

A Matter of Time

by Pamela McCaughey (2006)

based on UFO
created by Gerry & Sylvia Anderson and Reg Hill
and Law & Order: Criminal Intent
created by Dick Wolf
and The X-Files
created by Chris Carter

With research from "Dark Object" written by Don Ledger and Chris Styles
Sequel to Habeas Corpus...

In New York City's war on crime, the worst criminal offenders are pursued by the major case squad. These are their stories...

The Truth is Out There....

Chapter One

"It's him. I know it's him," Logan repeated.

"Are you sure?" Bobby Goran looked up from a desk full of files, "That case you're talking about must be what.....ten years ago?"

Pulling up a chair and straddling it, NYPD Detective Mike Logan laid another file folder on Goran's already overflowing desk, "I'll never forget that face - or those cold blue eyes."

Idly, Goran flipped open Logan's file and started scanning through the pages, "You never solved this one....?"

"Yeah, and it landed my partner and me in shit. Along with a couple of FBI agents."

"A body disappeared on its way to Quantico?"

"Never made it. The guy we found with the vic was alive, but then he disappeared from the hospital. Lennie and I got stonewalled by this Straker guy."

"Says here you had a psychiatrist speak with the survivor.....did you think he was the perp?"

"We didn't think so. In fact, Liz Olivet thought he'd been big time traumatized by whatever happened."

"The vic was missing her internal organs....?"

"Gutted like a fish. ME said it was a professional job."

"Organs for the black market?"

"No. Nothing that easy. This was a lot weirder. This guy Straker mustered some sort of high profile troops to try to intimidate us into dropping the investigation. Once those federal agents showed up we knew we were onto something. We just didn't know what."

"So where did you say you saw Straker today?"

"Getting into a limo at JFK - he's a pretty distinctive looking guy - silver hair, snappy dresser. Yeah, it was him."

"Did he see you?"

"Don't think so. I followed the damn limo right up to the front door of the Omega Corporation. That's why I'm so sure. And this time, I want to nail the bastard."

* * *

"Welcome back to the Big Apple again," Paul Foster shook hands with General Straker, "How was your flight?"

"The usual - bad food, bad movie - couldn't smoke," He lit up one of his customary cigarillos and luxuriated in the fumes, and watched Paul lower the passenger window to let in some fresh air, "So what's the big deal, Paul? Why did I have to take a civil air flight to get here asap?"

"It's Alec....," Foster paused, "There is no easy way to say this.....he's dying."

Straker stared off into space for a moment, and issued a long stream of smoke. He cleared his throat, "The cancer?"

"Yes, Ed. It's back. Our people have done all they can. The cancer reappeared in his brain and it's inoperable. The doctors wanted to try a newer and stronger chemotherapy but Alec is refusing further treatment. We thought maybe you could talk to him...."

Taking another long drag on his cigarillo, Straker shook his head, "If Alec has refused, it's because he's weighed all his options and didn't like them. He never did approve of the slash and burn method of treating cancer."

"But, if you could at least see him..."

"I know what he'll say, Paul."

"You can't use your....rank?"

Straker snorted, "That wouldn't impress Alec."

"Just see him. Maybe you can make a difference in his attitude."

"I'll see him. But I won't make any promises."

* * *

Ever since Alec's first bout with lung cancer, General Edward Straker had been forced to face the possibility that he might lose his dearest and only friend. The removal of one lung and subsequent chemo treatments had sent the cancer into remission for a few years. At Alec's request, Straker had allowed him to assume a semi-retired status - no active duty - but an advisory posting.

Only a month ago, Alec was complaining of severe headaches, blurred vision and nausea. He underwent a series of tests, MRIs, CAT scans, which eventually confirmed the brain tumour. It was not large but in area unreachable by contemporary surgical techniques. He'd been sent to the Omega facility in NYC for further study. And now this. The end of the road.

Straker opened the door to Alec's room and poked his head in. Alec was sitting up in bed, his head shaven from the tests, watching TV. He motioned for Straker to come in, and didn't even look surprised to see his old friend.

"Sit down, Ed. Are you here as my commanding officer or as my friend?"

"A little of both, I suppose," Straker took the seat closest to Alec's bed.

"Paul fill you in?"

"Of course. He's very worried."

"Yeah, well, there's really no reason to be. I've known this was coming - it's just been a matter of time."

"You fought the good fight, Alec," Straker stared down at his shoes. This conversation seemed so surreal.

"I won a few battles but I can't win the war. So I'm going to concede gracefully and die

with what's left of my dignity."

"Alec..."

Freeman cut him off, "I'm not afraid of this."

"I know that..."

"But, I am afraid for you, Ed."

Taken aback, Straker said, "Me?"

"Yes, you. My oldest and best friend. My friend who is going to be alone when I die. And I don't count those furry alien spawned critters you call cats as family!"

"You're just saying that because Cleo can see through all that Freeman charm," he smiled briefly, "Why are you foolishly refusing treatment which could extend your life?"

"For what? Why bother? To spend a few more weeks in this bed doing nothing but looking at the clock and the telly? I can't work anymore. I'm done. I've had a good life, I've taken a few of the baddies out in the process, and now it's time to pack it in."

Straker permitted himself the luxury of a sigh, "You always were a tough SOB."

"I'm just facing facts. The cancer is an invader I can no longer fight. It's a personal decision."

"I figured a tough guy like you would go down fighting."

"The aliens? Yes. The cancer? No matter what choices I make this disease is going to win. The only difference is the time factor. That's the only choice I have left, Ed."

"Your mind's made up, then?"

"Before you even walked in the door."

"I don't think I have to tell you the impact this is going to have on everyone." That's it, keep chatting. Don't stop. Don't think. Don't feel the pain.

"Don't go and get sentimental on me," Alec gave him a characteristic naughty school boy grin, "And no flag draped coffin or funeral. I want my ashes sprinkled at the front door of my favourite pub! That way every patron who walks in can take a piece of me in with them!" and he chuckled.

"I'm glad you think this is funny."

"Hey, it's a helluva a lot better than being gutted by the aliens!"

Straker's blue eyes were sombre, "How long did they give you with no treatment?"

"Couple of weeks."

"Than I'm staying right here. We're going to see this through together."

* * *

Chapter Two

"I don't know about this, Logan," ADA Carver had been looking over the same file Logan had shown Bobby Goran, "It was ten years ago or more, and the whole obstruction issue looks pretty cloudy. You failed back then to execute your warrant."

"Yeah, only because Straker pulled in enough muscle to stop us dead in our tracks. Things might not be so easy for him now - new governor, new mayor, new district attorney. We knew he and his people were responsible for getting Paul Foster out of the hospital. We needed proof - that's why we asked for the warrant - if we could search the building, we were likely to find him."

"Maybe there wasn't enough probable cause for the warrant and that's why it was quashed."

"No, it wasn't quashed. We got a good judge to sign off on it for us. Somehow Straker pulled strings to get the investigation stalled! These people even managed to get to Adam Schiff. It was after that Lennie and I hooked up with the feds."

"How did they get involved?"

"The vic's body never arrived at Quantico for an autopsy. We put two and two together: Straker and the Omega Corporation sprang Foster from the hospital - he and his VP were just chomping at the bit to get Foster back from us and probably out of the country - they said as much in the Lieutenant's office just before Foster disappeared. That Foster and the vic were Omega employees. They gave us this cock and bull story about wanting the vic's remains to be sent to her family, yadayadayada. It just makes sense that the disappearance of Foster had to be linked to the disappearance of the vic's body."

"If the vic and this Paul Foster were both Omega employees, why would their own company want them dead - or at the very least - removed?"

"Look, Lennie and I were wondering if some sort of industrial espionage was at play here. Either they were attacked and left for dead because of something they knew and shouldn't be knowing, or they were selling off company secrets and the company got pissed. Why would Omega go to all that trouble to get Foster back and to retrieve the vic's body? You'd think the company would want a full investigation - if they had nothing to hide!"

"So, your sole reason for the obstruction charge was based on seeing this Paul Foster outside the hospital after his so-called disappearance?"

"We started working the case with the feds after our warrant was refused. Then, he was seen leaving in a vehicle with Straker. Lennie and I were co-operating with the feds on surveillance of Omega's building, and Agent Mulder identified him. The vehicle lit out for upstate New York and Mulder followed them. We used all our cell phones to follow Mulder and catch up."

"And after that, none of the four of you could ever come up with a viable excuse for why you didn't find Paul Foster, or the others who were taking him upstate. In fact, your reports say you all spent the night in your cars and came back to the city in the morning empty handed and suffering from some sort of amnesia about the actual events of that night," Carver sighed and closed the file folder, "Detective, this case came as close to any in almost ruining both your careers on the force. As fishy as this whole story sounds, with plenty of conflicting possibilities and motivations, there just isn't any probable cause, twelve years later, to re-issue the warrant. If you can bring me some solid evidence, I can give it another look. But until then, my hands are tied. Unlike murder, time can run out on prosecuting a case of obstruction."

"What if I could ever get evidence that those people were attacked for whatever it was they must have known to draw down that kind of abuse? They were murdered and left for dead, and then Foster was kidnapped. What if Omega killed that girl to shut her up? Omega was and is still heavily invested in defence contracts."

"You have no proof Glynnis Baxter was murdered by anyone connected with Omega. A hunch is not proof - you know that, Detective! Paul Foster probably wasn't kidnapped but was released into the care of his company's officials."

"We checked. No release papers. He just disappeared."

"Hospital clerks make mistakes - they can lose paperwork, have a computer meltdown and lose records and such."

"We followed them upstate. They went up to a lake Why would anyone take a man who'd just been through that kind of trauma out of the hospital only to dump him in the woods again?"

"According to your report, you, Lennie Briscoe and the two FBI agent spent the night in upstate New York and came home with no memory of what happened next or where the Omega people went."

"That's just it - we still don't know what went down or why we had a group memory loss."

"What did the FBI agents put in their own report?"

"They wouldn't turn it over to us - said it was classified - called it an X-File."

"Logan, I understand you still have a lot of unanswered questions about this case and you probably have a personal stake in finding the answers, but at this point in time I cannot get you a warrant. I need more. A lot more."

* * *

Captain James Deakins waved Goran and Logan to the seats in front of his desk, "You want to re-open a cold case?"

"Carver says we need probable cause for a new warrant. We'd like to snoop around and see if we could find something incriminating," Logan explained.

"What do you think?" the Captain addressed the question to Goran.

"The case is unsolved and there's a lot of odd circumstances. Maybe we could do some digging and see what we come up with. We could also do some surveillance of this Ed Straker and check him out,"

"Look, we have a cold case division which deals with these matters - why not turn the files over to them and get on with the current cases. God knows we always have plenty of them!"

Goran lifted a hand to gesture at his commanding officer, "The whole case encompasses murder, kidnapping, possible industrial espionage, and the total befuddlement of two of New York City's finest plus a pair of federal agents. Doesn't it strike you just a little strange that everything in this case seems to come back to one man - Ed Straker? A man who has not been seen in New York for almost 12 years. A man who was last seen with the kidnap victim - and it has never been determined what happened to Paul Foster, or Glynnis Baxter's body? People just don't fall down the rabbit hole, sir."

Deakins shook his head, "OK, OK. But I want you two to pursue this business in your spare time - not work time. If you want to follow this mystery man around New York, be my guest, but I don't want you begging for NYPD resources unless you have something concrete to show me."

Logan and Goran nodded their assent and turned to leave, "I think the first thing we

should do is try to get a copy of that classified FBI report.....," Goran commented, swinging his brown clipboard up as he opened the captain's office door.

* * *

Chapter Three

Dana Scully sat down at her desk and felt the pencil drop onto her perfectly coiffed red hair. She glared up at her partner, Fox Mulder, but he only shrugged and gave her an innocent look, "Let me guess - you're bored again," she threw the offending pencil over to him. A quick scan of the ceiling showed at least two dozen pencils lodged point in to the soft grey tiles.

"Just waiting for my digital photos to download to my laptop," he smiled, tapping his fingers impatiently on the desk. The laptop made a small soft noise, signalling the finish of the download, and he started to click on the various images to have a better look at them.

"These better not be porn," Scully warned him, getting up to lean over Mulder's shoulders for a look-see.

"No, no, I took these on my trip to Peru to the Nasca lines.....," a pop-up text block came in over the photo, "Hell-oo, what's this?" Mulder clicked off the photo and went to his in box for e-mail.

"Who'd be sending you an e-mail with an attachment from the New York Police Department?" Scully queried.

Mulder clicked on the e-mail to open it, "Hm...this is interesting.....remember that case we got involved in years ago with the body that went missing and our trip upstate that ended with a case of amnesia? This e-mail is from one of those detectives..."

* * *

Logan and Goran sat down with Mulder and Scully in Interrogation Room One at the Major Crime Squad offices. Laid out on the table for the FBI agents were a series of photos taken only hours before of Ed Straker, Paul Foster and others - coming and going from the Omega Corporation building.

"We were pretty shocked when we actually surveilled the building and saw Paul Foster for ourselves!" Goran pointed to one of their photos of him, "Logan told me the last time any of you remembered seeing him was upstate New York - in the woods!"

"Well, at least these photos prove he isn't dead. And he's obviously still working for Omega - but doing what?" Mulder asked.

"We tried Googling Omega on the Net but can't get any information about the company's officers or research people. All we can get up is a website dedicated to flogging their computer games and business software," Logan offered.

"So they're still not very open about who they are or what they're doing, then," Scully commented, "Have you gone back to the offices yourselves or tried to get in?"

"Not yet. We wanted to bring you into this before we made any attempts to storm the gates, so to speak," Goran told her, "However we approach this, getting to Ed Straker and or Paul Foster is not going to be easy. If they were unwilling to deal with law enforcement all those years ago, they are still going to be very wary now."

"That place is locked up tighter than Fort Knox - I mean Lennie and I were forced to hand over our pieces to their security before we even got to see Straker. I don't even think Bill Gates is that security conscious."

"This information about Straker having been in the Air Force - how reliable is it?"

Logan shrugged, "One of our ADAs found that out after we got a call from the Pentagon telling us to call off the investigation. The gist of the story was that Omega does a lot of defence contracts and the military didn't want the company involved in some sort of public scandal - murder investigation. Claire Kincaid was only able to determine Straker had been in

the USAF and left in 1968 - but he wasn't discharged as far as she could find out. Two years later, he turns up as the CEO of a failing film company in England, then he's the President of a computer company in NYC with vital defence contracts - it all sounds hinky. That's why we thought his connection to the military might have had something to do with Glynnis Baxter's death and Paul Foster's disappearance."

Goran picked up another photo off the table, "Whatever happened all those years ago, it's clear Paul Foster is alive, healthy and a top Omega Corporation official. Did he kill Glynnis for industrial espionage and then he was rewarded with a big job in the company? Or was there some other kind of cover up at work? We tried to get access to your field reports on the matter through the Freedom of Information Act, but we were told that they were still considered classified."

Scully spoke up, "Once we filed our reports they were taken from us and sealed up with a lot of our other files. We've worked on so many peculiar cases that they form a body of material called the X-Files. Mulder and I are specialists in this area, but at the time this case happened, even we couldn't explain why we suffered amnesia or why we had followed the Omega people out to the woods."

"So, you're telling me even you two can't get access to your own reports?" Goran was incredulous.

"As crazy as that sounds," Mulder smiled, "It's the truth.....but.....sometimes we employ the talents of others to get for us what we can't get for ourselves...."

"Are you suggesting the Lone Gunmen could get our files?" Scully asked.

"Who are the Lone Gunmen?" Logan queried.

"Three guys who can hack into just about any computer system in the world," Mulder explained, "And find just about whatever information you want."

"Well, if these guys can really do what you're suggesting, have them hack into the Pentagon or one of those military think tanks and see if you can dig up some material on why Ed Straker left the airforce to pursue a career as a film exec." Logan told them.

* * *

"The Lone Gunmen were able to get some interesting information on our mysterious Mr. Straker," Mulder laid a file and a CD down on the desk, "I had them courier it overnight to us."

"How'd they do it so fast?" Goran asked.

Scully smiled at him, "Believe me, you don't want to know..."

Mulder added, "Let's just reiterate that they can get access to stuff nobody else can," he paused and opened the file - on the top was a photo of Straker in his USAF uniform, "Our man here was not only in the military, but he was in the top secret hush-hush military. Apparently privy to some pretty classified information. According to what the Lone Gunmen discovered, Straker's last fully documented military activity was in 1967 - he was sent to 'handle' the Shag Harbour incident."

When Logan and Goran didn't react, Mulder continued, "Shag Harbour isn't as well known among ufologists as Roswell, but that's because both the American and Canadian military closed ranks and kept the story played down."

"Where is Shag Harbour?" Logan queried.

"It's a remote fishing village on the Nova Scotia coast - Canada."

"What happened there?" Goran wanted to know, "And, how does this information impact our current case?"

"Because Straker was the lead officer for the American military in this case - he was

basically in charge of hushing it up, disposing of the evidence and silencing all those those people who were eyewitnesses. Does any of this behaviour sound familiar to you?"

The two NYPD detectives sat silently for a moment, digesting the implications. At last, Logan spoke up, "So.....you're saying if Straker was covering up some sort of UFO related incident in 1967 - he was doing the same thing in 1994 when we got the case?"

"Makes sense, doesn't it?" Mulder replied.

"All due respect, but are we talking little green men?" Goran was incredulous.

"We've never been able to find out what colour they are, but yes I do mean aliens - extra terrestrials."

Logan looked over at Scully, "You aren't saying much about this.....do you agree with your partner?"

"Gentlemen, I've seen.....too many unexplained things in my tenure with the X-Files division to dismiss any theory, no matter how....incredible it may seem."

"If Straker was handling some UFO incident in 1994 - what happened?"

"Your own reports spell it out," Mulder explained, "Detectives Logan and Briscoe found two victims - one alive and traumatized, one dead and horribly mutilated - her organs removed. Your own ME says the post mortem indicates the organs were removed while the victim was still alive and done by someone who had a professional knowledge of human anatomy. This case echoes at least a dozen or more Scully and I have encountered over the last 15 years. And in each case, the mutilated bodies and evidence were all spirited out of existence, the eyewitnesses end up disappearing, or have been affected by some sort of amnesia which wiped out knowledge of or remembrance of the incident itself."

"We were also subjected to that amnesia in 1994 when we followed Straker and Foster upstate. The next morning, none of us could recall what had happened - where those people had disappeared to or why we were following them in the first place," Scully finished.

"How come you two never mentioned this to me and Lennie in 1994?" Logan's voice was aggrieved.

"We didn't want to muddy the waters until after the trip upstate," Scully told him, "It didn't become totally evident to us at the time we were chasing a bona fide X-File until after that incident."

"Is that why Lennie and I weren't allowed to have copies of your field reports?"

"That's right. X-Files are not available to anyone outside the Bureau - and inside the Bureau access is strictly limited to the higher echelon," Mulder said, "And, we've had evidence confiscated from us over the years - where it eventually ended up even we don't know - although we have made some guesses."

Goran inclined his head like a cat at a mouse hole, "Where did your friends acquire their information? If your own files are inaccessible....."

"They hacked into the Pentagon computer system."

"Uh.....isn't that.....a dangerous, not to mention illegal act?" Goran raised a hand in gesture.

"It probably carries an enormous criminal charge with it, but they've never been detected yet," Mulder shrugged.

"I still can't get my head around the little green men theory," Logan shook his head, "Lennie and I weren't convinced this case was anything more than some murder to cover up industrial espionage of some sort. The Omega Corporation has these big defence contracts...."

"Has it ever occurred to you why a company helmed by a former USAF officer has so

much pull with the military, including multi-million dollar contracts to develop software and other equipment for them? When Straker shut down the investigation in '94 - he had the backing of the U.S. military infrastructure and complete government sanction. In fact, the American government has been lying to the public about UFOs since Roswell. Aliens are here, now. They've already been here for decades. If they were friendlies, there'd be no need to cover up their existence or activities. Our government, and maybe a lot of other governments worldwide, have been sleeping with the enemy and keeping their presence secret."

"But why? Why spend so much time, money and energy hiding aliens if they're a reality?" Goran shifted in his chair, clearly analyzing not just the information but Mulder himself, "Isn't it counterproductive to dismiss a reality rather than admit it?"

"The powers that be basically think, like Jack Nicholson in 'A Few Good Men', that we, the tax-paying public, can't handle the truth. Scully and I have uncovered so much evidence over the last 15 years to prove our theories, but someone is always pulling the truth just out of our reach."

"And, you think Ed Straker is that 'someone'?"

"I don't think he is the only 'someone' - but he's probably part of some vast underground organization that specializes in covert operations aimed at keeping the evidence covered up and the public ignorant."

Logan pushed himself away from the table and stood up, "I don't know about you folks but I have to get another cup of coffee and mull this over..."

Goran got up from his seat as well, "I have a phone call to make.....please excuse me..."

The two cops left the interrogation room. Mulder looked at Scully, "Did I tell them too much?"

* * *

"Whaddya think?" Logan asked Goran as he poured two cups of black coffee out for them.

"The FBI isn't in the habit of hiring nutbars. I did a little research myself on Mulder and Scully - they're both highly educated and accomplished agents. Mulder was one of the Bureau's top criminal profilers."

"But, you heard the same thing I heard in that room - can you buy that this whole case hinges on aliens from outer space?" Logan tasted his coffee and made a face - the idea that the perms he was looking for were not of this world seemed ridiculous.

Goran hesitated, ".....I.....don't like to dismiss any theory out of hand - especially a theory put forward by the FBI. However, the FBI is an arm of the government and if there was any truth at all to top secret military gadgetry being sold by our vics - I can see the FBI spreading dis-information to put us off the trail."

"Little green men is kinda over the top, don't you think?"

"Even Hitler said it was better to tell the big lie," Goran mused.

"Well, aliens from outer space is the biggest whopper I've heard in years."

"There are many top scientists, former astronauts and other researchers who do not discount the possible existence of life in other solar systems. Look at the SETI project. Now our closest galactic neighbour is Alpha Centauri, but current conventional space travel equipment isn't capable of going there. That being said, that doesn't mean an intelligent species elsewhere couldn't have advanced technology - advanced enough to travel to us."

"You're not buying this, are you?"

"Two choices: either they're feeding us this alien story to put us off the real trail, or

they're telling the truth - as they see it. I'd like to keep an open mind and study this further."

"So do we trust them or not?"

"I think we should follow whatever theories are presented. The key is not to accept one to the refusal to accept others. I'd like to find out just what kind of products the Omega Corporation builds for the military. Is it just computer equipment and software? Or is it something so radical that someone would risk their lives to sell it and the Omega Corporation would kill to keep those secrets?"

"Well, this just puts us back to Square One," Logan grouched, "If we discount everything Mulder and Scully have said today."

Goran shook his head, "Mulder talked about a government conspiracy of silence. What if he and Scully aren't in business to expose certain information, but their job is to keep it hushed up by diverting our attention away from the real matter?"

"Damn, it sounds like a John Le Carre novel!"

Goran smiled at Logan's comment, "So let's keep reading!"

* * *

Alec Freeman welcomed his old friend General Ed Straker every morning. They breakfasted together and talked over 'old times'. The two men were sharing a desperate conviviality - one dying, the other knowing death was just a matter of time.

Straker talked to the specialists who had been working on Alec's case.

"It's probably just a few weeks or less now," Dr. Chesser explained, "The cancer has been very aggressive and fast-moving."

"He seems so.....healthy," Straker replied.

"That's because the cancer is affecting only his brain. But you're going to notice memory lapses soon, and possibly a change in his personality as the tumour consumes more and more. He may even lose his ability to speak near the end and may possibly lapse into a coma before death."

"And, there are no drugs you can give him?"

"Only painkillers, and he's telling us he isn't in any pain - as yet."

"Do you think that will happen - that he'll feel pain?"

"Believe it or not, the brain doesn't respond that much to pain stimuli inside itself. But even if Alex had agreed to take the chemo we offered him, he'd only have gained a few more weeks. There comes a time when the patient himself has to make his own decisions."

Straker nodded quietly. Chesser had been taken out of the field and put into Omega's cancer research division decades ago. If anyone knew the medical score, it was him. It still didn't make it any easier to face losing Alec.

Now, many of their conversations were starting with the words 'remember when...' and Straker realized a whole lifetime had passed them both by - and neither of them had had any of the customary perks in life to soften the hardness of their choices. Alec had never married or had a family, Straker was of course divorced and Johnnie's death had been decades ago. The only person who had understood Straker's griefs was Alec and it was Alec who had spoken to Straker privately about the loss of astronaut Kovac with sympathy. Alec could always ferret out Straker's feelings - even though Ed worked like hell to conceal them from the rest of the world.

They were sitting companionably, enjoying the sunshine coming through the skylights in Straker's tiny Omega building rooftop apartment when Paul Foster came up.

"Ed, can I speak with you for a moment?" Foster had been trying to avoid bothering the

General so he could spend as much time with Alec as possible.

Freeman waved them off, "Go attend to business. I'm not going anywhere," he grinned from the relative comfort of his motorized wheelchair.

Straker and Foster stepped back to the elevator entrance, "What's so urgent, Paul?"

"Our building has come under surveillance."

"By whom?"

"Trouble-makers. FBI agents Mulder and Scully and two NYPD detectives, Logan and Goran."

Straker made a face, "I thought we'd managed to give those two feds the slip permanently."

"I've tried to keep a low profile here and you haven't travelled to New York that often in recent years."

"Why would they show up on our doorstep now? When did we deal with them upstate? That must be 10 years ago....."

"More like 12 years. I took the liberty of reviewing the files pertinent to that incident. They were dosed with amnesia drug and left to find their way back to the city - while we were able to escape and get below the radar. All the evidence was removed, including Glynnis Baxter's body. They had nothing left to build a case on. I cannot imagine what they're up to now. I'd like to deal with this situation once and for all."

"Whatever you do, it has to be with the least amount of fuss. We don't want this thing to come back to bite us in our collective asses again."

"I just got off the phone with our FBI contact. He says Mulder and Scully were contacted by the NYPD to get involved again. And our source at the NYPD tells me that Logan and Goran were told by their captain that they had to follow whatever leads they might have on their own time - he wasn't going to devote department resources to a cold case unless they had something concrete to go on."

"Then, let's make sure they don't have anything to build a case!" Straker told Foster.

* * *

CHAPTER FOUR

"I think the best thing we can do is lure our inquisitive detectives and their FBI pals away by planting some dis-information - something that looks convincing, but doesn't really hold any water - put them up against a brick wall, so to speak," Lew Waterman suggested.

Straker, Foster, Waterman, and some other top SHADO-Omega people were seated at one of the facility's conference tables, discussing the matter, "Lew has a point - we cannot confront them directly - it has to be by stealth. We used the amnesia drug on them the last time and it came back to bite us in the arse," Straker agreed, "But what can we plant that would be interesting enough to divert their attention?"

Foster brought some images up on the viewscreen, "Maybe this will interest Agent Mulder. He supposedly glommed onto some information about your work at Shag Harbour in the 1960's - what if we give him enough rope to hang himself? Our Pentagon contact told us their system had been hacked into by an unknown, and they had aimed specifically for any files pertaining to your work on that UFO incident, Ed."

"What do you suggest?"

"Let's see if we can entice Agent Mulder into leaving for Canada to interview some of the witnesses there. It's hard to get anyone to talk about it - some Canadian authors ran into a lot of silence when they were doing a book on Shag Harbour a few years ago. Without the FBI's involvement, Logan and Goran have no real leads. And it's questionable as to whether they have any belief in Mulder's claims that you were chasing little green men back then. The whole matter could get very nicely stalled. The NYPD contact says their captain is pressing them to drop it for lack of useful information."

"Well, the Shag Harbour witnesses - many of whom are dead now - won't talk to Mulder. They know which side of the bread the butter is on. Both the RCMP and military people were sworn to silence. They won't break that - it'd mean their pensions and their lives if they talked - even now."

"Yes, but Mulder and Scully don't know that, do they?"

"Our NYPD contact says Logan and Goran are more interested in seeing this as a case of industrial espionage - they think WE killed Glynnis and attempted to kill Paul because they were planning to sell company secrets to the highest bidder!" Lew explained. This caused a backslash of derisive laughter around the table.

"OK, let's see what we can do to divert Mulder and Scully, and let's get someone working on whoever hacked into the Pentagon - we don't want the same people getting anywhere near our systems," Straker said.

* * *

"I just got some interesting information from the Lone Gunmen, Scully, they came up with some names of witnesses for that Shag Harbour incident in Canada - the one Ed Straker was supposedly working on before he left the airforce," Mulder laid out some files on the hotel desk for his partner.

"Why is this so important?"

"I'd like to fly up there to Nova Scotia and talk to some of them - get a feel for what actually happened. It might be cogent to this case."

"Sounds more like a wild goose chase, Mulder," Scully told him, "After all, that was back in 1967 - I'd think most of those people would be dead by now."

"Not all of them - there's a couple fishermen, a retired RCMP officer who might be

willing to talk."

"Can we afford to leave New York right now? Logan and Goran are counting on us to find a connection between Omega and the government contracts they do work for."

"I keep telling you, Scully, and them, that that isn't about industrial espionage! It's about Ed Straker and some top secret covert operation he works for! Whatever Straker was up to, he obviously felt it was important enough to drug us and the cops to buy themselves time to get the hell out of the area and to keep us from remembering what happened in upstate New York!"

"Even American covert ops people can drug anyone who gets in their way. The blood tests I ran as soon as we got back to the city turned up a drug similar to Rohypnol."

"Yeah, yeah, I remember - the so-called 'date rape' drug. But why not just kill us?"

"Maybe we got lucky and they figured our deaths weren't necessary - or maybe they thought our memory loss was enough to scare us off the case. At any rate, the case ended up dropped from governmental pressure and lack of evidence."

"Exactly - these people - whoever they are - clean things up better than the KGB!"

"Given your reputation as 'Spooky' Mulder, they probably thought our experience upstate would just be written off to another unexplained X-File."

"That is until Logan saw Straker at the airport a week ago."

Scully sighed. It was obvious that anything she said at this point was not going to convince her partner to think otherwise, "OK, Mulder, suppose you do go to Canada - suppose you actually do get one of those witnesses to talk - what can be substantiated about an incident almost 40 years ago - no photos, no concrete evidence - just somebody's so-called memory of it. What if they too were given an amnesia drug and they don't remember anything, or they had what they saw suggested to them in a drugged state to muddy the waters?"

"I won't know until I go to Shag Harbour, will I?"

* * *

"He's where?" Logan asked Scully incredulously.

"He left for Canada this morning to investigate some witnesses of the Shag Harbour incident. I tried to talk him out of it."

"And how does he think chasing after a forty year old story is going to help our current investigation?" Goran found Mulder an interesting study.

Scully sighed, "As you recall, he thinks Ed Straker was at Shag Harbour in 1967 to oversee the covering up of the incident - either for the government or some secret government ops devoted to hiding the truth about aliens here."

Shaking his head, Logan's expression was grim, "Look, I know you feds aren't always willing to play nice with local police but this is just ridiculous. We asked you two here to help us with a legitimate investigation and Mulder goes running off to Canada on a mission of stupidity. This Ed Straker - his company builds computer equipment and software for the military - why is Mulder trying to divert the investigation into being about little green men! I don't buy it at all - is this some government bullshit to keep us from finding out about Omega's involvement with Glynnis Baxter's death? Is that what you're really here for?"

Scully stood up from her seat, "Detective Logan, I am as baffled by Mulder's actions as you are. I warned him this has little to do with the case at hand and we'd be better off directing our attentions to find out just what Omega DOES build for their military contracts."

"Is there anything your friends, the Lone Gunmen, could find out for us?" Goran interposed, "After all, they seem able to acquire information we can't. What Logan and I want

is conclusive evidence that Glynnis Baxter's death was the result of a murder gone wrong - and made to look like something else to throw law enforcement off the track. It's our belief that Baxter and Foster were planning to sell Omega's secrets and got caught at it - it makes for good motive to think the people at Omega didn't want them making any profit from industrial espionage - hence the murder and attempted murder."

"I'll talk to the LG and ask if they can hack back into some of the government's military lobbyists - they may be able to uncover some of the contract information."

"We'd like to know just what it was or is Omega does sell to the military," Goran added, "Is it just computer stuff or is it something more sinister?"

"You mean like hardware? Weapons and such?"

"Anything you could find out that would give us a leg to stand on would be helpful," Logan finished.

* * *

Mulder watched the door open a crack. The face that met his was darkly tanned and craggy, rather like Gary Cooper, the famous movie star, "Who're you?" the man asked warily.

Opening his FBI ID for him, Mulder said, "I'm with the Bureau, I'd like to come in and ask you a few questions."

"What could the FBI want here? This is Canada, in case you hadn't noticed! We're not the 51st state yet, y'know."

"It's about Shag Harbour - 1967.....," Mulder had to pull his foot back quickly before the door slammed shut. He knocked on the door again, but when it opened this time a shotgun greeted him through the small crack between the door and the frame.

"I told you this was Canada. I don't have to answer any questions. And if you don't leave my property, I'll shoot first and think about calling the Mounties later!"

Putting his hands up, Mulder backed away, "Fine, I'm leaving!"

The shotgun barrel remained trained on him as he got into his rented car and reversed out of the long driveway that had led to the retired fisherman's house.

Strike One.

* * *

"Are you the lady of the house? I was hoping I could speak with your husband.....Constable Berry...." Mulder showed his FBI badge yet again to the soft-featured sixtyish woman in the bib apron.

"You're too late, my husband passed away three weeks ago," she started to close the door.

"Do you mind if I asked you a few questions? I won't take too long.....it's just that I'm only here in the Shag Harbour area for a couple days...."

"Welllllll, alright, you can come in, but take your shoes off, I just finished scrubbing the floor..."

Mulder entered and removed his dress shoes. The kitchen was brightly decorated and clean, and the scent of baking was in the room.

"You can sit down and have a cuppa tea - but when that cup is empty, you have to go," she was still eyeing him suspiciously, "My grandkids are coming over shortly."

He sat down at the table and stirring in some sugar and milk just to extend his time there, "Your husband was a retired RCMP officer, right?"

"That's right."

"What happened to your husband, how did he die?"

"Heart attack. Unexpected. Just got up from watching Peter Mansbridge and the National and dropped on me. I didn't even have time to call 911. He was gone that quick."

"I.....understand your husband was one of the officers on the scene during the 1967 UFO incident."

"Oh, that!" Mrs Berry laughed shortly, derisively, "Is that what you wanted to talk to him about?"

"Actually, yes. I wanted to know if he had ever come into contact with any of the top American brass who came up here to sanitize the affair - you know - cover things up and keep people quiet."

"My husband never talked about his work. He tried to leave his job at the detachment when his shift was over. A real family man - I couldn't have wanted a better father for my children."

"So he never said anything to you about the supposed UFO crash out there in the water?"

"I don't think John ever believed that rot. He figured it was a downed Soviet sub - both the Americans and Canadians were running listening stations in that area underwater."

"So he did talk to you about it!"

"No. He didn't. I read that stuff in the Halifax Chronicle-Herald. They had a journalist working the story - but he went from claiming there had been a UFO there to finally deciding it was the Russian sub. Funny thing - he wasn't with the paper for much longer after that."

"Do you remember his name?"

"No.....not offhand..."

Strike Two....

* * *

It was a fair drive from Shag Harbour to Halifax, but a scenic one. The raw, rugged grandeur of Nova Scotia's South Coast was unlike anything Mulder had ever seen. He was reminded that the Swiss Air flight had crashed near Peggy's Cove, and any number of shipwrecks had taken place along that dangerously beautiful shoreline. It was ironic that the authorities tried to claim at the first that an airliner had crashed in Shag Harbour.

Upon his arrival in Nova Scotia's provincial capital, Mulder headed straight for the offices of the Chronicle-Herald. He flashed his badge and asked to speak to one of their top people.

"What can I do for the FBI, Mr. Mulder?" Leith Dunick asked him, gesturing for him to be seated.

"I'm following a lead, sir, and I was hoping you might be able to help me track down one of your former reporters."

"Really? How former? I've only been here for three years myself at the Herald."

"I don't really have a name. He was your reporter on the 1967 Shag Harbour story about a downed UFO."

Dunick looked askance and shook his head, "I'm afraid, Mr. Mulder that we don't have anyone here on staff that would go back that far....."

"What about your records department - would they possibly have an address for him?"

"We disposed of anything that old some time ago. We can't keep that stuff around. It's hard enough trying to keep up with putting our daily papers on DVD!"

"Is there any chance I could get access to any of the stories the Herald printed by this writer? Are they on DVD too?"

"I can take you down to our recording area. The librarian there can set you up with some old microfilms. We're doing the modern copies right now, and hoping to convert the older

materials shortly - it all takes money and time, you see."

* * *

Mulder asked the librarian for Chronicle-Herald files for the month of October, 1967. After spending about twenty minutes looking, the girl had to admit that the microfilm spool for that period was missing.....

Strike Three...

* * *

"How did you ever find me, Mr. Mulder?" Barry Wood sat down across his kitchen table from the intrepid FBI agent, "I've been retired from the journalism business for years."

"When I struck out at the Herald, I went to an Internet cafe and Googled for journalists connected to the Shag Harbour story - your name and your website came up. You're still writing..." Mulder stirred his tea. Mulder hated tea....Why did Canadians like tea so much?

"Yes, gothic horror novels. My 15th one was just published this year. You might say my experience in Shag Harbour, and after that, sort of gave me a Kafka complex. So instead of standing on the unemployment line I decided to use my skills to make money for me, not some newspaper."

"Why did you leave the Herald?"

"Let's say my path was greased for me by some very high level military personnel."

"Did you have a close encounter? I mean.....with the military brass?"

"Yes, and not even our own brass, but some Yank.... er.....sorry....American officer from the Airforce."

Mulder's attention level had just skyrocketed.

"Do you remember who he was? What his name was?"

"No, he wouldn't give me his name. He had a Boston accent, light coloured hair and the coldest blue eyes I think I've ever looked into."

"Is this him?" Mulder handed over a photo of Ed Straker in USAF uniform, circa 1967.

"Yep, that's him!"

"What did he say to you?"

"He told me to hand over the photos I'd gotten - I developed them myself - I wanted to take no chances on anyone else profiting from my hard work - and he wanted to shut me up. Said what I'd seen was not what I thought I'd seen and if I continued to report about it, I could end up worse than being out of a job. I could end up dead."

"Did you take him seriously?"

"Not at first. But then I had an even closer encounter with a pair of thugs who hit me so hard in their attempt to kill me that I ended up with a hearing disability. It was purely a miracle that some cab driver came to my rescue or else I'd have been feeding the fish in Halifax Harbour."

"What was in your photos?"

"Evidence. Evidence that threw out the possibility of a downed Russian sub on our coast. That was no sub. Whatever came down out there in Shag Harbour was not of this world, Mr. Mulder."

Wood took a long sip of his own cup of tea, "And it wasn't just the photos - although if they'd been published, I might have won the Pulitzer for news reporting! I managed to interview a couple witnesses who were very close to the incident itself - a local fisherman and a member of the Canadian military involved with the joint American-Canadian submarine tracking system - they called it MAD back then - magnetic anomaly detection - another Cold

War acronym for keeping watch on the Soviets. They had hydrophones planted all over the ocean bottom from the Arctic to the 49th parallel back in those days. Pure paranoia. Anyway, I heard from him that NORAD tracked some bogey into the earth's atmosphere and it impacted in Shag Harbour. They knew from the telemetry and all their high tech gear that this was not space debris, a splintering meteorite, or a downed airliner."

Mulder was listening intently.

"I got out there before the road blocks got thrown up - I had an illegal scanning device which picked up police and RCMP channels - and gave my camera to one of the fisherman when he was leaving port. I told him to use it on anything he might see out there in the water that was strange or worthy. A whole flotilla of fishing boats went out there to help with the operation. Eventually they were sent back to shore when the military arrived, but that was a couple of hours later. Once the military got involved, they set up road blocks - with the help of the local RCMP - and started throwing their weight around. It took me days to even get my camera back with the film - cloak and dagger with the fisherman - and when I started to develop the film I knew I had a blockbuster on my hands," Wood leaned forward in his seat, "I'd never had a bona fide 'raise the hair on the back of the neck' reaction before I saw those photos printed - and I've never had one since."

Wood grabbed a piece of paper and a pencil off his desk and started sketching. He turned the sketch around to Mulder, "What does that look like to you?"

"A figure. Someone's.....body?"

"Exactly. My fisherman hauled up what he thought was a body from a downed airliner - that's what everyone at first thought that crash was - but this one had a red pressure suit on and a cracked helmet - and he was bleeding green blood....."

"Wait a minute, wait a minute, your photos were in colour?"

"It cost a little more for colour film in those days but I was sure glad I had spent the extra money and hadn't cheaped out for only black and white!"

"Are you sure it was green blood?"

"The fisherman told me it took him three days to scrub the stuff off his boat deck. It was really.....sticky.....not like.....normal blood.....our blood. He had to use some sort of heavy duty industrial cleaner to get it off completely. He was afraid if he didn't get rid of it, in view of the whole crazy situation with the military presence, they'd confiscate his boat as evidence or something. He had to keep his boat - it was his livelihood."

"What happened to the body?"

"He dumped it overboard again so he wouldn't get caught with it. You have to understand, Mr. Mulder, this whole mess had people scared to death! Most of those fishermen just wanted to pretend it had never happened so they could go back to their workaday lives. This kind of thing always happens in the movies, not Nova Scotia."

"What about your superiors at the Herald? They didn't believe you?"

"Whether they did or not, supporting my side of the story would have cost them their jobs too - or worse. They had families and careers to protect. In hindsight, I might have done the same thing if I'd been in their shoes. They were getting pressure from some pretty dangerous sources - including the American secret service, CSIS, and even Interpol. There's no real telling how far up the food chain this thing went. In the scheme of things, who cared if one nobody reporter lost his job or ended up being fished out of the Harbour? I was getting weird phone calls, my phone line was being tapped, I narrowly dodged being killed - I can tell you - I was scared myself. I just dropped out of sight for about a year - went home and lived with my folks

- did odd jobs to contribute some money to the household and wrote my first novel. Like it or not, those gorillas helped me make a career choice, and I've never looked back. But if you ask me if I believe in little green men from outer space - the answer is yes."

Chapter Five

"Barry Wood positively ID'd Ed Straker as the United States Air Force officer who took his colour photos and told him to shut up about the UFO incident at Shag Harbour," Mulder explained to Scully, Logan and Goran.

Scully added, "The Lone Gunmen were not able to get any answers from hacking into the Pentagon about what kind of contracts Omega might have with the military. They also checked some other government systems and came up empty-handed. Whatever it is Omega is providing, nobody's documenting it."

"What about the Omega computer system itself?" Goran asked.

"Nothing. They couldn't get past any of the initial protocols - it's a completely different system than anybody else has - completely self-contained and entirely new. It bears no similarity to any current computer systems on the market."

"No wonder Omega didn't want their secrets sold!" Logan whistled, "If these Omega guys have developed a new computer system - who knows what else they've got!"

"The LG said Omega's system was far more sophisticated than anything Microsoft or any of their competitors have developed. They were stumped. They couldn't get in."

"Are any of you listening to what I just said?" Mulder was exasperated, "I said Ed Straker was the confirmed officer in charge of the Shag Harbour incident in 1967 - he's likely been doing the same thing for the last 40 years, folks!"

"Mulder, I know you want to tie Straker to our case by association with the '67 events, but that won't stand up in a court of law," Scully told him, "You have nothing to go on but the 40 year old memories of a journalist-turned-novelist. And you know neither the Canadian government or our own will ever confess to what may or may not have happened there, It's ancient history. Buried."

"What if we could get into the Omega building? We could try to get in at night..."

"You're clutching at straws," Goran reminded him, "That place has hard security 24 hours a day, seven days a week - it's locked up tighter than Fort Knox. They are totally inaccessible."

"Then there's only one choice left. We have to get our paws on Ed Straker and make him talk!" Mulder pounded his fist on the table.

* * *

"I don't know why I let you talk me into this, Mulder. Kidnapping is a criminal offence," Scully took a swig of her coffee. They were taking turns with Logan and Goran on surveilling the Omega building, hoping Straker would make an appearance.

"I don't want to kidnap him, I just want to talk to him. At the police Precinct."

"We're risking too much this time. Our own careers have been in danger too many times to count, but Logan and Goran don't need any trouble."

"Look, they started this thing with Straker. Logan saw him at JFK, recognized him and called us to get involved. I think we've turned up a lot more evidence than they ever have in this case. In fact, whatever evidence they had initially walked itself out of the morgue and out of the evidence room back in '94. And they don't even get what this case is really all about - it's not about industrial espionage - it's about UFOs!"

"And just what grounds are you going to use to take Ed Straker to the police station?"

"Obstruction, Scully. Straker obstructed our investigation 12 years ago. He's not under arrest, but he is under suspicion - a person of interest in our case. We can get away with that to hold him for a few hours of interrogation."

"He's not likely to talk to us at all. He'll just sit there until his lawyer comes along."

"We don't know that yet. We might get something."

"Don't count on it. If Straker has been engaged in cover-ups over the last 40 years, he's not about to spill his guts to anyone - not even the FBI - or perhaps I should say especially the FBI. You've been tracking this man on and off for years and you've always come up with nada."

"That's right - just enough evidence to be tantalizing - just out of my reach. But if I could get the man in front of me.....waaaaait a minute.....who's that getting into the limo that pulled up?" Mulder jumped out from behind the wheel and ran over to the limo. He pulled open the door.....

"Edward Straker, I'm Special Agent Mulder with the FBI - please step out of the vehicle....."

The small dart caught him in the shoulder, spun him around and he dropped to the sidewalk. Back in their car, Scully discovered a weapon of some sort aimed at her head from a Ninja style clad man, "Don't do anythin' stupid, lady!"

Scully was eased out of the passenger side of the car and she watched more ninjas pick up Mulder. Straker's limo pulled away from the curb - the whole operation had taken barely 15 seconds....

* * *

"Have you heard from Mulder and Scully today?" Logan asked Goran. They were both on shift for the NYPD, but were remaining in contact with the two FBI agents nonetheless.

"I talked to Scully this morning a little after 10:00 am. They were taking turns watching the front door of the Omega Corporation. Plenty of people in and out, probably staffers. But no Straker so far. You'd think he'd have to leave the building sometime, if only to go to a hotel for food and sleep."

"He's supposedly the company's President, maybe he's got accommodations inside the building itself. And as for Paul Foster, his name doesn't show up on any property lists, there's no cell phone, land line or Internet service registered in his name anywhere in the five boroughs, and he apparently doesn't even pay taxes!"

"This is totally fascinating.....," Goran replied, "How can a person live and work in a well-documented city like New York and not leave any kind of paper trail? I mean, even the diplomats and workers at the United Nations can be found if you know where to look."

"It's like Omega is some law unto itself - like they can do whatever they want with impunity. They're here - they've got that huge building downtown, but other than that, they're totally untraceable."

* * *

The darkened room swam into view as Mulder's eyes opened. He felt groggy, but he was aware enough to realize he was on lying on a decent bed. He'd been stripped of his clothing, his ID, his weapon. How long had he been there? And, where exactly was he? Mulder tried to bring up the last thing he could remember.....something about obstruction.....?

* * *

Dana Scully was experiencing a different scenario. She was sitting in what might have been an interrogation room. There was one chair - she was sitting on it - and no other furniture. The light was bright, and she saw no evidence of video cameras or other recording devices, although she guessed they were there somewhere. The door opened. It was so subtly designed that it faded into the wall when closed again. The man who looked at her was older, handsome,

with silver at his temples. His voice carried a soft Australian cadence.

"Special Agent Scully, FBI. Why were you and your partner surveilling the Omega Corporation's building downtown?"

"We're on a case," Scully had had her ID and weapon taken from her before she was drugged with something and she lost consciousness. When she'd woken up, she'd been in this room, her shoes were missing as well.

"And what is the nature of your case?" Lew Waterman paced the length of the room.

"I don't feel the nature of our investigation should be discussed with unauthorized persons."

"Detectives Logan and Goran told us you were very interested in Omega. Why would the police and the FBI be investigation a company which pays its taxes and otherwise adds to the local economy?" Waterman was also a great believer in the 'big lie'.

"Alright, then, if you think you know so much about our investigation, why are you questioning me? You have my partner. Maybe you can convince him to tell you what you want to know."

"Mr. Mulder won't be very interested in this investigation for much longer. I think he'll see the wisdom of letting sleeping dogs lie. And, so will you, Agent Scully."

"If you're planning on exerting some sort of pressure on us, I should tell you that we've been through that sort of thing before...."

"Not pressure. Never that," Lew smiled charmingly. He was handsome, Scully admitted to herself, "Just a change of priorities. You'll be headed back to D.C. shortly."

"I don't think we've been recalled."

"Actually, yes, you have been. We checked at your hotel and there was a message addressed to you both from a Mr. Skinner. Seems he has some other more vital assignments for you and Mr. Mulder."

"Well, I'd like to see that message myself," Scully told him.

Waterman smiled again and leaned over the pert redhead, "I'm sorry, but I disposed of it...." he laid a hand on her shoulder, Scully felt a very small pinprick in her skin, and Waterman's voice intoned, "To sleep.....perchance to dream....." Scully felt the room starting to spin.....

* * *

"I checked their hotel a few minutes ago," Goran said, "They're gone."

"What? Why would they leave the city and not let us know?" Logan exclaimed, "When did they leave?"

"The hotel says someone else from the FBI went up to their rooms, took all their luggage this afternoon, paid cash on the bill, and that was it."

"So Mulder and Scully didn't check out by themselves?"

"Apparently not."

"This doesn't sound right.....Mulder isn't the type to just skip town.....he was desperate to get something on Ed Straker...."

"Maybe we can flash our own badges at the hotel people and have a look at their rooms.....," Goran suggested.

* * *

The alarm clock rang 7:00 am. Scully turned it off and jumped out of bed, shedding her green PJs on the floor as she headed for the shower. She was about to get into the water stream when she noticed a small reddish mark on her shoulder.....an insect bite?

* * *

Across D.C., Fox Mulder's feet hit the floor. He really had to stop sleeping on the couch. His back was aching from the peculiar posture he'd slept in to fit onto the less than six feet long piece of furniture. The TV was still on from the night before, some morning news program with a perky female news announcer blithering away. He glanced at his watch. He and Scully would be due in Skinner's office promptly at eight.

* * *

In New York City, Logan and Goran had come up against the proverbial brick wall. They'd examined the former hotel rooms Mulder and Scully had used and found no fingerprints or other evidence to determine just who had entered and removed their luggage. In fact, Mulder and Scully were not answering their cell phones. The rental car they'd been using was back at the company, the bill paid in full by the FBI and wiped clean.

"This is crazy, Bobby, two people just can't disappear that completely," Logan shook his head.

"I checked with the head office in D.C. and they're claiming they've been sent on assignment to Washington state."

"That figures - send them to the opposite end of the country! I think they were getting too close to something and they got caught."

"But, caught by whom? The government, the military, the Omega Corporation, or their own people at the Bureau? Whatever evidence they'd been compiling was taken along with their luggage!"

"I just can't believe that story Mulder came up with about the UFO crap. I think he was way out in left field on that business!"

"That leaves us back at our original theory - industrial espionage. Let's face it, Mike, we're never going to crack this one."

"Lennie used to say the FBI were a pile of uncooperative humps and I guess he was right!"

Epilogue

Sitting beside Straker in the limo had been a small box containing Alec Freeman's ashes. It had all happened much too quickly for grief or regrets. There had been a moment the General wasn't sure whether he was going to make it to the airport when Fox Mulder had grabbed the door and tried to get to him, but Omega's security people had been on top of it, as usual.

Now on a private SHADAir flight back to Britain, Straker looked down at the box for the 50th time. It seemed impossible to him that what was left of his lifelong friend could fit in such a tiny container. How could that puny box hold all that Alec was: friend, advisor, warrior, comrade in arms?

Paul Foster had given him the address of Alec's favourite pub in London....it was just a matter of time now.

THE END