

The Truth Is Out There

Based on UFO (1969-1970)

Created by Gerry & Sylvia Anderson and Reg Hill

The X-Files (1990-2003)

Created by Chris Carter

Law & Order: Criminal Intent (1990-2006)

Created by Dick Wolf

Chapter One

He tossed and turned, images rising and falling in his dream. He felt hands grasping him, supporting him and finally putting him in his own bed - unusual as he normally slept on the living room sofa in front of the TV. And what was that they said to him? Shakespeare?

Mulder sat up. He was on the couch, the TV blaring away. He blinked in consternation, then he shut off the TV and punched a quick dial number on his cell.

"Scully? It's me. They did it to us again!"

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"This really pisses me off! Every time we get close to that rat bastard Straker and what he's up to, he slips through our fingers and then slips us a dose of amnesia!" Mulder was pacing back and forth in the X-Files tiny basement office.

His auburn haired partner was seated, her hands and fingers steepled as Mulder held forth, "What makes you think so sure of this? It was only a dream...." she replied.

"It wasn't just a dream. I saw what they did to us and it all made sense - except they put me in my bed - I never sleep there - you know that!"

"Well, if you dreamed correctly, how did 'they' manage to erase several weeks of us working a case with the NYPD so effectively?"

"I didn't say anything about the NYPD, Scully....."

"Oh.....shit....."

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The phone rang, "Logan, Major Case Squad."

"This is Fox Mulder - got a minute?"

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"You're never gonna believe this, Bobby," Logan sat down in front of Detective Goran's file folder stacked desk, "Just got off the phone with Agent Mulder. Remember that cold case of mine we were working with him and his partner and they disappeared on us? Looks like Straker and his goons took them back to D.C. and wiped their memories clear - until now."

Goran tilted his head, "Interesting. Sounds rather Mission: Impossible-ish, doesn't it?"

"Yeah, and get this - Mulder and Scully are going to England to get Straker. He's supposed to be the head of a film studio over there."

"Why tell us this?"

"They wanna know if we can get the time to join them overseas to take him down - we've all got something on him we want settled."

"Guess we better talk to the Captain."

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The two FBI agents and their NYPD counterparts were seated in Mulder's hotel room in London, discussing scenarios.

"We've located the Harlington-Straker film studio. It's in a rural area outside of town. Easy to find, but not easy to get access to," Scully explained, "Security there is extremely tight. Orchestrated more like a military complex than a dream factory."

"All visitors are vetted against a log at the front gate, given a special pass and then escorted wherever they're supposed to be going," Mulder added.

Goran replied, "Aren't film studios usually restricted? I mean, with all the fan stalkers and just plain movie gaga nutbars out there, it makes sense a film studio would be very careful about who they let in the front gates."

"Their security staff are armed, Detective, and more numerous than most studios have the payroll for," Scully told him, "The guards carry some pretty strong firepower," she opened her laptop to display a series of digital photos, "We took these covertly the day before you two arrived."

Logan whistled, "Geez - flak jackets! What are they afraid of?"

"That's what begs the question," Mulder nodded, "These guys look like they're outfitted to repel an armed assault. Not quite what you'd expect, considering the context of where they actually are."

"Aren't security guards all regulated by some kind of government legislation about what kind of weapons they're allowed to carry?" Goran was writing down info in his notebook.

"That's true - both here and in the U.S. But these guards aren't your dime store rent-a-jerks. Most of them are former military - from a variety of countries," Scully used the onboard mouse. The screen lit up with the Harlington-Straker homepage, "We Googled them - its a very extensive site, listing all all kinds of projects the studio's currently got in front of the cameras. There's even a blurb there about their security force. But, there is absolutely NO mention of Edward Straker at all."

"So how do we even know he's in there?" Logan shifted in his chair.

Scully clicked her mouse again, "Because we got these photos.....," the four of them watched a montage showing a silver haired Ed Straker passing the security gates and his car disappearing inside the compound.

"So what's our next move?" Goran's hand was poised to keep writing.

"We give Mr. Straker a dose of his own medicine."

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"The easiest way to do this is to nab Straker coming out of the studio. We figured he probably calls in advance to announce himself to security - if he doesn't show up - they'll sound the alarm and it would be harder for us to get out of the area. With Straker missing, the studio might call the local constabulary and use their own security people to cordon off the roads in and out," Mulder continued.

"Straker is a celebrity of sorts - he's a wealthy film executive - any disappearance might be interpreted as a kidnapping - as much a federal offence here in Great Britain as it is in the U.S.," Scully said quietly.

"Which is why we have to cover our tracks as carefully as possible," Mulder looked squarely at the two NYPD detectives, "We'll understand if you want to hop back on the next plane to New York at this point."

Logan and Goran looked at each other, gauging the other's intent. Finally Logan

answered, "We're in. This guy has a lot to answer for."

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"We rented the cottage under an assumed name and paid in Euros. The owner has never seen either of us. She thinks we're Canadian archeologists here to visit Stonehenge and the surrounding countryside. The cottage is big enough for us all to hole up there and private enough that we shouldn't be pestered by the locals," Scully held up a set of keys, "We also paid cash for the rental of an SUV - not the same vehicle we used to sit on the studio the other night."

"How are we going to do this? I'm used to seeing a crime from the outside in," Goran smiled.

Mulder took up the plan, "We're going to ambush him a few miles from the studio after he's left for the day. We watched him the other night just in case he might change his model of travel and use a chauffeured limo, or had an escort, but he doesn't. He drives his own vehicle, a silver BMW. We should be able to stop him, make the grab and head to the cottage to interrogate him."

"We're not going to run him off the road, I hope," Goran commented with concern.

"No, I'm going to wear a wig and pose as a tourist with car trouble. I'll flag him down and act injured - should be long enough for you three to take him. Mulder will drive his car off the road to make it look like Straker had an accident, and wipe it down for prints. Then, we'll leave the scene with our man," Scully told them.

"He's going to put up a fight," Logan suggested.

"That's why we've brought along some insurance," Mulder grinned and held up a small vial marked sodium pentathol.

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It was a cheap wig and itchy, but Scully managed to get it on over her own auburn hair. Riding 'shotgun' with her was Goran - mostly because they were certain Straker had never seen him before.

Mulder and Logan were sitting on the studio from a secluded spot, with their binoculars. They were surprised at how many hours Straker had spent in the film studio compound, arriving around coffee-break time and not exiting until about midnight, when they saw the by now familiar silver BMW stop at the front gate, and then depart down the road. They followed at a discreet distance - just enough to keep his taillights in view, and called ahead to Scully and Goran to be ready.....

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General Edward Straker was tired. He'd spent a coffee-fuelled day coping with a lot of problems, not the least some major ones at SHADO's Mars base. Tom Keith wanted to go back out there to trouble-shoot, but Straker refused to sign his orders because Keith wouldn't take a psych eval. He'd come home totally burned out from his last tour of duty on Mars and it was Jackson's opinion that Keith was still mourning the loss of his ex-wife. Stacy Boyd and Keith had been divorced for some time, but her death during an alien attack on one of the Aries shuttles had affected him more than he was willing to admit. Death was part of the job, which was why personal relationships amongst SHADO and Omega personnel were fraught with so many difficulties. Straker could sympathize with Keith - not knowing if astronaut Tina Kovac still survived as a willing prisoner of the aliens often kept Straker awake at night - but he couldn't send Keith back to Mars before he was ready.

He clicked his keyless door gadget, seated himself behind the wheel, and lit another

cigarillo. It would be a relief to get home, take a nice relaxing bath, spend some quality time with Cleo and her kittens and eat something. Should he call his favourite Indian restaurant for a takeout meal? He pressed the speed-dial number for place, asked for the manager, and said he'd arrive in about 20 mins for a pickup of some jasmine rice and tandoori chicken. That done, he turned on the ignition, wheeled the BMW around and headed for the front gate....

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Straker often found the dark roads surrounding the Harlington-Straker oddly comforting. At this time of night, there was no traffic and he could hit cruise control and enjoy the drive. One of the General's few vices was a fast car. Over his years as SHADO commander, and also as studio boss, he'd had his share of cool cars. Perhaps none had been so perfect for his film exec persona as the gull wing DeLorean he'd driven in the 1980's, but nowadays he found more discreet vehicles fitted him. And, he didn't wear full body suits or Nehru jackets as he'd done back then, either, preferring severe but elegant Versace apparel. With his silver hair and steely blue eyes, he looked the part of the busy film boss, and nobody ever questioned his role at Harlington-Straker.

He could almost taste that tandoori chicken. The General glanced at his Tag Heuer watch, noting that the cats would be wanting their Fancy Feast upon his arrival home. His one tenuous connection to Tina Kovac - Cleo the Siamese cat and her brood of kittens. Cleo had originally been Kovac's pet while she was waiting to give birth to Orion, her human-alien hybrid child. After her disappearance, Straker took Cleo into his own home and kept her - and she presented him with four unusual offspring - the results of Dr. Jackson's unauthorized dabbling with alien and feline DNA samples.

A set of flashing taillights glowed red in the night. Straker was wary. He had to be. A man in his position had to be aware of threats in every situation. However, the car, as he came abreast of it, was swerved to the side of the road, and what appeared to be a woman, was precariously hanging onto the drivers' side door. He could see the deployed airbag showing white in the faint light.

Slowing his BMW, Straker hit the button to roll down the passenger side window, "Are you alright, ma'am?" he called to the staggering female.

"Oh, thank God," a slurred voice replied, "Something ran out in front of me, and I slammed on the brakes - the airbag blew up in my face....."

Feeling chivalrous, Straker parked his car, got out and walked over to the woman, "I have a cell phone, I can call for an ambulance and a tow truck....."

He should have seen it coming. Alarm bells had rung in his head, but his Prince Valiant impulses had gotten the better of him. The last thing he saw as the syringe bit into his neck was the ground coming up at him.....

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"Oh, you're finally awake. Guess we must have used too much of that sodium pentathol on you."

A pretty face swam into Straker's line of sight. A somehow familiar face.....His head was still unsteady, his peripheral vision had yet to come back. He felt himself lying on a comfortable bed, but when he tried to get up, he realized he was restricted. His arms and legs were tied to the four bedpost corners. What was this all about?

The young woman with the auburn hair sat down next to him, "Are you alright? Hungry? Thirsty?"

"What I'd really like is to know what's going on here," Straker couldn't believe how calm

his voice was, considering the situation he found himself in.

"All in good time, Mr. Straker. Just a few ground rules. You aren't gagged because we're in a remote location and nobody would hear you if you did start yelling. You're tied up because we need you to be a captive audience, so to speak. You won't be going very far unless we decide to extradite you. And, of course, we do expect you to answer all our questions - it's up to you whether you do it voluntarily or with a little help from our bottle of sodium pentathol."

"What is it you want to know? I mean, if this is a kidnapping, I'm sure my studio will take care of any.....uh.....financial demands you might make...."

"This doesn't have anything to do with money, sir. This is purely about information."

"What kind of information?"

Another three faces filled the space around the young woman. All men. Then, Straker recognized two of them in particular.

One of the men pulled a chair up to bed and sat down, "Let's start with what you were doing at Shag Harbour in 1967....."

"What's a Shag Harbour?" Straker asked.

"Shag Harbour, Nova Scotia, Canada," Mulder repeated.

"Is that somewhere for Austin Powers to get laid?" the General was employing a time trusted SHADO game of 'silly answers' Monty Python would have been proud of.

"Do you remember threatening a Halifax Herald reporter and having your pals confiscate his photos, not to mention leaving him for dead?"

"What are you talking about?"

"1967 - the alien spacecraft that crashed into Nova Scotian waters and you and the United States Air Force covered it up."

"Sixty-seven? I think I was in California all that year.....all that psychedelic stuff....."

Logan leaned over Mulder's shoulder, "That's ancient history - how about something a little more recent - try 1994 New York City - Paul Foster and Glynnis Baxter. You and your Omega Corporation people made them disappear somehow. You got Foster outta the hospital - and commandeered Glynnis' body before it could make it to Quantico. Were you trying to keep them from selling company secrets?"

"Or did aliens attack them and you were trying to cover that up, too?" Mulder added.

"I don't know what you're talking about - I was at film school in '67.....of course I didn't have the creative genius of a George Lucas or a Steven Spielberg, so I opted to work in the management end of film production....."

"Oh, we know about you being a studio exec," Goran chimed in, "We also know you're the CEO of the Omega Corporation in New York City."

"So a guy can't diversify his business interests?" Straker smiled innocently.

"Except Omega isn't quite what it appears to be, is it? What are you providing to the U.S. military for all those pricey contracts? Must be a very lucrative business arrangement - in fact so lucrative it's definitely worth protecting. Is that why you tried to eliminate Foster and Baxter," Goran asked.

"Yeah, but you managed to swing Foster back into the fold, right? He's a bigshot with Omega now," Logan reasoned, "Do you have him do all your dirty work now?"

Straker tried to shrug his shoulders, "Look, I run a film studio. Harlington died a few years back and I sit in the responsibility seat now. Like I said before, if you money, I'm sure we can work this out - minus the violence."

Scully got up off Straker's bed, "I don't think he's going to answer any of our questions

voluntarily."

Mulder grimaced, "How soon can we use the sodium pentathol on him again?"

"I'd give him another hour or two to make certain we can give him a proper enough dose to unlock his secrets - but not enough to knock him out."

Chapter Two

The SHADO security people found Straker's car within minutes of the vehicle's silent alarm going off. The driver's side door was open and the silver BMW was front end into a tree, but the airbag had not deployed, so the 'accident' looked staged. If another vehicle had been involved, it must have remained on the pavement to avoid leaving tire tread marks. Nothing at the scene screamed 'aliens', so the next theory was a kidnapping based on Straker's film exec persona. They took the BMW back to one of SHADO's nearby forensic labs to be examined.

Security Chief Darrin Poulten leaned his head through the lab door, "Find anything?" he asked the team searching the car for clues.

"Somebody took the time to either wipe the steering wheel down really good, or wore gloves - no usable prints or sweat for DNA testing," Robyn Court told him, "Otherwise, we do have the General's prints, lots of cat hair, and ashes from those noxious cigarillos he smokes. His briefcase was still in the trunk - looks untouched. We don't have his personal security code so we haven't opened it yet."

"The studio hasn't received any ransom demands. If this was a kidnapping for money, they'd have contacted us by now. We've been sitting on this for two hours. We checked his condo - nada - just hungry cats. There was a message on his machine - he never picked up his order of takeout Indian food. The front gate says he signed out as usual when he left. Long range scanners picked up normal night time road traffic in the area. I was hoping you'd have gotten something usable from the car."

"All we can confirm is that there are no alien signatures here. Whoever kidnapped the General must have done so on the basis of his being the studio head."

"I'm just waiting for the download of the local area SID surveillance sat photos to see if we can pick up anything out the ordinary. Make up your reports on the car and e-mail me asap. I've gotta briefing with the higher ups in thirty minutes."

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Allan Leslie sighed. He was so close to retirement and getting that five year teaching package. He'd been alternately with SHADO and her sister organization Omega for almost thirty years. The brass had 'kicked him upstairs' a few months ago, so he didn't have to take on any more assignments personally. He could delegate and supervise - all from the comfort of his air conditioned second level office in SHADO's vast underground complex. Looking back on his varied career, he'd done it all - alien next extermination, personnel extractions, Interceptor flight duty, even two trips to the Mars base. Yeah, retirement was looking good.....and now this.

Leslie was sitting with Security Chief Polten, going over the SID downloads.

"There's the General's car," Darrin pointed to the laptop screen, "He stops to help what looks like a motorist in distress.....you can see three men come out of nowhere and restrain him," using the laptop's mouse controls, he telescoped in on the group surrounding Straker, "You can see one of the men moves the General's car up against the three to set up what will look like an accident. We were only able to get a good look at one face - the woman. Agent Dana Scully of the Federal Bureau of Investigation. We think one of the men with her may be her partner - Agent Fox Mulder. "

"And the other two?"

"No idea as yet."

Leslie shook his head, "Now we know Scully and Mulder are involved, this isn't a

kidnapping for money. Straker had a run-in a couple months ago with these two agents in New York City. We extracted him and did the ol' Shakespeare number on the agents. They're persistent, I'll give 'em that."

"What does the FBI want with the General?"

"It's not the FBI itself, it's Mulder and Scully. We figure they've bin tryin' to connect the dots on Straker for years. The agents run a research program within the FBI called the X-Files. It's an excuse to track down all the supposed alien activity they find out about in the continental United States. We've bin keepin' three steps ahead o' them for a long time. Always got messes cleared up before they arrived. They don't usually leave the U.S. to conduct investigations, but this time they have. And we may not have much time."

"OK, so they have the General - what can they do? If they want information, they wouldn't kill him, right?"

"More likely pump him for the information - interrogate him. They don't want 'im dead - they want 'im to sing like a goddamned canary," Leslie ruminated by chewing his thumb for a moment, "The General can hold out for awhile using SHADO techniques, but if they start puttin' drugs to him or bustin' him up, I don't know how far they'd go to make 'im talk....."

"What do you want to do first?"

"Let's start by checkin' the airlines - see when they came in. Then canvas the hotels - go through the Net and find out if they registered on-line and where. I'll bet my pension they're holed up someplace outside the city now. When you get their hotel, check all the outgoing phone calls from their rooms, the payphones and house phones, check even any payphones out on the street - they had to use a phone to find another location and pay for it. I'll call in Little and Gallant - they're good on this kind of detective work."

* * *

Although he'd been offered food and drink, Straker was wary and didn't consume anything.. SOP for all SHADO and Omega personnel. They'd already threatened to drug him again. He'd finally recognized them all - the two FBI agents and two of NYPD's finest, Robert Goran and Mike Logan. Tenacious as bulldogs - all of them - and not stupid either. They'd obviously planned carefully, and he'd been careless. He cursed himself silently for the hundredth time. He worried about Cleo and her family - had the studio and SHADO security people become aware he was missing by now? How would they find him? And could he keep his captors from getting any answers out of him?

Straker could smell the meal being prepared. It wasn't tandoori chicken, but after almost twelve hours of enforced captivity and hunger, even Cleo's Fancy Feast might have smelled good. Worst of all was going cold turkey from his tobacco fix. He rarely had to spend as many hours ever not smoking. Straker through ruefully of his now deceased friend, Alec Freeman, who's urged him to quit. Freeman ultimately died of cancer brought on by his habit.

For perhaps the millionth time, Straker inspected the ropes holding him to the bed, the room, the ceiling and the misty light slanting in through the window. His captors had made no effort to cover the window, so evidently their claim to be in a remote place was true. The bed was lower than the window, so all he could see was greyish sky and some dirty-looking clouds.

"You're sure you don't want something to eat?" Scully asked him, a dinner plate in her hand, the scent of the hot food too tantalisingly close.

"I'm more concerned about my cats. They expected me home to feed them hours ago," Straker retorted.

"They'll just have to wait, won't they?"

"The police will be looking for me by now," Straker lied.

"Perhaps. Perhaps not. If your studio has alerted them at all, they'll note there's been no ransom call. The way we left your car- head first into a roadside tree - they might just believe you were injured and wandered off into the woods."

"You'll never get out of the country without being caught, you know."

"Oh, we're aware of the ramifications. We have extradition papers here that will enable us to take you back to the States with us. Signed, sealed and you get delivered to New York first and then Washington, DC. My partner is more concerned about your alien-related activities. The rest of us are interested in your Omega Corporation and why Glynnis Baxter ended up dead and Paul Foster nearly so."

"I didn't know what happened to them back then and I still can't tell you. They were our employees. We cared about them - tried to get them back to their families. It was your American authorities who permitted Foster to check out of the hospital and Glynnis' body to disappear."

"But, you must have found Foster somehow yourselves because he not only still works for Omega, he's one of the executives."

Straker sought to tell a half truth with a straight face, "Miss Scully, Foster came to us. He told us he'd been released and what could we do for him? We sent him back to England on a medical leave and when he was better, we sent him back to New York to take up his work again. Simple as that."

"And why did you fail to report this turn of events to the NYPD and the FBI who were all frantically searching for him?"

"We didn't get the chance. You people came roaring after us....."

"Yes, and somehow, your people managed to help us lose several hours of time, and wakeup with no recollection of what had transpired. We only pieced it together much later. Six months ago you had your people do the same thing to us - a more elaborate scheme - but the result was the same - we ended up with our memories wiped of our investigation and you got off scot free to return here to Britain and once more escape justice."

"Justice is a word with many meanings," Straker admonished her, leaning up as far as his ropes would permit him to, "Just see that you don't mistake revenge for justice, my dear."

"Did Omega have Foster and Baxter attacked? Were they stealing company secrets to sell to the highest bidder?"

"Good God, no. Omega is a legitimate company. We don't try to murder people. In fact, I daresay none of our staff would even want to sell company secrets. All our staff are carefully screened - we don't hire anyone with the slightest hint of criminal enterprise in their backgrounds. Plus the salaries and benefits are of the highest order."

"Spoken like a true businessman."

"That's what I am, a business man. I run a film studio and I got involved with Omega from its beginnings. We don't command the monies that Bill Gates does, but we're trying to catch up - someday we will."

"That sounds like a sales pitch, Mr. Straker," Scully smiled.

"Damn right. I stand by everything Omega does."

"That includes all those juicy government contracts for the U.S. military?"

"A lot of companies have government contracts - it's not against the law. Grumman, who supplied the Lunar Excursion Modules for the Apollo moon shots - they made millions. Why shouldn't Omega get a piece of that pie?"

"It depends on what you're supplying to them, I suppose."

"Look, we do everything on the up and up. We supply them with training software and some satellite stuff. It's no big deal, but it's a nice little profit margin and the money gets dumped right back into research and development."

"Except what you supply to the military is considered classified and top secret - we couldn't even get access to it via the Freedom of Information Act. I started to have a whole new respect for Stanton Friedman, let me tell you."

"That designation is controlled by the military, not us. They want to keep everything classified, right down to the nuts and bolts they buy to put their tanks together. It wasn't our choice to have what we sell them considered classified. They made that call - you know the military - they don't want the public to know squat. And part of our continuing deal with them is to keep our mouths shut about what we do for them. It's a small price to pay to keep the money rolling in."

"So how do you explain the disappearance of Glynnis Baxter's body?"

"I can't. I have no idea what happened. We had a devil of a time explaining it to her family. In fact, we paid her family her insurance even though there was no body to bury. If I recall the situation, it was the NYPD who managed to lose the body enroute to Quantico. Y'know, I have wondered if those technicians were the type to sell a body for medical science and pocket the money...."

"Logan says you made a point of being very uncooperative during the whole matter."

"There wasn't much we could do - the ball was in their court - they lost Glynnis' body and then they let Foster check out of the hospital or something. I was never very clear on that. But we have a medical plan for all our staffers and that plan paid for Foster to come home here to Britain and get better."

"So you didn't just slip him out of the country because he was a material witness in a murder case?"

"The poor bloke had been traumatized enough. Plus, how could the authorities conduct a murder investigation or trial without a body or the evidence from it?"

"There are some authorities who say you and your company got rid of Foster so he couldn't talk about what happened - and how Glynnis ended up dead. That your people somehow were responsible for her body disappearing and Foster being released from the hospital without the permission of the NYPD."

"Nothing of the sort. I think I had some of our other executives handle Foster's medical leave and Glynnis' insurance. After all, as sad as it all was, I did have to get back here to run the studio."

"A very convenient exit, one could speculate."

"I've travelled back and forth when it was necessary, but since Omega is so well run, I spend most of my energy at the studio. It's a hands-on thing, making movies."

"Well, you've proven more cooperative than I expected, Mr. Straker. But, I'm not the only one with questions. I'm sure the others will get to you in their own time." Scully handed him a fork, "It's safe, I did not lace the food with drugs."

"Sez you," Straker smiled, took the utensil and sat up as Scully packed the pillows behind him and put the plate on his lap.

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He'd been asleep. The hot food, plus his nervous exhaustion had finally overcome him. He hadn't mentioned his ardent desire for a cigarillo because he knew they could use that as a

bargaining chip against him. He didn't especially want them to be able to exploit his tobacco habit as a weakness.

The window was open a crack. Birdsong drifted in. He'd long ago surmised his captors had brought him to a rural area. His TAG Heuer watch read 4:16 am. Surely the SHADO security people were looking for him by now?

Agent Scully's interrogation had been simple enough that his lies were almost truisms. He hoped he'd sounded convincing when she questioned him about Foster and Baxter. Scully had mentioned the possibility of his extradition back to the United States but she hadn't said on what charges. Had that threat of extradition merely been a hollow promise to make him more cooperative?

Perhaps he dropped off to sleep again, because his next phase of awareness included the scent of freshly brewing coffee. His stomach rumbled in appreciation - if he was home a cup of java would be his first concern - that and feeding Cleo and her furry progeny.

"Mr. Straker, would you like a cup of coffee?" Scully asked as she peeked around the door frame.

"That would be nice, yes," he replied, "I take it black."

When the coffee arrived a few minutes later was brought in by Mike Logan. He fixed Straker's pillows, helped him sit up and held the mug to his lips, "So - feel like talking?"

"Do I have a choice?"

"Not really," Logan pulled up a chair beside the bed, "Dana says you two had quite a chat last night."

"We spoke."

"Your answers sounded rational....even convincing....but I'm not convinced yet. Even if you and your people had nothing to do with what happened to Foster and Baxter - why cover it all up and obstruct our police investigation?"

Straker sighed, "You have to realize the position this whole thing put us in. We have alot of clients and as you know, some of them are 'sensitive' - the U.S. military, for instance. If word of that incident was leaked out to the press - we might have lost valuable contracts - we couldn't afford to lose business or our reputation. Look at the conclusions you and your partner came to - you automatically assumed that Foster and Baxter were stealing company secrets and were attacked to silence them. Omega Corporation had nothing to do with that, but we felt we had to protect ourselves and that's why we tried to keep Foster under wraps."

"That still doesn't explain what happened to Glynnis Baxter's body."

"Your people lost her. We had no recourse. We circled the wagons and called in some favours to try and make it all go away. We were simply trying to clean up the mess."

"Lennie and I called it obstruction of justice."

"Maybe it was the wrong thing to do but it was for the right reasons. Paul Foster was horribly traumatized - it took months of rehab and therapy for him to be able to go back to New York and resume his life and his employment with us. But we as a company stood by him and yes, we rewarded him over time with promotions - but they were based on merit - not on keeping him quiet about what happened."

"Paul Foster was a material witness in a murder investigation."

"Did you have any suspects? Were you likely to? I couldn't see further traumatizing Foster for a criminal investigation that was going nowhere."

"How did you know it was going nowhere - unless you or your people were the ones removing or eliminating all the evidence?"

"We're a computer company, not the CIA - we don't have the resources to do any of what you're suggesting. I hate to say this, but the incompetence of your whole department was responsible for the loss of Glynnis Baxter's body - we could have sued the NYPD on behalf of her family - but we never did. Without her body, there was little proof of her death and yet we paid the full indemnity on her life insurance out to her family - it's a matter of record - go look it up."

Logan sat back in his chair, "So if you people didn't try to kill Foster and Baxter, and the Omega Corporation didn't steal Baxter's body, why were you taking Foster upstate when we followed you?"

"Our staff shrink thought if we could take Foster back to the probably scene of the crime, it might jog his memories and we'd finally be able to find out what happened and help him with therapy."

"You didn't think the police might have been equally interested in those repressed memories of murder?"

"Like I said, we were trying to avoid any legal ramifications so Paul could be sent home to England to recover."

"That still doesn't answer what you did to us up there - you had us drugged....."

"Purely self protection for the company. You and your partner were pushing too hard. We pushed back. We hoped you'd drop the matter after that."

"We didn't have much choice. What you did to us blew our credibility and our investigation to ratshit. What were you doing up there with those kinds of drugs anyway?"

"The shrink had them in case Paul got too agitated. But you'd have never found the perpetrators anyway."

"What makes you so sure of that?"

"Your own investigation - or lack thereof. You were so desperate for theories you decided the victims were guilty of industrial espionage and what happened to them was payback."

"Revenge is always a good motive for murder."

"Not this time. Whoever killed Glynnis Baxter was some sort of twisto, not a company hitman," Straker motioned for another sip of coffee. They sat in silence for a moment.

"By the way, on what charges were you people planning to have me extradited?"

"I think you'll have to talk to Mulder on that one. He's our conspiracy expert."

* * *

After a decent breakfast of hardboiled eggs and toast, Straker had a visit next from Fox Mulder. The FBI agent pulled up the same chair Logan had used.

"I think it's time we had a little tete a tete, Mr. Straker," Mulder's face wore a serious expression. He laid out a recording device and activated it, "And just to show my good faith in your capacity to cooperate, we're going to have a record of our discussion."

It had been much easier to create half truths for Scully and Logan. Any conversation with Mulder was likely to include some very sensitive topics, none of which Straker intended to explain.

"Let's start with your military service record, shall we? We know you were a top USAF officer assigned to a specialized division - why were you sent to Shag Harbour in 1967?"

"I left the military to pursue a personal dream - I wanted to go to film school."

"Records indicate you didn't leave your Airforce posting until 1969."

"I didn't resign my commission. I'm too old for it now, but years ago I was considered a

reservist."

"If you wanted to attend film school and shift careers - why remain even on an inactive status with the military?"

"I remained a reservist to please my father, ok? He was USAF himself and not too thrilled with my decision to change careers." *That much was true*, thought Straker ruefully.

"I can produce a witness who ID'd you as the American military officer who threatened his life and probably ordered his Shag Harbour photos confiscated."

"Look, I've never been to Canada and I have no idea where Shag Harbour is. If someone says I was there in 1967, they're either lying or deluded."

"How did you go from being a film school graduate to running Harlington-Straker studios in less than a year? That doesn't seem possible."

"I had some money to invest and I found Mr. Harlington. His studio was floundering with money problems at the time and he was desperate enough to take me on as his partner. The rest is history, as they say."

"You must have had a considerable amount of cash - how did a USAF officer get enough money to leverage himself a partnership in a film studio?"

"Not that it's any of your business but I received a sizable inheritance from my mother's side of the family."

"Let's fast forward to 1994. What really happened to Foster and Baxter? Their injuries, especially Baxter's, were not the work of black market organ thieves or Satanic cultists. Scully and I have investigated enough similar-looking cases to know this was no random criminal psychopath's work. Carving Glynnis up like that took time and skill. And intimate knowledge of the human body. I know that nothing of this world perpetrated that cruelty on them....." Mulder leaned into Straker's personal space, "You know the NYPD was never going to solve this case because you knew who had done it. Except you couldn't tell the police the truth - that aliens from another planet were responsible for the carnage."

A good offence is always the best defence, so Straker decided to take the argument to Mulder, "I've heard a lot of crazy movie plots in my career but this is the wildest - why don't you write down a synopsis and submit it to our story development department at Harlington-Straker? I promise if you get me out of here, I'll drop it off personally."

Mulder smiled, "How did you way-lay Glynnis Baxter's body? And get Foster spirited out of the hospital? Those tasks were probably easy compared to the Shag Harbour incident when too many people saw pieces of an alien spacecraft and alien bodies being pulled from the water."

"I'll take your word for it that something considered unusual must have happened at this Shag Harbour place but I wasn't there! I was in California, enjoying the climate, the girls and my film studies."

"Why the big cover-up in '94? Why did you take Paul Foster upstate and how did you know exactly where he'd been attacked?"

"I told Detective Logan - our company shrink suggested we take Paul up there to jog his memory. We didn't know where he'd been exactly at all. Just that he was supposed to have been upstate when it happened."

"But how did you know that fact? It wasn't something the police told you, and if Foster's memory was repressed, he himself wouldn't have known where he and Glynnis had been when they were attacked."

"Like I said, the company shrink got some stuff out of Paul - enough to determine

approximately where he and Glynnis were attacked - Paul said they'd been upstate - the assumption was that they were dating and had gone up there to go camping."

"There was no camping equipment found in their car, Mr. Straker."

"I'm not a cop. I just asked the shrink to talk to Paul, see what he could get out of him."

"Who is your company 'shrink', by the way?"

"He isn't with us anymore."

"So, you can still tell me his name."

"Dr. Schroeder." Straker knew the man whose name he gave had passed away many years before, so Mulder would never be able to find him or question him.

"Is he registered with the state of New York?"

"He must have been. I didn't hire him myself."

"Where does he work now?"

"He doesn't - he's dead."

"That's rather convenient for you, now, isn't it?"

"People pass on. It's a fact of life."

"Just like Glynnis Baxter's death was a fact of life?"

Straker was getting pissed off. Baxter's death was an unfortunate occurrence, but when she signed up to work with Omega, she knew she wasn't hiring on with a babysitting service - she was well aware of the dangers of her job - but stopping the aliens was her passion and she gave her life in the line of duty. He turned his head to the wall, "I don't feel like talking anymore."

"Maybe not for now," Mulder informed him, "But, I know the truth is out there - and you are the conduit."

Chapter Three

He knocked briskly on the apartment door several times. When it opened he was greeted by a fairhaired young man. Taking his USAF dress hat off and tucking it securely under his arm, he asked, "Barry Wood?"

"Yes.....," the young man was surprised when Straker pushed past him quickly and entered, "What can I do for you?"

"You can stop writing stories in the Halifax Herald about Shag Harbour for a start."

"It's news. I'm a reporter - that's what I do."

"No, it's not news, it's sensationalism. Your stories have been interfering with a very sensitive military operation."

"You don't think a crashed spacecraft from another planet is news?"

"For a reporter, you're not very well informed. There's no downed UFO out there. We have an underwater listening station - near Shag Harbour - what has been erroneously described as an alien ship has actually been a Russian submarine in distress."

"Look, I talked to reliable witnesses - men who know what they saw, mister.....?"

"My name is of no importance to you. Just listen to what I'm saying: there is no UFO. No alien bodies were recovered. And the Russian sub has since departed for more Soviet-friendly waters. There is no story in Shag Harbour."

"Are you threatening me?" Barry Wood asked, incredulous.

"The United States Air Force doesn't need to threaten, Mr. Wood. You'll find no further witnesses to confirm or deny anything unusual happened in Shag Harbour. So no more stories about UFOs or Russian subs."

"Should I take it to mean you've paid the same kind of visit to those witnesses as you're giving me?"

"I wouldn't infer anything you don't have proof of - Project Blue Book cites the Shag Harbour circumstance as just one more case of mass hysteria about so-called alien ships landing."

"This was for real and we both know it - or else you wouldn't be here. It's a known fact that the military cover up such events."

"Mr. Wood, how much do you like your job?"

"Another threat?"

"You won't be employed with the Halifax Herald or any other newspaper in Canada or in the U.S. if you persist in reporting this delusion."

"So it's shut up or be fired?"

"Or worse."

"Even your own constitution guarantees freedom of the press."

"Nominally, yes. But, there can be extenuating circumstances. The reading public is not on a need to know basis."

"If there really was a downed alien spacecraft at Shag Harbour, the public deserves to know the truth," Barry temporized.

"No, they don't. Reportage of this kind merely fosters anxiety and paranoia in the public. That's not reporting - that's irresponsible fear mongering."

"And, you don't think the public can handle this kind of truth, is that it?"

"Especially if there never was a UFO incident to begin with."

"So you've managed to cover it all up and silence the witnesses to an event of

momentous importance."

"I've taken the liberty of speaking with your boss at the Halifax Herald. He assures me your newspaper won't be printing anymore bogus UFO reports. Take care, Mr. Wood. We'll be watching you." With that, Straker put on his hat and left the reporter's apartment.

And they did watch Barry Wood. When he attempted to recover his camera and the photos of the dead alien's body from the Shag Harbour fisherman, operatives confiscated them - but not without causing Wood some major injuries - he had put up a fight. Those pictures would have been worth a great deal of money to a reporter. Oddly enough, it had never been about the money with Barry Wood - it was the facts of the case he wanted to protect and report.

For Straker, Barry Wood was just one in a very long line of people who needed to be silenced or neutralized in the last 40 years, as SHADO and Omega got up and running to battle the alien menace in secret.

Project Blue Book had been discontinued just as SHADO and Omega were being formed. The multi-national consortium responsible for dunning the twin defence organizations from their black budgets agreed to continue debunking all UFO sightings to maintain the needed level of secrecy. Military leaders the world over fell into line and provided privately all reportage of alien activity so SHADO and Omega could neutralize them. Both organizations received carte blanche to cross borders and international airspace in pursuit of the aliens.

Shag Harbour was ancient history for Straker. Until Agent Mulder began his quest to question Straker about it, he hadn't even remembered the incident. Now the FBI agent wanted to call him to account for something that happened a lifetime ago. Straker should have been indignant perhaps that a young pup like Mulder would even dare to question him. But the work of SHADO and Omega was so vital that protecting them by his own words and deeds was second nature to him. So far his half-truths had bought him some time before his captors opted to utilize the threatened sodium pentathol. There were other drugs on the market - easily acquired - such as rohypnol - the so-called 'date rape' drug. SHADO and Omega used a combo of an even more powerful drug and post hypnotic suggestion to silence witnesses and others who'd seen too much or asked too many questions.

In the earliest years the two organizations had often been forced to compromise or actually eliminate those who posed a danger to their code of strict secrecy. It was ruthlessness at its worst, but Straker learned to rationalize it as being a necessary, though deplorable, evil. How many careers and lives had been ruined in the name of protecting their work? Until SHADO had been forced to assimilate Tina Kovac and her space shuttle crew, after they'd seen a space battle with the aliens, Straker hadn't realized the impact their secret policies had on the lives of individuals. A single life meant little, stacked against the urgency of halting the alien menace.

Tina Kovac's intrusion into his life had been a turning point. She'd made him remember the pain of sacrificing his marriage and losing his son Johnnie to the 'great god SHADO'. He watched her struggle with losing her own family, her identity, her own personal dreams. And when SHADO further unknowingly sacrificed her to the alien breeding program, she captured Straker's heart with her courage and spirit.

Now after 40 years of living for his work alone, Straker had been forced to reflect back on his life. Mulder's questions reminded him of his own youthful ruthlessness. Had his ex-wife Mary known the truth about him, she might not have even married him. After the divorce, Straker had shut off his own feelings to devote himself purely to the needs of his position as

commander of SHADO.

His thoughts were interrupted by a visitor. Detective Robert Goran pulled up the much used chair and sat down, a notebook and pen in his hand.

"Agent Mulder said you needed a break from talking, so I waited awhile. I've been listening in on all your conversations. You're quite an erudite man. MIT graduate, USAF officer - high ranking. You're smart enough to come up with whatever you think people want to hear, aren't you?"

"I'm just trying to get the truth across to them."

"Truth is a fluid thing, isn't it?" Goran smiled, "It means different things to different people. For instance, I'm sure you've been telling my compatriots one version of the 'truth' while keeping another, more vital truth, to yourself."

Straker recognized that Robert Goran, although he'd remained in the background up till now, was going to be his worthiest opponent yet, "I'm a simple man, Detective. I'm just telling the simple truth."

"Do you know why there's been no further use of the sodium pentathol on you? Because I asked them not to. I wanted to know what you'd say on your own - and you haven't disappointed. You've woven a reasonably believable web of half truths and out and out lies. In fact, your performance has been commendable."

Pretending to be aggrieved, Straker replied, "I've been most forthcoming, considering the criminal action you four have chosen to pursue. I could have refused to answer any questions."

"And risk us giving you another dose of sodium pentathol? No. You've been stalling us for days now. I don't think you're a criminal yourself, Mr. Straker, but I do believe that you've done your share of criminal acts for what you perceive to be the greater purpose. You burn with a zealot's fire - leading me to suspect you are much more than a studio executive slash computer company president."

"I can't help it if you four want to read something more into what I've already told you."

"You're not a pathological liar - you lie because you have to. You've been doing it for years. I've seen enough real criminals to know the difference. But you intrigue me, Mr. Straker, you really do. Because at bottom, you're a decent person."

It was Straker's turn to smile, "What is this - good cop, bad cop?"

"Not at all. I just have a different approach than my colleagues. And I know your stalling tactics have been to give whoever it is you know will come after you more time."

"I would hope the police are looking for me."

"Not the local police. Somebody else. Someone with the power and skill to find you and perhaps deal very summararily with us. You haven't put up any struggle. You haven't tried to escape. That's because you know you'll be rescued shortly."

"I can vouch for you with the police that I haven't been abused, but kidnapping is as much a criminal offence in here in Britain as it is in the U.S."

"We're well aware of that. But we also took the risk because we were looking for the truth, and some form of that truth surrounds you."

Straker didn't know what to make of a philosophizing cop. It was certainly true that when SHADO's extraction team found him, they might not be in a friendly mood. Was Goran's insight genuine or just a series of shrewd guesses? He seemed far more quiet and introspective than his fellow cop Logan or the two FBI officers. He was different.

"Are you telling me you risked being convicted of kidnapping merely to find out what law enforcement agency would come after me?" Straker asked him.

"That was a large part of our plan from the beginning. Getting you to talk or tell us anything valuable was going to be frosting on the cake. But, we weren't holding our breaths on that. Scully and Mulder felt sure that by taking you, we'd be attracting the attention of something or someone.....bigger."

Straker was suddenly seized with a strange emotion - fear. Not for himself. For his captors. In their search for the so-called truth, they'd put themselves behind the eight-ball. SHADO's extraction teams, especially where Straker's safety was concerned, tended to shoot first and ask questions later.

"Detective Goran, I feel it's only fair to warn you that British police do carry weapons."

"But, like all police forces, if in fact it really is the police who rescue you, they won't shoot four unarmed people - especially if we surrender ourselves."

I wouldn't be so sure of that, Straker thought, These men are more akin to a Navy SEALs special forces team than a squad of policemen. He knew the SHADO extraction people would be wearing modern combat garb and carrying some no-nonsense weaponry.

"Do I detect a note of concern from you? Does this mean our hunch was right?" Goran shifted in his chair and lifted his hand, palm upright, "Are we in any actual danger?"

Straker considered. It was no longer a cat and mouse game, pitting his believable lies against their skepticism. Their lives were much more in danger than his had ever been, for they had no reason to harm him and the extraction team did.

"Any rescue team, would, one would think, be interested in keeping us alive to stand trial for kidnapping you. Why would the police rescue you and kill us - it would be against all police procedure in any country."

"Do you want to take that gamble?" Straker had to be very careful still of whatever he said.

"So you're suggesting, ever so carefully, that it won't be the police who effect a rescue?"

"I just think it might be a good idea to vacate this place and leave me here so that whoever does come to get me won't have a chance to make the decision about what to do with you."

"You know, Agent Mulder told us that someone close to you managed to kidnap them, dose them with some sort of drug, and put them home in their own beds. They were six months before the figured out what had been done to them. That doesn't sound like something any police force would do, let alone have the resources to accomplish."

"I wouldn't know anything about that," Straker responded stiffly, "I understand Agent Mulder also claims to have been abducted by aliens."

Goran smiled, "Yes, I know, Agent Mulder has some very... interesting personal issues. But that aside, he seems to have been bang on right about you in many regards. You're not just what you appear to be, and from what has happened to many people who cross swords with you, you do seem to be able to marshall some amazing results. You're like teflon - nothing sticks to you. State governors and high-ranking Pentagon people back you up and make things 'go away' for you. Not too many people can wield that kind of power. I think you have the power to make anything happen or to silence anyone you want."

"You're giving me waaaay too much credit, Detective."

"Oh, no, I'm probably not giving you enough credit. We think this power of yours reaches across international borders, all the way up to the leaders of nations. But why is that? What is so special about you that the very mention of your name in some circles can work miracles?"

Straker had never heard his own power and position summarized so succinctly before. It

wasn't as though he revelled in his power. It was enough for him to know he could do whatever he had to do, call in any favour, all in the same of fighting the aliens.

"I know that you four have hatched this idea that I'm someone special, but I have to tell you you're mistaken. As a business man it would be wonderful to have the ear of highly-placed people, but that's not the case. Hell, even my cats don't do what I want them to do," he finished with a chuckle.

Goran smiled again at Straker's mention of his pets, "You have cats? Cats are very intellectual animals. Smart. Secretive. Always watching. I'm not surprised your pet of choice is the feline. You're rather cat-like yourself, you know. You're just toying with us, spinning things out until the denouement, right? And, then, when the time is right, you'll pounce on us."

Was Goran just trying to be funny or sarcastic? It was hard to tell with him. Like Straker himself, he had an unreadable character in some regards. He also knew how to string someone along.

"Well, this cat is feeling tired again, so I think I'd like to have a cat-nap," Straker told him, thinking it was better to end this interview now. It was going nowhere and he had the sense Goran was just playing with him, cat-like, in the hopes of observing more.

"Suit yourself. We can talk again later."

* * *

Al Leslie checked his cellphone and was rewarded with a text message from Darrin Poulten. He punched in Darrin's number and waited for him to pick up, "Got somethin' for me?" Al asked him.

"Yes. Outgoing calls from Agent Mulder's hotel room gave us the number of a woman in Salisbury near Stonehenge. I checked - this lady rents out cottages in the area to tourists. Little and Gallant are tracking the properties by Satellite right now. The locations should pop momentarily and we'll have the one they're holding Straker in."

"I want this done as low key as possible," Al admonished him, "Dress our guys like British police officers - we don't need the Yanks to see anything unusual. Include a medic in your team in case of injuries. And report back to me asap when you recover the General."

"What's our MO on the Americans?" Darrin inquired.

"Gas 'em good, administer a hefty dose of amnesia drug to them all and get the hell outta there."

* * *

The first miniature gas canister was expertly launched by Claude Gallant through the tiny opening between the raised window and the sash. Others penetrated the mail slot on the front door and dropped silently down the chimney to land unnoticed in the hearth. All exuded a scentless, non-smoking knock out gas. Within moments, the occupants of the cottage succumbed to something they couldn't see or smell, and once the extraction team was sure they were all down, they easily entered the place in search of Straker.

A quick sniff of antidote and Straker woke to find Little and Gallant untying him from his bed-prison. He recognized their eyes inside their breathing masks.

"How are my cats?" he asked, still groggy.

"Well fed and sassy as ever," Little's muffled voice came through his mask.

Darrin stuck his head inside the door and tore off his own headgear, "OK, people let's move it! I've got our friends here dosed up - let's go!"

Gallant and Little took Straker up and got him outside - an unmarked van drove up the lane and they piled in.

Poulten flipped open his cell, "Al? Yeah - we got him - we're on our way in. Our American pals are down for the count. No problems. Easy job."

Epilogue

Al Leslie stopped by Straker's office with a copy of the morning newspaper, "Thought you might enjoy the headline on page twelve," he grinned.

"Four American tourists found," the General read the black headline and continued, "Local Salisbury constables discovered four American tourists unconscious in a rental cottage near Stonehenge yesterday. Identified as two FBI agents and two detectives from New York City, the four did not appear to have any memory as to why they were there, or how they had travelled. The owner of the cottage told police she believed she was renting the place to a group of archeologists on holiday. Police are investigating the case but have no leads at present," Straker looked up, "Commendations on the work of your extraction team, Al."

"You kinda gave us a scare."

"I've made a full deposition and e-mailed it to your account. Those four were hell bent to get me to talk, but I staved them off with a few good lies and some half truths."

"They're being sent home tomorrow - we hacked into the local area police computer system. They're persistent buggers, I'll give them that."

"I've already made an appointment with the advanced medical department to have a sub-cutaneous transponder inserted as per your suggestion. I feel foolish enough about this incident without having to have an electronic 'dog collar'"

"For your own protection, General. It took us three days to track you down this time - with the transponder we'd be able to find you in mere minutes the next time - but there won't be a next time."

"Pass on my thanks to Pete Little for looking after Cleo and her kittens for me."

"No worries. Pete loves animals, sir," Al saluted and started for the exit.

"Al, wait up a minute. I'd like to talk to you about something else," he waved Al to a seat in front of his desk.

Leslie took a seat.

"I know you're scheduled for retirement and a teaching package shortly. And you richly deserve it, after all your years of service. But, I have a proposition for you. Darrin Poulten is being transferred to the Mars Base. Would you consider staying on with us as SHADO's chief of security for Great Britain?"

Al chewed his thumb for a moment, ruminating. Finally he said, "Ah well, I don't think I'm really ready to be put out to pasture yet. Yeah, I'll do it."

"Good man," Straker rose and leaned across his desk to shake hands with Leslie, "Your new assignment starts Monday. And, Al?"

Leslie turned back from the sliding doors, "Thanks for saving my ass - again."

Straker sat back in his chair, lit up a much cherished cigarillo and reflected. For 40 years he'd watched his step, because the aliens had made repeated assassination attempts on his life. Their motive was clear. But, he'd underestimated the motives of his own kind, who were willing to trade their lives to find the 'truth'. What was it Agent Mulder had said to him? *"The truth is out there."*

Indeed it was.

The End