

Now for the next installment of "SHADO Boxing":
By John D'Alton

SHADO Boxing #2 - "Headaches"

May 1998

Another UFO parody (well, its really more allusion/irony/humour rather than sarcastic parody).

This story will hopefully make sense to any reader, but will have most meaning for FAB-UFO list members at time of writing.

Any similarity between characters and events in this story and actual persons and events is purely intentional and an extension of your imagination. ;-)

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Headaches Pt 1

Opening video sequence

Skydiver three interior- scene at 45 degrees, everyone in panic.
Close-up of Col. Lake's face- looking really worried.
Foster telling off two young new SHADO recruits.
Indian street scene.
Skydiver hits sea bottom.
Close-up of Skydiver gauge.
Straker thumping his desk.
SHADO agent sneaking around Indian backstreets.
Gay Ellis looking really worried.
Fade out showing outside view of Moonbase.

"I didn't do it!" Cadet Weller exclaimed again. "I was watching the gauges and punched in the commands as instructed."

"But your Diver sank, Cadet; there must be some reason," demanded Col. Lake yet again. "Didn't you notice anything unusual at all?"

Sue Weller just looked blank and forlorn. She had no idea what had caused Skydiver 3 to go down. And now she was being blamed for it, when it was only her first tour of duty and was just following Lieutenant Marc's instructions the whole time.

Col. Lake stopped and thought for a moment, and then told Cadet Weller to go. She was feeling pretty worried. If they couldn't find the cause of the sinking she'd have to call all Skydivers in for a safety check-up. And that would be a serious breakdown in their defense, not to mention the cost.

Virginia groaned inwardly at having to explain the options to Straker. He'd want a cycle of safety checks- one Skydiver in at a time. But Virginia was afraid - this time they'd been lucky and rescued all crew, but next time, if they were in deeper water... she shuddered. She really didn't like unsolved mysteries- but in SHADO they were a constant headache.

* * *

Paul Foster was having second thoughts about these new recruits. They just mightn't make it despite all his encouragement.

"Listen you guys, try a bit harder. Aim and pull back slowly like I showed you. The targets are *that* way," he pointed across the field.

The new recruits looked pretty worn out from a long day. The sun is about to set. But they lift their rifles and fire off some more rounds. Spouts of dirt leap up either side of the targets, but no new holes appear on the targets themselves.

Paul grimaced at their efforts.

Dave looked frustrated. "Give us a break Colonel, we've been at this all day. You push us too hard- expect too much."

Looking increasingly angry, Paul interrupted, "Too hard? You think *I'm* too hard. Wait till you meet the boss!"

Taking a step forward Paul heated up even more, "And I'll tell you something more, the first time an alien fires at you, you'll thank me for this training. O.K.- we'll start again tomorrow. You're giving me a massive headache."

* * *

Agent D scampered along another narrow Indian backstreet. A strange sound was coming from ahead- a whining lilted sound that was very familiar. He walked faster, and peered cautiously around a corner. His heart was beating fast and sweat was dripping off his brow. Nothing in the air. What's that light? But the sound was only coming from an old lady grinding up curry and singing a folk song.

How does she do that he wondered. Darndest UFO sound he'd ever heard. It gave him a headache.

* * *

Straker thumped his desk. "I knew it Alec, There *is* a link. That Indian nuke went off just 15 minutes before Skydiver 3 went down. And the Indian Destroyer *Europa* was only a few miles away when she went down. And now Agent D has sent this report in."

Alec raised one eyebrow and took the document. He thought Ed was jumping to conclusions a bit again.

"Report on meeting with Indian Security Agency 15th April:

Usual update on SHADO activities received warmly.

No intelligence from their side. No recent sightings.

But they asked about Skydiver movements.

They seemed unusually interested.

Very guarded. Suspicious.

Should I try other channels?

They did *not* give us any warning on Nuke tests. Highly irregular. Also they said there was nothing to report on the joint acoustic gun project. Hard to believe. Should I make a face-to-face complaint to Indian Defense Minister?"

"Well Ed, I can see your point about the Acoustic gun project delays, but the Skydiver connection could be just a coincidence. We can't afford to upset the Indians."

Straker stood up briskly and walked towards the lift. "I want answers Alec. Tell Agent D to ask around. Find out why they were so interested in our Skydiver. And go through official channels about the "Europa." How come they just happened to be so close and able to rescue our crew so quickly." Straker pushed the 'down' button with a scowl. He had too many

headaches too handle and not enough hours.

* * *

Moonbase. Agent Sutherland is looking bored. She sits at a console across from Gay but neither seem to have much to do. She sighs, "Tell me Lieutenant, why have people been treating me like a social outcast lately. Is it anything I've said? I've left messages with several people but they haven't replied. have you heard *anything?*"

Gay smiled knowingly. "It's like this. The other week when you. . ." but before Gay could finish, Joan's voice sounded over the intercom, "Red Alert, Red Alert, decompression in powersector."

Part 2

Ordered panic cluttered the Moonbase corridors. The emergency team hopped in the one-sixth gee towards the power sector while other Moonbase personnel took emergency stations.

"It's a small hole and a large crack threatening to blow out, Lieutenant" Engineer Appleyard radioed in from outside the main power room. "We'll enter and attempt to seal it now."

Their suits were a little cramped for the first few minutes after you got inside them, Lt. Farkin thought. Must be some human factor involved in that. Maybe the movement wiggled his body in tighter or spread the suit better or something.

He and Appleyard carried their repair kits into the room. It was a bit of a mess. Someone had been trying to remove some "bunnies" from the system hard-drives when the air pressure had dropped. Now there was paper everywhere. And bits of "bunnies".

Gay nodded at Lt. Sutherland and spat at the intercom "Go to Yellow Alert. Emergency team in control. I pressure loss contained to Power Sector Main Room and adjoining corridor."

She continued her earlier story, "It's like this, the other week when you started growing, shall we say, chubby, you. . ." but before she could finish Lt. Sutherland interrupted.

"Gay, you know that was just a temporary side effect of that ray that hit me Earthside. Dr. Jackson says I'll shrink back to normal size in a month or two." Lt. Sutherland looked a little aggrieved. "Anyway, it's not my fault the cafe chair buckled when I sat on it, and I landed on Colonel Freeman's lap."

"I know," Gay replied tentatively, with a slight smirk, "But it's what happened after that upset people."

* * *

Dr. Jackson grimaced a little. He remembered where he'd first met Dave, one of their new recruits. It had been a memorable time throwing arms and legs at him. But now Paul was questioning his fitness. "Let me assssure you Paul, he'szzzz quite fit. Maybe you're expecting too much from him. I could detect no long-term effectsszz on him of that reducing ray. And his medical hissstory is superrrrrb. He doesn't drink or smoke. He'ssszzz in top condition. Give him a few more days and seeeee how he goesss."

Paul Foster still wasn't convinced. He leant further over Jackson's desk and tried to sound impressive, somehow knowing it wouldn't work, "But Doctor, have you checked his eyes properly? He seems to be having troubles."

"Actually his eyes tested fine, but I can tesssst himmmmm again if you want." Dr. Jackson replied, crossing his arms and leaning back in his chair. "Bring him in first thing tomorrow."

With that answer, Colonel Foster sauntered down the corridor. If he hurried he just had time to meet someone for a candle-lit dinner. A special someone he thought, grinning broadly.

* * *

"Okay, let's take her out" Colonel Lake ordered, smiling over at Cadet Weller with a look of grim determination. She was going to solve this mystery even if it took them all night. It left her restless knowing there was a logical reason for Skydiver 1's sinking that no one could find yet. The scientist part of her wanted tidiness. And she'd felt recently that she had to prove herself to the men in the command team again. They had seemed to be leaving her out of things a little lately. A success here would impress Straker for sure. And Alec. Virginia sighed.

Cadet Weller was feeling a little overwhelmed. Having Colonel Lake watching over her

shoulders was a little daunting. Even when Lt. Marc had reassured her earlier by saying she was doing fine she still felt panicky. "What if I get something wrong Lieutenant- they'll blame me for the crash, I know it." The dials and lights seemed to mist up before her eyes. But then she noticed Lt. Marc nodding reassurance again. She thought, "If only my headache would go away, I would show Colonel Lake I did nothing wrong."

Colonel Lake liked Skydiver 2. It had some improvements over Skydiver 1 that made it easier to control, and some engineering refinements the crew preferred. But it still had the charm of Skydiver 1 rather than the somewhat plastic feel of Skydivers 3-5. She always thought it would be a shame someday to decommission the older vessels. And their cars. Maybe they could be sold off to some museum one day. Maybe in Italy- they seemed to collect old things a lot there.

Virginia was convinced that she'd find the answers to the sinking. Skydiver 2 would repeat the maneuvers of Skydiver 1 and see what happened. They'd even go to India- it may come in useful being close to the current tense situation there. She shared Straker's view that something odd was up with the Indian government.

* * *

Agent D sipped another cup of hot chai. His contact said he'd deliver a message from their Indian government inside agent tomorrow morning. Until then he could relax a little and ponder how to fulfill the commander's orders.

He sensed Straker was right- there must be a connection between the Skydiver sinking and the tests. Maybe he could check out the captain of the *Europa* he thought.

Pondering the morrow, Agent D was interrupted by a wizened man hobbling on a walking stick. "Sahib, you must be coming. I have seen the light. The voices spoke to me. Come."

Agent D barely had time to grab his bag before he was hauled out of the tea shop and into the dark alley.

"Come friend, it will be returning again at 1 am. Being just a few minutes now. You will be seeing the silver disk and green lights."

Agent D recovered from his surprise and disbelief and started growing curious. He'd seen this old guy wandering around talking to himself. But this sounded something more. He followed cautiously but eagerly.

There was no moon that night and he nearly tripped on the rough road several times. At least 3 times he had to jump at the last second to avoid the cow pats. They hurried along for 15 minutes. Then around the corner past the mosque at the edge of town they stopped.

"See brother, it will be coming just there near the ricefields. The men with green skin will be coming again. They asked for you particularly. Yes, you only."

Agent D's eyes grew large. But he had no time to ask the questions bursting from his lips- for the unmistakable sound of a UFO was filling the air.

Part 3

(with special imagery dedicated to Suzanne 😊 not really what she had in mind but this is parody!)

The unmistakable sound of a UFO was filling the air, overshadowing the low groan coming from the old man, or was it from Agent D himself. He couldn't tell. He'd never seen a UFO so close. It just hovered there 10 metres away, eerily watching him like a lighted frisbee frozen in space.

"See sahib, the green-skinned messengers of Allah are coming and will be bringing you a

gift. They are holy angels I am knowing." Seeing agent D's look of incredulity, he added "Don't you believe in Allah's messengers sahib?"

Agent D wanted to run, but his legs had turned floppy. He felt sure that he tried to move that he'd collapse like a cow on a bike. All he could do was gaze at the shimmering disc and reply, "Yes my friend, I do believe in the one true god, but these are *not* his angels. They're from another planet, and are *not* bringing any blessings."

Looking disappointed, the old man went quiet. But his eyes grew very wide when the UFO opened and two green men walked out. "See sahib, they are coming. Just like I was telling. Now you will be believing."

Time seemed to grind to a near halt, as the aliens cautiously glanced around before approaching agent D.

They too stood quietly for awhile before offering, "We have something for you. Please read this and pass it on the SHADO, and pass on greetings from us- we are from the peace/science faction and are alarmed by these nuclear tests. This is information about the tests. We received it from a vicar who works for us. Read, you will understand."

With that they gently handed over a nice shiny new CD and retreated quickly to the UFO.

The old man's eyes grew even wider than a saucers- more like a trash can lid without the little handles on the side. "See sahib, they are giving you present."

* * *

Lt. Sutherland looked briefly embarrassed. She went as red as an interceptor's exhaust for just a few seconds and then spat out, "So *that's* what everyone's upset about! Gay, why didn't you tell me earlier? I *knew* you were talking about something hush-hush in the Girls Rude Group meeting in your room the other night. I walked in and you all pretended to be talking about repainting the interceptors green. I knew it sounded fishy."

Gay looked around to check that Joan was still out of earshot. "Well actually we *had* been talking about repainting them green. You know, to help with camouflage. Although it wouldn't match our moonbase colour scheme. Unless we made it fluorescent green, and then they'd match our hair hey?"

Lt. Sutherland stopped, looking quizzical. She wondered what had got into Gay's mind. She was normally such a sensible person. Was something affecting her thinking? Was the purple dye not working properly??

* * *

Paul settled back in his sofa. What a night. That Yuchy person was pretty wild. But why, he wondered, did she always wear that funny clothing and that makeup. It looked so real- it must take her hours to put it on.

But tomorrow he'd have to confront Dave and his pal again. Maybe if he pulled a bag over their heads it would help them to aim better, he ruminated cheekily.

* * *

Cadet Weller also fell asleep thinking about what tomorrow would bring. Would they sink off the coast of India like a sugarcube in coffee? Would she prove her innocence to Col. Lake? And Lt. Marc? What would happen...

Part 4

Cadet Weller woke out of daydream with a start. It had been a rather pleasant daydream, but now Col. Lake was back looking over her shoulder again.

"Okay Captain, let's repeat the movements of Skydiver 3 and see what happens. Are you

sure we're in the same place as Skydiver 3 was?"

Captain Pieten replied with a slight nod and a look of grim determination. Nothing was going to sink *her* sub. She'd been Captain of Skydiver 2 for over four years now and had a certain emotional attachment to her.

Lt. Marc began reading out the sequence from the Skydiver 3, "Ascend to depth of 400m, 1/4 ahead, bearing 310 degrees."

The pilot responded with an "aye aye" and adjusted some controls. Cadet Weller's hands were beginning to sweat profusely- even worse than in her favourite sauna when visited by ... (Damn, she thought, I get so easily distracted by these fantasies.)

Lt. Marc read out the next sequence, "Okay, after 2 minutes we spot an Indian ship and then rise to investigate. Get ready Cadet. It's nearly your turn."

Cadet Weller went red again, and heat rose from her collar like a boiling kettle.

* * *

"See sahib, now Allah's messengers are gone, you can look at your present," the old man said to the still stunned agent D.

It was a rather lovely looking present really- a shiny new CD with some beautifully made graphics- shots of UFOS and Moonbase! And what was this- stains on the CD? Had the vicar who'd made it blessed it with holy water too? (And why were the aliens using a vicar for an agent anyway he wondered.) But what was most astonishing was the label- "Secrets of Indian nuclear tests and the danger to SHADO."

He'd have to get this delivered to SHADO tonight. It could be strategic. Pity he wouldn't get time to view it himself, but global security could be at stake here.

"Sahib, look, the angels have left more slashings in the field", the old man again interrupted. And sure enough, agent D could see some neat round marks in the rice paddy.

"I am telling you Sahib, these messengers of Allah are coming here often. A few week's back they slashed this field with their mighty vehicle. And then the Punjabi coolies who are normally paid to do the slashing were becoming most upset because someone was stealing their slashing work. So they were slashing the slashings too. And then the owners hired some nasty fellows to slash the slashers. There was much blood Shaib. So much slashing."

Agent D. was getting completely lost by this conversation so he politely said goodnight and left to radio SHADO.

* * *

Lt. Sutherland was about to ask Gay another question when an important message came through from SHADO HQ. "Colonel Freeman will be arriving at moonbase tomorrow at 1100 hours to investigate the depressurisation incident." She sighed briefly and decided to wait till the end of shift to talk to Gay again. But it was very hard to keep her mind on work for the next 3 hours. It gave her a headache having to pull her mind back to the controls all the time. Alec! here again!! Sigh.

* * *

On the rifle range the next day, the first thing that Paul Foster noticed about Dave was his eyes. There was no way he could aim a weapon properly. He was right and Dr. Jackson was wrong. Dave's eyes were crossed so badly it was a wonder he could even walk!

Part 5

"Look at his eyes, Jackson," Paul Foster yelled across the desk. "If Dave's eyes were any more crossed he'd be looking backwards."

"Hmmm, yessss, I can seeee whaaaat you meeean Colonel Foster," Dr Jackson replied, looked a little perplexed. He didn't seem to understand how Dave's eyes could check out so well one week and be so faulty the next.

Dave stood warily watching, waiting wearily for Dr. Jackson to take out his eye-testing apparatus.

"Just hold stiiiiiiii for me for a moment pleeeese. Ahhh yessss, that's goooood," Dr Jackson droned dreamily in Dave's drooping ear. "Yesss, yessss, fine. I think I can see the problemmmm. Tell me Dave, have you been using the new 3d interceptor simulator trainer a lot in the last few days?"

Paul's jaw dropped a little. He'd got a bad headache himself just testing out the new simulator for an hour. If Dave had been using it for several hours a day, that would explain a lot.

"So tell me please Daaaave, whose idea was it to use the simulator so much hmmmm?" Jackson inquired in his know-it-all voice.

Foster thought to himself, "If he's implying I'm to blame, I'll smash that smirk off his face this time I swear."

* * *

Gay still had a smirk on her face at the end of shift and Lt. Sutherland was in no mood to discuss with Gay everyone's gossip about her when *Alec* was so close to arriving. She sighed to herself again, and then waited till Gay had gone before moving off to the library to play a quiet game of chess. Two hours later she was still on the 3rd move. Time seemed to be going so slowly waiting for sleep to come. Tomorrow. She sighed again. Just a few more hours.

* * *

Cadet Weller had no time to day-dream with Lt. Marc looking over her shoulder. The tension on Skydiver 2 was as thick as molasses and as electric as the inside of a toaster. It was giving her a headache.

"Okay, cadet, emergency surface," he blasted into her right ear.

Cadet Weller wrenched the control wheel to the left to initiate the emergency surface.

"No, hold it Cadet, that's the wrong way." Marc exploded, knowing the Cadet was about to sink them. Slowly a look of enlightenment crept across his face like daybreak in the desert. And then he looked around at Colonel Lake whose eyes revealed that she'd seen the same light he had.

Cadet Weller had trained on Skydiver 1, but on Skydiver 2 and 3, the controls had been modified to make them the more logical "right means full". Someone had forgot to brief her properly on the changes and she'd sunk Skydiver 3 because of a HE problem. Col. Lake could just picture Professor Farkin ripping out his remaining few tufts of hair in frustration. The Professor's report on the Human Factors Engineering aspects of Skydiver design had been shelved by Commander Straker as too esoteric, and now he'd been proved right.

Virginia grinned at the thought of explaining it all to the Commander. He really hated being shown to be wrong. And she really enjoyed showing him. A perfect match.

* * *

About eight hours later Agent D awoke from a bizarre dream about fields, slashings, SID, SHADO cars for sale, Colonel Lake, and a little dancing wooden puppet that kept repeating "F.A.B. Virgil". It had been all very strange. He'd have to stop eating those really hot Chicken curries at night; they were upsetting his sleep.

Today he'd have lots to keep him busy again. Before bed last night he'd looked up some

ancient local Indian texts about UFOs, "vimana" they'd called them, and it seemed that this area had been haunted by them for years. Today he'd try and track them down more, locate and interrogate this 'Vicar', see what his embassy contacts could tell him about the suspicious doings of the Indian Defense Department, and maybe even have time to look at the copy he'd made of the puzzling new CD the aliens had given him.

Hmmm, he thought, better go the double chappatti and sabzi breakfast and wash it down with 4 cups of super-strength Indian chai tea. That should keep him awake long enough.

* * *

Lt. Sutherland was also awake having breakfast and pondering the day to come. Another visit from Alec she dreamily thought, gazing out at the bleak Moonscape before her. She was in the middle of rehearsing her opening lines when Gay strode in with the startling news that Alec had arrived early. Lt. Sutherland rose quickly, glad her skirt now fitted better over her rapidly shrinking body, and was just about to dump the coffee down the disposer when Colonel Freeman walked in.

"Good morning Lieutenants," he breezily interrupted, smiling especially warmly at Lt. Sutherland. "I hear you've been having some troubles with your windows blowing out, and I thought I'd better come up and investigate. I was wondering Lt. Ellis, if you'd mind if Lt. Sutherland showed me around the computer rooms this morning and helped me out with my investigations today?"

Part 6

Colonel Lake could almost hear his eyeballs popping out over the radio. Straker was fuming. "Who's idea was it to put an untrained cadet on Skydiver 3 in the first place Colonel Lake? That little headache's cost us thousands, and you can bet Henderson will be on my case about the waste."

Col. Lake had expected a reaction, but not this much. She knew he'd be miffed. Being shown to have made a mistake in not listening to professor Farkin's report would needle him. But this seemed a bit over-the-top. Maybe the old man was losing it a little.

Ed continued with a scowl, "Cadet Weller should have been fully briefed on the HFE factors and the control panel modifications before she was let loose. If it was that Captain Pieten who authorized it I'll have her sent to Marsbase."

* * *

Foster couldn't wait for Alec to return from Moonbase. Then he could gang up with him against the Commander over the headache of the new 3d simulator. It had put one of his new recruits out of action for a week according to Dr. Jackson. And they desperately needed some more trained field operatives.

After his argument with Dr. Jackson, Paul had taken Dave for a coffee and discovered he was really a pretty nice guy after all. He had a thing about models of interceptors, acoustic guns, electronic music and Lt. Ellis, but other than that, would make a fine operative.

One thing he couldn't understand though. Dave seemed to have a death wish about torpedoes. Just another of those strange SHADO staff mysteries Paul guessed. Another mystery for him to mull over at night and to give him a headache when he couldn't work it out. He'd have to ask Yuchtar for her thoughts.

* * *

Agent D backed into another alley, running for his life. They were trying to trap him and he was running out of places to retreat to.

All around the sounds of busy Indian streets assailed his senses, and his nose was frying from the aromas in this spice market laneway. Walls of hanging shirts clowingly stroked him as he edged backwards. This was it. If they caught him here he was done for.

The shrieks grew suddenly more intense and then right before him the gang of child beggars exploded through the crowds. "Give rupees mister, please give rupees" a small face chanted. "Give me a dollar for my poor dying sister" another child yelled, while massaging his pockets and pulling at his shirt.

Agent D succumbed. It was the only way to get some peace from the encapsulating din. Beggars were a real headache. Give me aliens any day he thought to himself.

* * *

A few hours later Colonel Lake was briefing Straker over the radio again. "So that's it Commander, the Vicar seems to have totally disappeared, and Agent D. reports that all the problems with the Indian Defense department were just typical Indian bureaucracy and secrecy. It was all a big coincidence them being near Skydiver 3 when she sank."

Ed Straker looked puzzled, "Hmmm, I see, well the CD that the peace/science faction gave Agent D doesn't help much either. It has lots of interesting technical information on the Indian nuclear program, but nothing about their danger to SHADO. Except the obvious that is, that every test messes up our sensor arrays for a few minutes. I really can't see what the point of it all is."

Virginia paused for a moment before saying thoughtfully, "Maybe the peace/science faction are trying to warn us of a UFO attack masked by Indian nuclear tests."

"Yes, hmmm, could be Colonel." Ed replied. "Or there's another possible explanation. Maybe its all bogus. Maybe it's all a huge distraction. You know my theory on the alien science faction- Ninety percent of science factions are bogus, because ninety percent of everything is bogus."

Not for the first time Colonel Lake wondered at the enormity of the Commander's paranoia.

* * *

Lt. Sutherland was feeling a little paranoid herself that evening. She'd spent the best part of 4 hours in the computer rooms alone that morning with Alec Freeman, and all they'd done was go over printouts of stress fractures, and reports of the strange etch markings on the moonbase windows.

Something was causing all the failures in the windows, and Alec seemed far more interested in them than in her.

She picked at her spaghetti bolognese disinterestedly, wondering what had happened to their relationship. She sighed again. It had been a long frustrating day. All afternoon it had been so hard to stay focussed on her job in the control room that Gay had let her leave early. Now it was nearly 7 pm and she hadn't seen Alec since 1pm.

Lt. Ellis walked into the cafe with a petulant grin. "Ummm, mind if I join you Lieutenant?" she asked in that tone that said 'look what I've got here.'

"What's that Gay?" Lt Sutherland asked, trying to sound at least a little interested.

"Oh just the weeks emails from all my admirers on Marsbase. Those guys up there must be a bit oxygen-starved or something. You should read what they say in some of these emails!"

A low rumble drifted in at that moment from the doorway, and Lt. Sutherland's heart leaped into her throat.

Alec wandered in, looking very relaxed. "Evening Lieutenants. I've just finished

processing those window etching samples. They're amazingly interesting you know. I've had such a terrible headache since I arrived this morning I'm surprised I got them finished. Ahhhhh, Lt. Sutherland, would you be interested in coming down to my office for awhile to see the etchings? The medication I took has sure helped me get over my headache."

the end, until next weird story... John D'Alton