

Straker's Angels

by Pamela McCaughey (2011)

Based on UFO (1969-70)

Created by Gerry & Sylvia Anderson and Reg Hill

Suggested by: Charlie's Angels TV show (Aaron Spelling - Producer)

Chapter One - 1984

Alec Freeman stood up from the 'responsibility seat' and punched Ed Straker's desk phone, "Yes, Ed? Yes, they're here... one moment..." he switched to the speaker phone, "Go ahead."

Crisp Bostonian tones crackled through the office as Straker's voice said, "Good morning, ladies."

Gay Ellis, Nina Barry and Joan Harrington were seated around the desk, "Good morning, Commander," they chorused.

"As you know," Straker continued, "We've asked for your participation in a special mission. I'll give you the highlights - Alec will fill in the details... BritTek is a top secret government think tank located in northern Scotland. Scientists there work on a variety of hush-hush projects, most of which get passed onto our people at Omega. Our operative there, Jim Clow, has been monitoring UFO activity in the area and is concerned that the aliens may be interested in what is going on at BritTek. One of the big projects at BritTek currently is the development of a long-range subspace communications system for making contact with civilizations outside our own solar system. Obviously the aliens don't want such a project to move forward to completion - if we could communicate with other aliens, we might get assistance from them or join forces with them against the UFO aliens. Your job, ladies, will be to protect the project co-ordinator, Dr. Mookerjee, and ferret out any possible alien obstructions, plants or psychobombs they might utilize to put an end to this all important research. Good luck, Alec will keep me apprised of your progress."

Alec leaned over the desk with a series of thick manilla envelopes, "I've got airline tickets, passports and other paperwork for you all. Due to your advanced degrees and work in solid state electronics and communications, we've selected you for this mission. Your knowledge of such matters will convince him, at least for a time, that you're legitimate research assistants, provided by the government at his request to help the work move along faster."

Gay spoke up, "Is this connected in any way with the SETI project in the United States?"

"Inspired by it, more like," Alec passed out more paper folders to each woman present, "You can swot up on what Dr. Mookerjee's been doing so far - we got this material directly from Jim Clow. He says the doctor's ideas have promise."

"Exactly what kind of UFO activity has been reported in that area?" Joan Harrington wanted to know.

"I was just getting to that - several craft landings have been reported, and Jim confirmed that the chief security officer for BritTek, has disappeared without a trace. He may possibly have been abducted by the aliens - Bill Gordon would know the interior geography of the BritTek installation intimately, know every exit and every office. Jim figures the aliens took Gordon to pump him for information - he'd be their best bet for the best intel about the layout of the place."

"How long will this mission last?" Nina Barry inquired.

"There's a move afoot, on our part, to have Dr. Mookerjee and his work moved to another, safer, location. We need you three to remain with him until he's been transferred and out of alien reach. We are hoping this can be accomplished in two weeks' time. He'll require your protection 24/7 until the new facility is ready. SHADO brass is concerned the aliens, in addition to abducting Bill Gordon, may next choose to take the good doctor - either to confound his research, or to find out just how close he really is to project completion."

"As his research assistants, we can certainly spend a lot of hours a day with him, but at night..." Gay

began.

Alec cut her off, "This is where it gets dicey. We need one of you to... get personal with the good doctor. He thinks he's working for the British government, but he's actually working for us. He can't know why you're really there. And he can never find out about the real aliens and their interest in him and his work. One of you has to establish a relationship with him, so someone will be with him all the time, the other two backing the primary up."

The ladies sat back in their chairs, digesting that last revelation. They were toughened to fighting marauding aliens, not sleeping with egg-headed scientists.

"So... do I have a volunteer?" Alec smiled gamely.

After furtively glancing at each other, none of the three spoke up.

Finally, Alec continued, "Gay, I'm afraid that you got the short straw when this mission was planned. The task is yours."

Joan and Nina looked relieved. Gay sighed, "I'll just close my eyes and do it for my country."

"Dr. Mookerjee? Your new research assistants are here..." the dowdy secretary with the pen shoved through her bun poked her head around the door into the doctor's private office.

"Yes, please send them in now," came the voice from inside with a clipped British accent.

Looking them up and down one last time, the secretary ushered them in and removed herself, without closing the door.

The ladies filed in. Seated behind a desk covered with paperwork, was Dr. Passim Mookerjee. He stood up to greet them, "At last! I've been pressing rather hard to get more research people!"

Of above average height for an Indian, the doctor peered out over his dark rimmed glasses, with melting chocolate brown eyes and a perfect white smile. He was handsome in that way attractive men were, who did not realize their own good looks. Joan and Nina cast quick amused glances at Gay - lucky girl!

Joan extended her hand to his, "I'm really looking forward to working with you, sir."

"As am I," Nina Barry echoed, also shaking hands.

Gay was the last to greet him, "This is quite a facility here."

Dr. Mookerjee gestured for them to be seated, "As you're probably aware, BritTek is a government funded institution, which is probably why we never get as much money as we ask for," he chuckled, "Your security clearances just came through this morning, so there won't be any problems with that. I understand from your files you've all been involved in solid state electronics and other communications formats for some time."

"We received this posting only a few days ago, Doctor," Gay replied, "We've only had the smallest of exposure to your materials on the work."

"Yes, I know. We have to be very careful with this project. If word ever leaked out to hostile nations we were working on interstellar communications, there could be serious repercussions. The Americans have been working on the SETI project and they seem to think they have the corner on the market for such things."

"I didn't realize the Americans were considered hostile," said Joan.

"Under most circumstances, the Americans are our allies. But I can guarantee you if they were working on the same thing we are, they wouldn't share their information. This is a project which could have global impact, if and when we manage to contact aliens from another solar system. It is imperative that it remain top secret."

"We were told we'd be living on site?" Nina asked.

"Yes, that is quite true. We've devoted one whole wing of our facility here to living quarters, cafeteria, a small gymnasium and an entertainment room. Ms. Parsons, my secretary, will take you over there and let you get settled in. I'd like to see you back at my lab at 1300 hours to begin orientation. We have a lot to do ladies!"

He buzzed the secretary, "Ms Parsons? The ladies are ready to go over to the living quarters, and please show them the cafeteria - I'm sure they'd like to get a bite to eat before we start to work."

"We're going to need a special satellite built in order to boost the power to send a directed radio beam

into outer space. Since our closest 'neighbour' is the Alpha Centauri system, I'd like to try aiming there first, and we'll require a very concentrated carrier wave. We can bounce it off the satellite like a billiard ball being bank-shot into the side pocket," Dr. Mookerjee explained to his three new research assistants, "So, this project is a two-stepper: 1) we have to design the satellite itself; and 2) the equipment necessary to send the directed beam must also be engineered. I spent several months last year examining some of the equipment utilized by the SETI project. I was invited because of my own expertise in this area of study. When I saw what they were working with and what they were doing, I felt the whole idea could be pushed forward. SETI is a listening program. But, we're going to create a means by which we can send out carefully crafted messages to introduce ourselves and see if we can get a dialogue going with whomever answers us."

"Why haven't the Americans tried this?" Nina spoke up, "If they have some of the necessary technology now..."

"From what I understand, the American government doesn't want to spend any more money on SETI. There are many members in their Congress, who feel expenditures of this type are a waste of the taxpayers money, which could be better spent on other matters. They've even been rumoured to have cut NASA's funding by a large percentage. I convinced BritTek to at least put up the development cash. If the project proves possible, we'll get the green light to build the hardware. We seem to have a government, at least for the moment, interested in providing the start up funding."

"So our job is to take the idea from theory to working plans," Gay supplied.

"You go to the head of the class, Ms Ellis," the doctor smiled at her, "To quote that old television show, Mission: Impossible 'the mission, should you choose to accept it', is to create the blueprints and specs for the required equipment and prove it IS viable. Once that's done, we'll be able to lobby for the money to move the plans ahead into full production."

"A very ambitious scheme, Dr. Mookerjee," Gay replied, smiling, "I think I speak for all three of us when I say working on such a project will be considered a rare privilege in our careers."

"Ladies, this project could make it possible for us to create an interface with an alien intelligence. Provided they are friendly, and amenable, such a meeting of minds could benefit the human race in myriad ways, and perhaps even the aliens themselves. We tend to think alien cultures would be more advanced technologically than we ourselves currently are, but what if it proved we were the more advanced race? We could stand to assist the advancement of a sister race, one which would consider itself loyal to us and become our allies. Of course, I have to leave all of this business to the exo-anthropologists and politicians - I'm merely a scientist interested in creating the connection," the doctor smiled back.

Chapter Two

Assigned to three different research shifts, the three SHADO operatives were not surprised when Dr. Mookerjee opted to put Gay Ellis on his own work time period. It seemed that he found her attractive and she was following orders to exploit such an attraction. Their only contact was Jim Clow, because the installation itself was off-limits to most of the world, due to the secret nature of the work being done. Clow, insinuated by BritTek and SHADO as the installation's outside contact, was able to come and go on a daily basis and was therefore able to keep the ladies updated. He sat down beside Gay in the cafeteria, both of them carrying dinner trays.

"Anything new from Alec?" Gay inquired soto voce, helping herself to condiments on the table.

"No, the mission is to continue. We should have our new facility ready for the good doctor and his staff in three more weeks. I hope you can hold on til then."

"What about UFO sightings?"

"That's why I'm making contact - there have been several sightings in this area.. Bill Gordon still hasn't turned up - he's now officially MIA - we think the aliens have probably taken what information they could and disposed of him. The problem with a place like Scotland is that there's all sorts of lochs and lakes for a UFO to submerge and come out only when it's absolutely necessary. The Mobiles are doing a big sweep in this locale to see if they can pick up any traces. The main issue here is for you three to keep this place secure from alien incursion until we can move everyone to the new facility."

"I suppose you can't even tell me where the new facility is being set up?"

Jim shook his head, and forked a piece of steak off his plate, "No, afraid not. Better you don't know anyway. If there is an alien incursion, at least..."

Gay cut him off, "I won't be able to tell them or have them take the information from me, right?"

"It's for your own protection too, Gay."

"I don't see much protection, here, Jim. Nina and Joan and I are watching the doctor like she-hawks. We're trying to keep tabs on him 24/7, just as outlined. But it's not easy. Plus, there's the whole issue of my own situation within this mission."

Jim raised an eyebrow, "Let me guess, you're supposed to make one of the world's top scientists fall in love with you?"

"Just for his own protection, of course."

"Of course," Jim smiled.

"What do we do if there IS an alien incursion? Three of us simply cannot keep this place afloat if they choose to attack us."

"We know that. But you're our canaries in the mine here, you know. That's why you've got the secret transmitters. There are several Mobiles poised to come to your rescue as we speak. But they're keeping some distance right now so as to avoid tipping anyone here off, or scaring them unnecessarily about the security here."

"I'll be glad when this mission is over - I don't like all this MI5 stuff. Never did."

At the end of their work shift, Dr. Mookerjee surprised Gay by shutting down his computer and taking off his lab coat. Usually he worked late, necessitating Gay's working late. She watched him take off his glasses and rub his tired eyes.

"Are you stopping for today?" she asked.

"I need to sleep on the next stage. I'm tired, and I need to face this matter fresh in the morning."

"You've been putting in a lot of hours, sir. You probably need to divert your mind, rest."

Mookerjee smiled up at Gay, "Yes, that's a good idea. I had it in mind to have a good meal and perhaps watch a movie."

"We certainly have the facilities here for that."

"You're probably tired too, would you care to join me?"

Gay had a feeling that was what he'd been working up to, so she modulated her voice to sound surprised, "Well... sir, I wouldn't want to intrude..."

"My name is Passim. I used to call my father 'Sir'," Mookerjee told her, "And, no, you would not be intruding. But, perhaps I am intruding by asking?"

"No, sir... Passim..."

"Good, then it's settled. Let's go down to the cafeteria and order up something delicious!"

The 'something delicious' proved to be a several course Indian meal, starting with a spoon-licking dark daal soup, followed by an entree of Tandoori chicken, naan bread and finishing with a sweet dessert - all washed down with a special thick banana Indian-style drink.

"This was a wonderful meal - I had no idea the cafeteria served ethnic food," Gay observed, laying down her napkin.

"They know I like to have cuisine to remind me of home. I'm always asking for something spicy."

"Well, it certainly was! I must have gone through two carafes of water! But you hardly touched your drink."

"I'm used to the spices, you see," the doctor sat back and regarded Gay shyly, "Still interested in a movie?"

"What titles do we have available?" Gay smiled back.

"I think we have some American films in the library, plus a couple of those old British Hammer horror movies with Christopher Lee and Peter Cushing - they might be good for a chuckle."

"And can we have some popcorn?" Gay could see he was the type who enjoyed a little gentle teasing, "What's a movie without popcorn?"

"I'll see what I can do - microwave popcorn acceptable?"

Fortunately, they ended up choosing "Gandhi", starring Ben Kingsley. It was Gay's choice, not Dr. Mookerjee's, "After all," Gay told him, "I understand Ravi Shankar did the soundtrack at the request of director Richard Attenborough."

The installation's library had a small viewing room with several comfy couches and a DVD machine for watching films during leisure time. While Gay and the doctor did sit on the same couch, she got the distinct impression he wasn't a player - not the kind of fellow who couldn't be trusted. He was obviously interested, but not willing to force his attentions on her. Somewhat of a departure from some of the SHADO pilots she knew who were so testosterone-amped they were all over the female MoonBase operatives. It was rather amusing to be the pursuer rather than the pursued!

As a matter of politeness, Dr. Mookerjee walked Gay back to her room, "Thank you for making my evening a little less lonely," he told her, "My work occupies so much of my time and energies, I often don't take the time to unwind or relax."

Gay smiled, "All work and no play, they say..." she leaned into the doctor and tapped his forehead teasingly with her forefinger, "Makes Dr. Mookerjee a dull boy..."

He smiled back, "You can call me Passim, remember?"

"Passim..." she repeated. This time *he* leaned in, and the kiss was gentle, with a hint of what might come in private. Gay's arms went up around his neck and he pulled her close; he smelled faintly of cinnamon.

"Do you think inter-office romances are dangerous?" he asked softly.

"It depends... sometimes a little danger is a good thing... keeps the blood pumping..." Gay replied, smiling up at him.

"Maybe I should let you turn in for the night... we do have an early morning..."

The invitation in Gay's smile was unmistakable, "I'm very resilient... nothing a double carafe of coffee won't cure tomorrow..." she unlocked her door and held it open suggestively.

There was no hesitation in his eyes as he followed her inside.

Chapter Three

For some odd reason, Gay had the feeling her sister operatives guessed what she had been up to the previous evening, even though she scrupulously remained quiet. This part of the mission had been mandated for her, but after the events of last night, she didn't feel like she needed to divulge what was, after all, a private occurrence. On one level, this had been ordered; but on a personal level, she had mixed feelings. Dr. Mookerjee was an attractive, intelligent man - brilliant really - and she had the vague sensation that she was taking unfair advantage of him.

Upon entering the lab, she found a large coffee cup at her work station, already steaming with fresh java, mixed with cream. Dr. Mookerjee looked up from his own computations, nodded and smiled. Gay returned the smile and quietly sat down to examine the new work he'd placed at her spot.

Joan and Nina were already there, also dressed in their white lab coats, studiously avoiding eye contact, but the atmosphere seemed heavy with something unspoken.

The new work was incredible. The good doctor had been right - sleeping on it had provided him with some new ideas about the special satellites. He had sketched out some rough drawings already, along with specs for power consumption and special solar batteries, to be augmented by another energy system as backup in case the solar system failed. It was all genius.

The work day went along as usual. The three SHADO operatives were immersed in their research and it wasn't until after supper that Gay realized she had not heard from Jim Clow. Passim had asked her to go out for a walk with him - it was nice weather, and there was a small wooded area surrounding the installation. Gay left a note for Joan on her desk to say she'd gone out for a bit...

"How do you find this climate?" Gay asked Passim, trying to make small talk.

He reached for her hand as they walked along, "I don't mind it. There are areas of India where we get the full value of the seasonal changes just as you do here. But, it's true that in the southern states, it can be very hot and humid."

"I've never been to India, but I've been to other semi-tropical locations."

"Oh, someday I shall have to take you there! The history, the cuisine, the culture!" he smiled, "And of course I shall take you to Agra to see the Taj Mahal!"

Gay blushed, "The famous monument to love?"

"Yes, a Moghul king built it when his beloved wife died. It is a wonder of architecture and craftsmanship."

"Do you still have family in India?"

"My parents live in Calcutta. I have several brothers in overseas cities - one doing research in Boston at MIT, in fact."

"No sisters?"

"No sisters. But, my mother was the boss of us all," he chuckled, "And my father claimed he liked it that way!"

"Have they ever tried to arrange a marriage for you?"

"My father would like to see me settled, and my mother keeps mentioning grandchildren, but I've been content with my work - at least up til now," there was a knowing look in his eyes, "Perhaps marriage might be in the cards after all."

"Passim... how would your family feel about you marrying outside your faith?"

He squeezed her hand and stopped her on the path for a moment, "Is that what this conversation is all about?" Passim took her in his arms, "Are you afraid my family will not approve?"

"It had entered... my mind..." Gay replied quietly.

"I told them years ago that it was a distinct possibility, given my work in foreign countries, that I might consider marrying a non-Indian. I do not hold with the idea of arranged marriages - it's outdated and cruel. There are too many abuses of the system - and even though older practices such as doweries are supposed to be outlawed - they go on nonetheless - under the law and under the radar. It's wrong. I won't compromise myself simply to respect values which have long outlived themselves."

Gay felt guilty; she had been instructed to create a relationship with Passim for his own safety and the continuance of his important work. She was beginning to have real feelings for him, and yet she knew he was an assignment. Prevarication was not natural to her. But she could not be honest in this situation. How was she going to ever extricate herself from this situation without causing hurt to both of them...?

The quiet of the woods was soothing - but Gay realized she hadn't heard any birdsong for a good five minutes or more. The quiet had become sinister instead of soothing...

When the red and silver clothed aliens surrounded them, Gay knew why the birds had stopped singing...

Chapter Four

Klaxons sounded inside the installation! Joan and Nina, who'd been carrying weapons inside their clothes, tried to corral as many of the staffers in one area as possible to protect them, "Where the hell is Gay?" Joan bellowed over the noise.

Nina shook her head, "Dr. Mookerjee is missing too!"

One of the staffers, a frightened expression on her face said, "I thought they said they were going outside for a walk?...What's happening? What's going on here?"

"This installation has been entered by unfriendlies! We have to keep things secure!"

Three of the plant's security guards ran in, "It's the greenies!"

Nina nodded - they thought as much, but were still shocked that the aliens would chance such an attack with so many witnesses - unless of course they intended to silence the witnesses as only they knew how!

"Can we get the workers out?" one of the guards asked Joan tensely.

"If we could get them all to an egress point not already entered by the greenies..." she leaned into his ear so he could make out her orders over the blaring noise, "Try to get them to the emergency exit downstairs, and we'll try to keep them busy!" she crawled over to Nina, "Try and secure the computers so the aliens can't get access to the research materials! And try to send a distress call to the mobiles for reinforcements!"

The guard signalled to another, and they started herding the workers down a flight of stairs. Joan and the rest of the guards headed out of the big work room...

It was impossible to miss the cries of distress from other areas of the installation. Joan and the guards knew it meant the aliens had managed to surprise a number of the workers who hadn't made it back to the main room. They were probably dead - the aliens never took prisoners unless they knew they could get them back to their ship for body parts. The boldness of their attack had been a shock.

Where were the Mobiles in all this? Jim Clow had assured Gay privately that Mobiles were waiting not far from the installation to move in should the aliens show up - but so far Joan and Nina felt they were on their own. They had no idea where Gay and Dr. Mookerjee had disappeared to. And the only thing they could do now was to rescue as many of the workers as possible...

Chapter Three

There was a look of shock on Passim's face that Gay knew she would have to answer to somehow. They were herded deeper into the forest by the armed aliens. Gay had a small sidearm, but the aliens had patted them both down and taken it from her. Although Gay and Passim could see the alien faces inside their helmets, the green oxygen liquid they breathed swirled around, distorting their features and adding to their menace.

Passim was further shocked to see the aliens disarm Gay. It was a small weapon, unlike anything he'd seen before - a special SHADO issue weapon carried for its small size. It was also radar proof so the weapons were usually missed going through airport detection devices. That way SHADO and Omega operatives could travel without having their weapons taken from them.

"You have a gun? Why... did you need a gun... here?" Passim whispered as the aliens removed it from Gay, despite her struggles.

"It's a long story, Passim - one I hoped I wouldn't have to explain to you - but our 'company' here has made security an impossibility now." She prayed he wouldn't ask anymore leading questions.

"Who are these people? What do they want? Why do they not talk to us?" he nodded towards the aliens, "Why do they have green liquid inside their helmets? Why do they need helmets?"

"They're after the research at your installation I would guess," Gay told him, trying to keep her answers as non-committal as possible.

They entered a small clearing in the forest and there, covered by foliage and underbrush, was an alien ship. Gay wondered how long it had been there - after all - their ships disintegrated in the earth's atmosphere within 24-48 hours. The aliens prodded them forward with their weapons, and Gay realized that they were expected to enter the ship... how could she protect Dr. Mookerjee with no weapons and no chance of escape?

"Are we glad to see you!" Nina Barry shouted as she saw the first operatives from the SHADO mobiles pouring towards her into the installation. Behind them, she heard the screams and weapons firing that indicated their own people and the aliens were fighting for their lives.

Allan Leslie grinned through his own helmet, "Did somebody call for the cavalry to come over th' hill?" He was accompanied by a dozen other SHADO men, all garbed in heavy combat gear and armed to the teeth, "Is everythin' secure in here?"

"If you mean were we holed up with no chance of survival til you showed up - yes!" Joan Harrington rejoined, crawling out from under a table with her weapon.

"My boys are just cleanin' up things out there - got the greenies on the run - killed most of them - found a couple who'd committed suicide... you ladies in one piece?"

"We're ok, but how about the people out there?" Nina indicated outside their enclosure.

"It ain't pretty. They got some of the folks here at the installation - but we also met a group a' them comin' out just as we came in! There's casualties, but not as bad as it coulda bin!"

"We've got an additional problem - Gay and Dr. Mookerjee have disappeared. Did you find them anywhere here?"

Leslie shook his head, "Nope. Didn't see 'em - just a sec - I'll ask Reg Norris," he flipped on his headset, "Yo, Reg - have you got Gay Ellis or Dr. Mookerjee in that group we met comin' in here?" He listened and then flipped a frequency, "Garrett - I know you're cleanin' up dead greenies - hate ta ask this - did you find Gay Ellis or Dr. Mookerjee among the casualties?"

"They're not in the escaped group and they're not among the dead," Leslie explained, "So, where ya think they got to?"

"One of the other staffers here said she thought they'd left the installation just before the attack."

"What did she mean by 'left the installation'? Ya mean they went out into the forest?" Leslie asked.

Nina nodded, "They went out for a walk..."

Leslie's face went white, "I don't like tha' sound a' this at all..."

Gay Ellis had never seen the interior of an alien ship and she had never wanted to - unless she was taking

prisoners. Now she and Dr. Mookerjee were the prisoners and escape seemed an impossible idea at the present.

The two of them had been placed in a sealed room together. Four walls, a floor and ceiling comprised the "cell", and the aliens had opened a ceiling slot and pushed them down inside. Then the ceiling platform vanished up into the ceiling again, closing so tightly that they could not clearly see the seam where the platform and ceiling became one.

"What do they want with us? Who are these people, Gay?" Dr. Mookerjee was visibly shaken from their treatment at the hands of the aliens.

Gay was not certain how to explain things at this juncture. Considering they were in what appeared an escape-proof part of the alien ship, she realized that perhaps they were being "stored" for the journey back to the alien home world, or perhaps the aliens would kill them for their body parts - neither prospect was going to be easy to convey to the doctor.

"Passim... I have to confess to a certain level of... connivance on the part of Joan, Nina and myself... we were sent to help protect you and your installation from enemy incursion... but the worst has happened and it's rather a... difficult thing to explain..."

"Explain! We've been taken prisoner by some very strange people - they won't even speak to us - what is this all about? Why did our installation need protect? From what? From who?"

"It's the *who* that's harder to explain," Gay took him the shoulders, "Those people out there - who took us prisoners - they're not 'people' in the strictest sense of the word - they're... aliens - aliens from a planet many light years from earth. They've been coming here for some time - helping themselves to our natural resources and our own people. Nina and Joan and I belong to a special organization that has been trying to put an end to their incursions for some time..."

Dr. Mookerjee stopped her with a raised hand, "Aliens! You mean, the kind of intelligent creatures we would have been trying to contact with our finished project?"

"Yes... these aliens are intelligent, Passim, but they are not benign. They don't care about us - we're just cattle to them - you must understand the level of danger we're in here. These aliens take humans - live humans - for their body parts - to replant them in their own aging bodies so they can stay alive!"

He sank to the floor in shock at Gay's last words, "My God... they're cannibals?"

Gay knelt down next to him, "Not exactly - we don't think they actually eat human flesh, but they do cannibalize our bodies for hearts, lungs, livers, whatever their own people need to stay alive. That's what I mean about humans not mattering to them - they don't see us as equals - as equally intelligent beings - they see us a means to an end - to keep themselves alive. They consider themselves as more evolved in every way - technologically especially. Catching them alive has been impossible - therefore interrogation has been impossible, too. We can only determine some of their motives from the dead bodies we've been able to capture and autopsy..."

"Then, their reason for taking us is... to use us, to use us like..." he couldn't go on.

"I know it is a terrible thing to learn, especially now..."

"There is no chance for escape or rescue?"

"I don't even know if anyone at the installation knew we had left, Passim... and since the alien ships can only stay in Earth's atmosphere for 48 hours, these aliens will either have to leave soon, or secrete themselves into a lake or ocean in order to maintain their required cold temperatures."

"So... we're doomed..."

Gay sat down beside him with a thump, "I'm afraid so..."

Reg Norris, Al Leslie and Garrett Landon had left with Nina Barry and Joan Harrington. They were armed to the teeth and followed at a distance by one of the mobiles now freed from its work at the installation. Believing Dr. Mookerjee and Gay Ellis had ventured into the nearby forest, they decided to check it out in case an alien ship was out there too. Why else had they not returned? Were they prisoners? The aliens had to have had several ships in the area, waiting while their people raided the installation, and of course the SHADO personnel knew about the 48 hour limit. The aliens would not leave their own without a means of escape or an assist to escape.

Al Leslie communicated with the mobile asking if they had anything on their radar but often the aliens were able to block such search apparatus with their own technology. His headset came alive and he motioned to the others to get down, "Yeah, whaddya got?" he asked urgently.

"We just had a flicker run across our detection equipment. Could be a malfunction, could be a real bogey. Just thought you should lie low and check it out carefully," replied the mobile's comm officer, "I've just run several diagnostics and so far the equipment checks out."

"Keep us posted, y'hear?" Al admonished her. The others followed his lead and ducked behind trees, scanning the area with binoculars. They were feeling pinned down when a flash of reddish orange passed between some trees. Reg Norris was the first to spot the alien and he waved at the others to take notice. A small skirmish had the alien pinned down by the male members of the squad while Nina Barry informed the mobile of their "catch".

"We gotta keep this alien bastard alive, folks," Al said tersely, looking down through the swirling green liquid at the alien's impassive face. It was never possible to figure out just what they were thinking. It seemed as though even their facial expressions didn't mirror those of Earth, or perhaps they just pretended not to understand human expressions, "He could be our ticket to getting Gay and the Doctor back in one piece!"

Dragging the alien to his feet at gunpoint, Al leaned in to the alien's helmet and said, "I'll bet you *can* understand me, for all you're pretending not to. So here's the deal: if you co-operate with us, we'll keep you alive. No bullshit from you. We know there's one of your ships very close by or else you wouldn't be out on recc patrol. You've got two of our people and we want 'em back - with all their body parts intact, kapeesh?"

The alien flinched slightly as he felt the gun muzzle pressing against his upper back where his spine would meet his neck. He smiled slightly and Al nodded, "Just so's we understand each other... you're gonna take us to your ship. And we're gonna do this nice and easy. No warnings to your buddies, no funny stuff. We might even keep you alive afterwards if you're a good alien."

Gay was still pacing around their small cell, trying to pretend she wasn't upset. She knew she had to keep it together for the doctor. If they both freaked out, neither of them would be able to look for an opportunity of escape if and when their captors returned to check on them. At least the alien ship wasn't under water. That made discovery more possible.

"Do you think they'll come back to check on us?"

"I don't know, Passim. I'm hoping they will because it might afford us some sort of opportunity..."

"To do what...?" Passim seemed resigned.

"They do have their own vulnerabilities. You saw those helmets they wear, with the green liquid? Well, that liquid keeps them alive in our environment, and if you can break the glass or whatever it is in their helmets, we can overpower them. They won't be able to breathe and they'll die in a matter of minutes. It would be our only chance of escape."

"And that all depends on whether they're stupid enough to come near us again."

"OK, I'll be honest, the aliens' ships can only stay in Earth's atmosphere for 48 hours before they explode. We don't know all the whys on this issue. They often submerge in lakes and other watered areas. Geographically speaking, I don't think there are any lakes big enough in the area surrounding the installation to support one of their ships, so that means they'll have to move somehow, somewhere, *soon*."

"So what are our options?"

"We sit and wait, I guess."

Chapter Four

Joan Harrington glanced at her watch. Her forehead puckered nervously as she tried to mentally estimate how long the aliens' ship had been sitting in Earth atmosphere, and how long ago they'd likely captured Gay and Dr. Mookerjee. She knew time was of the essence. And she didn't trust their captured alien to take them on a wild goose chase just to waste time until his comrades could blast off or find a lake to hide in.

Garrett Landon returned from his advance recon a little breathless and a lot excited, "I found it!" he told the others as quietly as possible.

"Where is it?" Nina queried.

"Just over that rise, and down in a small wooded copse of trees. It's fairly well hidden but you can see it no trouble if you know what you're looking for," he glanced over at the alien, "I don't think our little green friend here was being very reliable. At the very least, he's stalling."

Leslie shorted derisively, "Yeah, well his survival depends on his co-operation, so he better *get* co-operatin'." He levelled his weapon at the alien's helmet faceplate, "I want you to signal your pals that you're ready to come in, and you're gonna take us in with ya. I mean it. I'll use this thing before you can rat us out. Your life doesn't mean anymore to us than our lives mean to you and your kind."

If the alien understood Al's comments, he made no sign of recognition. He did eyeball Leslie's weapon, knowing full well the humans knew his most obvious weakness and would exploit it. Not that he really cared. A part of their mission was always to avoid capture. Suicide was their only defence against prolonged capture or possible interrogation. But the moment was not yet. He might be able to help his crewmates fend off the humans once they reached the ship. He was already overdue to return to them, and they'd find that suspicious in itself. Humans were so predictable.

The humans had nudged the alien forward as they approached the spacecraft cautiously. They kept back a bit, using various trees to hide behind. Only Leslie followed the alien directly, his weapon at the ready. As they moved closer to the ship, it was silent. No flaring weapons discharge, no sign that the aliens inside knew they'd been discovered. But that didn't mean they weren't tracking them with their own equipment, so the humans had opted to use the alien as a shield. What they failed to realize was that the aliens wouldn't hesitate to shoot down one of their own simply to avoid capture themselves. Standard Operating Procedure.

By the time they were only yards away from the ship, they could see it in great detail, but there appeared no opening, no hatches, no windows or viewing ports. This they were used to. They knew the aliens' spacecraft were very unusual in that regard.

"If they don't let him in, it's gonna be a stand-off," Al commented, "Cause we're gonna stay right here with this greenie and sooner or later they're gonna have to make a move. They've either gotta take off or blow up. And if they have Gay and the doctor and any other poor shits in there for shipping back to the home world, they don't wanna blow up. Kinda a waste 'a all their efforts so far."

That much was true, but the aliens didn't send one ship out to forage at a time. They sent out dozens all over the world in different places, hedging their bets for "booty" in case some of their ships were shot down or captured. They played the laws of averages and the aliens knew they could always count on some of their own to escape.

After several minutes of silence and no obvious attempt by the aliens to engage their comrade outside, Al Leslie decided to force them to some sort of action. He called up the mobiles, "OK guys, I think we're gonna knock on their door. C'mon up to our location here and get ready to stage an assault on the ship."

It only took a few moments for Mobiles One and Three to make their way across the terrain, riding down over small trees and bushes to make their way over as quickly as possible. SHADO weaponry could and did compromise the aliens' metal on a regular basis, but with time counting down to the end of the 48 hours, they didn't know how much time they really had to force the aliens out into the open or to come out for a firefight.

"I want yas to line up that ship and hit it from both sides," Leslie ordered over his headset.

Joan reached out and grabbed Leslie by the arm, "Gay and Dr Mookerjee could still be in there!"

He shook her off, "We don't even know if they're still alive! Our job now isn't rescue, it's keepin' this damn ship from takin' off!"

Chastened, Joan realized Al was right but it caused a lump in her throat to think not only that Gay and

the Doctor could be dead, but the horrible death they might have been subjected to in the aliens' quest to harvest more body parts. She shuddered quietly and felt a righteous anger boil up in her chest: the green bastards! Let's get them! Let's get them for Gay and Dr. Mookerjee and all the other innocent humans who'd fallen prey to the aliens' rapacious need for regeneration!

Just at that second, the two Mobiles opened fire, using their laser cannons to strike at the ship's outer hull. These weapons were not unlike those used on the SkyDiver aircraft. They pounded the spacecraft repeatedly, trying to create as much damage as possible...

Inside that spacecraft, Gay and Passim felt the blows striking the outer hull.

"What's happening?" Dr. Mookerjee asked, failing to keep his balance on the shifting floor.

"It feels like we're under attack!" Gay told him.

"Who'd be attacking this ship?"

"It has to be our guys, Passim, the aliens don't attack each other! There could be several Mobiles out there firing at us. They're likely trying to force the aliens out. I doubt if they could take off effectively in this barrage!"

"But, don't they know we're in here?"

Remembering SOP, Gay replied, "They may have guessed we were captured, but they have to assume we've already been killed by the aliens. Their job now is to keep the ship from leaving Earth and/or to destroy it," she saw the stricken look on his face, "I'm sorry Passim, but we may not make it out of here alive, one way or the other..."

The captured alien tried to take down Al Leslie, but got his faceplate shot out for his actions. He dropped to the grass, leaking the live giving green fluid all the aliens depended on. As much as all SHADO personnel wanted to capture live aliens, that rule was usually overlooked when human lives were in danger. As it turns out, the skirmish was just the thing needed to move the aliens inside the ship to action.

A hatch, which had been all but invisible on the side of the alien ship, opened up and three aliens rushed out, firing weapons at the humans on the ground and a fourth one was trying to set up what looked like an alien version of a rocket launcher - probably a weapon to be used against the Mobiles.

Leslie waved his people forward and a firefight took place, with both aliens and humans diving for cover behind trees and large stones outside the ship. The humans had them pinned down, but the need to stop the alien with the rocket launcher was vital.

"I'll take that alien with the launcher, you guys get the rest!" Leslie ordered the others, cutting out from behind his rock and somersaulting closer so he could flatten himself against the ground. He crawled along on his belly, trying to get closer while the alien was distracted trying to load and aim. He was so taken with the action up front he didn't see Leslie come from behind and put a bullet from a special pistol into the back of his spine. The alien dropped like a marionette whose strings had been cut, and Leslie took possession of the launcher. Although he'd never seen one like it before, he immediately aimed it back at the alien ship and was rewarded with a gaping hole in the hull near the ground upon which it was situated...

The explosion was deafening, and Gay and Passim felt themselves thrown against a bulkhead, suddenly sprawling on the floor. Through the din, they heard a creaking sound above their heads and watched, open-mouthed, as the elevator that had dumped them into their holding cell earlier, started to descend. They choked on the smoke, but were alert enough to double team the alien who staggered off the elevator, weapon in hand. If his intentions had been to finish them off, he was thwarted, as the pair jumped him front and back, disarmed him and threw him down. They left him there, possibly unconscious from their attack, and clambered onto the elevator disk to make the trip to the upper level of the alien ship...

The SHADO people had made quick work of the remaining aliens outside and started climbing into the open hatch to look for survivors. It was then that they met Gay and Passim, still coughing from the smoke inside, trying to find their way out through the broken and wrecked interior. Alien equipment was covered in small fires, and the smoke was a greenish grey haze that at first impeded their sight and their breath.

"Are you alright?" Nina grabbed Gay to take her outside, while Reg Norris dragged Passim along behind.

Gay nodded, still coughing from the smoke and the effort of subduing the alien in their cell. The operatives got them away from the ship, laying them down behind some trees, while the unit's medic started to give them oxygen from tiny one person face masks.

"There's... there's an alien... in the bottom of the ship... we overpowered him... but he could still be alive..." Gay managed between long intakes of fresh air from her mask.

"A couple of our guys are still in there trying to salvage equipment, they'll find him if he's there," Joan replied. She recalibrated her headset and told someone to look out for an alien inside the ship.

At that moment, Garrett Landon and two other SHADO operatives came racing out of the ship, dragging the alien with them. The ship was beginning to make an odd humming, and to glow ominously.

"Everybody get as far away as you can!" Garrett bellowed above the noise, "She's gonna blow!" evidently the 48 hours was just ending and the ship would now self destruct!

Putting their heads down and covering their ears, the operatives all cowered behind trees and rocks, while the Mobiles backed out of the area at double speed. With a tremendous scream, the alien ship tore itself to pieces, leaving nothing more than a smoking hole in the ground...

Epilogue

"Alec was just telling me all about your mission! My congratulations, ladies!" the sound of Ed Straker's voice came out of the desk monitor as the three women took their seats in front of their commander's desk. Freeman was sitting there in The Responsibility Seat, grinning like the proverbial cat that ate the cream, pleased as punch that his proteges had been so successful.

"It was a bit hairy, sir, but quite an adventure, all in all," Joan glanced at Gay who was seated beside her.

"I take it Dr. Mookerjee and all his staff at the installation have been through their memory loss program?" Straker asked.

"Oh, yes, Commander, they were all taken to the Hillsborough to be 'debriefed' and treated," Gay replied.

"That's great. Do you think his project is one we should encourage?"

Nina and Joan looked at Gay, mutely asking her to be the one to answer that question.

"I believe the program has merit, sir, and could even prove successful, but in view of our ongoing battle with the aliens, I'm not certain we should be funding anymore technology that will announce who we are and where we are to the rest of the galaxy. We have enough problems as it is," Gay spoke emphatically, "Besides, with the Yanks working on their SETI project, this one here seems a little redundant. And quite possibly more dangerous than simply listening in to the static of space to see if we can detect anything that sounds like the call signals of some intelligent civilization light years away from us."

"So, you think we should cancel funding? How do you think Dr. Mookerjee will take that?" Straker asked.

"He won't like it. This project has been his baby from the start. But he's highly intelligent and adaptable. I think his brilliance could be better utilized in some other areas of his field."

"We'll certainly take that into consideration, Lt. Ellis," Straker's voice was conciliatory, "What kind of assignment would you ladies like to tackle next?"

The End