

Orion's Shadow

Based on "UFO" the science-fiction TV series created by
Gerry and Sylvia Anderson and Reg Hill (1969-1970)
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With research from "Emotional Intelligence" by Daniel Goleman

Part One - March 28, 2004

Dr. Raychaudhuri raised an eyebrow. She was bending over her autopsy table, one of the alien babies spread out before her. In the last week, she'd been expanding her work on the tiny bodies she'd brought back from Mars. She and her staff were opening all the skulls, examining each miniature brain. And, so far, there had been some remarkable findings. Each and every hybrid brain was yielding the same information - providing vital clues to the human-alien coupling, and much of it was comparable in every way to information they'd obtained several years earlier on another hybrid child.

Her last briefing with General Straker, only seven days ago, was still fresh in her mind. He'd wanted an update on the alien babies, even though the autopsies were far from finished. And, he'd wanted to see the bodies for himself. Mitali knew that his interest in those bodies found at the alien base on Mars was more than just professional.

Initial DNA tests on the babies proved they contained some of the same genetic material as one former NASA astronaut - Tina Kovac. As the result of an alien kidnap-and-breeding program, Kovac bore an alien-human baby several years earlier, and then had disappeared and gone away with the aliens, taking that all important child with her.

Straker's interest in Kovac had also been more than professional, although he didn't like to admit that fact. The birth of her hybrid child was a closely guarded secret inside SHADO and Omega - only those at the very highest security levels knew about the child's existence. That the child had survived successfully in utero, and was born alive at all, was a virtual scientific miracle. How the aliens had managed to blend their own DNA with that of a human woman was still mostly a mystery. The child, named Orion by its human mother, was the result of alien genetic tinkering - a hybrid which not only looked human, but could breathe easily within Earth's atmosphere, and live as completely as any normal human would. Orion had very distinct non-human elements, as well, such as his psi ability. Kovac absconded from a high-level security installation with the baby, and returned to the aliens, after which SHADO scientists began to suspect the odd organ attached to the bottom of his brain was a psi centre, and the child could and did control his mother's emotions and actions through some form of telepathy.

Kovac's possessive protectiveness towards her hybrid son, meant that SHADO scientists had not had the opportunity to do much testing on the child. Dr. Jackson himself tried to convince Kovac that it was necessary to do some psi testing, but Kovac always found some excuse or means of avoiding it. She didn't like or trust Jackson, and managed to weasel out of

the test process. At the time, they didn't know she was being controlled by the baby and part of her resistance to the testing was of alien origin. All they did know, from various MRIs and cat scans done shortly after Orion's birth, was that he had an additional organ located where his brain joined his spinal column, and the function of that additional organ was could only be speculated.

Mitali walked over to her computer and pulled up the files on the other alien baby autopsies, plus the files on Orion. Yes, the odd brain organ was there in each one so far, according to the reports filed by her staff. But there was something else interesting about those hybrid brains. Unlike the brains of adult aliens, which they'd recovered over the years, these brains were developed somewhat differently, especially in the regions where the twin amygdalas were stationed. Adult alien brains evidenced tiny, stunted amygdalas, with few connections to the rest of their brains. Their prefrontal cortexes were also stunted and much smaller than those of humans. A disconnection had also been found between the limbic systems and the neocortexes in alien brains - something only rarely found in humans and called alexithymia - a Greek term meaning lack of emotion. And, it had certainly been observed by SHADO personnel over the last 25 years or more that the aliens did not appear to experience much in the way of fear or empathy - either for themselves - or for the unfortunate humans who fell into their clutches.

These hybrid baby brains were more human-like in their structure, they appeared to have the appropriate sized amygdalas, and tissue slices viewed under electron microscopes detailed that their prefrontal cortexes were also more human. Had they lived, these babies would have reacted differently and thought differently than the aliens who had created them. Their responses would likely have included more emotions than the aliens typically experienced. Mitali also pulled up several more secret reports - those filed on Orion, and those filed by Dr. Imma Zama, SHADO's veterinarian in charge of the research on General Straker's Siamese kittens - the ones Dr. Jackson used for a private experiment. She had a lot of comparative reading to do before she talked to the General about her findings...

* * *

"You're absolutely sure about this?" Straker asked, closing the file Dr. Raychaudhuri had shown him on her laptop.

"We can never be 100 percent sure of anything where the aliens are concerned, but science never lies."

"So, if they had survived, those alien babies would have been almost exactly like Orion?"

"Right down to the silver irises. And, from what the autopsies are telling us, and the reports we do have on Orion, those babies would have been more than human, and more than alien. Almost a breed apart, even though they were created from joint DNA sources."

"Some sort of super-babies?"

"From what we can tell, they would have had the psi abilities at their command, something most humans never develop, and the advanced brain construction which the aliens themselves appear to lack. They would have had superior mental powers, and been able to live, breathe and eat in our atmosphere as easily as though born here to human women. In short, they'd look human, but with something extra."

"Orion looked normal. Except for those uncanny silver eyes, he looked like every other baby you'd see in a hospital nursery."

"Which is what makes what the aliens are doing so nefarious. They've managed to create human-alien hybrids which, when grown, could pass for humans. I'm beginning to believe Dr.

Jackson may have something with his fifth column theory."

"Doctor, how much of this information on the dead alien babies can you compare to Orion?"

"Based on the limited documentation we have on the child, I'd say those dead babies would have been like...his brothers and sisters. They all come from the same human DNA material, as Orion did. But unlike Orion, who was a true hybrid conception, I'm not certain if the babies found on Mars were created the same way, or if they are actually clones of Orion - genetically engineered clones. That's how perfectly formed they are."

The General stared off into space for a moment, finally he said, "Mitali, I can't imagine that any human woman could produce enough eggs at any one time, even with the use of modern fertility drugs to create that many babies."

"But suppose the original child, created with a human egg and an alien DNA, was to be cloned and engineered to create others, not necessarily identical, but very similar?"

"We can't do that here on this planet, can we?"

"We can clone sheep, mules and cats, but not with any degree of real success, your felines excepted. Even Dolly had to be euthanased awhile ago - the scientists who created her admitted she had health problems. There are too many variables for cloning most animals on this planet - regardless of what those idiotic Raelian cultists say. The moratorium many nations have placed on cloning humans has to do with ethical concerns. I don't think that's an issue for the aliens."

"But, why? Why are they doing all this? It's got to be costly in every way for them! Surely they aren't having total success? What about the alien babies you found in storage on Mars?"

"Those dead alien babies we found at the Mars facility - our autopsies show that they didn't survive much past the usual 9 month gestation period. Our autopsy tests show some died of entirely natural causes, Several we autopsied may have been euthanased - their health problems and deformities were just too enormous to be fixed. Also, we didn't find any evidence among the adult alien bodies that there were any capable of carrying fetuses - they were all males, as usual. So it begs the question as to how those fetuses were nurtured - certainly not in the mammalian sense we depend on here on Earth."

"So, are these babies made in test tubes like Louise Brown?"

"If they are, the aliens are utilizing a far more advanced means of doing it. In vitro fertilization techniques are for giving infertile couples a chance at being parents. Scientists here don't use it as a means of changing the species!"

"What about the containers the babies were found in?"

"We brought several home with us from Mars but the tech people are still poring over them, It's far more advanced than anything we have, but we think they were built to function as incubators."

Mitali brought another report up on her laptop for Straker to peruse. After a minute or so of reading he asked, "What is this business about the alien brain construction? Aren't their brains built like ours? I thought the only difference was the psi centre?"

"There's a section further in my report that you'll get later that compares the alien adult brains we've captured over the years to adult human brains. There are vital areas in which the alien brains are not like ours, suggesting that the aliens are emotionally and perhaps even psychologically disconnected. In other words, they don't feel emotions the same way humans do."

Straker was ruminative for a moment, "Well, that would certainly explain why the aliens

don't seem to react with fear when they're captured by us, or why they don't have any concern over what they do to our people when they take them."

"Exactly."

"So what does all this mean? What can we learn from all these Orion-like babies?"

Mitali laid a hand on Straker's shoulder, "That Kovac could still be alive."

* * *

It took Straker a couple seconds to digest what the good doctor had said. He'd basically resigned himself to the idea that Tina Kovac was no longer among the living. She had no real idea, when she went back to the aliens with her hybrid son, that they meant to use her for their own nefarious purposes, and that when they were done with her, she'd be cast on the human scrap heap like so many others. Such was the incredible mental control the aliens had been able to exert on her through her child.

"How do you figure that?" Straker finally asked.

Mitali sat down across from him to explain, "General, in order to create that many babies, the aliens had to have a good source of human eggs. Now, one human woman actually carries hundreds of eggs in her ovaries, from the time she herself is in the womb, until she hits menopause, and those eggs can be harvested. The aliens are good at harvesting many things, as you know. Fertility doctors here can and do harvest human eggs for childless couples, but they generally can only harvest a few at a time - you've no doubt heard of the multiple births which have happened as a result of medical intervention. Given the number of eggs Kovac has probably lost over the course of her almost 40 years of life, due to lack of fertilization, etc., we can expect that she still has many left the aliens would be able to harvest with means more advanced than our own."

"Where are you going with this?" Straker asked, finding it painful to listen to the doctor discuss Kovac and her eggs as though she were Dolly's mother.

"Kovac is their source. The aliens, until they manage to find another human woman to successfully breed with, keep using her eggs and her DNA to make these babies. All these babies have similar DNA markings to Kovac. They're her children, General. And, that tells me they have a stake in keeping her alive to provide living eggs and living DNA tissue with which to keep experimenting."

"So, what can we do about this? We don't know where she is. She could be back on the alien home world for all we know!"

"We can keep looking. The fact that we're finding baby installations within our own system and even at times on this planet means she has to be somewhere close enough for the aliens to use her."

Straker got out of his seat. For once, his discussion with Mitali had proven too unsettling for him to continue, "E-mail me the rest of your report," he growled and stalked out.

* * *

He slammed the condo door shut. Five hungry cats greeted his arrival, and the sight of his beloved felines softened his attitude. The best he had left of Kovac was her cat Cleo, and Cleo's four kittens, now almost young adult cats. He was continually amazed by their special abilities, even if they were the result of Dr. Jackson's under the table experimenting.

Once sated with copious amounts of Fancy Feast in their dishes, the cats all sat in a circle, washing and preening each other. Straker changed and got on his treadmill to walk off his frustration, but his mind kept spinning around what Mitali had told him.

Even if Kovac was by some miracle still alive, what had she become? A brood mare for

the aliens? His laptop chimed gently and he knew that meant Mitali's e-mailed report had likely arrived in his in-box. He couldn't look at it right now. He still couldn't face the reality of Kovac's disappearance, her seeming willingness to go with the aliens. All he could picture was her cradling her alien son in her arms the day she'd given birth...

Biddle began to make his usual keening sound and sure enough, the phone rang. It always amazed him that the cat was so attuned to such things. Straker shut off the treadmill, threw a towel around his neck and picked up his cell.

"Straker," he answered with his usual abrupt gruffness,

"It's Paul," the voice at the other end of the connection replied.

"Paul - what can I do for you?"

"Rather it's more what I can do for you. We think we may have discovered the next stage in the aliens' breeding program."

Part Two - April 2004

General Straker and Dr. Raychaudhuri got in the Omega Corporation limo waiting for them at JFK and sat in the rear compartment with General Paul Foster.

"You got my e-mailed material?" Paul asked, having known both his guests too long to bother with small talk.

"Yes," Mitali replied, "How did you know for certain?"

"Our little songbird inside the local police department tipped us off. We managed to get the bodies out of the NYPD morgue, before the coroners autopsied them and found the alien DNA in the fetuses, but there are still two detectives who are working the case to deal with. Elliott Stabler and John Munch. We need to get someone to talk to them and find out just how much they know."

* * *

"Well, now. To what do we owe the pleasure of a visit from the FBI?" John Munch smiled sardonically as Dr. Raychaudhuri and Peter Carlin flashed federal agent badges at him.

"We're here about the fertility clinic deaths. We understand you're the detectives working the case," Carlin smiled, showing perfect white teeth, the fluorescent light bouncing off his newly-shaved pate, "The bodies have disappeared?"

"Right out of the damn morgue," Elliott Stabler replied, pulling up a chair for himself, "I didn't think you feds would be interested in a medical malpractice case."

"Any time a case is complicated by evidence hijacking we like to check things out. Any chance we could do a walk-through the clinic with you?" Carlin asked.

"Yeah, sure. It's been shut down and the two nurses and the doctor are in custody. We tried to do an interrogation with the three of them this morning but they dummied up and asked for their lawyers. I figure they all smell major malpractice suits coming their way," Elliott said, "It's just too weird about the bodies. CSU went over the morgue with everything they had - not even prints left on the doors."

Mitali thought to herself, "Al and Pete can do some amazing things!" But she replied aloud, "Let's take a look at the clinic. I'm sure your CSU people did a thorough job, but it would be helpful to get a handle on the real scene."

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The clinic still had yellow police tape on the door, but Munch and Stabler were able to enter the building with their guests. Located in one of the more posh sections of town, the clinic looked more like a discreet brownstone than a medical facility.

Inside, the front foyer obviously served as a reception and waiting area. File cabinets lined one wall, and in the parlour area sat elegant furniture, grouped around a marble fireplace with magazines like Parenting and New Mother laid out on end tables for the patients to read. A large saltwater aquarium dominated one wall, and colourful fish darted in and out around the rock formations inside. Mitali raised an eyebrow - the fish were probably a means of relaxing nervous clients.

On the upper levels were recovery rooms, and a complete surgical room for fertility procedures. Mitali mentally identified the equipment as they looked around, and took discreet photos with her hidden purse camera, "Has anyone checked the refrigerators and cold storage areas?" she asked, "Clinics such as these usually store sperm samples, harvested eggs and such on-site."

"They're planning to come down and arrange something for this stuff - apparently there's

a whole issue at stake about ownership of the egg and sperm samples," Elliott explained.

"Then, you shouldn't mind if we have a look," Mitali smiled.

Munch grimaced in distaste, "I think I'll wait downstairs..."

* * *

Carlin watched with Stabler while Mitali donned her latex gloves to check the clinic's frozen samples. Special cold nitrogen units there were code numbered, and she knew that some would contain eggs and some might contain sperm. But what else could be contained in those units? Was there alien DNA stashed somewhere? And where were the eggs waiting to be fertilized and implanted?

"How many patients did this clinic have?" Carlin asked.

"We took their patient lists along with their accounting records. They had a pretty fair practice going. Found over 5000 couples' names on their database," Stabler told him.

"I take it you haven't had time to talk to any of these people as yet?" Carlin wanted to keep the NYPD's finest from noticing his partner's surreptitious removal of some samples to her specially designed shoulder bag.

"Oh, the doctor involved invoked all that crap about doctor-patient confidentiality, claimed infertility was a sensitive business and a deeply personal one for his patients and hadn't they all been already traumatized more than others because they couldn't have kids, yada yada yada," Stabler commented.

"Can we get a copy of that list from you? And their accounting records?"

"Sure, we can process that for you as soon as we get back to the precinct."

* * *

Peter returned with the detectives to their office, but Mitali excused herself and said she had to take care of something at the NYC FBI headquarters. She hailed a cab outside their precinct and took off.

"So, you were alerted to the dead patients by the hospitals?" Peter asked.

"Well, the hospitals called us, and the distraught husbands were screaming malpractice right from the get-go. Both had picked up their wives from the clinic after supposed fertility treatments and the women haemorrhaged so badly that they had to take them into the emergency rooms. They died shortly after being admitted," Munch explained.

"Did the hospitals release their medical files to you?"

"Yeah, you'll probably want copies of those too, huh?"

"Anything vital come out of those reports?"

"We had Rogers, one of our ME's, take a look at them, She said the records said the two women died of internal haemorrhaging, but she was planning to the autopsy the bodies to match things up - then they disappeared out of the morgue," Munch told him.

"Really?" Carlin smiled, "You'd think the morgue would step up their security after something like that." Peter took the envelope Elliott just handed him.

"Patient lists, accounting information and medical reports are all in there, plus some photos of the clinic," Elliott said, "You'll keep us in the loop on this one, right? I mean our Lieutenant is breathing down our necks for some answers."

"We'll call as soon as we go over this documentation," Peter smiled and departed.

* * *

Straker sat facing the Doctor and Peter Carlin, with General Foster on the other side of the table. The silver-haired SHADO commander was smoking one of his noxious cigarillos, "So what have we got here?"

"I've assigned a team of investigators to start contacting the patients on the clinic's list. We want to determine how many of them had actual fertility treatments and how many had pregnancies which went to term. In short - were any babies born as a result of the clinic's procedures?"

Foster looked at Mitali, "Were they cloning or trying to use human eggs?"

"I think they were working on the human egg-alien DNA combination. I ran the tests on the human eggs. Some may have belonged to the patients. But I found some other eggs there which raises the bar on this business," she looked over at Straker, "Of the seven egg samples I took, five of them matched Tina Kovac's DNA profile - they're definitely her eggs."

"You said the two NYPD cops tried an interrogation with the doctor and his two nurses," Foster queried.

"Stabler said they didn't get anything useful - the three of them asked for their lawyers and clammed up," Carlin replied, "The NYPD thinks this case is all about about medical malpractice. They don't appear to have a clue that there's anything bigger at stake here."

"We need to get to that doctor and his nurses," Foster suggested.

"That shouldn't be too hard - they were all released on bail a few hours ago."

"Let's get someone on that right away. We need some of our shrinks to handle this. If that trio was under alien influence - we need to know how it was done and why the aliens have gone this far," Straker said.

* * *

"My lawyer said I don't have to answer any more questions," Dr. Ian Smith said, as he tried to close his front door.

Peter Carlin's foot was in the way, and standing with him on the door stoop was Omega psychiatrist Dr. Christine Norris, "We won't take up much of your time," he said, smiling, "We could actually help your case, if you'd talk to us."

They could see distrust warring with calculation on the face of Dr. Smith, "Well, say your piece then," he opened the door for them to enter.

Inside the decor was austere. Several large prints hung on the walls - obviously photos of babies inside the womb.

"So how can you help my case?" the doctor asked them, "Hey, what're you doing?"

Christine had walked too closely beside him and slapped her hand on the back of his neck, "Calm down, Doctor Smith, we just want to ask you a few questions..." she helped Carlin grab him as he started to crumple to the hard wood floor. They got him to the couch and put his feet up.

"Should be just a few minutes, Peter and then we can start," Christine told him as Smith's eyes rolled up and down and finally closed as the drug took effect.

* * *

Mitali looked up from her work as General Straker walked into the lab, "Am I interrupting you, Doctor?"

"I can take a break," she said, getting up from her chair.

"Research is running the clinic's patient list - they're trying to find out which of any of those women might have given birth to live babies." For once, the General wasn't smoking.

"They told me that some of the reports they looked at first indicated a lot of women had miscarriages. Some of them went through several procedures that didn't result in a pregnancy at all. And the two bodies we recovered from the NYPD morgue very obviously died of complications with their miscarriages."

" So that means...?"

"The aliens either haven't perfected their hybridization techniques or perhaps not all human women make good hosts."

"You said you found some of Kovac's eggs in those samples you brought back from the clinic. Do you think some of them were used in those procedures rather than the patients' real eggs?"

"It's a definite possibility, General. Why else would they have them there on-site? What if the miscarriages all happened to women whose own eggs were used? And, what if Kovac's eggs were being utilized to ensure live births? We know of at least one that succeeded."

Straker's expression flickered for a moment at her allusion to Orion, "I've been wondering...what was so special about Kovac that her eggs are being used to make hybrid babies all over the place?"

"My guess is that she was a good host - her DNA must have some component that works well with the alien DNA. Some genetic factor in her DNA that is unusual - something so far confined to her alone."

"It's...audacious, Doctor. To use a fertility clinic to impregnate human women with alien hybrid babies! I never thought the aliens would go so far in this gambit. If we only knew what they were doing all this for - taking such chances - expending so much in the way of effort and their own resources!"

"They know a lot about human nature, General. They obviously know that women who use fertility clinics are often desperate, and often, if they have the money, willing to go through more than one procedure to ensure a pregnancy."

The General made a face, "Those desperate women were paying big fees to be used as guinea pigs for the aliens."

"As I understand it from our forensic accounting department, those fees were how the doctor, his nurses, and the rental on the brownstone got paid, not to mention the expensive equipment."

"What about alien equipment there?"

"An extraction team went into the house last night and brought out several pieces that were definitely of alien origin. They were housed in a secured area the police missed on their trips through. We identified them from the hidden sensor data I collected in the house yesterday. The tech department is going over it right now. It looks pretty much like the equipment we confiscated from the Mars installation."

"Doctor, there has to be a link here. The aliens were trying to grow babies of their own on Mars. Some of them might have lived if we hadn't attacked the base. This has to be the next step to something - but to what?"

"That clinic had a client list of over 5000 women. Maybe the aliens were tackling the odds and hoping to score another Orion here. And what if this clinic is not the only one the aliens are involved with? There are thousand of such clinics all over the world! "

"But, even if they hit the jackpot and another Orion is born - what then? What do the aliens do about it?"

"What did they do the last time?"

Straker shook his head sadly, "Keep me posted on any more important finds."

* * *

Dr Norris switched on her recording apparatus, "Now, Dr. Smith, I have a few questions for you...nothing to worry about...just free your mind and follow my lead..."

Lying on the couch, Smith's eyes were open but it was obvious he was not awake in the real sense of the word. He nodded slowly and his mouth opened slackly.

"How long have you been running your clinic?"

"...almost two years..."

"Tell me how you got set up."

"...I needed money...to get my practice started...the banks wouldn't give me what I needed...then..."

"Then what?" Peter Carlin asked quietly.

"They came...they called and said they were willing to back my clinic for whatever money I needed..."

"Who is they?"

"I don't know...they just gave me the cash...in a briefcase. Two million dollars...I couldn't believe it..." Smith frowned at the memory, "...they didn't tell me there were strings attached...at first..."

"Strings?" Christine threw a knowing glance at Carlin who was watching Smith as intently as she was.

* * *

Christine and Peter waited until it was dark outside before leaving the doctor's house through the back entrance. They walked three blocks and then hailed a cab to take them to the Omega Corp Building in downtown NYC. Safely stowed in her handbag was the recorded conversation they'd had with Dr. Smith. They couldn't get everything they wanted because it was clear the aliens had tampered with his subconscious memory to remove certain details, but they'd gotten enough information to confirm their own suspicions.

The other teams had also returned by then from their encounters with the clinic nurses, but it was clear the nurses knew nothing. As usual, all three would wake up in the morning with the suggestions planted in their minds that they'd been exhausted from their ordeal in jail and had gone to bed early.

"Well, we know Dr. Smith and his people will be too tied up answering to malpractice charges to reopen this clinic," Foster told his silver-haired commander.

General Straker pounded his fist on the briefing room table, "Damn it, Paul! We can keep this clinic closed down but what if the aliens find another one to set up? What if there are clinics like this one all over the planet?"

"We have to deal with this on an as-is basis. Now that we know what the aliens are up to we've sent intelligence reports out to all our operatives - they'll be checking fertility clinics everywhere. Not all of them are alien controlled, Ed, they can't be."

It was a sign of Foster's irritation that he called his superior by his first name, but they were old war horses together in the anti-alien business, and Straker didn't attach any negative meaning to it.

"Sorry, Paul, I'm just... overwhelmed, I guess..."

Foster changed his tack, "Look, I know this whole thing has dredged up the Kovac thing for you..."

"It's not just that," Straker waved that off, "It's this feeling of...impotence that's driving me crazy. Like we can't do anything to stop them. They've got the upper hand this time, and they know it. We close down one clinic and they'll just open another one. They're like cockroaches infesting a building, Paul, you can't kill them no matter what you do!"

"We'll stay on top of this. We'll ferret them out and shut them down. If there are any

babies born, we'll find them, and we'll keep the aliens from taking them away from us this time."

Straker's shoulders drooped, "They're winning. They're doing something monstrous and we can't stop them. They're using our very selves against us. All those desperate women, wanting babies... what better way to infiltrate us without a full scale invasion! They're...trying to become us!"

Foster sat back in his chair, ruminating for a moment. It was an ugly thought. By merging themselves with humans, they would eventually, if they were successful, melt into the human race, and then what?

"Get some sleep, Ed. You've been up for two days now. You can't live on coffee and cigarillos at your age, you know," he tried to smile at Straker, "Call Alec and see if Cleo has clawed him to bits yet."

Straker smiled briefly, his blue eyes tired and his face drawn, "Wake me if anything vital comes through."

* * *

"What have you got?" Straker's voice was crackly from sleep.

"Maybe a baby hit," Paul told him, standing at the sleep room door, his tall body silhouetted against the hall light, "We've had some of our researchers going over the clinic's patient list. So far, all of the patients said they had miscarriages, but we may get lucky this time. There's a woman in Massachusetts who is pregnant right now - and she's singing the praises of our Dr. Smith and his clinic!"

* * *

Straker and Foster hopped on the Omega Corporate jet and flew into Logan airport. They rented a Denali SUV and drove out to Reading, Mass., a small town about 15 minutes outside Boston. They turned up Mount Vernon Street and parked in the driveway of the house marked number 57. It was an older home, comfortable and simple, with flowers in the window boxes and in baskets hanging from the porch.

They were carrying bogus ID that said they were with the NYPD. Their cover story was planned out to tell the pregnant clinic patient that the clinic had been closed down due to malpractice and they were talking to everyone on the patient list to see if there were any other cases that needed to be filed along with the original two.

The two SHADO people were ushered into a cozy, old-fashioned kitchen, and treated to hot coffee and freshly made cinnamon rolls.

"I must say I was shocked when your people called me the other day," said Louise, pouring herself a glass of milk instead of the coffee, "I mean, Dr. Smith and his staff treated me just wonderfully! I had a very special case, and they did everything they could to handle my requests."

"We read in your files that you had artificial insemination?" Foster asked.

"Yes. But, not just any artificial insemination...", she paused and took a deep breath, "You see, my husband was killed last year in a car accident...we had both egg and sperm samples frozen and stored with the clinic, we'd been trying to get pregnant for so long..and I requested the clinic use my husband's sperm so I could get pregnant with a posthumous child. I felt...it was my last chance to have a piece of Harry."

"And, the procedure was successful?" Paul indicated Louise's swelling belly.

Louise smiled through liquid-filled eyes and patted her belly softly, "It seems ironic that I should get pregnant now, when Harry's gone, but I couldn't be happier! This is the only good

thing to happen to me since Harry passed..."

"Why did you go to a clinic in New York? Aren't there fertility clinics in Boston?" Straker asked.

"Yes, there are closer clinics, but my mother in law lives in New York, and it was just easier to go there, have the procedures done and then recuperate at her place. She's a retired nurse herself and I felt more...safe, I guess. Plus, back before Harry died, he couldn't always get time off from work to go with me to the clinic, so his mom did."

"Do you see an OB/GYN here in Reading?"

"No, that's just the problem. I'm going to have to find one now that I can't see Dr. Smith anymore. I was going up there to be checked every 2-3 weeks. And, his nurses are also midwives and I was planning to go back to New York to check into their clinic to have the baby when the time came. As you can imagine, this whole business has been a shocker. I always found Dr. Smith and his people to be the best!"

"If it would be any help to you, we could provide a new OB/GYN for you to see," Foster told Louise, "But, you'd have to come back to New York."

"Well, originally, when I was planning to do that, my mother in law was willing to take me and the baby back to her place to recover from the birth. She's thrilled that I finally got pregnant - she says it'll be like having a piece of Harry back!" Louise smiled.

"When is your due date?"

"I'm getting close to the end now. Just a few weeks, give or take. Dr. Smith said first births could be early or late, and I'm no spring chicken anymore. He said it might be harder after age 40, and I'm already 42."

"Do you think your mother in law would mind having you arrive early? I'm sure she'd want you to have the best of care, especially now that you're coming down to the wire," Foster smiled.

* * *

After making a few phone calls, and getting a neighbour to watch her house, Louise Gillis agreed to accompany the SHADO people back to the Big Apple. She had no reason to believe they were anything but NYPD police officers. Louise packed a couple bags of clothes for herself and the baby and left with them. Straker went on ahead to catch the Omega jet, and Foster stayed behind with Louise and took a commercial flight with her back to NYC. He dropped her at her mother in law's brownstone and explained he'd be back in the morning to escort her to the OB/GYN who was taking over all of the clinic's former patients.

Of course, the 'doctor' that Foster was taking her to see was Mitali Raychaudhuri. Mitali's scientific focus might have been elsewhere, but Straker and Foster didn't want to bring in an outside OB/GYN and the doctor who helped Kovac give birth had been transferred to Asia, so there was no time to get her to New York. Their intention was to keep the mother under very close surveillance, and to give her a story about the need to induce labour, so they could help her give birth in a secure SHADO-Omega location - they didn't want to take the chance of losing Louise Gillis and her possibly alien-human baby like they'd lost Kovac and Orion.

Raychaudhuri did an initial exam of Mrs. Gillis and reassured her that so far everything looked fine. They also asked if they could do another ultrasound and she agreed.

"Did anything strange come out on the ultrasound?" Straker asked.

"Well, if you mean did the baby have two heads or green skin, no. All the ultrasound showed us was that the baby has developed along normal human parameters," Mitali replied, showing Straker and Foster the taped ultrasound images, "What I'd really like to do is put her

through an MRI. We could learn a lot more from a test like that. We might even be able to make out the baby's brain."

"You'd be looking for the tell-tale alien organ at the base of the brain, right?" Foster questioned her.

"Exactly. Until the baby is born, we won't know if it has silver eyes or not."

"What about the sex of the child?" Straker wanted to know.

"It isn't safe to attempt amniocentesis this late in a pregnancy. We could injure or even kill the baby. I did see something on the ultrasound images that suggested this child might be a boy, but I'd rather not speculate without sounder evidence."

"Is the baby far enough along in its gestation for us to induce the birth? Could it survive birth now?" Straker was getting impatient. He'd failed with Kovac and her baby, but here was a second chance to redeem himself, "What about a C-section?"

"Human babies have been known to survive birth and outside the womb even as premature as 6 months old, but I really don't want to take unnecessary risks with this one. I've pulled up all the top secret files on Kovac's delivery - not an easy task to keep Dr. Jackson out of the loop. I don't know how many times I had to reroute the information before I could get it. If this baby follows a more alien gestation timetable - which at the moment is an unknown quantity to us - we could be doing more harm than good if we intervene before it's necessary."

"What are the chances this baby really is an alien-human hybrid?" Foster asked, "What if for once the clinic chose to deal with only human eggs and sperm?"

"From the patient files and the personal research done over the phone with the patients by our people, we know most of them all had miscarriages. The two women who died and set this whole investigation in motion definitely had alien DNA in their babies."

"That's what I mean, is this pregnancy succeeding because it doesn't have alien DNA mixed in?"

"You're making a good point, there, Paul, but we do have Kovac as our one exception we know about."

"All this discussion is moot if we can't get our hands on and keep this baby - especially if it turns out to be a hybrid," Straker told them emphatically, "We have to be able to convince that mother to give up her baby to us - IF it's a hybrid - and we can't tell her why!"

"That's why, whether this baby lives or dies, we have to lie to Mrs. Gillis."

Both older men stared at Mitali, "Look, it's like this," she said, "If this baby lives, and is a hybrid, we have to take the child away from her. We can't tell her why. If it doesn't survive birth, and is still a hybrid, we'll need the body for examination. We can't give it back to her. If the child lives, and isn't an alien-human mix, we have to keep her in the dark about what all this was about, right?"

"What do you suggest, then?" Straker swallowed. As usual, in his chase for the truth, he'd momentarily forgotten the very real human element in the whole business.

"Let me deal exclusively with Mrs. Gillis. This is a special case. I think anything we have to tell her will come more easily from a woman, and she'll accept it all better if I establish a relationship with her."

* * *

Several days fled by, making Straker more and more antsy. He wanted, more than anything, for the whole business to be over with. Waiting for this birth was very different from waiting for Orion. Mitali went over to visit Mrs. Gillis on a daily basis, examined her, and reported back to Foster and Straker, but nothing was new. Mrs. Gillis was still carrying a

healthy, moving, active baby, and without knowing the SHADO people were also awaiting this birth with barely concealed excitement, she too was eager to hold her newborn in her arms.

Mitali had given Mrs. Gillis a special pager so she could reach her anytime, anywhere, anyplace, and the good doctor had prepared a 'clinic' location for her within the Omega Corporation's building complex in Manhattan. It wasn't far from Omega's research division and had been chosen for that reason. As cold-blooded and cruel as it seemed, they had prepared themselves to tell Mrs. Gillis, if her baby was indeed an alien-human hybrid, that the child had died and they would look after the funeral arrangements for her, etc. If the child proved to be a normal human baby, they would send Mrs. Gillis home to her mother in law with the much longed for baby, and cut their own losses.

There were several considerations at hand of course. The SHADO-Omega people now knew that the alien hybrids had a built in psychic homing signal, and that these babies could control their mothers mentally as well. If they were foolish enough to leave this child with Mrs. Gillis, the aliens would find her, and remove her and the baby, the same way they had with Kovac and Orion. That action had to be prevented at all costs. Only by retaining a hybrid child could they hope to discover just what it was the aliens were up to with their specialized breeding programs.

Straker had wanted very much to be present at the birth, so Mitali arranged for the birthing room to have a large plate two-way mirror installed so he could observe. Of course, once the baby was born, knowing if it was a hybrid or not would be as easy as looking into its eyes and/or doing a quick DNA test. Modern DNA testing took only a few hours, and it would not be hard to convince Mrs. Gillis to remain at the clinic for awhile after the birth, whatever the outcome. Mitali had made the room comfortable and cheerful, painted in soft blues with soft blue and white bedding and a minimum of equipment. The room next door, which led in from the birthing room was where all the testing could be carried out quickly and easily, and it was equipped with an incubator and all the special accoutrements needed for a newborn.

When Mrs. Gillis finally beeped Mitali, she called Straker and Foster and told them "the game was afoot" - their code - via Shakespeare - for this matter. Mitali arrived at the Gillis brownstone with a comfortable SUV and took her off to the clinic they'd set up. Because the clinic's true nature was concealed from the public, they permitted Mrs. Gillis senior to accompany her daughter in law. Depending on the outcome of the birth, Mrs. Gillis junior might need a shoulder to cry on, or an equally happy mother in law to share the joy with.

* * *

Louise was exhausted. She'd been pushing for what seemed hours. Her mother-in-law wasn't complaining, but she knew she'd probably crushed the older woman's arthritic fingers by now.

"Why won't the baby come? is something wrong?" Louise asked, as wave after wave of pain wracked her body.

"The baby seems to be doing fine, Louise," Mitali looked up from the white sheet covering Louise's knees, "Can you do some more pushing for me?"

Putting herself back to the task at hand, Louise began panting and pushing again. She was rewarded with Mitali's voice saying, "I can see the head! You're crowning! Just a bit more..."

Louise has very little left to give, but she put her best effort into it and pushed as hard as she could. She heard the fetal monitor going crazy and called out, "What's going on? What's wrong?"

Mitali stared down at the bluish bundle in her hands - what the hell had happened? Not

being an experienced OB/GYN, it took her a second to realize what was wrong - the baby's umbilical cord was wrapped around its neck - she hastily snipped the cord and raced the baby to the next room to try to resuscitate it.

Straker had left his post by the two-way mirror and had entered the work room from another back entrance, "What happened...?" he asked, his facial expression stricken and white.

Trained medical workers in the room next door helped Mitali, suctioning the mucous out of the baby's nose, and massaging the tiny heart, but it was too late. Too late. Mitali looked up at the clock, and felt tears stinging her eyes, "Call it," she told the nurse standing beside her. She peeled off her latex gloves and took a deep breath. Straker's blue eyes had tears standing in them also. She had no choice now but to tell Mrs. Gillis it was all over. She thought the lies would get easier in her line of work, but they never did...

EPILOGUE

Straker sat down in the chair opposite Dr. Raychaudhuri. It was obvious from his appearance that he hadn't slept much in the last two days. His trademark cigarillo was not in evidence as he said, "What can you tell me?"

"It was a hybrid, alright. But, the human DNA matched Tina Kovac again," Mitali was also exhausted from the last several days' ordeal.

The silver-haired General nodded wordlessly - he'd really figured as much - but was just waiting for the tests to confirm his suspicions, "I really thought we were going to hit the jackpot this time..."

Mitali sighed heavily, "General, I feel responsible for this... mess. Perhaps if you'd had a real OB/GYN to handle this..."

Straker waved her off, "It wouldn't have mattered, Mitali. You did your best under the circumstances. I asked you to handle this personally. If anyone's at fault, it's me, for not making the decision to induce Mrs. Gillis or have a C-section done before she went into labour on her own."

"I can e-mail the final autopsy report to you shortly."

"That's fine. You go get some rest."

"I will, sir. I just have one thing left to do..."

* * *

Mitali got out of her Omega-issue SUV at the cemetery. She'd waited until the small crowd from the funeral and internment had dispersed before she got out and walked over. She came up behind Louise Gillis and said quietly, "I'm sorry I'm late."

Louise looked at Raychaudhuri, her eyes a red-rimmed mess, her black mascara running down one cheek, "It's like burying Harry all over again, you know..." she fell into Mitali's arms and sobbed, her body shaking uncontrollably. Mitali held her tightly.

Mrs. Gillis senior came back from saying goodbye to some of the other funeral attendees and saw her daughter-in-law in Mitali's arms, "We didn't think you were going to make it today, Doctor."

Mitali had never felt less like a doctor at that moment than in all her years with SHADO-Omega, "I...had a hard time getting away from the clinic...", and the autopsy she'd had to do on the child Louise had carried inside her body for nine months.

"We buried the baby with Harry," Mrs. Gillis senior said, indicating the fresh carving on the Gillis family memorial stone - Harry Gillis Jr - Born and Died April 30th.

Mitali nodded, knowing that whatever was in that tiny casket was definitely not Harry Gillis Jr. She'd let Louise hold the baby for a moment after his death, but when she'd taken the poor little body back, the casket had been filled with a perfectly weighted material and sealed against curious family wanting to have a look by the SHADO-Omega people. The real body had been sent to Mitali's lab for examination.

"You did everything you could, Doctor," Mrs. Gillis senior told Mitali, as she took her weeping daughter in law out of her arms and steered her off in the direction of their waiting car, "Thank you for coming."

Mitali stood in front of the memorial stone, and listened as all the cars drove off. She read the new carving on the stone again and felt a swell of anger in her throat that threatened to break free in a long scream. Instead, she fought it down with the iron will and courage she'd had to cultivate in all the long years she'd been working against the aliens.

"Bastards! It wasn't enough to kill our people, steal our natural resources, and threaten the security of our world. Now you're taking our hope and handing us back nothing but suffering!" she thought. The fertility clinic has been a weapon in the hands of the aliens. They didn't care about what they did, or who they did it to. They just went on, year after year, doing whatever it was they deemed necessary to keep their species alive. Human beings were just cattle to them. Lower animals to be utilized in the fight to survive.

She thought of the tiny body she'd had to carve apart in the interests of science and preservation of the human race. This war against the aliens was making them no better than the enemy. No respect for life, no choice but to kill nosy witnesses lest they go public with what they'd seen, lies on top of lies on top of lies! And, what for! To keep the peace. To keep the rest of the world from the panic and fear and paranoia that would surely accompany an honest admonition by the governments of the planet that there indeed was an alien menace and that it was a matter of life and death.

Mitali turned from the newly dug grave. The men were coming to fill it in, now that the family had left the scene. She walked back to her SUV. Tomorrow was another day

THE END