

ARRIVAL

by Chris Freeman

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PART ONE

Straker glanced briefly at the thin paper document in his hand and then back through the plate glass window. The official SHADO civilian recovery report had taken up less than half a page of text and should have prepared him for the sight that met his gaze. How could a simple metallic cylinder surprise a man? A man who had previously encountered such devices more than once. The first victim had been Russel Stone. A man snatched from his hearth and family and packed up inside just such a cylinder like so much frozen meat. The impersonality of the alien attacks always privately nauseated Straker when he hit them right up close and today was no exception. The message had come in a couple of hours before: '... UFO severely damaged... wreckage recovery in progress... two alien corpses recovered (still sealed inside their suits), two alien Bio-storage capsules recovered intact, damage minor ... proceeding to SHADO Mayland hospital.' Something inside of Ed had stirred itself, resolved into a vague feeling of unease and forced him to make his way to the recovery unit to watch the proceedings for himself.

He stood frozen to the spot as the cylinders were carefully opened up according to a now well-rehearsed procedure and two naked human bodies were extracted. Listening to the medics talking inside, Straker felt that faint feeling of unease growing inside him. He heard Jackson calling for drugs to be pumped into the hapless victims, instructing technicians to place pickup electrodes and sundry other medical probes on and in the two reclining bodies. A sudden urgent beeping from within the recovery room startled all present.

"We're losing him," Jackson said with his usual quiet air. Damn it, did nothing disturb this man? Straker wondered as Jackson urgently pumped ever-higher doses of drugs into the body before him. Flatline. Even from his limited vantage point behind glass, Ed could tell that they had lost one of their recovered bodies. He snapped on the intercom and spoke briefly.

"I want a brief report on what happened, Jackson. And a full one on the survivor, as soon as she is conscious; what she remembers of the attack, who she is etc." He snapped the intercom off and headed back to SHADO HQ. Perhaps he would catch up on some much-needed sleep. That is, if that niggling feeling of unease inside would let him.

* * *

Alec Freeman straightened slightly as Jackson entered Straker's office. He had no love for the man he regarded as a particularly unpleasant specimen of the human race. Frequently Alec had wondered whether Jackson would not have been more at home with the Aliens rather than with the humans on planet Earth. Jackson handed a printed document to Straker and took a step backwards. He had an unusually troubled look on his face as he simply spoke one word "Commander".

"What about the survivor, Jackson?" Straker enquired, that feeling of unease growing once more.

"Well," began Jackson, "The survivor is a female, human, estimated age between 25 and 30, not pregnant but signs of having borne one child, recovering steadily, estimated recovery of consciousness in about 12 hours."

"Who is she?" Alec Enquired.

"That is one of a series of puzzles which are curious enough for the Commander to be aware of. Her fingerprints are not on record anywhere, nor are her iris patterns. Nor is her genetic fingerprint on record anywhere. Er, er.. we've checked criminal records, interpol, credit card companies, social security records... all the usual channels. To all intents and purposes this woman does not exist, Commander."

Straker's eyelids raised a little. From the start he had felt that this case had meant trouble and it seemed as if his suspicions were being confirmed.

"And there is more. We ran a series of blood tests. Apparently she survived because her blood contained a type of anti-freezing agent. It would appear that her body had been specially prepared for low-temperature cryogenic suspension by this unknown chemical agent. This added agent seems to have been what has saved her from the same fate as our other less fortunate recoveree. We also did the standard body scan and discovered a small capsule under the skin of the palm of her left hand. The implant has been recovered and appears to function as a communications device."

"So. What are they up to now?" wondered Alec aloud.

"No, no, no!" Jackson suddenly interrupted. "We don't think either the agent in her blood or the device were alien in origin. We've analysed the substance the device is composed of and we think it was manufactured here, on earth, although it does appear to be of a manufacture which is highly advanced. We have scientists working on possible communications protocols right now."

"Curiouser and Curiouser," Straker murmured. "I want to know who she is, Jackson. When she regains consciousness I want to talk to our mystery woman myself. This case seems to have taken on some unusual aspects. And from my experience, unusual aspects always mean trouble."

"Come on, Ed" chimed in Alec, "Aren't you being a little paranoid? Perhaps you need to loosen up a little. She is a victim of an alien attack after all".

"Perhaps, Alec. But I still think I'll keep a personal eye on this one. Ok Jackson, keep me informed. Tell me when she becomes strong enough to be questioned."

Jackson sensed that he had been summarily dismissed and left Straker's office without ceremony. Alec poured himself a drink. Tallisker neat. He had always been partial to single malt and now felt as though he might need one. When Ed became involved in a case like this he always tended to worry. There were times when he felt as though Ed needed to be saved from himself.

"Go home, Ed. You're all in. Get some sleep for God's sake. Even you can't keep running forever without sleep you know. There's no emergency or alert here, I'll hold the fort."

"Thanks Alec. I think for once, I will accept your advice. I really do need some sleep. Keep an eye on our guest's situation will you."

Straker rose from the chair.

"Goodnight Alec."

* * *

The call, when it came, happened when Ed was in the bath. He picked up the mobile handset and heard Jackson telling him that the girl had regained consciousness and was ready for questioning. Jackson sounded unusually troubled. The conversation did nothing to quell Straker's qualms. If Jackson was troubled about something, then it usually meant bad news, he reflected on the drive into the studios. He made his way without ceremony to the medical centre and found Jackson waiting for him outside the room which housed the girl.

"Well Jackson, what's the story? Who is she? How did she come to be in their hands?"

"Well so far we've been unable to get too much out of her, Commander. However when she regained consciousness she gave us a frighteningly lucid description of some aliens."

"Oh?"

"No, Commander not our aliens. The... 'creatures'... of which she spoke were much more animalistic, only partially intelligent but very cunning and supremely vicious. They also happened to use a very potent acid as a bodily fluid."

"Delirious?" asked Straker

"I don't think so" Said Jackson. "Whatever may be the reality or otherwise of her story it is definitely real to her. And there is something else. The scientists working on the implant have managed a partial decode of the onboard memory of the device. She seems to have a birthdate quite a while into the future?"

Ed pondered. His troubled mind became more troubled. Had the aliens snatched this girl from the future? He remembered the incident with Turner and his time control capabilities. Had this girl really been whisked back from the times hence? If so, why? Or was she some witting or unwitting participant in some alien hoax, the purpose of which was known only to her inscrutable manipulators? He quickly nodded a brief acknowledgement to Jackson, turned the door handle and entered the room.

He smiled at the girl sitting up in the bed before him. A true vision of loveliness met his eyes. Her light blue pupils gazed quizzically at him, and her long brown hair hung around her shoulders.

"Well," she addressed him. "Perhaps you might be a little more forthcoming than that other guy, Jackson."

"Perhaps," retorted Straker. He dragged a chair to the side of the girl's bed and sat down, gazing into the light blue of her eyes. "For now, we need some answers from you. You seem to be something of a mystery woman."

"I'm a mystery? That's rich!" she said giving a hollow little laugh. "I last remember going into hypersleep aboard the Narcissus..."

"The Narcissus?" interrupted Straker.

"My escape shuttle. Next thing I know I'm in a bed in this... hospital... with a medical team round me. Now I've been probed and prodded by medical instruments that I've only seen in a museum. Simple question, mister?"

"Straker. Ed Straker"

"Well Mister Straker. Where am I? What hospital is this? Have I reached the outer rim?"

"Try not to think about that too much for the present," said Straker. He did not want to present this woman with too much information which might cause her sensory overload, especially after her recent ordeal at the hands of the aliens. More importantly, he needed to know whether this girl really was from the future.

"Now listen, Mister," she said, her anger clearly growing as her frustration increased. "I presume you've read the logs from the Nostromo. I've just spent a few hours at the hands of a

living biological nightmare, awoken to find myself poked about with antiquated medical instruments... do you know that they actually attached pickup electrodes to me to monitor my heart? And nobody wants to tell me anything. Now just who are you people? And where am I?"

Straker decided that attack might be the best form of defence.

"Well I can tell you that you're on Earth and that this is the year 1984." He saw the distrust and the hurt forming in her eyes, and wondered who could have betrayed this luscious creature, and how? "Yes, I realise that might come as a shock to you, but for now you'll just have to accept it from me on trust. What you need to concentrate on right now is getting your strength back, Miss?" Straker turned to go, briefly smiling at her in what he hoped was a reassuring manner.

She spoke once more. "Ripley. Ellen Ripley"

PART TWO

Alec looked down at the bottom of his empty glass and briefly considered the possibility of a refill. He thought better of it, and simply stared at the man in the white coat before him, standing in front of Straker's desk.

"Well Commander, there is good reason to believe that she is who she says she is. The technicians in charge of decoding the implant found under Miss Ripley's skin have managed to establish an effective interface with the device and extracted what amounts to her life history. She's a fascinating specimen!"

"Another of your laboratory rats, Jackson?" Alec said, his contempt for the man barely disguised. The corner of Jackson's mouth turned upwards slightly before he continued to speak.

"The device also seemed to be manufactured from an advanced form of a macromolecular allotrope of Buckminsterfullerene. Advanced, but definitely Earthbound. Not of Alien manufacture."

"Speaking of Aliens" said Alec, "What about those creatures she mentioned in her interviews?"

"Ah yes, the, er, er, creatures. A most interesting tale indeed Colonel Freeman. They appear to be biologically programmed to continue their species even at the most extreme costs to themselves. They use a form of acid for blood, and are supremely violent, cunning and vicious. They decimated her colleagues and caused the poor woman to have nightmares of a severity I have rarely seen. I wish I had one to study. All of which brings us to the problem in hand, Commander."

Straker stirred slightly and hunched over his desk. "Yes. What do we do with our guest. She has no home, no family... no history. She does not belong here." His features tightened and Alec knew that meant trouble.

"Well," he said "a problem indeed. But there's more Ed. If the aliens have developed time travel to that degree..."

"Yes, yes I know Alec. But for now we have a more immediate problem on our hands. Miss Ripley. We can't just administer a shot of amnesia drug and turn her loose to the re-integration teams. Where would she go!"

"Well..." Jackson unexpectedly spoke up at this point in the conversation. "I believe I have a possible solution, gentlemen." He smiled slightly and Alec winced.

"Based on my extensive psychometric tests and observations of her rapid recovery, er, er, her physical and mental fitness scales, psychological stability profiles..."

"Get to the point, Doctor" interrupted a clearly exasperated Straker. Jackson seemed to be enjoying the game far too much for his liking. The reply seemed not to surprise him too much.

"Recruit her into SHADO. She has a great many desirable qualities, represents a passable security risk, is physically and mentally fit, has very good IQ and other psychological indicators and would seem to me to be..."

Straker interrupted the flow. "Do it doctor. If we can gain a good recruit to SHADO and solve our little problem at the same time, then so much the better. Keep me informed of Miss Ripley's progress. That's all Jackson. Let me have the usual paper documentation!"

Jackson exited.

"Well Ed?"

"Well what?" a clearly exasperated Straker rejoined.

"I just hope you know what you're doing?" asked Alec, sensing that this was one of those occasions when questioning his superior's decisions would be welcomed. His answer came in the form of a simple raised eyebrow and a slight smile.

* * *

To say that Ellen Ripley progressed would be to understate the issue. Once fit enough to get up, she was filled in on the whole SHADO set-up. The works. The aliens, the organisation, the command structures, the supporting infrastructures. she took it all without flinching. Jackson spent many hours testing and re-testing her, watching as her reflexes were honed and her physical fitness was sharpened to ever higher levels. She seemed to relish the challenges set before her by the training programmes devised for her benefit. Her first times on moonbase, HQ, mobile teams all passed without incident. She was the very model of a perfect recruit. Only her time on Skydiver caused her any real anxieties. She seemed to find the claustrophobic atmosphere and lack of privacy somehow too reminiscent of the Nostromo to be comfortable. Nonetheless she took it in good part and, as always, rose to the challenge. Somehow she always seemed to remember Jackson and the endless batteries of tests he put her through, his seeming at times to take a perverse delight in playing cat and mouse with her.

"Some day" thought the newly minted Colonel Ripley. "some day".

PART THREE

Straker sat back in his chair with a slight smile on his face.

"So where is she, Alec, still finishing up on Moonbase?"

"Of course," replied Freeman. "But then you know that already don't you. Come on Ed, I work here, too, you know. What are you up to?"

"Well Alec, I just have the perfect assignment for our newly-minted Colonel Ripley. One that I think she'll feel a deal of satisfaction in executing. In fact it just so happens that I find myself typing the last details of her email right now." A rare smile played across his features; not a sardonic or ironic smile nor even one of slight irony or mockery. For the first time in a long time Ed Straker was smiling for the sheer joy of smiling.

"Her progress has been remarkable, Ed. Do you realise what a gem we hit upon when we recovered her? She's not only adjusted to the 20th century remarkably well but she has been the very model of a SHADO recruit. Skydiver, mobile patrols, moonbase... she's taken to them all like a duck to water. Plus we've been able to save a deal on our personal transport budget too!"

"Ah yes, the SHADO car issue. I understand she turned it down for a Harley Davidson Sportster. Not unexpected really, I guess. I rode pillion with her one night, Alec. Godddamn, she controls that machine with perfect precision. All that power and it's under her complete control!"

"She's also very, very beautiful." Alec observed.

"Is she, Freeman? Do you know I hadn't really noticed!" Alec finished his whisky as he noted the last traces of the smile ebbing from Ed's features.

* * *

"Come my dear Colonel Ripley, I'm an old man now. You don't want to hear my boring tales all night." The man was in his late 60s and he sported a greying beard but his gaze was as keen and alert as ever it might have been throughout his life.

"But believe me I am, professor. To be responsible for the design of all this: Moonbase!" For the first time in weeks Ellen Ripley's' pretty face displayed what amounted to awe.

The man sitting opposite her in the leisure sphere studied her kindly, trying not to convey an air of condescension. He drew his breath and prepared for a long discourse, thought better of it and then shook his head. The memories were to remain locked up inside his head, at least for that night! He looked up again, saw the pain and hurt forming in her eyes and grasped her hands in his, regretting his decision with every passing second.

"It was a long time ago," he said. "many years before SHADO. I designed a moonbase and a fleet of nuclear support rockets to ferry the materials up here. But then we were..." he swallowed hard, "Thwarted. An invasion by what SHADO scientists think was an organism genetically engineered by the aliens. And then just before that there was a three man crew I sent up in a conventional rocket. It was a true first, ahead of its time some said. They thwarted that one too. By the time those three men returned they had been compounded into the one, horrendous organism; Caroon, Greene, Reichenheim - I can still see the look in Judith Caroon's eyes when we were talking about her poor husband. The intention was to force us out of space you see, Colonel. But as you know it didn't work. There really are monsters out there you know Colonel. Monsters."

"I know", said Ripley softly. "I know..."

"Bernard", he said softly. "Just call me Bernard." A soft chime issued from a device

around Ripley's belt. "My shuttle" she said. "I'll be back on Earth this time tomorrow."

"Good luck, my dear. It's been so nice meeting you. Maybe our paths will cross again someday?"

"I hope so" she replied. "Bye Bernard".

* * *

Ripley sat back into the seat of her shuttle. The flight had been unremarkable and it had been good to see the Earth approaching through the windows of the moon ferry's flight deck. Even more interesting to her had been the content of Straker's email to her:

"Dr Jackson suspected traitor. Alien involvement probable. Suspect Jackson has been passing information to the aliens. Your assignment: interrogation of Jackson and loosening of tongue of same. No permanent damage to Jackson to be permitted, all other options open."

Ripley reflected on the message in front of her and the corner of her mouth turned upwards slightly in a little smile.

"Well, well, well", she said to herself. "Well, well, well!"

The G-forces of re-entry began to grip her body and she settled back in her seat.

* * *

She lost no time when she finally returned to her London flat. Dialling a secure link to SHADO HQ she typed a brief email to security team A and anticipated the task ahead of her with relish. It was a mere two hours later when a ring on her doorbell prompted her to stir.

Opening the door and standing back, she admitted two men sporting dark glasses who appeared to be supporting a very drunk man indeed. She closed the door and pointed to her sofa. Without further ado, the men dumped the semi-conscious body on the piece of furniture and stood back.

"Here he is Colonel", one of the men said. "The drug should wear off within the next hour or so. Do you have any further instructions, Ma'am?" the security team leader asked.

She spoke softly, telling them to return in the morning to collect the man. Quietly, politely but very purposefully she ushered the two out, locked the door behind them and turned her attention to the slumped form.

"Hello Doctor Jackson" she said softly, knowing that he was not as yet in a coherent state, and unable to make sense of her words. "We're going to have a fun night at home, aren't we now! There, let me just get you ready". She wandered into her bedroom, retrieved several lengths of white rope and returned to Jackson. Working rapidly, she bound him tightly, expertly and quickly. She knew he would scarcely be able to move, tied as he was.

His legs had been bound together and his hands had been tied behind his back. Smiling at her work, she retired to the bedroom to change.

"I think he deserves the full treatment here" she said to herself, opening a wardrobe door and bringing out a shiny black PVC catsuit. She changed into the figure-hugging garment and sat down on the bed, pulling on a pair of shiny black patent leather boots. The tops of the boots terminated just below her knees and the six inch spiked heels added to her already considerable height; she looked powerful and awesomely in control... Jackson was going to have a trip through hell before the night was out, she had decided. She poured herself a single malt and slowly drank it, watching consciousness and coherence slowly returning to Jackson as the drugs coursing through his veins gradually became less and less potent. Eventually he opened his eyes and began to struggle a little. It was useless. The bonds had been tied so expertly that he had not a hope of getting free. She stood up and with a single movement of her leg, prodded him with her boot. Jackson's bound body rolled off the sofa and fell to the floor.

"Jackson! I want information from you and I want it NOW. Make no mistake about it, I can make your life VERY uncomfortable indeed. Who are you working with, Jackson? Who have you been passing information to?" The corner of Jackson's mouth quirked upwards slightly as he realised what had happened to him. He spoke slowly but confidently, despite his current predicament:

"I don't know what you're talking about Colonel Ripley. I suggest you untie me and we talk this little episode over with the Commander."

"Oh yes, Commander Straker" she replied. "Let me tell you, Jackson. I have this assignment direct from Straker's hands himself. We know you've been loose lipped and unless you start talking right away, you are going to be put through some very uncomfortable minutes very, very soon."

Jackson snickered a little before speaking again: "Go to hell Ripley!" he said, with a slight laugh in his voice.

"Ok Jackson. Seems like I'll have to loosen that tongue a little doesn't it!". He saw her mouth tighten and a little chill ran up his spine. He lay there helpless as he saw Ripley walk to her bedroom and return brandishing a riding crop.

"Oh don't worry doctor, I had the place soundproofed. No one will hear your cries."

She brought the crop down smartly on Jackson's buttocks and he flinched. A stinging sensation ran up his spine.

"Talk! Who are your contacts?" The room fell silent once more and Ripley began to fall to her task with a will. She raised the crop high above her head and brought it down again with an almighty swish. Pain coursed through Jackson's rear as the crop repeatedly and forcefully struck home, but not one word escaped his lips. It was after five minutes of a sound cropping that Ripley paused and raised his head by grabbing his hair. She looked at him quizzically and then and only then did he speak.

"Yesssss, your psychometric tests confirmed you would be capable of this."

Ripley scowled.

"Oh yes. Those tests. I made a log of each and every one of them and whilst I was on Moonbase I emailed Doctor Shroeder to discuss them and guess what? Less than a third of the tests you put me through were standard SHADO tests. You've been using me like a guinea pig haven't you? What was the attraction huh? A specimen from the future that you simply couldn't resist?? Well now, the tables are turned and I am in control of YOU!"

There was no doubt that Jackson was extremely uncomfortable. His bum had turned a deep shade of red and welts were beginning to appear. In spite of all this, he laughed slightly at her and looked her straight in the eyes.

"Well done, Colonel Ripley. You passed my final test. The Commander and I arranged this little affair between us and I must say, you reacted as I anticipated you would. My final test Colonel. If you look under the carpet you will find a little document from HQ showing how I set up and authorised this whole business. I knew I could depend upon you Colonel, and I was not wrong."

Ripley's jaw dropped slightly. She rushed to the corner of the room, lifted the corner of the carpet and retrieved the documents which had obviously been planted there by SHADO security before she had arrived back on Earth. She sat in a chair. Open mouthed, she read the papers, saw the counter signatures of Commander Straker himself and realised that she had been yet another victim of Jackson's testing procedures. Adrenaline began to course through her veins as her anger mounted. After a few minutes she strode back towards Jackson, the

expression on her face sterner than ever.

"Well now, it seems like I've been set up here", she said. "But don't think I'm about to untie you. I'm just going to take you on a little trip to hell to teach you a lesson. Nothing to do with SHADO, this is purely personal".

A glint formed in Jackson's eyes as he saw the bullwhip in her hands. She rolled him on to his stomach with a booted foot and raised the whip. CRACK! Expertly, she brought it down across his back and he cried out loud. Again and again she wielded the whip, to Jackson's increasing discomfort. Finally he cried out:

"Enough, Ellen. Please have mercy on me". Ripley broke out in a broad smile.

"Well, well, well. Who's in charge now? From now on, when you are off duty things are going to be different for you and me. I have plans for you. Off duty, you will be owned by me. You will instantly obey me and never question MY orders or you will get a fearful punishment visited upon you. IS THAT CLEAR?"

Jackson hung his head. Ripley retrieved a dog collar from her cupboard and put it round Jackson's neck. She attached a heavy, shiny chain and jerked on it, forcing Jackson's head upwards. He looked her straight in the eyes.

"I said IS THAT CLEAR?" Jackson nodded his assent. Tomorrow was another day and Ripley intended to use it to the full, putting the finishing touches to Jackson's enslavement.

"Good. From now on you will address me as Mistress, and tomorrow I will go and have a dog tag engraved for your collar. It will say 'property of Mistress Ripley', understand?"

Jackson nodded again but Ripley apparently was not satisfied. "Say it Jackson" she said aggressively.

"Yes, Mistress Ripley" he said, hanging his head once again.

"Good", she said. "Now, let's have a demonstration of your loyalty.". She brought her booted foot close to his mouth and uttered one word: "CLEAN!"

Jackson extended his tongue and proceeded to run it all over her booted foot, cleaning the leather and showing just how much in her power he was. Suddenly she squatted over him and began to piss all over his bound body.

"This is just what you deserve, slave. I will utterly degrade you!" she scowled as Jackson got wetter and wetter. Straightening herself she observed Jackson's back. She could clearly see where her bullwhip had struck him and his bum was a mass of red welts where the crop had done its work.

"Behave yourself and I may consider unbinding you in an hour or two. Remember slave, Straker doesn't own you off duty... you have one owner and one only. ME!"

The once arrogant, laughing doctor could only nod his subservient acknowledgement. He knew she had broken him and enslaved him. From now on, there would be one woman and one woman alone he would answer to when the call of SHADO was not beckoning: his owner, Mistress Ellen Ripley, the beautiful dominatrix.

Both inwardly smiled. For Ripley, the future was going to prove very interesting, both on duty with SHADO and off duty with Jackson, her own collared slave.

And if he was good, then she might, just might untie him before another hour was up.

The End