

"The UFO Affair" (Part One)

Based on the TV series "The Man from U.N.C.L.E."
created by Norman Felton and Sam Rolfe
and "UFO" created by Gerry and Sylvia Anderson
written by Pamela McCaughey

PREMISE:

SHADO is organizing itself beneath the Harlington-Straker film production facilities. One of the studio's unknown "moles" is UNCLE agent Tom Andrews. He stumbles inadvertently upon the construction of SHADO, deep within the recesses of the floors below the studio, and learns the deadly secret SHADO is sworn to keep - that aliens are coming to earth! SHADO's "hit squad" must silence him for matters of security, but his "cover" has worked so well that they never learn who he really is. What Straker and Company don't realize is that agent Andrews goes missing by his UNCLE associates. And, UNCLE assigns agents Napoleon Solo and Illya Kuryakin to the case!

ACT ONE

"Open Channel D!" Tom Andrews whispered into his standard UNCLE issue pen-comm. Mr. Waverley's clipped British accent answered immediately, "Agent Andrews, yes, I read you."

"I don't want to rush this mission, sir, but I think I have almost all the information and photos I'll need to pin down that Straker case."

"The USAF officer who resurfaced as a British film executive under strange circumstances several years ago?"

"Yes. He's passing himself off now as a studio head, but I think it's just a cover for a very covert operation. I've managed to work myself into the facility fairly well as a set designer, but there's a lot more here than meets the eye."

"Do you think THRUSH is behind all this?"

"With THRUSH, anything is possible. The security around this place is certainly reminiscent of a THRUSH operation! You've got to have special passes to get from one area of the studios grounds to another, and more passes for traveling inside the main buildings! Even I haven't got the highest clearance passes yet. I've been here almost 18 months and it just gets weirder and weirder."

"Is it necessary for us to send you a back-up agent for this mission?"

"No, that would be counter-productive. Harlington-Straker is very fussy about who they hire - from their cleaning and janitorial staff, to their actors, their directors, their production crews. Someone new might make my job here more difficult."

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Agent Andrews reported early the next morning to begin work on a new feature film for Harlington-Straker. He left his Audi in the car park, and walked to the electronically operated front gates to the studio complex. There at the gates, the guards stopped him, asked him to exit

the car, ran a metal detector over him, front and back, and looked at his passes and his photo ID.

"Ere, Mate, gotta new pass for ya today - Security left it for ya last night. Seems ya got bumped up the ladder a bit, eh?" he handed over the fresh plastic cards.

Andrews looked at them. They were indeed three security increments up. He smiled, and pinned on his new ID, "Rather poor picture of me, isn't it?"

"Ya look like a bloody convict!" the guard grinned back. An electronic buzz heralded the opening of the gates, and Andrews passed through.

His first business that morning was to sit in on a creative meeting for a new period flick. A film version of the life of the Pharaoh Rameses II. Principal photography had already started in Egypt, and the design crew would have two months to create, build and complete the interior sets needed. Andrews started doodling some preliminary sketches, based on some of the round table discussions. He'd finish them later. Once the meeting was over, he hurried out on the pretext of getting lunch. But he wasn't hungry.

How far would this new security pass take him? Would he be able to utilize it to gain access to the nether regions of the Harlington-Straker? Three security increments up meant his cover was going well. The studio people had made it known to him that they were very pleased with his work, and this advanced pass was indicative of their trust.

Andrews decided to check it out. He crossed the big Victorian London lot, cutting through the modern New York streets, and made his way into the main building. That was where he'd focused most of his covert attention for the last year and a half. Straker's office was inside. His secretary, Miss Ealand, gave new meaning to the term "wolf at the door," except her prime function appeared to be keeping people away from The Big Man himself. He'd tried several times to engineer meetings with Straker, but they were always postponed, or canceled. It was clear Straker didn't feel he had to honor a meeting with a lowly set designer! In the whole time Andrews was assigned to monitor Straker, the man only took three trips away from his daily office routine - and those, Andrews discovered, were visits to his infant son and his now-divorced wife.

Whatever was going on in the bowels of the Harlington-Straker main office complex was definitely not associated with film-making! Skulking about at night, Andrews had discovered specialized equipment being shipped into the building in innocuous-looking crates. Equipment such as computer components, sensing devices, high-tech radar screens and consoles - a whole plethora of military hardware that just didn't belong in a film studio. Add to the fact Andrews watched the production calendars carefully for spy movies and war epics - there were none scheduled. So what could this equipment be for?

UNCLE had been monitoring THRUSH activities in Great Britain for some time. They were recruiting numerous American, British and French people to their cause - many of them former or current military personnel, dissatisfied with their own national policies. Edward Straker was Andrews' assignment. A former USAF officer, with links to the Pentagon, and one of the highest level security clearances in America - why would he join THRUSH? What was he doing for them? UNCLE wanted to know.

Andrews ducked into one of the mens' rooms, closed the door, and pulled out his pen-comm, "Open Channel D."

"We are receiving you. Report?"

"Agent Andrews here. I'm inside the Harlington-Straker office complex. The studio just awarded me a new security pass and I'm going to take advantage of it to see how far I can get

into the lower regions of the building. They're constructing some sort of military installation in the basement areas and I'm going to investigate."

"Have you established that this is a THRUSH operation?"

"Not yet, but I'm sure my investigation will turn up something, sir."

"Very well, Andrews, you may proceed," Mr. Waverley's voice commanded.

Andrews flushed one of the toilets for effect, and moved out again. Secretarial support staff walked the corridors, dressed in hot pants outfits and bright blue eye shadow. They took little notice of him - he was just one more crew member on the payroll, as his ID tag, pinned to his chocolate brown Nehru jacket, indicated.

He passed into the foyer where Straker's office was situated, and noted with excitement that Miss Ealand had exited, purse in hand, obviously off to run an errand for the silver-haired film exec. Andrews waited until Straker's "guard-dog" was well out of the area before trying the office door.

It was open. He slipped inside, sure that he hadn't been observed by passers-by. The electronic sign above Straker's office door read "vacant," meaning the Great Man was not in at the moment. Andrews flipped the switch he'd noted a dozen times on Miss Ealand's desk while waiting to get an appointment to see Straker. Pneumatic doors whooshed open a la Star Trek, and he entered quickly, before they slammed shut again.

Inside, the office was simple. Some abstract artwork on the walls, a big oak desk, and a couple of padded seats facing the desk. A small liquor cabinet rested in one corner. The entire room was painted eggshell. There was little to suggest a film executive occupied the office space.

Andrews felt the jolt as the room started to move! He steadied himself on his feet, and watched, slightly surprised, as the office sank down like an elevator, the outside view disappearing quickly. So! There was something peculiar going on under the studio! Why would a top studio executive work out of a glorified elevator? He had to be onto something.....

Within seconds, Straker's office moved to a halt. What should he do next? Try to open the door? What was on the other side? Andrews pulled out his pen-comm and established contact, whispering, "I'm inside the studio right now. Straker's office works like an elevator - I'm probably down in the bowels of the building - I'll investigate further and let you know what I've found."

He looked about the office carefully. There had to be a means of opening the door. His eyes swept the room, he looked behind all the paintings, and discovered only a safe. Then, he began going over the items on Straker's desk. He flipped open the cigar humidor, and there it was - a small red button. He pressed it - and the doors slid open.....

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.....facing Andrews as the doors parted, was a huge wall-sized logo - S.H.A.D.O. - what the hell was that? He stepped through the doors and read it: "Supreme Headquarters Alien Defense Organization." Was this SHADO a subsidiary of THRUSH? And what was this "alien" business about? Were they a covert operation trying to keep undesirable foreign nationals out of Britain? Aliens? Little green men? Had he been reading too much science-fiction?

Andrews moved quietly down the corridor - it was devoid of people - the hair on the back of Andrews' neck bristled - this was all way too easy --

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**SOMEWHERE IN THE HARLINGTON-STRAKER FILM PRODUCTION
COMPLEX....**

The pain in the back of his head throbbed insistently. Andrews sat up and assessed his situation. He was lying on a cot inside a small cell. Not only his coat, shoes, socks and belt were gone, but his sidearm, wallet, ID tags and pen-comm had been removed. Who ever KO'ed him was thorough. There was nothing in his pants pockets except lint.

Andrews looked up as the cell door opened. A peculiar-looking man stepped inside, "I see you're awake," he remarked. He had an unusual speaking voice - very Slavic. Was he a THRUSH agent?

"No thanks to your people, I'm sure," Andrews shot back, rubbing the back of his neck.

"Ah, I see our operatives were a little less than gentle. You'll have to excuse them, Mr. Andrews. You see, they take their work very seriously."

"Who the hell are you?" Andrews asked, as he sat up on the cot, plunking his feet on the cold concrete floor.

"My name isn't important, Mr. Andrews. But, we've been doing a little checking into your background. You seem to have a rather unhealthy obsession with Edward Straker."

Andrews kept silent. He had been trained on how to work against interrogation methods, and he had no desire to tell this man anything.

"In fact, you've been following Mr. Straker for the last eighteen months or so, haven't you? And, coming back onto studio property at night. Very strange activities for a set designer, wouldn't you say?"

"If you think I'm such a security risk, why did you keep giving me higher security clearances?"

"Well, we wanted to see just how much rope you'd take before you hung yourself," the interrogator smiled - a smarmy, irritating, patronizing smile that made Andrews want to bust him right in the chops. But, that pleasure would have to wait until the right moment. In the meantime, agent Andrews would play "thrust and parry" with this THRUSH man, "Plus, you're a very good set designer," the Slavic man leaned down and stared right into Andrews' eyes, "You should have stuck to your day job, rather than trying to play espionage agent!"

The interrogator stood up and paced the length of the small cell before returning to face Andrews, "We know who you are, Mr. Thomas Andrews. It's just a matter of who you're working for. We don't like moles here."

"What's a mole?" Andrews asked, feigning innocence.

"Don't play games with me, Mr. Andrews - I'm not in the mood for it! You came highly recommended from Paramount Pictures, that's how you got into Harlington-Straker studios. But, who do you really work for?"

"I don't have anything to hide," Andrews shrugged, "I'm just Tom Andrews, set designer, expatriate American. I've stayed here because I like the money and I like the country. What's so cloak and dagger about that?"

Andrews watched the Slavic man take something out of his jacket pocket, "Recognize this?" It was his pen-comm.

Again, Andrews tilted his head, "Looks like a ballpoint pen to me."

"Oh, no, Mr. Andrews. It's much more than that," he handed it over, "Why don't you show me how it works?"

"Have you got a piece of paper?"

"I don't believe you're that obtuse," the interrogator snagged the pen-comm back quickly. He held it up in front of Andrews' face, "We know this is some sort of communications device. Our labs can take it apart and find out how it works, but it would be so much easier to have

you do it for us," there was that smarmy smile again.

"Other than writing a message down with that thing, I don't see what else I could do with it."

"What you may not have realized until this moment is that we've been tracking your usage of this instrument for some months. Every time that frequency came up on the studio grounds, we've been able to trace it back to you. Day or night. We have a very sophisticated system here. So, I repeat, who are you working for and why have you centered your covert activities on Edward Straker?"

"If you know so much, why don't you tell me?"

"Oh, we have our theories, Mr. Andrews. And, we ruled out industrial espionage long ago. Are you really a set designer, or just a good facsimile?"

"Like I said, I worked for Paramount before I came over here. My resume should still be in Miss Ealand's office."

"Didn't you wonder why it was so easy to get into Mr. Straker's office? Why Miss Ealand left her desk so conveniently?"

Andrews' mind was running at top speed, trying to fathom out the next answer without giving anything away, "I've been trying to get an appointment with Straker for months now, to flog a film treatment idea I have. I thought when I saw her leave, I might have a chance to see him. She's pretty hard to get past."

"Ummmm, yes, and with good reason. Especially if people like you are lurking about. Do you work for the American government?"

"Good God, no!" Andrews lied truthfully.

"Then.....which government has you in its pay? Maybe the Russians? Pa Ruskie?"

Andrews shook his head, "I do not work for any government!"

"A solo act, eh? So what's in it for you? Blackmail? Dirty little secrets from the private lives of film executives? What?"

Andrews decided to make his greater height an issue in the confrontation. He stood up slowly, unfolding his long legs until he looked down on the smarmy little man from his six foot six vantage point, "Unless you have any proof that I'm some industrial spy, or a danger to anyone, I suggest you release me!"

The door opened and three large, burly men, dressed in navy blue uniforms entered, sidearms at the ready.

"I don't think you'll be going anywhere at all, Mr. Andrews," that god-damned smarmy smile again. He inclined his head towards the guards, "Take our guest down to Interrogation Room A. I think we can get him to co-operate with us much more fully there."

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Ed Straker finished reading Jackson's report, a grimace of distaste on his face. Alec Freeman often referred to Jackson as that "slimy son of a bitch," and with good reason. He'd just killed another intruder with those damn experimental brain drugs again!

Not only was the intruder now dead, but he'd been one of the rising stars of Harlington-Straker's production team. Tom Andrews' talent as a set designer/decorator had brought the studio their one and only Academy Award nomination ever. Jackson's report detailed his theory that Andrews was either shadowing Straker for blackmail and monetary gain, or was in the employ of some unfriendly nation's secret service. Straker certainly saw it was necessary to question the man, but once again, Jackson had taken the situation into his own hands, and came up empty. Now, they'd probably never know who or what Andrews really was. And,

worst of all, maybe Andrews really was just what he said he was, a set designer. Was SHADO security operating under more paranoia than was necessary? Were they just a killing-squad?

Now, there was nothing left for Straker to do than to rubber stamp the whole episode, have the body disposed of, Andrews' very existence erased in every way from Great Britain. It was a dirty business, and one which Straker knew Jackson enjoyed immensely. To say he disliked Jackson would have been an understatement, but General Henderson had insisted Straker take Jackson on the SHADO security team. Jackson was there because Straker didn't feel strong enough to buck Henderson's wishes, but someday.....

Straker looked up as his second in command, Alec Freeman came in. He went straight to Straker's wet bar, poured himself a triple from the rye whisky spout and gulped it down in one swallow. Then he refilled the small glass and sat down, his head in one hand.

"I take it this means you heard what happened to Andrews?" Straker inquired.

"That bastard!" Alec ground out from between his teeth, "Those drugs are experimental! Who gave him the authority to use them on humans!"

"Not me, certainly. Hell, I don't even like the idea of testing them on chimps!"

"Damn him! Damn Jackson!" Alec threw back the other three ounces of rye. He peered down into the glass, as if looking for answers, "We've got to get rid of that man!"

"Until General Henderson gives us the green light, we're stuck with him. I know he's over-zealous....."

"Over-zealous?" Freeman jumped up and leaned over Straker, "Is that SHADO's new name for murder?"

"Look, Alec, "Straker's voice was conciliatory. He'd known Freeman for years, and he knew him as a decent, honorable man, "This is a terrible mistake. A man's life has been snuffed out. But, Jackson brought me a pretty convincing set of parameters, which is why I agreed to have Andrews interrogated in the first place. The man never seemed to exist prior to 1969, we couldn't get a birth certificate, a baptismal document, a Social Insurance number - nothing to prove this man was who he was, except for a letter of reference from Paramount Pictures. Plus, he was following me for months. We had to find out what he was up to. You know what's at stake here."

"Yeah, I know," Freeman turned and walked back to his seat, "It's just that I think Jackson gets some sort of twisted pleasure out of doing this kind of thing. Jesus - he's like SHADO's own version of Dr. Mengele!" Alec's reference to the Nazi concentration camp doctor, known as the "Angel of Death" by Holocaust survivors, was not lost on Straker. He had his own scores to settle with Jackson. But, the time had to be right.

"How's work going on the Moon Base?" Straker took advantage of his role as Freeman's commanding officer to change the topic of conversation. He lit up a cigarillo and sat back in his chair, blowing perfect smoke rings.

Freeman got up and paced again, "Everyone's working around the clock, of course. It took some time to assemble the equipment for excavation, but they're so far on schedule. As you know, our new satellite is being launched next week, which will tie us in nicely with the staff there. The tracking people are on full alert. We're sorting new codes daily."

"And the sub construction?"

"I was out to the shipyard last month. The first one is almost ready for launch, as you know. And, they've started work on Sky 2 and Sky 3. I think they'll be operational early next year by the look of things. Of course, you never know when you're working with prototypes."

Straker drew on his cigarillo again, "Alec, I'd like you to handle taking Andrews off the

payroll. Officially, he's gone back to the States - death in the family - you come up with something plausible."

"Jackson makes the mess, Freeman cleans it up. I don't like this pattern of events at all, Ed."

"Hey, we've all got our dirty work cut out for us. We knew that when we signed on."

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UNCLE HEADQUARTERS, NEW YORK CITY.....

"When was the last time you heard from Andrews?" Napoleon Solo asked, straightening his new silk tie as he seated himself in front of Mr. Waverley's desk.

"He's missed his check-in time by over 24 hours now. We can't reach him by phone at his flat, and we've been told by the Head of Production at Harlington-Straker that he no longer works there. Said he left the country - some poppycock about a death in the family."

"Who'd you talk to?" asked Illya Kuryakin.

"An Aussie fellow named Freeman. Seemed very apologetic about Andrews no longer working there, actually. He said he was a most commendable set designer."

Kuryakin and Solo exchanged glances, "And, you want us to track Andrews down," Solo prompted.

"Yes," Waverley handed over files to each agent, "Here are your case dossiers, your airline tickets, passports, letters of reference, etcetera. Illya, you'll be posing as a Russian film director looking for Western financial assistance. This should get you the chance to meet with Ed Straker - let's hope. Napoleon, we've managed to secure you an appointment with Alec Freeman, one of the Harlington-Straker executives. He'll be interviewing you for a job position - in accounting. These assignments should get you past the front gate, and from there, you'll have a chance to pick up Andrews' trail."

Of course, it made zero sense for the two UNCLE agents to travel together. Solo had an economy class ticket, direct from NYC to London's Heathrow airport. Kuryakin's travel arrangements took him by private UNCLE plane connection to Iran, where he boarded an Aeroflot jet and flew to London from there.

ACT TWO

SOMEWHERE IN RURAL ENGLAND.....

Napoleon arrived in England first. He took himself a room at a nice hotel near the studio, and rented a new 1972 Jaguar to drive out for his interview. There had to be some perks to this job, Solo smiled to himself!

When he got to the Harlington-Straker front gates, he was pulled over. The guards looked him up on their clipboard, and had him show his ID and passports. He then got the electronic treatment when he stepped out of his rented vehicle. Having passed the first hurdle to get inside the complex, Solo drove slowly through the electronic gates and into the parking lot. As he got out and locked the car, he noticed a copper-colored gull wing door prototype DeLorean model parked beside his Jag. Those babies didn't come cheap!

Solo headed for the office complex the guards mentioned. He straightened his tie again, out of habit, as he entered and walked up to the receptionist.

Studio executive Alec Freeman came out to greet Solo. They shook hands, and Freeman guided him back to his posh office. The walls were covered with mounted film posters, a few signed actors' photos, and an extravagantly official looking mahogany desk. Solo noted the several thousand pound dress suit, the silk tie. A snappy dresser himself, Solo always paid attention to what others were wearing.

As Mr. Waverley suggested, there was still a hint of the Aussie in Freeman's voice. He seemed a jolly fellow, quite pleased with himself to occupy such a fancy office (he even offered Solo a Cuban cigar out of a solid silver humidor - Cuban cigars were illegal in the States because of the embargo placed on Cuban products by the American government). Napoleon took the cigar and puffed experimentally as Freeman used a gold-plated lighter to ignite it for him.

"We've had a few Americans working for us before, Mr. Solo. As comptroller of studio financial resources, you'd be responsible for the day to day accounting, as well as projections for each new feature we make. You'd be working with the production teams on this - they give you a price, and you tell them if we can afford to make their picture!" Freeman seemed to find this very amusing.

"Mr. Freeman....."

"Call me Alec - everyone else does," he smiled, puffing on his cigar.

"You realize if I take this position I'll have to terminate my job back in the States. I'll need some financial cushioning to help me make the transition."

"Oh yes. How soon could you get out of your commitment to Warner Brothers?"

"I'm sure my lawyer could handle it for me within 48 hours, especially if I were to call him today with an affirmative answer."

"Well, your resume, and your letters of reference are certainly of the highest order. Our former comptroller just quit to have a baby! I'd like to tie this up and get it off my mind," Freeman stood up and extended his hand to Solo - they shook, "Welcome to the Harlington-Straker family! Would like to meet MY boss?"

"Ed Straker? Sure! I hear he's pretty elusive!"

"Yeah, well, you would be too if people came out of the woodwork to pester you continually with scripts for grade F science-fiction movies and out-of-date westerns," Freeman laughed again. He picked up his phone, "I'll just see if he's in today.....Miss Ealand? Is the Great Man in his office.....no? That's too bad." He hung up, "Guess you'll have to wait till

tomorrow. How about a tour of our facility here?"

"Certainly. I may be an accountant, but I'm just as star-struck as the next person," Solo smiled.

"Say, when you worked at Warner Brothers, did you ever see Daffy Duck?" Freeman joked.

"No, but I think I may have worked for him....." Napoleon confided with a smile.

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Illya Kuryakin's Aeroflot flight touched down at Heathrow Airport. He ran the gauntlet of the security and immigration people, and was finally able to collect his luggage and flag down a cabbie outside. He already had reservations made for him at a London hotel, frequented by Soviet dignitaries and politicians. He practiced his Russian accent in the hotel room again before dialing the Harlington-Straker front office.

"Yes, this is Illeeeeya Kuryaw-kin calling. Da.....I have a Tuesday appointment with Meester Ed-var'd Straaaa-ker," he told the receptionist. She, in turn, put him through to Straker's personal administrative assistant, a Miss Ealand.

"Mr. Straker will be available to see you Tuesday morning at eleven am. Is that satisfactory, sir?"

"Quite satis-factory. Dasvedanya."

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All things considered, Illya felt he'd dressed just right. As a Soviet film-maker, he couldn't afford to be too fashionable, but the white turtleneck and black slacks, and matching Nehru jacket gave him just enough of that Russian bohemian look!

Knowing he had to look and drive the part, Illya rented a simple car to go out to the Harlington-Straker studios. Like Solo, he managed to get through the phalanx of security at the front gate. He entered the main office complex and the receptionist explained how he could get to Straker's office from there.

As Kuryakin opened the door, he was greeted by Straker's secretary, a Miss Ealand. She asked him to sit for a moment, as "Mr. Straker has a guest in with him," and he flipped through the British version of Variety while he waited. She also offered him coffee, which he declined.

Several minutes later, the double doors parted, and Kuryakin got his first real look at Ed Straker. Garbed in an elegant suit, white shirt and silk tie, the film exec looked too young to have silver hair. He bid goodbye to the man leaving, and turned to Illya.

"You must be our Russian guest," he smiled, revealing even white teeth, "Please, come in. Has Miss Ealand offered you some coffee or tea yet?" Straker held out his hand and grasped Illya's in a firm shake.

"Da, but I had a morning meal at my hotel, I don't need anything to drink - it's a long drive back to my hotel," Kuryakin was hoping to give the impression of struggling mildly with the English language.

Straker guided Illya into his office, and the pneumatic doors swooshed shut. They both sat down. Illya looked around casually. This office was the last known location of Thomas Andrews.

"How may we help you, Mr. Kuryakin?" Straker offered him a cigar from his humidor, but Illya declined. Instead he took out a package of Russian cigarettes and lit one. The room clouded up with smoke quickly - pungent, faintly spicy, a bit acrid.

"As I've tried to make clear in my correspondence, I am looking to facilitate a Soviet-British film venture. We feel the storyline will appeal to audiences in both countries, and if we

could entice a few well-known British actors and actresses to take roles, the film would have a built-in audience internationally."

"What's your pitch?" Straker blew out some smoke rings, his blue eyes bright with curiosity.

"We want to do a film version of the Battle of Stalingrad. War movies are still very popular in the Soviet Union, and abroad, especially in the United States. "The Green Berets" with John Wayne did very well. We also know there are films in the works to chronicle the Allied invasions of Nazi-held Holland - I believe the working title is "A Bridge Too Far." Principal photography for our battle and outdoor scenes could be done in the Soviet Union, with interiors shot here in Britain. We may be able to get permission from the city of Stalingrad, now known as Volgograd, to shoot in and around the actual areas of battle." Illya leaned back in his chair a bit, surreptitiously planting a small listening device on its underside.

"Who did you have in mind to play the lead male roles?"

"Well, Mr. Straker, we do have a 'wish-list' of British actors we'd like to have: Richard Burton, Alec Guinness (he's already played a Russian before in Doctor Zhivago), and Peter O'Toole are some of our first choices, but we realize they may not be interested in our project or may come with too high a price tag."

Straker puffed on his cigar in silence for a moment before responding, "I take it you do have a script written?"

"It's almost finished. I can have a copy sent here in a week or so. I'll make sure they send you an English copy. The film would be shot in English and we could dub the Russian version afterwards."

"What's your bottom line figure for this film?"

"I think we'll need at least 3 million pounds. I have the financial proposals right here," Illya withdrew a fat white envelope from his inside jacket pocket, and handed it across the desk to Straker.

"If you don't mind, I'll pass this on to our accounting department. We just hired a new comptroller and he'll be the one looking it over."

Illya smiled; he knew Napoleon Solo had been hired for this position.

"We've done a bit of research on you, Mr. Kuryakin. Seems you were one of Sergei Eisenstein's proteges." Straker was mentioning the famed Soviet film director, "Are you planning to direct this film yourself?"

"I'll be serving as both producer and director. It was my war research that went into the script, as well. You, of course, would have executive producer status on the project."

Straker nodded, "Well, I think we'll have your financial papers reviewed, and wait until the script comes in. We can probably have an answer for you by the end of this month. Is that satisfactory? Check with Miss Ealand on the way out, she'll schedule your next appointment here."

Illya knew this comment signaled the end of his "audience" with Ed Straker. He stood up, shook hands again with the film exec, and exited.

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Upon leaving Straker's office area, Illya decided to take a quick look around the complex. It was an ultra-modern building, and it seemed ideal to take advantage of his "visitors' ID" tag to snoop around, and then pretend he was lost if caught by security in verboten areas. He knew where Napoleon's accounting office was situated, but had no intention of heading down there and possibly being seen with him.

The rabbit warren of offices and departmental areas did not seem unusual. He noticed that all the staff were wearing ID tags similar to his own, with their names and departments, photos of themselves, and security level numbers. Andrews had mentioned in his reports that the employees were all graded according to their security levels. In fact, Andrews had just received an upgrade the very day he'd disappeared.

Nobody took much notice of Illya as he wandered from division to division inside the office complex. They nodded their heads at him and went back to their work or their discussions in progress. He didn't see any major evidence of heavy security, except the occasional video cam, mounted high up on some walls. If there was a stronger security presence, it must have been all concealed within the lighting fixtures, or in other unlikely places. There were several floors he couldn't get up to in the elevator system - they required individual ID cards for that purpose. And the stairwells to those areas could only be accessed by locked doors, requiring special security keys.

If Straker's office had the ability to disappear down into the bowels of the building, there was no evidence of it while Illya had been speaking with the man. But, if Straker's office could "submerge" itself, there had to be other means of getting into those lower levels. It wouldn't make sense not to have any other exits out of the complex. THRUSH was never that short-sighted. Maybe it would be worth a trip after dark.....

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"I'd want this guy followed out, Alec. Came in here, pretending to be a Soviet film director looking to me for a Western bankroll. If this guy is Russian, then I'm Karl Marx. And, what a cheesy Russian accent - we've got actors on this lot who'd be more convincing!" Straker told his second in command, as he seated himself in a padded chair, "Not only did this guy seem suspicious, but security says the tracing beacon in his ID card shows he's traveled all over this office building and he's out into the lots right now. He's looking for something, alright, but I don't think it's money." Then Straker produced the small electronic microphone Illya had secreted under his chair, and handed it to Alec.

Freeman looked at the bug thoughtfully, "Is this Russian? I understand his visa, passport and papers all checked out."

"I had Miss Ealand check with the Russian Embassy just after Kuryakin came in for his appointment - they've never heard of him! I don't know who uses those bug types. I wanted you to see it before I sent it down to the labs."

"Well, I can certainly put a detail on him. He hasn't left yet - that makes it even easier. Security can put a beacon in his car, too."

"First Andrews, now this fellow. Any chance the two are connected?"

Freeman shrugged, "Andrews was here for 18 months. There was plenty of time to observe his actions."

"Just keep this guy clearly in our sights at all times."

"What if he's the real thing and the movie deal is legitimate?"

"I don't think it is, but I've had the financial papers sent down to the new comptroller.....what's his name again?"

"Solo, Napoleon. American."

"Strange name.....well, he can budget the deal out, but I'm not expecting this project to ever see the light of day. Get this.....he wanted Richard Burton....."

* * *

Dressed entirely in black, Illya studied the area outside the Harlington-Straker fence. It

was after midnight. He'd parked his car on a country road, and hiked two miles through the underbrush to come out close to the west side of the property. As an experiment, Illya tossed a small stone against the fence. The buzzing and the small flash of light confirmed his suspicions - the fence was electrified.

The underbrush and trees had been trimmed back expertly, offering no location for Illya to attach and swing a rope to vault over the fence. He was going to have to do it the hard way after all. He took a small pair of gloves and what looked like shoe rubbers from his black backpack. Fortunately, the UNCLE labs had come up with some nice little gadgets to solve problems like this. He donned the "rubbers" first, fastening them over his boots. Then, he shoved both hands into the gloves and readjusted his pack. Illya leaned out and touched the fence with a gloved hand - they worked - his gloves, and his "rubbers" would ground him and protect him from the charge of electrical current running through the fence. He shimmed up and over the fence as quickly as possible, and jumped down on the other side.

After taking a moment to repack his gloves and rubbers, Illya moved noiselessly along the newly cut grass, down the small knoll, towards the Harlington-Straker office building. It was a bit slippery with the evening moisture, but he had good hiking boots on.

He approached the rear of the building. There were several exits there - he'd located them earlier in the day on his "walk." They were of course still locked, but UNCLE always provided - Illya extracted a small tool kit from his pack and inserted what appeared to be a thin piece of paper into the groove for the locking mechanism. He pressed the end of the paper until it filled up the groove with a gooey white substance. The Plasti-Paper hardened almost instantly, and Illya had made himself an artificial credit-card sized access key! He pressed the card again inside the lock mechanism, and heard the tumblers click back. The door opened silently and he passed through.

Once inside the building, Illya was faced with a series of stairwells, going both up and down, disappearing into perhaps the basement of the building. He decided to follow the stairwell down, and keep going until he found something. Andrews' last communication to UNCLE, before his disappearance, had been from deep in the basement of the studio office complex. Illya took out his pen-comm and whispered, "Open Channel D." There was a faint peep as his pen acknowledged his transmission, "I'm inside the Harlington-Straker building - I'll be taking a set of stairs down into what could be the basement. Please pass this information on to Agent Solo."

Illya counted a dozen sets of stairs as he penetrated ever deeper into the bowels of the building. At each landing was a set of pneumatic doors, just like the ones leading into Straker's office, but the access panels must have been on the inside. He saw no way to gain entry through them. It was galling to say the least - would the final doorway be the same?

Just when he thought he couldn't go down one more stair, Illya saw a dimly lit red lamp over the final door below. He made his way down, and stood there facing it, wondering what to do next. It seemed impervious to any kind of compromise. Two steel slab doors, no panels, no lock access mechanism in evidence. Maybe he'd have to retrace his steps, go back upstairs and try another entrance.

Resignedly, Illya started the upwards trudge. Good thing he was in reasonably good shape, he mused to himself. A strange shuffling sound caught his attention - he hurried his stair climbing - was somebody coming behind him?

He got his answer when a small gauge bullet zinged by his head! Jesus! They were shooting! Illya was flat out running the stairs now, taking them three at a time. He was

counting backwards, only three more to go.....

There were running footsteps echoing his own, more bullets, muffled voices. He reached the top stairs and pushed open the door he'd come in, sprinting across the slippery mowed grass lawn. They were after him still, like a pack of fox hounds, and there was several thousand feet of open space before he could hit the fence, get over it, and disappear into the underbrush. How the hell was he going to mount the fence without his special grounding gear?

Illya's forward momentum was too powerful - his boots slipped in the wet grass and he sprawled face first, clamoring all the while to get up and keep moving. Instead of the bullet he expected to the base of his skull, he felt a sharp jab to his lower buttock.....

* * *

A strange face floated out of the mist. Illya Kuryakin compared the strange fuzziness in his head to just waking from a general anaesthesia. But, he hadn't had surgery.....

"Awake are we? Good. We have a lot to talk about." The words were coming out of the stranger's mouth, but they seemed to be off-timed with the movement of his lips, like and old Japanese Godzilla movie.

"Who are you.....?"

"Ohhhh, my name isn't important at all. I'm Nobody. But, you, on the other hand....."

Illya tried to swing his foot off the cot and sit up. The vertigo that swelled in his head made him lie down again - the room was spinning.

"I don't think you should exert yourself, Comrade Kuryakin - if that's what your name really is," the Slavic sounding voice continued patronizingly, "You can talk lying down."

"Just what do you want me to talk about?"

The voice replied to him in perfect Russian, to which Illya automatically responded.

"Sooooo, you really can speak Russian. Are you a native or just incredibly well-educated in linguistics?"

"Born in Leningrad," Illya commented, in keeping with his "cover" as a Russian film-maker.

"But, can you tell me, Comrade, why you would need to infiltrate this studio by cover of darkness? Surely your petition for British financing for a joint venture film would not require you to come back after office hours?"

Illya knew there was little he could say to deter his interrogator on that point. He'd been caught red-handed. Worst of all, what had happened to his gear?

As if on cue, the interrogator asked, "You have some very sophisticated electronics in your knapsack, Comrade. Not exactly the sort of thing one would expect from a bourgeois film maker. I've seen this sort of thing before - how does it work?" and he held up Illya's UNCLE pen-comm.

If the interrogator had seen a pen-comm before, was it Tom Andrews'? Illya's brain was slowly de-fogging. He also knew the man could be toying with him. He might know perfectly well how a pen-comm worked, "Get me a piece of paper and I'll show you."

A short derisive laugh came out of the interrogator, "Really, you people must come up with some better lines than that! Our labs took one of these apart a few days ago. It's a communications device, alright. But, which channel do you use?"

"I use it to sign film contracts with," Illya played dumb. He'd string things out as long as possible. See how much patience this Slavic man had. Would a REAL film studio operate this kind of security? Illya didn't think so. Andrews had definitely been onto something.

"Yes, well, if you're not willing to talk to us of your own volition, we have other means to

persuade you," the threat was well-implied, but delivered with a maddening insouciance and a patronizing smile Illya would have liked to have wiped off his face.

* * *

From behind his one way glass vantage point, Straker puffed on his cigarillo. he waited until Jackson exited the cell and said, "Not this time, Doug."

Jackson stared at Straker, nonplused, "I beg your pardon?"

"No experimental drugs. I don't want another Andrews on my hand. Interrogate, use reasonable force, sodium pentathol if it'll help, but none of the other stuff. We can hold him here indefinitely. If there really is some sort of link between this Russian and Andrews, I want the time to piece it together. Dead men tell us nothing."

"I don't think General Henderson would appreciate my being interfered with in this fashion....." Jackson started to say.

"And, I don't give a damn about Henderson! I've explained to the General about your stack of bodies. I've also registered my complaints and he wants you here - over my objections I might add - but I am STILL the commander of this organization! The drugs kill. I want this fellow," Straker used his cigarillo to gesture to Kuryakin inside the cell, "whoever he may be - alive."

ACT THREE

Napoleon was not normally the nervous type. But, Mr. Waverley explained Illya had missed his own check-in time and was not reachable by any means. Illya's appointment with Straker had been the morning before. And, Solo knew his partner had planned to revisit the facility after dark. Had he ended up suffering the same fate as Andrews?

He turned back to studying the financial papers Illya had given Straker for the bogus movie deal. That seemed to be the only way Napoleon could think of to get himself into Straker's office. He called Miss Ealand, Straker's Administrative Assistant, and asked to book an appointment for himself to go over the papers. Miss Ealand explained Mr. Straker was out of the office and wouldn't be back in until the next day - could he wait?

Resignedly, Napoleon accepted a 1:30 pm meeting with Straker. He wondered how he could approach him on the financial business. How much about this sort of thing did Straker understand himself? Could Napoleon bluff his way through the meeting, talking about the hazards of working with the Soviets? Could he say the film couldn't come in for the prescribed budget? After all, shooting a film in the Soviet Union might be an expensive proposition, especially if the end product did not make enough profit back at the box office.

The last known location for Illya had been deep inside the Harlington-Straker building. If he'd met with foul play, it had to have come from there. How could two such bright UNCLE agents, Andrews and Kuryakin, get themselves trapped in the same way? Maybe it was time to do some more reconnoitering of his own.....

* * *

Napoleon chose a location different from that which Illya had utilized to enter the Harlington-Straker grounds that night. He easily scaled the fence with his "rubbers" and touched down quietly on the other side. Then he put on his infrared goggles and moved off.

Using his own ID pass card, Napoleon gained access to the office complex. He skirted the security guards carefully, and laid in wait until they passed by. These night guards in their navy blue uniforms were different than those who roamed the facility by day. They also appeared to have more personal equipment. Why the necessity to have more firepower at night? He noted silencer handguns, rifles, and a number of other items he could only guess at.

His objective was to get into Straker's office. He knew Illya had disappeared after going in one of the rear exits. If they'd found him and taken him into custody, they might just be looking for others to follow him. Best to steer clear of that. But, Andrews had said Straker's office was the key.

On first try, the office door handle was locked, and it looked like it also needed an ID card to gain entry. Napoleon, like Illya, carried some of the same small items, and he squeezed a sheet of Plasti-Paper into the card groove to see if he could get the configuration necessary to open it. With a soft whisper, the door opened, and Solo slipped in.

The office was in darkness. Thanks to his infrared goggles, he could see Straker's office doors directly ahead. How to get them open? Napoleon knew there had to be an easy way, perhaps a control padd on Miss Ealand's desk, but he'd never been in the office before and had no idea where to look. Instead, he pulled out his pen-comm and flicked it to several higher frequencies. They were so high, they were inaudible to human ears. One of them did the trick. The pneumatic doors slid open.

One of the first things he did was to check to see if Illya's "bug" was still under the seat. It was gone. Had the maintenance crew removed it, or someone else more sinister?

Was there a mechanism inside the office for making it go down into the basement? And where was it? Napoleon checked Straker's desk, and checked behind the artwork on the walls. Nothing.

"What is it you're looking for, Mr. Solo?" The voice coincided with the flash of the overhead lights going on. Napoleon blinked through his infrared goggles.

* * *

It was a small cell, with just a cot and a light in the ceiling, way out of reach. Napoleon had been separated from all his gear, including his pen-comm. His interrogator was Slavic, thin, with a smile that irritated.

"My, my, my, couldn't wait for your appointment with Mr. Straker tomorrow?"

Napoleon shrugged his shoulders and kept silent.

"This makes three of you now that we've found with these interesting bags of tricks," the Slavic man held up Solo's pen-comm, "Either you're all very stupid, or you don't realize we can pick up your transmissions with these things. Which is it, Mr. Solo?"

Again, Napoleon just smiled.

"Didn't you wonder why you got hired here so easily? We saw you and your cohort, Mr. Kuryakin, coming from a long way off."

"What happened to Andrews?" Napoleon asked.

The interrogator made a false face of concern, "Mr. Andrews? Oh, yes, Mr. Andrews.....didn't he go back to America - something about a death in the family?"

"You and I both know that's not true."

"Oh, I don't know anything, Mr. Solo, except what you're going to tell me," the nasty little man smiled, "But, you can rest assured that there was a death in Andrews' family."

Napoleon heard a light tapping at the door. The interrogator excused himself and went outside. When he returned, he was smiling again, "We have much nicer accommodations available for you, but they'll come at a price, you know. Information."

"I'm quite happy here," Napoleon mimicked the interrogator's smarmy smile intentionally.

"Suit yourself!" and he left.

Napoleon laid back on his cot. A moment later, he heard a peculiar metallic clang and the sound of running water. When he sat up again and put his feet on the floor, there were several inches of liquid, and the water level was rising!

He watched, dumbfounded, as the water filled his cell, not by inches, but now by feet! even by standing on the cot, Napoleon couldn't hope to stay above the rising water level. Obviously, these people meant to floor his cell - but to what end? He hadn't told them anything! He was of more use to them alive! As the level rose and rose, he struggled to stay afloat, but.....

* * *

"Think he's had enough?" Straker asked as nonchalantly as possible, watching Napoleon's death struggle in the water-filled cell.

Jackson smiled, "You're much too soft, Commander Straker. He may not be at that proper pitch of fear we need as yet."

Straker blew two perfect smoke rings, "Get him outta there - now!"

With a venomous expression, Jackson signaled one of the operatives to drain the cell. The water level decreased dramatically, until Solo was lying in a puddle of water on the cell floor, gasping for breath.

"Really, Commander, you should leave these matters up to me."

"I think it's time I had a little talk with our visitors. Get this one fixed up. Put him in with Kuryakin. Let them think their situation over for a bit."

* * *

When the cell door opened, Illya looked up, and Napoleon could see the bruises on his pale skin, the black eye, the dried blood at the corners of his mouth. He sat down on the single cot beside him. The cell door clanged shut.

"Not very hospitable, these people, are they?"

Illya winced, "No, and I don't think they mean to be, either. They may have cracked a few of my ribs....."

"They tried to drown me."

"Their methods seem to owe more to the Italian Mafia than THRUSH."

"The more I see, the less I think we're dealing with a THRUSH operation here. The sidearms, the equipment, the methods - not like THRUSH at all."

"I'd have to concur with you on that viewpoint. But, if they're not THRUSH, who the hell are they and what happened to Andrews?"

Napoleon sighed, "I think Andrews is dead."

"How can you be certain?"

"Something that slimy little man said to me during his interrogation - there really was a death in Andrews' family."

"I don't understand their lack of familiarity with our pen-comms. THRUSH would know immediately what they were. These people had to take them apart in their labs."

"Yes, and apparently our transmit frequencies were detected by their sensing system. Why would a film studio need that sensitive a system? This is about a lot more than just making movies, but if they're not THRUSH," Napoleon shrugged, "What is this whole operation about?"

"What about some covert MI6 operation?"

"I think they'd keep Mr. Waverley up to date on that - after all - he's an old MI6 man himself."

"Not necessarily. We didn't know about that Bond fellow for years."

"Mmmmmm, yes. See what you mean. How are you feeling?"

"I've been better. But, I'll live. I'd love a shot of Demerol, though....."

"Think they're listening in on us?"

"Quite likely. Not that we've said much that could be considered incriminating."

* * *

"What the hell is THRUSH?" Straker asked, "Sounds like a social disease...."

Jackson shrugged, "From what I've been able to ascertain, Solo and Kuryakin have been discussing an old covert organization we thought was pretty much extinct. THRUSH was very active in the mid to late 1960's. Much of their criminal network was destroyed by another American-based secret organization called UNCLE."

Straker inclined his head, "You think that's who these two work for?"

"Yes, and probably Andrews, as well. The big question is, why are they interested in you?"

"You said Andrews had been following me for months. Why?"

Jackson's voice was flat as he replied, "We never got an answer."

"So we don't know if he was interested in Ed Straker the film studio executive, or Ed Straker, commander of SHADO. What do you think?"

"I've had to reserve my judgment on this matter."

"And, how much of his intelligence on me got communicated back to his own organization?"

"We're not certain."

Straker rose from the seat behind his desk, "Jackson, you've completely bungled this investigation from the beginning. I've been forced to be patient with you because of General Henderson. Whatever you have on him must be substantial, because I simply cannot understand why he has insisted on having you affiliated with us. As head of security, you're supposed to handle these affairs properly and with due concern for getting the maximum amount of information for the least effort possible. Now a man is dead, and two more are our prisoners. If they came looking for Andrews, and they disappear, what are the odds that their own organization will send more people? You've seriously compromised the efficiency of SHADO with your draconian methods. You heard them in that cell - our methods owe more to the Mafia!"

"I take it you wish to handle this yourself?" Jackson inquired.

"Yes, I'll handle this from here on in. You've done quite enough."

* * *

Napoleon and Illya had scoured their joint cell, looking for mini-cams or bugging devices. They were certain their captors were listening in on them in some way, but they failed to find anything.

They flopped down onto the one cot in the room, their backs leaning against the cement wall, "What now?" Illya asked.

Napoleon shot him a look - it was clear what he meant - Illya had seen that look before - whenever they were going to try to make an escape.

"What do you think of this cell?" Napoleon spoke sotto voce.

"Steel construction - it must be water-tight like your last one."

"I can't see any difference, really," Napoleon leaned against Illya once more and whispered, "But, there had to be a place in my cell from where they drained the water so fast."

Illya nodded slowly, recognition dawning, "There's a panel under my bed," he whispered back, "I looked at it when they first put me in here - it covers about a three by four space, but I couldn't get it open."

"Might be a drain hatch of some sort. What if we could get it open? We might be able to get out of here - wherever here is."

"What if the hatch leads to where the water is stored?"

Napoleon shook his head, "Too many gallons of water to keep stored. I bet it circulates to some other area on this installation - I had the grand tour when I got hired here - there are a number of other locations that water could be diverted to - I saw a reservoir, a whole group of decorative fountains, a swimming pool. In fact, the water in my tank tasted a lot like chlorinated pool water."

Well, what are our options? We could stay here until they decide what to do with us...."

"Or," supplied Napoleon, we could pry that panel open and maybe get out of here."

Illya's expression gave Solo for no reason to doubt his agreement, "It'd be easier to do this under cover of darkness. If we could break the light, we could use a cot leg to try and pry the panel open."

They were both shoeless and weapon less. What could they do?

Napoleon shoved Illya off their cot rather violently, "If it wasn't for you, I wouldn't be in

here! You sleep on the floor!"

Illya supplied a couple of rude Russian epithets and got up as quickly as his broken ribs enabled him to do so, "I was here first - you sleep on the floor!" He pulled at the narrow mattress Napoleon was resting on.

The ensuing scuffle brought both men to their feet, the mattress shredded in pieces, the steel frame of the cot overturned. Napoleon fell when Illya kicked his knees out, and he grabbed the steel cot to push against Illya. He got up finally, and Illya, out of breath, and in pain from his cracked ribs, cowered against the wall as Napoleon prepared to deliver the coup de grace with the cot.

At the last second, Napoleon swung the steel cot frame up and at the wire-meshed light fixture, jamming one of the legs inside the cage. He pounded hard until the bulb exploded, with a small shower of sparks.

Illya was on the floor, feeling around for the panel, "I've got it," he whispered, "Right here."

In complete darkness, Napoleon permitted Illya to guide his hand and the leg of the cot to the floor panel - they both worked to jimmy it up. They could hear voices outside in the corridor.....

"I think we've got company coming....." Illya panted.

"Just a little more.....a little more.....come on.....put your back into it.....," Napoleon grunted.

The panel fell over with a metallic clang. Napoleon threw the cot aside to make room for Illya, "It's now or never..... jump!"

"How come I have to go first?" Illya complained.

"Don't stall!" Napoleon shoved him down the hole as he heard the cell's steel door being unlocked.....

* * *

ACT FOUR

They splashed down into an underground culvert, and swam along, following the water's flow. Breathless and fighting to stay above the water levels, both UNCLE agents were aware their captors would know exactly where their final destination would be. The trick would be to get there first and get out!

The light came at them as they rounded a corner, swimming furiously. They shouted to each other, but the sound of the running water was too loud for them to make out each other's words. In only a few seconds, they were deposited, wet and coughing, at the bottom of a man-made waterfall. They'd fallen into one of Harlington-Straker's outdoor sets!

Quickly, shivering and spitting up water, the duo climbed out, "I don't think I'm gonna want to take a bath or a shower again for at least a week," Napoleon commented ruefully, shaking his dripping head like a dog, "How're you're ribs?"

Illya coughed again, "That amusement park ride didn't do me any good, I can tell you that."

"Let's get out of here before they send in reinforcements. I don't think they're going to appreciate our little escape," he put an arm around Illya, "Can you start hiking? I think I can get my bearings if we move out of here."

Nodding, Illya wheezed, his hands on his knees, "If you can make it, I can make it....."

* * *

Jackson stood in front of Straker's desk, hands clasped demurely behind him, "They've escaped."

"To where? How?"

"They slipped down the drain tile for the cell. They've probably come out on the studio lot - our people are combing the place looking for them."

Straker glanced at his watch, angrily, "It's almost daylight! Studio workers will be arriving in an hour or so! How did they get out without being seen?"

"Oh, they were were seen - just a little too late. They knocked out the cell's light and pried open the drain hatch."

"When you get them, Jackson, I want to know right away and I'll be down to interrogate them myself."

"If you don't mind my saying so, Commander, we could have saved ourselves this sticky wicket if you'd just let me dispose of them....."

* * *

Their escape path took them through some studio lots and what looked like a wooded area for shooting exteriors. Napoleon stopped, waiting for Illya to get his breath.

"Soon be daylight," Illya huffed painfully, "Where can we lie low for awhile?"

"There's a maintenance shed over by the reservoir, let's see if we can make it over there."

"How far?"

"Another 30 minutes maybe."

Illya coughed, "Can we rest a bit longer? If I could just sit down for a minute...."

"We don't keep moving, I can guarantee those bully boys will find us."

The Russian nodded and tried to take a deep, ragged breath, "Lead on, MacDuff..."

By the time they made the shed, Illya was beginning to spit up blood again. Maybe his ribs were not just cracked.....

Napoleon used a good hard rock to break the padlock. It wasn't as secure as the rest of

the place, it really was just a shed for the reservoir. He helped Illya inside and pulled the door closed, after reattaching the lock to look semi-intact.

Illya laid down on a large bag of unopened peat moss. A quick itemization of the shed told the UNCLE agents that it was a cornucopia of landscaping and gardening tools, a large lawn mower and bags of peat moss, grass seed and fertilizer. From the amount of dust collected about, it looked as though the shed had not been visited for some time.

"As soon as it gets dark again, we'll go outside and try to find a way over the fence," Napoleon commented.

"Are we anywhere close to it?"

"Walking distance."

Napoleon took a rather sharp edged looking rake down off the shed wall, "We could use some of these tools to defend ourselves."

The pair settled in for the day. Illya fell into an exhausted sleep, his head propped up on a small bag of grass seed. Napoleon remained vigilant, listening for any sound outside that suggested they were about to be discovered. Quietly, so as not to disturb Illya's nap, Solo rummaged around the small shed. There was a skylight on the peaked roof, and as the sun intensified, he could see more and more things inside. He collected some heavy duty rope, the sharp rakes, a couple of electric cords (they might come in handy!), and a couple of hammers. A dirty, chlorophyll stained gardeners' apron hung on one wall, and Napoleon discovered that it had several pockets into which he could place some of the smaller items he wanted to take with them. They'd been in tight spots before.....

* * *

As darkness settled over rural England, Illya and Napoleon decided on their game plan. So far, they's stayed out of sight and free. But, the security forces would by now be out in droves, and probably expecting the UNCLE agents to make their break for it at night.

Their plan was to sneak to the electrified fence on the outer perimeter, and using the ropes found in the shed, try to raise and lower themselves over it somehow, without getting zotted. Napoleon had torn up some burlap bags and wrapped them tightly around Illya's ribcage, and day's rest had given the Russian agent enough time to recoup some energy and strength. They were both starving and thirsty, but that was something which would have to wait. Escape was first on the priority list!

As Napoleon had promised, the fence was within a short walking range. They kept themselves inside the tree cover as much as possible. There were a few large trees along the interior side of the fence, and it was those trees they pinned their hopes on using to hoist themselves up and over the electrified wire palisade.

"Look, I'll climb the tree, loop the ropes over, and then lift you using the ropes to the other side. I'm stronger than you are right now....." Napoleon explained to Illya.

"I probably won't be able to help you much from the other side, except to grab your legs - I can't lift anything - not even you....."

"That's ok, I can manage - I'm more worried about you getting to the other side."

Napoleon shimmied up the tree as quickly as he could. He secured the ropes and had Illya pull on them as hard as possible to ensure the knots would hold. It was amazing how many times Napoleon discovered a usage for his Boy Scouts training!

Illya stood still while Napoleon tied the rope ends tightly around his waist, "Now, I'm going to start raising you, and you have to swing yourself really hard to clear the fence....."

Solo squinted in the darkness as Illya moved higher and higher on the ropes. When he had

raised Illya about fifteen feet, "Ok, you're clear - you can start swinging out now," he called up softly, bracing himself against the tree's thick trunk, "When I can see you're out beyond the fence, I'll start dropping you down."

The tree rustled rhythmically as Illya began moving back and forth, gaining more momentum with each swing. Finally, he was well clear of the fence, and Napoleon let the ropes slide until Illya reached the ground on the other side. He fell to his knees, but otherwise did not seem hurt - just out of breath. The Russian scrambled up as fast as he could, and peered through the fence at his partner, "I'm ok," he whispered.

Climbing the tree again, Napoleon emptied his garden apron of everything except the small tools, tied off the ropes around his own waist and then secured them to the trunk. His goal was to swing out over the fence and then cut himself down on the other side with the garden shears he'd found in the shed. It took a couple of good push-offs, and he was right out over Illya's spot. With a quick clip of the shears, Napoleon was free-falling - he landed on his hands and feet.

"How very resourceful you, but I'm afraid we haven't had enough of your charming company," said a familiar voice out of the blackness. They heard and then saw a platoon of security guards, weapons at the ready. The smarmy little man stepped forward, "You gave us quite a bit of exercise today."

Illya felt a rifle butt in his ribs, and winced at the pain. Napoleon felt the rush of repressed fury - one wrong move and they might shoot!

* * *

This time, their accommodations were somewhat improved. At least they got a small room with two cots, and were served some coffee and hot soup. Exhausted, they napped for several hours, before being awakened by their guards. They were herded out of their room down the hall to an interrogation cell, and left to wait.

Both were somewhat surprised when the door opened and Ed Straker stepped inside. He was accompanied by two armed guards, who positioned themselves at the door, rifles in hand.

"I think it's time for an exchange of information," Straker started, his hands clasped behind his back, "Your co-operation is expected; it's not just an option," he paced around the men, looking at them closely, "For starters, who are you? Who do you work for?"

Both Napoleon and Illya were reasonably certain they weren't dealing with THRUSH people. Illya decided to offer a sop to co-operation, "You have our real names. But, we work for the United Network Command for Law Enforcement - UNCLE."

"And, just what is UNCLE's mandate?"

"To keep terrorists, criminals and madmen from interfering in the normal financial, political and military workings internationally. You might say, we're trouble-shooters who keep trouble under control," Napoleon added.

Straker nodded, "So what are you doing here at Harlington-Straker? Obviously you're not a Soviet film-maker," he indicated Illya, "And, you're not an accountant," he motioned to Napoleon.

"We came tracking the disappearance of Thomas Andrews, one of our operatives."

The UNCLE pair noticed Straker's eyes widen, "I'm sorry, but Andrews is dead."

"Why did you kill him?"

"I asked my security people to bring him in for questioning. His death was a regrettable outcome of that situation. I can assure you that I did not have him put to death. That decision was taken by our over-zealous security chief - whom I believe you've already met. Why was

Andrews tracking me?"

"He had orders from UNCLE HQ. Our organization was concerned that you had been recruited by THRUSH, and that you were running some sort of covert operation for them here on the premises of this studio facility. We wanted to investigate and if possible, neutralize the operation."

"I see. So he wasn't interested in Ed Straker, the film exec."

"Only in so far as Ed Straker, the film exec, was involved in something covert."

Straker stopped pacing, "Gentlemen, I am not at liberty to confide anything to you on the nature of our real work here. What I can tell you is that it is top secret, and contributed to by most of the Western nations, including the United States. Like you, we are engaged in a state of war against a cruel enemy, but again, I cannot divulge to you just who that enemy really is. We operate above the laws of any country, and if you had access to the right people in your respective governments, you'd discover that they'd back me up one hundred percent. It is imperative that we understand each other fully," Straker leaned forward across the table and stared Solo and Kuryakin down, "UNCLE will cease and desist all operations against us and our organization or we will shut you down - permanently."

"Until we have orders from our superior, we can't abandon a mission. How can we be sure you're telling us the truth?" Illya stated.

"Now that I know for certain which channels to pursue, I'll be speaking with your supervisor immediately. He'll be the one to tell you to stand down, but it'll be on my orders."

Napoleon had a hard time imagining anyone telling Mr. Alexander Waverley what to do, but was impressed with Straker's attitude. How could he be so damn cocksure? Who could harness that kind of international power?

"So what happens to us? Are we expendable - just like Andrews?"

"It doesn't have to be that way. You've seen virtually nothing of our operation here, and that's way I want to keep it - for your own protection - the less you know - the safer you are. Once I have assurances from your commander, you'll be released unharmed."

* * *

Straker didn't waste any time. He returned thirty minutes later with one of the hijacked UNCLE pen-comms, "Mr. Waverley will be contacting you momentarily." he handed the pen-comm to Illya.

They waited in silence until the pen-comm chirped. Illya flicked it to the "open" position, "Kuryakin here."

"Ah, yes, Mr. Kuryakin. I trust you and Mr. Solo are in good hands?" It certainly sounded like Waverley's voice, but both UNCLE agents were wary.

"Unidentified hands, I might say. They've played quite a game of chess with us, sir," Illya was hoping to trip up a phony Waverley with one of their old codes.

"I'm afraid the king has had to concede in this one," Waverley's voice continued, "I've had it in strictest confidence and from the highest offices in the country."

Damn! It had to be Waverley - only he would have made the chess reference back! Illya exchanged looks with Napoleon - he had heard the chess comment as well.

"So what happens now?"

"I've been told you will receive medical treatment and be released within twenty-four hours, in exchange for canceling your mission. They have also assured me they'll arrange a flight home for you both here to New York. You'll be debriefed upon your arrival here."

* * *

The UNCLE agents never did see Ed Straker again. Instead, they were handed over to a couple of doctors to x-ray and bandage Illya's cracked ribs, and give them both the once over. Their passports and personal ID credentials were returned to them, plus fresh clothing and shoes.

According to plan, Illya and Napoleon were driven out of the Harlington-Straker facility, and taken to a private airfield, guarded by security men until they boarded the small jet. From there, they were transferred to Gatwick Airport, and placed on a transatlantic flight for New York City.

Exhausted, and unable to even hazard a guess as to what organization they'd been in contact with, the two men slept most of the flight back to the United States.

* * *

Napoleon and Illya were more than surprised to be met at JFK airport by Mr. Waverley himself, in his private limousine. Since they had no luggage, they simply followed the driver and got in the back with their supervisor.

"I trust you had an uneventful flight home, gentlemen?" Mr. Waverley asked.

They were both too tired to make much conversation.

"I'm sorry to do your debriefing in this manner," Mr. Waverley pressed a button and the glass partition between the driver's area and the back slid up. Both Illya and Napoleon knew it made the passenger seating area soundproof, "However, the very nature of this situation calls for special handling."

After a moment of silence, Mr. Waverley spoke, "At the request of Mr. Edward Straker, I have been in contact with the Presidents of the United States and France, the Prime Minister of England, the current Head of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, the Supreme Commander from NATO, and a whole plethora of other political and military leaders. It would seem, gentlemen, that we have been outclassed by an organization which commands the finances and complicity of the most powerful men on the globe. We are merely engaged in seeking out criminals and terrorists. They are.....," Waverley paused for a moment, perhaps seeking the right words, ".....engaged in a struggle to protect this entire planet from the depredations of aliens from another solar system."

Illya and Napoleon stared at their chief, dumbfounded.

"You can see why they have had to maintain a rigid secrecy over this matter. Only those on a need to know basis are aware of this struggle. I am not even permitted to tell you the name of their organization. Only that they are NOT connected in any way with THRUSH or criminal activity. They kill only to protect themselves and their secrets. You can imagine what chaos there would be if the world's population was to learn of this menace. Whole scale anarchy!"

Napoleon cleared his throat, his voice a little incredulous, "Are we talking about little green men here?"

"This is no joke. I was shown evidence. The threat is real. These aliens are coming here to harvest our natural resources and our people for their own nefarious purposes. But, there is a price to pay for what little knowledge we have."

"What's that?"

"If any of the three of us speaks about this publicly, or leaks this to the public, we will be hunted down and killed. As much as I hate the very idea of UNCLE being blackmailed, I have been forced to recognize a power greater than that of our own. These people are utterly ruthless, and they will stop at nothing. I had to make some extremely unspeakable promises to

get you released alive."

Illya shook his head, "It doesn't seem possible.....aliens from another planet coming here....."

"Believe it, and forget about it. That's what these people want. Complete silence. Never another word mentioned."

Waverley's limo stopped in front of a fashionable Manhattan hotel, "I think this is where you gentlemen asked to be dropped off. We've booked rooms for you. You'll be able to recover from this mission in style."

The driver pulled to one side, and got out to open the door for Napoleon and Illya. They were getting out when Mr. Waverley said, "One last thing. There never was a mission to England. This whole episode didn't happen. We did not have this conversation. Have I made myself clear?"

EPILOGUE

SOMEWHERE DEEP BENEATH THE HARLINGTON-STRAKER FILM STUDIOS....

Alec Freeman strode into Straker's office, "Did you manage to take care of that little security problem you mentioned the other night?"

Straker waved him to a seat, "Yes, but you wouldn't believe the favours I had to call in to get everything settled," he lit a cigarillo, "I think that's the last we'll be hearing about our friends from UNCLE."

"Put the fear of God into them, eh?"

"I don't think they'll be troubling us again. Besides, we've got more pressing matters to take of."

"What's happened?"

"An international funded think tank in the Adirondacks was been compromised late last night. The scene has all the earmarks of an alien intrusion. Plus, the American air force tracked a UFO down on local radar. I've got the Omega Corporation working on it now."

"What would there be to interest the aliens there?"

"Genetic research. They were also working on special drugs to eliminate the problems of rejection to donor organs."

"Do the aliens have exactly the same kind of physiology as we do?"

"We know they're similar. And, we know they harvest humans for donor organs. This whole case just smacks of alien activity."

"So, what's being done about it?"

"Omega has sent in a group of operatives to investigate and collect any evidence of alien intervention, and to neutralize the situation accordingly. According to the reports coming in, the UFO went down, but never took off again. We know their ships can't remain in the earth's atmosphere for too long before they disintegrate. It's a race against time to find the UFO and its occupants."

* * *

UNCLE HEADQUARTERS, NEW YORK CITY.....

Mr. Waverley turned in his chair as Illya and Napoleon entered his office, "Gentlemen, I'm sorry to call you in off your vacation, but we've got a situation in the Adirondacks which needs to be taken care of urgently....."