

Star Beagle Adventures Episode 9: Long Distance Runaround

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Star Beagle Adventures Episode 9: Long Distance Runaround

by [LordRobertBruceScott](#)

Summary

I still remember the dream there...

Notes

Throughout this episode, snippets of lyrics are quoted. These are from the song, "Long Distance Runaround" by Jon Anderson. The song first appeared as side B for the single "Roundabout" and became a hit in its own right. It was subsequently released as track 6 on "Fragile", the fourth album by the progressive rock band, YES, 1971, Atlantic Records.



The Star Beagle Adventures

Episode 9: Long Distance Runaround

Scene 1: Bond Mate

9.1

Bond Mate

Because of their diverse schedules, Captain Skip Howard only had the luxury of sleeping with his bond mate once or twice a week. Several members of the U.S.S. Beagle's crew, particularly the civilians, had their spouses on board. And there were a few informal relationships. Outside of those romances, there was a fair amount of sexual activity. Given the variety and larger than usual populations of non-humans within the Beagle's crew, there was an enormous diversity of sexual and romantic mores and cultural norms that required adjustment from all persons on board.

Those who lived by strict moral standards regarding sexuality had to learn not to judge members of other cultures and other species by the moral standards they maintained for themselves, while the more libertine individuals were well advised to tone it down in public.

It was a delicate balance. For that and many other reasons, Skip Howard was very careful to avoid expressing his feelings toward his own bond mate and the nature of their relationship was unknown to much of the crew. Which was quite an accomplishment in a gossipy population of less than 150. Or the more than 200 crew, predominantly human, of the U.S.S. Mako and the U.S.S. Escort.

As he felt his lover's fingers lacing in his hair, the familiar downward pressure, Howard thought, not for the first time, that he was the luckiest of men. He loved being in command. And in this room, he loved yielding that burden.

But only in this room.

It wasn't supposed to be this way. It was a relationship that had been, in some ways, forced on both of them by circumstance. It was a story they seldom told and that only one other person on the ship deeply understood. There was passion, but that had come later. Their relationship was a relationship rooted first in compassion. It was compassion that had bonded them.

And this was their fourth anniversary.



SBA Episode 9: Long Distance Runaround; Scene 2: Sheeux Vosq Nala

Chapter Summary

Did we really tell lies?



The Star Beagle Adventures

Episode 9: Long Distance Runaround

Scene 2: Sheeux Vosq Nala

9.2

Sheeux Vosq Nala

Vosq was the most devout of believers. She was a Nala - she gathered seed to shower the sacred mound so that the Holy Ones need not interrupt their sacred studies in order to seek sustenance. She was, by many, many years, the oldest of Gathering Virgins. She had not been forced to withhold herself from mating by any defect in her looks or any deformity in her body. If she had been malformed, she would not have been allowed to serve.

The time was coming soon when the effect of aging would require her to give up her basket, and the special role in serving the Holy Ones that the basket symbolized and find a mate. Or a mate would be found for her. And given her age, it would not be a choice mate.

Sheeux Vosq Nala had served the Holy Ones all her life, but had only been in their presence once. That had been the day she was confirmed as a Nala. On that magnificent day, she had been brought down into their nest, into pools of crimson light, between row after row of Holy Warriors up to the thrones of the Holy Regents. They never said anything. But they were humming, buzzing, a deep vibration at the low threshold of her hearing.

As she was brought deeper and deeper into the nest, the humming had become more and more powerful. So powerful that she had felt it up and down her spine, filling her with ecstasy. Overwhelming her with visions of distant landscapes that she had never imagined, but where these Holy Warriors had fought. Where they had been long ago bred.

She had finally been brought to prostrate herself before the Holy Regents. The Holy Ones did not wear clothing. The Holy Regents, like the Holy Warriors, had a short tail that came from the bottom of their abdomens. A tail that ended in a venomous stinger. The High Holy Regent's stinger was vibrating and weeping venom. As she had been taught, Vosq had brought this stinger into her mouth and suckled the venom, swallowing it. It had burned her tongue. It had burned her throat. It burned in her stomach.

Then the Holy Regent had reached down and grasped the fur on the back of Vosq's neck, quickly bringing her to her knees and jabbed her stinger into the new Nala's belly, forever branding her with a triangle. A downward pointing triangle, symbolizing the Nala's place... A blade to set into those below her. A platform for the Holy Ones to stand upon. To stand upon her.

That had been 35 years ago.

Vosq had taken very good care of her skin. It was still black, shiny and supple, with no signs of the graying associated with age. But some black streaks were already evident in her purple fur. And today, for the first time since her confirmation, she had glimpsed a Holy Warrior. It had emerged from the nest and looked directly at her as she labored.

There was only one nest on Qualgaldi III. The vast majority of the purple went about their lives as if the Holy Ones were not there. Aside from the Devout and the Heretics, most purple had no contact or interaction with the Holy Ones. The Holy Warships came and went and never disturbed the Purple Fleet. Almost no one realized just how many Holy Warriors were in that one, vast nest.

Vosq walked across the baking grassland of the savannah that surrounded the nest. There was a compound for the Devout, built above ground from mud bricks. Just outside of the compound entrance was a large pile of books. All the same book. The Book of Heresy, penned by the greatest and most wanted of the heretics, Ben Urri Urri. So much a heretic that he had taken the word "heretic" as his given name and his title.

Vosq avoided this pile. She could smell the fuel that had been poured on it. After sunset, the books would be set on fire.

Vosq brought out her cell key as she entered the compound and walked down the halls. She unlocked the door to her cell and as she stepped into her cell and closed the door, Sheeux Vosq Nala lost consciousness.

And another consciousness carefully closed and locked her body inside her cell...

SBA Episode 9: Long Distance Runaround; Scene 3: Written in the Stars

Chapter Summary

Long time waiting to feel the sound



The Star Beagle Adventures

Episode 9: Long Distance Runaround

Scene 3: Written in the Stars

9.3

Written in the Stars

“Our recent experience with the holy landers must place them clearly in a high risk category.” Major Janet Carter was speaking as a military analyst.

Captain Skip Howard had been less than thrilled to be called out of his anniversary celebration to the U.S.S. Beagle’s conference room for this meeting. But he could not put it off without drawing attention to the meaningfulness of this week to him. Better to stretch out the celebrations than to invite too much scrutiny into his private life. He was more concerned about the potential impact on the crew than on his own privacy.

“Would your characterization be influenced by the religious language that our universal translators inferred from the context of a very alien language?” Howard asked.

“It has to be,” Major Carter replied. “Thanks to our interception of subspace radio broadcasts, our universal translator matrix has been updated with languages of many species indigenous to this region of the galaxy, including races that have, currently, or in the past, direct contact with the holy landers. Whether these aliens intend to be perceived as religious icons or devout in any way, this is the way they are perceived. Just as the founders were perceived as gods, these holy landers are perceived as prophets by the species whose worlds they inhabit.”

“There are many, many examples of one species worshipping another, most significantly worship of the orions,” said China Lane, the cultural systems team leader from the UFP diplomatic corps.

“Which remains a threat to the Federation,” Major Carter responded. “Orion worshippers are the primary strength of the Orion Syndicate and an ongoing genesis of terrorist attacks, particularly on military and law enforcement. They were responsible for the destruction of at least 3 starships during the Dominion War...”

“What are you learning from communications and media intercepts?” Commodore Yui Song interrupted.

“It is difficult to estimate just how far the Holy Lands extend, but it includes, in the nearby area, 5 solar systems that were initially settled by the descendants of the purple and the blue - the survivors of the Avial Selan system we just visited. There are further flung colonies of that civilization that have not been colonized by the holy landers. I think the operative word is, “yet.” The holy landings started about 40 years ago and these 5 planets are all recently colonized. We do not yet have a clear idea where their home system is, but it appears to be close to the galactic rim.”

“How far are we now from the galactic rim?” asked Commodore Yui.

“Just under 25 hundred light years,” replied premiere T’Eln. “There is another interesting facet that may help us predict where the home system might be found. Over the past 100 years, the stars in this region entered their moment of greatest concentration, creating an unusually dense region of stars for this region of space. A star cluster that will gradually dissipate over the next million years due to normal movement of the stars in their individual orbits of the galactic center.”

“Do you suspect a correlation?” asked Captain Skip Howard.

“It was serendipitous for the purple and the blue, giving them a number of systems within reach of their relatively low technology to which

they could emigrate following the collapse of most of their native environment,” T’Eln remarked. “The holy landers may be taking advantage of this cluster either deliberately or coincidentally. The rapid, recent growth of the Holy Lands appears to be written in the stars.”

SBA Episode 9: Long Distance Runaround; Scene 4: The Annoying

Chapter Summary

Cold summer glistening...



The Star Beagle Adventures

Episode 9: Long Distance Runaround

Scene 4: The Annoying

9.4

The Annoying

“Having three ships has given your expedition a unique diplomatic advantage.” Elder Gwenheldr was evidently amused.

Captain Skip Howard had learned enough about the frost giants to read the subtle movement of their feathers that signaled their emotions. Even though he was standing on a space station, he was wearing a heavy, Star Fleet uniform issue cloak over his uniform. The frost giants preferred a much colder climate than most Federation species would find comfortable.

Howard had brought with him a small honor guard of U.S. Marines, led by Captain Osollaa sh’Zhiathis. The denobulan planetologist, Cetriss Rye, Dean Sakura Nakamura Holland, and the assistant director of the United Federation of Planets Expeditionary Diplomatic Corps, Erok Gruex, a member of a rare member species known as the vrish. Of the nine visitors from the Beagle, only sh’Zhiathis and Gruex were not bundled in cold weather gear as andorians and vrish were well adapted to cold climates.

“The trick was determining which of us should make first contact with each of your cultures,” Howard responded. “It makes intuitive sense that your people would have a separate space station from the purple and the blue. And it seems the purple and the blue are determined to be two separate people even though they are a single species.”

“It is far, far more complicated than that,” Gwenheldr observed. “But I take only a passing interest in their affairs. We are, of course, grateful for their assistance first in helping relocate our refugees and then in developing our own warp capable ships. Despite their apparent inability to resolve their own political and cultural differences, both the purple and the blue are good people. If you will follow me, I believe we have a meeting room that will help make you more comfortable.”

Even with the well trained, if unarmed presence of five United States Marines, walking through a gigantic space station accompanied by a half dozen armed giants, each about 11 feet tall, was a somewhat intimidating experience. The clearance for the ceilings above the giants’ heads was easily another 10 feet, creating an enormous interior space. Most space stations did not feature such high clearance for their inhabitants.

For Captain Howard and his party, the station had somewhat the feeling of a gothic cathedral. It did not feel or look so much like a space station as a home for more than 6,000 frost giants. Walls, floors and ceilings were finished with veneers that made them look like the stone walls of the giant home Howard and his rescue team had visited on their homeworld nearly two weeks previously.

Their gigantic hosts brought this federation diplomatic party to a room that appeared designed for the giants to interact with smaller folk across a large table. Giant-sized chairs and benches were set on one side of the table. A short staircase led up to the other side of the table, which was subtly inclined so that smaller persons seated on chairs on a much higher floor had a comfortable eye-line with the giants across from them.

“We do have different living requirements and preferences,” Gwenheldr explained. “But we decided to locate our stations close to each other so that we could support one another at need, and so that we can jointly control landings. Most of the colonists planetside are blue, but the purple inhabit a few islands and we have a few large colonies in a mountainous island chain near the north pole. There is very little traffic among our colonies. There are a few small villages of blue refugees from the continent who share the southern island with us.”

“Refugees from the holy landers?” Howard asked.

Gwenheldr laughed. “I like that. Holy landers...” It took the elderly giant woman several minutes to regain her composure. “They call

themselves the anointed. We call them the annoying. They never stop praising themselves and their queen and her regents. All the chanting, just droning on and on. It becomes quite tiresome in very short order.”

“So how did they come to make a landing here?” Howard asked.

“I’m one of very few old enough to remember,” Gwenheldr replied. She preened her head feathers back in a movement Howard had come to associate with these giants ordering their thoughts. “Well over 60 years ago they first tried to land without permission, despite our warnings. We shot them down and they were vaporized before they were through the troposphere. I say “we,” but it was actually the purple. They’re quite serious about their bureaucracy.”

“Make a note, Erok” Howard said to the vrish diplomat. “Our ports service might learn a thing or two from these people.”

Vrish were one of a very small number of feathered species who were members of the Federation. They were rarely seen far from their homeworld, where they numbered less than 3 million. The ruddy feathering around Gruex’s mouth flexed slightly. “So noted,” he remarked dryly, without the slightest hint of humor. “So how did the annoying manage to make a landing?”

“A small fleet of them showed up. One of them filled out the proper forms and received permission to land on the continent and establish a colony,” the giant elder replied. “At the time, there were purple and giant settlements as well as blue scattered across the continent. Our people cleared out first because of the noise. Some moved to our settlements in the north, others emigrated to other star systems. When the blue started worshipping the annoying, the purple largely removed themselves to their space station, which grew dramatically. Eventually, they opened a few smaller space stations. The majority of them pressed on to other star systems, following our people.”

“How many of the blue worship the holy landers?” Howard asked.

“Almost all of them.”

SBA Episode 9: Long Distance Runaround; Scene 5: Ben Urri Urri

Chapter Summary

Did we really tell lies?



The Star Beagle Adventures

Episode 9: Long Distance Runaround

Scene 5: Ben Urri Urri

9.5

Ben Urri Urri

Sheeux Voss Nala was the most devout of believers. She was easily the eldest Nala, and master of all the traditions. It was evident among the Minders that she was already too old to be a Nala. Given her evident intelligence, they had an assignment for her: Track down the elusive heretic Ben Urri Urri.

Urri was bold enough to take the title Urri, meaning “despised heretic” not only as his title, but also as his given name. There was no family among the blue or the purple named “Ben,” which made the heretical writer all the more elusive. But from his writings it was clear that he was close to the center of worship, quite possibly one of the Minders.

Vosq had managed to maintain her role as a Nala well into adulthood largely because of her sweet, innocent, winning personality.

So Vosq had spent hours doing something she had never wanted to do - reading the hateful, diabolical, but dangerously reasonable diatribes of the heretic.

And Urri’s writings were dangerous. He described the Nala submission ceremony in lurid detail. Vosq had treasured the memory of her own submission ceremony, but now, reading it presented clinically by a stranger, Vosq could feel the heat of disgust rising in her scarred throat - disgust at what had, to a much younger version of herself, seemed like a sacred, holy and life-transforming experience. It had been beautiful back then. In retrospect, it was painful, vile and disgusting. Thanks to the heretic.

One thing that had become clear to Vosq about Urri’s writing: He was good. Really good. It wasn’t just his clear reasoning. It was his crisp descriptions of things that he could not possibly have seen. But Vosq had seen those things and she could not have described them more clearly. There was also cadence, rhythm, rhyme. The hallmarks of literacy.

The Devout and the Minders only allowed the holy scriptures. No other writings were allowed on the compound and very few of the Nala were literate enough to read anything. Vosq had been given an exception because of her job to track down the elusive Ben Urri Urri. She used that exception not only to gain access to his writings, but had reached out to the unbelievers on the space station, who had given her access to the kind of literature that Urri must have read.

The Minders were quite concerned that the eldest, most popular and influential of the Nalas was now reading not only the heretic’s writings but also all kinds of forbidden works in her, admittedly Devoutly assigned, quest to locate the elusive heretic, Ben Urri Urri.

So they had assigned her to read the holy scriptures again. The holy scriptures that had taught her how to read. That had been the most flawless, amazing wisdom and literature. And now reading them again after all this time and after reading Urri’s writing and the literature that must have taught him his craft...

The holy scriptures were crap.

There was just no other conclusion. The people who had written the scriptures must have had access to the classics, but appeared to have taken little from them. In several passages there were hints that these people had been educated. It was more like they had been drunk while they were writing. No, not drunk... Under the influence of holy rapture. Not writing about it afterward, writing while experiencing it.

Vosq knew that rapture. Had longed for it. Had lived in it. Until it had made her sick and she had to be carried out of the catacombs and

eventually, like so many others over time, banned from them. At the time it was all she could dream of. Now, thinking about it after time had passed, it seemed more like a sickness. Not a true spiritual awakening. She had tried for so long to not think about it, but the entire experience had left her finally feeling quite empty. Used. Inauthentic.

Even as she settled for the evening in her cell at the catacombs, she knew, somehow, that this would be the last night. Locking the cell door triggered the change. Sheeux Vosq, the Nala died that night. As she had died every night. But this was the last time.

Another person sat down at her desk. In her chair. Ben Urri Urri had planned for this moment. He... no... She, had known just how far the charade could be taken. It was a dangerous experiment in psychological creation of multiple personalities. Each triggered by an event. She was not Ben Urri Urri any more than she had been Sheeux Vosq Nala.

She did not have long. The Minders would be coming to drag Sheeux Vosq Nala to the bonfire, to be burnt with Ben Urri Urri's books. They would never know the irony that they planned to burn Ben Urri Urri as well. But Shadow had to escape. Shadow wasn't her true personality either, but another necessary personality created for just this moment. An illusionist. An escape artist. Shadow had no name. No voice. Would make no noise. Would seem, to anyone looking at her, to have no substance.

There was no other way out of the Nala's cell. Shadow unlatched a secret latch on the wall near the door. She lifted part of the floor, laid down in the small space underneath and brought that section of floor back over herself.

She didn't have to wait long before the door opened, and heavy foot treads announced that a number of guards and, impressively, a holy warrior were searching her cell. Shadow had no idea what senses the holy warrior might have or whether her hiding place was as secure as she might have hoped.

There really wasn't much cell to inspect. If they were to do a thorough inspection, her hiding place would be found. Shadow was counting on the simplicity of her quarters - just a single cell with a desk, a cot and a neat stack of books (which the Minders quickly removed) - to make any detailed search seem fruitless. People moved in and out of her quarters, but the holy warrior remained, slowly pacing about the room on four legs and searching the walls and ceiling with all three hands.

Shadow barely dared to breathe. She cringed each time the odd creature stepped on the lid to her hiding place, but it never moved. She had used tongue-and-groove fitting to keep it in place and had been preparing and testing it for years.

Finally, after what seemed like hours, all the creatures left her room and the door was shut and locked. From the outside. Shadow settled down for a series of light naps, conserving her strength. She had water and food stored in her hiding place. Getting through that lock on the outside of her cell door was the least of her worries in escaping from the compound. All of that would have to wait until nightfall.

Another 5 hours.

SBA Episode 9: Long Distance Runaround; Scene 6: Landing Escort

Chapter Summary

Letting in the sunshine...



The Star Beagle Adventures

Episode 9: Long Distance Runaround

Scene 6: Landing Escort

9.6

Landing Escort

Captain Skip Howard was interrupted in the middle of a tour of the incredibly impressive space station of the frost giants by a call from Commander Jason Bates, Commodore Yui Song's first officer aboard the U.S.S. Mako. The call also interrupted Commodore Yui, who was currently aboard the purple space station.

"Commodore, Captain, be aware that Captain Carter has resumed command of the U.S.S. Escort and is currently on course to the atmosphere of Asmorgan IV. Her trajectory is congruent with a landing that will put the Escort in close proximity to the compound of the holy landers."

Gwinheldr, the elderly frost giant who had been escorting Captain Howard through the giants' space station, overheard the message. "We received notice a few moments ago that Blue Orbital Command has cleared and invited all three ships of your task force, for approach and landing."

"Did you attempt contact?" Commodore Yui asked.

"No response," Bates replied.

"Esteemed Elder Gwinheldr, thank you so much for your hospitality," said Captain Howard. "I apologize for the..."

"You stay where you are, Skip," Yui Song interrupted over the comm link. "Esteemed Elder, we have an unusual situation and I very much hope you can help Captain Howard understand what may have led to this development."

"I do not understand the problem," the elderly female giant responded. "If you have an emergency arising within your group, our laws may severely limit our ability to help."

"I appreciate that, Esteemed Elder," replied Commodore Yui. "I am confident in Captain Howard's sensitivity to your laws." Yui Song's voice changed as she addressed her subordinate. "Skip, I'm counting on you to gather the context and make sense out of this. I need answers sooner rather than later. Jason, get me back aboard Mako. We're going after Rhonda. Yui out."

With that, Captain Howard was left with a confused and somewhat concerned elderly giant, more than twice his size.

"I do not understand the urgency," Gwinheldr said. "I thought making a landing would be expected."

"Esteemed Elder, could we return to the conference room?" Howard asked.

In response, the elderly frost giant reversed direction and gestured down the hall they had been traveling through. While her gigantic security detail did not reach for their equally gigantic weapons, there was a sense of increased alertness that sent a chill down Howard's spine and through his escort. He and his party were unarmed and while their gigantic hosts were not deliberately threatening, it was quite evident their weapons would not be needed if they wanted to do grievous harm to their relatively minuscule visitors.

"We will not ask for your assistance beyond answering a few questions that will hopefully help me understand why Captain Carter took this action without first requesting permission from our commanding officer," Howard offered as they walked back along the corridor toward the

conference room they had left nearly an hour previously.

“It’s particularly concerning because Rhonda Carter lives and breathes protocol,” Howard continued. “For her to not even acknowledge communication from the lead ship in our task force... Ah, thank you,” Howard interrupted himself as his hosts opened the door to the conference room they had inhabited a short time earlier.

“It means something is very wrong,” Howard continued as he sat down at the conference table, then: “Oh, blessings of the galaxy!” as one of the giants brought him an enormous tankard of what turned out to be some sort of very strong ale. He had to stand up to lift the tankard high enough to drink from it. It was like taking a sip from a very large pitcher.

“We had thought it very clever that each of your ships was dispatched to one of our stations,” one of the other giants at the table opined as Captain Howard drank a bit more deeply. “You were amused that Captain Carter happens to dye her hair the same color as the fur of the people she was visiting.”

“I don’t know what she might have learned or encountered among the blue to cause her to suddenly take a trip to the surface,” Howard worried. “Without asking permission,” he added.

Another of the giants had been reviewing information on a hexagonal pad - a pad large enough to serve as a viewscreen for any average office aboard the U.S.S. Beagle. “Esteemed Elder, our sensors indicate the alien craft has landed just outside the compound and several of the aliens have exited the craft and are walking toward the compound. Sensors indicate the aliens are not armed.”

“Thank you General,” the elderly female giant responded. She turned her attention toward Captain Howard. “You appear relieved, Captain. Were you concerned your colleague was about to attack the compound?”

“I won’t pretend not to be,” Howard replied. “An irrational decision toward violence would be a potential reason for Captain Carter’s strange behavior. I have to admit, I find her current behavior even more puzzling. We had heard rather grim stories about the holy landers and their religion via subspace radio traffic...”

“The writings of Ben Urri Urri,” Elder Gwinheldr responded. “I have read some of his writings as well. Child sacrifice. Sexual abuse. A locked down culture under the control of a priestly caste. We engaged in a large, multi-faceted investigation when his writings came to light. But we found no evidence of any of those abuses in this system. The holy landers are extremely annoying. But not evil. The blue believers seem to be very happy and to all appearances enjoy a very egalitarian culture. They consider the anointed to be living gods among them, but they opened every corner of the compound for our joint investigation. There were no places the investigators were not welcome.”

“The blue are not in any way oppressed?” Howard asked.

“They are sickeningly happy,” the elderly giant responded. “They seem to delight in feeding the anointed. Those closest to the compound live very close to the land. But even the blue in the coastal cities, far away from the compound regularly experience religious ecstasy. I was part of the investigation team. I couldn’t stand all the noise, but the blue really seemed happy.”

“So are the writings of Ben Urri Urri a fiction?” Howard asked.

“We have no way of knowing. People from our homeworld colonized at least 8 star systems and at least 5 of them are shared with the anointed,” Elder Gwinheldr replied. “Ben Urri Urri’s subspace podcasts come from another system.”

SBA Episode 9: Long Distance Runaround; Scene 7: Escort Rising

Chapter Summary

I still remember the time you said goodbye...



The Star Beagle Adventures

Episode 9: Long Distance Runaround

Scene 7: Escort Rising

9.7

Escort Rising

“I have already sent a team down to investigate. Jason is heading it up. I had sent Pel, but her biosigns crashed as soon as she landed and we brought her back up immediately. She had a terrible reaction to local conditions.”

Commodore Yui Song’s image was displayed on an enormous hexagonal screen in the gigantic conference room. Captain Skip Howard and his diplomatic team, consisting of Dean Sakura Nakamura Holland, and the assistant director of the United Federation of Planets Expeditionary Diplomatic Corps, Erok Gruex, along with the tall and somewhat awkward denobulan planetologist, Cetris Rye, were seated on one side of the giant table - the side set up so that human-sized visitors could be seated at eye-level across from the frost giants.

Marine Captain Osollaa sh'Zhiathis and the four other United States Marines assigned as Howard's honor guard were lined up against one wall, opposite the giant honor guard on the other side of the room.

On the frost giant side of the table were Elder Gwinheldr, General Thunwell, Cloud Seeker Hel, and Sun Seeker Tyriel. The fact that all these distinguished leaders were elderly females made it clear that the frost giant society was both matriarchal and gerontocratic.

“Commodore Yui Song, we are still catching up with why you and Captain Ronald Howard, XIV, are so concerned about the landing of your third craft,” Elder Gwinheldr said. “We all understood that your group were seeking permission to land.”

“We greatly appreciate your willingness to provide information about the local situation, Elder Gwinheldr,” Yui responded. She was wrestling with her impatience, balanced against a desperate need for local information. “These are deep space vessels. We each carry separate landing craft. It is unusual for us to land one of our main craft. But of greater concern is the lack of communication. It is extremely out of character for Captain Carter to not only take such action without permission, but to fail to respond to our repeated requests for communication.” Commodore Yui turned her attention toward Captain Howard. “Skip, I need to tend to the local situation. The Beagle has the better sensors.”

Howard nodded. “Major Carter and Sergeant Richards will coordinate directly with your staff to relay sensor readings while my group works here to try to develop a better understanding of the context.” Howard took a breath. “Song, get Ten’s wife, Bettes, over there to help Lucius with Pel. She’s done a lot of work with Pel. The sooner we know what happened to her down there... I think she’s the key to what’s going on.”

“Good idea, Skip,” Commodore Yui responded. “Got to go.” Her image vanished from the viewer.

“Who is Pel?” asked Sun Seeker Tyriel, the youngest of the four giant women across the table from Captain Howard.

“She’s ferengi, the only member of that species traveling with us,” Howard replied.

“What is unique about her species?”

Before Howard could respond to Tyriel’s question, the viewscreen came alive again, bringing a very concerned looking Yui Song back into the discussion.

“Escort is rising. Skip, I think you should return to your ship. They are on an exit trajectory. We may have a chase on our hands.”

“Have you tried the prefix codes?” Howard asked.

Commodore Yui Song shook her head. “Rhonda’s too smart for that. The prefix codes have been changed.”

“That isn’t easy to do,” Howard replied, rising from his seat. “At least two other command level officers had to work with her to change them.”

“Get to the Beagle, Skip,” said Yui. She signed off again.

“Elder Gwinheldr... General Thunwell... Cloud Seeker Hel... Sun Seeker Tyriel, please accept my apology for the sudden exit,” Howard said, then: “Beagle, this is Captain Howard. Nine to beam out, immediately.”

Because Howard and his team had boarded the frost giants’ space station through an airlock, this was the first time any of the giants had seen transporter technology in use, nor had they been aware it was possible. They reacted with shock and watched in amazement as Howard and his team vanished in a haze of blinking lights.

SBA Episode 9: Long Distance Runaround; Scene 8: Imbalance

Chapter Summary

Did we really count to 100?



The Star Beagle Adventures

Episode 9: Long Distance Runaround

Scene 8: Imbalance

9.8

Imbalance

“There are two holy landers aboard Escort.”

Major Janet Carter had walked this information to the bridge of the U.S.S. Beagle instead of using the comm system.

“I take it since you don’t want to put this on our ship’s comm system, that you have not informed Mako?” Captain Skip Howard was lounging, insouciantly as was his habit, on the throne-like captain’s chair of the U.S.S. Beagle.

“I am concerned that if Captain Carter were to become aware that we know that, she may figure out that we’re tapping into her internal security sensors and may find a way to block us,” Major Carter replied. “Whatever Rhonda’s up to, it seems clear she thinks we’re going to try to stop her.”

Howard touched a control on the arm of his captain’s throne: “Dutchie, fire up the holo-transporter...”

“Skip,” came Commander Dutch Holland’s voice over the comm. “It’s offline. The engines are misaligned. We’re not going anywhere. I can give you shields, weapons and sublight, but no warp and nothing requiring the DTG.”

Howard sat up straight. “Cause?”

“Unknown. I’ve been struggling with it for about three minutes. Sakura? I could use you down here. Better scramble the entire team. I can get them into alignment for just a second and they immediately go out again. Something is interfering with them.”

Sakura Nakamura Holland, Dutch’s wife and the Dean of Ship, was already on her feet and out the door before her name was mentioned. Captain Howard didn’t give her a glance. Major Carter took the seat abandoned by Dean Nakamura Holland.

“Major, open a channel to Mako.” Howard turned his chair to face the wall that Carter was seated at. A heartbeat later, Commodore Yui Song was displayed on the wall, standing on the bridge of the U.S.S. Mako.

“Skip, Escort is going to warp...”

“We can’t follow - engines misaligned. Song, there are two holy landers aboard Escort.”

“Escort’s gone, I’ll send you the Arizona. Mako out,” Commodore Yui replied. The view switched to an external view from which the U.S.S. Escort was missing. The U.S.S. Mako was turning, then leapt to warp, seeming to elongate before vanishing from the system.

Major Carter turned to face Captain Howard: “Sir, I’m picking up an escape pod that ejected from Escort just before they went to warp. Two lifesigns aboard: andorian; roylan. Both in distress.”

Captain Howard touched another control on the arm of his throne, then: “Bridge to transporter central. We have two crew members in a lifepod. Beam both directly to medical.”

Major Carter reported again: “Now reading the U.S.S. Arizona entering the system under the command of Lieutenant Commander Gregg Clark. He’s hailing.”

“On screen,” Howard ordered.

“Beagle, this is the U.S.S. Arizona, Gregg Clark commanding.” There couldn’t have been a less imposing figure than the U.S.S. Mako’s balding and ever smiling science officer. Everything about the man from his relaxed posture, soft voice and the comb-over of what was left of his light brown hair seemed designed to put people at ease.

“Gregg, what is happening aboard Mako?” Howard asked.

“That’s some telling,” Clark replied. “We launched while Mako was at warp in hot pursuit of Escort. I have a gift for your CMO. His wife, Bettes and her patient, Pel are here, ready to beam aboard.”

Captain Howard reacted with some surprise. “Major, please have Dr. Uto and her patient beamed directly to medical.”

“Aye sir,” the muscular marine officer replied and began entering information into her console.

“The Commodore decided it was best to leave Pel with you,” Lt. Cmdr. Clark continued. Behind him, the sound of people being dematerialized could be heard. “Whatever happened to Pel is part of the puzzle you’re trying to solve. Commodore Yui also felt it was best to leave Pel with you since she may be going into danger.”

“Is that why she sent you to me, Gregg?” Howard asked.

Clark offered a relaxed smile. “We’re here to provide whatever support you need. We have tractor capabilities and can give you a tow at warp if needed.”

“Good to know, Arizona. Stand by for that if needed, but at the moment we’re going to stay put and rely on the good will of the frost giants while we attempt to find out what is causing the imbalance. Just for the sake of planning, though, how fast can you tow us?”

Gregg Clark smiled again, but Howard could tell the man was a little nervous. “We would have to start slow, but we could get up to warp 4 if necessary. Faster than the natives.”

“Thanks Gregg,” Howard responded. “Keep your eyes open and report back if you notice anything going on with the locals. Please provide a detailed, written report of the goings on with Mako.”

“I’ll give you an essay within the hour, Arizona out,” Clark said with a characteristic smile.

SBA Episode 9: Long Distance Runaround; Scene 9: Shadow Rising

Chapter Summary

Hot color, melting the anger to stone...



The Star Beagle Adventures

Episode 9: Long Distance Runaround

Scene 9: Shadow Rising

9.9

Shadow Rising

Shadow had roused and left her hiding place under the floor by the door of her cell. These cells were designed to be locked from the outside, locking devout servants in for the night. The locking mechanism was simple, but effective - a short bar that swiveled down from the door frame on the outside of the door to fit into a large hook on the outside of the door, preventing the door from swinging outward.

Shadow had long ago carefully dug out part of the door frame and replaced it with a carefully crafted section of framing. It took a few minutes to disassemble this from the inside, but once done, the door opened normally with the part of the door frame that held the bar swinging out with the door. She had to stop and reassemble this and re-lock the door against the possibility of discovery.

And she had to perform all of these tasks by touch in pitch darkness.

Normally, the compound would be immersed in darkness at night. No watch lights. No lanterns. Nothing to spoil the night vision glasses of the watchers. Shadow would have had no chance in such a situation. But tonight was different. A great bonfire had been lit in the center of the compound to burn the books of Ben Urri Urri (and, had they found her, Shadow's previous persona, Sheeux Vosq Nala (and, had the devout become aware of it, their most dangerous adversary, the writer Ben Urri Urri himself.))

Shadow had chosen the moment that the bonfire would be raging the highest, creating patterns of light and shadow throughout the compound that gave her places to hide. She moved like a shadow, losing herself along the sides of buildings, then along the sides of the walls, then up to one of the watch stations. Four watchers would be inside. Two tasked with looking into the compound and two tasked with watching outside. The pair looking inward would be more dangerous to her in this moment, as they would not be wearing their night-vision gear, due to the bonfire. They were also more likely to be distracted.

Shadow's blowguns were not even 5" long, but that was all that was needed for such close range work. Her position, flush with the door, kept her hidden from the two outward looking watchers. She prepared four blowguns, then targeted the inward looking watcher furthest from her. The tiny, poisoned dart found its mark, hit with enough force to break the skin and dropped silently away. The watcher scratched his cheek in irritation, then, less than a second later, dropped to the floor, dead, drawing the attention of the other three.

While the two outward looking watchers were briefly blinded and engaged with removing their night vision gear, Shadow targeted the closer of the inward-looking watchers, embedding the poisoned dart in the back of his neck. She shifted position slightly to target the other two, felling each of them before they had their night vision gear off.

One watch station would not be enough. The area outside each section of wall was surveilled by watch stations located at each of two corners of that section. Shadow slipped along the top of the wall to the opposite corner station, there using another four blowguns to quickly dispatch four more watchers. This time she slipped into the watch station and took a rifle and a handgun as well as a few other supplies before making her way down the wall to the outside of the compound.

Taking down two watch stations would give her no more than 30 minutes grace before shift change, but that was more than long enough for her to, at a full run, put miles between herself and the compound.

While the watchers, the devout and all the other religious bureaucrats living at the compound were more than somewhat addled by their close,

endless contact with the anointed, their operatives among the general population in the cities beyond were not. By the time Shadow reached the outskirts of the nearby city of Valian, the secret police had been activated to look for her.

Sheeux Vosq Nala had developed an escape plan that involved a waiting private shuttle in Valian, operated by an admirer of the Nalas, on the promise of sexual favors from a beautiful, if aging Nala. Shadow had no doubt this pilot was already in custody and being tortured for information.

Ben Urri Urri had also developed an escape plan that involved a cell of followers that included another space pilot. Shadow had no doubt the lot of these conspirators were also already in the hands of the secret police.

Instead, she activated her own plan to get off planet...

SBA Episode 9: Long Distance Runaround; Scene 10: Sound Advice

Chapter Summary

Looking for the sunshine...



The Star Beagle Adventures

Episode 9: Long Distance Runaround

Scene 10: Sound Advice

9.10 Sound Advice

“I cannot express our gratitude enough for your friendship, Elder Gwinheldr.”

Captain Skip Howard’s command throne on the bridge of the U.S.S. Beagle was oriented toward the the port bow wall of the bridge, which displayed the frost giant leader, along with the youngest member of the four spiritual leaders of their community, Sun Seeker Tyriel.

“Friendship may be too strong a word, Captain Ronald Howard, XIV,” the elderly giant leader replied. “But we do not want your enmity and we are quite concerned about your ability to board any of our stations, or to send personnel anywhere to the surface at will. I do understand your plight and will continue to encourage our fellow citizens to leave you to your problems.”

“I very much hope in the future to earn your better opinion of us,” Captain Howard replied. “Until then, I have a ship to repair and a mystery to solve.”

At the same moment that the frost giant leader faded from the screen, Dr. Tentis Uto’s voice came over the comm: “Medical emergency, Skip. Internal sensors indicate Captain Osollaa sh’Zhiathis’ vital signs have crashed, but we cannot beam her into medical. Something is interfering with the transporters. Also, the three patients we picked up from the other ships were stable, but they are all now in rapid relapse. Pel is complaining about loud singing...”

“Ten, where is sh’Zhiathis?” Howard asked.

“Probe Control,” Uto responded.

“She was in there with Tommy when I left,” Major Carter added.

Howard touched a control on the arm of his command throne: “Bridge to Probe Control...”

No response.

“Sergeant Richards respond!” Howard ordered.

Silence.

“Janet, were you reviewing internal security feed from the U.S.S. Escort? The holy landers who were aboard?” Howard asked.

“Yes,” Major Carter replied. “Tommy put it on a loop. He thought he heard something. He had it turned up fairly loud...”

“Emergency cutoff of power to Probe Control,” Howard ordered.

“Non-responsive,” Carter reported after a moment. “Power has been manually re-routed through the direct feed for the forward section. I can’t shut it off independently.”

“Emergency decompression Probe Control.”

“Captain, please confirm that order.”

“You heard me Janet. Remove the atmosphere from Probe Control.”

In response, Carter turned to the ops panel. “Decompression complete.”

Howard touched another control: “Ten, beam everyone out of Probe Control, treat for decompression, and confine. Our people have been compromised, particularly Sergeant Richards. Make sure he is restrained.”

Dr. Uto’s voice came back through the comm system. “I have them, Skip. I’m still getting a fair amount of interference from that section, but less than before...”

In response Howard touched another control. “All personnel, evacuate all forward sections immediately. You have one minute. Engineering - Dutchie, I need you to shut down all power to all forward sections. Allow one minute for evacuation.”

“Confirmed, Skip,” came Commander Holland’s voice over the comm.

A full minute of silence passed on the bridge. Then calls came in from Medical and Engineering almost simultaneously:

“Skip, I don’t know what you did, but I’m seeing almost immediate improvement in all four of my patients...”

“Whatever was interfering with engine alignment seems to have stopped. We should have alignment within five minutes...”

Major Carter turned back toward Captain Howard. “What was it? And how did you know?”

“Mission first, explanation after,” Howard replied. “Major, I need you to secure Probe Control and prepare it for normal operations. Don EVA, make sure your suit is insulated from sound. I want you deaf as a post inside your helmet. Undo whatever Tommy did to physically hook directly into the primary EPS for the forward section and power down Probe Control, then notify Engineering to turn the power back on for the forward section.”

Captain Howard sat forward, tapped the arm of his command throne with a glossy black fingernail. “Before you restore power to PC, be sure all readouts are physically disconnected, then, as soon as you power up, end all playback functions, starting with any playback that has those holy landers in it. Only after you have done all that, re-pressurize and be certain there is no sound coming from anything in PC before you remove your helmet.”

Major Carter felt that certain orders required a response that made it clear the order was fully understood and would be carried out meticulously. She rose from her station, turned toward Captain Howard, stood at attention and saluted. “Sir, yes sir!”

As Major Carter turned sharply and exited the bridge, Howard touched a control on the arm of his command throne: “Sakura, please report to the bridge and prepare to take command.”

SBA Episode 9: Long Distance Runaround; Scene 11: Late Start

Chapter Summary

Waiting for the sunshine



The Star Beagle Adventures

Episode 9: Long Distance Runaround

Scene 11: Late Start

9.11 Late Start

“Sakura, please bring the U.S.S. Arizona into our shuttlebay. The Puppy is faster and can run longer. Since we don’t have room for both of them, the Puppy will have to follow us.”

As the dean of ship, currently at the ops station on the starboard bow side of the triangular bridge was communicating with Lt. Cmdr. Clark aboard the re-purposed and repainted cargo transport to negotiate docking, Captain Skip Howard turned his command throne toward the port bow side: “Ensign Tribe, plot an intercept course for the U.S.S. Mako, warp 6.”

Each of the three walls of the triangular bridge was a viewer. Each work station facing one of these wall-sized monitors had two chairs. It was rare for any of the three work stations to have both chairs occupied. But at this moment, piloting and navigation functions had been separated for greater efficiency. United States Marine Lieutenant Jim Whitesand was seated at the pilot station.

Star Fleet Ensign Susan Tribe, a half-Danish member of the Iglulik Inuit from so far north in Canada that her home was within sight of Greenland, after entering the course into the navigation station, turned back toward Captain Howard: “Course plotted. It won’t be a straight shot, sir. We will need to divert around a trinary system.”

“The Arizona is docked,” Dean Sakura Nakamura Holland reported. “Lieutenant Commander Gregg Clark is requesting permission to helm the Puppy.”

“He has one minute to transport over,” Howard responded. “Hail him when he gets there.”

Less than 30 seconds later, the U.S.S. Mako’s 2nd officer appeared on screen from the helm of the U.S.S. Puppy: “Beagle, this is the U.S.S. Puppy, Gregg Clark commanding.”

At that moment, Major Janet Carter returned to the bridge. Howard turned toward her: “Major, please arrange for a security detail to beam over to the Puppy. Five minutes.”

“Aye sir,” Carter responded and took the seat next to Sakura, who, turned toward Captain Howard again.

“Skip, I’d like to send Falok over to the Puppy.”

“Send Dr. Rossell along as well to keep him company,” Howard replied. He drummed his glossy, black fingernails restlessly on the arm of his command throne.

A minute later, Major Carter reported, “Lieutenant Pushkin and his team are aboard the Puppy.”

Moments later, Sakura Nakamura Holland reported, “Falok and Doctor Rossell are now aboard.”

Howard stood up and addressed the Mako’s science officer: “Gregg, you’ll have to catch up best you can. I prefer to get you there fully functional. We’re going to leave you behind. Don’t exceed the Puppy’s engineering tolerances unless we start calling for help.”

“Understood, Captain Howard. Good hunting.” Lt. Cmdr. Clark’s image on the screen was replaced by an external view that included the U.S.S. Puppy, silhouetted against the gargantuan space station of the frost giants.

“Lieutenant Whitesand, engage at warp 6 and bring us up to 7.5 nice and easy,” Howard commanded. “Ensign Tribe, at best speed, what is our

projected intercept with Mako?"

"47 hours, 38 minutes, Captain," Tribe replied.

"Sakura, you have the helm and command authorization for the next 40 hours." Howard stepped toward the rear exit to the bridge.

Dean Sakura Nakamura Holland met him halfway and put her hand on his shoulder. "Don't worry about a thing, Skip. I'll let you know when we get close."

Howard put his hand over hers and squeezed lightly. "Thank you." He moved quickly, just short of running from the bridge as the dean of ship took the command throne.

"Now responding to warp 7.5," came the report from the helm.

"Steady as she goes, Mr. Whitesand," Sakura replied.

SBA Episode 9: Long Distance Runaround; Scene 12: Spun Verz Nasqua

Chapter Summary

I still remember the time you said goodbye...



The Star Beagle Adventures

Episode 9: Long Distance Runaround

Scene 12: Spun Verz Nasqua

9.12

Spun Verz Nasqua

A terrible birth defect had ensured that Spun Verz would never walk. It was a genetic defect that occurred about once in every 2.5 million of the purple. Back on the homeworld, before the advent of deep space travel, children born with such a defect would often be abandoned to die or become wards of the state.

But the advent of deep space travel gave these children a potential and they were trained for service as Nasqua - cargo minders for zero-gravity cargo holds. Most Nasqua never left the space vessels or space stations on which they served. but Spun Verz Nasqua had, unlike most of her kind, relatives in Long City who were at least tolerant of a visit. And Verz was determined not to lose what little strength was in her malformed body.

When traveling in public, like most of the infirm, Verz preferred to stay close to the police, lest she be bullied or preyed upon. The police preferred to avoid such charges and paid as little heed to them as possible. So for the entire tram ride from the southern edge of Long City all the way to North Port, she flitted from the company of one bored transport police to another, as quickly as she could cause her walking chair to approach them.

But the complex, bulky contraption that substituted for her legs was difficult to maneuver through the narrow tram doors, which the police tended to use to make good their escape from the company of infirm hangers on. Especially because Verz tended to make small talk about her work in zero gravity cargo wells, from her evident long familiarity.

And all the while, the secret police of the priesthood sought for both the innocent, perfectly made Nala who was on the run and also, endlessly for the great heretic, knowing in no way how they might find him.

At North Port, Verz boarded a launch bound for a cargo freighter, but the flight was intercepted by one of the fighting ships of the anointed and its few passengers taken aboard to serve for an emergency mission, along with the majority of the supplies it carried.

Verz quickly shed and disassembled the prosthetic walker. At this point she could only hope the holy warriors aboard the anointed war ship would not bother reviewing the personnel list too closely. A Nasqua in a walker would be too easy to remember and miss.

There was only one place onboard the war ship that Spun Verz Nasqua, ne Shadow, ne Ben Urri Urri, ne Sheeux Vosq Nala could hide and be insulated from the song of the holy warriors.

The last thing she wanted, after having come all this way to escape the compound of the anointed, was to fall under their spell again.

9.12

SBA Episode 9: Long Distance Runaround; Scene 13: Life Signs

Chapter Summary

Long Distance Runaround...

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)



The Star Beagle Adventures

Episode 9: Long Distance Runaround

Scene 13: Life Signs

9.13

Life Signs

“Okay, so the holy warriors produce a very complex series of low vibrations that act on the lower brain, and, apparently, also interfere with the operation of vulcan-designed warp engines.”

Major Janet Carter, the commander of the U.S. Marines’ premier deep space reconnaissance and threat assessment unit, had been recruited heavily by all of the U.S. military services and by Star Fleet because of her high marks in the sciences. She was currently seated at the science station on the starboard-bow side of the U.S.S. Beagle’s triangular bridge.

Sakura Nakamura Holland, clad in a black and scarlet kimono, was seated primly on the vulcan-built ship’s command throne. She merely nodded at Major Carter’s ruminations.

“I figured out that much from his orders when he sent me to re-open Probe Control,” Carter continued. “But I’m still putting together how he figured all that out without looking at any of the readouts. I guess my first clue should have been first a ferengi, then an andorian getting sick in the presence of those holy landers...”

“Skip’s first clue came from the frost giants,” Sakura interrupted. “I should have picked up on it too. The giants were complaining about all the noise. So much annoying noise from the holy landers endlessly praising themselves that it drove the giants from their homes on the continent even a thousand miles away from the holy compound. I thought they were speaking metaphorically. Apparently, they were talking about literal sound waves, which would have to be very low frequency to travel through the ground. Those frost giants must have phenomenal low-frequency hearing, which, I suppose, would be helpful in predicting avalanches and other seismic events...”

The dean of ship fell silent and watched with interest as the commander of the ship’s contingent of U.S. Marines responded to a call on her board. Carter turned back to look at her. “Probe Echo 2 is picking up trace signals of terrestrial DNA from the 8th planet in the trinary system we are approaching. Our current course routes us around the edge of the system so we can maintain maximum warp.”

“Analysis?” Sakura asked.

“It could be a false positive. That would be anticipated due to the similarity of DNA signals across our galaxy, considering how much of it came from the progenitors,” Major Carter responded. “But there is a remote possibility that a shuttle or even an escape pod from either Escort or Mako could have targeted the planet. It is “M” class, a bit on the heavy side and almost entirely covered with a world-wide ocean. Probes Echo 2 and 3 are being re-tasked to search for traces of drive-plasma and debris.”

Sakura pondered this information for a moment, then: “Get me the Puppy.”

A moment later, the diffident, balding, 50-year old lieutenant commander appeared on one of the three wall-sized viewscreens that made up the triangular bridge. “Beagle, this is the U.S.S. Puppy, Gregg Clark commanding.”

“Hi Gregg,” Sakura replied. “We are picking up trace signals of terrestrial DNA from the Relussa system, specifically Relussa 8. It could be

ancient echoes of the work of the progenitors... Or it could be an escape pod from one of our sister ships. We have a current fix on the position of the U.S.S. Mako, so I am going to keep the Beagle on course to provide support. I'm re-assigning the Puppy to investigate the Relussa star system. We're sending you the telemetry and re-assigning Probes Echo 2 and 3 to your control for this investigation."

"Understood, Mrs. Holland," Clark replied. "What are my limitations?"

"I will leave that to your discretion," Sakura replied. "But where we're going, the Puppy is unlikely to be able to provide significant support. I recommend a thorough investigation. Don't break off to come to us unless you hear us calling for help."

Long Distance Runaround

Chapter End Notes

This is the final scene for Episode 9.

The adventure will continue with Episode 10: Schindler's Fish.

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