

Xmas On The Moon

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As she rose from her command seat to stretch the tension from arms and shoulders Gay Ellis's attention was caught by a subtle motion through the observation window on her left. With a frown marring her classically chiselled features she moved over to the six-inch thick, blast proof glass and stared out across an arid lunar landscape.

There could be no doubt that a source of light was swooping down from the west at incredible velocity, and whatever it was its existence had not been registered by the base's multi-billion dollar sensory equipment.

Small and round it gave off a golden blue glow of startling beauty, yet Gay had learned to distrust appearances. Out here attractive glittering lights could be deadly.

"Nina, will you come and have a look at this."

Uncoiling with cat-like grace an attractive Maltese girl made her way over, dark and sensuous she complimented Gay's cool English reserve. The commander did not have to indicate the approaching light, as it was only too obvious.

"Meteorite?" Nina offered before instantly correcting herself. "SID would have told us, maybe it's just semi-solid debris from that comet last night."

She didn't sound convinced by this either, and Gay's features reflected a deep doubt.

Before their eyes the object changed course veering by a good five degrees and losing height. No Gay thought this is not debris, yet it couldn't be a UFO either or every klaxon on the base would be screaming.

"It seems to be heading for Larson's gully," she said knowing this to be five kilometres from the base and quite deep.

Suddenly the light flared so brightly so that both women took an involuntary step back and shielded their eyes. The flare peeked after five seconds then lost most of its ferocity. When both women looked again the object could not be seen, whatever it was it had made moon fall.

"I'm going out there," Gay surprised her self by saying this, as commander her job was to stay here to coordinate events and officially her shift had just ended.

"Why not send one of the pilots?" Nina enquired. This was standard procedure and a logical course of action, but Gay wasn't thinking logically at that moment she was being driven by...what, some kind of emotional impulse? Certainly she felt that the new arrival was significant to her.

"No I'm going out there, wake Colonel Foster only when I'm gone."

Paul might insist on going himself and she didn't want that, she didn't really want anyone else involved although the rules insisted she take a co-pilot.

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The glow was getting stronger and not just because the moon mobile was nearing the gully, whatever lay within was producing more light. Next to Gay, Del Santos let a gasp escape

his lips. He was the most junior of the interceptor pilots and barely in his twenties so he could be spared for this non-emergency mission, plus he didn't talk much being in awe by the woman beside him. This suited Gay just fine as she wasn't in a talking mood, the closer they got to the gully the more she felt a strong pull in her stomach. She was being drawn inexorably towards this mystery object, somehow she felt sure that it knew her, her personally and not just for her rank.

"We'll stop on the lip of the gully and proceed on foot," she said getting a mute nod from her companion. Was I ever that young she thought? Santos was bright and ambitious, and in the limited confines of moon base he'd rise quickly - if he survived, and many didn't.

They faced a short walk down into the gully it wasn't very deep, yet neither took a step as they stared at the thing sat there in the dust below. It wasn't a UFO but it did look alien, it certainly wasn't space debris or some burned out satellite.

"Maybe we should have some back-up," Del suggested and a palpable fear of the unknown was visible even through his helmet visor.

"We're in no danger," Gay responded without knowing why she was so confident.

"But it's alien commander," the boy felt the need to state something obvious.

"You can stay here if you like." With this brusque comment barely out of her mouth

Gay began her approach, she was armed but her weapon remained over her shoulder. Through her helmet com-link she heard Del talking to moon base, perhaps informing them what was going on and asking for advice, however to his credit he followed her with his weapon drawn and primed. Gay liked that, she had selected Del herself from a panel of twelve hopefuls and it was nice to have ones judgement reinforced.

As she physically neared the object she felt an emotional burst so strong that it tore a gasp from her lips, good grief she was crying inside her space suit and her legs were trembling. Never before had she reacted like this to anything the aliens had sent. Fear yes, dread certainly, even anger but not with...with love!

"The glow is diminishing, commander."

Yes so it was, it had been since they began walking and now the object was fifty per cent less bright almost as if - well as if something within it was dying.

"We must get inside," Gay said whilst in her mind she was thinking the oddest thought I must save him. But who was this him she was thinking about?

"There doesn't seem to be an entrance, the surface is totally smooth." Santos was moving around the other side.

"There is a way in and we're going to find it."

"How do you know commander?"

Gay wasn't sure about the details but as her chest tightened she came to a halt and turned to face the faceted outer skin of the alien craft. "Here," she said. "We get in here."

With her in seconds the boy took out a sensory device and played it over the hull, Gay didn't need him to tell her that every reading was negative.

"Any moment now," she said earning a long, questioning glance.

It just appeared before them, melting into existence with the briefest of hazes. The oblong doorway had a rounded top and was plenty big enough for an adult human being even in a spacesuit.

She entered first with confident steps.

Within the craft the light effect was softer, more diffuse. Shapes could be seen but not distinguished, bubbles of silvery light and semi-solid columns of some nebulous vapour.

"Commander, what about Colonel Foster?"

Later Gay thought, afterwards but not now.

* * *

"Why didn't you try to stop her damn it?" Paul Foster couldn't keep the frustration out of his voice, even though he knew it was unfair to rebuke Santos. How did a junior officer on probation restrain his commanding officer?

"I couldn't stop her sir, she seems driven to do this."

"All right Del, go in after her and keep your eyes peeled. An interceptor will be with you in two minutes and another moon mobile in about six. What can you see?"

"Not much Colonel, there are some weird shapes ahead of me and some kind of..." Communication was lost to a wave of static and Foster balled a fist, he should be out there taking these risks not Gay and definitely not some kid wet behind the ears. But with Lieutenant Ellis gone he was the senior officer, he couldn't leave the base now.

"Shall I inform earth sir," Nina enquired.

"No, not until we have something tangible and Lieutenant Ellis is back here safe and sound."

* * *

It was eight-sided with a domed roof and a smooth glass-like floor, smaller than command centre it had a raised sarcophagus in the middle and Gay had ascended three steps to peer through the transparent top of this. Del couldn't see any aliens but he was still terrified, this whole thing might be one big trap wired to explode or take off at any moment. Oddly there was both gravity and oxygen, but neither chose not to remove their helmets.

Gay blinked tears from her eyes, her whole body was shaking now and there was a knot in her throat she couldn't shift. Through the top of the coffin-like device she could see a face the skin was pink not green and the hair was streaked with grey, the cheekbones were high like hers and the full lips seemed frozen into a smile of welcome. Eyes open the man stared up at her unblinkingly, but there was no sign of breathing. He wore a beige jacket and cream trousers and on his left lapel was an insignia she recognised. Upon his left wrist she could make out a gold Cartier watch, the fingers of which were frozen, as indeed was the date. It was as though no time had past over the last five years, not since this man had vanished from the face of the earth.

"Commander," Del said softly. "Are you all right?" He peered down at the man.

"Not an alien," he gasped. "He looks human."

"His name is Jack Ellis," said Gay softly. "And he's my father."

Before the youngster could stop her she had removed a laser cutter from her belt and its red beam was piercing the hull of the coffin, from which a hiss of vapour escaped almost knocking them over.

"What are you doing, we have to preserve the site intact." Del shouted thinking of quarantine protocols that had been drummed into him. But Gay wasn't functioning on that level, she was no longer a SHADO operative she was a daughter eager to be reunited with her father. Pushing Santos away she ran her beam along the edge of the coffin lid until the lid rose of its own accord, humming open on a hinge to expose the man within who was wrapped in some kind of ice cold cellophane.

"We must get him out of here," she said.

"No we can't, not without Foster's approval and he'll demand quarantine."

"Del either help me or wait outside," Gay snapped. Seeing that Jack Ellis was too big and

heavy for her to carry alone Del submitted to gallantry and took the man's upper body whilst gay grabbed him by the feet.

"How can we carry him all the way to the moon mobile, he weighs a.."

Suddenly Jack had no weight, it was as if his entire mass had been switched off and Del found himself carrying something as light as a feather.

"We can do it," said Gay. "He's helping us."

But he's dead Del thought, eyes fixed open, no respiration and no obvious pulse the man had to be dead.

* * *

"You did what?" Foster's anger scorched over the com-link to make Del wince and think of a disciplinary hearing.

"It was my decision colonel," Gay was as cool as a cucumber in her defiance, behind her seat in the moon mobile Jack Ellis lay immobile on a stretcher as he was ferried back to base.

"Yes lieutenant as senior officer you'll carry the can." The threat in Foster's voice was in no way diluted. Then he seemed to soften, "Take the body to perimeter dome 4, I'll quarantine your path to the medical bay where the alien will have to isolated."

"It's not an alien sir," Del cut in then bit his tongue, you did not argue with someone of Foster's rank.

"What do you mean Santos?"

"It's a man sir and Lt Ellis knows him, she claims it's her father."

"It is my father," Gay snapped the fire in her eyes almost messianic. Foster was quiet for several seconds as he took this in, probably as stunned as Santos.

"You're sure about this Gay?" He finally asked.

"Yes sir."

"But it's been five years."

"He's alive, I know he is."

"Are there any signs of life?"

No thought Gay, there aren't, but then who understood alien technology?

"It's just something that I sense," She replied in a voice most unlike her cool, clipped tones.

"Okay I understand your emotional attachment," Foster sounded almost reasonable. "But you've still broken the rules and I'll have to report this, when you get back you can consider yourself suspended from duty." If Gay cared it didn't show on her face.

* * *

It certainly showed on Straker's despite the fact that it was grainy and slightly blurred on the moon-to-earth communications link, also clear was his anger it sizzled out of him in waves even over millions of miles. He liked Gay, she was his protégé but that wouldn't stop him hanging her out to dry and Foster knew it.

"Is it a dead body?" The supreme commander snarled in his soft Boston accent.

"Zero life signs, the doctor thinks it's dead and that's good enough for me. Gay on the other hand..." Paul let his sentence hang in the air.

"How is she Paul?"

Gay was surprisingly composed once more, even contrite. She'd been confined to her quarters and hadn't objected. "I'm not sure, this just isn't like her at all she's normally so professional and detached." Paul sighed, "I sent you a video grab of the face on the corpse, is it Jack Ellis?"

Straker sighed and gave a weary nod, Jack had been a friend of his and if things had been different he would have been deputy commander of SHADO instead of Freeman. Then one night a UFO had landed near his home in Shropshire, Jack had been taken and the UFO had escaped the fledgling security of the day.

"Paul we know from experience that people taken by the aliens are harvested and Jack was in good health, it doesn't make any sense for them to return his body."

"Maybe they're playing a different game this time," Foster offered. "Although I don't see the point of it."

Me neither Straker's face reflected, "Just keep the body isolated and don't let Lt Ellis anywhere near it."

Don't worry, thought Paul, *I won't*, "Could the aliens be playing mind games, trying to weaken moon base by getting at Gay?"

"I don't see what that gains them, SHADO personnel are replaceable they must know that."

"But this does seem to be aimed at Gay."

"Right, so keep a close eye on her to. How's morale up there?"

Morale was fine, a little strained but the girls and pilots were holding it together. Nobody really knew what was going on.

"And the alien pod?" The SHADO chief asked.

"Still in the gully, our forensics boys are going over it but there doesn't seem to be much of interest."

"Tell them to keep looking, there are answers Paul somewhere."

What Foster had to say next took some getting out of his mouth because he didn't like it frankly it felt like a personal betrayal.

"I've suspended Lt Ellis, and I think under the circumstances that she should be transferred."

Frowning at the younger man, Ed licked his teeth.

"I know it's tough Paul but you've done the right thing, for now we'll keep Gay on the moon. My advice to you is to have a good heart to heart with her, she trusts you as much as anyone. But you're right, she could be finished with SHADO."

On that sad note Straker cut the connection leaving Foster with a heavy heart.

* * *

Dr Lewis circled the body on the theatre table. The cellophane wrap had been removed and within had been a fine film of crystals that had somehow preserved the body in perfect condition. In the two hours since the body had been in moon base an odd thing had happened, colour had returned to the pale cheeks and saliva was flowing in the mouth.

Even so when the eyes blinked, Lewis was still caught off guard and jerked with shock. He'd seen some strange things in his job but few were creepier than a man returning from the dead.

Forcing himself to move closer he leaned over Ellis and saw the eyes blink again, then from deep within the throat there came a sound, a strange rasping drawn out sigh. A finger twitched, then the whole hand and then a foot moved. Lewis took himself over to a com-link his whole body was shaking with fear and disbelief.

* * *

"Hi, how are you?" This was Foster's opening line and he was aware of how inadequate it was under the circumstances. Gay was effectively under house arrest and faced losing her

entire career.

Sat before him with a wan expression she was holding a framed, black and white photo of her father taken more than ten years ago.

Paul said, "Look I'm sorry Gay, but I really didn't have any choice."

The look she gave him was vulnerable, scared and in it's own way devastatingly sexy. She was a good looking woman and Foster wasn't immune to the fact, in the claustrophobic confines of moon base men and women had to control their sexual urges, but it wasn't easy not with those tight-fitting uniforms the girls wore.

"You did what you had to Paul," she said softly using his first name and not his rank, suddenly layers of formality seemed to have dissolved between them and they were just a man and woman struggling to survive in a hostile, airless wilderness.

"Maybe so but that doesn't mean I have like it," he said as he sat opposite and took her small hands in his large ones.

"Go ahead Paul ask the question I know you're dying to," she prompted as her eyes met his with a warmth he'd never seen in them before.

"Do I have to ask it?" he said.

Her eyes dipped, "No I suppose you don't, but you've every right to know. The truth is I'm not really sure why I broke all the rules, they just didn't seem important out there on the lunar surface, all that mattered was reaching my father and helping him."

"Did you know he was aboard that ship before you saw him?" Paul asked.

"In some way yes I think I did, don't ask me how I can't it explain it rationally. It was as if I was being pulled, directed by a force I couldn't resist. I know that makes me sound weak and vulnerable."

Foster raised a hand to interrupt he didn't think that at all because the one thing Gay Ellis wasn't was weak in his eyes.

"The body has been formally identified as your father, I'm sorry."

"Don't be Paul at least now I can have some closure, I can bury him and have done with it. Before when he was just missing it was unbearable, every day was an agony of not knowing of wondering what if."

The com-link interrupted them and Foster could have punched it, he was soon glad he hadn't it was Dr Lewis and his news was staggering.

* * *

When Paul entered the medical bay he was stunned to see a dead man sitting up and taking a drink of water, Jack still had a deathly grey pallor to his cheeks but now he seemed to have filled out there was about him a strange animation. Five years in alien hands and here he was, what in God's name would he be able to tell them? Gay was outside watching on video at Paul's insistence. Foster wanted to be sure this was a human being they were dealing with first.

Lowering the glass Jack blinked at him, "First water I've tasted in ages I never knew it was so sweet, funny I never touched the stuff before." The voice was a little gruff as though it hadn't been used in a while but the words and meaning were clear enough.

"Are you Major Jack Ellis," Paul demanded tersely. "Formerly of the RAF seconded to the European Space Agency in..."

The older man gave a rasping laugh and it had a chillingly graveyard quality, he threw the empty glass at Paul who caught it easily.

"Good reflexes, I like that." Ellis responded.

Somewhat put out Foster snapped, "You haven't answered my question."

"If this is our base on the moon then Gay must be here, can I see her?"

Evasive Paul thought and his wariness grew to distrust, "There are a few formalities first and one of them is convincing me you are whom you appear to be."

Ellis nodded slowly, "You work for SHADO which was formed on October 25th 1971 with Ed Straker as it's first supreme commander, he was the best man at my wedding and I was the best man at his. Moon base is a central hub ringed by five domes, it cost fifty billion dollars to build and took six years. Ed and myself were the first people to serve within it, our names are still scrawled on the door of a locker somewhere."

"You have a lot of intimate knowledge," Paul conceded. "But then you could have been well coached, five years is a long time in which to get word perfect."

Ellis hung his head for a moment as if tired, "How can I convince you of anything colonel, what can I say that will make you believe I am who I say I am?"

"How about some detailed information about the aliens like who they are and where they come from, oh and how we can defeat them?"

Ellis gave an ironic smile, "Don't you think I'd tell you all that if I could?"

"I don't know," Paul responded. "You might have amnesia or you could be holding out on us."

The older man ran a hand over his weather-beaten features, "You say I've been missing for years, well it doesn't seem like it to me."

"Are you claiming that your memory of the abduction is a blank?" As he asked this Paul threw a look at Dr Lewis, the shrug he got in return was noncommittal.

Jack said wearily, "I remember the night the UFO came for me, I can tell you everything I was doing, saying and thinking. Then there's this brilliant white light, a pain in my skull and nothing."

Foster barely contained his frustration, "You know we can't leave it like that."

"The Ed Straker I remember certainly wouldn't, how is he by the way?"

Paul was impassive he had made up his mind to volunteer no information about SHADO or its personnel until this man had been thoroughly vetted.

The next instant Gay rushed into the room flew across it and wrapped her arms around the dead man to squeeze him tightly. He squeezed her back and there were tears in those deep grey sad eyes of his, an ocean of pain.

Paul could have stopped Gay entering the room but she'd never have forgiven him, and who was he to forbid a family reunion he'd never lost a parent?

"Oh dad it's so good to see you," Gay sobbed. "I never thought I would ever again, I'd just about given up hope."

"Never give up hope honey," Ellis responded. "It's the one thing we always have."

Turning away Paul glanced up at a video screen with a live feed to earth, on it a blond man was scowling intently as he tried to make sense of what he was seeing.

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Straker was silent and solemn, before him on the desk was a file on Jack Ellis and next to it was another slimmer file marked 'abductees returned, risk assessment.'

When Alec Freeman broke the silence by lighting a cigar, the American twitched involuntarily.

"Why send him back Alec, and why after all this time?" As if speaking to himself the blond man tapped his fingers on the files, Freeman had never seen him looking so glacial, so intent. "The aliens don't just let people go so there has to be a strategy here, some kind of plan

aimed at moon base and ultimately us to."

The older man who was more laid back in style and appearance blew smoke into the air, "You've already made up your mind haven't you?" It wasn't an accusation but there was an edge to the words that even Straker wasn't immune to.

"Yes I'm afraid I have, there's only one possible response we can allow ourselves Alec. We daren't let our guard down."

"Gay isn't going to like it, you could lose her."

"Maybe we've lost her already, have you thought about that?"

Freeman arched his eyebrows but made no comment. Straker went on, "You're on the next flight up there Alec and you'll be taking the SART boys with you."

"Special Alien Response Team, is that really necessary?" Now Freeman's distaste began to show. "Can't Foster handle this?"

"Paul's a good man but he's too close to Gay Ellis," Came the snap.

"Paul's a professional, he's played it by the book so far."

"Alec this is something new, it requires a different kind of book. I know you think I'm being harsh and maybe I am, but that's the game we're in. Jack Ellis is a red alpha threat, we can't allow ourselves to see him in any other light until he's past the SART tests."

Freeman knew his boss was right that he was being clinical, logical and putting personal considerations aside even so it seemed harsh and heavy-handed so he stood up, "I'd better pack my toothbrush then."

"Pack two," said Straker with rare humour. "It could be a long haul."

* * *

Gay stood before Foster staring at him with open defiance and not a little disbelief, he felt scorched by her gaze and more than a little guilty. This was never going to be an easy meeting, not with Straker's orders still buzzing in his ears and Alec Freeman on the way. Paul was just glad they were having this conversation in the privacy of Gay's quarters and not the command module with the other girls looking on.

"You can't do it," Gay snapped, her back ramrod straight with anger. "Not after all this time and not after all he's been through, you've no evidence to...I won't cooperate with SART or with your draconian methods."

In Gay's place Paul knew he'd adopt the same attitude, he was totally sympathetic. Jack was her father, of course she loved him and wanted to protect him but she was still an officer in SHADO she had responsibilities, duties.

"I'm not happy about this either," he said. "But see it from our point of view, we have to assume the worst based on past experience. I'm not saying your dad is working for the aliens consciously but you know how they use people, how they manipulate minds and bodies. He's a potential time bomb and we'd be negating our duty if we didn't put him through every test we have, that's why SART was set up."

Suddenly sagging Gay flopped into a seat, burying her head in her hands she let out a low sob of frustration. "I know," she finally said as his hand brushed her shoulder. "But that doesn't make it any easier."

Paul knew a concession was called for, "You can be present throughout, a friendly face. I think we owe you that much."

When her eyes rose they were damp with tears and a deep inner longing for compassion. Five years was a long time to miss someone and now dad was being taken away again, at least that's what it felt like.

"What will they do to him Paul, do you know?"

Foster did far more than he would have liked, it started with intensive questioning under the truth drug then proceeded to deeper hypnotic interrogation that included taking the subject right back to the point of abduction and working forwards through every agonizing moment. Before he could say this a com-link buzzed, it was Nina Barry and the news wasn't good in fact it was shocking.

* * *

With a groan of effort Jack Ellis lifted himself off the medical bay table and took a few experimental steps watched closely by Dr Lewis.

"I think you should take it easy sir," Lewis remarked. "At least until we've finished our preliminary tests."

Throwing him a cold look the abductee then glanced down at his own palms as if seeing them for the first time then he said, "I'm sorry doctor, but there aren't going to be any more tests."

Lewis flinched not liking awkward patients, "Don't force me to get security in here sir, I'm only doing my duty."

"Yes so you are," Ellis responded. "And so am I."

He walked ever so casually over to the medic, "I'm not a monster, please don't ever think that."

Alerted more by the tone than the words themselves Lewis gazed with alarm at the man then reached out for a panic button.

Ellis touched him, just touched him gently on the chest. It was more of a caress than a blow but it was enough.

With a shriek of agony Lewis fell back into the wall, his face contorted with pain and eyes milky white. Then he slumped to the floor in a limp heap.

Unhappily it seemed Ellis regarded the doctor then going over to a power cable he rested his other hand on this and concentrated.

The lights of the medical bay flickered several times before winking off one by one. But Jack Ellis was still visible despite the gloom he was glowing very brightly indeed.

* * *

"What do you mean it's gone?" Paul demanded as he stormed into the command module. "How could it just take off with interceptors flying overhead and a ground team onsite?"

Linda Mason was a new operative with slightly oriental features and curly black hair tied up in a bun at the back of her head.

"One second it was there the next.." She held up her hands in frustration. Slumping into his seat Paul ran a shaking hand over his mouth Straker was going to love this.

"Did anyone see it vanish?"

"No sir."

"Was there any warning, a power build up?"

Linda sighed and close by Nina Barry responded, "There was a sharp spike of electro magnetic potential about fifteen seconds before hand."

"Coming from the gully?"

"No sir as far as we can tell the source of the spike was closer to home."

"Moon base?" Foster snapped.

"We can't pin it down to an exact location but..."

Paul was already on his feet, "Yellow alert, seal the base and put all interceptors in an in a

response vector."

"Sir, there are no UFO traces."

Maybe not but he had a feeling that was going to change.

* * *

Gay was surprised when the auto-seal on her door switched itself off and even more surprised when her father entered, no longer swearing a medical smock he was attired in a fawn cat suit. She ran to him but he held out both hands in a 'keep off' gesture and she froze in mid stride.

"Listen Gay it's time for us both to leave this place."

What did he mean by leave, where else was there to go?

"Very soon this base will no longer exist and I'm partly responsible for that."

"Dad, what are you saying?"

A conflicting mix of emotions passed over Jack's face, for a moment it seemed like an agony for him to reply then in a resigned voice he said.

"They changed me Gay, altered me completely. The essence of me remained but the rest is something else, please don't ask me to try and explain it I'm not sure there are enough words in the English language."

"You're working for the aliens?"

"You don't work for them, you become one of them." Ellis sagged. "There isn't much time love, I'm asking you to turn your back on your friends and your job and come with me."

"If you know me at all I'm sure you can guess the answer to that," she responded. Jack smiled but even in this there was sadness.

"I can't just leave you here to die."

"And I won't abandon my colleagues to the same fate, Dad what have you done?"

He shook his head, "I need you to trust me love, to take a leap of faith. I can't help the others but I can maybe help you."

"Dad I'm not running away like a scared cat, we can fight the aliens."

"No!" The word was blunt, harsh in its finality. "You can't, you have no idea what you're up against."

Now she touched him softly, lovingly. "Then tell me."

"Oh Gay, if only I could." When he touched his right forefinger to her forehead it glowed and so did her flesh, then she fell limply into his arms.

* * *

The medical bay door was half open, within everything had been overturned, smashed and burned. The bed Ellis had lay on was empty and nearby someone lay face down and very still it was Dr Lewis. Paul was stunned, but before he could touch the com-link it jumped to life with the voice of Linda Mason. Three UFOs had been tracked heading towards the moon. Swallowing hard Foster put the base on red alert he had one more port of call before returning to his job.

Somehow it wasn't a total surprise to find Gay gone, but at least her room bore none of the violence of the medical bay. The personal effects were missing as was a space suit and a spare oxygen tank this could only mean that Ellis was taking his daughter out onto the surface but why?

"Colonel airlock four has been breached," Linda informed.

"How did that happen?"

"I don't know sir but all over the base systems are going offline."

"What about communications?" A cold sickly dread was crawling up from his stomach.

"We've lost our link to earth, but we can still talk to the interceptors."

"Good, I want those UFOs dealt with."

That was when Linda told him there were now six traces. Paul asked if ground defences were still functioning.

"Lasers are down but we still have the robot rocket launchers."

"Deploy everything we've got that still works."

"What are you going to do colonel?"

Having seen movement beyond the thick glass of the room Paul went over to peer across the lunar landscape, he made out two figures. "I'm going outside, Lt Ellis has been kidnapped by her father and Dr Lewis is dead."

* * *

Consciousness returned to Gay very quickly like a veil being drawn back from her brain. She found herself walking across moon dust with her father. Oddly he wasn't wearing a space suit and didn't seem to need one. With an effort she pulled free and he turned to face her with an expression of angst. "Don't hate me Gay," he said and oddly she found she didn't. "Believe me when I tell you I had no choice in any of this, we are so small and they are so..." He cut off with tears in his eyes. "We must get clear of the base before the end comes, I can't let you be harmed."

She had to get back and coordinate a response, but as she turned she saw lights wink out across the base. "What have you done?" She screamed.

"I am a device, a living transmitter. The second you took me into the base I began to broadcast something."

Gay didn't understand and didn't want to, she began to walk back but he caught her by the glove and his strength was incredible. "Listen to me," he pleaded. "You can't change what is going to happen you can only waste your life in a pointless gesture of blind defiance."

"Let go of me," she said coldly and reluctantly he did holding his hands up. "I have a duty to SHADO, to the human race." She cried her mind now free of the emotional turmoil of before.

"SHADO is the past Gay, it no longer matters. I realised that the second I met the aliens and saw what they really are."

Disgusted she began to jog across the arid dusty lunar surface back to dome four, as she did a figure emerged and began to approach her holding a blaster.

* * *

On the radar screen Linda Mason watched three blips fly in formation away from the moon. "Interceptors launched, they will be in firing range within four minutes and twenty seconds."

Nina Barry looked over, "They'll only be able to take out three of the aliens, the rest are down to us."

"But we're losing power," Linda tried to keep the panic out of her voice but didn't totally succeed, this was her first tour of duty and it was beginning to show.

"Channel everything we have into the weaponry systems," Nina was a cool head in a crisis - she'd lived through enough of them.

Then Joan Harrington spoke up, "Interceptor leader reports a strange wave of light emanating from all six UFOs."

"Size and nature?" Nina demanded.

"Nature unknown, size is ten miles across and expanding."

"Can the interceptors go around it?"

Joan touched an earphone, "Not without losing the targets."

"Then they'll have to fire through it."

Suddenly one of the three dots on Linda's radar screen flared and vanished.

"I've lost interceptor one," She cried. "All trace is gone, it just winked out of existence."

Joan worked her terminal keys, "Confirmed." She said, "I can't detect it at all, it must have been destroyed."

"Blast negative," said Nina.

"Then where is it, what's happened to Lew?" Linda cried.

"Stay calm," Nina ordered.

"How can I stay calm, we've lost an interceptor?"

"Linda," Joan's voice had a warning edge forcing the youngest girl to draw in her hysteria.

"I'm sorry," she said. "Interceptors two and three closing, they'll be within range in..."

Suddenly it happened again, interceptor two just flared and disappeared it was Mark Bradley's craft. Linda let out a low moan of pure pain then looked up with a drawn, pale expression of horror. Nina took off her headphones and turned slowly, "No." She croaked. "Mark and Lew," she couldn't say anymore.

Joan said, "Del is calling in and requesting new orders, he says he's losing gyroscopic control. There's some kind of field being transmitted by the UFOs." Del was the youngest and newest interceptor pilot.

Nina blinked at the younger girl, "Tell him to break off."

Before the order could be given the third blip disappeared from the screen, and it meant that Santos had perished. "The aliens are through," Linda cried. "They're coming right for us."

Quickly Nina forced herself to work, directing the rocket launchers into position as the base lost power all over, never in its history had it faced such a crisis.

* * *

Paul met Gay halfway, and behind her he could see Ellis stood there without any protection. Jack wasn't doing anything except looking at the sky, as though he was waiting for something. Paul had just received a terrible message over his helmet microphone.

"Are you all right Gay? We've lost all three interceptors."

Barely able to take it in she forced down her tears, "My father has done something to the base."

"I know we've lost 20% power, I think that somehow he's draining it away."

"What are you going to do Paul?"

"I think you can guess what has to be done," and slowly he removed the weapon from his shoulder and primed it.

"No Paul," she cried. "You can't."

"We're fighting for our lives Gay, your father is the enemy."

"Let me talk to him, reason with him."

"Moon base is about to be attacked, we're at war." Foster snarled then swallowed his rage and fear they were wasted on Gay. Slowly she reached up with both gloves, the gesture only too clear. Pausing only briefly he handed her the gun. Turning sadly she began to retrace her steps with Foster in toe, Jack watched the sky for a moment longer then his eyes dipped to meet them seeing the iron resolve especially in his daughter.

"I understand," he said parting his arms in surrender. "Remember always Gay that I love you."

"I love you too, Dad," she said through tears before aiming the blaster it was already on the top setting, "I'm so sorry."

She fired.

* * *

"Here they come," said Linda as she stood in front of the main window. Six luminous stars were descending over the horizon in a rippling string. Each star was a different colour but their coordination was a fabulous sight, an angelic dance of death Linda thought and it's my death they're celebrating.

"In range in twelve seconds," Nina croaked. Outside on the surface there was a small flash of blue fire it didn't last long and when it had faded Foster's voice drifted over a speaker. "Are you still losing power?"

Linda went to check, the power bleed had stopped but the base was still 30% below par. "We don't have the lasers colonel just rockets."

"Get everyone who can carry a blaster outside, this is a fight to the finish."

Yes thought Linda it is.

* * *

As the enemy swooped down over the Lorenzo pass they fanned out to make themselves harder targets, a spinning green cone shot over Anderson's mountain and took the western route it was moving at breathtaking speed but began to slow down, from it spat a stream of hissing semi-solid particles in a wide angled beam. Dome three blew outwards in a flash of orange red fire, blown into a billion fragments. The shockwave pushed Paul back on his heels and the gorge caught in his throat.

A shimmering red UFO crested Sylvia's ridge and seemed to expand in size, part of it rotating one way and part the other way. There was a jagged angry white flash from its underbelly and dome two burst open like a rotten melon.

The moon base rocket launchers began to fire with a throbbing groan, vomiting a hail of tracer fire into the dark sky. Paul saw a long orange coloured UFO, over to try and avoid the rockets, failing it exploded spectacularly in a raging sunburst. Another UFO dodged the rockets with a dazzling aerial manoeuvre and flipped upside down to fire from the apex of its turret. Dome five became a blinding white after burn, ripped asunder by the power and accuracy of the alien weapon.

"We must get under cover Gay, we're too exposed here."

"But the base Paul, we have to do something."

Teeth clenched he turned away there was nothing to be done, moon base was dying, it was the end of an era maybe the end of SHADO itself.

"Committing suicide won't help now come on lieutenant!"

A purple spiralling UFO hovered right over the base, as space suited figures fired at it with hand held blasters that had absolutely no effect. From the base of the alien machine shot a wave of sparkling furious energy. Another dome blew, discharging itself and its innards across hundreds of yards of moon rock.

Only the command module was left surrounded by smoking, crackling ruins. Get out Paul thought, just get the hell out and run for it.

Then the biggest UFO arrived it was five times the size of the others a glistening gold and red cone of awesome and imposing beauty that swept over the lunar landscape with almost

stately grace. Losing height it spun slowly on its axis to get into the right position. Then it released a bolt of super brilliant whiteness that seemed to travel in slow motion.

* * *

Linda drew in a slow painful breath but it froze in her lungs, the bolt of white fire sank down towards the window. Reaching out she felt Nina and Joan hug her, all three girls wept softly as they waited together for the inevitable.

It came closer and brighter, closer and still brighter, and then a blinding flash.

The window melted, the wall around it cracked apart, computers fused and cables snapped. The end was so sudden and so complete that there was no pain just total and utter oblivion.

Paul and Gay watched it from a high perch, the final moment was almost beautiful a glorious multicoloured wipe out as the command module vaporised into fizzing sparks of plasma. Paul felt Gay shaking beside him and knew he was shaking to. Moon base gone, it didn't seem possible, and soon he thought we'll be gone to because if the aliens don't finish us lack of air will.

* * *

But the UFOs were drifting away not back the way they'd come, but on towards Earth and their main objective.

Gay said, "I wish I was dead to, that I'd died in their with the others."

Part of Paul felt like that to but he shoved it back down his throat this was no time for defeatism,

"Listen Gay there's an emergency survival bunker two miles east of here, I think we could make it on foot if we set off now. There's enough food and air for a couple of weeks, by then either SHADO will be here or - or they will." He pointed at the receding UFOs.

"Do you know what's ironic Paul, it's Christmas day?"

He hadn't even realised and it hardly seemed to matter anyway, but he said. "Merry Christmas," and they set off.