of the cops moving them on and moving them on and never stopping the nuisance properly, same as I'm starting to suspect that HR1787 shut the HR4918 aliens out so they started coming here. I suppose we still have the right to act against aliens when they harass and persistently steal people from us? And aliens aren't the only spacemen who abduct now."

"I got hold of DNA prints of some of the gipsies, from when they'd been arrested before for petty crime. Another reason to DNA-check any children in asteroid miner gangs. That and children who run away to space and then find it's not all as exciting as they'd expected but it's too late to get away and get home, such enticements as child-size AT spacesuits, genuine not toy, in a front display with space-type decor in 'Ack Keggy's branch shop in Oldham: 'easily into one but not so easily out of it', some say, and when they *are* recovered years later they've got spacesuit dependent and unused to gravity."

"What happened to the camp's dogs?" I asked, "That may be some clue."

"Shot. Vet found a 4-inch nail in each one, one each, it had entered at bullet speed point

first."

"Help. Those silent electromagnetic-powered guns that I thought the patent offices had safely requisitioned the patent of. Now it seems they're out, same as helirigs, those backpack helicopter motor and rotor sets that I'd thought were tight secret but someone re-invented it and published the plans in a handyman magazine instead of trying to patent it. One of the handiest bits of assault-boarding and landing kit ever made for small-craft sailors official and otherwise plus letting all sorts hop over security perimeters. Once when a squad of helirig thugs raided a garden party for the bar takings and people's valuables, some fool thought their motorcycle-type clothes and helmets were spacesuits and rang SHADO, yet another waste of our time."

Later that day a naval officer rang, to tell us that "7 sport scuba divers that disappeared at [coordinates and date secret] off the south coast of Devon, we know what happened to them, it's not anything to do with space. Just to save your time, so you can close any file you're running about them."

"What happened to them?" I asked.

"To protect secrecy of some underwater installations. Sport divers get everywhere. That's all you need to know. This is secret."

"And it leaves me where I was a lot of times when *we* were still secret, knowing what had happened to disappeared people and not being able to tell their relatives to settle their worries and let them inherit property etc. And space *is* involved, if any technology that humans got off aliens is involved - such as those *gekhkar*-type destructors that get put into submersible patrol and dredging craft, and we get blamed for letting them in."

There was nothing more that I could do with this matter. We got back to our usual work. A routine medical check showed that I have noticeably developed 'UFO chest', thickening of the ribs and work enlargement of the intercostal muscles caused by much liquid-breathing. A diving gear firm wanted me to approve and put my name to a new make of liquid-breathing deep diving suit. A concert and procession in the village promised to be a break from work; but the vicar, persistently hoping to make peace between all parties, included the Christmas carol 'God rest ye merry gentlemen' sung in alienese "as exiled Earthmen sang it under the high barren ridge of Estanddâran on the alien homeworld far from home"; the audience was invited to join in aided by song sheets. He planned the concert to be opened jointly by Khlîvakaghd from Derby (who came) and me or one of my staff, putting me in a difficult position having to choose between looking bad to the public by refusing and looking bad to the Committee and others by being in a public display and fraternizing with aliens unnecessarily.

Later that night I went out to look at the stars. Orion was well up and the air was unusually clear for England, and to the right of his belt I could see 27 Orionis (HR1787), magnitude 5.08. As had been for the last fortnight whenever spacecraft were near, something made me uneasy and seemed to tell me that we better go there again. Orion with his shield and raised heavy stick reminds me as much of a man in riotsquad gear as of the usual hunter figure. I thought of the space CRS and their adventures, and reflected that the alienese for 'nation' happens to be *kars(u-)* and the HR2718 aliens sometimes call themselves collectively *Karsa*, 'The Nation', and their language *Karsin*. I went to bed and dreamed of space.

In the morning Foster was back from Moonbase and Col.Freeman had gone to replace him. The base guards were drilling in riotsquad gear, and I kept thinking of Orion, even to finding my eyes straying to the place on their left waists where 27 Orionis is in the sky-figure. I got back to scheduling supplies for Moonbase and my patrol submarines. Foster was wading

through the endless complications of getting permission to set up a security perimeter round the unofficial spaceport that had developed round my base; at least that job was easier now SHADO had at last managed to buy Harlington Grange Farm and Elmstead Farm and so now owned the greater part of the spaceport service area. Time at last to build presentable service area buildings instead of the jumble of caravans, Portakabins, converted goods containers, and shacks built by aliens. Spacecraft came and went on the same untidy mixture of SHADO and NASA/ESA and unofficial journeys. If only SHADO was still undisputed master of all this complication like on 27 Orionis III.

"It's time we showed the flag away from Earth again." Foster said to us at SHADO's next private meeting.

"That'll need more UTC's than we've got here, if we're going to poke round there, and preferably one of the big craft. But they're locked up in Area 51, and they wouldn't tell even me a phone number or any other way to contact them. I get sick of that Committee's restrictions and needing to wait ages till they can meet again to ask them about nearly everything. We'll have to fly there and find them. We need those ships. And where's all those men they let me lead that time?"

"Us turning up *there* uninvited - what'll they do?"

"Well, we've got to. I'm sick of poking about in near Earth orbit while all sorts come and go where we can't or aren't allowed to follow them."

To cut a long argument short, that was done. I chose 7 UTC's and men to man them, and fitted them for a long journey, and next night flew up away to the west, and a few hours later came down in the desert plain with the dry lake bed between mountain ranges in Nevada. They sent fighters up and manned ground defences, but when they found who I was they let us land, and were polite but strict and curt, but I managed to get them to fetch Commander Clive Ansberg.

"I know what you want." he said, "USS Kaminski's ready to fly, but the Committee'll need ...".

"Yes yes, and this member's busy elsewhere with this, and that member's busy elsewhere with that, and sorry-but sorry-but they won't be able to meet quorate for the next 4 months at least. They're into too many other jobs and private businesses, and back to not wanting to disturb things from how they've settled to, and they're plain simple scared of deep space and not wanting to get involved in it, only to sit siege near Earth. Same as that factory at Westhoughton in Lancashire where I had stuff made went bust because silly civil servants kept taxing it at more than it could earn, and buying it off the liquidator is one reason why that 'Ack Keggy' and his bunch are there."

"The men I lent to you before are still here, and I could plead emergency, but that'd only delay the charge a bit and change it to 'improperly declaring emergency'. Anyway, they were intended as base-guards guarding one place steadily but you spoilt them for that, turning them into space-marines or whatever you'd call them, full of adventurousness and elitiness, wanting to 'bust ass' in all sorts of strange places."

"If the emergency does prove not to be there after all. Why make those ships and then just mothball them? I've done enough chasing about after small groups like Mo i Rana and Bitterfeld, and Huancayo wanting to join us but it'd mean having that alien Keghdin in SHADO middle-level staff, trying to get them to join with us to bulk up numbers, while all these men and ships here stay hidden away."

"OK, you can have Kaminski and Leila Carlin. Turton's being upgraded. And 40 UTC's,

and crew for them. I'll plead emergency."

That was done, and next night but one after moonset we took off, north away from the ecliptic plane and most avoidable eyes and radars such as asteroid miners. Finally we ducked south and went FTL, towards shining Orion with his shield and equipment belt and raised baton. Near our right (his left) end of that belt is what we sought. I had been there before, and I did not trust that the natives would not have emergency defences against big alien craft as well as against UTC's and the like, but I did not want to attack them. We dropped out of FTL a few times on the way to take star pattern photographs. We passed nothing much except a few faint red stars; most of the well-known stars in the Orion pattern are in the super-bright blue class and very distant. Two astronomers with us wanted to visit the Betelgeuse system as an example of the red giant class, but it is 300 light years away and was nowhere near my route. During the long flight across emptiness we got the men back to trained readiness after too much base comforts, and I steadily felt uneasier, until 27 Orionis came near and we dropped out of FTL. Here before information from HR2718 found in UFO wrecks had luckily warned us to keep right away from the centuries-old impenetrable defence in depth which I sometimes wished that Earth had, which efficiently destroyed anything from outside and everything not authorized by their central space command that took off from their planet and left atmosphere, except for letting a few aliens land officially at one top secret place occasionally to keep an ear on the Outside; I wondered how they paid the aliens for the information. Perhaps by watching and overhearing them for a while we could pick up some useful ideas.

I approached from their system's north to keep away from asteroid bases. Things seemed different and wrong when we listened for radio and radar. Only three of their patrol craft came out, and kept away from us. They were streamlined and winged for planet landing and pursuit into atmosphere to shoot down reentering illegal spacecraft or near-to-space attempts like Earth's X-100. We investigated a mass of new radar echoes. It was a shocking sight for men with my opinion on space defences. Holed or fragmented and often half melted remains of at least a hundred native patrol craft drifted about, gradually separating, and that need not have been the only battle area. Echoes moving as if they still had power were native work craft salvaging what they could. One of the patrol craft approached us. We were armed and wary. I hailed them in HR4918-ese - and one of them replied, ungrammatically in an odd accent; they proved not to know any Earth language that I know. Never before had HR1787 replied like this. A pitiful sign, that such independent proud hard-minded people were forced to treat with outsiders. I explained who we were, and he seemed to believe me.

They let us follow them in. Nothing came out at us. They did not like hearing HR4918-ese, but it was our only common language. Interrogation mannerisms that got into his talk spoke of the usual use that they had for that language. As we got near their planet our telescopes could see that near-planet orbiting and ground space defences had been thoroughly smashed.

As we orbited their planet, some of us and some of them came out in spacesuits and looked at each other. They were approximately humanoid but their faces were far from human. As we warily watched each other, a radar operator on Kaminski warned of 'missile rising from planet' and coordinates. It was a multistage chemical-fuel rocket, but its front end had cabin windows and was clearly not a warhead. Some nation down there had been developing a space effort in hiding for generations, waiting for things to change. Last time I was there even such a crude attempt would have been destroyed by a Space Guard patrol craft, stopping yet another purposeless expensive national space effort of exploration for its

own sake as it started. But not this time.

For their remaining three patrollers we and they agreed on codenames that translate as SG1, SG2, SG3. They described quickly what had happened. A fleet of well over 100 small armed craft had come from outside, and as others before from single craft to fleets had been allowed in so far, then trapped and attacked. But this fleet had new weapons, and also 18 big ships held in reserve black against black sky and then called in. Their Space Guard managed to wreck one of the ugly big things, but the rest brushed aside all defending weapons and cleaned up. They showed pictures of some of the attacking fleet.

"Those are HR2718 UFO's or a close copy. Them again." said one of my men.

"With those underbelly missile packs which the Earth students returned at Arden designed for them." I said, "To think my own people are responsible for this mess. And that unlucky volley of my planes' missiles that blew those UFO's to safety in Glen Barrisdale that December 2nd when all this started."

"This'd be a far worse shock for them than losing your 3 Interceptors that July 5th. All those craft gone, after so many generations of stability and keeping the outside safely out and their own people safely in."

"It's time we did some space-abducting of our own and brought that fancy findings-referring procedural Committee out here to see a few practicalities. If I'd been allowed to keep this fleet and men in action after Proxima and give the 'Karsa', as they call themselves, something else to cope with, this might not have happened, and we might have found what was happening out there instead of letting the Karsa make their own big ships. Now we know why the abduction rate's still lower than it was: they're busy setting up away, which they didn't do before because the men manning a remote power base might go independent. How so quick? On a new planet it takes time to build factories and find minerals and fuel and build transport links etc. Likely they've had heavy transport and manufacturing equipment in reserve for ages in case they needed to use it. And heavy transport craft like we've seen near Earth a few times like the one that brought 'Clive Ecky' and his stuff in to NDSP."

We were orbiting their planet about 1200 miles up. As we watched, another multistage rocket craft rose vertically from a silo hidden deep under a city rubbish dump, a desperate hope through generations of stasis but come real at last. Most of its bulk was huge chemical fuel and oxygen tanks. A large winged space and re-entry craft was fastened to its side. Flame blasted from its rear nozzles as it pushed itself up away from the planet's gravity bonds into the emptiness at last after long waiting. I remembered Earth's heroic beginnings in space, and did not know which side to support. One of the Space Guard patrollers went after each of the unauthorized craft while the third stayed with us. SG2 summarily demolished the shuttle-carrier with a missile hit through the attached shuttle into the second stage's fuel and oxygen tanks as the first stage was separating. SG2's heavy mounted lasers disposed of five spacesuited figures who baled out of the shuttle, ignoring unscrambled radio pleas in a planet language which I did not know. "That was another trying it on thinking we're down. How many more lots are harbouring those things in secret, who say to our faces they agree with our policies? There's no need for this. The Space Guard puts up for people any satellites that are needed." their commander said to me in HR2718-ese. It takes a big nation or a very big company to finance that sort of space flight experiment; but an industrialized Earth-type planet has room for many big nations and very big companies to make uncoordinated duplicate attempts at things.

SG3 had a longer run to catch the other illegal. As it got near, something rose out of the

sea. It was as big as Kaminski, and my men looked at in in alarm, for it had HR2718-type markings. SG3 fled. The rocket's second stage used its last fuel and dropped away while its last stage got into orbit. So we saw, among 27 Orionis's inner planets where none except their Space Guard men for centuries had reached either from outside or from inside and got away to tell of it. In a hillside town on a big offshore island explosions blew down a street of old warehouses revealing a slot in a hillside, which a spacecraft came out of, again a chemical-fuelled three-stager, but this time horizontally and every stage had wings and could land for re-use like my Moon-shuttles.

"Another illegal. Destroy it!" the native Space Guard commander ordered me, but some of my men started muttering, for this was not much like the dangerous alien nest that they had been promised hard action against. "Shoot it!" the commander continued, his HR2718-ese grammar suffering in his haste, "Red-suit aliens not do this to be kind! In old time red suit aliens land land take men take men to dismantle for spares, until we stop them. You say red suit aliens do same on your planet. They come do this and guard illegals just to set men against Space Guard so they can land land again, and my planet men will fly everywhere and make not-needed ships and space bases which waste much metals and fuel. Our wise men say: don't touch other worlds, don't let other worlds touch us, keep all stuff on own planet where it not get lost."

So he pleaded, who until a month ago had been utterly unreachable behind centuries-tested deep defences. He and his men were neither cowardly nor brave, merely hard and efficient and knew the remoter likely ends of allowing indiscriminate space travel to all. But I and my men were much nearer than 27 Orionis to the heroic beginnings of space flight, and hesitated, for to many of them it was as if I had ordered them to firing-squad Gagarin or Armstrong. But I could appreciate his last sentence; the author C.S.Lewis once called the huge distances of space "God's quarantine regulations to ensure that each world develops uninterrupted at its own rate". Some call that Space Guard, and prospects of similar developing on Earth, a 'dog in the manger', not exploring space and not letting others do so; but what if the dog is guarding the manger because it knows there are poisonous plants in the fodder in it? Different training would be needed to get all my fleet's men willing to routinely shoot unarmed men or craft just because they cross an invisible line - if public opinion tolerates it, which is unlikely.

As the space-plane dropped its first stage, the second stage spouted flame from a ragged hole in its side. But this was not from a shot but from a malfunction, for hidden long in a deep secret silo it could not be tested properly before. Unordered by me, my UTC #7 swooped in on it from the side, shot the second and third stages' cockpit canopies off with a laser, and fired two large missiles. The missiles slowed and stopped without exploding as they reached their targets. They flew off aiming for the black mass of Leila Carlin, steering awkwardly with two natives clinging to each, eight seconds in time before the space plane fireballed. The two from the third stage were in oxygen-breathing spacesuits; the two from the second stage were in fighter pilot pressure suits but luckily full-body type and with small built-in emergency oxygen supplies.

"Not rescue!" the commander warned us, "Regulations say no prisoners when shoot an illegal. Dangerous. Sometimes they had explosive suicide charges, we lost men and ships from that.". But it proved not to be so this time. We found nothing from the four then, for we had no common language; there off-world languages were a secret known only to the Space Guard and few others.

The space plane's first stage got away in time and landed, but a surviving Space Guard in-atmosphere plane which had approached unnoticed hedgehopping destroyed it on the ground and pumped a volley of missiles into its open silo, which erupted like a volcano as hidden stores exploded inside it. Enraged, my #7 and #9 without orders dived into atmosphere and shot the Space Guard plane down before Foster in Leila Carlin could call them off.

The big Karsa ship remained, plus any others that might be hanging about unseen end-on to us. A spread of ships listening to each others' radars as well as each to its own can see many types of radar-stealth shapes, and so we found that at least five more of the big hostiles were nearby. "Those could never have been made with HR2718's drained and redrained metals resources!" I said angrily, "How I know they've been setting up away, or getting stuff from away, or they've got allies in this, or I'm a Grey. Ye gods the Arden students real and properly electric prodded the Karsa out of their old stasis of standard UFO's and nothing else. 5 minutes different and those missiles from Foster's second lot of my planes That Day would have found a better target than 3 killed 5 wounded in some deer on that mountain Stob-whatever and that silly laird claiming we'd done Christ knows what expensive damage. And that Committee would have me build up next to nothing but properly made-out paperwork while the other side builds up armed ships.". The native work craft had already abandoned their salvaging and were bolting to planet or among asteroids like foxes to ground.

"Khak khet Streika Shadwupalqeg - khal!" I overheard as someone in a Karsa ship switched an unscrambled radio on too soon before using it to order us to surrender. That sentence took me back to an unexpected encounter in Toronto where I heard it before. 'khal' means "here". Against an enemy fleet that size all we could do was to hide under the planet's sea in a deep submarine canyon out of sight of sonar. So, here we were, hiding underwater like aliens until the storm passed, aliens ourselves on a strange world. At least any local patrol subs around would be on our side if the Karsa went underwater after us. Our big ships' collapsible holds expanded to the limit just fitted SG1 and SG2, which were not designed to submerge, one each, and their crews were in them; SG3 had to take its chances above. The Karsa fleet could do much damage by strafing but could not carry manpower enough to land and conquer large areas of the surface, if the people resisted well. The natives would have to leave us alone even if they felt hostile, as the Karsa were enough enemy. Some of my men started calling themselves and not the local people 'aliens', a confusing but understandably logical practice.

Over the next month the Karsa demonstrated and made many flying displays in the sky but did not shoot at civilian areas. Three big alien work craft of a type that I had not seen before, apparently space-going foundries, digested battle wreckage, defence satellites, nickel-iron meteorites, and two native suborbital airliners. The ground population went about their daily lives under a suddenly alien-ridden sky and tales of disaster brought by crash-landing or baled-out Space Patrol pilots jettisoning all secrecy in their shock of defeat, after a lifetime of being told that faster than light travel was impossible. The rocket-ship, and 7 more long-hidden 'illegal' national and company native spacecraft which ventured to take off during this time after long hopeless concealment, were left alone to land safely, and I began to guess what HR2718's policy was. But the Karsa fleet could not stay there forever without supplies, or it had work elsewhere; it left.

We surfaced and released SG1 and SG2. SG3 flew in and landed, trailing tresses of the swarf and scrap wire which had been heaped over it among old boilers and storage tanks in a scrapyard to hide it. Meanwhile the men in Leila Carlin had taught some HR2718-ese to the four from the space plane, and they could communicate a bit. The four called their planet's

people the Iwani. That was simply an old form of the pronoun 'we' in one of their languages plus a collective suffix, but it became the usual Earth name for them. We exchanged tissue and blood samples with them; that solved a long-standing mystery of theirs, for the samples from us matched an unidentified tissue species that they had sometimes found in transplanted organs in Karsa bodies that they recovered.

We would have to go some time. The Iwani who had contacted us wanted us to stay there as a temporary Space Guard until their own was rebuilt enough to do its job, but I had my own world to attend to. Also, by then we knew enough of the native languages to tell that big political upsets were developing among a welter of shock and 'coming of the aliens'-type messianism in a world for ages protected from such intrusions, and I remembered too well the events on Earth after the second Arden landing. When six more surviving Space Guard patrollers flew in with their Space Guard symbols painted out, I knew that there was no point in anything but ordering my fleet home. I would have needed many more big ships to fight off or warn off the new Karsa ships, and my skills and manpower did not run to putting a planet-sized collapsing political Humpty Dumpty together again on a world whose culture and politics I knew little of, where any native secret agencies that I could have worked with were collapsing along with the system that maintained them; and I was unwilling to cause mass civilian ground casualties. Their best option was to build much heavier-duty defences, far more than I had with me, powerful enough to routinely demolish a big armed armoured spacecraft at one shot; also better close-in defences, for 'a man with only a long spear is helpless once you get nearer to him than his spearhead can go'. Perhaps after that we and they together might set forth into the emptiness and track down and clean out the Karsa manufacturing power base once and for all. We set off for home, planning to return if and when possible with enough for some go at defending their industrial base while they rebuild their defences. We set off towards home.

"Can we go look at Zeta Reticuli?" an astronomer asked me as the stars gradually settled back into the familiar Earth sky pattern, "It's only about 37 light years away from Earth. The amount of silly tales about the place, it's time we found the truth and could stop a lot of fringe cult trash. It's two Sun-like stars about a tenth of a light year apart, HR1006 and HR1010."

"That's sure near enough to encourage any natives on one of them to try to reach the other, even without FTL." said someone.

"OK, I'll allow it, this time. We're supposed to be long range patrolling, not exploring." I said, "At least Reticulum as seen from Earth looks like what it's named after, unlike some others of the constellations that the astronomer Lacaille invented to fill out the far south. It's this little group like a fishing trawl."

"That's not what Lacaille intended, and anyway it puts the cod-end in Horologium territory. It was meant to be a little metal graticule that he used in his work. Same as Fornax the Furnace wasn't a steelworks Bessemer converter although it looks like one, and Telescopium wasn't a sea-ship captain's collapsible although it looks like one, and Antlia the Pump wasn't Argo the Ship's baling pump. No, Lacaille didn't commemorate any 'getting your hands dirty' trades, only arts and pure sciences."

When we got there both stars proved to have planets. "Well, there's *some* sort of people here, and they've got technology." Foster radioed, for artificial radio noise was coming from the Earth and Mars equivalents of both systems. We approached Zeta Ret.A.III carefully from its ecliptic north. Five continents of various sizes were clustered to one side of the pole; two had already collided and at the join pushed up jagged-backed ice-ridden mountains which

native roads and railways had to scramble awkwardly over. A geologist in my #4 got into a geotectonic reverie where 'fast' means several miles movement in a million years, until jerked back to reality by a general order to action stations as four ships approached us, three disc-shaped and wider and flatter than Karsa ships; the fourth was bigger and cylindrical. We hailed them in HR2718-ese and English. To my surprise one of them replied in English, in a flat voice that seemed to be synthesized.

"We can trust that you are not those from" he said, and some coordinates, "although your kit is copied from theirs. We will come out and meet you. It is to be expected that you would track us to our home some time."

Again crew came out of our ships and theirs and met. The natives were smaller than us, with large heads, and grey faces with big black almond-shaped eyes inside their air-breathing helmets. The astronomer looked helpless, for something that he had long rejected was true after all. They were Greys.

While they were outside, two of them opened a hatch and started to catch up with some overdue servicing. One of them reached into holes and found that his spacesuit caught on things. Then to my shock he took his spacesuit off in space vacuum. I waited for him to distend and froth out and dry, as I saw happen once in the battle for the alien base at Proxima, but he carried on working unaffected. His head was egg-shaped with a thin neck. He finally to our relief re-suited, and seemed out of breath. We and they got back onboard, and they let us follow them down. We came down over an ocean and jungle and a wide inland desert which became gradually wetter below us as we got further north. As we got lower, signs of habitation showed. We went over a city, low near a large airfield with aircraft and spacecraft winged or circular parked on its edges, and landed on a dry open place. Again we were down on an alien planet far from home, and I wondered how much this had to do with guarding Earth. Zeta Ret.A shone in a clear blue sky in heat like a Mediterranean summer. Zeta Ret.B was lowish northwest above the city as a dot much brighter than Venus, and at night would probably be heartily dratted by that world's astronomers if Greys were at all like humans in that respect.

As we came out, some of us took our helmets off, glad to feel the wind for a while. As the aliens came out, I felt bouts of a strange 'wrong!' feeling, and others of us felt various emotions. Foster, who had come out of the bulk of Leila Carlin standing above the magenta-leaved dry forest to the north, had a feeling of present evil and reached to unslung his laser gun. We were down, on the ground out of our ships, beyond space on the planet of the Greys that many tales of dread had hinted at. Birds sang - with them at least, evolution there had run parallel to Earth - but their song was alien and sounded ominous. The wind, over dry farmland and patches of strange-looking buildings from distant rounded mountains to the south, seemed laden with the aura of unnameable experiments, as people have reported after alleged stray contacts with Greys on Earth. The Greys looked disquieted by our reaction, and one of them took a walkietalkie out of a pocket and then a gun out of a holster as a space-marine who was with us as a guard reached into a grenade pouch. Tension mounted. The guard took two rounded objects from the pouch. The Greys started to edge away.

The guard shook one of the objects out: it was a large piece of the metal mini chainlinking that we use to reinforce repairs to AT spacesuits. He draped it over his head and ordered sharply: "Helmets on *now*, even if you've got to get one from onboard! And don't leave your helmets behind again!".

"Why?" I queried.

"Just do it!" he barked. We obeyed. With our heads inside metal, the strange feelings got

less. The guard showed us his other object; it was a microwave detector. "Their heads are emitting microwaves in the psycho-active band." he explained, "I bet they communicate among each other with it. We're just getting interference from it. Parts of our brains and spinal cords and likely of theirs are the right size to resonate to it, and to produce it if there's a source of electricity. Human brains do generate a bit of electricity, that's how hospital EEG machines work."

"I saw a TV program where someone proved that ordinary human water divining works by the thoracic enlargement of the spinal cord reacting to natural ground microwave emissions." said one of my men.

"But - that feeling of evil that I had ..." said Foster.

"was likely set off by a microwave frequency pattern that means something totally different with them, same as a lot of words mean different things in French from in English. If they meet Earthmen routinely, either the Greys or the Earthmen will have to wear woven wire balaclavas or some other sort of 'Faraday cage' round their heads to stop the microwaves."

Whether this explains other alleged ESP among humans, I will venture no opinion now. I tried to apologise and explain to the Greys. They seemed to understand. That effect promises to be a nuisance if they ever move openly among humans on Earth, but that is for later. Luckily some of them knew what caused the effect. Some of their communicators have a channel for brain microwaves as well as audio and video channels.

They told us what had been happening in space in the area. Their usual voices are a high-pitched chittering, and it is difficult from them to make human type speech sounds, so they usually synthesize them. "We know of those who call themselves the Karsa." one of them said, "They mostly left us alone, as our organs are too small for them, and we can fight back. But now they have new weapons, missile-packs under their ships' bellies, and they have started raiding here again, with huge black ships as well as their old-type ships. We have lost ships to them. We have been coming to Earth and watching you for a long time, but not shown ourselves much except accidentally, and we certainly had no intention of teaching you faster than light space travel. But now you and the Karsa together have upset things, and now you are here uninvited on one of our homeworlds, as we did not want to happen."

A ball of light passed across the sky, slowed, turned back, and turned into a native ship as it came in and landed. A radar operator in Kaminski radioed to me in surprise, for the ball of light had registered on his sensors as a Type B 'fairy'. "That is a side-effect of how our ship motors work when going fast in air." I was told, "It is a warping of space, which also kept us safe from your missiles when you shot at us thinking that we were Karsa ships.". That changed some assumptions of ours. While we were there we saw both types of 'fairy'; the Type A's were along an active geological fault along the edge of some hills near our landing field and were caused by piezoelectricity from geotectonic forces, as Earth theory had guessed, but all the Type B's that we saw there were admitted by the Greys to be their spacecraft running in the concealing space-warping.

They drove us into the city and showed us round buildings. It was only the second densely populated alien world we had been on, and after years of being told that Greys are hallucinations it was a shock to see thousands of them casually thronging the streets or working in the countryside around. One of my men was more direct; he complained that with that and the microwave effect and other things it was like 'being on a bad trip'. In a chemical works we were surprised to see one wading in strong acid naked unaffected, and to see some routinely working in enclosed reaction rooms exposed to what to humans would be massively

supra-lethal amounts of cyanide gas or carbon monoxide. Foster wondered how and where such hazards would exist in nature to encourage such resistances to evolve. Their large almond-shaped apparent eyes are natural goggles like an Earth snake's eye-covers; their true eyeballs are human-sized.

"I read that on Earth there's a natural lake of 10% sulphuric acid in the crater of a volcano called Niragongo in central Africa. You tend to find sulphur round volcanoes." said one of my crewmen.

But that was hardly the cause. We swopped blood and tissue samples with them. Later at home we found that the DNA of Zeta Ret A.III's native animals and plants differed from that of Zeta Ret B.III, as if each evolved separately from micro-organisms carried across space geological ages ago by some means; but the Greys' DNA did not relate much to either. There is a suspicion that they are descended from someone's long-ago genetical engineering experiment leftovers or surplus special-purposes creations dumped there. If so, the deed may have been very long ago and the culprits' laboratory not now existing or buried deep in rock, for the DNA nearest akin to theirs is that of the natives of 29 Orionis III, who are humanoid but bigger and more heavily built than Greys and have human-type naked eyes without goggles. But the Greys cannot help their ancestry and have a right to live, and without raids from HR2718.

They showed us some divers checking lock gates in a big canal. Again, beyond the width of space it was so much like home in some ways that the differences stood out. After I had earlier seen one of them space himself unharmed for nearly half an hour, it was no surprise that the divers had no breathing sets since they were merely looking round rather than working hard; but when they surfaced, we found that downwind from a Grey whose metabolism has been running in anaerobic mode that long is no place for a human with a sense of smell, and I had thought that long-trip asteroid miner smell was bad.

Inevitably, one of my men mentioned the Bermuda Triangle.

"We had an undersea base there for many centuries." the contact Grey said, "But we did not sink or seize or abduct any of your transport there. That flight of your warplanes that vanished there, that some of you make much of: one of our ships found them later on the seabed. They were all out of fuel. Their only way to navigate by a radio beacon was a simple resonating loop that read the right direction and also the direction 180 degrees wrong."

"Meaning they'd 'read off the back of the loop!'" Foster exclaimed, "I well remember that risk from the Air Force! Those 'DF loops', fine for tracking illegal transmitters on the ground, not so clever as aircraft navigators. Is that all that happened!?, after all the trash cultist stuff about that lot?!".

"And a lot of sea ships go across it, and a proportion sink for one reason and another. When your SHADO submarines started patrolling, we had to abandon the base before you found it and blew it up thinking it was a Karsa base. Then the Karsa took it over and used it for their own purposes for a while until you humans found it and destroyed it."

"That explains that." I replied, "I was wondering how the Karsa managed to set it up so quickly with only their ordinary UFO's to bring everything in."

"Some of you look scared at our appearance." said one of our local guides, "but it is the same with you. That last building, they thought you were Karsa, coming in that kit. I had thought that Earth had its own spacesuit designs."

"You may well ask." I replied, "We need a liquid-breathing suit for the accelerations that we get; we should be using the NASA ALBS suit, but every time I ask about it another design snag has arisen. Light years from anywhere is not the place for us to be the teething ring for

some kit developer's 'teething troubles'. It's all right you talking, you've had centuries to get your space kit right, and so have the Karsa."

"We do not abduct. The Karsa do that." he said, "We sometimes have examined and released someone. It is unlikely that you have not done the same, now you can fly all over the place. A few times in the past some ship captain of ours has 'let his heart rule his head', as you say, and gas-bombed some large Earth army that he saw, to save lives, after he saw a trail of ravage and slaughter that it was making just to enforce taxes and the like; but against our noninterference rules and as far as I know not for a long time."

I remembered the Bible's account of the fate of Sennacherib's Assyrian army, a few centuries BC, and wondered if my men would be tempted to do the same.

After another night there we got back to our ships, took off, surveyed some more, and left the system. "I know the boss says it's microwaves," said one of my men as we quickly surveyed the gas-giant Zeta Ret A.VI and its moons, "but I still say that was the creepiest 'ole we've been on, even after them Iwani's faces giving me nightmares. Pity anyone 'oo'll 'ave to live 'ere as a contact man. Real Greys, what next? On top of I was on 'is first long trip and them 29 Orionis natives, nearly like men but they looked all the time as if they'd all just been beaten up, *that* gave me the shivers also. They weren't like that on those pictures in that old moonbase of theirs. Boss reckons they've evolved to look like that since, camouflage to 'ide from predators; if so, they sure needed it. Lets get back 'ome to our own people that look like people."

We got back to the Sun uneventfully, picked up four men at a geologists' camp in Coprates Chaos on Mars who wanted a lift home, left them at Bordeaux in France, landed in Area 51, and heard there that a fourth Kaminski-type ship was nearly ready. The four Iwani had wanted to come back with us, so I brought them; they were of interest to xenobiologists and xenolinguists, but some of the staff there did not want to hear a lot of complications about interstellar politics but wanted back to the time when all the Outside could be lumped together as 'Them' to be kept away and out of sight and out of public knowledge; some on 27 Orionis III likely were saying the same.

A month later Moonbase reported an incoming sensor echo. It proved to be a 1400-foot-long roughly cylindrical ship which said in Karsa-ese that it was on a contact and trading mission. One of my patrollers caught up with it 3.1 A.U. away in the direction of Rigel. Its crew proved to be Iwani and Karsa mixed. With it, unexpectedly, was SG2, with a new symbol. It seems that its motor had been basically FTL capable all the time, but to grossly limit speed and range had had a secret sealed restrainer unit which had now been removed. That was the end of that hope of an alliance, leaving nothing except to let it land, preferably under guard, and ask its crew what they wanted, and warn the public to avoid too much fright at the appearance of the Iwani face. 27 Orionis III's old order has not reasserted itself. Their Space Guard has been disbanded, and its successor, like SHADO, is now limited to an uphill struggle to keep track of many comings and goings. They are all over space exploring, catching up on generations of being shut in on their planet. An endless list of places and streets named after members of the old regime have been renamed after space pioneers and their craft destroyed by Space Guard for going out of atmosphere in breach of international agreements. I had looked to them as a model, but now their Tokugawa-like isolationist stage is over, an alien 'Commodore 'Peary's 'black ships' have broken in, and there as well as on Earth unknown paths lie ahead - and I know that my own people are the cause. In space it is not now 'us versus them', but Earth is one among many contacting worlds with varying histories and

mentalities and needs - such as that HR2718 still needs a steady supply of transplant organs.  
And Man is still a spacefarer.