

Star Beagle Adventures Episode 12: Close to the Edge Part I - The Solid Time of Change

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Star Beagle Adventures Episode 12: Close to the Edge Part I - The Solid Time of Change

by [LordRobertBruceScott](#)

Summary

The U.S.S. Escort is lost in the Jar Galaxy.

Notes

Throughout this episode, snippets of lyrics are quoted. These are from the first movement of the song, “Close to the Edge part I - The Solid Time of Change” by Jon Anderson and Steve Howe. The song first appeared as track 1 on Close to the Edge, the fifth album by the progressive rock band, YES, 1972, Atlantic Records.

YES fans generally consider the 18-minute, 4-movement masterpiece, Close to the Edge, to be not only the band's crowning achievement, but simply the most transcendent audio experience ever recorded.

Do not let your life pass by without devoting 18 minutes strictly to listening to this piece of music.

Enlightenment awaits.

Scene 1: The Depths of Your Disgrace

Chapter Summary

A seasoned witch could call you from the depths of your disgrace
And rearrange your liver to the solid mental grace...

Chapter Notes

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



The Star Beagle Adventures

Episode 12: Close to the Edge Part I - The Solid Time of Change

Scene 1: The Depths of Your Disgrace

12.1

The Depths of Your Disgrace

The U.S.S. Escort's bolian first officer, Lieutenant Commander Zizira Gross, had no idea how to address the violence General Krank had visited on Transporter Chief Eva Mendez.

Mendez had made it through 18 years of service, including the entirety of both the Klingon and Dominion wars without a scratch. And she had been in the front line on both wars, serving with Rhonda Carter on this ship, the U.S.S. Escort, which had been in the thick of nearly every major battle.

Now, after all that time, she had been horribly wounded by a friend. Deliberately. It did not matter that Krank had done it to prevent her from stopping her own captain from re-taking her ship from aliens that had her in their trance.

Her jaw had been shattered and despite the best efforts of Chief Medical Technician Kara Garrity, Mendez would be drinking her meals through a straw for the next 6 weeks, or until they managed to deliver her to a proper medical facility. Garrity a tall, pale-skinned woman with light brown hair and eyes, and a broad, Slavic face, had done the best that she could do with the equipment available. Mendez, a veteran of two wars, was experiencing severe post traumatic stress disorder, often screaming in rage and fear, which did not help her recovery at all.

Once General Krank had verified that Lt. Cmdr. Gross was no longer under the spell of the holy warrior's song, he had returned command of the ship to her. As first officer, Gross then had the unfortunate duty of confining Krank to his quarters. She had no idea what else to do. But she visited the ancient general daily for his advice.

Captain Rhonda Carter was recuperating in her own quarters, located adjacent to Krank's. If recuperating was the correct word. With Chief Garrity's regular treatments, Krank's hearing was returning. The klingon might well not even have required such treatment due to his remarkable ability to recover from physical damage.

The same could not be said of Rhonda Carter. As Zizira Gross left Krank's quarters, she could hear Carter screaming again. The captain had recovered from the concussion that the elderly general's ear-clap had dealt her, but her hearing was not returning at all. While she had returned to bridge duty, she was unable to take command due to her inability to communicate. Instead of sitting in the command chair, Carter would spend her shift stalking around the bridge, reviewing the readings on every screen over and over again.

At the moment, the 50-year-old veteran captain, one of the most highly decorated officers currently serving in Star Fleet, was screaming herself hoarse trying to hear something. Anything. Taking out her raw rage. She often had bloody knuckles from regularly beating the triluminum walls of her cabin.

Worse than all of this for Gross was her own overwhelming sense of shame and guilt that she had, herself, fallen victim to the song of the holy warrior. She had taken command of the Escort while under that spell. The only people onboard Escort who had not fallen under that spell were the ship's andorian 2nd officer, Lt. Cmdr. Vranran zh'Kathar, and the tiny roylan chief engineer, Lt. Ki Kresid. The warrior's song had made

these two officers desperately ill and they had used an escape pod to flee the ship.

But the fact that even the two vulcans on the crew had fallen under the spell of the holy warrior's song did not help lift the weight of guilt and shame from Gross.

She touched the door-chime to the captain's quarters. Instead of generating a sound, the switch had been reprogrammed to cause the lights to flicker inside the captain's quarters. The captain stopped screaming and, after a moment, said, "Enter," in a loud and clearly damaged voice.

Gross walked into the captain's room for the second time since she had joined the crew nearly a year previously. There were only three individual staterooms, each, including the captain's, barely large enough for a bed, a built-in work station, a foot locker, and a tiny, but private washroom. The remainder of the crew slept 4 or 6 to a room. The last time Gross had been in Rhonda Carter's room, it had been barren of any personal effects with the sole exception of a photogram of Carter's deceased wife.

Now, bizarre, arcane symbols had been scrawled all over the walls, the desktop, the ceiling, the floor. Carter's face. Some were accomplished with grease pens, some with lipstick, some with various paints. Vats of strange liquids and brews bubbled restlessly on the desk and the top of the captain's foot locker.

Carter had, for the past year, taken to dying her iron gray hair a variety of bright shades of blue. At this moment, the captain's long hair was wild and unkempt - a twisting, curling tangle of various shades of blue and some un-dyed sections of iron gray. The makeup around her eyes was far too heavy and dark, making her wide, bright blue eyes look wild, dangerous.

Gross was shocked. Whenever Carter was in public, she was still a little untidy, but nothing like this... Wild hair... Wild makeup... Arcane symbols scrawled on her face...

Carter sat down wearily on the edge of her bed and held up her left hand. The computer recognized this motion and extended a robotic arm that was attached to the ceiling. A transparent screen was attached to this arm. Rhonda Carter grasped the bottom of the screen and interposed it between herself and her first officer. They could see each other through it.

"Out with it, Gross," Carter croaked in a harsh, damaged voice. The words, "Out with it, Gross," appeared on the screen.

"Sir, you really need to stop screaming," the bolian first officer replied. "I know you can feel how badly it's damaging your voice. And it's unsettling for the crew..."

"Are the holy landers following us?" Carter asked.

"No sir," Gross replied. "Long range telemetry indicates they are on almost an opposite heading from ours." The bolian first officer dragged the chair over and sank into it.

"Turn us around, Zizira," Carter ordered. "If they're not following us, we need to follow them." She readjusted the screen between them so she could more easily read the computer's real-time transcription of Gross's words.

"Captain?" Gross asked.

"Since they aren't following us, we must assume they're headed back home. We need to follow them. They know the way out of here."

"But Captain... that's the opposite direction than where we came from," Gross objected.

"Yeah," Carter croaked. "I think where we came from is just the in-door. And these holy landers know where the out-door is. The way out of here. That is where we need to go. Why did you betray me?"

Gross shook her head. Again, Rhonda Carter's eyes were frightening her, surrounded as they were by dark blue makeup. Wide. Piercing. Angry.

"Sir? I didn't..." Gross started.

Carter cut her off with a throaty roar. "You sent me and Krank down to that planet!! YOU!!! You took command of my ship!!! You're still in command!!! BITCH!!! TRAITOR!!!"

Gross jumped out of the chair. "I didn't..."

"YOU KNOW YOU DID!!!" Carter rose from the bed, smacked the screen out of the way, advancing on her first officer. "You're doing it RIGHT NOW!!!" The volume the blue-haired captain was able to produce was astounding. Her voice was shredding.

"No..."

"LIAR!! BITCH!!!"

"IT'S NOT MY FAULT!!!" Gross screamed at the top of her lungs.

Carter was standing nose-to-nose with her. Or would have been if she hadn't been significantly smaller than the bolian. Carter was only 5'0" and had never weighed more than 100 pounds. She was twenty years older than Gross, who was quite physically fit and well trained for a bolian. But Zizira Gross had no delusion. In a fist fight, Rhonda Carter could take down any three members of the Escort's crew in seconds. Her ability as a warrior, and particularly in hand-to-hand combat was legendary.

Gross was badly frightened. Crying freely. Trembling in fear. "It's not my fault," she said again, quietly.

Carter put her hands on Gross's shoulders. Still looking aggressively into her first officer's eyes.

"You're goddamned right it's not your fault." Carter released her first officer and stepped back. She backed up and sagged onto her bed.

Somehow, Gross knew she had been dismissed. She backed toward the door, still looking in wonder at the wild-haired captain and her insanely decorated quarters.

Just as the door opened behind Gross, Carter looked up, croaked in a loud voice: "And Zizira..."

"Yes sir?"

"If any of the crew complain about me screaming, ask them why the fuck they aren't screaming themselves. It would do them some good."

"Aye sir," Gross said, then made good her escape.



12.1

Chapter End Notes

I have re-written Captain Carter's background and had to make a change to her introduction in Episode 1.7.

The question might arise regarding how she was able to understand Gross's exclamation at the end of this scene when Carter cannot hear and there is no screen for her to read a transcription. While Carter is not a lip reader or a mind reader, in this situation it is easy enough for her to understand what Gross is saying from both reading her lips and the context.

rbs

SBA Episode 12, Scene 2: Gollum Juice

Chapter Summary

And achieve it all with music that came quickly from afar
Then taste the fruit of man recorded losing all against the hour...



The Star Beagle Adventures

Episode 12: Close to the Edge Part I - The Solid Time of Change

Scene 2: Gollum Juice

12.2 Gollum Juice

Captain Rhonda Carter had been summoned to the bridge by her first officer. When she arrived, she found a continuous, wrap-around, transparent screen had been mounted above the command chair. A new control added to the left arm panel allowed her to, once seated, lower this screen so that it was interposed into her field of vision between her and the bridge. No matter where she turned, she was viewing the bridge through this screen and her officers were viewing her face through it.

When Lt. Cmdr. Zizira Gross, standing behind the command chair, offered her comments, the screen displayed a small avatar that clearly identified the bolian first officer and displayed her words in real time with large, friendly, easy to read lettering:

“The Escort needs her captain back,” Gross said, her words displayed almost the instant she uttered them.

“It’s brilliant,” Carter replied, and was instantly amused to see her own words displayed on the wrap-around monitor, along with a little, blue-haired avatar representing herself. And further amused that the words and avatar followed her head movement as she turned to look at her first officer, so that they remained in the same relative position within her field of view.

“Really brilliant,” she croaked, looking through the screen at Gross. “But there has to be a delay that will slow my reaction time...”

“Captain, I know I speak for all of us,” Gross started. “Even with a full second delay, there is no one any of us would rather have in that chair in an emergency. I only ask one thing...”

Carter fixed an aggressive, blue-eyed glare on her blue-skinned first officer. “There is a condition?”

Unlike her response while in Carter’s quarters, Gross was not about to be intimidated. “You have to stop screaming. You can’t hear us, but we need to be able to hear you.”

“I don’t know...” Carter mused, her voice still weak and ragged.

“I have put together a list of crew members who are willing to come to your quarters and scream at you, if you really think that’s necessary...”

Carter immediately started laughing, alternating with clutching at her throat while making feeble “oww” noises. The laughter hurt.

Chief Kara Garrity brought the captain a lidded cup with a built-in straw. “Try this, sir. I found it while looking for remedies for damaged vocal cords.”

Carter took the proffered drink, sucked some through the straw and shuddered. “Oh god... This is really disgusting... What is it?”

“Something called Gollum Juice. Actors use it.”

Carter took another swig. “Ugh... What’s in it?”

Garrity consulted a pad: “Ginger root, lemon, cloves, honey, molasses... And dark rum...”

Carter took another swig. “Hmmm, you know... I think I could get used to this stuff...”

A tiny avatar of Master Chief Bill Waller, the chief of the boat, popped up on Rhonda Carter’s new wrap-around screen. If her hearing had not been damaged, she probably would not have heard him muttering under his breath. But the computer did, and provided her a transcription: “Mmph, that’s weird... Crud...”

Carter turned to face the veteran NCO, who was currently seated at the “eyes” station, monitoring the Escort’s long-range sensor array. “What is it, Bill?”

“It’s those holy warriors. I’m picking up a number of smaller ships converging on them.” Waller reported without turning from his displays. “At least I think they’re ships. The readings are really strange. The holy landers are changing course to evade. And the... well, I guess 23 counts as a swarm against 2... The swarm is giving chase...”

SBA Episode 12, Scene 3: Points to Nowhere

Chapter Summary

And assessing points to nowhere, leading every single one...



The Star Beagle Adventures

Episode 12: Close to the Edge Part I - The Solid Time of Change

Scene 3: Points to Nowhere

And assessing points to nowhere, leading every single one...

12.3

Points to Nowhere

“So the holy landers have taken evasive action. Have they actually changed their heading?” asked Captain Rhonda Carter.

“They’re running for the roof,” reported Master Chief Bill Waller. “They started with a 30% up-angle on the bow. Now it’s more like 50%. It looks like they want wide, open spaces with as few stars as they can find. They’ve pointed their bows at the blankest space they could find.”

“Great,” Carter muttered. “Okay, I hate doing this, but let’s give that swarm a wide berth. We’re going to lose time against the holy landers. And we can’t follow the holy landers above the galactic plane. We’re low on deuterium. There’s a trinary system 6.28 light years from our current location. Let’s go there and tank up.”

Carter took a breath, and then a long swig of Gollum juice. “Bill, first, get your eyes on the trinary system and advise if there are any dangers and also any useful resources. We could probably use some fresh atmosphere and water. Long term, I want you to gather as much information as you can about that swarm that’s chasing the holy landers.”

After another long pull at the Gollum juice, the blue-haired captain continued: “Zizira, put together a team for this purpose. We don’t have the scientists available to us. This crew are pretty much all fighters. Go through the crew roster in detail, interview them and find anyone with any skill or experience or interest in exobiology, alien cultures, alien technology and let’s get a full picture about that swarm. Just because the holy landers are afraid of them does not mean they are automatically our enemy. Probably, but let’s keep an open mind.”

Carter touched a control on her chair. “Chief Mendez, Chief Garrity, General Krank, meet me in Medical. Zizira - you have the conn.”

“Aye sir,” the bolian first officer replied as Chief Medical Technician Kara Garrity followed her captain to the bridge exit. “Master Chief Waller, what are you seeing?”

“Doesn’t look very hospitable,” the veteran coxswain replied. “It looks like two main sequence stars in fairly close, stable orbit of each other, with a blue giant orbiting further out. No Goldilocks zone and there’s one gas giant that appears to be doing a figure-8, orbiting the twin main sequence stars, then the blue giant. There are some mineral deposits in the outer ring, including frozen water and some metals...”

Garrity had any number of questions for her captain as she followed her to the interior room that served as a medical center. Why did the captain insist on taking the U.S.S. Escort away from the area it had emerged into this galaxy? Why was she so certain the holy landers knew the way out of this galaxy? How did a bunch of giant, singing ants take over the ship in the first place? Why was she letting Krank anywhere near Transporter Chief Eva Mendez?

What was this meeting all about and why did she have to go?

Why did the captain dye her hair blue?

But there was no point in asking any of these questions. Even before Captain Carter had been deafened, she would have been very unlikely to provide any answers. Any serious ones, anyway.

The small room that served as Escort’s infirmary actually had two bio beds and a medical work station. For the past two years, this had been

Kara Garrity's work station, seeing after the wounds of the crew. She had mended bone and flesh, removed kidney stones, terminated a few pregnancies, and even in one emergency, performed an appendectomy.

This room had seen far more complicated medical conditions and during the wars, a number of crew members had been brought here, only to die of their battle wounds because there just wasn't anything that could be done for them.

Now, with the ship's captain, a terrified Chief Eva Mendez and the ancient klingon general in this room, it was crowded. Mendez was huddled in a corner, trying to put as much space between Krank and herself as possible.

"Sometimes being deaf can be an advantage," Carter started. "It means in this room I don't have to put up with any back talk from any of you. You can scream your guts out at me if you want and all it will be to me is just you jacking your jaws."

"So listen up, pull it together and deal with it," Carter continued. "Krank, you shattered Eva's jaw. She can only drink her meals through a straw for the next at least 40 days. You will help her plan her meals. You will see to it that she completes them. You will sing very quietly to her, what ever song she wants to hear. Eva loves to sing. So you will learn her songs and sing them to her until she can sing them herself. You will listen to her critique of your singing, take it to heart, and endeavor to sing better."

Carter turned toward her now even more horrified transporter chief. "Eva, you will get over your fear of General Krank. He would give his life in a heartbeat to prevent any harm from coming to you. Try not to torment him too much. He can't carry a tune in a bucket, so you will have to recover so you can get back to singing your own songs. By the time you do, you'll be singing duets."

"Kara, you will supervise. They will never be together alone. You'll be there to keep Eva calm. You also need to monitor her diet. Sorry about the singing. You're just going to have to suffer through that. And you will report to me how things are going."

Both Eva Mendez and Kara Garrity started speaking excitedly at once. Even more loudly as the blue-haired captain turned and walked out.

"She cannot hear you," Krank said, very quietly.

Both Chief Mendez and Chief Garrity turned toward the elderly klingon general, only to realize that they had nothing to say to him.

"I don't know if this is a good idea. I don't understand human psychology," Krank offered. He turned to look at Eva Mendez. "I am sorry that you are afraid of me. And that you have been ordered to teach me how to sing, which, I am afraid, may be an impossible task. But you humans do have a remarkable ability to face your fears and grow stronger." The elderly klingon took a deep breath. He sat down on the edge of one of the biobeds. "I will do everything I can to help you heal. I owe you nothing less."

SBA Episode 12, Scene 4: Music of the Suns

Chapter Summary

A dewdrop can exalt us like the music of the sun...



The Star Beagle Adventures

Episode 12: Close to the Edge Part I - The Solid Time of Change

Scene 4: Music of the Suns

A dewdrop can exalt us like the music of the sun...

12.4

Music of the Suns

The sound of water, dripping slowly into a deep pool. Rhonda Carter had forgotten how much she enjoyed this sound. It had been years since she had visited this place. Carter had grown up near Augusta, Georgia, and as soon as she could, she had started caving. Cloudland Canyon State Park had been her favorite. Particularly the underground lake. Most people liked the falls.

Rhonda's favorite place was much further inside and required rappelling, climbing, and spelunking to get to. And Rhonda had a natural advantage - her diminutive frame could fit through spaces that most people wouldn't dare to enter.

Very few people ever made it into this place. It was possible to transport into this cavern, but not advisable. So how General Krank had found his way into here was mysterious to her. As was what he was trying to say to her. As silent as this place was, the dripping water completely drowned out his voice.

There was something in Krank's expression that bothered her. Rhonda settled back into her captain's chair and tried to focus on the elderly klingon. Krank could read lips, but she couldn't. And the dripping water was starting to drive her crazy. It still was her favorite sound. But it just kept dripping and dripping. And dripping. And precisely in time with the elderly general's words.

Carter reached up for the wraparound screen that her 1st officer had installed above her command chair. The computer was able to hear Krank and transcribed his words.

But Carter could not read th'lingan Hol.

And she really, really had to pee. And the captain's chair was not the place to pee.

Captain Carter dragged herself out of bed and wandered off tiredly to the water closet. There weren't many amenities on the Escort class ships. They had been designed to escort other ships. Which allowed the crew to take advantage of the few dozen empty staterooms that were typically available on Intrepid class ships, or the tremendous resources of the aging, but still quite useful Galaxy class ships that were, essentially, spacebound conference centers.

Until the fighting had to be done. In the heat of combat, there wasn't a better ship to be on than the small, nimble, heavily armed and even more heavily armored Escort class destroyers.

The captain's private quarters with its private water closet was one of the very few luxuries on this ship. The sound of dripping water had really made her need to pee. Actually, that might have been why she had been hearing dripping water. Maybe some dreamtime wish fulfillment as well.

She missed the sound of water. She also found herself missing the sound of silence. That wasn't what she heard now. It was an endless buzzing whine. Something akin to tinnitus. Being deaf was anything but quiet. Sometimes the noise threatened to overwhelm her.

It was that crackling sound that General Krank had tried to warn her about. But she still couldn't read th'lingn Hol. She tried to read the words again. And pondered that it was a bit of an extravagance that another wraparound screen had been installed above her toilet.

She needed to get up. But the crackling was the sound of her bones and flesh turning to stone.

Only now everything was sideways. She was still locked down. Turned to stone. With one eye she could see the wall of her room. The corner of her bed. The corner of her desk. The other eye could only barely see over her pillow.

And now the voice rang in her head... The loudest thing she had ever heard... A low rumble, like the holy warriors. A soft, high voice, like her deceased wife. A whisper... A roar...

"You do not understand. You are not listening. But you will."

Rhonda had never been a bed wetter as a child. She was grossed out that her sheets were now soaked with urine.

She set about, angrily, cleaning this mess up. It was only gradually as she was cleaning her quarters that she noticed the strange voice had left her a gift.

Silence.

Wonderful, delicious, beautiful silence.

SBA Episode 12, Scene 5: The Swarm

Chapter Summary

And take away the plain in which we move
And choose the course you're running...



The Star Beagle Adventures

Episode 12: Close to the Edge Part I - The Solid Time of Change

Scene 5: The Swarm

*And take away the plain in which we move
And choose the course you're running...*

12.5 The Swarm

“Summon Captain Carter.”

Ensign John Sevork, in command of the U.S.S. Escort’s swing watch, had a pronounced Texas drawl, earned from a childhood in Laredo. Which, even to the crew who had served with him over the past year, still sounded weird as hell coming from a vulcan. It was strange enough simply talking to a vulcan named John.

“Aye sir,” Flight Engineer Abra Kahen replied without turning from the “eyes” station.

“Belay that,” said Sevork, rising from the command chair.

“Sir?” Kahen asked, turning from her station only to see Captain Rhonda Carter taking the chair and lowering her wraparound viewscreen. “How does she do that?” Kahen muttered, almost inaudibly under her breath.

“Any good captain knows when her ship is in trouble, Mr. Kahen” Captain Carter replied. Then, under her own breath, she muttered, “I can feel it in the deck plates.”

“Variations in the artificial gravity,” Sevork added, equally quietly.

“Report, Ensign,” Carter croaked. She had been keeping silent to allow her voice to heal, but it still sounded (to others) and felt (to her) as if razor blades were flying around in her throat every time she spoke.

Ensign Sevork stepped forward to the pilot’s station. “Specialist Davi, please switch to aft view.”

The primary viewscreen displayed the trinary star system, with the view dominated by a gas giant that was receding as Escort traveled away from it. Swirling particles could be seen in what was essentially a ring system around the planet. The outer ring was elongating, pointed toward Escort, and still getting closer.

“We’re at maximum impulse, best possible angle of escape, shields up?” Carter asked.

“Aye, Captain,” Sevork replied. “But I don’t like their vibrational pattern. Identical to our shield frequency.”

“Meaning that when they catch us, they’ll pass right through our shields as if they weren’t even there,” Carter continued. “What do you think our welcoming committee wants? Defending their turf?”

“They register as biological,” Sevork responded. “I think their purposes are similar to ours.”

“They’re hungry,” Carter concluded.

“And Escort is a big, healthy serving of energy,” Sevork added.

“Have you tried modulating the shield frequency? Polarizing the deck plates?” Carter asked.

“I didn’t want to let them know we could do those things, yet,” the vulcan ensign replied.

“You’re one of Zizira’s people, aren’t you?” Carter asked, looking at the young vulcan more closely. He was about 5’10”, with dark skin and dark hair, the latter in the bowl haircut often seen among vulcan men.

“She recruited me from the academy, sir. This is my first post.”

Carter regarded the young vulcan with an appraising look. “There could be a future in this business for you, John. You might want to update your hairstyle. Tell me about these space bugs.”

“A reasonable analogy,” the young vulcan ensign replied. “They exist partly in relative space and partly in subspace. Given their small size and generally light construction, and the fact that they propel themselves through relative spacetime by their movement in subspace...”

“They are far faster and more maneuverable in this planet’s gravity well than we are,” Captain Carter concluded. “They’re going to catch us before we can get to a safe distance to go to warp. And if they get through our shields...”

“Analysis of their movements indicates they are primarily interested in our nacelles,” said John Sevrak, his calm, vulcan demeanor contrasting weirdly with his pronounced Texas accent. “If they get into the nacelles, they could prevent us from going to warp. Unless you want to disable the safety mechanisms and risk a warp core breach.”

“Not my first choice,” Carter mused. “How long until they get to us?”

“2 minutes, 23 seconds...”

SBA Episode 12, Scene 6: Some Kind of Fungus

Chapter Summary

Down at the edge, round by the corner...



The Star Beagle Adventures

Episode 12: Close to the Edge Part I - The Solid Time of Change

Scene 6: Some Kind of Fungus

Down at the edge, round by the corner...

12.6 Some Kind of Fungus

“Sound general quarters.”

As the interior lighting switched to battle blue, the red lights started flashing and the klaxon started to wail, Carter started giving orders.

“Standby to engage anti-borg shield frequency rotation. On my mark and not before. Can you do something similar with the characteristics of the polarization of the ablative hull plating?”

“Already programmed in,” Ensign Sevork responded.

“Getting a comparative read now,” Flight Engineer Abra Kahen reported from the “eyes” station. “This is interesting, carbon-based, not dissimilar to terrestrial DNA, some kind of fungus...”

“Mushrooms?” Carter said with mingled surprise and disgust. “Why is it always mushrooms?”

“Contact in 15 seconds,” said John Sevork.

“Engage anti-borg protocols,” Carter ordered.

“Shields holding, but they are adapting,” Flight Specialist Davi reported. Both she and Flight Engineer Abra Kahen were small, dark-skinned women from southern India.

“Mushrooms that exist partly in subspace. We have some experience with something similar,” Carter mused.

“Some of them are getting through the shielding...” Maya Davi sounded nervous.

“John,” Carter continued, “Those nasty little ferengi eyeball mushrooms last year... Or were they trill eyeballs? Didn’t they use deuterium as a kind of barrier breaker to transition from relative space to subspace and back?”

“We have clusters on the starboard nacelle... They’re adapting to the ablative plating...” Davi reported.

“They divide the deuterium into protium and then recombine it so they can ride the electron in and out of...” the young vulcan ensign started.

Carter waived him off. “Yeah, yeah... Point being, are these little mushroom bugs packing deuterium?”

“Confirmed,” Kahen replied from the “eyes” station.

“They’re into the starboard nacelle and we now have clusters on the port nacelle...”

Carter hit a control on her command chair. “General Krank to Transporter Room #1. Chief Mendez, you have 2 minutes to disable the

reconstitution safeties and enable mining protocols. Get it done now, Eva. Zizara, Chief Hess, are you both in engineering?"

"We're both here, Captain," the bolian first officer responded over the comm system.

"Get to the nacelles and disable the contamination safeties. 3 minutes."

"Aye, Captain," Lt. Cmdr. Gross replied over the comm. The comm caught her saying "Roman..." before shutting off.

"Getting into the port nacelle. Reading significant damage in the starboard nacelle. Warp system offline," said Specialist Davi.

"You're planning to go to warp with those mushrooms inside the nacelles?" asked Ensign John Sevork, his Laredo accent noticeably thicker.

"Pay attention to everything and hold down the fly buzz of your own thoughts, Ensign," Captain Carter said. "Focus..."

"Both nacelles are down," Davi reported. "Significant damage to the starboard nacelle..."

"General Krank, I want you to lock on to all of the deuterium located between our shields and the outer hull plating and beam it into the starboard nacelle."

"Captain?" Transporter Chief Eva Mendez asked over the comm system.

"You got those safeties off, Eva?"

"Aye sir..."

"Then stand down and surrender the console to Krank. That's an order. You can protest it later," Carter said.

"Locking on now," came Krank's voice over the comm system.

"Energize, then as soon as the cycle is complete, do it again. Keep doing it until there is no deuterium between our shields and the hull plating."

"Understood," Krank replied.

"Captain?"

Both Abra Kahen and Maya Davi turned to stare, wide-eyed, at their blue-haired captain only to have a vulcan snap sternly at them with a thick Texas accent:

"Mind your stations Specialists!"

Carter ignored them and hit another switch. "Zizira, Roman, on my mark, blow out the nacelles."

"Most of what we blow out will get caught between the shields and the hull..." came the voice of Chief Flight Engineer Roman Hess over the comm.

"Out with the bad, in with the good," Carter replied. "Wash, rinse, and repeat."

"Ready," Lt. Cmdr. Zizira Gross reported.

"Blow them," said Carter. "Flight Specialist Davi, stand by to engage the Bussard collectors in standby mode."

Davi's voice sounded more shaky than before: "Standing by, Captain."

"Do you want John to do it, Maya?" Carter asked.

"In for a penny, in for a pound, sir," Davi responded. "It's just another kind of photon torpedo..."

"That's the spirit, Davi," Carter said.

"Sir, the, um... The mushrooms are breaking off," Flight Engineer Kahen reported.

"Not as dumb as they look," said Carter.

"They just learned it's a dog-eat-dog galaxy out here," John Sevork observed.

"Step down to yellow alert. Let's get some more distance, then we'll do a 180, drop the shields, overcharge the nacelles, give them a good hard blow, pirouette 180 again and engage the Bussard collectors," Carter said. "After that, we'll have to get close to whichever of those suns is the safest to approach. It's going to take at least a week to rebuild our nacelles, so we'll have plenty of time to thoroughly study this system and learn all about our fungal fiends." She smiled. "Everybody gets to play scientist for a little while."

Chapter Summary

Not right away, Not right away...



The Star Beagle Adventures

Episode 12: Close to the Edge Part I - The Solid Time of Change

Scene 7: Leprechauns

Not right away, not right away...

12.7 Leprechauns

The U.S.S. Escort could not go to warp. The nacelles were damaged and needed significant repair work and then to be recharged. Before the nacelles could be fully recharged, they had to be decontaminated. Repair would require the construction of replacement parts, particularly the coils and the transfer plating. These parts were not particularly difficult to replicate... As long as the rather rare materials were available.

There were a number of rocky planets on which any number of materials could be found. But the more rare materials would be easier to detect among the five asteroid rings that were the wake of failed planets. It was not surprising that there were so many in this trinary system, with its twisting and shifting fields of gravity.

The asteroids in these clusters were so far apart that it could take the Escort from several minutes to well over an hour to navigate from one to the next, gradually finding, mining out and collecting the various elements needed to repair the ship's nacelles. Praseodymium, promethium, samarium, terbium, thulium, ytterbium, yttrium and scandium... All quite rare. The terbium and praseodymium were the hardest to find. There were trace amounts, but at this rate, unless Escort found a large deposit, it would take several weeks of collecting the trace amounts to collect enough for the needed repairs.

Captain Rhonda Carter was on the bridge when the signal was found. And the veteran Chief of the Boat, Master Chief Bill Waller, at the "eyes" station, was the one who found it.

"Jackpot! We have a winner! At least 90 kilograms of praseodymium and 10 kilos of terbium. More than twice what we need of both."

"Okay, Bill," said Carter. "What's the hitch?"

"Captain?" Waller asked.

"Wherever there's a pot of gold, there's always a leprechaun," Carter responded. "What's the leprechaun?"

"Looks like three large asteroids in a cluster," Waller replied. "The big one between the other two has the deposits."

"Okay, so the other two are leprechauns," Carter said. "How long until we get to them?"

"2 hours, 27 minutes," said Waller."

"Eyes on the leprechauns. What are they?" Carter croaked.

"They appear to be contiguous chunks broken off the main body. Mmph, that's weird..."

"Elaborate, Bill."

The chief of the boat was a thoroughly unremarkable looking man in his mid-50's. He kept the ring of gray hair around the sides and back of

his head clipped to a close bristle. At 5'6", he was of less than average height and reasonably fit, despite a hardened pot belly. Brown eyes, a soft voice, and a bit of a double-chin rounded out a remarkably unremarkable appearance.

But he was very highly regarded by everyone who knew him. A jack of all trades, good at interpreting new data, fixing pretty much any hardware and just as handy unsnarling contaminated code. And a great teacher, constantly upgrading the knowledge and abilities of every enlisted astronaut, and often providing wisdom for the officers as well.

"Well, they're about the same size and configuration," Waller elaborated. "The configuration looked familiar, so I'm running some comparisons... Lines up with the rough configuration of those swarm-like things that were following the holy landers and made them head for open space. And also similar to those little mushroom bugs we just fought off when we first entered this system."

"So those little mushrooms grow up to be these guys... Leprechauns... Lepreshrooms," Carter mused. "And they're at least smart enough to set up their ambush next to the nice watering hole... How do you think they'd react to a warning shot?"

"Is that what you think Captain Howard would do?"

The appearance of Krank's avatar and words on Rhonda Carter's wraparound screen startled her. She had been unaware of the klingon general's presence and wasn't certain when he had arrived on the bridge. She had granted Krank unlimited access to the Escort's bridge long ago and the elderly general often found a corner to lurk quietly in, his coming and going so inconspicuous that it served as a reminder that klingons did not need cloaking devices to be stealthy.

Carter almost needed a double-take to locate Krank on the cramped bridge. The man was capable of an incredible stillness. She took a breath. "He would probably call a meeting... No, he would show up at a meeting that Sakura would call, and everyone would talk about it for several hours."

"And if I had called such a meeting before we approached that gas giant and everyone carefully reviewed the sensor readings we had of this system before you gave the order to approach the planet, might things have turned out differently?" Krank asked.

Carter was not accustomed to being questioned on her bridge, but her respect for Krank kept her from responding combatively. "Who knows?" she replied. "Let's try it now. We don't have a conference room, so we'll have to confer here on the bridge. Tie in comms to engineering and medical and activate view screens. Okay Bill, show us a picture of our lepreshrooms..."

What appeared on screen looked nothing like a mushroom. It looked like a thorn made out of rock. A wide and more or less flat top had a sort of main root that twisted down to a vanishingly small point.

"I thought these things were mushrooms," Carter remarked.

"The mushroom grows on the inside," Waller responded. "The tip of the thorn is the interface between the creature's expression in subspace and relative space. The little ones were moving at warp, but at sublight speeds. If these are the same things we saw chasing the holy landers, they can, at minimum, move at warp 4."

"And we can't move at warp at all," Carter mused.

"Leaving us quite vulnerable if there are a large number of adult, um, lepreshrooms in this system," Krank concluded.

"So what do they want?" Carter asked. "They could just walk over here and get us at any time. They don't have to set up an ambush."

"Perhaps they are evaluating us," Krank mused.

"You think they're intelligent?" came Lt. Cmdr. Zizira Gross' voice over the comm system from her post in engineering.

"All stop," ordered Carter. "Let's test that theory. Zizara, Commander Dutch Holland gave us a dozen dogfish. How about we put three of them on a probe and send it over there, nice and slow, to see if our thorny friends will let them mine those materials for us and send them back to us on the probe."

"Now that is something Captain Howard would do," said General Krank.

SBA Episode 12, Scene 8: Just A Taste



The Star Beagle Adventures

Episode 12: Close to the Edge Part I - The Solid Time of Change

Scene 8: Just a Taste

Close to the edge, just by a river...

12.8 Just a Taste

“That’s interesting,” Master Chief Bill Waller commented. “They didn’t do a thing until the dogfish started mining. Now they’re drifting away...”

“Bill, I think you may be turning into a scientist,” Captain Rhonda Carter teased. “That’s the sort of thing the scientists say all the time... That’s weird... That’s interesting...”

“I think it’s the micro-transporters,” Waller said. “The dogfish are mining using their micro-transporters. That’s why your leprechauns are drifting off. And why they don’t approach us.”

“They’re afraid,” General Krank concluded. “They may never have seen transporter technology before.”

“Right,” Waller continued. “They weren’t afraid of the holy landers and their guns. Then Escort shows up and drinks the deuterium right out of the bellies of a bunch of their... um... Sporelings. Killing them in the process.”

“A brilliant, if rather ruthless tactic,” intoned Warrant Officer Seprek Harrison, a vulcan who had grown up in Phoenix, Arizona. Unlike the ship’s other vulcan, Harrison did not have a strong southern accent. At 94, he was the oldest member of Carter’s crew. At the moment, he was at the pilot’s station, but Harrison, like Waller, could work any station on the ship. “Hopefully one that our captain will not be court-marshaled for.”

“Wouldn’t be the first time,” Carter responded. “And I’ll take it as long as it gets my crew home alive and this ship home in one piece.”

“The probe is loaded, dogfish locked in and the probe is on its return... crap,” Waller reported.

“Bill?” Carter asked.

“It was too good to be true,” Waller replied. “They’re closing in on the probe.”

“Krank, what do you think about a warning shot now?”

“Unlikely to be effective,” the elderly general replied. “The holy landers tried that with the swarm that was following them with no noticeable effect.”

“I suggest we stall the probe, wait, and let them have their fill,” Warrant Officer Harrison offered.

Carter turned to look through her wraparound screen at the middle-aged vulcan. “You have a theory. Care to share it with the class?”

“The trace elements were scattered all over that asteroid. It wasn’t easy for the dogfish to collect them using their micro-transporters. It must have been extremely frustrating to those,” Seprek Harrison paused dramatically before using the name Rhonda Carter had given to the creatures. He drew a breath, then continued: “Leprechauns. More than what they need all in one rock, but nearly impossible for them to mine...”

“Both the fungi have penetrated the probe and are now removing the ore,” Bill Waller reported. Then: “Huh. They barely took any. Now they’re drifting away again. There’s still more than what we need on that probe.”

“Get that probe back here and onboard before any other of these guys show up,” Carter ordered.

“Yes ma’am. Bringing the probe back now, maximum sublight.”

Carter turned toward Harrison again. “How did you know?”

“I didn’t,” Harrison responded. “But I surmised that their method for traveling at warp probably wasn’t much different from ours, which would mean they would need similar materials. But a much smaller amount, given their much smaller mass. Too much of these metals would be toxic to them. So I suspected they would take only what they needed and leave the rest for us.”

Captain Carter made an amused noise. “I think Sakura would tell you to write it up and submit your conjecture for peer review.”

“I was considering it,” the vulcan warrant officer admitted.

“Consider it an order,” Carter replied.

SBA Episode 12, Scene 9: The Summoning

Chapter Summary

Crossed the line around the changes of the summer...
Reaching out to call the color of the sky...



The Star Beagle Adventures

Episode 12: Close to the Edge Part I - The Solid Time of Change

Scene 9: The Summoning

Crossed the line around the changes of the summer...

Reaching out to call the color of the sky...

12.9

The Summoning

Again, the sound of dripping water.

While Rhonda Carter very much appreciated the gift of silence, the silence was also beginning to drive her mad. Still, it was much better than the howling roar that had been her constant companion from the time Krank had deafened her until the last dream had freed her from the noise.

This time she realized that she was in a dream. In her favorite place in the caverns of Cloudland Canyon. A place that very few people could get to. And General Krank was not one of them.

“You’re not Krank,” said Carter. “Who are you?”

“You are listening.” It was the soft whisper of her wife’s voice. Coming, quite disturbingly, from an elderly klingon general. “You are listening now, not hearing. But you will... Because you so want to hear...”

This wasn’t the cavern in Cloudland Canyon State Park. There was a pool, and a stalactite from which water (or some liquid) was dripping.

“What are you? How are you getting into my dreams? Why me?” Rhonda Carter was far more used to being barraged with questions instead of being the one asking them. “I’ve had weird ghosts of genocidal machines leaking into my dreams with their death wish... Bizarre silicone aliens making me paint my fingernails black and put on green eyeshadow... Giant sacred ants singing to me waking and sleeping... And now you...”

Only the dripping of water in this cavern. No other sound answered her.

“Mushrooms? Are you those mushroom things we’ve been playing cat and mouse with?” Carter reached out to touch the stalactite. It was smooth, hard and slick. “Yeah, that’s right... The mushroom grows inside the rock. Those nasty ferengi mushrooms got inside my first officer’s head, took control of him, and nearly killed me.”

She stalked around the cramped, tiny cavern, grousing quietly to herself. “Mind-stealing mushrooms... Morose murder machines... Silent silicone sirens... Sactimonious insects...” She rapped her knuckles lightly against the stalactite. If this had been a real stalactite, the vibration would have affected the dripping, shaking more water loose. But this was a dream stalactite and Rhonda knew from long experience that dream items did not respond normally to the dreamer.

“A lifetime working in space. Ever since I was 16. I always slept like a rock. A hundred alien species. Thousands of light years. Three entire wars. Then I turn 50 and bang, weird alien consciences are barging into my dreams... Crawling around in my skull...”

She was grousing as she got up and ran her fingers along the inscriptions she had scrawled across the walls in her cabin. Every spell her research could find to restore her hearing. She never expected any of it to work. But this one had worked. The only one she had not cleaned off

the wall. Because it was the only one she had carved into the wall and then filled with metal-based paint.

At the moment she couldn't recall exactly how she had carved an inscription into a triluminum wall, but that didn't matter at the moment.

This was a summoning spell.

That's who was visiting her dreams. Something she had summoned. She could hear it breathing. The sound raised the small hairs on her arms and the back of her neck.

Still dreaming.

Rhonda Carter sat up with a shout.

And for just a second, she thought she heard herself.

SBA Episode 12, Scene 10: Faster Than Light

Chapter Summary

Passed around a moment clothed in mornings, faster than we see



The Star Beagle Adventures

Episode 12: Close to the Edge Part I - The Solid Time of Change

Scene 10: Faster Than Light

Passed around a moment clothed in mornings, faster than we see

12.10

Faster Than Light

“Exiting the system, warp 3,” reported Flight Specialist Maya Davi.

“And we have company,” added Warrant Officer Seprek Harrison from the “eyes” station. “Three ...” Harrison paused again before using the moniker coined by his captain, then: “Lepreshrooms... Make that four following us out of the system. Tracking us, but keeping their distance.”

“Remoras.”

Captain Rhonda Carter was leaned back in the command chair, gazing up at the wraparound screen. The computer had been programmed to follow her gaze, which meant that when she leaned back and looked up toward the ceiling, the entire screen would move up to interpose itself into her field of vision.

“They think we’re the shark?” asked Davi.

“By any chance, do you recognize any of them?” Carter asked.

“Solid identification,” Harrison confirmed. “We’ve seen all four of them before. Two were near the asteroid and took some of our terbium and praseodymium. We tracked them for a few hours. The other two met up with one of them.”

“And the lesson those first two learned in our encounter,” Carter continued. “Don’t mess with the shark and maybe it will leave you some scraps. The other two heard it from one of their sources.”

“Which means they can communicate,” Harrison observed.

“And we don’t want too many of them following us,” Carter added. She touched a control on the arm of her chair. “Chief Hess, how long before we can exceed warp 3?”

The voice of Chief Flight Engineer Roman Hess came through the comm system. “Still burning impurities out of the starboard nacelle. We’re topped off on deuterium, but I’m not even wild about warp 3 at this moment...”

“What would you recommend, Roman?” Carter asked.

“I guess 2 would be too much to ask for,” Hess replied. “But if we could take it down to 2.5, I think a slower burn-out would prolong the life of the starboard nacelle. At some point we’re going to need to put in to a starbase for a serious rebuild.”

Carter looked around the bridge and found what she was looking for. A fully armed and armored klingon who still managed to be completely inconspicuous in a very small space.

“So general, a shot across the bow?”

General Krank nodded slightly. “If you can’t outrun them, perhaps you can spook them.”

“Care to report to transporter room 1 for me?” Carter asked.

Krank responded by exiting the bridge.

“Roman, you’re going to get your wish,” Carter said. She sat up and as her gaze moved down away from the ceiling, the continuous, transparent screen that allowed her to read the remarks of her bridge officers and others communicating electronically, lowered to interpose itself into her line of sight. “Specialist Davi, reduce speed to warp 2.5. Seprek, keep an eye on our pilot fish.”

“They are slowing,” reported Seprek Harrison. The veteran warrant officer had served with Captain Carter since before she had been promoted to first lieutenant. At that time 2nd Lt. Rhonda Carter was directing the security department for the U.S.S. Odyssey and she and Harrison were among the only 6 people to survive the destruction of that ship. Those were the people in the security station with her amidst when the abandon ship order was given.

Carter had the presence of mind to beam everyone in the station into one of the Odyssey's shuttles and brought up the craft's shields just in time to protect the craft and its inhabitants from the destruction of the ship around them.

The shuttle had drifted without power for two days until they were picked up by a rescue mission from Deep Space 9 and returned to Star Fleet. Carter had been promoted to Lieutenant and assigned to the front lines, leading security teams and then assault forces first against klingon forces, then against the Dominion. Shortly after the outset of the Dominion war, she was promoted to Lieutenant Commander and given command of the U.S.S. Escort. And the five people she had saved from the Odyssey followed her through to each command and were all serving on the Escort now.

“They’re slowing, but still following,” Carter mused. “Let’s see if we can get them to give us a little more respect... Davi, slow us to warp 1 and put us on a glide path to all stop 15 seconds after we reach warp 1.”

“Aye Captain,” Flight Specialist Maya Davi responded. “Answering to warp 1 now and decelerating.”

“Our lepreshrooms have had enough and are returning to their star system,” the vulcan warrant officer reported from the “eyes” station.

“Hopefully they will spread the word among their kind to leave us alone,” said Carter.

“Maya, take us back up to warp 2.5. Seprek, see if you can find those holy landers we lost track of last week.”

“No sign yet of the holy landers, Captain,” Seprek Harrison replied. “But we are now picking up a beacon claiming to come from Commodore Yui Song.”

“Source?”

“That’s quite the question, Captain. The source seems to be from the galactic rim, but it’s sweeping back and forth at a tremendous rate. Putting the chart on your screen now.”

Carter watched the display. The source of the beacon was sweeping back and forth around the galactic rim, moving at speeds far faster than was possible with any known technology or even theory about space travel.

“Consider all points along this pattern,” Carter said. “Could the holy landers have been headed toward any of them?”

Harrison spent some time calculating. Then: “Negative, Captain. If I calculate the mean location of the signal source and project from the last known heading and velocity of the holy landers just before they altered course to escape the swarm, I would say they were headed in exactly the opposite direction.”

SBA Episode 12, Scene 11: Something Wicked This Way Comes

Chapter Summary

Getting over all the time I had to worry



The Star Beagle Adventures

Episode 12: Close to the Edge Part I - The Solid Time of Change

Scene 11: Something Wicked This Way Comes

Getting over all the time I had to worry

12.11

Something Wicked This Way Comes

Lt. Cmdr. Zizira Gross and General Krank were crowded uncomfortably into Captain Rhonda Carter's quarters. Uncomfortably both because of the lack of seating and the need for the blue-haired captain to use the transparent screen in order to read transcriptions of everyone's words as she could not hear them.

The elderly klingon general was seated next to Carter on her bed. The bolian first officer sat across from them in the room's only chair.

Captain Carter had cleaned all the bizarre markings off of her walls days ago, but one inscription had returned to her wall. Lt. Cmdr. Zizira Gross was stealing uncomfortable glances at it.

"Something's coming," Carter started. "I don't know what and I don't know how, but I reached out to something and it's coming."

"Is that why we're headed in the wrong direction?" Zizira Gross ran a blue hand over her blue scalp, then squeezed the back of her neck, a sign of agitation among bolians.

General Krank grunted. "You are running. Are you running away from something or are you running toward something?"

"We're following the holy landers," Carter answered. "They know the way out." She made an exasperated gesture with her left hand. "I need you to focus here..." Rhonda Carter looked down and sighed, gathering her thoughts, then: "You know that I went crazy trying to hear again..."

"We noticed," Gross muttered.

"I used to practice witchcraft as a kid," Carter continued. "Just for fun. Not something I believed in, but I would give my brothers the evil eye just to put them off their game. I was just playing, but I didn't let them know that..."

"All older brothers," Krank said. "Made you a fighter."

"Yeah," Carter replied. "Each one of them wanted to teach me how to fight. Surprised the hell out of them that I kind of knew already. I guess from watching them wrestle around. A bunch of big old farm boys and one little girl... But anyway, I went through a witchy phase when I was 10, 12 or so, and got fascinated with magic spells... Well, I was just using everything I could remember and everything I could find in the computer. I didn't think for a second any of it would work in any mystical way. I guess I was kind of hoping that it would help me... You know... Part of healing is mental..."

"Like poetry," Krank opined.

"I guess," Carter responded. "Yeah, kind of the way klingons use poetry. Strengthen the mind..."

"And the mind strengthens the body," said Krank.

"It was so loud," Carter continued. "When you deafened me. It was just this endless howling roar. Not like surf. More like a wind storm. But kind of dead, a dead sound. I had to exhaust myself to get to sleep. I think I was trying to distract myself from all the noise..." The blue haired captain pointed at the one inscription she had scrawled back onto her wall after cleaning it. "That is a summoning spell. Something came to me in a dream and took away the noise... It's been silent ever since. Occasionally, I think I hear myself when I'm talking, but for the most part,

totally silent. Then it came to me again in another dream and showed me that..." Carter pointed again at the summoning spell scrawled on her wall.

"You can't be serious," said Zizira Gross. "You don't really think you cast some sort of spell and summoned a demon of some sort..."

Rhonda Carter shrugged. "A year ago, some giant trans-dimensional mushroom eyeball rode a subspace carrier wave into this ship's communication system, showed up on my bridge and got inside your predecessor's head, leading to his death."

Carter leaned forward and tapped her first officer's knee. "That's why you're here." She leaned back. Gestured broadly to both Krank and Gross. "Not too long ago, all three of us were painting our nails black and our eyelids green thanks to creatures made of some sort of glass. This ship was taken over by giant, singing warrior ants to help them fight some horrifying, kite-shaped monster on a planet full of giant, glowing mushrooms. We just escaped from another variety of trans-dimensional mushrooms encased in thorns of rock. I wouldn't get too arrogant about what is, and what is not possible."

"So you think you summoned something?" asked Krank.

"I think I got something's attention," Carter opined. "With my luck, it'll turn out to be some sort of trans-dimensional singing mushroom with a fetish for nail polish..."

"All right," said Gross. "Let's assume you're right and some sort of psychic mushroom has tuned into your brain waves and is coming to meet us. What are we supposed to do about it?"

"Everything we know about this thing is on that wall or in your head," said Krank. "So we need to get into your head."

"We don't have Dr. Uto, or any of the betazoids with us," said Gross.

"Betazoids, no. But we do have vulcans," Krank observed.

"Great," muttered Carter. "Just what I need. More people in my head."

"It will have to be Ensign Sevork," said Gross. "They're both part human. John's more human than Seprek, but he has the ability and Seprek doesn't. Shall I?"

Carter sighed, then nodded.

The bolian first officer touched her communicator badge. "Ensign Sevork, this is Gross,"

The young vulcan's voice came through over the comm system: "This is Sevork, go ahead sir."

"Please join me in the captain's quarters."

The U.S.S. Escort wasn't a large ship and it was only a few moments before the senior officers were joined by Ensign John Sevork.

The young vulcan was sporting a purple mohawk and the beginnings of a purple goatee.

Rhonda Carter burst into laughter, only to find the three non-human officers looking at her with puzzled expressions. Carter couldn't help herself - she laughed until her sides and her throat ached. She clutched at her throat, trying to breathe, her eyes tearing up.

Sevork waited until his captain had regained enough composure to look at him through her transparent screen. "You suggested that I update my hairstyle..."

"Oh my God, I love it! You bizarre, wonderful terrestrial vulcans..." Carter managed, before lapsing into more helpless laughter.

SBA Episode 12, Scene 12: An Inside Job



The Star Beagle Adventures

Episode 12: Close to the Edge Part I - The Solid Time of Change

Scene 12: An Inside Job

Leaving all the changes far from far behind

12.12

An Inside Job

“My mind to your mind... Your thoughts to my thoughts...” The words sounded odd when spoken with a thick, West Texas accent.

It had taken Captain Rhonda Carter nearly 10 minutes to regain her composure and calm down to the point that Ensign John Sevork could attempt a mind meld.

Before it had fallen out due to radiation poisoning a little over a year ago, Rhonda Carter’s hair had been brown and fell long and perfectly straight almost to the back of her knees. It had grown back gray and coarse, no longer perfectly straight. Now dyed a number of shades of bright blue, her hair fell to the middle of her back.

She sat on the edge of her bed, bright blue eyes staring intently into the dark brown eyes of the dark-skinned young vulcan, seated in the only chair in her quarters. Sevork’s human ancestry was Mexican. He had recently shaved the sides of his head and dyed his thick hair a dark purple, arranged into a spiky mohawk. His fingers framed his captain’s face.

The elderly klingon, General Krank, was still seated next to Carter on the edge of her bed. The bolian first officer, Lt. Cmdr. Zizira Gross, having yielded her seat to the young vulcan, had hopped up onto the captain’s desk, her legs dangling, Star Fleet issue boots not quite reaching the floor.

Rhonda Carter was not the type of person who yielded control easily. It helped that John Sevork was a powerful telepath and, oddly, it helped that he was quite young, only 24 years old, pretty much a teenager for a vulcan. Carter felt more as if he were joining her and asking questions. He had a pleasant personality and that seemed to come through even in the mind meld.

First they walked together through the various monsters Carter had encountered over the past year. A giant, bloodshot eye, the size of a baseball, looked around the bridge of her ship, then slammed into the forehead of her former first officer, Lt. Cmdr. Straiv, a vulcan whom she had rescued from the jem’hadar and who had served as her strong right arm from that moment until his death. The creature that had taken him over had made him shoot both her and General Krank with a phaser set to kill. A wound that had very nearly killed both of them.

It was only shortly after that she had been dragged, in her dreams, across a thousand light years, into the dreaming consciousness of deadly machines that had been constructed to end a civilization. Some time later, the telepathic influence of some benign, but powerfully telepathic silicon-based lifeform had reached into her mind, causing her to unconsciously paint her fingernails and eyelids to match the colors used by a lance corporal of the United States Marines.

Carter had taken her ship and crew out of the Milky Way and into the Jar Galaxy while under the spell of giant, singing aliens who bore an odd resemblance to ants. She had stood with them on a planet as they used their songs to battle some horrifying, barely defined monster in the skies. And now, having been deafened to protect her from their songs, she had somehow summoned something in her desperation to hear again.

It was only after having reviewed all these experiences with her that Ensign Sevork ventured into Carter’s memories of her recent dreams. The grotto that was, and yet was not in Cloudland Canyon State Park. The impossible appearance of General Krank inside the cave that the minuscule captain had only barely been able to squeeze into. The elderly klingon general speaking with the voice of her now long-deceased wife:

“You do not understand. You are not listening. But you will.”

“You are listening now, not hearing. But you will... Because you so want to hear...”

Now new dream details were coming up. Things she dreamed but had not carried into her waking memory. The kite-shape of the pupils of General Krank’s eyes - had that been a reflection of her fears of the creature she had seen in the sky? Or was it a harbinger of the thing that had reached out to her?

The stalactite in the grotto - oddly shaped like the land thorns that housed the trans-dimensional mushrooms they had just escaped from - was that a harbinger or a reflection of her own fears?

There were really no concrete clues as to what was coming. Even in its words to her - it hadn’t said it was coming.

But somehow she knew it was.

Somehow, John Sevork was able to validate that instinct.

Something had reached out to her in her dreams.

It had changed her, silencing the roar of her deafness, giving her some peace.

It had communicated with her.

And it was coming...

SBA Episode 12, Scene 13: The Big One

Chapter Summary

We relieve the tension only to find out the master's name



The Star Beagle Adventures

Episode 12: Close to the Edge Part I - The Solid Time of Change

Scene 13: The Big One

We relieve the tension only to find out the master's name

12.13 The Big One

“Lieutenant Commander, I’m getting something on the edge of our sensor range, following us,” reported Flight Engineer Abra Kahen. She was a small, dark-skinned Indian woman, currently operating the “eyes” station.

The U.S.S. Escort’s bolian first officer was in the command chair. Without turning, she asked, “Configuration?”

“Warp envelope configuration is unique. Not getting a read on its propulsion, probably because of the distance.” Kahen’s voice quavered a little. She cleared her throat. “Judging from the warp field, it’s similar to our mass. Somewhat larger.”

“Any chance it’s just on its way to some place we’ve recently been?” asked Lt. Cmdr. Zizara Gross.

“Well...” Kahen prevaricated. “I can’t categorically rule that out, but they’re matching our heading and velocity precisely. And they’re precisely on the edge of our sensor range. This is no science vessel, but we can still see pretty far.”

The blue-skinned first officer pressed a control on the arm of the command chair. “Gross to Captain Carter...”

Silence.

“Captain, are you able to respond?”

More silence.

“Computer, locate Captain Carter.”

A strong female voice that had been the voice of nearly every Star Fleet vessel for more than a hundred years replied: “Captain Carter is in her quarters.”

Zizara Gross touched another control. “Gross to General Krank. General, can you check on the Captain?”

She nearly jumped out of the chair when the elderly klingon’s voice came from just behind her: “I will go do that.”

Gross turned her chair to watch the general exiting the bridge. She waited until the doors closed behind him, then: “Seriously, Abra, can we get him a bell or something?”

“Only if you volunteer to put it on him, sir,” Abra Kahen responded, dryly.

“Warrant Officer Harrison, please report to Captain Carter’s quarters.”

The elderly klingon general was standing in the corridor just outside the door to Carter’s quarters, which were adjacent to his. At 82, General Krank was quite elderly for a klingon. At 94, Warrant Officer Seprek Harrison was middle aged for a vulcan - even a vulcan with human heritage. Unlike Ensign John Sevork, whose dry humor always came through, Seprek Harrison's demeanor was all vulcan. This made Harrison very easy for Krank to relate to.

“General Krank,” the vulcan warrant officer said as he joined the general at Carter’s door.

“Captain Carter had a kinetic alarm installed that is designed to wake her in case of emergency,” Krank responded. “It shakes her bed with increasing intensity. The computer indicates she is in her bed, asleep, and non responsive to the kinetic alarm. Please open the door.”

“Computer, unlock and open door 1-B-8, emergency override, Harrison, Seprek, B, 14, Laredo, Regula, 29.”

The powerful stench of urine poured out into the hall as the door opened and within, Carter could be heard groaning in her sleep.

Warrant Officer Seprek Harrison adroitly stepped aside, allowing Krank to rush into the room. The elderly klingon general scooped up Captain Rhonda Carter, who was rigid, bright pink and struggling against her locked muscles. Her simple white underwear and t-shirt were soaked in her own urine.

“Chief Garrity to Medical!” Krank’s voice was loud and rough.

“I will clean up in here and bring fresh clothing,” the vulcan warrant officer advised, not certain whether the elderly klingon had heard him, or if he had, whether the information registered.

Krank’s mind was given entirely to navigating the narrow corridor. The U.S.S. Escort’s sick bay was located almost directly underneath the captain’s quarters, 1 deck down. But getting her from her room to medical involved him turning sideways to duck through emergency bulkhead hatches that he could barely squeeze through, careful not to bark the minuscule captain’s head, knees or feet against the triluminum braces, to the end of the hall where the lift was inconveniently located, then back the other way through a nearly identical corridor.

Carter was tiny and weighed less than a klingon child, but Krank was exhausted by the time he got her into sick bay. Chief Medical Technician Kara Garrity helped him deposit her onto the main diagnostic biobed.

“Emergency kapclonigen, two standard doses!” Garrity called, then retrieved two hypospray applicators as they were deposited in a dispenser and applied one to each side of Carter’s neck, generating a high-pitched hissing noise.

Rhonda Carter, still unconscious, responded to the medication quickly, her skin color returning to normal, but she was still struggling against her dream-locked muscles, trying to force herself awake.

Garrity deposited the hyposyringes into the dispenser than said, “Um.... 2.5 milligrams gamma-aminobutyric acid, slow release micro-doses.”

The dispenser deposited another hypospray unit, which Garrity retrieved. She hesitated a moment, then applied it to Carter’s neck.

Gradually, Carter relaxed and began breathing deeply.

“Oh... Oh gods... she’s a mess...” Garrity was starting to shake.

“I will clean her,” said Krank.

“Actually, I believe she would be more comfortable if I were to do that,” came Warrant Officer Harrison’s voice as he entered Medical, a neatly folded uniform in his arms. “General, I believe you may be needed on the bridge.”

General Krank briefly locked eyes with the vulcan. Warrant officers rarely served on such small vessels and Harrison seemed to be entirely outside of the normal chain of command, reporting directly to Carter. Harrison was a martial arts expert and had been brought into Star Fleet as an instructor. He was one of the five people whom Carter had rescued from the U.S.S. Odyssey at the outset of the Dominion War and had served with her ever since.

Although he had initially felt challenged, on just a moment’s reflection, Krank felt a tremendous sense of relief. He had become close to Carter and almost felt as if she were a daughter. Especially since he had lost his own daughter along with all of his children and grandchildren during the war. He sighed, looked down, then put his hand on Harrison’s shoulder. “Thank you, Seprek,” he said, using the vulcan’s given name for the first time.

SBA Episode 12, Scene 14: A Different Style

Chapter Summary

Seasons will pass you by



The Star Beagle Adventures

Episode 12: Close to the Edge Part I - The Solid Time of Change

Scene 14: A Different Style

Seasons will pass you by

12.14

A Different Style

"I'm not going to punch my way out of this one, am I?"

Captain Rhonda Carter sat on the edge of the biobed, her feet dangling, toes occasionally brushing the floor. The transparent screen and its robotic arm mount had been brought from her quarters and attached to the ceiling so that she could communicate.

"Your family has a history of hypertension. Your diet is good and you are physically fit and active," said Chief Medical Technician Kara Garrity. "But you have to take your medicine."

"I take it religiously," Carter replied. "I keep a chart."

"Then something is countering the effect, and I don't know what that is," Garrity replied.

"Telepathy," opined Warrant Officer Seprek Harrison.

"Telepathy?" Carter and Garrity asked in unison. They looked at the middle-aged vulcan as if a mushroom had just sprouted from the top of his head.

"All humanoids are telepathic. Humans, klingons, and most other species produce neurotransmitters that are resistant to telepathic contact," Harrison explained. "You can imagine the adaptive evolutionary advantage. When humans are exposed to telepathy, via, for example, a mind-meld, it changes their body's chemistry. Hypertension is a common side-effect. You have been exposed to a lot of telepathic contact - at least for a human."

"So not only are these... things crawling around in my brain," Carter started. "Their giving me high blood pressure?"

"That is a likely result," Harrison rejoined. "And for humans, repeated and prolonged exposure to telepathy lowers your resistance to telepathic contact, making you increasingly vulnerable."

Carter took a moment to read and re-read this conversation. Then: "How can I fight that?"

Seprek Harrison raised an eyebrow. "I have been studying your fighting style for several years now, trying to learn something that I can teach my students. You have no form, your stance is terrible at best, you have absolutely no training and it shows, but you always spot your opponent's weakness and take advantage of it. And you do it so fast that I really have to be paying attention to see it. I have long suspected that your remarkable fighting ability is, in some way, telepathic. Humans do have a rudimentary telepathy."

"So how does that help me?" Carter asked.

"It doesn't," Harrison replied. "I'm concerned that teaching you any techniques vulcans use to suppress telepathy might upset the natural mental balance you rely on. And a lot of people depend on that ability to keep not only you, but themselves, alive."

Carter scrolled back the screen she had been reading and re-read nearly the entire conversation. Then sat for a moment, just mulling things over.

Chief Medical Technician Kara Garrity leaned against a biobed and watched with interest. It seemed that her captain was developing a new way of thinking, using her disability to her advantage.

Rhonda Carter had enlisted in Star Fleet at the age of 17, just in time for the first Cardassian War. She had a natural leadership ability and a killer instinct, which had caused her to rocket through the enlisted ranks, leading to a battlefield commission as an ensign. She was one of those rare officers who had never attended either officer candidate school, ROTC or the academy. She was a tough farm girl, uneducated, and largely untrained. She had relied for decades on instinct, intuition, and a ferocious intensity of concentration.

The blue-haired captain looked up. "Okay... Suppressing my supposed telepathic ability might be counter-productive and probably won't work anyway. And that's not really my style. How about leaning into it? How do I lean into it?"

It was Seprek Harrison's turn to think.

"I may not be your best counsellor in that area. I am neither a warrior nor a telepath," the vulcan advised. "My human heritage has given me the natural human resistance to telepathy, probably much stronger than yours."

"You are a martial arts instructor," Garrity observed.

"I am," Harrison agreed. "A very good one. But I realized long ago that if I were to try to teach Rhonda anything, it would be counter-productive. She doesn't need to be thinking about forms or stance, or anything at all, really. I think her best counsel when it comes to this issue might come from General Krank and possibly John Sevork. John is young and inexperienced, but he is also the only native telepath we have on our crew."

"Captain, if I may," Garrity began.

"Out with it, Kara," Carter responded.

"When Krank brought you in, you were fighting to wake up," said Garrity. "That's kind of like running away. And you're not the type to run away from a fight. Can you, instead of trying to wake up, try to relax back into the... um... er... dream... you know... kind of... hang in there and try to take control?"

"You're telling me to punch my way through it?"

SBA Episode 12, Scene 15: My Boy

Chapter Summary

Now that it's all over and done...

Now that you find, now that you're whole...

Chapter Notes

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



The Star Beagle Adventures

Episode 12: Close to the Edge Part I - The Solid Time of Change

Scene 15: My Boy

Now that it's all over and done...

Now that you find, now that you're whole...

12.15

My Boy

"So that's my boy... I want to get a look at him. And I want a chat. On my terms."

Captain Rhonda Carter was seated in the command chair of the U.S.S. Escort. For the first time since entering the Jar Galaxy, she was relaxed, her thin arms draped over the chair's control panels, head leaned back, looking up at her wraparound screen.

"Computer, on my monitor, show me our follower. Best image, from whichever source. John, prepare a probe. I want a dogfish on it. When ready, we will drop it and leave it dark. I want it programmed to pursue our follower and beam the dogfish onto whatever it is that's following us. Then I want images. Program the probe to take readings in passive mode, and to transmit them to us compressed at the same time it beams the dogfish over. I suspect both will be destroyed in short order, so we need to get as much as possible in a single burst."

"Aye Captain," the young vulcan replied from the "eyes" station. He had been entering commands into the panel from the moment she had started instructing him.

A few minutes later: "It is ready."

"Drop it."

Carter thumbed a control on the arm of the command chair. "Roman, I'm going to need a burst of speed for two minutes. How much can you give me without burning out our repairs to the nacelles?"

The voice of Chief Flight Engineer Roman Hess came back through the comm system. "I wouldn't risk anything over warp 6. We're doing well at warp 5. When you drop back, I would recommend warp 4 for an hour before taking it back up."

"What if we stop?" the captain asked.

Hess's voice came back over the comm, but Carter was reading his words on her screen. "I wouldn't recommend that unless you're prepared to not go again for some time. If we drop below warp 2, we have to stop for repairs, which will take a few hours."

Carter thought for a moment, then: “Get ready to make those repairs Roman. And understand that you may have to do them in the middle of a fight.”

“Aye, Captain.”

The bridge remained largely silent. Carter noted General Krank entering the bridge and finding his favorite corner from which to observe.

It was well over an hour later when the young vulcan at the “eyes” station reported, “Our follower has just passed our probe. Probe activated.”

“All right, Bill,” said Carter. “Take us to warp 6. Let’s see what our tail-chaser does.”

“Now responding to warp 6,” the chief of the boat replied from the helm.

Ensign John Sevork reported from the “eyes” station, “Your boy is matching our velocity, staying exactly at the edge of our sensor range.”

Master Chief Bill Waller began counting from the helm. “15 seconds.” It seemed an eternity before he said, “30 seconds...” The bridge was silent except for his counting: “1 minute, 15 seconds...”

When he got to 1 minute, 45 seconds, he began counting every 5 seconds. At 1 minute, 55 seconds, Carter ordered: “All stop.”

“”Getting a compressed data stream from the probe and readings from the dogfish,” Sevork reported, then: “And the probe has gone silent.”

“Let’s see it, John,” Carter said.

The image of a thorn made of rock appeared on the screen. Except on the nearly flat top of this thorn, something was standing, gripping the rock.

“It’s a giant lepreshroom inside a land thorn,” Master Chief Waller observed, quite unnecessarily.

“Yeah,” Ensign Sevork replied. “But what’s that thing standing on it? Looks kind of like a cross between a stag and a giant tiger shrimp.”

“That would be my boy,” Carter replied.

“Captain,” Sevork started, “New information is riding in on Commodore Yui’s beacon. It’s telling us the way into this galaxy is not the way out of it.”

“What have I been telling you all this time?” Carter said.

“And our friend is coming to meet us,” Sevork continued. “Warp 6.”

Carter looked down for the first time to the main viewscreen. Her translucent, wraparound screen lowered to remain in her field of vision. “Turn us around to greet him, Bill.”

She thumbed a switch on the arm of her command chair, linking her to every speaker ship wide:

“All hands... Battle stations...”

Close to the Edge Part I - The Solid Time of Change

Chapter End Notes

This is the final scene for Episode 12.

The adventure continues in Episode 13: Close to the Edge Part II - Total Mass Retain

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