

Sea Poste

by Pamela McCaughey (2001)

based on the series "UFO" (1969-71)

With Research From:

"A Night To Remember" by Walter Lord

"Titanic: An Illustrated History" by Don Lynch and Ken Marschall

"The Discovery of the Titanic" by Dr. Robert Ballard

Apologies for the usage of real people Dr. Robert Ballard and Martin Bowen.

Chapter One

August 22nd, 1985 - SHADO Control

"Red Alert! Red Alert!" SID's voice boomed out through the loud speakers simultaneously at both the SHADO headquarters on Earth and SHADO's Moonbase, *"Three UFOs lifting off from the North Atlantic Ocean! Latitude 41 degrees, 44 north...by longitude 48 degrees 53...west...."*

Commander Ed Straker barreled out of his office to stand beside Lt. Keith Ford at one of the OPS consoles, "Get Sky One and Five out there on the double!" he barked at Ford.

"Sky One is already in the area, sir. Sky Five is moving quickly to join them," Ford replied, listening intently to the incoming messages on his headset.

Straker consulted the large illuminated global map on the wall beside Ford's station, "Those co-ordinates puts Sky One somewhere around 350 nautical miles off the coast of Newfoundland. What the hell were the UFOs doing out there? Fishing for cod?"

Alec Freeman joined Straker at the wall map, "These are the UFOs we lost a couple of days ago, right?"

Cold blue eyes looked up at Freeman, "We're NOT going to lose them *this* time, by God! I've just had Ford deploy both Sky One and Five to the site."

Freeman lit up a cigarette, took a long pull, and turned his head to cough. SHADO's silver-haired commander was watching the indicator lights as the Skydiver submarines tracked on the map moved into position.

"Both Captain Carlin and Captain Waterman have launched, sir," reported Ford, "They're tracking the UFOs right now. Shall I have Lt. Ellis launch the Interceptors?"

"Order it just for good measure, Keith," Straker's jaw was tight.

Ford resumed his connection with Moonbase and ordered an Interceptor launch. Straker and Freeman could hear the babble of noise coming from the voice-coms as the Moonbase pilots scrambled.

"Have visual contact with UFO at bearing zero-five-niner-seven, section Red," Peter Carlin's voice crackled over the line, "Am in pursuit."

"This is Sky Five, Waterman here - I'm chasing a pair of UFOs - dodging fire! Damn, they're peeling off!"

"Positive hit on UFO - no wait - I just winged him!" Carlin reported, "He's spiraling into

the ocean!"

"I'm hit! I can't hold her - I'm going to have to eject! Mayday! Mayday!" and Waterman's voice was cut off abruptly.

Ford yelled into his headset, "Sky One, did you hear that? Waterman's ejecting!"

"I copy you, SHADO Control, I'm headed to his co-ordinates now!"

SID chimed in again over the intercom chatter, "*One UFO escaping earth's atmosphere! Heading out to space!*"

Straker leaned over Ford, "Make sure Sky Five intercepts Captain Waterman, we don't want to lose him! Do they have his last reported position?"

"Yes, they just confirmed they are sailing to rescue him. He's ejected successfully and landed in the water."

"Are you still tracking the UFO that sank?" Freeman asked Ford.

"Yes, sir. We've got the co-ordinates it went in at."

Captain Carlin's voice came in again, "I'm in visual range of the straggler but he's too far ahead of me!"

Ford resumed contact with Lt. Ellis at Moonbase, "SID should be sending you the trajectory data as we speak."

"The Interceptors are airborne, I'll feed the co-ordinates through to their on-board computers now!"

* * *

Three bomb-laden Interceptors sheared off across the Moon's surface, heading for the UFOs. In the silent vacuum of space, their massive engines didn't make any sound, and they left no tell-tale trails behind them. Swiftly, they streaked earthward, their on-board sensors and computers quickly adjusting their positions to come face to face with the alien ships.

Mark Bradley's quiet tones reported, "Have both UFOs on visual, am preparing to track and destroy UFO Alpha-Mark One."

"Roger, Mark, we'll take the other one," replied Astronaut Allan Leslie.

Gay Ellis spoke once again, "Mark, your computer is showing a positive destruct on that UFO."

"Bradley to Moonbase Control, positive hit!"

"Got the other UFO! Good-bye aliens! Whoo-hoo!" Leslie crowed through the voice com, "This calls for a beer! Let's go home!"

Freeman grinned at Straker, as Leslie's cheer erupted from the PA system, "Happy fellow, isn't he?"

"You know those Canadians, Alec, always up for a celebration," Straker's grin faded, "But, we can't celebrate here. We've still got a missing UFO," he turned to Keith Ford, "I want Sky One and Five to stay in the area and reconnoiter - we've got to find that damn UFO - does Sky Five have Waterman aboard yet?"

"They're just picking him up, sir."

"I want all their data - from both subs - asap! We'll have a briefing in three hours!"

* * *

SHADO Control's briefing room...

"OK, what have we got?" Straker asked his hastily assembled team. Seated around the big mahogany table were Colonels Virginia Lake, Alec Freeman, Paul Foster, SHADO's head oceanographer Dr. Maya Stewart, and present via video conference, Captains Carlin and Waterman. A young man came in just as Straker spoke, and took his seat beside Dr. Stewart.

"Sky One has an approximate fix on the downed UFO, Commander, but it's gone really deep."

"How deep?" queried Straker, lighting one of his ubiquitous cigarillos.

"About two miles down. The UFO dropped in at a spot just beyond the Continental Shelf. Depths in this area can reach over twelve thousand feet."

"Good God, we'll never be able to reach the UFO in that! Not unless it can bring itself back up. Maybe it's playing possum?" Foster commented.

Dr. Stewart shook her head, her reddish braids moving across her shoulders, "If this situation had occurred last year, I would have agreed with you. But, things have changed."

"What's different?"

The view screen on the wall lit up with the image of a small submarine, "This is what's different. The *Deep Reach* is now fully operational. She's a fully equipped three man submersible, developed from "borrowed" American and Soviet Navy technologies. *Deep Reach* has a titanium hull, sonar/radar reflectors to avoid detection, special grappling arms, underwater lasers, advanced weaponry and the capacity to 'run silent'. She passed her sea trials earlier this year and has been permanently assigned to a SHADO ship, which masquerades as an oceanographic vessel, called the *S.S. Miranda*. This gives them the cover to go anywhere in the world. Up until a month ago, *Deep Reach* was conducting thermal vent research on the ocean bottom," Dr. Stewart turned to the newly seated young man, "I'd like to introduce to you Lt. John-Paul Masson, the pilot of the *Deep Reach*. We had a hard time recruiting him away from his last job - he was working with Jacques Cousteau for the last five years!"

"Welcome aboard, Lieutenant," Straker nodded to him, "I read your file - very impressive for such a youngster! Another Canadian, eh?"

Lt. Masson smiled, "You wouldn't believe how many times I've heard 'eh' since I joined SHADO, sir."

"Well, Masson," said Foster, "We like to make people feel at home in our organization. I kid Alec here all the time about being from 'down under'."

"What do you think of the *Deep Reach* so far, Lieutenant?" Virginia Lake asked.

"She's a beautiful piece of technology. In fact, the *Deep Reach* was part of the incentive Dr. Stewart used to lure me into SHADO recruitment. As she mentioned, I've been with Jacques Cousteau for the last five years and I was piloting his submersible for some time, but the *Deep Reach* is an incredible vehicle."

"You'll be getting more opportunities to put her to work. We're sending the *Miranda* and *Deep Reach* out to the North Atlantic to try and recover that UFO we lost off Newfoundland," Colonel Lake continued.

Freeman punched up the next schematic on the wall screen - a map of the North Atlantic, "Here's the location the UFO went down - about 350 miles off the southern coast of Newfoundland. Now, at present, we don't have enough available data to establish whether the UFO has crashed on the ocean bottom with all hands lost, or if it's simply hiding to effect repairs and take off again when ready. Because of the extreme depths the UFO has entered, pressure down there is as much as 6000 pounds per square inch! So, this won't be any ordinary mission. The task of the *Deep Reach* will be to find it and perhaps even conduct a recovery mission. It depends entirely on what you find when you get down there. I don't need to remind you of how hazardous a mission this will be. The aliens have underwater weaponry, designed for sinking Earth surface ships, as well as SHADO's own subs. UFOs can survive underwater for an indefinite period of time, unlike on the surface. They've also been trying to set up

underwater beach-heads here, and while we've found and destroyed a good many of them, we know there are likely others. It may be that this UFO is connected to one of the submerged bases - your mission will include that possibility."

Virginia Lake brought up the next photo, two research vessels under way, "We have a complication in all this. These ships are the *Knorr*, out of the Woods Hole Institute of Oceanography, and the other is *Le Suroit*, part of the French oceanographic organization called IFREMER. They're involved in a joint project, and they've got National Geographic people on board as well. Whatever they're doing out there, they are going to be in our search area. We have to avoid contact with them, and keep them from finding our downed UFO."

Masson spoke up, "I'm conversant with the work of both Institutes - they have the use of some very sophisticated equipment."

Nodding, Colonel Lake punched up another photo, "This is Argo, a form of applied optical fiber technology. It provides video pictures in real time and its development was funded by the U.S. Navy. They tested it earlier this year to map the debris field and condition of an American prototype nuclear sub which sank in 1963. We have a similar type of technology on board the *Miranda*, called Live Eye," Lake flipped to another picture, "And, this is *Alvin*, the sub used by Dr. Robert Ballard, who is heading this joint venture. It's a smaller, less powerful version of our sub. You'll want to steer clear of them."

"What kind of joint venture are they working on? Do we know?" asked Masson.

Freeman grinned and lit a cigarette, "We've heard rumours but they sound pretty silly. They're supposedly searching for the wreck of the *Titanic*!"

"Really?" whistled Masson, "The *Titanic* is the Holy Grail of all shipwrecks! Finding the fabled lost liner would be a feather in any oceanographer's cap!"

"All we really know for certain is that they're using Argo and another piece of equipment, the SAR, to "mow the lawn" across an area of the Atlantic, looking for possible targets. But, I can't believe Woods Hole and IFREMER, let alone the U.S. Navy, would get involved in such a search. It seems pretty frivolous to employ all that hardware for a shipwreck that took place so long ago," Lake commented.

"Well, at the time it happened in 1912, the *Titanic* galvanized public emotions and opinions in much the same way the assassination of JFK did in 1963. It was considered a disaster of epic proportions," added Masson.

"Sounds like you know a thing or two about this shipwreck, son," Straker said.

"When I was working with Cousteau, he told me about finding the *Titanic's* sister ship, the *Britannic*, in the Mediterranean Ocean. Just off the coast of Greece. He also dove on the wreck of the Empress of Ireland in the St. Lawrence River. Kind of got me interested in shipwrecks. I've done some SCUBA diving on shallow wrecks myself, but nothing like these big liners. When you see them, it's like reaching out and touching history..."

"Just don't get diverted from this mission," Freeman puffed on his cig, "We're looking for a downed UFO, armed and dangerous, not some ancient hulk of a shipwreck."

* * *

August 24th, 1985 - somewhere in the North Atlantic...

"We've had everything that sails or flies out looking for that UFO - but no sightings so far," Captain Carlin reported via video link. On board the *Miranda*, were Lt. Masson, Dr. Stewart, Straker, Col. Lake and the *Miranda's* skipper, Captain Patrick O'Brien.

"Now that we're here on-site, the *Deep Reach* can get to work immediately, and locate it, hopefully in quick time," Dr. Stewart replied.

"We'll be doing our first dive shortly, we're just looking for the sea to calm down a bit," Lt. Masson explained, "We don't like to launch in high seas. It can be dangerous."

"There - see? I still don't like the idea of you going down there, Commander," Virginia Lake looked at Straker, "It's too risky for someone in your position."

"If that UFO is there, I want to see it for myself - and anything else that might be down there with it!" Straker admonished the Colonel, "If there's an alien underwater base set up, I want it destroyed!"

"It's more boring than dangerous," Lt. Masson explained, grinning, "The descent to the bottom takes several hours, the confines of the *Deep Reach* are pretty cramped quarters, and there is NO bathroom!"

"I'll take that risk," Straker grinned back at the young Canadian pilot, "I guess I won't be drinking any coffee on the trip down!"

Colonel Lake gave Straker the hairy eyeball - it wasn't the boredom of the trip to the ocean bottom she dreaded for SHADO's commander-in-chief - it was his claustrophobia.

The briefing ended and all left the wardroom on board the *Miranda* to go on with their various tasks. Lake remained in her seat, as did Straker, "You want to say something to me, Colonel Lake?" His big blue eyes bored into hers.

"I'm not just concerned for your personal safety, Commander. I think you know what I'm talking about. Nina Barry explained it all to me a couple of years ago after that sub-smash."

"Nina has a big mouth," Straker's expression was sour, "I suppose you think I'll have a claustrophobic fit down there."

"The *Deep Reach* is a hell of a lot smaller than the inside of a Skydiver sub. It'll be just you and Dr. Stewart and Lt. Masson in a titanium-hulled vehicle scarcely bigger than a Volkswagen beetle."

"Look, Colonel, don't you think I've considered all this before I opted to go down there? I know what my own personal limits are - only too well. But, I've been working since the sub-smash episode to control my fear of enclosed spaces. This won't be easy for me, I'll admit. There's something dangerous down there, and I have to see it, and see it neutralized before I can have any piece of mind."

* * *

Later on that day...

"Ed, I still have to register my protest on this," Virginia Lake was watching Straker get suited up to go down with the crew of the *Deep Reach*, "It's still pretty rough out there!" She was also eyeing the rolling sea, into which the SHADO submersible would soon descend.

"Masson says it won't be too bad once we're on our way down - and if things are too dangerous, we'll simply abort the dive and return to the surface," Straker explained, fitting a warm toque down over his silver hair, "You've been taking 'mother hen' lessons from Alec - if you're not careful, you'll lay an egg!"

"There's no good reason why you can't just let the crew do their work without you on board."

"Oh, yes, there is - I *want* to go - case closed, Colonel..."

Lt. Masson came up to the arguing pair, with Dr. Stewart in tow, "We're ready to launch, Commander."

Straker nodded, shooting Lake one last hairy eyeball, "Let's get this trip started, then!"

* * *

Light faded quickly as the *Deep Reach* dropped down below the surface of the water.

Masson explained that in order to save power, they wouldn't be using their engines or turning on their exterior lights until they were just about to the bottom. The interior of the *Deep Reach* was an amazing cornucopia of technological wonders. Straker was glad he didn't have to learn to operate such a complex vehicle. He watched Lt. Masson deftly maneuver the fleet submersible during their descent. Dr. Stewart took notes on their rate of descent, the outside hull temperature, their power usage, etc. The marine division of SHADO wanted as much data on the *Deep Reach* as possible during all its missions.

Finally, the sub reached its maximum depth - about two miles. On flashed the external lights, and Lt. Masson expertly moved the *Deep Reach* in the direction prescribed for him via the mother ship, *Miranda*. Captain O'Brien, the *Miranda's* skipper, would be guiding the *Deep Reach* along a search path on the ocean bottom.

"Roger, *Miranda*," Lt. Masson told the control ship, "We're turning onto your co-ordinates now - data locked into the on-board computer - looks like a light snowstorm down here right now."

Masson was referring to the sand and gunk being stirred up from the bottom by the *Deep Reach's* propellers. Thin-looking eyeless fish swam by, and the sea floor looked like a pale gray, almost lunar, landscape. Straker watched as they passed over small rocks and stones, a beer bottle here and there. At these depths, very little in the way of large fish or crustaceans lived - much of the life down there was microscopic in form. And, no matter how powerful or technologically advanced the *Deep Reach* was, the ocean at these depths, could find lots of ways to kill them. A hull breach, a tiny leak, could happen so quickly and cause such a swift implosion that the *Deep Reach's* passengers "wouldn't even have time to kiss their asses good-bye" as Lt. Masson had put it so succinctly.

Sliding noiselessly over the seabed terrain, the *Deep Reach's* exterior sensors were sending information back to the on-board computers inside. Dr. Stewart was constantly monitoring them, looking for a rise in water temperature or some other indication that the downed UFO was nearby.

"What the hell is *that*?" Straker pointed out of the viewing port at a large metal object.

Masson brought the *Deep Reach* around and up, so they could get a good look at their find.

"It's metal, but it's not alien metal," Dr. Stewart was consulting the sensors, "Look at the apertures - three of them! It's huge!"

"And, it's been down here for some time, too - look at the corrosion on the metal," Masson commented, "I'm going to take a picture of this and scan it back to the *Miranda* - maybe they can decide what it is." Masson manipulated the high-rez exterior camera system and took several good shots of it, transferring the data to the surface and the mother ship.

They continued on, moving in the same direction their coordinated dictated. As they watched the ocean bed, they began to see more items on the bottom. Bottles, shoes, pieces of metal furniture, a bathtub, a stained glass window piece, and many other articles.

"Good God, what is this, a garbage dump?" Straker shook his head.

Suddenly, the view ports went dark and Masson pulled the *Deep Reach* back and up dramatically - up and up until an ancient apparition appeared in view...rust colored rivulets dripping down the bow...her proud name still visible even after seventy-three years...

"Holy shit," whispered Lt. Masson, "It's the *Titanic*!"

Chapter Two

After their initial shock, and a hasty message sent topside to the *Miranda*, the trio in the *Deep Reach* had time to take in the immense proportions of the fabled sunken liner. Masson expertly lifted the submersible over what remained of the *Titanic's* once clean white superstructure. Shorn of her four stacks and crumbled with the violence of the collision with the sea bottom, the *Titanic* looked oddly naked, her forward mast laid back against the bridge at an improbable angle. Attached to the mast, they saw the crow's nest, from which the *Titanic's* lookout signaled the approach of the fatal iceberg.

"I had no idea she'd look this *big*," Masson said quietly, steering the *Deep Reach* down the length of the massive ship, "That pile of junk we passed on the way in must have been her debris trail."

"Debris trail?" Straker asked.

"Yeah. When a ship sinks and breaks up on the way to the bottom, all the stuff from inside drops out and forms a trail leading to the wreckage. It's kind of like following the bread crumbs home, only in reverse," Masson explained, "And, if our UFO broke up, we can probably expect a debris trail from it. We'll be able to track the 'garbage' right into the wreck, if there is one."

"What are those...long orange things hanging off the wreck?" Straker pointed out the view port.

Dr. Stewart answered, "The iron and steel in the hulk are, for lack of a better word, rusting out. At these depths, the oxygen isn't here to speed the process, so that means there's something else at work on the *Titanic*." Dr. Stewart shook her head, "The most famous shipwreck in marine in history and we can't even tell the world it's down here."

"Well, if Dr. Ballard and his team are as good as I've heard they are, they'll find it the same way we did," Straker said, "But, I think we'll have to refocus ourselves back to the task at hand. Lt. Masson?"

Masson flashed his lights one last time at the *Titanic*, and steered the *Deep Reach* up and over her superstructure, leaving the lonely wreck back in the dark.

* * *

"We're back on track, *Miranda*," Masson radioed the control ship, "Bearing seven-four-oh-one."

"Picking up a bogey dead ahead somewhere," Dr. Stewart consulted her sensors, "Alien metal...could be wreckage..."

Masson lowered the glare of his exterior lights just in case they were in close proximity to the downed UFO. No point in advertising their presence just yet. The *Deep Reach* followed along, until the trio inside could spot what appeared to be shards of shattered metal. He slowed the sub's forward momentum and radioed their exact co-ordinates back to the *Miranda*.

"Does this wreckage mean the UFO shattered on contact with the ocean bottom?" Straker leaned forward to get a better view out of the port on his side of the sub.

"Well, it looks like exterior material - sheathing and such - see how thin it is?" Dr. Stewart pointed out, "UFOs can withstand massive G forces in outer space - they may have been able to survive the crash down here and the immense pressures with minimal damage. We'll have to get closer I think."

"I've had the *Deep Reach* on radar/sonar deflect now since we left the *Titanic*, and we're running silent," Masson commented, "We can move in, at least close enough to take some

pictures if we sight the UFO..."

They were all quiet as the *Deep Reach* moved forward slowly, cautiously. The sub was rocked as a bolt of energy swept out of the darkness ahead, just missing them by mere feet!

"Shit! What was that?" Straker bellowed.

"That," Masson announced, "Was our welcoming party!"

"What are you going to do now?"

Masson radioed the control ship, "*Miranda*, come in, *Miranda*! We've got company down here - company with live ammo! I'm transferring data to your computers - we're coming up!"

* * *

It was a rough landing in a rainstorm. The divers attached the cables and the lift collars to the *Deep Reach* but it was another thirty minutes before they dared pull the sub up and onto its perch on the back of the *Miranda*. Any false move, and they could have ended up dashing the *Deep Reach* against the *Miranda*'s stern, causing damage which would require a trip back to the mainland to fix. They couldn't afford that kind of delay.

Straker was the first out of the hatch, "Virginia, get the crisis crew together and patch me through to SHADO control in England - we have to determine our next move!"

Crew people went scurrying - securing the *Deep Reach* on deck, heading below to gather the people Straker demanded, and into the bridge/command station to communicate with SHADO Control. Within fifteen minutes, the crisis crew was assembled in the Captain's 'ready room' just off the bridge.

Captain O'Brien spoke first, "We've had a chance to look at the video footage *Deep Reach* took of the alien wreckage again, and the warning shot the aliens fired across your bow. I'd say they're at least marginally operational, and they've obviously been able to pick you out despite your running silent and utilizing the anti-radar device. They evidently haven't imploded. If we could capture that UFO intact, and study it, we'd be able to learn an enormous amount about their technology and construction."

"I concur, Captain, so the operative thing here is to keep the folks on the *Knorr* and *Le Suroit* ignorant of our activities in these waters so we can effect this little salvage effort," Straker said, "But, salvaging at those depths has never been attempted before - certainly not by SHADO."

Dr. Stewart spoke up, "The UFO fired on us, so that means the crew is on board and at least one of them is alive and at his post. We'll have to neutralize whatever threat the UFO poses to us before we can even begin a salvage operation. We know UFOs can survive indefinitely underwater, but I don't know what effect these depths will have on their hull, even though they've obviously managed to survive the crash fairly intact. Unlike the UFO, the *Deep Reach* does have her limits. She's as good as human technology can make her, but she's still got a titanium hull - and that makes her vulnerable to alien attack. We can use her for a number of aspects of this mission, but I wouldn't advise we send her in alone again. It's just too much risk."

"Right, that's why I've called in Skydivers One and Five," Straker agreed, "With them as back up, we can possibly confuse and divert the UFO, knock it out of action, and then find a way to bring it to the surface. And, then there's always the danger of it exploding in our atmosphere once it's out of the water."

"Why can't we just put it out of commission and leave it where it is, if it's so difficult to bring it up?" Colonel Lake inquired.

"Because our friendly joint French and American oceanographic teams might just find it

while they're out here looking for the *Titanic* - the UFO isn't too far from the *Titanic's* wreck - and secrecy has to be maintained. It's true that the technology it takes to go that deep isn't widespread, but someday a trip down there will be commonplace, and we can't have any errant UFOs down there to be found," Captain O'Brien explained.

"So what's our next step?" Lake looked at Straker.

"Neutralize that UFO and make sure it can't cause us any more harm."

"The Skydivers were never built to withstand the pressures of such depths - they can't go down to the UFO," Lake reminded them all.

"That's correct. We're going to have to entice that UFO to come a little closer to the surface - and the *Deep Reach* is going to help us do just that!"

* * *

August 25, 1985 - on board the *Miranda*

Lieutenant Masson, Captain O'Brien, Dr. Stewart, Colonel Lake and Commander Straker were poring over a map of the ocean bottom in the briefing room.

"Our up to date co-ordinates put the UFO right here, on the other side of the *Titanic*, about a mile away," Masson placed his finger on the map.

Captain O'Brien spoke up, "I had some divers place a buoy over the location with some equipment to keep us alerted to any vehicular movement in that area. We're just waiting now for Sky One and Sky Five to get into position. We're going to have to move fast in whatever we do because our window of opportunity is getting smaller. I had a courtesy call from the skipper of the *Knorr* last night, asking what we were doing out here."

Dr. Stewart nodded her head, "I presume you utilized our standard cover."

"As far as they know, we're researching cod stocks for the Fisheries Department of Newfoundland and Environment Canada. But, the *Knorr* and *Le Suroit* are getting getting closer and closer to us with their specialized equipment - and they're not fools. They'll know something is up if they detect all our hardware out here. We can hide the *Deep Reach*, with its advanced technology, but not the Skydivers. That's why their part of the mission has to take place asap so they can leave the area again."

"So what's the best game plan?" Colonel Lake asked.

Straker used a long pointer, "Our UFO is here. We can bring both Skydivers in with their firepower, and dangle the *Deep Reach* in front of the aliens as live bait. The idea is to get the UFO to chase the *Deep Reach*, confuse them with our numbers closer to the surface, and put it out of commission, if possible, without destroying it. That's if the UFO is still operational. Then the salvage part of this operation will take over."

"The *Chester* will be rendezvousing with us this afternoon, Commander. I had a communique from her a couple hours ago," Captain O'Brien reported.

"The *Chester* is our salvage ship," Masson told Colonel Lake.

"Yes, you'll be working with them to get the UFO off the ocean floor, once it's neutralized. Their captain is Steve Greaney. I hear he's SHADO's best salvage expert. He got that Skydiver off the bottom a couple of years ago when I was aboard her," Straker shot a look at Colonel Lake, but she didn't say anything.

"Most estimates put the UFO's weight around 25 to 35 tons - that's no small feat of engineering to get something that size to the surface - and keep it a secret," Masson commented.

"That's true, but the *Chester* is bringing along a special barge with her, that'll lift the UFO with its magnetic cables and be it's new home if we can get it up in time," Captain O'Brien

explained, "The barge was specially designed and constructed a few years after Commander Straker's sub-smash adventure. It's crammed with extremely powerful lifting and monitoring equipment. We'll need the *Deep Reach* to go down and attach the cabling to the UFO for the lift, and The *Chester's* crew will be able to keep constant tabs on the UFO's condition as they retrieve and transport it."

"What if something goes wrong - like the UFO hits Earth's atmosphere and decides to detonate as usual?" Colonel Lake felt compelled to ask.

"In that case, the *Chester* can detach the barge from tow and get out of harm's way. UFOs have a history of blowing clean - so there won't be any water or air pollution if it explodes. But, there could be some leftover debris."

"And, any debris that sinks?" Straker questioned.

"We'll come back and help the *Chester* secure it after the *Knorr* and *Le Suroit* have left the area. An intact UFO would be highly detectable. Seabed garbage hopefully won't raise any alarm."

"You're sure of that, Captain?" Lake asked.

"We have detection equipment that homes in on alien metal. The *Knorr* and *Le Suroit* don't. All they're looking for are metal targets which could be part of the Titanic. That's their main mission out here. Scraps of metal which are not vintage 1912 probably won't interest them."

Colonel Lake was still concerned about the mission, "What if the UFO isn't operational and doesn't chase the *Deep Reach*? What if it can't, or won't, get off the seabed...?"

"Then, the *Deep Reach* is going to have to go back down and blow that squatter to rat shit," Masson finished.

* * *

August 25th, 1985 - two miles down...

"*Miranda*, this is *Deep Reach*," Masson radioed up to the mother ship, "We're going to be in position shortly."

"Roger, *Deep Reach*, Sky One and Sky Five are also in position - they're ready to fire on your command," Captain O'Brien reported, "Let us know when you have a visual."

Masson maneuvered around the *Titanic's* bow, "Better close your eyes, old girl, this is top secret stuff," he joked.

Straker was on edge. And, it wasn't just his claustrophobia. The last trip down was just for reconnoitering - this time it was no sight-seeing tour, but a mission of possible destruction. Everything turned on whether they could get the UFO to give chase. There were so many variables! Was the UFO operational? Could it get off the ocean floor? Would it take the *Deep Reach* as bait? Would Sky One and Sky Five succeed in injuring it but not destroying it? What about the salvage effort? Was it worth it? Or was it just a fruitless exercise - would the UFO disintegrate the second it reached the surface? Or would they have to destroy the UFO on the bottom and hope they could get the Skydivers out of the area before the *Knorr* and *Le Suroit* got too close or noticed the blast? As Masson piloted the *Deep Reach* up and over the *Titanic's* rusticle-covered bow, Straker even began to wonder what kind of effect an underwater explosion would have on the ancient wreck - would they end up accidentally destroying the most fabled ocean liner the world had ever known - before its grave was known to the world?

The *Deep Reach* had been operating with her radar/sonar detection on, but Masson purposely shut that damping field down as they approached the last known co-ordinates of the UFO. This time, they wanted to really catch the UFO's attention! He eased the submersible

down closer to the seabed and slid along its featureless surface. Out of the darkness, the silver metallic gleam caught their eyes, and the UFO glowed ominously as it fired!

With a muttered "Sheeee-it! We found it!" Masson radioed briskly, as he took evasive action and spiraled away from the UFO, which fired again.

"Too close for comfort!" Straker commented nervously. How small was this damn bathtub toy anyway? Suddenly his collar was too tight...

Masson expertly piloted the *Deep Reach* just a hop, skip and a jump ahead of the UFO's energy bolts. Dr. Stewart was monitoring her equipment and said, "It's working! The UFO is lifting off the bottom!"

"Sky One and Sky Five, we're comin' at ya!" Masson radioed ahead, barking out their co-ordinates for Captains Carlin and Waterman and sending them to the *Miranda*.

The *Deep Reach* didn't dare surface too quickly - under Masson's hands, the controls kept the sub streaking across the ocean bottom, moving away from the *Titanic's* wreck, and dodging alien firepower.

"Bring it up to seven thousand feet if you can!" Captain Carlin's voice crackled through the radio.

Masson adjusted the *Deep Reach's* ballasting system and soon she was soaring up through the depths, the UFO hot on her trail. Another energy bolt sailed by the viewing ports and then the sub shuddered! Straker and Stewart watched as one of the *Deep Reach's* grappling arms flew off the outside of the titanium hull and dropped away into the blackness of the ocean depths.

"Sky One - we're hit!" Masson reported, followed by "Damn!"

"What's wrong?" the three in the *Deep Reach* heard Captain Waterman's voice asking.

"That last hit must have damaged one of our power cells - we're losing power!" Masson was frantically trying to switch to auxiliary power as the lights inside the *Deep Reach* faded darker every second. There was a crackling sound, and the sub went completely dark inside, the exterior lights faded out, and Masson couldn't get any answer to his repeated calls on the radio.

Straker, Stewart and Masson could feel the *Deep Reach* in free fall. She finally drifted down and landed gently on the bottom.

"Now what?" Dr. Stewart asked.

In the darkness, Masson's voice was quiet, "We're blind, deaf and almost powerless. You tell *me*."

* * *

Closer to the surface, Sky Five had a visual sighting of the rapidly ascending UFO, "She's got to be headed out," Captain Waterman warned Sky One and the *Miranda*.

"Where the hell is the *Deep Reach*?" asked Captain O'Brien.

"Their last message was that they'd been hit!" Captain Carlin chimed in, "I'm launching to intercept the UFO!"

"Roger that, we'll go down as far as we can and look for the *Deep Reach*," Waterman said.

The UFO broke the surface and spiraled upwards - only to find Captain Carlin waiting! He followed the UFO up through the stratosphere and fired off a barrage of small missiles - finally nailing the UFO - it exploded in a shower of metal and debris.

Carlin flew over the wreckage, "No bodies in sight as yet! Sky One, please rendezvous with this position - we'll do a recon of the area asap!"

"What's your current position?" Captain O'Brien requested back on the *Miranda*.

"Five-eight-three-seven, Area Blue. The wreckage is about one hundred and twenty four miles due east of you - I think we were too far away for anyone to see the blast!"

A technician on board the Sky One confirmed, "We're on our way to the wreckage site, Captain - we should have visual sighting soon."

Captain O'Brien radioed Sky Five again, "Any sign of the *Deep Reach* yet?"

"I think she's gone to the bottom..." Waterman answered, his voice trailing off.

Chapter Three

Aboard the *Miranda*...

"He's where?" Alec Freeman's incredulous voice screamed out of the speaker on the *Miranda*'s bridge.

Virginia Lake took a deep breath, "I tried to convince him how dangerous this mission was - to leave it to the experts - but he insisted on going. Now we can't raise the *Deep Reach* on radio and Captain Waterman thinks they went to the bottom."

"What about the UFO?" Freeman asked.

"Destroyed. Captain Carlin brought it down. Sky One's crew is collecting the wreckage now."

"What about that bunch from Woods Hole - have you had any trouble with them?"

"No. The UFO went down over one hundred miles from our current position. So far the situation is still secure. Except for the Commander."

"If they're down on the bottom, how can we reach them? Do we even know if they're...still alive?" Freeman's voice choked on that last question. Colonel Lake knew Freeman was virtually Straker's only close friend.

"The last we heard from the sub, she'd lost a grappling arm and was losing power. Masson, the pilot, switched to auxiliary. The *Deep Reach* has a titanium hull. If they haven't sprung a leak, they could just be sitting down there, waiting for a rescue. If the hull was compromised, they've long since imploded. At least we've got their co-ordinates."

"Supposing they're alive, how much time have they got?"

"We need to locate them and get them back topside soon - we've got less than twenty hours before the power cells fade out completely, but Captain O'Brien thinks the reason we can't reach them via voice-com is because their communications are out."

"SHADO doesn't have another sub like the *Deep Reach* - at least not something that can go down to those depths. What the hell can we do?" Lake could hear the anguish and frustration in his Aussie-accented voice.

"Captains O'Brien, Carlin and Waterman think we only have one choice left. We have to break security. We have to get the help of the Woods Hole people. They've got a submersible called *Alvin* which can locate the *Deep Reach* for us."

* * *

The *S.S. Chester*, SHADO's best salvage ship was on-site. Captain Greaney spoke with the others on the *Miranda* by video com-link to discuss the 'search and rescue' mission, "Look, the UFO has been destroyed. The wreckage is being taken care of as we speak. The Woods Hole people think we're with Environment Canada or some such thing. Let's just ask them to help us locate our own sub, so we can bring it up using the *Chester*. Simple as that," Captain Greaney rationalized, "No mariner worth his weight in salt water would pass on a rescue mission."

Captain O'Brien nodded to his yeoman, "Get the *Knorr* on the radio right now."

O'Brien asked to speak with Dr. Robert Ballard, who was heading up the Woods Hole contingent. Moments later, Ballard's crisp, professional voice filled the *Miranda*'s bridge, "Captain O'Brien, I understand you people have some sort of emergency over there."

"We've got a submersible on the bottom, Doctor, and we can't communicate with the crew. In fact, we're pretty worried about them. They've got about twenty hours worth of air left and we need your team's help to get them back to the surface."

"What can we do for you?"

"We need you to deploy *Alvin* to locate our sub and assist with the salvage effort."

Ballard whistled through the voice-com, "Salvage at these depths?"

"We don't have any choice but to try it. We've got a special salvage vessel standing by. If the *Alvin* could just locate the *Deep Reach* for us and hook up the cabling, we could bring our sub to the surface. Time is of the essence - the *Deep Reach's* batteries have less than twenty hours worth of power to keep the air circulating and the heat pumps going. After that...well, it's anybody's guess."

"What if the *Deep Reach* has imploded?"

"If it has, we need to know and to locate whatever wreckage there is."

"Just let me check for a moment, Captain O'Brien. I need to be able to tell you how fast we can deploy *Alvin*," Dr. Ballard put them on 'hold'. When he came back, his voice was cheerful, "We can rendezvous at your location within 45 minutes and deploy *Alvin* as quickly as possible. They're getting her ready right now so there won't be any delays."

"That's great Doctor, we'll have the *Chester* standing by. And, Doctor, we'd appreciate no press on this little search and rescue effort. It's going to be hard enough to explain to Environment Canada that we may have lost their sub and their personnel without having it all over the media."

* * *

The *Knorr* came alongside the *Miranda* and the *Chester*. Those on board the *Miranda* could see that *Alvin* was swung out and ready to dive. Captain O'Brien communicated the *Deep Reach's* last co-ordinates to Dr. Ballard so they could do a thorough search of the bottom.

"We'll be able to keep up a constant connection with the *Knorr*, and they can patch us through to you folks on the surface. As soon as we find anything, you'll be notified," Dr. Ballard radioed the *Miranda*.

Colonel Lake and Captain O'Brien watched anxiously as *Alvin* began to sink out of sight, "How much longer do they have now?" Colonel Lake asked.

O'Brien looked at his watch, "About eighteen hours. The *Deep Reach's* power cells can't last forever. I just hope the *Alvin* can locate them before it's too late."

"At least you don't have to explain to Alec Freeman that Commander Straker might have to be listed as MIA," Lake continued.

"No, but the marine division is going to want to know how the hell we lost their prototype sub, plus two of our best people - along with Straker. And, the bottom line is that Straker insisted on going out for this mission. You did try to talk him out of it. He knew the risks involved."

Virginia sighed, her eyes following the *Knorr* as it moved up and down on the water, "I know. It's not going to make it any easier knowing the Commander *wanted* to be in on this from the start. It's just out of all the ways he could have faced death, locked up in that tiny sub is not the best one."

O'Brien raised an eyebrow, "There's no good way to die, Colonel."

* * *

In the stricken *Deep Reach* ...

"You can't reestablish contact with the surface?" Straker asked for the fortieth time.

Masson shook his head, "No, sir. I've tried over-riding everything but I can't even get so much as a ping out of the communications console."

Inside the Deep Reach, the temperature was dropping, and condensation was forming on most of the equipment. They were all trying to breath lightly through their noses to avoid adding to the water build-up. The utter blackness was deeper than anything any of the three had ever experienced before. They had shut down some of the sensors and other expendable internal functions in favour of prolonging the efficiency of the power cells for breathing air and temperature, but even that was failing. So far, the titanium hull was intact. The broken off grappling arm and the incapacitated communications system had not compromised the integrity of the hull. But Straker began to think an instantaneous implosion might have been easier to tolerate than a slow death by suffocation in the dark. He tried to quell his rising anxiety by chit-chatting with Masson and Stewart. From the conversation, they were all trying to pretend to each other that they'd be fine, they'd be found and brought back to the surface. But how? How would the *Chester* find them?

"You're sure you were able to send off our last co-ordinates to the *Miranda*?" Straker queried again.

"They must have gotten my message because they affirmed it before our com-link went down. They know where we are. It's just a matter of bringing us up now," Masson said matter-of-factly, but in truth, he felt far from it.

"I'm sure the *Chester* is on site, it's the best salvage vessel in the fleet," Dr. Stewart supplied in the darkness.

* * *

Inside *Alvin*...

"Martin, can you alter course to reach those co-ordinates from Captain O'Brien? We should be ready to start our search pattern," Dr. Ballard ordered the *Alvin's* pilot, Martin Bowen.

Alvin banked smoothly and moved off in the direction of the *Deep Reach's* last reported location. Dr. Ballard noted the smoothness of the ocean bottom, the lack of fish and other marine life that were usually present in other areas of the world's oceans. They'd been drawing the *Argo* and the SAR across what seemed like acres of the ocean bottom - and the video cams always recorded the same flat, featureless, almost lunar-like landscape. If the *Titanic* was indeed down there somewhere, it was so far like looking for a needle in a haystack. And now these Canadians were in trouble and Ballard never turned down anyone in distress. The *Titanic* would just have to wait a bit longer. But, it was frustrating. They'd been toiling in the North Atlantic for weeks, working out from the latitude and longitude where the *Titanic* went down in 1912, and they hadn't found even so much as a piece of wreckage. Had Officer Boxhall's co-ordinates been wrong? Were they looking in all the wrong places? And their trip was nearly over. They'd have to leave at the beginning of September and go back to Woods Hole empty-handed. Ballard sighed. Maybe the *Titanic* was like Noah's Ark - a fable. He was also worried that the 1929 underwater landslide had perhaps covered the wreck and they'd never know if it was there at all - even if they sailed right over it.

Ballard's mind came back to the present. The *Deep Reach* was just a little bigger than *Alvin* - if the co-ordinates given them by Captain O'Brien were correct, they should come up on her eventually. Even so, would they be able to determine if there was any life aboard? Assuming the sub was intact and her titanium hull hadn't given way at these pressures. O'Brien had told him the *Deep Reach's* communications had crapped out - their last message had been to radio in their location.

"Bob - look at that!"

Out of the blackness, a shiny object caught Martin Bowen's attention. Ballard looked through his own view port. There were no lights inside, but as *Alvin* flashed her own exterior lights across the object, they could read the name *Deep Reach* along her side...

* * *

"Virginia? I thought you'd want to know - Dr. Ballard found the *Deep Reach*!" Captain O'Brien poked his head in the ward room door.

Colonel Lake got up, a relieved expression on her pretty face, "Thank God! When?"

"Just a few minutes ago - he radioed in," he walked her back to the bridge, "We're not out of the woods yet. We've got to get the salvage operation in gear. Captain Greaney on the Chester says they're going to have to have the *Alvin* attach the magnetic lift cables so they can start bringing the *Deep Reach* to the surface."

"Can *Alvin* do that kind of work?"

"Yes, but *Alvin* is going to have to come part of the way back up so we can send the cables down to them. It's going to be a tricky operation any way you look at it. *Alvin* isn't used to going up and down in such a short time."

"Did Dr. Ballard say if there was any sign of life on board the *Deep Reach*?"

"He thought he saw a face through one of the view ports. The main thing is that the *Deep Reach* is intact - meaning the likelihood of Straker, Stewart and Masson living through this is getting somewhat better. If we can get the *Deep Reach* up before the power cells expire, they might just make it."

* * *

Chapter Four

On board the *Chester*...

"Captain, *Alvin* is ready to take down the cables," one of the *Chester's* officers poked his head inside Captain Greaney's ready room just off the bridge.

The chief SHADO salvage officer got up from his calculations and underwater maps to head out to the communications centre on the bridge. He pushed a radio toggle, "Dr. Ballard? How did she look down there?"

"She's sitting upright, Captain. We've got the cables in our grappling arms. We should be able to attach the magnetic cables to her hooks on the main hatch."

Captain Greaney glanced at his watch, "We don't have a lot of time left, Doctor. How long will it take you folks to get back to the *Deep Reach's* position and get hooked up?"

"About three hours - give or take."

"I know it's the best you can do, given *Alvin's* situation. Keep us posted - once you get her hooked up, we'll need you to nursemaid her up and make sure she doesn't slip off the cables. Can you stay down that long?"

"Well, it's going to be tight, but we'll just have to make it. If we have to surface ahead of the *Deep Reach* we'll let you know in advance."

"Roger that, *Alvin*. We're just grateful for the help."

* * *

On the ocean bottom...

"My God! Did you see that?" Straker peered out of his view port, as the other sub swung around, filling the *Deep Reach's* cockpit with brilliant light, "Somebody's *out* there!"

Dr. Stewart nodded in the almost blinding luminescence, "There's only one submersible in our general area which could come down this far. It must be Dr. Ballard's *Alvin*."

"Would the crew on the *Miranda* break secrecy to ask for their help finding us?" Straker asked anxiously.

"Whoever that is out there, they're going to report sighting us, and I know the *Miranda* got my last message with our co-ordinates. I'm hoping that sub is part of a rescue team," Masson commented.

"Damn, they're going!" Straker's voice broke as he watched the *Alvin* turn away. The three in the *Deep Reach* were once again in the wretched blackness. Straker swallowed hard, knowing the others couldn't see him anyway. If he made it out of this situation alive, he was going to swear off submarines for the rest of his life...

* * *

"That's right, Alec, the *Alvin* is on its way down to attach the magnetic salvage cables right now. Dr. Ballard said he saw someone looking out one of the viewing ports, so they're still alive," Virginia Lake was explaining to Colonel Freeman back in England at SHADO Control.

"Thank God for that!" Colonel Lake could hear Alec's barely concealed sigh of relief. He didn't want to lose his good friend Ed Straker or end up as SHADO's supreme commander, "How long now till they get back to the surface?"

"Only a few hours now. The *Chester* has to bring the *Deep Reach* up slowly from those extreme depths, but the most recent calculations mean there won't be a moment to spare when they break the surface and our divers pop the hatch."

"Well, I won't be happy until I hear Ed's voice myself on the voice-com. What about

medical care?"

"We've got a medic on board the *Miranda* who's shipping over to the *Chester* to await the rescue. She's well-versed in deep water diving conditions and such. The *Miranda* has a decompression chamber for anyone suffering ... And, if anybody's in really critical condition we'll have to air evac to St. John's, Newfoundland - they're the closest medical facility to our location."

"Keep me posted on the salvage operation - and let me know the moment they're up and out of that damn sub!"

* * *

Robert Ballard watched Martin Bowen operating *Alvin's* grappling 'manipulators', as he deftly attached the magnetic salvage cables to the *Deep Reach*. It was a slower process than hoped, but each cable was vital to the lift. One consideration in mind was the length of time the sub had been on the bottom - would they clear the seabed easily or would they be mired in muck? Would the *Chester* be able to bring the *Deep Reach* up in time to save the crew aboard her? One thing was for certain - *Alvin* was certainly proving his worth to Ballard already - and they hadn't even found the *Titanic* as yet!

Another three quarters of an hour and *Alvin* had finished attaching the magnetic cables from the *Chester's* special salvage barge - Dr. Ballard gave Captain Greaney the green light to start the lift.

"Captain Greaney, I'm sorry, but *Alvin* is pretty much at his limit here," Ballard reported, "We're going to have to start our own ascent before the *Deep Reach* - we have no choice."

"We understand - you've been generous above and beyond the call of duty already, Doctor," Greaney replied, "See you on the surface!"

* * *

Those awaiting rescue inside the *Deep Reach* watched anxiously through the view ports as the *Alvin* worked away patiently, attaching the magnetic lift cables.

"Thank God - they're back!" Straker realized after the words were out that he was sweating furiously and his voice was shaking. The *Alvin's* powerful lights illuminated the inside of the *Deep Reach* and provided much needed reassurance to the trio inside the SHADO submersible, "What are they doing out there, anyway?"

"From what I can make out, they're attaching cables to our hatch," Masson murmured, peering out into the abyss.

Dr. Stewart nodded, "Special magnetic cables I'll bet. The *Chester* has this salvage barge that can lift just about anything! We could be out of here in a few hours."

A few hours! Straker thought miserably. *Haven't we already been down here more than a few hours?* Now that rescue seemed imminent, he was that much more eager to get out that titanium-hulled tin can and breathe real air, not the stale, barely recirculated *Deep Reach* air. He watched intently as the *Alvin* worked; watched the slow, methodical movements of the sub's 'manipulators'. The *Alvin's* view ports glowed with light, but he couldn't see the occupants.

"How are we doing air wise?" Dr. Stewart asked.

Masson checked his indicators, "Depending on how long this lift takes, we might just make it."

* * *

Captain Greaney, from force of habit, looked from his watch to the bridge clock and back. He was mentally counting the hours and minutes since the *Alvin* had signed off and the

barge crew started lifting the *Deep Reach*. The crew knew they could only lift the sub so fast, and time was of the essence to rescue the crew. The *Miranda's* medic was standing by to check them the minute the divers popped the hatch. While the *Chester* had effected many salvage operations in the past, this one was definitely the most challenging. And when the *Chester* lifted that stricken Skydiver off the bottom, Commander Straker was no longer aboard. The actual presence of Straker aboard the *Deep Reach* made this rescue mission even more urgent and nerve-wracking. The success of this mission was going to make or break Greaney's career in SHADO! But, he was confident nonetheless. They were well within their required time parameters, and if nothing else, this situation was a real test of the *Deep Reach's* seaworthiness in extreme conditions.

"Captain, the *Deep Reach* has passed the four thousand feet mark, they'll be on the surface soon," one of the *Chester's* officers reported.

Greaney barked, "Deploy our divers and make the last checks with the barge crew - get that medic over there too! Call Colonel Lake! I want this rescue to be picture perfect!"

* * *

"We've passed the four thousand foot mark," Masson said, checking his instruments.

Straker breathed a barely-concealed sigh of relief, "When will we hit the surface?"

"Hard to say, the salvage people are probably trying to bring us up faster than we'd surface under our own power, but they still can't go too fast or we could be faced with oxygen poisoning, asphyxia, nitrogen narcosis, barotrauma, or some other nasty condition."

"Barotrauma? What's that?" Straker asked anxiously.

"You don't want to know," Masson replied.

"Barotrauma is a series of different conditions which can occur in divers who have been down very deep and are suddenly pulled up too fast - their bodies just can't take the explosion of gasses and changes in pressure. It's not a pretty sight," Dr. Stewart explained dispassionately, "But, the *Miranda* does have a decompression chamber, so you can take comfort in that, Commander."

Comfort? You mean there are still a dozen ways we can die even when we get to the surface? Straker thought to himself, tugging at his collar, *The only comfort I'll have is when I'm out of this thing...*

"Oh oh...I don't like this...I think our battery power is cutting out...," Masson muttered.

* * *

On board the salvage barge the *Miranda's* medic, Dr. Bobbie Anderson, stood preparing herself mentally for as many eventualities as possible. It was a black night, and the water below looked even blacker. It was out of that abyss that the *Deep Reach* would emerge, and what about the trio inside the sub?

She knew she wouldn't have time for anything but a quick diagnosis of her patients, and putting them in the decomp chamber could be a necessary reality. Arrangements were made so that the *Chester's* salvage barge could quickly swing the *Deep Reach's* occupants over to the *Miranda* and the chamber within minutes of popping the sub's hatch. If Straker, Masson and Stewart were unconscious, then getting them into the decomp chamber would take precedence over normal procedures - it would be even more important than trying to evacuate them by air to the nearest hospital facility.

Dr. Anderson went over her list again. Asphyxia was a real possibility, especially since the CO2 scrubbers in the *Deep Reach* might have malfunctioned after the drop to the bottom. Nitrogen narcosis, caused by breathing inert gasses at pressure, could make the trio in the sub

unconscious or put them in a stupor, causing dangerous, inappropriate judgment. Dr. Anderson feared narcosis greatly because of the crazy things it could cause divers to do - it could bring on recklessness, disregard for safety and a host of other impairments. Oxygen poisoning was another condition to be avoided - it affected subjects similarly - along with visual and aural hallucinations. And, if the temperature in the *Deep Reach* had gone way below body temperature, the three could end up suffering hypothermia. She was also concerned about arterial gas embolism, middle ear and sinus over pressure, decompression sickness and a plethora of other messy diving ailments. Nobody on the surface had been able to communicate with the occupants of the *Deep Reach* for many hours now, and it was anybody's guess as to their actual condition!

Captain Greaney's voice came through on Dr. Anderson's head-set, "We're sending the divers out to secure the *Deep Reach*, Doctor, you should be able to have a look at your patients in just a few minutes now!"

The doctor nodded and walked out to the rear of the *Chester's* salvage barge with her medical pack. Bright lights snapped on at the stern, illuminating the salvage deck, and the noise of the special lifting equipment was loud, even through her head-set. Other crew members stood by, poised to secure the *Deep Reach* as she was lifted onto the barge. As soon as the sub was safely on board, the hatch would be opened and the trio would be removed to the housing so the doctor could examine them quickly and make her decisions.

Dr. Anderson had been calculating the length of time the sub had been below, the pressures she'd been exposed to, and the possibilities of problems with air supply and temperature. Her greatest fear was that the opened hatch would reveal three corpses. It would be only a matter of minutes now...

* * *

The divers had done their job. Her propellers dripping water, her titanium hull gleaming with moisture, the *Deep Reach* finally sat on the salvage barge. Crewmen scurried to attach the ladders to the hatch, and Dr. Anderson followed a crew member up as the hatch was opened.

Flashlights tore into the sub's interior darkness, as Dr. Anderson peered into the *Deep Reach's* cockpit...what would they find?

Blinking and covering his eyes with one hand, Lt. Masson was the first to poke his head out of the hatch, "We're ok, we're still alive!" he told Dr. Anderson. The crew workers pulled the occupants up and out of the submersible, onto the barge's stern.

Next came Dr. Stewart, looking none the worse for wear. She was wrapped in a warm blanket and taken with Masson to the housing unit on the barge's stern. Last of all, came Commander Straker. Dr. Anderson threw a blanket around his shoulders too, and walked him to the shelter.

All three were shivering, as Dr. Anderson checked their vitals and asked them questions about their condition. She turned to the waiting crewmen, "I want them transferred asap to the *Miranda* - I think they should have a few hours in the decomp tank. I'll follow with them."

August 28th, 1985

Once the immediate health hazards had been overcome, Masson, Stewart and Straker were up and about. The *Chester* had departed with the *Deep Reach*, for SHADO's main dry dock facilities for extensive repairs and refit.

After expressing their thanks to Dr. Robert Ballard for his assistance, and suggesting a specific set of co-ordinates to him to assist in his search for the *Titanic*, the *Miranda* set sail

for Great Britain. They had his assurances that he and his people would not report to the press about the *Deep Reach's* perilous journey to the surface, and they in turn wished him luck with the rest of his expedition to find the ill-fated ocean liner...

Commander Straker found young Masson standing out on the *Miranda's* fantail, watching as they passed by the *Knorr* and *Le Suroit*, now once again intent on their own mission of discovery.

"Think they'll find it?" Straker asked him quietly, indicating the Woods Hole and IFREMER ships floating at anchor, as the *Miranda* cruised away.

Masson was thoughtful, "I've been wondering about that. They've certainly got the technology for it. And, we *did* give them some valuable information on its whereabouts...I just can't help thinking about how close we came to joining the *Titanic's* dead..."

"I'm swearing off submarines for good this time," and Straker grinned a bit.

"Not me. As soon as the *Deep Reach* is ready to go back to work, so am I."

"If you'd like, I can have you assigned to the refit detail at the dry dock," Straker suggested.

"I'd really appreciate that, sir," Masson looked at the silver-haired commander gratefully.

Straker inclined his head, indicating the ocean, "And, I appreciate the way you kept your head down there, son. We're damn lucky to have recruited someone like you." He offered his hand to the young lieutenant.

Masson accepted his commander's commendation, and his handshake, "Someday, I'd like to come back here...I'd like to come back to the *Titanic* and...I don't know...say a few words for those that didn't make it...from someone who did."

EPILOGUE

September 1, 1985

"Did you hear the news today?" Paul Foster sat down across from Ed Straker's desk, smiling.

"No, I've been busy reading reports - I haven't even turned on the TV."

"Dr. Ballard and his expedition found the *Titanic*!"

"Really?" Straker sat back in his seat, "I know someone in SHADO who'll be very pleased to hear that."

"Commander?" Foster asked curiously.

"Lt. Masson - the pilot of the *Deep Reach* - he has a personal interest in the 'old girl', as he calls the *Titanic*. He's asked for permission to revisit the wreck after all the hoopla with Dr. Ballard's group is over."

"How long will it take before the *Deep Reach* can go back into service?"

"About a month or so. I just finished reading the full damage report. It wasn't as bad as anyone expected. She should be up and running in a couple weeks."

"Is Masson going to stay on as the sub's pilot?"

"I don't think I could convince him otherwise. He's a pretty determined young man. Just like someone else I know," Straker smiled across the desk at Foster.

"I read some prelim reports on the alien bodies they found with the downed UFO wreckage. Typical organ replacement - that sort of thing."

Straker lit a cigarillo and sat back in his seat again, "What worries me, Paul, is that UFO may have been part of a major beach-head organization. We destroyed one alien underwater base a few years ago - but how many are there that we haven't located yet? The deepest areas of the earth's oceans are just barely being explored now. This incident proves UFOs can survive only too well at depths far below 97% of our own underwater technology. I'm afraid the *Deep Reach* is going to be one very busy submarine over the next few years. I've already called for construction on some sister subs to start as soon as possible. The work of the *Deep Reach* is too vital for her to remain an 'only child' in the SHADO navy."

"I suppose General Henderson flipped his wig when you asked for a financial appropriation for this new fleet of deep sea subs?"

"He wasn't thrilled with my request for another eight million pounds, no. He bitched about the fact I'd asked for upgrades to the Skydiver fleet just seven months ago. But after reading the reports on the incident, he realized SHADO couldn't afford to have to ask for help from civilians, no matter how well-meaning they might be. I think my personal experience report convinced him."

"So what happens next?"

"We stay vigilant, Paul. We use the *Deep Reach* and her new sisters to cruise the world's oceans for us. It's not just from outer space we have to fear the aliens' threat. They've invaded inner space, too."

THE END