

Still Waters Run Deep

Based on "UFO" the science-fiction TV series created by
Gerry and Sylvia Anderson and Reg Hill (1969-1970)
and "The Man from Atlantis" (1977-78)
created by Herbert F. Solow & Herman Miller
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CHAPTER ONE

February 15, 1975

"All clear ahead, sir," the helmsman of *Skydiver One* reported to his skipper.

"Steady as she goes, Mr. Galley," Captain Peter Carlin advised his crewman, "We'll be slowing in about fifteen minutes to drop that container buoy for the *Miranda*. They can pick up the core samples we took yesterday and get them back to HQ for analysis."

Carlin scanned the ocean bottom carefully through the periscope. Like so many of his crew-mates, the novelty of being aboard SHADO's flagship submarine had not worn off. Neither had their desire to eradicate their planet of the alien menace. SHADO, and its sister organization, Omega, had been created to neutralize that threat.

"Captain, there's some sort of wreckage floating towards the surface.....no! It's not wreckage! It's a body! A man, I think!"

The skipper quickly turned his periscope to the co-ordinates his crew-mate gave him. Yes. There he was. Drifting in the current, "Is he alive?" Carlin asked.

"I can't tell for certain, sir. Should we try to intercept?"

Altruistically speaking, Carlin did not want to leave a man to die in the chill waters of the North Atlantic. Hypothermia at this time of year was a surety. But, bringing him aboard could also constitute a security risk. SHADO and Omega were top secret. Plus, they were planning to rendezvous with the *Miranda* very soon.

"Bring her up to the surface, Mr. Galley. We can't leave him out there like this," Carlin ordered the helmsman, all the while thinking: *I sure hope this isn't going to be more trouble than it's worth.....*

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Skydiver One surfaced as smoothly as possible, so as not to set up a hard back wash of water against their victim. Carlin ordered *Skydiver's* medic and another crew member to bring the man aboard. As soon as they'd accomplished their mission, they submerged and continued on to their appointment with the *Miranda*.

"That's right, Paddy, we've got him on board now," Carlin explained to the *Miranda's* captain, "He's in pretty bad shape. We'd like to transfer him to you - you have better medical facilities than we do down here."

The bearded and bespectacled skipper of the *Miranda* nodded on the video view screen, "We'll meet you at the drop zone and take him with us. I'll have Dr. Anderson stand by for her patient. What's his status?"

"He's unconscious - and we found him naked. He's got some head injuries, and he's having

difficulty breathing. Our medic tried to put a trach tube in him, but couldn't get it in his throat."

"Right. I'll pass that on to Bobbie and she can be ready for him."

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Aboard the *Miranda*

"We'll take those core samples back to GHQ in Britain," Captain O'Brien told Peter Carlin, over the video screen, "And, we'll take our patient back too. The Omega boys can worry about the security risk."

"I wonder whatever happened to him out here? There's no evidence at the location we found him of any sort of ship wreck."

"If we can get him stabilized, maybe Bobbie can get him to tell us. She didn't look too encouraging when he was brought on board."

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"Breathe, will you!" Dr. Bobbie Anderson was trying to get her now semi-conscious patient to take oxygen mask and suck the life-giving gas into his lungs. He kept throwing it off and gasping wretchedly. She saw the mark on his throat where the *Skydiver* medic had unsuccessfully attempted to insert a trachea tube. The wound was fresh and bloody and the patient kept tearing the bandage off it.

It was while she was holding his hands to still him, that Dr. Anderson realized there was something altogether different about them. A fleshy webbing stretched between all his digits. And, his mouth was working oddly - like a fish out of water. *He was unable to breathe and rejected oxygen gas.* She had an idea. A crazy one, but an idea nonetheless.

"Help me get him to the test tank!" she called to her medical assistant.

"What?"

"Don't ask questions - just do as I say! Now!"

Together, the doctor and her assistant supported the man out onto the deck and down a flight of stairs. As they came down, the *Miranda's* resident oceanographer looked up through her glasses in consternation.

"Maya! We need your help. We have to get this man into the tank right now! He's going to die if we don't get him in there!" Dr. Anderson insisted, pushing Maya aside.

Between the three of them, they climbed the stairwell with him and eased the patient down into the tank. Dr. Anderson jumped in with him, her white medical coat floating on the water's surface, and watched as he submerged himself. As the minutes ticked by, she saw the man come to full consciousness, saw him begin to breathe without difficulty, and then watched as he started to swim circles around her and play with the fish in the test tank. He stripped off the jumpsuit he'd been dressed in to transfer to the *Miranda*, and swam in the nude, as though he was not used to such encumbrances as clothing.

Bobbie looked up at Dr. Stewart, "Well, I'll be damned! He's a merman!"

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Captain O'Brien shook his head and asked, "What made you decide to take him down to the test tank?"

"I don't know - I guess it was those webbed hands. He's also got webbed feet. I'm not completely sure as yet, I need to do more tests and probing, but I think the reason the *Skydiver's* medic couldn't get a trachea tube in his throat was because his gills were blocking the way."

"Amazing - a man who is completely evolved to live underwater," the captain paused, "You don't think there's any chance he's part of some sort of alien fifth column element?"

"I really can't say. To be safe, let's keep him separated from the rest of the crew until we get him back to Britain. In the meantime, Dr. Stewart and I can conduct some tests and get some data ready for the SHADO labs. We've drawn blood to do some tox screens, and he seems to be free of radiation. But, the less contact he has with others, the better."

* * *

Dr. Anderson was astonished at the rapid recovery her patient appeared to make after he was placed in the test tank. The scars on his throat and his head seemed to heal almost overnight, and not only was he breathing easily and swimming constantly, but he was finally beginning to respond to his surroundings in a human way. He smiled up through the water at Drs. Anderson and Stewart and played with the fish in the tank - he seemed almost playful - and grateful to be alive.

With her patient stabilized for the moment, Dr. Anderson began to wonder what she should feed him. Was he truly a merman who would prefer raw fish? Or should she try to tempt him with more human-type food?

"I have some sushi stored in the freezer," Dr. Stewart suggested, "Or I could give you some of the herring I've been saving for the dolphins."

"Maybe the sushi. I just don't know. Right now, he seems to be doing so well - I don't want to make him sick on the wrong kind of food."

"How did your tox screens come out?"

"Nothing so far. His head and throat injuries are healing up nicely. I took extra blood samples for the labs at GHQ to do some DNA testing on. I can't imagine he'd have the same kind of DNA as we have. The Captain posited the idea that maybe this man was of alien origin....."

Dr. Stewart pondered that comment, her twin braids falling forward. She stuffed her hands in the pockets of her white lab coat, covering her denim jeans and Steeleye Span sweatshirt, "We know the aliens can't live in our atmosphere for too long before they die. What if they're water breathers? But, he looks too much like one of us....."

Bobbie nodded, diverting her gaze into the test tank where her patient was lazily swimming circles. Over the last 24 hours, she'd noticed a number of things other than his whale-like qualities. His eyes had a green luminescence, probably for swimming deep underwater where the sunlight could not filter down. He preferred nudity to the SHADO issue jumpsuit he'd been given on board the Skydiver, and he didn't appear to be capable of speech, for all Dr. Anderson and Dr. Stewart had tried communicating verbally with him. He was a real mystery, alright.

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Dr. Anderson took down her paperwork so she could "baby-sit" the merman. She'd given him some sushi and not only did he wolf it down with great alacrity, but he actually seemed to want more. After she gave him a bit of raw herring, he settled down to playing with the fish in the tank again, giving her a chance to go over some of the printed test results they'd taken earlier in the day. She and Dr. Stewart had noted that when they turned out all the lights in the tank area, their merman actually seemed to go to sleep for awhile. Some of his behaviour was human-like, some of it was more dolphin-like. A genuine curiosity.

Bobbie got up and walked back over to the tank, taking off her glasses long enough to blink her eyes and press her temples with her fingers. She ran a hand through her short haircut and yawned. She'd been up many hours without any real rest, and a migraine was threatening to overtake her due to exhaustion. The merman was slowly circling the tank, just drifting

about. She sat down beside the tank to watch him for a moment. She could see her own reflection distorted in the glass and wondered if her slender figure and long delicate fingers looked strange to the merman inside the tank.

Inclining his head to one side, the merman swam right up and faced Bobbie through the plexiglass. His luminescent green eyes were beautiful - what deep-sea wonders had they beheld? Bobbie and Maya had marveled at his incredible recuperative powers, and his seemingly dual evolutionary development, as both humanoid and sea creature. She watched, fascinated, as he put one of his webbed hands up, and pressed it to the glass. He seemed to be inviting her to do the same.....she held up her own hand and he moved his to the same spot on the tank. Playfully, the merman moved his hand around the inside of the tank glass, compelling Bobbie to move with him. Was it a game? He had been evidencing an almost dolphin-like playfulness with her and Maya, chasing the tank fish but not eating them, toying with the test equipment they'd used on him.

He continued to move his hand up the glass until Bobbie could not reach. She had to mount the staircase to play the game, and still the merman kept enticing her. Bobbie got to the top and climbed onto the small deck where they'd originally dropped him in. Was he trying to communicate something, or just playing?

The merman surfaced and looked up at her. His luminous green eyes seemed to implore. He held out a webbed hand and when she reached back, he slapped at her hand. Not hard. Gently. The way a dolphin would nose a human.

"What do you want?" she asked him, but there was no reply. He simply continued to look up at her. Finally, she said, "Do you want company? Are you lonely?"

His green eyed gaze was her only answer. For some reason, Bobbie felt compelled to strip off her white lab coat, step out of her dress and plunge into the tank with the merman. The water was cooler than she expected, and she gasped as the merman took her hands in his and drew her down under the water's surface. He removed her glasses and she watched them sink to the bottom of the tank. For someone who'd never learned to swim properly, she was not afraid. It felt as though everything was happening to someone else. And, without her glasses, her visual perceptions underwater were out of focus.

Her mind raced, "*What can I do? What do you want?*"

She felt the warmth of his mouth on her own as he kissed her. Then, the images began to coalesce in her head.....*explosions.....fear.....swimming hard to get away.....twirling silver jewels.....shooting fire.....the others dropping to the sea bottom as they died amidst the terrible attacks.....*

Bobbie was struggling. She broke free of the merman, broke free of the water as she scrabbled away from the webbed hands and the terrible images in her head. Water ran off her in rivulets as she pulled herself up and onto the platform and out of the tank. She had to wake Maya and Captain O'Brien.....

* * *

SHADO GHQ - the debriefing with Straker

"I'm inclined to accept the telepathic images I saw from our merman as legitimate, Commander," Dr. Anderson explained to SHADO's top man, "Considering his apparent inability to speak as we do, and his undersea evolution, how would he even know about alien ships? The telepathic link he established with me must be his species' means of communication."

Dr. Stewart pushed a thick file folder across the table to Straker, "This is a complete

listing of all our tests - tox screens, standard medical exams and samples, and observations. From the time he was brought on board the *Miranda*, one of us has always been with him. We're going to be wrestling with the evolutionary questions for decades. It's just amazing that an underwater humanoid species could evolve, independently of our own, and remain totally unknown for all this time."

"What about the location where he was found? Did *Sky One* find any evidence of an underwater installation?" Straker asked.

"Nothing so far. Our *Skydiver* subs can only go down to certain depths, and west of Newfoundland, the Continental Shelf drops off to over 12,000 feet," Dr. Stewart explained, "But, from the images I got, I don't think our merman came from anything as sophisticated as that. It seems as though his species lived together as a school of fish might, or a pod of dolphins or whales, moving from place to place to find food and some measure of protection, safe places to breed and bear their young. I think it's possible they just happened to be in the wrong place at the wrong time. The aliens must have seen them in the area and attacked them to preserve their own security."

"How's his health?"

Maya smiled, "He's eating well, his wounds have completely healed, and he's healthy by any standards. We're waiting on DNA tests to determine more about his species, but from X-Rays we've taken, he appears to have the standard humanoid internal organs, plus some extras. In addition to his webbed hands and feet, he's got definite gills, and he eliminates much like other sea mammals do. He has a full set of upper teeth, but instead of lower teeth, he seems to have a whale-like baleen on the bottom for filtering food. We're not completely certain, but in his natural habitat, he may eat small crustaceans, possibly plankton, some fish."

Bobbie continued, "I can't say whether he's like us or not, emotionally. The images I received were tinged with powerful feelings of fear and terror, and it's obvious he saw others of his species injured and dying, but I'm not sure if his species goes through a grieving process as we do. Because he doesn't speak, we don't know how much of what we say to him verbally is understood. He has a good attention span, but whether his intelligence is humanoid, or more like a dolphin, is anybody's guess at the moment."

"The *Miranda* will be staying in port for a few days more, taking on supplies, but I've just signed orders for you two to remain on this case. You're our lead investigators on our merman. I'm going to need you to establish some sort of rapport with this fellow and learn as much as you can about the alien attack. If those aliens are down below somewhere, we've got to find them and destroy them."

* * *

Several days later....

The merman had been moved from the test tank on the *Miranda* to a much larger salt-water pool which had been specially prepared for him at SHADO's top secret sea lab on the British coast. Called Project Atlantis, Drs. Anderson and Stewart had been joined by Dr. Schroeder, one of SHADO's top medical men, and their little group settled down to establish communications in some format with the merman and study him in-depth.

"His DNA has many differences from ours," Dr. Schroeder told Bobbie and Maya, "There are also many similarities, but too many evolutionary variables to say he's entirely humanoid like us. Dr. Stewart, you'll be getting some interesting slides and tissue materials to examine from our medical tests. Your preliminary theories, comparing the merman to a dolphin or a whale, may end up bearing out."

"For easier discussion," Dr. Anderson smiled, "We gave him a name. We've called him Neptune."

Schroeder nodded, laying out his stack of files, "Ah yes.....an ancient god of the seas.....good designation.....now, our merman has a much thicker epidermis than we do, with several layers of subcutaneous fatty deposits - possibly to protect him against colder temperatures. And he seems to leak a type of natural oil in both his hair and his skin to keep from drying out. You'll note his fingers and toes do not crinkle like our skin does when we've been in the water too long. The webbing, of course, makes it easier for him to swim.....from his lung capacity and musculature tests, I believe he could make very fast speeds in open water. In fact, his musculature is even more highly developed than ours. Dr. Anderson, you were quite right about the extra eye lid - that's what gives him the sleepy, dreamy appearance - and his eyes have far more highly developed photo receptors than we do, as you suspected. His very light skin color may be a result of rarely being exposed to the sunlight. Hard to say if that is the cause, or if he lacks the natural type of melanin we carry in our bodies. More tests will decipher that. He is proving to be a most fascinating specimen."

"I'm going to be setting up a series of sea mammal testing for Neptune," Dr. Stewart explained, "Because he seems to have so many porpoise or whale-like aspects, we're going to test him for echo location. X-rays show he does seem to have an organ like a voice box in the appropriate area of the throat, so while he doesn't speak in the same way we do, he may actually make other sounds when necessary. And, there's an odd little organ in the top of his head which may mimic the same organ used by whales for sonar. As you know, whales 'sing' and their songs are fairly complex inter-species communications which we don't know much about as yet. It may be possible that Neptune's telepathic powers are far more developed than ours, so Dr. Jackson is coming in to test him for psi and other extrasensory abilities. It's a full slate of exams, and they're listed as I have them scheduled here, starting tomorrow morning," Maya passed around stapled sheets of paper to the others, "You'll each get a full report and briefing when all the tests have been completed and evaluated. Once we co-ordinate the reports from all our tests, we'll be able to send a final dossier to Commander Straker at GHQ."

"When is Dr. Jackson expected?"

"I understand he's to arrive by the end of the week to begin psi testing."

* * *

April 1st, 1975

As the days went by, the research team discovered more and more vital information about their merman. Neptune even began to respond to his name right away. The team was constantly amazed by his seeming mental melange of humanoid and cetacean-like intelligence. While he didn't vocalize with them, he did use hand gestures and body language to communicate. And, he seemed to pick up hand gestures quickly from the humans. Dr. Anderson was adept at American Sign Language, a study all SHADO and Omega personnel were required to become proficient in. He learned the alphabet from her in one day and went on to learn other signals which meant more abstract concepts. As the testing continued, it was clear that his was no primitive species, even if they had not lived as surface breathing humanoids did. He had a dolphin-like playfulness, and typically dolphin-like eagerness to please them and learn new things. He became very demanding, wanting to play, to be tested for most of his waking hours. Neptune exhibited no fear, even when they subjected him to medical exams, drew blood and made him pose for X-rays. He could stand brief periods outside the pool, but they returned him to it as quickly as possible every time. They were not

sure how much time he could spend out of it.

"Dr. Jackson is here to start the psi testing with Neptune," Dr. Stewart told Bobbie as they were watching him swim lazy circles in the pool.

"Fine. He's ready. I think he's getting a bit bored with that we've been doing with him the last few days. We can't measure his intelligence by human standards, but he's so amenable to everything. And, eager to learn. I think he's just about to start creating sentences with the ASL I taught him."

"It's probably time we upgraded his food situation. The baleen-like structure in his mouth, and the fact he has normal upper teeth, tells me he can ingest both fish which need to be chewed, and he may be able to filter tiny organisms like plankton."

"What do you suggest? We can't exactly dangle herring for him to jump at like a seal."

"No, I'm not suggesting anything like that," Maya laughed, "But, a constant diet of sushi is not what he's used to. We could be inhibiting his natural feeding behaviours considerably in captivity. And, perhaps even affecting his health. I think it's time we provided him with some edible live items in the pool. I'd like to give him some fish types that dolphins eat in the wild and see if that entices him. If so, it would be a good opportunity for us to observe his eating habits."

Bobbie nodded, "Start tomorrow. Then we can make our observations and start monitoring his physiological changes if any ensue from the change in diet. Can you get any plankton for him?"

"One of the university test facilities is studying luminescent plankton - I'll get some containers of it and see if he's interested," Maya left to make some phone calls and handle other work.

Sitting down beside the pool, Bobbie watched Neptune as he hovered near her in the water. He had some fish for company, but it was apparent he was far more interested in human companionship. Bobbie signed to him "*new food tomorrow*" but she wasn't sure if he would even understand the concept of *tomorrow*. For the first time since the experience in the *Miranda's* test tank, Neptune held out his hand to her in that imploring fashion. He signed to her "*please*."

"*Please*" what? Please for new food? Or please for company? Bobbie signed back "*Hungry?*"

Neptune signed back affirmatively, but then he signed again, "*Not food*."

What did he mean? He didn't want new food? She got down on her hands and knees beside the pool, the protective tiling felt cold and clammy on her palms. Neptune was looking out through the water at her, his head inclined to one side. Finally he reached out of the water and grasped her hand, pulling gently. His touch was soft, his skin cool with the water temperature, and yet warm beneath his skin. He caressed her hand. "*Here. Come in here with me*," it seemed as though she could hear his thoughts moving directly from his mind to hers.

She put her glasses in her coat pocket and then removed her lab coat, her simple dress and shoes, and slid into the pool beside Neptune with a small splash. She saw him smile at her, and he took her hand again. He pulled her along, swimming under the water with her, trying to get her to mimic his own movements. Bobbie struggled to hold her breath and copy his undulating swimming style, which was one part humanoid, many parts dolphin. Out of breath, she broke the surface of the pool, gasping. Yet, she felt driven to continue. He was reaching out to her - trying to communicate in his own way, trying to bring her into his world somehow.

To her surprise, Neptune tugged at her underwear. He touched her bra with a quizzical

look in his eyes, and it was clear he didn't understand the concept of clothing at all. His species was obviously born, lived and died without such encumbrances as clothes. "Why?" he seemed to be asking.

Bobbie knew that the reasons her species wore clothing would be so foreign to him as to be inexplicable, given his limited knowledge and communications skills at present. How could she explain that her species was less hardy than his, that the often harsh environment of life on the surface required protective garments? But, here in the free environs of the salt water pool, her underwear felt like a barrier to some greater experience, some greater chance of understanding him, of truly connecting.....

Off came the bra and underpants. They dropped like ribbons of fabric to the bottom of the pool, and Neptune again tried to make her emulate his swimming movements. She tried her best with her long legs, but she needed to come up for air, or else she would panic. Not being a natural swimmer, she had the typical response to holding her breath underwater.

Neptune urged her to climb onto his back, and when she did so, he took her around and around the pool, so she could hold her head above the water and yet be close to him. She's seen similar behaviour between dolphins and humans at water theme parks. He wanted her to ride with him, and play!

They continued for another half an hour, swimming, playing with the pool toys, and finally floating motionless in the water, enclosed in some sort of timeless water-world, in which nothing mattered. Bobbie realized that for at least thirty minutes, she hadn't thought about medical tests, or physical exams, or anything at all. Time had stood still while she'd cavorted with the merman.

Gentle hands reached out and experimentally caressed her. She wasn't embarrassed. He was learning. His beautiful green eyes were playful, and yet there was a gravity in them as well. He pressed his mouth to hers, and she felt his thoughts, "*So alone.....*"

She suddenly felt overwhelmed with his grief and longing. It was as though his emotions had become hers. She felt his pain - fresh, immediate, searing. Bobbie saw again in his mind the loss of his pod-members, the other merpeople who were killed by the marauding silver ships, dealing death in every direction as they scrambled to escape. His terror and his wish for death when he realized he was alone.

He needed comfort. He was reaching out, beseeching her to understand his need to be accepted into a new pod, a new family group. He had to belong.....somewhere. She was kind to him, he could trust her.....

As he drew her into his arms and covered her with kisses, Bobbie felt no strangeness. It felt natural to respond to him, to accept and be accepted. The world of SHADO and Omega, of menacing aliens, of medical tests and intelligence exams receded from her mind.....

CHAPTER TWO

Dr. Anderson was dimly aware of a floating feeling. Like she was a ship adrift on the ocean. She stirred and felt her nude body moving in water. As she woke up, she realized she was still in the salt waters of the SHADO installation's pool. Nearby, watching her with eager eyes, was Neptune. How long had she been asleep?

She pulled herself, dripping, out of the water, and hastily tried to put her dress back on. Where were her undies? Damn. They were at the bottom of the pool! With a shy smile, Neptune dove down and retrieved her bra and underpants. Bobbie stuffed them in the pocket of her lab coat.

What had happened? Had she really seen those images? Those pictures in her mind of how Neptune's people lived? Their simple wanderings from ocean to ocean, in search of abundant food and safety for their young? How they had avoided the surface people for literally thousands of years? How they feared the surface people for their deadly weapons - that they killed the whales and the dolphins and destroyed the stocks of cod and other fish until it became harder and harder for Neptune's own people to find sustenance? All those images showed Bobbie a world and a situation she had never before thought much about. Man's depredations of the seas were killing so many species, but it had taken the aliens to decimate Neptune's pod. Now, Neptune was the last of his kind. And, afraid. Afraid of being alone.

With a blush, she realized that was not all that had happened. A connection far greater than she had expected was created. A physical and psychic blending that was totally different from anything she'd known with a male of her own species.

But, reality struck her like a hammer-blow. What she had done in the interests of forging a better connection with her subject had backfired. It had become personal. Neptune had filled her head with images of his own life, his own people. She could not forget what she'd seen. Nor could she forget the strange sweetness of their lovemaking. Each in their own way seeking knowledge of the other's world - what images had he taken from her mind about her life? Would any of it make sense to him?

She looked at her waterproof watch. Had she really been there most of the night? It was time to get a shower and get ready for Dr. Jackson's psi testing. Neptune's expression was one of sadness as she walked away from the side of the pool to the door.

"I'll be back.....later.....," she told him.

* * *

"I'm preparing a report on our merman for Commander Straker, but I have copies here for all of you as well. Neptune's psi rating is extremely high, as you suspected. But, so far, the only person on the project he seems to be responding to with his abilities is Dr. Anderson. He seems most attached to you, Doctor," Jackson's voice sounded innocent, but his inference was not. Typical Jackson.

"Well, that's probably because Dr. Stewart and myself are the personnel who have remained with him the longest since he was taken out of the water," Bobbie decided to ignore Jackson's pointed comment, "We've been responsible for feeding and caring for him for the most part."

"He appears to be well-developed mentally, although his is unable to speak as we speak. So far, at least. I noted that he is using some ASL hand signals and words when I tested him. He seems to be gaining a good mastery of the language. But, does he really understand their

meaning?"

Dr. Stewart jumped in, "Neptune has a clear desire to communicate. I've been teaching him ASL and so far, he's amassed a vocabulary of just under 50 words and meanings. I'm sure he'll be able to expand on that and begin forming sentences - even if they're grammatically simple. As for his telepathic abilities, we've posited the theory that this is the main form of communications used among his species. Vocal abilities are very minimal. He appears to use echo location - in much the same way as whales and dolphins."

"Yes, there are many references in your reports to cetacean-like behaviours."

"Even cetacean-like physical features," Dr. Stewart added, "He has a baleen-type structure in his mouth for filtering plankton possibly, and he eats regular fish too. In fact, we started him on luminescent plankton just as you arrived from HQ and he seems to like it."

"Any ideas on evolution?" Jackson sat back in his chair, much enjoying the role of chairman.

"I think that's going to take a great deal of time. All I can say, is that somehow, at some point, some humans obviously decided to return to the oceans. Did this happen parallel to the development of homo sapiens? I don't know. Neptune has many humanoid characteristics, in addition to those which are cetacean-like. Whales and their whole genus are sea mammals - they give birth to live young, and their mothers feed them milk, just as land mammals do. Over time, Neptune's species may have developed cetacean-like behaviours and physical attributes because they were necessary for survival. It seems bizarre to consider any link between humans and cetaceans, I know," Dr. Stewart finished.

"Dr. Anderson, your comments?" Jackson's smile was oily.

"As a doctor, there are a lot of questions I feel further research may answer," Bobbie was cautious. She knew Jackson's already considerable reputation in SHADO for ferreting out the secrets of others. If she wanted to remain on this project, she had to get a grip on herself. To distance herself from getting too close to her subject.....

Dr. Schroeder spoke up for the first time during the briefing, "Dr. Jackson, you haven't stated as yet what your recommendations to Commander Straker are going to be. The three of us have worked hard to document what we consider to be a vital find - scientifically speaking, and from SHADO's perspective. We have a representative of a species here that may be the last of his kind - he has telepathically intimated that his family unit - his pod - were destroyed by the aliens. This information could prove very important," Dr. Schroeder leaned forward in his seat, "This young merman could be of enormous assistance to us in flushing out alien underwater installations. We've known for some time that the aliens work mainly underwater for their own safety and security. Look at that case in Shag Harbour, Nova Scotia, and the others along the Atlantic coast. Neptune may in fact be a vast storehouse of information - waiting to be tapped - for SHADO."

"Yeeeessss," Jackson drawled, "I don't doubt that," he stood up to signal that the briefing was at an end, "I'll of course be passing your recommendations through to the Commander when I return to HQ. I'm sure you'll receive further orders after that."

* * *

What happened next surprised even Dr. Schroeder. The project received a visit from the big man himself, Commander Straker.

"After I read your reports, and Dr. Jackson's, I realized that we had a very rare find indeed. I'd like to meet our homo oceanus, as Dr. Anderson calls him," Straker stood at the head of the briefing table, "It seems almost inconceivable that we've been sharing this planet's

oceans with another humanoid species - unknown to us for thousands of years."

"He's very bright, and eager to please," Dr. Stewart replied, "But, you have to remember that he understands only what he's learned so far from us. The wider picture, concerning the aliens and why they killed his pod-members, is not clear to him as yet. He's just learning to communicate abstract ideas in a format we can understand, and he still uses telepathy to get serious concepts, such as grief and fear, across to us. Or should I say, to Dr. Anderson. He seems to have imprinted on her as his contact to the rest of us."

"I'm sure, Dr. Anderson, you'll be willing to assist in getting as much information as possible from our merman. If he trusts you, that makes you our point-woman, in this search for further knowledge about possible underwater alien installations. What has he communicated to you so far about where his pod was attacked?"

"If you're asking me if he's pin-pointed a geographical location on the map, no sir, he hasn't. All I've been able to ascertain is that his pod was attacked somewhere in the mid-Atlantic. I don't think his species understands the geography of the oceans the way we do. They just.....go where instinct demands. They seem to migrate from area to area, looking for food and shelter from whatever hazards they may face below the surface. What we're dealing with here, is a species of human which has a completely different set of parameters for living than we do. They've shaved life down to its slimmest expectations - food, shelter, a shared community of their own kind. Yes, Neptune is humanoid, but he's more like a.....whale or a dolphin....."

Straker's blue eyes were unfathomable as he said, "You're aware that the American Navy has been secretly working with dolphins for some time."

"I've heard the rumours and I've seen some leaked documentation. But, Neptune is more than just an animal. He's a thinking, feeling human. It's just that because of his evolution, he straddles the fence between being truly human, and truly cetacean in nature. I also understand that the Navy's work with dolphins has not been scientific, but military, and they don't seem to mind expending any number of dolphins to accomplish their aims. I hope SHADO will not use Neptune so ruthlessly. He's the only one of his species we have." Bobbie felt it was important to drive that point home to SHADO's commander.

"In this war with the aliens, we're all expendable, if it will stop them from coming here. But, I'm sure we can glean information from our merman without causing him any harm. SHADO is sworn to protect all those who live on this planet - and that includes those who live in its oceans. Neptune could be a vital step forward for us if handled properly. I think expanding his capacity to communicate directly, rather than telepathically, should be paramount. I don't like putting all my trust in one person as an information funnel," he looked pointedly at Dr. Anderson, "Even if you do have the best interests at heart for our merman."

* * *

Straker wanted to meet Neptune and see the research facility for himself. Drs. Stewart and Anderson took Straker down to the salt pool to see Neptune. Bobbie hoped by putting a real face to the name, Straker would take a more human view of the merman, rather than scientific or military. She knew she was already 'in over her head', but if she could keep the personal involvement out of her relationship with Neptune, she could be more objective and work for his best interests.

The doctors ran Neptune through a few tests in the pool to show Straker firsthand what his behaviour was like, and they spoke with him before he left to go back to SHADO HQ.

"Doctors, believe me, I realize we have quite a scientific find here, but he's seen the aliens

up close and personal. It's vital that we get some information out of him as to *where* the aliens attacked his group.....his pod, as you call it. Consider that your prime target in this project for the time being. Keep me in the loop."

They saw Straker off and returned to the pool area. Bobbie was thinking, "Maya, we know Neptune uses some form of echo location, right? What if his pod was doing that when the aliens found them? What if the aliens detected the echo location soundings of Neptune's pod of mer-people and investigated?"

Maya inclined her head. As always, she thought about a query for a few moments before answering, "Straker wants us to find the geographic location the aliens attacked the pod - he obviously thinks the aliens killed the pod to hide some sort of covert activity - maybe an underwater installation or something. We know the co-ordinates where Sky One picked Neptune out of the water. But, I don't think one merman could make enough sound to carry strongly enough that the aliens would pick it up. Why don't we record Neptune's echo location sounds and have them amplified to sound like more than one! That would give our people the chance to stage a recon mission."

"Let's talk to the equipment staff right away. And, get Dr. Schroeder to contact HQ and get the go-ahead on this."

* * *

"Let me get this straight, you want to record echo location sounds from our merman to see if that will raise any aliens?" Straker repeated to Schroeder over the phone.

"That's right, Commander. Drs. Stewart and Anderson have theorized that the aliens may have been drawn to the pod because they picked up their echo-location soundings. If we record Neptune, we can amplify his sounds, and have Sky One broadcast them underwater. It might just flush out any aliens hiding below."

"It sounds like a long shot, Doctor."

"We have a merman who cannot speak to us in our way. Anything we try to do with him is going to be a long shot. But, this is a relatively safe experiment. If the aliens are drawn to the sounds, then we'll have *Sky One* right on site to take care of things. If it doesn't get any attention, we start back at Square One again."

"Alright, fine. I'll order *Sky One* to liaise with you on this mission, with *Sky Three* as a standby just in case there's any action. Let's get on this right away. Signed orders for this mission will arrive for you via SHADO courier tomorrow morning. Start recording!"

* * *

Over the last few days, Dr. Anderson had been spending less time with Neptune than usual. She asked Dr. Stewart to co-ordinate the recording of Neptune's echo location sounds, and to oversee his feeding and testing with Dr. Schroeder. She wasn't avoiding her responsibilities, but she was avoiding Neptune himself as much as possible. And, when she did go down to the salt pool, his big green eyes followed her around sadly, as though he were a rejected puppy. Avoiding him personally was easy, avoiding him mentally wasn't.

Although she didn't want to admit it, Bobbie was drawn beyond her own will to the merman. There was something about him, mute though he was, that touched her heart. He was beautiful, like a wild animal. He had the heart of a dolphin and the body of a man - a heady combination. Bobbie spent her life living in her mind. Her work always came first and foremost. Romance was just a distraction to avoid. But, romance was not what had happened between Bobbie and Neptune. It was something else - on a far deeper level. It went beyond man and woman. He asked nothing of her, and yet gave all that he was. He was reaching out to

her to be understood and accepted. And, his acceptance of her was wholehearted in a way other human males could never fathom or emulate.

Neptune also made her think. As a medical doctor, she rarely concerned herself with the kind of work that scientist or oceanographers like Maya Stewart carried on. It was enough for her to work in tandem on the *Miranda*, to be a small part in the bigger mission of SHADO - to end the alien depredations of their planet and their people. But, Neptune's mental images - of his people, of the undersea world they inhabited, of their fear of the surface breathers and their killing of whales and other creatures, stirred her to consider what mankind had been doing in the ocean for so many centuries had been wrong. She was seeing a whole different philosophy through Neptune, and it was changing her perceptions in ways she never expected. It was time the world heeded the call to conservation and recognition of the other intelligent beings on the planet.

Here was a gentle, intelligent creature from the sea, homo oceanus, part humanoid, part cetacean, and he was telling her that his kind had shrunk from contact with surface people, because their track record proved they couldn't be trusted. They'd kept themselves entirely invisible from the world outside the oceans for reasons of self-protection. And, now, in the very place they expected to find safety, they were decimated by an alien menace.

Bobbie began to feel a righteous anger building in her. She would do everything in her power to protect Neptune, and to find those aliens responsible and make them pay.

* * *

"We've got some pretty powerful recordings ready," Maya explained, "*Sky One* and the *Miranda* are going out to the co-ordinates. I just opened our sealed orders from HQ. You and I are to report back to the *Miranda* with Neptune."

Bobbie looked up from her paperwork, and removed her glasses, "Why do we have to take Neptune? He's safer here at the facility."

"Straker's orders. Apparently he still feels Neptune might recognize something in the area, or contribute in some way. We've got less than seven hours to prepare before the *Miranda* docks and we follow *Sky One* and *Three* out to sea."

As Maya got down to sorting necessary equipment and collecting their research papers, Bobbie opted to go down to the salt pool. She knelt down on the cool tiles and waited for Neptune to swim over to her. He was usually excited to see her, but today he was hesitant. He floated serenely on the other side, looking at her quizzically. He knew she'd been avoiding him and now he was confused.

"Neptune.....we must take a journey.....a very important voyage," Bobbie started speaking. Neptune eyed her carefully but did not come any closer.

She sat down, took her shoes off, and dropped her legs over the side of the pool, "I know you don't understand. It seems like I'm.....never here anymore. But, I have important work to do....." Did the concept of work mean anything to him at all? She realized it probably didn't. She started again, "Neptune, you didn't do anything wrong. I did. I.....I should not have.....been so intimate with you....."

It was a quiet time of day. Maya and Dr. Schroeder were busy in other areas of the facility. Bobbie had sent the regular observer off for his dinner. She stripped off to her clothes and got into the pool. As always, the water was a pleasant sensation on her skin. She hadn't meant to go this far, but it seemed vital to make contact with Neptune.

"We need your help," Bobbie said aloud, as she paddled over to his side of the pool, "Only you can help us."

Hesitantly, Neptune accepted her outstretched hands. The flood of images that struck her brain at his touch was almost painful in its intensity - loneliness, fear, questioning. Why had she left him alone? Why did she not remain with him? Had he done something wrong? The rawness and honesty of his emotions was almost more than she could stand.

"I'm sorry," she tried to send her emotions back to him, "I won't do it again. I was afraid...."

She sensed his lack of understanding - he was appalled that she could fear him, "We.....I need your help.....the people who attacked your pod.....they may still be down there.....they are our enemies too. They have killed my people just as they killed yours. We must go back to sea to find them and stop them....."

Again, the images flowed from his mind to hers. She saw a peaceful merpeople, a small group who swam the oceans of the world, who played, fed, made love, bore their young in secluded safe places, and lived only in the moment. For them, there was no yesterday or tomorrow - only the present. There was a primal simplicity to their lives that seemed impossible for Bobbie to comprehend, just as the complexity of her life eluded Neptune's understanding.

* * *

May 3rd, 1975

The *Miranda* sailed on calm spring waters, but as they approached the co-ordinates where Neptune had been picked up by Sky One, they saw lots of small "growlers" - chunks of ice which had dropped off larger icebergs and ice masses as they made their way down from the Greenland coast. It was still cold and Drs. Stewart and Anderson were shocked that Neptune and his pod could withstand such frigid temperatures. After all, 1500 people had died of hypothermia when the Titanic went down in that area in April 1912.

Because of having to move about, and board the ship, Neptune now spent at least an hour every day out of his pool. He made himself at home in the *Miranda's* test tank again, but convincing him to put on clothing had been something of an adventure.

Bobbie tried to explain to him that it was necessary in her world for people to wear garments. It was to protect humans from the elements and to satisfy cultural restrictions. But, Bobbie despaired, even as she tried to tell him about clothing. How could he ever really understand what the word "culture" meant? After all, his own people were intelligent, but they had no "culture" per se. They lived like dolphins, their only concerns were those immediate to their continued survival.

It took her over an hour to convince him to put on a simple pair of pants, a shirt and jacket, and he absolutely refused to bother with underwear. He thought socks were ridiculous. He wasn't much more impressed with the idea of shoes, but Bobbie managed to explain that these were to protect the bottoms of his feet from all the potentially hurtful surfaces he might have to traverse to get on board the *Miranda*.

Even as they voyaged out to the original co-ordinates, Neptune seemed preoccupied and distant. Bobbie sensed the very idea of going back to the sea, returning to the site of his pod's decimation, was painful and fraught with conflicting emotions. Although Neptune was still eating the stock of plankton and fish Maya had brought on board the *Miranda* for him, Bobbie discovered he was also interested in regular human food. He was amazed to see fruit items; Bobbie peeled a banana in front of him and he surprised her by wanting a bite. She gave it to him, a little nervously, because she didn't know how his gastrointestinal system would react to something so exotic as fruit. But, he seemed fine and indeed acquired a taste for bananas,

requesting one through ASL every day. He also wanted a taste of Bobbie's pineapple juice and decided it was delicious!

Both Bobbie and Maya discovered new things about Neptune almost hourly. He was a vast cornucopia of information, and they kept recording each new discovery with a scientific and personal excitement neither of them had ever experienced in their careers. They kept a steady stream of coded reports going back to Commander Straker, detailing all they were learning about their merman.

Captain O'Brien had set the *Miranda's* course to join Sky One at the original co-ordinates where Neptune had been found earlier. They arrived at the site in the wee hours of the morning, when the sky was barely turning pink, its colours reflected in the icebergs and growlers floating on the water's surface. Contact was made with *Sky One* and *Sky Three*; the captains synchronized the time at which *Sky One* planned to broadcast the augmented echo location soundings they'd recorded from Neptune before leaving Britain.

The soundings were scheduled to be broadcast at 05:00 am sharp that morning, and Bobbie went below to check on Neptune. The weather was cool and clear, with the sun was coming up on the eastern horizon. When she got below to Neptune's test tank area, she found him sitting on one of the benches, trying to put on the slacks and shirt Bobbie had given him for coming on board the *Miranda*.

"What are you doing?" she signed in ASL to him.

Neptune looked up, a rare expression of frustration evident on his handsome face. He signed back that he was trying to put on "things", and he pointed upwards, suggesting he meant to go topside. Bobbie smothered a giggle as she assisted him in putting his shirt on the right way around ("The buttons do up in the front," she explained in ASL to him). Then she asked him why he wanted to be dressed.

His response surprised her. He signed that he knew they were going back to the place he'd been found and he wanted to see it again.

Neither Maya nor Bobbie had explained much to him about why they were recording his echo location soundings. Now Bobbie realized she had to tell him something. She used ASL again to sign to him about the soundings and how they were going to reproduce them underwater to see if they could flush out the enemy ships which attacked his pod.

Although it was clear Neptune did not understand how they could recreate his echo location soundings, he insisted that he wanted to go up on deck. Bobbie at last agreed, because he seemed so insistent, and persuaded him to put on some shoes and a warm jacket from the ship's stores as it was cold out in the early morning hours.

"Captain, he wants to come up on deck and see our location. I don't know if this will provide us with anymore information or not, but I've managed to convince him to put on clothing." Bobbie explained on the bridge.

Paddy O'Brien grinned, "Yeah, I can just imagine the stir it would cause among our female crew members to see him out there on deck in the nude! I can't see it would cause any problems," he checked his watch, "We've got about 15 minutes before *Sky One* starts broadcasting the echo location soundings. But, you'll have to get him below asap if we make contact with any alien ships."

Holding firmly to Bobbie's hand, Neptune came up the stairs from below and went with her to the rail at the stern to look out over the water. His expression was thoughtful, and he inclined his head from side to side, watching the seagulls that followed in their slow wake, listening to their mournful cries, and noting the chop of the ocean against the *Miranda's*

powerful steel hull. Bobbie's communications device sprang to life, as Captain O'Brien's voice crackled out, "Standby, all hands! *Sky One* begins broadcasting in 30 seconds!"

Bobbie watched Neptune. His expression changed. He inclined his head to the waters below, and she wondered - was it possible he could hear the echo soundings on the surface? He seemed to vibrate with excitement. All she could hear was the lap of the water and the seagulls.

Suddenly, Neptune gesticulated down to the water and climbed the rail. Bobbie grabbed at him, but before she could stop him, he dove over the side of the *Miranda* and down into the dark Atlantic waters. She heard her own scream as he disappeared into the ocean depths.....

Then, she saw the waters churning ahead of the *Miranda*. And, Captain O'Brien's voice came through her communicator again, "All hands to battle stations - all hands to battle stations!"

* * *

Bobbie stood stunned, transfixed at the rail for a moment, watching three spinning silver alien ships emerge from the churning waters ahead. They arced down over the *Miranda*, firing at will at the SHADO surface ship, forcing her to make a run for the protection of the bridge. There, Captain O'Brien was barking orders for evasive action and firing special laser cannon at the alien spacecraft. The comm officer was fielding garbled transmissions from both *Sky One* and *Sky Three*; Bobbie heard the powerful engines overhead as *Sky Three* zoomed in for the kill, and Captain Carlin was being launched from *Sky One* to join the attack.

"Have visuals," Captain Carlin reported, as Captain Waterman, in *Sky Three*, shot one of the alien ships down and it crash landed in the choppy ocean.

The *Miranda's* laser cannon fired repeatedly, bringing another alien ship down, and Carlin fired off a missile, which blew the third alien ship to bits. Debris rained down on the waters, while the other two alien craft sank beneath the waves to their watery graves.

Once all three alien ships had been reported disposed of, Captain O'Brien ordered the *Miranda* secured from general alert, and joined the other two in an area search for wreckage, bodies, or whatever else they could find. Bobbie asked Captain O'Brien if she could see him in his ready room for a moment when the battle was over.

"Shouldn't you be below with our merman?" the Captain asked her.

"That's just it, Captain! He jumped overboard just before the alien ships surfaced! He's.....gone! I couldn't stop him!"

"Oh, shit!" O'Brien took a deep breath, "I'll contact *Sky One* and *Sky Three* - they can have their people do an underwater search," he saw the stricken look on Bobbie's face and spoke to it, "Look, we'll do all we can to find him, Boo. I promise you that."

* * *

48 hours later.....

Bobbie sat down in Captain O'Brien's ready room. He looked up at her. His expression was grim, "Bobbie, we've done a complete and thorough search of this area. I'm sorry. We can't find Neptune."

A rising lump in her throat meant all she could do was nod at the Captain.

"I know how vital Neptune was to SHADO, and I know how important he was to you and Maya personally. But, between the three of our ships, we just haven't been able to locate him. We don't know if he left the area, or.....was injured or killed by the alien ships which crash landed in the water. We've done a major search, we've even replayed the recorded sonar soundings to get his attention. We thought maybe he could hear them above the surface, even

though we couldn't. No luck." Paddy's voice was quiet as he explained, "We've got some alien wreckage which we're taking back to HQ. But, no bodies. Alien or otherwise."

Bobbie stood up slowly, "Paddy, could I ask you to inform GHQ of this? Maya and I will.....try to get a full report ready to transmit before we reach shore," she fetched a deep sigh, holding back tears of frustration and loss.

Paddy stopped her as she went to leave, his beautiful eyes looking on her with pity from behind his glasses, "We've done all we can here, Boo. I don't know what else to tell you."

CHAPTER THREE

June 28th, 1978

Drs. Maya Stewart and Bobbie Anderson sat down in front of Alec Freeman. He was Straker's second in command, so they figured something interesting must be afoot to get an "audience" with him at the SHADO headquarters, buried deep beneath the Harlington-Straker Film Studios.

"Please sit down, ladies," Freeman smiled, "Can I offer you some tea or coffee?"

Maya accepted a coffee, and Bobbie ordered an herbal tea. Freeman continued, "I'm standing in for Commander Straker on this briefing today. He's got a meeting with General Henderson and the Astrophysical Commission," he waited until the ladies had their beverages in hand, "I have a new assignment for you both. It's something I think which will be of vital interest to SHADO and to you both personally."

"Our Omega operatives on the American West Coast have sent us some very interesting intelligence photos. We've decided these photos require some in-depth investigation, so we're dispatching you to California to deal with it," Freeman opened a file and spread some blown up pictures out on his desk for the doctors to see. He watched them both for reactions. Maya inclined her head curiously, but Bobbie gasped.

"As you can see, we've got pictures of a missing person. Our merman, Neptune."

Bobbie's voice was rigidly controlled as she asked, "Where did these pictures come from? He's alive?"

Freeman smiled, "Not only is he alive, but he's being held at the Foundation for Oceanic Research in Long Beach. That facility is under the direction of a Dr. Elizabeth Merrill. Your job will be to join the Foundation as exchange scientists from Environment Canada. That should permit you to get access to their facility, and hopefully Neptune. Your job will be find out what he remembers and knows about SHADO."

Maya spoke up, "Are we required to bring him back with us?"

"That hasn't been decided as yet. It mainly depends on how much of a security risk he may prove to be. He saw quite a few things about SHADO's operations, including the alien ships which destroyed his pod, and the battle between our ships and the alien craft three years ago. We can't risk him spilling all this to Dr. Merrill or to any of the people at the Foundation. If we'd known about his survival sooner.....You've got to determine his risk factor and act accordingly." Freeman opened another file and passed out perfectly falsified Canadian passports and Environment Canada documents, "You're going to join the Foundation as cetacean researchers working to discover why so many whales have been beaching themselves on Canada's eastern and western coasts. Hopefully this will get you through the proverbial door, and bring you into closer contact with Neptune. If our people could get photos, the belief is, you should be able to find him and spirit him out of there. You'll be flying to New York, from there to Vancouver, and from there to Long Beach. Maya will be equipped with some amnesia drug to be used at your discretion. We're also sending the *Miranda* through the Panama Canal to cruise the California coast so you can get out of there in one piece."

* * *

En route to the Foundation for Oceanic Research....

Dr. Merrill's smile was bright and cheerful as she welcomed Bobbie and Maya at the airport, "I hope you had a good flight? I've got a car waiting for us outside. They'll take us right down to the Foundation."

Once in the Foundation's station wagon, Bobbie and Maya handed over their Environment Canada documents for perusal, "Please, call me Liz," Dr. Merrill smiled again, "Do you prefer Roberta or Josephine?" she asked Dr. Anderson.

"Just call me Bobbie - everyone else does."

"I've been reading some of the reports from Canada, vis a vis the whale beaching problem. Are they beaching because they're ill?"

Maya replied, "Some whales do have minor health problems, but a great many of them are not sick at all. Frankly, it's getting quite worrisome. We've been lobbying with other nations to stop the Russians and the Japanese from whale hunting in the Pacific, but so far no luck. And the Norwegians on the Atlantic coast are still doing some hunting. It's most distressing to see these poor creatures hunted almost to the point of extinction. After all, the products once taken from whales are no longer necessary. Ambergris has been replaced by lab-created chemicals in perfumes, and whale oil is not necessary for lighting lamps. As for whale meat, it's actually less healthy for human consumption than once thought. The hunt is a total anachronism which is only serving to spread suffering and seriously harm the numbers of whales in the world."

"What about aboriginal hunters - the Eskimos for instance?"

"It's just as difficult to stop the Inuit from hunting as well," Bobbie added, "Their view is that whale hunting is an ancestral cultural thing which the white man should not interfere with. But, the truth is, they take far fewer whales every year than do the whaling fleets of other countries."

"Well, at the Foundation, we do very careful research into whale life, and also into the effect the hunt is having on the various species of whales, porpoises, etc. They're very intelligent creatures, and we at the Foundation feel humanity is doing a major disservice to them by treating them in such a cavalier manner."

"Our mandate, from Environment Canada, is to determine if the hunt is causing some whales to beach themselves, or if hunt injuries are the culprit. We work mainly out of the Vancouver Aquarium, but as you know from our introduction papers, it's a problem in the Atlantic Provinces as well. Many reports are coming to us from cetacean experts in Newfoundland, Nova Scotia and Prince Edward Island especially."

"We can certainly give you the benefit of our research and hopefully exchange some information while you're here. I hope you don't mind, but instead of putting you up in a local hotel, we've arranged for you to stay at the Foundation's facility living quarters."

* * *

Drs. Stewart and Anderson were bunked in together in one of the Foundation's simple rooms for the scientists and researchers attached to the facility. Each room had two beds, two desks and closets for stowing personal gear. One task the Foundation had been involved with on a large scale, was placing harmless electronic monitors on as many whales of different species as possible, so they could chart their migratory patterns. They also knew that the fleets from countries which permitted whale hunting often cruised hereditary migratory tracks in hopes of snaring whales.

Elizabeth Merrill took them on a tour of the Foundation's many labs and research stations, their test tanks and pools, and they even had a baby humpback whale in for medical reasons. The baby was being given medication, and once it was healthy enough to be on its own, they planned to release it into the ocean. Somehow the baby had gotten separated from its pod and ended up beached on the California coast.

Bobbie and Maya were kneeling beside the baby whale in its pool when a shadow fell over them in the warm California sun. Boo looked up into a pair of familiar green eyes.

"My name is Mark Harris. I have been looking after the small one here," he indicated the baby whale. Standing taller than Bobbie remembered, Mark was clad in a pair of yellow swim trunks and a white squall jacket.

Recovering herself, Bobbie nudged Maya and they both stood up to look in the handsome face of the man they knew as Neptune. They exchanged a quick glance - he could talk?

"I.....understand the baby whale will be released soon," Bobbie stammered. Quick. Think. Don't just stare!

Neptune, now called Mark Harris, inclined his head to one side, measuring Bobbie's reaction. Maya continued to regard him calmly. He looked at Boo intently, curiously, "Yes. We here at the Foundation believe returning sea mammals and other sea creatures to their natural habitat is very important."

Boo, having recovered herself, asked the obvious question, "How long have you been here at the Foundation?"

"Dr. Merrill.....got me involved about two years ago. I have been helping her with some of her research, and assisting with the whale banding program."

* * *

Three years had obviously changed Mark Harris from the dolphin-like humanoid Drs. Stewart and Anderson had known, to a self-assured, English-speaking cetacean research assistant. What the hell had happened to him in those three years since he launched himself over the railing of the *Miranda* and disappeared into the cold spring sea?

"He's not the same person at all!" Bobbie gasped to Maya in private.

As always, Maya refused to be shocked, "Bobbie, these people here at the Foundation, if they know who and what Mark really is, have had several years to make a serious difference in his life. We only had him with us for a couple months. They've had time to teach him to speak, and to think for himself in our world. They've also had the luxury of time to do far more research on him and employ him to be of service to themselves and other sea creatures."

"If he'd stayed with us longer, we could have helped him too."

"Maybe. Don't forget, people like Straker and Jackson have bigger agendas than the self-realization of one merman. To them he was just a means to an end. Here, at the Foundation, he is respected and works as one of them. I honestly don't know if we could have given him any better a life than he has here."

"So, you're saying we should just leave him here?" Bobbie bristled.

Maya held up a long-fingered hand, "Our mission is to find out if he remembers anything vital about his time with us. If he doesn't pose any kind of security risk, then why not leave him here? He's happy, he's working, he has colleagues. What was his life with us? A specimen to be studied?"

Bobbie bit her words back. She hadn't told anyone about the personal nature of her former relationship with Mark-Neptune. It seemed clear from his lack of recognition of them that he had no memory of the weeks he'd spent in SHADO custody. This pained Bobbie more than she could admit. She felt they'd established a special bond. When he'd disappeared, she'd forced herself to believe she'd never see him again. And, now he was here, alive, a real man now, not a wild animal, and she was faced with the feelings she'd refused to acknowledge three years ago. And, she knew Maya was right. Straker had said in one of their debriefings that nobody was considered sacrosanct in the war against the aliens. Anyone and anything could

and would be sacrificed to the cause, if necessary. Including homo oceanus.

She sighed, "I'm just a research doctor. What do I know about undercover ops? I should never have agreed to come on this mission."

"Look, we're here. We have a job to do. See if you can find a way to speak privately with Neptune.....er.....Mark. Get close to him again if you can. Find out what he at least remembers about coming to the Foundation - or what happened to him in the last 3 years. He trusted you once. See if you can resurrect that trust. I'll work on Dr. Merrill."

* * *

It wasn't hard to find excuses to go to the whale pool at the Foundation. And, Mark seemed to be spending most of his time there too, monitoring the baby's condition and playing with him in the pool. Bobbie sat down beside the pool and watched, while Mark swam with the youngster, imitating its behaviour and appearing to enjoy the process. When he finally noticed Bobbie sitting there, he swam over.

"Nice to see you, Dr. Anderson. Did Dr. Merrill give you the tour today?"

"Yes. We're taking a break before we start working on some collected data. I thought I'd come down to see how your little one was doing." Bobbie watched his handsome face for some signs of recognition, but saw none. Could it be somehow his mind had completely erased the whole interval of time he's spent with SHADO?

"Would you like to join us?" Mark indicated the pool.

"No, I don't think so."

"You do not swim." It was more a statement, not a question.

"Not well enough to jump in there and play, no," Bobbie smiled in spite of herself. Even as a baby, the whale in the pool was several hundred kilos and swimming with a whale would be a whole different experience than swimming with a man, "Besides, I don't have a swim suit."

"A suit is not necessary. Or natural." It was then that Bobbie realized Mark was swimming in the nude, "You.....people.....seem far too concerned with the subject of nudity. Clothing is just a.....cultural response.....," he said the term slowly, as though it was a learned statement.

Bobbie looked around. It appeared that she and Mark were the only ones in the pool area. Sheepishly, she stripped off to her undies and slipped into the pool beside Mark. She gasped at the coolness of the water. She expected the pool to be heated, but then she realized it would have to be sea temperature in order to be comfortable for the baby whale.

Mark smiled, his green eyes flashing, "You find the water cold?"

"Yes, but I know you have to maintain the temperature for the baby!" Boo managed to get out between teeth chattering.

"You must get moving in order to warm up - here - come with me!" Mark grasped her two hands and started to pull her around the perimeter of the pool, encouraging her to kick and move herself along with him. The baby whale observed them, the big cetacean eyes taking in all their movements, hoping for a chance to join the play.

"Neptune wants to play with us," Mark told her, "Get on his back - he will take you around the pool." Bobbie stared at him for a moment - Neptune. He called the baby whale Neptune. That had been the name they'd given *him* three years ago. Mark helped Bobbie climb on the whale's back and was surprised at the consistency of the whale's skin under her own body. The whale was tame enough to swim through the water, but when he dove under, Bobbie came sputtering to the surface.

Mark actually threw back his head and laughed, "Neptune does not realize you cannot hold your breath under water as he does!" He lifted her up in his arms and held her so she could spit out the pool water and recover. The nearness of his body, the warmth of him through the cold water, sent a shock of sensation down her spine. She turned her head away so he wouldn't see the emotion in her eyes.

"You are.....ok?" he asked solicitously, pushing her wet hair back from her face with an intimacy that stunned her. She nodded, still choking a bit. Here she was, trying to be professional about all this, and her emotions were betraying her left, right and centre. She should not have come to California. Her deepest fear was that her feelings would cause her to compromise the mission. Why had she ever agreed to come out here? Maya could have handled things so much better alone.....

* * *

"Environment Canada must have a lot of irons in the fire," Dr. Merrill commented to Maya as they sat down to examine some data. They were waiting for Bobbie, but decided to go ahead and start when she was late.

"Actually, we do. We handle many different things under the umbrella title of EC," Maya replied evenly, "Everything and anything which affects or is affected by nature is our business. We cover such diverse subjects as weather patterns, crop failures, pest control, the development of new strains of grain and domestic animals, and research into wild animals as well. Our Department has a broad spectrum of employees, scientists and researchers. We even have a Minister in Parliament who speaks for the Department."

"Our Foundation is basically independent, which often makes funding difficult. Right now, we've managed to attract some corporate dollars, but we try to make sure the Foundation's mandate is not influenced by those companies. We're here to research and conserve, not to service the requirements of big business."

"Even as a federally mandated Department, EC can be subject to various problems. If the government wants its tax dollars spent in certain directions, and not in others, it can be hard to continue certain projects."

"Have the cetacean experts in Canada had problems funding their own research?"

"Yes and no. It depends, sadly, on the federal administration in charge. Some governments are more interested in conservation, some are not. We have to do as much work as possible when we do get funding. We never know when a federal election could dry up the monies."

"You seem to have developed a very efficient staff here. Has Dr. Harris been with you long?" Maya decided to slip the question into the conversation.

"He's.....not a doctor, actually. But, he's been of inestimable assistance to us in our whale banding project. He seems to have an incredible bond with them."

Maya noted the evasive expression on Dr. Merrill's face, and the fact she didn't actually answer her question, "So he's been with you for some time?"

"About two years," Dr. Merrill finally replied, "Don't tell me you're going to try and recruit him?"

"Couldn't even if I wanted to. EC is very stringent about hiring. I don't have that power," Maya smiled reassuringly.

Dr. Merrill's expression told Maya she wasn't convinced by her assurances, "I wonder what's keeping Dr. Anderson?"

* * *

Dr. Anderson was at that moment, struggling with herself. Part of her wanted to scream out "*Don't you remember me?*" and part of her wanted to put as many miles between herself and Mark Harris as possible. He was safe here at the Foundation. Maya was right. Her presence there, even if he was to remember her, and his life, would be sorely compromised. Their mission to find out how much he knew about SHADO and the aliens was twofold - if they found out he *did* remember anything - they would have to act accordingly. But, what did "accordingly" mean? Bobbie shrank from the possibility that their SHADO superiors meant assassination. But, she knew through the SHADO grapevine that others had met a similar fate. What about the amnesia drug? She knew Maya was carrying some with her.....

"Yes, I'm.....fine," Boo finally managed to choke out. She untangled herself from Mark's arms and scrambled to exit the pool. She picked up her clothes. When she paused to look back, Mark was staring at her, his head inclined, curiosity evident in his expression.

"I'll see you.....later?" he asked her.

Not trusting herself to speak, Boo just nodded and hurried away.

* * *

"Here you are - we were wondering what happened to you," Maya said when she found Boo getting out of the shower in their quarters.

"I had a close encounter of the Mark kind," Bobbie wrapped the big towel around herself and fluffed her short haircut.

Maya's eyebrows reached for her forehead, "Get anything useful out of him?"

"If you mean did he recognize me in any way, no. But, here's an interesting tidbit - he called the baby whale *Neptune*."

Maya shrugged, "Could also be a coincidence."

"How could someone like Mark ever hear about Greek mythology? How did you make out with Dr. Merrill?"

"She's a little PO'ed you didn't show up for the briefing, but I made some excuses. All I got out of her about Mark was that he'd been here at the Foundation for the last two years. Since he's been missing for three, that means he was somewhere for an entire year before coming here."

"Well, he's definitely equipped to survive out there in the ocean by himself, but we lost him in the North Atlantic - he'd have had some traveling to do in that year to arrive here on the West Coast."

"Neither one of them wants to open up about Mark's arrival here, or what he really is. I'd say they're more concerned with people like us finding him out. But, I don't know if that also means he was able to tell Dr. Merrill about being with us or not."

Bobbie sighed, "So what do we do next? I'm not into this secret agent thing at all."

Maya stood in silent contemplation for a moment, "What are your chances of getting to see him again - alone?"

"They might be good. He seemed upset when I left the pool this afternoon."

"Do you think he still practices that psychic link he used with you three years ago?"

"Hard to say. If he did, he wouldn't have had any problem reading my mind earlier."

"I think at this point we need to stimulate whatever memories he might have, and then apply some good old-fashioned amnesia drug. The thing is, his year alone in the ocean might have already done that for him."

Bobbie knew that if what Maya was saying was possible, the drug would not only wipe out all memories of SHADO and the aliens, but of herself and the relationship she'd once had

with Mark Harris. But, the drug was better than what she knew could happen to him. SHADO's security was more important than any one life. She'd known that when she signed on. But, she'd never expected, in her line of work, to have to make that kind of decision.

Maya sat down on her bed, "Invite him here for a drink. Talk to him. Find out as much as you can. Use the drug if necessary. It's the only way."

CHAPTER FOUR

Bobbie felt nervous. She looked at herself in the mirror again. Had she applied too much make-up? Would Mark even care? Maya had agreed to absent herself by dining with Dr. Merrill so Boo could have some privacy with Mark to talk over some ordered-in dinner. He'd accepted her invitation with alacrity and didn't question it at all.

She had selected the food carefully. She ordered a salmon steak for them both, along with a banana-based dessert to finish off. Bananas had been a weakness of his three years ago. Did he still like them? She also knew he didn't drink spirits the last time, and wondered if she should offer him any. As it was, she had a large bottle of fresh chilled pineapple juice at the ready. Mark had liked it three years ago and it was particularly good for hiding the amnesia drug in. It was cloudy and yellowish, and strongly flavoured. The drug was often given in coffee, but she didn't know for sure if he would drink caffeinated beverages. The juice was a better bet.

There was a soft knock on the door, and Boo straightened out her skirt for the last time before answering the door. Mark stood there, handsome and green-eyed, a small box in his hand. Bobbie swallowed, smiled and motioned him in. He handed her the box.

"Oh," she was surprised, "You didn't have to....."

"Open it," Mark smiled at her.

She took the lid off and found a small sterling silver chain and pendant of a whale inside. "It's lovely, Mark. Thank you."

"I know you and Dr. Stewart will be returning to Canada. I wanted to give you something to remember your time here with us at the Foundation." He took the chain out of the box and moved around to link it behind Bobbie's neck. The thoughtfulness of the gift only exacerbated Bobbie's feeling of betrayal. She'd asked him there to determine the level of his memories of his time spent with SHADO, and the aliens who had destroyed his pod. She might even have to administer a special drug if he proved to have too strong a memory. Her face blushed with shame, but Mark took it as gratitude, "I am glad you like it."

The meal was delivered only moments later, and they sat down to lift their lids off the salmon steaks, braised veggies and tartar sauce. Bobbie poured pineapple juice for him, and he downed the whole glass, holding it out for more.

"What graduate school did you go to before coming to the Foundation?" Bobbie asked, watching Mark tear into his salmon steak with an almost animal-like pleasure. Maya and she had contrived a list of questions to ask him in the hopes of either getting honest answers, or determining his level of memory.

"I did not.....attend school," Mark told her, "Dr. Merrill brought me to the Foundation herself."

Bobbie would never get used to Mark's cryptic way of speaking. Perhaps it was a result of his cetacean-like mind set, "Why was that?"

"To help her with her research."

"Do you work only with whales?"

"No, I work with dolphins and other sea mammals."

"You must find it very rewarding."

"It is.....my life. Before Dr. Merrill found me, I knew nothing."

"I don't understand."

"Dr. Merrill is responsible for my being here. She found me and brought me to the

Foundation. She even brought in a speech doctor to help me learn to speak with my voice box.....like you do. I do not use sign language anymore."

"Sign language?"

"That is what the doctor called it. He said only people who cannot hear use it."

"Do you still understand sign language?"

Mark held up his hand and spelled out, "*Yes, of course,*" to Bobbie.

"You do not care for your salmon?" Mark asked her verbally, "It is very good. I prefer it uncooked, but I have become accustomed to it this way."

Was she on the verge of learning anything from him? She didn't know.

"Where were you living before Dr. Merrill found you?" She decided to be bold.

"That time is.....not clear."

"Were you ill?"

"Yes, perhaps. I was no longer able to.....live."

"Then, you were sick," Bobbie prompted him.

"Not sick in body. Sick here," he indicated his chest, "I was alone. All I could do was beach myself. That is how Dr. Merrill found me. She brought me here to the Foundation."

Bobbie was stunned momentarily. Beaching was a very whale-like act. Many scientists were at a loss to understand why whales beached themselves - sometimes they were not even ill. Had Mark just given her a clue to why whales did it too?

"Were you ever able to tell her where you had been?"

"Not really. It seemed as though my life started when I came to the Foundation. Everything else was.....far away."

"Dr. Merrill treats you very well, then?" Bobbie felt a pang of jealousy tear through her heart. Had he formed the same kind of relationship with Elizabeth Merrill he had formed with her three years ago?

"Yes, she has been very kind to me. She helped me to learn about myself, helped me to speak, and gave me the chance to do work. I am happy here."

Bobbie nodded, "You seem to have found a good place." Did this mean he had no real memories of his time spent with SHADO? That she was absolved from having to probe further or administer the amnesia drug?

"A good place, yes. Very different from the place I was before."

"The ocean," Bobbie added.

"No. With you."

* * *

Bobbie sat back in her chair, "I beg your pardon?" she asked.

Mark finished his salmon and looked up at her, "I was not sure about where I was before. But, then you came here. I started having those dreams again. Now I know I was with you.....before."

She swallowed hard, "What do you remember?"

"My people.....they are all dead.....I remember those terrible silver ships.....and you."

Boo lowered her head. He wasn't going to make it easy for her. What a mistake. Her very appearance at the Foundation had stimulated memories he didn't need to remember. Why hadn't they just left him in peace?

"I'm sorry, Mark."

"You are sorry? For what? You did nothing wrong. You took me in, you looked after me."

You gave me health and food, and a safe place to be."

Bobbie was on the verge of saying it was her job to do all those things, that at first her scientific curiosity had been aroused, and that was why she'd taken such good care of him.

"I also remember you were different from Dr. Merrill. You.....understood my.....way of communicating. You accepted my thoughts. You were not afraid of me because I was.....different."

Again, Bobbie couldn't tell him that too had been part of her job - that Commander Straker had ordered her to communicate with the merman in any way possible. To get as much information about the aliens as she could, "No, I was not afraid of you."

"Dr. Merrill was not afraid of me. But, she did not.....bond with me as you did. She was more interested in.....research. She wanted to study me, to mold me, to see how far she could go with training me. There are times.....when I feel like one of the Foundation's trained seals. With her, I am something to be studied. With you, I was....." he fumbled for the right words, "At home."

"Life is very complicated, Mark. Sometimes things happen that should never have occurred."

Mark got up from his seat, and took Bobbie by the hand. He lifted her out of her chair, "I dreamed of you.....I dreamed you would come back to me.....and I did not know who you were or when you would come. And, you are here now."

She did not resist when he pulled her into his arms. Nor did she resist the ardour of his kisses. She couldn't help herself. She wanted him as much as he wanted her. There was only one thing left to do. She would justify it to herself later.

"Let's have another glass of pineapple juice....." Bobbie suggested quietly.

* * *

Over breakfast the next morning, Bobbie told Maya their mission was completed. Maya wisely didn't ask for details, but Bobbie mentioned the pineapple juice and the amnesia drug.

"I'll signal the *Miranda* and we can rendezvous with them as soon as we can politely get away," she pulled out her SHADO issue communications device, "I'll tell Dr. Merrill that we've been recalled by EC."

They packed their luggage and asked Dr. Merrill to drive them to the airport. They were planning to fly from there to San Francisco to meet the *Miranda*, but of course they'd given it out that they were returning to Vancouver.

"I'm sorry your trip was so short with us, Dr. Stewart," Elizabeth Merrill smiled, as she placed their bags in the Foundation car trunk. She looked up and waved, "Mark, please come over and say goodbye. The doctors are leaving us."

Mark walked over to them and smiled gently, "I hope your trip has been a useful one."

Maya nodded, "Have to get back to Vancouver, but I think we've got some great research material to share with the EC folks there."

He wasn't looking at Maya. He was looking at Bobbie. She was dressed in a simple black cotton dress. At her neck was the silver chain and whale charm Mark had given her. He leaned forward and lifted it from her neck, "This is beautiful. Where did you get it?"

Bobbie blushed, but answered, "A friend gave it to me."

Mark inclined his head to one side, "A very thoughtful friend."

"Yes.....a good friend.....," Bobbie murmured, lowering her head.

"OK, we'd better get you to the airport before you miss your flight back to Canuck-land!" Dr. Merrill smiled, ushering Boo and Maya into the car.

Bobbie looked back through the rear window in time to see Mark sign to her, "*Your secrets are safe with me.*"

EPILOGUE

"I just read Dr. Anderson's report, Alec. Sounds like it was an easy job after all," Commander Straker tapped the ashes off his cigarillo.

"I was a little sanguine on sending Bobbie out on this one. She's not really experienced with covert ops you know."

"No, but, I felt she was the best one for the mission. She was intimately involved in working with our merman three years ago. I figured she'd be able to judge him better than anyone today."

"Did you also read Bobbie's request to be transferred?"

"Yes. Odd request, wasn't it? We really don't have a conservation unit in SHADO. But, she wants to set one up. She says Dr. Stewart is willing to work with her to get the unit up and running, and to recruit the necessary people - both from inside SHADO and Omega - and out."

"What do you think, Ed?"

"Well, considering protecting Earth's natural resources is one of our mandates, maybe we should look at this proposal. A separate unit could provide valuable research for us down the road. I see she's got Captain Patrick O'Brien's recommendation too."

"The *Miranda's* skipper. Yes, I know him. They do a lot of Omega work - you know - cleaning things up, locating downed alien craft at sea - that sort of thing. It wouldn't be that big a leap for them to be re-commissioned as a conservation ship."

"Right. Let's get the three of them in here and get this unit on the go. Time's a'wastin', Alec!"

THE END