

UFO - The Battle Continues
Based on the ITC Century 21 series 'UFO'
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TARGET REACQUIRED
by Jeff Stone

Part 3

Chapter 8

"There is a tendency in 20th Century science to forget there will be a 21st Century science, and indeed a *30th* Century science, from which vantage points our knowledge of the Universe may appear quite different than it does to us. We suffer, perhaps, from temporal provincialism, a form of arrogance that has always irritated posterity."

- Dr J. Allen Hynek,

Chairman of the Astronomy

Department at Northwestern University and scientific consultant to US Air Force UFO investigation projects Sign, Grudge and Blue Book, August 1966

"Electricity is not only an energy source, it is also the very lifeblood of our modern society. Without it, we are little more than medieval peasants surrounded by dead machines."

- Viktor Benes, 'Crises'

LONDON, ENGLAND
7-37pm GMT
December 1983

The streetlights had all gone out, but there were plenty of fires to illuminate the darkness. From the top of the BCCI Tower, looking westwards into the heart of the city, Gary Sloane had a first-class view of it all.

How the blazes that were engulfing entire blocks had started, Sloane had no idea...it hardly mattered. He'd been in his office two floors below when it had all started; tapping away at his computer, doing important work that couldn't wait until the end of the Christmas break. Well, truth be told, he'd been fiddling the books, covering up a extremely dodgy offload of shares that an insider pal of his had put him on to. What BCCI didn't know wouldn't hurt them, right? OK, so it was their money he'd used to buy the bloody things in the first place; but the way he saw it, he was doing them a favour. His boss had always said you had to make money work for you. So Sloane was merely doing what he'd been told.

Anyway, the tip had been excellent, and Sloane had made himself a rather tasty profit. All that remained to do was delete the records of the original cash transfer and fake a computer glitch to explain the irregularity in the records.

This has almost been completed when the power failed. Sloane had sat there in irritated silence for a few moments, waiting for the bulding's generator to automatically kick in. When it hadn't, irritation was replaced by panic; had someone found out what he was doing? If so, killing the electricity in the whole building was an odd way to stop him. He looked out at the windows that formed one wall of the office. The lights in the adjacent building had gone out, and so had the ones in the apartment block just visible to its left. In fact, Sloane couldn't see a single light on anywhere. **Surely a blackout wouldn't be this widespread?**

And then the sounds began. At first, it was like cutlery being dropped in a distant room, a sort of muffled clatter. This was followed by more noises; breaking glass, the screech of tires, indistinct voices from the streets far below. Then a hollow THUD that shook Sloane in his chair. He had glanced out the windows, in time to see a gigantic fireball mushroom upwards off to the east. Sloane had got up and walked numbly over to the glass, gazing out in bemused horror. There was not much to see, just hints of movement in the night.

The noise grew, built, becoming a single roar of chaotic insanity. It was like the sound of a car smash repeated over and over and over again.

What the f--k is happening? Gripped by a terror he didn't really understand, Sloane ran out of the office and crashed through the doors of the main stairwell. He clattered up the steps, alone in the dark with the hollow clapping of his very expensive shoes and the rasp of his panicked breath. A small voice in head kept telling him that running *upstairs* in an emergency was a bloody stupid thing to do; but if he'd listened to that small voice before, he'd have never taken that stock tip and become a rich man.

Bursting out onto the roof, Sloane skidded to a halt and looked around. The BCCI Tower was one of the tallest structures in London...hell, in *England*...and one could see for miles in all directions. Sloane didn't like what he saw.

The *whole city* was dark. Buildings stood like gaunt tombs, barely visible against the overcast night sky. The noise was deafening; it was as if every soul in London was outdoors screaming their heads off. It was doubly chilling for Sloane because there were no accompanying sounds of rescue or hope. No fire engine sirens, no police horns, no helicopter

blades. Just the very human, very frightened noise of a city in agony. A city also on fire; the first large blazes had sprang up while Sloane maintained his lonely rooftop vigil. He longed to hear the klaxon of a fire truck; surely they wouldn't just leave whole buildings to burn to the ground? Why weren't they doing anything?

It occurred to Sloane that 'they' were probably in as much trouble as anyone else. Typical; the people in charge were always the first to fall to bits in a crisis, he had mused as he watched a car pile-up on Flood Street burn. And to think he'd been worried that they'd find out about his little bit of hanky-panky. **They'll have bigger things on their minds now.** For it was obvious this was no mere blackout; something really bad had happened.

But what? Nuclear attack? Sloane had read somewhere that nukes could cause power failures if they burst in the air. If so, who'd attacked? And why? Questions of a more personal nature intruded into Sloane's thoughts. *How am I going to get home?* Driving through this mess would be impossible, and it was a good twenty miles to his flat. *Ah, what the hell, I'll walk,* he decided. *It's not every day you get to wander through a disaster area.* Sloane was amazed at how detached he felt about the misery and death that was happening right now all around him; as cold and analytical as his partner-in-crime, the now-dead computer in his office.

He tore his eyes away from the nightmare cityscape and made to turn for the roof exit, but halted in his tracks when a flying saucer the size of a mansion broke through the cloud cover and swept across the sky directly over the Tower. "Oh," Sloane said aloud, smiling slightly. "So *that's* why."

**SPACE INTRUDER DETECTOR
EARTH ORBIT
7-39pm GMT**

THIS IS S.I.D. EXTREME EMERGENCY. UFO ATTACK IN PROGRESS. TWELVE TYPE-B AND THREE TYPE-C CRAFT HAVE PENETRATED INNER DEFENCE RING, AND ARE ASSUMING POSITIONS OVER MAJOR POPULATION CENTRES.

REASON FOR FAILURE TO DETECT UFOS PRIOR TO THIS POINT UNKNOWN. FURTHER UFO FLOTILLA DETECTED IN AREA NFR 32, APPROACHING OUTER DEFENCE PERIMETER. FLOTILLA COMPRISES SIXTEEN TYPE-B AND FIVE TYPE-C CRAFT. EUTRONIC AND SPECTRO-SCAN ANALYSIS OF PREVIOUSLY UNKNOWN TYPE-C CRAFT IN PROGRESS.

IMMEDIATE COUNTERMEASURES AGAINST ATTACK STRONGLY RECOMMENDED. EXTREME EMERGENCY.

MOONBASE 7-41pm GMT

Lt Ellis wondered if she'd woken up in Hell today instead of in her bed in the Habitation Sphere. Within the space of a few hours, what had seemed like an ordinary run-of-the-mill common-or-garden Alien attack had turned into Judgment Day.

The ultra-high-resolution cameras stationed all about MoonBase were now trained on the Earth. At the touch of a button, Ellis could zoom in on a smoke cloud the size of Lake Michigan hanging over China, spy on malfunctioning robot supertankers in the Adriatic sailing round and round in spastic circles...or take in the entirety of Britain, its usually light-dappled form now almost lost amidst the darkness of the night-side. But she didn't want to look, didn't want to see what was happening down there. It was enough to know that it was, and that her work was all about helping to prevent even greater horror.

But what could they do? The remaining Interceptors had been launched towards the oncoming UFO flotilla, all of their Missile Tanks were deployed in defence of the base...it was just 'sit and hope'.

Barry and Harrington were at their stations, relaying reports from the various SHADO stations scattered around the globe. Normally, the communications channels were flooded with cross--bleed from neighbouring military frequencies; today, SHADO was alone in a void.

"Call for you, Lieutaenant. It's Colonel Freeman," Barry called out. Ellis nodded and activated her console screen.

"Status report, Gay."

"Interceptors were launched three minutes ago, and are en route to the targets in Area NFR 32." Her tone conveyed the lack of hope she felt in her heart. If all eighteen Interceptors hadn't been enough to stop just ten UFOs, what good would a depleted force be against *twenty-one*?

"Right." Freeman coughed. "How the bloody hell did those other UFOs get through our screens?"

"We're as much in the dark..." Ellis paused, aware of the unintentional blunder she'd just made. Freeman was either too angry or tired...or both...to notice. "Er, we have no idea, sir. Best guess is that they were already on Earth and have just come out of hiding."

"Yeah, that's what we thought. Update on them, please."

Ellis gestured for a report from Harrington. The other woman came over with a print-out. "Ahhh...UFOs have broken formation and are assuming positions above major Northern Hemisphere population centres. Details are being relayed via digilink. No hostile action as yet."

"And these new big saucers?"

"Well, other than their size, they seem to be no different. Spectroscan indicates they're 'bullet-proof', and may well be carriers for the smaller ships."

Freeman nodded, then looked off-camera. "Oh, right. Here's Colonel Lake."

Lake came on the screen. Her mascara was smudged; Ellis wondered who or what she'd been crying about. And then she realised that the possible answers to that question ran into the thousands.

"Hello, Gay. I have a programme for SID here. Stand by to receive data package." Ellis keyed the relevant controls, and within a few seconds the metallic trilling of digital transfer rang out. SID announced that 'he' was commencing receipt.

"What's the ETA of the Interceptors?" Lake asked while they were waiting. Ellis checked the chronometer.

"They'll be in strike range in...exactly fifteen minutes."

"Right." There was a long pause. Ellis stood it for a few seconds, then asked: "How is it down there?"

Lake pursed her lips in resignation. "Hellish? Yeah, that'd be the word. Half of London's on fire, apparently. We're moving emergency teams into place now, but it's a toy broly in a hurricane."

The question of the UFOs already in Earth's atmosphere hung unspoken in the air; both women knew that with all of the SkyBolt fleet out of action, there was nothing that could be done.

PROGRAM RECEIVED. NOW PROCESSING came the call from SID. This jolted Lake out of her awkward quiet, and she forced a smile.

"Thanks, Gay."

"My pleasure." She noticed the time. "I have to co-ordinate IP settings with the Interceptors."

"Right, good luck. SHADO HQ out."

The screen went blank, and Ellis brought up a tactical plot of the Interceptors.

As she watched the two sets of blips inch toward one another, she found herself wondering not about the attack to come, nor the disaster on Earth, but about the nuclear missiles the MAJIC planes had fired at the North Pole UFO just prior to the Pulse.

Something doesn't add up with that, she thought, chewing on her lip. This whole situation is full of factors that make no sense. UFOs that are invulnerable one moment, vulnerable the next...that fly straight over a defenceless MoonBase without so much as trying to attack...that use EMP weapons to knock our planes and spaceships out of the sky, then just let us shoot them down...and why did MAJIC attack that UFO without telling us? Why try to hide it? Why?

SIBERIA
RUSSIAN DEMOCRATIC FEDERATION
7-50pm GMT

The man frog-marching Waterman through the snow apparently knew no English, and Waterman's grasp of Russian didn't extend much further than 'vodka', but when you have a gun words are often not necessary. This was true of now; with a combination of grunts and rifle waves, Waterman had got the distinct impression the fur-clad mystery man was keen on him moving this way and not being lazy about it. Oh well, at least he'd given Waterman a fur coat and leggings to wear. The all-consuming fire-pain of the Arctic cold had now receded to a mere agony...but this was mainly due to the blood now returning to limbs starved of warmth and circulation for God knows how long.

"You want to...want to tell me how...you knew where I was?" Waterman called back over his shoulder. "I'd love to know...ah...to know..." *He can't understand what I'm saying, even if the wind wasn't at Force 6...* "...how you knew what my coat size is, too!"

More unintelligible Russian, and a prod in the back with the gun. Waterman shrugged and redoubled his pace. **No sense of humour....**

He'd been searched by his would-be rescuer before they'd moved off on this little walk, and thus his tracker beacon had been left behind. Hopefully, though, SHADO would have rescue teams in the air already...when they found the beacon, it would be a simple task to search a few kilometres in every direction to locate them. The storm had died down, and they were both in brown furs; it would be hard to *not* be noticed.

The duo crested a snowhill, and Waterman found himself looking down into a large hollow carved out of the earth. Within this mighty bowl stood tents, parabolic dishes, and a teeming throng of fur-clad people and Huskie dogs. Woodfires blazed here and there, sending plumes of richly-scented smoke into the sky. Just to see activity and *people* again after what seemed like days of solitary pain and hardship was a blessing.

Waterman's companion gestured with the gun again, and the Englishman skidded down the slope into the camp. He was marched past an outer ring of tents, which looked to be full of computers and Snowmobiles, into a central area dominated by a collapsible Nissen hut. The structure was enormous and formed the bulls-eye of this circular encampment. As he moved towards the hut, Waterman could feel the attention of the whole camp on him. Eyes glinted from under parka hoods, betraying no emotion. There was no hostility, not even curiosity; merely a sense that these people, whoever they were, knew who Waterman was. Almost as if he were expected....

The door of the hut opened and a man in a padded ski suit emerged. He strode towards Waterman, pulling his hood down as he came. The face greeting the SHADO officer was a very Russian one...a large, rounded head shorn of hair, with a stern expression and heavy eyebrows. Large grey eyes under hooded lids regarded Waterman keenly.

"You are SHADO, yes?"

The man said in English, his Russian accent almost obscuring the words. It was as if he'd learnt Waterman's language from watching those bad movies where the 'Russkies' spoke like cartoon Cossacks. Waterman nodded.

"Yes. How the hell do you know that? Who *are* you people?"

"We track your plane, see it crash. Went to get you in Snowmobiles, but all our machines stop working. Computers crashed, engines stop...even radio is dead." The man shrugged, and

held out his gloved hand. "I am Anotoly Nosenko, leader of this expedition. We are from ZPF."

Waterman took the hand. **God, ZPF!** The ZPF was the Russian equivalent of MAJIC, albeit on a far smaller and less expensive scale. Given the number of alleged saucer crashes and sightings in the Democratic Federation, the ZPF had earned a reputation for getting a lot of work done with sheer manpower and next to no money. "We track your dogfight with UFOs," Nosenko saying, pronouncing the acronym as 'Yay-fo'. "See your planes crash like, ah, ninepins?"

"Yes, something like that," Waterman said stonily.

"Anyway, we try and find you...we have not much of your English luck. You first man we find alive. Come this way, please."

Waterman allowed himself to be led into the hut, where he was greeted with a sight he knew he'd probably see but had hoped not to. Sky 2's pilot, Gary Tyler, lay on a stretcher in an ante-room to the hut's main area, open eyes staring emptily at the roof. There was no sign of injury. "His neck...broken in fall," Nosenko offered. "Dead when we find him. We are most sorry." He sounded sorry, too.

Waterman just nodded. "You say the radios are dead?"

"Da, da. Everything is dead. Even back-up generator. We think one of your planes must have had nuclear weapon on board, set off EM pulse. Only our gear, it is hardened for such matters, so we are at a, ah, at a loss."

"None of our planes were carrying atomic weapons."

"Hmmm, it is mystery alright. I think you would like to see this, da? Over here."

Nosenko pointed to a window in the door leading into the hut's main chamber. It was fogged with condensation, and the Russian wiped at it with his glove.

"It is interesting you should be hunting flying saucers when we are doing the same thing," he said. "Only, we have a bit more good fortune, yes?"

Waterman didn't reply; he was stunned beyond words. Sitting inside the chamber, intact and gleaming like it had just come off the production line, was a Alien saucer.

INTERCEPTION POINT
DEEP SPACE
7-55pm GMT

"Missile timing data programmed. Ready for firing." Captain Mark Bradley flicked up the guards on his control stick's thumb-triggers and waited for the moment to arrive. His eutroniscope showed the Alien fleet coming in at Sol 6, once again making no attempt to avoid the attack they *had* to know was bearing down on them. But then, what had they to fear? They were all 'bullet-proof' vessels; they'd probably laugh off the missiles Eagle Wing was about to launch. Each of the Interceptors was equipped with highly experimental photon warheads, with a destructive potential approaching 30 megatons apiece. In normal circumstances, such weapons would never be used; the resulting explosion was so enormous that a kid with a backyard telescope on Earth could've seen it. It was hard enough explaining away frequent *normal* nuclear detonations in deep space, let alone ones that rivalled the Sun for brightness.

But, no-one on Earth was looking now, and the situation was desperate. The Alien fleet *had* to be stopped, and photon bombs were the best and only way to do it. There'd been talk back at base of ramming the UFOs if the missiles didn't do the trick; this was what it had come to. The implication that a largely pointless death was preferable to allowing the Aliens through to Earth was lost on no-one. HQ had expressly forbidden such suicide actions, but out here, millions of miles from any Earthly authority, such strictures meant as little as this attack probably would. In the end, it was all gestures, brave but doomed gestures.

The moment arrived, and Eagle Wing made their gesture.

Bradley squeezed his triggers and watched his missile shoot off towards the invaders. Others joined it on its unerring flight. "Eagle Wing," he reported flatly. "All missiles away."

RESCUE ALPHA
SIBERIA
7-55pm GMT

"My God, what a day." With these words, Peter Wilkin clambered into the tilt-rotor. Straker and Robinson were ready with warm clothes and a hot drink, both of which the pilot accepted with more than a little alacrity.

"Have you picked up Waterman? I was on my way to his position when you found me." He moved over to the cockpit radar scope and pointed at one of the beacon blips. "Yes, I knew it. A copse of trees just to the north, that's where he is." He turned around and noticed Straker's concerned glance. Wilkin took the hint and sat down in the cabin.

"Alright, let's go." Straker motioned to Robinson, and the woman hopped her station in the cockpit. After a quick check of the systems, she urged the ungainly aircraft back into the sky. Conditions had improved somewhat over the past half-hour or so, which made her task merely hazardous, as opposed to suicidal. Once at altitude, she reached over and changed the side-scan radar settings. Two of the remaining three beacon traces came up almost instantly, still badly ghosted but coming in strong; they were almost equal in terms of distance from the three rescue craft in the area, so she assigned Rescue Beta to pick up one. The other, Waterman's beacon, she would take care of. But where was the fourth beacon?

In the cabin, Wilkin had finished his drink and slumped back in his chair. His total exhaustion was plain to see, but Straker needed information. "What can you tell me about the crashes?" he asked the pilot. "Anything might be important." Wilkin straightened up, ran a hand through his still frost-rimed hair.

"Hell only knows what happened, Commander," Wilkin began. "One second, we're closing on the UFOs...then the planes just fell out of the sky. Total power loss. Why they waited so long to zap us I can't say. It's like they were...I dunno, *humouring* us. Letting us think we stood a chance."

"They certainly are choosy about when they use that damn EMP weapon. Up until now, that is. They've just used a bigger version, knocked out all electrical power on Earth."

Wilkin gasped. "And I guess they've launched an attack?"

Straker grunted. "Hm...it's underway right now. One wave is already in the atmosphere, and the Interceptors should've just closed with second out in space."

Robinson chimed in: "Commander? Rescue Delta has located Sky 2's ejection capsule. The beacon is still inside, and there's no sign of the pilot."

"Is it a natural instinct for pilots to strike out on their own after crashing?" Straker wondered aloud, with more than a trace of annoyance. "First rule of crash survival; stay near the damn wreck!"

"Why didn't he take his beacon?" Wilkin asked.

"We'll ask him if and when he find him," Straker replied, moving forward to look at the radar scope. He noticed a large rounded blip a few kilometres to the north of Waterman's beacon.

"What's that?"

Robinson gazed at her read-out. "I was just about to tell you. Some sort of settlement. Hard to tell more with all this distortion. It's within walking distance of Waterman's location, and SKY 2's pilot could also have conceivably reached there in the time since the crash."

"Alright," said Straker. "We'll check out the beacon trace, and head on to the settlement

afterwards. If nothing else, we'll find people who know the area."

Robinson nodded, and urged more power out of the tilt-rotor's engines.

Transcript of radio broadcast by President James Carter, transmitted from an unknown location 7-56pm GMT

"...My fellow Americans, today we are faced with the greatest crisis our nation...our world...has ever known. The fact that so few of you can hear these words is testament to the scale of the disaster.

At this moment, fear and uncertainty are running rampant, and I wish to lay to rest some of the rumours that have already far and wide despite the disruption of mass communication. The disruption of all electrical power in the continental United States, was NOT, and I stress this, NOT caused by an enemy attack.

The plain truth of the matter is that this disaster is world-wide and its cause remains unknown. However, claims of nuclear attack by Russia, China or any other country are, I assure you all, completely groundless.. I am in contact with other world leaders at this time, including the leaders of all the nuclear powers, and they are all as shocked and horrified by this situation as we are.

Facts are scanty at this early hour, but what is certain is this: any electrical device which was in operation at the time of the event has been immobilised. This paralysis has struck not only machines that use mains power, but also those which run on storage batteries. Therefore, almost all motor vehicles and aircraft have been rendered useless. Only those devices which have been 'hardened' against specific types of radiation have escaped this fate. I am happy to say that a large fraction of our country's emergency and military vehicles and equipment have thus escaped immobilisation.

As I speak, units of the National Guard and the Federal Emergency Management Agency are moving into position, their mission to restore order and provide humanitarian assistance. Following this message, the location of FEMA emergency stations will be broadcast. I urge all of you to head for the nearest station in your area, and to do so in as orderly a manner as the situation allows. We are presented here with a grave challenge, but it is one we shall meet with all the courage and resolution that I know we as Americans are capable of. All members of Congress, the Joint Chiefs of Staff and the Senate that were able to be located at the time the event took place have been taken to a secure location, and I can assure you here and now that our government and our cherished democracy lives on.

It is in times like this that the very mettle of our humanity is tested, and I am confident that we will not be found wanting. The world has today been struck a greivous blow, but it is one we will recover from. What is needed now is courage, courage and resolution, guided by the unshakeable faith that there is no crisis that the human spirit cannot overcome. I wish you all good luck in the difficult days ahead, and may God bless America."

[National anthem, followed by FEMA broadcast]

ABOVE LONDON

7-56pm GMT

Unnoticed by the panicking millions below, two UFOs sailed through the night. The blanket cloud cover had been enhanced by the smoke from the firestorms consuming vast areas of London; the Aliens could not have asked for better conditions in which to operate.

The duo was now joined by one of the larger saucers, and all three halted in mid-air. Then, as if after being given instructions, one of the smaller craft broke away on a new heading. Its flight path would lead it directly to SHADO HQ.