

The Cold Truth

by Pamela McCaughey (2020)

Based on UFO (1969-70)

Created by Gerry & Sylvia Anderson and Reg Hill

And Due South (created by Paul Haggis and Paul Gross circa 1996)

With an appearance by character Joe Two Rivers (Canadian Broadcasting Corporation program Forest Rangers circa 1963)

Chapter One

Straker hated this time of year. The staff were distracted because of the holiday season and that made them less than attentive in his view. It wasn't that they didn't give 100% all the time it was just that their own family issues crowded in on their mindsets in December. Those who were married and had children often merged duty time with online Christmas shopping. Perhaps it didn't cause them to pay less attention to their work but Straker, having neither a spouse or child to think about, found the whole thing disconcerting. Not to mention a tiny bit jealous.

A man in his position of command, could if he wanted to, send out stringent orders to all SHADO and Omega operatives to forgo any conversational references and thoughts to the December holiday. But Straker knew any such orders would be looked upon as demeaning and Grinch like. He did allow his own office staff to put up a small lighted Christmas tree. It was actually rather nice and had a certain appeal. However it's appearance only served to remind him that he was ultimately alone all of the year.

That the aliens had any idea or concerns about human traditions did not seem likely. In that particular December there had been literally dozens of red alerts experienced. Moon Base staff had scrambled the interceptors almost every day with sightings constant throughout the month. Or the other theory was that the aliens were only too aware that this time of year was special to a large segment of earth's population. Therefore they stepped up their activity as a counterpoint to a possible laxness on the part of SHADO's people.

Most of the month the interceptors had prevented alien spacecraft from reaching earth's orbit. This meant that the Skydiver fleet and the mobiles and many other SHADO and Omega agents were on high alert but not active. Of course the situation couldn't last.

The interceptors were mostly on target but two days earlier they had lost visual contact with a UFO and it had made its way to earth's atmosphere. Given the UFOs could only last two days on earth unless submerged in cold water or in arctic conditions, it was anyone's guess as to where this alien ship had landed. They had tracked it down to the Northwest Territories in Canada but had lost its whereabouts in the snowy wastelands mostly inhabited by polar bears. If it had submerged in Arctic waters it could remain there almost indefinitely, hiding out from SHADO's extensive tracking systems worldwide. And skimming about all over the place under water especially in deeper bodies like Hudson Bay or the North Atlantic.

This meant that staff would have to be dispatched throughout a large swath of land in the hopes of spotting evidence of the alien ship or its possible activities. Knowing the aliens were always on the hunt for human victims to vivisect for transplantable bodily organs, SHADO theorists were confused that the aliens would choose to sit themselves down in such an unpopulated area. But then again the capture of humans might not be the reason for their current mission on earth.

Straker had his cadre of theorists working around-the-clock trying to determine what could possibly be of interest in that location in the Northwest Territories. They were looking at the local population such as it was, the local animal groups and possible mining or other exploitable natural resources the aliens might consider worth the risk.

Several decades earlier SHADO thinkers had been presented with the idea that the aliens followed up human mining activity for their own purposes. At a remote location in Australia they had proven interested in uranium and diamonds. In the early 2000's, several high quality diamond mines had been opened in the North West Territories, producing both Gem Quality and industrial diamonds.

Was there any chance that the aliens were again interested in diamond mining or was there some other reason they had gone there? A small vein of emeralds had been discovered a few years before but was not considered worthy of spending the money and effort of establishing an actual mine. Uranium had been discovered and was being removed in several locations across Canada's Northern territories. Maybe the aliens had detected new sources of the mineral, as yet undiscovered by human exploration.

Mobiles had been deployed to a large area that included well-known diamond mines Ekati and Diavik, under the guise of the Environment Canada banner. SHADO frequently used this cover whenever they had to operate in any areas that had regular populations. They'd worked out a covert agreement with the Canadian government years ago for this privilege.

The staff working in the two diamond mines were staggered into groups that worked for a period of time while others got time off, but there was always a specific number of well-educated and intelligent people on duty at the mines, so they had to be very careful to either avoid contact altogether or preserve the fiction of working for Environment Canada if they did end up having any dealings with the mine people.

Along with the regular group of experienced northern operatives, Straker had ordered Paul Foster and Benton Fraser to head up the expedition. He knew he could trust the combined experience and knowledge both of them could provide to the mobile Staff sent there. Fraser was now a retired RCMP officer, having been recruited by SHADO several years ago. Paul Foster had been with the organization since the early 1980s, his own recruitment having come about as a result of a UFO incursion that caused his experimental plane to crash. Having risen to the rank of general within SHADO meant Foster had great authority and experience with ferreting out alien beachheads. It was a constant struggle for the covert organization to keep the aliens off-balance and to prevent them from establishing permanent and secret bases from which to conduct their cruel missions.

Their dying planet was now in all likelihood bereft of natural resources, needed minerals, possibly water, food items, and the necessity of taking of human organs to keep them alive. That the aliens were possibly confronted with the same ecological and environmental realities that were still being discounted by climate change denying ostriches on earth made their plight seem almost pitiable. If it had not been for the insidious cruelty the aliens exercised in their search for what would sustain them, one might almost have offered them assistance. But the aliens insisted on taking what they wanted when they wanted it and how they wanted it without recourse to making contact with any earth government or authority. It was as though they considered making contact beneath their dignity and humanity was merely a sub species to be exploited. This was basically what led to the execution of a decades long secret war between the aliens and SHADO.

"I really don't see the need for you to go on this expedition, Ed," Virginia commented as she watched him pack his woollies into a small duffel, "You hate the cold! Or is there another real reason you're going?"

"What other reason do I need? I want to find that damn UFO and find out what it's doing there! Frankly I'm scared they're up to more ecological havoc. With the shrinking ice packs and other problems in the Arctic, the planet can't take anymore trouble!"

Hands on her hips, Virginia nodded, "Oh yes ecological problems are abounding on this planet but I don't think that's why you're going to the Northwest Territories. You're going to escape Christmas!"

"Now what would make you think that? My son is dead and my ex wife is a homicidal maniac who killed her second husband, although the bastard did deserve it. And you think I love celebrating Christmas, the most family oriented holiday on the Western calendar?"

Virginia had been friends long enough with Ed Straker that she knew about many aspects of his life. What she didn't know, what only the now dead Alec Freeman had known, was the irreparable pain Straker had suffered from the loss of his marriage and then his only child Johnnie. It had all been enough to make the General bitter and lonely, with a heart that couldn't be breached.

"Ok, I get it, but at your age....."

"My age! I'm fit as a fiddle, even the SHADO quacks have told me so!"

"What about the heart damage you sustained in that assassination attempt?"

"Most of the damage my heart has ever sustained was caused by humans, not the aliens. Besides, I take my meds religiously."

Sighing, and knowing the argument was useless, Virginia said, "I feel like I have to remind you to take better care of yourself. Alec's gone and he's the only one you'd ever listen to."

"And I miss that old Aussie every day let me tell you. But Dr Davidson has me well under her scrutiny. She doesn't let me away with too much. I took Cleo and her kittens down to Bonnie last night so she could look after

them while I'm away."

"What did she say about your trip?"

"She wasn't happy. But she knows better than to bring up my age, my health or my personal life. She just gave me extra meds and reminded me to cut back on my tobacco intake."

"As one of your personal physicians she should have refused for you to go to Canada. She should know....."

Straker cut her off, "On the contrary Bonnie knows I'll go with or without her permission. She just puts herself on record to cover her arse. Besides, the real reason YOU don't want me to go is that if I bought the farm you and Paul would have to duke it out to take over my Responsibility Seat," he grinned nastily.

"I don't want...."

The silver haired general shook his head, "Virginia I know you're not that kind of person, and neither is Paul, but you are the two most senior people with Peter Carlin's retirement. One day, someday, it might be necessary for one of you to take my job."

"I'd rather it be later than sooner, Ed, which is why I'd rather you didn't go."

"Look, I won't be out there in the mobiles risking my skin with the younger fellows. I'll be safe at the field command set up."

"You promise?"

"Would I lie to you?"

"Yes."

Chapter Two

"The locals have told me that they've found an unusually large number of polar bears and seals dead in our search area," Benton Fraser explained to Ed Straker and their two operatives, Don Cameron and Tim Dexter, as he carefully piloted their SHADO mobile over the white snow covered landscape.

"Were they killed BY locals or by some other means?" Cameron asked.

Fraser shook his head, "Killed and mutilated. Typical alien calling card, but why they'd do that I don't know. It's got the Innu pretty upset. They've fought hard for permission to take these animals themselves. The anti hunting groups would rather see them stopped altogether but the aboriginal people see hunting as an extension of their traditional lifestyle. Ideas change very slowly up here I'm afraid."

"What kind of mutilation was done? The briefing notes seemed rather vague," Tim Dexter noted.

"I saw one bear autopsy myself. A female. She'd been pregnant but the fetuses appeared to have been removed. Along with her reproductive organs and her liver. We weren't able to get any seal carcasses to do post mortems on. But we understand they too were all females."

Straker spoke up, "Females. Hmmm. Wonder why the aliens would target females?"

"Yes that's it, males aren't being attacked by the aliens. At least not yet."

"Begg the question, doesn't it?" Straker replied, a thoughtful expression on his face.

"We've got a couple kilometres before we arrive at the next broken ice location. You boys will get the underwater probe ready for deployment?" Fraser looked back momentarily at Cameron and Dexter.

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Straker lit himself a cigarillo as he watched Cameron and Dexter lower the probe into the water. Fraser was operating the remote device to send it into the deeper water and there was a small screen that provided video back from the probe's cameras. It was also equipped with Alien-Tect, SHADO's technology for sensing alien metals. If its sensors went off, that would mean there was an alien ship submerged close by in the icy Arctic waters.

Fraser's high security cell phone went off and he answered it quickly, then handed it to Straker, "Its Paul for you."

"Paul, where are you?" Straker asked.

"We're about twelve kilos away from you to the north. Found another mutilated bear. Female. We're trying to get her loaded to take back for an autopsy."

"How many does that make now?"

"Thirty one. But we have a complication with this one."

"Damn.....," Straker already had an idea of what Paul was about to report.

"Yeah. Got an Innu hunter in shock. Don't know what he actually saw yet. But we've got to take him back to base, get him some medical treatment and find out how much he knows."

"Ok, we'll see you back there. I'd like to sit in on the interrogation. Fraser can translate for us if he doesn't speak English."

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They raised the probe, dripping wet and coated in ice, and wrapped it in a special drying tarp developed by the Omega labs for just that purpose. Once back at base, the probe would be cleaned, it's memory banks downloaded and readied for the next mission. The four men boarded their mobile and headed back to join Paul and the other teams for a daily debriefing. The night teams would be deployed as they headed in, as the area was currently under 24 hour surveillance.

Dr Alexandra Cormier had the Innu hunter in a stasis booth, using his IV to feed him necessary antibiotics, drugs to combat the shock and keep him in a light stage of unconsciousness. She felt he'd be able to answer questions in a few hours but he needed some time to recover. Between the physical shock and the mental shock, nobody knew what his condition might be.

During the debriefing, reports on the various probes deployed were disappointing. None of the teams had found any evidence of the alien craft. From the number of dead bears found on the snow, it was wondered how they could accomplish such mutilations if they had to work exposed to the Arctic climate. Just about every day brought new snowfall. And the temperatures were dangerously sub zero day and night.

"They can't be working outside. It doesn't make sense. They've got to have a lab somewhere they drag the poor animals to and then cut them. What are we missing?" Don Cameron asked, cradling his cup of coffee.

"If they submerged a spacecraft they'd have to be able to either get in and get out of the water somehow. Plus they'd have to be doing it at night to maintain as much secrecy as possible. Seems somewhat counter productive to have to bring up a ship every day, maybe even several times a day, or night." Dexter mused.

"So how else are they doing this? Are you suggesting they've got an in land base set up?" Fraser queried.

"Why not? They're quite capable of it. Wouldn't be the first time we've found an alien beach head. So maybe we've been going about this wrong. They must have a base set up, maybe even a small one, but they've got it hidden well out of sight. Perhaps even underground but still on terra firma," was Dexter's reply.

Straker laughed without mirth, "Hah the jokes on us! With all this trackless winter wonderland, they could hunker down under a snow drift and evade us because we've been looking for them in the water."

Paul Foster flashed their search area map on the computerized view screen, "Alright then, let's look at this: we could extend the current search area and start using that new ground penetrating radar rigged with the Alien-Tect I ordered in from the Omega labs two days ago. It's been unpacked and calibrated - ready to be deployed."

One of the other operatives, Michael Ritchie, spoke up, "I've been looking over the air reconnaissance footage as per General Foster's orders. There's nothing on those video DVDs that stands out as an unusual structure on the snow's surface. Of course the aliens aren't exactly going to hang out a neon sign, but even they need a means of heating and cooling their base, bringing in oxygen to be used their way, and an entrance of sorts. So is there some way they could make something that belongs to the natural landscape into that entrance they'd need?"

Foster nodded, "They've used underwater volcanoes before and caves that lead down into water. We even once found them in a cenote in Mexico! They're likely protected from the elements outside by their environmental suits but they can't operate on the animals without more freedom to be as precise as the autopsies are showing. So I think we'll have to start again with the radar units and cover as much ground as we can in the next few hours. I'll send out a message to our teams currently on the surface and let them know that when they come in, they'll be gotten up to speed on everything as you folks will be," Paul depressed several buttons in the view screen console, "Ok, here's the specs in the ground penetrating radar units and how they'll be deployed....."

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"Brought you something to keep warm with," Foster handed Straker a big mug of steaming Java. The general was standing outside the SHADO base to smoke as tobacco usage was verboten inside and he wasn't one to flout the rules for personal reasons. Not since his son Johnnie died decades earlier.

They stood in silence for a few moments, both exhaling steaming breath in the severely sub zero Arctic air. It was morning, but the sun was sluggish about coming up above the horizon, perhaps not any more animated than the humans to stir in the freezing temperatures.

"Are you going out with a team this morning?" Paul asked.

"Yes, I thought I'd go out with Michael Ritchie's group."

"Nobody here expects you to put yourself out on the firing line you know. As the senior officer you have the privilege of staying back at base to.....coordinate things."

"Uhhhh.....no.....you know that's not how I roll."

Foster watched his commander swig down some of the hot coffee, "I'm only thinking of you...."

Straker squashed out what was left of his cigarillo into the hard packed snow with his polar style boot, "I already had this conversation with Virginia before I left England. Don't start."

"Fine, but I hate it when you play Captain Ahab!"

Measuring his tone, Straker replied, "I'm not. I'm going to keep hands on as long as I can. Sitting back giving orders or delegating to others has never been my style. You should know that after all these years."

"Well, I'd like to see you keep your job in the Responsibility Seat for a few more years yet. I know you - you'll never allow yourself to be put out to pasture - you'll drop in the traces."

"You and Virginia can run things if anything happens to me. You've both been ready for a long time."

"That's true I suppose. But the thing is, we'd rather take orders from you than be the ones issuing them."

"Well ok you talked me into it. I'm issuing you a personal order: I don't want to hear anymore veiled comments about my age, the state of my health or my tobacco use. I've got my doctor's permission to be here and by God, I'll do my job," Straker smiled at Foster, "Besides, being over here keeps me away from Virginia's nagging and babysitting - she seems to think I'm in my dotage and I need a minder!"

Paul laughed, "Actually she told me in her phone call that she thought you were running away from Christmas!"

Shaking his head, Straker rolled his eyes, "Unbelievable!"

"Are you?"

"I'm not answering that question on the grounds I might incriminate myself, and don't tell Virginia I said that!"

Chapter Three

The interrogation of the aboriginal hunter was carried out by Benton Fraser and recorded and observed by both Straker and Foster. Dr Cormier monitored the session as per standard procedure for medical reasons.

The SHADO men were shocked to discover their "guest" was quite elderly. He had to be in his eighties at least. No wonder Dr Cormier had been so concerned with his condition.

Fraser started out the conversation by telling the hunter he was in a medical facility and they had found him severely injured. He asked him about family, or who they could take him home to.

The hunter proved to speak English very well. Innu was a second language for him as he explained, "My name is Joe Two Rivers. I have a granddaughter and her children I live with. I was born among the Haida people in British Columbia, but Laika married an Innu and asked me to move here so she could look after me in my later years. She seems to think I cannot take care of myself, as if I haven't been doing just that all my life!"

Hidden behind a two way mirror watching, Straker made a face and said, "This fellow and I have a lot in common!"

"When we found you, you appeared to have been out in the cold for hours. We were very worried for you. Hypothermia is serious! But Dr Cormier thinks you'll recover just fine. What took you out that far?"

"I went out on my Ski-doo but left it and went on foot for a bit. I was tracking a polar bear. I figured if I could get one, I'd have a prize for Christmas. My great grandson has wanted a polar bear skin as a gift."

"When we found you though, you had no weapon and we never found your Ski-doo at all. How far away were you?"

"I don't know as I'd left my GPS back with the Ski-doo. Stupid I know. But I was closing in on the bear and I didn't want to lose it. I'd been tracking it for hours. In fact, I almost had it, but somebody got to it first!"

Fraser feigned surprise, "You mean another hunter took it from you?"

"That's what I thought at first, too. I thought, Joe, you're too late! You missed your chance! And when I found the carcass I realized something wasn't right."

"Was there something strange about it?"

"Oh yes! No bullet injuries. Not even bow and arrow. But the polar bear was gutted like a fish. Blood all over the snow. Not a clean kill at all. And just left there like that. No hunter I know among the people would do such a thing."

"Why did you end up on the snow in such poor condition?"

"I realized then that I'd left my GPS behind. I was lost. And as the light faded I went back to lie with the bear to keep warm. I was very lucky you found me. Else the Great Spirit would have called me to go with Him."

"So you got lost and stayed with the bear. That was good. Smart. It may have saved your life you know."

"Like I said, my granddaughter thinks old Joe can't look after himself."

"Well, when you're ready to travel we will get you back to your village and you'll be able to spend Christmas with your family."

"That's a relief. I won't have a bear for my great grandson but I'll have a story to tell."

Thinking that was the end of the session, Fraser stood up to leave, "A pleasure to make your acquaintance, Joe Two Rivers. In case I don't see you again, have a happy holiday!"

Joe nodded and then he held up a hand, "There's one thing I don't understand....."

Fraser turned back, "What's that?"

"I passed a small gathering of igloos on my hunt that day, but there was nobody about and I couldn't see any sign of life. I meant to report it to the Mounties when I got back. I wondered if it was an abandoned hunting location. But at this time of year most hunters are keeping close to home."

"I don't suppose you noticed your GPS reading when you passed it?"

Joe reeled off latitude and longitude easily.

"What made you remember so exactly?"

"It's where I left my Ski-doo to track the bear on foot. I figured it would be safe there. Maybe it's still there. I'd sure like to have it back if it could be found. It's only two years old."

Fraser leaned over and smiled at the old hunter, "Joe, thank you kindly for the information. In fact I think I'll go out today and look for your Ski-doo!"

"You're sure it would be no trouble?"

"No trouble at all!"

Fraser came out of Joe's room and beckoned for Straker and Foster to follow him to the briefing room. He picked up the public address system and asked for the daytime operatives to join them.

Once all were assembled, Fraser put up the air reconnaissance video of the latitude and longitude Joe had given him. Sure enough there were four barely discernible igloo shapes, white on white with pale gray shadows hardly visible.

"Gentlemen, I think we may have overlooked something. See this video footage? I'm instructing one of our SID satellites to give us a close up of this image. When it comes in, any moment now, we may have a new lead."

The view on the screen shifted. The sunlight was hardly there but it was possible to make out the igloos in more detail. And only a few yards away from the group, sat a Ski-doo.

"Oh my God, when in Rome..." Michael Ritchie's voice was followed by a whistle.

"Before any of us get pissed about missing this, let me remind you that these structures are all made of ice and snow, normal and natural items found in this climate. They wouldn't register at all on any radar or monitoring system. It's what could be beneath these structures we must determine. If the aliens are using the igloos as a duck blind for their current operation, well, they put one over on us - at least for a few days. They could also be well below the surface, either in a well established base or a sunken UFO. It's just barely out of our original search grid."

Paul Foster stood up, "Let's get saddled up and get out there. No time to waste. Call in the night crew and get Skydiver Seven on the horn. We may need their firepower."

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The Arctic mobiles were loaded with the ground penetrating radar units, techs to monitor them and everyone was heavily armed. Armoured like tanks, these mobiles were specially designed to function in the sub zero climate of extreme northern areas like Canada's territories or Russia's Siberia. They moved on special tracks that resisted cold and ice.

Straker opted to go out with Michael Ritchie's group as he'd mentioned to Foster earlier. He knew that team well and figured they might see some action. It had been some years since the General had personally been involved in taking out an alien base and he felt a strange thrill of anticipation. One of the perks of his rank was that he could assign himself wherever and with whomever he wanted!

The mobile groups were to be deployed from all angles of the igloo gathering so they could cover all sides. Joe Two Rivers had seen no activity there, but a lone local hunter wouldn't have raise an alarm with the aliens. That they didn't take him for spare parts suggested they were running a different type of mission in that location. Or else they didn't think he was worth the risk of giving themselves away.

Techs started up the ground penetrating radar units as soon as they got within a short distance of the possible installation. They moved up very slowly because visibility had become poor - a storm had moved in. But they had satellite sighting and Intel to go by and the weather was no detriment to their mission. If there was an alien nest there it had to be neutralized.

"How far down can the ground radar detect structures?" Straker asked Lt Ritchie.

"This particular model can scan through about one hundred yards. Because the aliens often dig themselves in deep, there's a move on to create a prototype that can scan further down. But we've also got scanners looking for alien metal going and we'll be concentrating on the igloos as service elements for the base itself. They've got to get some oxygen in and release the dirty air back out somehow. Not to mention a power source. There's nothing out here for them to tap into so they must have their own generators. And they'll need the cold temperatures to preserve any ships they've got hidden. That ship has to have landed here somewhere. If it'd taken off again we'd have tracked it and they know that."

"So even with all this scientific hardware on board, do you think we'll see any action?" Straker was dying for a smoke but he knew that luxury would have to wait.

Michael was silent while he weighed the General's query then he said, "That depends, sir. Personally I'd like to take the fight to the aliens but I have orders."

"What kind of orders?"

"Well.....just sayin' sir, but General Foster ordered me to clear out with you on board if it came down to a fire fight."

"Oh he did, did he?"

"Yes sir. He did."

"You know I'm the higher ranking officer here."

"I'm aware of that fact, Sir."

"And you wouldn't want to disobey the orders of said ranking officer, would you?"

Michael knew where this was going and it made him uncomfortable. General Foster wanted him to keep Straker out of the fight, but Straker was the Supreme Commander of SHADO. Bottom line, Straker outranked them both and his orders were to be considered first.

"Are you issuing me new orders?"

"As of this moment, Lt Ritchie, I expect you to do your job even if it takes us right into one of those alien igloos. It's not a request, it's an order. Got that?"

Without looking back at the other operatives traveling with them in their mobile, Michael nodded, the ghost of a smile forming on his face, "Yes, sir. Tim, are we picking up anything at all in the radar back there?"

"Not yet, but that could be due to a couple factors. And it also depends on how deep the aliens are.....ok.....the Alien-Tect is starting to register something....."

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The mobiles had formed a perimeter of about a half a kilometre away from the circle of igloos. Joe's Ski-doo was visible. The Alien-TECT sensors were going off their limits screaming with contacts, all of it centred on that location. Were the aliens as yet aware of their presence in the area? How far out did their own sensors work? What were they doing there? How big was their underground installation? These were questions being carefully discussed on secure wireless communications utilized by the mobiles to plan their attack procedures.

General Straker led the discussion, "I don't think we have any other choice but to commit manpower to searching for an entrance to the aliens' base. Once inside we may be able to capture a few of them or even get our hands on some of their technology. That's a big part of this mission. But we've also got to try and determine what they've been up to, and for that reason alone I'd prefer not to blast the base. I'd like to take it as intact as possible. However, I don't want our people sacrificed. Kill if you have to - capture if you can."

Don Cameron spoke up, "What if some of the aliens try suicide? They do that a lot rather than risk capture."

"Well if they do, then at least we will have autopsy candidates. If it comes down to preserving the base for our theorists to comb over, then alien deaths become the least of our worries. The greenies certainly don't worry about killing us."

"I put in a call to Dr Raychaudhuri about joining us after the mission to do autopsies on the aliens and we'll have Dr Zama come in to do post mortems on any animals we find," Paul Foster added, "She might be able to determine why the aliens were taking them."

Michael Ritchie's voice came in, "It's getting dark and we've got snow coming down. We should be able to move in shortly. I think we should leave a driver in each mobile in case we have to exit the area fast and the rest of the teams can head into the igloo circle."

"Copy that, Mike," Foster replied, "Let's get moving."

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"Sir, are you sure you wouldn't rather stay with the mobile as our getaway driver?" Lt Ritchie asked General Straker.

The silver haired SHADO commander unlocked his weapon and pulled on his touque and night vision glasses, "I have every confidence in young Butland here to get us out of harm's way if it's necessary. Let's get going."

Shrugging to himself with an "I tried!" expression on his face, Ritchie motioned for Operative Butland to take the drivers' seat, "Ok, guys, we're going out the back exit. Remember we've got about half a kilos hike so pace yourselves."

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It had been several decades since Straker had taken such an exhaustive hike but he felt all those hours on his treadmill had been worth it. Not only did he manage to keep up with the younger fellows but his breathing rate wasn't as bad as it could have been. Considering his lifelong smoking habit, this was a bonus he'd be able to flourish in Virginia's face later on.

The darkness fell quickly in the northern territories and Straker felt protected and comforted by it. All the men were dressed in Arctic clothing with alien weapon proof vests on underneath, as well as night vision goggles, protective helmets and a multitude of weapons and explosives. They came well prepared.

Just up over a group of snow drifts that had formed frozen dunes, Mike Ritchie hunkered down and paused to use his binoculars. The others in his group, including Straker, stayed down out of sight of the alien installation. Comlink communication with the other attack groups meant they were all within easy striking

distance. Paul Foster wanted his group to go first, followed by the others with particular igloo targets assigned. There were four igloos visible and each group would attack its own target according to orders.

Mike watched as Foster's group stealthily headed into their own assigned igloo and disappeared. His own group were ordered to go last, so he and his men watched the other three groups head in before he waved his own towards their igloo.

They had to crawl on their hands and knees through the igloo opening. It had been constructed to look just like a normal igloo in that way. Mike led his team through the opening, and they found upon their entrance that the crawl space led to a wide stairwell inside. This meant they could move more easily and upright. Straker slipped in behind the others and wondered what the other groups were encountering.

Quietly Mike motioned for the others to follow him down the stairs. They exchanged their night vision goggles for special indoor glasses that illuminated their surroundings with a very gentle light, permitting them to see in the dark. The stairwell took them into a corridor that was seemingly unguarded but all the men switched on jamming gadgets hoping to block any alien sensors from detecting their presence.....

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Paul Foster gestured for his group to follow him down a dimly lit stairwell just as they passed the initial igloo entrance. Because it was lit, they would dispense with their goggles and glasses for the moment. Weapons at the ready, they tread quietly down the corridor.....

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Benton Fraser cautiously crawled on hands and knees through the igloo's opening. He could barely hear his men shuffling in behind him when he realized there was some sort of blockage in their way. He held up a hand to halt everyone and flashed a tiny penlight ahead into the darkness. He'd never seen such an elaborate mechanical installation. One of his team came forward and began taking photos with a special flash camera that could compensate for poor lighting conditions. Two others moved ahead and began scanning the alien machinery, trying to determine its possible usages and what it was made of. Fraser and his last teammate slipped by and followed a low ceilinged pathway that seemed to drop deeper every few yards.....

* * *

The fourth group, led by Don Cameron, made its way inside the igloo assigned them carefully. Everyone had to switch to their special low illumination glasses because of the lack of light in the interior. They could all hear a low humming sound coming from further inside and they quietly followed it. As they moved closer to the sound source they could feel a growing draft.

Using American Sign Language to avoid speaking, Cameron motioned to one of his team, "Think we've found a ventilation shaft?"

His teammate, Skip Williston, nodded and signed back, "I'd be inclined to concur, but the actual machinery must be further inside. I'm packing lots of C4, would you like me to ready some charges?"

"Yes but not until we've gone down inside and actually found the installation. We can take the option of blowing it as a last resort. Remember, Straker and Foster would like to get some live greenies to interrogate!"

* * *

Straker's usual desire for tobacco dissipated with each moment as he followed Mike Ritchie and his group deeper into the alien installation. He hadn't felt this kind of adrenalin rush in years! Any fear had long since deserted him. Instead he felt an excitement that caused him to wear a grim smile. Each minute brought them closer to the interior of the alien base. What would they find down there?

Chapter Four

There was an oddly warmer temperature inside the stairwell leading down inside the igloo. Mike Ritchie led his team further. They could hear a soft humming noise and Straker wondered if the sound was indicative of the aliens' power source. They had to be using some kind of alien generated power as there was nothing available for them to tap into in this northern location.

Mike's communications pod vibrated soundlessly and he glanced at the screen. All the other units were inside their respective igloos and all were proceeding downwards. It was good to know they'd all be converging eventually. Each group would have the others' backs if it turned into a fire fight.

The stairwell came to an abrupt end ahead and they could all see subdued lighting pouring up. The team brought their weapons online quickly, taking no chances with whatever aliens they'd encounter.

* * *

"I don't fucking believe this!" Straker's dour facial expression said it all, "You're telling me this whole installation has been thoroughly searched and there's not one single alien here?"

Mike Ritchie changed the foot he was standing on as he gave his report, "That's the way it is, sir. The place has been turned inside out. We don't know when they vacated or how - yet. We have found what appears to be refrigeration units loaded with vivisected bears and seals. And there's a big lab space where something was going on as research but we're going to need our exobiology types to get in here to examine it."

Shaking his head and pulling off his helmet in disgust, Straker sat down on the edge of a table, "Ok, I'll sign off on getting our science nerds in here. And we'll need a couple of tech geeks to start tearing the hardware apart. At least this time we've gotten an intact nest to have fun with. Most of the time they just blow 'em up on their way out."

"That's what's so strange about this site. They've left it here for us. That's totally outside their standard operating procedure."

"Everybody's been on site here for more hours than I'd like to think. I'm going to call in some fresh troops to guard the premises and let our guys get back for a few hours' sleep", the General took out his specialized secure Omega cell phone to make the call, "In the meantime let's get everybody rounded up to get back to base....."

Straker's comments were punctuated by a low rumbling sound that rippled along like gurgling river, "Now what.....?" He made a face.

"Don't like the sound of that, sir, I think we better head outside asap!"

As they crawled out the igloo opening they could make out a mass exodus of all the other operatives, crawling and running away into the pale pinkish dawn light. Some were dragging items taken for the alien nest and some were just running as fast as they could in the impeding snow!

Several moments later an ear splitting blast came out of the four igloo openings and flames could be seen shooting out all over the place!

Ritchie raised his head to survey the burning fires and the now melting ice structures. A huge pool of water was quickly spreading beyond the igloos' perimeter, pouring out towards the fleeing SHADO personnel.

Straker's cell phone vibrated to life and he barked into it, "Who is it?"

"It's Paul, you ok?"

"Never mind me, did everyone else get out?"

"All present and accounted for!"

"Delayed detonation?"

"Looks that way. Aliens probably hoped to kill off a few of us into the bargain!"

Looking back over his shoulder at the destroyed alien installation, Straker felt a rush of rage and a desperate need for a cigarillo. He wanted to hit something. To punch something. To roar out loud in anger. But he couldn't. He had the position of supreme leader weighing on him, and the morale of the men under his command to consider.

With a heavy heart he watched the flames burst to the skies and saw the oily black smoke billowing up into the pristine Arctic morning. Foggy steam came out of his mouth as he murmured, "God damn it all to hell...."

* * *

Virginia Lake looked a bit smug as she watched General Straker settle down into his Responsibility Seat behind his plexiglass desk. In all these years he'd never bothered to replace it, or change the 1980s decor of his

office. Perhaps he didn't want to waste the money on such a frivolous job or maybe he found the original decor comforting somehow.

"So, how was Canada?"

"If you must know, it was bloody frigid and highly disappointing."

"I hear you saw a little action."

"Very little. You must have read my report by now."

"Yes and I read the other reports based on what some of our operatives were able to drag out of the site or document with their cell cameras."

"Damn it there was some kind of scientific research being carried out there and we still don't know what it was!"

"I would imagine our theorists will have a field day drumming up ideas and postulations about just what was going on there. It'll take time for them to come up with anything valid."

"That's just it - we need to know right this minute how they got into that location, how they built it, what it was for, and how they got out without us knowing."

"Do you think they've found a way around our Alien-Tect?"

"That scares the shit out of me. If we can't depend on the AT anymore we're almost back to Square One. This would put us back to the 1980s if we can't see them coming. Our senior science nerds over at Omega have been working on AT upgrades but what if the AT is simply useless now?"

"I guess we sit back and wait. Wait to see what their next move is."

"All these years it's been like a deadly chess game, trying to find out when and where they'd strike again. I feel like I've just been check mated."

"Well, cheer up, Ed at least you did manage to miss Christmas."

"What's that supposed to mean?" Straker asked indignantly.

"You didn't realize the night of your big nest take down was December 25th?"

Epilogue

Joe Two Rivers smiled as he opened the cabin door. He gestured for the tall red serge clad figure to come in.

Benton Fraser came in and stood in front of Joe's fireplace, taking off his thermal gloves and his Mountie's Stetson. Joe approached him with a mug of steaming coffee.

"Thank you for finding my snowmobile and returning it. My granddaughter helped me pay for it so I really felt bad about leaving it behind."

"We found it right where you said you'd left it, actually," Fraser sat down at Joe's insistence, "Your coordinates from the GPS were right on the mark."

Joe nodded and sipped at his own cup of coffee, "I'm afraid I have a confession to make. I didn't tell you everything last week. I'd like to make amends for that now."

The handsome Canadian lifted an eyebrow, "I wondered about that."

Looking down at the floor and clearing his throat, Joe said, "You've spent enough time living here in the Arctic among the native peoples to know that we have many myths and legends. They're a part of our cultural heritage. The old people believed many of them but nowadays the youth think of them just as old stories to while away an evening."

Fraser looked up expectantly for Joe to continue.

"I was afraid of telling what I saw. Afraid of being laughed at. There's an old story we often tell children to keep them from wandering down to the shore and getting drowned. Mothers tell it mostly. It's the story of the Qalupalik," Joe watched Fraser to see if he was familiar with his story, "The Qalupalik is a human like creature. They make a distinctive humming sound when they're near and you can hear them. Legend tells us that they have long hair and green skin and they wear a special amautiit, or hooded parka. They come from the ocean you see and they use the hooded parka to take children back underwater with them."

Joe paused and took another swig of coffee, "The day I was tracking the polar bear and came across the circle of igloos I was curious. I got off my Skidoo and thought I'd check them out to see if anyone was there. That's when I saw the Qalupalik. I couldn't believe it. I thought I'd gone crazy. It was dressed up in a strange parka with a clear bubble thing like a helmet on its head. I couldn't see its hair but I could see its green skin!"

"What happened, Joe?"

"What happened next is that it saw me. I was sure it was going to kill me. And it was dragging the dead polar bear carcass out of one of the igloos. It had some sort of weapon I think but it wasn't like a rifle or a handgun. It was more like a pen that could shoot light and melt the snow! He forced me away from the circle of igloos and made me drag the bear carcass quite a distance from the circle. It was getting dark but he just left me there with the dead bear and he melted all the snow upon which the blood had flowed. It just melted away.....," he lowered his head, "I was lucky your people found me....."

The two men sat in silence for a moment, both pondering their own thoughts perhaps. Finally Joe leaned over and spoke, "You don't have to believe me of course. But I felt like I should tell someone."

Fraser looked Joe in the eye, "I believe you."

"Why do you believe me?"

"Because I've seen them too"

The End

Author: