

SHADO Snafu In The Sun

by Pamela McCaughey

based on UFO (1969-70) created by Gerry & Sylvia Anderson and Reg Hill
and CSI: Miami (2002-2005) created by Anthony Zuiker

Chapter One

"OK, Alex, what do we have here?" Horatio Caine crouched down and took off his sunglasses to speak with Miami-Dade County's ME.

"Male diver washed ashore," Alex pulled off the face mask, "He's been in the water at least 24 hours I'd say. But this greenish tinge to his skin...that's not necessarily consistent with ocean immersion."

Eric joined them, "Pretty expensive and heavy duty equipment our vic has on," he observed.

Horatio looked up, "Eric, his gear doesn't look like what a weekend scuba diver would wear..."

"No way. Those tanks are tri-gas types and his suit is for deep sea exploration."

"I'll know more when I get him on the table," Alex said, motioning for the waiting ME's officers to bag him.

"And the sea shall give up its dead..." Horatio quoted, putting his glasses back on.

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Once the victim had been properly deposited on Alex's dissection table, she set to work removing the diver's outer wear. She had removed the skullcap, his fins, and gloves and each item was carefully placed into tagged and waiting evidence containers for trace to look at.

She pulled the suit's zippers from the neck down, intending to peel him like the proverbial banana, but what she saw once the opening zipper reached the vic's chest made her hesitate. Alex pulled off her latex gloves and reached for the phone...

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"I didn't want to go further until you could see it. I'll finish the postmortem after," Alex pulled back the dive suit and clamped it securely so Horatio and Eric could have a good look.

Eric whistled, "Talking about running on empty! Who would do such a thing and why?"

"Not pirates, they like to hit hard and fast - this kind of mutilation takes too much time," Horatio leaned in for a closer examination. He'd also donned a pair of latex gloves and reached into the victim's thoracic cavity, "This is a professional job, Alex."

She nodded, "Whoever did this must have had surgical experience."

"What is our vic missing?"

"Lungs, liver, intestines, pancreas, stomach, spleen and gall bladder. The only theory I can come up with is our vic ran afoul of some black marketers who sell organs for transplants."

"Some...one got pretty greedy, didn't they?" Horatio murmured.

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"H, we got the lab report on the tri-gas tanks our vic was wearing. They may tell us why the vic's skin was green," Eric laid a plastic covered folder on the desk where Horatio was going over the diver's suit, mask, gloves and fins with a powerful magnifying glass and a pair of

tweezers.

"You know, Eric, the victim was nude when Alex removed his suit completely. Is that standard procedure for deep sea divers?"

"Most of them wear a special type of thermal underwear that fits snugly within the suit."

"It's like he was striped, ravaged, poured back into the suit and then dumped. Which means our primary crime scene likely isn't even in town. But could surgery of this kind possibly be done on board a ship? The facilities would have to be fairly sophisticated, wouldn't they?"

Eric was never sure when Horatio was talking to him or speaking rhetorically, working plausible scenarios out in his mind's eye. Horatio's silence was broken by his cell phone going off.

"Caine here...yes Alex? OK, we'll be there."

"What's up?"

"Another diver just washed ashore."

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"I finished my postmortem. This vic had all her internal organs removed too - along with her ovaries," Alex explained, "Same green tinged skin, same precision surgical work."

"The dental records turned up with IDs on our floaters - husband and wife. Eric checked missing persons and found out this pair were part of a dive cruise to the Florida Keys. The ship and the others aboard her are also MIA. Coast Guard has found no trace of the vessel, no debris, no evidence of shipwreck or sinking. In fact, the weather reports for the area in which the Sea Rover was sailing say clear skies and zero precipitation."

"Those people fell afoul of bad humans, not foul weather, Horatio. Insofar as I can determine, both vics had their organs removed via vivisection - like lab animals. I'd say that's the COD."

"That's a pretty cruel and unusual way to kill someone, Alex," Horatio made a face at the thought of the victims' mistreatment.

"The lab says the contents of their dive tanks are also unusual - some kind of greenish oxygen rich fluid that the vics either ingested or inhaled. There are other trace chemicals in the fluid they haven't as yet identified."

"I went over their suits, their diving gear, everything. No blood. No stains - inside or out. How can a body be so mutilated and not bleed out? We found no fingerprints on anything - other than the victims' own."

"Horatio, there are more questions here than answers. I've actually reviewed the bodies twice per victim. Everywhere the organs were removed, the remaining connective tissue has been cauterized with some sort of special instrument - could even be laser. If so, the use of such equipment would probably make the primary crime scene a hospital or clinic."

Horatio nodded, "I'll get Eric to do a run down on all the local hospitals and clinics which have laser facilities. But even if the crimes were committed here in Miami, it still doesn't answer why our vics ended up in the water."

"Could it be a ruse to put us off?"

"Why would two members of a dive cruise end up back on shore? Or why would the perps put them back into their dive suits? Curiouser and curiouser..."

Chapter Two

Admiral Carlin hadn't taken on a mission personally for a long time. Like Alec Freeman, Lew Waterman, and Paul Foster, he had moved up the chain of command and was now C in C of the entire Atlantic SHADO Fleet. He remained with SHADO rather than transferring to SHADO's sister organization Omega, as had Foster and Waterman. Carlin was more accustomed to direct military matters, as opposed to the shadowy MIB ops Omega specialized in.

He sat in on the briefing, along with Al Leslie and Ana Padilla, the other members of his team. The mission was thoroughly explained to them - and they were scheduled to leave for Miami within the hour. It was short notice but with special ops that was the norm.

They were filing out of the briefing room to catch their flight when an operative stopped Carlin, "General Straker would like a word with you before you ship out, Admiral."

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SHADO's silver haired commander got to his feet and shook hands with Carlin - a gesture he reserved only for those who'd been in the organization as long as he had, "I know you're about to leave for the States so I'll be brief," he waved Carlin to a seat opposite his desk.

"Normally, I'd have someone else handle a case like this, but Foster is tied up on another project and Alec is semi-retired these days. I want someone I can trust to not only take this on, but to keep me in the loop, and to keep quiet."

"It all sounded pretty routine at the briefing," Carlin replied.

"Yes, I know, body and evidence extraction in Miami, but we now have a possible location where the victims' ship went down and chances are there's an underwater alien base in the vicinity. Plus the woman's reproductive organs were removed along with her others, and that's a new wrinkle for our green friends."

Carlin nodded; as a high-ranking officer, he'd been privy to classified information on the destruction of a series of alien bases found beneath the earth's oceans. Due to the colder temperatures available underwater, the aliens secreted their stolen swag and made a break out of earth orbit to return to their own star system. The greenies also likes geographical locales such as Siberia and northern Canada for the same reasons - cold, remote, sparsely populated, rarely visited.

Straker handed a DVD case across the desk, "Have a look at this on your way to Miami. You'll see why this mission is so special. We think the ops at this alien base could be connected to several we took out a while ago - one in Canada and one on Mars."

The Admiral rose from his chair, DVD in hand, "I'll keep you posted on every aspect of the mission as it progresses."

"See that you do."

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The Miranda pulled up to the pier in the Miami port and was made fast. Watching from the bridge was Captain Patrick O'Brien, looking every inch the old sea dog with his salt and pepper beard and officer's hat.

A bag of macadamia nuts sat on his console - his one luxury - and he contacted the harbour master to announce their arrival and to request a time he could present his ship's papers.

To the watching world, the Miranda was an oceanographic research vessel, registered in Canada. But her true mission was concealed beneath her study steel and titanium decks. For

the Miranda was really a special ops ship for SHADO and Omega.

Built for speed and stealth, the Miranda could erase herself completely from sonar and radar scopes, with a flick of a switch on her cloaking device. And she was armed to the gunwales with the highest tech equipment to seek out and destroy the earth's greatest foes - the unknown and inscrutable aliens from the vastness of space. Captain O'Brien's crew was a melange of genuine research people and operatives who posed as crewmembers so they could carry out their missions under a legitimate guise.

Three new operatives had come aboard for this mission to Miami - one of them the Atlantic Fleet's C in C, Admiral Peter Carlin. They'd landed via chopper while the Miranda was still on the high seas - a tricky manoeuvre at best in the teeth of a raging storm sweeping up the Florida coast. It had to be an urgent mission to risk three people, and one so highly placed as the Admiral, rather than waiting for the tropical blast to blow over.

But Captain O'Brien was accustomed to handling all kinds of storms - natural or those created by humans or aliens. He'd been with SHADO from the beginning as a youngster in the Skydiver fleet. He knew the sea and he knew the vital importance of eradicating the aliens and their secret nests.

Ana Padilla was the first off the ship. She and her small extraction team, with a fast Omega chopper waiting at the airport for them, were going in to the local county morgue to remove the victims' bodies. They were well drilled in the purpose and had carried out hundreds of similar removals. Operatives like Pete Little, Al Leslie and Ana worked hand in glove together to ensure a successful extraction mission every time.

The bodies, when removed and loaded onto the chopper, would be flown to Omega's NYC labs - Ana and Pete would rejoin the Miranda, while Al would be in charge of removing the victims' original dive suits and equipment from the county evidence locker. Once both ops were completed, the Miranda would leave port to pursue the second phase of her mission - to search the Florida keys for the aliens' latest base.

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Alex felt a hand on her forehead. Her eyes opened but everything in her field of vision looked fuzziyyyyy...

"You're ok, Alex. You must have slipped and hit your head..." the voice was familiar, kindly, soothing.

She swung her head in the direction of the voice and felt the room spinning, "...Horatio? Where am I?"

"The hospital. Doctor says you've got a nasty bump on your head, but nothing to worry about."

"How'd I end up...here?" She began to realize her head was aching dully.

"Callie found you on the floor beside the autopsy table. Can you remember how you got hurt?" his voice was gentle and quiet, but Alex could sense an urgency in his tone.

"...I was doing a post mortem on that motorcycle accident victim..."

"His body was still on the table when Callie discovered you, unconscious."

Alex shook her head and stopped when the pain moved inside her skull from one side to the other, "The last thing I remember was sewing up the Y-incision..."

A cell phone purred and Horatio lifted a finger to silence Alex as he answered it, "Yes, Eric?"

There was a pause while he listened. Alex saw his face tightening, his lips pursing, "I see...well, just continue with your evidence collection then."

"Is something wrong?" Alex found the pain more bearable when her eyes were closed.

"Some...one removed the bodies of our dive victims from the morgue, and Callie caught a man attempting to abscond with the victims' dive equipment from the evidence locker. I'll bet...your concussion and these criminal acts are related."

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"Why would the aliens remove the female victim's reproductive organs? They've never done that before?" Straker barked into his secure comm line - he had Dr. Raychaudhuri on the line from Omega's labs in NYC.

"Look, General, we know they can successfully transplant other human organs and tissues into their own bodies - this is a bit more complex, but not impossible."

"But, why would they bother?"

"Adult human females are born with a finite number of fertilizable eggs - depending on the age of our female victim - and her own level of fertility - it may be possible to implant the ovaries into an alien female."

Straker puffed on his cigarillo and leaned back in his chair, "Yes, I suppose it would be the next logical step...If a human woman can incubate a normal baby outside her womb and have a C-section done, maybe the aliens with their advanced medical techniques could re-create such a situation on purpose."

"I agree - if they can make this work - then it would represent the next step forward in their own evolution. We've known for 30 years or more that they were a dying race - and suspected they were now unable to reproduce themselves. If there are in fact living alien females - they'd be somewhat long in the tooth to support a fetus - but then we know human women have gotten pregnant and given birth in their 50's and 60's through special fertility treatments. What if all the aliens really want are the viable eggs in the stolen ovaries?"

"That's big possibility - look at that alien nursery you found on Mars - no wombs needed there. And if the aliens are looking to restock human eggs, that could mean...Tina Kovac is of no more use to them..." Straker broke off.

Dr. Raychaudhuri knew that Kovac's unknown fate with the aliens gnawed at Straker's heart, "We can only propose theories, General. We really have no proof one way or the other."

Straker shook his head sadly, "She has to be dead. The aliens use humans and toss them out like yesterday's trash. And if Orion survived, or if the aliens have managed to create other successful hybrid babies on Kovac, her personal stock of eggs would likely have to have run out by now. She was close to 40 when she and Orion disappeared."

Mitali didn't think it was necessary to remind him that as a human female aged, her eggs were also less viable, "After the loss of all the Kovac-derived babies at the aliens' Mars base, it would make sense they'd be looking for replacement genetic material by stealing them - it would be easier to remove the eggs from an ovary than to have to deal with the whole human."

"You're saying we could see more of this, aren't you?"

"The aliens have been trying all kinds of options - hybrids, clones - remember that fertility clinic we found right here in New York which the aliens were using? They must feel they're on to something big. Either they've scored more successes like Orion or they're very close to it. Kovac was likely their first break through. They're not going to stop now."

"All I have left of Kovac is Cleo and her little cat family," Straker's voice caught and Mitali had to admit privately she never had expected a hardass like Straker to actually mourn a loss. His pain seemed greatly at odds with his well known persona and reputation for coldness.

"General, we owe Kovac only one thing now: to stop the exploitation of more human

women."

Chapter Three

Standing with his hands on his hips, his Miami PD badge displayed on his belt, Horatio Caine surveyed the autopsy room where Callie Duquesne found Alex unconscious.

Eric and Ryan Wolfe had gone over and over the room looking for evidence of any kind. How could anyone manage to render an ME insensible, remove two bodies and abscond with them - all without leaving behind fingerprints, hairs, shoe marks or any other type of evidence?

Both CSI techs were feeling Horatio's dismay over the lack of evidence, and to satisfy him, they'd been over the rooms in question three times each. No amount of dusting, fuming, sweeping or metal detecting turned up anything which would point them to who had done this or why.

The original criminal activity which had brought the divers' bodies ashore had been momentarily shoved to the back burner as their disappearance became the priority. But with no evidence to process, finding the perps would be impossible.

At a briefing later that day, Horatio flipped through the few pages of information and pursed his lips in frustration.

"I'm sorry, H, but there's just nothing. We processed our asses off and got nada," Eric told him.

"There has to be something you missed."

Ryan Wolfe backed up his partner, "We tried everything we could do to raise prints, shoe marks, you name it. There were no hairs, no fibres. We scrupulously vacuumed the rooms and picked through the contents of each separate bag. Nothing turned up - nothing that didn't correspond to our own people or ourselves. And as a result we have nothing to compare to AFIS or the criminal DNA databases."

"We're dead in the water on this, H," Eric finished.

"Gentlemen," H's voice was calm, but his eyes were stormy, "We have no other choice but to go back to square one and find out what brought our vics here in the first place - and hope we get lucky enough to find out who killed them and then who took them."

"What if the two crimes aren't related?" Wolfe asked.

"Who else but the killers would even want the bodies back? Dispose of the evidence before a paints a trail right to your own door."

"But it doesn't make sense. Coming in here," Eric temporized, "In broad daylight - is one hell of a risk. That guy you've got in holding is our only clue - and he was trying to steal evidence from the locker. There's no video tape of the people who took the bodies, no evidence they were here at all except for the fact the bodies are missing. Maybe this guy in holding had accomplices!"

"Alex claims she has no memory of the incident. Maybe she didn't see him."

"Look, this man either committed this crime alone or he had help. There's no way he could have done everything by himself."

"Ok then, let's go back to the original crime. How many hospitals and clinics in the Miami-Dade county have laser facilities?"

Eric looked relieved - here was something he could deal with, "Including the local hospitals and 13 private clinics, there are in total 20 laser facilities available."

Ryan Wolfe opened a file of his own, "We also got the Coast Guard and meteorological guys to try to give us a fix on where the bodies might have been dumped, based on how they landed on our beach. Since the Sea Rover was out in the Florida Keys, it seemed pretty weird

that they'd end up in Miami. The guys think our vics were dumped..."

Horatio's brow furrowed, "That's a long way from the Keys."

"Whatever happened to the Sea Rover we don't know yet. The others who were on board have never turned up and the Coast Guard says there was perfect weather out there when the ship disappeared."

"So there's no natural reason for a shipwreck," Horatio stated the obvious.

"No pirated we've ever dealt with mutilated their vics in this way," Eric replied.

"And, there's no known crime syndicate - the Russians, the Mafia, or even the Columbia drug lords - that take the time to work over a body so much. Revenge killings usually take a different form with them," Ryan added, "Something which can be done quickly."

"Yes, Alex said our vics' injuries took time and had to be accomplished by someone who knew the human body well," H commented, "Guess it's time we hit all the laser facilities and find out if any one of them has been processing human organs. In the meantime, I'll talk to our suspect."

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"Admiral, we can't wait any longer. Al's not back - he hasn't checked in. My guess is that he's been compromised."

Peter Carlin looked up at Captain O'Brien, "Can we send someone in to find him?"

"I can send Ana back out, sir, but we're on a tight schedule. Our orders would have us back to sea in another 3 hours. Instructions are to meet Sky 7 and 12 at the possible alien base co-ordinates."

"I don't want to leave any of our people behind."

"Neither do I. But time is of the essence - we have to find and extract him - and still maintain our time line..."

Ana came rushing onto the bridge, "Sirs, I found out where Al is!"

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"Who are you and why were you trying to steal evidence in a murder case?" Detective Frank Tripp leaned across the table, looking intently at a silver haired man.

"Don't know whatcha talkin' about," came the reply.

Horatio put a hand on his hip, clearing his jacket away from the MPD badge on his belt, "You weren't carrying any ID. Now at this point, I think a little co-operation from you might go a long way."

Al Leslie chewed his left thumb ruminatively as thought he was giving due consideration to Horatio's comments, "I don't need no stinkin' ID."

Detective Tripp rolled his eyes at Horatio, "Funny guy, huh? We caught you red handed with the dive tanks, suits and other stuff. Your car's a rental. But the rental people don't even have a record of you."

"Not my fault. I paid in cash."

"But you'd have to have shown them a valid drivers' licence."

Leslie shrugged, "They didn't ask any questions."

The detective nudged a small gadget forward on the table in front of Leslie, "Wanna tell us what this is for?"

"No idea."

"We took it out of your own pocket."

Al shrugged again, "Coulda bin planted on me."

"Not by us," Horatio took his meaning, "And what about this ring? We took that off your

finger. Was that planted too?" Caine placed what looked like a gold signet ring on the table, "It's a stinger ring for injecting drugs."

Al glanced at the ring, "Bought it at an antique store. I think it's bin around."

"Why would you take those dive suits and tanks?"

"You tell me."

"Are you a diver? Were you part of the Sea Rover's dive cruise?"

"What's the Sea Rover?"

"The Sea Rover, my uncooperative friend, is the vessel that dive gear may have come from, "Horatio's voice was icy calm, betraying none of his frustration.

"Well, I don't know anything about that."

"Why else would you be trying to remove that evidence?"

"Hey, far be it from me to do your job for yah."

"Your prints haven't surfaced from any source. We ran them through AFIS, the military, the civil service, the FBI, CIA, you name it. Ran your photo, too. You just don't even seem to exist, my friend. Why would that be?"

"What can I say? I'm just a private kinda guy."

"Did someone pay you to steal the evidence?"

"I don't need money."

"Did someone order you to do it?"

"I'm not in the military."

"I don't suppose you'd know anything about 2 bodies being removed from our morgue?"

"Dead bodies? Jeez, I don't even like going to funerals."

"This verbal fencing is getting us nowhere fast," Horatio interposed.

"Guess your just wastin' your time, eh?" Al grinned sardonically.

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"Where the hell is he?" Carlin demanded.

"He's at the Miami-Dade county crime lab. Looks like he never made it out," Ana explained, "I just hacked into the police and hospital computer systems. They've run Al's prints and photo looking to ID him."

"Well, they won't find anything," Captain O'Brien said, "And, he'll never talk."

"What would you advise, Paddy?" Carlin had long had the privilege of calling the Captain by his nickname.

"The longer they have him, the better the chances they might transfer him to a more secure facility. That would make it even harder to extract him."

"He's probably been interrogated."

"According to the police department computer system, the officers on his case are Detective Frank Tripp and Lt. Horatio Caine," Ana told them, "What if we stalled for time by identifying him as an Environment Canada employee? That might keep them distracted enough for us to get him, and the evidence he was sent to collect, out of there."

"This is going to take longer than 3 hours, Admiral," Captain O'Brien warned.

"You're right. We're going to have to contact HQ and alter our time line somewhat. Apprise HQ of our situation. Tell them we've got a small SNAFU and we'll be back on track as soon as we get Al out of there."

* * *

General Straker checked his Rolex again. A swift SHADO transport had taken him across the Atlantic. As far as the Miami airport was concerned, his flight had originated in St. John's,

Newfoundland - not unusual for a deputy chief for Environment Canada. Over the years, Straker had played the role of the Canadian department official many times. He had it down cold. Which was why he was needed to do it again.

Ana Padilla met him on the tarmac with a bogusly rented vehicle. It was amazing how effective a winsome smile and a surreptitious injection of SHADO's famous amnesia drug could be in such circumstances.

"Al is still in the Miami-Dade holding cell. He has been interrogated at least twice and they still have no idea of who he is. I think we can go in, do a bit of negotiating, and bit of distraction and extract both our man and the divers' evidence."

"Plan of action?"

"You parlay with the officers on his case - I'll slip in and get the dive equipment and evidence. Pete Little can help me."

"Any idea what went wrong?"

"No. Al is one of our best. He's never been caught before."

* * *

"I'm Lieutenant Horatio Caine. And you are?" H took off his glasses and extended a hand to yet another mysterious silver haired man.

"Ed Straker, deputy minister for Environment Canada. We understand you may be holding one of our people here. Quite a relief to know he's safe and in good hands."

"Just who are you referring to, sir?" Caine asked cautiously.

"Alan Leslie."

Horatio nodded slowly, "Maybe he's our mystery man. Would you be able to ID him for us?"

"Yes, of course."

Caine walked Straker back to the holding cell areas and pointed Leslie out to him, "Do you know that fellow?"

Straker gave Leslie the once-over, "That's Al Leslie. Can I sign him out now?"

"It's not quite that simple, Mr. Straker. You see, your man here is being held in connection with a criminal act."

Straker did a convincing double-take, "Al? He's one of our best researchers. He's not the criminal type."

"Mr. Leslie was caught attempting to remove vital crime evidence from our locker earlier today."

"You have proof?"

"We wouldn't hold him otherwise. He also had some fairly sophisticated gadgets with him. One item we think he used to shut down our closed circuit surveillance cameras in the evidence locker and vault areas. And he wears an odd ring with a needle and miniature compartment for holding drugs."

Straker laughed shortly, "Sounds more like James Bond than Al Leslie!"

"He's been remarkably uncooperative. Why do you think he wouldn't ID himself or explain who he works for? How did he get into the States?"

"Embarrassment maybe? Al always enjoyed a good reputation with the department. As for how he got down here - well - we understood he was on vacation. When he didn't report for work, we got concerned."

"How did you know to find him in Miami?"

"Traced his airline tickets here," Straker was not a habitual liar by inclination, but by

necessity, "Look, whatever he's done, I'm sure we can work something equitable out."

"Mr. Straker, I don't think you understand the gravity of his crime."

"We can handle this through diplomatic channels, can't we? I'm here to make sure Environment Canada doesn't end up with a black eye out of this situation. Al Leslie is a Canadian civil servant. As such, he can expect diplomatic immunity, right?"

"But he wasn't here in his capacity as a Canadian civil servant, he was here as a private citizen on vacation when he committed the crime."

"Alleged crime, Lt. Caine."

"We have plenty of evidence against Mr. Leslie. His prints, the dive equipment in his possession, the anti-camera device."

"You'll pardon me for taking nothing at face value," Straker smiled coldly, "I'd very much like to see your evidence."

"I can probably arrange for that."

"What about Al? Can I see him? Talk to him?"

"We've advised him of his rights under Miranda and he hasn't asked yet for a lawyer."

"I guess for the moment I'll have to serve as his council."

"And you'll have to pardon me, Mr. Straker, for not knowing you could practice law outside of Canada," Horatio's smile was equally cool.

"I am familiar with some points of American law, of course. But I'd like to see him, and any evidence you have gathered."

Horatio's cell phone went off. He flipped it open, "Caine here. What? That's not possible...yes, ok, I'll be right there." Horatio's expression was grim, "It would seem that you won't be seeing Mr. Leslie after all. He's gone."

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Straker followed Horatio on the run to the lock-up area. One of the Miami-Dade police officers was still lying on the floor, looking dazed. Another officer, a long haired blonde, was assisting him.

"Callie, what happened here?" Caine asked tersely.

"This officer was rendered unconscious - and one person has escaped custody. We had a prisoner here apparently who had yet to be identified," Callie retorted, all the while looking at Straker.

Horatio swung on Straker, "Your Mr. Leslie has managed to extricate himself from custody. You wouldn't have assisted him somehow?"

"Hardly," Straker retorted, "I've been with you the whole time."

"What about accomplices? In the last 24 hours we've had both evidence and bodies stolen from a murder investigation. Our ME was assaulted."

Straker rolled his blue eyes theatrically, "Lieutenant Caine, I came to Miami in the hopes of finding Mr. Leslie and bringing him safely home. I'm as distressed by his disappearance as you are. He was in YOUR custody. I hold you responsible for this."

Horatio's cell phone purred insistently again, "Yes?" his voice sounded uncharacteristically frustrated when he spoke again to Straker, "Not only has Mr. Leslie gone AWOL, but the evidence he tried to steal earlier today is gone - again!"

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SHADO's General Straker was seated in one of Miami-Dade's interview rooms. He'd presented very well-done bogus credentials which described him as a top official with Environment Canada and the police accepted them as such by all appearances. It was not the

first time Straker thought he should commend his documents people on their superlative work!

"Let me get this straight one more time," Detective Frank Tripp intoned, "You came down here looking for Allan Leslie because?"

"He didn't report for work as he should have. He was many days overdue and we at the department got worried when we couldn't reach him via his cell phone, his e-mail, we didn't know where he was. We opted to follow whatever information we had to track him down. The trail led me here - he WAS here - until your people managed to lose him!"

"And you were completely unaware that Mr. Leslie was wanted by Miami-Dade police?" Horatio asked for the hundredth time it seemed.

"Of course. I only discovered his alleged involvement in a supposed criminal act when I got here. You informed me yourself," Straker nodded at Lt. Caine, "I was shocked. Allan Leslie is not the criminal type. He's a serious researcher with a string of academic credentials to his name."

"So you have no idea why he'd attempt to steal evidence in a murder investigation?"

"No! As I stated, he is not the criminal type. He's a scientist. I cannot imagine any reason why he'd get himself involved in such a thing."

"We have his prints on the items recovered," Horatio reminded Straker.

"Could they have been planted?" Straker was trying to string them along so he could ease away to his own escape - the Miranda was waiting in port for him - and Al Leslie was already back on board - that much he surmised. They also had a date with a possible alien underwater base and Straker did not want to waste any more time than was necessary.

"Not likely. He was caught red-handed."

"Did you interrogate him?"

"Several times."

"And what did he say?"

"He didn't deny or confirm it - he just avoided answering our questions," Tripp told him.

"That doesn't sound like the Allan Leslie I know," Straker prevaricated. He knew well enough that all SHADO and Omega personnel were specially trained to give nothing away and to answer as cryptically as possible when forced into interrogations by genuine law enforcement officers.

Horatio pushed two items across the table at Straker. Without batting an eye, even though he recognized the articles, Straker viewed them and said, "What's this?"

"We took these things from your Mr. Leslie - remember I told you we removed a special ring and a gadget for disturbing videotape recorders? I take it they're not standard issue for Environment Canada employees."

Straker glanced again at the items on the table, "Lieutenant Caine, I'm just a government official - I have no idea what these things are for."

"You said earlier that you thought Mr. Leslie had been in our area on vacation."

"Yes, I explained we tracked him here due to the fact he'd ordered his plane tickets through his computer on the Net." A most plausible lie, Straker felt. He decided it was time to put Caine and Tripp on the defensive, "Since Al was in your custody at the time of his most recent disappearance, I'd like to know what to do. Do I file a missing persons report? Do I tax your department with his disappearance? I have to report back to my own superiors at Environment Canada - how am I going to explain this debacle to them? That you believe our employee guilty of some crime, and now you've managed to lose him entirely! His very life could be in danger!" Straker hoped he sounded appropriately aggrieved.

"If you don't think Mr. Leslie capable of committing a crime on his own, then is there anything in his life for which he could be threatened if he didn't help the people who wanted this evidence to disappear?"

Shaking his silver head, Straker got up from his seat. He was tired of the verbal fencing and he just wanted to get back to the Miranda and continue on with their mission, "Al wasn't married. He had no family that I know of. He wasn't a man who could be frightened or easily taken advantage of. He lived for his work. I'm sure this business is all just a big mistake."

"We're not done here, Mr. Straker," Detective Tripp cautioned him as he headed for the door.

Straker opened the door carefully so he was only leaving a smudgy palm print which couldn't be traced, "Until I talk to my superiors in Ottawa, we are done. Good day gentlemen, I'll be in touch when I know what steps my department wants me to take in this matter."

Chapter Four

The Miranda arrived at the coordinates where the Sea Rover had last been reported. Initial scans of the bottom produced no evidence of the Sea Rover's loss or debris to suggest her possible sinking.

"Are you getting any weird magnetic effects or picking up anything with the Alien-Tect scanners?" Straker asked. He was on the bridge with Peter Carlin and Captain O'Brien.

"Ana has been hard at work scanning the seabed for hours. So far nothing even remotely alien has shown up."

"The loss of the Sea Rover and those two dead divers point to definite alien activity," Carlin commented, "The dive cruise sent those people deep underwater in search of buried treasure. They must have come on the aliens' base accidentally."

"Standard operating procedure for the aliens faced with intruders has always been to eliminate the threat and harvest any available organs," Straker added, "This scenario is typical."

"I agree, but given the number of days we've lost since the dead divers first came ashore, and all the problems in between, my concern is that the greenies have had enough time to pack up and leave. If the site was simply a group of their spacecraft, rather than an actual installation, and they leave the area, we've got nothing - just a couple of depressions in the sand," O'Brien explained.

"There's been no reported UFOs in the last 3 days trying to leave earth," Straker stated, "If they have removed themselves, they've done it while underwater."

"It wouldn't make sense to surface and risk detection, especially since the American Coast Guard was crawling all over this area looking for the Sea Rover..." Captain O'Brien was interrupted by a call on the bridge phone. He picked it up, "Bridge, O'Brien here...My GOD! Brace yourselves!" O'Brien barked, the phone still in his hand.

The Miranda heeled over steeply, like a schooner battling a nor'wester. Sirens wailed, and the sea, visible through the bridge windows, rushed up to meet them in a torrent of water that rolled up the Miranda's bow and splashed along her sides furiously!

Various bridge crew members lost their footing and slid along the deck as the vessel rode out the rogue waves. Straker had dropped to the deck and Carlin was gripping the captain's console, trying to stay upright. O'Brien was on the phone again, shouting orders into the receiver to his engineers, braced precariously against the wall.

For several long seconds, the Miranda continued rolling over, and everything that wasn't fastened down slid to the deck - clipboards, small gadgets, hand compasses, cell phones, paper sea charts. The resulting blast of the high seas, the Miranda's sirens, and the avalanche of people and stuff created an impossible cacophony.

With agonizing slowness, the Miranda started to recover her trim. The seas laid off, and finally the sirens stopped blaring. Crew members on the bridge picked themselves up and started to collect fallen people and items, while others recalibrated and checked equipment, and started damage reports.

Captain O'Brien assisted a white-faced Straker off the deck, "What the bloody hell was that?" SHADO's C in C demanded.

Ana Padilla arrived on the bridge, dishevelled and anxious, "Captain, that thing measured a 5.3 on the Richter Scale!"

O'Brien nodded, "And I'll bet it wasn't a seaquake or a tsunami, either!"

Straker looked stunned, "You think the aliens did that?"

Carlin's expression was grim as he replied, "Could they have destroyed their own base!"

"Ana, keep scanning - we must've been on the rim outside the epicentre of the blast. You know what to look for," O'Brien picked up the bridge phone, "I'll get Al Leslie to co-ordinate a dive team as soon as its safe to go into the water. The aliens don't self destruct their sites unless they're compromised - and we're operating under the cloaking device. The two Skydivers haven't arrived yet - they're still en route to these co-ordinates. We weren't expecting them for another three hours or more. Something else must have happened."

Still shaken, Straker lowered himself to O'Brien's command chair, "Yes, yes, let's get to the bottom of this! I want to know what almost turned us into the Poseidon Adventure."

* * *

The two Skydiver subs arrived while Ana and her scan team were still scouring the ocean bottom. The sea had finally stopped churning.

"We actually picked up the explosion on our own sensors," Captain MacSwain said over the secure comm line, "Decided to pile on more speed and get here early to check it out."

"Good thing we weren't at the centre of the blast," O'Brien said, "You might have had a search and rescue operation on your hands."

The two SkyDivers were ordered to conduct visual scans of the area by submerging and observing, "If you see anything, we'll send in our dive team."

* * *

Down in the scanner room, Ana was giving a progress report to General Straker and Admiral Carlin, "For such a big explosion, we're getting very minimal radiation readings. We sweep every 30 seconds for radiation as we get closer to the blast epicentre. If the readings continue this low, Al and his divers will be able to do a personal assessment of the site."

Ana's comm phone went off, "Yes, this is Ana," she paused, listening, "Really? I'll advise Al's team immediately," she clicked off, "That was the bridge, gentlemen. We have bodies."

* * *

Al Leslie's dive team recovered seven bodies from the water. Laid out in Dr. Bobbie Anderson's lab below decks, shorn of their equipment, were five alien males and two humans - one male and the other female.

General Straker was also suited up in scrubs. He wanted to see them, "Can we ID the humans?"

"I'll do a ten-card and have Maya run their prints. Their faces are too damaged for photos."

"What will you do with the bodies?"

"They'll be autopsied, photographed, recorded and buried at sea. We have no other choice. Even if we ID them, we can't contact the families," Bobbie sighed, "Seems cruel - the families will never get any closure."

Straker knew all about a lack of closure. Would he ever learn what had happened to astronaut Tina Kovac? "Start with the aliens. The humans aren't the issue now."

* * *

The next operation for the dive team was a hands-on reconnoitring of the area. Ana's scanning turned up no dangerous radiation levels so it was determined safe to go down.

Al Leslie and his men took sea sleds and digital video cams to record anything they might find on the bottom.

The closer the divers got to the bottom, the murkier the visibility became, "Geez, the

mud's been all stirred up here - small wonder with that blast we got, "Al spoke through his voicecom.

Skimming alongside Al was his teammate Pete Little. They were riding lower to the sea floor on their sleds, "The radiation level is staying the same," Pete reported, scanning as they moved along.

Ana's voice crackled through their headsets, "Any sign of debris yet?"

"Nah. Looks like several depressions in the sea bottom though," Al said, "Like a coupla UFOs coulda bin sittin' here...wait a minute...we're comin' up on somethin'..."

Pete's voice came back, "Almost looks like shards of ...fibreglass...didn't the Sea Rover have a fibreglass hull?"

"That's an affirmative, Pete," Ana replied, "You're seeing wreckage, then? We must have scanned this area a dozen times before you two went down and didn't come up with anything fibreglass..."

Al and Pete scootered closer and lower, using their gloved hands to turn over the debris pieces, "Uh oh. Got another body."

* * *

Pete and Al brought up the corpse and a piece of the fibreglass debris. The Miranda's techs ID'ed it as consistent with the Sea Rover's hull type.

Dr. Anderson had finished her autopsies of the aliens and was reporting to General Straker, "Their COD is definitely explosive concussion - whatever caused the blast killed them. I can only guess these greenies were sacrificed to allow the others time to escape."

"What about the new body?"

"Mangled, but definitely human."

"Organs harvested?"

"All three human bodies recovered have been harvested. I'll finish the post mortems before the end of today."

Straker paced the length of Bobbie's lab, "Then, this was all just a wild goose chase. We almost lost one of our people in Miami, had a screw-up with an extraction ops. And there was never any alien base at all. Just a crime of opportunity. A group of bad luck divers looking to score a Mel Fisher motherlode of treasure who ended up as the catch of the day for a bunch of thieving aliens."

"General, there was alien activity here - all the evidence points to that. But it wasn't a big operation. It was likely a small scale ops with just a couple craft taking the opportunity to eliminate the Sea Rover's people and harvest a few more organs."

Straker pounded one fist into his palm, "The harvesting of the female's reproductive organs...that's a new gambit for the aliens."

Maya Stewart handed Straker a CD in a plastic case, "This is a copy of Bobbie's post-mortems for you to look at. I just burned it. The female body had only her ovaries removed along with her thoracic organs. This matches the pattern of harvesting information we received on the original female diver found on the beach in Miami."

He took the CD case from Maya and looked at Bobbie intently, " Let's get the bodies and evidence back to Omega HQ in New York and see what our theorists can come up with."

* * *

"H, what are we going to do about the missing bodies and evidence?" Eric didn't like to press his boss, but it was going to be impossible to solve a crime without the victims' bodies.

"And, we're taking heat over the escaped suspect too," Ryan reminded Horatio, "Nobody

down in holding has the slightest idea of how it all happened, even though they been interviewed and even been given polygraphs. It's like none of them ever even saw the suspect or can remember what he looked like. How could something like this happen?"

Horatio Caine had been standing with his hands on his hips, his lips pursed, his eyes stormy with frustration. Never a man to evidence his own emotions, this case had taxed his control to the limit, "What can you tell me about this Straker fellow? How could he just disappear into thin air? There's only so many ways out of Miami, people."

"He was registered at the hotel he gave us, but they never saw him, nor did he ever actually stay there as far as they know. We tried to track the credit card he paid for the room with, but came up with nothing. I called Environment Canada's offices in Canada and they'd never heard of him before."

"So, we can safely assume our Mr. Straker is not who he says he is," Horatio mused.

"Two people have left this facility and we can't find them. Dead bodies and the evidence in a murder case have been stolen, along with all the computer files and fluid samples. The brass are NOT going to like this one bit," Ryan reiterated.

"Gentlemen, let me handle this. I don't consider this case closed at all. The lack of evidence doesn't mean we don't have two murders to solve. We just have to go back to square one. I'll talk to the brass." Horatio put on his glasses and left the room.

"Think he can worm his way out of this one?" Eric asked Callie, "That mug at internal affairs has been gunning to H for a long time now. This could be the case that breaks the proverbial camel's back."

Callie got up from the briefing table and picked up the one lone file to survive the evidence thefts, "I think Horatio does have one ace up his sleeve..."

To be continued...