

Siamese Sanctuary

by Pamela McCaughey (2006)

based on "UFO" (1969-70) created by Gerry & Sylvia Anderson & Reg Hill

Chapter One

"I called you both here, because frankly, I didn't know what else to do," General Straker addressed Drs. Imma Zama and Bonnie Davidson, "The kittens are restless, constantly crying, and it's especially bad at night. Even Cleo can't comfort them."

Dr. Zama nodded, "I can do a physical exam on each one of them for you today,"

"Dr. Davidson, aside from real illness, can you suggest any reasons the kittens could be so upset?"

The blonde psychiatrist inclined her head before answering, "They're a year old now. We've seen their psychic abilities expanding, almost exponentially. The behaviour mode you're describing to me doesn't sound related to any kind of physical discomfort, but I agree Dr. Zama should do the exams, just to rule out true illness. I'm only theorizing here, but they may be responding to some sort of psychic stimuli too subtle for humans to apprehend. A psychic stimuli which is too close for their comfort. Has Kiki attempted to speak to you telepathically as before when you were all prisoners of Dr. Jackson?"

"No, she's not tried to reach me on that level as yet."

"The kittens' increasing sentience makes them very self-aware, but they're still technically, in feline terms, like children. Yes, they are physically mature enough to mate and produce offspring, but mentally they still want to play and carry on typically kittenish behaviours. Even the brightest human children can be confused by something unknown or beyond their current comprehension level. And it doesn't help that they are now far advanced beyond their mother. Except for giving birth to them, Cleo is still, and always will be, a normal cat. So her ability to understand her progeny is a very limited one."

"If the kittens are responding to psychic stimuli, what could it be? As far as we know, most humans do not have the abilities they have."

Dr. Davidson pondered her next comment, "That's quite true. So we have to consider other possibilities."

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As expected, Dr. Zama's physical exams yielded no evidence of illness. In fact, she said the kittens appeared to be in peak physical condition.

Straker ruminated on Dr. Davidson's comments. If the kittens were indeed reacting to psychic stimuli - where was it coming from?

The sleepless nights were beginning to take a toll on the 60-something General. He tried talking to Kiki, which made him feel somewhat silly, to see if she would communicate with him but to no avail. Even Cleo seemed frustrated with her inability to comfort her progeny and had taken to spending her nights on the living room couch instead of on the queen sized bed with Straker and the kittens.

Doing his usual ten hour days at the SHADO headquarters, buried deep inside the Harlington-Straker movie studio was getting more tiresome because his sleep pattern was so

poor. He was drinking more coffee, smoking more of his noxious cigarillos and feeling less and less effective every day.

He was on his way home from SHADO one night late. Special communiques had arrived from Mars Base and he stayed extra time to deal with them. Straker realized in the car that he was out of Fancy Feast, his favourite micromeals and coffee filters. A stop at his local market would be a necessary detour before heading home for another night of no sleep...

The General was balancing his grocery bags and fumbling in his coat pocket for his keyless car entry when he sensed a figure blocking the parking lot lights to his right. He stopped and turned, "May I help you?" he asked the figure.

"I saw you coming out of the market - you seemed to require assistance," the young man replied. In the near darkness, Straker couldn't make out his facial features, but he could tell he was tall, thin, and moved with an unusual grace for such a gangly fellow.

"I can manage just fine, thank you," Straker replied. After his kidnapping episode not too long ago, he had become very vigilant. A kidnapping, or even a car-jacking, was not outside the realm of possibility in the General's mind - he had developed a more heightened sense of danger over the last few weeks.

The young man inclined his head, but as he turned to move away, the light caught his eyes - and Straker saw the silver irises shining brightly. Suddenly, his knees lost their strength.

He watched as the lithe fellow loped away from him and quickly blurred into the darkness at the other end of the parking lot. His hand closed on the keyless entry and he pressed the button, opened the driver's side door and fired the groceries into the back seat. Straker sat down behind the wheel, locked all the doors, and sat there shaking for many minutes before he had the strength to turn the key in the ignition...

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"I know it sounds crazy - that's what I keep telling myself," Straker puffed nervously on his cigarillo and tapped the ashes onto his office floor.

Allan Leslie, the newly made Security Director for SHADO Ops Great Britain, sat across from the General, ruminantly nibbling his thumb, "Why didja wait till this mornin' to let us know? It'll be impossible to track him down now after so many hours."

Straker shook his head, "I've been tired - not sleeping - I thought maybe I was seeing things. Besides, it's totally implausible. Orion was born in 2001 - he's a mere six year old now. This person I encountered last night was very definitely an adult male."

"Were ya able to get a look at his face - other than the silver irises?"

"Too dark in the parking lot for that. It was like he knew how to remain shadowed while he approached me."

"Body type?"

"Tall, slight - he moved quickly and gracefully - almost like a dancer."

Leslie rolled his eyes heavenward, "So we're lookin' for an escapee from the local ballet company, eh?" he couldn't resist a ghost of a smile.

"You think I'm certifiable, don't you?" Straker returned the smile ruefully.

"Nah. This is no crazier than psychic cats," Al's expression turned serious, "I can have my guys do a forensic sweep of the parking lot and the surrounding tree areas - see if buddy mighta dropped a cigarette butt or a gum wrapper - somethin' with DNA or prints on it. But, I gotta tell ya not to get your hopes up that we'll find anythin' this many hours later."

"Just let me know when your team gets back."

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After Al left, Straker's eyes wandered over to the unfinished baby portrait of Orion hanging on his office wall. Astronaut Tina Kovac had started it shortly before she disappeared back to Canada with her human-alien hybrid infant. She'd left the painting behind along with her other things, and most importantly for Straker, Cleo the Siamese cat. Straker had taken possession of whatever personal effects had belonged to Kovac, after they'd been assessed for evidence.

Paul Foster and Al Leslie had both privately recounted to him their last encounter with Kovac before she willingly gave herself and her baby back to the aliens. Straker knew the details. His head told him there was no way Kovac could still be alive after six years in alien custody. But his heart still harboured hope long after. The capture of alive alien in 2006 and that alien's subsequent autopsy gave Straker the sad proof he'd been dreading. The DNA profile on the dead alien's pancreas matched that of Kovac's. The aliens had used her up in every way possible - true to their scavenging nature to the very end.

When Orion was born, Straker had had what Kovac sarcastically called "a front row seat." He'd allowed himself to get emotionally involved, and castigated himself privately for it. It wasn't just the amazement that a hybrid child could be born - it was Kovac herself who captured his heart. She embodied so many of the same drives and attitudes he himself lived by. Both had put their life's work ahead of their families and had lived to regret it. And when the aliens murdered Kovac's husband and son, and took her daughter, it was Straker who'd given the order to destroy the alien ship carrying the young girl away.

Now the very idea that Orion or someone like him was here on earth froze Straker's blood. Such a thing meant the aliens had been more than successful in their breeding program - that they'd finally managed to make a viable hybrid who could live, breathe and function on Earth as a human - a monster in disguise - walking among humans - but as their enemy. An enemy who was here - to do what?

If the SHADO theorists were right and the hybrids or clones of hybrids were meant to be some sort of fifth column to help the aliens get a better foothold on planet Earth - how would they go about doing it? Would they function as terrorists? Assassins? Spies? What were the aliens' real motives currently?

For years, SHADO and Omega had engaged in a secret war aimed at thwarting the aliens from stealing humans for organ transplant and whatever natural resources they could get. In all these decades, they still had no absolute proof where the aliens' home world was, how long they'd been coming and why they needed to continue coming.

Again, the theorists ascribed the aliens' actions to survival. It was believed the aliens had somehow managed to poison their own world, were possibly incapable of procreating naturally, and were using their dwindling technological resources to make the trip to Earth to plunder what they could. Except in the last 30 years or so, the aliens showed no sign of giving up, or lessening their assault on Earth. Like parasitic insects, they wormed their way into nation after nation, establishing nests and beachheads, taking whatever they wanted, whenever they wanted, and exhibiting no remorse or concern for their cruel and inhuman behaviour when rarely captured.

All this still left Straker with the unanswered question - what had happened to Orion when Kovac gave him back to the aliens and what was he capable of?

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As expected, Al Leslie's forensic team turned up nothing of value to the investigation. Not that Straker expected any results. The aliens were champions when it came to avoiding

evidence of themselves. SHADO and Omega scientists worked hard to understand captured alien technology, and to adapt their own, capable of detecting alien equipment and craft. And, every time they managed to find a way to match them, the aliens jumped ahead in the techno-race. Hardly the signature of a dying civilization!

Disgusted and pooped, Straker took himself off to his high security condo. He could finish his 'paperwork' at home later. Leftovers in the microwave constituted his supper. Cleo and the kittens were clambering for his attention, so he steeped a cup of Earl Grey tea (an addiction he'd gotten from Kovac) and sat down on the couch with his mug and his laptop. Kiki was the first to cuddle up beside him, joined in succession by Biddle and Kla. Misha took up a spot on his shoulder, via the couch back and Mama Cleo ensconced herself on his other side.

It had been an unusually quiet evening; no calls, no visitors and no TV. The cats slept peacefully, their tails and paws wrapped around each other. From time to time, Straker would pause from his computer to stroke a soft, furry body, only to be rewarded with several seconds of purring, before somnolence took over again. This warm and loving legacy, the only thing of substance Kovac had left him, had made a special difference in his life. The cats made Straker feel loved and wanted, and their growing sentience had just been an odd bonus.

The quiet, coupled with piles of purring cats, and Straker's exhaustion was enough to make him drowsy. He was just about to nod off when the cats all dove off from him, crying and restlessly pacing the floor. They took turns leaping from one piece of furniture to the other, obviously upset. Only Cleo remained with him, a perplexed expression on her little black face.

Straker shoved the laptop aside and hit speed-dial to the security desk downstairs, "Yes, Straker here. Is there anything odd happening there?"

The officer on duty replied, "We had a response to the motion detectors outside. By the time our guys got out - it was over. Must have been a nocturnal animal."

"You checked the cameras?"

"Just rewinding now, sir."

"I'll be right down. I want to see the recording myself!"

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Playback on the recorders confirmed that there had indeed been someone outside the building - if only for a few moments of time. It would have been impossible to identify the person - except the light caught his eyes as he turned away to leave and they shone silver.

Straker called Al Leslie to brief the building's security staff.

"We think this guy is stalkin' the General," Leslie explained, putting up the image taken from the outside recorders on his laptop screen and blowing it up so the silver irises were clearly visible, "For all we know he may be controlled by the aliens. This means we gotta prevent him from gettin' access to this buildin' at all costs. The only physical description we have of this guy, from the General, is that he's tall, on the slim side, and has these radical silver irises. The best course of action is to capture him alive so we can interrogate him and find out what he's up to. We've set the General up with a pair of bodyguards as of now."

One of the guards asked, "This building doesn't contain holding facilities keeping prisoners."

"Yeah, I know, so ya gotta contact me asap so I can have him picked up to be taken to a secure location. Keep him on ice till our guys get here."

"What if he's armed?"

"We don't know for sure if he is, but if he's alien-controlled, he might have one of those

small energy weapons - you know the ones - they look like pens. Defend yourselves, but take him down easy - understood?"

The guards all murmured assent. Leslie escorted Straker back upstairs. Two burly looking guards were already stationed outside his condo entrance.

"How'd you know there'd been an intruder alert?" Leslie queried.

"The cats. They reacted violently to something. I called downstairs and then called you in. Dr. Davidson thinks the cats are picking up psychic signals from this man I've seen twice now."

"Any chance he's after them, not you?"

Straker blinked in consternation - this was a little wrinkle he'd never considered, "Why would the aliens want my cats?"

"They're pretty special. The aliens know they exist. Maybe the aliens want them for some reason we don't know about. Whoever is doin' the stalkin' here must realize his presence is picked up by the cats."

"Then maybe the cats are the ones who need guarding, not me," Straker replied, looking pointedly at the guards outside his door.

"You're not gettin' off that easy!" Leslie admonished him, "I'll have another pair of guards sent in asap to cover you, and these guys will cover the cats. We're not gonna take any chances here at all!"

Chapter Two

In years past, the aliens had made several attempts to kill Straker. They'd used mind control on various humans within the SHADO organization, and other means, to accomplish their goal. Fortunately, Straker had escaped their efforts, and the aliens ceased to be a direct threat to his life for some time.

Now Straker was shocked by Leslie's suggestion that the cats were the aliens' target. Since he'd been approached at the parking lot he couldn't shake the idea the aliens had sent someone after him - someone who looked amazingly like an adult Orion. This matter had dredged up all Straker's feelings about Canadian astronaut Tina Kovac. He believed they'd uncovered ample evidence of her death, but he had spent less time thinking about her hybrid child - except to curse the fate which sent him back to the aliens.

Straker had relived the day of Orion's birth in his mind many times since his close encounter in the parking lot. Kovac, and now the cats, were the only living creatures to pierce his heart since his son Johnnie had died.

Jackson's evil scheme - to clone the kittens from their mother Cleo - using precious and rare DNA taken from Orion before his disappearance - had blossomed into a seeming madness. He regarded the kittens as nothing more than lab animals with no reason to grant them clemency from his planned experiments of cruelty and death for scientific post-mortems. What Jackson had not realized was that the kittens, with their alien DNA, were more useful for study as the living, growing in sentience, beings they were. Their special abilities, which set them apart from ever other creature on the planet and were developing exponentially, made their continued existence and study vital. Could their abilities be indicative of what Orion would or could become? Or perhaps HAD become?

Another anomaly: unlike most female cats, neither Kiya nor Kla evidenced sexual maturity. They were about a year old and had never gone into heat. Not even the two males, Biddle and Misha, showed any sign of procreative interest. It was as if their physical maturity had been suspended at some point in favour of their mental capacities. Both Drs. Zama and Davidson declared them healthy feline specimens, and although they kittens had the correct 'equipment' to reproduce - none had shown any inclination towards it. Was this oddity the result of the alien DNA?

How had the aliens located the kittens and Straker himself? Once, when Cleo was pregnant, the aliens had tried to remove her from Straker's car. They had left Straker unharmed and ultimately they did not take Cleo at all. SHADO theorists debated the possibility that the alien DNA in the kittens had some sort of psychic signature the aliens could track, just as they had tracked Orion in Kovac's womb.

So, who were the aliens really targeting? Were they after Straker himself, or was he mistaken and they were after Cleo's family? All these questions crowded Straker's mind and made it impossible for him to sleep. He petted the furry little bodies curled up next to him in bed and considered: he knew there were two tough, armed guards assigned just outside the door for their protection - but from what?

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Some evenings were quieter than others. The two guards who were assigned to man the security desk that night in General Straker's building were well-trained experts. Guards working the site were rotated constantly to maintain alertness, but the same men were there on a regular basis, and knew all the residents well.

A small movement at the front door caused both guards to get to their feet quickly. Before either one of them could draw their weapons, they both fell victim to an incredible pain in their chests! The pain was so intense, they felt as though their hearts were about to explode! As they gasped for breath, they saw bluish lights emanating from a shadowy figure in front of them...

A strange stripling with silver irises watched the men slump to the floor. Satisfied they were dead, and no longer any threat to him, he stepped over them and headed for the stairwell...

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Upstairs, Straker woke up. All four of the kittens had left his bed and were pacing, crying and obviously upset. Grabbing his cell off the night-table, he called downstairs. No answer. Then he speed-dialed Leslie and his extra security team. There had to be something wrong !!

The four cats had made their way to the living room. Straker, clad in his pyjamas, followed them. He had taken out his personal weapon and stuck it in the back of his PJ bottoms just in case...

Leslie's security people had installed several new locking devices: physical, electronic, and one which read Straker's retina and fingerprints in order to gain entrance. But none of these new devices could stop the door from shaking violently in its frame. Someone was outside and they meant to find a way in!

Cleo's kittens were agitated in the extreme - their tails were fluffed, their ears flattened back against their heads, and their eyes wide in fear and anger. The door frame shook loose and fell with a heavy metallic sound on the floor of Straker's condo. A sudden silence fell over the room as the cats stopped keening and a tall, thin young man entered.

There was no expression on the face that so clearly mirrored that of Tina Kovac's. Red-haired, but with silver irises, the young man walked over the fallen steel door and stared at Straker quietly.

"What do you want?" Straker demanded.

Raising a hand, palm up, Orion advanced on him. Straker brought up the small weapon he'd been holding behind his back, "I can kill you!"

Orion smiled, a painful reflection of Kovac again, and Straker heard Orion's voice in his head: *<No, General, I will kill you>*

With a deft gesture, Orion telekinetically pulled the gun from Straker's hand and sent it spinning across the room. He lifted his palm again and a pale beam of light shot out of his hand and struck the General on the chest.

The pain was immediate. Straker clutched at his heart. He knew with certainty that Orion was killing him with some sort of psychic power. He cried out, sinking to the floor, wincing as the pain only increased, flooding his chest and spreading out through his arms and legs.

Just as the pain became unbearable, Straker struggled to open his eyes one last time. He was stunned to see Orion bathed in four beams of light - being directed at him by Cleo's kittens! Their eyes had turned an icy blue and the beams were issuing from them!

Straker's own pain began to subside - he was able to keep his eyes open again and saw Orion's face change - he was the one now in pain. As the cats concentrated their psychic powers on him, he collapsed to the floor overcome - no longer able to menace Straker. In mute supplication, Orion held out a hand to Straker, who for some reason felt compelled to crawl over and gather the young man up in his arms.

The silver eyes darkened and closed, and Straker heard one last cry of anguish from Orion

in his head <*Father...*>

Epilogue

The General was packing his bag and donning his jacket. He was being released from the Salisbury Institute where he'd been taken right after Orion's death. After seven hours of medical exams for himself and Cleo's kittens, they were all going home.

Dr. Davidson knocked and came in as Straker was about to leave the room, "Can I speak with you in private, sir?"

"Of course, Doctor."

The two sat down and Davidson continued, "I wanted to tell you about something we found in your tests. Whatever Orion did to you seems to have caused permanent damage to some of the muscles in your heart. We'd like to do regular stress tests and look at finding the right medication for you."

Straker nodded. He considered himself lucky to be alive. It would be surprising if he hadn't gotten out of the episode without some sort of lasting trauma.

"How are the kittens? I can take them home with me now?"

"Yes, they're fine, considering what they've been through as well."

"They saved my life - again," Straker said, "Who said a dog is man's best friend?" he smiled briefly.

Dr. Davidson got up. "I won't keep you any longer, General, but we do want you back in ten days' time."

"E-mail me an appointment and I'll be here."

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After settling Cleo and her furry progeny back at his condo, Straker travelled on to SHADO HQ at the Harlington-Straker studio complex. It was going to feel good to get back to the responsibility seat for once.

He also wanted a face to face with Dr. Raychaudhuri on Orion's post-mortem and the autopsies on the guards he killed.

Dr. Raychaudhuri sat down across from Straker's desk with her laptop, "First of all, we found some odd circumstances during the post which has led to some differing theories in our exobiology department," she turned her laptop to face the General so he could see the images she wanted to display, "None of Orion's organs were transplants. This of course was not really a surprise, but we did discover he had a very weak immune system. He would not have survived any more than another week or so had he not died when he did."

"So what does that mean?"

"It means the alien-human hybrid basically has a 'best before' date, and they can only live so long in our atmosphere, with our natural toxins. Things in our air and water which do not bother us, are still deadly to the hybrids - but over time - not immediately as in the case with the aliens themselves."

"But, Orion was born on earth - he lived here for three months before Kovac gave him back to the aliens."

"Exactly. And, that leads me to another theory - this man was not Orion - or at least not the original!"

Straker sat back in his chair, "You mean Orion has been cloned?"

"We know the aliens can clone organs for transplant and have been doing so for some time. They'd have to at the rate their people seem to need them. While we humans are at the threshold of cloning technology, with only limited success being gained with animals subjects, I

believe the aliens have progressed to cloning and possibly accelerating humanoid growth. It also makes more sense strategically to utilize an Orion clone to do the aliens' dirty work, rather than risking the original. I can't see them sending the original into such a dangerous situation."

"Orion should only be a six year old boy right now. How did they get an adult copy of him?"

"As I said, if they can clone him, they can probably also accelerate the clone's growth. The problem is obviously that the clones still suffer major weaknesses. This whole episode may have in fact been experimental, in that the aliens wanted to test a clone's abilities, immune system, aptitude for carrying out a simple mission under their direction."

"Mitali, I'm going to tell you something now I didn't even tell Al Leslie or the security people. When 'Orion' was dying..." Straker swallowed, "...he called me...'Father'..."

Raychaudhuri seemed thoughtful before she replied, "You were present at the real Orion's birth, weren't you?"

Straker nodded and Mitali said, "The clone must have had some sort of vestigial genetic memory from the real Orion of that. I wondered if that was possible..."

Clearing his throat, Straker continued, "What about the guards? How did the clone kill them?"

"Heart attacks - all of them. These were young healthy men - with no history of heart disease in their medical files. I don't know if he was able to disrupt the heart's electrical field to cause the attacks - it's possible. It's also possible he psychically 'convinced' them they were having attacks. We just don't know for certain right now."

"Believe me, Doctor, the pain was real."

Straker's desk comm buzzed. Brenda McQuinn's voice said, "I have Al Leslie waiting to see you, sir."

"Send him along, Precious."

Mitali raised an eyebrow, "Precious?"

"That girl is like gold, Doctor. She's the only worthy successor to Miss Eland I've found!"

Raychaudhuri snapped her laptop shut just as Leslie entered. "I'll get back to you when and if we know more."

Leslie took the recently vacated chair and passed a DVD case across the desk, "You can have a look at the report later and I'll just hit the high spots for ya right now."

"How the hell did Orion get in the building?"

"As far as we can tell from the CCTV footage, he musta waited for the door to open so he could sneak in. We found a web of electronics inside his clothes. We haven't had enough time to work it all out, but the web may've been a personal cloaking device. He used it to get by all our security protocols at the door and surprised the guards."

"Mitali thinks Orion utilized some sort of psychic power - or that he somehow convinced the guards mentally that they were having heart attacks. Is it possible he used alien gadgetry to kill them?"

"We didn't find anythin' else in his clothin', or on the body itself - unless the Doc found somethin' inside the body which coulda been used that way," Leslie chewed his thumb.

"There was nothing like that in her post-mortem."

"Yeah, well, we're gonna be studyin' this alien tech pretty close - might be somethin' we could adapt for our own use," he got up to leave, "I'll track ya down when we get more info."

The pneumatic doors closed on Leslie and the office fell silent. Straker picked up a stack of DVDs - all reports he could review at home on his own computer. He suddenly felt tired. It

was time to pack it in for the night.

He e-mailed Precious to let her know he would be leaving shortly and threw the DVDs into his battered old briefcase. On his way by Kovac's unfinished portrait of Orion the infant, he stopped and looked at it. The painting had hung in his office for six years now. Time to put the past to bed - Kovac was dead and perhaps the real Orion was too.

Straker lifted the painting off the wall and took it down. More than time to stop thinking about what never was - what never would be.

Cleo and her kittens would be awaiting his return at his newly reinforced security condo. A cup of Earl Grey and a purring cat heap on his lap were his future now.

The End