

Feelings of Misgiving

Part 1 - Suzanne Sutherland

Alec swirled his fingers in the little puddle of spilt whisky and soda as he stood at the bar. The noise of the restaurant seemed distant as he gazed at the patterns he created. Leaning with his head on one hand for support, his craggy face creased in deep thought. Alec was not his usual lively smiling self ready to support the secret organisation that he worked for with so much dedication. Really, how he wished that he could get away from it somehow. But he knew the only way to quit SHADO in his position was by execution.

The bartender eyed Alec with concern. This customer had two drinks in him but looked quite intoxicated already. The manager would not approve. *Le Petit Moulin* was a high-class place where quite well-to-do people liked to come for wonderful French food and to enjoy the Gallic atmosphere. Drunkards did not fit the scene.

"Pardon, Monsieur, have you finished for tonight?" inquired the bartender.

"Oh yes, sorry," Alec looked up at him with a forced smile, "I was miles away. How much do I owe you?"

Once outside the restaurant, Alec took a big deep breath of fresh air. "Well, no point in feeling sorry for myself. I've just got to make the best of it," he muttered to himself.

Alec decided not to go home just yet. The summer evening tingled with promise. Something from his past stirred his sense of adventure. Right now he would do anything to get away from his present predicament.

He drove out of London heading southwest towards Wiltshire. As a young teenager he had spent some happy holidays playing along the River Avon near Salisbury. Aunt Maggie, one of his eccentric maiden aunts living in England, had invited her Australian nephew over one summer. He even wondered if his very first girlfriend, Sarah Thomson, would still be there.

"What are you thinking, you old fool? Sarah is probably happily married with four kids by now. Do you really think she would be interested in an old punch bag like you? Do you think she would even remember you?" he chastised himself.

The sweet scent of honeysuckle entered his memories. The thought of being stung by nettles as he tried to grab Sarah made him laugh and wince while he drove on the motorway. He remembered Aunt Maggie had to use nearly half a bottle of Calamine lotion on his arms and legs to calm the sting. She didn't realise that he had fallen into the clump of stinging plants when he was down to just his vest and underwear. Ah, the joys of being young,' thought Alec!!

The town of Warminster came into view. Darkness still had not cloaked the warm summer evening and many people were out for a stroll through the town centre.

Alec perceived that most of the people were not walking at a leisurely pace. Many of them, both young and old, seemed to be running. Was there some kind of festival going on? He didn't see any signs or banners indicating such an event.

He stopped the car and wound down the window. A mother and father with their three children hurried past him.

"Hey, who's come to town?" Alec asked the man.

"What? Oh, don't you know? This place is known for its sightings of UFOs. Everybody is going up to the hill over there to watch!" replied the man elatedly.

Oh bugger, I try to get away from work and it's always there to catch up on me thought

Alec with a silent sigh.

Alec got out of his car and the man pointed to the hill in question. The family then hurried on their way to join the growing throng.

He felt torn between his quest to find the young man inside and his sense of duty. It was always thus so it seemed! Anyway, it probably was nothing, just a bit of mass hysteria perhaps. But, still he better go up that Warminster hill to investigate.

Part 2 - Yuchtar

Slightly breathless after the climb, Alec squatted with his hands resting on his knees and his weight on the balls of his feet. When he caught a glimpse of the spectacle around him, however, he momentarily forgot to breathe at all. It was beautiful - dancing shimmering lights in the sky. He'd seen this sort of thing before, of course, and he was pleased to find no actual ufo's in the area, but it was a beautiful sight none-the-less. He couldn't remember just what the phenomenon was called, but the lights were caused by shifts in the Earth's crust.

He smiled at the sight and then frowned when he saw a familiar figure in the crowd. The years hadn't changed her at all. The only reason he frowned was because Sarah Thomson was watching the spectacle in the sky with two small children by her side. So, she had married and created a family. How stupid to have even hoped she would be waiting here for him. He shrugged and the smile returned as he stood and walked over to her.

"Sarah," he said gently into her right ear. Her face turned toward him and he noticed she had tears in her eyes. This startled him somewhat, but he couldn't help being pleased to find a hint of recognition there too.

"Alec," she said. "My goodness, where did you come from, then?" She tried to smile, but she couldn't hide the tears he had already seen.

"Are you all right, Sarah?" he asked.

"Yes. Yes, of course, Alec." Gesturing to the two children, she introduced them.

"Children," she said. "This is an old friend of Mummie's. His name is Alec. Alec, this is Amanda and Jonathan."

"Are you going to go up in the stars with daddy too then?" asked Amanda, and then things became quite clear to Alec and he shook his head no as he took Sarah into his arms and held her as she sobbed quietly.

Part 3 - John D'Alton

It took a few moments for Sarah to relax into Alec's arms, and a few moments longer for her to stiffen up again. After all, Sarah had only been widowed for less than two weeks.

Alec gently released Sarah and looked into her eyes again. He could see the deep pain and the bewilderment still there, but didn't know what to say. Sarah tried to speak but stopped, looking pleadingly back to the sky and back to Alec. Alec couldn't tell her exactly how Albert had been killed. It was supposed to be a well planned mission, just routine testing of the living space on the new "rocket to the stars". Well, the first stage in the 20 year long construction phase of the Alpha Centauri project anyway.

But it had gone horribly wrong. All of the papers carried the cover story on their front pages "Albert Sanderson killed in freak meteor accident". But Alec knew that there was more to it than that. He'd seen the preliminary reports from General Henderson too and knew that even that day Paul Foster was probably off investigating. He felt a deep urge to break security and wipe away Sarah's confusion. *see footnotes*

Alec turned instead to the children, feeling a little helpless, and said "Your father was a great man, I wish I'd met him." That started them crying too.

Sarah burst out suddenly "Oh Alec, it's not fair. Why him? It was supposed to be safe. And now we can't even watch Star Trek without having to face it all again...", and then she melted again.

Alec was still wondering what to say when he noticed yet again a tall older well-dressed man with a wisp of white hair paying particular attention to Sarah. He was acting kinda noseey actually. Alec surreptitiously kept his eye on him for a few minutes as Sarah told him about all the happy days with Albert and the kids at the Space Centre. The excitement of mission control, and the challenges of space. Still the old man kept watching them. Alec was about to say something to the old English gent about not perving at attractive young women in tears when he suddenly realised that the man's attentions were actually focussed on himself.

But before he had a chance a police helicopter flew crazily over the treetops and drowned out the crowd with their warning message.

Part 4 - Patricia Embury

The helicopter hovered over the hilltop, the resulting breeze ruffled the hair of those gathered below. The white "POLICE" lettering was illuminated by the spotlight that played over the crowd. Alec lifted his arm to shield his and Sarah's eyes from the glare as the light paused briefly upon them. The whine of a loudspeaker quieted the crowd. "Attention please" the voice from the helicopter said. "Evacuate this area immediately! There has been an accident at Alpha Chemical. Return to your homes, and keep your doors and windows closed and locked until further notice." The helicopter lifted into the night.

Alec and Sarah locked eyes briefly as the crowd quickly dispersed. Sarah pulled a tissue from her purse and wiped the tears from Jonathan's eyes. She picked him up and grabbed Amanda's hand.

"Alec, I guess we must be going." Sarah paused. "I'm sorry I acted as I did. I am happy to see you... It's just.."

"I understand." Alec replied. "Do you need a lift home? My car is just down the hill."

"No." Sarah smiled as they started walking. "So is mine." Alec noticed the older man had disappeared as they approached the street. She directed the children to a late model station wagon. Alec held his arms out as Sarah handed a sleepy Jonathan to him. She opened a rear door and Amanda crawled inside. Sarah took the boy from Alec and fastened him into his car seat. Alec closed the door and escorted Sarah to the driver's side door. Sarah unlocked the door and got into the car.

"Listen, if you'd like to talk." Alec's voice trailed off.

Sarah smiled softly and fumbled through her purse. She quickly scribbled something on a clean napkin and pressed it into Alec's hand. "I'd better get the children home." Alec stood back as Sarah closed the door and drove away. Alec looked at the napkin - FA8-6717 was written in ink below the logo of a local fast food restaurant.

He carefully folded the napkin and placed it into his wallet. His car was parked a short distance up the street. That's funny, Alpha Chemical is a bit far to evacuate this far south. I'd better check in with SHADO. As Alec put his key into the door, the older gentleman appeared from behind a nearby tree. As Freeman opened his car door, he felt the reassuring outline of his gun beneath his jacket.

The older man stopped in front of Alec. "Your name is Alec Freeman?" he spoke hesitantly, as if he were speaking English for the first time.

Freeman nodded. "Do I know you?"

"No, Yes." the man replied. "Although I have never met you, you have met several of my brothers."

Alec turned towards the man. "Your brothers? Is there something I can help you with?"

"Yes." The man looked towards the heavens and looked at Alec. "I seek.....Sanctuary."

Part 5 - Deborah Rorabaugh

"I'm afraid you have me confused with somebody else," Freeman said. The man looked confused. "If you're looking for asylum, you need to be talking to the Home office or somebody in diplomatic service," Freeman continued. "I'm in the movie business." Freeman winced inside at using the same line Straker used to put off overzealous UFO amateurs.

The confusion in the other man's face cleared. "Yes, I see. SHADO must maintain its fiction."

Alarms went off inside Freeman's chest at the same time as the car phone sounded. Freeman reached over and picked up the receiver without taking his eyes off the man.

"Yes?" Freeman said into the receiver.

"Alec?" Straker's voice came through the speaker at Freeman's ear. "I was wondering if I could impose on you to go to Warminster to check on something for us?"

"I'm already there. I has just getting ready to call in, see what was going on," Freeman said. "The police said something about a problem at Alpha Chemical."

"You know the drill, Alec," Straker said. "You helped write it."

"Look, Ed, I can't talk right now," Freeman said. "Just give me the map reference and I'll check it out."

"Okay," Straker said, but Freeman thought he heard just the tiniest bit of pain in Straker's voice at being put off so rudely. Straker read off the coordinates - about a mile south of Warminster.

"I'll check back as soon as I have anything," Freeman said.

"Of course," Straker replied. "Alec, be careful. I have a bad feeling about this one." There was a click in Freeman's ear as the connection broke. Freeman put the receiver back in its place on car the console.

The man's expression had become thoughtful while Straker was on the phone, almost as though the man were listening in on another wavelength.

"You were saying something about shadows?" Freeman said.

"Your language is difficult for me," the man said. "I am asking SHADO for sanctuary from those of my polity who hold enmity against your people."

"I see," Freeman said. He gestured for the man to come around to the passenger side of the car and get in. Freeman reached over and popped over the door when the man had trouble with the door handle.

"Do you have a name?" Freeman asked when the man settled into the passenger seat and closed the car door.

"I am called Magister," the man said. "It is my life pod your people are searching for."

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Straker put down the phone on his desk and rubbed his eyes. Something in Freeman's voice bothered him. Granted, Alec was upset by the IAC's decision to allow NASA and Eurospace to continue with the space tests despite one death already and SHADO's belief it wasn't an accident, but many operatives were unhappy about it, including Straker and the senior staff. Freeman was the only one threatening to take action, to blow the whistle on them all if the IAC didn't come clean on the dangers of the project.

Straker hoped Alec would calm down and come to his senses soon. At the very least, it was embarrassing to have his chief of staff behaving like a militant teenager. The worst case scenario was unthinkable, but Straker knew Henderson and the others at the IAC would have

no compunction at all against terminating Freeman with prejudice if he carried through his threat. Straker hoped a little excursion into the field might help. At least it wouldn't hurt.

The white phone to the studio office buzzed and Straker picked it up.

"Captain Scully and his family are here," Miss Ealand's carefully modulated voice said.

"I'll be right there," Straker said. He hung up the phone and looked around his underground office in SHADO control. The paperwork would wait till morning. He had studio business to attend to.

Bill Scully and his family were waiting in Miss Ealand's office when Straker walked in. Scully was an American Naval officer who had been helping out as a consultant on a Harlington-Straker war thriller. The filming was completed - tonight was the 'wrap' party.

"Mister Straker," Scully began. "I'd like to introduce my wife Maggie and my two youngest kids, Dana and Charlie."

"How do you do?" Straker said, managing a smile. The kids were teenagers. Dana was a young woman with red hair and green eyes that seemed to miss nothing. Charlie, her brother looked to be a gangly fifteen, brown hair and blue eyes, more impressed by starlets and computer controlled cameras than anything else.

"Ed and I were in Nam together," Scully explained to the kids.

Straker turned to Miss Ealand before ushering the Scullys out of the office. "I'm expecting a call from Mister Freeman. Page me when he checks in."

"Yes, sir," Miss Ealand said.

Part 6 - Suzanne Sutherland

"Okay, Mr. Magister, I suppose you want to tell me your story." Alec wondered how long he could keep up this facade.

Alec made no attempt to start the car. He simply sat back in his seat trying to look nonchalant while Magister relayed his tale. With the gun in easy reach, Alec felt in control of the situation.

"My people come from thousands of light years away," Magister began slowly, staring out the front window as if in a trance. Night had finally fallen and the town of Warminster returned to normality. "Our ways are just as complex as yours, Mr. Freeman. You would need several lifetimes to understand the ways of my kind."

"Oh?"

"Yes."

Alec noticed that Magister wore a wig but no tinge of green could be seen on his face. Definitely an alien, however, was he one of those that kept SHADO on their toes? If he was a green-head then he should have decomposed by now, surely.

"That's quite a fantastic tale there, Mr. Magister. I'm sure Mr. Straker would find it a good basis for a science-fiction story," answered Alec flippantly. Deep down inside he ached to know more about this alien.

"Ah yes, Commander Straker, isn't it?" Magister had a slow lilting accent not unlike Doctor Jackson. Yeah, that would be right, Doctor Jackson an alien. He was sure weird enough.

Magister looked searchingly into Alec's eyes looking for a sign of recognition after mentioning his Commanding Officer. But Colonel Freeman had been trained to resist interrogation. Outwardly he gave nothing away.

The alien began to sound desperate. "I am seeking Sanctuary, that is all. I have....." He broke off and clutched at his chest. A look of intense pain creased his face and then his head lolled back.

Alec tried to feel for a pulse in the alien's neck and wrist but there was nothing. Then he saw it. At the bottom of Magister's neck it looked as if a bit of skin was beginning to come away. Gingerly, Alec peeled some of it back. He caught a glimpse of green skin.

Starting the engine, Alec began a mad rush back to Harlington-Straker Film Studios. Once on the motorway, he phoned SHADO headquarters and heard Miss Ealand on the other end.

"Oh, hello Alec, Mr. Straker has been waiting for you to get back in touch," she answered pleasantly.

"Please hurry, Miss Ealand, it is of the utmost priority. I need to speak to him right away."

He managed to keep one eye on the road and the other on his special passenger. Miss Ealand seemed to be taking her time about it.

Alec eventually heard whoops of laughter and the chinking of glasses in the distance on the other end of the line. "Yes, Alec, what is it?" said Straker.

"Ed, I'm on my way back to SHADO. I can't explain too much at the moment but have the medical centre ready to take a casualty."

"What's happened? Are you all right?"

"Yes, yes, I'm okay. Look, Ed, I can't talk much now as I'm already going way over the speed limit. I have an alien in my car."

"You've got a what?" Straker exclaimed incredulously.

"I know, and I haven't invited this one over for drinks. Calls himself Magister and he is seeking Sanctuary."

"Okay." Straker sensed someone was near him by the phone. He tried to sound as casual as possible. "There will be someone to meet you as soon as you arrive. I'll be in my office as usual. Take care, Alec."

Ed put down the receiver. Thinking it was high time he left this stifling wrap party, he stood for a moment deciding the next course of action. He needed to make his excuses and get back to the office immediately.

Still sensing another person's presence in the corridor, he slowly turned to see the young lady with the striking red hair looking up at him....

Part 7 - Yuchtar

"You have beautiful eyes."

No doubt about it, Straker thought. *Dana Scully is going to be a real heart breaker.*

"Thank you," he said to her. "And you have lovely hair."

"It's red."

"Yes, it is."

"Are you pestering the man, Dana?" asked Captain Scully as he placed a hand on the girl's shoulder.

"He's minty," Dana replied.

Scully and Straker exchanged amused glances - wordlessly asking each other where the heck the girl had heard THAT term, and Scully announced that they had a plane to catch - it was time to get the kids back home.

"Yes, I was just out the door myself, Captain. I'll walk with you."

As they made their way down the hall, Straker admired the two attractive Scully children. "You have a fine family, Captain; you must be proud," he said as he felt a slight pain in his heart thinking of his own little boy whom he saw all too infrequently.

"Thank you, Mr. Straker. Yes, I am proud." The Captain beamed.

Rounding a corner, the group was almost bowled over by a trauma team rushing by with a patient on a gurney. The 'patient' SHOULD have been admitted through the Medical Center's emergency entrance below ground from the garage, but Freeman must have pulled right up to the front doors! Straker was NOT happy.

The startled Scully family looked curiously after the speeding trauma team.

"Probably rehearsing for 'As the Stomach Turns'," Straker told them. "Nothing serious, I'm sure." He tried to smile reassuringly, but didn't quite make it.

Dana looked up at her father and said, "I'm gonna be a doctor someday, Daddy."

"And you'll be a great doctor too, sweetheart," Scully replied. To Straker, he said, "You go check that out, sir. I can find the exit myself."

"Thank you, Captain. Have a pleasant trip." He shook the Navy Captain's hand and nodded to the children before walking briskly off in the direction the trauma team had fled.

Part 8 - John D'Alton

"What on earth are you doing Alec, bringing an alien in like this. There's security issues here you know." Straker fumed at Alec, pacing outside the theatre observation window.

"But I tell you Ed. his story sounded genuine, and when he passed out I figured I had to take the risk. We may only have a short time to save him, and then imagine the information he could give us." Alec was excited but sounded a bit unsure.

"If he'll cooperate," piped in Paul, always the sceptic.

Straker stroked his chin, and mused "Yes, Paul, and there's always the possibility it's all an elaborate ruse. I received an alert from Moonbase on the way down. There's at least 30 UFOs flocking outside the orbit of Pluto. They're either here to recapture this defector, or they're up to their usual no good. We're taking a big chance here."

Alec's mind drifted off to his moments on the hill with Sarah before he'd met the alien. He couldn't even have a few hours off in peace, he thought in disgust. He was having a lot of feelings of regret lately, he realised.

More and more he felt like just disappearing in some out of the way place like Tasmania.

Everyone was getting nervous on Moonbase. Even Gay was a little short with her co-workers.

"That's 35 identified UFOs now Lieutenant," Joan almost whispered. She hadn't seen so many UFOs attacking at once for nearly a year. They usually came in twos and threes for some strange reason. Joan knew they'd have no way of stopping such a large armada if they all attacked earth at once.

"Have you got those figures for me yet Joan?" Gay snapped out again. "I have this funny feeling about this".

Gay had been working on a theory for a few days now- somehow there was a connection between some UFO trajectories and the recent death in space of Capt. Thomson. Straker wanted answers but nothing quite clicked. But she felt sure there was a link here somewhere.

Sometimes the pressure was just a little too much thought Gay, and suddenly she found herself day-dreaming about a holiday in Fiji.

* * *

Ed, Alec and Paul were in the briefing room discussing alternatives over some hot coffee but weren't getting far. They were all stuck with the dilemma of risks versus possibilities. The Commander was still worried about the likelihood it was all some twisted alien plot. But he was just enough convinced by Alec's description of his discussion with Mr. Magister to be unsure.

"Ok guys, we've been here 15 minutes and gotten nowhere. I'm going to call in Col. Lake and a few others and see what they think for once." Alec looked a bit shocked so Ed went on, "I know that's a bit unusual but in the circumstances..." and his voice trailed off. Paul's eyes narrowed but he said nothing. He had his own views about Straker's decision-making style.

Before anyone said anything more, Colonel Lake interrupted with a priority security alarm. "Commander, Captain Scully just reported in. His daughter has disappeared. Seems that she spun him a story about needing to go to the bathroom, but never returned. He thinks she's probably snooping around here somewhere. We've sent 4 agents out to find here but no luck so far."

Ed visibly wilted. "Thank you Colonel. Keep me informed. That Dana girl could be a real

nuisance- she's pretty nosy. Oh, and please come down to the briefing room for a quick meeting. Out." And then Ed muttered barely audibly "And to tell me some answers. What a day".

Paul thought that Ed. looked pretty worn out and discouraged today. He seemed to have lost his usual zest and determination a little. Maybe it was all the excitement coming at once. He knew that occasionally his commander had feelings of misgiving about working in SHADO, and today seemed to be another attack of the feelings. Paul wondered how he himself would feel under all the pressure. And yet again he was glad not to be in charge.

Inside the operating room, Dr. Jackson was trying everything. Stimulants seemed to have worked to start the alien's 'heart' beating again, but he didn't know what to do about the dropping temperature and rapidly eroding tissue. And he was a little worried about all the hardware wired into this alien. Were any of the bits a bomb?

He was about to alert Straker when the alien opened his eyes and with a look of sheer terror and misgiving said just four words, "They're coming for me."

Part 9 - Patricia Embury

"Red Alert. Red Alert. U.F.O. on positive track." The voice of S.I.D. (Space Intruder Detector) echoed through the Moonbase control sphere.

"Here they come." Joan said flatly as she pressed a series of buttons on her console.

"How many?" Gay sighed softly as her thoughts returned to the present, away from the tropical beach and Long Island Iced Tea she had been imagining.

"Seven contacts." Joan swiveled to face Gay, a puzzled expression on her face. "Only seven, Lieutenant."

"Maybe we have a fighting chance." Gay replied, hope infusing into her voice. "Confirm trajectory. This may only be a first wave. Notify headquarters." She pulled the microphone closer. "Interceptors, immediate launch."

* * *

In the leisure sphere/ready room, Peter Carlin, fresh from a golfing holiday in Inverness, Scotland donned his helmet. He nodded at Mark Bradley and Alex Masters, and the trio jumped into the launch chutes in one fluid movement.

* * *

"Trajectory confirmed." Joan replied, looking at Gay. "Relaying data to central computer."

Gay nodded. "Interceptors, stand by to receive targeting coordinates."

"Roger Moonbase." Carlin's voice echoed through the sphere. "Standing by."

"Wait a minute!" cried Joan. "Three of them are splitting off."

"Confirm trajectory." ordered Gay.

"Confirm trajectory one, zero, six, three, seven, nine, five." Joan replied with practiced calm.

"That puts them well out of interceptor range." Gay moved to Joan's position. "Plot their course on the screen." The moving blips appeared on the screen. The pattern looked vaguely familiar. "Now, plot their course in relation to the location of the destroyed space mission." Another blip appeared on the screen. The spinners were heading directly toward the location where Captain Thompson's ship had been destroyed.

Gay grinned and slapped the counter. She returned to her console and relayed the targeting coordinates for the first three spinners to the interceptors and called headquarters.

* * *

Ed Straker leaned over Lieutenant Ford's shoulder. "Nice work, Gay." Alec Freeman and Paul Foster stood next to their commander.

"So, the aliens destroyed Thompson's craft to keep other traffic out of the area." Freeman conjectured. "But, that was several weeks ago."

"Yes, Alec." Straker said thoughtfully. "Maybe they figured that we wouldn't launch another mission to that area so soon after an 'accident' in space."

"They're trying to keep us out of there." Foster piped in. "What are they hiding?"

Colonel Lake joined the group. "You'll be pleased to know that we found our little visitor."

"Where was she?" Straker asked.

"She had managed to sneak into the set of the space puppet show. Gerry was showing her how the marionettes worked when security found her."

"Good." Straker motioned towards the screen. "Our friends are showing their hand. It seems they don't want us in this sector." Straker pointed to the area where the spinners were heading.

"That's in Grey sector." Colonel Lake replied. "Although the interceptors can't reach it, there's not much there... At least nothing of real strategic value."

"It is, however, on a direct path towards Mars." Freeman interjected. "It's possible they could build a base on Mars and stage attacks on Earth."

Lake shook her head.

"But some still get through." Straker tapped his chin with his pen. "Look at Alec's friend." Straker paused. "Why else could they use a base on Mars?"

"A staging area for processing their captives." Foster suggested. "Surely they know by now that we don't have the firepower for an offensive operation."

The three blips heading towards Moonbase disappeared from the screen. Three additional contacts immediately replaced them.

"They'll get through." Foster replied. "The interceptors can't re-arm and re-fuel in time."

"Alert the Skydiver fleet and place all ground units on Red Alert," ordered Straker. "Paul, get ready in Mobile One."

Foster left as Straker turned to Freeman. "They must be coming after your friend. I wonder what he wants to tell us?" Freeman shrugged his shoulders.

"What would you like to know, Commander?" The party turned to the voice to see Doctor Jackson pushing Magister in a wheelchair. Magister was slumped over, and appeared very tired. "I will tell you what I can, Commander. I haven't much time."

Part 10 - John D'Alton

Magister was straining to stay upright in the wheelchair, and seemed blinded by the lights. "We know all about you in SHADO, but we don't have full understanding yet. This bothers us, especially my group- we're the 'science/peace faction'. That's why they're coming after me Commander. I'm supposed to be..." Magister gasped and flopped down.

The alien seemed to be rapidly deteriorating right before Straker's eyes.

"Can't you do something Doctor?" Straker snapped at Jackson again.

"Yesss, you ssee we don't undersstand his physiology very well yet Commander. Anything I could do may kill him."

"Well try something. He'll be dead soon and I want answers *before* those other 28 UFOs arrive," the Commander said, eyebrows raised and hands on hips.

It was obvious to Alec that Straker would probably win this argument. He was one of the few people who could actually win against the enigmatic doctor.

"Okay, I'll try some heart sstimulants, but I warn you the resssults may not be good, Commander", Jackson spoke between gritted teeth. He looked even more evil like that, thought Paul.

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"Red Alert. Red Alert. U.F.O. on positive track." SID's baritone voice spoke again.

"This looks like the other 28 UFOs coming in now Lieutenant", Joan said, with a growing look of apprehension obvious on her face.

Gay wondered how she looked too. She was having strong feelings of misgiving, with the interceptors out and half the Moonbase ground defenses under repair.

"Confirm the trajectory Joan, are they headed here or towards Earth, or for that mystery location on the way to Mars?" Gay almost grinned. She was still feeling a bit high over her confirmed hunch. The Commander had seemed even pleased for once when he'd called her to say 'good work'. Gay wondered why couldn't she have time to enjoy work a bit more instead of having to handle the panic of 3 separate waves of UFOs? Oh well, she sighed.

"They're splitting off Lieutenant," Joan's answer interrupted Gay's brief reverie. "It looks like another 5 are heading for Earth but the rest are now on course for Mars. It doesn't make sense!"

Joan and Gay looked across the room at each other but were lost for words. Gay was about to alert SHADO HQ when Captain Carlin's voice boomed over the speakers.

"We have visual," Carlin reported, "we're starting attack run now".

"Roger Captain; good shooting," Joan replied.

* * *

After a second injection Magister's eyes flickered.

"Mars. Mars. I was supposed to go to Mars. They adapted my body with all this technology. I was supposed to live there and study Earth more to understand you humans better. The faction I'm in just wants peace. We are scientists. But the others disagree so I escaped. You must protect me, please Commander."

Dr. Jackson bent over the alien and appealed to him "But you sseem to be dying, what can we do?"

"I don't understand. This isn't supposed to happen. My adaptions were supposed to ..." again Magister faded out.

Straker and Alec exchanged worried glances.

"So do we give him back, commander?" Paul asked.

Straker stroked his chin again, "It depends which faction the UFOs are from. Is it his peace faction or the 'bad guys' coming for him now? And what about the wave headed for Mars?"

Paul chimed in eagerly, "I know Magister was worried, but it doesn't make sense unless it's the peace faction coming now. It was some of that wave that headed for Moonbase and almost *let* themselves get shot. I think they were trying to tell us something."

But Alec looked even more perplexed than Paul. "It doesn't add up though. If they're so peaceful why blow up the capsule last month? And how come Magister's dying now?"

* * *

Captain Carlin looked perplexed too when he reported in to Lt. Ellis.

"They just sat there like sitting ducks. I tell you, after the first one was down, the others didn't even move. It was as though they *wanted* to get shot down. I've never seen anything like it."

Gay and Joan looked across the room silently again. They suddenly felt some tinge of sympathy for dying aliens.

* * *

Straker rushed into the room where Magister had been wheeled. "Hurry Doctor, there's 3 UFOs about ten minutes away. You've got to resuscitate him again."

But Dr. Jackson had a look of sadness, pain and anger on his face, "I'm sssorry commander, it's too late, he's dead."

Part 11 - John D'Alton

Straker looked shocked for a moment, then a wave of sadness crept across his face like a shadow. He felt suddenly cold inside. Had he been responsible for hastening Magister's death by pushing Dr. Jackson? Turning to Alec for support, he noticed that Alec was giving him his usual concealed look of disapproval- concealed to others but obvious to Ed.

Then Dr. Jackson spoke at last, breaking the awkward silence. "Can I take him down below for some post-mortem examinationsss now pleassse Commander" he spoke with an air of having been vindicated, and with the professional pique that Ed always found grating.

Paul was about to wheel Magister away with Jackson when Straker suddenly became very animated.

"No, not so fast. Paul, wheel him outside onto that hill." Ed said, pointing to the nearby grassy knoll. "I've got a hunch they want him back but won't harm us if we cooperate. That's what they were trying to tell us by letting those UFOs get blasted near moonbase. And send out a mobile nearby, but with the doors left open. Make sure the crew gets away quickly. Those 5 UFOs are only a few minutes away. And Alec, get all radar and sensing systems here powered down immediately. I want our visitors to feel welcome."

Paul and Alec were trying hard to follow Ed's rapid speech and logical jumps. Was he serious? Power down the radar? But Straker sounded so determined. Alec scowled and rubbed his chin. "That's a big risk you're taking Ed. There's something I don't like about Magister's behaviour and explanations. It could all be another trick to destroy SHADO." But his words merely bounced off Straker like raindrops off the windows.

Paul shuffled his feet for a moment and then brightened up before wheeling Magister away from a totally perplexed Jackson.

* * *

Col. Lake was having a lot of misgivings about the next few minutes. With so many UFOs in so many places something could easily go wrong. And now this hare-brained scheme from the Commander. She felt torn in two. Should she call Gen. Henderson about Straker's mad idea to welcome the UFOs, and risk his anger? Or risk SHADO?

Even though she often disapproved of Ed's leadership style she still harboured some strong feelings towards him. It curbed her outbursts and embarrassed her at times. Did Ed know? Had he sensed her feelings? Sometimes she dreamed about him even.

But this time he was going too far. They could all be killed, and all over a dead body. With much trepidation she started dialling.

* * *

Alec peered into the gathering mist. The grassy knoll was bare except for the mobile. It looked forlorn with it's doors open. Lonely rather than inviting. Timid almost.

The hill reminded him of another recent hill watching the sky with a special friend. He still felt the pain of the missed moments. He knew that he should be watching the approaching UFO but his heart was off with his lost love. Regrets welled up in his throat, and he surrepticiously wiped his eyes.

Straker was also staring out the window. He seemed especially pensive and still. The other UFOs were hovering above while this one UFO was coming straight in. Had they understood his "message"? In the next few moments he knew he'd either learn a lot about alien psychology or be blown to pieces. He wondered why he felt so reckless today.

Paul gazed eagerly at the descending UFO. For once he could enjoy marvelling at the

alien technology rather than issue orders to fire. The glistening colours, the silver precision. He sometimes dreamed of flying in one. He'd fly around London a few times to attract the media, and then land near a favourite lady friend's house and step out in front of the crowds and offer her a lift. But he'd have to make do with borrowing Ed's cool car again. It seemed to work with the women.

The UFO landed. It didn't fire at the mobile but seemed to freeze. Three minutes passed before some red suits emerged and scampered over to the wheelchair. They seemed unconcerned about the closeness of SHADO HQ and were doing something to Magister with a box with lights and buttons.

The wind whisked more mist over the aliens, and another 5 minutes passed. Inside SHADO HQ Col. Lake was still on hold to General Henderson. Her back was wet with sweat and fear.

The hill remained quiet. Not even the birds were flying over at sunset as usual. Then suddenly the red suits bolted upright and seemed to clap their hands. The wheelchair jerked backwards. Paul's jaw dropped and Alec's eyebrows slid up his head and back over his unruly hair. Dr. Jackson jerked around to a grinning Straker who looked like the proverbial cat that had eaten its bird. For their erstwhile patient had suddenly almost sprinted to the UFO.

Straker resisted the urge to say something to Dr. Jackson. Instead he briskly walked off towards the control room, smacking his fist noisily into his palm while quietly but firmly saying "Yes."

Paul and Alec were left to wonder at the sight of the rapidly departing UFO.

* * *

In the control room systems were coming back on line. Straker was debriefing with Alec and Paul when Col. Lake serenely glided up to him. "Could I see you alone for a moment Commander."

Despite her calm there was no mistaking the look of fear yet determination on her face. Paul looked pointedly over to Alec who nodded subtly back to him.

Ed hesitated a moment and then asked the others to leave. "What is it Colonel?" he asked very formally.

Virginia tried to explain her actions but within moments grew intensely animated. Her tears flowed when she reached her description of her doubts and feelings of being torn apart. Her protestations of loyalty could almost be heard outside. But when she came to her anger over being kept on hold for so long before catching Henderson, Straker could contain himself no more. He burst in a raucous laughter that *could* easily be heard outside the room.

* * *

"So don't worry too much about the good General, Ginny, I'm sure I can handle him. As long as you join me for dinner tonight." Ed said, gently touching Virginia on the arm as she left his office. Her cheeks growing very cherry, Virginia nodded vigorously. She was so relieved Ed had understood her actions and not been angry with her. And dinner! She moved off singing quietly to herself.

Inside, Ed wasn't feeling quite so confident. After all, he had risked a lot to learn something about the aliens. He now had fairly convincing proof that alien factions existed, and just maybe, the peace faction could aid them in working out a peaceful solution to the UFO situation. Surely the potential cost-savings would sway the General? Still, he had risked losing a mobile, and SHADO HQ **had** been down for nearly 30 minutes. It had been a bit dramatic for a hunch. Hmmm, he had lots of feelings of misgiving about tomorrow's meeting with

Henderson.

* * *

Back in the debriefing session, Paul and Alec tried to hide their smirks, but Straker saw them anyway. He turned his head a bit to the side and with an elephantine grin said "Paul, I've told you before, don't judge a situation by the end of a conversation."

Part 12- the end

Alec stood frozen for what seemed an eternity. Straker moved towards him but stopped when he saw the tableau. Alec, the window, the lonely hill, and the mist coming in at dusk. Just like a week ago.

Had it been that long?, Straker thought. A week since Magister had appeared, died and then "recovered"? A week since the UFO had landed un-harmed. And been allowed to leave again safely? Had he been dreaming? Or having a nightmare? Straker shuddered at the memory of his intense de-brief with General Henderson. They'd yelled at each other for ten minutes before Straker had threatened to resign. That seemed to have hit a nerve. Then the General had calmed down and finally agreed that Ed may have made the right decision. After all, they'd made a friendly contact with a peaceful faction of aliens- it *could* be a breakthrough. Ed sighed. He still shared some of Alec's doubts about the whole event. Had it all been an elaborate ruse? They'd probably never know.

Alec was still staring out onto the hill and Straker decided to just quietly walk off. The daily reports could wait awhile. And anyway, he had another dinner planned with Virginia.

* * *

Alec finally left the window a little after 6pm. The mist had completely obscured the hill and the spot where Magister had left from. For some strange reason Alec felt a deep sense of loss, and tears began to well up into his eyes. It was almost as if they were on the edge of something all the time in SHADO, but just never quite worked it out. And the personal contact with Magister seemed more real the further away it was. They'd connected in some weird way. Alec wondered what fate awaited Magister that so terrified him. Did aliens experiment on their own kind?

Walking down to his office Alec made a decision. He'd been putting it off for a week now. Fear and apprehension had prevented him from acting. And a certain sense of "decency". But now in his loneliness and grief he decided. The hill scene had reminded him, all too poignantly, of another recent memorable hill. Had reminded him of a family. Of a special woman. Of her softness. Her openness. Her grief.

Alec reached for his phone. The number was silent but he knew how to find it.

"Hello Sarah, how are you. Ummm, this is Alec." he hesitantly said.

Sarah Thomson sounded delighted to hear him, "Ohhh Alec, how good of you to call. It was ahh, a surprise to see you last week."

Alec felt that she'd wanted to say something else and felt his face grow warm at the thought.

"Ahhh, yesss, ummm, Sarah, I was wondering whether I could bump into you again, maybe, say for dinner. How about tonight?" Alec finished in a rush of uncontrolled emotions. He still thought it was a bit soon after her husband's death to make much contact, but she was so friendly, and so hmmmmm.

"Oh Alec, how sweet. I'd be delighted. Everyone's been avoiding me like the plague. I needed the space for awhile to grieve, but now they're all making me feel like a leper. It's horrible. I feel so lonely at times. But, ahhhh...., tonight I can't make it. Ahhh, Tex Allen is coming over dinner, and the kids just love him, and well, you know, ahh...." But Alec knew what she meant. Tex and him had always shared a not-too-secret jealousy of missing out on Sarah, and it sounded like Alec'd been beaten to the punch again.

Finishing the conversation quickly, Alec dropped the phone in its cradle and stared off

into space again. He was still too much in grief over Magister to feel more disappointment. There was some symmetry in his week though he thought forlornly. Maybe he really should just resign and get a life again. It was all a bit much.

But then, he thought, he should have known it wouldn't work out with Sarah - after all, before he called he'd had strong feelings- feelings of misgiving.

Footnote: From John Dalton: *Well, actually, Alec did *not* know him, but knew from the SHADO report that he had been married with 2 kids, to an English wife. He put 2 and 2 together when he met Sarah and saw her tears and heard the kids question, which was similar to one reported in the papers. The papers had listed their names of course, but Alec had no way of knowing that the "Sarah" was his Sarah. Make sense? I suppose I should have written that explanation in.*