

# The

An A-Team,  
X-Files,  
Nowhere Man  
'zine...



# Files



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## Opening the A-Files . . .

Ugh! It's done! It's finally, really, truly done! I'm going to run around and do a happy dance for a while right now, I think. I'm very pleased to have this sucker off my hard drive and to the printers 'cause it's been haunting my thoughts for much too long already! And so, in any event, welcome to "The A-Files." When I first proposed the idea for this 'zine I wasn't sure if it would actually "come together" in the end, but here it is, the work of a few very obsessed - or I should say, *dedicated* - A-Team and X-Files fans.

This 'zine certainly has a much darker tone to it than the A-Team 'zines I've put together before, for obvious reasons I think. Yes, there's some violence where people actually *do* get injured, maybe even killed, so be forewarned. Still, I think it's interesting to see how each author took a decidedly different approach to the crossover idea and created three very different stories. I think they each pretty much stand on their own but I do have a few comments to make regarding "Through the Thin Veil." I honestly didn't start out with the intention of this story turning into a freakin' novel, but it just sort of happened, so my apologies. After watching the Nowhere Man episode "Hidden Agenda" I just *had* to figure out some way of tying the A-Team into the plot (i.e., I'm never one to turn up the possibility of a double-Dwight story line!), and I'd always wanted to write a Team story set on St. Kitts anyway . . . then Scully and Mulder came into the picture and things just got incredibly complicated. Because I was writing as NM was still airing, certain elements in the story as I'd conceived it began to conflict with the show, at least from the episode "Calaway" and on, but frankly I was less than pleased with the way the show was wrapped up at the end of its first (and only, *\*sniff\**) season and so I decided to go ahead with my own "alternative" plotline. I hope it makes for a good read.

Well, I'm off to get back to work on . . . *drumroll, please* . . . Plans Scams and Vans #3, where things will definitely be a little more lighthearted than they have been here. There have been so many great contributions coming in from every one for that 'zine that I may sit out writing for it myself (I need to recuperate!) and just edit and illo for it, but we'll see. Some people will kill me if I don't get the next installment of "Shadows and Stars" written up for it at least. And we're even throwing around the idea of doing an "Ultimate/adult Mary Sue" A-Team 'zine in the near future (tentative title is "Where's Mary Sue When You Need Her?" - all right, who just groaned??) . . . check the back of this 'zine for more info on both projects.

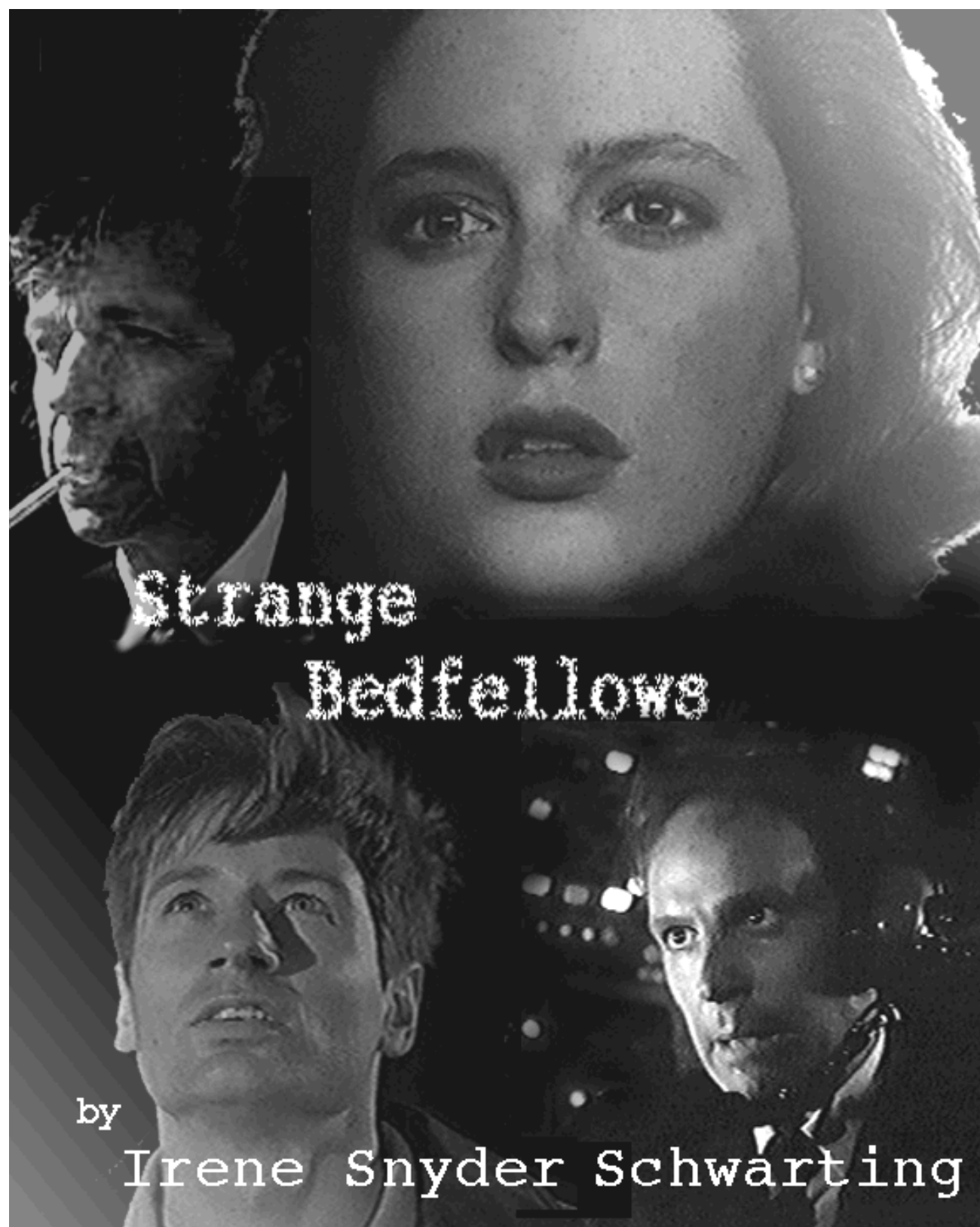
That's all from your trusty and tired editor for now, I'm off for a good drink! Ta ta!

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The radio crackled. "Agent Mulder," Hannibal's voice came through, "this partner of yours, she a redhead?"

Mulder grabbed frantically at the radio. "Yes, that's Scully," he said hurriedly. "Did you find her? Is she okay?"

Hannibal looked thoughtfully at the limp figure in the infirmary bed. Disheveled red hair framed a thin face almost as white as the sheet that covered her. He pulled back an eyelid and shone his flashlight at her, checking for reflexes. The pupil contracted at the light, but did not track when he waved the light back and forth. "She's alive," he replied, taking her wrist. "Pulse and respiration are steady, but she's out cold. No obvious injuries. Drugged, would be my guess. Where are you?" He pulled the sheet back, then replaced it hastily when he realized she was not dressed. He looked around the room, but didn't see anything even resembling a hospital gown or, better, clothes.

"Beats me. Murdock, where the hell are we?"

The rangy pilot looked back at the FBI agent. "Blimey, we're deep in the depths of this infernal rabbit warren, that we are, me matey," he growled. "'Twould be me guess, we're drawin' near to the center, where there's a fortune in gold awaitin'."

Mulder flipped the radio on again. "According to Long John Silver, we're near the center of operations," he reported dryly. "Colonel, is this guy all there?"

Hannibal grinned to himself as he tightly wrapped the unconscious woman in the sheet. "Murdock? Sure he is. We're not quite sure where, but he's definitely all somewhere. Have you seen Face and B.A.? I'm too deep in this damned mountain. I can't pick up anything but you."

"Not for a while. I heard gunfire a few minutes ago, and some explosions."

More static crackled on Hannibal's radio, and he thought he could vaguely discern Face's voice through the noise. "What was that? Face, I'm not reading you at all."

"He said the fires are out now and the guards are returning into the base," Mulder reported.

"Well, it served its purpose. I'm going to need some cover getting Scully out of here, since she's not real mobile. Can you and Murdock get down here?"

"We'll work on it - although I'm not sure where we are relative to you."

Hannibal started stuffing medications and bandages into his knapsack. "Tell Face and B.A. to move in too, I'm gonna need them to run

interference."

Mulder repeated the message, and an extended burst of static indicated that Face responded. "He says they're pinned down at the moment, but they'll move in as soon as they can," Mulder relayed, chuckling. "Well, that's approximately what he said. Do you want a verbatim transcript?"

Hannibal grinned. Face's ability to complain about everything was legendary. "That's okay, I can imagine. How soon can you guys be down here?"

Mulder spotted an elevator. "We're on five, according to this sign. I think -" He broke off when the sound of gunfire erupted nearby, and ducked around a corner. Murdock was poised across the corridor, listening.

"From the sounds, they do be comin' this way," he whispered. "Let us be off, 'fore they make us to walk t'plank."

"I think you need a ship for that," Mulder said, but he was already moving back down the corridor. Slipping from doorway to doorway to dodge the roving patrols hunting them, the men made their way deeper into the underground complex.

Hannibal heard the gunfire too, although it was somewhat more distant from where he was. Muttering imprecations, he slung Scully over his shoulder and left the infirmary. "We're under-billing on this job," he muttered. Footsteps resonated around the corner behind him, and he hastened to get under cover. He hid himself and the girl under a staircase as a dozen men marched by, and once again cursed himself for getting them into this mess. Ever since the A-Team's trial and execution, the Army had standing orders to shoot them on sight, and Hannibal knew that on several occasions only Stockwell's dubious protection had kept them alive. Since their resignation from his service, that protection was missing; although Hannibal didn't think Stockwell would take it upon himself to hunt them down, he sure wasn't going to interfere if anyone else did. Collaborating with a federal agent to break into a top-secret military base was probably not the safest course of action, he concluded. But what the hell, you only live once, and they just couldn't pass on this superb opportunity to thumb their noses once again at the government.

Just what is this place? he wondered, settling into a more comfortable position as more troops passed. Outsiders had wondered for years just what went on at this mysterious Nevada base, the very existence of which the government denied. Mulder had told the team of the rumors that there was an alien spaceship

here, and had jokingly speculated that they were conducting experiments into human-alien breeding, but nobody really knew. Hannibal figured this base was used to develop and test experimental planes or weapons, though after being inside for several hours he hadn't seen anything to confirm that one way or another. In fact, he hadn't been able to figure out even what branch of the military ran the place - he hadn't seen a recognizable bit of insignia or uniforms since they got inside. The whole place had a paramilitary, underground feel which reminded Hannibal of some of Stockwell's operations around the world. *This place was just that arrogant son of a bitch's type of game*, he thought to himself. If anybody in the U.S. government was capable of kidnapping a federal agent just for trespassing, Hannibal figured, it had to be Stockwell. The only real question was, just what was it that they didn't want her to see?

Mulder and Scully had been nosing around, trying to find out just what was going on (without authorization, Mulder had admitted when Hannibal pressed him on it) and she hadn't made it back to the rendezvous. When nobody at the Bureau would support him in his attempts to find his partner, Mulder had hunted up the A-Team. You had to admire the guy's guts, although Hannibal had the feeling that Mulder felt it was his fault the girl was here. But still, he was putting his job on the line at the very least just by associating with them, let alone taking the risk of getting killed by breaking into this place.

So now they'd found the girl, mission accomplished. All that remained was getting out alive. Hannibal waited for the coast to clear, and wished for a cigar.

The radio crackled with static again, then B.A.'s voice came through faintly. "Hannibal? Murdock? Innybody out there? Come in!"

Murdock answered. "Read you loud and clear, mah good man," he drawled. Long John Silver had apparently been replaced by Foghorn Leghorn. "Where might ya'll be at?"

"Shut up, fool," B.A. suggested. "We're on the fifth level. There's patrols everywhere. Is Hannibal with you?"

"Deeper in, in the depths of the caverns. He's found the missing treasure, that he has. The fair damsel has been rescued from the villains, aye, indeed." Silver was back.

"Good. Faceman's been hit. Ain't real bad, but we gotta get outta here." B.A.'s voice was getting clearer. "We're gonna head for the rendezvous outside, 'kay?"

"We've got to move," Mulder told Murdock

urgently. Their temporary hiding place was about to be discovered. He grabbed the radio. "Hannibal found Scully, so let's get out of here, B.A."

"We're movin'." With that curt rejoinder, B.A. was gone. Voices and footsteps were approaching them from two directions. Mulder and Murdock set out in the third.

Hannibal lowered his burden to the floor and wiped sweat off his face. Scully was by no means a large woman, but he was getting damned tired of hauling her around. "Are you waking up yet?" he muttered irritably, checking her pupils yet again. They were beginning to respond to the light, which he took to mean she was coming around. Hopefully, she'd wake up soon. Dodging squads of men in unmarked uniforms, he'd ended up heading deeper and deeper into the complex, and couldn't avoid feeling that he was being herded. From what Murdock said, it sounded like they were too. "Like cattle to the slaughterhouse," he muttered to himself, making a quick investigation of the vicinity. There didn't seem to be anybody after him at the moment, but Hannibal wasn't foolish enough to think they wouldn't be on his trail soon.

When he got back to Scully, her eyes were finally open. Hannibal crouched swiftly at her side, covering her mouth with his hand and pinning her down. She struggled weakly, wide blue eyes darting frantically, but was tangled in the sheet and he restrained her effortlessly. "Miss Scully, my name is Hannibal Smith. Fox Mulder sent me in to get you out," he whispered reassuringly.

At her partner's name, Scully calmed down, and Hannibal slowly released her. "Mulder?" she asked. "Is he here? Where am I? What's going on? Who are you?"

"Mulder is with the rest of my team," he assured her, hoping it was true. "We're still inside the base you and he were investigating, and we're getting out."

Scully digested this information. "How long have I been here?"

"About six days." He cocked his head, listening. "The patrols are coming closer, we need to get moving. Can you walk?"

"I don't know." With Hannibal's assistance, she got to tentative feet and stood on her own, swaying slightly. "So far, so good." She assayed a thin smile, which faded when she realized she wore only the sheet. "Where are my clothes?" she asked, clutching it around her.

Hannibal shook his head apologetically. "Couldn't find 'em. Sorry. If you'll let me have

the sheet a moment, I'll see what I can do."

Scully hesitated, reluctant to shed her only garment in front of this man, before her pragmatic side reasserted itself. Surely he had wrapped her in the sheet to begin with, while she was unconscious. She wouldn't be revealing any secrets now. Besides, she wasn't likely to be able to preserve her modesty wearing the sheet like a cape. Trying not to blush, she handed him the sheet, which he accepted with politely averted eyes. He whipped out a pocketknife, quickly ripped three holes in the center to make the sheet into a loose poncho, then handed it back. Scully put it over her head and got her arms through the armholes. Hannibal ripped the bottom edge off so she wouldn't trip over the hem of her new gown, then surveyed her critically. "Well, I don't think it'll win any awards on Saville Row, but it'll do."

"You're a fine tailor," Scully acknowledged. "Now what?"

"Now we get the hell out of here."

B.A. forced open the door and pulled his teammate inside, closing it only moments before the sound of running footsteps echoed from the corridor. The two men crouched in the shadows as the searching guards began trying all the doors. B.A. gripped the knob in his massive fists, and when it began to turn, put all his strength into holding it still.

"This one's locked," a voice outside reported to someone. "They must have gone around the corner." The response was unintelligible, but the footsteps moved away and they were, for the moment, undisturbed. "No problem," B.A. observed nonchalantly.

Face was ominously pale, and he did not respond to the big man's joke. "Too close," he whispered. "They're gonna be tracking me soon." His bloody footprints on the white carpet gave truth to his words.

"Lessee." Face gritted his teeth as B.A. slit his pants leg to examine the wound, working with the efficiency of long experience. A bullet had torn through the conman's thigh just above the knee. It had passed cleanly through, leaving matching holes in front and back of his leg, and the lack of spurting blood indicated that no arteries had been hit. A sluggish trickle of blood had soaked his pants and socks, and was dripping slowly onto the floor. "You one lucky sonofagun, Faceman," B.A. told him brusquely.

"How bad is it?" Face squinted at the wound, trying to pretend it was someone else's leg. It was not the first time he'd ever been shot, but it was not the kind of experience that improved

with repetition.

"You gonna be fine. Ain't gonna be goin' dancin' for a while, though." B.A. rummaged in his pack and produced a bundle of bandages, which he began to wind tightly around the conman's injury.

"Oh, damn. I had a date tonight, too."

"See if she can take a rain check." B.A. kept his voice light, but he was getting very concerned. Face's injury, though not fatal, was going to slow them down, and getting out of the complex was becoming a priority. Their diversion had served its purpose, but the soldiers were returning to the complex bound and determined to find the perpetrators. B.A. and Face had found themselves getting deeper and deeper inside as they dodged the patrols, and there were no helpful maps indicating the nearest exits. The last exchange of gunfire had put the soldiers hot on their trail, and B.A. knew these folks were inclined to shoot first and ask questions later.

He finished applying the field bandage and clapped Face on the shoulder. "Think you kin get by without any painkiller, Faceman? Need you to be thinking fast, not all fuzzy, if you kin take the hurtin'."

"I'll be okay."

B.A. looked at him sharply. If the Faceman wasn't complaining, it was time to start worrying about him. "You rest a minute, man. I'm gonna see how we kin get outta here."

Face nodded silently and leaned back against the wall, eyes closed. B.A. worried for a moment, then set out to prowl the office, looking for an escape. In a back room, he found what at first appeared to be a closet. When he forced it open, though, he discovered a ventilation shaft and access ladder, leading to a lower level. B.A. judged it with a critical eye. The shaft was barely wide enough for him to squeeze through, and he could help Face shimmy down the ladder. Getting to another level would throw the guards off their trail, at least for a few minutes, so they could try to double back to the exit. Nodding to himself, the burly sergeant went back to retrieve his wounded comrade.

Face was sitting on the desk, sifting through stacks of papers. He glanced up as B.A. reentered the office. "We've hit the jackpot here, B.A. Look at all this."

"What is it?"

"I'm not really sure, but it's big. A lot of this stuff looks like it belongs in the health department, not an airbase. These files refer to some kind of experiment, immunization records, 'test subjects.' This is genetic typing stuff

here." He waved a set of incomprehensible diagrams. B.A. shrugged. Face had, in the course of his many scams, acquired a superficial knowledge of a lot of arcane material, but none of it was the sort of thing B.A. had the slightest interest in. He didn't see what Face found so fascinating about this stuff.

"So what? We gotta get movin', Faceman."

"But look at this, B.A. 'Program supervisor: Stockwell, General H.' That slimy bastard's got his fingers in this, somehow."

"Anytime somethin' no good's goin' on, Stockwell's in it," B.A. remarked. "Mebbee Mulder an' his partner know somethin' we don't."

"Maybe they do." Pondering that, Face stuffed the papers into his pack and accepted B.A.'s aid to stand.

The observer paused before the last security monitor in the row and stared thoughtfully at the screen. A big black man filled most of the image, but when he moved away the camera picked up a blond man, limping awkwardly down the hall. His lips moved, and the observer wished the security cameras were equipped with microphones. The men both looked vaguely familiar, but he couldn't quite place them. Irritated, he turned to the officer standing silently behind him. "Who are they?" he asked quietly, lighting a cigarette.

The officer stiffened to attention. "We don't know yet, sir," he admitted. "They're some sort of special operations team, appear to be military. Not one of ours, sir." His eyes watered as the observer coolly blew smoke into his face.

"I didn't ask who they aren't." He waited for his words to impact, then turned back to the monitors. "Get me Stockwell."

His words were obeyed immediately, and within seconds another monitor came alive, this one showing the calm face of retired General Hunt Stockwell. "Good morning," Stockwell said. "What can I do for you?"

The observer gave a silent signal to the technician behind him, and the images from the security cameras were fed into the satellite uplink to Stockwell's plane. The general's eyes shifted as he scanned the images, then returned as calm as ever. "So, we have intruders into our little project."

"Who are they, Stockwell?" the observer grated. "And what are they doing?"

"They are almost certainly attempting a rescue of the agent currently in custody," Stockwell said indifferently, "as I predicted would happen."

"They look like your pet mercenaries."

"They are," Stockwell acknowledged.

"Baracus and Peck, certainly. I assume Smith is with them as well."

"You knew of this operation?" There was ominous accusation in his tone, and he ground the cigarette out angrily.

Stockwell spread his hands innocently. "Of course not. The A-Team is no longer under my jurisdiction, as you know. It was probably the partner who recruited them for this operation." His tone turned distinctly accusing. "You let him get too close in the first place. He should never have known about this base at all, let alone gotten so close as to necessitate such drastic measures. He is evidently a remarkably resourceful young man, and one who bears watching."

"I have been watching him for a long time," snapped the observer.

Stockwell glanced curiously at the monitor, which had changed to show two different men running down a stairwell. Both were tall, and dressed in black, but the one in front wore a ski mask that obscured his features. "Smith's lost weight," he observed. "That's your agent in back, isn't it? He looks familiar."

"He should - you've seen him before, Stockwell, though not in twenty years. That's Bill Mulder's boy, Fox." The observer lit another cigarette.

"Really? That explains a lot." Stockwell nodded curtly. "Have they released the prisoner?"

"It appears so."

Stockwell steeped his fingers thoughtfully. "How was our security breached?"

The officer spoke up reluctantly. "Apparently there were a series of explosions in the outer buildings and at the perimeter, and the forces were called out to contain the fire. The intruders got in during the confusion."

"And your troops have not been able to capture four men, with a sick woman, in almost an hour? We shall have to look into improving our security, Captain."

"Five men, sir."

"Five?" Stockwell raised an eyebrow. "Smith, Baracus, Peck, Mulder, and - ?"

"There's another man we haven't identified yet."

"Interesting." If Stockwell had any ideas as to the identity of the missing man, he kept them to himself. "Where are they now, Captain?"

"They've split up - some on level four and some on five. My troops exchanged fire with two men on level four about ten minutes ago, and I believe that at least one of them is wounded."

"Really? What gave you that impression?" Stockwell asked sarcastically. "I could see



myself that Peck was favoring his left leg. So, they are probably all on the way to level five now. What do you intend to do?"

"We have all the exits sealed off. There is no way out. They cannot evade my men indefinitely: it's merely a matter of time before we have them all in custody," said the captain stiffly.

Stockwell was unimpressed. "A matter of how much time? That is the critical issue. They could do untold amounts of damage before you corral them. Do not underestimate these men, Captain. I have reviewed their files extensively and worked with them myself - they are very, very good."

The observer exhaled a long stream of smoke. "You shouldn't have let them go. They are too dangerous to be let loose."

"We've been over this ground already," Stockwell snapped. "The pardons were only a stopgap measure; it was never intended as a permanent means of control. You can only dangle the carrot for so long, before eventually the mule will balk. And Colonel Smith is an exceedingly stubborn mule."

"They should have been terminated, and the whole Hanoi business laid to rest once and for all."

"That was my original plan, which you voted against. 'As long as their fugitive status is maintained, we can control them.' We could not anticipate that they would so neatly slip their leashes when they realized the pardons were not forthcoming." Stockwell stopped himself short, then continued in his usual calm tones. "This is old terrain, and not pertinent to the matter at hand. The question is, what are they going to do now?"

"I think they're going to see what we've been working on."

Stockwell's eyebrow twitched. "So you intend to let them in?"

"I don't see how we will be able to stop them. The search pattern is having the effect of forcing them deeper into the complex, rather than drawing them out, and they are remarkably adroit at dodging patrols. I expect that within the next ten minutes they will be in the Alpha sector."

"And then?"

The observer turned back to the monitors, and his voice was emotionless. "And then they will be stopped. By the time they get in, they will be surrounded, and there are no exits from the silo. They will not be allowed to leave. Understood, Captain?"

"Understood, sir."

"Then I think you have work to do."

"Yes sir." Taking that as a dismissal, the captain slipped out the door.

"A pity, really, that they should end here," Stockwell said softly. "I had plans for the A-Team."

The observer kept his gaze fixed on the monitor. "The best-laid plans, Stockwell." He ground his cigarette out.

Hannibal looked anxiously down at the woman, supported primarily by his arm. They weren't making much better time than he had carrying her, and from the sounds of it they were about to be surrounded. He spotted a flicker of motion near the end of the corridor and hastily yanked Scully around a corner. Irritation flashed in her eyes at being manhandled, but subsided when she heard the voices behind them. Hannibal released her arm and handed her his pistol as he unslung his rifle. "Let's see if we can dampen their enthusiasm," he suggested, and fired a volley of shots back up the corridor. Scully followed suit, the heavy pistol barking a sharp counterpart to the boom of the rifle, and the approaching guards backed off quickly. After a moment, they returned fire, blindly, but Hannibal and Scully had already headed down the gently inclined corridor. The bare metal walls were uninterrupted, except for a heavy steel door at the far end. "Step into my parlor, said the spider to the fly," Hannibal growled.

"What do you mean?"

"They've chased us here for a reason," the colonel snarled. "Damned if I know why, but I don't like it." He stopped and scowled at the door. "It's too easy, too obvious that we're supposed to run through there."

Scully looked over her shoulder. The guards had resumed their approach: the sound of running footsteps indicated they were about to come around the corner, where the fugitives were completely exposed. "Our choices are limited," she observed dryly.

"I know, that's what I don't like. It's got to be a trap."

"It's open it and maybe trigger the trap, or stand here and get shot!" Scully was not a patient woman at the best of times, and she was not feeling her best.

"Nothing to lose but life itself," Hannibal grumbled. "Here goes nothing." Slinging his rifle, he grasped the doorknob and yanked. A piercing siren emanated as he triggered the alarms, accompanying the hiss of a foul-smelling gas that spurted out of fixtures set high into the wall. Hannibal and Scully covered their mouths,

but it was too late. Hannibal shielded the agent with his own body, then both collapsed to the floor as the poison gas permeated their systems.

Mulder and Murdock heard the wail of the siren and began running towards it, rubber-soled shoes almost silent on the concrete floor. As they wheeled around a corner, they found themselves behind a half-dozen guards hastening towards an unseen objective. Murdock skidded to a stop and, with a ruthlessness Mulder would not have suspected, coolly shot them each in the back of the knee. "They'll live," he snapped, and hurried past the screaming, wounded men towards the source of the siren.

Mulder beat him to them, gently lifting his partner's head from the floor. Scully's head lolled limply from side to side, and her eyes were rolled far up into her head. "What the hell?" he wondered.

Murdock was examining Hannibal. "I don't know," he confessed. "They don't look injured - I wonder what happened. But at least it looks like they're coming around." Indeed, Hannibal was already showing signs of reviving.

Footsteps echoed behind them, and the men turned around to see B.A., supporting a wan Face, hurrying down the corridor towards them. "Hi guys," said Face. "How's it going?"

"What happened to Hannibal?" B.A. growled.

"Is that your partner?" asked Face, eyeing Scully's recumbent form appreciatively.

Mulder hastily straightened Scully's loose smock to protect her dignity and shot Face a dirty look. "Yes, this is Special Agent Scully."

Face snorted, unimpressed, and limped over to examine his commander. Mulder noticed that blood was continuing to slowly ooze from beneath the bandage around the conman's thigh. His trouser leg was already saturated and he left a messy trail as he walked.

"Looks like the door was booby-trapped somehow," Murdock observed.

Face nodded thoughtfully. "Iocane gas, I'd guess. It's a neuraleptic, causes temporary unconsciousness but no permanent damage, as long as the dose is small. It's only effective in high concentration, so it dissipates quickly. It's the latest thing in security installations - leaves your intruders out cold, but doesn't endanger your guards. Very neat."

"How'd you know that?" asked Mulder, curious.

Face grinned mockingly at him. "Trade secret. You shoulda known it, though - they've got the same setup on the entrances to the FBI building in DC."

"Really? I've never tried to break in."

"Don't bother. It's a lot of trouble to beat an iocane system."

Mulder's eyes narrowed. "Sounds like you've tried it."

Face shrugged. "There's a way around every system, if you have time. Hannibal must have been in a real hurry to get caught by this one."

"If I'm oriented right, we're just about at the center of the complex," Murdock remarked. "And this is about the first locked door we've hit. Something gives me the impression we've found the pot of gold at the center of the spider web."

Face winced. "Please don't mix metaphors like that. I have a headache." He leaned back against the wall and closed his eyes wearily.

"Sorry, Faceman." Murdock settled back on his heels and looked thoughtfully at the massive steel door in front of them. "I wonder if triggering the alarm once was enough." Before anyone could stop him, he grabbed the doorknob and yanked. The others covered their mouths and noses in anticipation of another release of poisonous gas, but nothing happened. The door did not budge.

"Don' be doin' that, fool," B.A. snarled. "Coulda set off another alarm, man!"

Murdock ignored him and commenced an intensive examination of the door lock. Having assured himself that Scully would recover, Mulder turned his attention to the door as well. "I wonder what's so secret that it's behind a locked steel door at the center of a secret military base." He pulled on the door, ascertaining for himself that it was locked, and turned to the most larcenous member of the A-Team. "Face, think you can get this door open?"

Face's mouth quirked in what might have been a grin. "No problem. Stand clear, guys." He pulled his pistol and fired half a dozen shots at the lockplate. The door groaned and swung slowly inwards. "Consider it opened."

Mulder was staring past him at the sight revealed by the open door. "I'll be damned."

It wasn't really a flying saucer, he decided, tracing its lines with his eyes. More than anything, it resembled a flying teacup, upside down and with a transparent bubble where the handle ought to be. It was primarily made of a blue-hued metal, which reflected red and green highlights from the fluorescent lights. The hairs on his neck stood up, and he realized it was emanating, or perhaps contained in, a powerful magnetic field. It hovered, apparently unsupported, in the center of a large hangar, surrounded by things Mulder couldn't begin to

guess the purpose of. As he lifted his gaze, he saw a circular hatch high overhead and realized that this ship was intended to fly.

"What the hell is that?" B.A. demanded.

Mulder took a deep breath. "That, B.A., is proof of what I've been searching for all these years. Proof that our government has an alien spaceship. Proof that we have been contacted by extra-terrestrial life." He wished Scully was awake to see this.

B.A. looked skeptical. "That's a flying saucer? Don't look like no UFO to me."

"Doesn't look like any plane I've ever seen, though," Face disagreed, staring at the vessel. "Not that it matters, really - it's pretty clear that whether it's an alien spaceship or just some newfangled experimental plane, that's what they've been keeping such a big secret and they're not gonna be happy about us busting in here. I think -" He cut himself off, head cocked as he listened intently. "We're about to have company, guys."

A moment later, the others heard the sounds of the guards' reinforcements approaching. "That's our ticket out of here," Murdock declared, pointing to the strange ship.

"Can you fly it?" Mulder asked dubiously. He'd seen and been impressed by the pilot's record and abilities, but this was a ship unlike any he'd ever seen.

"Hey, buddy, if it's got wings, I can fly it," Murdock boasted.

"It hasn't got wings," Face pointed out.

Murdock looked taken aback for a moment, then shrugged. "Should be even easier, then, huh?"

B.A. was shaking his head furiously. "Uh-uh! I ain't gonna fly, and I ain't gonna fly in no alien spaceship, and I doubly ain't gonna fly with this crazy fool steering! No way!"

"Come on, B.A., can we discuss this in private a moment?" Murdock said soothingly. B.A. looked disgruntled, but followed the pilot a few yards up the hall, where Murdock began to speak quietly but emphatically. Mulder started to follow, to point out that this wasn't really the time or the place for philosophical discussions, but Face caught his eye and shook his head slightly. "Let Murdock handle it," he suggested quietly. "He's had a lot of practice talking B.A. into things." He shifted his weight and winced.

"Are you okay?"

Face grinned tightly. "Fine. Why do you ask?"

Mulder decided that if Face was oblivious to the oozing wound in his leg, he wasn't going to burst his bubble. "No reason. Now what are we

going to do?"

Face shrugged. "Either we'll get out of here, somehow, or else we're gonna get executed. Again. One or the other."

"You're a great morale booster," Mulder told him dryly.

"I do my best. Listen, Mulder, even if Murdock succeeds in talking B.A. into getting into that ship, he's gonna try to bolt. Be prepared to hold him down."

Mulder looked down at his own lanky form, and across at B.A.'s bulk. "How am I supposed to do that?"

Another strained grin. "Got a two-by-four handy?"

Murdock suddenly raised his voice in an angry shout, his usual manic zaniness nowhere in evidence. Face and Mulder watched in startled silence as he rounded furiously on the larger man.

"What else are we gonna do, man? We're up against the wall here, and those aren't popguns those guys are carrying! Hannibal's down, Face is hurt, we got noncombatant casualties -" by which Mulder supposed he meant Scully - "and that bird is the only way out! Here we are in the middle of a top-security military base, having just seen their big secret, and you think they're gonna let us just walk out of here? Or even arrest us? Don't be stupid, B.A. - the chips are down, now, this one's for keeps. We haven't got time to be worrying about your delicate sensibilities!"

Mulder thought he was going to continue, but the pilot had said his piece. Betraying an unsuspected strength in his wiry body, he hoisted his limp commander onto his shoulder and stalked off towards the strange ship. B.A. stood motionless, taken aback by the mild-mannered pilot's outburst. Mulder had the feeling there was a long history behind Murdock's explosion, and decided quickly that he had not the slightest interest in exploring it. Shrugging his shoulders and consigning his fate to whatever gods protect fools and madmen, he lifted Scully and followed.

B.A. scowled at Face, daring him to comment, but the conman was beyond his usual witticisms. A small pool of blood was slowly forming around his feet, and he swayed slightly as he leaned against the wall. "Whaddaya say, B.A.? Time to cut the cards."

B.A. was too angry and, truth be told, too frightened to answer. Murdock had made the reality of their situation painfully clear. There was no other way out, and his unit needed him. Although B.A. himself would rather die than fly, he couldn't force that decision on others, and there was no way Face was going to make it to

the ship alone. "Awright," he grumbled. "If you're crazy 'nuff to let that fool fly, I'll get you there, but I ain't gonna fly. I'll make my own way out."

Face's smile was a shadow of its former self. "Whatever you say, B.A." He draped an arm across B.A.'s shoulder and let the other man take his weight.

"Damn fool's gonna get hisself killed, an' everybody else too," B.A. growled. Muttering to himself, he half-carried his teammate down the ramp towards the alien ship.

Their unsteady progress was witnessed by the nameless observer, watching the images from the concealed security cameras on his monitor. No flicker of expression indicated his thoughts on the matter as the team disappeared into the ship. Drawing deeply on his cigarette, he turned to another monitor, where Stockwell waited impatiently. "Like lambs to the slaughter, they've trapped themselves," he reported calmly. "They've entered the Mark 1. Even if they figure out how to seal the hatch, our men can breach it in seconds. They're not going anywhere now."

Stockwell did not seem equally confident. "Did you get an ident on the fifth man?"

"Not yet. What does it matter?"

"It may be crucial. Time will tell." Behind tinted glasses, Stockwell's eyes were cool.

Mulder stopped just inside the hatch, staring in gape-mouthed astonishment, but Murdock moved forward immediately, carrying a groggy Hannibal into the back of the ship and easing him onto a long, bench-like apparatus. "You back with us, Colonel?" he asked.

Hannibal rubbed his eyes. "Yeah, I think so. There was some kind of gas - is Agent Scully okay?"

Mulder shook himself and set Scully on the bench beside the white-haired colonel. "She's coming around. Thanks for rescuing her, Hannibal."

Hannibal grinned. "You'll get our bill." His grin faded and he looked at Murdock. "Situation report, Captain?"

Murdock saluted. "We are inside an alien spaceship in a launch bay at the center of the complex. Enemy troops are closing in from all sides, ETA two minutes."

"Where's Face and B.A.?"

"Bringing up the rear, Colonel," Face reported as B.A. dragged him into the cockpit.

"What happened to you?" Hannibal asked his wounded lieutenant.

"Mosquito bite." B.A. lowered him to a

bench, and Face reached up to clap the big man appreciatively on the shoulder. "Thanks a lot, B.A.. Couldn't have made it without you."

"Now you're here, I'm leavin'. I ain't flying in this crazy ship!" The burly sergeant was a peculiar shade of green, and in his rapid panting Mulder spotted the signs of incipient panic. As inconspicuously as possible, he slipped behind the others and closed the hatch. B.A. turned at the sound and began a threatening growl. "Don't you be gettin' in my way. I ain't gonna fly!" He moved towards Mulder, who ducked behind Hannibal, then B.A.'s eyes turned up into his head and he collapsed into a large, heavily gilded heap.

"My dosage is getting better," Face said, returning the empty hypodermic needle to his knapsack. "It usually takes a lot longer to get him under."

"Secure him, Face," suggested Hannibal, rising to unsteady feet and moving to examine the console.

"Never mind, I'll do it," said Mulder, noting the effort with which the lieutenant moved. The A-Team had explained B.A.'s flying difficulties earlier, so he didn't remark on Face's unusual means of anxiety control, just rummaged in his pack and produced a coil of rope. Face sat back gratefully. "Hope you tie good knots. If he comes around, our lives will depend on it. Oh, welcome back, Miss Scully."

The others noticed that her eyes were open and tracking again. Mulder took a break from his labors to give her a quick hug, which she returned absently, her attention absorbed by the odd decor of the ship. The cockpit was filled with panels of strange meters and flashing blue lights, levers too thick for a human hand to comfortably grasp and strange markings embossed on every surface. Paper labels, covered with notation in several different handwritings, were taped to most of the instruments, suggesting various interpretations of the symbols. The ceiling was too low for a man to stand comfortably, and the whole vessel had the feel of being designed for passengers significantly different than those who currently occupied it.

"Mulder, where are we?" Scully asked in a remarkably calm voice.

Mulder was industriously strapping the unconscious B.A. to the floor. "Remember those strange lights in the sky at that airbase in Idaho? The ones that I said were UFOs and you didn't think so?"

"Yes. You disappeared into the base and I had to hold one of the airbase security at gunpoint to get you out."

"This is one of those ships. I'm sure of it."

"You're saying we're inside a UFO?" Scully was frankly skeptical.

"Have you ever seen a plane like this?" Mulder gestured to the odd designs on the floor and walls.

"No . . ." she trailed off, finally registering the other men in the crowded cabin and nervously straightening her smock.

Mulder nodded at each of the others in turn. "Special Agent Dana Scully, may I introduce Faceman, Murdock, and this is B.A., who would no doubt shake your hand if he were conscious. Hannibal, the leader of this motley crew, you've already met."

She nodded, her attention on B.A. "Do I want to know why you're tying him up?"

Face explained, "B.A. gets violent when he has to fly. So it's much more restful all around if he's unconscious."

Scully shook her head in a total lack of comprehension. "Flying? How?"

Hannibal finished his perusal of the exotic console and turned to Murdock. "Captain, can you fly this thing?"

Murdock saluted, all seriousness now. "Yes sir, I can."

"Murdock, I admit I'm not a pilot, that's your department, but I've seen the inside of a lot of cockpits," Face interjected. "I've never seen anything remotely like this. How did you learn to fly this?"

Murdock looked uncomfortable, and turned away from the others, staring out the viewscreen at the hangar around them. "I've flown it before, before the war. They've modified it a bit, made it more human-compatible, is all."

Mulder jumped on that. "Human compatible? This ship is based on technology scavenged from the alien spaceship that crashed in Roswell forty years ago, isn't it?"

Murdock shook his head. "As far as I know, the technology doesn't exist to replicate it, though it might by now - I haven't really kept up with such matters. This is the original wreck. It took more than twenty years just to get the engines functional. I was - one of the first - to fly it, in 1967." Old pain glittered in his eyes, memories the others did not share.

Hannibal broke in dryly. "I think this might be a good time to see if it's been mothballed or if it still hums." He nodded towards the viewscreen. Soldiers were pouring into the hangar like ants into a hive. "To paraphrase the great Olivier, we've given our lines; it's time to get off the stage."

"Aye-aye, Captain." Long John Silver was

back. Murdock moved quickly across the cramped cockpit and seated himself in the center chair. "Originally this was a two-man craft, but it looks like they've added a comm console there." He nodded towards the only recognizable bit of machinery, a radio and TV screen. "If you'll man that, Colonel, my guess is that somebody's gonna be calling us pretty soon. Mulder's on guns. Face, Scully, hold onto your seats." He began flipping switches on the console, and a dull hum began to reverberate through the little ship.

Hannibal obligingly seated himself in front of the radio and turned it on. "Oh, by the way, Colonel, B.A. and I found out something interesting. Stockwell's involved with this operation," Face observed, pulling the crumpled papers from his knapsack. "Not sure exactly how, but he's listed here as 'program supervisor, Project Lens'."

"Interesting." Hannibal hastily perused the papers. "I bet he's going to be calling us real soon, with yet another 'deal we can't refuse.' I'm looking forward to this."

"I wonder just what 'Project Lens' is," Mulder remarked.

"Contact lens. Contact," volunteered Murdock. "That's what this operation used to be called, Project Contact." He pressed a quick series of buttons, and all the lights on Mulder's panel lit up. "You're up and running, Mr. Mulder."

"What do I do?" asked Mulder, peering eagerly at the labels attached to the controls at his station. His eyes were dancing like a kid's at Christmas.

"That's weapons," Murdock said absently, his concentration on the dials in front of him. "It's some kind of plasma beam, that's about all I know." He pulled back on a lever and the ship began to rotate slowly in place. "Hmm, having these things actually working makes this baby a whole lot more responsive." He rotated a device that resembled nothing so much as an Atari joystick and the ship rose into the air. On the ground below, the guards flattened themselves against walls and under tables. "Oh, you love to fly, don't you, sweetheart," Murdock crooned softly to the ship. "Let's get you out of this cage and see what you can do." He took off in a slow circle around the hangar.

The observer watched the monitor, stone-faced as his prized possession began to fly around the silo. After a moment, he turned to the base commander, who had replaced the hapless security chief. The commander looked ill. "We have an ident on the fifth man," he reported tentatively.

"I can tell you who he is," Stockwell snapped from the screen. "Captain H.M. Murdock. He was the A-Team's pilot during the war, and has been collaborating with them ever since. How is it that this helicopter pilot learned to fly that ship? Who talked?"

The commander's head came up sharply. "No one talked," he snapped. "Outside of this base, there are four men in the world who know how to fly that plane. Two are catatonic in a hospital in Switzerland, and one is a raving psychotic in an asylum in Bangkok. None have spoken a coherent sentence in more than fifteen years."

"And?"

The commander lowered his gaze reluctantly. "Captain Murdock is the fourth."

"Is that so?" Stockwell's face was unreadable.

"He was one of the initial pilots on the project," the observer said, lighting another of his endless chain of cigarettes. "Like the others, he collapsed under pressure, but at that time we didn't have the security control techniques refined. Even so, at that time it seemed adequate - none of the washouts demonstrated any memory for the operation, even well after the fact."

"There was a war on, General," the commander reminded Stockwell, "and good pilots were needed. All the washouts who were capable volunteered for reassignment to the Delta, where they served their country to the last."

"Captain Murdock was, regrettably, too competent," Stockwell concluded, "and survived the war?"

"Accidents do happen. But like the others, he snapped, a few years later. He's been in the nuthatch in L.A. since 1972. He was never considered to be a security risk." The commander's jaw tightened. "It would appear that no one has monitored him recently. Captain Murdock was released from the V.A. in 1987 and has been openly affiliated with the A-Team ever since."

"You knew about this," the observer accused Stockwell. The general looked back coolly.

"Of course I knew Murdock was with the A-Team. They were working for me. How should I have known he was one of the test pilots in the 60s? That was before my affiliation with the project began. You control all the records of the early tests."

The commander observed the tension between his two superiors and decided to try to change the subject. "Regardless, what are we going to do now? They have the ship, they know how to fly it. If they figure out the armaments they will be essentially unstoppable. They have

already disabled the remote pilot controls," he added unnecessarily.

The two men glared at each other. "We'll have to contact them, try to negotiate them into bringing it down," Stockwell said finally. "I would recommend that you open contact . . . Colonel Smith and I did not part on the best of terms."

The other smiled without humor. "As I recall he threatened to 'cut your black heart out and feed it to the crows.' Remember, Stockwell, I have my sources too. I suspect that Agent Mulder is not going to be entirely enthusiastic about talking to me."

"Why, just because he knows you had him burned alive? I can't think why that would upset him."

The observer ignored Stockwell's sarcastic remark and turned to the commander, who was growing increasingly uncomfortable as the others snarled at each other. "Scramble the fighters. It may be most opportune to destroy all the evidence."

"That would be a pity," Stockwell remarked.

The observer shrugged minutely and exhaled a long stream of smoke. "The project cannot be compromised."

Scully looked at Face, who gave her a reassuring grin. "Snickers bar?" he offered, producing one from his knapsack.

Scully suddenly realized she was ravenous. "That is the most sensible thing anyone has said all day," she replied, ripping the wrapper off and wolfing the candy down.

"All night, actually," Face corrected her, glancing at his watch. "It's half past five in the morning, according to the outside world."

"What day?" Scully was finding the sweetness and familiar chewiness of the candy bar oddly stabilizing, a piece of normality in an otherwise insane situation.

"It's the fourteenth. Sunday." Face levered his injured leg up onto the bench and gritted his teeth as he began unwinding the saturated bandage around his knee.

Scully bestirred herself to cross the narrow aisle. "What happened?" she asked, examining the wound with professional expertise.

Face bit back a sharp response and restricted himself to the obvious answer. "I got shot."

"Really? I would never have guessed." She smiled through the sarcasm, and Face knew she was regaining her balance. Mulder had mentioned that his partner was a doctor, and Face relaxed to let her probe the bullet hole.

Scully's loose smock snagged on a mysterious protuberance from the wall as she reached for the medical kit in B.A.'s knapsack. "Here, suggested Face, slipping off his own belt and wrapping it around her waist. "It's the latest in kidnap-victim chic."

"Thanks." Scully knotted the belt, turning her bedsheet smock into a tunic-style dress, and went back to the medicine kit, which was stocked with supplies for anything from snakebite to performing transfusions or chest surgery. "Ready for anything, aren't you?" she remarked, selecting a bottle of anesthetic and a small syringe and beginning to fill one from the other.

"Boy Scouts motto, 'be prepared'." Face held up the three fingered scouts' salute. "We had no idea what condition you'd be in."

"I'm fine, now that I've had some chocolate," she smiled. "You, however, appear to have lost a significant amount of blood. You really ought to stay off your feet, you know."

"The thought had occurred to me."

"The bleeding has just about stopped." She tested the syringe, squirting a few drops into the air. "This'll take effect in a few minutes, then I'll get a fresh bandage on it. Try not to run around any more, and you can probably get by without a transfusion."

Face started to tell her not to inject him, then changed his mind. For better or for worse, they were in Murdock's hands as long as they were in the air - there was not much he could do. The adrenaline he'd been running on since taking the bullet was wearing off, and the throbbing pain from his leg was making him sufficiently vague that the anesthetic could only improve things. Scully injected the painkiller into his wounded leg, and Face relaxed as the cool numbness spread up his leg. "Question for you, Doctor Scully. Do you know what these are?"

Scully carefully examined the crumpled papers. "It's some kind of experimental protocol," she said slowly. "Human subjects, here, and non-human here, maybe animal." She pointed to two different paragraphs that made no sense at all to Face. "This is smallpox vaccine . . ." she trailed off, reading and muttering to herself in medical jargon.

Face frowned. "Smallpox vaccine? They don't give that any more, do they? I thought it had been eradicated."

"It was . . . this is an old study. Look at the dates; some of these protocols began almost thirty years ago. A lot about genetic matching, blood typing . . . has Mulder seen this yet?"

"No . . . he's been kind of busy. Why?"

"This may have to do with the disappearance

of his sister."

"When did she disappear? Same time you were kidnapped?"

"No, Samantha disappeared more than twenty years ago. 1972."

"Really? That was a very interesting year." Mulling on that, Face leaned back against the wall and closed his eyes, as Scully turned to see what the others were doing in the cockpit.

"Let's get this baby into the open air," suggested Hannibal. "Those guys down there are starting to get antsy." He pointed at the guards on the floor beneath them, some of whom were pointing rifles at the errant ship.

Murdock snorted. "They can't take us down with just rifles. Maybe with a rocket launcher, but I doubt it. We're the most heavily armed ship around." Nonetheless, he pushed forward on the joystick, and the ship swung into a steep climb, rapidly approaching the circular hatch at the top of the silo. "Mulder, would you be so kind as to open the door?"

Mulder looked frantically over the array of controls on the panel before him. "How?"

Murdock brought the ship to a hover before the hatch and pointed at two switches and a small screen on Mulder's panel. "Aim, fire. Point and shoot, man, just like a Nikon camera."

Mulder hesitantly adjusted one switch until a small blue light was centered on the screen, then gently tapped the other. A narrow beam of piercing blue light flashed from above them, and the hatch was no longer there. "I'll be damned," Mulder said softly. "I vaporized it." Dawn light poured through the opening. With a hair-raising howl, Captain H.M. Murdock piloted them out into the Nevada morning.

The passengers kept their gaze away from the stomach-churning gyrations of the world outside as Murdock took the little ship through its paces. What was most disconcerting, they found, was the way the ship seemed blithely oblivious of principles of conservation of momentum. Murdock took them through antics that no human-designed vessel could perform, split second changes of altitude and direction that didn't seem possible, yet inside, the ship was as steady as a rock. After a moment Scully turned back to Face and resumed her first aid. "You know," she remarked softly, "the pilots that Mulder and I saw at that airbase in Idaho were completely insane. Mulder thought it was due to hyperstress on the body or brain from performing maneuvers beyond human capability."

Face looked thoughtful. "Murdock was in the psychiatric ward of the V.A. for fifteen years," he observed.

"But I'm cured now!" Murdock crowed from the cockpit. "One hundred percent sane, got my papers and everything!" Mulder and Hannibal exchanged glances, but didn't remark. The pilot went on in a more subdued tone, "As long as you're not feeling the G-force, you'll be fine." To prove the point, he balanced a pencil on the tip of his finger as he put the ship into a dizzying series of barrel rolls. The pencil bobbed unsteadily for a moment, then tumbled to the floor as if they were still sitting in the hangar. "This baby's got inertia dampers that I don't even pretend to understand. Presumably, the original pilots could push it a lot harder than we weak humans, but who knows? Even being conservative as I always am, we can outmaneuver anything they've got to throw at us and not have any trouble with our tummies."

"What's the range on this thing?" Hannibal asked.

"Anywhere you want to go. It's solar powered," Murdock responded promptly.

"Anywhere?" There was a gleam in Hannibal's eye.

"Well, this is an atmospheric craft," Murdock amended. "I don't know if it operates outside the stratosphere or not. We could always find out."

Hannibal shook his head firmly. "Not right now. I think first we'll have a little talk with Stockwell and his cronies." A light on the console in front of him had begun to flash. "In fact, I believe that's him calling right now. Put us into a holding pattern, Murdock." He pressed the 'answer' button. The screen flickered and resolved into Stockwell's familiar features. "Hi, general, how's tricks?" Hannibal asked cheerfully.

"You and your men are in a lot of trouble," Stockwell informed him curtly, "and I'm not going to help you out on this one."

"How do you figure that?"

"You have broken into a top-security military installation and stolen a highly classified piece of experimental hardware," Stockwell snapped.

Hannibal shrugged. "Not the first time," he pointed out. "In fact, we've done so on your orders in the past."

"You're not under my orders now, and you're not under my protection - "

Hannibal interrupted him. "And we can't tell you how good it feels."

Stockwell paused, and his gaze flickered as if he was looking at someone off screen. "I have news for you, Colonel Smith. A squadron of fighters are on their way to your position. If you

men do not surrender that ship immediately, you will be blown out of the sky."

Hannibal laughed. "I like that, Stockwell, you've still got your sense of humor. You know the abilities of this ship as well as I do, probably better, in fact. You know that there's nothing you can send up here that can take us down. You don't want to get a lot of innocent flyboys hurt while we experiment with this laser beam, do you?" He signaled to Mulder, who promptly obliterated a boulder on the desert below.

Stockwell switched to his backup plan without batting an eye. "We know you have a wounded man. He's going to need medical attention, you'll have to land soon and we'll be waiting for you."

"Try again. Agent Scully, remember her? Your boys kidnapped her for investigating your secret base? She's a doctor, Stockwell. Face is getting the medical treatment he needs." Hannibal was enjoying this immensely.

"Ah yes, how is lovely Agent Scully? And Mr. Mulder, he's with you too, isn't he? I have someone who wants to speak with him." The screen split in two and another familiar face appeared.

"Mr. Mulder, you have wreaked untold damage to the project your father devoted his life to."

Mulder leaned over. "That's rich coming from you, you cancerous sonofabitch. You killed my father when he started getting uncomfortable with your little 'project'. You tried to kill me and you kidnapped my partner. We're gonna blow the lid off your dirty little secrets."

"You are jeopardizing your lives, Mr. Mulder," Stockwell pointed out, "not to mention your careers, by associating with the A-Team. Are you aware that they are convicted murderers, under sentence of death?"

"We were framed," Face remarked from the back of the ship.

"By you and your associates," Murdock contributed.

Scully stepped in front of the camera pickup, holding the papers Face had given her. "What about these 'experiments'?" she demanded. "We have the documents now, the proof that you've been engaging in experiments on innocent and unknowing citizens for more than twenty years. How many of those subjects died as a result of your 'project'? How many lives have you destroyed in your experiments?"

"Forgeries," the observer dismissed her. "You have no proof of anything."

"Oh, I think she does," Hannibal said, his voice hard. "By themselves these may not hold



all the answers, but they fill in too many holes to be ignored. These will start people asking questions, questions you don't want to answer. And once it starts to unravel . . . I think a lot of old secrets will be exposed. You have a lot to answer for."

"What you people have done is worse than murder," Mulder snarled at the screen. "You buried the truth, but it's out there and we've found it."

"And what are you going to do with it, Mr. Mulder?" Stockwell's face was expressionless.

"How about we land this baby on the roof of the White House?" suggested Murdock.

"Or drop these files off at CNN?" Scully volunteered.

"Publicity is just what you don't want," Hannibal observed to the two men on the split screen monitor. "And unless we can talk some turkey, that's exactly what we're gonna give you. I suggest you play nice, or we're gonna take our toys and go on the news."

Stockwell glared back at him, not giving an inch. "I have something you want too, Colonel Smith. I can still arrange those pardons. You can go back to being free men."

"That's a start," Hannibal conceded, "but only a start. Doesn't give Mulder and Scully here anything for their efforts. You're gonna have to do better than that."

Stockwell remained silent, and the other spoke up. "I can guarantee your reinstatement at the FBI."

"That's a call," Face observed, "since he's the one who got you booted out anyway. Raise."

"Can you bring my sister back to life?" Scully asked bitterly. "Or Mulder's father?"

"Some things are beyond my control," the observer said tightly, exhaling a long stream of smoke. "Be reasonable, Agent Scully."

"How about Samantha?" Mulder asked suddenly. "Can you give me back my sister?"

"It may not be impossible." With that curt remark, he signaled somebody off screen and the screen went blank. After a moment Stockwell reappeared alone.

"I think our negotiations will reach a satisfactory conclusion," the general said to Hannibal, sounding pleased.

Hannibal laughed again. "You think so, huh?" He turned away and looked out the viewscreen. They were hovering high above the Nevada desert, still in the holding pattern Murdock had set. In the distance, a flash of sunlight on metal indicated that the enemy fighters were on their way, but Hannibal dismissed them from his mind for the time being. Stockwell wasn't about to start a firefight, not yet. The rising sun turned the ground below into a rainbow of colors, and their shadow was a tiny purple smudge streaking across the sand. "Gonna be a great day," Hannibal said to himself. He looked around at his team: a gilded giant unconscious on the floor, a wounded con artist stretched across the back bench, a female doctor dressed in a bedsheet, an obsessed FBI agent manning a plasma weapon like no other in the world, and a pilot who was unquestionably mad. All of them wanted by the law of the land for multiple charges, and sitting in a ship that would, when announced, change the face of society for ever. "You think so?" Hannibal repeated, turning back to Stockwell. "I think we hold all the cards. Get used to it, Stockwell. From now on, we do it my way."



# AGENDA

by Brandon Kaonohi

*Inspiration for this story comes from "The A-Team" television series (1983-87) created by Frank Lupo and Stephen J. Cannel, "The X-Files" television series (1993-current) created by Chris Carter and the novel and movie "Seven Days in May" by Fletcher Knebel, Charles W. Bailly II (novel) and Rod Sterling (screenplay).*

- Prologue -

Cancer Man walks down a long hallway in the U.S. Pentagon. He walks through a doorway and into a huge, vault-like room filled with catalog boxes. He walks up to one of these boxes and removes from his jacket pocket a small vial containing a metallic object. He places it into one of the boxes with almost a dozen identical vials. He puts the box back in place and walks away . . .

November 12, 1995

1:30pm

FBI Headquarters

Washington DC

Agent Fox Mulder, sitting in his basement office, is reading some old X-Files. He comes across one marked X-130130, is intrigued by the numbers and opens it. The file contains an intelligence report from the Vietnam War about UFO sightings by military units in 'Nam - special operation units, in fact. The first sighting was by an officer by the name of Captain H.M. Murdock, who stated that while flying a helicopter during a night extraction he saw an unidentified flying object on his way out. This sighting was confirmed by the commanding officer of the extracted unit, Colonel John Smith, and the intelligence officer, Lieutenant Templeton Peck. However, the file stated that after the incident, an investigation turned up nothing, even though three other units in the area also reported the same event. It was dismissed as V.C. movement, but the soldiers' descriptions were not consistent with any type of aircraft the Vietnamese not only had then, but now as well.

Mulder decides to look further into this case by accessing the service records of the officers involved in the sighting. However, all he can find is that they were a special commando team, that all records of their assignments were classified, and that they had been arrested and charged with robbing the Bank of Hanoi in January of 1972. They escaped and were not re-captured for

fourteen years, at which time they were court-martialed and sentenced to execution. The file ends there, not stating the date and time and if they actually had been executed. As Mulder digs deeper, trying to find out the details of their execution, he is stopped every step of the way by dead ends and missing documents.

After two weeks of trying the "official channels," he goes home. That night he tapes an "X" to his window, lights it with a lamp and goes to sleep. The next morning when he steps out to get his paper, he notices handwriting on the paper, over the front page of the sports section, which reads:

*Behind the Jefferson Memorial 1am.*

November 30, 1995

11:30am

U.S. Senate Offices

Deciding to forego work, Mulder goes to visit one last source, Senator Matheson. As he arrives at the U.S. Senate offices he is met by a small army unit. A man with silver oak leaves on his uniform walks up to him.

"What do you know about Smith?"

"Excuse me?" comes Mulder's feeble reply.

"My name is Colonel Decker, United States Army. You've been making inquiries about a Colonel John Smith. Why?"

"Uh, well frankly . . ."

"Well frankly sir, he is a wanted man. Wanted for the murder of a military officer."

"Yes, I know, and that's all I . . ."

"Agent Mulder, I don't think that's all you know."

"Didn't your mother tell you it's impolite to keep interrupting people?"

"Listen Agent Mulder, I don't give a damn about manners, I've been hunting this S.O.B. for fifteen years and I will do anything to get my hands on him."

"I don't know any more than you do, and frankly if I did, I don't think I'd have to explain myself to you," says Mulder as he presses his

way past the colonel.

Four MPs point their guns at Mulder and stand in his way. Mulder turns to the colonel and says, "Listen, if you have a problem with me, talk to Assistant Director Skinner. I've done nothing illegal so you'd better . . ."

"I'd better what?"

Suddenly Senator Matheson walks down the stairs and sees the hoopla.

"What's problem here, Colonel," questions the Senator.

"Nothing sir, just asking the agent here a few questions . . ."

"I see. Well, are you done?"

"Yes, sir."

"Then be on your way, Colonel."

"Yes, sir . . . *Move out*," shouts Decker in disgust.

"Mr. Mulder, you're making enemies faster than friends to defend you."

"Yes, sir. Maybe I should take one of those infommercial seminars and bone up on friend-making."

Senator Matheson smiles. "You wish to see me?"

"Well I'm not here to donate to Bob Dole's campaign fund."

"Let's have lunch," says the Senator with a smirk.

---

1:00am

Jefferson Memorial

Mulder stands alone in the Washington cold. Donning his trenchcoat he tries to blow warm breath into his hands.

"Cold, Mr. Mulder?"

"Yeah. Why couldn't we meet somewhere warmer, like maybe a Knicks game?"

"You've been inquiring about a commando unit assigned in Vietnam in 1972?"

"What do you know - that I don't, I mean. Why can't I find any records of their execution? What do you know about them?"

"When they robbed the Bank of Hanoi, they were under military orders."

"From Colonel Morrison?"

"Among them."

"During the court martial in 1986, only three men were on trial but the records say there were four members in the A-Team."

"The last was the pilot of the helicopter. He could not be linked with the others and was legally institutionalized in a V.A. hospital."

"Where?"

Mr. X pulls a file folder from his trenchcoat

marked "TOP SECRET". "Here is the rest of the information on these men that you were unable to access. The name and location of the V.A. Hospital where the pilot resides is in there."

"I thought he was discharged."

"So did he."

"Then, he *is* reachable."

"As are the others, if you really want to find them."

Mulder opens the file and reads a few lines. "This says that they recovered a UFO. According to an X-File, they only spotted one."

"The X-File only shows the official report, Agent Mulder."

"Who is Captain Josh Curtis?"

"Read on."

"According to this report, he testified at the Team's court martial against them, and he died in an accident during the trial. What happened to . . ."

A group of drunk teenagers come around the corner, singing. They stare at Mulder for a second and then burst out laughing. Mulder turns to where Mr. X had been standing, but sees no trace of him. Mulder puts the file in his coat and walks away, muttering, "Must be close to finals . . ."

---

December 1, 1995

9:00am

FBI Headquarters

Washington DC

Mulder is sitting behind his desk watching "Debbie Does Dallas." Agent Scully walks through the doorway and immediately looks to see what is intriguing Mulder.

"Hmmm . . . new training video?"

"The star says she saw UFOs six consecutive nights during the filming of this video. They abducted her and instructed her how to give 'intergalactic head'."

"Well, I've never given head like that before," replies Scully sarcastically.

"Exactly how do you gi-" starts Mulder until he sees the "uh-uh" look from his partner.

"So, what is it today," asks Scully, picking up Mulder's copy of The National Enquirer. "Big Foot in Las Vegas or Elvis in a hardware store in Iowa?"

"I say Westwood, Los Angeles."

"Why? No stories about that place on 'Hard Copy'."

"In 1972, three commandos, part of a unit called 'The A-Team', recovered a UFO in Vietnam. They wanted to go public, but the CIA operating in

the area at the time decided against it."

"So . . ."

"So three days later, under orders, they attempted to rob The Bank of Hanoi. Afterwards during some shelling, their C.O., a Colonel Morrison, was killed. They contended that they robbed the bank under Morrison's orders and that he was killed in the mortar shelling. The military didn't believe them and they were charged and were to be court-martialed, but they escaped. Fourteen years later they were re-captured and court-martialed, under a new charge - Murder in the First."

"Where did that come from?"

"Testimony was presented that their C.O. was a V.C. agent and that they killed him when they found out."

"So they're dead?"

"No, well, they were executed in 1986, in front of fourteen witnesses, but when they were to be buried, their bodies were missing."

"What's your curiosity about this case."

"According to the rest of this file, an alien was captured and executed. Deep Throat once told me that he was with the Company in Vietnam and that he executed an alien there."

"And you want to know if your martyr was behind this?"

"I want the truth."

"And it's in Westwood?"

"The chopper pilot that was with the unit at the time is in the V.A. hospital there. I want to hear what he has to say."

---

December 3, 1995

3:30pm

Veterans' Administration Hospital

Westwood, Los Angeles

Mulder and Scully walk through the hospital to a courtyard in the rear; they choose a table with four chairs and sit. After about ten minutes, two orderlies come out with a man. Mulder stands.

"Captain Murdock?" asks Scully.

"No, I am," replies Murdock.

"Uh . . . we're Federal Agents. I'm Dana Scully and this is Fox Mulder."

"Quick as?"

"Excuse me?" says Scully.

"A fox," Mulder jumps in.

"Captain, we were wondering . . . what do you know about the A-Team?"

"The A-Team? The A-Team . . . Wasn't there a show in the eighties called that? No . . . no . . . that was 'Airwolf' . . . The team . . . well, I'll be damned. I haven't seen them in over twenty

years . . ."

"Not according to my sources," says Mulder.

"Big brother's always watching, huh." Murdock winks. "I guess that's why I'm back in this loony bin."

"You think you're being watched?" asks Scully.

"Who wants to tail a nut? So, if you think you know I've seen them, why did you bother to ask?"

"Look Captain, we're not here to capture them. I work with X-Files and I am interested in the UFO you recovered in 1972 near Hanoi," Mulder replies.

"UFO, eh?" Murdock leans toward Mulder and says, "Come back in two days and my memory might be better -" moving away - "It was just a V.C. chopper, man . . . Hell, I'm so nuts I had breakfast with Bugs Bunny."

---

10:00am

December 4, 1995

Veterans' Administration Hospital

Westwood, Los Angeles

The next morning, two men walk into the V.A. hospital.

"Here to see H.M. Murdock, sonny . . ."

"And you are . . . ?" asks the charge nurse.

"Carl . . . Carl Murdock the Third, H.M.'s grand uncle."

"I've never seen you before. And you?"

"I'm Norton Murdock, Carl's grandson . . . Murdock's my cousin, we've been living in Italy for the last fifteen years, kinda lost track of relatives. We found out ol' H.M.'s here and decided to pay him a visit."

"Well, I'm sure he'll be happy. He hasn't had visitors in a long time."

The nurse instructs two orderlies to escort Murdock's grand uncle and cousin to his room. They do so and leave.

"Hey, Murdock."

"Boy, am I happy to see my long lost cousin!"

"Murdock, it's me, Face."

"Aw. Just play on my emotions why don't you."

"Enough, Murdock," cuts in Hannibal, taking a seat on Murdock's bed. "You called?"

"Yeah, two feds came by yesterday asking questions about the UFO we recovered in 'Nam. They say they aren't after you, but they want the 411 on the UFO."

"Really, that's a new one," says Face. "Boy, the Pentagon's really turning on the heat to

catch us, eh?"

"What were their names?" inquires Hannibal.

"Umm . . . one was Fox Mulder and the other was a tasty dish named Scully. She's your type, Faceman."

"Scully? Not Dana Scully?" asks Hannibal.

"You know them?" Face wonders.

"I knew a William Scully. He was a Navy lieutenant commander when I met him. When I was a captain in the 101, we did some maneuvers with the carrier he was stationed on. He had a newborn daughter named Dana. We kept in contact a bit but after I went to 'Nam, we lost touch afterwards. I think he went into Naval Intelligence or something."

"Could be a connection," says Murdock.

"Face, I want you to look up these Mulder and Scully characters."

"Not again, you know I hate military installations! Besides, I'm getting kinda old for this kind of work."

---

9:55pm

December 4, 1995

Veterans' Administration Hospital  
Westwood, Los Angeles

A blackout puts the hospital in a frenzy with five minutes until lockdown. Orderlies are so busy rounding up patients that no one thinks anything when B.A. and Face, dressed like fellow orderlies, push a gurney around and right out the door.

---

11:00pm

Conference Room 202 in the Westwood Library

Hannibal starts the meeting, "Report, Face."

Face stands up, facing the Team. "Well, from what I could find, Agent Fox Mulder was an outstanding agent until his fascination with these so called 'X-Files' turned him into a Bureau outcast. His father, William Mulder, was in the State Department until 1979, when he resigned. He was killed in 1995. Mulder has a sister who has been missing since she was eight. Ms. Scully is a medical doctor, but instead of working her residency with a hospital she joined the FBI. She has been partners with Agent Mulder since 1993. Her father was William Scully, Hannibal - Captain William Scully, who died in 1993."

"Sounds like typical FBI," says B.A.

"All except these X-Files. Now, why would a bright young agent ruin his career chasing UFOs?" asks Murdock.

"According to my sources he claims his sister was abducted by them," replies Face.

"We still can't trust government," interjects B.A. "They're all out to get us."

"Sounds right, B.A.," says Hannibal, "but once they expose the truth, maybe we can clear our names."

"But how are we going to prove that the government set us up because we were going public with the UFO?" Face asks.

"True, but we've been on the run for twenty-four years . . . and we will be until the day we die unless we find a way to clear our names," replies Hannibal.

"Man's got a point," says a weary B.A.

"Okay then, B.A., Face. Get Murdock back to the V.A."

---

12:00am

December 5, 1995

Motel 6, Room 204

Agent Mulder is sitting and watching TV in his single motel room. He is reading the files X had given him earlier when the phone rings.

"Yes, who is this?"

"Who you've been looking for. Go to Jefferies Middle School, room C102 tomorrow night between eight and eleven. Bring no one but your partner. If we see anyone else we won't be there."

*\*CLICK\**

---

9:00pm

December 5, 1995

Jefferies Middle School Room C102

"Did he say who he was?"

"No, just to make sure we were alone."

Suddenly from behind them, a voice calls, "Agents Mulder and Scully?"

The two agents turn around and see three men standing behind them, pointing M-16's at them.

"Nice," says Scully, reaching for her service gun.

"Don't," warns Hannibal. "Let me introduce myself . . ."

"Colonel Smith," interrupts Mulder.

"Indeed," replies Hannibal as he slings his rifle behind him and lights a cigar, "and this is Lieutenant Templeton Peck . . ."

"Face," corrects Peck.

"And Sergeant Bosco - excuse me - 'B.A.' Baracus."

"What does the B.A. stand for?" asks Mulder.

"Bad Attitude, fool," touts B.A.

"Nice 'do," responds Mulder, indicating B.A.'s graying mohawk.

"The A-Team," continues Scully. "So what about . . ."

". . . Not so fast, hot stuff," interrupts Hannibal. "I want to make one thing perfectly clear. Frankly, we know the truth and no longer have any real need to expose it. All we want is to clear our names. We've been on the lam since '72 and we're getting tired of it. So, you help us do that, and we'll help you expose the truth."

"You've got a deal."

"Mulder," whispers Scully, "are you sure we can trust them?"

"We can't trust anyone, Scully."

---

10:30am

December 7, 1995

FBI Headquarters

Washington DC

"You wanted to see me, Skinner?"

"Yes, Agent Mulder, come in. It has come to certain people's attention that you have been in contact with the A-Team."

"A-Team, sir?"

"Agent Mulder, those men have been wanted since 1972. They are to be executed as soon as they are captured."

"I don't know . . ."

"Agent Mulder." Mulder turns around and sees a cloud of smoke. "What do you take us for?"

"You again."

Cancer Man appears from behind the smoke and confronts Mulder. "They have been of no consequence up to now."

"But now they threaten to expose you."

"They will be found and eliminated," responds Cancer Man as he walks out the back door to Skinner's office.

"I can't believe you're helping them."

"Look, Mulder, I work for the United States government, and so do you for that matter. Those men are wanted, and we have taken an oath to capture and prosecute criminals."

"But they were set up, sir. The government was trying to suppress UFO evidence and had them framed to make sure they didn't tell what they saw."

"And you can prove this?"

"Not right now; I need some time. And they are willing to testify."

"No one will believe criminals."

"Give me a chance."

"I'll help, but only legally. As I said before - this is not my cause."

---

11:30pm

Veterans' Administration Hospital

Westwood, Los Angeles

Another blackout occurs at the V.A. hospital. This time, however, two men show up, flashing badges and transfer forms.

"We're here to pick up Captain Murdock."

"Who are you? Get those lights out of my face!" yells the charge nurse.

"We're here to transfer him now," says Cancer Man, emerging behind the men, his trademark Morley in his mouth.

Suddenly six men in black fatigues storm in and head right for Murdock's room.

"Get up!" one of them shouts.

They grab Murdock and drag him kicking and screaming out the front door. Cancer Man throws a transfer order at the nurse and leaves. Outside, they throw Murdock to the ground, cuff his hands and feet, put him in a sack and throw him in a black chopper. The men get in, followed by Cancer Man, and the chopper takes off into the darkness.

---

6:00am

December 8, 1995

Home of Amy Allen

Los Angeles

*\*CREAK\**

"Mmmm . . . what the . . ."

Suddenly Amy's mouth is taped shut and Cancer Man appears.

"I suggest you make this easy on all of us, Ms. Allen."

As the men pick up Amy she kicks one in the jewels and tries to run for the window. Just as she reaches the window, another man comes through it and punches her in the face, knocking her out.

---

6:30am

Home of Frankie Santana

Hollywood

"Dishpan" is getting ready for his morning jog. He opens the door and is greeted by two men in black fatigues.

"What the he-"

One of the men hits Frankie in the face with the butt of his rifle, knocking him out.

---

9:00am  
42nd Street  
Manhattan

"I hope these men will not be a problem."

"They will not," replies a sweaty Cancer Man. "We have one member of the Team and two known associates already, and we will use them to make sure the others don't talk."

"That's not good enough," says Fat Man from the corner.

"Yes," agrees Well-Manicured Man. "We want them eliminated. Perhaps we should handle this internally. After you botched the Scully assassination and allowed Alex Krycek to get away with the digital tape - not to mention Cardinal going rogue."

"The Krycek and Cardinal incidents were fixed and the data tape was recovered. As for Scully, she is not an immediate threat."

"Not an immediate threat!" yells Well-Manicured Man. "She and Mr. Mulder are threatening to expose our operation!"

"The matter will be handled," says Cancer Man as he scurries back out the door.

---

9:00pm  
Coffee house near the Mall  
Washington DC

"Another cappuccino?"

"We're fine, ma'am," replies Hannibal. Turning to Mulder, he says, "I've received some disturbing news. Murdock was kidnapped last night - well, officially transferred, but nobody knows where."

"I don't . . ."

"That's right, you don't. This is getting out of hand," says Hannibal.

"I'm sorry, Colonel, I'll try to . . ."

Suddenly everyone shuts up as Face walks in with a grim expression. He throws a copy of the late edition Los Angeles Times at Mulder.

"What's wrong, Lieutenant?" asks Scully.

"Read on . . ." replies Face as he orders a

cappuccino and sits down next to B.A.

"L.A. Times reporter and Hollywood stunt coordinator kidnapped'," reads Mulder, skimming the article. "They didn't arrive at work and no one knows where they are . . . evidence of a struggle at Miss Allen's home . . . neighbor witnessed Frankie being taken away . . . speculation that the events are connected."

"Agent Mulder, talking to you no longer seems to be in our best interest. Three members of our Team are missing since we've talked to you. What the hell is going on?"

"I don't know, but I can try to . . ."

"Do better than try, Badge, and remember, we know where you live."

---

8:30pm  
December 9, 1995  
Smithsonian Institute

"Mr. Mulder, you have been relying too much on me lately."

"What are you saying . . ."

"I'm saying these hasty public meetings may jeopardize my position, like it did for my predecessor."

"Who kidnapped Captain Murdock and the reporter and stunt man in L.A.?"

"You know who."

"Why?"

"To make sure the truth doesn't get out."

"Because the A-Team can confirm the existence of UFOs?"

"It goes much deeper than that. You may want to end your search into this matter here." X then turns to walk away.

Mulder takes his gun out, grabs X and throws him against the wall. "I want the truth, damn it!"

"Mr. Mulder, the truth, this time, is closer to you than to me."

"My father - was my father involved! And Deep Throat . . . was he the one who executed the alien, in Vietnam?"

X just gives Mulder a blank stare.

"Tell me, damn you!"

"I cannot."

"Then what good are you?"

"You wouldn't have what you have now without . . ."



". . . And what the hell is that? I just have more questions!"

"When you run out of questions, it's all over."

8:30pm

DC's Martini's Restaurant and Bar

"Ms. Scully, how nice to see you could make it. Do you mind if I call you Dana?"

"Well, since I'm off duty, why not. So why did you have to meet me so urgently, Lieutenant?"

"Not so quickly, Dana, and please call me Face," he says as he pulls Scully's seat out for her.

"Thank you, Face. Nice nickname - why 'Face'?"

"Because I'm a man of a thousand faces," he replies, taking his own seat.

"Like the charm you're using now?"

"No no no, the charm is actually authentic for me."

"I see."

"We'll have a bottle of your finest champagne," says Face to the waiter, then he asks Scully, "You do drink, don't you?"

"Only when off duty. You wouldn't be trying to seduce me now, would you, Face?"

"Me? Well, maybe. Is there anything between you and your partner?"

"Nothing more than work."

Face smiles as he hands Scully her menu. "Money's no object."

"I guess being a soldier of fortune pays well."

"Sometimes, but every once in awhile Hannibal decides to do a freebie, and they usually end up being the hardest assignments . . ."

After dinner Face and Scully take a walk through the Mall along a lighted path.

"You know, Lieutenant . . . sorry, Face, this really hasn't been a bad evening. Still got your charm after all these years on the run, hmm?"

"Well, that's how I stay alive."

Eventually they end up at the hotel Face is staying at and in his room.

"Another drink, Dana?"

"I think I've had enough tonight . . ."

"Aw, come on . . . I don't want to have a nightcap alone."

"Maybe one more."

After three more nightcaps, Face decides it's now or never. He leans over and lightly kisses Scully on the lips. She tries to resist, but

the alcohol takes over and she starts kissing back. He unbuttons her blouse and begins to fondle her supple breasts while she reaches between his legs.

6:30am

December 10, 1995

\*RING\*

"Huh? What happened . . . ? Oh, no . . ."

\*RING\*

Scully gets up off the floor where she and Face had spent the night. She reaches for her underwear and finds them ripped too severely to wear again.

\*RING\*

Face awakens and looks at Scully. He starts to "rise" and Scully covers herself with her blouse. Face reaches for his phone but the ringing continues.

"Must be mine," says Scully as she gets up and runs to her trenchcoat. She pulls it on and takes the phone out. "Hello?"

"Scully? Are you okay? You sound shaky."

"Umm . . . I'm fine, Mulder. What's up?"

"Colonel Smith wants another meeting. I'll stop by and pick you up."

"Uh . . . I'm not home, I'll meet you there."

"Okay. It's Martini's, one hour."

Scully's eyes go wide. "Martini's? Umm . . . Okay, I'll be there."

As soon as she hangs up she notices Face is also on the phone.

"I guess that was Mulder saying to meet at Martini's?"

7:30am

DC's Martini's Restaurant and Bar

"Are you ready to talk?"

"Agent Mulder," says Hannibal, very perturbed, "three of our friends are missing. I get a call in the middle of the night saying if we testify, they die. Now, you tell me my motivation to stay here and not just disappear."

"Again? Well, because you'd be right back where you started in 1972."

The Team members look at each other. They shrug and order another round of cappuccinos. Hannibal starts, "In 1972, we were assigned to a special commando unit in Vietnam. One night while doing night patrols near Hanoi we got word through transmissions from three other units that an unidentified flying object was seen over the

city. An artillery unit shot it down and we were then ordered to recover it . . ."

Colonel Smith is overseeing his other troops, carrying the wreckage to their chopper.

"What the hell is this thing, Colonel?" asks the pilot.

"Beats me. Our orders are just to recover it and take it back to H.Q."

A black chopper comes over the ridge and lands about fifty feet from Colonel Smith. Colonel Morrison, accompanied by three men in dark suits, get out followed by six men in black fatigues. They run over to Lieutenant Peck and three grunts pushing a sealed gurney towards their chopper.

"Stop," says a younger-looking Cancer Man.

Peck stops and looks at Cancer Man, and then at his C.O., who is now running to join the group.

"What seems to be the problem," Smith asks Colonel Morrison.

"We're taking these," pipes in Cancer Man.

"No you're not. We have orders to transport everything recovered."

"Your orders have been changed," says a younger Deep Throat, handing the colonel a piece of paper.

The men in fatigues then take the gurney to their chopper.

"What exactly is in there, Colonel?"

"In what?" asks Colonel Morrison. "You've recovered everything in the wreck."

Suddenly the gurney falls over and the case covering it breaks. A small body falls out.

"You idiots!" yells Cancer Man. He takes a revolver out and shoots the man responsible for dropping the gurney. "Drop it again and the rest of you go home like him!"

"What the hell is that?!" yells Lieutenant Peck.

"You saw nothing," replies the youngest of the three men, Bill Mulder.

The gurney goes into the chopper and the doors close. Colonel Morrison and the three men go to the field behind the camp where all the men have been assembled. The commando unit follows them. Colonel Morrison proceeds to debrief the troops on the activities. They are told that they saw nothing and if word ever gets out, not them but their loved ones will die.

As the men walk back to the chopper, Colonel Smith runs up to them. "You're not going to get away with this, Colonel Morrison!"

"The hell I'm not, Colonel Smith. Don't try to stop them. You can't win."

"We'll see what the Senate has to say about this."

Cancer Man turns to Smith. "Don't even try to threaten us, Colonel. There is nothing you can do here but your job. You have orders and I suggest you follow them and forget today happened."

The three men and Colonel Morrison then board the chopper and it takes off . . .

"Do you know who the three men were?" asks Scully.

"Personally, no," Face responds. "But I read something about a top government official who was killed last year, who may have been one of the men."

"You never said anything before, Face," pipes in Hannibal.

"Never thought much of it at the time; just figured another enemy bites the dust."

"What happened then . . ." Mulder asks.

Hannibal continues, "We then went to our C.O., Colonel Morrison, to try to talk to him again. Two days later we received orders from the him to rob the bank of Hanoi. We went down there and did the job. When we got back we found out Colonel Morrison was killed in an artillery attack while we were in Hanoi. Murdock saw the colonel when he returned. There were two others who could have backed our story but they're also dead."

"Captain Curtis?"

"Yeah, and a Vietnamese colonel who said that Morrison was a V.C. agent and that we were set up to embarrass the U.S. Probably a front Morrison told them to keep the UFO."

Scully jumps in, "But if Morrison worked for the V.C., why would he want the U.S. to keep the UFO?"

"That, my dear, I don't know. Now the problem arises, agents, of how do we prove this? We are convicted criminals as far the U.S. government is concerned."

"I'll check my sources and see if I can uncover anything," replies Mulder.

9:00am

FBI Headquarters

Washington DC

"Where is Mulder, Assistant Director?"

"I don't know."

"Bull. I'm getting tired of this. If you're helping him . . ."

"What? I'll have a heart-attack?"

"A man your age . . ."

"Do I have to call Albert in here? I don't think you'd risk it. Or maybe you

would . . . Cardinal . . ."

Cancer Man remembers the Native American elder and his twenty tribesmen who know what his dirty laundry looks like and backs off a bit. "Louis Cardinal? He was the man who killed Scully's sister and tried to kill you, is that right?"

"And you had him killed to keep him from fingering you."

Suddenly, Alex Krycek barges in from the back door. "Freeze, you son-of-a-bitch," he screams at Cancer Man.

"Krycek!" Cancer Man exclaims.

"You left me to die. Now I'm returning the favor, you bastard!"

In the commotion Skinner draws his pistol and points it at Krycek.

"Put the gun down, Krycek."

"No! He won't pay for his crimes in any court of law. He can disappear as quickly and easily as I did."

"What are you talking about? Where have you been, Krycek?" asks Cancer Man.

"You know damn well where I've been! You stuck me in that missile silo trapped with that alien and its spaceship to die with it."

"You must be hallucinating, Krycek. I never . . ."

"Shut up you liar!"

Skinner turns to Cancer Man. "What the hell is he talking about?"

Krycek moves his gun towards Skinner. "Now, you put your gun down."

Cancer Man sees his opportunity to get rid of one more problem. He draws and fires immediately into Krycek's shoulder, forcing the former FBI agent to drop his weapon. Skinner moves for his cuffs, but Cancer Man points his weapon at Skinner. "No." Skinner drops the cuffs and gun and puts his hands up.

"Right here, in my office?"

Agents are pounding at the door. Cancer Man picks up Skinner's pistol and walks over to Krycek and fires it into his head. Then he pulls his slug from the wall and hands the pistol back to Skinner.

"You're a hero, Director. That gun," he points to Krycek's, "will match the one responsible for Bill Mulder's death. Don't forget this."

The agents outside knock the door down just as Cancer Man closes the back door behind himself.

"Good God," exclaims Byers as his jaw hits the ground.

"The A-Team!" yells Langley.

"So you've heard of them?" inquires Mulder with a smirk.

"Heard of them? These guys are legendary!" says Frohike, looking up from his magnifying glass.

"Gee, you're embarrassing us," replies Face.

"Apparently you know who we are," says Hannibal, "but who are you?"

"These are unofficial unofficial channels, Colonel," replies Mulder. "A government watchdog group. This is Langley," he points to the long-haired, hippie-type with glasses, "Byers," he points to a man with a beard and wearing a suit, "and finally Frohike," he points to a frumpy-looking man with glasses, peering out behind a huge magnifying glass.

"Government watchdog?" repeats Face.

"Obviously non-subscribers," says Langley, handing Face a copy of their newsletter, The Lone Gunmen.

"The Lone Gunmen, cute. I'm assuming you don't believe the Warren Commission."

Frohike starts laughing. "The Warren Commission! The biggest crock in U.S. history; well, until the Watergate hearings."

Mulder asks them, "Can you give us evidence exonerating the A-Team of the charges and conviction against them?"

"Evidence that you can legally use?" asks Langley.

"What about three missing persons . . ." starts Mulder.

"The three suspected of working with the A-Team. We can try to find their location, but it's going to be hell getting them out. We have the names of some covert safe-houses; we can see if they're there," says Langley.

"They're probably going to try to use them to capture the rest of you guys," said Byers. "We can't even be sure your friends are still alive."

"If they aren't," Hannibal starts and turns to Mulder, "the deal's off and we go out for blood."

"I don't see why the deal would be off," responds Mulder. "These men, if they're who I think . . ."

"And exactly who do you think kidnapped them?"

"There's a man - a cigarette smoking man, who always seems to be one step ahead of me no matter where I am or what I'm doing. I think he may be the one responsible for the kidnappings."

"Cigarettes? As long as they're not

Morley's," says Face.

Mulder just stares at the lieutenant.

"Damn, they are."

"Why?" interjects Scully.

"One of the men we met in 'Nam smoked Morley's. May be just a coincidence, but one can never be sure," says Hannibal.

"I have, *had* an address. I doubt it's still good though," Mulder says.

"We'll take the chance," Hannibal answers.

"But he won't talk. He's willing to take the truth to the grave and so are the people he works for."

---

9:00pm

900 West Georgia St.

Cancer Man is sitting in his chair in the sparsely decorated apartment. He is drinking from a bottle of Scotch and smoking one of his trademark Morley's.

"He's not worth it," comes a voice from behind. Cancer Man gets up and draws his weapon and points it at a silhouette against the window.

"You, you've taken the place of Deep Throat."

"He had a reason to help Mulder. His guilt and loyalty to Bill kept him going to Fox. I have no reason to help him. I have no need to expose the truth. It's good enough for me."

"Then why are you here? Not to ask me to a Mets game."

"His death will bring unwanted attention to the Organization and as an agent of it, I have been asked to tell you to stop. You have Murdock and the other two. Use them to persuade the A-Team to shut-up and the matter will die."

"I'm afraid that isn't an option. I no longer work solely for the Organization. Their superiors feel that it's not a wise option to let the A-Team or even Mulder and Scully live. If it exposes them, then so be it. As long as the big picture is left intact. You people can always be replaced."

X fires his weapon and so does Cancer Man. Cancer Man is hit first, skewing his shot. X takes off out the opened window.

---

10:30pm

900 West Georgia St.

The A-Team bursts into the apartment, brandishing their M-16's. B.A. kicks down the door while pointing his weapon inwards. Hannibal comes in from behind and moves right. Scully follows and goes left and B.A. runs straight

ahead. They all yell "Freeze!" and at the same time, Face and Mulder come through the open window leading to the fire escape. Mulder moves towards the light switch and turns it on.

"Damn, nobody's here," yells B.A. in disgust.

"Well, someone was here," says Mulder as he reaches down to a small pool of blood on the carpet. He takes a sample and turns to Scully. "We can finally find out who our mystery friend is."

"Oh crap!" yells Hannibal from the kitchen.

"Get out, the place's wired!"

They all scurry for the window. Mulder, the last to get out, just misses the blast as it takes out the entire second floor and starts to bring down the rest of the building.

"Everyone okay?"

Everyone answers positively except Scully, who's still laying on the ground near the building. Mulder runs over to her.

"Oh no."

Face joins him and takes Scully up in his arms. As the fire starts spreading, he moves across the street while Mulder takes out his cellular-phone and dials 911.

---

9:30am

December 11, 1995

H.Q. of The Lone Gunmen

"How's your partner?"

"They don't know yet. She has a concussion and a broken arm."

"Sorry, Mulder. We should have been more cautious."

"It's all right, Colonel. But we seem to be running short on troops here."

"Uh-oh. Man's got that look in his eye again," B.A. groans.

"Not the Jazz again, Hannibal," adds Face.

"You Gunmen, can you track down where our smoking friend is?" Hannibal asks.

"We can try, but we don't know a damn thing about him. Mulder?" responds Byers.

"Well, he does come to FBI H.Q. every once in awhile. Usually in Skinner's office."

"Okay then," interrupts Hannibal. "You plant a bug in his office and when our smoking friend comes and goes, we'll have him."

---

10:00am

FBI H.Q.

The remaining members of the A-Team and the Lone Gunmen move into position around the J.

Edgar Hoover building and watch Mulder go inside.

"Agent Mulder, what the hell were you doing there?" yells Skinner.

"You know damn well what I was doing there."

"Where is he?"

"Beats me," says Mulder, slipping the bug under Skinner's desk as he peers out the window.

"Where is the A-Team, Agent Mulder."

"I don't know."

"Why is Agent Scully in the hospital?"

"I don't know."

"Mulder, if I don't start getting some answers I'm going to have to put you on suspension."

Mulder takes out his badge and sidearm and throws them onto Skinner's desk.

"Frankly sir, the truth is more important than this stinking job," says Mulder he walks out the door.

Thirty minutes later, Cancer Man walks through Skinner's back door.

"Where the hell is Mulder?!"

"Sir, I . . . uh . . ."

"Don't stall, Skinner, I don't have time for this shit. Give me Mulder!"

"Mulder has been put on suspension as of thirty minutes ago. He turned in his badge and gun."

Cancer Man takes Mulder's gun and badge from Skinner and storms out of the room.

*"Gopher to Hen, Gopher to Hen, come in Hen."*

"Langley, stop with this stupid codename crap. What is it?" says an annoyed Byers.

*"I've just found a secret . . . oh, crap . . ."*

"Langley! Langley!"

Cancer Man walks down a dim underground tunnel beneath FBI headquarters, sticks a codecard into a groove in the brick wall and an opening behind him appears. He turns and walks through it and the door closes behind him.

"Langley!"

*"I found a secret tunnel under FBI H.Q. There's a codecard required to access the exit out of here. You'd better bring the decker board down here so we can crack it."*

"Roger, Langley. We have your position, we're coming down."

Ten minutes later Byers, Frohike and Face come down.

"Where are the other two?" asks Langley.

"They're staying up top in case we need to make a hasty get away, and actually it's three - Mulder was put on suspension," replies Frohike.

"Damn, okay, well, hook up the decker so we

can crack this system," says Langley.

"Right," says Byers as he places a credit card-looking device with long wires into the slot Cancer Man used earlier. He then hooks the wires to what looks like a keyboard with a small L.E.D. monitor. "Ready." He sets the decker on, and the L.E.D. readout runs numbers at an astronomical rate. "We should be in there in a few minutes."

"If the code is a small one," replies Langley.

Face, looking puzzled, asks, "What is that thing?"

Byers looks up. "Didn't you see 'Terminator 2'?"

Face is even more puzzled.

"It uses either a serial port or this credit card port to run access or account codes, and when it finds a valid code, it'll input it and we're in."

After about twenty minutes Byers yells, "Got it!" The doorway leads into a hallway, and as soon as the door is fully opened, the hallway lights up.

"Wow," says Face. "A lot quieter than dyanmite." Then into his walkie-talkie he calls, "Hannibal, we have access. Should we go in?"

"Wait for us."

In a few minutes, Hannibal, B.A. and Mulder join the rest of the pack. They draw their weapons and proceed down the tunnel. After what seems like forever, they finally reach the end of the tunnel and yet another door.

"Where the hell are we now?" asks B.A.

"Beats me," replies Mulder. He turns to Byers. "Can you open it?"

"I don't see why not."

Byers inserts the card into another slot and runs the same code sequence that opened the first door.

"Bingo!"

The seven men enter an empty room.

"According to this map," Langley finally jumps in, "and if I've been tracking our movement correctly, we should be directly under the center courtyard of the Pentagon."

"The Pentagon?" Mulder exclaims.

"Makes sense," adds Hannibal. "Why wouldn't they have all the major H.Q.'s connected?"

"But why in secret?"

"Who knows, but I don't think we are prepared to take on the military headquarters' guys," says Face.

"Indeed you're not," agrees a voice from the shadows.

All guns point to the voice. The figure steps out of the darkness.

"X," Mulder says.

"Who?" asks Frohike.

"Mr. Mulder, you and your friends, even as well equipped as you are, are no match for him right now."

"Uhhh . . . Mulder, do you know this man?" asks Hannibal.

"Yes. All right, X, how can we stop him, and why have you exposed yourself?"

"Our cigarette smoking friend and his associates have gone too far. They plan on enslaving the world. You see, Mr. Mulder, the men in the White House, the United Nations . . . they have no power. They are merely figureheads, pawns, to carry out a bigger agenda. I work for the Organization, as did my predecessor. We run this country, gentleman, not Mr. Clinton or any of his cohorts. There are many of us in many countries, but we all answer and follow the lead of a greater consortium who make all the real decisions. Earlier I tried to stop him, but was unable."

"But killing one man won't end this. He can be replaced," Mulder reasons.

"It won't be as easy as it sounds. It has taken him nearly fifty years to get to his position of power and influence in the U.S. government. You see, while there are those who can take his place, there are no longer any people in the Organization here in the U.S. who agree with their agenda. It would be practically impossible to get someone with enough power in this country to go along with their agenda and the U.S. will play a pivotal role in their plans. With the exception of . . ."

After a few tense moments, Mulder demands, "Of who?"

"The Chairman of the Joint Chiefs."

"General Broderick? Why would he turn? He was a hero during the Vietnam and Gulf War," says Hannibal.

"True, but he feels Mr. Clinton's lack of military experience is a detriment to the government's, and to the United States' survival."

"If we don't stop them soon, they will destroy planning that has taken the Organization fifty years to set up. The truth will be known, Mr. Mulder, and that time is soon. These men see that it will threaten their power, power that they don't want to give up anymore."

"So how do we stop it?" asks Mulder.

"As I said, we must take out as many of the consortium as possible. The cigarette-smoking man is a major key, since he is the U.S. contact - the rest would be even better. It would be hard to re-establish a new and powerful U.S. link."

"But you said the Chairman . . ."

"The Chairman, right now, is as much of a

pawn as the President. It will take a while for him to get the power the current position-holder has."

"How can we stop him?"

"You're well on your way, but don't go knocking down the front door of the Pentagon."

X hands Mulder a piece of paper. It contains a flight number, an airline, and an address.

"What's this?"

"The A-Team's friends have all been interrogated, and now they are going to be moved to three remote locations around the world. You must intercept them before they leave if you want to see them alive again. If you hit the address first, your friends will be dead before you can fire the first shot. You're going to have to get them and strike the consortium before they get the word and split to somewhere I can no longer help you."

---

3:30am

December 12, 1995

John F. Kennedy International Airport  
New York

Fifteen minutes before Murdock, Amy and Frankie are to arrive, Hannibal, Face, B.A., Mulder, Langley, Byers and Frohike show up, dressed in full military regalia.

"You men have been ordered off. We're to transport the prisoners to their new final destination," says Hannibal to a pair of uniformed soldiers.

"I'm sorry, Colonel, but we have . . ."

"You have what, soldier?! Do you see these birds? I'm giving you a direct order."

A third soldier gets up and walks over.

"With all due respect, sir, there is only one man who can give us an order."

"The man with the Morley's?"

"Yes, sir."

"Well, he couldn't be here and we are here under his orders. Now, soldier, you will follow my orders or . . ."

The rest of the Team point their M-16's at the soldiers. The soldiers look at each other.

"Uh . . . yes, sir . . ."

With that the soldiers grab their gear and take off.

"Thank God that's all it took," says Frohike, wiping his brow.

"Okay, Lieutenant, Sergeant, take Langley and Frohike and make sure that only those soldiers got in and only we get out."

"Right, Hannibal."

Face sets out and plants charges around the

perimeter of the airport while Hannibal, Mulder and Byers take their positions in the C-130.

"Who's going to fly this thing if we can pull this off?" Mulder asks Hannibal.

"Murdock."

"Will he be up to it?"

"He'll have to be; here they come."

They peer out the cockpit window and see three black vans pulling into the fairway towards the jet. Hannibal gets up and steps out of the plane.

"Thank you, we'll take it from here."

"Very good, sir."

Hannibal takes Murdock and Frankie, and after their initial shock at seeing Hannibal they head up to the plane where Mulder and Byers are waiting with their M-16's. Then Amy comes out followed by some more soldiers.

"Oh no," says Hannibal out loud.

"Well, I'll be . . . Smith!"

"Is there a problem, Colonel Decker?" says one of the soldiers.

"That's Colonel John Smith of the A-Team, you idiot!"

The soldiers look at Hannibal.

"Time for plan B, boys . . ."

"What's plan B, Agent Man," says Murdock to Mulder.

"He never told us," replies Mulder, who hands M-16's to Frankie and Murdock.

Hannibal turns and runs to the underside of the plane as the soldiers open fire. The four in the plane return fire as Decker grabs Amy and heads back to his van.

"B.A., Face, we've run into a bit of a snag."

"What's new, Hannibal," Face answers.

"Decker showed up."

"Decker!"

"He's heading out of here but he's still got Amy, so try not to kill them."

"Right, Hannibal."

Meanwhile, Murdock gets into the cockpit and opens the rear door. Hannibal, noticing this, heads for it and climbs up, avoiding the gun fire. Mulder, Dishpan and Byers continue their assault on the soldiers, but they are overrun.

"Forget it, guys," says Hannibal as he joins the rest of his group and they close the door and get into their seats. Hannibal then joins Murdock in the cockpit.

"Where's the big man and Face, Colonel?"

"They're our backup, Captain. Are you fit to fly?"

"As fit as ever, Hannibal."

"Well, first we'd better pick up B.A., Face and Amy. Follow that van, Murdock."

While Murdock drives the plane after Decker

and Amy, B.A. is getting ready to set off some well-placed explosives. First he blows up the security gate, and then a few areas around the fence. Face, Langley and Frohike are set up in bunkers around this area. As the van comes into view, the three men fire their M-60's at the tires and axles of the van, blowing it off its chassis. The top spins off and crashes into some nearby construction equipment. Decker and the two soldiers with him start to return fire out the window and the now-opened door.

"Make sure you don't kill Amy," yells Face into his walkie-talkie over the fire. B.A. and Face grab smaller machine guns and head around to take Decker out from the rear.

Decker stands up and yells through a bullhorn. "Give it up, Lieutenant, you can't win. We'll kill Ms. Allen if you don't . . ."

"Don't what, Roddy?" asks Face as he sticks a nine-millimeter right into Decker's face. "Tell them to drop their weapons."

Just then, the rest of the Team shows up in the jet. Hannibal gets out and looks around.

"Decker, never figured you to be working for the Organization."

"You never figured a lot of things, Smith."

"I'll bet. Tie them up, Lieutenant, and let's get rolling." He turns around, looks at Mulder, and as he lights his cigar he says, "I love it when a plan comes together."

"Plan?" asks Mulder, turning to Murdock.

"Plan . . ." replies Murdock as B.A. walks over.

"Damn crazy man . . . You're okay!"

"You do care, big guy!" replies Murdock as he tries to hug B.A.

B.A., scowling at Murdock, corrects himself, "Of course not, fool!"

Frankie jumps in, "Hey, Johnny, what the Hell is going on here? Who are these men and this Organization?"

"Sorry about getting you involved, Frankie. I know you've been trying to get on with your life after Stockwell gave you your pardon, but it appears we're back in the game."

"Hey, Johnny, I'm through, I told you that after I met Jamie in 1990 and we got married, I'm not a man of fists any more."

"Once an A-Team member, always an A-Team member!"

"Well," says Amy, "what next?"

"Sorry, Triple A, this one's not for you. It's going to be bloody."

"Oh, and a dainty little woman will do you guys no good?"

"Dainty?" asks Face. "Look, Amy, we just . . ."

"Don't worry, Face, I lost the Jazz years ago."

"Good," says X as he comes out of the shadows and takes the butt of a pistol and knocks B.A. out. "I understand he doesn't like flying."

"What do you want now?"

"I figured it would be difficult to do an assault in the middle of New York City with a C-130."

"You knew Decker would be out here, didn't you? Why didn't you warn us?" torts Hannibal.

"I wanted to see if you men are worthy of my help. In that chopper over there are fatigues and fresh ammunition for us."

Mulder steps in. "Us? Since when are you willing to put your life on the line?"

"Agent Mulder, my life was on the line the minute your nemeses decided to implement their own agenda."

---

4:15am  
42nd Street  
New York

Well-Manicured Man and Fat Man are talking together in the corner of the dimly lit room. Cancer Man walks in with his Morley in his mouth and a cast on his arm.

"What happened to you?" asks Well-Manicured Man.

"Don't ask."

"But I did."

"Krycek escaped. There was a little trouble, but now he's dead. You'll be seeing it in tomorrow's paper. Assistant Director Skinner will receive the credit for killing a rogue agent who was also responsible for killing our former colleague."

"Bill?"

"Yes."

"And his son? The A-Team?"

"Captain Murdock and the other two associates will be moved to remote locations around the world so we can keep the A-Team in check."

"And Mulder and Scully?"

"They will be eliminated."

"Where are they?"

"Have I lost your trust?"

"You lost our trust when you messed up last time."

"The problems were all corrected."

Fat Man finally interrupts, "There shouldn't have been any problems in the first place."

Three men in suits walk in and go up to Cancer Man and whisper something in his ear.

"Problem?" Fat Man asks.

"No."

"Then where's Scully?"

"She's been moved?"

"Where?"

"She'll be found, then Mulder and The A-Team will be ours."

"It better work this time, I'm warning you . . ."

"We're getting too old for this Hannibal", says Face. "We're not soldiers anymore - geesh . . . we're old men."

"That's right, Lieutenant, but we're old men on the run, no good. We have to see this through."

The Team settle down on 52nd Street.

"I thought their base was on 42nd," comments Hannibal.

"It is, but they have security all along the street. We'll have to sneak in. You're the strategist, Colonel. Here is a map with the locations of the added security."

Hannibal eyes the map. "Okay, this is going to be bloody, boys. You Gunmen don't need to be here."

"And miss the biggest conspiracy story of all times?! This, Colonel Smith, is our lives' work," argues Byers.

"Okay then. Sergeant, you and the captain here find us a van and load the M-60's on it."

"Yes, sir," they reply in unison.

"Lieutenant, Langley and Frohike will come in from the far end with B.A. The rest of us will come in from this end. Murdock will come in the chopper for air support and a hasty retraction if necessary."

As soon as everything is ready, Hannibal signals a go. Hannibal's team comes down the street, and as soon as they find the right building they get out, weapons at the ready, and go in. Soon about two dozen armed soldiers start coming out from all over the street, following the team. Murdock springs into action, releasing a few air-to-ground missiles and taking out the lower half of that block of 42nd street. Face's team comes down the other side and quickly apprehends the remaining soldiers.

Hannibal's team, after taking out all the security, bursts into a room and is greeted by the Organization mens' guns, stalemated.

"Gentlemen, we have been expecting you," says Well-Manicured Man. "It's useless to fight. We have your associates and . . ."

". . . You mean Murdock and the rest? Who do think is flying that chopper outside?"



Fat Man walks over to the window and sees the firefight.

Cancer Man reaches for his gun and fires at X. Everyone is set off and bullets start flying everywhere. Hannibal's men all duck for cover while still shooting.

"Everyone okay?" Hannibal asks.

"No, X and Byers are hit," replies Mulder, looking around.

"Will they live?"

"We'll be fine, Colonel," says X.

Cancer Man heads out the back door as B.A. as the rest come through the windows, making quick work of the rest of the guards.

"Well, who has the advantage now, my - " starts Hannibal lighting a cigar - "where is he?"

"Who, Colonel?" replies Well-Manicured Man.

"Our cigarette smoking friend."

Well-Manicured Man and Fat Man look around and notice he's missing.

"That son-of-a-bitch! He left us to die," says Fat Man.

"Colonel, the truths you seek are in North Dakota," Well-Manicured Man adds.

"What?"

"He's gone there, to make sure that they," looking up, "don't save you."

"Why are you suddenly being so cooperative?" Mulder jumps in.

"He left us; kill him."

"That's not my way, sir."

Murdock lands the chopper on what's left of the street, and as the Team flies away they see about twenty police squad cars come down both ends of the street. Just as they reach the building it blows up, taking out about five of the police cars in the process.

Mulder looks around. "What the hell?"

"Mr. Mulder, they had to be stopped," replies X.

"It didn't have to be that way."

"Yes, it did. They have too much power and influence. No one could have stopped them using the law."

"Mulder, Byers is losing a lot of blood. We need to get him to a hospital," says Frohike.

"Murdock?" asks Mulder.

"On it, dude!"

After they land at the nearest hospital, Frohike takes Byers inside. X looks them over and heads back to the chopper. Hannibal steps in front of him and says, "You're injured too, you should stay."

"Listen, Colonel, I'm fine."

"B.A."

B.A. walks up behind X and hits him on the

back of the neck, knocking him out. He picks X up and carries him into the hospital, and returns with Frohike in a few minutes.

"They should be fine here," says Frohike.

Everyone piles back into the chopper and they take off again for the Dakotas.

-----  
9:00pm

Black Crow, North Dakota

"Well, I'll be damned," says Murdock as he looks at the fuel gauge. "This puppy is barely half empty."

As they head on, they see a black car speeding towards an all too familiar missile silo for Agent Mulder.

"Something on your mind, Agent Mulder?" asks Hannibal.

"Just remembering . . . I was so close to the truth here. I found out a few months ago that they were housing a UFO from World War Two here."

"So you saw it?"

"No, Cancer Man stopped me before I could find the right silo or Krycek."

"Who?"

"Alex Krycek - he was my partner for awhile. An E.B.E. inhabited his body and he came here to get his ship."

"So close, yet . . ."

A car stops outside the silo and Cancer Man gets out, just as the chopper hits the ground. Suddenly two armed squads of men come out of the silo and open fire on the chopper as Cancer Man disappears behind the doors. The Team dive out, except Hannibal, and hide behind cover and return fire. The chopper takes back off, and as it does, an armored tank comes out from behind the silo, accompanied by more soldiers. Hannibal leans out the window and fires at the men as they try to shoot Murdock down. Murdock starts launching Mark 82's at the welcoming party. The soldiers scatter all over the place.

Two more tanks and another chopper arrive. The chopper fires and hits Murdock and Hannibal's craft, blowing the engine out. Everyone is watching the chopper fall so Mulder takes this opportunity to head for the silo doors. As he does, the sky turns black, and the other chopper begins to lose power and starts to fall, and the tanks stop dead in their tracks.

A huge object starts descending down on them with only blinking lights to distinguish it from the dark sky. Mulder looks and suddenly another of the female clones, which last year appeared and posed as his missing sister to get

him to help them fight off an alien bounty hunter, appears. Mulder walks up to her.

"I thought you were all killed!"

"All? Oh yes, the clones of me. Fox, I'm not a clone."

"Sa . . . Sa . . ."

Suddenly Cancer Man reappears and draws his weapon.

"No!" he screams as he runs towards the woman and starts to fire. Mulder is able to push her out of the way, but in the process takes a slug in his upper torso and falls. Samantha looks at Cancer Man and his gun flies from his hands. He pulls out a knife and continues his charge. Just before he gets to the woman, Mulder lunges and tackles Cancer Man. They struggle, and finally the knife is thrown away. Cancer Man pushes Mulder off and goes for the knife, but he heads in the wrong direction, instead grabbing a pen that he dropped as he had been running. When he notices his mistake and turns around, Mulder is charging at him with the knife and plunges the blade into Cancer Man's heart.

As he dies, he says to Mulder, "You can never w . . . w . . . wi . . . win . . ."

As Mulder hears this he looks up at Samantha.

"Is . . . is . . ."

"It's really me Fox, I'm sorry I couldn't ge-"

But her final words are lost.

From the chopper wreck, Colonel Decker emerges. "I finally have you all," he gloats.

"No you don't," says a voice behind him.

Decker turns and is stunned. As Hannibal and Murdock move towards B.A. and Face they see why and are also shocked.

Face starts, in disbelief, "It can't be . . ."

"Colonel Smith, men . . . it's good to see you again. I'm sorry it turned out the way it did back in '72. I didn't want to send you on that set-up, but it wasn't our time yet. You will be pardoned, now. Colonel Decker, tell your men to stand down."

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December 17, 1995

Arlington National Cemetery

Dana Scully is barely standing over her former partner's casket. His mother is crying over his casket, next to Scully and Samantha. Senator Matheson shows up soon. Another car arrives and out steps Assistant Director Walter Skinner as well as Albert, the Native American who had saved Mulder's life the year before. Just before the music starts, a black van with a red stripe on

its side arrives. Out from it walk Colonel Morrison, Colonel John "Hannibal" Smith, Captain HM "Howlin' Mad" Murdock, Lieutenant Templeton "Face" Peck, S.F.C. Bosco "B.A." Baracus, all men in full military uniform, and Frankie Santana and Amy Allen. They walk over and join The Lone Gunmen, who had also arrived earlier.

Frohike says, "So, you guys are cleared now?"

Hannibal nods and adds, "And we've been given discharges with full honors."

From about 250 yards away, a black man in a trenchcoat watches the proceedings through a pair of high power binoculars.

As the funeral continues, Mulder's mother is asked to say a few words.

"I knew very little of my son during his final year. I was afraid, afraid of what he would think if . . . I believe Ms. Scully would be better suited for this."

Scully takes the podium and wipes some tears she's trying to hold back from her cheeks.

"Agent Mulder . . . Fox . . . was a man who spent his life looking for the truth. He asked nothing more from life but to answer him the question of, 'Are we alone?' People called him 'Spooky' because of his beliefs. They said he was an embarrassment to the bureau, but I say no man or woman in its history has done the badge prouder. He gave up everything for his passion, his crusade . . . his job, like no officer has. He was more than just a partner, he was a mentor, a student, and most dearly of all a friend.

"In the past two years I have lost my father, my sister and now a man with whom I would gladly trade places. He lived his life by a code of honor, friendship and love. He knew the price for the truth was willing to pay that price to get it. There will be no one else, in my life, and I know in the lives he touched, that will or can ever take his place."

As she finishes, the A-Team gives a salute. Skinner, seeing this and remembering his Marine days, renders one as well as tears fall down his cheeks.

As Mulder's casket is lowered into the grave, X puts his binoculars away and turns around and leaves.

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- Epilogue -

Back at FBI headquarters, Scully carefully stacks posters, faxes, and other papers and junk into cardboard boxes. She picks up Mulder's badge and her eyes start to well up again. Suddenly there is a knock on the door.

"Director Skinner? Can I . . ."

"There are some men here to see you."

"Ms. Scully," says Hannibal as he removes his service cap. The rest of the Team enter the room and remove their headgear as well.

"We wish your partner was here to see the benefits of his work."

"I'm sure he is, sir."

"Please, call me Hannibal. After his reappearance, Colonel Morrison was able to testify and show proof that we were set up and

so was he at our trial as a V.C. operative, set up by the cigarette smoking man. We have finally, after over two decades, been pardoned for a crime we are not guilty of."

"I'm sure Mulder is very happy, wherever he is. I just hope he found what he was looking for as well."

Hannibal nods and as he and the Team leave, he turns back to Scully and says, "He found it, Ms. Scully. He found it."



## THE X DEGREES OF SEPARATION

by Michele Lellouche

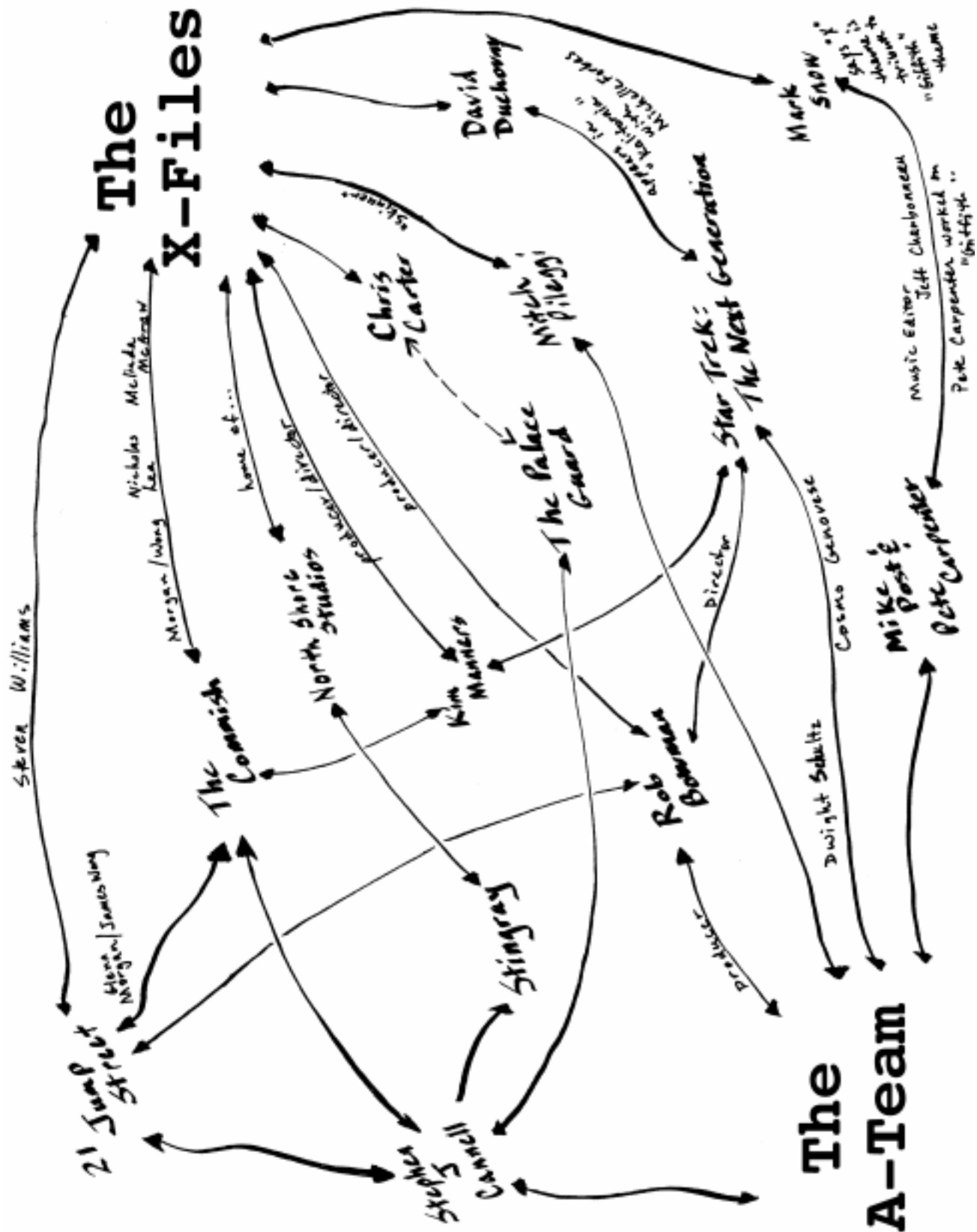
You might think that there is no connection between The A-Team and The X-Files, besides the fact that they are both American television series and have titles that begin with hyphenated letters.

And you would be wrong. There are lots of connections between these two series, despite being separated by ten years and being completely different in tone, style, and subject matter. The following page presents a chart that ties The A-Team and The X-Files together. The title of this chart comes from John Guare's play (and later film) "Six Degrees of Separation" with its idea that everyone in the world is related to everyone else, if you look hard enough. What got me started was the guys who came up with the idea that every actor in Hollywood can be traced back to actor Kevin Bacon.

So, the X degrees of separation. I put a few cues on the chart, but here's the translation. Let's start with The A-Team. It's co-created by Stephen J. Cannell, who produced 21 Jump Street and The Commish. 21 Jump Street ties to X via Steven Williams (Cpt. Fuller of Jump Street and Mr. X of X), as well as producers Glen Morgan, James Wong and Kim Manners. Those producers go on to The Commish and then on to X, taking with them Nicholas Lea (Offr. Ricky Caruso on Commish, Krychek on X) and Melinda McGraw (Det. Cyd Madison on Commish and Melissa Scully on X).

A straighter line goes from Cannell to his series Stingray. Star Nick Mancuso urged Cannell to go to Canada, which resulted in Cannell moving north in a big way, and building North Shore Studios in Vancouver, which is now home to The X-Files.

There are straight lines from The A-Team to The X-Files. Mitch Pileggi, who plays A.D. Skinner on X, guested on "The Road to Hope." Producer Rob S. Bowman (as he was known then) got his start as a producer on The A-Team, then directed



his way through various series including Stingray, until he ended up as a producer/director on X. Even Dwight Schultz provides a direct connection, by reading "The Unofficial X-Files Companion" for Audiobooks *[and his ongoing interest in the X-related subject of UFOs, co-hosting Don Ecker's radio program "UFOs Tonite!" - Ed.]*.

Perhaps the most tenuous connection is the minor Cannell series The Palace Guard, which debuted and died in 1991. Cannell at one time sought out X creator Chris Carter to work on Guard. (Incidentally, Guard seems to be the show that Cannell went to see Brandon Tartikoff about when Tartikoff gave him the legendary order for The A-Team: "The A-Team: Mission:Impossible, Road Warrior and The Magnificent Seven, all rolled into one, and Mr. T drives the car.")

Going back from The X-Files to The A-Team, you can start with X star David Duchovny, who appeared in the feature film Kalifornia with Michelle Forbes. Forbes appeared in Star Trek: The Next Generation, which employed Dwight Schultz (as Barclay), Rob Bowman and Kim Manners (as directors), and A-Team script supervisor Cosmo Genovese.

Then you can take the really obscure route. X composer Mark Snow calls his whistling X theme a tribute in a way to The Andy Griffith Show theme by Earle Hagen. One of those who worked with Hagen on Griffith was Pete Carpenter, who teamed with Mike Post to write the score and theme for The A-Team. Music editor Jeff Charbonneau worked for both Post and Snow.

So, maybe this zine isn't so farfetched after all...



# Through the Thin Veil

by N.N. Pellegrini

*"A little knowledge may be a dangerous thing, but gadzooks! What about too much knowledge?"*

- Phil K. Dick

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## Chapter One:

### The Return of the Aquamaniac

---

*My name is Thomas Veil. Or at least it was.*

*I'm a photographer. I had it all. A wife - Allison. Friends. A career. And in one moment it was all taken away. All because of a single photograph. I have it; they want it. And they will do anything to get the negative.*

*I'm keeping this diary as proof that these events are real. I know they are. They . . . have to be.*

*I keep telling myself that, forcing myself to keep careful records of everything that has happened to me through this entire nightmare, in case I begin to doubt myself. It has happened more than once already. I used to say that the only person I could trust was myself. Now, I don't even know if I can do that anymore*

*I've been told that nothing I remember is real. Led to believe that "Hidden Agenda" never happened, or at very least not the way I had thought it did. I've been told that I have a chemical time-bomb ticking away in my brain, thanks to Them, and that in a few more months I will lose all memory of who I am. Thomas Veil will, finally, completely cease to exist.*

*Every night when I go to sleep - those nights when I can sleep - I wonder if I will remember any of this nightmare the next morning. The fear and uncertainty have driven me to finally look towards settling this whole business conclusively, and by any means necessary. I know I can't go against Them alone any more. They are too big. Too powerful. I must put my trust in someone else who just might be able to help, before it's too late. Too late, perhaps, for all of us . . .*

"All right, all right, quiet on the set! Places everyone, places! Got the shot, Georgio? Great. Terrific. Johnny, you ready? Remember, *ten seconds* - don't pop up early again - then come out charging! Okay, 'Death of the Aquamaniac' scene twenty-five, take five. Ready . . . and . . . ACTION!"

Screams rang out all around the movie's beachfront set as young, scantily clad women ran from the ocean waters in mock terror. One of

them practically stepped right on top of Thomas Veil, who flinched and rolled away for cover as sand was kicked up into his face. He wished he had thought of some other way to contact John "Hannibal" Smith besides taking a job as an extra on his latest movie. It was Tom's third day on the set - his third day of lying around in nothing but his swim trunks, and the nagging sunburn on his shoulders was getting as bad as the nagging voice in his head that this whole idea of his was crazy. That *he* was crazy, thinking that hiring the A-Team was going to help him at this point, or that they would even take his case. Today was the first day John Smith had actually been around, filming his scenes for what was billed as the last and absolutely "best" Aquamaniac film ever. From the sheer number of extras hired for these beach shots, it did seem to Tom as though the producers were pulling out all the stops and stretching their B-movie budget as far as they could.

From his location on the sand, cowering from the stampeding bathers, Tom spotted the man he was looking for - or in fact the large, green, scaly costume that had been his trademark character for the past fifteen years. Huge clawed hands waved threateningly at the young women running all around, and a loud growl came from within the suit that somehow managed to ring out over the din of shouts and screams. Tom had to admit that the Aquamaniac was one of the more convincing rubber-suited creatures he'd ever seen. Monster movies weren't very popular in the States anymore, but apparently audiences still lapped this stuff up in Japan - at least, that's what the cameraman he'd talked to yesterday had assured him. The foreign market for these trashy monster movies was supposedly incredible. But Johnny was gettin' up there, he'd said, and thought it was time to retire the mutant green giant for good. *A damn shame it was, the end of an era . . .* but the great "Hannibal" Smith wanted to try his luck in a few roles without the aid of prosthetics and monster suits before leaving the film industry for good.

Someone yelled, "Cut!" and the chaos subsided momentarily. From the director's chair, a short stocky man yelled through the megaphone, "That was great, Johnny. But let's get one more shot, and I want to see more claw waving this time."

"Terry, I've been in this suit since eight o'clock this morning!" the Aquamaniac grumbled to the director, folding his scaly arms impatiently. "It's got to be a hundred-and-fifty-fucking-degrees in here, and the air conditioning unit is busted again. You're not gonna get a lot of



claw waving if I die of heat stroke first."

Terry rubbed the back of his neck anxiously, and after a moment's pause acquiesced. "All right, all right. Max, get someone on the suit, we'll break for lunch." Shouting to the crowds, he continued, "Okay everyone, lunch break! Back on the set in half an hour!"



The crowd dispersed as the many extras and most of the crew wandered over to the catering tables. Tom hovered near the beach, watching from a distance as several people helped Smith out of the Aquamaniac costume. Then he saw the white-haired man head for a trailer towards the back of the lot. Determined to get a chance to see him now or give up on this insane idea for good, Tom followed him. When he reached the trailer, Smith was already on the phone, having an argument with someone. Probably his agent, Tom guessed from Smith's end of the conversation. Smith was sitting perched on the edge of the doorway, chewing on an unlit cigar. Tom felt a momentary rush of panic but then it passed as he saw Smith bite off the end and then light it up normally. Seemed lately that every time Tom saw a cigar, someone was poking a hole in the end of it with a pencil . . .

"- What do you mean, I don't have the part yet? I'm *prime* for that role! . . . Look, I *know* the producers want Newman, but are they gonna get him with that kind of budget? *Exactly*, Jer, that's why they need me for the part . . . Uh-huh . . . Well, listen, Jer, you keep on it, all right? . . . Yeah, bye, Jer." Smith put down the phone and shook his head, then looked up at Tom, who was hovering nearby. Good naturedly and with a soft smile, Smith explained, "No wonder I've been playing monsters all my career with an agent like Jerry."

Tom smiled back, finding it hard to believe

the over sixty-year-old man he was standing in front of was the legendary Colonel John "Hannibal" Smith, one time leader of the notorious A-Team. He remembered the pictures he'd seen of the man, during the trial in '86, ten years ago. Smith had been all confidence and bravado back then, his blue eyes steeled with the hardened look of a career soldier. That look had softened somewhat over the past few years, but Tom could still see a hint of it in his face and eyes and hoped it was really still there. Otherwise, Tom thought, he was here for nothing. "Well, you do seem to do pretty convincing job of it," Tom commented.

"After over fifteen years playing this part, I should hope so! So what's up, kid? You're one of the extras out there today, aren't you?" Tom nodded, remembering self-consciously that he was still only wearing the fluorescent pink swim trunks provided by the wardrobe department. "Are you here for some advice on breaking into the industry from an old pro or something? Looking at you, I'd say you've got a chance - good build, good hair . . ."

"Well, thanks, but that isn't really what I wanted to talk to you about. I wanted . . ." Tom sighed and stalled for a moment, "I wanted to know if the A-Team was still in action, and looking for work."

Smith grinned around his cigar. Then he said wistfully, "The A-Team hasn't been in action since we got our pardon in '88, kid. Kind of hard to keep up with that kind of action when we weren't on the run anymore - at least, if we didn't want to end up *back* on the run."

"That's not exactly what I've heard," Tom replied. "I've heard you still take a job, every so often, if it strikes your interest."

"Oh yeah? Where did you hear that?" Smith asked suspiciously.

"I've been around," was all Tom said on the subject. "Look, I need some help. You and your Team were on the run for over fifteen years. You know what it's like to be constantly looking over your shoulder, on the run for something you're not responsible for. Not being able to lead a normal life - not even *having* a life anymore. That's where I am now, and I need your help."

"Sounds like you're in some sort of real trouble," Smith commented, betraying a hint of curiosity in his voice.

"Trouble doesn't even begin to describe it," replied Tom wearily. "I stumbled into something I wasn't supposed to, and now there are a lot of people determined to make sure I disappear - completely, along with any evidence as to who I am. The way I figure it, I don't have much time

left, one way or another. That's why I wanted to see you. Ask for your help."

Smith studied Tom seriously and puffed on his cigar for a few silent minutes. Then he slid off the edge of the trailer where he'd been sitting and straightened up, gazing back towards the movie set. "Those bozos in costuming won't get the AC in the suit fixed 'till tomorrow. I'll go tell Terry I need the afternoon off from shooting. Then I'll call the others and we'll all listen to your story, Mr. . . ."

"Veil. Thomas Veil."

"Okay, Mr. Veil. Stay here, I'll be back in ten minutes."

"Does that mean -"

"It means we'll listen to your story, and then maybe we'll take your case, if the others are interested." A somewhat mischievous smile touched Smith's face, seeming to wipe away ten years from his apparent age. "It's been a while, so I think they just might be."

\* \* \* \*

Only an hour later and Tom was sitting in the middle of a noisy, bustling day-care center in one of the rougher neighborhoods in L.A. He was describing to Smith and Sergeant Bosco "B.A." Baracus, one of the other Team members, the details of his predicament. Young children were everywhere, especially hovering around the giant Baracus, who seemed to be a magnet for their attention. Yet he gently shooed them away and back to their games and the other employees at the center that he now owned and managed in order to concentrate on Tom's story.

"They done all this to you just 'cause a some photograph?" B.A. asked.

Tom nodded. "They'll do anything to get the negatives. *Anything*. I've been institutionalized, chased by assassins, tricked and conned into doubting who I was, tortured . . . all because of this photograph. I don't even fully understand why it's so important to Them. They've already taken away my entire identity, trying to break me and get me to give in. But I haven't, not yet at least. And I'm not the only one They've done this to."

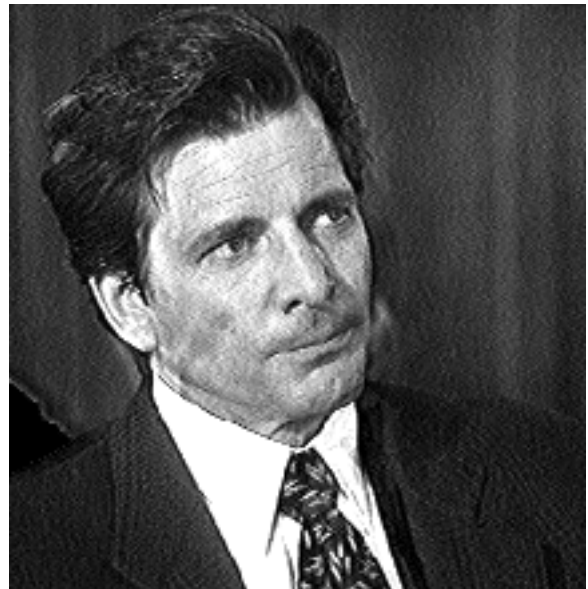
"But who exactly are they?" Smith asked.

"I don't know. I've put together everything I know in my diary: names, faces . . . any leads I can find. One thing I know for sure - at least, as sure as I know anything these days - They've got something big set up on this tiny island in the Caribbean called St. Kitts. I saw it on a map once. I think it may be Their base of operations."

"I never even heard of it," Smith commented. B.A. nodded in agreement.

"It's a very small, very quiet place. Not even much of a tourist trade to speak of. I've done a little research," explained Tom, reaching down to pull out a large envelope from his satchel. Inside was a stack of tourist booklets and flyers about the island. "Near as I can figure, its sheer anonymity is why They might choose it. That, and its location close to the U.S. mainland. But I haven't found out anything concrete about what They're doing down there."

Hannibal glanced through some of the flyers. Just then the third member of the Team came in to join them, Lieutenant Templeton Peck. "Hey guys, what's the story? I got out here as soon as I could," he said as he pulled over a small plastic chair. He tried to sit comfortably, even though the chair was designed for someone under the age of ten. Peck was wearing a fashionably styled suit ensemble, and gave Tom the impression of being a real smooth operator. He looked a little older than he had in old newspaper photographs Tom had seen, but he still had maintained his classically handsome features. "You're lucky I was in town, Hannibal. I'm supposed to fly out tonight to Boston to hit that 'Battlestar Galactica' convention," he continued.



"Thomas Veil, meet Templeton Peck," Hannibal introduced, and the two men shook hands.

"You can just call me 'Face'," Peck added.

"Tom here seems to be in a pretty interesting dilemma, if all of this is for real." Smith looked questioningly at Tom. "Why don't you tell us more about the photograph, so we can try to understand just why it's so important."

Tom sighed. "It was going to be my big

break. The photo that would get published in every newspaper and newsmagazine across the country." He removed another item from his satchel, a fairly large blow-up of the photograph. It was an image that was all too familiar to Tom: four bodies hanging from the makeshift executioner's stand, heads covered by canvas sacks. The still mysterious figures who had orchestrated the execution. He gave the photo to Hannibal. "As well as I remember, this happened down in Chile. I was tracking a lead about the U.S. Army being involved in fighting rebel forces in the hills. But what I found wasn't the U.S. Army at all - just a bunch of guys in fake uniforms and recruits from the States looking for action."

"Somebody's dirty little war, no doubt," Hannibal commented, handing the photograph over to Face. "It's not unheard of, Tom, for the CIA to get their hands into business like this. If they can't get into a third-world affair legally, they'll do it any way they can."

"It's called 'destabilization'," Face added, shaking his head. "Somehow it's supposed to help protect U.S. interests, but don't ask me to explain how."

"Yeah, I know. I've spent time in Nicaragua. I've seen what's gone on in Central America. That was what I suspected here as well, at first. But this thing seemed to go . . . even deeper than that. This whole business was stranger than anything I'd come across before."

"I wasn't alone when I started on the trip," Tom continued to explain. "I was with a journalist named Harrison Barton. He was the one who originally got wind of the situation, and called me in - as a favor," Tom said. "They caught us both, and They killed him. By some miracle the local rebels rescued me a few seconds before I ended up with a bullet in the head as well. But later They captured some of the rebels, and this is what happened to them." He nodded to the photograph. "I managed to get away, get back to the States . . . the photograph was the centerpiece of a one-man show I was putting on a few months later. It was only opening night of the show when They caught up with me and started me on this crazy trip. I've been trying to fight Them all these months since then, but now I just want out. I won't give in to Them . . . I can't, not after this long . . . but I'm tired. Tired of being alone in the fight when no one else seems to understand why I just can't give in."

"And why exactly is that?" Hannibal asked.

The question caught Tom a little off-guard. He thought about just how he could explain it. "I

think, because I *know* that what They're doing is wrong. The mind control, the experiments on people, Their 'agenda' for complete control of everyone, this . . ." Again, he looked to the photo. "Nothing and no one can tell me that's right. I can't give in and let Them continue to do this. Somewhere it has to stop."

"And that's what you want us to do? Stop these guys?"

"I don't know if you can. I don't know if anyone can. But I know I can't do it by myself. I'm not a soldier. I'm not trained for this kind of thing. You guys are."

"What I want is for you to come with me, to St. Kitts. I need to find out what's going on down there, hopefully find out who's behind this whole conspiracy to begin with. Or if there really is nothing there, and I've imagined everything, well, I need to know that too." Tom looked around at the three men hopefully. "Look, I can't pay you much now, but if I get my life back, I can pay whatever your fee for the case is."



The Team members looked at each other. "I say we go for it, guys," Smith said finally. "It's been a while, and you know, I wouldn't mind a little action that wasn't just staged on a movie lot."

B.A. nodded and said, "Sounds like these dudes need to be taught a lesson, man. I'm for it."

Face sighed. "I'm gonna have to cancel at the convention . . ." Hannibal and B.A. both shot him dirty looks. ". . . but, hey, you're right. A little sun in the Caribbean sounds better than winter in Massachusetts any day," he quickly changed his tune.

"Great. Congratulations Tom, you've just hired the A-Team," Smith declared, extending his

hand to Tom. A simple enough gesture, and one Tom got the impression really meant something to the colonel. Tom took it cautiously, hoping the trust really did go both ways this time.

Smith continued speaking. "However, since we're starting out underfinanced, we're gonna have to be creative. It'll be just like the old days. Face, you're gonna need to scam us a plane."

"Right," Face said, frowning and rubbing his chin as he thought over his options.

"Ain't flyin', Hannibal," B.A. growled. "Face is gonna have to scam us a *boat*."

"A boat?" Tom echoed in disbelief.

"Right, a boat . . ." Face agreed, giving Hannibal a quick wink.

". . . And call Murdock. See if he can get away from Kelly for a few days. Maggie's gonna give me hell about this as it is, I'm sure."

"We don't need that crazy fool with us if we ain't flyin' . . ." B.A. objected.

"B.A., we'll need the extra manpower, that's all." Hannibal started working on a fresh cigar and observed, "Y'know, I think this is gonna be fun . . ."

\* \* \* \*

"So what do you say to an all-expenses-paid, fun-filled trip to the sunny Caribbean isle of St. Kitts, Scully?"

FBI agent Dana Scully stared skeptically across the cluttered desk at her partner, Fox Mulder. "Why, what are we going to find down there - Long John Silver's ghost? Giant killer lobsters?"



"No, just your garden-variety, world-wide, alien/CIA conspiracy." Mulder got up from his chair and went over to the TV and VCR behind Scully to put in a tape. "I just got this one last night, from a friend in the Chicago police. A guy came in to a police station to confess to - *get this*

- crimes against humanity. Said he was the result of government experiments into hybridizing human and alien DNA."

"Sounds familiar . . ." Scully started.

"To us. But the police thought he was just another nut case, going on and on about clones, strange mystery men, government involvement and UFOs . . . So, they sent him to their psych ward for evaluation. That's where this tape was made." Mulder started the video and the subject's face appeared on the TV screen. He appeared to be a perfectly normal, middle-aged man, in a high state of agitation. He sat in a stark, light-green room at a metal desk, his leg bouncing nervously under the table, his hands gesturing wildly.

*"It's all part of their plan, see?"* he was saying. *"Take over the world by eliminating anyone and everyone that could stand up to them. Replace them with us - clones! Perfect imitations. I'm not the real Jack Harper, you understand, I'm just a clone of him. The real one died two years ago. He was supposed to be going in to the hospital for an ulcer treatment, and he just never came back - I did."*

*"So then, if you are part of this plan, why are you coming forward now?"* asked a soft woman's voice from somewhere off-camera.

*"Because I can't help them anymore with their plans. I just can't. I don't like what they are trying to do. They keep us brainwashed most of the time so we never question what we're doing and why. But I started to put it all together and I want out!"*

Fox paused the tape and turned to Scully, who just looked at him with her typical suspicion. "Sounds like just another paranoid delusional to me, Mulder."

"All right, but how about this: they kept him in observation overnight, but when the guards came by the following morning to check on him, he'd just disappeared."

"Disappeared."

"Completely. No signs that he'd even been in his cell at all. Somehow he'd escaped, or . . . someone wanted to make sure he didn't talk to the police any more than he'd done so already."

Scully did not comment on Mulder's speculations. "How does all this relate to St. Kitts?"

"The man mentions the island later in the interview. He claims that's where all of his orders originated from - where he came from as well. So I did a little checking myself into the area. Found several reports - unofficial ones, of course - about sightings of strange lights over the island and the waters surrounding it from

tourists and residents alike."

"No doubt fishing boats out late at night, or drug runners making deliveries in speedboats . . . low-flying aircrafts . . ."

"Maybe, but he also mentions something else very peculiar in the interview - cigars. Watching out for the men with cigars." Mulder fast-forwarded the tape a bit, then started it again about ten minutes further into the interview.

*"- and the government, they can't do anything, they've been taken over long ago by the men with the cigars."*

*"Men . . . with cigars, you say?"*

*"Yes yes yes - the men with the cigars. They're the ones behind all of this madness! They have a master plan for taking over the world completely by the year 2000, you'll see. Go ahead, don't believe me and find out for yourself four years from now."*

Mulder stopped the tape and looked to Scully again, obviously curious to hear her reaction. She just shook her head and stated, "Mulder, I think this is all just a little *too* crazy, even for you."

"Actually, it's not crazy at all," Frohike declared, spinning away from the computer and examining the printed-out photo of a man working on a large stogie. The disheveled, middle-aged man was one of three individuals who called themselves "The Lone Gunmen": conspiracy-theory followers and investigators who had provided assistance to Mulder and Scully on several cases in the past. Mulder had thought they might have something interesting to say regarding this particular investigation. "Rumors about a conspiracy of cigar-smoking men have filtered down through the underground since the sixties." He handed the photograph to Mulder.

"Yeah, and it's *stayed* in the underground because anyone who's attempted to talk about it openly so far has mysteriously disappeared without a trace," Langley added, the younger man smiling and pushing his thick rimmed glasses up on his nose. "Met with strange 'accidents'. You're talking about something that probably goes waaaaay up through the system."

"Who am I looking at here?" Mulder asked. Scully looked over his shoulder at the photo.

"I don't know," Frohike admitted. "No one knows - he just keeps appearing in the background of every major CIA-related conspiracy story for the past three decades. You name it - MK-Ultra, Cambodia, Nicaragua, Iran-Contra . . . Hell, Watergate - you look, and there he is. You mentioned cigars; that's what made me think of him. This is one of the best shots I've got of this

guy. He's not exactly a publicity-hound, mind you. There are others I've spotted like him too, in other photographs . . . but this is the one man I've found the clearest shot of to date."

It was a photograph - and not a very clear one - of an elderly gentleman, nothing especially distinctive about him that Mulder could see . . . except for a slightly darkened mark on the right side of his neck, evident in the profile shot. "What is that, a birthmark?"

"Another sign of the conspiracy, we think," Byers added. "Some sort of scar - we've seen it on a few other figures that we believe are connected to him. But, like Langley says, this is all just our information and speculation, a few things we've pieced together from some very nervous contacts. Nobody who knows anything about this wants to talk about it. We've never published anything on the subject before or really pursued it that much. Every lead basically turned into a dead end."

"What about the St. Kitts connection? Hear anything about that?" Mulder asked.

The three Lone Gunmen looked at each other and shrugged. Langley spoke up, "Just the occasional, run-of-the-mill UFO sightings. Nothing to necessarily tie it in with these guys. What you're telling us, Mulder, is news to our ears."

Mulder looked at the photo again, and at Scully. Her expression was unreadable. Mulder folded up the print-out and slipped it into his wallet. "Thanks guys. I'll be in touch."

"Yeah, anytime, Mulder," Frohike replied, turning back to his computer. "Just give us the exclusive when you crack this case, huh?"



"Hey, Mulder - a word of warning." Mulder turned back from the door to find Byers looking at

him with a grave expression. "These guys, if they're for real, are scary stuff. Watch yourself, all right?"

Mulder smiled. "I always do, Byers."

\* \* \* \*

Face called in later that afternoon to tell Hannibal that he had a jet ready to go, and Murdock was on his way to meet them at the airport. B.A. was very much on guard the whole day while he, Hannibal and Tom waited for word on transportation at the day care center. B.A. had not been tricked into flying for a while, so he was caught off-guard by the five-year-old girl who reported to the big man that the milk with her lunch was sour. The concerned Baracus quickly tasted the suspect milk himself, which was actually fine except for the large dose of the knock-out drug it contained. B.A. was snoring soundly just moments later.

Hannibal gave the girl her promised lollipop and she skipped away contentedly to join the other children once more, and he started dragging B.A. up out of his chair. "Wanna give me a hand, pal? I'm out of practice doing this and he seems to have gained some weight lately."

Confused, Tom got up and grabbed a thick, muscled arm and struggled with the unconscious B.A. "I take it . . . this is somehow necessary?"

"Yeah, B.A. hates to fly, especially with Murdock. He won't wake up until we're on the ground on St. Kitts - at least, hopefully he won't."

"Hopefully?"

"Well, last time we did this we found he was starting to get immune to the stuff and woke up right over the middle of the Atlantic. Of course, that was almost six months ago. Anyway, he nearly choked the pilot to death and we nearly ended up taking a nose-dive into the ocean. But hopefully that won't happen again."

"*Hopefully.* Great," Tom grunted as he staggered along with over two-hundred pounds of muscle and metal, and wondered what he was really getting himself into. Amy had told him that working with the A-Team could be a real . . . experience. He was beginning to understand just what she had been talking about . . .

They got B.A. into the van through no small effort and Hannibal took the wheel. In about half an hour they were at the small airstrip where Face was waiting next to his new sports car, a dark red, new model Porsche.

"I hate leaving this car parked here while we go traipsing around the world," Face mused worriedly as he gazed back at the car.

"Where's Murdock?" Hannibal asked.

"Checking out the plane, making sure we're set to go. B.A. . . ?"

"In the van. Come on, let's get him on board."

Face and Hannibal found a small baggage cart and unceremoniously lugged B.A. onto it, along with their few bags of basic supplies and a small trunk marked "Props". Face sighed and looked around happily. "I pulled the old 'Billy Joe Bob-the-millionaire-from-Texas' trip on them, with Murdock's help. Thinks we're taking the plane on a test run to Reno before buying it. Y'know, I'd forgotten how much fun it was to play on how gullible most people are."

"Yeah, well, hope you've gotten in all the practice you need, Face, because we're gonna need to get hotel accommodations and other supplies when we get down there."

"No problem. I brought 'Boots and Bikinis' along, and even that crazy script Murdock wrote, 'Bruce Willis Versus the Nitroglycerin Man.' I did some research and apparently they already filmed one of those 'Missing in Action' flicks down there on St. Kitts, so we should be able to do the movie company scam no problem."

"Terrific. Let's load the plane and go." Hannibal started pushing the cart along, and Face double-checked that his car and the van were locked and secured in the parking lot before following suit. Tom tagged along behind them both out to the plane, which turned out to be a sleek, new-looking small passenger jet.

"You mean to say you got this plane for free?" Tom asked Face.

"Tricks of the trade, my friend. Tricks of the trade . . ."

Face joined Murdock in the cockpit to check on their flight plans after helping to drag B.A. on board, and Hannibal and Tom took care of loading their supplies. "Come on Tom, I'll introduce you to the final member of the Team." Tom brought his bags into the plane and dropped them into a seat, then followed Hannibal into the cockpit, where the colonel seemed to be in the middle of a fond reunion.

"Thomas Veil, this is our pilot, Captain H.M. Murdock," Hannibal introduced as Tom stepped into the cockpit of the plane. A cold chill passed through him when the man in question turned around from the plane's controls to greet him a wide grin. Tom found himself staring right at a ghost.

"Howdy, Tom!" Murdock greeted him cheerily. "So, you're the reason I get to take this great vacation, huh? Can't say the wife was too pleased at bein' left behind while I get to hit the

beaches, though."

Tom was speechless for a moment, remembering the last time he had seen the very same man. It was two years ago, in the jungles of Chile. There was no doubt in his mind who it was. "Harrison?!"

"*Harrison?*" Hannibal and Face both echoed, looking back and forth between Tom and Murdock, whose grin had quickly evaporated and who now wore a strangely bewildered expression on his face.



"Do I know you from somewhere or somethin'?" Murdock asked warily. *No one had called him by that name since . . .*

"You . . . you're Harrison. Harrison Barton. And you're supposed to be dead," Tom insisted. If he wasn't Harrison, he had to be his goddamned twin brother. The resemblance was uncanny and unnerving. Then again, Tom was almost getting used to surprises like this. It was becoming almost . . . predictable.

"Well, last I checked I was still alive, and the name's Murdock, not Barton."

"Barton, wasn't he the guy you said . . . ?" Hannibal started to ask.

"Yes! He was the one who was with me, down in Chile. The one who got me on the lead that started this whole business in the first place. I swear, you look just like him, man," Tom said to Murdock, shaking his head in disbelief. "And I saw him get killed, right in front of me. They shot him point blank, in the head. Look, I'm not crazy, I wouldn't make something like that up."

The three Team members looked at each

other in bewildered silence for a few moments, and Tom was sure some sort of unspoken communication was passing between them. He could practically hear the colonel's thoughts, his concern that maybe they really *were* dealing with a complete lunatic. He had seen that expression and heard the sentiment more than a few times the past months.

Tom was ready to hear Smith announce that the job was off, but then the colonel seemed to come to some sort of decision. With a half smile he asked, "Murdock, you haven't been taking any jobs on the side down in South America without telling us, have you?"

"Not that I can remember, Colonel, but every now and then I still get those memory lapses," Murdock joked in return, and said to Tom, "It just . . . must be some sort of weird coincidence, y'know?"

Tom tried to reassure himself that was the case, but he couldn't get past the resemblance. The man spoke with a different accent than Harrison, but besides that he was a dead ringer for him. *Dead ringer . . .* Tom thought to himself, *how ironic*. Feeling the Team members' eyes all on him, he decided he'd better play it cool if he wanted to keep them on his side. He forced a smile and said, "Yeah, sure. Must be. Well, I guess I'll go load up the rest of the stuff."

"Yeah, I'll strap B.A. in, then we can get out of here. Face, you fill Murdock in on all the details," Hannibal instructed as Tom left the front cabin and he turned to do the same. Once Tom was out of ear shot, he turned back around and asked Murdock, "Harrison?"

The pilot grimaced. "Somehow he got that one right, I don't know how. I've never seen him before in my life. At least, I don't think so. And who was this guy I'm supposed to look just like, anyway?"

"I'll tell you all about it during the trip," Face said, then added teasingly, "So, *Harrison*, do we find out what the 'M' is for now, too?"

"Uh uh, no way. One deep, dark secret revealed a day is enough," Murdock insisted as he busied himself preparing the plane for take off, trying to cover up how weirdly disoriented he was suddenly feeling. Face and Hannibal exchanged glances, then Hannibal shrugged and headed back to get ready to leave.

The take-off was smooth and easy, and soon the A-Team were back in action and on their way to the sunny Caribbean.

## Chapter Two:

## Making Connections

*"What do you want, Harry?"*

*"You know, you 'n me, mano a mano."*

*"No, man, no! No, I haven't got time for a little 'you 'n me, mano a mano.' I'm goin' home, man."*

*"Haven't had time for a national cover photo either, have you, Tom."*

*". . . You called to cheer me up?"*

*"I called to give you the cover that you've been wankin' over, you jerk-off. Why do you always want to leave the dance before the girls get there?"*

*"Are we through?"*

*"Pally-o'mine, look, what I've got's gonna blow the lid off of every major newspaper and glossy in the States."*

*"Look, what you've got, Harry, can probably be cured with antibiotics."*

*"You're gonna make the same mistake you made in Iraq, and you sure left there a day early and a million dollars short -"*

*"- What can I tell you, the President forgot to fax me his plans ahead of time."*

*"Yeah, well, I'm here at the startin' line, pal, and this is your fax. All of the facts that's fit to print. Yeah, you, you go get on that plane now. I'm tellin' you, this is gonna make Iran-Contra look like a bake-off. Adios . . ."*

Tom blinked away the memory and turned from the small aircraft window. Hannibal Smith was regarding him curiously from a seat across the aisle. "You doing okay there, Tom?"

"Yeah, fine. Just . . . remembering something. It's . . ." he shook his head, "not important. Not now, anyway."

Hannibal nodded. "We've got a fair amount of time to kill, and I'd like to learn a little more about this conspiracy we may be going up against. More details on how They operate and what you've seen of Them so far."

Tom obliged the colonel, expanding on what he'd already relayed to the Team members earlier that day about his experiences. Peck joined them after a while, half listening to Tom and half thumbing through the tourist booklets on St. Kitts that Tom had provided.

"How sure are you about this island being Their headquarters?" Hannibal asked.

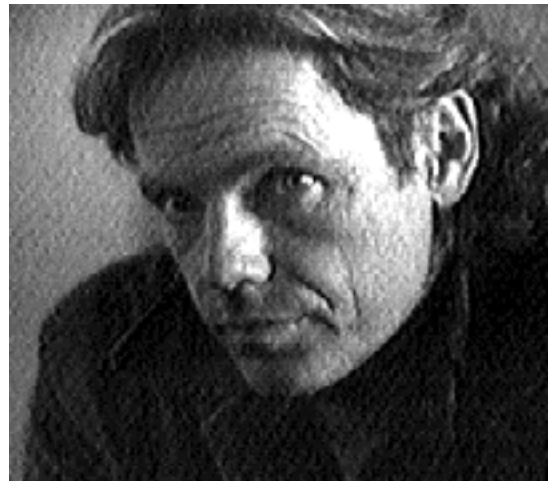
"Not as sure as I'd like to be. But besides the map I saw in Chile, I've also seen it

mentioned, if only in passing, in other documents I've gotten a hold of from Them. The problem is, frequently the information I manage to get is corrupted by the time I get my hands on it, or it's too out-of-date to be of any use to me. And I don't even know if 'Hidden Agenda' happened the way I remember it, either." Tom hesitated, not sure whether he should go on and reveal everything to the Team. Smith was waiting patiently for him to continue, so at the risk of sounding completely crazy he described his meeting with his former contact, "Alexander Hale".

"It was like he was grilling me to check just how complete my memory of the photograph was. It turned out he'd been caught as an informant and They were using him to get this information from me. Then he told me that none of what I remembered was real. Told me to go to this place off the interstate in DC. They were monitoring him the whole time, apparently, because as soon as he started telling me about it and questioning the accuracy of my memories, They killed him."

"How?" Face inquired.

"I don't know, he just . . . went into these convulsions, like . . . he could have been implanted with some sort of device that They could trigger at will.



"I left, and I went to that place. What I found off the roadside where he'd told me to go was an exact duplicate of everything in the photograph: the buildings, the executioner's stand, everything. I . . . didn't know what it meant. I still don't. I can't be sure if They were just trying to make me doubt my sanity and memory of what really happened, or if the photograph really isn't what I thought it was."

"Well, I hope we can help you find out, Tom," Smith said seriously. He then turned to Peck and asked, "So, do you have something good lined up



for us, Face?"

Face nodded as he typed something into his palmtop computer notebook. "I think we'll shoot for the Ocean Terrace Inn. It's right in the heart of town, and sounds pretty posh. Just the type of place that should be easy to scam, 'cause they look like they're itching for some hot publicity right now from all the ads in this tourist magazine. There's one huge resort on the island called Jack Tarr Village that must be sucking up most of the tourist dollars. The rest of the hotels are probably just dying for a chance like this to come along. It's too bad I didn't have a few more days to set this one up; I could have sent some faxes along ahead of us, make it look like we were really expected to arrive. But I think I can still arrange something once we get on the ground.

"Should work to our advantage as well that we're arriving in the middle of the night - the late-night staff's likely to be a little on the dull side and too scared to wake up their boss if there's trouble. Same at the airport, though I think we should still use the fake passports - just in case, and . . ." Face smiled, "for old time's sake. I got a fresh batch made up not long ago for just such an occasion."

"Sounds good." Hannibal finished off the cigar he was working on and settled back into his seat contentedly. His mind raced with ideas and plans based on Tom's information, yet his body demanded that he get some rest. Ruefully he had to admit he was getting a bit old for this stuff anymore, and he didn't have quite the stamina he used to for all this excitement and running around. *And they were only getting started . . .*

He yawned and thought back once to Maggie who, as he had predicted, had not been too thrilled with his announcement that he was taking off on a job, if just for a few days. Maybe a week or two, depending. But she'd known there was nothing she could say to dissuade him when it came to the chance to get back on the jazz. She'd sent him off with an over-the-phone kiss and a warning that he'd better be home soon and in one piece. Terry and the rest of the production crew from the "Aquamaniac" had been even less thrilled with his sudden departure. Hannibal had instructed them to continue filming around his shots as much as possible.

Tom saw Smith drifting off asleep, and Peck busy with his computer and a pile of scripts, and found himself alone with his own thoughts again. The appearance of the Team's pilot, Murdock, still bothered him. He looked way too much like Barton for it to be a coincidence. Seeing him today had started Tom thinking about the events

leading up to "Hidden Agenda" all over again, and the other times he'd worked with Barton before then. Certainly Harrison had been a boozier, a stoner, a womanizer with a penchant for getting into trouble and debt wherever he went. But he did have an eye and an ear for news, and more than a few friends within the press corps and beyond that kept him from getting into too deep of a bind.

When he had disappeared in South America almost completely incommunicado for two years, it only seemed par for the course for Harrison Barton. He had made a hefty killing covering the Gulf War and putting together his sharp, uncompromising and often hilarious commentary into a book that had sold reasonably well and gained him some real notice for something other than his obnoxious personality. Word of mouth after his disappearance was that the crazy bastard was likely snorting away all his royalties in Rio, and later in Chile, where word surfaced briefly that he would bought himself a grand hacienda in the jungles and was living the lush life. Barton would stagger out of his hole when the money and the drugs ran out, probably just in time to cover another breaking world event and be right at the front line again.

That's what Harrison had thought those covert troops in Chile he'd heard rumors about were going to be, but this time he had let himself get just a bit *too* close to the front lines. Himself and Tom, who not for the first time and certainly not the last wished he hadn't let himself get talked into coming along on that adventure.

Tom never would have thought of bringing the A-Team in on his trouble if it had not been for Amy Allen, and a fateful meeting he'd had with the reporter during the '86 Gorbachev-Reagan summit in Iceland. He remembered that meeting distinctly. Political finagling and deal-making were not Tom's usual beat, but he had been offered the assignment by an editor at one of the big news-weeklies he'd befriended not long back, and the money was too good to turn down. "Star Wars" technology and Reagan's perceived stubbornness were the hot topics at the summit that Fall and causing a real stir worldwide. It was a hot time in world politics still dominated by cold war fears, and the press was having a field day with the situation . . .

The small bar in the hotel where Tom had been staying in Reykjavik, Iceland had been continually packed with journalists and photographers from everywhere, trading stories in every language and running the bartender ragged while they waited for any news to break. Thomas Veil was used to the scene from many

assignments in the past, and he recognized a few familiar faces here and there in the crowd. On that one particular afternoon, his second day on the assignment, he had not been feeling much like schmoozing and planned on just grabbing a beer and crashing out in his room. But as he had worked his way out towards the exit he'd spotted one person he recognized and knew reasonably well - well enough to know that she looked to be in dangerous need of cheering up.

Indeed, L.A. Courier reporter Amy Allen was sitting at a table by herself, a newspaper spread out in front of her along with an alarming array of empty glasses. Tom had run into her more than once the past few years while on assignment and knew she was a tough, aggressive go-getter of a journalist, always alert and in control. Not someone who spent her hours off-duty like this. He had never seen her looking this disheveled and out-of-sorts, gazing out emptily into space and looking like a broken spirit. It was no wonder everyone else seemed to be staying clear and leaving her well alone.

"Allen? You okay?" Tom asked with concern as he neared her table. She did not even seem to notice him. "Amy Allen?"

". . . Huh?" She looked up from the paper finally and focused bleary eyes on him. Recognition slowly dawned. "Oh. Tom, isn't it?"

"Yeah, Thomas Veil. I think we met last in Manila, earlier this year. May I . . . ?" he asked, indicating the chair across from her. She nodded, and he sat down. "You doing okay there? I couldn't help noticing . . ." he looked towards the beer bottles. "Not that I want to make any judgment calls here, but this doesn't seem like you."

"Yeah well, it's not every day that I read about three innocent people getting executed in front of a firing squad. I'm sure you've seen this by now."

"Seen what?" Tom asked, then looked down as Amy turned around the newspaper so he could see. He read the headline to himself: **"End of the Line for the A-Team."** "Oh, yeah, that's been the big story back home the past few weeks. Every reporter and photographer that hasn't been sent out here's been covering that trial. So they actually did it today? It's hard to believe."

"I know. I can't . . . I've read this, over and over again today, watched the news, and I . . . I just can't believe it . . ." Her voice was cracking and her eyes were filled with tears as she bit back her words. Tom remembered, then, hearing about her rumored connection with the A-Team a few years back, and suddenly he understood why she was so upset.

"Hey, hey, Allen, maybe we should get you out of here, okay? Huh?" Tom asked, placing a concerned hand on her arm. "C'mon, let's go out for some air, or at least just get you back to your room, all right?"

"Yeah, sure," she replied, obviously not really caring but too upset and defeated to argue about it. He helped her up onto wobbly feet and led her out to the lobby, then up to her room. She collapsed down onto the sofa in the plain, small room and Tom called room service for some coffee. He went into the bathroom and came back out with a glass of water for her. She accepted it, taking a sip and looking down into the glass as if it held all the answers she was looking for.

Tom asked, "Are you gonna be okay, Allen? Do you want to talk about it?"

Amy sighed, closed her eyes and shook her head wearily. "I suppose it doesn't really make any difference now, does it?" She opened her eyes again, fixing them intently on Tom, then stated emphatically, "They didn't do it, Tom. I *know* they didn't. Because . . . I knew them. I worked with them, for over a year, and there's *no way* they could have robbed that bank except under orders. There's no way they killed that Colonel Morrison."



"There always was a lot of speculation in the press pools about exactly how you always landed those scoops on them."

"Yeah, well, it was reckless of me, I know. I came about *this close* to becoming a wanted criminal myself because of it." She unsteadily held up her thumb and index finger, indicating less than an inch of space between them. "So I had to give it up, finally. When a foreign correspondent position opened up, I jumped for it. I finally had enough clout to get the job after all the stories

related to the Team I'd brought in. But *Christ*, Tom, they weren't the bad guys! They were the best, the most honor-bound . . . three men I ever met."

She looked off somewhere far away. "Somehow, I just . . . I thought they would pull through in the end. After everything I'd seen them do, I just kept believing, hoping . . . And they have friends, too, friends that I was sure would be able to pull some strings, get them out of there in time, but . . ." She looked down sadly, and took another sip of water. "They told me once - the guys - that I had to accept death, if I was going to be able to work with them. It was something they learned to do, right from the start, and that's how they managed to survive on the edge for so long. Can you understand what that means, Tom?"

"I . . . I don't know. I've seen death, a lot of it. We all do in this business."

"But that's not what I mean, Tom. Could you accept your own death? If someone was to break in here, right now, and point a gun at your head, could you accept it? Accept it enough not to panic, and then try to think of a way out of it if you were somehow damn lucky? That's the way they were, and it always seemed to work. I guess their luck just finally ran out. I guess they knew they couldn't cheat death forever, that finally it would come down to something like this." She smiled fondly. "It was easy enough, once you got to know them, to think that they could."

There was a knock at the door - their coffee had arrived. After the waiter had left, Tom let Amy talk on some more, vent her anger for he didn't know how long. He did not mind and, actually, was rather fascinated by her whole tale. It explained a lot about what he'd seen of her in action and how she never seemed to mind getting into the worst and most dangerous places on assignment. She certainly had learned quite a lot from working with the A-Team, and he could understand her loyalty to them. Personally, he had never thought too much about whether they were guilty or not. It had never been a story he followed closely.

Finally she stopped talking and looked ready to fall asleep right where she sat, despite the plentiful amounts of caffeine. At least she had sobered up a bit and Tom felt safe leaving her alone. "You look like you should really get some rest, Amy. Are you gonna be okay now?" he asked her.

"Yeah, I guess. I'm . . . I'm just going to need some time to sort things out. Once this assignment is over, I think I should take some

time off. Time to grieve. But I'll be okay." She smiled weakly. "Thanks for listening, Tom."

"Hey, no problem. And . . . I'm sorry about your friends."

Tom remembered leaving her then, still concerned but knowing that she was a tough kid and would pull through okay in the end.

It had only taken until the next morning, in fact, for her to get back in top form. He had been sitting in the hotel dining room, finishing up his breakfast, when she'd bounded up behind him and surprised him with a resounding slap on the back.

"Tom! You won't believe what I just heard off the wire!" she'd exclaimed, grabbing a chair at his table and helping herself to a piece of toast off his plate. "They did it!"

"Who did what?"

"The A-Team! They escaped!"

"What?! What about the firing squad?"

"The bodies disappeared. No one knows what happened to them, except they suspect now some 'priest' may have slipped them something, switched the bullets for blanks. No one knows for sure, really, but word is that they're not dead. Somehow, they managed to pull off the impossible. As always."

*Pull off the impossible* . . . Tom thought, coming back to the present, looking around at the men in the aircraft he'd hired. That was what he needed them to do now - four men to take on an entire organization that spread how far he did not know, nor how strong they really were. What they were attempting to accomplish in the end. Tom knew it was a long shot, but he didn't know what else to try anymore. If Amy's opinion of the Team was correct, maybe they could do it. He could only hope as much.

\* \* \* \*

The afternoon after his and Scully's meeting with the Lone Gunmen, Mulder was heading back to his car in the parking lot at FBI H.Q., getting ready to leave for the airport. A voice called his name.

"Agent Mulder."

Mulder recognized the voice without having to turn around and see who it was. His mysterious contact within the conspiracy organization he had been pursuing, a man he could never tell how far he could trust, and whose side he really was on in the end. Mulder had left his customary signal in his window to contact the man the night before.

"X" appeared from behind a support beam and started in on Fox right away. "This better be worth my time."

"I don't know, you'll have to tell me,"

Mulder replied coolly. He reached into his wallet and pulled out the photograph of the cigar-smoking man. "Can you tell me anything about him?"

X took the photograph. Mulder knew he caught the mysterious agent by surprise by the ever-so-slight delay before his response. "No," X finally said in a flat voice, handing back the photograph.

"No, you don't know anything about him, or no, you can't tell me?" Mulder insisted. "He's important, isn't he?"

X looked around impatiently, almost nervously, and dropped his voice to little above a whisper. "You don't know the half of it, Mulder."

"So tell me, dammit!"

"No. If you're going after him, there's nothing I can - or will - do to help."

"St. Kitts - is that where he is? Where they've been orchestrating everything through?"

"Good-bye, Agent Mulder." X spun around to leave, calling after him, "You're on your own this time, so watch your back."

*You're the second person to tell me that in less than two days,* Mulder said to himself. *I*

*suppose I should take that as a sign.* He'd gotten all the confirmation from X he needed that he was on the right track this time to *something* big. . . now he only had to figure out exactly what that something was.



## Chapter Three:

## Plans and Scams

"Hanibaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaa! I'm on a plane!  
What am I doin' on a plane!"

The roaring cry of B.A. Baracus woke up Hannibal, Face and Tom instantly. The sergeant was screaming and threatening everyone on board the plane with gruesome bodily harm, struggling to undo the straps that temporarily held him secure in his seat.

"You're a dead man, Hannibal! *Dead!* And then that foo' Murdock!"

Hannibal warily approached the large man and tried to reason with him. Tom looked nervously at Face, who appeared about ready to run for it, even though there was nowhere to really go on the small plane.

There was a calm voice over the intercom. *"Gentlemen and mudsuckers, we are now making our final approach on the sunny island of St. Christopher, otherwise known in common vernacular as St. Kitts. Please take this moment to fasten your seatbelts, secure your tray tables, extinguish all stinky old cigars and make sure that B.A. isn't going to kill the pilot. Thank you, and enjoy the rest of the flight."*

"Hannibaaaaaaa!" B.A. bellowed again in response.

"Now, B.A., you know we had to do this, as much as you hate to fly," Hannibal spoke gently. "We're on a tight time schedule here, so a boat was out of the question. If you've got to blame anyone, blame the client."

"Hey, wait a minute -" Tom objected.

"Or better yet, blame these conspiracy guys when we find them. If it wasn't for them we wouldn't have had to bring you down here in the first place."

"It still ain't right, man," B.A. insisted, although he sounded a little less sure of himself this time. "One of these days, Hannibal . . ."

"I know, B.A. I know." Hannibal patted him on the shoulder and glanced out the window. They were nearly on the ground. "Just hang tight a few more minutes, all right?"

B.A. gave his worst scowl, then just frowned in panic as he looked out the window himself and saw the lights of the airport below. Hannibal knew he would not be any more trouble, at least until they landed, because he would be too petrified to even move.

Hannibal returned to his seat across from Tom, and leaned forward to say to Face quietly,

"We gotta find something stronger for him next time." The lieutenant nodded in agreement.



The landing was easy and without incident, although Murdock made sure to be nowhere within B.A.'s reach afterwards. Dealing with the immigration officials at the tiny Golden Rock Airport on St. Kitts was slow going but in the end relatively pain-free. They had managed to arrive just after a huge tour-package group from Canada, and by the time they reached the single employee working behind the immigration desk, he was beyond giving their passports and other documents more than the most perfunctory appraisal. Their bags and other luggage passed through equally without question - it helped that their small stash of weapons was hidden in two trunks, in compartments underneath bulky camera equipment and Hannibal's old Gatorella costume (*It's for next year's Carnival*, Face had explained to the curious employee.) The airport was yet to be equipped with X-ray equipment of any kind, and no one seemed too interested in digging through their bags after finishing with the Canadian tourists.

The Team piled into one of the Taxi vans waiting outside the airport, and Hannibal started complaining to Face about the new passports he had made. "Face, where the hell do you come up with these names, anyway? 'George Peppard'? Do I look like a 'George' to you?"

"I thought it sounded stately enough for an actor."

"This coming from someone who comes up with his aliases at the breakfast table, Mr. *Benedict*." Murdock climbed in a seat behind Face and Hannibal. "But come on, Face, 'Dwight Schultz'? Dwight is worse than Harrison," he grumbled.

"I get no appreciation for all my work from you guys," complained Face.

"Yeah, leave Faceman alone," B.A. agreed from where he sat next to Tom in the back, obviously satisfied with his own new identity.

"I knew he'd like the 'Laurence Teraud' bit," Face whispered proudly to Hannibal.

They were quickly on the road into and through Basseterre, the main town on the island, and then up to the outskirts of town where the Ocean Terrace Inn was located. The town was deathly quiet, being late in the evening on a weeknight. Only a few small bars were still operating under glowing neon beer signs and long strings of Christmas lights. All the while as they rode, the driver cheerfully went on about how much they were sure to enjoy their visit, and if they were in need of an island tour he'd be most happy to make arrangements to accommodate them, because the island surely had some of the finest historical sites to be seen in the entire Caribbean and it would be a shame not to visit them during the course of their holiday.

The late-night staff at the hotel was, as Face had hoped, rather ill-equipped at knowing how to handle their surprise arrival, which Face argued was certainly not *supposed* to be a surprise as his office had made the reservations over two months ago. How could there be no record on the hotel's computer of the film crew arriving? It was *unthinkable* that an error could have been made, as he had called only the night before to confirm the reservations.

The sheepish young woman behind the desk might have put up more of a fight about it if not for B.A. hovering closely behind Face, looking none too happy and with his typical scowl firmly in place. Flying always put B.A. in a particularly bad mood, a state that could often be put to good use by the Team either in a fight or a scam. After about twenty minutes of arguing and fruitless searching for records that did not exist, the girl gave in and said there were three rooms available for the next two nights. Face accepted them grudgingly, stating firmly that he would speak with the hotel manager in the morning about this whole fiasco and make sure they would be "treated correctly." With that, the Team retired for the evening, Tom getting his own room, Face sharing with Murdock and Hannibal sharing with B.A.

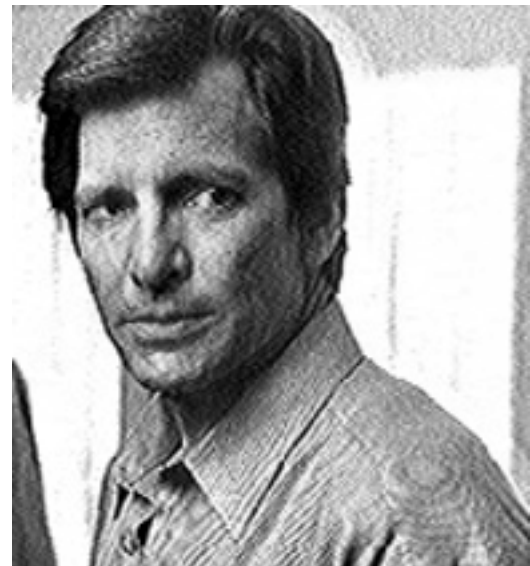
The first thing Tom did when he entered his room was search it carefully, first to ease his paranoid mind that there were no obvious bugs or surveillance systems in place, and second to find a secure hiding place for a few items. In particular, the one item he never liked to leave too far away from wherever he was - his negatives. He had not informed the Team that he

had them with him; Colonel Smith had asked where they were, and Tom had only replied, "Safe." Smith had not questioned him further about it, something that had eased Tom's mind a bit. Usually people involved in the Conspiracy were not that quick to give up on that point, so he supposed that the A-Team probably were safe to work with, for now at least.

\* \* \* \*

The Team members were not up and about until late the following morning. As could be expected, the daytime staff at the hotel was a little more difficult to scam. They swore that they had never heard *anything* about a movie production company planning on staying at the hotel, and that there must have been some mistake. Face played up a storm, however, fretting and moaning about how much trouble *he* was going to be in when the executive producers heard about this mix-up.

"Stephen J., he's not going to like this one bit! Oh Lord, if the travel office screwed up the hotel bookings, I'm *history*! Are you *sure* there's no mention of our arrival in your records? This is a major production company we're talking about here."



The display and histrionics went on and on, and after a while Hannibal was almost beginning to doubt that Face was going to pull it off. Greg Serano, the hotel's manager, was a bit sharper than the lieutenant had bargained for and refused to get himself wrapped up in the state of panic Face was trying so hard to create. Not even B.A.'s impressive bulk seemed to be helping their case this time around.

It was, therefore, very fortunate that just

when Face was close to giving up and coming up with some completely new tactic, the faxes he had called in some favors for the night before came through. The faxes bore official Universal Studios logos on their letterhead and were directed to one Dirk Benedict and the Nitroglycerin Man crew. They asked for confirmation of the crew's safe arrival at the Ocean Terrace Inn and when should they send Mr. Willis, Ms. Streep and the rest of the cast and crew down for filming. When the phone call from "Stephen J. Cannell Productions" came through just a few minutes later, Face noticed the first beads of sweat breaking out across Greg's brow, and he knew they were in.

Apologies were issued in excess and arrangements made so that whatever accommodations the film company needed would be met. Surely there had simply been some error in the computer records, a file lost, a misunderstanding, and there would be *no* further problems, they were reassured.

Tom and the Team left the main office shortly thereafter to enjoy a complimentary breakfast in the garden verandah dining room. They ate with much appreciation of the wonderful and certainly ample display of food. The waitstaff hovered around them, happily providing B.A. with his second and then third servings of fried eggs and ham. It was already becoming hot and slightly muggy, some storm clouds out over the water in the bay in the distance threatening a rainstorm for later in the day.

While they were eating mostly in silence, afraid of saying too much with the staff hanging around them non-stop, Tom found himself staring at Murdock most of the time, and not (or at least, not primarily) because of the incredibly loud Hawaiian shirt and straw hat he was wearing that morning. The hat was most remarkable, in that it had a large, straw-sculptured grasshopper perched on its brim. Tom still just could not get over the Murdock's resemblance to Harrison Barton. A few times Murdock caught him staring but did not say anything - but Tom caught a hint of suspicion and wariness in the captain's eyes each time before he quickly looked away. Tom didn't like it one bit. He hadn't bargained for this "Murdock" character when he had decided to hire the A-Team, and it was the one main standing doubt he had about working with them.

As the waitresses began disappearing into the kitchen and other dining room, preparing for the soon-to-arrive lunch crowd, Hannibal finally spoke up candidly. "You really had me going there for a while, Face. I thought you'd lost it with that manager."

Face was taken aback, and reached up reflexively to fix his tie, even though he was not wearing one. "Hannibal, please! Give me a little credit here. I thought I handled everything quite convincingly, thank you very much. And *no* thanks to the rest of you gentlemen, I might add."

"Hey Faceman, you always say I just screw up your scams so I just figured you wanted me to stay quiet," Murdock commented innocently.

Face turned to Hannibal, who shrugged. "Don't look at me. I'm just one of the actors on this film, and not even one of the important ones. Who ever heard of 'George Peppard'?"

Then Face looked at B.A., who just scowled at him and put away another cherry danish. "Yeah, well, just thank Rhonda and Irene back at my publicity office in L.A. for getting those faxes and that phone call in this morning and saving our butts."

"Seems like this is all an awful lot of work for a few hotel rooms . . ." Tom suggested. "I feel kind of bad taking advantage of these people like this."

"Well, when you manage to get around to paying us, you can cover their bill too, with interest with you want," said Face. "But for now, we have to make due any way we can."

"I think it's time we start planning our course of action here, guys," Hannibal remarked, changing the topic. "Tom, you didn't have any idea exactly where on this island your friends had set up their operations, did you?"

Tom shook his head. "No, the map I saw wasn't that specific. It just showed this island as the center of *something* big."

Somewhere in the dining room there was a sound of breaking glass. Tom spun around quickly - it was a sound that always made him jumpy. It seemed to follow him everywhere, though he did not know whether it meant anything or whether it was just another sign of his own paranoia. This time it turned out to be a small glass that had been knocked off a table by one of the waitresses, who had been trying to shoo away a small bird feeding from the sugar bowl.

*"It's only glass, Tom. Only reflections of things you've already seen . . ."*

Hannibal cleared throat and Tom turned his attention back to the Team. "All right. That means our first job has to be finding Them, if They're still even here to begin with."

"If we had a chopper, I could do a scan around the island from the air," Murdock suggested hopefully. "I believe, Face, if you look in the script - page fifty-four, to be exact - you'll find a nice aerial combat sequence with Willis commandeering a chopper in order to save

Meryl Streep from the giant slime monster."

"Yeah, I suppose that'll do," Face observed. "Murdock and I will try to spread the movie company story around today, find out if they have a Film Commission office where we can get a credit line going. Then see if we can get ourselves a chopper. If they even *have* any on this island."

"This 'Nitroglycerin Man' thing - it's actually a real script?" Tom asked in disbelief.

Murdock looked offended. "Of course it's real! I spent a whole two weeks working on it. Katie thinks it's the greatest."

"Katie's only five - she still thinks *Barney* is the greatest," Face commented.

Hannibal finished his coffee and got up, walking to the end of the balcony that looked down over Basseterre Bay and the rest of the city. "Tom, B.A., we'll go scout around town, find out what the local hot spots are and see if we can pick up any gossip. I don't know how willing the local population will be to talk to a couple of tourists like us, but we can give it a try. We'll rendezvous back here tonight to see if any of us have made any headway."

\* \* \* \*

Basseterre, St. Kitts' largest and only real "city", was actually a beautiful example of how a Caribbean town could be developed to appeal to tourists while retaining its colonial heritage and the dignity of its people. Buildings no taller than two or three stories lined the narrow streets, all painted in bright pastels and housing everything from hotels and souvenir shops to produce markets and "snackettes." The center of the city, called "The Circus", was a roundabout where taxi drivers parked their vans and cars and congregated to look for jobs under a circle of giant, ancient palm trees.

The Ballahoo restaurant's long balcony looked down over the Circus, as did the new Circus Grill and the open air bar of the Basseterre Hotel. Local businessmen and women gathered on these balconies equally with the tourists at lunchtime to look down on all the activity in the streets and dine on everything from hamburgers to lobster salad. Old women would set up on the corners of the roundabout with displays of mangoes, bananas, and more exotic fruits, depending on what happened to be in season at the moment. One man could always be found with his old rusted-green pickup truck full of coconuts, rounded up daily from the coconut field in the countryside. He was a source of much commentary and speculation by tourists. They

never ceased to be amazed at the nonchalant way he would lop off the top of a coconut with his giant machete for a customer, just barely missing his fingertips, all the while discussing the latest island politics and news animatedly.

St. Kitts and its sister island, Nevis, were very political islands, Tom and the others discovered as they roamed from bar to bar, restaurant to shopping center, scoping out the territory and putting out feelers for any information on the conspiracy. But about the only thing people were eager to give their opinions about besides the best restaurants for real Creole food was the state of the current island government. Most of the middle-aged and elderly population were dissatisfied with the newly and somewhat questionably-elected Labor party candidate for Prime Minister, Denzil Douglas, while the younger folks were praising his work and the changes he'd made over the old PAM-controlled government. Many Nevisians, however, so dissatisfied with the new Labor government's policies of increased involvement in Nevisian affairs, were appealing seriously for independent status from St. Kitts for the first time.

It was a volatile time on the island, apparently; with an upcoming extradition hearing involving drug trafficking and the murder of a police officer, U.S. Troops were stationed for "exercises" on a small base in the Foothills of Basseterre, mostly out-of-sight but never out of the minds of the island's residents. All of this was interesting information, but it told Tom, B.A. and Hannibal little about what they were really searching for. After several hours the heat and all the political talk was beginning to exhaust them.

They made one last stop that afternoon that was a hole in the wall - literally. Gilley's Chicken Mart was nothing more than a small green-and-white shack on a narrow side street, with several tables and chairs situated under a tin roof next door where a small bar and snackette operated. Instead of a door to Gilley's, there was just a tiny opening, no more than three-by-five inches in dimension, at about chest level. People would walk up to the hole and stick in their hand with a few East Caribbean dollars. The dollars would be taken and a piece of roasted chicken doled out into their hand in return.

Tom, Hannibal and B.A. watched this phenomenon for several minutes from where they sat at their tiny table, nursing their Carib beers. Hannibal finally gave in to curiosity and decided to try the mysterious chicken shack himself.

"Hey, this is the best roasted chicken I think



I've ever tasted!" he proclaimed enthusiastically as he sat back down, offering the leg out to Tom or B.A. to taste. B.A. tried a piece, and was soon at Gilley's door himself getting three servings. Tom passed, leery of what exactly was going on inside the tiny building.

Hannibal finished his chicken leg and said to Tom, "I don't mean to sound negative, kid, but I can't help but feel like we may not find anything going on down here. What will you do next if that's the case?"

"I . . . I don't know, exactly. I've just been going day to day, week to week for so long . . . I haven't really thought about what I'd do next if we don't find anything here," Tom tried to explain. "I follow one lead to the next, and nine out of ten times I find something when I get there. Either I've got incredibly good intuition, or this conspiracy is more wide-spread than even I appreciate yet. And believe me, I know it's big."

Hannibal nodded. "I guess we'll have to take your word on that for now. If nothing else, this is turning into a pretty good vacation, right B.A.?"

"Yeah man," B.A. agreed with a mouthful of chicken. "Ain't a bad place at all!"



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**Chapter Four:****At the Crossroads**

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That evening the Team and Tom enjoyed Ocean Terrace Inn's famous Wednesday night West Indian buffet, complete with live music provided by the island's largest steel band, the Coronets. The head table at the end of the restaurant's balcony had been reserved expressly for them, and the band started up with an easy-going, extra-extended version of Stevie Wonder's "I Just Called to Say I Love You" as the early evening diners began to arrive.

"Learn anything interesting today, guys?" Face asked Hannibal and B.A., then he tasted the white wine that the restaurant captain had brought over for them. He nodded to the captain that the wine was acceptable and the man left after filling everyone else's glasses.

"Only that everyone here loves to talk politics, and the tourist season's been real slow," Tom jumped in with a reply.

"- And that Gilley's Chicken Mart needs to franchise into the States. They'd put KFC out of business in no time," added Hannibal.

"Huh?" Murdock and Face asked in unison.

"Nothing important. What about you two?"

"Well, we managed to get a chopper, but that was an adventure all onto itself," Face explained. "The only one we could track down is owned by some big-wig who runs the Four Seasons Resort over on Nevis. So, we had to take the God-awful ferry boat over to Nevis, which took a good two hours as they decided to make an unannounced stop at the Deep Water Port to pick up some cargo. We made it over to the Four Seasons around two, finally found this guy about an hour later, and sometime around four actually managed to get the chopper off the ground." Face shook his head in exasperation. "I swear, Hannibal, everything around here runs in slow-motion. I don't know how a person's supposed to get anything done at all!"

". . . Anyway," Murdock continued, "we took her up and checked out pretty much the whole island, along the coast, up around the volcano peak, and down the peninsula. Didn't spot nothin' real suspicious on a first look-around."

"What about radio antenna, satellite dishes . . ." Tom suggested.

Face described, "There's one radio antenna, over on Nevis though. It's for the local A.M. station, 'Voice of Nevis'. Spotted a couple satellite dishes, mostly down in the Frigate Bay area here where there looks to be a lot of rich

fancy types livin' it up in big mansions."

"That could be Them," Tom speculated. "From what I've seen, They don't have any aversion to living well."

"Could be, but if I had to bet on where They'd be located, I'd say it would be that peninsula," Murdock speculated. "It's real quiet down there, hardly a building in sight. Only one main highway, a few clearings where it looks like there might be some hotels goin' up soon."

"According to the tourist booklet, the whole area was only opened up a few years ago. Used to be, the only way to get around was by boat from the water, or four-wheel drive on land," added Face.

"That does sound plausible," Hannibal agreed. "Might be a good idea to check it out from the ground tomorrow."

As the evening wore on, the band actually began to pick up, switching gears around eight o'clock from slow favorites like "Island in the Sun" into the tourist-friendly calypso of "Hot Hot Hot". After dinner the Team moved down to the Calypso Bar, an open-air structure painted in fluorescent, swirling patterns and with an enormous birdcage serving as the back wall. The music was keeping the thirty-odd parakeets in the cage awake and rather annoyed. They fluttered around nervously and noisily behind Mike, the subdued bartender.

The main business of the day finished, B.A. started up a conversation with Mike, and Hannibal and Face got deep into a discussion over impending movie projects. Tom commented to Murdock, "Somehow I had a different impression of what the A-Team would be like."

"Oh?" Murdock wondered. "Well, we haven't



really been 'The A-Team' that much the past few years, so maybe we're a little out of practice. But don't worry, when things start to heat up . . ." he nodded and grinned slyly, "so will we."

The grin spooked Tom because once again he was seeing no one but Harrison Barton sitting next to him. Murdock noticed Tom's changed expression and said in exasperation, "Do you have to keep starin' at me like that, Tom? You're really givin' me the creeps."

"Sorry," Tom apologized quickly. "You just keep reminding me of someone."

"Yeah, this Barton character, I know. But I'm not him. How could I be - you said yourself he's dead."

"Yeah. Problem is, I've had other friends come back from the dead. And I can't trust my memory to be intact. Harrison may still be alive for all I know. He may not have even existed."

"Well, you can trust my memory on this matter, and my psychiatrist can verify that for you. I'm not, never have been nor ever will be Harrison Barton," Murdock stated emphatically. Then, betraying some curiosity he asked, "But you say this guy really looked that much like me?"

Tom nodded. "I swear, like you were identical twins."

"Same age . . ."

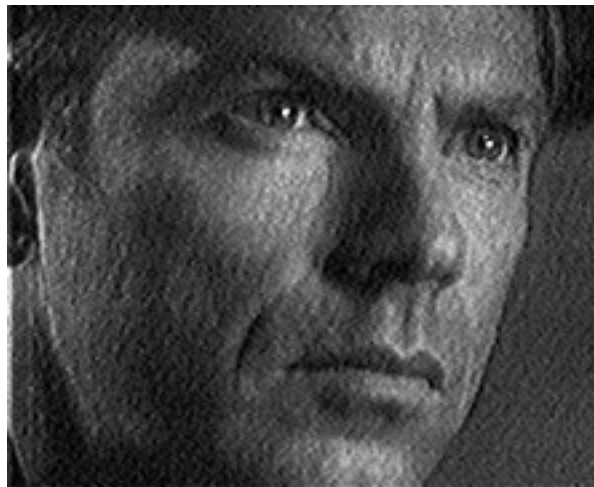
"As far as I could tell, I mean, could have been a few years difference. I knew Barton a pretty long time, and I'm fairly sure he was somewhere around fifty, maybe, when . . . I saw him last."

"Hmm." Murdock leaned back in his stool and watched the band for a while. The large ensemble of musicians consisted of players that ranged in age from six to sixty. The youngest members of the troop were relegated to keeping the beat going by banging furiously away on what looked like nothing more than overturned trash cans, while the older players worked their magic on the small melodious pans. Several young couples with obviously a bit too much to drink had gotten up the courage to try to dance on the small platform in front of the band. They were not doing a very good job of it. At the end of one very long calypso number, an announcer took the stage and a small fashion show started to the accompaniment of the steel band, featuring garments produced by some of the island's various designers and fabric-makers.

"Did he . . . you knew him pretty well, you said?" Murdock inquired further.

"Well, I ran into him a lot on assignments over the years. He could be a good partner on a

job - at least, when he wasn't completely stoned out of his head or determined to drink P.J. O'Rourke under the table." O'Rourke was a fellow gonzo-journalist who always seemed to slum around in the same hellholes as Barton. About the only thing the two of them could agree upon was that the world looked a helluva lot better from the bottom of a bottle of Scotch. "I didn't really know much more about him, though. He did brag a lot about being a real activist-type for a while, a draft dodger and all that, back when he was younger. But Harrison was always so full of shit, too, that you could never really believe anything he said."



Murdock seemed thoughtful, but just nodded and didn't say anything more on the subject.

Face was momentarily distracted from his conversation with Hannibal when he spotted a woman enter the courtyard by herself - that in and of itself was an odd sight here, as everyone else at the hotel seemed to be old retirees and young newlywed couples. Face did a quick estimate of her age and figure as she passed by, and watched as she then joined an elderly, obviously local couple at a table in front of the bar. They both greeted her as if she was an old friend, the large dark skinned woman grabbing her in a warm embrace and laughing. The woman was not exactly Face's normal type - a little old (meaning, close to his own age) and in okay shape but not a runway model by any standards. Yet there was something in her demeanor and appearance that he found compelling. Maybe it was just the lack of any other competition for his attention at the moment.

"Some things never change, do they, Lieutenant?"

"What?" Face asked, turning back to look at Hannibal. "Oh, sorry I was just -"

"- Admiring the scenery? Well, it's getting late and I want us to get moving early tomorrow." Hannibal got off his stool and announced, "I'm heading in. We'll meet up at seven-hundred and make plans from there."

Murdock, B.A. and Tom followed suit shortly. Face stayed at the bar a while longer, ordering another drink and keeping an eye on the woman. *Some things never change . . . or did they?* More and more Face had been finding himself looking at Hannibal and Murdock, both married and obviously very happy, and wondering if he wasn't really missing something. All those years he had prided himself on his ability to bring home a different woman every night, and now he felt as if he was waking up finally and realizing that he had nothing to show for all his endeavors except a very full little black book.

His life had settled down, since the pardon, and he knew he did not have the same excuse he used to about not being able to keep a steady relationship going because of the military being on his tail. He had thought about a few women he had promised he would get back in touch with, if he ever were free, yet he never had. He doubted they had ever expected him to do so.

The woman and the couple left sometime later, and then Face decided to depart as well. He signed the bar bill and walked back to his room, wondering now to himself whether it was just too late in life to change.

\* \* \* \*

One of the couples out in the courtyard that Face had mistakenly identified as "newlyweds" was actually Agents Mulder and Scully, dressed down somewhat from their usual dark suits in order to blend in a little better with the vacationers. Mulder's head was bobbling slowly in time with the music, his eyes following one of the shapely young women who had now come onto the stage to model some Batik beachwear. Currently she was just wearing a tiny skirt and a scarf tied around her chest as a bikini top. Scully sighed and poked her half-drunk and now mostly melted Pina Colada. "Mulder, this is ridiculous. What are we doing here?" she asked finally.

"Scully, this is the biggest weekly entertainment event on the island. Everyone who's anyone will be here. Where better to expect our friend to make an appearance?"

"If he's here, which is a pretty big if."

"If not him, one of his associates." Mulder did a slow scan of the crowd again. They had arrived a little after the fashion show had begun and the place started to get particularly busy.

Nothing caught his attention too closely, until he turned towards the Carnival Bar. He almost missed him and wondered how on earth he had on his previous scans of the bar - perhaps because the man had not been watching the show and had been sitting with his back towards the courtyard. B.A. Baracus was someone who turned heads wherever he went, with his stiff mohawk and bountiful gold jewelry. It did not take more than a few seconds for Mulder to recognize him now that he was getting a full view. He could not quite believe it when he then identified three of the other men in the company of the large former sergeant. With a grin, Mulder said, "Scully, you're *not* going to believe who's sitting at the bar right now."

"Who, your Neck-Scar Man, the guy in your photograph?"

"Neck-Scar Man, that's cute. No, it's the A-Team."



"The A-Team." Scully gave him a "Yeah, right" look.

"Go on, see for yourself."

She turned around slowly towards the bar. A moment later she recognized them herself. "Well, I'll be damned."

"Now, what do you think the A-Team is doing down here, hmm?"

"Maybe just taking a vacation, like everyone else except us?"

"If so, where are their families? Colonel Smith is a married man these days, and so is that pilot of theirs, Murdock - the tall skinny guy in the loud shirt. Even has a couple of kids by now, I think I remember hearing."

Scully had not even recognized Murdock. "I

didn't know you were such an expert on the A-Team, Mulder."

"Sideline interest. I got into researching their case in college after reading a psychiatric paper on Murdock. The man's a walking thesis subject, Scully. And the way the Team somehow managed to escape from that firing squad when numerous people witnessed their deaths and handled their bodies is an X-File no one's tried to explain yet. But anyway, I think if the four of them are down here, there's got to be something up."

"Why don't you ask them yourself?"

It was a tempting idea, but Mulder was not sure the direct approach would work best, at least for now. Besides, he reminded himself, for all he knew they could be down here working for the other side. He did not know that much about their motivations and loyalties to say for sure where they would fit in a puzzle like this one.

Colonel Smith was just getting up to leave as Mulder debated further. "I think we should keep our distance for now, but keep an eye out for them. This is a small place. I'm sure our paths will cross again."

"Whatever. I'm heading back to the hotel now. Enjoy the rest of the show." Scully got up from the table after a final sip on her drink. They were staying at the Fort Thomas Hotel, just across the street from Ocean Terrace. It was not nearly as posh but it catered to business travelers, conventioners, and other budget-minded travelers. "See you in the morning?"

"Bright and early," Mulder replied, returning his attention to the models. He stayed until about ten, when the show and the band finished up, keeping his eyes alternately on the stage, the crowd, and the bar. The rest of the A-Team had retired not long after Colonel Smith had left, along with the other person Mulder did not recognize. He guessed the man was a new associate of theirs, or perhaps their current client. Mulder was very curious to know how the A-Team fit into this situation, for there was no doubt in his mind that they must in some way.

Mulder went up to the bar a little while after the last man, Lieutenant Peck, had left, and he talked to the bartender for a while. Just by inquiring into general island affairs, he found out about the movie company scam the Team was pulling on the hotel, which only heightened his interest in the matter. Of course, the bartender did not know they were the A-Team; he referred to individuals of different names but who were no doubt Smith, Peck and Baracus. The entire hotel staff had been instructed to treat them with special courtesy and everyone was apparently

quite excited by the prospect of the increased business this movie venture could bring to the hotel. Mulder said nothing to interfere with the Team's charade.

On a whim, Mulder asked the bartender if he had ever seen the Neck-Scar Man before, showing Mike the photograph. Mike thought about it for a moment, shaking up a drink for one of the waitresses to deliver, and then indicated, yes, he did remember seeing the man on more than a few occasions before. He did not know his name or what his business was, but he knew the name of one of the people he had always seen Neck-Scar Man come in with before - Rizzo. Rizzo DeMarco. Everyone on the island knew Rizzo, apparently.

"Why's that?" Mulder asked.

Mike shook his head and smiled. "Rizzo . . . 'e's a crazy mon, 'kay? Been livin' on and off down 'ere for years. Says 'e used to be a big person in de Mafia an' all dat. Always gettin' in trouble with de government an' his women . . . 'e's real loose."



"So where can I find this guy?"

Mike laughed. "Mon, if you be down 'ere more than a few days, you'll find him, don' worry."

Mulder figured the bartender was probably right. This island was a very small place. It should not take him long until he found this man Rizzo, and then the Neck-Scar Man, and then . . . *what, then?* What was he going to actually do when he found him? He wasn't sure, had not really thought about that yet. He supposed the answer would be obvious when the time arrived. In the meantime, he needed to find out more about what was going on down here, besides fashion shows and steel drum bands.

Finishing his drink, Mulder left Mike a generous tip and left to head back to his hotel. He

never once noticed the sandy-haired gentleman dining by himself in the balcony above the courtyard. But the man had taken them all in that evening - Mulder and Scully, the A-Team . . . Thomas Veil . . . Things were going to start getting very interesting soon, he knew. And that meant he needed to inform his boss about the situation right away.

Some might have thought it was an impossible coincidence that he happened to be on St. Kitts that day and at that specific time, at the Ocean Terrace Inn where he could observe these events unfolding. Those who knew the man better knew it was just another example of his special and quite sought-after strange luck.



He went down to the hotel's lobby and the placed a phone call. When a woman coolly answered on the other end, he replied, "Songbird, this is Able Two. Tell Able One that we may have a crisis in the making."

\* \* \* \*

The evening breeze carried through the deluxe hotel room, along with the sounds of crickets and night birds. Tom was restless in the heat, half dozing and unable to quite put the voices in his head to rest.

*"There's one person I can trust . . . myself."*

*"Yeah. But so what. . . Joe Carter is dead. And so is Thomas Veil."*

Sleep never was quite the same to Tom anymore. After enduring weeks of deprivation, he no longer took for granted the ability to close his eyes and let the world slip away for even a

few precious moments. Yet at the same time sleep meant losing control, not knowing if he would even wake up the next morning. If he would wake up somewhere far away, under Their control, being prepped for a series of Their experiments and interrogations. Again. That maybe the "programming" would take over, and he would never be himself anymore.

*Dreams . . .*

He shifted under the lingering humid air that the overhead fan could not dissipate. Dreams were a blessing and a curse. Sometimes he would dream and he would remember things the way they used to be. Allison. And Lauren. Sometimes he would dream that she was still alive, and that none of this craziness had ever happened. Those were the good nights. He would see her smile, remember they way they had been at the beginning, high school sweethearts, long-distance lovers in college . . . before his work had ever driven them apart and, in his mind, cost Lauren her life.

But mostly there were the bad nights. The nightmares . . . always the nightmares that seemed to follow even the good dreams. That evening when he finally drifted asleep, the nightmares took him back to the jungles of Chile, made him relive those events one more time in his head. Events that may have only existed in his mind to begin with but that he could not quite let go of . . .

*. . . There was just something about a jungle, he mused as the jeep barreled down what could only be called a road in the broadest sense of the word. Something that just cried out adventure and danger and made his pulse quicken with expectation. Either that or it was the edge from his last fix wearing off and wreaking havoc with his nervous system. His partner in this grand little expedition was complaining about something again. Why couldn't the man just take it easy and roll with the punches? He knew where he was going - well, actually, he *didn't* know, but he did sort of have a vague idea . . . well, not much more than a hunch at that point, but what did that matter? Eventually they would end up where they needed to be. It was only a matter of time.*

*"Harrison, we've been driving around for three hours, there's nothing out here."*

*"According to Angela's map, base camp's right beyond this hill . . . oh boy, somebody's always killing somebody in this country."*

*"Seems to send you home packin'."*

*"Death's a small price to pay for life! I can live here! Hell, back home - I mean, you know*

*what twenty bucks buys you down here?"*

*"I've noticed."*

*"Nah na na na nah - I'm not talkin' about the girls - I'm talkin' about the homes, the land - everything! Here - hell, I'm on top of the pile here. Everywhere where else, you . . . you - you gotta dig pretty deep to find me."*

Suddenly there was the sound of an explosion, gunfire. The jeep came to a sudden jarring stop -

- at which Murdock awoke with a start and for a brief moment couldn't remember where he was and what he was doing there. Then he spotted Face soundly asleep in the other double bed, and remembered . . . St. Kitts. Thomas Veil. Thomas Veil had been in the dream, he realized, puzzled, wondering if it really *had* just been a dream . . . something about it seemed too real, especially to someone who was used to seeing strange things and having a wild imagination. He could have sworn it felt like something he had actually seen . . .

He tried to fall back asleep but could not get the dream out of his head for a long while. He

thought back to Tom's story about Harrison Barton, which had bothered him right from the start but he had hoped he could put aside as an interesting little coincidence. Now he felt like he should be hearing the Twilight Zone theme song strike up at any moment. But no musical cue followed, so he just shook his head and tried to forget about it, tried to convince himself it didn't really mean anything at all . . .



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**Chapter Five:****Private Investigations**

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The next morning, Face and Tom were assigned to do an initial ground inspection of the southeastern peninsula, while Murdock and Hannibal went to check out Frigate Bay and scout out the local big-shots living there. B.A., they had decided, would probably do best to spend some more time in town, poking around and seeing what he might be able to draw out from any of the island locals about suspicious foreigner-types. People might be more willing to talk to him alone than they would any of the rest of the Team.

With a map in hand and riding in an open-top jeep provided courtesy of the hotel, Tom and Face took off for the peninsula. Once they got out of Basseterre they had little trouble finding their way around - there was only one main road around the island. Once they cleared the first hill into the Frigate Bay area it was easy enough to spot their destination, a road cut into the side of the small hill beyond a large lagoon and a rather sadly under-cared for golf course.

It was only nine in the morning, but already the heat was becoming oppressive. The sky was a perfect clear blue and only the lightest breeze blew through the palms and the bushes along the road. The incline up the first hill was steep, and Face took it slow even in the four-wheel drive vehicle. There was something about the way the road was carved right into the hill, with a sheer rock wall on one side of him and nothing but the Atlantic Ocean on the other, that made him a little cautious.

When they hit the top of the hill, both men were taken aback by the sight before them. Face pulled the jeep off into the small curb so they could both get out and take a look. The whole length of the peninsula stretched out before them, several hundred feet below. There was just a skinny strip of land and jagged hills, with the Atlantic Ocean pounding heavily on one coast and the Caribbean Sea gently lapping against the other. From their perspective on top of the hill, there were no signs of any inhabitation at all on the land. The only sounds were the cries of birds and the occasional call from some young goats making their way down through the brush grass below.

Somehow the sight had not impressed Face as much the day before from the air as it did now. "I didn't think places like this still existed," he commented to Tom, who was taking photographs of the view.

"In the Caribbean? I don't think many do," Tom agreed. "And with this road in here now I doubt it will be much longer until the resorts buy it all up."

"Yeah, next thing you know this place'll be another St. Maarten, filled with luxury hotels, casinos and duty-free perfume and jewelry stores."

All one had to do was turn around and look back down at the Frigate Bay area they had just left to know that prediction was very likely to come true. Time-share condo lots covered the low-lying land, along with all the other trappings of a tourism-based economy.

They got back in the jeep and slowly made their way down the hill to the thin, flat strip of land before the next, even steeper hill. Up close now, they saw the signs of impending development: a square clearing in the brush and a large sign marked with the name of a management company. To their left side, the barren Atlantic beach showed no signs of life. They took the turn-off to the right, past the clearing and a small, bizarre S-shaped salt pond towards the Caribbean shore. The beach was deserted except for a small shack painted with the logos for Carib and Ting soda, and a few stacks of lawn chairs and umbrellas. A hand-lettered, wooden sign advertised snorkeling trips and horseback rides, with a phone number to call and "Ask for Gulani." A single house was located on the cliffside but it appeared similarly deserted. There was nothing much to see at all.

They continued their slow exploration of the peninsula, eventually clearing the top of one hill to find what had to be the strangest sight of all on the island. The Great Salt Pond was enclosed on the Caribbean side by only the thinnest strip of land, peaked with a tiny hill that looked as if it had seen much better days before Hurricane Hugo destroyed most of it a few years back. What was so odd about the salt pond was its color - a freakish, decidedly unnatural bright pink. The construction of the road had caused the run-off of reddish soil into the pond, muddying its waters and changing its color from the previous clear blue, perhaps permanently. Along the shores where the waterline had receded, traces of white salt laced around the pond, along with the bleached-white, gnarled stumps of dead trees and bushes. The stumps poked out of the water like ghoulish corpses, skeletons twisted in the agony of their deaths. It seemed to Face that the place would have made a perfect location for one of Hannibal's monster movies. He had the irrational desire to drive a little faster to get past the ghostly scene.



The road traced a path along the inner edge of the pond. They had to stop halfway across to allow an old man to shoo his small herd of skinny cattle off the road. A family of vervet monkeys sat in a tree watching them with cautious curiosity. They scampered off quickly when Tom began taking pictures of them. He took a picture of the old man as well, in his faded jeans and ancient worn sandals. The man grinned a mostly toothless smile and waved at them when they finally passed by, leaving him and his cattle behind.

Not long after that, they found a turn-off in the road, complete with a sign announcing the "Turtle Bar Beach Grill and Condominiums." Deciding to leave that path for their return trip, they continued farther down the main road, through a passage laced by wild sea grape bushes, and closed in on the very tip of the island. Nevis loomed close in front of them now and new sign posts greeted them. These were large metallic ones painted with fancy, Middle Eastern-style lettering, proclaiming this place to be the future sight of the luxurious "Casablanca" resort. Another sign illustrated the impressive plans for the resort for all to see, everything from the main hotel complex to the tennis courts, shopping complex, casino, three swimming pools, and the various other necessities of a complete island-vacation experience. All they actually saw, though, as they drove along to the site was a large shed with one wall already broken into and with a rusted looking bulldozer parked next to it. Then, at the very tip of the island, they found a three-story cube of red-painted steel girders on a square of cement. The sight was completely abandoned otherwise. The beach in front of them was pretty, but not resort-quality by any standards. It was rocky, with only a thick layer of white sand on top that looked as if it had been deposited there by the developers. Just a few feet out and a thick mat of green seaweed covered the beach's bottom. Dead weeds floated up on the barren shore as well in thick waves. The only growth along the shoreline was a sprawling mat of sea grape vines and five of the most pathetic-looking palm trees Face thought he had ever seen. Four other dead stumps next to the five survivors seemed to testify to the fact that the whole development was, in fact, dead in the water.

"So much for the development of the tourist industry here," he commented.

"I wonder what happened," Tom mused, aiming his camera up at the skeletal steel structure. "It looks like they were pretty serious about this project, and then just packed

up and left. Like a tropical ghost town."

"Maybe a better prospect came along," Face guessed. "Besides a good view and secluded location, this place would need some serious overhauls before becoming a tropical paradise."

"Maybe . . ." Tom stopped, mid-thought when he spied out of the corner of his camera lens another structure to their right. It was a single story, white-and-yellow complex down the coastline a bit, overgrown with bushes and tall weeds. It looked equally abandoned, but what caught Tom's attention was the rather large satellite dish he could just make out peeking behind one of the buildings. "Check this out." He pointed in the direction of the other building, and the dish.

"Hmm . . . shall we?" Face asked.

"Yeah, let's."

\* \* \* \*

The jeep pulled over in front of the low-lying building, which had only a dirt path connecting it to the main road. Face got out and headed towards the front door, which was unlocked. Tom stayed outside, wandering around the perimeter of what must have once been a very exclusive and secluded small hotel and heading towards the satellite dish. There was not much to see. The walls the building were starting to rot out, the white paint and yellow trim peeling away from the old wood.

"Looks like just another bankrupted hotel," Face observed as he joined Tom back outside, having found little to catch his attention inside. Tom was much more interested in something he had picked up off the ground, right near the base of the satellite dish.

"What is it?" Face asked, noticing Tom studying something intently.

Tom held it up for Face to see. It was a half-smoked cigar, with a tell-tale pencil hole poked in the still intact end. "They may not be here right now, but They were. And recently," Tom stated emphatically.

\* \* \* \*

B.A. made his way around the streets of Basseterre, feeling a strange sense of ease at his surroundings. As always, he turned heads wherever he went, yet here it was not with the usual mix of curiosity, fear and sometimes even anger he usually sensed in people elsewhere. Instead, people would look at him and smile, nod their heads in greeting, and often even want to stop and talk to him. Find out who he was. That

afternoon he must have related his tale of his rise from his poor beginnings in Chicago into the army and to his current level of relative prosperity at least ten times by noon. When he sat down with a group of cab drivers in the Circus for a while, sharing sodas out of a cooler in the back of one of their vans, it was not long before a large flock of young children began to gather around him. They all wanted to check out his jewelry, fascinated by it and by him. In an act of trust he let a few of them try on a few chains for themselves - none of the children tried to run away with it, they just laughed and pointed at each other, enjoying the game of acting rich and famous.

"How you get so rich, mon?" one boy asked.

"Must be a movie star," another child guessed.

"Or a wrestler!"

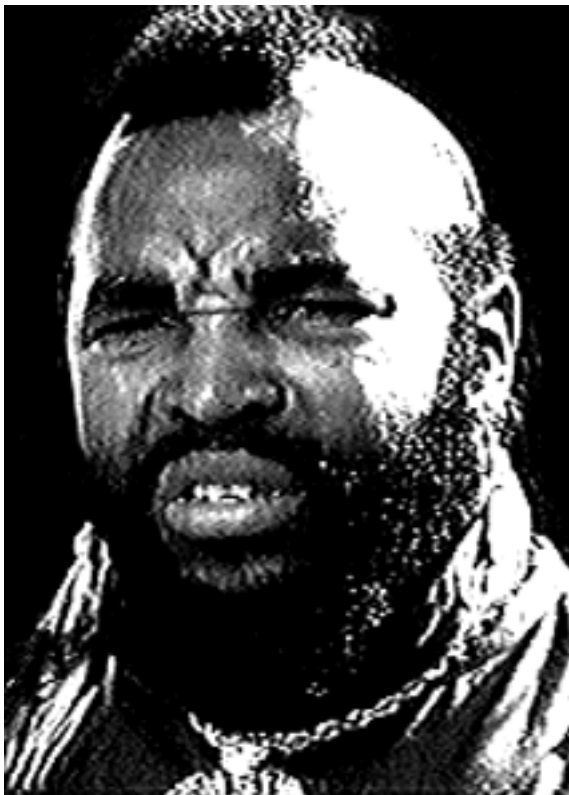
"Only one way for a black man t'get so rich, mon," one slightly older boy insisted. Some of the others giggled.

B.A. fixed his gaze on him. "Oh? And what's that?"

The boy smiled, shuffling back and forth on his feet. "C'mon, mon, y'know."

"No, tell me," B.A. said patiently.

"Drugs, mon! Dat's de only way to get dat rich," the boy explained with a knowing smile.



B.A. put down the small girl that had been sitting on his knee and leaned forward with a

serious scowl to stare at the boy. "That's what you think, huh? You really think you can make yourself a rich, big man with drugs?"

"Sure, mon, dey all do. Dat's de only way a brother can make rich like de whites 'round here. An' dey all do it, too."

"Only one thing drugs is gonna get you, foo', and that's *dead*. Sure, you'll live big for a while, 'til you get busted, 'til you die from an overdose of your own crap, or lose all your money on your habit. Or someone decides you ain't no good no more an' decides to blow you away an' take over your territory. That what you want? That's what'll make you feel big and proud?"

The children were all quiet, either transfixed by B.A.'s words or looking down at the ground in embarrassment or guilt. He knew, many of them probably had older siblings who were involved in drugs, and who probably showed off to their family and friends all the fancy things they got with their drug money. Who would not be impressed by that in such a poor area? It was the same thing B.A. saw day in and day out in the L.A. ghettos. "I got where I am today by hard work and believin' in myself, and in God. You can do the same thing, but you just gotta have the strength to do right an' strive for it. Don't take the fast an' easy road, 'cause it's only gonna lead you to a dead end. You understand?"

Just then a large tan van stopped in front of them, horn honking loudly. A woman opened the door and yelled out something incomprehensible in thick island patois to the children. They began to break up and head over to the vehicle, those who had been admiring B.A.'s jewelry returning it carefully to him. The taller boy joined them, turning back to give B.A. one more questioning look before shrugging and piling into the vehicle.

After they left, one of the drivers who had been sitting next to B.A. shook his head sadly. "Dey's all like that round 'ere these days. Drugs . . . dey all think that's de way out of 'ere. None a'dem want to work anymore. Dey see de rich tourists comin' through, an' dey all want to have de same tings - an' who can blame dem?"

"It's the same everywhere," B.A. agreed sadly. "Some things never change. Some things never change."

\* \* \* \*

At Mulder's suggestion - or very near insistence - Scully and he had hired a cab driver to take them on the full tour of the island that morning. Their guide was a middle-aged gentleman with the unfortunate name Gasley, who drove a five-year-old Mitsubishi Van painted with the name "The

Love Bird". The van managed the best it could on the bumps and holes of the island's less than smoothly paved main road. Scully found the touristy stops such as the Batik factory and Carib Indian Rocks rather tedious, but Mulder seemed to be enjoying himself, taking snapshots everywhere and appearing to hang on Gasley's every word. Gasley was a soft-spoken and surprisingly knowledgeable individual, able to point out and discuss many of the details of St. Kitts' stormy history. The island, it turned out, had a fascinating record of being of bone of contention between the British, French, and even early on the Spanish during numerous wars and battle, changing possession between the nations many times before finally becoming a British colony. Now, it was a very proud and fiercely independent state along with its sister island, Nevis, struggling to prove to itself and the world it did not need to be under any colonial support or rule anymore.

The midpoint of their tour was the Golden Lemon hotel in Dieppe Bay on the northern-most tip of the island. Feeling guilty about leaving their driver sitting out in the heat while they ate lunch, the two agents invited him in to join them and he, after much prodding and insistence, reluctantly accepted.

Sitting on the verandah of the beautiful old plantation house, Mulder continued asking Gasley all about the island's history and current politics. Gasley seemed pleased to have such an interested client for the day and was more than happy to discuss such matters, especially if it gave him a chance to vent his anger at the country's current president, Denzil Douglas.

"E's runnin' the country into the ground with his policies an' his drug money," Gasley stated emphatically. "E don' want to see de tourist industry thrive 'ere at all. The only industries he's supportin' are de sugar cane - which never helped our economy, de market is not strong enough - and de drugs."

Scully's attention was wandering a bit, mainly due to the rum punch she was sipping that was turning out to be nowhere near as harmless as it appeared. Therefore she was not certain she had heard Mulder quite right when he asked Gasley, "Have you ever heard anyone here talk about seeing UFOs?"

Gasley seemed equally surprised at the question. "Hello?" he asked.

"UFOs - flying saucers, strange lights in the sky, aliens . . ." Mulder supplied in explanation.

"Oh . . ." Gasley exclaimed in sudden understanding, then laughed softly. "Oh, well, now-and-then, you know, some people say dey've

seen something in de night, especially now down on de peninsula along de highway, but . . . well, if you want to know, I think dey've just been drinking a few too many rum punches."

Gasley laughed again and Scully grinned. "I think you're probably right, Gasley. Another one of these and even I'd start seeing UFOs."

Mulder did not say anything; he was already planning on a late-night trip down the peninsula that evening.

\* \* \* \*

Tom did not know whether to feel vindicated or more confused than ever as Face turned the jeep onto the small dirt road that led to the Turtle Bar and Grill. He had proof in his mind now that They *had* been on the island. But where were They now was still the question. Had They predicted he would track Them down here, and moved on already?

The road - if it could really be called that - ended abruptly in a small parking lot along the water's edge, behind a large wooden structure that had to be the bar. They could not see much of it until they walked around the corner of the building to the main entrance. The Turtle Bar was a bright and cheery place that seemed to revel in its god-awful tackiness. Fishing nets adorned the ceilings, along with numerous wind chimes, coconut shells carved into bird feeders, brightly painted wooden figures of fishes and birds, and various other pieces of nautically-themed junk. Jimmy Buffet blared too loudly out of the stereo; he was singing about cheeseburgers in Paradise. A waitress rushed by them to a picnic table outside, carrying a huge plateful of grilled fish and fries on a large tray. Close on her heels was a virtual army of scrawny cats and kittens who quickly took up position at the feet of the customer who had ordered the food, all vying for sympathy and whatever stray morsels of the fish they could con out of him.

Tom and Face grabbed a table near the front of the restaurant's verandah and another waitress meandered over to give them menus. After she left, Face took a better look around and was surprised and pleased to notice a familiar face at the bar. It was the woman he had seen at the hotel the night before. She was chatting it up with the bartender, a tanned young man who bore a strong resemblance to Ocean Terrace's manager, Greg.

"Say, Tom, order me a fish sandwich or something," Face said, getting up from the table and walking over to the bar. He took the stool next to the woman, who was laughing hard at

something the bartender had just said. She turned to new arrival and met Face's smile with an engaging smile of her own. Sun-bleached, short light-brown hair framed her face, which Face found very appealing now that he was seeing her up close and in the full light for the first time.

"Hi there," Face started, wondering why suddenly he seemed completely out of good pick-up lines.

"Hello," she responded. "Have you tried one of Ricky's Turtle Coladas yet?"

"Erm, no, can't say I have. I just got here."

"Hmm, I thought so. Well, no one should leave this island without trying a Turtle Colada. Ricky?"

"Sure thing," Ricky responded, busying himself preparing the drink and whistling along with the loud music.

"Make that two," Face said, then turning back to the woman. "I take it this isn't *your* first visit down here."

"Actually, I live down here," she admitted. "I own a gallery, work the tourist business. My name's Carol, by the way."

"Carol, nice to meet you. I'm -" he paused for a split-second, debating, then decided to stay with the alias for now - "Dirk. Dirk Benedict. I'm here with a movie crew right now."

"Really. Well, nice to meet you, Dirk."

"Won't you come join us? I'd love to talk to you about the island some more - we've been so busy setting things up for the upcoming shoot that we haven't had much time to just explore and relax."

Carol hesitated only momentarily and then agreed, picking up her drink and following Face over to their table. "Tom, this is Carol. She owns a gallery down here," Face introduced her.

"Hi," Tom said. He took the extra Turtle Punch Face had brought over and sipped it cautiously.

"You know, Tom's a photographer himself," Face supplied.

"That's interesting. I mostly deal with work on canvas, but there is one photographer who I'm quite fond of and carry some of his work. Ever hear of Chance Harper?" she asked.

Tom shook his head. She continued, "Truly incredible work. You'll have to drop by my gallery to see it before you leave."

"I think I'd like that," Tom replied, and she smiled.

Face was beginning to feel a little left out - she seemed to be more than a bit interested in Tom. "Is your gallery down on the peninsula here?"

"No, there's really nothing down here,

except this place." She indicated the Turtle Bar and the few condos up along the cliffside. "It's beautiful down here, in a dry and barren sort of way. But I prefer the mountainside. My place is up on the outskirts on one of the villages, on the Atlantic side of the island. Today is my day off, though, so my manager is watching the gallery."

"How long have you been on the island?" asked Tom.

"A little over two years now. Early retirement. I just got tired of the high-pressure lifestyle in the States. As soon as my children were through with college and I knew they would be secure, I moved down here."

Face commented, "So, I guess you pretty much know everything about everyone on St. Kitts."

She laughed pleasantly. "Well, as much as there *is* to know about people down here. The political scene is pretty rough, but it's always been like that, ever since I first came down here for a vacation trip over twelve years ago. And you have a few local characters that you can't spend more than a week around here without running into somewhere. People that like to act as if they're big players, but they're mostly just a lot of hot air."

"Mostly?" Face inquired.

"Well," she shrugged, and stirred her drink slowly. She spoke now in a softer voice. "A few of them really are into serious bad business. A couple guys that probably had connections with the mob at one time or another, and drugs . . . drugs are a real problem. And it used to not be that way. I mean, small traffickers were always around, but we're talking about a few heavy hitters. They like to call themselves 'investors', brag around at the bars about how much money they make. But there's only one thing they're really 'investing' in, believe me."

Face nodded in understanding. She continued, "So, you said you're with some movie company, hmm? Not another one of those awful 'Missing in Action' flicks, I hope."

"No, no, no. We're working on a much bigger project. Guaranteed summer blockbuster." Face paused for a moment. ". . . It's called 'Bruce Willis Versus the Nitroglycerin Man'."

When she just stared at them both, looking on the verge of breaking up laughing, Tom added, "That's just the working title."

"I should hope so!" she replied. "That's terrible. But, Bruce Willis . . . now, I wouldn't mind seeing *him* down here, though . . ."

Face knew an opening when he saw one. "Well, you know, Carol, I can certainly make arrangements for you to have a chance to meet

Mr. Willis when he arrives, perhaps even get a scene filmed up at your gallery . . . there might even be a part for you in the movie, we're always looking for new talent."

She regarded Face with an expression that let him know she was not that easy to con. But she was not exactly going to turn him down cold either. "We'll have to see about that, Mr. Benedict, I suppose, won't we?"

He smiled back. "I hope so."

\* \* \* \*

"We've got trouble."

"Oh?"

"Yeah. Could be big trouble. Guess who just took a little trip down to St. Kitts."



Cancer Man glanced up at the other man and waited for him to continue speaking. Instead he threw down a computer printout on his desk - a passenger list for an American Airlines flight from Puerto Rico to St. Kitts. The names **Mulder, Fox and Scully, Dana** were circled with a thick red marker. Cancer Man checked the date and time of the flight, and then asked, "What did they find out that motivated them to go there?"

"Who the hell knows. Probably got wind of that rat in Chicago - he was the closest we've come to a blow-up in a while."

"And what is the status of that problem."

"That? *That* was taken care of a week ago. The question is, what are you gonna do about *this* problem."

"I'll take care of Mulder and Scully."

"As well as you have before?"

"They've never gotten this close before, there was no reason to be . . . too drastic." The other man looked somewhat preoccupied still. "Is there something else?"

"Maybe, but nothing of your concern. Just take care of the Feds."

"What? Is something else going on there? If the security of the operation has been jeopardized you *know* what must be done -"

"Yes, yes, I know! Who the hell do you think initiated those security measures to begin with! Relax, things are under control." With that comment, the man ground down the stub of his cigar in Cancer Man's ash tray and left.

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Chapter Six:Pieces of the Puzzle

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Face had found it was quite easy to waste away most of the afternoon talking with Carol and just sitting in the shade under Turtle Bar verandah, working on a slow but steady stream of Ricky's Turtle Punches. Tom had wandered off after a while to the beach while the two of them continued to chat. Before Face knew it, the clock was almost at 4:00 p.m. *Funny*, he thought, *one day ago I was complaining about how slow things are down here. Seems like it's contagious.* He said his good-byes to Carol, who was getting ready for a quick swim before it got too late herself, and then found Tom. They got back into the jeep for the ride back to town, not having found much for their efforts that day but both feeling a little more relaxed and in synch with the island's pace.

When they made it to the hotel about a half-hour later, they found Hannibal and B.A. at the pool, enjoying the hotel's High Tea. "I see you guys have been hard at work," Face remarked, helping himself to a cucumber sandwich off Hannibal's tray and settling into a nearby pool chair.

"Murdock and I finished up around three-thirty. He should be back anytime now from getting the photos developed," Hannibal explained. "We hit every real show-off mansion we could get into in Frigate Bay. I don't know if we found anything useful, though; Tom will have to be the judge of that."

Murdock joined them a little while later with the photos and sporting a new T-shirt done up in the colors of the St. Kitts' flag that proclaimed he was "100% Kittitian and Proud." By then, Tea was over and Happy Hour was just beginning. The older couples who had been enjoying the English Tea mostly disappeared. They were replaced by the younger crowd and a group of single men from Canada who seemed determined to find out just how many half-price rum punches they could get out of the slow-moving afternoon bartender, Elora, in the next sixty minutes.

The Team relocated to Tom's room, and Murdock spread the photos out on the bed for everyone to examine. He also had the photos that Face had taken from the helicopter the day before.

"Most of these guys couldn't get enough of showing off their places and getting photos taken of themselves," Murdock remarked about the pictures of the fancy homes and well-to-do men.

Some of the homes were of stately designs that would have been more at home in the Hamptons than this small island. Others were of such outrageous and overdone designs that anyone would be hard-pressed to figure out exactly *where* they might fit in. "We just had to mention 'movie company' and they couldn't get enough of us."

"Did you notice anything unusual about the people, in general?" Tom asked, as he closely examined the series of photographs.

"Besides being full of themselves and two sheets to the wind on booze or coke?" Hannibal remarked. "Not really. A few of them seemed a little nervous at first about letting us in, but then they seemed pretty unconcerned."

"Actually, there were three of them - I remembered looking for this after you mentioned it, Tom - that were smokin' big fancy cigars. Didn't get a chance to see them stickin' any pencils in them, though," Murdock commented. "Here - this one, this one . . . and this one. Richard Davis, Mark Samson, James Black."

Tom picked up photos of the three men Murdock indicated. "You managed to get profile shots, great," Tom commented, looking closely for the tell-tale scar on the neck. He could make it out definitely on two of the men, but he was not sure he could see it on the third gentleman because the lighting was not good enough in the picture. Tom thought he even recognized the first two from some of the files on the palmtop Hale had given him. "I think the first two are pretty suspect," he agreed.



He studied the pictures of the other people Murdock and Hannibal had managed to track down

at home and photograph. There was no one he had seen before in his travels, but one or two of the others struck him as potential conspiracy-types as well. B.A. looked over the photos, asking Hannibal for each of the mens' names. Hannibal complied and then asked, "Why? Did you find out anything in town, B.A.?"

"Asked 'round a lot 'bout who the big men are down here. Heard a couple names come up a few times. These two are big time coke dealers, maybe," B.A. said, indicating two of the men Tom had not picked out. "Connected with the new government here, too. That's why lot of the older people 'specially don't like this new president, they think he's just workin' for the drug lords. I even went up to check out the military base, see what was going' on up there today, but couldn't get too close. It was all fenced in, guards posted outside the perimeter."

Then B.A. pointed to a third picture, one of a white-haired, paunchy man standing proudly in front of his house, and his jeep. The jeep had bull horns strapped to the hood for some inexplicable reason. "An' this guy, Rizzo, thinks he's some big man with the Mafia but ain't no one knows for sure about him. Most people think he's just got a big mouth. Supposedly he hangs out a lot drinkin' with those two guys Tom picked out."

"Hmm . . ." Hannibal thought over that little piece of information for a while.

"So, what's the next step, Hannibal," Face asked finally.

"Next step. Good question," Hannibal mused to himself, reaching in his pocket for a cigar of his own to help him concentrate. This routine was familiar routine to the Team members, and they waited for the colonel to come to some decision. "Okay. We have two definite leads here with the men Tom picked. We should get surveillance on them both. See what they're up to. Maybe that'll involve putting a little pressure on them, finding out who and where they run to. And we have this guy, Rizzo. Street opinion of him is pretty accurate, B.A. The man's a blowhard, loves to brag about any supposedly shady dealings he's orchestrated."

"I'll concur on that," Murdock agreed. "Guy wouldn't shut up. And you think I talk too much, B.A. . ."

"He might be the one to try to squeeze for information on his buddies before we go for them directly," Hannibal mused, mulling over the possibilities in his mind. "I can probably take care of that. He seemed real interested in the movie idea."

"Y'know, Colonel, we still haven't campused the rest of the island that well," Murdock

observed, as he checked out the aerial shots some more. "Lookin' at these photos there are a few spots I'd like to investigate a little better. Some old, abandoned-lookin' plantations and the like."

"Okay, why don't you take care of that. If anyone gets curious just remember the movie-company cover - you're out looking for good location shots. Or think up anything thing else that would fit the situation." Murdock nodded.

"I'll go with Murdock," Face suggested. It would give him an excuse to check out Carol - and her gallery in the countryside, of course.

"All right," Hannibal agreed. "Tom and B.A. can handle setting up observation on these guys. B.A., did you bring your electronics equipment?"

B.A. nodded. "Course, man. Might need a few things though from the hardware store down here, dependin'."

"Nitroglycerin Man,' page one-oh-five," Murdock suggested. "Wherein our hero takes out a whole squad of aliens with a weedwhacker and various other accouterments from the corner hardware store. I wrote that scene just with you in mind, B.A.," he finished proudly.

B.A. showed no discernible signs of appreciation for Murdock's forethought. Hannibal began to wrap up the meeting. "Great. Looks like we'll all be pretty busy come tomorrow. Let's grab some food and then call it a night."

\* \* \* \* \*

The evening was a quiet one after the meeting. After dinner, Face spent some more time buttering up the hotel manager with news of how the movie crew was making out while the rest of the Team retired early to bed. Hannibal called his agent to find out how things were going on the movie set without him, and then he tried reading over a new script he'd been sent recently. He found his thoughts too preoccupied with other matters to concentrate. This case had him puzzled.

He got the urge for a good cigar, to maybe help him relax and get to sleep, but he knew B.A. would not appreciate the smoke filling up their shared hotel room. Sometimes B.A. gave him as much of a hard time as Maggie about the cigars. Besides, the night outside looked inviting and he thought a walk might help even more. "I'll be back in a while, just goin' out for a smoke," he told B.A., who nodded without looking up from the fight he was watching on the sports channel on the TV.

The air outside was surprisingly cool compared to the earlier heat, and Hannibal was glad for the light jacket he'd thrown on before

stepping out of his room. The breeze came up the cliffside and rustled lightly through the palm fronds of the trees, the smaller leaves of the hibiscus plants and the elephant ears that dotted the hotel's grounds. Low lamps lit up the grounds softly, and crickets chirped and echoed everywhere around him. Hannibal found himself wishing he had Maggie with him, for he knew she would have enjoyed this place, no doubt about it. Maybe he would make a point of taking her back here someday, when he was not traveling on a job.

He continued his walk down the steep slope, past the giant birdcage that housed two normally vocal parrots. They now slept peacefully in their darkened hollow near the vegetable garden. As he passed the garden, he was surprised to notice that he was not the only Team member who was feeling a bit restless that night. He spotted Murdock leaning against the low wall that bordered the hotel's grounds and looked out over the city below.

Murdock turned briefly when he heard Hannibal approaching and nodded in greeting. "Colonel."

"Captain. Quite a night, isn't it?" Hannibal gazed out over the small city's crescent-shaped bay, which was all a-lit with bright street lamps and the smaller lights from the tightly packed houses. The bright flash of the airport's beacon could be seen in the distance, as could the faint ghostly glow from the shoreline of Nevis across the narrow channel of the Caribbean Sea. A heavy, pulsating bass beat could be heard emanating from somewhere down below, either from one of the waterfront bars or off the back of someone's pickup truck. The sound blended strangely yet soothingly in with the crickets and the other sounds of the night.

"Sure is . . ." Murdock agreed. Hannibal knew his captain well enough to see that something was bothering him, but he seemed hesitant to speak of it.

"How about a walk down to the wharf, get a couple beers . . ." Hannibal suggested.

"Sounds good," Murdock agreed. They walked out the gate and down the steep hill that led to the Fisherman's Wharf. Even though it was late the restaurant was mostly quiet that night. The locals did not come down to the wharf much nowadays because it had become too expensive and too touristy in recent years. Being a Thursday night most of the guests at Ocean Terrace were at the Turtle Bar for their weekly Gourmet Night.

Murdock claimed one of the picnic tables along the edge of the water, and Hannibal joined

him a few minutes later with a pair of Caribs from the bar.

They made small talk for a while as they worked on the drinks, getting their first real chance to catch up on what had been going on in their lives for the past few months. They did not see each other much anymore, except occasionally when Hannibal would stumble across someone needing a stunt pilot for some movie or TV program. He had gotten Murdock more than a few jobs that way over the past few years, but basically the pilot led his own life, as they all did. He and Kelly had been married not long after the Team's pardon had gone through and Stockwell had freed them from his control. Murdock had moved out to the country to her place, and with two kids now, his own plane, and work as a flight instructor and occasional charter jobs, he lived a mostly quiet and secluded life. It seemed to suit him better than life in Bad Rock with Maggie had been treating Hannibal. He just could not completely get used to the lack of excitement, the plain lack of *things to do*.

Finally, when they had both relaxed a bit from the talk and the alcohol, Murdock got to the heart of the problem. "This whole job spooks me, Colonel," he stated matter-of-factly.



That much Hannibal had guessed already. "What about it in particular, Murdock."

"Everything. I mean, I don't doubt what Tom has said about what's happened to him. I'm sure he's tellin' us the truth - at least, as much as he knows the truth himself. It's just . . . kind of scary to think that there's an organization out there that can take control of people's lives like that. Who knows what they're really up to, and



how far they reach. How many people we may have encountered over the years that are a part of it."

Hannibal nodded. "I've wondered a lot about that too. And I agree, I don't like the idea that stuff like this is going on. But . . . is there something else bothering you?"

Murdock frowned. "It's that . . . whole business with that Harrison Barton character Tom's seems convinced I have to be. I've been runnin' it through my head, top to bottom and back again, and there's only two ways I can think to explain it. And I don't like either of them." He paused for a minute, then blurted out, "Colonel, how much do you know about my family? Besides Kelly and the kids, I mean."

The sudden change in topic caught Hannibal off-guard. Especially since if there was one thing Murdock always seemed very private about it was his background, anything about his life before he had hooked up with the Team during 'Nam. But Hannibal was pretty much the same way himself, therefore he had always accepted that Murdock must have had his reasons for being so reserved about the topic. Hannibal knew he certainly did himself. "Only what I've heard from you, Murdock, which has never been that much. Just that your mother died when you were very young, and that you were pretty close to your father. At least until after the war. You used to talk about him a lot, back in 'Nam, I remember, but . . . I guess I never heard you mention him much after that."

Murdock smiled without humor. "Yeah, he was real proud of his hot-shot pilot of a son - until he turned out to be a basket case. He pretty much didn't want to have anything to do with me after that. Thought I was a disgrace to the family name. But I wasn't the first one. I had a brother too, did you know that?"

"No. No, I didn't," Hannibal admitted, surprised.

"Yeah. Roger. He was a year younger than me. If you think *I'm* a nut-ball . . ." Murdock shook his head, "at least I had 'Nam as an excuse. I was pretty straight and together before then. Roger, he was a headcase from the time he was a little kid. Always into trouble, and never seeming to give a damn about anything. Oh, he wasn't dumb, Colonel, he was real smart, actually. Loved to read, could do well in school too - when he *wanted* to. But that wasn't very often.

"The thing was, we looked so much alike I swear we could pass for twins sometimes if we tried. People used to get us confused all the time as kids. We actually got along pretty well, all

things considered. Until I got into the academy. Roger *hated* the military. Because dad was career soldier all-the-way, and everything dad was, Roger didn't want to have anything to do with. They never got along well at all. I think . . . I think he blamed Dad for Mom's death, too. Maybe he wasn't all that far off, either."

Hannibal was curious at this sudden revelation. "I never heard what happened to her."

"Officially? It was an accident. Car crash," Murdock explained. "Unofficially . . . ? Mom . . . she was never really . . . all right. In the head, y'know what I'm saying?"

"You mean, she was . . ."

Murdock sighed. "I don't remember that much about her myself. Just little things, things that stand out to a kid. That some times she was fine, perfectly happy, the perfect mom. And then other times, she'd just . . . not seem like she was there. She'd be in the middle of fixing dinner, or playing with Roger and me, and she'd just start crying hysterically. Or screaming at us, or dad, or anyone else that was around. Or she'd just go into her and dad's room and we wouldn't see her for a day or two. I guess we were just sort of used to it, because that's the way things always were. Looking back now, with all my 'psychiatric training' so to speak, I guess she was what they nowadays call 'manic-depressive.' But back then she was just 'very sensitive'. That's what Aunt Helen always told me. You didn't talk about family members bein' crazy in those days, 'specially not to the kids. That's just the way things were, y'know?"

"So, you think . . ."

"That one day she just decided she couldn't take it anymore? Maybe. I don't know. All I really remember from that time was Roger getting a lot more distant from dad after that. Like he blamed him for it. Later when we were a little older, and dad was remarried and everything, Roger started fighting with him a lot - he used to yell at dad that he should have done something to help mom when she was sick, and that it was his fault she was gone. I don't know. Maybe they should have taken her to see a shrink, get her on medications, but like I said -"

"It was a different time. No one liked to admit things like that we're going on behind the closed doors of the perfect American family."

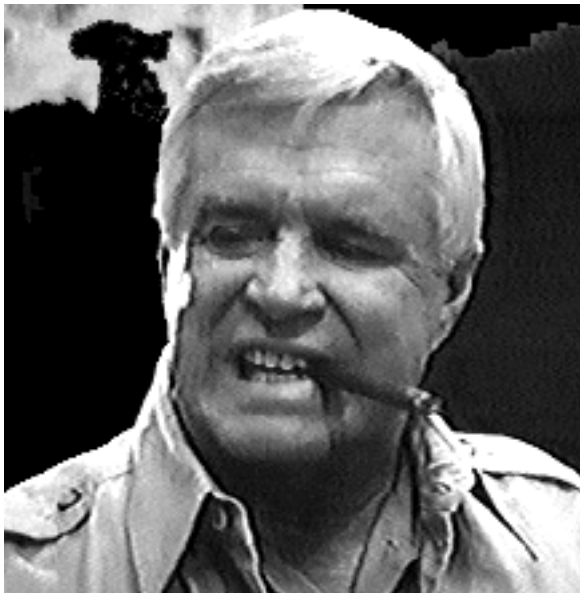
"Exactly. Well anyway, while I was gettin' transferred out to 'Nam, Roger was burning his draft card and disappearing out into the underground on the West Coast, San Francisco. He was into the whole hippie drugs-love-and-peace trip by then. I heard he was making a

pretty big name for himself in some radical groups for a while, the few times he wrote me, basically to call me a 'god-damned fucking baby-killer' and other endearing things. Then, around '70, he just disappeared."

"Disappeared?" Hannibal echoed, and Murdock nodded.

"I never heard from him again. Neither did dad or anyone else in the family. There weren't any reports that he'd died, but we just didn't know. I always figured he'd gotten himself into trouble a few too many times and blew the country. And . . . maybe taken along a new identity with him."

Murdock was silent for a while, leaving it to the colonel to figure out what he was implying. It did not take him long. "You mean, you think Harrison Barton may really have been this brother you haven't heard from in over twenty years?"



Murdock shrugged and looked at Hannibal. "I know it's crazy, but it somehow seems to make sense. The description fits. He looked like me. He was heavy into drugs, living on the edge and one step away from getting himself killed. The one thing that Roger always put some effort into in school was writing. That he'd become a gonzo journalist makes sense. Even the *name* makes sense. Considering how many people were always confusing him with me, it would be pretty easy for him to get used to being 'Harrison' for real. And, Colonel . . ." Murdock fixed his eyes steadily on Hannibal's, "Barton? That was our mother's maiden name."

Hannibal did not know quite what to say. Murdock did make a pretty convincing argument

of it. He could understand just why this had been bothering him so much. Hannibal finished off the last of his beer and said finally, "You said there were two ways you could think to explain it. What's the second?"

"Oh, that's the one I *really* don't like. It's that somehow that really was me that down there in Chile with Tom. That I was Harrison Barton."

"But, that doesn't make any sense, Murdock! And if it were you, you wouldn't be here today. You'd be dead."

Murdock shrugged. "I know, I know. It's crazy. But then crazy's always been my forte, hasn't it? Look, we know from what Tom's said how They can manipulate people to get them to do whatever They want. And not even necessarily realize it. Suppose . . . suppose They did something like that to me? I don't remember anything, true, but I . . . I can't shake this creepy feeling every time I think about the possibility. Even sometimes when I take a good look at Tom . . . it's like a little warning light in my head flashin' and tellin' me not to go there - that there's something there I really don't want to know about."

Murdock was staring earnestly at Hannibal at this point, looking obviously for some sort of reassurance but Hannibal did not know what type to give. Did Murdock want to here that his crazy idea was plausible, or did he want to hear the truth - that it was just plain crazy? Hannibal shook his head finally and said, "Murdock, I think it's foolish to worry too much about an implausible explanation like that when a much more possible one is staring you in the face. Harrison Barton very likely may have been your long-lost brother. When we get back to the States why don't you look it up - I'm sure you can find pictures of him somewhere, and you'll be able to tell if it's him or not, won't you?"

"Well, yeah . . ."

"So there you go. Look, even if you two weren't close it must hurt to know he's probably dead. But your other idea just doesn't hold water. You know me, I wouldn't tell you that if there was a chance of it being otherwise, would I?"

"No, no you wouldn't, Colonel. That's why I knew I could talk to you about it."

"Right. Now, it's getting late. We should head back." Hannibal stood up to leave and to let Murdock know the discussion was closed, and Murdock followed. They left the wharf and climbed the hill in silence, Hannibal feeling very weary all of a sudden. He hoped the fight B.A. had been watching was over now so he could get some sleep.

They got back to the main hotel building and Hannibal was about to turn off on the path towards his room. "See you tomorrow, Murdock, and try to relax, okay?"

"Yeah, thanks, Hannibal. . . . Uh, can I ask you just one more thing?"

Hannibal nodded. "Sure, what."

Murdock looked uncomfortably at the ground and then up at Hannibal. "When exactly in '94 did Tom say he took that picture? What month of the year, I mean?"

Hannibal thought for a moment, trying to remember . . . "I think it was . . . early. February, maybe. Why?"

Murdock got a pained expression, as if that was just what he did not want to hear. But he just shook his head and said, "Nothing. Never mind. 'Night, Hannibal."

Hannibal watched Murdock turn away quickly and head towards the stairs to his room, concern for his senior officer foremost in his mind as he headed in for the night himself.

\* \* \* \*

Back in Washington DC, FBI Assistant Director Walter Skinner was working late, trying to catch up on a backlog of unread and un-filed reports. Things had been uncharacteristically quiet around the office lately and he hoped for a few more days of similar low activity so he might actually be able to get up to date. When he suddenly smelled the stench of cigarette smoke in the air, he knew his hopes for a quiet evening were gone.

"What do you want this time?" he asked of the shadowy figure.

Cancer Man stepped forward out of the darkness of the corner of Skinner's office. "What are Mulder and Scully doing in St. Kitts," he demanded.



"God only knows. Chasing more stories of lights in the sky and four-fingered aliens, no doubt."

"I want them out of there. As of yesterday."

Skinner fixed unblinking eyes on the man. "Why? There must be something very important going on there if that's the way you feel. What dirty little secret of yours did they manage to get on the trail of this time?"

"Nothing of your concern. Nothing of *their* concern, if you understand what I'm saying, Skinner."

"Oh, I understand perfectly. Just how much longer do you think you and your friends are going to be able to get away with this?"

"Longer than you'll live to see it, if you don't take my advice seriously."

\* \* \* \*

"You *can't* be serious about this, Mulder," Scully complained, stifling a yawn. It was late and she was still drowsy from that second rum punch she'd had at the Golden Lemon. Mulder was driving their rental car along the steep and winding peninsula road, which did not even have street lights along it for illumination in the night.

"I said you could stay back at the hotel. I just want to have a look around."

"Oh, no, if I let you go alone you'd come back full of stories about all the weird and unexplainable things you saw. I *had* to come along."

"I'm hurt, Scully. Are you saying that after all this time, you still don't trust my judgment?" Mulder asked with a grin.

She replied, "Just watch the road, okay? I don't feel like going over the edge of this cliff and feeding the sharks tonight."

As if to illustrate her point, a motorcycle came up behind them, horn beeping loudly as it barreled on past them. It disappeared quickly into the darkness and around a sharp bend in the road ahead of them.

"Wonder where he's going in such a hurry," Mulder mused.

They continued along for about fifteen minutes, circling around the salt pond and turning off towards the southernmost tip of the island. They passed by the abandoned construction site for the luxury resort and finally parked slightly up from the beach. The only illumination was the almost full-moon and distant lights coming across the channel from Nevis.

Mulder killed the engine and turned off the headlights, plunging the car into near darkness. Scully sighed and thought about taking a nap. "Wake me up if anything happens," she instructed her partner, reclining her seat a bit and closing her eyes.

In contrast to his partner, Mulder was wide awake and ready for anything . . . or nothing. He had spent more than a few nights out hunting UFOs and was used to the monotony of it. He sort of enjoyed it; found it gave him time to think.

He turned on the radio very softly so as not to disturb Scully and found the "Voice of Nevis" station. It was currently playing a Top Twenty countdown for the Caribbean. He checked his watch - just about 10:00 p.m. He would hang out here for about an hour, then move to another location for a while if nothing turned up . . . but he had a sneaking suspicion something just might.

It was 10:43 when Mulder first spotted the green lights over the water. They were still rather far away - he guessed halfway between here and Nevis - but they were growing brighter. He nudged Scully gently and she woke up quickly.

"What is it?" she asked.

"I don't know - you tell me," he replied, pointing towards the lights.

She saw them and watched silently for a moment. Mulder had turned the radio off and the windows were open. "Looks like fishing boats out at sea, Mulder."

The lights were growing brighter and more distinct now, traveling in close pairs. There were six of them that Mulder could count. "I don't hear any motors. And they don't seem to be moving like fishing boats."

Scully had to admit Mulder was right about that. Their moment was too smooth, as if they were gliding across the water instead of riding through the rough current of the channel. Scully

racked her brain for any logical way to explain the phenomena. "It could be - Mulder?"

Mulder was getting out of the car now to get a better look. The lights were almost at the shoreline now, glowing small spheres of green light. The water behind them was eerily illuminated, and Mulder could almost make out a large dark shape behind and beneath them now . . . He walked a little closer to the shore; they were maybe twenty feet away from him when . . .

"*Mulder!*" Scully shouted as the lights suddenly lifted off the waters with a loud metallic hum. The force of the air currents as the lights took off knocked Mulder to the ground, but Scully got the best look she could at them, and the shape behind them. She could see they were all connected to some large, dark, disk-like object that had been hidden except for its front edge by the waters. It was hard to judge its size because it was gone almost instantaneously. It moved impossibly fast.

Scully got out of the car and ran over to Mulder, who was just getting back to his feet and searching the skies for any signs of the phenomena. "Did you see that Scully? Did you see it?" he asked excitedly.

"Yeah, I saw it," she replied, uneasy because nothing she could think of could explain what she had just seen - except that it was a UFO.

"How good of a look did you get at it?"

"Not very . . . it moved too fast. The lights were too bright to see much of anything else."

They both stood around silently for a few minutes, trying to digest the night's events. Finally Mulder said, "Well, I doubt we'll see anything else tonight, Scully."

With that comment Fox got back into the rental car and started the engine. They drove back to the hotel mostly in silence, both wondering what in the world was going on and how it was all connected.



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**Chapter Seven:****Monkey Business**

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Mulder and Scully had only just sat down at their table for breakfast and taken their first sips of fresh, Blue Mountain coffee when a woman from the hotel's main office came over to them. "Fax for you, Mr. Mulder," she explained, handing over the single-sheet of paper and then walking away.

"What is it?" Scully asked, noticing Mulder's expression quickly turning sour.

"Take a wild guess - Skinner wants us back home A.S.A.P."

"Why?"

"Doesn't say, but I bet I know why. Someone found out we're down here and doesn't want us digging around anymore."

"Must just be a more pressing case has come up, that's all," Scully argued. "All we've seen so far are some strange lights in the sky. You and I both have seen more than a few 'experimental' military aircraft before. We know the U.S. is stationed here right now. It was probably nothing."

Mulder was not buying it and she could tell. He balled the fax up in his right hand, and then

unfolded it carefully, studying the wrinkled and smudged words. "Gee, I think there's something wrong with the fax machine down here. I can't read a word of this, can you?"

"Mulder . . ."

"Sorry, Scully. I'm not giving up on this one that easily. I can't get past this feeling that *this is it*. That was no black-wing military craft we saw last night. I'm gonna find these guys and find out what they're up to. Too many people have warned me to steer clear of this place to believe there's nothing of consequence to find. If you want to go back, though . . . I won't force you to stay with me on this one."

*He wouldn't, but he sure would appreciate it if I did. And God knows what he might get himself into without me watching his back . . .* Scully mused. "All right, Mulder, you win - for now. What do you propose we do today?"

"Find the infamous Rizzo Demarco, and see how he fits into this puzzle, if at all."

\* \* \* \*

*The teenage boy is putting the final touches on his model jet fighter, painting in the insignia on the left wing, when a loud pounding on the door to his room causes him to jump and lose his concentration. Before he gets the chance to*

answer, the door is already open, an all-too-familiar face peering around from behind it. A face that's almost a mirror reflection of his own, except for the trouble-making grin it usually wore in comparison to his own serious expression.

"Hey, Harry, c'mon!"

"C'mon what, Rog," he answers dubiously. His brother has that out-for-trouble grin on his face, and H.M. isn't in the mood to be dragged into trouble with him.

"Put away that plastic piece of shit and c'mon, that's what. DeeJay and Skeet are outside in the pickup. Skeet's older brother's throwin' a party and he said it was cool for us to come over. There's beer and girls, man, so let's go."

"I don't know, Rog . . ."

"Aw, for Pete's sake, Harry, you gonna waste your whole Friday playin' with those stupid models of yours? No wonder everyone thinks you're such a geek."

The boy looks down self-consciously at the array of paint jars and plastic pieces on his desk. "Yeah, well, if everyone thinks I'm a geek they won't want me to come along anyway. Besides, Dad'll be home soon."

"Forget Dad, leave him a note sayin' we went to a god-damned church social or somethin'. C'mon, this is your chance to show everyone you're cool. And . . ." Roger leans close and teases, "Donna's gonna be there . . . and I hear for some crazy reason she actually kind of likes you."

H.M.'s interest is suddenly peaked. "You serious? You're not just pullin' my leg here . . ."

"I'm serious, pally! Now, are you comin' or not?"

A horn honks loudly outside, and H.M. debates his choices on last time. DeeJay and Skeet aren't his favorite people, and he doesn't get along well with their and Roger's other friends that well, but if Donna was going to be around, well . . . "OK, I'm comin'. I hope you don't get us in trouble, that's all," H.M. says as he stands up and grabs his favorite baseball cap.

Roger laughs and punches his brother in the arm. "Me? Trouble? I never get in trouble, not for long anyway . . ."

Murdock smiled to himself as he remembered that they had indeed both gotten in trouble that night, serious trouble, when they stumbled in the house sometime past 1:00 a.m. to find their father waiting impatiently downstairs. Roger had been so wasted and drunk he had thrown up all over the front porch. They had both gotten hell over it, especially H.M., because, as dad had said and not for the first time (it was practically a

mantra recited every time his elder son did something considered less than proper), "I thought you were smarter than that, son. Keep it up like that and you'll never get that appointment to the academy, just you wait and see!"

To top it off the party had not even been any fun, either. The beer had made him sick and Donna ended up spending most of the party out back necking with one of Skeet's friends who were visiting from Beaumont.

"Murdock? Did you hear me?"

"Huh?" Murdock realized that Face had been asking him something.

"I said, do you have any idea where we are now? None of these villages have signs to identify them, at least not that I can see. Not that I think it matters anyway . . ."

Murdock looked down at the small tourist map and counted off in his head that this was the third village they had passed through since they took off on the Caribbean side of the island after leaving Basseterre. "I think we must be in Challengers now," he guessed. It was not much of a village, either. There were a few sad-looking shacks and concrete-block homes along the roadside, with more houses located down the slope to the waters' edge.

"What's got you so preoccupied today?" Face asked suddenly, a few minutes later.

Murdock just shrugged, not feeling like retelling the same whole story he had gone through with Hannibal the night before. It was still bothering him. He almost wanted to ask Tom a few things about details of the incident in Chile now, but at the same time he was a little afraid that it might match a little too closely with the dreams he had been having. Last night they had come back, even more vivid than before. "Nothin' important, I guess. What d'you think of this whole job, anyway, Face."

"I don't know, it's a job, and the client's probably gonna stiff us - as usual. I don't really think we're gonna find anything going on. But it's a nice change of pace down here. And you know, I hardly ever see you or B.A. or Hannibal anymore these days. Hannibal sometimes, on the movie lots, but even so he has his own life now with Maggie. You've got Kelly. B.A. has his kids at the center. We're not, well . . ."

"We're not the A-Team any more," Murdock finished for him. That was the other thing that was bothering him about this job. In some ways it felt as if they were all simply going through the motions this time. Whatever it was that used to make them more than just a team - what made them the "A-Team" - seemed to be missing in some way. Maybe it was the edge from always

being on the run, and always having to rely on each other the way they used to. "Tom said to me that we weren't what he expected."

"Well, we've heard that one before."

"Yeah, but this time I started thinkin' we're not even what I expected anymore. Maybe we really are just gettin' too old for this stuff these days." They were already out of Challengers, and the road was winding along the edge of the water. The waves washed up along the rocky beach where two men stood up to their knees in the water, casting out a fishing net.

"I guess we'll find that out for sure if anything starts to go down here," Face suggested.

"Yeah. Guess so."

\* \* \* \*

Tom followed B.A. through town that morning while the sergeant shopped for hardware supplies. He was lugging along boxes of wiring, cables and other assorted junk that Tom had no idea what they were supposed to do to with once they were done. All the charges were going on a tab arranged by the St. Kitts' Film Commission, a small (at the moment, one person, who also worked in the St. Kitts Philatelic Office) operation that had not seen any real business since the first "Missing in Action" movie.

After an hour of shopping they loaded the supplies up, just stopping at a small snackette for some soda for Tom and milk for B.A. The day was already turning into a scorcher, not a single cloud in the sky and very little breeze to keep things cool.

Tom decided to take advantage of the short break to ask the normally reticent sergeant a few questions. "This pilot of yours, Murdock - has he always been a member of the Team?"

"Yeah, unfortunately," B.A. grumbled, making a face. "Hannibal hooked up with him in 'Nam - man was crazy then and is crazy still. An' that's just the way Hannibal likes things - sometimes I think he's crazier than Murdock."

"How come he was never indicted with the rest of the Team on the bank job?"

"Cause they finally realized what a nutcase he was an' shipped him off to the V.A. Even though he was our pilot on that mission, they weren't about t'go after him when he was already locked up."

"How long has he been out of the hospital?"

B.A. shrugged. "Bout ten years now. Still a crazy foo', though," B.A. insisted yet again. Then he demanded, his protective instinct kicking in, "Why are you so interested in Murdock?"

Tom just tried to play nonchalant. He

remembered B.A. had been out cold when he had first accused Murdock of being Barton, and it looked as though the others had not mentioned his slip. "I just like to cover my bases. I don't like dealing with unknown properties. Murdock . . . reminds me of someone I've dealt with before, that's all, and I'm trying to figure out the connection."



"Ain't no one ever figured out Murdock too good, man. Don't even try it, it'll just give you a headache in the end." B.A. balled up his milk carton in his hands and got up from the stoop where they had been sitting. "C'mon, let's get to work."

\* \* \* \*

Murdock and Face's drive along the island so far had been uneventful and unenlightening. They took the road up to Brimstone Hill, which was an impressive old fortress left over from the colonial days when the French and British fought tooth and nail for control of the island. The only time the two military powers had ever agreed and worked together, apparently, was to kill off the native Indian population whenever there was a break between European wars back home. The two men stopped for lunch at J's Place, a two-level restaurant and club that sat at the base of Brimstone Hill and served up some of the most authentic local food on the island. After plentiful servings of curried conch and "goat water" soup, they got back on the road and continued on their tour, passing through Newton's Ground and Dieppe Bay, then heading around to the Atlantic side of the island. They passed through Saddlers,

Harris, and Tabernacle villages, and then into Mansion, taking side roads to check out anything that might be unusual but finding nothing out of the ordinary.

They were then entering the village Molineux, which was a visually striking sight as it was located along a deep slope of mountainside, along a narrow river gully. Small houses and shacks speckled the valley in a manner that seemed impossibly precarious. As they hit the mid-point of the bend of the road that curved along the inside of the mountain cliff, Face noted a small wooden sign pointing for a turn to take to reach the Sandpiper Gallery - Carol's shop. The sign was painted brightly with hibiscus flowers and hummingbirds.

"I want to say hi to someone at the gallery," Face stated as he turned the jeep off onto the bumpy, steep road.

"Ah, *l'amour* strikes *l'homme visage* again, yes?" Murdock teased, gripping the door to the jeep as it bumped dangerously along.

"I just told someone I'd check out the gallery if I happened to be passing by, and we happen to be passing by, all right?" Face replied defensively. The houses were thinning out slightly and they were reaching the high, outer edges of the village. Another sign indicated a final turn and a few slow-driving moments later (as they had to wait for a mother hen and a stream of six tiny chickadees to pass by) they were at the large, pink-and-blue building that obviously housed the gallery. A slightly smaller but similarly painted home was located next to it, surrounded by bougainvillea and young mango trees.

"So what's her name?" Murdock asked as he stepped out of the jeep.

"Carol." Face took in the view - the beautiful valley sloping beneath them, the thickening rainforest behind them reaching to the high peaks of the volcano. It was not hard to see why Carol picked this spot for her gallery and her house, though he had expected a much more elegant-looking home than this one, something like the mansions down in Frigate Bay. This house was a very modest dwelling that blended in with the styles of the homes in the village.

Face and Murdock were the only customers in the gallery that afternoon. It was a cheerful, bright place with a decidedly eclectic collection of paintings, sculptures, and other objects on display. The first room seemed devoted to local works and was filled with brightly painted scenes of tropical life and African themes. A second room featured more unusual pieces, large and eerily beautiful landscapes populated only by

statues and other inanimate objects. Face's attention was caught especially by one very large piece of moonlit pool at a Roman-styled mansion, the ocean reflecting the moonlight in the distance.

"It's called 'Freccia D'Oro'," came a voice behind him. He turned and saw Carol approaching with a smile. Today she was wearing a soft tangerine-colored short set that brought out the soft gold in her hair.

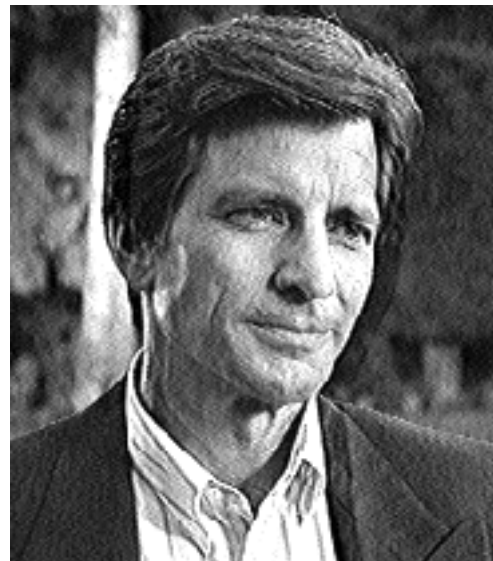
"It's beautiful. Who's the artist?"

"Jim Buckels. He's one of the leading neo-surrealists today. That piece is in my private collection. I've been collecting his prints for years. I do have some of his pieces for sale, on the other wall, if you're interested." She led him on a brief tour around the works on display in the room. He ended up buying a small watercolor by local artist, a painting of the small village they were in right now.

"It'll look perfect at my beach house," Face complimented.

Carol smiled. "I'll be sure to tell Jasper you thought so. He's been one of my favorite artists here for a while. I've been trying to encourage him to get into larger works."

They talked a while longer, then Face spotted Murdock hanging around in the front room looking ready to leave. "Well, I'd better get going, you know, I have some more sites to check out for the movie. Are you busy tonight, Carol? I'd love to take you out to dinner somewhere - what's your favorite place on the island?"



She considered for a moment - whether she was deciding where to go or whether to accept his invitation to begin with, Face could not be sure. Finally she replied, "The Blue Horizon' is always nice. Up in Bird Rock."



"Then shall we say, seven o'clock?"

She smiled again, and Face felt his heart do a little loop. He could not put his finger on it, but he felt there was definitely something special about her, something that connected with him in a way he had not felt about a woman in a long time. "Seven o'clock it is. I'll meet you there."

By the time they had cleared their way out of Molineux, bumped along the road into the rainforest to visit Ottley's Plantation Inn and the surrounding area, then made their way out of Cayon, they were both growing weary from the drive and the lack of turning up anything remotely suspicious.

"This all seems pointless, if you ask me," Face said. "I don't know what we're even looking for in particular, do you?"

"No . . . but somehow I think I will when we see it," Murdock said thoughtfully. His eyes darted quickly out to the water's edge to their left, then to the sugar cane fields to the right . . .

. . . Then quickly back to the left, and the white, sterile-looking building that they were approaching. It was set back from the road, surrounded by palm trees and a wire fence, and looked completely deserted. "Slow down a sec. Any idea what this place is?" Murdock remembered seeing it from the chopper the other day and thinking it seemed a bit odd, sitting out here in the middle of empty fields and in between villages. Up close it looked even more peculiar.

The jeep slowed down as they drew closer to the building. The grass needed trimming all around it and a family of goats was working hard to do just that. Face squinted at the faded lettering on the sign at the entrance. "The something-Primate Research Center. Yeah, Tom and I saw some monkeys running around on the peninsula yesterday."

"Vervet monkeys, supposedly they're all over this place. And to think that anyone could experiment on those cute little devils!" said Murdock sadly.

"Well, it doesn't look like anyone's doing any more experiments these days."

"If that's the case, what do you think that car is doin' here?"

It took Face a moment to spot the vehicle himself. It was a dark, new model blue sedan, mostly hidden behind a patch of tall grass next to the building. "Do you think . . . ?"

"I think it's worth taking a better look," finished Murdock, stepping out of the jeep and approaching the path towards the building. Face followed suit.

Murdock had a camera out and was taking

pictures of the building and surroundings. Face poked around the grounds, looking for anything interesting that someone might have left lying about in the grass in haste or carelessness. Or, he thought more suspiciously, any trip wires or booby traps set up for unwanted visitors.

They had been at it only a minute or two before a large man stepped out from the front door of the supposedly deserted research building. He was dark-skinned and rather enormous, wider and taller than B.A. When he spoke he proved himself not to be of local origin.

"Hey, this is private property. I think you'd both better be getting along," he warned gently yet with clear intent and a distinctive American accent.

"Aw gee, sorry man," Murdock answered him in a bit of a hippie lilt. "Like, they told us this place was deserted, y'know. Maybe for sale."

"Yeah," Face jumped in, seeing Murdock setting up some sort of scam. "We're looking to open up a business down here, tie-dye fabrics and fashions for export all over the Caribbean."



"We already got a name for our company, too, man - 'Fit to Be Tied!'" Murdock continued, laughing to himself.

Face suppressed a groan (*How does he come up with these things so fast?!*, he wondered), but before he got a chance to continue with the story the man started in, "Well, this building ain't for sale. Whoever told you that, he's got the wrong information. Now, if you don't mind -"

"Yeah, sure, all right," Murdock acquiesced.

Face continued, "Just who *does* own the building now? Maybe we could talk to him and make him an offer for -"

"No. Ain't for sale." The burly man was standing right in front of Murdock now, looming

high and wide over the skinny pilot. As Murdock started to put away his camera, the man yanked it away from him.

"Hey, man!" Murdock protested.

"Boss says no photos, either." He roughly popped open the camera and pulled out the roll of film, exposing it all to the sunlight. Then he tossed the now-empty camera back to Murdock.

With the guard glaring after them, Face and Murdock returned to their jeep and started to drive away. "Did you get the feelin' that somethin' funny might be goin' on in there, Faceman?"

"Uh huh . . ." Face replied uneasily. "I think Hannibal might find this all pretty interesting."

\* \* \* \*

The small octagon-shaped wooden shack called the "Monkey Bar" was packed, as always, that afternoon. Tourists from Jack Tarr dominated this stretch of Frigate Bay beach, and they were a group of individuals who were a far cry from the subdued travelers found at Ocean Terrace. Many of them were loud, overweight Texans, whose idea of exercise was taking the ten foot trek to the bar to get another beer and then back to their umbrella-shaded beach chairs. There were also several South American families with young children running around, yelling and laughing loudly, and some only slightly more reserved Canadian couples.

Hannibal spied more than a few obviously unattached young ladies in the crowd as well from where he sat at the bar, but they were a bit too young and wild-looking to catch his eye anymore, even without Maggie there to give him hell. Besides that, all the especially good-looking ones were already receiving the fawning attention of the young local men who worked for Jack Tarr operating the water-skiing, snorkeling, and other water sports activities. It was like a tiny version of Club Med playing itself in this small corner of the normally subdued island.

Hannibal was there keeping an eye out for Rizzo. When he had stopped by the man's house to find him earlier that morning, all he had found was the house's "security guard" and grounds-keeper, a young Rastifarian named Sunshine. Sunshine did not know exactly where Rizzo had gone, but explained that no doubt the man would end up at the Monkey Bar by the early afternoon as he always did. So Hannibal had taken off and decided to spend a few quiet hours on the beach until then, giving himself a little more time to think over the case and his plan of action, and some time to think about his men as well. He

wondered seriously that, even if they were successful this time, perhaps this job would be the last case they took as a Team. It did not quite have the same feeling anymore, hadn't really since they had received their pardons and returned to the world of common, law-abiding citizens. Truthfully, it was damn hard to run a job in their typical fashion *without* a flagrant disregard for the law. They never used to worry about such things before, but now it was a real concern. None of them wanted to end up back on the run again.

That was why most of the cases they ended up taking these days were out of the country, where they could be less easily traced and recognized, and get away with more of their standard tricks. Still, even those jobs had been drying up, or appearing less and less appealing with time.

He had taken a long swim in the calm water, his only company that morning a single pelican fishing off the rocks at the end of the beach and a small fish that decided to follow him around in the water. At one point, swimming out a little farther, he had encountered a rather large manta ray, which came up from the sandy bottom to eye him curiously for a moment before gliding away out to sea. Around one o'clock Hannibal had decided he needed to get out of the sun and had grabbed a chicken sandwich at the Anchorage. He had talked for a while to the soft-spoken, elderly gentleman that owned the small restaurant on the quiet end of the beach. Then he had walked up the beach towards the Monkey Bar, where he had settled down to nurse a few beers and wait for Rizzo to appear.

While at the bar, he started talking to a young vacationing couple who seemed a touch more intelligent and sober than the rest of the crowd. She was apparently a physician; he was in some branch of law enforcement. They had been talking for maybe fifteen minutes when the sound of a loud horn playing "The Yellow Rose of Texas" caught Hannibal's attention. He looked beyond the bar to see Rizzo Demarco's tan jeep pulling up nearby. There were several loud, cheery cries that came up from the bar crowd to greet him as he killed the engine. He swaggered out of the vehicle, bare-chested and with his beer-belly hanging out defiantly underneath a pile of gold chains that almost rivaled B.A.'s. He then proceeded to make the rounds of all the women at the bar. As he made his way around he spotted Hannibal and grabbed the colonel in a mighty bear hug.

"Hey, you of a bitch! I told ya you had to come down here and do some partying, didn't I?"

Rizzo bellowed, obviously well on his way to a drunken stupor already.

Hannibal nodded and raised his bottle of Carib in greeting. "Couldn't turn down the invitation, Rizzo."

"Yeah, but what are you doin' drinkin' that shit? Carib - Christ, that stuff tastes like two-year old piss . . ." Rizzo made a face and called to the bartender. "Monroe, two Johnny Walkers for me and my friend here . . . uh . . ."

"Peppard," Hannibal supplied.

"Yeah, yeah, that's it. Jesus, I got a head like a sieve when it comes to shit like that anymore, y'know what I'm saying?" Rizzo laughed boisterously. "So how's that movie of yours comin' along?"

"Fine. We're still just doing the preliminary work, figuring out locations for the different shots. Be a while yet before we do any filming."

"Yeah, yeah, I know how it goes. I've done some business in the movies myself, behind the

scenes and shit," he boasted. "Y'know, that 'Mission in Action' or 'Missing in Action,' whatever the hell it was . . ." he paused as his drink arrived, tossing down the shot quickly. "Listen, what are you up to today? I'm gonna go out fishing with some friends. Want to come along?"

The idea of spending several hours out on the water with Rizzo and his friends was about the last thing Hannibal really wanted to do, but it would certainly be the best way to try to get a handle on what these people might be doing. "Sure, why not."

Rizzo burped loudly in agreement. "Fuckin' A, that's the spirit, George! Sunshine oughta be 'round with the boat anytime now. How 'bout another one while we're waiting?"

"Still working on this one, Rizzo."

"All right, then I'll have yours, and another one how myself, how's that? Monroe, get back over here . . ."



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**Chapter Eight:****Close Out**

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"Well, now what?" Scully asked after she and Mulder had said good-bye to Hannibal and watched him leave with Rizzo.

"I don't know. It is intriguing, though, that the A-Team seems to be down here interested in the same people we are."

"You think Smith's really going along with Rizzo there as part of an investigation?"

"C'mon, Scully, there's no way a man like Hannibal Smith would willingly want to hang out with a loser like Demarco. It's a credit to Smith's acting abilities that he was able to look even remotely enthused about the prospect."

"So, what are we going to do next?"

The agent looked thoughtful. "I want to go back to the beach where we saw that UFO last night. Just have another look at the location, maybe ask around see and if anyone else in the area has seen anything like that before."

"Sounds good. I need to work on my tan a bit anyway."

\* \* \* \*

Scully and Mulder were back at Cockleshell Beach about a half hour later. The area was deserted except for one local family enjoying the afternoon on the sand, four young children playing in the shallows while their parents sat on the beach listening to soca on their van's radio. The two agents scouted around the beach but not unexpectedly they found nothing of note, no signs of the craft they had seen the night before. As Mulder went over to talk with the couple on the beach, Scully explored on her own for a while, half-heartedly looking for anything and mostly worrying about Mulder.

She knew he had always been driven to the edge of obsession by the subject of UFOs, but lately she was beginning to wonder if he had gone completely over the edge - especially since the death of his father. And she knew she could not exactly blame him if that was the case - more and more, it increasingly difficult for her to dismiss the many things they had seen and experienced together as unrelated, strange phenomena. She had suffered her own losses in the past few years, and perhaps it was foolish not to expect some of Mulder's attitudes and beliefs to rub off on her.

Perhaps they were not foolish beliefs at all. She could not deny that she had seen something . . . inexplicable last night. It worried

her to think where all of these events could lead. Two people working with only the hesitant support of their supervisor could not stop these people - whoever they were and whatever their objectives. Mulder seemed to think that they could, and that was what made them different, she supposed.

She was sitting on the sand, watching a fishing boat crossing the channel when Mulder came over to join her. "Guess what, Scully. One of the kids over there has seen our UFO. More than once, in fact."

"Oh really."

"Yes indeed. The oldest, James. He's fifteen. He and some of his friends supposedly come down this way at night for . . . 'parties'."

"Parties'?" Scully echoed, catching the way Mulder had said the word.

"So he calls them. I got the impression these parties were more like rendezvous for drug deliveries."

"Great. So you're taking the word of a fifteen-year old drug dealer who was probably coked-up at the time and probably just saw an airplane."

"Maybe, but he described the same exact thing we saw - a craft that could operate underwater as well as airborne, the same lights, the same approximate dimensions. He says the guys over at Turtle Beach even have a few photos they've taken of it. I'd like to check it out."

"Mm hmm."

"Something wrong?"

"No, just . . ." she debated telling him but decided against it. They'd had the conversation before, and never to any satisfactory resolution. "Never mind, just thinking. Let's go."

\* \* \* \*

"So, how'd it go today, guys?"

"Oh, pretty interesting, Hannibal," Face replied as he and Murdock joined the colonel at the hotel bar. It was just the start of happy hour so they ordered a round of rum punches. "And you?"

Hannibal shook his head and sighed. "About as interesting as watching paint dry and not nearly as painless. Rizzo Demarco may have connections with the men in the Conspiracy, but he doesn't know shit about it himself. He doesn't even know how to fish - all we managed to catch were a couple of seagulls who kept following our boat around and trying to get our bait. I don't think anyone would trust that loser with any real information. Wasted three hours out on a boat with him and one of the other guys we thought

might be involved in this thing - Davis. If Davis *is* involved, he sure didn't let it on. Was real tight-lipped most of the time, couldn't get him to talk about much of anything, except local politics. He did have that weird birthmark or scar that Tom described, that much was for sure. But, you said you found something interesting?"

"Maybe," Murdock started to explain, describing their encounter with the less-than-hospitable guard at the former research facility. It was not much of a lead, Hannibal agreed, but it still intrigued him enough to want to find out more. He asked them to describe as much as they could about the lay-out of the facility and was developing a map in his head of the grounds when B.A. and Tom turned up.

"Any luck today?" Hannibal asked.

"Not much," B.A. admitted. "Was tapped in to Davis' line this morning, 'till I heard him get a call from Rizzo to join him fishin'. After that we tried the other guy, Samson. Only calls he got were one from his gardener about comin' in to trim the hedges, one from his daughter Rachel in the States, and some guy callin' him about chasin' a couple intruders off some of his property up in the countryside."

Face and Murdock looked at each at that remark. "About what time was that call, B.A.?" Face inquired.

"Around four. Sounded like a routine check-in call," Tom answered quickly. "Why?"

"I think those 'intruders' were us," Face explained.

"He didn't say exactly what property, did he?" Murdock asked.

B.A. replied, "No, man, didn't say. Why, is it important?"

Murdock repeated a condensed version of the same story he had told Hannibal. After he was finished speaking, the four team members looked to each other with that same unspoken communication Tom had seen before in the airplane cabin, that first day he had met them all.

"I think we've found what we're looking for, gentlemen," Hannibal said, echoing the thoughts he knew his Team shared. "We'd better investigate this 'research facility' a little more thoroughly - and be prepared to possibly face some resistance when we do."

The men nodded, and he continued, "Face, Murdock, I want you two to map out this place as best as you can. I think we should hit tonight, before they have too much time to maybe pack up and move out, or call in reinforcements."

"Samson didn't sound too worried on the phone," B.A. supplied. "I think he bought the guard's story that it was just a couple dumb

tourists."

"Maybe, but we can't take a chance otherwise," Hannibal replied, then turned to Tom. "You should come along, too, Tom, even though there's a chance it could get ugly."

Tom smiled and said, "I've been living 'ugly' all year. There's no way I'm *not* coming along, Colonel Smith."

\* \* \* \*

Scully and Mulder had spent the rest of the afternoon and early evening at Turtle Beach, talking to the bartender-owner Ricky and some of his staff. They had actually been quite willing to talk about what they had seen, especially as some of them had tried reporting the sightings to the local police and been dismissed quickly as being crazy. Yes, a number of the staff had seen the UFO before - the restaurant normally closed down by six or seven in the evenings, but on Thursday nights they stayed open late for dancing and a buffet. Several times after closing on those nights, the staff had seen strange lights in the sky, particularly in the area near Cockleshell or while driving the road near the Great Salt Pond. Ricky showed them a handful of blurry pictures he had tried to take of it one evening but there wasn't much to see.

"And how many times have you seen this?" Mulder asked.

Ricky shrugged and spoke with a soft West Indian accent. "Maybe three, four times myself. Don' know what it could be, mon, but some kind of UFO. Scary at first, y'know, but now . . ." he shrugged, "we're all just kind of used to it 'round here. It leaves us alone, we'll leave it alone. The police don' want to do nothin' so there isn't much we *can* do 'bout it."

"Has anyone tried to inquire at the military base about it?" Scully wanted to know.

"No," Ricky admitted, and laughed. "But if it is somethin' they're workin' on, I doubt they'd tell a local restaurant-owner about it, y'know?"

The agents returned to their hotel around six-thirty, having stayed at Turtle Beach until closing time. When they passed through the reception area at the hotel after parking their car, they were stopped on their way to their rooms by the receptionist. "Excuse me, Mr. Mulder? There's a message for you," the woman explained politely.

The two agents looked at each other a moment. "Skinner again," Scully guessed.

Mulder took the envelope the receptionist handed him, which was marked only by his last name, scrawled in a familiar handwriting. "I

don't think so, Scully," he responded, opening it and looking at the small note it contained:

*On the lawn by the pool, 10 pm. Be ready.*

He passed the note to Scully who viewed it with suspicious surprise.

"Looks like we've finally hit the jackpot," he said with a smile.

"Be ready for what?" Dana wanted to know.

"For anything."

\* \* \* \*

The voice on the phone was irate. "How the hell could you let him get this far? What have you idiots been up to, playing around like this for months? Don't tell me you couldn't have taken care of him a long time ago!"

"Of course we could have, if that had been our only interest in the subject -"

"Yeah, yeah, I know all about you and your buddies little psychological gameplay, well, that's all *jack shit* as far as I'm concerned if he's this close to uncovering the whole Organization."

"He is only one man. Surely you can handle the security risk."

"How can I when you and your *compadres* up there won't let me finish him off once and for all! Are you giving me the clearance to finally put an end to this whole charade and kill him?"

There was a pause on the other end of the phone. "Yes. But - only as a last resort, one I hardly think will be necessary."

"Yeah, well, we'll see. Some goofballs were pokin' around the Outpost today. Could have just been a pair of damn tourists, it wasn't your precious Mr. Veil but still . . ."

"A man and a woman?"

"No, no. Two men. Why? Who -"

"It is unimportant."

"Unimportant! Don't tell me what is and isn't important - I'm an equal partner in this operation, and don't you forget it. I want you to send more support down here, *now*."

"You already have an entire army at your disposal. What more could you need? Just do your job. And let us do ours."

The Fat Man put down the phone without waiting for an answer and picked up his cigar instead. "The natives are getting restless, gentlemen," he announced to his gathered associates.

"Is it Mulder and Scully?" Cancer Man inquired.

"No, at least, it doesn't look like your FBI agents have stumbled across anything yet."

Neither has Thomas Veil, though we know he's there. One of our men spotted him in the town, with a man he believed to be a member of . . . the A-Team."

"The A-Team? Dear God," the Well-Manicured Man shook his head and chuckled.



"I fail to see what you find so amusing about that," said Cancer Man coldly. "It would be bad

enough if it were simply Mulder and Scully, or Thomas Veil, but now that miserable troop of do-gooders are involved? I vote for Close-Out, now."

"A little eager, aren't you?" Fat Man asked.

"No, I'm just sick of playing around with individuals that should have been taken care of long ago. We botched it up, let them get away with too much because we were afraid to act. Let's cash in our options and move before it really is too late."

A new voice spoke up, reasoning, "A Close-Out will set us back at least five years - maybe even a decade, we can't afford - "

"No, we can't. But we cannot afford exposure, either," Well Manicured Man interrupted. "That is why the time is past for psychological experiments and concerns over a single damn photograph. Let that damage be done. We must eliminate all the risks before we are eliminated ourselves."

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**Chapter Nine:****Flashpoint**

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At 10:00 p.m., Scully and Mulder were waiting for their mysterious contact to appear on the deserted lawn that surrounded the hotel on its back and right sides.

"I don't like this, Mulder," Scully stated affirmatively, pulling her light jacket a little tighter to her body.

Mulder regarded her with a cocked eyebrow. "Finally beginning to believe that there's something going on here?"

Scully did not want to admit to it but he was right. "Maybe. But I have no idea exactly what."

"You will soon enough, Agent Scully."

Both agents recognized the voice coming from behind them, and they spun around quickly.

Mulder remarked, "I thought you said I was on my own this time. What brought about this change of heart - suddenly find a shred of a conscience?"

The insult did not seem to phase X in the least. "I could care less about what happens to you, Mulder. I thought you'd have sense to leave well enough alone and understand that there are some things that are just too big for you to take on by yourself. But I guess I was giving you credit for too much intelligence. Besides, you're not the only one who has decided to start making trouble down here."

"You mean the A-Team?" Scully asked.

"Yes. They've been brought in here by someone else just as insanely persistent and difficult as you."

"Oh really. I think I'd like to meet this person, then. Sounds like we'd have a lot to talk about."

"You will tonight, because we have to stop him - stop the entire Team - before it's too late."

"Too late for what?" inquired Scully.

"Too late for the nearly seventy-thousand people living on this island, Miss Scully. Now come with me, we don't have much time."

\* \* \* \*

They parked the jeep slightly up the road from the research center, relying on the dark night and the tall sugar cane stalks all around them to hide their attack. Hannibal glanced over each of his Team members, each looking prepared for what could very possibly be a dangerous situation. He hoped they were all as ready as they appeared; without the benefit of frequent missions and

occasional training exercises to keep in shape and alert, he was not sure their reactions would be as finely tuned as they used to be. And that was what would get them into trouble.

"You guys ready?" he asked, and Murdock, B.A. and Face each nodded in agreement. "Tom?"

Tom nodded as well. Hannibal had to admit he did not look scared at all. And that was a good thing. Tom may not have been a professional soldier but he seemed to have learned quickly how to become one over the past months, Hannibal guessed.

"All right. This is an information gathering mission, first and foremost. We don't know what we're gonna find, so be extra alert. If we encounter superior forces, or anything goes wrong, we rendezvous back here if at all possible. Murdock, you and Tom stick together, the same for Face and me. We'll split into two teams inside and try to cover as much as we can. B.A., you stay at the door, keep an eye out for anything suspicious."

"Right, man."

With that, the Team sprung into action, approaching the compound in near silence and darkness. They came upon the main entrance to the building, which was protected only by a chain and padlock. "Would've expected tighter security than this," Smith muttered while Face worked quickly on the lock.

"I don't think they expect people to give them too much trouble," Face replied. "Besides, it might look suspicious from the outside to have lots of obvious security. But we'll have to be careful once we get inside. Could be motion detectors, IR beams and the like - so watch your step."

He made short work of the lock, and once the door was opened the Team split up. B.A. stayed by the front entrance, watchful for any signs of activity. While Face and Hannibal headed down a corridor to the left, Tom and Murdock kept going straight ahead towards the back of the building. So far, all was quiet - they peered through the doors of several locked rooms, seeing little but laboratory benches and equipment that looked, in the glow of their flashlight beams through the glass window panes, as if it had not been touched in years.

"Nothin' so far, Colonel," Murdock whispered into his microphone. He spotted a staircase up at the end of the corridor and said, "Looks like there might be a basement - Tom and I'll check it out."

"Gotcha, Murdock," came Hannibal's voice in his small earplug. Murdock nodded to Tom and they made their way to the staircase, which did



indeed lead down to a lower level. Upon entering the basement hallway they began to hear strange noises, screeches and cries.

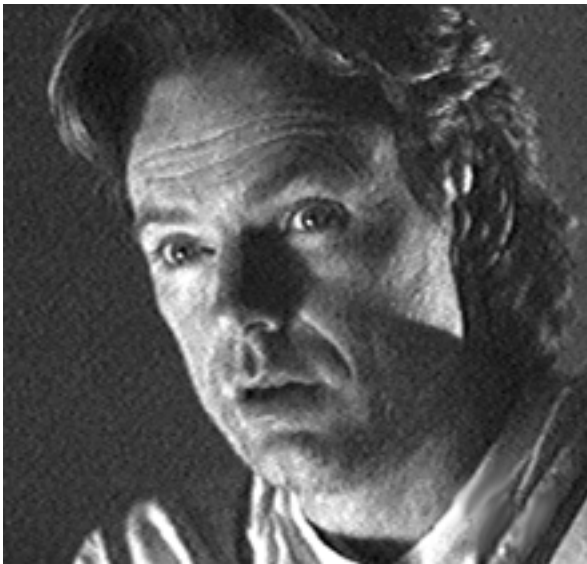
"Shoulda known it," Murdock said to Tom. "They always hide the freaky stuff in the attic or the basement."

They followed the noises, ending up in front of a large steel door equipped with a coded security lock.

"Please enter the 6-letter security code," the digital screen announced in flashing red letters above the touch-pad lock.

Murdock turned to Veil for an idea. Tom thought for a moment, then took a wild but logical guess. He typed in A-G-E-N-D-A and held his breath for a moment. There was a hiss as the door slid open, and both men let out their breaths. The screeches and cries were much louder now, and as Tom pointed his flashlight into the room he saw the source of all the noise - cage after cage of small monkeys.

Murdock let out a small cry of surprise and rushed over to the cages. "Aw, look at you poor guys . . ." he said sympathetically. "All cooped up in here . . . what're they doin' to you, anyway? I thought no one was experimentin' on you any more."



"Watch out -" Tom warned as Murdock reached out to one of the monkeys, who was stretching out a hand through the bars of his cage. Murdock let the small hand take hold of one of his fingers. Suddenly he jumped back as the monkey bared its teeth and tried with viscous force to pull his finger inside the cage for a good bite.

"Whoah!" Murdock exclaimed, regarding the animals much more warily now.

"I told you."

"Man, what the hell is goin' on down here?" Murdock demanded again, noticing how some of the animals were hooked up to all sorts of electrodes and monitors. Medical charts were tacked up to each cage, along with strange graphs and signal readouts.

Tom was not given a chance to reply, though, because suddenly someone grabbed him from behind in a tight neck hold. Murdock heard the sounds of the struggle and spun away from the cages, only to turn right into a head-blow that knocked him to the ground. Tom's struggles were ended as someone held a chloroform-soaked handkerchief in front of his nose, causing him to fall unconscious as well.

The two attackers turned to a third man who was just entering the room. It was the same gentleman that had watched the Team from the Terrace of Ocean Terrace that first night on the island. "Get them out of here, and back to the Empress. Quickly," he stressed to his two men. "I'll stay here to take care of the rest." With that remark they all moved like shadows, disappearing silently into the darkness.

\* \* \* \*

Meanwhile, Face and Hannibal stood in the doorway to a large room on the left side of the building. File cabinets lined the walls of the room, floor to ceiling. "Hannibal, where do we even start here?" Face asked quietly.

"Anything on Veil. Or 'Hidden Agenda' or Calaway," Hannibal responded as he entered the room, shining his flashlight at the small typed labels on the cabinets in front of him. Most of the files' titles made no sense to him; he could not even find a logical order to their layout. He scanned the cabinets on the far wall, trying to decipher the labels: "MK-Ultra Response (50-59, 60-69, 70-)," "Delayed Hypnotic Programming (Canceled)," "Case Histories: Artificial Personality Implementation (Current)" . . . After few minutes his eyes finally landed on one label that struck a familiar note because of Tom's case: "Electro-chemical Memory Control (Current)." He opened the cabinet and searched the files, sure enough finding one marked "Calaway". He grabbed it and began thumbing through it quickly.

And that was when it all went to hell.

"Hannibal -" he heard B.A.'s voice cut into his earphone, only to be drowned out by the sound of gunfire ripping through the building, shattering the windows in a noisy storm of broken glass. Hannibal dropped to the floor, quickly shoving the file under his shirt, trying to gauge where the

fire was coming from. His flashlight was gone and in its place he strapped on his night vision goggles. Everything took on a greenish tint beneath the lenses, but at least he could see everything fairly distinctly. He noticed Face doing the same.

"Plan B - now!" Hannibal ordered out loud and into his microphone, which was nothing more than the Team's code for getting the hell out of a bad situation - just like this one. Obviously someone did not want them poking around in here. He hoped Murdock was still with Tom and would make sure the photographer followed suit out the building. Hannibal drew his gun and heard the sounds of a scuffle and more gunfire nearby. Face was at the door, firing at somebody, then ducking for cover behind the file cabinets as a volley of machine-gun fire came in response.

"We're cut off, Hannibal," Face hissed.

"From in here, maybe. But there's always the window." Hannibal went over to the front window and, not seeing anyone in the immediate area, knocked out the broken pane with a gloved fist and waved to Face. The lieutenant did not argue and was out and on the ground running within seconds.

Hannibal stepped up through the window and then jumped out, rolling to the ground for cover and to catch his breath for a moment. Next step would be getting back to the jeep - if it had not been discovered yet - regroup and try to put together what they had learned. Hannibal cautiously got to his feet, still hearing gunfire inside the building. Taking a quick scan around for the others, he was a little disconcerted when he did not immediately see Face anywhere ahead of him. He was just starting to take off in the direction of the road when gunfire broke out, coming from, it seemed, both in front of and behind him. He felt a hot sting of pain in his right arm and tripped and fell, losing his gun. He cursed the pain and his clumsiness, struggling to find his gun in the thick grass.

He feared the worst when he felt hands grab him roughly by the feet and drag him away into the brush - against much protesting and fruitless struggling on his part - while the gunfire still rained on. Once they got behind cover Hannibal whirled around and was surprised to see the young man he remembered talking to at the Monkey Bar.

"Take it easy, I'm here to help you out," the man supplied before Hannibal say anything. "Can you walk okay?"

"They got me in the arm, not the leg," Hannibal replied impatiently, not liking to be man-handled like that even by someone claiming to be

on his side.

"Then come with me - we've got a boat off-shore, just through the brush out here." The man did not wait for Hannibal's response before helping him to his feet and starting to lead him away from the battle scene.

"Wait, the others . . ." Hannibal started. He was not about to run off for cover while the rest of the Team were still in danger.

"Don't worry, we've got that covered. Come on!" he insisted.

The man led the colonel through the tall wild sugar cane and grass, then through a thick patch of sea grapes before they reached the beach. There were no lights on the small speedboat anchored just off the shore. In the feint moonlight as they neared the boat and as they stepped into the shallow water, Hannibal could make out one figure on board - the red-head who had also been at the Monkey Bar.

The woman started to stand up as they got near the boat and helped Hannibal get on board. "He's got a bullet wound in the upper arm," the man told the woman.

"I'll check it out," she assured him.

"I'm going back to help X find the rest of them," the man continued, then took off at a quick jog into the brush.

Hannibal sat down on the boat, his mind racing with confusion and the annoying throbbing pain in his arm. The woman had pulled out a small kit and was starting to cut away the sleeve of his blood-stained shirt.

"Who are you?" Hannibal demanded. "What's going on up there? I have to -"

"You don't have to do anything right now except sit still and let me look at that bullet wound," the woman insisted. "My partner is trying to find your friends now, with a little help. He should be back soon, if he doesn't get caught in the crossfire. I'm Agent Dana Scully, FBI," she explained.

"FBI," Hannibal repeated sourly. "Great. How do you guys fit into this whole mess - *ouch!*"

"Easy, Colonel Smith," she soothed as she continued applying antiseptic to the wound. "And we don't, except that I've got a crazy partner who wants us both to lose our jobs, or our lives, or most likely both."

"How do you know who I am, Miss Scully," Hannibal asked.

"Your reputation precedes you, Colonel," Dana replied cryptically. She continued working on the wound in silence, starting to apply a dressing to it. "Bullet passed in and out, looks like minimal damage from what I can see here. But once we get you inside I want to look at it a

bit more closely, make sure we don't have any fabric lodged in there to give you an infection." Moments later Hannibal heard the sound of someone approaching. Scully heard it too and immediately pulled her gun with her free hand. Hannibal was impressed by her quick reactions. The weapon dropped as she recognized her partner, along with B.A., Face and a dark-skinned man Hannibal had not seen before. They all waded out to the boat and boarded.

"Hannibal! You okay?" Faceman inquired with worry.

"Yeah, I'll be fine, kid."

The young FBI agent climbed into the boat and said, "It was pretty hard convincing your men here not to shoot me and to come along with us."

"When we found out the jeep's tires had been shot out, we guessed we didn't have much choice in the matter," Face added.

"Where's Tom and Murdock?" Hannibal asked, growing concerned. "Last I heard from them was when they went into the basement."

B.A. frowned. "Couldn't find either of 'em, or reach 'em on their wires."

Hannibal's spirits sunk further. Gunfire was still ringing out back up at the compound. "Who in hell is still shooting at who up there?!" he demanded.

"That's a good question," Mulder replied.

"And what exactly are you three doing out here, and what do you want with us?" Face asked.

"We gotta find Murdock. And Tom," B.A. threw in.

"Look, we'll tell you guys everything we know, and try to help you find your friends, if you'll come along with us right now and tell us what you know about this whole situation," Mulder explained. "But whatever you decide, I don't think sitting right here asking twenty questions is the best idea."

The three Team members looked at each other. Hannibal answered the unasked question, simply saying, "FBI." Face and B.A. groaned but did not protest any further. Hannibal turned to Mulder and said, "All right, for now."

\* \* \* \*

The six figures on the boat were silent as it moved slowly along the coastline. They were heading up towards Dieppe Bay, and as the lights of the small village grew closer they killed the boat's motor. In a few minutes they were on the beach, and the speedboat pulled up close to shore

near a line of fishing boats by the Golden Lemon.

The severe-looking black man led them all towards one of the condominium units, pulling out a key at leading them inside.

Scully led Hannibal into the small kitchen, which had the brightest light, and checked out his arm better than she could before on the boat. After about twenty minutes, she was satisfied and applied a layer of bandages around the wound and offered him some of the stronger painkillers in her kit. He declined the offer. "I'd like to keep my wits about me right now, Ms. Scully. A couple of aspirin will be fine. Now, can we get down to business? We have a missing client and a missing member of our unit."

"They will have to be the least of your worries right now, Colonel," the mysterious man who had yet to give them his name replied. "Either they were captured by the Organization, and it's probably too late to do anything to help them, or they are in the hands of Stockwell's men right now, in which case you have nothing to worry about."

"Stockwell?!" Face exclaimed. "Not General Hunt Stockwell?"

"Yes."

"Oh, great," Face grimaced. None of the Team members were very pleased about this latest twist of fate.

"And who's side are you on?" Hannibal queried him.

"At times, both. Other times, neither. Right now, I'm on your side and that's all that matters."

"X here says the Organization's gonna blow the entire island sky-high tonight if They don't get you guys," Mulder explained.

"This has been Their base of operations for years. A testing ground for new technology, things They have learned from . . . the Others," X continued.

"Others? As in . . . ?" Face started.

"Little green men, Lieutenant," Mulder finished. "Remember Roswell? Aliens recovered at that crash site - one of them was still alive. The officials at the base managed to learn the reason behind the aliens' visit before the last one died from its injuries."

Hannibal asked, "What was it - their reason, that is?"

X answered bluntly, "Colonization."

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Chapter Ten:The Hidden Agenda

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When Tom awoke, his head aching dully, he had no idea where he was. He found himself stretched out on a reasonably comfortable sofa, staring up at the ceiling of a small, dimly lit room. He could not see much for the darkness and tried to quell his momentary panic.

As he began to move around and try to sit up, bright lights suddenly came on over his head, causing him to flinch. It took him a few moments to overcome his disorientation and begin to regain his sight, and to really start to take in his surroundings. He spotted Murdock there with him, slumped down into an upholstered chair and starting to stir slowly. Dark blue carpeting covered the floor, which matched the dark color of the walls. The walls appeared slightly curved, as if he was not in a building at all, but perhaps a train compartment, or . . .



"Welcome to my private jet, Mr. Veil," came a smooth voice. There was a mechanical, whirring sound as a darkened panel before him receded to reveal a man Tom had never seen before. The individual was seated behind a large desk and was surrounded on three sides by walls of computers and monitors. "Or, perhaps, I should more accurately say, welcome *back*."

"Who are you?" Tom croaked, slowly finding his voice again. "Another one of Them?"

"No, believe it or not, Mr. Veil, I *am* one of the good guys. I work . . . against 'Them,' as you say," the man continued in his affected tone.

"Good guys." That's a matter of opinion, Stockwell," Murdock spoke up, rubbing his head groggily.

"Good to see you again as well, Captain."

"Sorry I can't say the same, General."

Tom studied his new adversary (for he had no real reason to believe he was anything but that yet), trying to gauge what his angle was. The man looked to be in his early sixties, his hair graying but still showing streaks of its original dark brown. He wore thin-rimmed glasses and a well-styled dark suit, and reminded Tom less of one of 'Them' as he did some sort of CIA spook. Tom noticed, also, the large Doberman pincher that slept soundly at his feet. That Murdock seemed familiar with the man and none too fond of him did nothing to ease Tom's thoughts.

"Thomas, I am General Hunt Stockwell. And you *do* know who I am - at least, you did at one time."

"Why should I know you. Why should I believe anything but that you're just another one of Them," Tom challenged. "Last I knew we were attacking their base, and now I'm here. What would *you* think?"

The person calling himself Stockwell sighed, and removed his glasses, polishing the lenses slowly with a handkerchief. "Yes, I can understand your doubts, Thomas. But that attack, by yourself and the A-Team, left us no choice but to bring you in finally, to try to make you understand."

"If you *are* working against Them, why would you want to stop us? That doesn't make sense!" Thomas looked to Murdock, who said nothing but glowered with obvious distaste at Stockwell.

"Mr. Veil, if you will . . . *indulge* me the chance to explain, I think many things will finally make sense to you. And to you, Captain, although I know you are already familiar with some of what this is all about."

"Enough to not be happy to see you here, Stockwell."

"Thomas, I can help you get your life back, but only if you trust me."

"I don't have a lot of trust to spread around, General, so I'm going to need some more reason to give you any than just your 'indulgence'."

Stockwell grinned a shark-like smile. "Very well. I expected no less from you. That's why you have always been such a highly prized agent for me - you trust no one but yourself."

"Agent? *They* tried to sell that same game on me already, Stockwell - tried to convince me I was some sort of operative being put through a test."

"Yes, we figured *They* would try something like that. Thought manipulation, mind control . . . some of Their favorite tricks. But you *are* an

operative, Thomas, just on the other side of the coin. *My* side. Your cover has always been your photography - what better career for an operative meant to report back from the front lines than that of a photojournalist?

"Now, I can sense your disbelief, but what I am telling you *is* the truth. You have worked, on and off, for *my* organization for ten years. At least, ten years, until the 'Hidden Agenda' operation."

Tom laughed away the suggestion. "If that's so, how come I don't remember you? Why wouldn't I remember working for *your* 'organization' ever?"

"That, my friend, is the problem. And part of the operation to begin with. It was necessary, for the security of the mission, that you not remember, not have any idea who you were working for - or, for that matter, that you were working for anyone at all.

"You see, Thomas, my . . . associates and I have been working against 'Them' for a long, long time now. Long enough to know that, if and when one of our agents is captured, he will either kill himself - if he gets the chance and sticks to his training - or he will break. Everyone of them, eventually, will break. They - our enemies - are very proficient at pulling any information they need, or want, from anyone. You have probably already seen that, I'm sure."

"They haven't gotten my negatives," Tom said.

"True. Very true. And that's something you are to be commended for, Thomas. You've shown great resourcefulness and resolve through all of this. But let me continue to explain.

"You see, we realized, after too many compromises to our security because of Their tricks and information leaks, that we needed some way to counter Their tactics. Some way to protect ourselves and our agents - from themselves. With the help of some of the finest scientists and psychological experts we could recruit, including a few brought over from Their side, we developed a plan. The idea was simple: The best operatives - the safest - would be ones that did not even *realize* they were operatives. Did not remember that they were acting on anything beyond their own free will and driving curiosity. The 'Hidden Agenda' mission was to be the first field test of the project, and it was, to an extent, an incredible success. But there were, unfortunately . . . complications."

Tom raised an eyebrow. "You mean, me."

Stockwell smiled again. "Ah, I believe you're beginning to understand, Thomas."

"No, I'm beginning to think this is the

craziest tactic you guys have ever tried on me. If you expect me to believe this line of *crap* - " Tom stood up, ready to try for the door. He stopped when he heard the all too familiar click of a gun being cocked.



"I expect you to sit and *listen* to what I have to say, and give me a chance to explain," Stockwell continued smoothly, pointing the gun casually at Tom. "You wouldn't get far anyway, Thomas, I have men positioned outside to insure our . . . privacy. It is best, for now, for you to do things *my way*."

Tom glanced at Murdock, who simply shrugged and said, "No point in fightin' him, Tom. When Stockwell feels like giving a lecture there ain't nothin' that'll stop him."

Giving up on escape for the moment, Tom collapsed back down on the sofa and glared at the General. "I know the idea seems implausible to you, Thomas, and that is only to be expected given the nature of your problem.

"The idea was that you would be programmed, so to speak, not to remember anything associated with our organization. Nothing at all. Yet subliminally you would be instructed, *driven* to act as we wished. Your mission would be implanted into your mind so deeply that you would not realize you were doing anything that wasn't part of your job - as a photographer. If the mission was a success, another subliminal suggestion would make sure you contacted a certain member of our operation, so you could be brought in for debriefing, and *deprogramming*. Your original memories restored, and if necessary for security, your memory of the actual operation erased. Yet due to certain . . . unfortunate complications on this mission, only one of our operatives made it back for deprogramming. You didn't."

"Who *did* make it back?" Tom asked, not yet

believing the story but curious to hear how much longer Stockwell could keep his yarn going.

Stockwell gazed at him coolly, scratching the head of the now-awake large dog. Then he glanced towards Murdock. "Murdock made it back."

\* \* \* \*

"Before I go running off to risk my life here again tonight, let me see if I have this all straight. Because we came down here and supposedly blew Their cover on this operation, They're going to destroy all the evidence - basically, destroy this entire *island* - using some sort of weapon based on alien technology that They've built," Face said as they started loading up a jeep X had supplied with weapons and other materials, barely believing the words coming out of his own mouth.

"Once they realize that they were unable to stop you on the assault at the research center, yes," X agreed. "That's why Stockwell had his men ready for a counter-attack on the compound tonight to help create confusion and delay any such actions. They probably don't even know who They are fighting out there anymore."

"What I don't understand is why They think, when this colonization actually takes place, that the aliens - or Others as you call them - are gonna give Them any special treatment," Hannibal asked.

"It was part of the bargain They struck. Covert co-operation with the Others' plan and They wouldn't go public with Their knowledge of it. After colonization there would be need for humans to help control the rest of the population, and They would have that position. The crash at Roswell was only the first contact. They now had a close-to-operational space vehicle in Their possession, with communications technology that allowed Them to contact other crafts in the area. They made the offer; the Others indicated what sorts of circumstances would make their eventual assault that much smoother," said X.

"But how does Tom fit in all of this business?" B.A. wanted to know.

"He simply saw something he shouldn't have seen. He eventually led you men down here, didn't he? They're probably kicking Themselves now for playing with him for so long, expecting Their little mind games to work. They obviously underestimated his resourcefulness and determination."

". . . And that's why we have to stop Them before They decide to blow this place to smithereens," said Face. "Lovely little bunch, that's for sure."

"They keep the weapon up in the mountains in a very isolated spot. With American troops stationed here now because of the political problems, it'll be easy for Them to blame it all on some Army exercise gone haywire."

"Sure, makes perfect sense to me," Scully remarked, hopping into the back of the jeep.

"Wait a minute, you're staying here," Mulder stated protectively.



"Like hell I am," she declared. Before Hannibal or any of the other men could object, she continued, "Look, these people are responsible for the death of my sister. They've implanted something into my neck and done things to me that may give me terminal cancer in a few years anyway. There's no way I'm *not* coming along to try to stop Them from causing any more harm."

The men did not look too pleased, but Mulder did manage a smile. "Glad to see you're finally a believer, Scully."

X shook his head, took the wheel and just said, "Come on, let's go."

\* \* \* \*

Stockwell's revelation caught Tom unprepared. Murdock looked rather ill, if not completely surprised. "Are you trying to tell me that Murdock and Barton are the same person?" Tom asked.

"Murdock was Harrison Barton, yes. At least, for that operation, he *became* Barton," explained Stockwell. "You see, the *real* Harrison Barton, the one you knew from previous jobs together in the field, died not long after his move to South America in '92. He got into a bar fight in Rio over a young woman. Her husband didn't care for the rather rude overtures Barton was making towards her, and knifed him rather viciously during the resulting brawl. Would you care to see pictures?" Stockwell opened a file cabinet and

held out a folder to Tom.

Tom swallowed and decided he really did not want to take a look at what was inside. Whether it was for real or not, it would likely be an unpleasant sight. He shook his head. "No, thanks." Stockwell offered the folder in Murdock's direction. After a momentary indecision the captain stood up and snatched the folder away from Stockwell. There was silence in the room as Murdock opened the folder slowly, an obvious tremor in his hands. It made Tom feel like a voyeur, trying to read Murdock's unfathomable expression as he looked at the first picture. He did not get any farther than that before closing the folder, tossing it back onto Stockwell's desk, and dropping back down into his chair.

Stockwell continued nonchalantly. "In any case, we'd been keeping an eye on Barton for quite a while, knowing he'd end up getting in trouble like this eventually. We'd considered the possibility of recruiting him, but he was too unstable. Too unpredictable. But he did bear an uncanny resemblance to someone who had been, shall we say, 'under our wing' for years. Captain Murdock."

Murdock asked bluntly, "Was Barton my brother, Stockwell?"

After a brief hesitation, Stockwell replied, "It's very possible, and highly likely. But I don't have access to that information at the moment, and frankly, it never mattered, Captain, so I never bothered to find out for sure. All that mattered was that someday we knew Barton could come in handy as a cover for you."

"Nothing matters to you, Stockwell, unless it fits in neatly with your objectives." Murdock shook his head.

Stockwell just continued, ignoring Murdock's comments. "In any event, when we learned of Barton's death, we made sure that news of his demise never went beyond that bar in Rio. We spread the story that he was in Chile, living the life of a hermit and basically out of touch with the rest of the world. We knew we could 'resurrect' Barton if necessary at any time. And that time came in '94, when we learned about suspicious activity by the Organization in the jungles not far from Barton's mythical home. One of our agents got word to us that he suspected unusual goings-on that could only be associated with Them, but was only able to provide us with the sketchiest details of what They were up to before he was intercepted, and terminated. But those details were enough to provide a perfect test case for our programming protocol and send Murdock - and you, Tom - into action.

"Murdock was fed with the information from our contact, as well as being hypnotically convinced that he was Barton. We had enough information on the man that the identity could be firmly established within Murdock's mind. The captain's known mental instability, in fact, only made this easier to accomplish, for he was known to cling to different personalities when placed under severe stress. When we were finished we set him up in Barton's place, with several women we recruited from the local area that were smart and more than willing to play house with a crazy American for the money we were paying them. We monitored him for several weeks, making sure that the personality would stick. Then we made sure he knew you were in Nicaragua, right where we had planted you after erasing your memory of your association with us. From there on, you were both acting under our instructions, yet should you be captured and interrogated you would have no conscious recollection of that fact. And unless they were able to discover the special release sequence, they could never release your subconscious recollections as well."

"That's all a very amusing and clever explanation, Stockwell, but I still don't buy it. You haven't really shown me anything that would convince me this was for real. Besides, you're forgetting something important - I saw Barton - or Murdock, or *whoever* that was - get killed, right in front of me. Yet you claim he made it back."

"He did. If you remember anything different than that, it is no doubt the result of some trick by Them. You have been captured and under Their control, to some extent, during the past months, haven't you?"

Tom had to admit that was the case. "A few times. They tried to trick me with false memories, or very selective ones."

"Indeed. Well, no doubt They wanted you to believe you were completely on your own through all of this. It would help Them keep you desperate, thinking you were without any help at all. But Murdock was there - the rebel group saved both of you, Thomas - and if it wasn't for the fact that Murdock was reasonably proficient in the language and able to talk them out of *killing* you both, you never would have gotten the chance to take your precious photograph."

"That's bullshit," Tom argued.

"No, he's right, Tom," Murdock finally put in quietly. Tom wheeled around to face the captain. Murdock had been so quiet through most of the proceedings to this point Tom had almost forgotten he was there. Murdock looked back and forth between Tom and Stockwell. "I remember

now. I remember what happened." He seemed as shocked at his own revelation as Thomas was.

"All of it?" Stockwell inquired, not appearing at all surprised.

"I . . ." Murdock's mouth hung open for a moment as he tried to find the right words, then he shook his head. He continued, ". . . Who the hell knows. I remember . . . *something* . . . it's like, I'm there but it doesn't seem like it's *me*, it's like I'm watchin' someone else . . . I've sort of been rememberin' things, little bits and pieces since we got down here, but it didn't make any sense, I . . ."

"Why don't you just tell us what you remember, Captain," Stockwell put in.

Murdock thought for a moment. "I remember bein' in the jungles. The camp. And . . . sneakin' around and seein' those women workin' on the uniforms. Tryin' to figure out what was goin' on, and the plan Tom and I came up with. Waitin' and jumpin' two of the recruits, takin' their places so we could find out what was goin' on." Murdock paused, steepling his hands, biting his lip in concentration and glancing sideways at Tom.



"We knew which building had to be their H.Q., we just needed to get in there. I . . . scammed us in there somehow, then I remember runnin' away from the camp . . . knowin' they would be after us soon if they weren't already. That we had to get out of there, try to get back to our jeep and back to town . . ."

"Let's stop when we get to New York, okay?"

". . . We thought we were far enough away from the camp to take a cigarette break . . . I was beat and Tom, well . . . he was startin' to get the

shakes pretty bad, it looked like . . ."

*"Hey, you . . . are you gonna tell me what you found back there, or have you turned into my personal aerobics instructor?"*

*"What do you know about Saint Kitts?"*

*"Saint Kitts, I mean, wha - it's some island in the Caribbean. Why?"*

". . . We didn't know what we'd just really found. This seemed to go way beyond anything we'd gone out there expectin' to find . . ."

*"Well from everything I could see back there Saint Kitts is the brain center of this operation."*

*"How the hell are we gonna make any sense out of that - !"*

*"- I don't know, I don't know - think about it. It's close to the U.S. mainland, it's pretty easy in and out from either side of the Atlantic. I mean, if you were gonna run some sort of clandestine operation where would you run it from?"*

*"Well, I'd run it out of Quincy's Tavern, but . . . this is a story, pally, I mean, wherever it ends up taking us, this is one helluva story, right?!"*

". . . We shouldn't have stopped. It was careless of us."

*"Unfortunately I don't think it's going to take you very much further."*

Tom waited while Murdock paused, closing his eyes in concentration . . . he finally continued after a few minutes, sounding a little less sure of himself and exactly what happened.

"It's all kind of confusing to me after that. I mean . . . they had us. I knew there wasn't any way out of this one unless they suddenly turned a helluva lot more accommodating than they'd been so far . . ."

*"Who the hell are you?"*

*"Funny, that was the next question I was going to ask you -"*

Murdock flinched. Tom held his breath.

"I knew what was coming next . . . I looked up and saw it in his face . . ."

*"Can I quote you on that?"*

*"No."*

"I heard . . . a shot, and was on the ground . . . took a minute before I realized I wasn't dead . . . the guy who was about to kill me



was instead. Right down on the ground next to me. The rebels had shown up in the nick of time, and they were shootin' up everything and everyone. It was over before I had the chance to get off the ground. I think . . . Tom was okay, I remember, he'd dropped for cover as soon as the gunfire started.

"Next thing I remember . . . some sort of argument with the guys who rescued us. I don't think they were too sure we were on their side - and they were pretty sure Tom wasn't Jim Morrison by now, too." Tom and Murdock exchanged glances. Tom felt a chill passing through him, thinking that if Murdock of that little joke . . .

"What happened next, do you remember?" Stockwell queried.

Murdock nodded. "Yeah, it's getting clearer the more I think about it. I think we'd finally convinced them to trust us, and that we were on their side, when their camp was attacked. Tom and I managed to find cover and could only watch while the 'soldiers' - whoever they were - caught the rebel leaders and killed everyone else. And then took off. We decided, the way things were goin', that it would be best to split up from this point on. . ."

*"Oh man, this day has just gone from bad to worse to freakin' unbelievable. I wish to hell you hadn't thrown out my medication - I feel a serious nervous breakdown comin' on."*

*"C'mon, Harry, don't flake out on me now. What're we gonna do?"*

*"I dunno about you, pally, but I'm lookin' at that our former friends' jeep here and thinkin' it would be real nice to get the hell outta here before I really do bite the big one."*

*"We can't just desert them - we have to help them -"*

*"Help them? How, wha-what're we supposed to do? Grab a couple of AK's and go charging to their rescue like a pair of Rambos? Uh-uh, ain't gonna work. I value my life a little bit more than that."*

*"All right, fine. You go back. I'm going to follow them back to the camp."*

*"Christ, Tom -"*

*"Look, even if we can't help them, I can at least maybe get a few pictures of those guys and what's going on down there. From a distance, trust me. Here - take the mini-cam and the pictures from the H.Q. If I don't make it back . . . at least you'll have these."*

*"Tom, you're nuts. No, you're beyond nuts, you're seriously psychotic."*

*"Maybe. But I need to put a coda on this one, and at least one of us needs to get this information out. . . . If I don't see you again, Harry -"*

*"It'll be too damn soon, right, pally? Look - just watch yourself."*

"And that's . . . that's it, that's all I can remember now," Murdock finished with a frown.

"That's because by that evening, you were back in our custody and being debriefed," Stockwell informed him. "We did not know what happened to you, Tom; for a while we believed you were dead, until you surfaced again in the states, preparing for your big photography exhibition. For some reason your programming had slightly failed and you never contacted us. Still, we decided that we would leave you be for the time being, as a . . . test case. To see how well your programming could hold for a long term cover. Allison knew nothing of your covert employment - none of your associates and friends did. It would provide us with a great deal of information on how well our protocols could perform."

Tom fought hard to control his anger. Glaring at the General he said, "I can't tell you how glad I am to know I was such a good *test case* for you."

Stockwell ignored the comment. "But back to the Chile assignment, and the photographs. Thanks to that map you men got pictures of, we were able to learn of Their operations down here, on St. Kitts. We had known They were running out of the Caribbean somewhere, but couldn't pinpoint Their exact location. Now we could. For the past two years since then, we've planned and executed careful surveillance of the island, slowly and surely infiltrating Their organization through more programmed operatives, and others. We could have planned an aggressive attack, and knocked out the H.Q. anytime, but we knew in the long run that would accomplish nothing. Those who escaped and those in the upper echelons would just regroup elsewhere, and it would take us another two or three years to catch up with Them again. We could learn so much more if They didn't know we knew where They were.

"Unfortunately, thanks to you and the A-Team, I'm afraid that operation has come to an abrupt end."

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Chapter Eleven:Assault

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The badly paved mountain roads were treacherous enough in the daytime, but at night, with no street lights or guides of any kind, it was a miracle the A-Team and their new associates did not end up stuck in a ditch or even worse, down at the bottom of a river ghaut.

The jeep trundled along the bumpy path cautiously as they drove deeper into the jungle. Hannibal was uneasy about the operation, and everything else that had been happening in what was turning into one very long night. He did not like having to turn over his command to anyone else, but for now he was stuck following this mysterious X character into God-only-knew-what. The two FBI agents seemed professional enough, but they, too, were unknown quantities in this affair. Too many years on the run had left him with an innate distrust of the law-enforcement field in any shape or form - even a form as lovely as Dana Scully.

On top of that, his arm hurt like hell from the bullet wound that was the result of (in his opinion) unforgivable carelessness on his part, and he was missing a client *and* a Team member. X had not given any reason why anyone would want to take Murdock except for the fact that he had been with Tom . . . but Hannibal had not forgotten his conversation with the captain the other night and Murdock's great unease about this mission. Suppose the pilot really *did* have some connection to what was happening here . . . what did that say about him? Murdock always was full of surprises, but Hannibal was not sure he liked what that might mean in this case.

"Hannibal?" he heard a soft voice ask. It was Face, sitting next to him. Hannibal smiled slightly to himself. Peck always was good at sensing when something was bothering him.

"Just thinkin', kid. I'm okay," Hannibal reassured him. Face did not inquire any further.

A few minutes later and X stopped the jeep, pulling it as much as possible off the road and into the bushes. "We walk from here," he explained. "I don't know what type of forces to expect - I think they sent the bulk of their men down to the research facility tonight. But be prepared for anything."

"Always works for me," Face replied.

The five followed X along the side of the road, which was still creeping up the mountainside but had shrunk in size and definition to little more than two parallel concrete strips

under the thick jungle canopy. "Did you realize this is one of the last and largest natural rain forests left in the Caribbean, Scully?" Mulder remarked softly.

"That's nice to know, Mulder, but I'm not really in the mood for a geography lesson right now."

"Just thought it would help you appreciate the scenery."

X waved them to a stop and they grouped close to see what he was pointing towards. Hannibal pulled out his night-vision glasses and looked ahead. They were on the top of a small plateau where several cars were parked. Hannibal saw the small bridge that crossed a river ghaut and led to what appeared to be a cave opening.

"They keep the weapon, and sometimes the craft you and Scully saw, Mulder, in there."

"They can fly a plane into there?" B.A. asked skeptically.

"Not a plane, an alien craft. With maneuverability and technology you cannot even begin to imagine," X stated.

"What's the plan, then?" Mulder asked X, who then turned to Hannibal.

"I was under the impression that plans are Colonel Smith's forte."

Hannibal put down his goggles and reached into his pocket for a cigar, not speaking until he had carefully unwrapped it, lit it, and puffed thoughtfully on it for a few moments.

"I know what he's gonna say, man," B.A. put in with disgust. "The front door. *Always* the front door! The man don't have no plans, just a death wish."



Hannibal shrugged innocently and said, "Maybe, B.A., but in this case what choice do we have *but* the front door? Do you see another

entrance into that place? But, of course, we could use a distraction first." Hannibal turned to Face with a smile.

"Aw, come on . . . !"

Hannibal looked at his watch while Face protested. Just about two hours had passed since they had pulled out of the attack on the research building, two hours since Tom and Murdock had gone missing. "Think fast, Lieutenant, I don't want to sit here all night."

\* \* \* \*

"Sir, we can't just sit here all night," the young man insisted to his commanding officer. Robert Sanders heard the soldier's complaints but did not respond for a few minutes while he considered his next move. They had battled the Organizations' forces to a stand-off, neither side now sure who had the upper hand, who was closer to surrendering. Sanders was holding the high ground in the sugar cane field just off to the left side of the compound, yet he was hesitant to call in a full charge against the facility until necessary. He had to assume his task was still to stall the Organization's men until he received the signal from Stockwell otherwise.

The call came in while he was considering his response. "Able Two here, what's the status, Songbird," he said into his radio.

A woman's voice replied, *"Able One has received the package, and the secondary mission is underway. Able Three may need backup."*

"What about our current position, Songbird."

*"Abandon, immediately. Local authorities have been made aware of some sort of disturbance. Let them deal with whoever is still there. And Able One wishes for you to report back to the Empress."*

"Understood. Able Two out." There was a volley of gunfire exchanged between the compound and some of his men, then he called in to all of them through his radio, "We're disengaging. Eight, Nine, Ten, you're with me. We're returning to the Empress. The rest of you men are to proceed to the secondary target, and quickly, for aid to Able Three. We're abandoning position, repeat, we are *abandoning this position.*"

\* \* \* \*

Ellis Watson, one of two guards standing outside the entryway to the cave, cursed and spit out his moisture-soaked cigarette. He hated this stupid rainforest, this whole damn assignment. When he had joined the paramilitary group six months ago,

he had expected to stick close to home, taking care of undesirables in the U.S. of A. (where he thought there certainly were *plenty*) - not standing around all night by some cave in the middle of a hot, wet, boring rain forest, guarding something he was not even cleared to know anything about. He knew some of the other men shared his disinterest and anger but none of them dared show it or talk about it openly; they all knew what would happen next. They had all *seen* what would happen next during their weeks in the training camp, and what happened to those who did not follow orders completely and without question.

He shouldered his rifle and leaned against a mossy, wet rock at the cave's mouth. He looked across at Barry, the other guard on duty for this shift. Barry was resting against a palm tree and looked as if he was drifting asleep, his head nodding and jerking every so often. Seeing an opportunity to take out a little aggravation, Ellis crept up to his almost-sleeping comrade and gave him a solid whack in the stomach with the butt of his gun. Barry keeled over with pain, sucking in air and trying to recover from the shock of being awoken suddenly and in such a brutal fashion.

"What the fuck!" Barry spit out, struggling to get to his feet and glaring at Ellis.

"Now you oughta stay awake for the rest of the night. Be glad I decided to help you out instead 'a reportin' you to the Sergeant," Ellis replied with a smirk.

"Yeah, yeah, fuck you very much, you piece of shit." Barry was ready to show Ellis just how much he appreciated the help when they both heard someone . . . singing?

*"Daaaaaaay-o, day-e-a-o, daylight come and me wanna go hoooooooooome,"* a man was bellowing loudly not far away. Both guards looked around, whipping out their large flashlights to scan the area frantically. They spotted the man staggering across the bridge, holding a brown paper bag. He paused once, halfway across the bridge that swung precariously under his weight, and he brought the bag to his mouth and tipped his head back.

"Hey, you there!" Ellis hollered, lifting his gun at the intruder. The man blinked unfocused eyes at them in the glare of the lights. Then he smiled and staggered across the rest of the bridge towards them.

"A-ha! I have found civilization again!" the man cried. "I say, please lead me to the concierge, I need to register a formal . . . complaint!" The last word was accented by a hiccup that sent the disheveled man stumbling against Ellis, who quickly flung him away and to

the ground.

"What the hell is he doin' here?" Barry asked, finger itching on the trigger of his rifle. "We oughta waste him!"

"This ain't no hotel, asshole," Ellis supplied, agreeing with Barry's suggestion and just as eager to get the chance to do it himself.

The man staggered off the ground and clutched his bagged bottle close to him, looking distraught. "Aw, nuts. I musta taken a wrong turn somewhere. Well, in that case -"

With lightning reflexes the man swung the bottle and it connected solidly with Ellis' jawbone. Barry was too slow to realize what was happening. The man quickly spun around and connected a solid punch to the guard's stomach with his free hand, then another one to the face, knocking him out cold. Ellis was moaning and rolling on the ground in pain, but one more punch and he too was out like a light.

Face was checking both men for other weapons, equipment, and radios while the rest of the team crept across the bridge. "Nice job, Lieutenant," Hannibal congratulated him.

"We could have shot and killed both men from across the ghaut," X commented.

"That's not our way," Hannibal stated firmly. "We don't kill unless absolutely necessary. And while I'm commanding, you follow my orders. Besides, someone would have heard the gunfire, and we need to use the element of surprise as long as possible. For which, these uniforms could come in handy." Looking at the two unconscious men again, he added, "Face, Mulder, you two look like you could fit into these."

"Great," Face remarked.

"Yeah, isn't it?"

\* \* \* \*

"You still look thoughtful, Tom. What will it take to convince you that what I've said . . . what Murdock has said - is the truth?"

Tom did not reply at first. What was holding him back? He still had so many questions . . . so many things he did not understand or how they all fit together. "One thing I don't understand is just how the A-Team fits in with all this. What's your connection to them, and to Murdock?"

"I was the one who made arrangements for Peck, Baracus, and Smith to receive their pardons nine years ago."

"Arrangements . . ." Murdock shook his head and said to Tom, "He tricked us into running a mission for him, then set the guys up for the trial and execution. He made us all virtual prisoners

and forced us to run his missions until he was ready to arrange for the pardon."

"As I've explained to the captain more than once before, it was necessary to operate as I did. And if it wasn't for my intervention, Captain, remember that you would still be rotting away in a V.A. hospital in Los Angeles and your friends would still be wanted men."

"If it wasn't for your *intervention*, Stockwell, the Team never would have been in that situation to begin with!"

"You two mind letting me in on what all this is about?" Tom interrupted.

Stockwell sighed and leaned back in his chair. "My connection to the A-Team goes back many, many years, Tom, as does my connection to the Organization. I was actually working with Them - your enemies - back then. I was just a young and eager recruit from a covert operations unit that They had selected because of my exceptional performance in the field."

"Modest, too, isn't he?" Murdock interrupted.

"I was still relatively new in the Organization in the late sixties - learning the ropes, working with my superiors to help realize Their objectives during the Vietnam conflict. They had a virtual lock over all of the covert operations going on in the country, and elsewhere. The CIA was Their tool, Their cover. Captain Murdock was one of the finest pilots our side had during those years - naturally, he was recruited to work for the CIA on occasion. But he didn't really seem to have a stomach for the type of work that was involved, and proved to be difficult to work with. We did keep an eye on him, though, because of his connections to the A-Team, and thereby to Colonel Morrison.

"Morrison, you see, was a problem. We learned, just towards the end of the war, that he'd turned to the other side. He had grown disillusioned and had become involved in the drug and weapons trade, along with Captain Josh Curtis. The NVA, it seems, had made him an offer he couldn't refuse. The A-Team was officially under his control, but it would probably come to no surprise to you, Tom, that they weren't exactly the easiest unit of soldiers to control. Morrison realized this, and had sent them on more than a few 'suicide' missions by the start of the New Year in '72. Much to his dismay, they kept making it back, the missions successful.

"We knew what was going on, but kept out of it - until we learned of Morrison's plans for the Bank job. He meant for the Team to pull the mission off, present the money to him - and then

turn around and deny any knowledge of the mission. All documents and orders endorsing the mission would be destroyed. The money would go partially to Morrison for his help in embarrassing the U.S. government and getting rid of the A-Team, and the rest back to the North Vietnamese government."

"How did you know about all of this?" Tom asked.

"The Organization had, even back then, Tom, contacts everywhere. Including NVA intelligence. There was a meeting to discuss our options. Morrison could be eliminated before the bank job went down, or . . . things could be played out differently . . . We didn't want him to get the money - indeed, we could use the money. We could also use having the A-Team on our side.

"So, there was another meeting arranged, right before the bank job. With Captain Murdock . . ."

*The Company man and his unnamed associate, who never said a word but just gazed coolly at the captain from behind a cloud of cigarette smoke, had sat waiting for him in the hotel room, at a table under the overhead fan that moved in a slow, lazy circle above their heads.*

*"What is it this time, Stockwell?" he had practically snarled at the colonel. "I told you I was done with you and your crazy business, your secret missions. I don't want any part of it anymore."*

*"I know, Captain, but my partners and I have need of your skills - and your association with the A-Team once more. A job of extreme importance - you will understand why when you read the information in this report. And I promise, after you finish this job for us, we will no longer require your services . . ." The colonel's icy grin had sent chills along the pilot's spine. It had reminded him of a wolf, waiting with anticipation for his chance to make the killing attack. ". . . If you do things my way, of course."*

*Murdock had read the contents of the report, shocked by their contents and by the final orders. He had listened to Stockwell's conformation of its contents, then taken the much-needed cigarette offered by the silent, smoking man. Collecting himself finally and knowing he had no real choice in the matter, he had managed to say, "All right. But I sure as hell hope your 'intelligence' is correct about this. And you'd better have our asses covered, Stockwell, and back us up when the shit hits the fan. You're leavin' me and the entire Team out on a real limb here."*

*The sly smile had never left the colonel's*

*lips. "Believe me, Captain, pull this one off for us and everything will go exactly as we've planned . . ."*

"Did things go 'exactly as you planned'?" Tom asked Stockwell.

"Yes and no. The robbery was a bust. It seemed even the NVA didn't trust Morrison to pull things off, and only left a small amount of the money that was originally supposed to be there for the Team to 'steal.' Morrison was . . . taken care of, as was part of the plan discussed with Murdock. The fact that the H.Q. was hit shortly after his confirmed death was inconsequential - we didn't need to set-up the Team for murder, not yet, at least - but we knew for sure Morrison was no longer in the picture. And the A-Team was in custody, though we never got the chance to bargain with them as we had wished to. They were on a plane to Fort Bragg practically before the night was over, and Smith wasn't about to wait around for a trial. They escaped and were deep in the underground shortly thereafter. We tried to reach them through Murdock but were unsuccessful - Murdock was not at his most coherent and communicative at the time. So that plan was forgotten about for the time being, and we moved on.

"Back then, I still believed in Their ideas, Tom. I thought They really were doing what was best for the country, best for the world . . . I didn't understand just what They had in mind. I was still young, and naive, and only privy to the vaguest information about the motivations of the Organization's founders.

"It was only after Vietnam, and what I observed happening in the years that followed - after my promotion and after working on covert operations around the world for Them - that I was invited into Their 'Inner Circle.' It was then that I learned about the rest of it. The . . . experiments. Recovered alien technology. The seeds of Their plan had been planted back in 1947 with that recovered UFO at Roswell. The bargain They subsequently struck with the Aliens to aid in the eventual colonization of Earth . . . They felt They were unstoppable."

Stockwell continued, detailing the same information X had told the other Team members and the FBI agents. Then he said, "Believe it or not, Thomas, Murdock, I *do* have a conscience. This was not what I had signed up for and it had nothing to do with my beliefs. If we were going to be attacked by an alien force, I would not work with Them. I would be prepared to fight for our independence and survival. That was how I started my *own* Organization in the years that

followed, recruiting other disillusioned operatives, men whom I knew I could trust. By the time I fully broke away from Them and They realized what I was up to, I already had too strong a network to be challenged directly. It was not long after that time that I brought in the A-Team to work with me, for a time, and also to help in the one way I could rectify the wrong I had aided in against them many years back."

Stockwell paused, finally, and there was silence for a few minutes. "There is much more to the story, Tom, as I'm sure you can imagine. But there is also plenty of time to go into the details later. And of course, once you let us help you regain the rest of your memory, it will all be much clearer to you and you will know these things are the truth. But I'm growing a bit tired now of discussing the past, and I would like to move on to other matters, concerning our *present* situation."

"Okay, but one last question," Tom said, struggling to fit all this information together with the picture in his mind of his life in the past year. "Hale. Alexander Hale. He was a contact of mine in Their Organization for a while. When we finally met, he told me that the whole business with the photograph wasn't real, that it was all staged. Somehow They killed him while we were talking in a restaurant in Washington, but before he died he told me to go find this place off the interstate. It was a stage set-up just like what I had seen when I took the photograph. Others within the Organization, when I confronted Them, also dropped hints that the photograph wasn't what I remembered it to be. Now, you're telling me the photograph was real? Why would Hale tell me it wasn't?"



"Hale was with Them, yes. But when he set up that meeting with you in that restaurant, he was, at the time, working for us - under duress. We'd caught him, made it . . . *advisable* for him

that he help our side for a change. He had only been feeding you information previously with the hope of eventually trapping you. We figured we could take advantage of your 'trust' in him to question you about how your memory of the event was holding up. We were not sure how much They had destroyed your memory with Their own experiments on you already.

"However, in the end Hale decided not to play along with the game. Probably figured he was a dead man one way or another and didn't want to a 'traitor' to his cause. We were monitoring your conversation, and once he decided to veer away from what we'd told him to ask you, we decided to terminate him before he could feed you too many lies about the photograph and the operation."

"Why not just contact me directly, *dammit!* Why all these charades? That's what I don't get, Stockwell."

"You barely trust me now, Thomas. Would you have trusted me, two months ago, if we had brought you in and explained all this? Besides . . . as I mentioned earlier, there has been a certain . . . interest . . . in simply following your exploits over the past months. While we wanted the photograph, we also wanted to study the success of our programming. I must say, you performed beautifully for us, and managed to disrupt several of Their operations single-handedly without even realizing why you might be so driven to do so. It was only because you went a little too far this time that we finally had to bring you in."

Tom sat quietly for several minutes trying to quell his anger. His thoughts were a tangled mess of doubts, suspicions and fears that what he had just been told was the truth. Could he believe this individual? Could he afford *not* to believe him? It did not all add up in his mind yet, and the whole idea of Stockwell's explanation was insane - almost insane enough, he had to admit, though, that it *could* be true. Finally he sighed and spoke. "All right, Stockwell. So you've brought me here, told me all this, what do you want from me now?"

"I should think that would be obvious to you, Thomas. First, we'll want to know everything you've learned these past months about the conspiracy. Names, faces, methods of operation, the works. I assume you must have been keeping some sort of journal or record of everything." Tom nodded. "Good. I will need those records. And second, which should come as no surprise, I'll need those negatives - for safe keeping, you understand. You can't keep running with them forever, Thomas, and expect to keep them out of

Their hands. However, give them to me, and they will be safe. You have my word."

"And if I trust you . . . and give you the negatives, and everything else, what do I get? Do I get my life back? Allison? Everything else that They've taken from me?"

"Unfortunately, Tom, my powers *do* have their limits. They have taken those things from you; They are the only ones who can give those things back. Allison - *your* Allison, the one you married originally, no doubt was murdered and replaced by a double the night you lost your identity. If not sooner. I'm sorry to have to tell you that, but it is likely the truth. You have to forget about her and move on," Stockwell said bluntly.

"But I *can* ensure you that your memory - your real memory, not what may have been doctored or damaged by Them - can and will be fully restored. The programming and treatments you received at Calaway can be counteracted. You will be a whole man again, and you can be brought back into the Organization. And, instead of your old identity, we can give you a new one, if you wish to move on. We will not force you to stay with us."

Tom did not respond to the general immediately. Then Stockwell persisted, asking, "Thomas, do you believe me now? You must realize, of course, that this is the only possible explanation for everything you have gone through this year."

Tom hated to admit it, but as much as he tried to think otherwise the evidence before him was too strong to be denied. It explained everything, from his own dilemma back to the A-Team.

"Where are the negatives, Thomas," Stockwell asked finally, firmly, leaving no doubt in Tom's mind that the General intended to get them from him, one way or another. "You've done well, but now it's time to let us help you. I need to know where they are."

Tom closed his eyes and inhaled deeply, debating his options one last time. Opening his eyes he looked to Murdock, who showed no doubts and no signs of any insanity anymore. He said nothing to dispute Stockwell's claims.

Tom let out a deep sigh and then spoke, feeling suddenly incredibly weary and tired. Tired of the whole affair. Tired of being toyed with, experimented with, abused, chased. *Let it end, here and now. One way or another, just let it end.* "They're . . . in a small envelope, taped to the underside of the TV in my room at the hotel, room 23."

Stockwell smiled. "Thank you, Thomas, for

not making this matter too difficult. I have Agents on the way to meet us here already." Speaking into an intercom on his desk, he said, "Carla could you join us here, please."

Almost instantly a tall, attractive blonde entered the plane compartment from a doorway behind where Stockwell sat.

"Yes, General?" she asked, glancing at both Tom and Murdock for a moment.

"I assume you've been monitoring our proceedings here, Carla."

"Yes, sir."

"Since Able Two is not here yet, why don't you redirect him to go directly to OTI and retrieve the negatives."



Carla smiled. "I'm sorry, Hunt, but that won't be necessary. Thank you for your help, though." Suddenly she pulled a gun out from the inside of her suit jacket. Stockwell only had a split second to realize what was happening before she fired. The shot was right to his head, killing him quickly. Tom found himself frozen in shock, barely able to register what was happening.

Murdock was quicker to react, jumping to his feet and reaching reflexively into his jacket. It was then that he realized with dismay that, of course, he had been disarmed when captured by Stockwell's agents.

Carla saw his movement and quickly turned the gun around to him. "*Don't* - unless you want me to kill you as well, Captain." He knew she would do it. There was something in her expression that he found disturbing. As if she was not even control of herself anymore but functioning on some sort of programming . . . *Oh, crap . . .* Murdock thought to himself. *They had gotten to her, right under Stockwell's nose.*

A guard that must have been stationed outside the plane came charging in, alerted somehow to the situation inside immediately. He was down with one shot to the heart before even getting a chance to raise his own gun . . . *his gun*, Murdock noted with a glimmer of optimism. The guard's body had fallen about three feet away from Murdock's feet, the gun falling out of his hand and landing temptingly close to where he now stood. Murdock dared not do more than glance at it once for fear that Carla would notice it as well.

Still keeping the gun on Murdock, she turned slightly to Tom. "We are going to leave now, and retrieve those negatives, Thomas. Thank you for leading Stockwell down here so we could finally rid ourselves of this . . . nuisance. Once we have the negatives, I believe there are some people who would like to talk to you. *Both* of you, and the rest of the A-Team if they have not already been taken care of."

Murdock had calculated his odds. They were not good, but he knew if he did not try something now, for sure he would be dead later anyway. While she was still focused on Tom, he dropped to the ground with a fast roll, hearing the first shot as he landed and grabbed for the gun . . . the second just as he was coming up into a crouch, only barely registering the stinging in his thigh before firing madly at the woman. The first two shots were wide but the third one struck home, getting her high in the chest just as she fired off a third round of her own. She fell to the cabin floor with a scream, dropping her weapon. She made no other sound.

Murdock started to get back to his feet, but then the adrenaline began to wear off and the pain in his leg increased dramatically. Tom rushed over to help support him up and onto the sofa. The whole cabin was a bloody mess - Stockwell's blood, Carla's blood, the guard's blood, Murdock's blood.

"You okay?" Tom asked, instantly realizing what a stupid question it was.

"Yeah, swell. I've just got a big hole in my leg, no sweat," Murdock grumbled. "I think I'll live, though."

Tom ran over to Stockwell's desk, trying not to think about the gruesome mess all around him while he looked for a pair of scissors. He looked down once at Carla's body. Seeing that she definitely was dead reassured him only somewhat. He found some scissors in the top drawer, and then started to work to cut away fabric of Murdock's pants around the bullet wound. He had just finished and was starting to wonder what in the world he was supposed to do

next when someone Tom had never seen before came barging into the cabin. He was followed quickly by three other men. Murdock still had the guard's gun and didn't lower it for a moment, then he appeared to recognize the men and put it down.

"*Jesus H. Christ!*" one of the men exclaimed when he saw the mess, then he rushed over to Stockwell's body.

"Hey guys, so much for showing up in the nick of time," Murdock commented. The first man came over to check out Murdock's wounded leg.



"What the hell happened here? To you? I thought everything was under control," he demanded.

"Carla the mad sniper clipped me in the leg, after killing Stockwell. Guess it was a bad case of PMS," Murdock explained.

"Or programming," the man guessed.

"Yeah, that's what I figured. She wiggled out as soon as she came in here and saw me and Tom."

"Who are you guys?" Tom inquired.

"These are some of Stockwell's finest, Tom," said Murdock. "This here is Robert Sanders, Stockwell's first-in-command - or, I suppose you're just the 'first-in-command, period' as of now."

"It does appear that way, yes," Sanders agreed grimly. Turning momentarily to the man checking out Carla's body, he asked, "Is she wired?"

"Not that I can see," the agent reported. "But that doesn't guarantee anything. They are more than capable of using implanted tracking and surveillance equipment, if They'd somehow captured and converted her."

"That means They might have overheard



everything," Murdock suggested. "They might have heard Tom telling Stockwell where the negatives are . . ."

"We'd better get them before They have the chance, then," Sanders agreed. "Even so, we might not get there fast enough."

The sandy-haired man turned away from Murdock and said to Tom, "Tell us where they are, Mr. Veil. We can probably move in some of our people and get to them faster."

The Agent looked to Tom, who looked back and forth between him, Murdock, and Stockwell's still form. "It's okay, Tom. You can trust this guy - as much as you trusted me and Stockwell," Murdock confirmed. "None of these guys or the rest of Stockwell's team is part of Their Organization - unless They've got another plant like Carla."

"Don't worry," Sanders said. "I'll take care of the matter personally, with my men here. They couldn't have gotten to all of us."

Tom agreed and told them the same description he'd told Stockwell. He was too confused and exhausted at this point to question whether he could trust them or not. He had to, at this point.

"All right. Able Eight, stay here with these two. Nine and Ten, you're with me. Once we've gotten confirmation from Able Three that the secondary mission is complete, we need to be ready to get out of here. We may have a few more casualties besides Murdock - don't worry, we have a safe house on Puerto Rico we can get you cleaned up at if you can hang on a little while longer," Sanders told Murdock, who nodded. "Then let's do it."

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**Chapter Twelve:****The End of the Line**

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The guard turned as he heard footsteps coming down the darkened corridor. More alert than his externally posted comrades, he was quickly at attention and pointing his rifle towards the two approaching figures. When he spotted the uniforms he relaxed and lowered the weapon slightly. "Ellis? Barry? What's up? Hey - wh -"

Mulder swung the butt of his rifle at the man's chin, knocking him to the ground. "Well, *he* certainly won't be up for a while," Face remarked.

The rest of the team came into sight moments later. The tunnel was reasonably wide and high, much more spacious than it had appeared from the outside. Small bulbs illuminated the walls and floor in straight lines, almost like airport landing lights. "How much deeper does this tunnel go?" Hannibal asked X.

"Not much, and the place we need to get to is below this level. Several floors below."

"How big *is* this place?" Scully wondered aloud.

"There are five levels to the facility," X explained. "I spent a great deal of time here . . . in the past. We just have to hope they haven't changed the lay-out since then."

They continued inward until they found themselves into a more spacious section of the tunnel. The lights on the floor ended in a circle in a slightly depressed area on the ground. "This is where they usually store the craft, but it must be out running tonight. Damn. No matter; that is not our top priority tonight. We'll use the stairs over here." X indicated an opening in the floor, with a single metal staircase leading downward. Hannibal and Face led the way, descending one at a time, followed by Scully. Mulder was just starting down when a pair of guards interrupted them, coming out of an elevator near the landing pad across the "hangar".

"Hey!" one of them began to shout, but X cut him down quickly and viciously. The other one reached for something inside the elevator, triggering a loud alarm before X shot him as well.

"Go!" X yelled. "Two floors down, go!"

No one argued with the command, and they moved as fast as they could down the stairs as the siren echoed all around them. Someone was just opening the door that separated the stairwell from the main facility rooms as Face came to the bottom of the steps. He dived and tackled the

man, punching him solidly in the face. Seeing, for the moment, that the coast was clear, Hannibal indicated that they should all run in the room. They took cover behind a wall of computer equipment just as someone else took notice of them from across the room. He began firing and sparks flew from the electrical components. Scully flinched and ducked for cover while X, who had stayed back behind the entrance to the stairwell, fired off a volley that was followed by several screams and then nothing more.

"Clear for the moment," X called, and the rest of the team broke cautiously from their cover.

Hannibal looked around the large room, which was filled floor to ceiling with computer and electrical equipment, and lab benches covered with strange analytical and chemical apparatus. Besides the guard there were several men in the room, wearing white lab coats which were now stained red with blood. They lay slumped in their chairs or on the ground, dead or dying. "They were unarmed," Hannibal growled at X. "Was that really necessary?"

X, who had knocked one of the bodies out of a chair so that he could sit at a computer terminal, spun around to glower at the colonel. His expression was chilling as he spoke slowly, "It was absolutely necessary, Colonel Smith. You don't know what these men have been responsible for. I do."

"What are you trying to do now?" Mulder asked, looking over X's shoulder at the computer.

"I need to find the program sequence to disable the weapon," X replied.

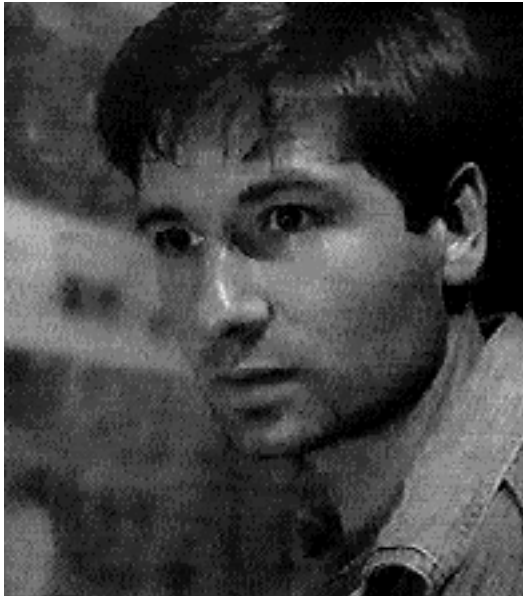
Hannibal ordered to his men, "B.A., guard the stairs. Face, stay by the elevator." He was getting very tired of the alarm constantly buzzing in his ears. Spotting the bell up high on the wall by the elevator he fired off one well-placed shot and effectively disabled it, then went back to watching X busy at work on the computer. "Well, I hope you can find it quickly, 'cause sooner or later we're gonna have some more company."

Scully walked around cautiously, trying to make sense of what the facility was for. She stopped in front of a darkened panel on the wall not far from where X sat. Mulder came up behind her, also intrigued. "I wonder what this button's for . . ." he mused, reaching forward to one of the controls on the panel.

"Mulder, I wouldn't -"

There was a buzzing that made them both jump, then the darkened panel receded to reveal just a clear glass one, in front of a small chamber. Inside the chamber was only a perfectly rounded sphere of a strangely

luminescent metal, hovering through some unseen mechanism above the bottom of the chamber.



"What is that?" Hannibal asked, also joining them in front of the panel.

X glanced up quickly then went back to the terminal. "That's what we're here to stop from detonating. The aliens' equivalent of a nuclear bomb. It could flatten this island to dust with a strong but very focused explosion - *shit!*" he cursed, staring at the screen, which was scrolling down a list of commands and flashing a countdown clock in one small window.

"What?" Mulder asked, not liking X's suddenly worried expression.

"I've finally accessed the control files - but the device has already been triggered remotely. We have five minutes until detonation."

"So, just turn it off," Hannibal ordered.

"I'm trying, but it's not that easy - some of the programming has been changed since I last used it, the whole system has been reconfigured."

"Yeah, I hate Windows '95, too," Mulder cracked.

"All right, everyone drop your weapons and freeze where you are!" someone ordered from behind them. Hannibal spun around and saw, across the room, a man standing there with at least six armed guards flanking him. They stood behind a waist-high bank of equipment. The front person was none other than Samson. "You, get away from the computer NOW!" he ordered.

Scully, Mulder and X acquiesced, and Face and B.A. waited for a nod from Hannibal before dropping their weapons and moving away from the exits. They both had a look of shock on their faces at missing the intruders. "Where did

you -" Face started.

"This facility is designed to withstand any such *amateur* assaults," Samson sneered, and turning to X he added, "and there have been security modification since you were last here."

"So I've noticed," X answered. "But do you realize your associates have activated the device? We will all die in about four minutes if you don't -"

"I don't care. I'm already dead as far as They're concerned!" he explained, with a note of crazed hysteria. The middle-aged gentleman laughed nervously and continued, "Even if I had killed you all before you got here, They would need someone to take the fall for this security breach. And it would be me. So, if anyone's going down here tonight, we *all* will go down."

"You won't win," Mulder remarked. "Even if you kill us, others will stop this plan of yours. You can't keep the world in the dark forever about what you're trying to do."

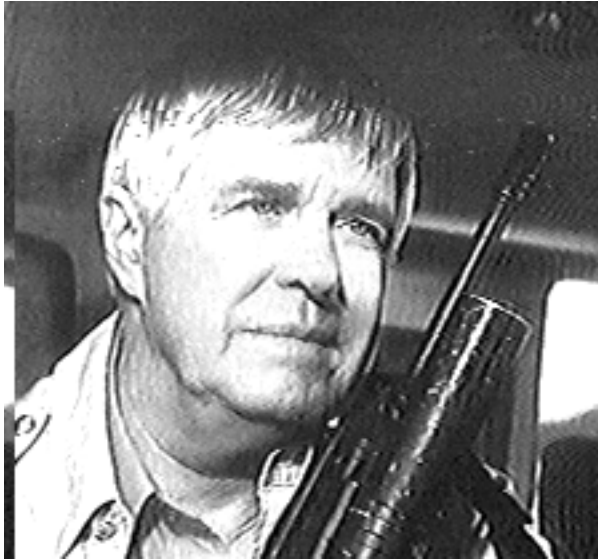
"But we have for over forty years already, Mr. Mulder. All we need is another four years, and then -"

A loud explosion inside the stairwell, shattering the access door and sending smoke and flames billowing into the room, interrupted his speech and drew the guards momentary attention. Hannibal did not think twice about the reason for the explosion, just took advantage of the distraction to drop down and grab his gun with his good arm. Just as one of the guards turned away from the explosion and noticed his movement, he fired and hit the man high in the shoulder.

Moments after the explosion the elevator door had opened and another group of soldiers came charging out, dressed in dark fatigues different from what the Organizations' guards were wearing. While Scully and Mulder and the Team members attempted to take quick cover behind a lab bench, the newly arrived men engaged the guards in a quick but bloody shooting match. After an ear-shattering exchange of gunfire that could have only lasted five seconds at most, the firing stopped and someone yelled, "Facility secured - Colonel Smith, men, it's all right, we're with Stockwell."

Hannibal let out the breath he had been holding in and stood up. He recognized, vaguely, the man who had been speaking from his days back in Langley at Stockwell's compound. "It's all right, guys," he told his men, who then followed him out from behind their hiding place. Several more men appeared from out of the stairwell, no doubt the ones that had placed the explosives for the distraction. X ran quickly back over to the computer, which miraculously had not been hit,

while Hannibal took a look around. One of Stockwell's men was down and obviously dead and another two were wounded. The guards were all down, and two of Stockwell's men were pulling Samson - wounded but still alive - out to the main floor.



"Thanks for the help," Hannibal told the man, who just nodded. Turning to X, he said, "Now that that little distraction has been taken care of, how are we doing?"

X did not look away from the screen. "I'm working on it . . ." he said flatly. "Just hope that they haven't changed the passcode sequence in the past few months."

The next few minutes passed in deathly silence as they watched X at work on the console. The countdown clock was still going, clearing the final minute mark now. The orb was now glowing a bright red, occasional energy sparks shooting

off it, all for now contained within the chamber.

Mulder put a protective arm around Scully's waist. "Scully, if this is it . . . I just want you to know . . ."

She took hold of his hand firmly and just said, "I know, Mulder. I know."

X typed in a final command sequence, triggering a new window to appear on the computer screen. "Verifying final lockout sequence," the screen read, with a status bar appearing and scrolling slowly along. The clock was down to 00:28 seconds.

"Come on, come on . . ." X encouraged. Hannibal puled out a cigar - his last one, perhaps in more ways than one, he mused, and lit it up for a good puff just in case . . .

Suddenly the clock froze at 00:08.

"Sequence verified. Countdown halted," the screen now read. The orb began to return quickly to its original soft glow, the sparks abating quickly. There was a round of cheers from the men, Face and B.A. breathing deep sighs of relief while Mulder and Scully hugged each other happily.

"All right!" one of the soldiers exclaimed, then getting on his radio. "Able Two, Able Two, do you read. Repeat, Able Two, this is Able Four, do you copy."

After a few seconds, there came the static-filled reply. "This is Able Two. What is your status, Able Four."

"Mission accomplished, Able Two. Facility secured. We did it, sir," he finished, unable to suppress an ecstatic nervous laugh.

Hannibal just grinned. "You know, I always say this, but this time I really mean it. I love it when a plan comes together!"

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**Epilogue:****Just Like Starting Over**

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Only a few days later and the Team were back in the United States and on familiar territory - General Hunt Stockwell's former command headquarters in Langley, Virginia. They were joined by Tom and the two FBI agents, and also Robert Sanders. Sanders had, as expected, officially been appointed to take over the operation in Stockwell's absence. Next to Stockwell he had the most knowledge and experience when it came to dealing with the Conspiracy group, and the rest of the operation trusted him implicitly.

The mysterious "Mr. X" had remained behind on St. Kitts to help with a small clean-up crew. They now had access to all of the Organization's paper work and facilities in the mountain cave, although an unexplained fire had burned the Primate Research Facility down to the ground that same night. Local authorities were investigating the incident but were coming up with no answers, except that perhaps some drug processors had set up camp inside the building and caused an accidental explosion.

In the meantime, the Team, Tom and the agents were all thoroughly debriefed and brought up to date on everything they had not learned on their own about the virtual war against the Conspiracy. Mulder hoped he might learn something more about his still-missing sister, but unfortunately there was no information available beyond the incident with the clones, which he had already observed first-hand. Still, he had hope. One day, if it meant having to hitchhike a ride on a spaceship and travel halfway across the galaxy, he would find her. At least he now had undeniable proof that things were really going on behind the general public's back involving the knowledge and use of alien technology, and that there were people besides himself determined to do something to stop them. That was some consolation and gave him some hope.

Face, B.A. and Hannibal finally learned the truth from Sanders about how they were set up for the bank job, and why Stockwell eventually tried to make up for it in the only way he could. As much as they disliked the man and the way he had treated him for the time spent while under his control, they all had to admit to a little grudging respect that he would feel honor-bound to try to help them in the end.

After the third day, Hannibal was getting tired of all the interrogation and information

sessions and ready to split. He only put up with it all because he understood the threat posed by this Organization they had unwittingly gotten themselves involved against in this war. Hannibal had checked in with both Maggie and the movie director shortly after his arrival, and both were more than a little eager to see him back in California. He was equally anxious to get back, but something in the past few days of action had brought a restlessness back into his spirit that he thought he had managed to quell in recent years. He knew Maggie would sense it, and would not be happy about it. As he walked the generous grounds around the ranch, trying to sort out his own thoughts on the subject, he found Murdock off by himself, stretched out on the grass, reading.

"You doing all right, Captain?" he asked as he sat down next to him.

"Yeah, yeah. Pretty much so, Colonel."

"What d'you got there?" Hannibal asked, looking at the book in the pilot's hands. It was Harrison Barton's book on his adventures covering the Gulf War.

"Check out the photo on the inside flap," Murdock suggested.

Hannibal did so and couldn't hide his surprise. "Tom was right - he looks just like you!"

"Uh huh, ain't no doubt in my mind. That's Roger all right. Writes just like he used to talk. It's too bad . . . too bad we never got the chance to put things right between us. We were both pretty screwed up, but in different ways. I can't help but wonder if we couldn't have helped each other out through a lot of it."

"We all have regrets, Captain."

"Yeah, and some of us more than others." Murdock was looking out across the thick green lawns, the rolling hills that spread out to the fog-shrouded horizon. "I guess . . . Colonel, there's something I need to say to everyone, but especially you. I . . . don't expect you to ever forgive me for what happened, but I want you to know, I *need* you to know just how sorry I am about it all."

"Murdock, what the hell are you talking about?"

"What else? Didn't you hear what Tom said? What Stockwell told him - what Sanders told you? Colonel, I was the one who killed Morrison! If it wasn't for me actin' on those orders from Stockwell, none of this would ever have happened. You and Face and B.A., you wouldn't have had to live for fifteen years as wanted fugitives; you could have all lead normal lives. But it was all my fault."

"Murdock -"

"But I swear, Colonel, it wasn't until . . . first when we took that job for Fulbright and went back to 'Nam, and then when the trial went down, and Stockwell was hangin' around all the time, that I began to remember it all. Somehow between that night and the time I got transferred back to the loony bin in L.A. for observation, I managed to completely block out what happened. I guess . . . I just couldn't deal with bein' responsible for what happened to you all. And when I finally started to remember what happened, I . . . I couldn't bring myself to say anything about it. I was . . . too afraid.

"I did confront Stockwell about it, though, eventually. I was ready to kill that bastard, I swear, if he didn't give me a straight story on why he gave me that order. That's when I finally heard about what he was really up to. That his making this . . . arrangement with you guys was the only way he could think to make right what had gone wrong. But he swore . . . Hell, *threatened* that I couldn't mention anything about it to you guys, or he'd break the deal."

"So you let this guilt eat at you all these years since then?" Hannibal asked. "Even though Stockwell considered himself the one really at fault - as he was, with the rest of the Organization?"



"I still carry a lot of guilt about it, Colonel, that's what I'm tryin' to tell you. It's part of why, I guess, when Stockwell asked me to run some extra jobs for him, here and there, after the pardon . . . as much as I wanted to forget about it all I felt like I had to do it, to try to make things even. I had to get back at those bastards for what they'd done to all of us. But even with things made right today, what happened back then

cost you guys fifteen years of your lives and -"

"Captain, stop it and listen to me," Hannibal ordered sternly, taking Murdock by the shoulders and forcing him to look at Smith straight on. "I don't blame you for anything. And I know Face and B.A. don't blame you either. You did exactly what a good soldier is supposed to - obey a direct order from a superior officer. You were led to believe you were acting out a necessary and important command, and you did it. That someone else managed to twist the situation to set us up was an unfortunate complication. *It wasn't your fault.*"

"But, Colonel -"

"No. No, I won't let you beat yourself up over this anymore. What happened, happened, and there's no point wondering about what things would have been like if they had happened any different. Hell, Murdock, if it wasn't for being on the run like we were, all those years, do you think any of us would still be together, still be the friends we are today?"

"Probably not. But, we might have had a lot more."

"Really? Somehow, I don't think so. B.A., he never could have been a career soldier. He couldn't deal with any officers except for me, and that's why I took him in our unit. He'd be doing the same thing he is today, I'm sure. Face is and always will be just who he is - conning and conniving his way through life, whether it's to scam an airplane or a job as a movie producer. I never would have met Maggie, if it wasn't for us being on the run from Lynch that one day and needing a doctor for B.A. And would you have ever met Kelly, if those bounty hunters hadn't been after us?"

"No . . . I guess not, but -"

"And are you trying to tell me you would want that to never have happened?" Murdock didn't respond. "I thought so. Captain, it's time to let go of the guilt. It's time to let go of the past. That's an *order*, Captain. Am I making myself clear?"

Murdock looked down at the ground, then back up at Hannibal, and nodded. "Yeah. Yes, sir."

"Good. Now, forget about having to make any big confessions to the others. They'll tell you the same thing. We've got other things to worry about and think about now. Like if we're gonna just drop this case now that Tom's problem is solved, or if we're gonna stick with it for the long haul."

Murdock smiled finally, a familiar twinkle in his eyes that was matching the one in Hannibal's. "Got a taste for good ol' jazz again, have we,

Colonel?"

"Never lost it, Captain, just tried to put it aside for too long, I think. I mean, part of the problem was that after the pardon we got too well-known to be effective in the game anymore. But things are a lot quieter now. We're not on the cover of every newspaper and weekly these days."

"True . . ."

"And it looks like there's plenty of trouble out there with this conspiracy group and a need for people like us to fight them."

"Mm hmm . . ."

Hannibal was quiet for a moment, contemplating. "Of course, Maggie and Kelly are gonna want to kill us."

"Most definitely," Murdock replied seriously.

They sat quietly for a few moments, then both started laughing. Both men got up and started walking back to the ranch. Hannibal pulled out a fresh cigar and was still grinning mischievously when they came across B.A. on the patio.

"Oh no," Baracus groaned when he saw both of their expressions. "Two crazy men on the jazz, I don't even wanna hear it!"

"Relax, B.A.," Hannibal chided him. "You're gonna love it."

\* \* \* \*

Face, meanwhile, was busy on the phone inside the compound.

"Sandpiper Gallery, this is Carol speaking."

"Carol? Hi, it's . . . Dirk."

"Oh, hi! I . . . I wasn't expecting to hear from you."

"Yeah, I know. I'm sorry, I had to leave to go back home rather unexpectedly. Something . . . really serious came up. The movie deal fell through," he lied, and hated having to lie to her. He wanted to tell her the truth but that could take a good couple of hours, at least.

"I see. I'm sorry to hear about that."

"Listen, I . . . I just wanted to let you know, I really . . . I hope we can see each other again sometime. I'd like to come back and visit you again, and really get the chance to get to know you better."

Carol's voice sounded wistful and somewhat dubious when she replied. "You must realize I've heard that line many times before."

Face sighed. "I know, I'm sure you have. Believe me, I've used it myself more times than I'd like to admit. But I really do mean it. I think you're a very special person, Carol. Thinking

about you makes me consider things I haven't thought seriously about in a long, long time."

There was silence on Carol's end of the phone for a while, except for the sound of the stereo playing lightly in the background of her gallery. The soft reggae sounds made Face start to miss her and the island even more. "Temp, it's been a long time since I've thought about things like that myself, if I understand what you're saying correctly. I'm quite happy with my life the way it is. Without . . . complications. Maybe I've just been through a few too many bad relationships."



"I'm not asking for anything definite, Carol. I just want to know, if I was able to come back down to the island again, sometime soon . . . that you wouldn't mind seeing me again."

"I wouldn't mind at all. In fact, I'll be looking forward to it, if not expecting it. Okay?"

Face smiled to himself. "Okay. And here's to hoping I can surprise you."

Tom sat by himself, alone and thinking, studying a photograph of Allison for about the thousandth time. He knew there was no going back now, that was one thing that was certain about his life now. Somehow that did not comfort him as much as he thought it should. All this time, he wanted so badly to find the truth. Well, now he had it, and it left him feeling nothing if just cold and alone. If he had just given Them the negatives, way back at the start, he could have had it all back, could have had the life that was denied to him forever now. Or would he, he wondered. Or would Stockwell's men have brought him back in, maybe even killed him because of his failure.

Now all he had was this: his new identity,

courtesy of the organization here in Langley. A place to live - here - if he wanted to rejoin their efforts to put a final end to Them. And probably die in the process, if he wasn't careful. Or to take his identity and start over for real somewhere. Still always wondering if They would eventually find him, and decide to take him out just for revenge if nothing else. It didn't seem like much of a choice at all, he thought. And that's what his search for the truth had brought him. It had been all that had kept him going, all he'd had left to believe in . . .

*"What is it you really believe in, Tom? What keeps you comin' back for more?"*

*"The truth."*

*"Truth? Truth! Ah, mon ami très, très ingenu, truth is nothing but the biggest illusion of them all! You won't find any truth out here, clicking away at starving babies or crying women in Nicaragua who've just watched their whole family be murdered by U.S. funded rebels."*

*"You used to believe in the truth, Harry."*

*"I also used to believe that free love, drugs, and peace, man, could change the world."*

*"And now?"*

*"And now I just believe in the sex and the drugs. Fuck peace. Fuck changing the world. If it wasn't for war and people treating each other like yesterday's garbage you and I wouldn't have a job, pally, and I couldn't afford the drugs - or the women. So here's a toast to all the sick, scheming bastards out there that keep me, Harrison Barton, and you, Thomas Veil, truth-seeking photographer extraordinaire, out of the unemployment office."*

Tom turned when he heard a knock at the door. He looked up and saw it was Robert Sanders. The man's expression was kind and gentle. "Hey, Tom. How are you hanging in there?" he asked in his deceptively soft voice.

"I'm . . . hanging, I'll say that much," Tom replied honestly. Robert came into the room and sat across from him. "I'm still trying to decide what I should do now. Everything . . . everything's changed."

"I can understand that, Tom. It must be difficult to get used to the idea that it's all over."

"Yeah, but it isn't, right? I mean, the mystery, the photograph - that's over. But not this whole business with Them. They're still out there. And the life I at least thought I had is over. Can you understand what that is like?"

"Perfectly." Tom looked to the older man for an explanation but he just sighed and said, "We've all given up a great deal in fighting this

battle, Tom. Had to put the security of our country - our world - ahead of our families and loved ones . . . and now that Stockwell is gone, and I have to take over where he left off . . . " The man just shook his head and looked incredibly tired. Tom was pretty sure he knew the feeling pretty well. Yet he recovered quickly and asked, "Now, do you have any thoughts on what you are going to do next? Have you considered the possibilities?"

"I've considered them, all right, backwards and forwards and back again. And, truthfully, one way or another it doesn't seem to matter to me anymore. My old life is gone. The Allison I used to know is gone - if she was ever really there in the beginning."

Robert nodded. "Why don't you just stay here for now, with me and the rest of the group. We have a lot of work to be done now, and I know we could use the help of someone with your experience and proven abilities. But . . . if you don't want anything to do with this whole crazy affair anymore, I'd certainly understand that as well."

Tom considered silently for a moment, going over to the window to look out at the hills and forests in the distance. "The plan for colonization is still on for four years from now, isn't it?"

"As far as we now. Whether or not the Others have the help of the Conspiracy or not, we still believe they are sure to come. We just have to be prepared to fight, whatever situation presents itself to us, without causing panic in the general public beforehand."

"Sounds like a pretty big job." Sanders said nothing. "Well, maybe I'll stick around . . . for a little while, at least."

"I'm glad to hear it, Tom. Now, if I can only get my son Chance to join us, he's a photographer as well, with some rather . . . interesting talents. I think you two could make a rather good team . . ."

\* \* \* \*

Mulder and Scully had left Virginia after their quick debriefings - Sanders had suggested, for their own safety, that they stay on the compound for a few more days until the dust settled, but they had declined.

"People have been wanting me dead for too long to start worrying unduly about it now," Mulder had joked. Besides, part of him wanted to get back to DC as soon as possible and find out how things had hit the fan since he they had left.

He was not unduly surprised that Skinner called them into his office just moments after



their arrival.

"I guess you missed us a lot, huh, Skinner?"

"Just cut the crap, Mulder, and hand over your badge. And gun. You too, Agent Scully. You've both been removed from duty."

"What?" Scully exclaimed. "Sir, if I may -"

"You may *not*, Scully. Look, I won't even claim to have a clue about what you two got yourselves involved with this time. All I know is that these orders came down from over *my* head and I've got no control over them."

"You mean it came from the cigarette-smoking man. You're finally completely caving in to him, aren't you?" Mulder asked.



"It's none of your business anymore, Mulder. Look . . ." suddenly Skinner's tone softened slightly, "You know I have nothing but the deepest respect for both of you. But you push things too far. I'm sorry, I've tried to protect you as long as possible from . . . them . . . but I've reached my limit. Now, please . . . get your stuff together, and just go. And . . . I'm sorry."

Mulder's eyes held Skinner's until the Assistant Director finally looked away. "So am I," Mulder replied. "So am I."

\* \* \* \*

It was not surprising that their offices had already been cleaned out, all of their belongings haphazardly boxed-up and sitting in neat piles in the middle of their rooms. Scully felt dazed, unable to believe her career, her life's work had been so easily dismissed. Mulder was less surprised by this turn of events and tried to cheer her up as best he could. But she only

grinned half-heartedly at his jokes as they carried the boxes down to the elevator and then the parking garage, curious glances from other agents following them everywhere but no one spoke or offered any condolences or support.

The garage was quiet now, being just a little before 11 A.M. Most of the government employees had arrived at work already and it was too early for people to be leaving for lunch breaks. They began unloading the boxes in silence off the mail cart they had borrowed out of the hallway and into the trunk of Scully's car. They had both known their jobs had been at risk, and with everything that had happened it would have been highly improbable that they would get their positions back again. Still, it was a difficult reality to accept for both agents.

"I guess that's the last of it," Mulder said, looking down at last box. It was full of his posters, news clippings, various UFO merchandise.

"Indeed it is, Mr. Mulder."

Reaching reflexively for weapons they no longer carried, both agents spun around. "What do you want now, you bastard. You got what you wanted - we're out of your way now," Scully told the mysterious Cancer Man. "Why don't you just leave us alone."

"Because, Ms. Scully, I know you won't leave *us* alone - badge or no badge," he explained, stepping up right in front of her and exhaling a cloud of foul smoke into her face. "You caused untold damage to the entire operation. And that can not go unpunished."

"Scully -" Mulder started to warn, suddenly realizing what was going on. He leapt to get between the two of them, knocking her to the ground just as a single shot was fired. There was silence for a few moments, then the sound of something falling, metal coming into contact with hard cement.

"Scully?" Mulder asked this time, picking himself up off the ground.

"I'm fine," she assured him. Mulder turned to look and found that it was the Cancer Man that had fallen, dropping his gun and now laying in a quickly spreading pool of blood.

Scully noticed and was equally bewildered. A moment ago she had believed she was about to die at this man's hands. Somehow he was dead instead. "Who . . . ?"

"I believe I am the party in question, Miss Scully," a gray-haired gentleman in a well-tailored suit announced, stepping out of the shadows not too far away from them. He spoke with a refined English accent, and stepped up to the body and put his own gun away. "I must say

it is quite satisfying to finally have this waste of humanity disposed of properly," the man said.

"Thanks for the help," Mulder managed to stammer, feeling a bit numb and unable to think of anything better to say. He found it hard to believe the man on the floor was actually, finally dead. A man he had never even learned the name of, and someone who still held the answers to so many of Mulder's questions. He wondered if he ever could learn them now.

Scully seemed to recover from the shock first and asked, "Who are you?"



"A friend of Robert Sanders - I believe you've met. He called me to say he had two rather stubborn and rather important people who were likely to get themselves killed today. I was told to make sure that didn't happen. My name is also Robert - Robert *McCall*, that is."

"Nice to meet you, Mr. McCall. What are we going to do with . . . him?" Mulder indicated the body.

"Help me carry the body over to that

dumpster." Mulder and McCall lifted Cancer Man's body over to a large newspaper recycling bin and dumped him inside. "They'll find him soon enough. A fitting end for him, isn't it?"

"Left out with the morning trash. Yeah," Mulder agreed. He was taking a quick liking to this new mystery man.

"Now, I'd suggest both of you get into my car here and come with me. An associate of mine should be here shortly to retrieve your car and your personal items."

"Where are we going?" Scully asked as they both followed him over to a black jaguar parked on the other side of the garage and sat together in the back.

"New York, Ms. Scully. You're both in my protective custody for a while until we see how They are going to react to all of this. The whole Organization is spinning on its head right now, trying to regroup and estimate how badly They were damaged by recent events. They may either decide to go completely underground for a while until things settle down . . . or They may decide They need to push their plans ahead full speed and put Their final plan into action before Their cover is completely blown. We can't be sure one way or another right now, except to say these are very dangerous times, indeed.

"Your friend here with the cigarettes was the lead man for the operation. What will happen now is anybody's guess."

"So you're just going to sit on us for now so we can't cause any more trouble?" Mulder queried.

The car pulled out of the parking lot and into DC traffic, and McCall replied, "Actually, Mr. Mulder, we have a proposition for both of you, now that you are, I believe, unemployed . . ."

Mulder looked to his former partner and gave her a lopsided grin. "Here we go again, Scully . . ."

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## IN THE FUTURE FROM SOCKII PRESS...

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The following titles are either currently in the making or proposed for future publication, **if there appears to be enough interest in the material** going to print. If no one seems interested, they won't happen. To contribute to any of the below titles or indicate an interest in purchasing these if/when they go to print, please write the editor at: **Nicole Pellegrini, 2429 Locust St. #315, Philadelphia, PA 19103**. Enclose an SASE, please! Submissions should be sent typewritten, along with (if possible) a hard copy on floppy disk, Mac-format preferable but not necessary. Submissions also accepted via email to: [pellegrini@eniac.seas.upenn.edu](mailto:pellegrini@eniac.seas.upenn.edu). No set length or style guidelines, except if otherwise indicated.

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**WHERE'S MARY SUE WHEN YOU NEED HER?** A "special edition" of PLANS SCAMS AND VANS - all Mary Sue stories! Make it silly or make it sexy - *anything* goes in this 'zine so long as you've written yourself into it in some fashion. Will also take stories involving characters outside of the A-Team played by Dwight, Dirk George, T - for instance, Battlestar Galactica, ST:TNG, etc. No deadline yet; contact for more details.

**PLANS SCAMS AND VANS 3.** We'll keep doing this series until we get it right! All ready planned/accepted for this issue of our A-Team 'zine: "**Mercenary Reunion**," by Laura Michaels, a **Highlander/A-Team** crossover; "**All For One**" by Irene Schwarting; "**Drive**" by Gill Dunn; "**Of Martyrs and Cheeseburgers**" by Rhonda Eudaly; "**Welcome to Hotel California**" by Nancy Wilson; "**Intertwining Fates**" by Natasha McKee; also "**The Episode Guide From Hell**," and more! Submissions still accepted! Crossovers, humorous, serious, romantic, h/c, anything goes (through strong PG-rated at most). Aiming for early '97 publication, will accept submissions up to the end of '96. this issue is filling up fast, so if page count goes above about 100 pages will start collecting material for PSV#4...

**GOING NOWHERE FAST.** A **Nowhere Man** 'zine. This show was too good to let die after one season. What's next for Thomas Veil? Who is he really? Is there anyone or anything in his memories he can trust? Did you really hate the season finale and want to write your own ending for the show? Humor, h/c, romance, serious pieces, artwork, articles - I'll take anything, so long as it's good quality. Will go to print if/when enough material is accepted, and there is enough interest in the project.

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## About the authors

**Brandon Kaonohi** is the result of genetic engineering, much like Arnold Schwarzenegger and Danny DeVito in "Twins," but he is what happens when the egg DOESN'T split. He enjoys writing crossover stories from his favorite shows of the 80's and 90's including [The A-Team](#), [The Equalizer](#), [The X-Files](#), [Magnum P.I.](#), [Knight Rider](#) and [ER](#). He also writes for several other small 'zines and ezines. When he is not playing X-Wing and watching TV he is wasting his time on an Information and Computer Science Degree and writing Web Pages for spare change in the cold and snowy state of Hawaii.

**Michele Lellouche's** daytime identity is that of an employee benefits attorney in Jacksonville. However, she'd like to be better known as tv critic at large (check [www.zentertainment.com](http://www.zentertainment.com)), Olympic author (see Historical Dictionary of the Modern Olympic Movement) and very amateur figure skater. She's also a die hard [A-Team](#) and [X-Files](#) fan. Mulder/Scully '96!

**Nicole Pellegrini** hasn't been called Michele once in the past six months, but she still wonders if she has an evil twin somewhere besmirching her already questionable reputation and sanity. By some miracle she is still at the University of Pennsylvania, theoretically working on her thesis on polymer miscibility, but someone will no doubt come to their senses and rectify that situation shortly. The men in the white coats have for the most part left her alone as of late and allowed her to keep writing and even get back to her interest in surrealist painting - a pastime which got off to a marvelous start early in life when a concerned friend's parent once said to her folks at a high school art exhibit, *"How can you sleep with her in the house?!"*

**Irene Snyder Schwarting** appears to be an innocent graduate student who writes fan-fiction as a hobby while trying to maintain a tenuous peace treaty between the two cats and the dog who allow her to share their house. After being followed by mysterious men in black sedans and having important documents disappear without a trace from her computer, though, she fears writing for [The A-Files](#) may have blown her cover, and she may be going underground any day now. Future publications will be covertly emailed to the editor's laptop with no return address.

**Sparky the Computer** is a mostly well-behaved Performa 6300, which doesn't talk back to its master too much but does insist that a well-done brisket will cure just about whatever ails you.