

Straker Stalker

Based on "UFO" the science-fiction TV series created by
Gerry and Sylvia Anderson and Reg Hill (1969-1970)

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Chapter One

September 1981

"I'm sorry, Miss Corey, but Mr. Straker is not a casting agent. He's a busy man, he doesn't see actresses," Miss Ealand's voice was cold as she remonstrated with the insistent young woman in her office.

"Well, he's gonna fuckin' see me! I didn't come all this way out here to go home without an interview," retorted the actress, her weird green eyes livid with anger.

"You can go down to Central Casting and book with the people down there."

"They can't give me an appointment until next month. I want to see someone right now!"

"That is at their discretion. They're busy too. If I have to call Security, I'll be forced to report this to them. Now, please leave."

Instead of making a graceful exit, Miss Corey leaned over the desk and grabbed Miss Ealand's expensive blouse by the shoulder, "I told you - I want to see Mr. Straker - now!" She tried to pull the SHADO secretary up out of her chair.

Before things came to blows, and Miss Ealand was well trained to handle such physical situations, Straker's office doors opened. The silver-haired commander came out, frigid anger evident in his big blue eyes. He easily twisted Corey's free arm behind her back and pulled her off Miss Ealand, "Call Security at once. They'll deal with this."

Corey was furious, "Let me go! I'll file charges! I'll tell the police you attacked me! I can make plenty of trouble for you!"

Straker's voice was even colder than his eyes, "The only trouble you'll be making is for yourself," at that moment, two armed studio Security guards came in, "She's all yours, gentlemen. As of right now, this woman is persona non grata on this studio - is that understood?"

Corey stared at Straker, "What does that mean?"

Miss Ealand smiled grimly, "It means you're not welcome here, Miss Corey."

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"What the hell was that all about?" Straker asked his long-suffering secretary after the security guards muscled the struggling actress out of the office.

"She came charging in here, furious because she couldn't get an appointment with Central Casting. Apparently, she thought she could do better by speaking with you."

"Who is she?"

"Claire Corey, from her portfolio," Miss Ealand picked the flat case up off her desk, "This is hers."

Straker opened it and flipped through the resume and color photos. He held up several taken of Corey in the nude, "Evidently, she thinks we do porn movies here."

Miss Ealand made a face, "I can see that it gets mailed back to her."

"Don't bother. Just dispose of it. No director in his right mind would hire that creature."

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"I guess she put on quite a show down at Central Casting, too," Alec told his commander, "They were about to call Security when she stormed out of their offices, and didn't realize she was headed to your part of the studio."

"Do we know anything about her?"

Freeman flipped open the portfolio Miss Ealand had turned over to him, "I had Security check the other two studios she listed on her resume. They're fly-by-night operations that specialize in quickie porn movies. Down and dirty, no plots, no big names."

Straker harumphed, "So why did she come here?"

"Don't know - unless she thought it was time to move into real film work. The one spokesman our people talked to said she was loco and they let her go."

"Hardly surprising. The girl has an anger management problem. Well, see to it the front gate has her photo and her ID info - I don't want her coming in here causing anymore trouble. I've got more pressing issues to consider."

"Speaking of that, how are the budget meetings going with General Henderson?"

"Don't ask. The Astrophysical people are worse than Jack Benny when it comes to parting with real cash. Moon Base needs some upgrades to its sensor systems, the *Skydiver* fleet is badly in need of some dry dock work, I want extra funding allocated to our deep sea submersible project, and it's time to start a recruiting drive again. All of those things require massive cash infusions."

"Can't they just read the reports and accept the urgency of all these requirements?"

"With this whole planet in peril, you'd think SHADO's requests would get top priority. The Soviet Union's spending part of their black budget on their incursions into Afghanistan, and they don't want to give Astrophysical any extra. The U.S. wants to divert part of its black budget into this Star Wars project they're developing, and the Brits are still deciding whether to make the Queen pay income tax. None of these issues compares in importance with SHADO's continued mandate."

"When do you have to meet with them again?"

"Tomorrow morning. That's why I'm leaving early today, so I can get some sleep and wake up fresh for another round of bickering!"

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Straker bid good night to Alec, lit up a cigarillo and took his office elevator up to the main level. When he exited, Miss Ealand had gone for the day, and he let himself out with the special security code. He wheeled his pale golden DeLorean out of the parking lot and up to the main gate, where his ID, retinal scan and fingerprints were checked as was habit. Security was tight. It had to be.

The sunshine was still warm that late summer evening. Straker figured a long hot shower and a bite to eat would be appropriate before hitting the sack.

He usually used cruise control on the DeLorean, but tonight he opened her up a bit and sped down the normally quiet country road. The car was one of the few perks to his job as commander of SHADO. A casual glance in the rearview mirror caught his attention. He could see another car, a deep copper colored sports model, pacing him, coming up behind. Quickly.

Shifting into the passing lane, Straker sped around a slower vehicle and pressed down the gas pedal. His DeLorean hit almost 180 KPH, and he figured he'd cleared away from whoever

had been trying to follow him.

Wrong. The car reappeared only moments later, obviously capable of hitting high speeds as well. Straker could barely make out one lone occupant in the vehicle. He gunned his own car forward and watched out of the corner of his eye as the needle on the speedometer crept past 200 KPH, and the scenery flew past the side windows of his car.

The DeLorean was hurtling down the quiet country road faster than Straker had ever pushed her. The other vehicle was keeping up, and closing the gap between itself and his car. A little evasive maneuver was called for - Straker didn't cut back on his speed, but he made a quick shift to the side of the road and the other car went speeding on past him. He slammed on the brakes, did a U-turn and screamed off in the opposite direction.

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"And, you didn't even get a license plate number?" Alec asked, when Straker called him to check in the next day.

"Things were happening too fast for that. All I know is it was a Japanese-made dark copper colored sports model."

"Hell, Ed, that could describe hundreds of foreign cars!"

"I know. I'm not normally this paranoid, but I *know* it was following me."

"Aliens?"

"They've tried that kind of monkey-business before, Alec. Even if they succeeded in killing me, that wouldn't put an end to SHADO. I think they know that by now."

"How are things going in today's round of talks?"

"The way things are, I'd rather face the aliens," Straker's voice was sarcastic.

* * *

Straker turned off the highway onto the thoroughfare which would take him home. Actually, it wasn't a *home* home. It was where he slept when he had to get away from SHADO headquarters for a few hours. The house was plainly furnished, and Straker hadn't bothered upgrading its typical late 70's decorative style. He never spent enough time there to care what kind of carpets or wallpaper were in vogue. The rust-colored shag carpet felt nice on his bare feet and the dark chocolate leather living room furniture was soft to sit on when he was reading reports. Otherwise, he took little interest in the place. An Omega team kept the yard up, cleaned the interior, maintained video and audio equipment, plus intruder alert monitors. Omega was SHADO's sister organization, and mainly concerned with maintaining security.

No plants, no pets, no home-like accouterments cluttered the place. Like its resident, it was ascetic, spare and austere. The one piece of artwork in the house hung over the fireplace mantle - a lonely-looking seascape which Straker took for himself when he and his ex-wife Mary divorced a decade ago. And, Straker rarely lit a fire, either. All the personal fire had gone out of his life with his divorce.

The fax machine in the kitchen had spat out a couple of minor messages - Paul Foster was inquiring about the budget talks, and Lt. Ford was reminding Straker about a code change coming up. Straker shrugged off his Nehru jacket and lit a fresh cigarillo. He threw the leftovers of an Indian curry in a bowl, and fired it into the microwave. He suddenly felt a wave of exhaustion. Maybe it would be nicer to laze in a hot tub of water, rather than have to stand in the shower...

He chased the curry down with a tall glass of iced tea and put the dirty items in the dishwasher. In the bathroom, he ran the whirlpool tub full, and proceeded to get undressed. Still in the prime of his life, Straker's body was slim, but muscular, and he eased down into the

tub, with a cigarillo clenched between his teeth. He caught a quick glance of himself and the cig in the bathroom mirror and was reminded of American president FDR for a moment...

The hot water was soothing, and its swirling action began to take some of the tension out of his body. Straker laid his head back and closed his eyes. It seemed so long since he'd just been able to relax and let his mind wander. As he laid there, the cigarillo burned down, so he took out the butt and threw it into the open toilet bowl. For the first time in days, he actually felt he could doze off...

Crashing glass brought him fully awake. "*What the hell?*" he thought to himself as he scrambled for a towel to wrap around his waist, and clamored out of the warm security of the tub. He padded out to the living room and found the front window shattered, shards of glass lying all over the carpet and the leather furniture. On the floor was a half brick, with a piece of paper wrapped around it.

Straker picked up the phone and punched in the code for his Omega security team.

* * *

Colonel Lake smiled as SHADO's commander paced his living room, still in his towel. She watched the Omega team carefully clean up all the broken glass, examine the projectile which had apparently done the damage, and patrol the outside of the house and its grounds for clues.

"The paper wrapped around the brick is some sort of trade paper for the film industry," Virginia told him, "There's an article about you on the front of it," she pointed out his picture which accompanied the story, "Doesn't do you justice at all," she smiled again at his dishabille.

Straker hitched the towel a little tighter, "Very funny, Colonel Lake. Has it been dusted for fingerprints yet?"

Major Leslie spoke up, "Yeah, we dusted everything for prints, and the guys are out now in the yard and the drive way lookin' for anything to tie this up."

One of the other Omega men came back in, "We've got tire tracks on the soft shoulder on the side of the street across from the house - Reg is making a plaster cast of them right now."

"Any ideas on this?" Straker directed his question to Major Leslie.

Leslie shrugged, "Vandalism. Who knows. If I was a cop I'd ask who your enemies were, but I don't think the aliens would stoop to this kinda thing. A brick through the window has a more earthy connotation to it. Somebody just plain doesn't like you. Piss anyone off lately?"

Straker's expression was grim, "As a matter of fact, yes."

Leslie looked back at him with an "I can believe that" expression, but he said instead, "Give me the details."

* * *

Major Leslie sat down across from Straker in his underground SHADO office, "We tracked down the prints on the papers and the brick that came through your picture window last night." He placed a file in front of the Commander.

"Seems your Miss Corey was busy the other night. Her prints were all over the stuff."

Straker nodded and opened the file folder. There were photos of the plaster tire track, fingerprints match ups, etc, "Alec said she was a small time porn star trying to get into mainstream films."

"Yeah, well, that's just a sideline. Her day job is with ITC, the television company. She's a typist in the traffic department there. We also traced her through motor vehicles and got her license numbers. She owns a copper colored Nissan similar to the one you said followed you home the other night."

"I had her removed by the studio security two days ago. Caused a ruckus with Miss

Ealand. Wouldn't leave the office on her own."

"Any idea why she's got it in for you?"

"She wanted me to tell Central Casting to give her an appointment I guess. Her portfolio and resume got left behind when the security guards ejected her. Alec checked with the porn film companies she'd worked for. One of them said she was trouble and he fired her off the set."

"So you think this is purely studio-related, then?"

"Appears so, Major. What's next?"

"Keep an eye out. There's all kinda nuts in the film industry - you know that. Don't go to the law about this broad. She bothers you again, let us know. We'll fix it."

* * *

The next week went by without incident. The Omega boys replaced Straker's front window and beefed up the house security system immediately.

Straker was busy handling new funding requisitions for the Astrophysical Commission when Miss Ealand buzzed him from upstairs.

"I'm sorry to bother you, sir, but I have a gentleman here who says he has a summons for you," the secretary's voice was strained.

"A summons? For what? I don't have time for this!"

"I know, sir, but he says he has to deliver it personally to you - it's his job to make sure you get it."

Straker smothered a curse, and stubbed out his cigarillo, "Tell him I'll be right up, then."

* * *

"Mr. Edward Straker?" the summons man looked uneasy.

"Yes," Straker spat the affirmative out, while lighting a new cig, "What's this about?"

"I don't read 'em, I just deliver 'em, sir," the fellow handed over the envelope and beat a hasty exit.

Miss Ealand tried to keep typing to cover her curiosity, but she eyed Straker out of her peripheral vision. She saw his face turn white with rage, and then the storm broke.

"Jesus Christ!" Straker threw the envelope and its contents on her desk, "Patch me through to the legal department! Now!"

* * *

Harlington-Straker's top legal eagle, John Pollabauer, finished reading over the summons. He looked up at his boss, "I don't think this is very serious, Ed. After all, there are several witnesses who can testify to the fact that you did not assault her in Miss Ealand's office that day."

"*She* actually assaulted Miss Ealand - I had to drag her off! If she considers what I did assault, well, that must be why she's filing this charge."

"Look, I've seen her type before. It's the same mentality at work with a woman who cries rape when no rape occurred. Since you have witnesses to prove you didn't assault her in the manner she is charging, there has to be another motive at work here."

Straker sat on the end of his desk and lit another cigarillo. He'd gone through half a dozen of them in the last hour, "From what we've been able to find out, she's a wanna-be porn queen whose day job is as a typist at ITC. She drives an imported sports car too rich for her salary, and she's been fired off the set of at least one sleaze shop. Last week she followed me home in a high speed chase and then threw a brick through my front window."

John smiled and leaned back in his chair, "I think I can take care of this summons for you

with little difficulty. This is obviously the work of somebody with a screw loose. Profilers in the United States call these people stalkers - they get up a grudge against some innocent person and then make their lives a living hell with weird phone calls, following them around, invading their lives. It's all a power play - meant to make the person being stalked scared."

"There's just one problem, John, I didn't go to the police about this woman. The Omega boys were handling it for me."

"HmMMM. No problem. I can have one of them pose as a member of the studio's security and say you had them handle it instead of going to the police."

"Allan Leslie was heading up the investigation."

"Right, I'll talk with him and get this thing settled post haste."

* * *

"Well, there's good news and bad news about that summons, Ed," John Pollabauer said into the phone.

"What's the good news?"

"Her lawyer is willing to drop the charges completely."

"Great! What's the bad news?"

"For a price."

"Shit. What is wrong with this woman?"

"She says you injured her arm and she wants you to pay chiropractor and acupuncturist fees, plus a cash penalty for the incident, and court costs."

"What do you advise?"

"Just do it and get her off your back. If you pay all the costs she asks for, then she can't come back and bite you in the ass afterwards."

"John, I didn't assault her. Paying her off says I did."

"Look, what she wants in costs is penny ante to the studio. It's going to cost you more in peace of mind to fight it. Do you really want to get yourself dragged into court over this?"

Straker sighed. He knew his lawyer was right, "OK, John, do it. Get it over with," he tacked on an afterthought, "And, while you're at it, get a restraining order so the bitch can't come after me again."

* * *

Early the next morning, Straker arrived at the Harlington-Straker studio, his old battered briefcase in hand, "Good morning, Miss Ealand," he said cheerfully.

Noting the sour look on his secretary's face, Straker asked, "Is it not a good morning?"

Miss Ealand handed him a copy of a tabloid-style paper, "You've made the front page, sir."

Blinking in consternation, Straker flipped open the paper to see the front. he read the headlines, "Harlington-Straker Exec Demands Oral Sex For Interview With Actress".

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Straker threw the offending tabloid down on John Pollabaur's desk, "I thought we were through with this!"

John picked up the paper and read the headline. He tried to conceal a grin, and took a deep breath, "Ed, I don't know what to say. Honestly. This is right out of left field."

"It's not enough that I have to pay all the costs for something I didn't do, but now I get my name splashed all over the place as a casting couch director! Hell, I doubt if the ink is even dry on the agreement as yet!"

"I was expecting to hear from her lawyer today about it. It was my understanding she was

going to accept your terms. Her lawyer didn't even object to the restraining order you asked for."

"Well, I object! I object to having my name slandered, my front window broken, my reputation impugned! Do something about this!"

"What do you want me to do?"

"Cancel my agreement, for one thing! I'm not paying her so she can tell some phony story to the tabloids and make more money ruining me in the press! If she can afford that Nissan sports car, she doesn't need my petty cash."

"What about the restraining order?"

"Belay that! I want an anti-defamation suit instead. Handle it!"

* * *

Paul Foster poked his head inside Straker's office door, "Is this where I line up for the casting couch?"

Straker's expression was grim, "Not funny, Paul."

Foster grinned, "Oh, come on, Commander. Haven't you ever used that studio head title of yours to score with some chickie?"

"One more crack like that and I'll demote you to swabbing the deck of *Sky One*!"

"I see we don't have a sense of humour about this yet," Paul sat down across from Straker.

"There's nothing humorous about this business at all. I've got to run SHADO and I don't like being distracted with some petty grudge-holding porn queen."

"Is she cute? Maybe I can take her off your hands."

"Just drop it, Paul. I'm not in the mood."

"You wanted to see me?"

"Yes. You said when we were in Dallas last month that you were interested in getting more involved with the work the Omega Corporation does. How would you like to fly to New York and get some first-hand experience?"

Foster's expression brightened, "Fantastic! I didn't think my request would get such quick attention."

"We've had to divert a number of our operatives into field work and we need some expert people in the home office to co-ordinate things. You've already had experience on Moon Base and with the Skydiver subs. I figured you were ready for some MIB work," Straker passed a manila folder over to Foster, "Inside you'll find your signed orders to work at Omega pro tem, a passport, and your Omega ID card. You'll be going as a member of the Harlington-Straker documentary team, doing research for an upcoming program about the computer industry."

* * *

October, 1981

"Do I have to appear in court?"

"You can swear out a statement and have it read in court if you want. I'll be calling a number of witnesses - the two studio security guards, Miss Ealand, the secretaries at Central Casting and Allan Leslie. I'm also going to be subpoenaing the tabloid writer who took the story from Miss Corey, and I'll grill him over how she approached him and what she asked for in payment. Once I submit the evidence about her throwing the brick through your window, and her shady background, it should be a slam-dunk in your favour," John replied, "Do you want any punitive damages?"

"No, only a retraction in the same tabloid that printed her sleazy story, and a side bar

about my counter-suit. If she wants to ruin me in public, she's going to pay for it with her own reputation."

"I'll take care of it. We're booked on the court docket in a few weeks time."

"How were you able to get us a court date so fast?"

"Oh, I have a few favours I can call in now and then."

Chapter Two

Paul was surprised to have an Omega operative meet him at JFK Airport. A very attractive operative, named Denise Feltcher.

"My, you do things up right, here in the Big Apple," Foster mused as they cruised from the airport to downtown NYC in the private Omega Corp. limo.

"We're an up and coming computer company. We have to look the part as well as play the part," Denise told him, "I understand you're interested in MIB field work?"

"I'm interested in everything about Omega. I read some dossiers on the SHADAIR flight over. The company really is engaged in computer development. It's not just a pose, then?"

"Most of our development is for our own purposes, of course, but we do have some lucrative military contracts with 'friendly nations', shall we say," Denise smiled, "Nations which devote large chunks of their annual black budgets to SHADO and Omega. But, we do save the best stuff for our own uses. I'll be taking you on a tour of our facilities once we get there. I think you'll be most favorably impressed."

* * *

An after the tour coffee break took Foster and Denise to the Omega Corporation's cafeteria.

"This is so much more than I realized. I had no idea you had exobiology labs here! And, your metallurgy department is amazing! That gadget in development will actually be able to detect the presence of alien metals and spacecraft?"

"That's the idea. We've also got special cell phones and what we're going to call palm pilots in development as well. As you saw, our R&D division is 24/7."

"And, what department of Omega do you work for?" Paul asked over his coffee cup with a smile.

"I'm in Public Relations. I make sure the public only knows as much about Omega as Omega wants them to know. But, as you can see, over 90 percent of what is in development here never gets to the public. We're still trailing behind companies like MicroSoft on the Dow Jones, but we're finding niche markets for our own stuff."

"Like the military."

"Keeps the tills ringing. We've actually had the boys in brass come to us with proposals for certain new technologies. And, we do our share of...borrowing from other technological sources. For instance, Commander Straker is putting together funding for a prototype deep sea submersible, similar to what the Woods Hole Institute is working on. If the project is a success, he'll put in for the money to build a whole fleet of them. Since the aliens like to hide out in the deep recesses of the Earth's oceans, we have to flush them out where they go. Omega people all over the world have been scouting for just the right blend of ideas to make our own subs even better."

"Sounds like Omega spends as much of its time in industrial espionage as it does in its own development."

"Every source of information is important. If there's something out there of use to us, hey, let's get it. Anything for the cause, you know," she smiled back.

"So when can I get started here?"

"We've got one of Omega's apartments available for you to move into. And, you can start tomorrow morning."

* * *

"Miss Ealand, when did you first meet Claire Corey?" John Pollabauer asked Straker's secretary on the witness stand.

"She came into my office and demanded to see Mr. Straker."

"What did you tell her?"

"I tried to explain that as head of the studio, he did not see actors or actresses, and she should seek an appointment at Central Casting."

"And, how did she react to that information?"

"She became very angry and abusive towards me."

"What did she do or say that indicated this state of mind?"

The opposing lawyer stood up, "I protest. Miss Ealand is not a psychologist. She can't speculate about what was going on inside my client's mind." Claire Corey was seated beside her lawyer, her eyes balefully staring down Miss Ealand, daring her to describe the events of that day. Clad in a short skirt, a low cut top, her face heavy with make-up, and a bimbo pouffed hairstyle, she didn't seem to realize she presented a somewhat unsavory impression to the court.

"That isn't what Mr. Pollabauer is asking, Mr. Irvine," the judge looked back at John, "You may continue."

"Miss Ealand?"

"She began to yell, to use to profanity, and finally, she grabbed my blouse and tried to tear the sleeve."

"Rather excessive for a perfect stranger, wouldn't you say?"

"Objection! He's leading the witness!"

"Stick to your questions, Mr. Pollabauer," the judge warned.

"What happened then?"

"Well, Mr. Straker came out of his office and took care of the situation."

"What do you mean by 'taking care of the situation'?"

"I mean, he called the studio security and two guards came in to escort Miss Corey off the premises."

"The same two security officers who were on the stand earlier this morning?"

"Yes."

"And, did any conversation pass between Miss Corey and Mr. Straker at that time?"

"Yes. He told her to go to Central Casting and she said she'd already been and didn't want to wait a month for an interview. She demanded to see him instead."

"Was it at this point that Miss Corey alleged Mr. Straker assaulted her?"

"He had to pull her off me, yes."

"Do you feel he used excessive force?"

"He restrained her from tearing my blouse, and made her let go of me. I wouldn't say he was excessively forceful."

Lawyer Irvine stood up again, "Objection. My client suffered serious injuries from that assault and has had to seek on-going medical treatment."

"Approach!" the judge intoned. Both Pollabauer and Irvine advanced to the judge's lofty bench. The judge put his hand over the microphone, "Mr. Irvine, it has already been established earlier in these proceedings that your client dropped the charges she originally filed against Mr. Straker. In other words, no charges, no incident. There is no point in bringing it up again. Step back."

"Miss Ealand, did Miss Corey leave something in your office that day?"

"Yes, sir."

"And, what was it?"

"It was a portfolio."

"An artist's portfolio?"

"Well, no. It was the kind that actresses and models carry about with them - there were pictures of Miss Corey inside."

"Oh, yes, pictures," John took up a manila envelope and showed it to the courtroom, "I'd like to enter this envelope of photos as Exhibit 5." With the judge's nod, John continued speaking to Miss Ealand, "I believe you've seen these photos already."

"I have."

"What did you do with them?"

"I turned them and the portfolio over to studio security."

"Why did you do that?"

"Because it was necessary for the security people to know who she was and to deny her entrance to the studio grounds again. Mr. Straker's orders."

With a nice little flourish, John snapped the color photos out of the envelope smartly, "Are these the photos you saw that day?"

Miss Ealand looked down at the photos and nodded, "Yes."

"Can you describe them for me?"

"They're photos of Miss Corey."

"Anything special about them?"

"They're of her...in the nude."

The judge raised an eyebrow, a move which was not lost on either Pollabauer or Irvine.

"Why do you think she was carrying nude photos of herself in her portfolio?"

"Objection!" Irvine stood up, "Personal photos!"

"They were not personal photos, they were part of her resume. Goes to establishing Miss Corey's character, Your Honor," John replied.

The judge waved at Irvine to sit down, "I'll allow this question."

"Our security people found out after that Miss Corey used the photos to get work."

"What kind of work?"

"Well...I suppose you could call it work."

"Don't be coy, Miss Ealand, we're all grown-ups here," John smiled.

"Mr. Leslie in security investigated her and found out that she used the photos to get work in pornographic movies."

The jury's eyes all snapped to the defendant in her short skirt and cleavage.

"That will be all, Miss Ealand."

"Cross examination, Mr. Irvine?" he judge asked.

"No, sir."

"Fine. We'll recess for 30 minutes. Mr. Pollabauer, do you have your next witness ready?"

"Yes, Mr. Leslie is here and ready."

"We'll commence with his testimony after the break."

* * *

"Anyway, I think Al's testimony pretty much clinched it. I asked him about Miss Corey's shady porn career, her following you home, throwing the brick through your front window, we had plaster castings to match her tire tracks, and of course her fingerprints, ad infinitum. At

this point, I think the jury is pretty much on our side. How they vote in this matter, of course, is another story," John told Commander Straker, "I do my summation tomorrow, and I was able to introduce the business about the assault charges being dropped, and her demands for money earlier in the proceedings. I don't think she comes off very well with all the evidence we have against her."

"Just nail her ass to the wall and let's get this thing over with. Were you able to bring up that stuff about stalking?"

"I tried to slip it in but the judge said since there were no police involved in our side of the investigation, we couldn't use that terminology or mention it. I said it was legitimate, considering Mark Chapman stalked John Lennon last year and killed him, but the judge said he didn't see any evidence Corey intended to kill you. I do think the evidence stands on its own, whether the word 'stalker' is used or not."

"Just get that retraction in the tabloid. It's not just me she defamed, it's the whole damn organization. I've even had General Henderson asking about it."

* * *

The Big Apple...

"We've got a 'bite' up in Vermont. Want to come along for the ride?" Denise sat down on the corner of Paul's desk.

"What's a 'bite'?"

"A 'bite' is slang around here for a possible sighting or close encounter, as the Ufologists call them."

"What's up?"

"Posh health spa. Missing persons. Some political big shot being held in seclusion till he's supposed to spill the beans at a Nazi war crimes trial next month in The Hague."

"What do they think happened?"

"The locals are freaked. The body of his mistress was found - carved up like a Christmas turkey. And, he's disappeared entirely."

* * *

"Possible assassination attempt?" Paul asked, as Denise drove them to Vermont.

"Unlikely. Most assassins don't risk taking enough time to tear somebody's body up. Not even the Mafia do that sort of thing unless they've got plenty of time and privacy. Our boys figure this could be the work of aliens."

"You said this man was being held in seclusion at the health spa?"

"Erich von Drammel. He got out of Germany as a young man when the Nazi regime fell in 1945. He offered to turn in some of his escaped Nazi buddies hiding out in Argentina in return for a shorter sentence. Some of the men he fingered were big fish in the Gestapo, involved in the Final Solution against the European Jewish population. The Mossad have been wanting to get them for years. They were all living under assumed identities in South America. Von Drammel helped Interpol capture them all."

"Was he being actively protected? Was his life in danger for turning in the other Nazis?"

"He thought it was. The U.S. government wouldn't touch him with a ten foot pole. They had to get an independent organization to baby-sit him. Group called U.N.C.L.E."

"Where have I heard that name before?"

"Back in the 70's our SHADO boys clashed with them. They're an independent law enforcement agency, with fingers in a lot of international pies. Good agents for the most part. But, when SHADO was first up and running, a couple of them ran afoul of our security system."

Not to mention the actual UFO incident they got themselves involved in and our boys had to save their asses. Commander Straker takes a dim view of independent organizations like UNCLE because they operate under the usual radar, and since they're not part of any national intelligence network, they can't be called off by any government intervention."

"So, in a way, they're sort of like us, then."

"Yes and no. Their own finances come from a variety of international sources, but mostly all commercial and industrial, whereas our funds come from the black budgets of hundreds of nations around the world. Plus, they're mostly involved in political things - assassinations for hire, if necessary, rescue ops for fallen leaders, protection for guys like Von Drammel. They take on a lot of missions the CIA and MI5 wouldn't touch due to political considerations. Because UNCLE doesn't work for any one government, they can do things other intelligence organizations can't - or won't. Back in the 70's, Commander Straker reached a modus vivendi with UNCLE's top brass to share some intelligence. Of course, we don't share anything with them which smacks of our real mandate."

"If UNCLE had two agents working to protect von Drammel, any idea if they're still involved with the case?"

"Our sources indicate the two agents assigned to von Drammel were Illya Kuryakin and Napoleon Solo. We're going to meet up with them at the spa and investigate this together. They would like to find von Drammel alive and deliver him to his trial."

* * *

Meanwhile, back in Jolly Olde...

Straker picked up his phone receiver and heard the voice at the other end say, "It's over, Ed. You've won!"

Relief was written all over Straker's face, "John, how nice to hear those words from you!" he lit up a fresh cigarillo in celebration.

"Miss Corey will be required to pay court costs, arrange for a retraction of her earlier story in the tabloid newspaper and I tacked on another restraining order, just for good measure."

"You have no idea how glad I am this business is finally over, John. Just a pain in the backside. That's all it was."

"Well, you can rest easy now. The jury voted completely to exonerate your reputation, and that of the studio's. One look at her, and they knew what she was all about."

"Once again, you've scored one for the angels! Would you mind sending a copy of the proceedings to General Henderson, collect? He's been hassling me for weeks about this. I just love being able to prove I was right to that old bastard."

* * *

"I hear you've scored a victory in court," Miss Ealand smiled as Straker came up to leave for the evening. She was packing up her own briefcase and preparing to go home herself.

"Yes, John came through once again! he's worth every penny we pay him - and more."

"Well, good on you, sir. I knew we'd win. She had no case against you."

Straker picked up his car phone on the way out and called his favourite Indian restaurant. He ordered a seafood curry, some rice, chapatis, a vegetarian dish and daal soup, and told them he'd pick it up on his way home. When he arrived, they had his food packaged and ready. It was his celebration for the successful court case. Normally very abstemious where his lifestyle was concerned, one of Straker's few concessions to personal appetite was Indian curry. He loved the spicy flavours, the delicate aromas, the intense colors of India's cuisine.

Alec had often teased him that what he really needed was to get a marriage arranged with some beautiful maiden from Calcutta - one who could cook like a dream and not mind being ignored otherwise!

He turned into his driveway, and sat for a moment, savouring the delicious curry fragrances which had scented up the interior of his car. Then, he sighed in anticipation, leaned back into the back seat and extracted the packages. That was the last thing he remembered doing...

* * *

"Jesus, Ed, you scared the shit out of us!"

Still half out of it, Straker recognized Alec's voice, "They got the bullet out of you alright. Thank God Al Leslie was over there checking your intruder alert system!"

The sterile white SHADO hospital room swam into visibility as Straker struggled to regain consciousness, "What are you talking about, Alec?"

"Somebody tried to kill you while you were getting out of your car in your driveway last night!"

Straker's eyes snapped to full focus on hearing those words, "Kill me?"

"Al and the Omega boys are working on it. At least we know it wasn't the aliens. The bullet is of entirely Earth metals."

Alec's cell phone went off, "S'cuse me a moment. Yeah?" he paused to listen to the caller, "Really? You're kidding? You're not? Let me talk to him first. I'll get right back to you."

Freeman turned to Straker, "Al says the shooter may have been your Miss Corey!"

* * *

"Ok, here's the poop on this," Al Leslie sat down in the seat beside Straker's bed, "There were no footprints or tire tracks around your house like the last time. She's too smart for that stuff. But, we got prints off the shell casing in your driveway, and they match hers taken off the brick that came through your window. I ran her through the government firearms system and didn't find any guns registered to her. However, I was talking to John Pollabauer a bit ago and he suggested I check the system for her lawyer's name, Irvine. Turns out Mr. Irvine not only has a gun registered to his name, but it's the same make and caliber of the gun that shot you."

"So you think she got the gun from her lawyer?" Straker asked incredulously.

"Either he gave it to her, or she just took it. Hard to say where a lawyer would stash his own piece."

"The bitch just doesn't give up!"

"I think we're dealing with a real kook here, Commander."

"What did John say? Should we go to the police about it this time?"

"The Omega boys would like to get your permission to handle this case personally."

Straker knew what that meant. The Omega "boys" weren't above eliminating people they perceived as troublemakers, and this one had just about cost their leader his life.

"If she disappears, especially just after losing in court to me, it could cause a lot of bad press, and just come back to haunt us. Turn over all your evidence to the local law and let them handle it. I'll get John in here to oversee the case for our side."

* * *

John opened his briefcase, "Got some really interesting information from a PI snitch I know. Name's Jeff Randall. Been in the business for years. His partner, Marty Hopkirk, died years ago on a case. I asked him to do some checking for me into our Miss Corey, and also her

lawyer, Irvine. Turns out Jeff was already on the case! Irvine's wife knew he was having an affair with someone and hired Jeff to track down the details."

Straker whistled, "This girl gets around!"

"That's not all. Remember the fancy Japanese sports car she drives? Paid for by her sugar daddy, lawyer Irvine. So is her expensive apartment, her wardrobe, and he even got her the job at ITC. Jeff says Irvine has some connection named Eagles at ITC who hired her."

"So, what about the gun? Al Leslie said the gun was registered to Irvine?"

"Yes, that's true. How Claire Corey got the gun is another matter. Irvine has not reported the gun as missing, so either he knew she took it, and would return it, or he isn't even aware the gun is missing as yet."

"I had Al turn over all our evidence to the police."

"I've been talking to them. They're executing a search warrant on Irvine's office and his home, Corey's apartment and her car. It'll likely turn up one of those places."

"Unless it's at the bottom of some river by now."

"Well, we do have her fingerprints on the shell casing. That means whatever gun she used, she loaded it. I doubt if the lawyer was behind all this. But, they're checking him out anyway. Got to cover all the bases."

"Well, they tell me I'll be able to get out of here in a day or so. Will I have to give a statement to the police?"

"I'm afraid you'll have to do just that. It's not like the court situation. They need your sworn testimony. And, once the case does go to court, you might have to make a personal appearance, but we can do it pretty painlessly, I think."

Straker sighed, "John, this is really the limit. I'm so damn tired of the name Claire Corey I could spit."

"Look, Ed, stalkers are crazy. But, crazy like foxes. I think we've got more than enough evidence to put her in jail for this. I'm going to try to get the other court case submitted as evidence, and this time I'm going to see if I can introduce the stalker business. Now, that we've got the police working on it, maybe we can get the Yard to send us one of their profilers as an expert witness."

"You don't think there's any chance she might try for a crazy defense - what do they call it? Not guilty by reason of mental impairment or some such legal shit?"

"Unless she's been seeing a shrink regularly, I don't think there's a basis for that. And, if she tries it, I'll ask for her to be examined by one of our own shrinks."

"Send her to Doug Jackson!" Straker smiled grimly.

"I might just do that," John grinned back, knowing Jackson's reputation.

"Keep me posted. I just want this thing to be over once and for all."

* * *

The Spa in upstate Vermont...

"We had Mr. Waverley contact your people as soon as we found the body. Looked somewhat familiar," Illya Kuryakin explained to Paul and Denise.

"I understand from the topographical maps that there are a few lakes in this area," Denise replied, "Perhaps our perpetrators are hiding out."

Napoleon Solo looked at Paul and Denise, "Look, we know what this is all about - that's why we called you in on this. Ideally, we'd like to find von Drammel alive and able to testify next week. But, if his mistress is dead, I suppose we can figure he's dead too - by association."

"Even if he were found alive, which I doubt very much, we'd have to administer special

drugs to remove all memories of his "visit" with the perps. I can't say how that would affect his ability to testify," Paul explained.

Denise jumped in, "The drugs usually affect short term memories, not those gathered over a longer period. But, Paul's right, we'd have to take him to one of our facilities before giving him back to you for the trial. We just can't risk him talking about any close encounters."

"So our chances of getting von Drammel back alive are pretty slim - what's going on out there? If he and the girl were attacked, what's to stop the perps from attacking other people?"

"That's just it. We have to get out to the location and scout around. If the perps are not hiding in one of the local lakes, they might be up to building a beach-head. Maybe von Drammel and his lady friend stumbled on something they weren't supposed to see. The perps in question here view snoopers as both a security risk and fresh meat."

Ilya made a face of disgust, "Napoleon and I rented us a Jeep vehicle to take us over any terrain. Let's get out there."

* * *

"You're kidding?"

"Her defense is not guilty by reason of mental defect. She's claiming her lover, Irvine, wouldn't leave his wife, and he was in the process of breaking off their affair because she couldn't get into mainstream films. He was apparently tired of paying for her lifestyle and tired of sharing her with her porn movie co-stars. She says when Harlington-Straker refused to see her or give her an interview, she just 'snapped'," John explained.

"Do you believe it?"

"Of course not. Especially in light of the fact Irvine has represented her in all these cases she's been involved in. Jeff Randall says Irvine has had several extra-marital affairs in the past. Miss Corey was just one more in a long line of ladies. But, his wife got antsy this time because of the money he was spending - the fancy car he bought her, expensive apartment, jewelry, clothing, romantic vacations on the Continent, etc. I think Mrs. Irvine thought he might ditch the marriage this time. If she was going to end up divorced, she wanted proof of her husband's infidelity so she could sue for a juicy portion of their assets and alimony. "

"What a rigamarole!" Straker shook his head, "Any news on the gun?"

"Actually, yes. It was found back in Irvine's office. The police tested it, and found not only had it been fired recently, but one bullet was missing from the cylinder. Miss Corey may have wiped the weapon clean, but she obviously didn't even think about the possibility of us finding the spent shell casing with her fingerprints on it in your yard. She's smart, but not that smart."

"What's next?"

"She's been arrested, arraigned and charged, but Irvine had someone else put up the bail to get her out. I think he's trying to distance himself from her at this point, but it's too late. They're interrogating him today. I doubt if he'll corroborate any of her story on being crazy."

"If she's claiming mental defect, can we get her in to see Jackson for our side?"

"I'm going to ask for that, and I might just get it. Because this is a capital case, we'll end up facing a different judge in a higher court."

"Let me know how things develop."

To be continued in "The Not Again Affair".